

EXODUS



A photo of my family and I moving to the United States from Israel in 2002. There were 14 suitcases (including 7 carry-ons, 2 car seats, 2 booster seats, a twin stroller, and my brother's scooter which we couldn't bear to leave behind). We meant to stay in the United States for two to three years, but 18 years later my parents still live in the same town. Even though we moved, my family's connection to Israel remains strong and it's hard to find a distinction between being Israeli and American. Both parts of my identity influence how I see and interact with the world for the better. ■

Travel **BANNED**



Naomi Michael



Trump's expanded travel ban just went into effect for 6 new countries

Citizens of Myanmar, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania can still visit the US, but most won't be able to settle here permanently.

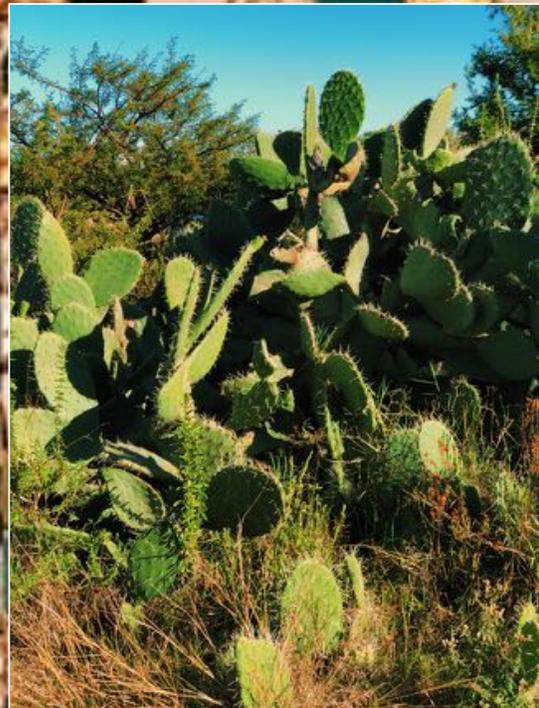
By Nicole Narea | @nicolenarea | Updated Feb 21, 2020, 10:18am EST

Will the next time you visit home be your last?



