

2) ALFONSO VILLEGAS

"What it means to me to live in the United States of America."

"What can I give back?" is my answer to the question "What it means to me to live in the United States of America?". I have traveled to a number of countries in South America including Colombia, Bolivia, Mexico and Panama to name a few. I have also kept up with current events, read books, followed history and immersed myself in the societies and cultures of different nations. Though, each is beautiful and unique in their own way, I have always had an intense gratitude for my parents for choosing the United States as their home some 20 odd years ago. For me, the United States is truly a place where one can manifest their own destiny with the promise of fruit after their own hard labor.

After my parents moved here to the United States, both my mother and father had to take up menial jobs to support the family and encouraged my brothers and sister to help out as much as they could. They worked hard to create a quasi comfortable life in the United States. At this moment, I am enjoying the benefit of typing on a laptop in my living room, with air-conditioning, and a full stomach. Half a world away, Zimbabwe is experiencing hyper inflation; kids in Iraq go home under curfew to avoid being thought insurgents; violent riots erupt in Kenya over lack of political legitimacy; UN troops fire rubber pellets to disperse a mob protesting rising food costs in Haiti. In my opinion, to live in the United States is to be blessed and to have a choice in this world. In the opinion of the rest of the world, I am richer than a majority of the population of this world.

I cannot claim to have grown up with a silver spoon in my mouth, but I can surely recognize when I live comfortably. In my studies and readings I cannot identify with those that are oppressed, starving, abused, dishearten, terrorized or discriminated against.

I do not have to cower in fear for being part of a group, nor do I have to fear a brisk walk to the store. However, I am far from ungrateful. I, as a result, know that I have a duty to recognize and acknowledge the wondrous opportunity and resources that are at my disposal everyday.

Living in the United States entitles me to live in such a way that makes me happy and respects the happiness of those around me. I am endowed with those "inalienable rights" that the founders of this nation set forth. Working hard to give back to the community and my parents is a responsibility that I bear, honor and respect and should any other law abiding citizen. Living here in the United States means to me that I share in the responsibility in protecting my rights as a citizen and those rights of my fellow compatriots. However, it also induces me to call attention to the injustices felt by my fellow man and to promote their well being calling attention to their strife.

How then can I respect and enjoy the rights of man and call attention to the strife of others? How can I give back to the community and to the world? The answer is to educate myself about the issues that bother us. The process includes educating myself in the solutions also. Education is a means by which we all break the chains of bondage to indifference, servitude to our superstitions and domination by our fears. By becoming a well informed member of society I can clearly make decisions and learn on my behalf. Education is one way of ensuring my rights and the rights of others. Secondly is to participate in the solution. The point of being an American is what you can give back that is good for the community. I will have given over 700 community service hours by April 20th of 2008 during my high school career. John F. Kennedy quipped "...ask not what your country can do for you; but, what you can do for your country?". Whether it is

2) giving blood at my school Blood Drive, walking for The Cancer Society or writing my congressman I am becoming part of a solution.

What I can give back to my country and to my community is what it means to be an American. It is also what it means for me to live in the United States. I deserve to give back to the United States for the wonderful blessing that I have shared in. It is only fair that others bask in these gifts also. Service to my country and above all, service to your fellow man is what makes us human and what living here in the United States is all about.