

Sunset Park's Struggling Businesses

By Tania Mohammed



I have been living in Sunset Park since April 2018. Sunset Park is a multi-ethnic neighborhood. In 2018, 29.0% of the population identified as Asian, 2.4% identified as black, 39.1% identified as Latinx, and 26.4% identified as white. The businesses in this area have been hard hit by the pandemic, especially on 8th Avenue where the businesses are predominantly run by Chinese immigrants. Since Covid-19 spread from China, many people stopped shopping or eating at restaurants in this area, very early in the pandemic, because there was fear and misinformation about whether people in the area had the virus.

I walked through the different parts of the neighborhood to answer the question:

How did the pandemic affect businesses in Sunset Park?



This deli has a sign to acknowledge how the community support has helped this business survive.



There are many stores with for rent signs or businesses that are closed on 8th Avenue-
Brooklyn's Chinatown.



A row of small stores on 5th Avenue have been shut down. This is where a large part of Sunset Park's Latinx-run businesses are located.



The beloved owner, Kevin Lee, of this deli, located on 43rd Street and 4th Avenue, passed away due to Covid-19. The store closed over the summer.



This shows one of the courtyards in Industry City, which is on 3rd Avenue. The construction of Industry City has been controversial because people in the Sunset Park community are worried about gentrification, since it might bring up the cost of living in this neighborhood. Rising rents would make this neighborhood unaffordable for many low-income families



Most of the restaurants and stores in Industry City are open; although, many have shorter hours or are only open from Friday-Sunday. A custodian is seen with a cleaning cart to make sure the space is sanitized for customers.



While many of the smaller businesses in the Chinese and Latinx community closed for good, Starbucks opened in Industry City in June.



The name of the neighborhood comes from the beautiful views of the sunset that can be seen from Sunset Park. Hopefully, the businesses and the community revive soon, so that everyone can continue to appreciate the beauty and vitality of the neighborhood.

Reflection

The walk around Sunset Park revealed how many businesses suffered as a result of the pandemic. Just from observation it seems that Chinese businesses were harder hit than any other group. It was disheartening to see all the “for sale” and “for rent signs.” I wish the government made more of an effort to help these businesses. However, I also noticed how resilient the people in this community are, as many people were selling their products on the street and doing what they can to make a living.

In terms of creating a photo essay, I am genuinely surprised by the end product because this was my first photo essay. It was interesting to take on a project that required me to convey a message through photos, as I am more comfortable with writing my ideas. I appreciated the challenge of having to think creatively and narrow down my photos. I had to think about how to thematically organized my photos in the most logical manner. If I could do this project again, I would make more of an effort to take photos of people, because capturing human emotions would have made my photo essay even more meaningful in depicting the struggles of the community.

The End



Thank you!