

THE MOVEMENT

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The Community Marches to Free The Land

For the last 40 years, community residents in the Figueroa corridor have experienced the never-ending cycle of broken promises, including commitments that never materialized from the 1992 Uprising. On October 7, 2023, the people of South Los Angeles reset the debate around negligent landowners and nuisance properties that contribute to violence, abuse, and criminal entrapment along Figueroa. Three hundred residents marched in a call to action to liberate 12 motels along the Figueroa Corridor between Gage and Century.

Motel business owners have profited while knowingly harming the community by facilitating these conditions for too long. Black and Brown residents in this area have been asking for help to deal with these systemic issues and to secure the resources they need to promote public safety and provide opportunities to thrive. And since the pandemic, sex trafficking and sex work have qualitatively gotten worse on Figueroa, which is among the country's top five areas for sex work and is one of the county's only corridors that operates 24/7.

CoCo's Record of Transforming Our Community

In 1990, amid economic and social turmoil, the Community Coalition (CoCo) envisioned that our community could address the problems of violence and addiction more humanely through constructive alternatives to fear and incarceration. We were determined to rely less on law enforcement and instead move toward addressing the root causes of crime and violence in our community. We developed innovative approaches to counter what plagued our neighborhoods to build power and change public policy.

Since then, we have worked within the city's regulatory framework for three decades to "clean up or close down" nuisance businesses. Our members and area residents have documented the activity that puts neighbors at risk and endangers young women, men, and youth. We have taken photos, made videos, and collected discarded drug paraphernalia. Stakeholders have provided testimony at countless hearings before zoning

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Free the Land ! Free The Land! Free The Land!



On October 7, 2023, the People demanded that area motel owners share our vision of a positive transformation in the Figueroa corridor or transfer their property to the people. We called for the city and its departments to adhere to and hold landowners accountable to the land use and planning processes in order to encourage economic and housing development for Black and Brown people and finally bring a just allocation of public resources in this long neglected neighborhood. We dream of a Los Angeles that is free from violence, racism, exploitation, poverty, and preventable diseases. We want to provide safe places to eat, sleep, work, and play, small businesses, green spaces, great schools, good jobs, healthy food, clean streets, and community events. And a community where a working-class family can buy a home, raise their children, and grow old.



The Community Marches to Free the Land (con't from page 1)

administrators, planning commissions, and city council members.

Between 1992 and 2022, Community Coalition has had many land use victories. CoCo has:

- Prevented 150 liquor stores destroyed during the Civil Unrest from rebuilding,
- Prevented four new liquor stores and one new motel from coming into South LA,
- Placed corrective conditions on 21 problem liquor stores, motels, recycling centers, and bars,
- Closed down 11 grandfathered liquor stores, motels, and bars (7 liquor stores, three motels, one bar),
- Supported conversion of over 48 former liquor stores and motels (44 from Civil Unrest) into other businesses, affordable housing, and social service agencies,
- Participated in more than 240 hearings, and
- Involved 38,878 people in signing petitions, participating in public hearings and demonstrations, and holding decision-makers accountable for nuisance abatement in our community.

Through these efforts, we learned crime decreases dramatically when lawless businesses are closed.

The opportunities we have today in the Figueroa corridor are

clear: to expose nuisance businesses and landowners as the problem, raise visibility on unethical practices and transform nuisance motel businesses into other community assets i.e. mental health and social services, sites for small businesses, green space, senior and childcare centers, economic development, workforce training and placement opportunities.

The Vision

Reclaim, Reimagine, and Revitalize the Figueroa Corridor by instituting community-based solutions to create a vibrant community with safe and permanent housing, access to healthy food, safe places to play, effective transit, and businesses that serve the area's current neighbors.

We dream of a South Los Angeles that is free from violence, racism, exploitation, poverty, and preventable diseases. We want to provide safe places to eat, sleep, work, and play, small businesses, green spaces, great schools, good jobs, healthy food, clean streets, and community events. And a community where a working-class family can buy a home, raise their children, and grow old.



By **MARSHA MITCHELL**

Senior Director of Communications

Chef Crystal Blanchette has deep roots in South Central ... Like so many of us, her family was part of the Great Migration from southern states to the West, which started in 1910 and lasted until the 1970s. Her great-grandmother purchased a house at 117th and Hoover 60 years ago for her father and his siblings, just as the housing covenants were being challenged. Her father still lives in South LA and has become a stalwart community activist.

