

# Who gets to be an American?

This project is an interdisciplinary exploration organized by the Berkshire Cultural Resource Center (BCRC), and MCLA offices of Academic Affairs, English/Communications, Fine and Performing Arts - Arts Management, History/Political Science and Public Policy.

Gila River



SETSUKO WINCHESTER: FREEDOM FROM FEAR/THE YELLOW BOWL PROJECT

To learn more about this project visit the artist's website - <http://www.yellowbowlproject.com/>  
or  
the exhibition archive - <https://smartcommonsblog.wordpress.com>

WHO GETS TO BE AN AMERICAN? APPLICATION FOR NATURALIZATION

are you white?

- yes
- no

if no, do you typically act like those of your race?

- yes
- no

are you male?

- yes
- no

if no, do you enjoy housework?

- yes
- no

are you rich?

- yes
- no

if no, are you willing to work hard with a goal of becoming rich?

- yes
- no

are you heterosexual?

- yes
- no

if no, have you partaken in perverted behavior more than once?

- yes
- no

are you a practicing christian?

- yes
- no

if no, are you willing to convert?

- yes
- no

are you physically abled?

- yes
- no

if no, are you able to preform most tasks without assistance?

- yes
- no

(SKIP unless previous answers have been YES/NO;YES/YES/YES/YES/YES)

are you going to have kids?

- yes
- no

if no, are you willing to adopt from someone of our choosing?

- yes
- no

are you willing to die overseas for this country?

- yes
- no

if no, are you willing to worship those who do?

- yes
- no

are you of the opinion that capitalism is the ideal form of economics and politics?

- yes
- no

if no, are you of the opinion that fascism is the ideal form of economics and politics?

- yes
- no

are you planning to study subjects to go into executive or corporate work?

yes

no

if no, are you willing to work blue collar work?

yes

no

are you willing to do blue collar work, despite having a degree for executive or corporate work?

yes

no

if no, are you going to study more for a different field of executive or corporate work?

yes

no

are you a user of green energy?

yes

no

if yes, are you willing to use only fossil fuels?

yes

no

are you planning on adopting a golden retriever?

yes

no

if no, are you considering a dalmation or a collie?

yes

no

will you be purchasing goods from American companies with good standing? (i.e; APPLE, MARS, L.L. BEAN, etc.)

yes

no

if no, are you planning on purchasing from American companies with okay standing?

(i.e; WHOLE FOODS, BARNES AND NOBLE, GAP, etc.)

yes

no

are you able to speak a language other than English?

yes

no

if yes, are you willing to forget this language?

yes

no

do you enjoy pastimes such as football or baseball?

yes

no

if no, do you enjoy pastimes such as playing the lottery or hunting?

yes

no

are you willing to consume media and attempt to reach the standards of appearance set by this media?

yes

no

if no, are you willing to face ridicule?

yes

no

(if answered YES to PREVIOUS question)

are you willing to let others enjoy the looks that you have practiced, per the previously mentioned standards,

however they see fit?

yes

no

if no, are you prepared to stop making yourself up and face ridicule?

yes

no

have you read uncle tom's cabin or to kill a mockingbird?

yes

no

if yes, are you willing to read the great gatsby?

yes

no

do you own at least four semi-automatic rifles, five handguns, or three shotguns?

yes

no

if no, are you willing to purchase guns in the amount specified above?

yes

no

are you able to digest high-fructose corn syrup?

yes

no

if no, are you willing to go under stomach

reconstruction?

yes

no

do you respect the officers of the law?

yes

no

if no, are you willing to be shot?

yes

no

OUR TOP AMERICANS WILL REVIEW YOUR APPLICATION. YOU WILL RECEIVE WORD IN THREE TO FIVE YEARS ABOUT YOUR STATUS. NOTE THAT, ONCE GRANTED, ALL PERSONS ARE SUBJECT TO CONSTANT PERSONAL ANALYSIS AND REMOVAL OF CITIZENSHIP STATUS WITH NO WARNING.

- Madeline McConnell



Manzanar, Setsuko Winchester

“America: The Beautiful?”

