



The Human Story to Immigration

By: Nancy Chen Marden

American Dirt is a novel that tells a tale of Lydia Quixano Perez, who lives in Acapulco, Mexico, and runs a quaint bookstore. She has an eight year old son, Luca, the love of her life, and a wonderful husband, who is a journalist. One day she meets a man, Javier, who comes into her bookstore and whose charm and intellect quickly captures Lydia into an intimate friendship. But unbeknownst to Lydia, Javier is the crime boss of the newest drug cartel that has taken over Acapulco. Her comfortable middle-class existence is turned upside down when her husband's tell-all profile of the crime lord gets published. In a blink of an eye, she is forced to flee the only life she knows with Luca, as she witnessed the brutal murder of her husband along with her entire extended family. This unforeseen tragedy instantly transforms Lydia and Luca into migrants, desperate to get to the north toward the United States where Javier cannot reach them and where they stand a chance at life again.

It has been nearly a year since I read this book and the characters have continued to stay with me. I still wonder if Lydia and Luca have found the “better life” they were seeking. This story touched me in many ways and has left an indelible impression on me. Mainly, a profound sense of compassion and heartbreak for the thousands if not millions of migrants who risk their lives to cross the border each year. I’m not arguing for illegal immigration, rather I am focusing on the humanness of their plight. Through *American Dirt*, I have come to a deeper understanding of why some may choose to go through the difficult and oftentimes, dangerous journey to this country. It may not feel like much of a choice at all. Perhaps, it is their only chance at surviving and escaping an horrendous life circumstance. I think my biggest takeaway from this book is how quick to judge we can be when we don’t know the full scope of someone’s story.

American Dirt has also led me to reflect upon my family’s own journey as immigrants to this country. I was six years old when my life and family was uprooted from Taiwan and replanted in America. The extent of my knowledge about why we immigrated to this country is that my dad’s business had failed terribly and he needed a new start. Like many immigrants, we didn’t have much in terms of financial means when we came to this country and we struggled for several years before my dad found his footing again. Similar to Lydia and Luca, my family had no idea what was in store for us in this new country. Though my family’s immigration story cannot compare with many of the migrants’ experiences, I think ultimately, we’re all after the same thing – hope for a better future.

Lastly, I’d like to highlight the need for all of us to educate ourselves - whether through attending classes, watching films, reading books, or finding other ways to connect with the Hispanic/Latinx community - in order to confront our biases and cultivate empathy for what someone else’s experiences may be. What

I've learned in the past year in working on this newsletter is that the fight against racism is truly an active process. It's hard and at times, uncomfortable work but such an important one.