

Everyone Gets an American Flag

Script:

December 13, 2010 Reading

Karl is sitting. All other characters enter while speaking, then they sit in their respective chairs.

VIDHYA/INTERVIEWER

How do you define yourself? As an immigrant? An American?

ANNA

...you surprised by how many people in the U.S. were born elsewhere?

KARL

Like I said I don't know how much of the story is interesting to you.

PRIYA

I think that somehow your memory is so tied in with language that once you lose your native tongue, your... memories kind of go along with that too.

INTERVIEWER 2

It is extremely engaging, I mean, the fact that y-your telling me... I wasn't too sure how to approach you.

KARL

Yeah, I notice a lot of people see me like rolling down on the sidewalk or something and they would like-like step away, you know, its like, "oh crap, don't... let's not get in its way or something." If I was a normal person, you wouldn't like move out of the way.

INTERVIEWER 3

You mentioned that at first when you met the Chicano community it was difficult at first. Were they upset that you didn't know English?

RODRIGO

No, I was upset that they didn't know Spanish.

JULIE

J-Jambo ni jina langu Julie.

INTERVIEWER 4

Oh what did you say?

JULIE

I just said hello my name is Julie

RINA

Hopefully, I am anonymous. [laughs]

HYON CHU

I was reading through the transcripts and actually, I am going to keep them to put in my daughter's ... journal. You know? Because it's all there?

VIDHYA/INTERVIEWER

How do you define yourself? As an immigrant? An American?

Except for Karl, all characters stand while introducing themselves.

HYON CHU

And then the one question that was asked of me was, What is your American name now? And I just said, Why do I need an American name? My name is Hyon Chu.

Actress turns and puts on glasses

PRIYA

Sure, my name is Priya Raman. I was born in 1975, my father was in the army, so pretty much all my life or at least for the most of my childhood, I moved around the country, we were in very

different places. . . . growing up I had friends from different religions, different backgrounds, parsis, muslims, christians, punjabis, sindhis, and so we basically celebrated every festival.

JULIE

My name is Lukogho Julie-Christine Kasomo. My first name my parents gave me, I guess it was a joint decision between my mom and my dad. . . My parents were living in Kenya and then they moved to Congo, specifically in the North eastern part of Congo. While in Congo, I was born. It was a Friday, which was market day, early in the morning at 6:30 in the morning, which is funny cause I am not a morning person. I don't know how that happened.

FANG

[My name is Fang Lee.] I actually had a really happy childhood, believe me a lot! I have grandparents. We, in China, most families live with grandparents, we don't have a separate house. You know in China, we have one-child policy after 1979, the year I was born, so my sister was ok. And then after me, I'm ok, but after my brother - because of the birth of my brother, my mom lost her job... Because she didn't obey the policy of China and the government tried to punish her and then she lost her job.

Actress puts scarf around her neck

RINA

I born in Iran. [My name is Rina.] I grew up in a kind of upper class family. We are four sisters no brothers. I have lived all my life when I was back there in Tehran Capital city of Iran.

RODRIGO

I was born in Mexico City in 1970. I am 40 years old. I first came to the U.S in 1995. Then I stayed here for about four months and went back. And then I went back a year later, in 1996. And then I have been here since then.

KARL

My name is Karl. My Vietnamese name is Khang, um but when I got my citizenship we used kinda added an English name to it just so... make it easier to communicate with people, yeah. As a kid I read a lot so one of the novel that I read, one of the character name is Karl, and I was... I really liked that character's name. It was like a detective novel that was translated from German.

KARLA

[I'm Karla Reyes.] I have two different instances in which I immigrated to the states. The first one was when I was three years old...and the [other when] I was about to turn ten.

Actress puts on glasses

ANNA

I'm named after my Gramma...[I'm Anna]...who's still alive, which is weird. Generally Jewish families don't name their children after live relatives. I think the superstition is that, you know, death will confuse the two, or something.

VIDHYA

I am Vidhya Subramanian. I came from India. Actually I was born in India in Chennai. In a city called Chennai which was actually called Madras at the time I lived in India. I was born in 1968 and um, let's see... I'm an only child to my parents. Let's see I came to the United States in 1990, yeah. 1990. I've gone back often.

MARIAM

They met and got married. When they had me they were both students at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. . . When I was 2 and a half we went back to Iran... I stayed in Iran until I was 18. I went past the University in Iran.

RAFAEL

I am Rafael Tirado. I am from Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico, I am 35 years old. I came here 8 years ago. I am the first to immigrate. I was the first one and then I brought my nephews. . .but. . .ahh. . . I initially came here because. . . my boyfriend, not the current one, but the one before him. I met him in . . .1996 and. . . ahh. . . we were together in Mexico about 6 years. . . we would've have been 14 years together but I broke up with him like about 5 months ago and. . .ahh. . . but it was him who brought me here.

PIOTR

My name is Piotr Gardias. Middle name Joseph in Polish language (laughs). Joseph maybe in American right? Okay, then date of birth: 31st January, 1933. I was born in Poland in the village Grochowka. Practically my father and my mother both of them they belonged to the Polish

underground army. They were fighting for the independence because we are one hundred and twenty years under soviet occupation, and German and Austria as you remember from the history. Right? . . . Eh, you know, when you are member of Polish underground army, you should know that you can be killed anytime because it was secret right?

VIDHYA

Well, um... like I said I'm an only child so growing up was a bit lonely because I always, I would always complain to my parents that I would have loved to have had a sibling maybe just to fight with, ya know... If nothing else.

KARL

my dad left after my little brother was born, so yeah-- It was difficult because of me because I have a disability. I made life harder for her, probably, yeah. I was born... it's called osteogenesis imperfecta. . .and basically Brittle Bone Disease. So my bones break really easily. So I don't, so my body doesn't build enough calcium, so, I don't have bone strength to support myself to stand up. . . And ... yeah ... I mean, I was born like normal child. . . But she was like, “umm,” -- yeah . . . The... “house”-wife? . . . the “maternal” wife? The “mid”-wife! ... Anyways that person was giving me a bath or something and she notice that my thigh was like red and got swollen. So they took an x-ray and she saw my bones was broken. So ... Basically. . . my mom tell me that from that point forward ... the hospital is kinda like my baby home.

JULIE

I was the town talker, I was the town caller, that's what they would call me... (laugh)..telling everybody's business...umm hmm...town talker at 2.. . . My mom was a nurse, she still is a nurse right now. My dad was doing, some, like, research and he was a missionary . . . had already been studying, umm getting his masters here. . . he left soon after I was born. . . . So he went to America first and then we followed. I was really young when he left, so at the time I was so oblivious to his absence. I was so in the world of Africa, I mean there was just so much going on when you're a little kid. I think any kid in any place is just...after a while is just...out of sight out of mind.

KARLA

My dad just sent money back in order for us to survive. Not survive, but just like live, you know. I had gotten more cousins you know like my aunts ended up getting pregnant and all of that stuff

but when we were living with them. . . there was no privacy. We were living on the ground, on the floor in the living room and we ended up just putting all of our clothes in a box, like the whole family's stuff was in a box. My dad was here and I couldn't understand why he couldn't go over there or why we couldn't see him and you know why everything was happening.

PRIYA

I think most of my aunts and uncles thought I was not being girl-like. "Oh you shouldn't do this, that's not what girls do or you should not talk loudly, that's not what girls do, you can't climb trees and all. So I got so angry when I was kid, I remember that I started beating up boys. Anytime I saw a boy, I'd take my shoe off and go beat him.

JULIE

For someone who grew up where there was a lot of rain I hated the rain. I was a prima donna. When it rained it got really really muddy and it's just all bad. I was the kid saying "you're gonna carry me, I'm not going to walk."

KARL

But I ... I remember I had a lot of aunts ... my dad's side ... oh my god ... the aunts ... they loud ...

