

MYSTERIOUS CALIFORNIA: FOUR AUTHORS
DISCUSSIONS QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS TO POSE AFTER READING
***SOUTHLAND* by NINA REVOYR**

In *Southland*, Nina Revoyr brings us a compelling story of race, love, murder, and history against the backdrop of Los Angeles. A young Japanese-American law student, Jackie Ishida, discovers that four black teenagers were killed in her grandfather's store during the Watts Riots of 1965, and that the murders were never solved or reported. In the process of piecing together the story of the boys' deaths, Jackie unearths secrets of her family's history.

Characters:

Jackie Ishida, Frank's granddaughter, UCLA law student

Frank Sakai, store owner

James Lanier, cousin of one of the boys who was murdered and new friend/co-detective with Jackie

Curtis Martindale, one of the murdered boys

Alma, Curtis' mother

The Holiday Bowl, a bowling alley founded in 1958 by five Japanese Americans. The Holiday Bowl was part of the process of rebuilding the Nikkei community after Internment; the owners sold shares throughout the community in order to finance its construction. Though valued for its 1950s style "Googie" architecture and for its role in integrating Los Angeles, the Holiday Bowl was demolished in October of 2003.

1. Nina Revoyr has referred to the Holiday Bowl Coffee Shop as the birthplace of "Southland." What do you think she means by that? Can a place inspire story?
2. In "Southland," Jackie Ishida learns a key piece about the unsolved crime she is trying to solve, when she talks to Kenji Hirano, her dead grandfather's friend at the Holiday Bowl. Kenji Hirano is described as a pious but delusional man (he occasionally hears the voice of God)? What does she learn from Kenji Hirano? We, the readers, learn about the tragic deaths of Kenji's wife and infant during Internment. What happens when people can't talk about such personal loss and violence?

3. From a book titled "A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life" by Parker Palmer, pg. 169: "Violence is done when parents insult children, when teachers demean students, when supervisors treat employees as disposable means to economic ends, when physicians treat patients as objects, when people condemn gays and lesbians 'in the name of God,' when racists live by the belief that people with a different skin color are less than human. And just as physical violence may lead to bodily death, spiritual violence causes death in other guises – the death of a sense of self, of trust in others, of risk-taking on behalf of creativity, of commitment to the common good. If obituaries were written for death of this kind, every daily newspaper would be a tome." What examples can you think of from *Southland* that show the results of spiritual violence versus physical violence?
4. Did you know that southern California beaches were segregated?
5. Revoyr writes in the Prologue of "Southland:" "In the city where history is useless and the future reinvented every day, no one has any need for game you hunted and cooked yourself; for berries stolen off the vine; for neighbors in pairs and threesomes sitting on stoops with cups of coffee, faces lifted to accept the morning sun. No one thinks about the neighborhood, its little corner market. No one, including the children of the people who lived there." Do you feel that history is treated as if it is useless in Los Angeles? What about elsewhere? Do you feel you are a part of a neighborhood where you know people, talk to people, run into them at the market?
6. Have there been any buildings in your life that played an important role and were demolished, like the Holiday Bowl. What were the consequences?
7. How do you feel about Los Angeles after reading "Southland?"
8. When the murderer is revealed, were you surprised? What does the identity of the murderer indicate about the nature of racism?