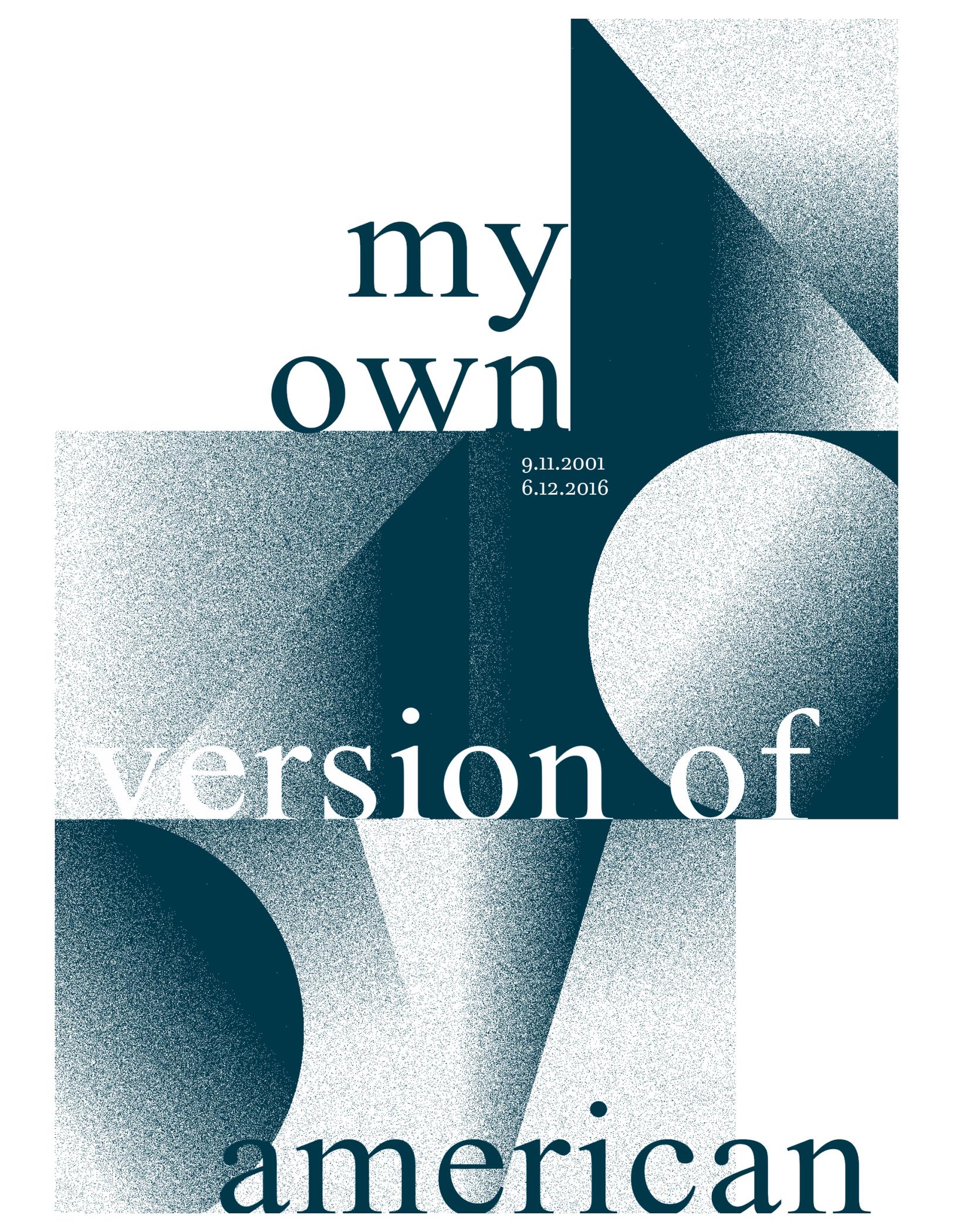


Btw she is trying to come to the US
on Monday ahead of the travel ban



Can you imagine all the places you'll never visit?





my
own

9.11.2001
6.12.2016

version of

american

NEW 'AMERICAN'

I remember that day vividly, September 11, 2001. I was in my first grade classroom in Brooklyn, when someone whispered something into my teacher's ear. Her face grew pale, as if the life had been sucked out of her. Only later, when my parents came to pick me up, did I learn what had happened.

The Twin Towers had been struck by a Muslim group, leading to thousands of casualties on American soil, many of whom my father took care of in the hospital that very day.

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I overheard a voicemail left by my father's colleague, threatening to kill him and retorting him to go back to 'where he came from.' I was in shock that someone could want the very man who saved the lives of his fellow Americans, dead. I was furious, and in a teary rage, I told my dad I hated that man on the phone.

My dad sat me down and told me, “This is a small price to pay for the sacrifices I made for a better life. There is no country better than America. We must be quiet and remain compassionate towards everyone.” In that moment, his explanation softened my demeanor.

‘This is a small price to pay for the sacrifices I made for a better life. There is no country better than America. We must be quiet and remain compassionate...’

With time, hate crimes and racial profiling increased against immigrants. My parents responded with silence to the blatant racial murmurs that surrounded them, which I came to mirror. I became a passive citizen, and in reflecting the immigrant ideals of my parents, I solely focused on academics.

Following my high school graduation as valedictorian, I had an interview at the National Institutes of Health set for June 12, 2016, right in the middle of Ramadan, the holy month for Muslims. As I nervously awaited my departure, my eyes wandered to the many televisions at the airport, only to see that there had been a terror attack at the Pulse Orlando nightclub, only a two-hour distance from my home in Florida. My initial reaction to such headlines was hope that it not be a Muslim, followed by resignation once the name reflected that stereotype.

Yet, instead of my usual submission to the slew of ignorant assaults upon the faith, the familiarity of this name struck me. My desensitization quickly morphed into a visceral anxiety as they plastered his recognizable face across the screen. I knew Omar Mateen.

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come to love became known to
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I had broken bread with his sisters at our mutual mosque the night before the shooting. That same family who I had come to love became known to the greater masses as the family of the Pulse Nightclub Shooter. I felt sick to my stomach at the pointless murder, pained for the victims and their families, and could not fathom what we might face as the Muslim community associated with the shooter.

I instantaneously felt like an outsider in the country I was born in, the same feeling I developed after 9/11.

Upon landing, I called my father, in tears, who remained quiet as I rambled incoherently. When I was done, he finally responded in the same way he had when I was a child. This time those words felt very different.

In the weeks to come, our mosque would be burned down. In the months to come, the Muslim Ban, a blatant discrimination, would be put forth as policy.