RODRIGO

My parents, they both had to work, so they usually were not around. But in the neighborhood that I lived, you knew everybody. . . . This is Mexico, this is very low-income neighborhood where you don't have any role models that you can relate to. The only role models that I had were on TV and movies. . . . When I was probably eight or ten, there was this child star. He was a kid, a boy, he was a singer. And he would be in movies. So I remember I would tell my mom that I wanted to be like him. Just because that was my reference that I wanted to be in TV and movies right? And my mom, "Yeah. Yeah. Yeah." [Whatever].

RINA

My childhood, I really miss my childhood, my childhood, I miss it I really miss it, I had a great time. I had the time of my life. . . . yes actually most of my time my good time that I remember when before revolution. Because I had the best of my life.. no restricting. Women were under no the pressure. Music was not forbidden you know.

KARL

I got a wheelchair, it didn't really fit me, but better than what I had.what I had was a little wooden board with uh little wheels on the bottom where I just kind of strolled myself like push myself around, it's not like wheelchair when I'm tall, I was like two inches up from the ground, so I just kind of crawled on the ground I guess you can even say that.

RAFAEL

Yes, I remember when I turn 5, I had a piñata, I think it was the only one I had and it wasn't a big thing but they invited a lot of people, but. . . but they got me a piñata from Mimoso Ratón/Cuddly Mouse a Mexican character from TV and. . . they bought me brand new clothes, and I mean. . . It was nice. . . cake. . . they invited my friends from the block. . . . that celebration I remember a lot. . . . because seldom my family would gather together. . .

RODRIGO

All of us would gather to celebrate Christmas... My parents were lower class people. But they always wanted us to aspire to feel good on that day. It was good, I remember a lot. The cooking of my mom and the piñata and the full celebration.. It was big for us.

ANNA

We're not religious, at all So, um, none of the holidays...In Russia you don't celebrate Christmas, you celebrate New Year's, And my parents explained to me that it was a very special and very beloved holiday because it was one of the few that wasn't party related, or communism related.

PIOTR

I remember the last moment before the second world war, practically the war was already started the next day, and we escape this area by train. The last train. because The next day there was no train anymore because German already, I think German? Ten days later Russia attack Poland. I go to the village Grochowka because there was mother's family. We go back and we stay there. The war was ended very fast during one month, and they capture the Poland. German capture western country, and the Russian eastern country, and we were under German occupation. I remember it very well.

RINA

We had king. We had queen you know. The day king and queen left. That's one of the worst day I ever remember. Annnd.. my parents they were crying and my mom had to go outside to get something and the other people were celebrating and they were passing sweets. And I remember

when my mom came home she was crying so hard and said, a guy asked me to have some sweets and she just ... didn't want to take any sweets because she was actually upset. She was not celebrating they were crying.

KARLA

I always have the fondest memories of Día de los Muertos en México because my mom used to, every year she used to buy sodas and candies so we could sell them because we lived, literally twenty feet away from a cemetery, But we weren't really selling candies we were eating them the whole time.

MARIAM

In Iran I always felt like I wasn't normal, ' cuz we were raised different. And in every single school, like, kids, other kids would be like "why are you so weird?" . . . I pretty much hated all the schools. I had bad experiences, extremely bad experiences with school.

KARLA

School was a really good experience for me. . . I don't want to totally over-generalize but Mexicans, we tend to be like very proud of our heritage. And um and so they, they they did a lot of activities for us to feel proud of that.

KARL

I couldn't go to school because the official they were like-- I was too smart for specialized school, but too fragile to go to a normal school. [So basically, I was homeschooled]

PIOTR

I went to the Warsaw University right, and I was studying there. I was studying and also I think a year later or maybe the same time I applied for the job at the design bureau, and I have a problem again because I was studying there right, and what I was studying was nuclear power, and I received another degree, and at that time at this design bureau there was three position to go to Leningrad or Moscow somewhere to learn more about nuclear energy, and some of them went to France, but they were Jewish and I was Polish so I was not allowed to go there.

RODRIGO

But I feel very lucky, I'm very proud that my parents, the first priority for us was to pursue education. And even though they were not educated themselves. . . So, they put that in me and

for me I keep that as a survival. . . .

KARLA

Um, it's been my experience um that men, I mean women are a lot stronger than men in my family, in every sense of the word. . . . The women in my family they've been the ones to pick up the pieces you know like when shit hits the fan. When things go wrong. When their husbands lose their jobs, when their kids go to jail. Even in celebrations they're the ones who organize everything. So, it's very interesting and it's a good thing, but it's not a good thing. It's a good thing because that's the way I grew up and that's the way that I am—I can take care of myself.

Piotr stands to tell joke

PIOTR

You know this .. the ... maybe Polish joke about Bulgarian people. Bulgarians have donkeys but Polish we have no Donkey's because it is too cold. We have horses right? And as I recall this joke was many years ago. Before the second world war there was no war right? And the Bulgarian guy was sitting on the Donkey right? His wife was walking behind him right? But the Polish custom is different right? We say the first woman is best, and the second man. Even if I am greeting the woman, of course especially older, I am taking her hand and kissing her hands. Did you know this or not? This is typical. You have respect. Not that this is sexual. No this is respect, but there Bulgarian they treat the first man because he is man. And the second part of Joke, I am explain you, and after the war the Polish guy is close to the border and he sees this Bulgarian guy, and the woman is riding on the donkey, and he is walking behind her, and the Polish guy ask him, "oh why have you just now learned like we and you have respect? She is in the front of you this like that. " "Ah no, she is sitting there because there are mines.' (laughs) That means if mine would have exploded ... but it is specially because Polish culture is different I don't know maybe just now we have no culture at all.

JULIE

I remember my dad always tell us, your looking for "snake's-leg" when you would complain about something. You're looking, go find a snake's- leg, which meant essentially, that whatever issue you were looking for could not be found, cannot be resolved, snakes don't have legs.

RINA

Muslim, all Muslim. I know, it doesn't look like I am practicing it but I am... We kept the main rules . . . for basic things Muslim women should do, which the main thing is praying, keep the

Ramadan, fasting once a year, and just be a good person, don't lie, don't hurt people but as for I am a woman I have to cover my hair, I don't do that, you know, I don't wear scarf and as you see me here, I don't wear any scarf, which I supposed to but no I don't practice it that strong. . . I believe god is more kind than that,

MARIAM

Before I had so much faith and that faith saved me in so much problems. There were times I really did not want to live. I was at some point I was suicidal when I was 9 years old. There were a lot of drugs at home. And I remember piling up a collection based on color. I could eat to die. Mom came home.

PRIYA

I think the common uniting factor among everybody is humanity and I think that should be the biggest religion of all.

FANG

I'm not reli...reli...related to any religion. Yeah, it's curious, because most the Chinese people, they don't have religion... I always wanted to move out, you know, to...I'm very curious about the world outside of our family and our city. So when I got the job in our city, I was fine, and then I tried to...I always wanted to look at the world outside of me...And actually I had a really good job in Shanghai before I moved to the United States.

ANNA

You know, I'm Russian I'm relatively proud of it. So, like I said, If it was a good day, then I was happy If it wasn't, then I wasn't I didn't really have.. "oh no, Russia, my home" I did not have these feelings I think because my Mom didn't have these feelings.

MARIAM

I have some feelings, like I have some ideas of America from Disney cartoons. The image of America was of happy children and music and dance and a lot of stuff I missed in Iran.

RODRIGO

Actually my dream was to one day go to Europe. So, um...really everything that I knew about the United States, you know was Disneyland. If I was only able to go to Disneyland and that was

it, I did not want to know more.

Rafael stands while speaking

RAFAEL

Always when I was watching TV. . .ahh. . .I liked the lifestyle from here. I came because I learned about the American Dream by watching Ally McBeal and Veronica's Closets on Mexican TV. I thought I could be like Ally or Veronica: Independent, smart and have lots of boyfriends.