At the edge of the woods  
Sits the biggest tree  
I had ever seen.  
Stoic and rough,  
A circular path carved out of the forest near her feet.  
My entire family cannot link arms around the body

Barbed wire juts from her skin,  
A facial piercing.  
Her body is warped  
From years of plantation fencing.  
She stands  
At the heart of native land.

Maybe they planted her there  
With a kiss of the dirt,  
“Grow,”  
They whispered, and she did.  
For years children sang songs with her,  
She taught them to call like  
The wind. To recognize her cry.  
She watched them grow  
And leave  
And die.  
And she mourned them with her leaves  
Every autumn.  
She watched her land get sold away  
And cleared for firewood,  
They killed her children before her  
And when they finished they cleaned  
Their bloody hands  
On her skin.

So when they ask me,  
“What is American?”  
I want to tell them America is full of  
Greedy businessmen in crisp suits  
Selling a family's land just to build  
A fucking campground.

When they ask me  
“What is American?”  
I point at a single mother and her  
4 sons whom she refuses to enroll in school  
Because she is undocumented And scared.  
She wakes them early each morning  
And teaches them algebra  
In broken English.  
When they want to know  
“What is American?”  
I point to the trees;

America is chopping down families  
And forcing the mothers to watch.  
It is ripping away homes with silent witnesses  
Unable to speak.

So when the hurricanes came this fall,  
I wasn't surprised.  
The wind---she came for her children,  
Plucked them like hairs from the dirt,  
“Want them!? Then take them!”  
Smashing her own kin into cars  
And houses and  
fusing them together.

So when people wonder  
“What is American?”  
I tell them it is  
Ripping and cutting  
chaos,  
Turmoil and abandonment,  
Disappointment and dissociation  
I tell them America vanished a long time ago.

Now we reside  
In a wasteland.

- Meadow Voisine

We the People

We the people  
of every race,  
We the people  
of every ethnicity,  
We the people  
of every orientation,  
We the people  
of every background,  
We the people  
of a diverse nation,  
We the people  
supposed to be united,  
We the people  
targeted,  
We the people  
attacked,  
We the people  
stereotyped,  
We the people  
discriminated,  
We the people  
silenced,  
  
We the people  
divided.

- Cassandra Lavoie

Who are we

as Americans, as human beings  
to tell someone with different  
Color, hair, language  
Go back to your country.  
Tame your hair.  
Speak English.

What gives you the right  
to question the validity a life?  
You list your ethnic background:  
50% Irish  
30% Italian  
and a mix of Russian and Turkish somewhere down the line.  
When you yell go back to your country  
Do you think about all the places you came from?

When do you become  
an American?  
Is it when you straighten your curls?  
Shop at The Gap?  
Requirements according to white America:  
Drop the accent.  
Lose the heritage.  
Gain heterosexual partner.  
Obtain white picket fence.  
All this can be yours for the price of assimilation.  
Where do you get off  
telling they're not American  
if they don't speak English?  
You travel abroad  
on lavish vacations  
Does the waiter in Barcelona  
expect the white couple to speak Spanish?  
Does the shop owner in Brazil yell at you,  
Speak Portuguese or leave my country.

Why is it so difficult  
for white Americans  
who had the privilege of being born here  
who never have to question their validity  
or have it questioned for them  
what have immigrants done to you  
other than diversify your culture?  
How dare they.  
When will we become a melting pot  
instead of a trail mix  
everyone favoring the chocolate  
leaving the rest.

- Bailey Brissett

## What does it mean to be an American?

When your country is broken into two sides: those pushing everyone else away and those fighting for freedom, it is hard to see how we could be united as one. When you see basic rights denied time and time again to people without privilege, you wonder how this country stands for freedom. When you see a president put up blockades to prevent immigrants from moving in, you wonder how this country is land of opportunity. When you hear the American Dream, you question how it can ever be a reality.

Trump's campaign centered on "Making America Great Again" but it never called to question a time when we were great. When was that? During slavery, or segregation, during a time when everyone couldn't marry who they loved, or religious hatred spewed like wildfire. When immigrants were always, have always, come here and yet they have always been deemed 'other.' America was this melting pot of cultures and yet we have never taken the time to appreciate the great diversity the country offers. The knowledge and culture is at are finger tips and yet the hatred present makes us inclined to dismiss it. What does it mean to be American when your entire family is citizen and pushed away because they do not match up to what makes "America Great."

