VERSSES ON
THE HORIZON
2023 Youth Poet Laureate Cohort Anthology
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Four pairs of business shoes clack on pavement. Eight legs walk in perfect meter. Four torsos shift and twist with each step. Suits black. Eyes ahead. These men insist they will be respected, these men talk like they’re not waiting to hear back.

Four men slice through the building. These men never stop for the receptionist. These men don’t ask for an extra espresso shot. These men cut price. These men cash fast. These men live better. These men don’t think twice.
Dime Dreams

When I wake, 
sleep-hazy and half-dreaming 
in the small, dark hours 
the moon is a dime.

The moon 
through my bedroom window 
shines silver, 
a beacon, 
a giant one-tenth-dollar lighthouse 
to the American Dream.

The Man in the Moon, Franklin Delano Roosevelt 
looks lovingly down on his land 
—our land— 
“this land is your land / this land is my land” 
with a mouth that folds gently at the corners 
and crater eyes 
like soft, young coal.

Come and get me, 
those eyes say.
America likes a fight.

America wants to fight. She wants to throw shiny guns at you, she wants to hurl forty different dishwashers at you and provoke you into throwing one back straight into the shopping cart.

America grins like a tiger. Her skin gleams pearl; her hair shines bronze; her voice is an eagle’s caw, and her skin smells like salt earth and rocky sea. Her face lives on mountains and skyscrapers, painted in clouds by roaring airplanes. The fire in her belly could burn the world down.

America wants to shout herself hoarse on the Senate floor. America wants to judge you, to jeer at you, to throw rotten fruit at your judge’s white robes. She wants to make the Pacific Garbage Patch bigger and smellier, just to make the tree-huggers cry. If it all goes her way, Texas will be everywhere. If she wins, “from sea to shining sea” will mean owning every inch of this God-damned blue marble.

America has always gotten what she wants. The people she chooses always choose her. The places she wants,
she always can conquer. America was weaned on lumber and cotton and buffalo; now she gorges herself on coal and cars and beef. She has never known failure. She has been hungry, but she has always found prey; she has been poor, but she has always scraped her way back up. She has *fought* for what she wants, and never once has she failed.

America wants to stir you. America wants to whack you over the head with a 7/11 sign, to shove a hotdog in your mouth, to give you ten seconds to choose between fifty brands of dog food.

She wants to grip your jaw with a red-taloned hand and force English words from your throat, To shove your arms through coat sleeves and strangle you with a tie, Because in America, it’s her way or the highway.

She wants you, though, to fight back; to strain and struggle, to whimper and beg, to cry for help and scream in rage. The thrill doesn’t catch, you see, when it’s too easy.

America wants to own you, but she wants to have to fight for it.
CLAIRE BEELI is a writer from Long Beach, CA. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Block Party Magazine*, *Polyphony Lit*, and *Chin-chilla Lit* among others, and has been recognized by institutions like the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and the New York Times Learning Network. When she’s not reading, writing, or volunteering at her local library, she’s being crushed by a dog bigger than she is.
You have Black Girl Magic and then some
Knowing how to use BGM is the difference between making allies or enemies
Knowing how to use BGM is the difference between failure and success
You are a force young one

Have a smart, but kind, mouth

Be physically able to wage revolution (Angela Davis)

Know self-love
Ask questions
Forgive quickly
Love fiercely
Embrace conversation
Make art
Make mistakes
Make tea
Take chances
Absolutely take care of one another (Ruby Bridges)

Racism is a grown-up disease (Ruby Bridges)
Racism has no place in the heart of a child (Ruby Bridges)
Change the things you cannot accept (Angela Davis)
Step up and say something (Adama Iwu)
Get out there and do it every day (Nina Shaw)

Make your own boundaries about how you conduct yourself
What you’re interested in
And how you carry yourself
Form your opinion of yourself from your own lens
Speak your truth even when you’re being drowned out
   by the noise of the world
Keep your truth safe
Don’t let being offended be a reason to be pulled out
   of balance
The only limits are those we allow or those we put on
   ourselves

Live by your family values
Make the most of each present moment
Take that deep breath before speaking, responding, or
   reacting
Let go of what doesn’t make you happy
Live authentically every day
Find and follow your own path
You have so much to offer the world

  *Incite learning like a riot* (Bettina Love)

Avoid small talk
Hold your truth
Know your worth

  Buy a plant, water it

Be quick-witted
Be present
Be love

  *Exercise*
  *Create*
  *Grow*

*See yourself reflected in history* (Lecia Brooks)
Remembering is not enough, but it is a very good beginning (Lecia Brooks)