JULIE

You have these ideas of what the world is going to be like. America and Europe, when you're in Africa, just kind of has this "it's the land of golden opportunity, paved with gold, and money is just growing." . . . You don't necessarily know what it is or what it's going to be like, but you have an idea from what you've heard and from watching all these, we had movies that we watched.... people are watching movies from like the 80's and they would watch like the Chuck Norris movies, the Bruce Lee movies and just looking at whatever, and kind of the background scenes. . . . so it was just kind of like..this is America.

KARL

I felt....umm... half excited because I'm getting to live in this new environment where it's going to be and new opportunities await, that's what they say, so I was excited to see all the...you know experience all that and I was a little sad also because we were leaving a lot of our family you know I. . . it was big goodbye.

RINA

It was an unknown world, that was exciting ---but at the same time leaving my family behind... You're leaving your whole world behind, this is serious, you know everything, it is as if you are born again. Its like the little kid going to amusement park. It is fun it is exciting. What its going to be? I am going to America.

VIDHYA

I think at that time it was more of a the excitement of the unknown...

PRIYA

I was sitting in a client meeting one day in Delhi[...]and the client was just blabbing away and I

was just like what am I doing with my life? . . . I looked back at my academic career and I thought to myself, 'I could've done so much better if I had applied myself just a little bit more.' I felt like I let myself down. Mentally I'd decided pretty much that day at the meeting with my client, that "that's it, I can't sit through another one of these meetings again or my head is going to explode."

RAFAEL

. . . I wanted to be independent, in Mexico I was independent but I wanted to be by myself without anybody behind me.

ANNA

With Israel people ask about the bombings And the war.... zzzz The wars. . . . it's just something you live with I mean, you are afraid You're cautious. But you can't be afraid. Because it's just impossible for a human being to make that level of fear Constantly. . . eventually apathy Or Resignation, or whatever you want to call it takes over and you're like Okay so this is the situation I'm stuck with, Now how do I deal with it. So that's kind of living in Israel... You know it's hard When you live in a country your country's always the good guy . . . You know, when I came to America I didn't realize quite how many people, I mean OK, I always knew how many people hated Israel But I didn't quite realize...

Mariam stands while speaking

MARIAM

I had fear and I followed the news. I see those people die and knowing that America is not doing anything. And my anger at America for supporting Israel. I still vividly remember all of the images I saw. I remember I saw an Israeli soldier cut off a Palestinian's leg and throw the leg away. I remember a 5 or 6 year old little girl crying on the beach. Her family had gone on this vacation. They were just sitting on the beach and the Israeli soldier had shot the mom, the dad, her baby brother and she had seen all that and she was screaming and crying. And I remember not being able to sleep that night. And it was just horrible and I had this image that America sponsored all this death. It was a place beautiful inside but it was a place that sponsored crimes outside the country. Because of that what America did to other countries it was a nice place to live inside, you know, but I couldn't stop thinking like this hatred of not the American people. It's not the American people. We were always told... Even the Iranian media showed the American people separate from the government. It showed the crimes the government did and

showed the American people saying... The Americans were so nice and stuff but I just hated the government. ... My hatred for the American government.

Anna stands while speaking

ANNA

I don't think politics is something to be discussed with a stranger, unless you're at a particular place where that's why you were there is to discuss politics... So honestly, you just keep to the weather.

PIOTR

Practically it was Russian party PZPR. They call Polish Union Party, Republican Party PZPR, but it was not. Polish is not Communist. We are against because we lose independence you know, and even my father who was jailed, he received an ID number that he belonged to PZPR. I was not belong to the party but my colleagues were, so I say okay, . . . I apply to the Polish party and my colleague said no don't eh admit him because I am going to church and I said yeah I believe in Jesus Christ if you don't want me is okay (laughs). I give back ID because I don't want this, to do this organization, because bandits they are killing their womans, and after then, they didn't allow me working anymore. I lost everything. They agreed that we should be removed from Poland, and many of us immigrated to different countries.

Rina stands while speaking

RINA

We were in one of those..um.. the most famous the biggest park in our city Tehran. And we were just walking and around the park talking with my sister and my mother. And that was when the big car came with all the womans. authority. And they came and stopped in front of us, and all of a sudden there was the authority people, just attack us to get my sister, because she didn't have proper hijab-. . . Your hijab is not proper. And you have, we need to take you. We need to take you! And they claimed that she had a little bit make up. Which she didn't! Then my mom got really nervous. She said no no please forgive her you know. Don't take her tha- there. She's gonna fix it. . . and meanwhile I was afraid maybe they want to take to me too soo because I mean I had proper hijab but you know they can mark you on anything so... my mother- she was a kind of almost begging on her knees. To uh stop her... Finally. . . she said okay okay just fix her scarf. . . . Tie her scarf tighter you know...she will you know.. uhh wear her hijab in a proper way. They let her go. That was the kind of light-bulb moment that I decided that that's the

opportunity for me—Plus my dad always want us to be educated, and especially in a foreign country—especially like a country like the U.S.A. . . . So based on his wishes and based on what had happened, and based on what was going on back home—based on the opportunity came, and that was the age for me to get married and start a family—back home they believe that... which is wrong, totally wrong. Then all those reasons give to me a good motivation to accept that offer... And I was hoping I could bring my whole family over here but that didn't happened, so I have only one sister that is here. The one who got in trouble.

HYUN CHU

I can't imagine that, its like, think about yourself moving to another country and not knowing if you're ever going to see your family again, at least in the near future and picking up a new language. It would just be completely shocking and horrible, right? Not to know anybody there where you're going to.

JULIE

If things in Congo would have been ideal, and more stable, I don't think my parents would have ever left. Why would anybody struggle or try to leave where they are coming from, knowing that they're leaving their family, knowing that they never may be able to see their families and having to deal with that separation to come to a new place where you're not well received, you don't really know anything.

KARL

[I came in] umm nineteen-ninety eight, so it was like late nineties...the pop, the boy bands were popular (laughs)

FANG

And then he finally, he decided to come back to China to marry me. . . . I didn't even think about I needed to quit a job, and how, what's the result, and what's the consequence. Like, what's the effect of my life. I just needed to, I think I needed to quite my job and marry him, and go with him. So, we just did it! (laughs)

VIDHYA

I came here on an H-4 because I got married to my husband who was here on an H-1, which is like a work permit visa. So (clears throat) the spouse then becomes an H-4. It feels strange to be classified as, "I'm an H-4" "I'm an H-1"

KARLA

My mom ended up deciding that we were going to come over here and I'm not really sure how she got all the arrangements and stuff, but we just kind of showed up over here again. And my father wasn't too necessarily happy about it, not, I think it was the...fact that he had been living by himself for such a long time that he kind of just got used to it you know and I think he kind of just felt like another responsibility you know but it's kind of just easier to detach yourself from somebody you don't see.

RODRIGO

It was not something that I planned, it was to help my brother and pass his wife and his kid... His son was seven months at that time. And he couldn't risk his wife and his son, to just let a coyote, the smuggler, to pass them. So he asked me would you go... and I had just finished college and I didn't have plans. . . So I said, this is a free trip to the States so I will go.

Rodrigo stands

KARLA

I remember it vividly, mainly because um, I was being carried by the person who was leading us um and he dropped me and it's kind of um, kind of like a funny sentimental story in the family mainly because I was crying and...he had dropped me and uh, well it hurt. And um, so um...I was yelling at him and I was yelling profanities at him. . . I don't remember exactly what I said but everybody tells me that I was like...I said really bad words...

VIDHYA

He had seen me in magazine covers and stuff and was interested in pursuing me. So, at that time he lived in the United States. . . he talked to his parents and they talked to my parents and --its interesting because (clears throat) I didn't have a clue about any of these happenings and I just found out about it when my parents talked to me and said, "Ok he is interested." He was visiting from the US for about a week or 10 days or whatever and so at that point I had actually been going around saying I'm never going to get married or I'm going to dance for the rest of my life or If I get married it's going to be when I'm 30 years old or whatever. . . I was very immature at that time. . .I remember my mom coming and talking to me about him and I'd met him for about a week or so and we were talking about what to do about it, right? So talking about it and my mom's first instinct, I mean my mom said to me, "I leave it up to you. The decision is up to you.

