

lonely planet

# Los Angeles



From collagen to celluloid

## **Watts Labor Community Action Center**

In the historic heart of Watts, this 7-acre complex is simply known as the Center (*WLCAC*; ☎ 213-563-5642, 10950 S Central Ave; open daily, call for hours). It was founded by union activist Ted Watkins after the 1965 riots and provides such social services as day care, job training and senior services. The Center has been operating from its current facilities since 1992, after the original structure was torched during the 1992 riots. It has been instrumental in bringing a hospital, two shopping centers, a park and other infrastructure to Watts. Through its exhibits and cultural events, the Center also strives to bring Angelenos from other parts of the city, as well as tourists, to Watts in an effort to reverse the negative perceptions of the area.

Anchoring a water garden is *The Mother of Humanity*, a bronze sculpture by Nigel Binns, which blends physical features and spiritual symbols of all races in a celebration of contributions by women to civilization. The northern edge of the complex features the Mudtown Flats, a row of facades intended to re-create Central Ave in its '20s and '30s heyday. Depicting such places as the Plantation Night Club and the Largo Theater, it often serves as a backdrop for movie shoots.

Off to the east is the Ted Watkins Center for Communication, a 35,000-sq-foot space named for the Center's founder who died in 1992. Inside are several performance spaces, a gallery and the interesting free Civil Rights Museum. A tour of the latter starts with a peek into the hull of a slave ship filled with human figures and continues with a walk down a virtual Mississippi Delta dirt road, complete with crickets, wagons, trees and other props. It leads to the Countdown to Eternity, an exhibit focused on telling the story of Martin Luther King Jr and the 1960s Civil Rights Movement through photographs and artifacts.

The Center also sponsors concerts and other events. You can explore on your own, but free guided tours are available as well (call ahead).