Lead by removing obstacles so others can lead
(Elizabeth Nyamayaro)
Always attempt to lift as you climb (Angela Davis)
Empower other women (Nina Shaw)
The BGM Family

What are you doing to make justice roll down like waters
(Lecia Brooks)
Be a part of an ongoing historical movement
(Angela Davis)
Act as if it were possible to radically transform the world
(Angela Davis)
Grasp things at the root (Angela Davis)

Brown v. Board is still not fulfilled (Linda Brown)
The struggle has to continue (Linda Brown)
The March continues (Lecia Brooks)

You will impact generations.
Being diagnosed with disabilities means you get a new loving community.
I represent a lot of students in schooling today.
School is hard.
Don’t make it harder than it needs to be for me.
Have some flexibility.
Assessments suck. All of them.
And still I press on.
Kind kids are outnumbered 5 to 1.
I hold my head up high about all of my intersectional identities.
But the world is not always kind to these identities.
And that includes the world of school.
Stop putting content first.
Put caring first.
Self-advocacy is everything.
Be fierce.
Be kind.
But be fierce.
But be kind.
But be fierce.
The world is a good place.
Yet, there are barriers all around us.
We all know them.

I’m a girl.
Some people see that as a barrier.
It isn’t.
But some people see it that way.
I’m ten-years-old and I am already a feminist
and I know what a misogynist is too.
I am not in college yet, but you are.
Work to tear down the barriers against girls.
Future me thanks you.

I am Black.
Perfect...dark...Black. With beautiful...kinky...hair.
Some people see that as a barrier.
It isn’t.
But some people see it that way.
I’m ten-years-old and I can already define anti-Blackness.
And Black is Beautiful.
I am not in college yet, but you are.
Work to stop the barriers against Blackness.
Future me thanks you.

I have two dads.
Some people see that as a barrier.
It isn’t.
But some people see it that way.
I am ten-years-old and I have already felt homophobia.
But I have also felt the joy of being included.
I am not in college yet, but you are.
Work to end hatred and unkindness towards families like mine.
Future me thanks you.

I see people in my neighborhood who are homeless and one time a family was living in a van on our street and they had three kids my age.
I am ten-years-old and I know that I am luckier than a lot of people.
And it has taught me to be thankful.
Gym clothes, science and social studies projects, field trips.
I know that going to school costs a lot of money.
I am not in college yet, but you are.
Think about what you ask students to buy.
Future me thanks you.

I learn differently.
Some people see that as a barrier.
It isn’t.
But some people see it that way.
Learning takes me a little longer sometimes.
That’s all.
But I always learn.
I am not in college yet, but you are.
Work to support those of us who learn differently.
Future me thanks you.

I don’t have a go-to person in my school yet.
I have been in my school for six years now.
There isn’t much I can do about unkind people except to be kind to them.
I am not in college yet, but you are.
Be someone’s go-to person.
Future me thanks you.

I’m ten-years-old.
Some people see that as a barrier.
It isn’t.
But some people see it that way.
I have art in two museums, two chapters published in books, and speak in college classes to tell teachers that kids my age can tackle tough topics.
I might be ten-years-old but don’t underestimate me.
I’m not in college yet, but you are.
Value what every age brings.
Future me thanks you.

The world is a good place.
Yet, there are barriers all around us.
We all know them.

But each of us also knows people who
    Rise,
    Rise,
    Rise above those barriers.
I’m not in college yet, but you are.
Help others rise.
Future me thanks you.
HELENA DONATO-SAPP is a 13-year-old author, speaker, artist, and activist. Helena has published in books, peer-reviewed journals, magazines, exhibited art in museums, and spoken to audiences nationwide. Helena is the designated Poet of the National Institutes for Historically Underserved Students. She recently received a global honor for her work in Disability Justice—the 2022 D-30 Disability Impact List—which recognizes 30 individuals around the world for their impact on the inclusion, leadership, and representation of people with disabilities in various fields. She was also awarded “16 Under 16 in STEM” from The 74 as one of the nation’s most notable teen thinkers and doers. She was recently awarded as a “Woman of Distinction” by the 69th State Assembly District of CA celebrating Women’s History Month. She lives in Long Beach with her two fathers.
To hell, the galleries. In my mortal hand, 
I hold a collection of canvases— 
A book, bound but still endless. 
Someday, its contents might be contraband 
For it will survive the temporal sand 
That ticks until our own world collapses. 
Our books will persist, even in pieces— 
The vessels to ideas that will withstand

Unjust insistence for conformity 
With concrete lines drawn for normalcy 
And hungry hierarchies seeking control. 
Try as they might, oppressors won’t cajole 
Defeat. We may fight with complacency 
But we will waltz with creativity.
The puny kid on the tv screen, rattling off state capitals like a bird singing, was just seven years old.