Who gets to be an American is subjected to who had privilege and falls into the ideal form. The right religion, gender, skin ton, language, and cultural background all affect the way we are viewed in society and the way we are treated. It's about how people in power view those below them and determines who deserves to be a rightful American. It's about an ideal society of workers and higher class and who falls into which category. It's not about who actually has citizenship but who deserves to wear that title. There is no equality just privilege.

- Breanna Castor

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## What It Means to Be American

The boom of my footsteps bounces off  
Paintings and family portraits,  
Echoes off high ceilings.  
I watch the Statue of Liberty revolve on my porch  
Sparkling red, white, and blue,  
Spinning faster as the wind picks up.  
The Lady in Green who  
Brings people in, and sends them back out.  
The Revolving Door of American Immigration Reform  
Those who belong in this country,  
Those who deserve protection,  
Those who have more American pride than most born here,  
Are sent away.  
The religion they practice is "too radical",  
The country they come from is "too threatening",  
The people with whom they only have origin in common are  
"too violent".  
Condemned from birth for these things they cannot control.  
America claims to be the land of the free.  
I am embarrassed to be American.

- Amanda Gilmore

## A Reinterpretation of the poem on the Statue of Liberty to show what the modern idea of American immigration.

Our Mother of Exiles.  
Is silenced by the voices of Hate  
A Burnt out torch  
A Do not enter sign.  
The tired the poor the huddled masses  
Sink in the Atlantic  
As they go to open a locked door  
A barred up window.  
The golden door is painted.  
And its starting to chip.  
Our mother of Exiles.  
Cries out for her children a thousand miles away  
Her voice drowned out by the sound  
Of hate  
"I'll look Syrian children in the face and say they can't  
come"  
The leader of the Free world  
A world free of dignity  
A world free of hope  
A world free of love  
Our Mother of Exiles  
Can no longer cry with silent lips.  
Because they're covered with DuckTape™

- Timothy Downs

## What does it mean to be an American?

When mother was entering the retirement village I was helping her to organize her finances and I suggested she look for ways to reduce her tax load.

Nope.

She said: I live in the best country in the world. I pay taxes and I am happy to pay them for the privilege of living here. Best country in the world. And she was white. And she came from privilege. She donated much of her money to causes she believed in. Because she could. Because even in the best country in the world, people went to bed hungry and cold.

When 45 was elected many of my contemporaries declared they would leave and go to another country rather than stay and watch the destruction that was inevitable. But they didn't leave. Why? Idealistically:

Because with the advent of 45's destruction of much of what white, progressive, privilege believes in they recognized that once 45 is in jail, they would be needed to help re-build a country more inclusive for all races and religions, a country that every resident can be proud of. Realistically they were invested in this country, emotionally, socially, economically.

They stayed because they are American. They stayed because they could.

## What does it mean to be an American?

It means following the rules.

Except when they are unjust.

It means giving to others

Even when you have nothing left to give.

It means voting

Except when you are too poor to get to the polls.

It means speaking your mind earnestly

Even if no one else agrees.

Because you can.

## What does it mean to be an American?

I don't know.

I have been one all my life.

I never questioned it.

Until now.

- Barbara Reeves

## Who Gets to be an American?

*Who gets to be an American, or who wants to be an American, and why?  
Who gets to be an American is relative to the "American" you're referring to.*

If you are referring to the American dream that allows so many an opportunity from struggles of their native lands and allures so many to its shores with a giant WELCOME ALL statue, anyone can be, and has the guaranteed ability written in stone to be an American.

If you are referring to knowing and living with what Americans did to so many different types of native, indigenous and deemed uncivilized peoples. What Americans continue to do to one another on a federal, state, city, community, neighborhood, or campus wide level. The acts of hatred glorified and deemed common by our own government, leaders, politicians, businessmen, media outlets and social media. The unwillingness of Americans to move forward and break free from a long history of hate and intolerance.

All of this weighing so heavily on your shoulders, but making you small, isolated and insignificant is just what they want you to feel. Still you can't help but feel it anyway as you try to help where you can. Everything is already so tight, so scarce for you that you're already struggling to make ends meet, and you feel it pulling at your chest, that deep inner fire begging you to help, and... you can't. You have all this "freedom" as they say, but your voice seems hushed. You feel like you can't help. Not in the ways you wish you could.