But please say yes.”

Rafael stands while he speaks, moves to the center of the stage

RAFAEL

The day I left, I was in my sister’s house in Tijuana, and then so. . . I went to the. . . I don’t know how do you say pollero (laughs). . . the person who helped me cross. . . smuggler, yeah. We went to his house and then we took a bus. I don’t remember the name of the town. . . a little town. . . and then we stopped on the line. Then we waited until midnight to cross it. . . .

Rafael sits in the center of the stage. Rodrigo walks towards him while he speaks.

RODRIGO

on our way of crossing the border, we found this other group of one woman and three men. Which later we found out, that they... I don’t want to say that they raped the woman. But they kind of forced her to have you know, sexual relationships with them. But for her, it was her only way to come. I mean it was by herself. So, we were about ten or twelve people just crossing the border. . . . They took us in a van to a very far away place. . . . From there we took a bus that took us farther away from the city. And from there we waited until about ten pm when it was really dark.

Rodrigo sits opposite of Rafael. They converse with each other.

RAFAEL

there moments in which we had to run so fast because we were walking on the road, you know where there were cars coming... we had to hide in the bushes. . . It was only the coyote and me.

RODRIGO

And we were just like feet away from the line, which was just barbed wire. And that was it, I mean it was Mexico and United States and we were looking at the United States.

RAFAEL

Finally when we got to the point, so they supposed to pick us up. . . and they never arrived, they never arrived.

RODRIGO

But that didn't happen..... I think we wanted to believe that somebody was going to pick us up. Because I think we were more afraid of being caught. We knew that you already spent a night, why not another night, you know? As long as you're breathing. You can just keep going. . . .Pretty much as soon as it got dark we walked for the whole night. And during the day we had to hide.

RAFAEL

We were waiting like 3 or 4 hours and they finally got there like at 6 it almost morning. And that was it, they took us to the house of another person. So, in that house, finally I ate.

RODRIGO

It was three days after and we did not have water. . . We didn't have food or anything and it was just really um... we were just really dying of thirst.

RAFAEL

It was the house of a Mexican family, very poor, because the house was made of like cardboard. . . they give me water and the caldo de res with frijoles and it was delicious. . .

RODRIGO

But then the person who was taking us, he managed to get us to the point where they picked us up And so they told us how we would be placed. Some would be in the trunk, I was going to be lying down on the floor and there were three ladies. Uh, my sister-in law one of them and the other lady and another lady, they were going to be sitting on top of me.

RAFAEL

So, the guy took me to Santa Ana with two persons so they were a couple from Oaxaca I think, they were very small guys lucky for me, I mean, para mi buena suerte because he put us in the trunk of the. . . of his car. It was a Honda, I mean like a Civic or something like that, a very compact car and they put us, he put us in the trunk three of us, the guy, his wife and me.

RODRIGO

And so they were going to be able to fit everybody into just that car... And they told us it is going to be a ten-minute ride, but which turned to be like forty-five minutes.

RAFAEL

And he told us “oh don’t worry, so you gonna be here like one hour or less” Okay, so no problem but it was a lie because he stay inside for like four hours. . . in the trunk, me and the couple, I mean I’ve never have claustrophobia, but in that moment I think that I started to feel it.

Rodrigo stands while he speaks

RODRIGO

And you would hear the guys like you know, hitting the trunk because the air. I was on the floor with I don’t know how many pounds on me. . . And we got to a place where they just ask us to get out and it was an empty, dark, dirty house. I don’t know what was on the floor, but we just crashed there.

RAFAEL

For the whole thing I paid like \$1500. Tijuana to Los Angeles was fifteen hundred.

Rodrigo extends his hand to Rafael and helps him up.

ANNA

So apparently...My Dad got transferred, through his job, which is why we came.

PIOTR

I buy the ticket and to the United States. Practically by the United States because my daughter -- she came to United States, right. My -- my intent was came to United States and apply for asylum, and I did when I came.

KARL

The airport wasn't anything like...it's not like nice here, lots of people very dirty, very noisy, very smelly. It was also like my first time in the airport. . . . The airplane was quite scary, the first time on the airplane, taking off and landing, your ears start to go crazy, I get freaked out easily, I didn't know what was going on... Umm...we had to take a couple of planes in like Taiwan or something so we spent a few hours in the airport, it was kind of weird and yeah it was a real long flight and very uncomfortable.

MARIAM

We did not have legal immigration issuance when we came to the airport. I mean I was covered – I had this scarf. I was covered head to toe basically. And when we got to New York they took us to this immigrant place. It was really unpleasant. They were holding us for a long time. My uncle had come to pick us up and ... I could feel that we were singled out. I was because of my scarf. Actually it was when we passed the first checkpoint after we left Iran the first check point we passed they took me in the room to check under my scarf like there was a bomb or something. Like it was so ridiculous to me. They did it in a nice way, they were smiling and like. It was a lady who took me, of course a guy could not do my hair.

ANNA

I think we took two planes, maybe three...But yeah, the whole journey is about 24 hours.

FANG

Oh, it's too bad! (laughs) When I left Shanghai, I was really excited. So, but, my parents, you know, my parents were really sad, because, you know, after marriage – it's like the marriage is sending me away from them. . . . I fly with my husband, and, um, I started to be up...yeah, I became very upset on the airplane because I notice nobody understand my English. I talked to the person, um, who is serving in the airplane. I ask for some drink, but she couldn't understand me.

MARIAM

My dad tried to be like, oh, you know, it'll be fine, it'll be fine. He didn't, he didn't by no means he wanted us to live here permanently. He just wanted us to come here, get a really good degree, and he knew that when we go back to Iran with a, you know, American degree we would much easier have a job then.

FANG

Actually, before I came to the United States, he tried to shoot from the camera, the web camera, about his apartment and his school, you know, but when I came here, it's still...it's very different.

PRIYA

When I first got in I remember my first meal, was a subway sandwich and then the next morning I was like I somehow decided I had to eat MacDonalds and fell sick after doing that.

VIDHYA

Ya know when I came here I always have this notion in my head. America. White. It's all white people. So when you come here you realize that's not true.

FANG

And then, in China, because I worked in business area, usually you dress very formal, and especially in Shanghai. It's very fashionable. Shanghai is very fashion, very modern city, and even my home town, the small city, it's really good because it's in the East of China and the economy is really good, a lot of companies over there, and every people...every person is trying to do their own business, so, most people have their really good life. And when I come here, I notice, oh, the building are so old, and the street are so old, and there are not so many people...

Julie stands while speaking

JULIE

I was raised all around Southern California, and I grew up in Orange County for most of my time, so that was kind of interesting being the smart black kid..(laugh)..who never really quite fit in with the black kids or the white kids, so it's just kind of this place that I was in, in-between. Media tends to give this idea that in order to be authentically black, you had to have this whole experience of, I'm from the hood. . . the whole baby daddy baby mama drama type of thing. So that was challenging.....in that aspect of well "we're all black"when I walk down the street..(laugh)..no one goes "uhh, Africa!"

HYUN CHU

I remember being in someone's office and I think it was the guy who signed off the papers. . . . I remember he had asked. . . this was directed to my mom, What color are your eyes? And she said brown. Right? And... and he said, No! It's black! You have black eyes. . . and I remember thinking, Ok, so I have black eyes. . . I remember thinking years later, there's no such thing as black eyes! Idiot! . . .