My mother pointed at the flickering face and declared, proudly, “That’s going to be you one day.”

Me? She said I was to be a prodigy who will rise through school grades as the hot air balloon that brings warm, joyous pride to our family name, stranded on the rocks below. My mother stared at me with bright eyes and I stared back with the face of a deer in headlights.

She tried to drive me into every subject she could, but I slumped through middle school just like every other schmuck. Every PE class, the sun breathed down my neck like a hovering mother monitoring my work. The basketballs clunk against the sizzling blacktop like a clock counting the years I squandered as I shot two-pointers on the losers’ empty court with my fellow unathletic, average friend. The rhythm falters a little when they dribble on their foot again, but they didn’t bother to chase the ball as it bounded back into the bushes. Instead, they turned to me and glared
at my tenth shot. They huffed, “Why are you so good at everything?”
The court fell fully silent. I met their stare with wide, confused eyes, and said, “I’m not good at everything. Who is?”
Oh, the Humanity

It’s always the same
when the news solemnly drone on
about another attack of hate:
the air chills,
the room quiets,
and the TV’s glare blinks in our pupils
like the blue and red sirens.

Someone’s Filipino grandma
was punched
by a neighbor
of the apartment she lived in
and was about to enter.

Someone’s Black father
was beaten
by a brother pair
who spotted him at the local shop
minding his own business.

Someone’s family synagogue
was shot
by an armed intruder
who took eleven hostages down
with him to the afterlife.

It’s always the same when
the news numbly move on
from another attack of hate:
voices clamor,
trampling each other,
smearing supposed righteousness
as we listen to the sirens.

Tell me, are those targets,
with their different faces, ideas, labels,
human too?
Aren’t they
intelligent, beautiful
citizens of this blue and green rock
just like you?

That bearded man at the hardware store
scoffed
at my mother’s womanhood
and my father’s broken accent,
mocking as we tried to find caulk.

That judgmental cashier behind the register
frowned
at my parents’ Chinese fair skin
and our ethnic Cambodian-ness,
probing as we tried to buy groceries.

That prideful youth on the playground
sneered
at my lunch’s sticky rice cake
and it’s name of “nom ansom,”
snickering as I tried to eat in peace.

Tell me, am I,
with my different face, ideas, labels,
human too?
Aren’t I
an American, Californian
living along the coast of this long beach
MATILDA IEM is currently a CSULB freshman with an animation major. Beyond academia, she tends to dabble in art and literature in her free time, finding both mediums to be effective and enjoyable outlets for activism and personal self-expression. Her work has been featured in the Khmer sections of the Mark Twain Library Branch and local Reflections art contests.
To Be Heard

In a literal sense we’re all seen but seldom heard
What’s a pretty picture without a couple words
An introduction to a song with no chorus verse

Dismissed
I’m missed
Cast aside like a drop of water amidst a giant wave
Trying to escape; have a trail to blaze
I want to be heard
I have to be heard
Intent, but no effect in my words
I yearn to speak my truth, my pain
To shed my fears and my doubts in vain

So, hear me now
Please
I pray
I dream
Idolization and esteem
Feels as though I’m in a time machine

Desires like premonitions
It’s to a high standard I’m conditioned
In a rigid mold I’m positioned

Work becomes sedulous
Trepidation forces eloquence
Guilt has an emphasis

I need to pave my own path and
Stop thinking about set in stone but more so
wide-open sand
Life is unplanned

But I’m a dreamer
My City

My city made me
Just a kid but feel so free

Sun tan burned in the skin, eternized
Just add water, and let photosynthesize
Salt in the mellow breeze
Skinny streets lined with palm trees
Look up at peach skies
As the sun lands it’s day long fly

The populations a tapestry
The road where all walks of life meet
Stitched together with cloths from many places
We have the Grand Prix, but are made up of a hundred
different races

Our variety shown through restaurants, our vast inclusion
No one the same, new possibilities in fusion
Serving up opportunities on a dish
In plain sight is their wish

My city made me who I am
And I’m grateful for each piece of that man

KIERAN LUNDY is a seventh grader at Hughes Middle School in Long Beach, California. His art has been featured in the Press Telegram and he has received mentorship from two former English teachers. Aside from spending his time writing, Kieran plays American Football for two separate teams, thoroughly enjoys snowboarding, and loves to travel.
Silence. Not a word.

I’m laden with the souls of six million. 
Their final moments, words, tears all released into my willing hands.
They are relieved, yet the sorrow that plagued them still condemns them in the afterlife.
They are lost, ignored, empty.

