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American

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AMERICAN MELISSA VELASCO

I walked under the expressway overpass,
To where the houses are nicer.
The schools get more money there.
The people have more money there.
Crossing the border
Of the expressway,
I stick out like a sore thumb.
A sore brown thumb.
The bell rings and I take my seat,
White faces eager,
With their brand-name backpacks,
Their new books,
And their shiny pencils.
I take out my book,
Borrowed from my sister -
I still see her name penned on the inside cover.
We turn to chapter 10,
We learn about the New World -
How the Inca disrespected the Bible
And that's why they died.
I wonder what Atahualpa thought,
When he saw his people die.
When these white men came out of nowhere,
And spoke a language he didn't know.
I go through the same cycle,
About seven times a day,
Class after class, we learn new things.
We learn about Columbus, and Darwin.
After the last bell rings,
I head back under the overpass,
Where the schools have less money.
Where the people have less money.
Where I am a brown thumb on a brown hand.
The once proud people
Descendants of the ancient -

The Mayan, Aztec, and Incan
Look down from wherever they are.
They look down at me -
A body stuck in limbo.
I speak too much Spanish to be American.
I speak too much English to be Peruvian.
Born in America.
Well, *North* America.
Because, just as Mami and Papi taught me -
North, South, and Central combine
Into one American continent.
So maybe I am an American –
Regardless of your borders.

