



**ARLINGTON
STREET CHURCH**
Unitarian Universalist

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE
BY JOHN KRAMER

PROGRAM NOTES AND LYRICS

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“ We have always believed it possible
for men and women to rise
as far as their talent and energy allow.
Neither race nor place of birth
should affect their chances.”

– Robert Kennedy
(1925 - 1968)

Arlington Street Church
Boston, Massachusetts
Founded in 1729

Gathered in love and service for justice and peace

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

I. WELCOME

Chorus:

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free”

– Emma Lazarus (1849 - 1887), *New Colossus* (1883)

Freedom from oppression,
Freedom from want,
Freedom of religion.
Welcome to this land of freedom for all,
The promise of freedom for all.

II. THE BOSOM OF AMERICA

Baritone:

“The bosom of America is open to receive
not only the Opulent and respectable Stranger,
but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions
whom we shall welcome to participation
of all our rights and privileges,
if by decency and propriety of conduct
they appear to merit the enjoyment.”

– George Washington (1732 - 1799)
Letter to an association of Irish American immigrants (1783)

Chorus:

Welcome to this land of freedom for all,
The promise of freedom for all.

Tenor:

“A right which nature has given to all,
of departing from the country
in which chance, not choice,
has placed them.”

– Thomas Jefferson, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774)

III. WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?

Chorus:

We come from lands afar
In different times,
From many places,
A nation of immigrants

I come from the north,
I come from the south,
I came from east and west,
I come from Asia,
I come from Europe,
I come from Africa,

We come from Mexico, China, India, Philippines, Vietnam, El Salvador, Cuba, South Korea, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Canada, Jamaica, Columbia, Haiti, Germany, Honduras, Peru.*

Where do you come from?

Poland, Ecuador, Russia, Iran, Italy, Ukraine, Pakistan, Japan, Brazil, Guyana, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Bangladesh, Iraq, Venezuela, Laos, Ethiopia, Portugal, Egypt.

Welcome to this land of immigrants.

**Largest to smallest number of foreign born population of the U.S.
by country of birth in 2013*

IV. THE IMMIGRANT STRUGGLE

Chorus:

What's your story?
Did you struggle when you got here?

Tenor:

Eighteen hundred and forty five
The wretched blight did then arrive
To their homes they said, "Goodbye."
Only to find, "No Irish need apply."

Chorus:

Welcome to the promise of freedom for all.

Tenor:

From war and revolution,
They came to mine for gold,
And built the Western railway,
Through sun and heat and cold.
They huddled into Chinatown,
The sole safe place they knew,
Until they were excluded
In Eighteen Ninety Two.

V. JOURNEY FROM THE SOUTH

Chorus:

Was your journey hard?
Did you get here by walking?

Miles and miles of walking,
Over hills, over mountains,
In the sun and the rain,
We just keep walking.

Eighteen hundred miles from Honduras to the U.S.A.
Cross the desert we keep walking,

Fourteen hundred miles from Guatemala to the U.S.A.
Hours of riding on a train, on the tops of the train,
On the train on the tracks, on the train called, "La Bestia"

Leaving home for the unknown,
Such a home we could not stay.
Selling everything we own,
Hoping for a better day.
We just keep moving.

Days and days of moving,
Follow the coyote through the desert,
All you can see is just the sand,
Follow the coyote cross the border.

VI. WE REMEMBER, WE CRY

Soprano:

Let us pause as witnesses, to remember and cry.

We remember those taken against their will,
Torn away from their land.

We remember those torn away from their land
To make room for others.

We remember those whose journey goes on and on, cross the river,
But not to the land of the living,

May their journey end,
May they rest in peace.

Chorus:

We remember
And we cry.

VII. FINALE

Chorus:

This land of freedom.

Baritone:

"The land flourished because it was fed from so many sources,
nourished by many cultures and traditions and peoples."

– Lyndon B. Johnson (1908 - 1973)
from his remarks at the signing of the immigration bill
(Liberty Island, New York October 3, 1965)

Chorus:

A promised land of freedom

Tenor:

“Nearly all Americans have ancestors who braved the oceans,
liberty loving risk takers in search of an ideal.
Immigration is not just a link to America’s past;
it’s also a bridge to America’s future.”

– George H. W. Bush (b. 1924)
from his remarks on the signing the Immigration Act of 1990
(November 20, 1990)

Chorus:

Freedom of religion

Baritone:

“Offering an Asylum to the persecuted and oppressed
of every Nation and Religion.
The religion then of every man
must be left to the conviction
and conscience of every man;
and it is the right of every man
to exercise it as these may dictate.”

– James Madison (1751 - 1817)
from his Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments
(c. June 20, 1785)

Chorus:

Freedom of opportunity

Tenor:

“We have always believed it possible
for men and women to rise
as far as their talent and energy allow.
Neither race nor place of birth
should affect their chances.”

– Robert Kennedy (1925 - 1968)
from his forward to John F. Kennedy’s posthumously published book,
A Nation of Immigrants (1963)

Chorus:

Freedom from oppression

Baritone:

“The United States should be an asylum
for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty.”

– Thomas Paine (1737 - 1809), *Common Sense* (1776)

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

– Emma Lazarus (1849 - 1887), *New Colossus* (1883)

Welcome to this land of freedom for all,
The promise of freedom for all.

– All unattributed texts ~ John Kramer (b. 1973)

PROGRAM NOTES BY THE COMPOSER:

“The bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions whom we shall welcome to participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment.”

These words of George Washington inspired me to write this work. I was motivated by the anti-immigrant rhetoric that is on the rise. I believe in the United States as a place of freedom and opportunity for all, and a country that has benefited tremendously from all immigrants.

While the overall concept of this piece is one of welcome and openness to the immigrant, movement four, The Immigrant Struggle, speaks to the difficulties incurred by the Irish in their migration during the potato famine and also the Chinese, whose immigration was restricted by the 1892 Chinese exclusion act.

The story of movement is another central theme to the immigrant experience. All immigrant families travel, some in comfort, and some under duress. Reading many stories of migration from south of our border, especially Honduras and Guatemala, inspired me to write the fifth movement Journey from the South. This movement attempts to tell of the heroic efforts many immigrants make to reach this country; it also stands, in a way, for all immigrant journeys.

So many of us in this country are immigrants, but not all; certainly we have to contend with the fact that native populations were displaced to make room for the new arrivals. And not all immigrants came here by their own free will. The sixth movement is a requiem that speaks to the overwhelming sadness I feel when deeply contemplating the enormity of this situation. Sometimes, all we can do is “remember and cry.”

The story of immigration is the story of this country – a story of the freedoms, freedom of opportunity, freedom from oppression, and freedom of religion. The Immigrant Experience is the telling of that story, yours and mine, through music.

– John Kramer

John Kramer serves as Music Director at the Winchester Unitarian Society. He graduated from the University of Iowa in 1998 with a Master's degree in music composition and a Master of Fine Arts degree in piano performance. John has worked extensively as a collaborative pianist and choral conductor and has written music for piano, organ, choir, and chamber ensembles.