

RE: Oral History of Maria Fernanda Calveron as told to Kathi Berke

From plaque near Statue of Liberty welcoming immigrants to the U.S.

**"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"**

Emma Lazarus, 1883

Every person in the United States is an immigrant or descends from immigrants except Native Americans.

Currently, immigrants are under fire. As with other loathed groups in American history, they are the objects of scorn and hatred.

This is grotesquely untrue. Immigrants fuel the economy and the country.

I live in Queens. It contains a multitude of countries and cultures. The people there speak more than 138 languages, more than the rest of the city, state and country.

This oral history is of Maria Fernanda Calveron, a woman who emigrated from Cali, Colombia 12 years ago. She and her husband have owned Paper Plus Printing in my neighborhood, Sunnyside, Queens, for the past ten years. She studied business and law in Colombia before she came to the U.S. She knew very little English.

Her business has grown and thrived despite the economic ups and downs of the last ten years, especially the last two.

She asked me to interview her in her shop. She tells her story in lilting, musical English. The sounds you hear in the background will give you a sense of what's going on: the rhythmic noise of her staff busily designing and printing posters, books, catalogues, and newsletters to the tunes of pop radio using huge technologically advanced machines.