Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Community in the Time of COVID

Noriko Nakada · Wednesday, August 12th, 2020

Several days each week in my neighborhood in South Los Angeles I head out for a run. When my family and I moved here in 2018, the neighborhood was already shifting. It was the summer before teachers were preparing to go on strike, before the spring when Nipsey Hussle was murdered just a few blocks away. It was a year after Alton Sterling was killed by police and two years before Ahmaud Arbery.

I run through the neighborhood captured by Lynell George in *After/Image: Los Angeles Outside the Frame.* She writes about these streets as the veins and arteries of her childhood, and now this is where I run in pleasant weather: up 59th Street to Alviso, across Slauson, and up the hill.

I've grown comfortable here, familiar with the steady rise and fall of the land, cars speeding down from Overhill, the unforgiving grade on the other side of Angeles Vista. I've gotten used to neighborhood kids speeding by on bikes, parents walking to and from the bus or the market, others getting exercise like me.

I make eye contact with my neighbors, give a head nod, a wave, an acknowledgement. Sometimes I smile or a ask "How's it goin'?" but usually it's quiet. Just feet on pavement. We breathe in and out, and so much is communicated in those silent seconds.

I pass a Black man today and I smile, but it's hidden behind a mask, so I nod. He nods back, and I think about all of the history that has brought us here, to this narrow block of asphalt and concrete under South Central skies: two masked runners getting in a workout during a pandemic on land that was once Tongva, that was later redlined, where Black Americans sought the warmth of other suns and Japanese sought homes post World War II incarceration.

I wonder what he sees when he sees me? Can he recognize that I'm half-Japanese, or does he see a white woman? A Latina? A woman of color he can't quite place? Does his heart race? Will this woman call the cops? Does she fear me? Will she cross the street out of fear? What is her story?

And what do I see in him? What anti-Blackness courses through my veins and arteries despite all of the positive interactions I've had with Black men and all the hundreds of runs I've taken without incident in our neighborhood. I remind myself that he is simply another man on the street.

We pass one another. I am on a run, and he is on a run, and who has time for our stories in this moment? Our stories are the veins and arteries within us and on this morning, community simply means easy passage, a head nod of acknowledgement, and a morning run. We do no harm.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, August 12th, 2020 at 2:32 pm and is filed under Discourse
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