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# Southland



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## Synopsis

"[A]n absolutely compelling story of family and racial tragedy. Revoyr's novel is honest in detailing southern California's brutal history, and honorable in showing how families survived with love and tenacity and dignity."—Susan Straight, author of *Highwire Moon* *Southland* brings us a fascinating story of race, love, murder and history, against the backdrop of an ever-changing Los Angeles. A young Japanese-American woman, Jackie Ishida, is in her last semester of law school when her grandfather, Frank Sakai, dies unexpectedly. While trying to fulfill a request from his will, Jackie discovers that four African-American boys were killed in the store Frank owned during the Watts Riots of 1965. Along with James Lanier, a cousin of one of the victims, Jackie tries to piece together the story of the boys' deaths. In the process, she unearths the long-held secrets of her family's history. *Southland* depicts a young woman in the process of learning that her own history has bestowed upon her a deep obligation to be engaged in the larger world. And in Frank Sakai and his African-American friends, it presents characters who find significant common ground in their struggles, but who also engage each other across grounds—historical and cultural—that are still very much in dispute. Moving in and out of the past—from the internment camps of World War II, to the barley fields of the Crenshaw District in the 1930s, to the streets of Watts in the 1960s, to the night spots and garment factories of the 1990s—*Southland* weaves a tale of Los Angeles in all of its faces and forms. Nina Revoyr is the author of *The Necessary Hunger* ("Irresistible."—*Time Magazine*). She was born in Japan, raised in Tokyo and Los Angeles, and is of Japanese and Polish-American descent. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Revoyr (*The Necessary Hunger*) returns to the gritty, central Los Angeles of her debut with this compelling if overlong tale of a headstrong Japanese-American lesbian law student obsessed with discovering her family history and solving a murder mystery. Jackie Ishida, 25, is undone by the sudden death in 1994 of her loving, seemingly healthy Japanese grandfather, Frank Sakai. A veteran of World War II, he lived a philanthropic life and in the 1960s owned a small grocery in the racially integrated Crenshaw district he grew up in. When Jackie's aunt Lois finds a large shoebox with \$38,000 in cash in Frank's closet, both women are perplexed, particularly since they also discover a mysterious beneficiary, Curtis Martindale, in a decades-old will. Lois dispatches Jackie to find Curtis. Enter strong, street-smart James Lanier, a cousin of Curtis's, who informs Jackie that Curtis is dead. An employee at Frank's store during the Watts riots in 1965, Curtis, along with three other black teenage boys, was found frozen to death in the store's freezer. This heinous crime was never reported (nor discussed within the Sakai family) and though white beat cop Nick Lawson was pegged as a prime suspect, the case was never solved and Frank closed the store permanently. As Jackie and James dig deeper into Curtis's past, their friendship (and awkward attraction to each other) takes its toll on Jackie's fading three-year relationship with girlfriend Laura. In chapters alternating past and present, clues are uncovered that romantically link Curtis's mother Alma to Frank. When a surprise suspect in the killings is fingered, it paves the way for a dark conclusion rooted in skepticism, injustice and racial intolerance. Somewhat overplotted but never lacking in vivid detail and authentic atmosphere, the novel cements Revoyr's reputation as one of the freshest young chroniclers of life in L.A. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Spanning three generations, Revoyr's follow-up to *The Necessary Hunger* (1997) uses the murder of three boys during the 1965 Watts riot as the pivot point for a moving, sometimes harrowing exploration of race relations among black, Japanese, and white residents of L.A. When her grandfather dies in 1994, young Japanese American lawyer Jackie Ishida seeks to discover why her grandfather, Frank, had once planned to leave his Crenshaw grocery store to one of the murder victims, a black teen from the neighborhood. After enlisting the help of one of the young man's relatives, rock-solid community group worker James Lanier, Jackie embarks on a journey that will enable her to understand why she has fled so far from her Japanese roots she won't even consider

dating a fellow Asian. Switching effortlessly from the mid-1990s to the 1960s, the 1940s, and back again, Revoyr populates the landscape with compelling characters who are equally believable whether they're black, Japanese, male, female, gay, or straight. With prose that is beautiful, precise, but never pretentious, she brings to vivid life a painful, seldom-explored part of L.A.'s past that should not be forgotten. If Oprah still had her book club, this novel likely would be at the top of her selection list. Frank Sennett

