Livin’ la Vida Bronx

By Isabel Marte
The Bronx

Often when a person hears a mention of The Bronx, people connect it to an unsafe and poor area full of gangs, crime, etc. However, what they should connect it to is a welcoming and misunderstood community. The Bronx does not stay shining throughout the night, but that does not make it any less exciting to live in. My community lies minutes away from Manhattan's Washington Heights, although it is still The Bronx, which gives it a rich cultural balance. The story of my community is important to know because the reputation of the Bronx is deceiving. The photographs of my neighborhood is worth the view because it shows the real and positive aspects of The Bronx. For my community in The Bronx, is a pleasant and benign community.

My community is significantly safer now, than it was in the previous years due to an increase in surveillance. It used to be common to hear a gunshot, or hear that the grocery stores on the corner had been robbed. In addition, there would often be residents loitering outside of local stores. A few years ago, I used to despise my area and could not wait to leave. After the parties that my neighbor often threw, there would always be drunks throwing glass bottles on the floors and walls outside of the building, if not yelling pointlessly. The last straw was when one of my neighbor's party threw a bottle of alcohol at our window, shattering it into pieces. Not too long after, surveillance cameras were placed in front of many buildings, including my own. Police cars would often drive around to check up on the area. Renovations became common in the local stores and even in our apartments, making the area not only cleaner and but more appealing to everyone. Newspaper articles do not give the area credit. Newspapers say otherwise, focusing on the whole area of the 34th precinct, which is from Washington Heights to Inwood. In "Where Crime Is Up Across the Board, More Police but Not Many Jitters", Al Baker states, "the 34th Precinct, which covers Washington Heights and Inwood in Manhattan, is the only precinct to show an increase this year in criminal complaints ... (Over all, the precinct is up 23.6 percent in major crimes.)". Baker makes the point that in total, the crime rate has increased, however, near 181st Street in Washington Heights is the area that I am closer to, has gotten significantly safer with the surveillance input. In addition, the article itself is out of date by two years. Jose, who has been a worker at a local bodega for over 20 years, would disagree with the article since he observes that over time the community has changed a lot in the aspects of security, cleanliness and calmness. The community has been acknowledged by many residents as to being safer, especially by the increase in surveillance.

Along with being safer, my community's diversity is rich, bringing about a welcoming feeling. NY1's Shazia Khan states, "Now, a more mixed population calls the neighborhood home." Khan is referring to the Dominican dominance that used to live throughout Washington Heights. Slowly the dominance is dying out because residents were forced to move elsewhere due to housing issues. Many applied for Section 8, a service to help lower class residents, yet many buildings in Washington Heights rejected Section 8, forcing many Dominicans to live in The Bronx. Many of these residents are in my community. Most residents in my community are Spanish speakers, but there are also many different African cultures in our community as well. In Washington Heights there is a new migration of Asians into the neighborhoods. Ironically, the history of Washington Heights started with Puerto Ricans and Cubans, and then later Dominicans and Mexicans. When interviewed, all randomly selected residents said that they would like the diversity of the neighborhood to remain. Spanish culture is so rich and lively, that just being near Washington Heights you would get the sense that you're in a Spanish country and not in New York, making it a welcoming community to all different cultures.

The photographs taken of my community further support the warm and welcoming feeling of my area through its subjects and color. The photos all have the theme of warmth. The color choice of hints of red were purposely chosen to bring out that warmth. The photo of Jose, the grocery store worker, shows the Dominican culture through a likable seemingly-modest working character. The local park shows a common spot where people go, yet its emptiness shows that it's a calm area. The Washington Heights streets show the diversity of people that live in the area. The statue shows the cultures of the neighborhood being mostly Catholics, from the Spanish culture. All of the photographs share a darker shadow on the edges to bring the viewer closer to the subjects, and closer to the warmth of the color. These elements make the community stand out, bringing the emotion of peace and warmth when they see the area.

My community in The Bronx brings about a peaceful atmosphere. The deceiving reputation of the Bronx does not support this, which is why my body of work is important. These photos will give at least a second thought about how to perceive the Bronx community. The neighbors are very friendly, and keep out of the way. There is a peace that is seen throughout the community through its calmness and quietness. The story of my community is vital to know because bad reputations try bring it down. The area has gotten so much safer and much more diverse over the years. Hopefully, the community will continue to grow and more people will learn to see that although the borough is poor, it is rich inviting environment and diversity.

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