PIOTR

There was enthusiasm. When I came to the United States, there was everything for free. Everyone for free, and because United States suddenly became super power, because Russia lose

PRIYA

Not being shocked by anything except perhaps kids walking around with like 'juicy' written on their butts

Rafael stands while speaking

RAFAEL

I got here in San Jose on First and. . . I don't remember, it was in like a gas station on First close to 101, that's the point left me and my friends picked me up. It was like Tijuana I felt like in Tijuana. It wasn't like I thought about it, no. It's because. . . in Mexico when I was watching like TV shows, like you know. . . Ally McBeal that's the one of my favorite shows and you know, in that kind of shows you see like big cities, with big buildings, nice houses and in San Jose is not like (laughs). . .

RINA

when I came to the United States, I had an image of getting to the United States with many lights and colors and ehhe, like a something like Las Vegas. But when I came here, I said What happened to those lights, to those neons, to those signs that are blinking and colorful and uhhhh, light! So apparently San Jose is not like that so then I had a visit in Vegas, then I said, oh, okay that's what we are talking.

VIDHYA

When I landed it was end of February in New Hampshire. It was all white. And to give you some idea about Chennai, the city I came from. There are only three types of temp there is hot, hotter and hottest. That's it. . . So coming here the moment I landed it was complete white. A blanket of snow.

MARIAM

New York was really something. The Empire State, all the beautiful attraction of America. And the one thing that attracted me was that everything was so colorful. It was interesting to see people of all races, of all countries, and they all different like everybody else you know.. There were so many colors. And there are so many colors. With the excitement and all. Especially for the first ten days. then after that we came to San Jose.

ANNA

I mean, I'm sorry, people can be melancholy about snow...all they want. But they're wrong. They're lying. They're lying.

PRIYA

For some reason when I think about America, it's like, oh my god it's cold, it's gonna be really super cold, so I remember stepping off the plane in Tuscon Arizona in the middle of July in like full sleeves, sweatshirt and coat and everything and like dying...it was ridiculous!

KARL

When we came here it was really dark because it was during the winter. . . and I barely brought any-- like tropical country so we had very thin clothes, I had a jacket on, but it wasn't like legit jacket to wear in the cold weather . . . so It was freezing. After we got there we had to take a shower, so we went in a took a shower and uh only cold water cause I was "what this hot water?" In Vietnam we just shower with a bucket of cold water that's it, so it was cold water spraying on me, once I was done with my shower I was just like shaking I couldn't put on my clothes....shivering it was funny...kind of funny, kind of stupid at the same time..... I didn't know about hot water, I mean we don't have like you know umm faucet like that in Vietnam.

Rodrigo stands while speaking

RODRIGO

I don't know if you have ever been in Mexico? But Mexico smells different. But as soon as you pass here. We were in San Diego in this house....It smells like something different, like Windex. (Laughs). That particular smell. And it was like, oh, we made it. But this is all dark because they couldn't turn on the lights. And they brought us food, so...each one of us got a bag with a hamburger. And I had never tried pickles. And these were full of pickles. And I just find it disgusting. (Laughs) And I thought like, this is what America tastes like! It was just that particular flavor that I, and I think I associated pickles with the whole journey, that I cannot stand pickles.

KARL

Vietnamese Coffee. Oh, my god. Coffee! But not like coffee here where you put in the machine, and it spills out the coffee. But no Vietnamese... you have a glass, a tall glass, you have a little filter you put on top of glass. Put coffee on top, pour hot water in it, and the coffee would drip like one drop at a time into the glass.

ANNA

In Israel. . .The dairy. I used to love yoghurts. And hot chocolate. They have this hot chocolate.

It's amazing!

PIOTR

What I like the best, the soup from the potatoes and the mushrooms (laughs). Oh it is very delicious, and I like this (laughs) I can tell you a story because this was very popular, and when I was grown a little bit and the war started, and my uncle and my family there, my mother and my father they say okay, and they prepare the soup (laughs) for this, okay, and they have to care for this soup so it is ready when they come back, but when they came back I ate all soup (laughs), and they say where is soup?

HYON CHU

One of our primary source of food is kimchi. And its made out of, it's pickled cabbage basically but it's made out of hot spices and garlic. We use lots of garlic in our food so I mean my dad, ever since I could remember, he's always had garlic every day. And it's not just pieces of garlic that you mince into some kind of dish, it's whole cloves of garlic. . . . And my husband, who's very sensitive to smell, sometimes he's like, Did you have kimchi today? And I'm like, yeah, I had kimchi today. And I never really understood where that came from until my parents lived here for a very short period a few years ago. And I went to go pick up my dad and he got in the car and I was like, Whoa! Roll down the windows!

KARL

And, usually, it's like half a glass of coffee. It's just like black coffee. Then you take the filter off, you pour in some condensed milk, mix it up. And that's Vietnamese coffee.

ANNA

They take this giant cup, and then they warm up the milk. And on the bottom, they put like 3 pieces of chocolate. And then it slo..w..ly melts. Or you can melt it really fast. So good! Oh my god. That was the best hot chocolate.

PIOTR

And what else that is typical Polish food what I like platskis. . . . You can go to the just now there is not so far from here Polish church in San Jose there is festival, one a year, and you can buy the same, the same kind of food because they prepare this type of food.

RINA

Yes, you know... we have many Persian stores in San Jose and restaurants. Food is a great...way for me to stay connected...

JULIE

My favorite food growing up was plantain. I was a starch person, I love plantain which is basically; a lot of people here think it was a banana, but it's not, it's kin to the banana. . . . I'm very particular, the banana has to be just enough ripeness where it's not super hard, but then it can't be too soft, because then it becomes too mushy and sweet and I don't eat that. So it has to be nice and in between.

RODRIGO

I worked in McDonald's.

RAFAEL

my mother's food. . . In my house, it didn't matter if there was not meat, chicken or whatever. . . She would make very yummy soups, and potato cakes, like crab cakes, but potato cakes.

PRIYA

Absolutely. I think parents and food. That's about it. Otherwise, everything else is negotiable.

KARL

Coffee is very big in Vietnam, it's how they spend their time. Morning time before you go to work, you go to coffee shop. You sit there for like two hours. Like literally, some people spend hours in coffee shop, just like reading the newspaper. A glass of coffee they can drink forever, it's like, "oh my god!" You know people here they's chug their coffee and they start walking. Right? Um, but coffee, um coffee shops in Vietnam. When you go to Vietnam, there's lots of coffee shops, that's all you find.

PRIYA

The biggest thing I think that happened when I first moved here was, "Oh my god your English is so good!" And I usually would be very tempted to tell them that "I wish yours was better."

MARIAM

It's so frustrating when you're speaking English and...they understand your English, they just don't understand what you mean. . . .

KARL

I didn't know English, so not very comfortable. Like certain words, certain pronunciations and I was like ... hmm ... that's not how we say it in Vietnam,

RODRIGO

Something I remember too, is I used to go to the supermarket and walk the aisles and just try to memorize, you know, part of the aisle. Like how do you say peas?

ANNA

So there are words like that, just occasions where I forget, or things I get wrong all the time, like "opera" and "Oprah". I have to think about it really hard every time and I always forget which one is which. I don't even watch the show and I've never been to an opera... or oprah. Oprah is the person, right?

KARL

I had a dictionary that I used a lot so I guess I picked it up pretty quickly.

ANNA

And "fate" and "faith" I always have to remember which one is which. I always have to stop and say fate is destiny, faith is belief. Even now I had to stop and think about it, 'cause I forget.

RODRIGO

I wanted to pursue a different goal, which was to study English...So, but it was hard. Because again, when you don't know the language...And being an educated person that you know that you can engage in deep conversations about subjects in your own language, but here you look mentally challenged. So, it was a very humbling experience in a sense that, you know I was able to also see myself in the opposite side.

ANNA

I used to think in Hebrew, when we were in Russia I don't remember which language I was thinking of...I think in English now, I dream in English.

JULIE

So Kiswahili is like the language ... I lost a lot of it unfortunately, I think that's one of the things I do regret, but growing up, Africa had such a negative connotation to itself, that I came to, going through elementary school and not wanting to have really any association with it because people didn't necessarily understand. . . . I really stopped speaking in Swahili up into the age of 8.

