



By Cole West
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Community

Community and the definition of the word has become more fluid and dynamic as humans have evolved and adopted policies and practices that aid in survival and growth.

Community is defined by a set of characteristics that all individuals share so that that community may flourish and among these are trust, loyalty, and tolerance. In Jose Antonio Vargas' book, *Dear America, Notes of an Undocumented Citizen*, these traits of community are illustrated in a critical and respective light as he experiences the polar opposite of each trait and the trait itself.

Trust and loyalty of community are traits experienced by all, but it seems that these are magnified in the author's case, given his undocumented citizen status. From his earliest years in America, he gave his trust to friends and mentors of his community by telling them of his illegal status. One of whom was his teacher, Mrs. Denny. He revealed to her that he did not possess the "right green card" (Vargas 64) to take an international trip to Japan. She used the information, not to betray his trust, but to change the trip to Hawaii instead of Japan so that he would not be discovered. Without trust in his peers and mentors, he felt as if he did not belong in the community, and therefore not a part of community at all. The loyalty that his friends had given

him led him to feel accepted and embraced by the community, and he never had any doubts that he would be found out as a result of his peers betraying him. Some families went as far as “adopting” (Vargas 65) him so that he could gain citizenship, an astounding amount of loyalty that is admirable to all. Community fails when the loyalty of all is questionable, and Vargas felt numerous times as if the world that he came to love was against him, willing to betray him at every turn.

Tolerance is just as important, if not more valuable, than trust and loyalty. Humans have always had the ability to form their own opinions. Tolerance is the practice of accepting someone for who they are, whether one agrees with it or not. Vargas is an “undocumented and gay person of color” (Vargas 165), which means he is at the mercy of society, which has historically looked down upon minorities and people deemed as “different.” One does not have to agree with someone or the status of someone,, but the key to society is to realize these differences and accept people for who they are, for that is the definition of tolerance and progress. He uses this to illustrate how if people of a community accept each other for who they are, then real progress and growth can begin.

These traits are some of the characteristics of a progressive society and cannot be measured by numbers. They are instead calculated by the continual practice and progressiveness of the people who decide to embrace them, eventually affecting society in the long run for the better. Jose Antonio Vargas experiences these traits, and outlines them in his book, *Dear America, Notes of an Undocumented Citizen*, a testament to these values and their impact on communities around the world.

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