From these strong Southern connections, Crystal learned to love the land and to love food. She comes from a long line of women who understand how important access to quality food is and how most black folks live in food deserts. "When we move into cities, we struggle. I want to teach people to grow their own food, even if they live in an apartment. We think we must go to the supermarket, but that's not true. We need knowledge and the resources to feed ourselves," Blanchette explains.

As someone who has been cooking her whole life, Crystal's passion for cooking and her desire to create positive change led her to pursue a career as a chef. She honed her skills in renowned culinary schools and worked in prestigious restaurants, gaining valuable experience and expertise. However, she felt a calling to use her culinary talents to make a difference in underserved communities.

"I learned at a young age that black and brown communities have limited access to healthy food, and I wanted to do something about it. One of my clients told me I should open a restaurant," says Chef Crystal. "I admire anyone who does that, but I thought, 'This isn't my dream. But why not be the facilitator in creating a space that supports others with their dreams.' This allows me to be useful in my community."

Motivated by a deep sense of social responsibility, Crystal founded Inner City Kitchen (ICK) to address food insecurity and empower individuals from inner-city neighborhoods. Her kitchen is a hub for culinary education, job training, and community engagement. Crystal believes providing access to nutritious meals and culinary skills can transform lives and uplift communities.

ICK started 10 years ago as a cooking and nutrition program for inner-city youth and families. It has been a source of joy and giving as Crystal has taught cooking classes and nutrition education. Inner City Kitchen is a culinary incubator space where current and future restaurateurs get support. It offers culinary training programs that equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue careers in the food industry.

Set to expand her brand, Inner City Kitchen Food Hall will soon open in South Los Angeles. The hall will continue to focus on the community and established restaurants by providing healthy food education and an opportunity to offer a flagship food stall within the central location. The food stalls will include an anchor tenancy by Lucky Luke Brewing, a vertical garden in partnership with female, black-owned Know Your Fruit Farms, a butchery, access to organic produce, beverage service, and entertainment.

Crystal and her team will provide hands-on training, mentorship, and support, empowering participants to build sustainable livelihoods and break the cycle of poverty. Through these programs, ICK hopes to nourish bodies and nurture dreams and aspirations like she's done with her own.

CoCo Is Helping to Address Food Insecurity In South LA

Access to adequate food and nutrition should be a fundamental human right. Unfortunately, millions of people around the world still lack access to nutritious food and clean water. Food insecurity, a persistent issue affecting communities worldwide, is particularly prevalent in South Los Angeles. As of July 2022, 24.3% of L.A. County households were food insecure in the past year (2022).

South LA lacks full-service grocery stores and are dominated by fast-food chains and convenience stores, offering predominantly processed and unhealthy food choices. This scarcity of nutritious options creates food deserts. A food desert is an area with a 20% or higher poverty rate and in which one-third of the population lives more than a mile away from a supermarket. These food deserts disproportionately affect low-income communities, exacerbating health disparities and contributing to the high prevalence of diet-related diseases.

“The region of South Los Angeles is a community with extremely limited access to fresh food. In fact, South L.A. is currently considered a food desert. The lack of access to fresh foods and a drought of supermarkets results in an influx of fast food restaurants, liquor stores, and small convenience stores.”—[Food Deserts in South LA](#).



Addressing food insecurity requires a multifaceted approach that involves community engagement, policy changes, and increased investment in local food systems. The state’s food assistance program, [CalFresh](#), has been drastically cut. Community gardens, farmers’ markets, and urban agriculture initiatives can provide fresh produce and foster community resilience. Collaborations between local organizations, government agencies, and businesses can help establish more grocery stores and incentivize healthy food retail in underserved areas. Additionally, educational programs on nutrition, cooking skills, and budgeting can empower residents to make healthier food choices. Grassroots organizations and community leaders can work together to advocate for policies that promote equitable access to healthy food, such as zoning regulations that encourage the establishment of grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods.

