



American Diaspora: Poetry of Displacement

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America has become home to many of the world's peoples, scattered by war, famine, and economic hardship, drawn here by the desire to live the American dream. According to editors Suarez and Van Cleave, however, recent arrivals as well as those who trace their roots back to the earliest waves of immigration, live with an unresolved sense of yearning, a psychological, spiritual restlessness.

Beginning with the premise that "the United States is a nation in self-exile," Suarez and Van Cleave have compiled a comprehensive compendium of poems examining "Dislocation," "American Journeys," and "Invocations." The continental scope of the anthology fittingly describes the many and varied experiences, both geographical and psychological, that face this nation's diverse population; poets of many backgrounds, some established (Reginald Gibbons, Brenda Hillman, Agad Shahid Ali), most little known, are represented.

"We came to this country / By every roundabout, / With hunger like a startled face / And passports folding doubt." These lines, by Wyatt Prunty, express what all immigrants must have felt as they came to this continent: hunger both physical and spiritual. The poems of the first section, "Dislocation," explore the facets of such hunger and doubt and address the fact that, as Carolina Hospital says, "Distance has made us all strangers."

The second section, "American Journeys," covers a range of territories, from "being derailed by my big-city expectations" (Carolyn Wright) and "confused, using no maps" (Christopher Davis) to a lyrical summation of American possibility: "Oh, I can't say I was happy / those few strange moments on the Interstate. / But I know I was at peace" (David Starkey).

"Invocations," the final section, plumbs the sense of loss and longing that Suarez and Van Cleave posit as the American experience. Robert Phillips eloquently expresses what each American, in this land of speed and constant movement, has felt at one time or another: "All my good friends have gone away. / There's nothing more I want to say."

American Diaspora, however, succeeds in saying it all: the many poems capture the essence of our yearnings for location and community and our real, though temporary, sense of being at home here in America.

DUNCAN SPRATTMORAN (July / August 2001)

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