

America *by Shreejay Arja*

I weep to you, America
for the asian who sells their brains
in AI goodiebags and
the boys who debate
the "real things"
like the ethics of
dead mothers and
babies at doorsteps.
and how much of christ
they can cut to the gram
sell for a hit of holiness.
and the ones who
aren't this or that are
Righteously not human
as their heads
hang low
and their graves hang
lower.
and the ones who sell
blood like water
and safety like water
bottles
because buying guns are cheaper
then buying a heart.
I weep because everyone's
a saint a lover a mother and
a daughter
but never did I see
no true american.

American Hope *by Igor Chernyshev*

America you gave me what my homeland could not
This country, and one over there, one says live all the same
The force, the scheming, empire tentacles' menace

You so big, and gave a way for own kin
Use fruits of work for own nation
Live in the honor of the word

America your honor is at stake, in disbelief and chaos
Fruit is for reapers' own, honor is for weak
Lies, fear, and doubt are mixing with the hope

American *by Charlie Englund*

When I think of being American,
I think of speed.

A country that says:
prove it.

If you don't build,
you fall behind.
If you don't run,
you disappear.

I love it for the chances.
for the doors that open
if you are relentless.

In Paris,
you are allowed to be,
not constantly become.

In America,
everything is becoming something.

It is generous with opportunity
and careless with people.

I am grateful,
but not blind.

Salt and Static *by Ilumin Mahal Gacayan*

In the end, the Pacific pieces together
the night: a map of salt and static.

I left at two – the way back

is a house I never lived in,
even longer than the long road
of wanting to belong.

Bring the heart of the December fog,
When the light and citrus
Become the coded words of night.
When memory barks like a dog
Tethered to a different hemisphere,
its owner long gone.

My placenta is

somewhere,
keeping the wrong time and place.
I am someone's echo, but their
history lives in a house I cannot enter,
uttered in a language too rough to
bend to my *conyo* tongue.
Turning the corner of encounters,

a parallel self hides in the wind,
somewhat familiar, but
living in a body I almost inherited.

America, let me

toast this sugar I'm made of.
When the day comes,
let my queer, salt-stained hair lead
the way through the black map.
Freedom is the storm moving us
Beyond "right" and "wrong" of the blood.

Another call marked "home"
goes unanswered

Reunions are one less
fewer than the versions of us
we had to leave behind.

Between Two Language *by Zhao Gao*

I feel like I belong
When I do not have to choose
between two languages.

At home, my words are soft.
Outside, my words are careful.

My hope for democracy is this:
no one has to hide
their accent
or their history.

When I think of being American,
I imagine many stories
sharing one street.

Borders are real on paper,
but people carry whole countries
inside their chest.

Freedom is not only a law.
It is the feeling
that your voice
does not need permission.

I belong
when my difference
is not a problem
but a gift.

Movements Without Borders *by Chengmao Li*

We come to California carrying more than luggage,
a second language in the mouth, a first name misheard,
a map that says here and a heart that says maybe.
We learn the new rules of belonging by small signs:
a form that asks for boxes,
a classroom that asks for voice,
a flag that asks for faith,
a street that asks for speed,
a border that asks for proof,
a mirror that asks,
who counts,
today.

Then someone saves a seat.
Someone says your name right, slowly, without laughing.
Someone shares notes, food, a ride from the foothills,
and the line on the map stops feeling like a verdict.
The campus lawn becomes a commons,
the library a shelter of quiet citizenship,
and democracy turns out to be this ordinary thing:
people making room,
again,
again,
again.

My hope for democracy is not perfection.
It is the widening.
Not one story, but many speaking at once.
Not "go back," but "come in."
Not a wall, but a door you can hold open
until your arm shakes,
until your neighbor is through,
until you realize
the border was never the edge of the world,
only the edge of someone's imagination.

Strawberries *by Gustavo Jimenez Iniguez*

The clock hits five, and his feet slip into his beat-up Spider-Man shoes
Today is his first day in the strawberry fields, working with his *pa*
He goes to wake him up as the sun is still asleep.
Jumping and dancing, his joy burst like it's been waiting for spring.
Like a slumbering grizzly with its naive little cub.
They put on their matching *tejanas* and out the door they go.

The boy never feared the shadows
until they walked out of vans with guns and masks.
Too young to remember the home he had left.
Sinaloa, where his father was from
A land littered with missing people posters.
The mother was one.
They come for better. They come for the best?
But *America* looks more and more like the home
They once left

Crying and crying, his tears hit the floor
Holding a box of strawberries, the fattest of the bunch.
One after another, they roll out the kitchen door
A gun to his back and a knee to his neck
"Are you a US citizen?" They hadn't bothered to check
Indiscriminate wolves surround for a feast in the night
The strawberry cub approaches the darkness in sight
With hesitant hands, he caresses his gun.
Papa reaches out to take hold of his son.
A flash of smoke followed by a deafening silence
Freedom was no more, and belonging was silenced.

The strawberry nectar drips down to his mouth
And in his final breath, the sweetness slips out.
The darkness took hold, leaving nothing behind.

I fear that someday this nation will learn
and all it will take is for children to
burn.

America *by Brandon Gonzalez*

Favoritism among the colors
Underneath like dirt under a fingernail
Certain distaste toward other
Killed for far more than a piece of paper
I see the harsh reality of this side
Count your time and make it worth wild
Everyone watch your backs

America *by Alexander Gitchev*

I feel like I belong
when I don't have to explain why.