Not yet, and not with that attitude, anyhow.

- Lindsay DeWinkleer

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## Who Gets to be an American?

America; land of the free, home of the brave. A place where everyone has the freedom to shoot for the stars and try their luck at achieving the ever-elusive American Dream. America is hailed as a cultural melting pot of class, race, and culture, built by immigrants for immigrants. Yet not everyone gets to be an American. Certainly not unless you have your paperwork in order, and sometimes not even then. In order to get to be an American, you have to be either lucky enough to be born here or you have to be able to jump the many and financial and obligational hurdles along the pathway to citizenship.

The elements of citizenship are especially relevant in today's political climate, as more and more "illegal" immigrants who were brought over to the U.S. at a young age are facing deportation from the country they grew up in. Are these people, raised in America for the majority of their lives, not Americans? They contribute to the United States economy, pay taxes, and exist within our society, yet they are seen as less than simply due to a whole lot of paperwork. These people wrongly do not get to be Americans in the eyes of our current administration.

As the political climate worsens, specifically regarding Trump's ever-restrictive and isolationist border control policy, it seems that less and less individuals are going to get to be Americans, or even have a chance at experiencing life within the United States. Refugees and immigrants of their own free will alike, I feel that we are far too selective of who gets to be an American. Our country, built upon migration after migration of immigrants, needs to look itself in the mirror and recognize that there are many problems that could be solved by opening our borders further instead of closing them up.

- Andrew Hall

## Proposed Questions for the Naturalization Test

Are you the color  
of Congress, the Senate,  
and the tacky walls of the Oval Office?  
Do you speak the right language,  
is it with the right accent? And if not  
can we use your brain or your labor  
to make our weapons?  
Would you vote for the correct person?  
Were your ancestors brought  
or did they come?  
Or have they been here all along?  
Are you a Red, a commie  
who's more of a socialist,  
a bleeding heart liberal willing to pay two bucks  
more for a McDonald's burger if it means  
the person serving it can live too?  
Did you have no choice about going into debt?  
Are you sure? Aren't you just lazy?  
Do you love the right people?  
Are you a fag, a dyke,  
a twink, butch, bear, otter, femme,  
queen, did you cry at the news of Pulse,  
have your tears drowned you?  
What's your gender, and do you know  
you only get two choices? What's between your legs?  
Have you feared; holding the hand of your other half  
as they flounce beside you;  
walking the street  
when the street lamps are  
tiny metropolitan suns hiding the stars;  
the officer stopping you  
for reasons you know are old  
but still killing,  
when did they stop calling it lynching?

What? Are you still here?

- Iris E. McPherson

## What does it mean to be an American?

When your country is broken into two sides: those pushing everyone else away and those fighting for freedom, it is hard to see how we could be united as one. When you see basic rights denied time and time again to people without privilege, you wonder how this country stands for freedom. When you see a president put up blockades to prevent immigrants from moving in, you wonder how this country is a land of opportunity. When I hear the American Dream, I now question how it could have ever been a reality.

Trump's campaign centered on "Making America Great Again" but it never called to question a time when we were great. When was that? During slavery, or segregation, during a time when everyone couldn't marry who they loved, or religious hatred spewed like wildfire. When immigrants were always, have always, come here and yet they have always been deemed 'other.' America was this melting pot of cultures and yet we have never taken the time to appreciate the great diversity the country offers. The knowledge and culture is at our finger tips and yet the hatred present makes us inclined to dismiss it. What does it mean to be American when your entire family is a citizen and yet they are pushed away because they do not match up to what makes "America Great."

Who gets to be an American is subjected to who has privilege and falls into the ideal form. The right religion, gender, skin tone, language, and cultural background all affect the way we are viewed in society and the way we are treated. It's about how people in power view those below them and determines who deserves to be a rightful American. It's about an ideal society of workers and higher class and who falls into which category. It's not about who actually has

citizenship but who deserves to wear that title. There is no equality just privilege. Because when you ask the question of who gets to be an American, the answer should be everyone. But it's not.

