

# PORTRAITS OF A COMMUNITY

**CITIZEN JOURNALISM  
PROJECT**

Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2018

The Autry is proud to support the work of the Citizen Journalism Project. To encourage the free flow of expression and dialogue, we have avoided a heavy-handed editorial approach. All of the views and opinions contained within this publication solely reflect those of the individual contributors.

This project would not be possible without the collaboration of numerous individuals and organizations. The Autry Museum would like to thank Alliance Collins Family College-Ready High School, Santa Monica Alternative Schoolhouse, and WriteGirl for their assistance in connecting young journalists and photographers with the museum.

# **AUTRY MUSEUM**

**OF THE AMERICAN WEST**

TheAutry.org/LaRaza | #AutryLaRaza #PSTLALA  
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**WELLS  
FARGO**

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We created these zines in order to support the work of the women and men who, in the late 1960s and 1970s, contributed to the pages of *La Raza*. Also, we wanted to recognize the continuing need for citizen journalism, and we hoped to engage with the Los Angeles community in a new way. We invited residents from across Los Angeles County to participate in our project by serving as the citizen journalists for their communities. We asked them to share their community's challenges, successes, issues, and stories, and published them in hard copy and online.

This issue—our third and final issue—reflects events and conversations from the first half of 2018. We have organized the issue into four chapters: Community Support, Immigrant, Lack of Support, and Post-Parkland. If you would like to read our first two issues, you can do so by visiting the Autry's website: [www.theautry.org/citizen-journalism](http://www.theautry.org/citizen-journalism).

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# COMMUNITY SUPPORT



2018 was a year rife with complicated issues and anxieties, but Southland communities persisted. Our first chapter highlights what communities do to support each other. They honor all (young and old), empower women and girls, lift each other up through beauty and compassion, and provide healing opportunities for those who need it.

# HOME

By Phalaen Chang

LA is bustling, sunlight reflecting off  
of windows, lights glittering against  
the night sky, salted ocean scents carried  
on cold, dry winds. Cigarette smoke, the sharp  
smell of diesel mingling. Red, orange, yellow, green  
traffic lights on congested highways  
of everyone going home.

LA is colorfully loud, women marching,  
signs waving, voices demanding,  
pulsing, surging, beating  
with the heart of the city of the voices  
of children, teens, adults, citizens, people.

LA is diverse, harboring a corner  
for everyone, Victorian-style homes blending  
with desert-style terracotta tiled roofs, metal  
bars over windows, Chinese characters propped  
up on storefronts, bright Spanish-style murals  
against taco stores, accents swirling  
with the voices in the air,  
condos and apartments breathing out their stories  
from open windows, their breath smelling of  
spices, salsa, and sriracha worked into  
the dishes of lands from around the globe.

LA's spirit runs in my blood, a willingness  
to embrace chaos and difference, hearing  
stories from poetry slams and the LA Times.  
LA is where my friends were born, where  
my family went for a promise of opportunity,  
where I cried and laughed and fell and grew.  
LA is where my heart goes, where  
my heart stays.

LA is home.



Photograph by Nicole Garcia

## Mi Madre

August 26, 2017  
A hard-working  
mother who works  
day and night in  
order to provide for  
her family

## Ava

January 27, 2018  
A worry-free child  
living life to the fullest



Photograph by Nicole Garcia



Photograph by Nicole Garcia

## Home

She lives in South Central, Los Angeles. An area many are afraid of. An area many do not want to come across. An area that has its history, but also an area that holds its culture. She is not ashamed of where she is from. Her home holds love and a future for her and her community. This community is filled with citizens who do not judge one another but rather bring them

closer. Her neighbors are her closest friends because she grew up having them all around. She is from South Central, Los Angeles. A place many do not find beautiful. But she, she finds art within this beauty. A place she enjoys to call home because it has taught her many life lessons, lessons she will never forget. South Central, Los Angeles. A place I love to call home.

# MOM'S PRAYERS

By Paola Martinez

Lonely days, lonely nights  
I look for the homies but they're not in sight  
This crazy life I live, I'm lucky to be alive  
Not stuck in a cell doing life  
My Mom asks, "When you going to get it together and do right?"  
Mom forgive me for God knows I try  
I'm sorry for the times I made you cry  
Thank you for the prayers you say for me every night  
Turn to the left and turn to the right  
Bullets fly...Rivals die...Don't know why  
I get thrills out of all of this...can't deny  
God kept me safe and sane for he knows  
It's not my time to say goodbye  
Mom please hold on  
Don't give up...the storm will pass  
The future will be bright  
For I will start to do right.

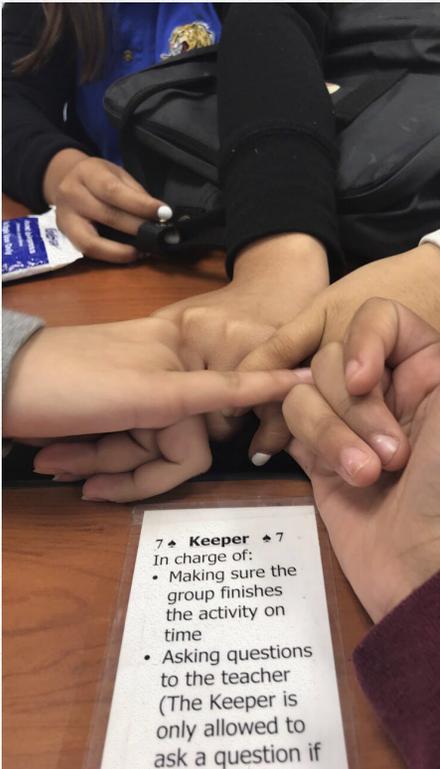
Today, my mother no longer stays up at night worried about me or scared when she hears sirens or gunshots in the neighborhood. I am no longer chasing death. I am now at Homeboy Industries. Father G (Pops) welcomed me with arms wide open. I am now continuing my education and working on myself, attending therapy to heal my anger and trauma. No doubt GOD heard my mother's prayers.



Photograph by Alan Lopez

## Volunteers

Parents from the community take the time from their day to decorate for the kids in an elementary school.



Photograph by Rebecca Beltran

## Unity

In my community, there has always been an issue to become united. Unity has become less probable within our community since President Trump's presidency. He has created a dichotomy in the society. This challenges not just this community but the United States overall. Children are becoming influenced negatively based on his declarations. We must set good examples for the upcoming generations. We are liable for keeping this nation strong regardless of the fact that Trump holds a "condescending role" based on his title.

# SOCIETY

By Jennifer Aguilar

One Nation,  
We're all united...  
Freedom of speech they all said,  
However, we all fall divided...  
Not by generation and not by communities...  
We fall divided by skin color, race, and religion.

# MY LIFE SO FAR

By Guadalupe Garnica

Growing up in East Los Angeles, City Terrace, and Alhambra taught me a lot. East L.A. was harsh; I witnessed a lot of violence, a lot of poverty. We always had a roof over our heads, and my mom always cooked us a hot meal, but we didn't have the best clothes or shoes. My mom had six kids, but my brother, Ulysses, died when he was three months and eleven days old. He was number four in our family, and his death really messed my mom up.

I began trying out drugs at twelve and continued to experiment throughout my entire life until January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I have been clean for thirteen and one-half months now.

I can honestly say that I truly enjoy life today and I love my freedom. My family loves and respects me because I gave up the gang/drug life. I am now responsible and reliable; people can count on me today. I plan on getting married in twenty days, and I am both anxious and excited to begin a new chapter in my life. My soon-to-be wife is currently in a federal facility. We actually met back in December 2007 in a state prison. I was released from there three months later and was placed into an immigration hold, then deported. I illegally reentered the United States, only to be rearrested two years later.

