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Dear America

By Alexandra Reinecke



Alexandra Reinecke is from Westchester, New York. She currently resides in Lafayette, where she is junior at Campolindo High school. She writes every morning at 5 o'clock opposite a print of "View of the World from 9th Avenue" and consumes copious amounts of coffee. Her likes include maple-flavored anything and snow. Her favorite animal is a tiger.

against the nation I call home. But like the first colony at Roanoke, so often fail my attempts to root myself in this native soil.

Recently, I told my boyfriend that I am ashamed of our country. He told me that I should be ashamed of my shame. He told me that by being loudly critical I am quietly unpatriotic. He told me that I can't together love America and reprimand it. But I argue otherwise. I argue that shame requires passion. I argue that criticism marks the patriot. I argue that reproof calls fidelity home.

I love America. This is something I realize as, from the iMac in the journalism room, I research journalism in Mexico, which is a dangerous job. This is something I realize as I watch a documentary on North Korea, where the government stocks grocery stores with movie-set food and allows such a dearth of infrastructure that the people eat what meals they do take by candlelight or in the dark.

We criticize journalists in America today, but we do not kill them. We fail in the realm of free and accessible healthcare, but we do not fail to provide our citizens with the necessary sustenance to support their health.

Despite what the current administration or sentiment may espouse, America is great because we are good. We stand for individual freedom and the courage of self-reliance. We stand for a standard of equity and a spirit of competition with which to actionize it. We stand for honesty, and for hard work, and for the secular salvation of personal achievement we, at our best, offer any willing to work after it.

America is the first country mandated by, rather than mandated for the people. It is the unlikely experiment that succeeded. It is the fragile system of democracy that, after establishing itself, in a 17th century miracle, in New England's harsh climate, re-established itself every four years since then.

I'd like to tell my boyfriend that I am ashamed not of what America is, but what it is not. I'd like to tell him that the same mind which lampoons the Senate's attempted Obamacare repeal is the one pushed to a shaking tear at the thought that we are not what we worship ourselves for pretending to be. I'd like to tell anyone who will listen that only those of us impassioned enough to fight for what America might be are those who, when it fails our exalted expectations, fight against it.

Last week, I stood on the front porch in the cold cleanness of an early autumn evening. The sky was light, and the air frigid, and in the surrounding trees-redwoods, oaks-a rustling of cool wind against foliage. The cloth of an American flag hangs from a pole tacked at an angle to the front of our house, and in the autumnal coolness, its cloth was shot with white sunlight that illuminated bright lapis and cranberry.

Standing on the porch, looking at the white sun shot through the cloth, I was proud to be an American. I have often felt so proud. This is a feeling, however, that I have had with less frequency since November than I have had these 17 years.

As a child, I was wide-eyed to stories of cornucopias and Plymouth Rock and how, after carving a country from a rocky shoreline, our ancestors sat to long tables of Massachusetts berries and roast corn. I liked Patrick Henry's fiery "Give me liberty or give me death!" I enjoyed the burnt goo of marshmallows on Fourth of July, and the equitable words of Thomas Jefferson in class.

I was proud to be an American, and to be one under our flag. But I have been proud to be one, recently, rather than always, intermittently. I have worn my patriotism not as a skin, but as a sweater, or as the jade necklace I reserve for special occasions.

For 17 years, the America I knew and the American I was aligned. Now, however, I often find those two concepts waring. I want to be proud of my country. I want to love America. I seek reasons to be for and not

against the nation I call home. But like the first colony at Roanoke, so often fail my attempts to root myself in this native soil.

It is easy to confuse dissent with dislike, but I don't hate America, and never will. Whenever I fail to love America the country, when I wear my patriotism only intermittently, like a jade necklace, it is not to express mistrust. Whenever I fail to love America the country it is because I love too strongly America the idea.

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