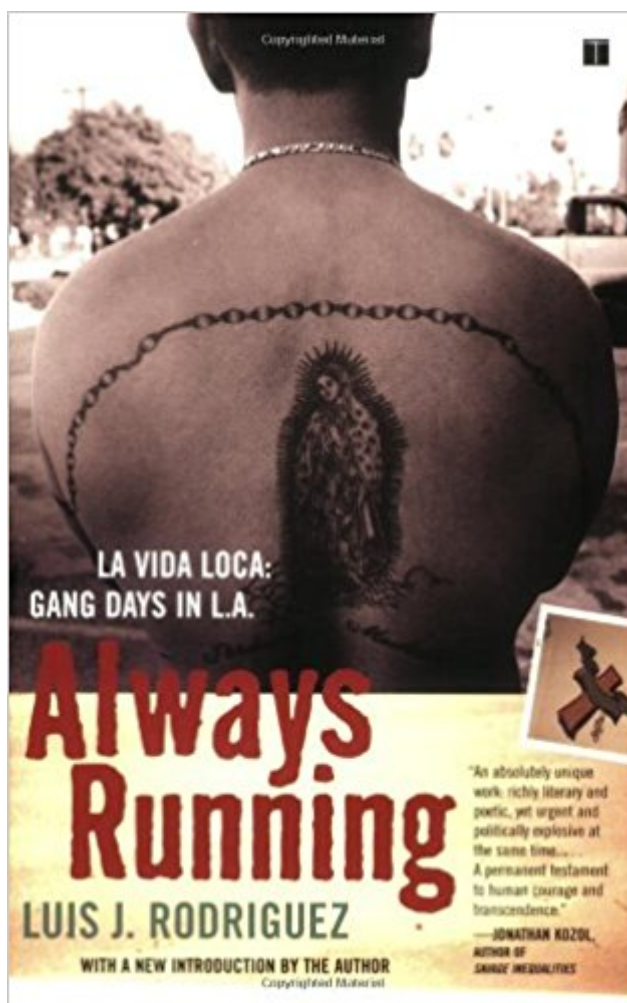


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Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days In L.A.



Synopsis

The award-winning and bestselling classic memoir about a young Chicano gang member surviving the dangerous streets of East Los Angeles, now featuring a new introduction by the author. Winner of the Carl Sandburg Literary Award, hailed as a New York Times notable book, and read by hundreds of thousands, *Always Running* is the searing true story of one man's life in a Chicano gang and his heroic struggle to free himself from its grip. By age twelve, Luis Rodriguez was a veteran of East Los Angeles gang warfare. Lured by a seemingly invincible gang culture, he witnessed countless shootings, beatings, and arrests and then watched with increasing fear as gang life claimed friends and family members. Before long, Rodriguez saw a way out of the barrio through education and the power of words and successfully broke free from years of violence and desperation. Achieving success as an award-winning poet, he was sure the streets would haunt him no more until his young son joined a gang. Rodriguez fought for his child by telling his own story in *Always Running*, a vivid memoir that explores the motivations of gang life and cautions against the death and destruction that inevitably claim its participants. At times heartbreakingly sad and brutal, *Always Running* is ultimately an uplifting true story, filled with hope, insight, and a hard-earned lesson for the next generation.

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Customer Reviews

As the preface of this admirable but ultimately disappointing memoir states, Rodriguez, an award-winning poet and publisher of the small press Tia Chucha, decided to document his youth as