One way Community Coalition is helping to address food scarcity is through our Wellness Wednesdays. The brainchild of Community Coalition staff member Renee Henderson, the WW Hub has helped 7,337 families in the community. Community Coalition partnered with "The Key to the Streets" to launch a weekly food giveaway during the Wellness Wednesday Hub. Other social service partners include El Nido Family Centers, The Children's Collective, Inc.; Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, and City Plants, which provided fruit trees to participants.

Views from the Corner of 81st & Vermont

BY ALBERTO RETANA
PRESIDENT & CEO
Community Coalition



As we close out the year, we honored three leaders—Judy Belk, Antonia Hernandez and Dr. Robert Ross—this month at our People Power Progress Awards.

These titans of philanthropy exhibit the kind of leadership our country and city needs more than ever. Our dinner was a tribute to BOLD LEADERSHIP + COURAGEOUS ACTION that gets to the root of inequality. Honoring leadership is more than just celebrating and remembering—it's about committing to carry on the torch.

Throughout the pandemic, we saw existing equity gaps grow more expansive, and everyday needs increase. For example, the life expectancy of Latino populations in California decreased by 5.7 years between 2019 and 2021, 3.8 years for Black people, and 3 years for Asian populations, while it only declined by 1.9 years for white people. Additionally, residents report that the cost of living continues to increase with no remedy in sight.

We applaud these philanthropic leaders who continued to meet the challenge by galvanizing unprecedented resources to prioritize the highest-need communities. Even before the pandemic, we worked with Judy, Antonia and Bob who led the fight to expand funding for social justice efforts across California.

As Community Coalition embarks on its next phase of building power through the Center for Community Organizing (CCO), we will take the lessons that Bob, Antonia, and Judy have manifested into our work as we continue to Free The Land. Our vision for South LA is rooted in the dreams of those who migrated to South Los Angeles from the American South and the Global South, fleeing violence, terror, abject poverty, and oppression to find opportunities in South Los Angeles.

We will expose nuisance businesses and landowners as the problem. We will raise visibility on unethical practices in the Figueroa Corridor. And we will take advantage of the opportunity that we have as community members to change the land use and planning processes to encourage economic development along the corridor and build strategic partnerships to create jobs, workforce training, and placement opportunities.

In Solidarity,
Alberto



After several brainstorming meetings with Community Coalition members, mural artist Terrick Gutierrez has shared the final design of the Center for Community Organizing (CCO) mural (pictured above). Our members love it. Huge shoutout to all of the members that showed up every Wednesday evening to engage around the mural design! We are now transitioning into the hands-on phase of the work. CoCo members and staff will begin painting the mural during solidarity days which are taking place the last week of October.

Terrick is a South Central Youth Empowered Thru Action (SCYEA) alum and LA-based interdisciplinary artist, creative technologist, activist, and storyteller. Growing up in South Central LA, in many ways his work is a visual autobiography that reflects the struggle and resilience of his youth. He has exhibited in Atlanta, New York, and Los Angeles and is in private collections on the East and West Coast.

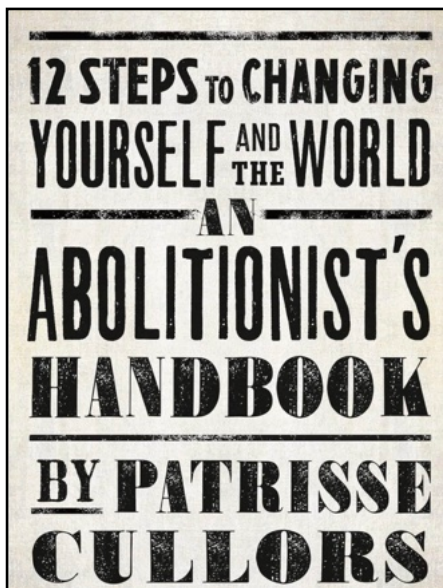
Debra Lee Fellows Share Space with Patrisse Cullors

Patrisse Cullors has been at the forefront of the world stage for over a decade, dedicating her life to advocating for racial equality and social justice. Through her leadership, she has helped bring attention to the disproportionate violence and discrimination experienced by people of color, sparking a global conversation. Her efforts have also inspired countless individuals to join the movement, fostering a sense of unity and empowerment among marginalized communities.

