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American DREAMers

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3rd Place

American DREAMers

It is true when they say that the more things change, the more they stay the same. In 1883 Emma Lazarus wrote “The New Colossus,” the poem on the base of the Statue of Liberty that most famously reads: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” (Davis 49). Lazarus’ words give the statue meaning; it is a significant symbol of hope for immigrants coming to the United States in pursuit of a better life. These words resonated with immigrants coming to America through Ellis Island at the turn of the century, and they continue resonate today with immigrant families like those of Oscar, Lorenzo, Luis and Christian who crossed the Mexican border. The opportunity the United States had to offer these families was worth the risk of entering and living in the country as undocumented immigrants. Major Goins utilized this same poem, as described in *Spare Parts*, to inspire his students at Carl Hayden and teach them what the fundamental values of the nation really were. Although their documentation argued otherwise, these four boys were American; they embodied the American Dream by taking an opportunity to do something extraordinary despite all odds being against them.

When the boys were presented with the opportunity to enter the robotics competition, it wasn’t a matter of if they should do it – it was a matter of how they were going to get it done. It took persistence, determination and a great deal of bravery to accomplish what they did. Understanding the complexities and nuances of underwater robotics is rarely expected of any high school student, let alone a high school student from West Phoenix. But these four boys from Carl Hayden High School defied all expectations. Although the funding, resources and equipment these students had available to them were not up to par with the other teams, they did what they could in that tiny robotics closet, and what they did worked. It was their passion for

the project that took them a long way; it got them equipment like an underwater tape measure, motors and access to a pool. Their inquisitive nature and enthusiasm for their robot, Stinky, charmed the people who donated resources to the team and broadened their horizons. Oscar even said, “We got people believing in us, so now we got to believe in ourselves” (Davis 104). They faced adversity every step of the way regarding their robot as well as in their lives as undocumented immigrants. What was amazing is that they never felt sorry for themselves when something didn’t go right or when they felt they didn’t belong. They simply saw it as an opportunity to innovate and improve. Forward thinking like this is what has made America great. When it comes to looking at the opportunities these boys had, it is important to consider the question: “What If?”

What if their teachers had never encouraged them to compete in the higher division? What if Lorenzo had become deeply enthralled in a gang? What if their families had never even brought them to the United States? At the time when Arizona was undergoing intense deportation raids, these boys were doing something truly amazing. What might or might not have happened had they been stopped in the street for looking or “having a strong body odor common to illegal aliens”? (Davis 32). What if it wasn’t their choice to come into the country without proper documents? As children, they just did what they were told to do by their parents. The DREAM Act legitimizes this exact “what if” situation, and it recognizes that children like Oscar, Lorenzo, Luis and Christian are American in every sense of the word – they just lack proper paperwork. People like them are more than deserving to live in this country because of their ingenuity, persistence, courage and strength. These qualities are common to many immigrants, both past and present, in the United States. Which brings about a final question: What if there were no immigrants in America?

In 1776, the United States was founded upon the principle that every person has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These fundamental values make it a place where people come to start a better life, and the masses, as described by Emma Lazarus, are in pursuit of just that. The United States should be welcoming to those with good intentions and a willingness to work hard, and see diversity as a strength. *Spare Parts* shows us that we should be building bridges, not walls, because you never know who could be the next person to make the American Dream come true.

Works Cited

Davis, Joshua. *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot and the Battle for The American Dream*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014.