During that incarceration, I was reunited with my soon-to-be wife, and we've been together ever since. She'll be home in December, and next March we will renew our vows and throw a nice-sized party, so all our friends and family can join us in celebrating our unity.

# COLOR FILLS THE BIGGER PICTURE!

By Diego Hernandez

No one is born racist but influenced, created, and convinced. Color does not matter, it just paints the picture in a more clear and understandable way. We all as a community form the bigger picture, but we limit ourselves from the possibilities that others can contribute to it. We all need each other not separate each other, but to reunite as one to create a stronger voice against in our enemy. United as one gives us the power to change what surrounds us, united as one we can rebuild, united as one we can invent, and united as one we can heal the wounds left behind our history. Racism isn't born, it's created by the negative people around. That is why you should surround yourself with those who care.



Photograph by Rebecca Beltran

## Below the Surface

My community was able to help me become mentally strong. I was exposed to support groups and therapy sessions, which helped me during my depression. In my community, there is a lot of poverty, homelessness, and instability. For these reasons, several teens do not want to seek help because of fear. I committed a mistake. I sought help right when I was on the bridge of life and death. This deserves to be advocated, and there should be a social change to save lives.



Photograph by Aysel Castillo

## Compassion For All Beings In The Universe Starts Within YOU.

Los Angeles, California 90001

Not everybody leaves a negative message.



## Skid Row

Many people come out to have a better life in L.A. but end up crashing and ending up in the streets.

Photograph by Brisa Rivera



# SCHOOL

By Sydney Palleiko

School  
 Something about it  
 Not just for learning  
 For growing  
 Achieving  
 Experiencing  
 It takes balance  
 Strength  
 Courage



# IT'S NOT EASY

By Sydney Palleiko

It's not easy  
 Being on a 1,200-pound animal  
 Communicating with a being who doesn't speak the same language  
 Sacrificing so much for something so little  
 Falling down but getting up  
 Fighting through the tears and pain  
 Drives me to keep improving  
 To keep going  
 You finally realize  
 It's not easy



Photograph by Brisa Rivera

## The Game of the City?

I do not know what was more beautiful, the game or the city.

## The Battle of San Pedro (or, Childhood Toys in Teenaged Hands)

I used to always want to be in the military like my grandpa. We used to always play with toy soldiers all the time. We would spend hours working with them and then start all over when we had completely destroyed the battlefield. I took this in San Pedro's ruins on the coast, which looking at it seems like a battlefield.



Photograph by Jack R. Warner

# STRAY ANIMALS

Photograph and text by Aysel Castillo

There is a huge problem in my community that has to do with stray animals. Many times, I see dogs, cats, bunnies, even chickens walking down the streets without an owner.

Not too long ago, my 10-year-old sister, along with my neighbor, found a 2-month old kitten crying unstopably under my neighbor's car. Once carried, the kitten felt at home and quit crying. Once the children showed me the kitten, I ran inside my house to get leftover kitten milk formula and a bottle from months before. I rapidly stepped out to carry and feed the kitten, when I realized it had a broken leg. Luckily, cat bones tend to heal on their own. Therefore, all I had to do was take care of it until it healed. Despite the fact that I take stray animals in my house, there are many people who do not. There are people in my community who do the opposite and kick them out instead, leaving them without a home. People need to spread awareness about this topic.





Photograph by Vanessa D. Rivera

## California Poppy

The California poppy, much like the Raza of California, stands in its grace and glory through the diversity of climate and economic challenges, racial and gentrification uncertainty, truth of the past and excitement of the unforeseen future, and in the end together under the same peaceful sun.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SPREADING GOD'S WORD

By Alicia Martinez Gallardo

In my own family it was most important to baptize our children, and it was a “must” to educate them in the Catholic Church. Religious education was where you would find us children once a week right after school. Remembering those days, and now enrolling my own children, I find the need to not only be educated in the Catholic Church, but to share the knowledge, that I have been taught myself. Now I understand the importance of teaching God’s word to others that are still unaware of his unconditional love. We can return his love by trying to live a life of harmony with one another.

The feeling I got when I walked myself back to the religious education office was mixed with the excitement of being able to share my knowledge but I was even more excited to learn from these young and very fresh open minds. Teaching them the true love God has for each and every one of us reinforces the reason for his own creations, his children made in his own image. The reward was all mine, seeing the joy in each of them and learning more and more about myself along the way. I know that God has a purpose for every one of us. But the biggest joy came in the form of seeing them blossom and share their love for one another and for the bigger family outside of their home—the family who are all God’s children, God’s family.



Photograph by Alessandra Lopez

## Feminista

Painting located at Maywood Plaza, empowering women's self-worth.



Photograph by Alessandra Lopez

## Mi Primer Libro

Grandparents are human books; they are capable of telling us so many different stories, each one with a lesson.



Photograph by Evelyn Olvera

## Mother?

February 3, 2018, at 12:19 p.m. What does this woman represent? You decide. Maybe she is telling you to reach for your dreams even if everything seems to be crumbling or to have hope in the darkest of hours. She might even be a mother calling out towards her children. Whatever we believe she represents can have some connection towards who we are, our life, and our beliefs.



Photograph by Evelyn Olvera

## A Voice

February 3, 2018, 12:27 p.m. You are walking in Downtown LA and one of the many things you see are the masterpieces painted across walls. Each one has a special meaning to it, but have you ever stopped to study the similarities? As you continue your journey through LA you come to the conclusion that many of the paintings serve as advocates, may it be towards cultural awareness or women's rights. Whatever it may be, you can't help but stand and admire it for a couple seconds, then continue going towards your destination.

# WE ARE AN UPRISING OF LOVE

Performance by Odessa Guzmán, Citlali Bandt, and students from Vista High School

We are an Uprising of Love  
Respect my Existence or Expect my Resistance  
Prison is not the Answer  
How we Dress does Not mean yes  
You Cannot Control us with Fear  
Revolution is not a One-time Event  
Resist, Insist, and Persist  
My Body, My Choice  
We are an Uprising of Love

Love is Colorblind  
Books not Guns, Culture not Violence  
Fight Ignorance not Immigrants  
Human Rights are not Optional  
Protect Our Children, Not Guns  
Marriage is About Love, not Gender  
Equality Hurts No One  
We Will Not be Silenced  
We Will Rise

Bombing people in order to bring about peace is like making love in order to bring about virginity—it just doesn't work. It has never worked. It will never work.

I am no longer accepting the things I can't change. I am changing the things I can't accept.

We come from Revolutionaries. Revolution is in our blood. When our leaders fail to represent us, fail to look out for us, fail to recognize our equality, our humanity, and instead fan the flames of racial hatred, then it's our duty, our American legacy, to rise up against that injustice.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America guarantees our freedom of speech. It does not guarantee that our speech, that our voices, our choices, our communities will be heard. For that, we have to reach out, unite with others and make it so our voices cannot be ignored.

We will not be ignored! We will be heard! There is no force more powerful than young people determined to rise. We will rise!

# CHILDREN AT THE WOMEN'S MARCH

Photograph and text by Psipsina Haendel

On January 20th, the one-year anniversary of Donald Trump's inauguration, hundreds of thousands of people gathered in downtown Los Angeles for the second annual Women's March. Pershing Square and the grassy knolls of City Hall were crowded with people waving signs and chanting. It was truly liberating to see people from all backgrounds and all reaches of the city come together to fight for equality. Amongst the sea of adults, many who had lived through times of turmoil and inequality for women, were a profusion of children. Whether perched atop their parent's shoulders, riding in the back of a red wagon, or striding along on their own two feet, these children ushered in the next generation of activists.