an East Los Angeles gang member in an effort to steer his teenaged son, Ramiro, away from the gang that he recently joined. A member of various Latino gangs based in and around the South San Gabriel Valley during the late 1960s, Rodriguez participated in random acts of violence, and was imprisoned on several occasions for the crimes he committed. Unfortunately, he offers frustratingly little detail behind the facts of his life and activity in the gangs. Rodriguez presents colorful characters and highly charged events, such as shootings, Mexican funerals, rapes and arrests, but his writing style renders much of that rich material forgettable. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"An absolutely unique work: richly literary and poetic, yet urgent and politically explosive at the same time...A permanent testament to human courage and transcendence." -- Jonathan Kozol, author of *Savage Inequalities*"Rodriguez's account of his coming of age is vivid, raw...fierce, and fearless...Here's truth no television set, burning night and day, could ever begin to offer." -- Gary Soto, *The New York Times Book Review*"Every spiky anecdote from a life of guns, razors, uppers, downers, glue, heroin, sex, and early death supports this former gang member's view of the violence as collective suicide. That Rodriguez's memoir takes place...before the '92 L.A. riots only makes this beautifully written and politically astute account more compelling." -- Suzanne Ruta, *Entertainment Weekly*"Extraordinarily haunting and evocative." -- Paul Ruffins, *The Washington Post Book World*

Always Running is an engaging and intelligent look into the socio-political factors that have led to the proliferation of street gangs in the last century in areas where large percentages of citizens have few opportunities but plentiful obstacles, told through the firsthand experiences of former gang member and now activist, Luis Rodriguez, as he grows up as an oppressed minority in the over-policed, but under-protected, gang-haven of East LA. Though his story is fairly common—his parents moved from Mexico to LA to improve their lives and in spite of their best efforts weren't able to protect their son from getting absorbed into the world of gangs surrounding him—it's how he tells the story that makes this book unique and valuable. Rodriguez doesn't romanticize the gang lifestyle of drugs, women, and crime the way that other writers might do. Rather, Rodriguez uses real human emotion and insight to explain the sheer horrors of this lifestyle in an attempt to deter any kids from wanting to live it. Though *Always Running* is a personal account of Rodriguez's gang activity and later activism, it's as much a historical account of the factors that led to the rise of gangs in LA in the 20th Century—and he

blends the two perfectly. We see how those factors are similar to those that led Rodriguez to join a gang himself. He didn't join because he wanted to do drugs, have power, and kill people, he joined because, if he didn't, he'd be more vulnerable to being beaten, robbed, and/or killed growing up as an oppressed minority in a dangerous and chaotic world. A gang affiliation meant protection but it also meant identity. Mexicans have long faced discrimination in this country, and many joined gangs as a way to celebrate their heritage of struggle. The book is filled with great quotes that explain this identity: "I'd walk into the counselor's office for whatever reason and looks of disdain greeted me" "one meant for a criminal" "It was harder to defy this expectation than just accept it" "It was a jacket I could try to take off, but they kept putting it back on" "So why not be proud? Why not be an outlaw? Why not make it our own?" Though the book exposes a lot of ugliness, one of the major themes Rodriguez explores is his pride in Chicano heritage, and how this pride eventually inspired him to give up the gang lifestyle. When he's able to explore his identity in more positive ways, such as through joining Chicano pride groups, painting murals, and writing about his experiences, Rodriguez slowly starts to leave the gang lifestyle behind, and in doing so, he begins to see through its shallowness and pointlessness. Though it may give kids protection and a feeling of pride, he shows how those doing the "protecting" may be the very people who you need protection from when you question their lifestyle and how silly their pride is when it comes at the expense of selling your own soul. Luckily for Rodriguez, he was able to escape this lifestyle, which is not something many of his friends could say. Death is always around every corner, and every turn of the page, and so few kids like Rodriguez are able to live long enough to see through this lifestyle and develop into productive members of society. One of the most valuable parts of this book is its socio-political message about the horrible affects the oppression of minorities has on a society, and this message is as current and poignant today as it was when the book was written. Rodriguez explains how systemic racism was used throughout the history of LA to keep certain minority groups poor, disenfranchised, and controlled by their oppressors, and how this not only hurts the minority groups, but also hurts the oppressors. Society creates gangs then lives in fear of being attacked by them and police brutality results. It's impossible today to turn on the news and avoid stories of policemen and women harassing, intimidating, assaulting, and sometimes, killing, specific demographics of US citizens for no other reason than their skin color, religious affiliation, national origins. This book is filled with so many examples of horrific crimes committed by police officers that it's hard not to be outraged. Granted, most of these crimes were committed against gang members, but these gang members were mostly misguided kids, and the