As part of the culminating activities before graduating this week, the inaugural cohort of the Debra Lee Women's Organizing Fellowship had the opportunity to engage in an intimate salon with Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter Movement, moderated by CoCo Board Vice-Chair Mary M. Lee. Cullors has just completed a new book, *An Abolitionist's Handbook: 12 Steps to Changing Yourself and the World*. While the book is a how-to on Black liberation, it is also a self help book on the "economy of care."

An activist with over 20 years of community organizing experience, Patrisse encouraged the Debra Lee Fellows

take breaks and encourage others they work with to do the same. She also talked about the importance of having courageous conversations among members of movement and friends and family. Most importantly, she reminded the group to prioritize care for themselves — however that



Top left—The Debra Lee Fellows eagerly await Ms. Cullors arrival, bottom left, CoCo's Executive Vice President Aurea Montes-Rodriguez introduces Ms. Cullors and bottom right, CoCo Board Vice Chair Mary Lee facilitates the day's event.

looks for each individual.

"If we create the economy of care, that means we individually, and in our interpersonal relationships, are caring for each other," said Cullors.

Cullors' activism extends beyond her role as a co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement. She has become a symbol of resilience and determination, inspiring future generations of activists to continue the fight for racial justice. One of the key aspects of her work is her commitment to intersectionality and inclusivity within the movement. She has consistently emphasized the importance of recognizing and addressing the overlapping forms of oppression faced by marginalized communities, including those based on race, gender, sexuality, and class. By centering the experiences of Black women, Cullors has helped create a more inclusive and comprehensive movement that strives for justice for all.

Follow Us @CoCoSouthLA



CoCo's 2023 People Power Progress Awards

For more than three decades, Community Coalition and its members have been at the forefront of organizing and building solidarity between Black and Brown communities. From addressing the community's needs during the recent pandemic to the Free the Land movement focused on reclaiming the Figueroa Corridor for the people, Black and Brown allies have united in the fight against structural racism and inequality—working tirelessly to bring about change. Through our coalition, we have witnessed hard-fought victories that have positively transformed South Los Angeles.

As we confront challenging community conditions such as homelessness, gentrification, and inequitable community investment, we remain hopeful because of our commitment to organizing. Our movement, the Center for Community Organizing (CCO) aims to strengthen the national organizing landscape. Just as Community Coalition's legacy of organizing has been vital to our collective progress, we also recognize the transformative legacy of this year's honorees. Their leadership during the pandemic enabled us to provide resources to those who needed them most.

Judy Belk serves as Senior Advisor to the [California Wellness Foundation](#), where she provides strategic counsel to the CEO and Board of Directors. Most recently, she served for nine years as the foundation's President and CEO and a member of the Board of Directors, stepping down in September 2023. As CEO, Belk had responsibility for overseeing a \$1 billion endowment, \$60 million annually in grants and program related investments, and a \$17 million operating budget.

Dr. Robert Ross, is president and chief executive officer of [The California Endowment \(TCE\)](#), a private statewide foundation established in 1996 to address the health needs of Californians. Under his leadership the foundation launched a 10-year statewide commitment investing \$1 billion to advance policies and forge partnerships to build healthy communities, with a focus on underserved communities. In the summer of 2024 Dr. Ross will be retiring from his leadership role as President and CEO of TCE.

Antonia Hernández, President and Chief Executive Officer of the [California Community Foundation \(CCF\)](#), after nearly two decades of leading and transforming CFF

2023
**PEOPLE
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AWARDS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26
6 P.M. - 10 P.M.

THE VIBIANA
214 S. MAIN STREET
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
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JUDY BELK

HONORING
DR. ROBERT ROSS

ANTONIA HERNANDEZ

into a strong, vibrant advocate for Los Angeles announced her plans to retire. During her tenure she grew the assets of CCF from \$540 million to \$2.3 billion, while distributing over \$3.4 billion in grants to address the needs of the community. Antonia is nationally regarded for her expertise in immigration, civil rights and philanthropy, and has spent more than four decades advocating for social justice and improving the lives of underserved communities in Los Angeles County and beyond.

Community Coalition continues to support power-building and multi-racial coalition-building in our respective communities. We also acknowledge the philanthropic community's significant investment in racial justice and BIPOC-led organizations in recent years. As new philanthropic leaders emerge and giving institutions consider their next steps, we hope this moment inspires them to further strengthen our efforts during this critical time by continuing to invest in South LA and supporting community organizing and the Center for Community Organizing.