They were there to give support to the cause, to protest the way our country treats women.



# MOTION

By Phalaen Chang

When she dances  
the music stops moving  
its energy coursing  
through her veins.  
A dazzling smile,  
eyes penetrating, she  
is intensity,  
all the colors glaring  
at full brightness.  
She makes  
the music move.

When he dances  
he smiles up at the sky,  
arms up and out, embracing  
the world  
with nothing to lose.  
He is  
the music  
suspended in the air  
floating,  
reaching,  
and nothing is there  
to hold him down and  
the world is his.

When they dance,  
they are colors swirling,  
light intensity,  
heartbeats pulsing,  
radiating an energy so  
strong and pure,  
the language of the lyrics and  
the genre of the music is  
universal in their actions,  
the world feels their existence  
as one  
star shining in the darkness, and

everyone else puts aside  
their differences and in that moment  
there are no divisions.



Photograph by Christopher Herrera

## Johnny

A young'un just trying to make it to the top.



# IMMIGRANT



*Immigrant* recognizes the diversity within Los Angeles's immigrant communities and their L.A. roots.

This section shatters common notions of an immigrant by humanizing their experiences through interviews, photographs, poetry, and essays. They are not one type of people but many different kinds with varying cultures, and they comprise an essential part of the Southland fabric.

# DÉJAME SOÑAR

By Evelyn Olvera

It was not my choice  
Just like being born  
I had no idea what my parents wanted for me, but I trusted them

Why do you punish me for something that I had no say  
I was not an 18 year old who was able to make my own decisions

Déjame soñar  
You tell me I have constraints  
Yet math class has taught me to work over them  
You tell me I'm not Americanized enough  
Yet history and English prove me otherwise,  
teaching me about the creation of this new world

You want to send me back to a place I was born in yet have hardly  
any idea of its roots  
No Indian American had ever told Columbus to show his green  
card yet there he was

Stop  
Déjame soñar  
Because in the end it will be me and my generation who will get  
you out of the whole you are digging us all in  
Déjame soñar

# JUSTICE FOR DREAMERS

By Fabiola Gonzalez

My friend, Jose, was born in Mexico City and came to the United States when he was really young. He is a DACA dreamer. Like most Americans and their ancestors, Jose came to this country for a better life and better opportunity. But he is struggling because he isn't a U. S. citizen. I am frustrated for him that he is not receiving all the benefits that everybody else receives. In my opinion, it affects my friend, myself, and other people. I feel guilty because I have the opportunity as a U.S. citizen and I don't always take advantage of it. He, on the other hand, desires to have those opportunities and create his own peaceful life.

The government should vote on a policy that allows us have what we deserve, to be able to go to college without any issues. Jose has been struggling with school supplies. He has been working, but gets frustrated because he just wants to be able to be treated like a regular person. He goes to school and enjoys it. Jose is a motivated student and plans to get his master's degree. I think we should give Jose and people like him the opportunity to succeed in life.

# LOS INVISIBLES

By Jeni Ortega

Lo creas o no, están ahí.  
Dijeron, ahí vi.  
¿Oyeron su voz?  
¿Fue uno o dos?

¿Adónde se fueron?  
¿Murieron?  
El silencio se vuelve loco.  
La noche aúlla.

Nadie los ve.  
Nadie los escucha.  
Nadie entiende que están allí.  
Nadie except los que también desaparecieron.

Es su hora de aparecer.  
Es su tiempo para vivir la vida otra vez.  
El sol brilla con una sonrisa una vez más.  
Dijeron, allí vi lo que estábamos destinados a ser.



Photograph by Diego Hernandez

## Behind Color

No matter what culture, race, or ethnicity that stands behind the shadows, we all still look the same.

# ONE CHICANO'S PERSPECTIVE

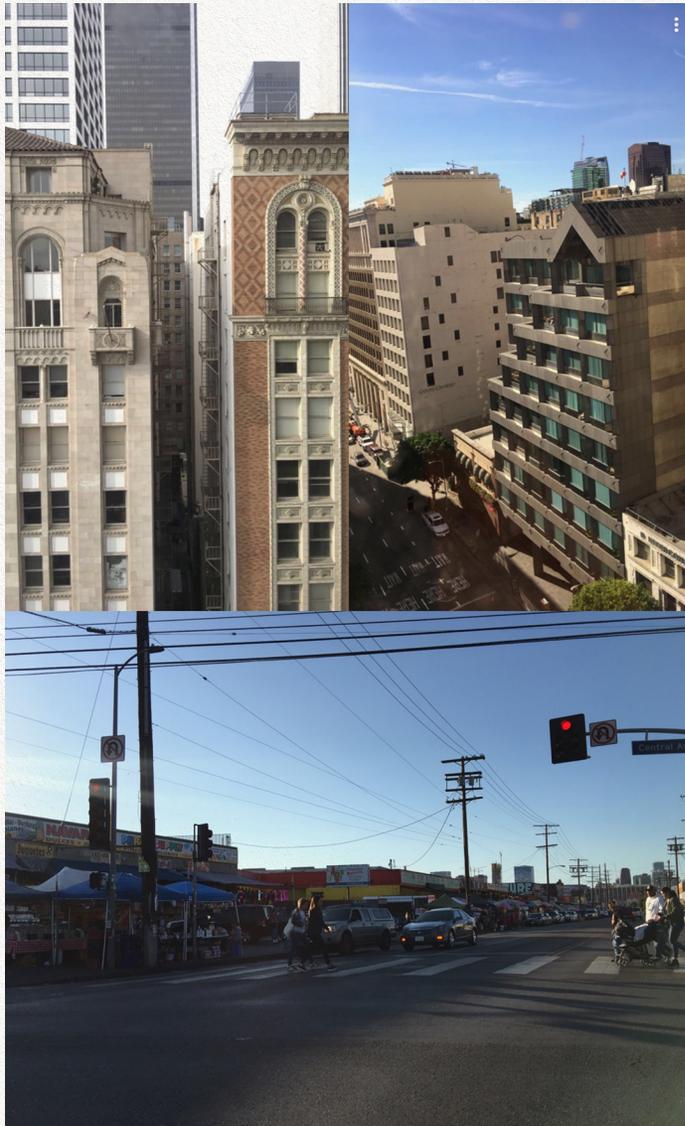
By David Lee Portillo

The beginning of the Chicano movement was of the result of the vile and racist treatment of Mexicans as second-class citizens. We remember the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the East L.A. High School Blowouts, a walkout to boycott a failed school system. The government used the educational system to erase our Mexican heritage.

The bigotry and the racism I felt from an early age scared me as I heard the sting of white Americans' insults: no-good Mexican, Greaser, Beaner, and go back to Mexico. The pain from these insults no child born in America should ever have to feel or hear. Then to make the situation worse, we had to suffer the indignity of society's misguided attempt to assimilate us into becoming white Americans.

It began in elementary school where I really felt the sting. I was told that Spanish was a dirty language, and I was beaten for speaking it. I was more educated than these teachers because I was bilingual and could speak both languages very well. When I would slip into speaking Spanish, I was slapped or made to hold out both hands, palms up, to be hit with a ruler. There were times when I would be taken to the principal's office to get whipped with his belt.

I was so disillusioned by this system that I became a juvenile delinquent, running the streets and ditching school. At that time, I felt that America excluded us Mexicans from realizing our dreams of being included in this great society of ours. Thus, the Chicano movement was born to unite us in our fight against these injustices placed on our people. Viva La Raza was our war cry. Chicano Power was our strength. We applaud those high school students in 1968 that spoke out against these injustices and fought for equality.



