



*Their Great Gift*

Written by John Coy

Photographs by Wing Young Huie

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Many authors and illustrators share stories about situations that compel individuals to leave their homelands. These journeys are often forced by external factors, such as political conflict, or driven by personal reasons, such as economic or professional gain. *Their Great Gift* leaves out the reasons for immigration and focuses on the arrivals of people from diverse backgrounds. The photographs, by Wing Young Huie, feature powerful images that cross generations, eras, and cultures. The photographs record the sacrifices immigrants make as they come to a new land and encounter new and strange languages and cultures. Yet, the immigrants find jobs and some eventually open their own businesses. Written for readers of all ages, the informational text is simple, bold, and focused. The introduction states it is written for the children of immigrants. Since in the U.S., that applies to everyone who is not Native American, the book has wide appeal.

The minimal text is both a strength and weakness of this book. It succeeds in addressing the challenges of families coming to a new land for young readers. A simple sentence on each page is surrounded with photographs of people reflecting on the particular activity or challenge. However, it may be confusing if readers don't realize the text is written from the perspective of a child. (The opening begins, "My family.") For the reader who may be culturally and socially removed by generations from an ancestor's immigration, the text could be confusing. Once this minor point is clarified, the richness of the message within the simple lines and abundant photographs drives home the last line: "What will we do with their great gifts?" These gifts might be an appreciation for families of all backgrounds, consideration of the fact most of us are descendants from some generation of travelers, and renewed interest in individual heritage.

The book cover flap mentions that both the author and photographer's families were immigrants to the U.S., but the text of the book does not specifically mention the United States, so the book is applicable to all Western that receive immigrants. Beginning pages provide a running strip of immigrant faces, reflecting the diversity of people who immigrate. These faces preface the many color and black and white images within. The final pages reveal a display of fireworks along a river's edge, reminding readers of patriotic celebrations.

*Their Great Gift* provides an important perspective for readers considering the significance of immigration for their country. Other books that discuss the arrivals of immigrants might be paired as well, such as *Denied, Detained, Deported: Stories from the Dark Side of American Immigration* by Ann Bausam (2009), *Children of Ellis Island* by Barry Moreno (2005), *I'm New Here* by Ann Sibley O'Brien (2015),

and *Coolies* by Yin and Chris Sonpiet (2001). The first of these is for older readers but compliments Coy's book well. *Denied, Detained, Deported* extends the immigrant story beyond the journey from the origin country to the new lives at the destination. *WOW Review* offers many titles throughout to consider for such a text set as well, in an issue focused on "[Forced Journeys](#)" (Vol. IV, Issue 2).

Both author and photographer are the children of immigrants and both reside in Minneapolis. Their friendship preceded their collaboration on this book. Wing Hui had been photographing immigrants for 30 years in many neighborhoods and across generations. Thus, his rich collection of people in many different contexts and activities provided many choices for the images used that reflect and embellish each line written by John Coy. Coy and Hui include biographical insights about their own immigrant families in a section called "Our Arrival Stories." Both author and illustrator have other published books.

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