ForeWord Reviews

POLITICAL SCIENCE

America the Beautiful: Reflections on Her Past, Present and Future
Sri Chinmoy
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Patriotism as a virtue seems almost old-fashioned these days. Except on rare occasions, our society views patriotic sentiments much like a Norman Rockwell painting: quaint, heart-warming, and dated. In fact, unbalanced criticism of our government arguably constitutes the norm. But to Sri Chinmoy, our country remains worthy of love and praise.

America the Beautiful collects Chinmoy's poetry and prose honoring his adopted homeland. The compilation calls readers to view America with fresh eyes and remember what makes her great: a belief in freedom, founding fathers who penned a world-changing Constitution, and a people whose generosity and industry proved essential to the world.

The book's chapters reflect on America's founding, its growth toward fulfilling its original vision, where it stands today, and where it can head in the future. In each section, quotes and poems rooted in a deep love for America celebrate the nation's spirit. They also honor great patriots who guided the nation, such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Chinmoy's background adds a unique weight to his perspective. An immigrant from India, he came to America in the mid-1960s. A musician, artist, athlete, writer, poet, and advocate for world peace, he became well-known to world leaders through his work at the United Nations and lectures at universities such as Cambridge and Harvard.

Chinmoy's vast world experience makes the statements and poems in this book all the more fascinating. His effusive praise for America followed by quotes on what patriotism means inspires readers to rekindle their love for their homeland. "America's vision was to become transcendentally great. America's future is to become universally good," he writes.

Although small in size, *America the Beautiful* is a challenging read. Chinmoy's writing style makes his meaning difficult to grasp at times. One often feels the quotes require further context to be fully understood. And because it is a collection of quotes, his thoughts seem to jump all over the place without a narrative or thematic thread. Perhaps a different format would be helpful here.

Nevertheless, this compilation demonstrates a patriotism that almost inspires jealousy and guilt. To see America's gifts afresh makes it clear that Americans often take these blessings for granted. This book would be a great addition to the library of anyone who loves history or politics. And it's the perfect balance for the many books published today that focus on where America has gone wrong. As Chinmoy says, "America has bad qualities, true, but American principles are absolutely divine."

Diane Gardner