HYON CHU

I remember being called into a parent kind of, parent child meeting with the teacher. . . And I remember, it was my father and . . . the teacher looking at him from across the table ~~like this,~~ ~~very much like this~~ and I was kind of sitting off to the side looking outside and she looked at him and said, "Do you understand the word 'flunk'?" And I just remember thinking that's a bad word because there's another bad word that starts with an "f" right? I know! Why would she...flunk, right? I remember that drive home. I remember the ugly yellow truck that we used to have and we were at a stoplight and my dad looked down at me...and said, "You have to stop speaking Korean."

RAFAEL

Sometimes I also feel like because you don't speak well the language they treat you like if you were retarded. And unfortunately, not just because you speak English you are more intelligent than me, we are equal, it's just that I have a limitation. . . and that hurts.

JULIE

You're always gonna be seen as if you don't know anything because it's not to the American standard.

MARIAM

And I couldn't make friends, like really close friends, for like 3, at least 3 years, I had difficulty making close friends. Like, I constantly felt like I, they didn't understand me, and I didn't understand them. Like, we would understand each other's English, but there would be this constant misunderstandings. . .

FANG

And, a lot of time – believe me...I don't know. Um, maybe because of my language? Maybe I have accent? At the beginning, especially at the beginning, I was not confident to speak. And, I

think they...they assume that...if I don't speak English, I don't have...I don't have any thought.... Oh, it was hard. (laughs) Nightmare. And then, you know, because I had a lot of time when we just came, I took some free English class, it's ESL, and then I try to communicate with other classmates, but most of them come from different countries. And their English are as worse as mine. (laughs)

KARLA

In fifth grade, that's when I learned English, I had the besst ESL teacher and . . . I remember and this is something that I think changed my life at that time. . . everyone in my class was actually from a different part of the world. Like it wasn't all Spanish speakers. Where it was you know, people who spoke Arabic, people who spoke Ethiopian, you know like from ALL over the world and it was such a beautiful place to be.

KARL

I get along with other people from other countries. Um, for some odd reason. I think because, because we have... we forced to speak in English. Also because... this is something we have in common we try to speak in another language that's not our own.

RODRIGO

In this Adult School, there were people from all over the places which I had never thought I was going to meet. People from Africa, from Asia, from every continent. And that was really enriching and that was a very nice experience for me to see that diversity that I didn't see in Mexico. In Mexico, you see Mexicans and that's it.

KARLA

. . . actually when I went back to Mexico, I spoke like spanglish, even as a 5 year old, I spoke spanglish. And I remember my first like week in class in first grade. I was like totally confused about what everyone was saying cuz everyone was speaking Spanish but it was like whole sentences in Spanish and I couldn't understand that.

RODRIGO

Spanglish is a weird thing. It's speaking by your heart and if your heart feels in Spanish just say it in Spanish. And if you say it in English, sometimes it is practical to say it in English.

JULIE

We spoke kind of this Swanglish, That's a Swahili English type of a mix. I remember being at church and I always prayed or started of praying in Swahili and then would move to English.

VIDHYA

Even when I go back to India now I speak with a different accent. I almost go back to that Indian-ness in me and Indian accent. I'm almost schizophrenic when I'm there...I don't know which one's the real one (laughs).

PRIYA

See, I'm never really aware of my Indian-ness.

RODRIGO

And you would see how people treat you just because you look in a certain way. And that was the way they would talk to you, kind of like condescending. And you can feel it; it is just that feeling that you know when they do it, right? And sometimes when it came to the language, they would explain to me. . . . They didn't know that I had a higher degree. And that I had a higher degree than their high school diploma. But obviously, for me it was kind of embarrassing to say yes I have a college degree and here I'm cleaning tables.

RAFAEL

In my job, they are, I don't know, the way they treat each other, it's very rough, and they know about my relationship with my ex boyfriend and they attack me. They think that because you are gay you are a dirty person that you are always thinking about sex, or the only thing that moves you to be with a man it's sex. That hurts me a lot, a lot, because. . . we are human. . . like in my case if I was with a man it was because I loved him.

RINA

...sometimes even our own people take advantage of old culture and these situation. Some men, you know, because they get image of the women should always be at home. Her only job should be cooking, cleaning, and washing. And if she got educated, that's good... but she still has to be able to do all those things at the same time. And for a human being, this is too much!

FANG

I notice that people in United States, they really, um, they are, they like to have their private life after they go to work. So...so, now we kind of, you know – my husband go to work, and then come back home...on the routine. And I don't have much, I don't have many friends, and I don't have many entertainment. After study, I need to do the housework – cooking, cleaning, taking care of the kids.

Mariam stands while speaking

MARIAM

So the first thing that started my doubts was me taking a literature class. . . .And the teacher was amazing. As, um, stubborn as she is in her non-religious beliefs, which is fine, all of us have our biases, you know. I just feel like , I just feel like a lot of times people who don't believe in religion feel like they have no biases. So, she started like we started having discussions, and she started steering up her doubts, and I had a huge crush on her, too. Another um, OK, I'm, see, I'm gonna get side tracked. . . [So] another thing really made me also, um, feel suicidal was that I thought I was a lesbian. And then she told me, "oh" she was like, "oh, well then you're a lesbian, there's nothing to be ashamed of, you know." And the minute they tell you you're a lesbian there's nothing to be ashamed of they, I mean, they don't realize that even in this society, we live in a society that a lot of people, a lot of young people commit suicide because they're even in high school, their classmates make, like, you know, harass them for being lesbian or gay, or whatever identity. So, when they tell you this they tell you it's nothing to be ashamed of but it's not realistic.

RODRIGO

And at the job sometimes you really tried to be nice to everybody because you always hear the stories that you're just a phone call away from being sent back. So, yeah, you become the nicest person. (laughs) So you would not upset anybody that had that number and would report you.

KARL

when I started school ... I didn't speak much English and that was my ... my first time outside the home ... So, I was really shy and quiet. Sit in my own corner, you know. Didn't know what to expect, what to think, what people think of me. Tough like that. I had a caretaker ... she always pushing me to do these things like do this ... hang out with these people. And I'm like "hmm" ... you know ... I just kinda ignore her. Hmm ... and ... very ... very frustrated, you know. Like yeah I am ... I don't know what's going on ... and she's wanting me to do all these things. So we always argued and I would cry and she would cry ... I feel bad for making my caretaker cry.

PIOTR

As I remember, when I came here, I came there was in central plant, there was a guy who was Jewish and he has a drawing of a donkey. A picture of a donkey, and it was written Polish joke, right. And I came to him, say what -- what do you mean this donkey Polish joke? I complain. He has to remove this picture. Americans, they make jokes, dirty jokes about the Polish. And I didn't know about that.

RAFAEL

Have I felt discriminated against? Yes, yes. . . for example when you go to a restaurant, sometimes they give priority. . . when you are waiting sometimes they give priority to white people. And that, I don't like.

MARIAM

And it was also that I thought God is never gonna love me again. I was like. . . I was a lesbian, which meant that I would only love women, which meant I could either marry a man and be miserable for the rest of my life, or marry a woman and God will damn me to hell, and um, the whole society will harass me for the rest of my life.

RINA

I will have to say my marriage was sort of traditional. We came over here we married, you know, American style. He was the first person in my life. (...) Ever, ever had any relationship. So that was huge. Maybe that's why I got so dependent on him. (...) Because he became my mother. He became my dad. He became my sisters... Almost 2 years after I got my first child and 5 years later I got my second child. And two boys. They are American, although, they do speak my language sometimes. (...) I am still in this marriage...

