

L.A. group presents crack epidemic drama

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORTS

The Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), an award-winning theater group, will present a performance of "Agents and Assets" at the First Unitarian-Universalist Church, Oct. 17-19 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, Oct. 20 at 4 p.m.

The play, which has received rave reviews in Los Angeles, addresses the American government's escalating war on drugs.

The entire drama is re-enacted from an actual hearing transcript from the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the body charged with the oversight of the government's intelligence agencies. The report denies allegations made in a 1996 series of articles in the San Jose Mercury News that alleged CIA involvement in crack cocaine trafficking to urban America.

For the Detroit performance, LAPD has added to the cast res-

idents from Detroit who have been severely impacted by drugs and drug policy.

Many of the characters are portrayed by former crack addicts.

"Agents and Assets" director John Malpede said the play helps to highlight the complexity of the issues that surround the drug trade.

"The 'war on drugs,' as the name clearly states, imposes a military solution on a public health and social problem, and in doing so, turns our own citizens into the enemy, and then proceeds to victimize our citizens and their communities," Malpede said. "Agents and Assets" invites its audience to consider the actions of the U.S. government, whether it be in a distant third world country or in downtown Detroit."

Rickey Mantley, of the LAPD, who plays one of the lead characters in "Agents and Assets,"

said the performance deals with some very important issues concerning the crack epidemic.

"We want to make people aware of how the drug policies of this country contradict what the government does about drugs," Mantley said. "Whether or not it can be proven that there was direct involvement by the government in selling crack cocaine, it's clear that the government helped to facilitate it to some degree. The play deals with how the drug policies have impacted minority communities in terms of addiction and incarceration with no treatment."

The performances include discussion forums about the play during the course of four days with participants like activist JoAnn Watson, the Michigan Drug Reform group and Dawud Muhammad, Nation of Islam minister.

For more information, call (313) 671-3583.

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