

American.
by Ysabelle Buenavista

I remember when I was little and people used to ask me *Where are you from?*

I used to say *I'm American.*

and they gave me this *look* : like I was making a joke.

because what they *really* meant was *What ethnicity are you?*

and that just didn't occur to me

because I knew I was born here - I was American.

So when they asked again *No, where are you from?*

I just shook my head and said again *I'm American.*

but what really makes you an American?

some believe that what makes you American

is determined by the color of your skin

or the accent

that mixes up your vowels and drops your articles.

in reality, it's the miles you or your ancestors

have traveled to get here

it's the dirt on their hands and the blisters on their feet

it's the hard work that it took to get on the boat or train

across the stretches of land to the Nation of Dreams.

but it's also the blood on their hands

it's *Where are your papers?*

and the quiet whispering behind hands to ears

like the soft rustling of wind through trees.

it's the crying and parents left behind

and the scorn of those who scream at your retreating back

you don't have the right to return.

but in the end

it's the naive but resolute freshmen

holding hands while walking through the hallway

brown intertwined with white.

it's the country built on slavery

but it's also the country of a thousand other countries.

when people think of America they think of apple pie, McDonalds, and *freedom* –

they don't think of discrimination - and they shouldn't.

because that's what shouldn't define America or what makes one American,

it should be something wholly and utterly rejected.

but in reality this is hard to achieve.

because instead of acknowledging the fact that the prejudice
is there and it's prevalent, we ignore it.

because *If it doesn't affect you directly, it doesn't matter.*

Don't make a scene.

they, the ones born with a silver spoon in their mouths

the ones who *Never had anything handed to them, thanks.*

have also never had to leave everything they had ever loved and known

have no right to say what makes one American.

because they who are French, German, Polish, English, Scottish, Irish
are immigrants too.

so instead of saying *build a wall!*

or looking at someone who has small eyes, black hair, and a round face

and telling them *You're not really American.*

take a step back and think *What makes me American?*