Photograph by Samantha Carrillo

## The Truth Behind L.A.

Various immigrants imagine Los Angeles, California, as a wealthy and beautiful place. A city where it is so easy to make money, have huge houses, and a safer city, so they migrate to Los Angeles in hope for an exciting life. However, California is completely the opposite of that depending on your income. It's not easy for people to make money quickly like everyone believes. Everything is far more expensive here than where people lived before. Every day's a hustle for people trying to make a dollar one way or another.

# GENTRIFICATION...

By Marcos Estrada Nava

I am 29 years of age, born and raised in East Los Angeles. My East L.A. is changing before my eyes. I see the change every single day in the community. Families who resided for decades are being forced out.

Before gentrification, our immigrant community was very united, with little tiendas on every corner as well as taco trucks working hard to try to meet their goals. Everybody knew each other and liked to help each other out. Of course this affects me because it is now happening to my family members and friends that reside in my community. Families as well as business owners are looking somewhere else. Businesses can't compete with the new stores and they are being bumped out of the property. Families as well can't afford the rise in housing costs.



Photograph by Jesse Vazquez

## We the People

We don't go out and search for jobs to steal, we go out and make a living from what we Mexicans are made of.



Photograph by Evelyn Olvera

## Tradition

February 13, 2018. Pacific, located in Huntington Park, is mainly known for its stores, or to be more specific, the quinceañeras stores. As you enter this main street you find yourself face to face with El Gallo Giro bakery which has been there for as long as you remember, but then again you're only 17. A place where you would go with your parents or where your parents would send you to get the pan dulce for a merinda or the following morning for your desayuno.



Interview by Bryant Celio

This is one of the many business that stays hard at work until it is completely dark in Walnut Park.

### Interview With Owner of the Store

**1ST QUESTION:** Why did you open this store?

**ANSWER:** I wanted to start to save money for my kids so they can go to the college of their choice.

**2ND QUESTION:** Do you ever regret get opening?

**ANSWER:** I do not regret it all. I met new people and my kids learn new skills by coming.

**3RD QUESTION:** If the was one thing you could tell your kids, what will you tell them?

**ANSWER:** Do not forget about the days you spent in this place learning new skills, making new friends, and working hard.

### Interview With worker of the Store

**1ST QUESTION:** Why do you come?

**ANSWER:** I come to help my mom and I enjoy talking to the customers that come.

**2ND QUESTION:** Do you ever regret coming here?

**ANSWER:** Not really. I open, help my mom, and learn how to handle money.

**3RD QUESTION:** If you had one thing to tell your mom, what would you say?

**ANSWER:** I love you and don't worry. I still have one more year before college.



Photograph by Jesse Vazquez

## The Makers

People say we come to the United States and become a negative impact to the economy, but we create jobs.

# BETTER THAN WHAT YOU THINK

By Aysel Castillo

many people have the tendency to consider East Los Angeles “ghetto” and “dangerous.” many times because of the street art, the homeless, the tiny homes, the immigrants—none of which should result in the consideration of any negative word.

the immense love for my community is inexplicable.

I have come to the conclusion that once I grow up and try to move to another city, I will find nothing similar to East Los Angeles.

I will not be surrounded by the same amount of hispanics.

I will not be hearing police sirens on a daily basis.

I will not hear the same everyday *hellos*,

I will miss the “ghetto” and “dangerous” East Los Angeles.

# NEGLECT



*Neglect* reveals the ways in which communities suffer when avenues for support are absent. Issues such as homelessness, blight, gangs, pollution, substance abuse, incarcerated youth, police abuse, and gentrification impact everyone—directly and indirectly—and communities shoulder the burden of those issues.

# THERE

By Jasmine Zuniga

She has been there for as long as I remember

Wandering through the streets

Clothes soiled, shoes torn

People look the other way pretending they see nothing

Pretending she is not there

But she is



Photograph by Citlalli Porfirio

## Broken People

Being broken from the inside and still managed to have its beauty from the outside.

# HUNTINGTON PARK

Dear Huntington Park,

Our community needs to be fixed. Huntington Park is a big and amazing community. But we need to open our eyes and not just admire the good things about Huntington Park. For instance, many teenagers are starting to get influenced to drink and smoke. These kids are barely starting their lives and they are already ruining it. Kids are beginning to ditch schools, and not being responsible kids because all they want to do is smoke and drink. Due to this behavior there is a lot of graffiti. People are now using walls as a piece of paper to do their so-called "art." Our community is a place where we all live and it is our home. We need to make a change and keep our kids away from drinking and smoking. As well as to stop having so much graffiti throughout our community. Huntington Park, let's make a change as soon as possible.

Sincerely,  
A member of your community  
Lesly Martinez



## Dirty

This picture shows how the city of Huntington Park doesn't care about how or what they do to the streets that people walk and drive on.



Photograph by Joshua Ruiz



Photograph by Lesly Martinez

## David

Many teens are starting to smoke at a very young age.

# WHY AM I HERE

By Nicole Garcia

Why am I here  
Why do I wake up everyday  
Why do I go to school, work, or play  
Am I doing this to help others or to help myself  
Am I hurting people rather than offering help  
Why am I here  
I constantly ask myself  
Seconds begin to turn into minutes, hours, days and then into years  
Can today be the day the answer appears  
To the question asked  
Why am I here?

# DEAR YOUTH OF WHITTIER

By Michael Fernandez

The streets ain't the place to be,  
Living gang-related ain't the thing for me.  
I'd rather stack up and work the benefits of we,  
So I ain't going to stop 'til I achieve my dreams.  
I'm going to leave the haters alone,  
Be who I want to be.  
Going to the top now, y'all wanna watch?  
I ain't going to follow.

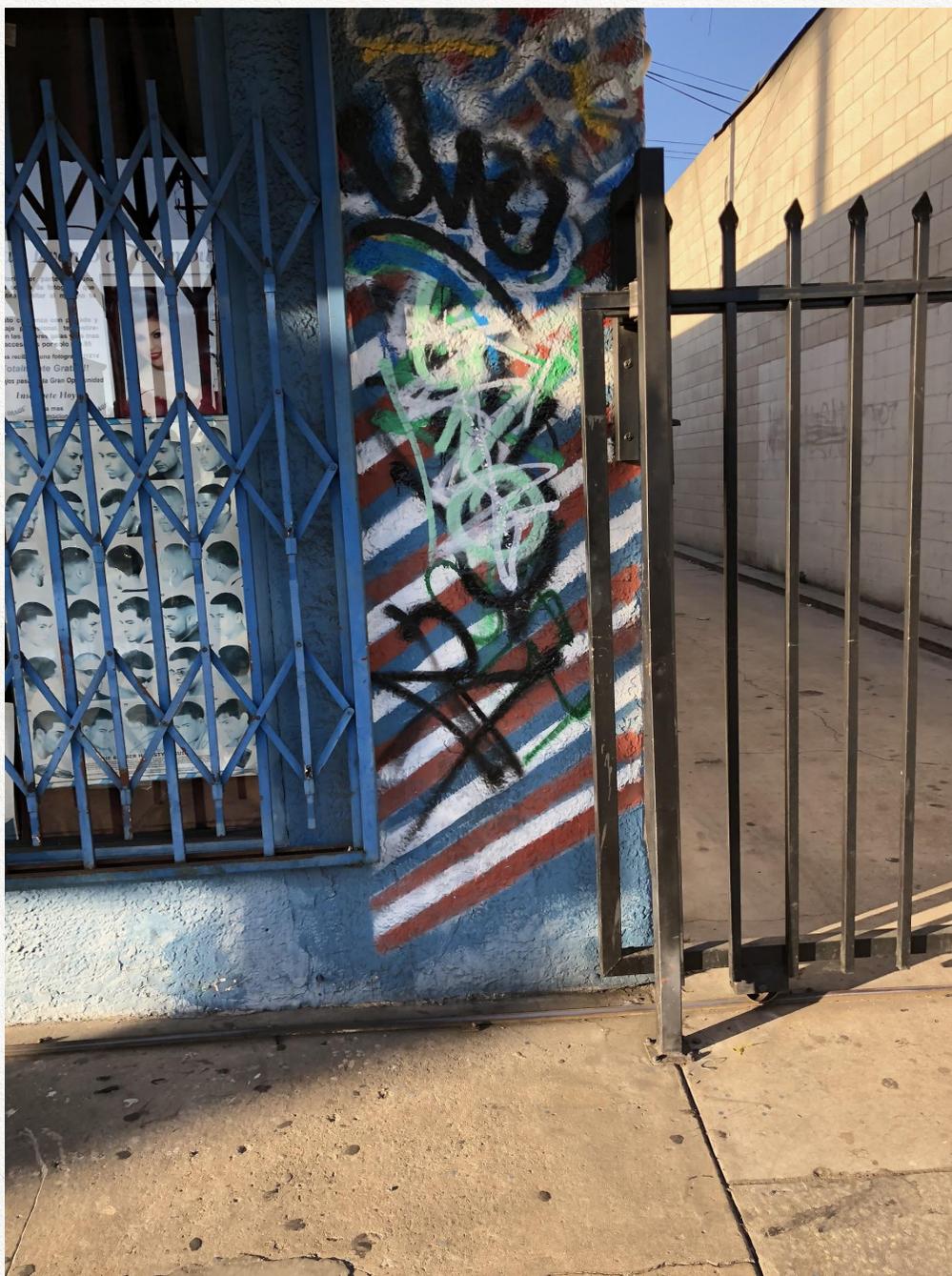
Do my thing, be who you are.  
Don't ever think you ain't going to be a thing.  
Ignore haters, let them be.  
Visualize everything we want to be.  
Choices, they're all yours,  
So don't be a living friend.  
Be the best, but don't  
Forget about the rest.



