



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Who Gets to Tell the Story of America?

WE THE PEOPLE exhibition rejects American exceptionalism and centers the voices, histories, and creative power of 35 BIPOC artists and South Los Angeles residents as the nation approaches the 250th Signing of the Declaration of Independence

LOS ANGELES, CA — As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Community Coalition (CoCo) and Sankofa.org are inviting the public to reconsider one of the nation's most enduring questions: **Who gets to tell the story of America?**

Through a groundbreaking new exhibition at LADC Studios, **WE THE PEOPLE** centers the voices, stories, and creative expressions of Black, Indigenous, Brown, immigrant, LGBTQ+, femme, and historically marginalized communities—not as footnotes in America's history, but as authors of its past, present, and future.

While many commemorations during the nation's semi-quincentennial will celebrate narratives of American exceptionalism, this exhibition offers a deeper and more honest examination of America's past, present, and future. Part exhibition, part cultural intervention, and part people's storytelling project, **WE THE PEOPLE opens Thursday, July 2nd and runs through Sunday, July 19th**. The project emerges at a pivotal moment in our American history.

"Too often, our nation's history is told through the lens of perceived power, leaving out the communities whose labor, resistance, creativity, and sacrifice built this country," said Gerri Lawrence, exhibition producer for CoCo. **WE THE PEOPLE** challenges that mainstream narrative and counters erasure by centering the voices and experiences of those who too often have been violently silenced."

Rooted in the lived realities and leadership of everyday people, the exhibition explores the intersections of history, identity, memory, resistance, and belonging. Through immersive storytelling, participatory art installations, community-generated narratives, and cultural expression, visitors will be invited to engage with both the painful truths and transformative possibilities of the American experience.

"As a storyteller and an advocate, I want people to walk through this exhibition and see themselves, their ancestors and their future children. I want them to see the stories we've carried, the struggles we've survived, and the joy we've created despite it all. **WE THE PEOPLE** is special because it reminds us that history isn't just something that happened to us—it's something we've shaped and continue to shape every day," Gina Belafonte, Executive Director of Sankofa.org which is co-producing the exhibit.

The exhibition confronts the legacies of genocide, enslavement, land theft, state violence, and neocolonialism while simultaneously celebrating the movements, cultures, and communities that have continuously fought to transform the nation. It amplifies not only struggle, but also futurism, joy, beauty, resilience, and collective power.

Drawing from traditions of community storytelling and artistic activism, WE THE PEOPLE expands the definition of what it means to be American and invites visitors to see democracy as an unfinished project—which is continuously shaped by those courageous enough to show up and demand change. South Los Angeles serves as both the geographic home and symbolic heart of the exhibition: a place where the realities of systemic injustice meet generations of organizing, cultural innovation, joy, hope and community-led transformation.

At its core, WE THE PEOPLE is an invitation to remember the legacies that mainstream America has tried to bury, an opportunity to resurrect the stories of those who have been erased as we imagine a more just and inclusive future. WE THE PEOPLE calls visitors into a deeper truth—that **WE are the storytellers, WE are the architects and WE ARE THE PEOPLE that make America great.**

WE THE PEOPLE will be on view from July 2 through July 19, 2026, at LADC Studios, located at 5955 S. Western Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90047.

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About Community Coalition

Community Coalition (CoCo) works to transform the social and economic conditions that foster addiction, crime, violence, and poverty in South Los Angeles through community organizing, policy advocacy, civic engagement, leadership development, and cultural organizing.

About Sankofa.org

Sankofa.org uses storytelling, culture, and technology to amplify the voices of marginalized communities and inspire collective action toward a more equitable future.



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WE THE PEOPLE—35 Artists, 250 Years, One Exhibition of Memory, Resistance & Reimagining

The introductory lines of the Declaration of Independence reads, *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”* The US Constitution's, which was drafted and signed 10 years later, Preamble reads: *“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”*

"In 2026, we should reflect on these texts and consider if these are in fact “truths” that are 'self evident.' Depending on who is telling the story, one could argue that these words do not represent the experiences of many people, especially those in low income, immigrant, and minority communities that face inequities, violence, racism, and other barriers to access and advancement," says WE THE PEOPLE exhibition curator Dominique Clayton.

Drawing from an intergenerational and intercultural mix of mediums and narratives, WE THE PEOPLE features 30 artists charting the journey of America and its peoples from the issuance of the Declaration of Independence (DOI) 250 years ago to present day. The gallery space will take viewers from a historic recap of our origin stories to the America we are currently living in and ending on a final look at what our future should look like.

Several of the artists in the WE THE PEOPLE exhibition confront the inequities of America. D.C. based Lex Marie's Black maternal health flag reminds us of birth and reproductive failures which stem from slavery and exploitation alongside striking

portraits by photographer Raven Varona highlighting the intergenerational power of matriarchy in minority communities. Legendary photographer John Simmons takes us back to an earlier part of America's history capturing scenes of protest against war, which although taken in the sixties, look eerily similar to the protests against the war taking place today.

Figurative artists including Glenn Hardy Jr, Adrian Armstrong, Jonah Elijah and Mohammed Mubarak, who all present images of joy, family, culture, leadership and community, reflect the America we are living in now and how we might sustain our identities while navigating disparities, oppression, and violence in our communities.