Priya stands while speaking

PRIYA

Well...my mother put me up on a matrimony website.... First she did it without telling me and then she told me what she'd done. . . . And so just to make her happy I said, "you can do what you feel like. I don't really care." And I would just agree to go out with them because A) it would save a lot of time and energy arguing with her and B) I was a graduate student, I was poor, at least these guys would take me out for a meal and I would get a good meal out of it and I'm very

happy about that. But...it got to a point where I had to write my comprehensive exams for my PhD, and I was like, I know I love you and I know you want me to get married but there is no way I can deal with this sort of you know, juggling five different guys and you know, telling people that I like walking on the beach, and pink is my favorite color and all that crap...ummm...and....so she's like, "Ok fine, there's this last guy, this last guy." So I said, "Ok fine, last guy." And that turned out to be the guy actually. (laughter)

JULIE

There were definitely times where I didn't disclose the fact that I'm African. Sounds horrible, just because the people just did not know how to receive that or perceive that. As of right now, umm I'm very comfortable with who I am, and I don't care, I'll let you know, this is what it is. . . . People don't know who I am or what I am or what to do.

ANNA

~~But she asks a lot of questions.~~ You know, how they say Jewish instead or Hebrew, and I'm like, The language is Hebrew. Jewish is the nationality slash religion.

RINA

Especially I left in a worst time of war. And I remember wherever I left I couldn't even contact my family for a while because they were traveling to another city, in order to be safe. In order to be safe from a bomb, bombing and war. That was the worst time that I left the country, the day of my marriage was the worst day actually that they were bombing Tehran.

RAFAEL

I haven't seen my mother since I left. She tried to get her visa once and they denied her visa and she didn't want to try again. . . . If I had to decide between staying here or go back, I think that the only reason that would made me go back to Mexico is my mother. Because she is an older person, she is 60 years old, and well, she is very strong but I am afraid that something would happen to her and I don't have the opportunity to see her, no?

RODRIGO

I always thought I was going to go back. But things just unfolded in different ways and I came, I started working. I was working and working. And then...I had the opportunity to go to college. . . . And then I knew I felt more comfortable speaking English, I was able to get a better job. I was

making money, I was helping my family. And I just thought after a few years, I thought, maybe this is where I want to stay.

KARL

Vietnamese culture, um, is very different . . . I'm not an important person basically. So here, living in American, I get the opportunities- so, I can travel, I can attend these conferences and everybody knows me, but I mean, in the Vietnamese culture I'm less than a man, I guess, because of my disability. Mmm... evvv-eventually, I really appreciate the help that I get.

KARLA

when you internalize what others think of you and I think that a lot of my community and even myself, I perpetuate that when I say things like, "oh, like you know we're always late." Or like, "oh you're either a gang member or you got pregnant at 16." So for me, when we talk about that, we're kind of perpetuating that. . . The thing I'm mostly concerned about is the little kids growing up being ashamed of being Mexican.

FANG

We are worried if we move back to China, how can my daughter catch up with other kids. Because the kindergarten, what they are teaching in kindergarten, it's like more complicated than second grade in the United States.

PRIYA

you know, ummm...but I think for some reason Indians are associated with strong accents. I think if there are stereotypes about Indians I think they are positive, at least in the circles that I move. Of course some people might think that we just run motels and things like that but I think the stereotype is hardworking, very smart, engineer, sort of a thing.

MARIAM

. . . In Iranian culture sort of like we don't really share what we feel as much. . . We don't have the go to counselor stuff, and we don't have all this, you know? Seeing counselors, psychologists. It's not a culture in Iran... they judge you, too. You can get in trouble, you know? But, you know, here it's, there's counseling, . . . I would say one of the best resources here that I always appreciated was the availability of help, you know? I am currently not suicidal and don't feel depressed.

RAFAEL

For the future I'd like to get my papers. . . (laughs). . . I don't know, I mean, I'd like to learn well the language. . . to be able to express myself better in this country, study a career that can help me leave the job with annoying customers and. . . I don't know, to have a better financial status... I'd like to buy a house with my family, my two nephews. . . and those are my most immediate plans.

KARL

I don't know if San Jose State specifically make- help me grow up- I mean, I mean, um, I mean just by having the disability I grown up at a different rate than people. Like, I see things that people don't see, I see things that... people don't specifically notice, you know, and I observe a lot just by sitting around. I observe people, I learn a lot about people.

HYON CHU

Tolerance to me should be taken out of the vocabulary because you can't really appreciate and embrace a culture if you're just tolerating it, right?...And that's true for San Jose State, you know. We're not diverse because we've done anything as an institution, ~~we're diverse because we just happen to be in San Jose.~~ . . . We just happen to be in an ideal location where we have a lot of diversity. That does not make an institution or any place or any country...culturally competent, right?

Rodrigo stands while speaking

RODRIGO

Something that also I think was a turning point; it was my connection with the Chicano community. Which at the beginning was little bit difficult because me not speaking English and they looking like Mexicans but not speaking Spanish... And when I went through um, college and I was now able to immerse myself into this other group. For me it was like, wow, okay... these folks are just like me.... And so that brought me closer to my Mexicanidad. Me being Mexican. And really appreciate from a distance my culture. Which I don't think that I had when I was there. And so that really gave me a lot of pride and gave me strength to continue learning and have a presence here that I did not have in Mexico.

Karla stands while speaking

KARLA

Somehow I ended up becoming this voice for undocumented students and I encouraged others to become a part of it. I saw so much power in that and I was like, this is what we got to do, we got to like be learning more about the institution and the way that decisions are made and be a better part of that, you know like more in really seeing the change.

HYON CHU

To walk around and say we don't have any prejudices, that's absolutely false, we all have prejudices.

MARIAM

But as I kept an open mind and refuse to label myself, I experienced attraction to men as well and fell in love with a man. I am not gay or lesbian or straight. I am a human and too complicated for each of these empty words.

KARL

I try to do things outside my comfort zone I think, like because I have brittle bones and there are not a lot of things that I can do but I do them anyways because, you know, like my mom's like 'don't do this because you might hurt yourself', right, like you fell... like, I'm the baby of the house. Like, I'm a man, but a man-baby, so, um, so she's always like 'don't do this and this' and the rebel that I am... I come out of my way and do it anyways. Um, I guess that's one of the Americanized things too- when people tell me not to do something, I do it, its like, if I think that I can do it I do it.

HYON CHU

But I was thinking of this one example of the Virginia Tech tragedy that happened a few years ago. It was, the perpetrator was Korean. A Korean American student, I think...And I just remember when that happened, all I heard that morning was that there was some kind of massacre at Virginia Tech, then we heard that it was a male, and then we heard that it was like...an Asian male. And then of course all the Asians are like, Oh my god I hope he's not...from my community, right?... ~~I think because of my experience of growing up in predominantly white communities and not having access to the Korean culture as much as I think I would have had. And when I was a kid I never really thought about this kind of stuff because I~~

~~was more consumed with trying to be more white or trying to fit in...~~

PIOTR

If you look carefully, United States, Obama, is not -- not Reagan at all. It's not Reagan. It is losing everything. And he is -- he is practically -- he is supporting Russia, you know. That means it is not good for Poland. I believe it is not good for United States because Russian is going slowly, slowly going to hell.

ANNA

I mean, no, I , it's not like I don't feel at home here, anything like that, I don't associate Americanism or Israelism or Russianism with feeling at home somewhere it's just I wouldn't die for this country necessarily. Unless they paid me very very well for it.

Vidhya stands while speaking

VIDHYA

I am an American citizen...so I did get my citizenship. I got it about, just before I got remarried. So about 10 years ago. When you go to the oath taking ceremony itself that is when it hit me and Oh my god, ya know. What does this mean? That I'm not Indian any more? Ya know, and when they make you take the Pledge of Allegiance right? at that oath ceremony. This is the gesture, the hand upon your heart gesture that uh, I couldn't get myself to do it. I just couldn't and I kept ya know. I felt like I was betraying my country almost in some sense.[...] and so it took me a long time to get that hand up to my heart and to be able to repeat those words. And as I was starting to do that I felt myself tear up and I started crying and before I knew it I was crying. Because I was happy I was becoming an American citizen? ...because I feel like I'm no longer an Indian citizen? I think it was a sense of loss. I mean 21 years of my life I lived in India. That's not going to be taken out of my system that easy, right?

