

## SECOND PLACE

ESSAY CONTEST WINNER

Catherine Pickavet

My America bowed out the day I was born. With my light brown face nestled against my white mother's body, I experienced one of the only comforts this America would allow me: the shroud of naïveté that would for a long time conceal my lack of identity. My long, tiresome, and angst-ridden journey toward eliminating the significance of my mixed-race blood would be without the equality that the red, white, and blue promises for all. There would only be questions and an overwhelming quest for belonging. This is my America. This is my story. It's a story of race and why I chose to give it up.

# RACE

I wasn't surprised when I first heard about the rape. There was a man missing from my life and his absence resonated within me. But this wasn't the only thing that consumed me. Once I discovered the mirror, I was plagued by something else. Why was I darker than my mother? My incessant questions concerning his whereabouts no doubt played an important role in the revelation that, I existed because of a violent sexual assault. A brutal act conceived both me and a racial reality whose burden I would be forced to grapple with.

Racial America was not something I felt a part of. My urge to recognize my differences intensified as the years went on. That it even mattered was more so a testament to the situation in which I was living, rather than any conclusions I was able to reach on my own. I only knew what I had to try to become because it was shoved down my throat at every turn. So I decided to find out for myself, and my search for a way to fit in began with my longing for a father when I was two years old.

"That's my daddy!" I shouted, pointing at the television. My mom, sitting next to me on the couch, looked at me, caught off-guard by this outburst. I was certain I had found that elusive male figure that