- Breanna Castor



Amanda Romanelli

## Why Nobody?

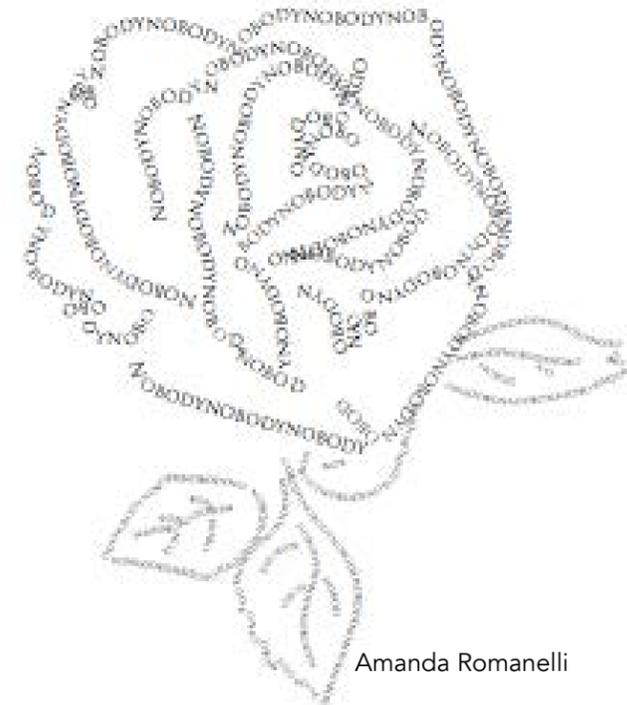
*Who Gets to be an American, through the eyes of Mary Ellen Solt*

Answering the question "Who gets to be an American?" was not an easy thing to do. Surprisingly, it was a question that I had never even thought of before. When I did begin to think about it, I found that I had variety of different opinions. However, there were two opinions that I felt very strongly about. The first was the fact that humans are very selfish creatures. We have unrightfully claimed land and created these horrible things called "borders." The earth belongs to no one. The aggressive possession of masses of dirt really perplexes me. My other "answer" to this question came after I settled down and accepted that in our reality, the earth really does belong to groups of people. In my opinion, the number/types of people that truly can be Americans, or become Americans, is growing smaller and smaller. We have made the process of becoming an American nearly impossible. I think anyone who wants to be an American should get to be, but that's just not the case. After I had established my two slightly different answers, I knew that I had to pick a word or a phrase to represent them. I also knew that because of my artists rather minimal style (Mary Ellen Solt), that I should probably pick just one word. I turned to my word bank, and the word "NOBODY," in all caps, really stood out to me. It was harsh but true, and I felt it represented both of my answers to the question perfectly.

I then had to think about how I would create a piece using the word "NOBODY." To stay true to my artist's style (Mary Ellen Solt), I also decided that I would need my poem to form some kind of plant. I was stumped. The more I thought, the more I realized all the metaphors/ different meanings behind plants. I couldn't pick just one, so I picked three. The first was an olive branch, something that is supposed to symbolize peace and forgiveness. I thought it was ironic but eye opening to create the appearance of an olive branch just using the word "NOBODY." For my next two pieces, I chose an oak tree and a rose. The oak tree is the national tree of the United States and the rose is the national flower. We (as a nation) have also claimed these innocent pieces of nature as our own.

I created the olive branch and oak tree using "clipping masks" in Illustrator. I visually like this effect much more than how I created the rose. I feel that these two are more representative of my style mixing with my artist's style. With the rose piece, I used the pencil tool to draw the rose, and then the type-on-a-path tool. I kept feeling like I had to choose which one to turn in, but I think all three work really nicely together.

- Amanda Romanelli



Amanda Romanelli



### A Separate Togetherness

There are two vastly different America's right now, which in turn, has led to two vastly different experiences of being an American. Your America, versus My America. Your Experience as an American, in contrast with My Experience as an American. Though no two experiences are exactly the same, there are two very different mindsets behind what the issues in Our America are.

