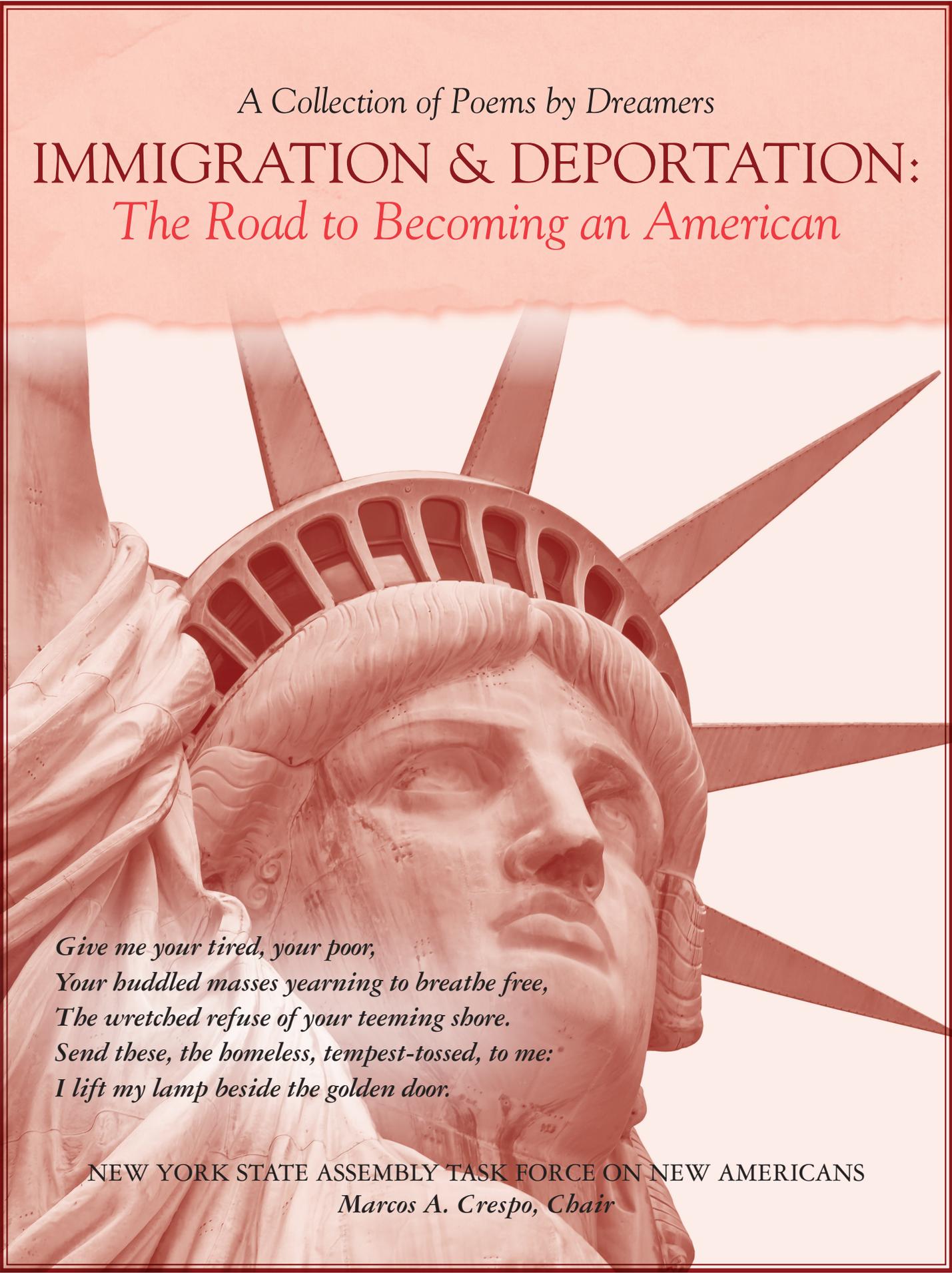


A Collection of Poems by Dreamers

IMMIGRATION & DEPORTATION: *The Road to Becoming an American*



*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY TASK FORCE ON NEW AMERICANS

Marcos A. Crespo, Chair



NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
TASK FORCE ON NEW AMERICANS

February 14, 2014

Dear Colleagues, Friends, and Neighbors:

Every day and all across New York and our nation, dedicated and hardworking educators help shape our future through their interaction with young minds. Building the human resources our society will need to progress is an admirable profession that leaves all of us indebted to these educators.

