



**DAYS OF  
DIALOGUE**

THE INSTITUTE FOR NONVIOLENCE IN LOS ANGELES

# FACING RACISM AND BIGOTRY IN LOS ANGELES

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**Days of Dialogue on Facing Racism and Bigotry  
Cohosted by NAACP San Fernando Valley Branch  
And Northridge Invisible  
Congregational Church of Chatsworth  
20440 Lassen St., Chatsworth, CA 91311**

**August 9, 2023**



### Demographics:

This primarily in-person dialogue attracted 22 participants -- including two who logged in from South Africa. The gender breakdown was 14 female, 8 male. Of this number, 10 identified as White, 8 as African American, 2 as Latina, and 2 as South African. Regarding their ages, 18 were older than 25 and four were younger.



The San Fernando Valley is still stereotyped by some as largely White, due to the influx of many families who planted roots in the 1960s and 70s to escape the Black and Brown neighborhoods and especially the heavily integrated schools in other parts of Los Angeles. Today, diversity thrives throughout the Valley, but not without challenges. Most infamously, White police officers beat African American Rodney King. Although decades ago, racial problems remain pervasive.

The San Fernando Valley Branch of the NAACP, a co-sponsor of this dialogue, fights for civil rights, equality, and protection throughout the region. Northridge Invisible, also a co-host, is a grassroots organization that advocates for democracy, voting rights, and progressive political candidates. The Valley's broad diversity is also reflected in the leadership and membership of the Congregational Church of Chatsworth, the location of this dialogue.

In general, the groups discussed the disparaging racial, ethnic, antisemitic, xenophobic, and homophobic comments made by then-City Council President Nuri Martinez, then-Councilmember Gil Cedillo, current, but embattled Councilmember Kevin DeLeon and county labor leader Ron Herrera. All Latinos, they strategized on how to use redistricting to orchestrate a political power grab for Latinos at the expense of African Americans in Los Angeles, in a conversation they assumed would remain private.

Made public through a leak to news media, their comments --especially by Martinez --revealed contempt for Mexican immigrants from Oaxaca, referred to a gay councilmember as "a little bitch," and his Black son as a misbehaving "little monkey." She also insulted Jews and Armenians including members of the Los Angeles City Council. The others made their own offensive remarks or remained silent.



After igniting a firestorm, Martinez, Cedillo and Herrera are no longer in their positions, but De Leon remains on the council and is in a runoff election.

In response to their repugnant comments, dialogue participants met in small groups and discussed the controversy within the context of the power that city officials have when speaking insensitively about race, ethnicity, and gender. Some participants also focused on the historic and ongoing lack of trust African Americans have for elected officials. Prompted by facilitators, they also shared their personal experiences with racism and bigotry.



**INTRODUCTIONS:** Rev. James Thomas welcomed everyone to this event.

**EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM/BIGOTRY:** When asked about their experiences with racism, some reported being overlooked in a store by a White cashier, witnessing White people getting out of a swimming pool in Idaho after Black people entered the pool. One man talked about how he was scheduled to interview a White man in a hotel lobby; the job candidate walked past him a few times before being surprised that a suited Black man was there to interview him. A Latina woman mentioned the interactions she had with her White boss and watching while their gardener was pulled over by a White police officer.

Questioned about possible solutions, one group noted the importance of have difficult conversations about race and colorism with family members and friends. This included how to speak to family members and friends, including those who were very opposed to speaking about sensitive topics, or even unresponsive.

After listening to some discussions, the South African participants offered their experiences with racism and bigotry. Because racism is normalized in their country, they revealed that they have experienced racism so often they are numb to it. Whites own the economic power in South Africa, a land of immense wealth, inhabited largely by Black people, most of whom remain impoverished.

One South African participant, a young man with education, described how Whites considered a “better Black.” He noticed that the Black domestic women who worked in the predominantly White parts of town were mistreated and had to leave the town by the end of the day. Describing the heart-breaking problem of classism, he said he was only treated better because he was educated.

Another South African stated that he was tired of systems that prey on Black people. “When they are called out on their racist actions or behaviors, we [Black people] rush to forgiveness too quickly without being made whole.”



**BUILDING TRUST:** When the conversations focused on the controversial comments by the politicians and labor leader, participants were asked what it would take to build trust between our elected officials, law enforcement and the community. Many stated they didn't believe it could happen. Participants agreed that just when we [community/nation] take a few steps forward, something happens with our police and political figures, and we take a few steps back. "You shouldn't have to be scared. We pay tax dollars for law enforcement to protect us." As for our politicians, there was a consensus that once they are elected, they forget how they got there. One participant stated that there should be more people of color in positions of leadership.

Referring specifically to the racist and disparaging comments made by Martinez, Cedillo, De Leon and Herrera, one participant described the recent events as "rolodex of racist incidents." Despite the exodus of Martinez, Cedillo and Herrera, she said the pervasive distrust of law enforcement and politicians by Black people has worsened. She also questioned the historic lack of resources, adding that sufficient money needs to be allocated so Black people aren't suffering. "They need to acknowledge that we need housing, food, water, etc." Other participants commented in agreement about the need for housing, food, and basic needs. They added that money drives everything, and one suggested, "We need to figure out how to help each other at a basic level."

More comments were offered about how oppression is systemic. Minorities, for example, typically receive less pay than Whites who hold identical positions. Some underserved communities struggle to have clean air and water. water and still receive less pay than whites.

Additional comments were made about the needed systemic change. "You can't build trust in something that you weren't designed to participate in." The suggestion was made to dismantle all systems, including the people in positions of power, and start over. "We don't trust each other. Trust won't happen with current elected officials."



**RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS:** The small group dialogues ended with asking participants to offer recommendations for solutions. The groups offered the following suggestions:

- Take the money out of politics
- Dismantle the current systems in place and start over
- Provide money and equal access to education
- Correct the narrative
- Additional housing
- Opportunities for higher education
- Infiltrate at every level – get out and vote
- Change the system
- Better pathways
- Better policing
- Provide money and resources to those doing the work