Photograph by Lesly Martinez

## Matthew

Many kids are starting to have children of their own at a very young age when they are barely starting to live their own life.



Photograph by Juan Castillo

Gang taggings are all over the walls in our community making our walls look dirty and making our community, have a bad representation.



Photograph by Evelyn Olvera

## One of a Kind

February, 18, 2018. A rare moment is captured. It's early in the morning, and a kid is enjoying nature. No, it's not virtual reality. A 5-year-old is enjoying the beauty of a river, breathing in unpolluted air. No second-hand smoking. No carbon dioxide affecting and filling his lungs. Take the time out of your day to find a beautiful place, untouched by society, breathe, and enjoy your new happy place.



Photograph by Aysel Castillo

# INTERVIEW WITH ROSIO L. (BEST FRIEND)

By Jasmine Zuniga

**INTERVIEWER:** Is there anything that happened in your community that made it feel like a community?

**ROSIO:** When I was younger, me and every single kid from the block would come out and play. It was like a miniature community of just kids. Every day, my friend Alondra would come over and knock on my door. Me and my brother would come out to play along with the other kids. Me and the other kids would play freeze tag at least once a day. Also, we would create different games every day. One day we created a game called Adventurers. We would pretend we were in the jungle and escape the traps. We also played soccer and collected bugs we found. One time we played with bugs by putting them in small cans and such.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where are you guys now?

**ROSIO:** We just stopped talking eventually. Some moved and the others stopped coming around. It was only three years ago so we played for quite a while. Many kids don't come out to play as much nowadays. Now it is all about iPads and things. I wish many kids could come out and play like how it used to be before.



## ◀◀◀◀◀ Mini Market. Los Angeles, California 90001.

The thickness of the mini market wall represents the number of times, people tag.

Charlie, the store owner, has painted over graffiti more than 20 times, simply because people that are willing to damage someone else's property have the urge to represent their crew.

# YOUR RASPY, MESSED-UP LAUGH

By Elizabeth Lopez

This one goes out to my tío  
Quien me tapaba cuando hacía frío  
He's the man that taught me of care  
I remember his short, nappy hair  
I still see his fancy pants  
His buttoned shirts and tennis shoes  
He taught me of my pain  
When I was young and had no clue  
I still smell his fainted stench  
Of hairspray and cigarettes  
I still feel the smell scraping through my throat  
As he stared at me with his eyes so brown and red  
But I can't remember his voice  
I'm better at remembering childhood toys  
But I recall what he had said  
In days before he laid there dead  
They echo in my head  
"Te amo míja" and "cuenta conmigo"  
Why did you have to leave me tío  
You were always like a burnt-out wall  
Sturdy but bound to fall  
I've accepted that you're gone  
I can't always have it all  
Instead I reminisce about the days we spent in bliss  
My mind flows away to remember this  
You came home one day, late night  
Nana and I came to bug you  
You just told us it was all right  
You took one of us in each arm  
Like you did on other days  
And protected us from all harm  
You kept us from its way  
The pitter-patter of your heart stopped beating  
Your body had no marks  
You weren't bleeding  
Your skin was of pale purple  
And your eyes stared up so lifeless  
We didn't even say goodbye

What a way to pay back your kindness  
Your images haunt my thoughts  
Will I forget them?  
I think not  
Substances have a way to gain control over one's body  
So it's okay tío Ricardo  
I know it's not your fault

## LETTERS

By Briana Belmontes

Dear dad, who were we kidding we were both mad,  
so to each other all we did was nag.  
Giving up on trying to be a perfect daughter . . . I did lag,  
you were stubborn and I was stubborn, feelings got in the way a tad.

Dear father, knowing me I could sometimes be a bother,  
also knowing you, you'll never withdraw your honor.  
Out of annoyance you threw out an offer.  
Those words wouldn't sink in, you would throw out your own daughter?

Dear pops I gotta say, man, that I give you props,  
to do what you did I wouldn't even jump from rooftops.  
So I grabbed what I could and gave myself five minutes tops,  
while internally my tears spilled out like raindrops.

Dear pa, sometimes I felt like you only loved me by law,  
fixing limited time just to let me stay with my ma.  
In that time there was something that I finally saw,  
But I still couldn't believe you'd let fall.

Dear parent, I guess it's become plainly apparent,  
that I've become so violently errant.  
Though now I've slowly been less transparent,  
but to most I'll always remain so aberrant.

Dear dad, I got to say I always seem so sad,  
while you seemed to follow every fad.  
I want to follow my dreams, but everybody's saying "too bad,"  
and I swear I feel like I'll just go mad.  
Though not as long as I'm writing in this notepad.

# THE WHITE WALLS

By youth in Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall to describe their experiences,  
names are not included

Incarcerated, how did a guy like me  
Become trapped behind the white walls?  
Actually, since nine months old my skin color  
Has made me feel like an image and a target  
to become a victim of the walls.

I am an inmate in the compound.  
Within the compound are these walls  
Reflecting my case constantly to me and  
How my freedom may  
Be coming to an end.

So many people are in here fighting for their lives.  
You can become best friends with someone and  
Next thing you know they disappear into the wind.

In these walls, why is it you only see blacks and browns?

Why is it that we take up most of the jail population? Maybe the walls have the  
best explanation for this. Maybe it's just a coincidence our races grow up in poverty.  
Hopefully we can out-smart the walls and stop becoming trapped.