As social, gender, and economic inequalities plague our communities, institutions of higher learning have become safe havens where our youth are helped on their way to their full human potential. John Jay College of Criminal Justice is an example of such a place; where students are welcomed, encouraged and guided no matter their background or circumstances.

As the nation debates and waits for federal action on immigration issues, John Jay College under the leadership of President Jeremy Travis has engaged his campus community in this important national debate and has highlighted how it impacts students.

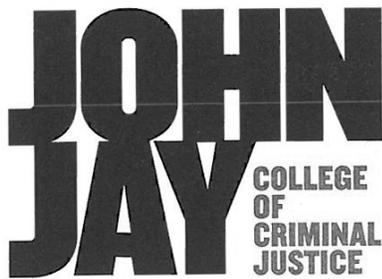
The poems found in this publication are a highlight of the discussions on youth, immigration and deportation that has been promoted by Dr. Travis and John Jay College. The writings of a select number of students on his campus gives us all a better insight into the struggles tens of thousands of our youth, called Dreamers, endure as they strive to complete a college education and become full contributing members of our society.

I am proud to share the work and the visions of the students highlighted in this publication with you. It is my hope, as Chair of the Assembly Task Force on New Americans, that the humanity portrayed in these poems encourages us all to work for a fair and humane immigration policy.

Sincerely,

Marcos A. Crespo
Chair, Assembly Task Force on New Americans

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Jeremy Travis
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Dear Friends:

One of the distinguishing features of John Jay College is its highly diverse faculty and student population. With over 15,000 students, the John Jay College student body is a microcosm of the bustling diversity and immigrant history of New York City. The demographic profile of the college bears this out, with fully 65% of our students coming from underrepresented minority groups, including first and second generation immigrants. Close to one third of our faculty are members of minority groups. In the heart of this pulsating urban metropolis, John Jay College reflects and embodies the cultural and ethnic diversity of the City's communities. We value this diversity.

There is another dimension to this reality. In a city where more than 3 million of its 8 million residents are foreign born, the impact of deportation is severely felt throughout our communities. Nationally, although deportation has long been a widespread practice of the United States government, its history can easily be overshadowed by the popular narrative that we are a nation of immigrants.

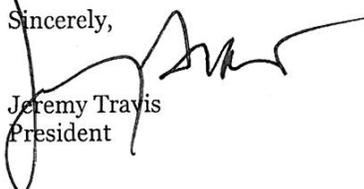
Today, I am proud to reflect on a set of impressive events that have taken place throughout the fall 2013 semester at John Jay College of Criminal Justice under the title of *Immigration & Deportation Initiative* – a semester-long, campus-wide thematic initiative that highlighted the past, present and future of immigration and deportation policy in the United States. Over the course of this past semester, the Initiative brought the often hidden realities of deportation into fuller relief for John Jay College students, faculty and staff. Through lectures, photographic installations, faculty-led and student-performed dramatic plays, several panel discussions, and many other student-driven projects, the initiative aimed to deepen and nuance the College community's understanding of deportation.

I am above all proud and grateful for the dedicated support and sponsorship of our students. In particular, members of the John Jay Student Council have emerged as steadfast academic as well as financial sponsors. Additionally, some of our students have taken this opportunity to create a DREAMers student club at John Jay College. Clearly, this initiative was not simply done FOR students but BY and WITH students who found ways to make their voices heard and share their individual experiences. One means of communicating these personal stories was through a poetry contest. Of 15 submissions four were selected as the winners – all are printed in this issue with permission from their authors, and, as you will read, are powerful, passionate writings. We once again congratulate our student participants, especially the winners.

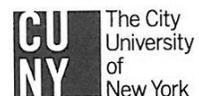
I applaud the NYS Assembly Task Force on New Americans under the Leadership of Assembly Member Marcus Crespo for their efforts in assisting immigrants in their successful transition. Further, I thank the Task Force for producing this publication and supporting our youth.