One America is founded on the principle of being a "worthy American". The idea that some people simply deserve more than others. If you are not successful it is your own fault, not the fault of the society that has made it nearly impossible for you to succeed. It has an ever-changing and ever-growing list of rules and qualifications that are required for you to be a True American. It means accepting injustice, hate, and inequality, because that's just the way things are. They way they have been. It means being compliant. It means fearing a change in the status quo because it does not benefit you. It means being comfortable because your race, gender, sexual identity, social class, religion, or lack of disability make you "normal". They give you your rights. They make you right.

The Other America is uncomfortable. It is founded in empathy and a search for equality. It means being afraid for yourself, or your family, your friends, your neighbors. It means that you cannot avoid politics. Politics belong in Hollywood, sports, theatre, music, family dinners. It is no longer a question of politics. It is a question of human rights and human dignity. It means that your boldness when speaking up against injustice is overshadowed by the boldness of racism, sexism, bigotry and hatred. It means being angry and feeling helpless. Feeling chastised. It means despite all of this being determined and standing your ground. In the Other America, our nation's "great history" is one that is dated and inexcusable. It has no place in our world today.

Your America is centered around one loud and extreme voice that is followed blindly because it restores power to those who have always held it. Keeping things the way they have always been, and attacking anyone or anything that might challenge that. My America is made up of many voices, that may not speak the same language, or always fully agree with each other. My America is nowhere near perfect, but in it, all voices are validated and encourage My America to grow. My America is a place to speak up, and a place more importantly, to listen.

- Alexandra Sasso

### What makes you American?

Where you were born?  
Where you end up?  
Your history?

Social security number or  
Identification card?  
The taxes you pay?  
Your constant debt?

Or your experiences?  
The people you  
Surround yourself with?  
The things you are  
Passionate about?

Fighting for what  
You believe in?  
Voicing your  
Opinion and  
Being heard?  
Staying quiet and  
Getting nothing done?  
Compromises you make?

The pursuit of happiness:  
Life should be richer,  
Better, and fuller for all.  
Opportunities abound  
Regardless of  
Social class or  
Circumstances of birth.  
Affordable housing,  
Stable job,  
Education

And health care.  
Aspirations of age.  
Is this reality?  
Sadly, no.

A happiness driven by greed  
Is unattainable.  
Someone else will  
Always have more.  
Refuse to succumb to  
Strong social forces.  
Politics divide.  
Just talking,  
Not connecting.  
Twisted logic.  
One-sided arguments.  
Fear is the vehicle that  
Helps make something  
Logical.  
Focus on what really matters.  
Create  
A meaningful life.

Contribute to  
Community and society.  
Spend time  
With loved ones.  
A sense of togetherness.  
Uniting  
For a common cause.  
Ourselves and  
Individuality.

Get more pleasure out of  
Saving than spending.  
Live below means  
But within needs.  
Not spending  
Every penny.

Every individual has  
Equal opportunity  
to pursue  
A personal vision.  
Not impressing people,  
Impressing yourself.  
Condemned by fear.  
The one constant  
Is change.  
Intense curiosity.  
Investigate when  
Something doesn't feel right.  
Explore the why.  
Address issues.  
Rule of law,  
Unjust.  
Speak up about  
Problems in society.  
Words are important.  
Discover how to  
Explain things  
To the general public.  
Don't just explain it,  
Show it.  
Change.  
Take something familiar,  
Transform it.  
Make people talk about  
Things that are  
Uncomfortable to  
Say something about.  
Become curious.  
Trigger emotional spot.  
No logic.  
Speak  
In a way that  
Words can't.  
Don't leave emotion  
To the side.  
But protect  
Yourself.

Self-discovery.  
Uncover things;  
Layers.  
We take  
Our Americanness for  
Granted.  
Missing links  
In conversation.  
See parallels.  
Accepted for who we are.  
We don't know.  
We never question it.  
We don't know what it means.  
So how can we  
Protect it?  
We want  
Freedom from fear,  
Freedom to be an individual  
Where are we headed?

We want  
A life where  
We can  
Sleep at night,  
Are happy,  
And are  
At our best.

- Kelsey Sherman

## The Base

*"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!"*

### **Give me your tired,**

I mean not too tired,  
they need to be able to work

### **your poor,**

how poor are we talking?  
we aren't here to support everyone  
Stay where you are  
If you want charity

### **Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,**

breathe free? First you take  
our air  
what will be next?  
Our Jobs? Our Women?