When I think of being American,
I think of a fusion restaurant
that serves everything:
adobo, sirens, cities, banitsa,
every type, everywhere.

Democracy is overflowing with contradiction.
Each to their own higher power,
let's pray the levee holds.

Honks on El Camino *by Lauren Axtell*

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP beep

BEEBEEBeeeeePEEBEEEPBeeeEEEEEEEEP

BEEEP

beep beep

Laughter filled with hope

and loud tears falling

joins the melody

of The American Chorus

down El Camino

Please stand for the pledge of allegiance *by Asia Celestine*

I stand, face the flag
And place my hand over my heart
because mother always told me this is my country

So
I pledge allegiance to the Flag
of the not so United States of America
What's so united about
Red and Blue
Black and white
Or those born without this birth right

My pledge is faith to you
That I will never see in return

Oh sorry

and to the Republic for which it stands,
one nation,
Exclusions may apply though

under god
Wait you cant be talking about my God
No My god says
When a foreigner resides among you in your land,
do not mistreat them.
The foreigner residing among you must be treated
as your native-born.
Love them as yourself,

Maybe that's the problem

Indivisible,
with liberty and justice for who?

Not me
Because my parents used to tell me no
matter what keep your hands on the
dash
Where they can be seen
Don't reach or fight

And now they tell me make sure you
carry ID
and if need be scream loud enough for
everyone can see
Because papers or not they'll cause a
scene
In this supposed Land of the free

You may be seated

Freedom *by Darby Eng*

is the concrete walls that separate families its
the execution of peaceful protesters in the street its
widespread xenophobia endorsed by our "officials" its
the kidnapping of innocent human lives its
the deporting of decorated veterans its
the protection of the corrupt elites its
the desensitization of detestable horrors that occur daily its
hatred its

lost

Mother to Son *by Suxiang Hu*

Son, you ask why I stop playing tennis and piano?

Well, Harry, I am not going to lie to you:

I quit tennis to save money from coach expense,

I stop piano to save time for pursuing nursing.

Me, I grew up in rural China in the 1990s with poverty,

I am a black duck, I couldn't fly,

and as a middle-aged immigrant,

I wish I was able to fulfill myself by involving the society.

You, as a teenage and new generation, are different:

You are a white goose, you could fly,

You are allowed to make mistakes from time to time,

You are allowed to be emotional once a while,

You are allowed to get lost sometimes,

You are allowed to yell at me if you have to.

You can fly, fly, fly and travel lightly in America.

I belong *by Tracy Le*

when my voice is not quieted,
when my name is called upon,
when my story is not shortened.

Borders may draw lines on maps,
but they cannot draw lines on dreams.
My family carries languages
like photographs in their pockets.

Democracy, to me,
is everyone getting a turn to speak
and everyone choosing to listen.

Freedom feels like open doors,
like walking forward
without leaving myself behind.

Broad Stripes and Bright Stars *by Vanessa Maynard*

American American American a big melting pot of cultures and languages

American American American

American American American immigrants who have paved the way for me

American American American

california coast, great plains, rocky mountains, deep south, original thirteen

i believe no one on stolen land is illegal and that's how it should always be

America *by Kristina McCreary*

firelight

the gentle light of red and gold dēnglóng strung across a shop front

the warm candlelight that caresses the petals of the cempasúchil and sheets of papel picado

the tender glow of diya that illuminates the rangoli decorating the floor

light in its purest form

welcoming you

you belong here

America *by Kayleigh O'Sullivan*

We all want to set
the flag ablaze
in some way.
Since nothing about
our lovely land
feels like ours,
Yet that is just why
we will survive.
We're pushed
by our pursuit
for gentle life,
liberty,
and whole happiness
I strictly declare,
and humbly ask,
that one day
we unite again.
We will converge
at the ash
and use every
last bit of us,
pull our flag
out of its prison
we're creating,
wave it high
when we are all free,
and even if
am not alive
to witness it fly
wave it anyway.

America *by Junhyeok Park*

Democracy is a mosaic of broken glass
where every shard reflects a different name.

Belonging is the 280 freeway at dusk—
it looks different depending on where you're driving.

I am a letter that crossed an ocean in a suitcase
to tell you the border is just a line of ink.
I stopped knocking because I'm already inside.
My voice is the compass and the seed.
Welcome to the garden.
Welcome to the now.

When I think of America I imagine *by Ariana Perez*

Freedom,
while children are caged.

Opportunity,
while rent climbs higher
than wages.

Justice,
while we teach our children
how to survive traffic stops.

When I think of America

I imagine a place
not yet broken,
still at work.

Open Streets, Open Voices *by Angelina Sattar*

I walk down streets
where laughter spills from cafés
and everyone's voice
rings like a bell.

I belong in hands that build,
in songs we share,
in stories that cross
lines on maps
and hearts.

Democracy is a garden
that grows with every seed
even those left in shadows,
even those pushed aside.

Freedom is not quiet.
It lives in voices
that refuse to be ignored,
and dreams that stretch
under the same wide sky.

Dream that Entered

Individuality.
speech protected.
citizens in control.
Talent protected.
uniqueness.
wishes made.
acclamation .
vision many.
opportunity.
our freedom.

We the people shall make,
the dream with an open stage.
We shall overcome, as long as
Justice is rightfully done, America.

by Harshdeep Singh