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There are not enough good things to say about Revoyr's *Southland*. The novel is beyond incredible and dare I say that Ms. Revoyr is perhaps one of the best contemporary authors of our time. It is a gripping and wonderful novel about tough times in Los Angeles county. Those who have lived through the era following WWII will relate to the heated, racial tensions between that erupted during the Watts riots. If you are part of the latter generation, you will experience a harsh dose of reality as you move with the main character in her search for the killer of four young African American men. The book is extremely realistic, staying true to the time period but also being captivating in that Revoyr's writing style is both creative and engaging. This novel will speak most heavily to native Angelinos but is transcendent and makes a terrific read for anyone attempting to understand the fabric of the star-studded town of L.A.

I started reading this the day after I visited the Watts Towers in south central LA. As a rather nervous visitor to the area (not without reason - there was a drive by killing of an 11 year old outside a church the same day) I was absolutely glued to this book. I love the LA noir genre of detective fiction. This is very different, and offers far more insight into WHY LA is as it is. It takes us to other parts of LA - the more middleclass areas of West LA (where I was staying), for example. This book is a riveting story, and it deftly juggles the historical context and so achieves so much 'explanation' and 'history' in a naturalistic way. It also, most importantly of all, offers hope (which, by contrast, noir fiction rarely does)

I got this book for my class on Los Angeles history, and I really enjoyed it. The book flowed well and had a very entertaining storyline. This was one book that I actually took the time to read cover to cover rather than skim through. Though it's been a while since I read this book, this book makes me smile whenever I think about it. I really appreciated following the narrator's path to self-discovery while she is seeking to unveil the truth about this history. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested.

I read this in preparation of future references. I am shocked at how unique and authentic this book is. The story line is unique, but yet on point with the history. The book focuses on multiple aspects of life and history. The book had a few touches on war: "Why didn't you ever tell me that you fought in the war?" "Because it didn't make any difference." page 199. "Definitely worth a read if you're interested in the history of Los Angeles, especially the Crenshaw district." You judge a book by its contents, but what makes a book good is how it changes your value on certain things. How does Southland changes one's view? Well, after I read this book; I did not believe the prejudices of this world. As an eighteen year old college student, this book had certainly opened my eyes. At the moment I am reading "The Help", "The Help" and "Southland" are different in many ways, but they are both similar when presenting views on equality and discriminations. I would recommend both books to anyone.

I lived through the Watts Riots in LA so this book confirmed a number of "suspicions". Nina's description of Lanier fits my husband in many respects. He also told me of his experience as a soldier in an all Black unit in Korea--the story about the Korean child is almost the same as he told it to me. This was a re-read for me as I first read the book when it came out.

I accidentally came across this title when I was looking for a new book to download. I'm so glad I did! It's very well written and although it is a work of fiction it is a historically correct portrayal of some of the terrible injustices in LA's past (and I think a cautionary tale that history repeats itself). As a native Angeleno I think the story and characters captured the tone, mood and "look" of the real LA in the postwar years through the early '90's. I think readers from anywhere will find this a story well told and worth reading.

Truth be told, this was a required reading for my college course. Obviously, I was not eager to read this, as it was a graded assignment. However, I'm glad that it was. This is a beautiful story with a beautiful ending. The beginning was slow. It wasn't until nearly half the book in until I became mesmerized with the writing, the characters, and the history of Angeles Mesa and the Watts Riots. Curtis became my favorite character, and Frank and Alma became my favorite couple. Undoubtedly, this is a book that I will read again in the future, appreciating the contents more and more after each read.

What a great read - perfect balance of mystery, suspense, and tragedy. The characters are so diverse, yet still very familiar. My only gripe is the cast - it took me a few chapters (& a side note) to get familiar with this sizable group of characters that span across different families and decades. Regardless, this book was \*not\* disappointing, at all.

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