# COMPOUND LIFE: A FIELD GUIDE

By youth in Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall to describe their experiences,  
names are not included

## NEW VOCABULARY

**CAGE:** the fence that surrounds the perimeter.

**STAFF:** Probation

**KP:** the person who cleans and prepares food and provides dayroom activities.

**STAND-UP:** Bathroom #1

**SIT-DOWN:** Bathroom #2

**DAYROOM:** Free time to play cards, dominoes, and watch movies

**EXCHANGES:** When clothes don't fit, KP comes to give you new ones

**SHOWER ROLL:** Towel, socks, shirt, and boxers rolled up in a towel

**PERIODIC:** You get one phone call a week, free, on a house phone. Some staff let you be on the phone longer, because they don't mind. Some staff will time you to the minute.

**COLLECT:** You can use the phone any day as long as the people have money on their account to accept your call—it charges by the minute.

## WHAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE YOU GOT HERE

You need to raise your hand for everything.

You are under 24-hour watch. Probation staff has surveillance on you. There is no sneaking off, because everyone knows where you are at all times.

You get three meals a day (breakfast: 8am, lunch: noon, dinner: 5pm).

Sometimes you won't get enough food, so whenever offered, take it. You need to eat as much as you can, because sometimes you will get hungry.

Raise your hand for everything. Always respect staff, or it shows up in court.

## DAILY LIFE

Wake up at 5–6am to brush and groom.

Eat breakfast. Take it back to your room and wait for school.

Do your room clean-up while you are in it.

After the first half of school, you eat lunch. Take a break in your room, then go back to the second half of school.

After school, go back to your room for “free time.” In the “day room,” we can watch PG13 TV, play cards, dominoes, Connect 4, Uno, and more.

Wait for rec time outside. Come back from rec to eat dinner.

After dinner, go to your room.

Get ready to shower, butt naked.

Then, go back to your room and get dressed.

Wait for clinic (nurse) to get meds. Call it a day and go to sleep. Start over.

# THE SNAPPERS

Roman Flores

I guess this is nothing new in my community and it has been going on for decades, but now I am experiencing this negativity in my community. At the moment police are harassing everyone. The cops snap on everyone for no apparent reason just because they can. But once someone speaks up to them, that person ends up getting arrested or cited. The community hasn't done anything about it because there is not much they can do.

For example, when I was about twelve years old, I was walking with two of my cousins, one about my age and the other three years younger. We were walking to our grandma's house right down the street from my house when out of nowhere a bright light flashed in our faces, and two officers jumped out the car with their guns out. We were young and scared, so we didn't know what to do. The cops told us we were being searched because we looked "suspicious." I don't know how two twelve-year-olds and a nine-year-old look suspicious walking down the street.

That just goes to show how if the police feel like randomly messing with you, they'll do it even if you're not doing anything wrong. It's really disturbing the peace, and growing up seeing all that has made me hate cops and not feel protected by them.

This past weekend at around 10 o'clock at night, my cousin had come down from Lancaster and he was interested in a car my neighbor was selling. He asked if we could go see it only 15 feet away from my house. Once we stepped out of my driveway, I saw the cops turning down the street, but once they saw us they immediately stopped and reversed so my cousin and I looked at each other. I told him to just keep walking. We were not doing anything wrong in the first place. So we approached the car my neighbor was selling and the car blocked me and my cousin from the cops' view so they literally drove up the sidewalk to come harass us. They flashed their lights at us and started asking us back-to-back questions as if they were trying to get something out of us. But like I said, we weren't doing anything wrong so we weren't sweating it. They were asking us if we were on probation or parole, just trying to find any reason to bust us. The following day there were maybe about 8 or 9 cop cars patrolling my street. They went up and down the street, pulling everyone over and looking at everyone sideways—once again disturbing the peace and tranquility of our neighborhoods.

# THE CREEK FIRE

Abigail Reinoso

Recently my community has gone through a few hardships. A couple of months ago, one of the largest fires in Los Angeles history, the Creek Fire, hit my community. There were mandatory evacuations, and it was very hard to be able to pick only a few items to take for my daughter and me. Some of the items I chose for me and my daughter were clothing, formula, diapers, and pictures of my kids I had put away. The fire was so close to my house that as soon as we walked out the front door, we could see it clearly. The fire was right behind one of the middle schools we have in town and all the schools had to be canceled until the fire was clear.

The fire and evacuation were a horrible experience not only for me, but also for my daughter. The smoke was so strong that it was very hard for her to breathe. No one was able to get back to the community because of how big the fire was becoming. Everyone had to find another route to take to be able to get back into town. For example, when I was taking the bus it had to stop at a certain stop and everyone had to walk the rest of the way.

I was so fearful for my daughter's health, I took her to the hospital to get her checked to make sure that she didn't inhale any of the smoke. The doctors gave my daughter a breathing treatment for a while because of the smoke inhalation. She's doing better now.

Unfortunately for my neighbors, some of their houses burned down and some lost half their homes. I feel fortunate that I was spared. My baby and I are happy and content.

# KEEP YOUR INSENSITIVE HUMOR TO YOURSELF!

By Psipsina Haendel

Many middle and high schoolers have learned to block out what they don't want to hear. Don't engage, people will say. We're told we have to pick and choose our battles because we can't win them all. But it goes without saying that certain things shouldn't be said. Period. In my classroom, insensitive and ill-mannered humor is on the rise. As these comments are being made, kids and adults alike are letting it slide, not realizing the gravity of these remarks.

I was raised knowing that there are certain things that one doesn't joke about—under any circumstances. So when kids in my class regularly make crude “jokes” about rape, the Holocaust, and human trafficking, I can't help but wonder if they were raised in a cave. In what world is it okay to make light of such grim things? And who finds it funny? I make a conscious effort to separate myself from this type of talk, but sometimes I overhear snippets. I know I don't stand alone when I say, “keep it to yourself.”

I have to wonder where the idea that this “humor” is okay comes from. I should hope that middle schoolers are well aware that the issues they so crassly joke about still occur today. More women, along with a smattering of men, are coming forward to address the individuals who have committed acts of sexual violence or sexually harassed them. Statistics show that

anywhere from 17% to 25% of women will experience some type of sexual violence in their lifetime. That's nothing to quip about. In addition, anti-Semitism is far from being a thing of the past. The FBI reported that in the last year, the number of hate crimes towards Jews rose substantially. The Holocaust may be over, but Jews are still the victims of both physical and verbal attacks. Lastly, human trafficking, both national and international, is a much bigger issue than discussed. Currently, there are nearly 30 million victims of human trafficking across the globe. In the United States, between 15,000 and 17,500 people are trafficked into the country each year. This is the third largest international crime industry, following the transport of illegal drugs and arms. Knowing these facts makes me even more incredulous when I overhear one of these callous jokes.

A lack of knowledge is no excuse for comments like these. But even if you aren't educated on current events, the reactions, aggravation, and yes, *pleas* from those who happen to hear the “joke” should be enough. I've asked the asinine wisecrackers to stop countless times, and not once has anything changed. So the next time you hear a comment making light of a grave situation, *say something*, because not enough of us are.

# THE PLACARD

By Kaleb LeBlanc

Countless times, at my public school, I have seen parents park their cars in the disabled spot. My name is Kaleb LeBlanc. My mother owns a disabled placard, and it disgusts me when I see people parking in the wrong spot. My mother has a flaring-up knee problem due to a disease commonly known as M.S., or multiple sclerosis. This disease makes it hard for her to walk sometimes, so she needs a close-up spot to her valued destination. Many times, she has not had access to these spots, due to people without a disabled placard parking there. Not only is this illegal, but it is extremely selfish and disrespectful.

With a handicap placard, you have privileges. You may park by a curb that is painted green (limited-time parking). Or, handicapped people may park in any blue-curbed spot or disabled parking area. (A blue curb indicates a handicap area). Handicapped citizens do not need to pay as much for parking in some places. One example is the Santa Monica beach. My mother has been allowed to pay less to enter the lots. If someone with a placard parks in these spaces in California, they get fined from \$250 to \$500.