They were once hopefully, but that is a faded memory. 
A memory as forgotten and yearned for as a spring day in winter.

Their earthly bodies fated to light the embers of a wood or corrode in a cold, dead grave.
Their souls haven’t much to look forward to.
The stench of a genocide still lingers in their nose.
The sound of their final words still echo in their ears.
Some things are too dark for light to illuminate.

Silence. Not a word.

The seconds on the clock whisk away, never to be retrieved.
I, to my amusement, have left you with excess days, yet limited years.
The years will trickle irrevocably, like sand in the hourglass.
Your lives, always truncated, have bittersweet blends of wasted tomorrows and hollow yesterdays.
In my grand schemes, the legacies of your lives will surely have served an aimless purpose.

No matter how much credit you give yourselves, your memories share the same fate you do. Like all promising things, they will die.
Nothing can endure in the continuous centuries I bestow upon you.
When all is said and done, it is I who will fare you goodbye.

The truth still looms, whispering the sole honesty it can contribute:
The only thing timeless is myself.

Language is a connection.
Bonds people together.
Letters strung into words, words pieced into sentences, sentences crafted into speech.

Language is expression.
With it, ideas can be shared, conveyed, manifested.
Language, one of humankind’s earliest innovations, is intended to understand others.

And with it, we understand society.

Bilingualism opens your perception, your mind.
Learning a new language means exposing yourself to the culture, history, and people behind it.
Enveloping yourself in cultures that once seemed foreign, but now twinge with a sense of appreciation.

Language is power.
Knowing many languages means reaching many people.
Doubling your audience.

Allowing your thoughts to be known.
Your voice to be heard.
Language is a safe space.
Something we’ve known since youth and will keep with us till old age.
It resonates on a personal level.
Builds a form of togetherness—it’s human nature to relate to those who speak your language.
Language is a way to unite.  
Being bilingual enables you to see the world  
in multiple perspectives, lenses.  
Enables a person to see society in a different mindset.  
Encourages people to be open-minded, diverse.  
Supports unity by building an atmosphere of tolerance.  
An atmosphere that is essential for the well-being  
of this generation and generations to come.

Language is a key.  
A key to make everlasting change to the world.  
A key to influence people.  
A key for people to influence us.

Language is a connection.

El lenguaje es una conexión.  
Une a las personas.  
Letras encadenadas en palabras, palabras ensambladas  
en oraciones, oraciones elaboradas en habla.

El lenguaje es expresión.  
Con él, las ideas se pueden compartir, transmitir,  
manifestar.  
El lenguaje, una de las primeras innovaciones de la  
humanidad, está destinado a comprender a los  
demás.

Y con él entendemos a la sociedad.

El bilingüismo abre tu percepción, tu mente.  
Aprender un nuevo idioma significa exponerse  
a la cultura, la historia y a las personas detrás de él.
Envolviéndose en culturas que alguna vez parecieron extranjeras, pero que ahora sienten una punzada de aprecio.

El lenguaje es poder.
Conocer muchos idiomas significa llegar a muchas personas.
Duplicar tu audiencia.

Permitir que se conozcan tus pensamientos.
Tu voz para ser escuchada.
El idioma es un espacio seguro.
Algo que conocemos desde la juventud y que lo mantendremos hasta la vejez.
Resuena a nivel personal.
Crea una forma de unión: es parte de la naturaleza humana relacionarse con aquellos que hablan tu idioma.

El lenguaje es una forma de unir.
Ser bilingüe le permite ver el mundo en múltiples perspectivas, lentes.
Permite a una persona ver a la sociedad con una mentalidad diferente.
Anima a las personas a ser diversas y de mente abierta.
Apoya la unidad creando una atmósfera de tolerancia.
Una atmósfera que es esencial para el bienestar de esta generación y de las generaciones venideras.

El idioma es clave.
Una clave para lograr un cambio eterno en el mundo.
Una clave para influir a las personas.
Una clave para que la gente nos influya.
SOFIA URIBE is a sophomore at Sato Academy of Mathematics and Science. She plans to pursue environmental science and creative writing and adores reading novels, writing short stories, creating art, surfing with friends, and singing opera. She’s performed with the Long Beach Symphony, Long Beach Youth Choice, and has also featured in an LA Opera production. She is also a member of the Green Team, a club that was recently featured on PBS’s Green Things. One interesting fact about Sofia is that she’s been stung by a scorpion and jellyfish while traveling.
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Thank you for allowing the Youth Poet Laureate program to promote the work of Long Beach youth poets. Here’s to the next and many more anthologies!