Please visit the webpage at www.jjay.cuny.edu/id2013, to learn more about the events of our semester-long program. This is an important and timely topic. As an educational institution focused on issues of criminal and social justice we have a responsibility and opportunity to join and shape the national debate through such in-depth initiatives.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Travis
President



Thoughts In Transit

by Rose Mary Osorio

A man sitting next to me
Smells like grass and cigarettes
He's a small man but
His hands are so big and worn out
Like the machinery that they treat him as
Rusty, but working to the point of malfunction
Just like the relationship between me and my father
Which is exactly what the man on the 2 train looks like
A little Mexican man with dark hair and baggy eyes
Torn jeans and dirty work boots just like my father
With a black Jansport book-bag
That smells like the company that exploits him
Like grass and cigarettes
Or like the fish market, where my father knows is the death of him
He made a vow to his children that he cannot live for
Himself because he is too old to dream, too Mexican to be citizen
And far too stubborn to give me and two other siblings anything but love
Just like the man on the 2 train
Who probably has children to feed, where he works
Minimum wage jobs to make limited food on the table
Just like my father, far too old for the physical work he's given
But too motivated to stop, hoping that his children
Will learn the vocabulary he doesn't know, the language he rarely spoke
Just like the man on the 2 train, with the grey mustache and the foreign name
Who was falling asleep next to me on the 2 train
And he nods off and drifts away, to the place where his parents once lived
And where he once called home...
"Next stop is 72nd street"
Only to wake up and realize
That he'll never be young and even if he were he would not be back in Puebla
He'd work his way only to end up in the same place he's in today
Just like my father
And I wonder how he doesn't go insane
Cause I can't travel without the iPod my father worked for
Because I wouldn't dare leave myself with my own thoughts
Like the man with the baggy eyes, ripped jeans and dirty work boots
Like the man on the 2 train
I cry because I look into his blank eyes and don't know what he's thinking
Just like my father, who looks like the cracks on my palms
So close and always loving but so small and crooked across my skin
so unnoticed. Just like the man on the 2 train.

This Might Be Home

by *Bismarck Martinez*

Mother came home late again tonight,
hauling two big bags of rice over her shoulders—
twenty-five pounds for twenty dollars.
Two jobs to feed three mouths
on three children that wait at home
during the daytime, diamond-eyed and hungry.
We live in a cold-water flat in Flushing
with a balcony that looks over an empty lot
with weeds growing from the cracks
and wispy vines swallowing the wire fence.
We are no longer in San Pedro anymore, but
a quarter acre of it has followed us here
and spread itself under our balcony.
Mother is starting to speak in jumbled English.
She stays up late some nights listening
to talk radio hosts tell jokes
that she can't quite understand.
Some days she tries to make small talk
with the mailman who gives her
a confused stare, then muffles his
Whatever you say.
Mother likes to sing songs in the kitchen
and she spins, soulfully, a dance
I once saw her dance on a weekend
back in San Pedro. Sometimes I wonder
if I will ever see her happy here,
the way she was happy there.
Mother came home late again tonight,
with a voter registration card
clasped tightly between her thumbs
and the sides of her index fingers.
I see a smile I hadn't seen since San Pedro
and think this might be home.

Let The Freedom Ring!

by *Maoly Hernandez*

We've been here
Since we could crawl in the sand
And drink from the sun
And shower in the sea
We're here
The spirits of the past
Of broken-backs laborers
Chained to deferred dreams
Go on, Let the freedom ring!
I said, go on let me hear the freedom ring!
Okay
You'll get paid three dollars an hour
Because you don't belong to the state
You won't get to see your mother
Because she does not belong to the state
You must say farewell to your brothers
Your lover, your daughters, your father, your own self
You do not belong to the state
You'll be chased, stereotyped
Criminalized in the land of the free
I said please, let me hear the freedom ring!
As if we are not children of the Earth
The sky is fragmented
We are only spirits
Since we crawled in the sand
And drank from the sun
And showered in the sea
Let the freedom ring!
Ring with deferred dreams
With the boulevard of illiteracy
You'll be chained at your college graduation
If you are lucky to get into school
As if for not being green, you cannot do any good
Let me hear Sammy's voice
Telling me I do not belong
For I am a child of this Earth
For the sky above is one
The moon is only one
And although the stars are many
Do they all not shine for all?
You and I belong to the land in which we stand
Let me hear it right this time
Let the true freedom ring!

Rusty Chains

by *Angy Rivera*

Opening the squeaky door I find my mother sitting there bent over holding albums in one hand soft cream colored tissues in the other trembling.

shaking.

crying.

begging for forgiveness.

I'm tired.

