

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## I Have a Dream: Inaugural Poems for a New Generation

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, January 20th, 2021

### Introduction

We begin with hope. This is perhaps why poems were traditional New Year's gifts—for what is poetry but a stockpile of possibilities. The past year has been shaped by the coronavirus pandemic, by economic recession and racial unrest, by distance learning and social distancing, and what was possibly the most gripping election in US history. But it was also defined by the generosity of our neighbors and the kindness of strangers.

The idea for this anthology came about after more than 100 of our county's high school students spent the last month of 2020 attending poetry workshops and crafting inaugural poems. Partly inspired by the Academy of American Poets' 2021 Inaugural Poem Contest, we challenged San Mateo County's youth to write about their views, their experiences and their hopes for America. Our purpose is not only to amplify the voices of our young people, but also acknowledge that they are co-authors of our national and community narrative, and of the spaces which they inhabit.

San Mateo County in Northern California is home to over 158,000 youth under the age of 18, who were raised in the age of technology: as an example, 90 of this anthology's contributors are Gen Zers born the same year as Facebook; the others, ages 10 and below, belong to Generation Alpha, born around the time (or after) "app" was voted word of the year. As our youth explore and engage with digital innovations, it is our hope that they also gain a deeper appreciation for the nuances of language, to give voice to all that is possible and remarkable.

"We encounter each other in words..." writes Elizabeth Alexander, whose inaugural poem inspired many pieces in this collection. In crafting the poems in this anthology, our young people are embedding this particular moment in history with their identities and unique experiences, staking a claim to a future that is wholly theirs. And what a vision it is, to "come together / And... show [the world] what we can become."

— **Aileen Cassinotto**, Poet Laureate of the County of San Mateo, California

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Some poems from the anthology, *I Have A Dream: Inaugural Poems For a New Generation*:

Portola Valley First Graders, "Woodland Poem"

Abigale Wee: "Growing Home"

Hailee Smalley: “Vibrant Petals”

Itzel Sanchez: “Untitled”

Kaia Glafkides: “America Today”

Ana Johnston: “Safer”

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An Anthology by San Mateo County

Edited by Aileen Cassinetta & Jim Ward



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