However, this fine does not deter most people. Many citizens continue to think it is their right to park wherever they want without thinking about others. It is sad to say that the times I have recorded people parking in the four disabled spots at my school, only a fourth of the time do they actually

have a handicap placard. The other 75% of the time, someone is parked in the disabled spot without a license.

I have only seen one instance where a police officer or traffic officer has ticketed someone wrongly parked in a disabled space. I have seen many times where the officer has passed by someone in the wrong spot. You might think, "Why would a police officer stop to ticket someone for parking in the disabled spot? They need to stop robberies, or save people." In reality, this could be one of the most mandatory things for a police officer to perform. If a disabled person is not able to get a close, easily accessible spot, and gets injured, the person illegally parked in the space should be charged and held responsible. I have seen instances where a disabled person has gotten dropped off on the street, because someone without a placard is currently parked in the disabled spot.

This problem may not occur in every community, but in the communities where it does exist, it is a growing problem that will get worse as time progresses, if not given proper attention. Many times my mother has advocated for her rights, standing up to people who were taking away her right, her access, her assistance. We, the people can fix this problem by standing up for those can't or who need help, and sharing our knowledge of the problem with those who do not know or understand.

# “DISCOVERING” VENICE BEACH: GENTRIFICATION’S EFFECT ON A HISTORICALLY LAI-D-BACK BEACH COMMUNITY

By Psipsina Haendel

The median home price in Venice, California, wows at a hefty 1.65 million dollars. Driving through the neighborhood, I’m accustomed to seeing construction—historic beach bungalows being torn down to make room for yet another monstrous home. Not only are the houses being drastically changed, but hip and expensive shops have made a name for themselves along streets like Abbot Kinney, Main Street, and Rose Avenue. Although gang activity and drug problems have remained the same in many parts of Venice, the neighborhood is no longer the poor, quiet beachfront area many long-time locals knew it to be. After a sizable number of developers swooped in, the former home of the hippie and the middle-earning individual has been transformed into an upper-class paradise.

Chevy Chase’s *Fletch*, an all-time favorite movie of mine, takes place in 1980s West Los Angeles. The movie follows Fletch, a clever *Los Angeles Times* journalist living near Venice Beach. While working on a story about drugs on the beaches, Fletch becomes immersed in even more trouble. At first, I could hardly recognize

the city I was raised in. The movie depicts barren beaches and minimal tourists. When I asked my mother, who grew up just a few miles north of Venice, she told me that yes, the city used to be a lot quieter. I could hardly fathom that the tourist-filled, boutique-lined streets of Venice were once anywhere close to quiet. After watching the movie, my mother told me about living around the area back then. “The Santa Monica Promenade was so empty,” she told me. “All of the storefronts were boarded up and fenced off.” She went on to tell me how she and her sprinted to Woolworth’s, one of the few stores open on the street, to buy string to make bracelets. To put it simply, the area just wasn’t hip or happening.

“The city was cleaned up—physically, and in terms of crime,” my grandmother told me. She moved to an area north of Venice in 1972. She’s watched the city grow up. In the early 2000s, the appearance of declining crime rates, gang activity, and drug usage attracted a new group of people: the upper class. Venice is quaint—good weather, great beaches, and a 1960s vibe. It’s easy to see the appeal. New

homes—gradually climbing to as large as 6,000 square feet—were built. Old properties were torn down, and the rents of the surviving homes rose, forcing many locals to pack their bags.

As Venice was being transformed, so were the lives of many of its former residents. After years of slow yet steady gentrification, a house in the area was a hot commodity. When the demand rose, so did the rent. Suddenly, people couldn't pay these fees, whether for a home or a business. Driving down Rose Avenue, I always can't help but notice a small cluster of shops—a coin laundromat, the Ranch Market, and another building, empty and boarded up. The faded sign in the front of the independent grocer is still there, but the store is closed. I can only assume the owners couldn't pay the rent. The laundromat is still running, but barely. Peeling paint and loose planks can only indicate that the business is on its last legs. The differences between these buildings and the surrounding ones is striking. A vegan ice cream store, day-glo sign and all, calls your name from across the street. Nearby, organic coffee shops and restaurants boast all-natural ingredients and are always crowded. I've been to lunches where an eight, ounce juice will cost no less than ten dollars. It's painfully obvious that businesses that may have been there since the heyday of the Beatles were torn down to make room for these new, expensive establishments.

In addition to affecting businesses, the rising rent has had a tremendous effect on locals. Many people who aren't able

to afford the rising rent in the neighborhood are forced to up and leave. Some have lived in Venice Beach their whole lives. Many depend on their location for a doable commute. Although many former residents are able to find other homes in different parts of Los Angeles, some are left out in the cold. Since Venice was modernized, homelessness has become an even more prominent problem in the area. Large encampments have popped up on Rose Avenue between Lincoln Boulevard and Main Street. Wealthy homeowners complain, and in turn, pull up the stakes on the homeless. A cycle has been put into motion: encamp, complain, relocate. With nowhere to go, the homeless victims of Venice Beach's gentrification are stuck. Until something changes, this is the way it will remain.

Gentrification in Venice Beach has made the area more desirable for the upper class. State-of-the-art homes, lavish shops, and trendy cafes attract tourists and the wealthy. Cities across the country begin the seemingly exciting process of modernization every day. Although some positive things come from modernization, beneath the surface, gentrification can harm. The negative effects and repercussions are many.

# RECYCLING ISN'T THE FINAL SOLUTION

By Liliانا Mukherjee

Throughout our lives, we are told how important it is to recycle plastics. There are signs around the trash bin, reminding you that the plastics you want to throw away are recyclable. Friends and family remind you how important it is to recycle. Recycling ads tell you to recycle your plastic bottles. But the truth is, recycling isn't the ultimate solution to the plastic problem.

While recycling is certainly a step up from throwing plastic in the trash, the recycling system has major flaws that make it an unsustainable solution. For example, did you know that some recyclable plastics have to be sent to specific facilities to actually be recycled? What this means is a regular recycling facility can't recycle it, and the plastic still ends up in the garbage. But most people don't know this, and just throw the plastic in the regular recycling bin. Now sure, we could try to better educate people on the places they can recycle their plastics, but there's another problem. Often, recycling companies send plastic they can't easily recycle to China, but now China has banned the imported plastic, meaning plastic that recycling companies don't want will have nowhere to go.

The final nail in the coffin is the fact that recyclable plastic is simply more expensive to use. Creating new plastic is the cheaper option. When given the choice between the two, what do you think companies will do? Recycling



A plastic trash bag bulges out of a recycling bin.



Bits of plastic and cardboard stick out of a recycling bin.



A line of recycling and trash bins line the street.

plastic is still definitely a better option than throwing the plastic on the ground, or in the trash, but it also can't be the final solution.

The truth is that we really need to just stop using single-use plastics altogether, and start using things that are reusable. Reusable water bottles, instead of plastic bottles bought at the store. Reusable stainless steel straws, instead of straws

used once at a restaurant. If everyone stopped using single-use plastics, companies would stop making plastics altogether. If we stopped making new plastics, we wouldn't need to recycle them in the first place, and we could stop plastic pollution altogether. So next time you go to get a plastic straw, or a bottle, thinking that it's okay because you can just recycle it, think twice.



## EA ERV \$.10

By Lola Grace King

Pictured here is a neighborhood resident beginning her weekly can pickup with three cans from my house. I asked her why she chooses to do such a laborious task for her community and she replied, "Everyone should give back to their planet. Small deeds can go a long way."