### **The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.**

your full?  
how do you think we feel  
Stop sending everyone here  
Find somewhere else to suffer and  
spread your fear

### **Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,**

no home where you come from  
we can't give you one here  
This is not a boarding house

### **I lift my lamp beside the golden door!**

the door is gilded  
the lamp illuminates the lock

- Kolumbia Cook

Unnamed, Unknown.

When I was 8, my best friend Manny lived next door  
with his brother, his mother, his sister, his nephew,  
in a basement. The concrete floor, cold,  
littered with plastic pieces of toys that were  
no more.

They weren't American.

The windows let just slivers of light into that four room "apartment."

Yes, those are air quotes...

Two families lived upstairs - one, in the garage.

No room, no money, broken English.

They were the most generous people I knew.

Summer days we spent drinking fruit punch made from powder,  
playing Sonic on an old PS3 that was always  
crashing, with the slight scent of microwave  
popcorn wafting through the air.

I had my first kiss just outside that basement  
with a boy my father said was much too old for me  
who happened to be Manny's older brother -  
Lucas, was it?

It was sweet and simple and ended in awkward giggles, right before  
I moved across the state.

But that boy isn't the one I still think about to this day.

Manny's chubby cheeks and contagious laughter filled any room. It's been so long, I can barely remember his face,  
but I can still hear his drawl  
and him yelling about how his brother had caught cooties.

To this day, I could probably pick out his voice from a hundred others  
not because of some accent you might imagine  
but because he had this goofy confidence in  
everything he said.

He didn't care if he messed up a word like I would,  
embarrassed, my cheeks going red.

He'd wave it off and make a joke, maybe because it was easier  
than listening to ignorant

people who couldn't  
or wouldn't  
understand.

How could anyone say, my best friend, his family, shouldn't be here?

They were illegal.

But in Brentwood, Long Island, weren't most people?

I was one of the maybe ten white people who lived on my block on 4th Street,  
and considering my family made up six of those people,  
that's not saying much.

There was the lady next door, white as parchment,  
with the toys embedded in soap she gave to all the neighborhood kids,  
whose back yard was unkempt like a jungle.

I can't remember any others.

*Were there any others?*

Latin music played on half of the stations  
and no, I'm not just talking about Shakira.

Hips don't lie, and neither does the truth.

The truth is Manny was my friend, my best friend.

That was his childhood, my childhood, our childhood

It's been over ten years since I moved from that little blue and white house on 4th Street.

It's been over ten years since I saw Manny and his family.

Sometimes it feels like months go by without him crossing my mind.

A year or two after I moved, I found out he no longer lived in that basement.

I hope he moved somewhere nice,  
with a back yard and swings.

I wonder if he grew up taller,  
since he always was so short.

Maybe he even grew into that voluminous laugh  
that still echos in my memories.

- Nora Hones

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Rev. Dr. E. Frederick Proelss

the doctors gave up on him  
put him in a wheelbarrow  
so a nurse could bring him out  
to the edge of the property  
dumping his body on the ground  
left for dead  
and when the bombers  
droned overhead  
the hospital fell to ruin  
but he lived  
he rode the train  
to one of those dark  
German creations  
and he was lucky to take  
the train on the right  
ushered into line by a familiar face  
where they made him a scientist  
who leaned over the microscope  
they threw in front of him  
not sure what he was looking for  
but burying his face in his work  
look busy look sure  
and when the uniforms walked by  
he nodded on his cue

he sent his wife  
with the star on her chest  
and his children  
his daughter who fled her home  
and still remembers the doll  
she could not take with her  
across the North Atlantic  
and he made the same journey  
without guarantee of finding them  
but he did

his family lived  
by his Protestant chapel  
on Rikers where he prayed

with the inmates  
counseled them  
helped them buy Christmas gifts  
for their children  
and he gave  
last rites to the bodies  
his inmates helped pull  
from the burning plane  
that crashed on the island  
February 1st 1957  
his family cared for the wounded  
his daughter saw the pianist  
with burned hands

his children grew up  
he lost his son  
his daughters had children  
and in quiet pride  
he watched his grandsons  
take their first steps  
as first generation  
American boys

- Madison Mayer