I'm tired of seeing my mother cry and ask for forgiveness to a crime she did not commit.

her salty heavy tears falling from her cheeks like dead bodies failing to cross the border feelings of guilt from her immigration situation lacking papers. no documentation crying over opportunities I couldn't receive dreams I couldn't complete.

fussing over empty social security number boxes on college applications what will I say to the administration? my mother who so fearlessly dropped everything and everyone for something new a place she did not understand she couldn't comprehend parent teacher conferences, doctor's appointments, meeting with the landlord, at the store, I translated everything becoming her ears, mouth covering her eyes her lips with my 6 year old tenderness.

the bridge to two worlds.

Coffee beans, salsa, vallenatos, agua ardiente, arepas, empanada, agua panela meets backstreet boys, sesame street, barney, concrete pavements and snow my mother who spent nights crying for life and memories back home no longer in control she thought I didn't know every muffled weep stabbed at my soul she said, "Angy, I came here because of you"

Self-hatred rose in the depth of my heart and mind wanted to cover my eyes, ears and hide why?

yelling. screaming "why didn't you just abort me!

grabbed me, pulled me right out of your body saved yourself all this agony searched for a better life without me?"

"I didn't have a reason to live..till you came along" she counters.

my mother always sacrificing.

giving but never receiving

scared her status will be revealed by simply breathing don't talk about this, don't trust anyone.

raised in dark-colored all-consuming fear sucking me down stealing my laugh I was scared to own this, afraid to be myself no le digas a nadie! I heard her repeat. don't tell anybody.

Oppression and injustice weighing down on my back bones splitting cracking weighing down on me I'm reaching for clarity hate, tugging at me pulling from all sides.

gotta break free from these rusty colored chains that tie me down and keep me from reaching my fullest potential.

holding on tight to them I dig my nails and teeth into every word ever spoken every diss every hate crime

every time my mother was blamed each hate word carved in my brain dig my nails and teeth into each tear I shed for

every time I was told I wouldn't be able to do it for my grandmother looking down from heaven this is for you.

for all the memories we didn't have a chance to create for my mother sitting somewhere at home this is for you.

for all the fear drowning you I will come out alone crushing these chains and stating I am undocumented and unafraid

I want to celebrate our victory

No im not sorry. and yes I will own my story.

A World Through A Different Set of Lens

by *Daniella Sapozhinkova*

Closets

Are the chains that bind us.

The hard decisions we live with.

And, the hard decision that must take place.

But, what happens

When in such a world,

Such a society,

A civilization

That is so advanced

Cars, computers, gigabytes, RAM

HD, 3-D, T.V.,

There is no such thing as FREE.

Voice an opinion,

You are shamed.

Have a different religion,

And be labeled "terrorist."

When does it end?

When does it stop?

It's the 21st century,

Yet, women are still treated in the conventional view.

Men, still have difficulties too.

Lesbian, Gay, Transsexual, Bisexual

Such complex names

For things that should be common sense.

When did love turn into hate?

When did hope turn into fear?

What does America mean to me, you ask?

It means a world

Of suffering, pain resentment,

Lies, confines, and

Closets.

Untitled

By Monnero Guervil

Being an American to me means being surrounded by opportunities
Opportunities to me means being brave enough to make that first step
Brave steps taken by my parents include leaving their community in the Caribbean
The Caribbean is the region they left then immigrated to the United States
The United States is where they began to try and improve their new life
Life was difficult but at the same time bearable because of a growing family
Family growth means more opportunities for every family member
Members of the family fortunately had the opportunity to make a critical choice
The critical choices we made had a major impact on our lives from that day forward
Moving forward is difficult when you are the children of immigrants
Immigrant research suggest immigrants and their children face greater challenges
Greater challenges because immigrants and their children often go through the system
The system institutionalizes immigrants and their children; you have one of two options
Your one of two options is criminality or the alternative, which is to pursue education
Education is the more popular option because of its ties to freedom
Freedom is exactly what is taken from you when you choose criminality
Criminality is not always a choice sometimes it's an issue immigrants face for being undocumented
Being undocumented sometimes makes you the victim of specific laws and policies
Laws and policies by the government that can leave you vulnerable to deportation
Deportation is the last thing my parents would want to face after taking a brave step for an opportunity
They had the opportunity to live in and join a Caribbean community in Queens, New York
The Queens, New York community educated my parents on the steps to take towards a better life
A better and possibly great life is now on the horizon because my parents took an initiative
Their initiative to apply great advice and learn from mistakes put their children in the position we're in now
Now my parent's children are all students, the two oldest in College the youngest in high school
The same high school that gave me the opportunity to make the right choice
The right choice to continue education at John Jay College of Criminal Justice!

