

The community poem, “America, My Voice for Change,” was created at the *Voices for Change* Educators Summit (Summer, 2019) presented by Kent State University’s School of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Studies. Sponsored by The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, the goal of the Summit was to prepare middle and high school teachers to educate a new generation about the history and legacy of May 4, 1970, and its relevance to contemporary issues and events.

Using the Wick Poetry Center’s *Thread* application, community voices were collected in response to keynote speaker Sara Abou Rashed’s poem, “I Am America” and scripted by the Wick Poetry Center. The next day, Sara Abou Rashed and summit participants performed the community poem at the close of the Summit.

America, My Voice for Change

After Sara Abou Rashed’s “I Am America”

Voices for Change Conference Community Poem

*I do not know all of your names,
but all of you do know mine... I am America
I am America, I am America
for America is one resilient woman,
who is loud, proud, strong,
whose shoulders shelter continents,
whose arms extend and reach beyond oceans.*

Sara Abou Rashed

America, hear my song,
my unique story
blending into my new home.

I am America, for America is
the mother of all children
who want to be loved
no matter their background.

I am America, for America is a gardener,
a seed planter, not always remembering
the water and sunlight.

America, you are still earning my dream,
embedded in everything I do and say,
in every choice I make.

I am America, for I am the child of boat people,
Still, proudly hyphenated.

I am America, for I am the mouthpiece of revolutionary mothers
who never got a chance to speak their truth.
I sing their songs, America. I teach their lessons.

I am America, for I was raised
by opposing and conflicting views.

I am outside looking in, America.
And inside looking out.

America, you have nurtured my potential
and steadfast possibility.
I am impoverished and powerful,
privileged and poor.

I am America like so many others—
mother, spouse, lover, sister, friend,
all identities rooted deep within.

I was raised by Italian immigrants
and Native Americans.
I am one strand of my family,
a strong braid of love.

I am America, for I am a teacher willing
to instruct anyone who comes.
I am not limited to just one voice or language.

I come from a far-away land displaced by war,
then targeted here fifty years ago.
My song is louder now, America.
My need for healing greater, America!

I am America, for I am a disabled veteran.
I come from the wisdom of my pain.

I come from O-H-I-O, from middle America, America,
broad shouldered, suckled on the farm,
where hands hang out car windows
and rock-n-roll lyrics hang in the wind.

I am the same America where three generations
made tires to support their families.

The same America of the rolling hills of glacial till,
the streams and endless woods.

The same small towns not noticeable on a map
are ones with a mighty heart.

I am from the America of swing sets and sisters,
church pews and scriptures
heaven and hellfire,
love and redemption.

From a book whose faded, dog-eared pages
tell a timeless story.

I come from American patriots who served this country,
who fought for the flag that represents her.

I come from seekers and dreamers.

*I am America, and oh dear America,
I love you even at times when you do not love me.*

*I claim you even when you denounce me,
when you tell me that I need to go back,
that I simply do not belong. When you strangle me,
handcuff me at airports, prison me, deport me,
I love you still and I grasp onto you,
like a child to its mother, even when you let go of me.
And I wear your face, America. I wear your
face of 13 stripes and 50 stars even when you're too scared
to look into mine, because I am not ashamed
of you, I am ashamed of what they've made you.
America, they do not know you like I do.*

Sara Abou Rashed

America, this is my voice for change.