cops, who are adults who've sworn to protect and defend US citizens, oftentimes cause more violence and crime than the gang members. Again, Rodriguez has a lot of great quotes to explain this: "In the barrio, the police are just another gang." Shootings, assaults and skirmishes between the barrios are direct results of police activity. Even drug dealing. I know this. Everybody knows this. Quotes like this show why the Black Lives Matter movement is so important, and how it didn't just emerge out of some bubble "the problem has always been here, and the more that people read books like *Always Running*, the better chances we have as a society to address it. Part poetic personal story, part engaging historical lesson, part inspiration tale of redemption, part exultation of Chicano heritage, part poignant work of socio-political activism, *Always Running* is a multifaceted book dripping with live-in human experience and emotion, and I highly recommend it to everyone who cares about improving the world they live in.

What's crazy about this book is that so much of this was eerily similar to events that happened much more recently: What happened in Baltimore and Ferguson, to name just two. Unfortunately, stories of police brutality disproportionately being inflicted on people with brown and black skin hasn't changed much since what Luis Rodriguez experienced in his youth. One thing I didn't like about this book was that he jumped around time-wise for reasons that weren't clear to me. He'd talk about stuff that happened in 1970 and then suddenly we're back in 1968, back and forth. Sometimes he'd be talking about being 15 and suddenly we're talking about events that happened when he was 9. There were lots of characters, too. These two things meant it wasn't always easy to follow the narrative. My favorite part of the book was when he and a Chicano girl tried out to become the school mascots Joe and Josephine Aztec because their community was tired of Anglo students filling the role and making the characters look like bumbling morons. Luis and Esme do an authentic Aztec dance in authentic Aztec dress. It was a part of building community pride and the scene made me tear up. His story of the violence and prejudice and poverty he was subjected to meant joining what they called "clubs" and the media called "gangs" for protection seem like a logical thing to do. That he got out alive and became a published writer is the surprising part of the story.

I am not sure how I stumbled across this book.. Maybe it was because I enjoy memoirs and running? I am a middle class white person, that is far removed from Luis's experience and journey in life. I am so grateful for his perspective, it has broadened mine. The book is beautifully written, inspirational and thought provoking.

I grew up in Las Lomas a little after Mr. Rodriguez. His telling of his stories, his descriptions of the neighborhood and the life there evokes so many memories and feelings that I have stopped reading this book at night - it invades my sleep. I don't know many people who were able to survive well enough to write a grocery list, let alone a great biography like this. It's been over 40 years since I left the barrio but I am reminded of it daily by the dental damage I sustained when getting "jumped out" and by the grief I still feel over loss of sister to the substances that pervade Mr. Rodriguez's narrative. I'm deeply impressed and grateful that this story can be told at all, and told so well at that!

Great bio about life in a barrio and gang life particularly. I can see why it would appeal to young adults. This was an account of life in the 60's but it is timeless as the same scenarios are replayed today in society. Poverty, racism and lack of access to a real life are depicted here. The author shares his journey to make his life have meaning. His story is not for little children- it is dark and violent. Rodriguez's honesty about himself is what makes this book 5 star. You know his friends experience life similarly yet chose different paths with far different outcomes. This book is about the human spirit and well worth the read.

Had to purchase this book for my Exposition Composition English class. My first thought was "WTF why are we reading a book about a dude who used to be in a gang" (not being racist/judgemental) it turns out I really like this book. SPOILERS: it's about a guy named Luis telling you about his story. And lemme say his story is worth to read. I recommend it if you like autobiography books or a life changing moment.

such a great inspiration and insight for all youth living in an urban world. I read this when I was 16 years old and going through a rough patch. It gave me the perspective I lacked and insight. I found inspiration to write more and it validated my teen existence in an unprecedented way. I was moved to hear the author do a read and book signing. I bought this for a relative who teaches at-risk youth.

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