An Immigrant's Struggles

by Jazmyn Smith

His love travelled to the United States
A mystery to me the first time I saw his face
For us to meet, could it have been fate?
His smile, that warmth could not be erased
The student visa granted was a temporary fix
In his studies he took as serious as a heart attack
Imagining his departure at any time makes me sick
An inspiration to me, needed bad habits to crack
The immigrant is a slave, and the deportation is its' master
Looking over one's shoulder, counting the days, being brave
Success is a dream, so far away, couldn't come any faster
In a new world, a better life, one's soul he wanted to save
Everyone around him takes life for granted,
A mere opportunity to him; inconceivable thought leaves him frantic

'Sailing towards the horizon'

by Jorge Carranza

Ephemeral days have promptly flown by the ever changing sky of my life
Elusive beams of light playfully interact with the shadows upon the ocean
Vague shapes resemble what once were precious moments and unforgettable experiences
Elder sailors steadily sail with splendid technique where the firmament gently meets the waters
The wind violently distort the flags that proudly signal the presence of the now distant boats
They will not stop waving as long as their journeys keep taking them to uncharted lands
As long as the spirit of adventure feed their hearts, as long as hope nourish their souls

I wonder if any of the vessels displays a flag that I could take as my emblem
Colors that could satisfy my need of belonging and embrace me unconditionally
A realm where liberty is no longer a wishful concept, but a living ideal of enduring principles
Long-standing testament for justice and symbol of solidarity among those gazing upon
Even the strongest of tempests would not shake the their steadiness of spirit and power of will
What would I renounce to stand firm knowing that the path is set and ready to walk on
There is no doubt in my resolution; there is no hesitation that worries my resolve

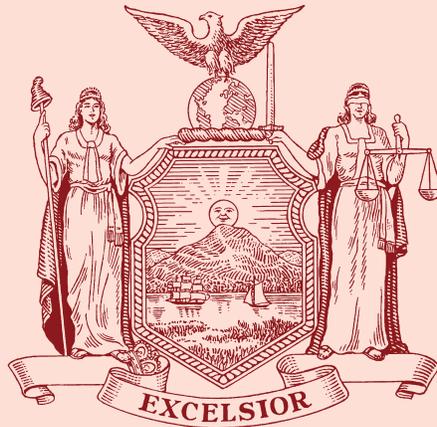
I take a step back to make sense of my convoluted thoughts and expand my perspective
The incidence of other sailors contemplating upon the horizon takes me by surprise
Suddenly, I am not alone in this quest; I can almost feel our hearts beating at unison
No words are needed to communicate our most inner desires and link our aspirations
Our destinies are sealed by fate, and our paths will cross far ahead in unspoken agreement
This is no longer a delusion that my tinted innocence once made up of dreams
Our determination is now palpable and the majestic sea is witness of our tenacity
Do not question the desire we share; Do not tempt the silent plea of youthful ambitions

It is not a place where my desires find refuge, I repeat so I will never forget
It is the household where we came to realize our inconceivable potential
There lies the deep-rooted community that supports each other in uttermost harmony
Righteous nation holding essential human ideals that time has tested so many times
Even if we ever journey away, we will still find counsel as we sleep under the same stars
To be American is to stop being an abstract observer, but to become an unbiased participant
To esteem the truths that grant us freedom, and share the light that guides humanity

Some before me endured unimaginable hardships to attain what I now hold in high
We are not exempt of discrimination and adversities, for this world is not flawless
For this is mirage is part of the infinite desert that yearns for better days
It is up to us to forgive and reach for each other; to preserve the flame of collective liberty

During my teen years I first arrive to this land of unstoppable sentiments
Nothing would have ever prepare me for what it was to come ahead in my alleyway
This was not a noticeable turning point, but a natural metamorphosis
That calmness of spirit as if I was born to reach this point and fulfill my purpose
Miles away from my origin I somehow found a rightful point of new beginning
No language or custom would stop me from reaching that harbor where I belong

To be American is to have a voice that merges with the ones of others
To be the driving force that propel us further without letting pride blind us in obscurity
Let us be different as we come from the farthest corners of the Earth with thirst
Pieces of a puzzle that only accomplish meaning when bought together
Let's hold hands as knowledge nourish our minds and hope drives our determination



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