

Full Disclosure: Echoes of Home and Reflections on Heritage and Privilege

Description

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Author's Memo

Through these reflections on heritage, I aimed to delve into my personal experiences as a child of parents who immigrated from the Bronx to a suburban lifestyle. The narrative begins with a candid admission that while I often claim a connection to the Bronx through my parents, the reality is that I'm far from the struggles and experiences they faced. I grapple with feelings of guilt and jealousy regarding the contrasting realities of my parents' upbringing and my own. I reflect on the privilege afforded by my suburban lifestyle, juxtaposed with the richness of culture and experiences that I feel I've missed out on. Overall, "Full Disclosure" is a deeply personal exploration of identity, privilege, and the complexities of heritage.

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By Andre Frueh for Unsplash

Sometimes when people ask me where I am from, I start by saying that “both of my parents are from the Bronx.”

It is equal parts truth and lie, because it is factual and yet has nothing to do with me and everything to do with my sepia-toned reflection of their journey, in contrast to my own privileged guilt over manicured lawns and high thread count sheets.

And full disclosure: I think it makes me seem more gritty when I say it...

which I am not because I truly know nothing of the poverty they left behind
Which ironically they did not notice at the time...It wasn't called that,,it was simply called life.
I regretfully know nothing of chickens on city streets, or of
wheeling and dealings in black market alleys, or of stoop conversations, or of the daily “Nun-anxiety,”
they endured in school.

I have never experienced fire hydrant water parks or the smell of meat gravy in the street on Sundays,
or an old country's language filling the air, while epic games of stickball occupied the pavement. I can
only imagine the crowded family gatherings in a two bedroom apartment, inhabited by three families,
where liquor flowed almost as freely as laughter, cigar smoke, home made wine and joy.

And full disclosure: I am jealous of the story of their struggle but not their actual struggle because I
have never once been hungry for more than a couple of hours.

‘Sometimes when people ask me where I am from, I start by saying that “both of my parents are from the Bronx.”

And how fucking ungrateful of me to lament that I will never dance to the rhythm of life lived at that
hectic pace, because my parents are the American dream personified in post world war II suburbia...a
landing strip for the fleet of one-way great white flights, packed with Irish and Italians from all five
boroughs. Suddenly they were being called “white”as the day-to-day distinctions between new money
and old money were blurred by offerings at Church, highly-rated school systems and restricted use
Little League fields.

At the inner-city school in which I teach, a student recently asked, “Mister...do you always have to give
something up to get something?” I openly admired his introspection and replied with a vague generic
answer about sacrifice, change and staying true to yourself.

‘And full disclosure: I am jealous of the story of their struggle but not their actual struggle because I have never once been hungry for more than a couple of hours.

Full disclosure: I should have said, “yes.”

As a “first-generation suburbanite” (I’m not trying to make that a thing, btw), it has always been in my consciousness that my parent’s lives growing up in the Bronx, were far more rich in culture, experiences and grit than mine would ever be. As a child, I hung on every little nugget of detail that I could extract from the rare moments of reminiscence that occurred during family parties. The Bronx, while only eleven miles from where I grew up in Westchester County, was lightyears away from my reality.

The closest connection I had to immigrant experience was through our next-door neighbors, who spoke Italian, occasionally hung a deer carcass from a tree in their yard and raised their Thanksgiving turkey in their garden. Ironically they were probably the richest family on the block as they ingeniously monopolized the landscaping services for the entire area of Bronxville Manor. But other than that, it seemed that any trace of the “old world” was erased from our sheltered existence.

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And of course that is what had to happen. As I romanced the poverty and struggle of an urban immigrant class, my parents moved out and moved up. The leap of that post World War II generation was monumental and they rightfully enjoyed the fruition of their parent’s dreams. Great schools, space between homes, picket fences and garages to park in, meant that they had made it. And for us children it meant comfort, food, security and safety. What it also meant was that the richness of collective culture— of street interaction and collective celebrations would fade away and disappear.

My father spoke enough Italian to fake his way through a conversation, but we spoke none. We would

live our lives in restricted spaces, mostly our own homes and with little struggle or need for negotiation to survive. We didn't rely on anyone else and therefore we didn't commune with anyone else. Sure we had a few friends on the block and at school, and occasionally we would visit each other's homes for holidays, but it didn't feel like we depended on each other.

