

I have lived in my Los Angeles apartment long enough to have watched the building two blocks over burn to the ground twice. The last time, two years ago, it was the third week of June.

This time, it was nighttime—the third week of June. Even with all the sawing and the crinkle and buzz of the hoses, the flames wrapped as high as the nearby palms. Many slow minutes later, it looked like it was spreading, so I opened Citizen to see if I could get a better view. A popup asked if I wanted to subscribe to premium for \$19.99 a month. In the group text for my building, someone turned on their air purifier. If I subscribe, it says, I'll also be granted access to details about the nearby DUI traffic incident.

I'd half-watched half of *Nightcrawler* that morning. In lieu of listening to the dialogue, I'd been trying to decide whether the scene where Jake Gyllenhaal's character hires an intern was filmed in the Googie-style diner in my neighborhood.

It wasn't, but while I was looking for it, I discovered that Gyllenhaal's pop journalism-proclaimed doppelgänger, Jared Leto, lives in a former U.S. military defense compound sandwiched between the Houdini Estate and the Mulholland Tennis Club in Laurel Canyon.<sup>1</sup> The diner is up for Historic-Cultural Monument status; the compound was awarded protection from the city in 2015.<sup>2</sup>

Before it was some sort of military-industrial playground for the weird ultra-wealthy, Lookout Mountain housed a military-industrial playground in the form of a fully-equipped production studio, plus a bomb shelter.<sup>3</sup> Most of the films and images produced by the 1352nd Motion Picture Squadron of 1947–69 remain classified, but one of the photographs of an H-bomb test, made on a Lookout Mountain camera, apparently featured as the only color photograph in the original MoMA exhibition of Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*.<sup>4</sup>

The blocky photo of an orange mushroom cloud looks kind of the same as every other—devastating and unremarkable—so when fed through Google's reverse image search, it turns up various eBay listings for cheap posters and vinyl albums with vaguely combustion-related cover art. Ours was a nation founded on spirit, turned now into something else.

<sup>1</sup> Naturally, the property appears to be owned not directly by Leto, but by a trust registered in the Cayman Islands.

<sup>2</sup> Los Angeles Department of City Planning, "Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the Lookout Mountain Air Force Station," CHC-2015-2485-HCM, 2015, <https://planning.lacity.org/StaffRpt/CHC/09-17-15/5.%20Lookout%20Mountain%20Air%20Force%20Station%20Final.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ned O'Gorman and Kevin Hamilton, "Lookout Mountain Laboratory," The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, accessed July 2, 2023, <https://www.lookoutamerica.org/about>.

<sup>4</sup> John O'Brian, "The Nuclear Family of Man," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, July 2, 2008, <https://apjff.org/-John-O'Brian/2816/article.html>.