## “BIRD”

By Aurelio Paltera

Which one is the “bird” that emits fossil fuels? If you couldn’t tell, it is the one in the lower-right-hand corner. This “bird” can pollute the world below because its engine can emit heat, noise, particles, and gases which could include CO<sub>2</sub>. CO<sub>2</sub> is a minor but important component of the atmosphere. We humans have increased the amount of carbon dioxide by one third the amount since the cultural revolution. Even though this is not a felony, I think we should at least make an effort to create more environmentally friendly jets and planes.



# POST-PARKLAND



On March 14, 2018, students participated in peaceful protests across the United States. They marched, made signs, and took part in events to remember the seventeen students and staff killed by a gunman one month earlier at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The shooting is—to date—the deadliest shooting at a high school in the United States, and added to the ongoing conversations about gun control. The students you hear from in this final chapter participated in the March protests because they felt the current dialogue lacked youth voices.

# YOU KNOW

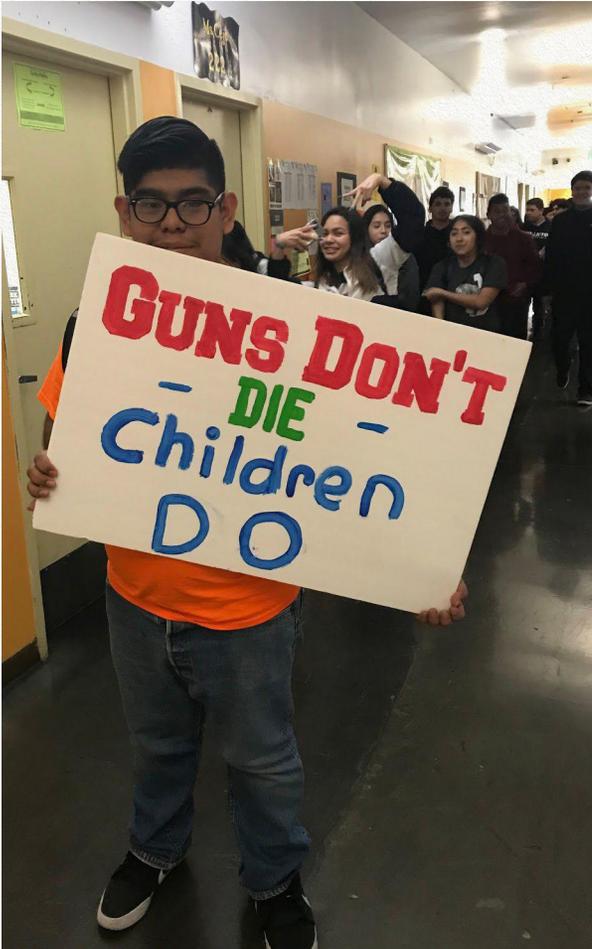
By Evelyn Olvera

Pull, reload, repeat  
Three simple actions that can take a life within seconds  
Three simple words that can create a statistic or a tragedy  
Three simple things that can be prevented  
But what is being done?

We don't want your condolences  
We want actions being taken  
And if our voice and unity isn't enough, then what must we do.  
Kill more?  
Don't we have enough?  
Take a hint

Three simple actions  
Three simple words  
Three simple things  
Yet so complex

I didn't have to say what was being described, yet you know  
Isn't this a sign demonstrating the urgency of this issue



Photograph by Melissa Salvatore-Alcala

## Guns Don't Die

Students walk out of classes and through the hallways to advocate for stricter gun laws to protect students in schools.

## Change We Desire



Photograph by Martha Martinez

# MAYBE JUST MAYBE WE WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Aurelio Paltera

Today, February 21st, 2018, some of my fellow students and I walked out of S.M.A.S.H. (Santa Monica Alternative School House) for seventeen minutes, one minute for each list lost in the dreadful Florida school shooting. While some teachers may see a small bunch of seventh graders walk out of math and think that we had done so strictly so we would miss math, and while this may be true of the few who left our group, not all of us, including me, did it for show. I felt I had to because I strongly believe that what happened on that day was something that should never happen again in our country, or any other country. Our teachers at S.M.A.S.H have learned to not punish us blindly. They first inquire about what we are doing.

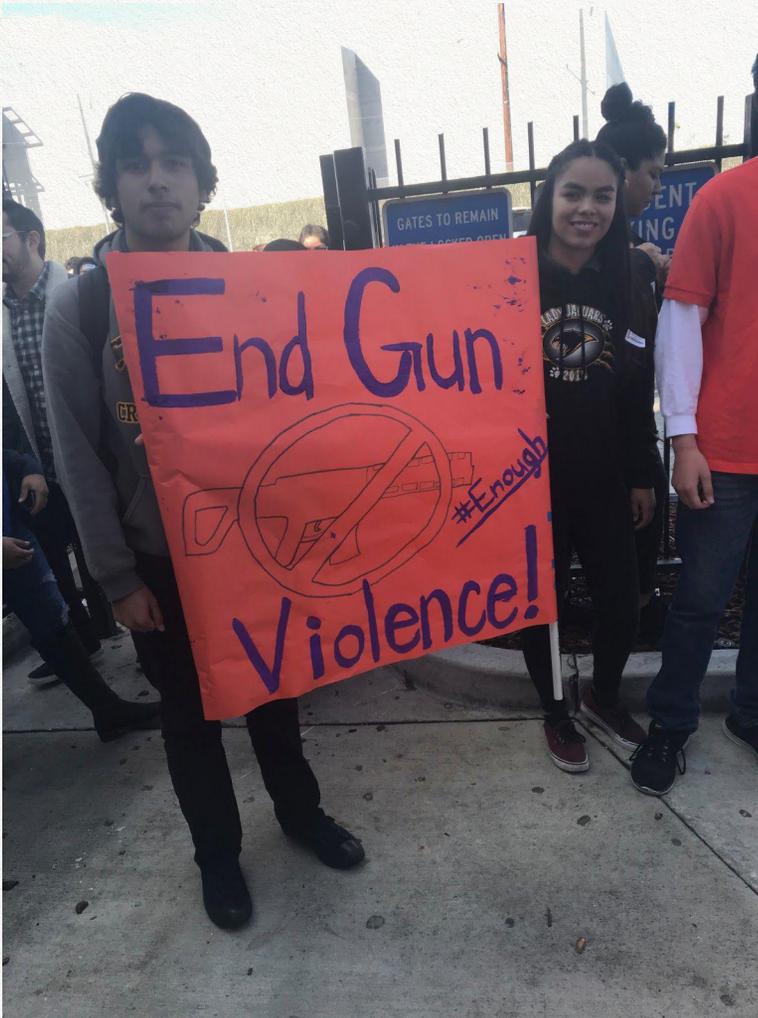
We didn't intend to be noticed by the press or any other mainstream media. We have done this movement strictly for our community. But now we have a chance to make an impact on more than just our community. Since I am enrolled in the Citizen Journalism Project, me and my small S.M.A.S.H community could be noticed and maybe just maybe, we can make a difference.



## Nuestros Padres

Parents join students and staff to advocate for safer schools in America.

Photograph by  
Melissa Salvatore-Alcala



Photograph by Melissa Salvatore-Alcala

## Enough is Enough

Our senior students lead the way into the senior patio to rally other students to end gun violence. Students call the names of the 17 victims from Florida and held a 17-second moment of silence.



Photograph by Nicole Garcia

## Let's Make Change Now

This was at our school's walk-in rally that advocated for gun control.

## We Pledge

Students pledge that they will commit to being nonviolent and peaceful.



Photograph by Melissa Salvatore-Alcala





**AUTRY  
MUSEUM  
OF THE AMERICAN WEST**

TheAutry.org/LaRaza | #AutryLaRaza #PSTLALA  
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