ANNA

I'm an American citizen. I an American citizen! But I'm not an American. You can't be an American in America unless you grow up here. I'm still working on my being an American. I haven't been a citizen for very long so maybe that will bring a certain Americanism, so I guess it's a work in progress. I'm not quite an American,... I'm certainly more American than I am Russian, more American than Israeli, and more Israeli than Russian. It's all a matter of degrees so we'll see in ten years. (pause) By that time I'll be French. Or Canadian. Or you know, Uzbeki.

Whatever. We'll see.

HYON CHU

. . . now you're an American citizen everyone gets an American flag, Woohoo!

RINA

When I am there I miss America, when I am here I miss back home.

MARIAM

I find really strange being there. I did not belong anyway. When you go to Iran oh you are so Americanized. When you are here you are too Iranian.

RAFAEL

I was lucky but unfortunately a lot of people haven't been that lucky. I've heard that a lot of people are able to cross but a lot of people end up dying on the road. That they really think about it, and if it's worth to risk your life, and if it's really something that you want to do and why you want to do it. Because if you have another option, then try that option. The way I came here, it's not recommended.

PIOTR

You have to protect yourself I think that is America because they are coming right? And they are using any kind of tricks I don't know how. United States just now has a serious problem and I don't like this

KARLA

Immigration reform. . .um yeah for legalization I mean like in some movements it's for Dream Act and some others it's for like legalization of all families you know and it's so different at the same time and everybody's like pushing for the same thing and because we're all students, it kind of comes down to like, let me work. You know, so I don't know if it's through dream act or immigration reform, you know, like I've completed university, I'm going through it and I will not be able to work in my field.

Rodrigo stands, approaches Karla, then speaks

RODRIGO

We have all these SB 540 students pursuing the Dream. Who had been really good students, yet they are not able to work... What's the problem? I mean how many Americans are left without a job because of these people? Not many... I hope that it can happen just because as an immigrant and now that I have legal status, my privilege changed. But I still think that once we were able to understand the real roots of the problem. . . we can do a better job and just as a society. I think the fear that I sense, it comes more out of racism.

Karla stands, then speaks

KARLA

Our movement requires not only educating people about it, but also putting a face to the issue. . . when they think of illegal immigrants they think of people standing outside of Home Depot, they think about, you know, people stuck in trucks, you know crossing the border, they think of people packing into this you know, the trunk of some random car, I don't know like people have this misconception of what an undocumented immigrant looks like and um the reality is, we can be sitting next to an undocumented student in our classes and not know it, . . Some of them will tell you they're Chicanos, some of them will tell you they're Salvadoreños, and some of them will tell you they're American. They're as American as anybody

PRIYA

I think under the skin we're all one. You prick us and we bleed, right?...we're all human beings and it's just by accident of birth that we were born some place different.

VIDHYA

I do not appreciate being termed ya know or identified by the caste that I belong to. It's just something you were born into. What did you do? You didn't do anything to achieve it, right?...

HYON CHU

Think about why people are coming over to America, if we can start from a place of really understanding people and that it's not because they all want to be "Americans," that's not necessarily why people come over. We can talk about anything and it's all going to come back to these roots of prejudice...prejudicial thoughts and how they're formed.

Fang stands while speaking

FANG

And we came here with very...very legal, yeah...and...visa. And, we come here, not only for our own life...I think most of Chinese people they came here, especially young people, they are all very intelligent young people. Um, I'm sure they contribute a lot to the development of United States. I think other...citizens from other countries, may did the same thing. . . . So, what if we all leave United States? How United peop...I mean, how, United States can handle it?

PIOTR

I came twenty thirty years ago at that time it was similar everybody was enthusiastic. Nobody was complaining. Everybody has work at that time. I think that ... You have many Vietnamese. You have many different people coming, and from Mexico. They of course they support their country. They think only this coming to United States to do their job. Practically if they have a job right? No, maybe it is not good for some American people like for example you because you will not find the work. Right? Because if somebody is coming and doing the same work cheaper it is not good for you but it is good for business man (laughs). It depends who is looking right?

JULIE

For immigrants this is not a piece of cake, immigrants are not trying to take your job and in some places some people don't even want to be here. Their here because this is what they need to do to support their families.

PRIYA

So all immigration stories need not be, "Oh I'm leaving my homeland behind and I'm gong here." . . . Yes, there are things that may be unexpected. But they should also be prepared to deal with that...So my immigration story is not one of longing or you know, Oh I'm so alone and so sad.

ANNA

But just the whole thing of picking up your life and going somewhere else. It's just what you do. It's just what I do.

RAFAEL

I didn't have any regrets of doing that. No, no. . . I was very conscious of what I was doing and never felt any regret. Right now I think and . . . I go back back and I say "Wow, it was very risky what I did, and I was a lucky man. . ."

VIDHYA

I love being in this country. I love what it has given me. The, what it has contributed to my persona. What it has given to me as a person.

RINA

Moving to United States and living here for many long years now, have changed me a lot—A LOT. I mean literally I can say I am becoming another person based on my views and standards and my belief toward life and especially marriage, and women too.

HYUN CHU

You know and part of it is the culture and it's like Asians just don't wanna make waves. Especially if you're a woman, you really should be seen not heard. And I was never that. So for me I'm very blessed...I do love – I love the United States. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

PRIYA

I find that moving here to America, it's brought me a great sense of independence, it's brought me a sense of accomplishment for sure, it's brought me a sense of thankfulness for my heritage more than anything else. The more I've lived here, the more I've appreciated where I've come from.

KARLA

I've learned so much in being a part of these movements, about myself, about others, about what I'm willing to compromise, or willing to not, you know, to not compromise in what I want to do, but um but then it's also like, it's not stagnant, you know what I mean it's not like I'm going to do the same thing over and over and over.

FANG

. . . I became very tough. I feel like, um, yeah. I...If I were in China, if I stayed in China, I would have much easier life. I can say that. I'm sure about it, actually.

PRIYA

I'm quite proud of my heritage, and very pleased of who my people are, where I come from, and all that sort of stuff. On the other hand, I'm also pretty excited about functioning and living in a new society so I think you should just, like, you know, balance between the, who you are, and who you're becoming. . .

JULIE

I'm hoping to go back to Congo and be able to go to school where I can really learn Swahili, re-learn it. . . .Someday, just to visit and to work and to do some mobilizing of the people, I don't know, to do something fantastic.

RAFAEL

Maybe tomorrow they kicked me out and they can do it and I don't want to feel like I am at home because tomorrow when they kick me out I am going to say "yo no soy de alli ni aqui. . . I am neither from here nor from there. . ."

RINA

I'm focusing on my career right now. Because this is what I... what I have to do. Because that's eventually open the future for me. And create independency for me. So that's why this is my primary goal.

PRIYA

Teaching, I never taught in India, I never knew I was going to be a teacher, I never planned on becoming one and nobody ever thought I'd be one. But...the job gives me so much satisfaction that for me that is one thing that has come out of this moving.

HYON CHU

And then to go into a field like student affairs where even the normal person doesn't know what we do, try explaining that to somebody like my parents where their English is limited and there might not even be words in the Korean dictionary to describe what I do.

Rodrigo stands while speaking

RODRIGO

I think I can be very dramatic and tragic about my story and tell all the sad parts that have happened to me...But my story is nothing compared to those who are outside and not able to enter this country. ..For a lot of different folks, it doesn't happen that way for them. They come with their own hands and that is all they have, their dreams. So...it is just really sad and I hope that my story and all the other stories that are going to be interviewed shed the light. Just to see people more like human beings, rather than putting labels. I mean, when you turn out the light

everybody is the same. So, hopefully you can turn out the light; see that everybody is the same and just light the room with our intelligence and intellect. That is my input. (Laughs).