

Gardena HS Women’s Leadership Project and the Days of Dialogue

By Sikivu Hutchinson, Senior Intergroup Specialist

On March 29th, the Gardena HS Women’s Leadership Project, Let Up mentors, Safe School Ambassadors and Peer Health mentors facilitated a school-wide day of dialogue on campus climate. Over 2000 students were surveyed in class on race relations, classroom and school environment, safety and their views on how to improve tense relations between blacks and Latinos and youth and adults. The dialogue was organized by LAUSD Human Relations and local district 8 with support from the HRC’s Zerohour school/Healthy Start team.



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During the spring semester, WLP, MECHA and the BSU have partnered to produce an original play called “Divided We Fall” a depiction of black/Latino conflict and collaboration, featuring the characters of Luis and Mara, two time-traveling members of the original Afro-Mexican pobladores who founded L.A. in 1781:



Mara: So I'm wondering to myself what the fighting is all about?

Luis: Territory, turf, respect. All of the things that took place in our time between the Anglos and the Mexicans. After we founded L.A. and all hell broke loose with the whites stealing our land.

Mara (looks disgusted and mimics posture of a guy): Really? Looks like a death match to me. Boys going at it, so macho, so tough, so hard. Que stupido.

Luis: You don't understand. You're just a female.

Mara: Right. You think you've got a special cross to bear just because you're a man? This isn't the same thing as the gringos stealing our land back in the day—it's about our own self-hatred!

Luis: It's hard being a brown man, a black man in this society.

Mara: And it's hard being a black or brown woman burying sons, brothers, fathers and sisters every week. I walk through the Roosevelt cemetery in Gardena and there are thousands of us, six feet under, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old. Babies names on the headstones. Babies who never even had a chance to decide what they wanted to be in life. So young they make Tupac and Biggie look like old men. There are more of us buried in Roosevelt than there are sitting in classes at UCLA.

Luis: Well what do you expect? Look around you. There aren't any jobs in the community. Some of the homies I see are making \$7.50 an hour working the grill at Mickey D's while the white boys on the west side are getting them intern jobs in corporate America. If they can't get respect the way the white man does then turf and territory is the only way they can get respect.

Mara (sucks her teeth): That's tired. It's more than tired, it's genocidal.

Luis: Genocide? What do you mean?

Mara: It's when one race exterminates another because they think they're inferior. But we do it to ourselves—brown and black brothers and sisters because we don't love ourselves, because we haven't been taught to love ourselves. Some parts of Latin America are just as black as Africa . Veracruz , Guerrero. Those are black states; but the images of beauty we show to the world are telenovela Clairol blond.

