



By Vivek Boddakayala  
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### **Dear America Essay**

In his book, “Dear America,” Jose Antonio Vargas asks a question. A question seemingly brought up a plethora of times in various mediums, but with no definite answer. What makes you American? In this query lies the foundation of Vargas’ dilemma. This one question alone is enough to divide people, whether it may be in opposition or support. However, through such issues the strongest bonds and communities between like-minded individuals can be formed. Jose Vargas wants the reader to understand that a community is made up of not just skin tone or associated stereotypes, but unity centered on a common set of values and ideals.

It is apparent to anyone reading Vargas’ book that the story revolves around two central themes. The focus point is not only Vargas’ struggle with facing his undocumented status, but also his interactions with the people around him who accepted him.. Throughout his many struggles during his childhood, Vargas found support in a group of people who accepted him for who he is. Vargas described these people as his “adopted family” because at the time, not even his own family was willing to accept his sexual orientation or his decision not to marry into citizenship. This is a great example of a community that goes beyond familial or racial ties. Vargas himself remarked, “They did it because they could afford to; more importantly, they did

it because they wanted to.” One great example of a friendship that transcended background and sexual orientation was that of Vargas and his late friend Jake. Despite their differences, Jake proved to be one of Vargas and his cause’s biggest supporters. So much so that his death acted as a catalyst for Vargas to embrace his shortcomings, and open up to those he is close with.

Personally, before reading this book I never stopped and considered “what makes me an American and part of my community?” Before answering this question for myself, I first thought of my parents and their siblings. Unlike me and my brother, they emigrated here from India as young adults. When I asked myself what they would think, do they consider themselves American and part of the community, I knew what their answer would be with a 100% certainty. Absolutely. It was then I found my answer. I consider myself American not because I prefer hamburgers over rice or that I prefer American pop over Bollywood music, but because I couldn’t imagine living anywhere else.

As one reads “Dear America,” through Jose Antonio Vargas’ life the nature and foundation of an integrated community can be observed. Vargas reveals a community must be established on trust, understanding, and perseverance. Due to his tight circle of friends and allies, Vargas was able to find his way through the many trials and tribulations he encountered through his childhood as well as his career. Jose Anthony Vargas wished to share that anyone can be part of a community.

*(Vivek is a biology major from Manalapan, New Jersey.)*