



**CITY OF LOS ANGELES ANNOUNCES 150+ CITY-WIDE
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND RACISM – DECLARES MONTH
OF SEPTEMBER AS OFFICIAL EMBRACE LA MONTH**

***embRACE LA Initiative Returns for Second Year;
Originally Created by LA City Council President Herb Wesson,
Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell & Community Coalition to Unite Angelenos***

2019 Initiative Aims to Establish New Office of Racial Equity in Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES, CA (September 10, 2019) – Today, at a press conference on the steps of City Hall, the city of Los Angeles presented a resolution to declare September **embRACE LA Month**. The month-long [embRACE LA](#) initiative will boldly engage community members through 150+ city-wide conversations about race and racism, aimed to unify and empower Angelenos.

Developed by City Council President **Herb Wesson** and Councilmember **Mitch O’Farrell** – in partnership **Community Coalition**, a grassroots social justice organization in South Los Angeles – the 2019 embRACE LA initiative will provide a space for conversations to ignite change through community engagement. This year’s ultimate goal is to establish a new **Office of Racial Equity** in Los Angeles to strengthen inclusion for LA’s most marginalized communities.

Los Angeles City Council President **Herb Wesson** welcomed the crowd: "Today we are living in the Divided States of America with a President determined to pit us against each other by either our political affiliations or often simply by the color of our skin," said Wesson. "These divisions have been exacerbated by Trump, but did not start with him. Enough is enough - we must once and for all address the systemic racism in our country and face it head on. The hill is big but step-by-step we can reach the top. The first step is to start the conversation – with those who have a different perspective than you, with different life experiences, and make an effort to listen and understand each other. That is how we strengthen our community. We are providing that environment with embRACE LA, which can be replicated throughout the country. We can build not only a better city, but a better country—united we can stand—but it starts in our neighborhood, district, and city."

"The powers that be want us divided and isolated from one another instead of coming together to talk and recognize our shared experiences and values," said **Alberto Retana**, President and CEO of Community Coalition. "embRACE LA is the antithesis to those calls for division. We can’t address the deep-rooted racism in this country if we’re not prepared to discuss it in meaningful ways."

Organizers encouraged community members to join the movement by visiting the website, where they can access a downloadable toolkit which includes resources and guides on hosting conversations about race. The website also features a survey for residents to offer input and share their viewpoint on the state of equity in Los Angeles. It’s anticipated that approximately 150+ of these gatherings will take place across the city in homes, offices, businesses and community-based organizations (i.e. [Peace Over](#)

[Violence](#) and UCLA's [Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies](#)), culminating with a dinner in each of the 15 council districts, hosted by its respective council representative.

"Nearly three years ago we launched a pilot program called 'embrACE LA' and asked Angelenos to weigh in on issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity," said Councilmember **Mitch O'Farrell**. "Today, the program continues as we break bread with our neighbors and counterbalance the daily onslaught of vitriol, hate, and willful ignorance coming out of the White House. This next phase will help us fine tune the goals of the program so we can grow stronger as a community, defend the values we hold dear in our city, and identify opportunities for neighborhoods that have been historically overlooked."

Community Coalition member and South LA resident **Rachel Day** shared a personal story about racism, in which her 20 year old son was falsely accused of shoplifting while checking out of a grocery store with her on Mother's Day. Police threatened to tase him and handcuffed him. "All I could think is how could this happen? Yet inequities like this happen all the time. This is why talking about race and racism is so important. This is why being an active member of your community is vital. embrACE LA and Community Coalition are so inspiring to me – it's a way to reconnect with people and the community."

Amid today's chaotic and often-divided political and socio-economic national climate, embrACE LA gives Angelenos the opportunity to sit down – whether it's with complete strangers or colleagues – and have meaningful in-person conversations about one of America's defining struggles. Each gathering will give Angelenos the unique opportunity to put themselves out there in new ways and expand their points of view – interacting with people who have diverse backgrounds, learning about different life experiences, or breaking bread with neighbors where there is much in common but little to no previous interaction.