Multidisciplinary and conceptual artists like Patrisse Cullors, Patrick Martinez, Teresa Flores, and Genevieve Gagnard incorporate bold statements in new mediums that force us to confront the true meanings of each word and object. Filmmaker Keith Brown presents a documentary that centers the Black National Anthem and the HRDWRKR film team captures voices of the people of today.

Each gallery in WE THE PEOPLE has a special offering for viewers and ends with crafting a vision of the future we deserve. As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Community Coalition (CoCo) and Sankofa.org invite you to reconsider one of the nation's most enduring questions: **Who gets to tell the story of America?** Join us and experience WE THE PEOPLE, a powerful and immersive exhibition at LADC Studios, located at 5955 S. Western Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90047, from July 2 - 19, 2026.



OUR MISSION

Community Coalition (CoCo) transforms the social and economic conditions that fuel poverty, violence, crime, and addiction in South Los Angeles.

OUR BELIEFS

We believe that the people most impacted by injustice are the experts in the solutions. We believe real change happens when communities come together, organize, and act collectively. That is why we bring residents together to develop leadership, build community power, and advance campaigns that create meaningful change. Through organizing, advocacy, and civic engagement, we are transforming schools, strengthening families, improving neighborhood conditions, and building a thriving South Los Angeles where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

OUR STORY

Community Coalition was founded in 1990 by Mayor Karen Bass and a group of community activists who refused to accept the false choice between neglect and punishment. At the height of the crack cocaine epidemic, South Los Angeles was experiencing profound loss and instability. Families were being torn apart by addiction, violence was increasing, and entire neighborhoods were under siege. Rather than investing in treatment, prevention, and community support, policymakers responded with harsher laws and aggressive policing strategies that often deepened the harm.

The founders of Community Coalition believed there was another way. They knew that lasting solutions could not be imposed on communities—they had come from the people most affected. More than three decades later, that vision continues to guide our work.

Community Coalition has grown into one of the nation's leading community organizing institutions, engaging thousands of residents in the fight for equity, justice, and opportunity. Together, we have helped secure billions of dollars in public investments, transformed schools, advanced public health, strengthened civic participation, and built pathways for community leadership.

OUR ECONOMIC IMPACT

For more than 35 years, CoCo has been organizing residents via leadership development, civic engagement, policy advocacy, and facilitating direct action. CoCo has helped secure more than \$16 billion in public investments for schools, students, caregivers, families, and historically under-resourced communities. From winning \$1 billion for new school construction, \$700 million in education equity funding, and a landmark \$2 billion education justice settlement, to securing investments in Black student achievement, kinship care, undocumented students, LGBTQ+ youth, and community organizing infrastructure, The South Los Angeles we know today—as well as the city, county, and state—would look dramatically different without the leadership and organizing power of Community Coalition's youth and adult members.

SANKOFA.ORG

OUR MISSION

Sankofa.org advances racial justice, social transformation, and civic participation through the power of art, storytelling, culture, and technology. We work to build a more equitable and inclusive democracy by amplifying the voices, experiences, and leadership of communities most impacted by injustice.

OUR BELIEFS

We believe that culture shapes consciousness, and consciousness shapes society. We believe that artists, storytellers, organizers, and communities have the power to transform narratives, challenge systems of oppression, and inspire collective action. We believe that those closest to the challenges facing our communities are closest to the solutions. Through creative engagement, civic participation, intergenerational leadership, and community-centered storytelling, we work to strengthen democratic values, advance social justice, and build a future rooted in dignity, belonging, and shared humanity.

OUR STORY

Sankofa.org was co-founded by the activist, artist, and humanitarian Harry Belafonte and is guided by the African principle of Sankofa: to reach back and gather the wisdom of the past in order to move forward. Throughout his life, Belafonte understood that art and culture were not separate from social change, they were essential tools for advancing it.

Building on a legacy that helped fuel the Civil Rights Movement and numerous human rights struggles around the world, Sankofa.org was created to continue that tradition for a new generation. The organization emerged from a recognition that while injustice evolves, so too must the strategies used to confront it. In an era defined by rapid technological change, growing inequality, political polarization, and misinformation, Sankofa.org works at the intersection of culture, narrative, and civic engagement to help communities imagine and build a more just future.

Today, Sankofa.org collaborates with artists, activists, educators, technologists, organizers, and community leaders to develop innovative campaigns, immersive storytelling experiences, public engagement initiatives, and leadership programs that strengthen democratic participation and advance social justice. Our work bridges generations, disciplines, and movements while remaining grounded in the belief that culture is one of the most powerful forces for social transformation.

OUR SOCIAL IMPACT

For more than a decade, Sankofa.org has mobilized millions of people through cultural organizing, narrative change campaigns, voter engagement initiatives, artistic collaborations, educational programming, and emerging technologies. Through strategic partnerships and community-centered storytelling, we have helped elevate critical conversations around racial justice, democracy, public health, civic participation, immigrant rights, youth leadership, criminal justice reform, and economic equity.

Our work has engaged artists, cultural influencers, grassroots organizations, educators, faith leaders, and community advocates in creating new pathways for public participation and collective action. From national voter engagement campaigns and public education initiatives to virtual reality experiences, immersive storytelling projects, and intergenerational leadership programs, Sankofa.org continues to demonstrate how culture can serve as a powerful form of civic infrastructure.

As we look toward the future, Sankofa.org remains committed to building a world where storytelling is a catalyst for justice, technology serves humanity, and every community has the power to shape the narratives that define its future.