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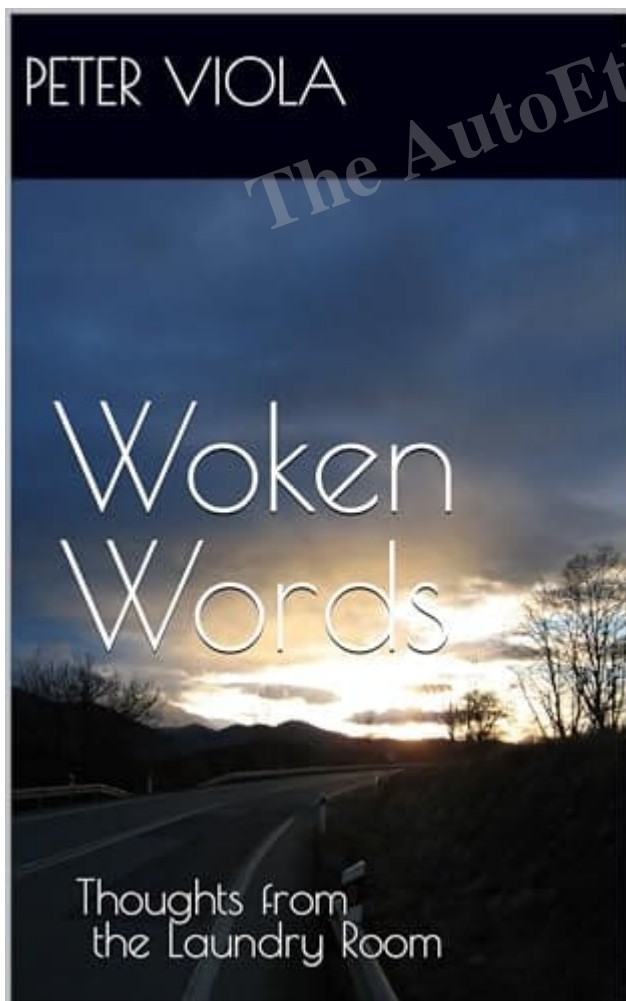
I know logically that it is just what happens. Assimilation and Americanization are processes that occur to all groups over time. But my experience is my experience and as grateful as i am for the gains that have been made through the risks that my parents took, I am perhaps unfairly jealous of the richness of the environment through which they endured.

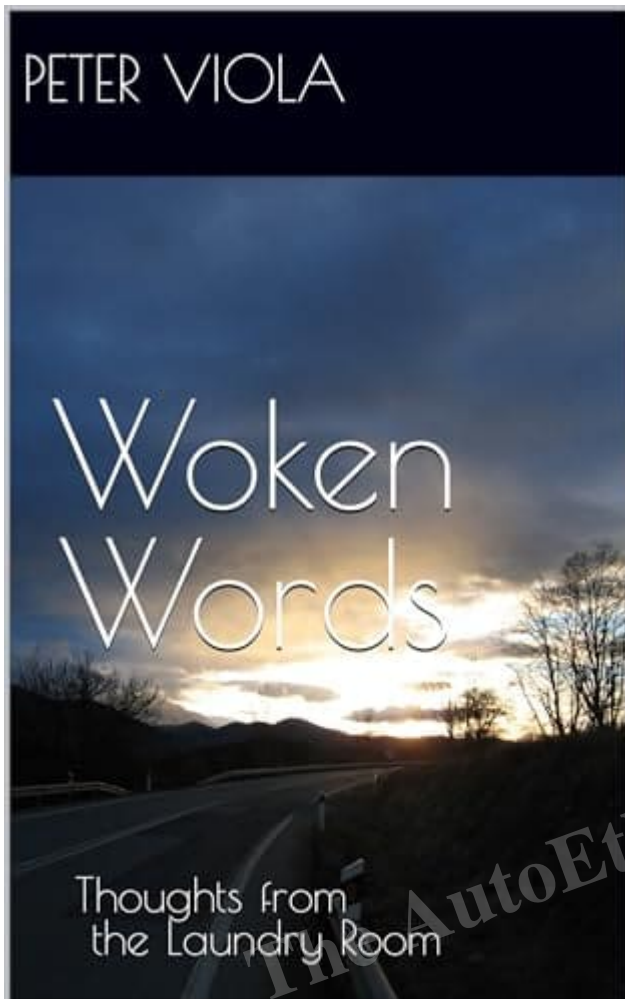
Now to this day, I still take great pride in my ethnicity and heritage and its unique place in the American pantheon of immigrant history, but I have never felt an active part of that story. When prompted, I proudly identify myself as "half-Italian/ half-Irish," but the fact remains that my biggest contribution to my heritage is my honoring it from a distance .

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...I am a human-race-ist...
someone who erases the baseless lies and
embraces all the shades of faces as proven cases
of commonality because our reality is that we
share every emotion across the earth and ocean
we are one race occupying one space and if you choose to contact trace
you will find me connected to you in ways you never thought you knew
but the truth will set us free...because the truth is you and me
share the same sun when it shines and the same hope when it finds
us desperate for acceptance and love, needing a sign from above
to know that we are not constantly judged
for being less than what they say we are,
you see my friend I am a gift that shines like you
and we will lift each other high up too,

there will be times when you need me and I need you
to see past what they have tried to do, attempts to divide in two...
but we are not down for this fake equation watch us rise to this occasion
now we're wise to generations of invasions of our minds,
power plays from every Nation every kind of cowardly manipulation that has tried to convince us
otherwise brainwashed us and fed us lies...
but now it's been exposed the game is done
This Power trip is over and we've won.
From this moment on we will look each other in the eye...
respect each other love and strive for understanding side by side
each other standing tall and hand and hand demanding
that we all are prepared to face this –as we shout together
“yes I am a human-race-ist.”





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