Gatherings will consist of approximately 10-12 participants who live, work or go to school in Los Angeles. A host will guide each conversation, generally lasting 2-3 hours. Conversations will vary, occurring across the city at different times throughout the day, sometimes with light refreshments or a meal.

Community Coalition has also enlisted support from experts in various Los Angeles industries, including the arts and entertainment. The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art and Bad Robot Co-CEOs **J.J. Abrams** and **Katie McGrath** will host gatherings in an effort to implement change. Abrams, McGrath and their film and TV production company Bad Robot are behind films including *Star Wars Episodes VII and IX*, *Star Trek Beyond*, *Mission Impossible – Fallout* and TV shows *Alias*, *Lost* and *Westworld*.

In taking this unique approach of utilizing community engagement and conversation as a strategy to ignite sustainable policy change, embrACE LA and the City of Los Angeles together will serve as a leading voice and case study for other major cities in the United States to address racial equity.

Los Angeles is one of the most diverse cities in the United States. Angelenos speak more than 200 different languages and come from more than 100 different countries. The majority of LA's 3.8 million residents are Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC) – making LA a "majority-minority" city. LA is roughly 49% Latinx, 29% White, 12% Asian or Pacific Islander, 9% Black, and 0.2% Native American. About 2% of LA's population identify as two or more races. Even though LA is a majority-minority city, BIPOC often have the least access to resources needed to thrive.

That leads into the need for an Office of Racial Equity, which would help close racial disparities and strengthen inclusion for LA's most marginalized communities. Input will centralize efforts in building a culture where equity, social justice and community engagement are at the heart of decision making.

Through these steps, such an office would spark city dialogue and implement actionable policy to create a more equitable city.

In fall 2016, Los Angeles City Council President Herb Wesson and Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell launched embRACE LA. The goal was to challenge and change racial biases and inequities within individuals, neighborhoods and the city government. Through programs and strategies, embRACE LA began as an unprecedented partnership between government, organizations and communities.

In 2018, the Los Angeles City Council partnered with Community Coalition to launch the first iteration of embRACE LA, making history by successfully training over 40 facilitators and organizing 125 free dinners in homes and community-based organizations throughout the City of Los Angeles. 1,200 residents participated in hundreds of authentic and honest conversations, each driven by the initiative's core principal: we cannot heal what we will not face.

Throughout 2019 and beyond, embRACE LA partners will continue working to improve the conditions of Angelenos most at risk of inequities in our city, utilizing meaningful conversations, campaign building and equity policy advancement.

To learn more, to host your own conversation, or to offer input on the Office of Racial Equity, please visit www.embRACELA.org.

ABOUT COMMUNITY COALITION

For the past 30 years, Community Coalition has brought the community of South LA together to build leadership, launch action campaigns, and create a unified voice for Los Angeles. By working to transform the social and economic conditions that foster inequity, Community Coalition aims to empower everyday residents to influence and change public policy. 2020 will mark the organization's 30th anniversary, a time to reflect on the work and look ahead to the next 30 years of changemaking in South Los Angeles. For more information, please visit <http://cocosouthla.org/>.

ABOUT LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT HERB WESSON

Herb J. Wesson, Jr. has served as the President of the Los Angeles City Council since November 2011 and has represented Council District 10 since 2005. Wesson is the first African American to hold the position of Council President in the city's history and has been re-elected three times to lead the city's legislative body. During his tenure as Council President, Wesson has presided over monumental policy initiatives making Los Angeles a better place to live, work and raise a family. Not only have local policy initiatives—which include raising the minimum wage, divesting from Wall Street and consolidating city elections to increase voter turnout—positively affected local residents, but in many cases the city's actions have spurred state and national response and served as a model for similar policies. For more information, please visit <http://herbwesson.com/>.

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