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My father's words seemed too inert. I realized that my experience as an American by birth was different than his. I had, up until then, only been a passive force, but I realized the need for active compassion.

As a result, I began working with the One America Movement, to bring people across religious, racial and political backgrounds together. I also integrated my passion for healthcare by providing services to refugee communities and displaced populations, and protested for immigrant rights. It was then that I became my own version of American.

The experience of the first generation is one of dichotomous identities, one that entails forging contrasting personas into a cohesive individual. In my life, I have struggled with finding that balance; how to simultaneously assimilate to the American culture, yet maintain the values of my roots. With time, I have learned to navigate my role in a way that meshes the ideals of my immigrant parents into a personal framework that reflects my ideals as well.

Throughout all of this, I have truly learned what it means to be who I am today.

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9:53 IN MUMBAI



9:53PM IN MUMBAI I cried while on the phone with my parents
but they didn't know

“There are no quiet places in India”

7:37PM IN UDAIPUR

Think I only slept from 11 to 2am
Head pounding, dizzy and nauseous at
breakfast

“Abhay, I was a history major.”

9:50PM IN NEW DEHLI

This trip has been hard. Dida speaks to me
in 10 min monlogues that I just nod to. Dadu
repeats what the guide says to me as if I
can't understand English.

Every Saturday after engineering class,
Dadu would stop by Dida's house to get a
glimpse of her. He sent her presents, which
Dida didn't like.

9:51PM IN KOLKATA

“I have been on a diet my entire life.” -Dida.

She plans to return in October for her
sister; didn't like that we only spent 6 hours
visiting her. Wb the last 20 years in which
you didn't speak to her?

“Sometimes I have thought about packing
my bags.” Were there tears in her eyes?

Dadu: So you have been writing all of this
down?

Me: No.

10:39PM IN KOLKATA

“You know Julia, in Indian families, it is all
politics. His mother would not say a word to
me.”

This trip is never ending. Each day is a
mountain to climb.

6:51PM IN KOLKATA

I'm tired of nodding, carrying a purse, of Dada reminding me that I am just getting a "glimpse" of India, of not eating lunch, of Dadu speaking on behalf of me, giving me permission I don't need, of walking slowly, of Dida recounting every detail of her diet, of arguing, of thinking about getting old, dying.

4:49PM STILL IN
KOLKATA

One time, Dadu drank a milkshake with weed balls and got high. He couldn't believe how much he was able to eat afterwards.

Dida always played the knowledge goddess in childhood plays because of her long hair.

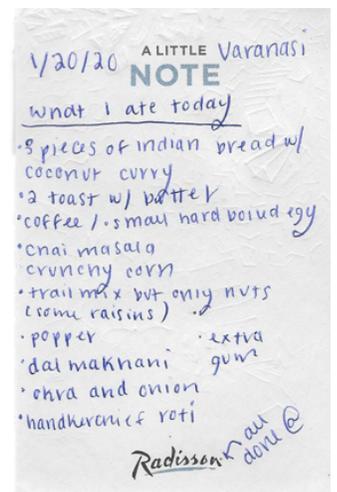
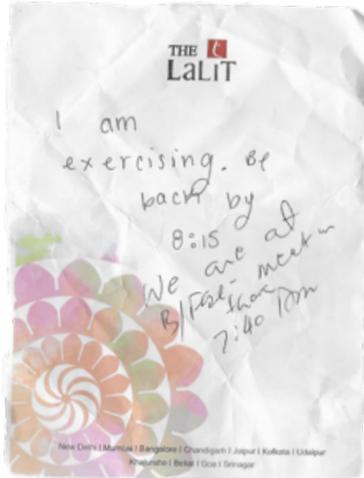
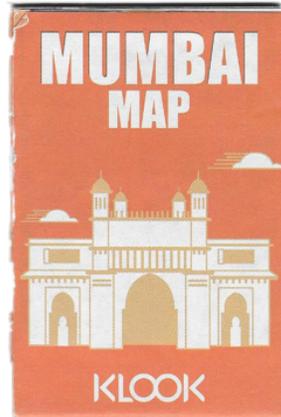
9:22PM IN KOLKATA

I have never realized that my knowledge of my relatives' pasts were really just clouds.

Apparently after 18 months of BHU visits, sneaking out to movies, and picnics in Sarnath, they decided to marry (seems too simple). Ron went back to the US and they'd write each other letters. Manju had to bribe the mailman to deliver his notes to her at school at a certain time.

to my grandparents, thank you.

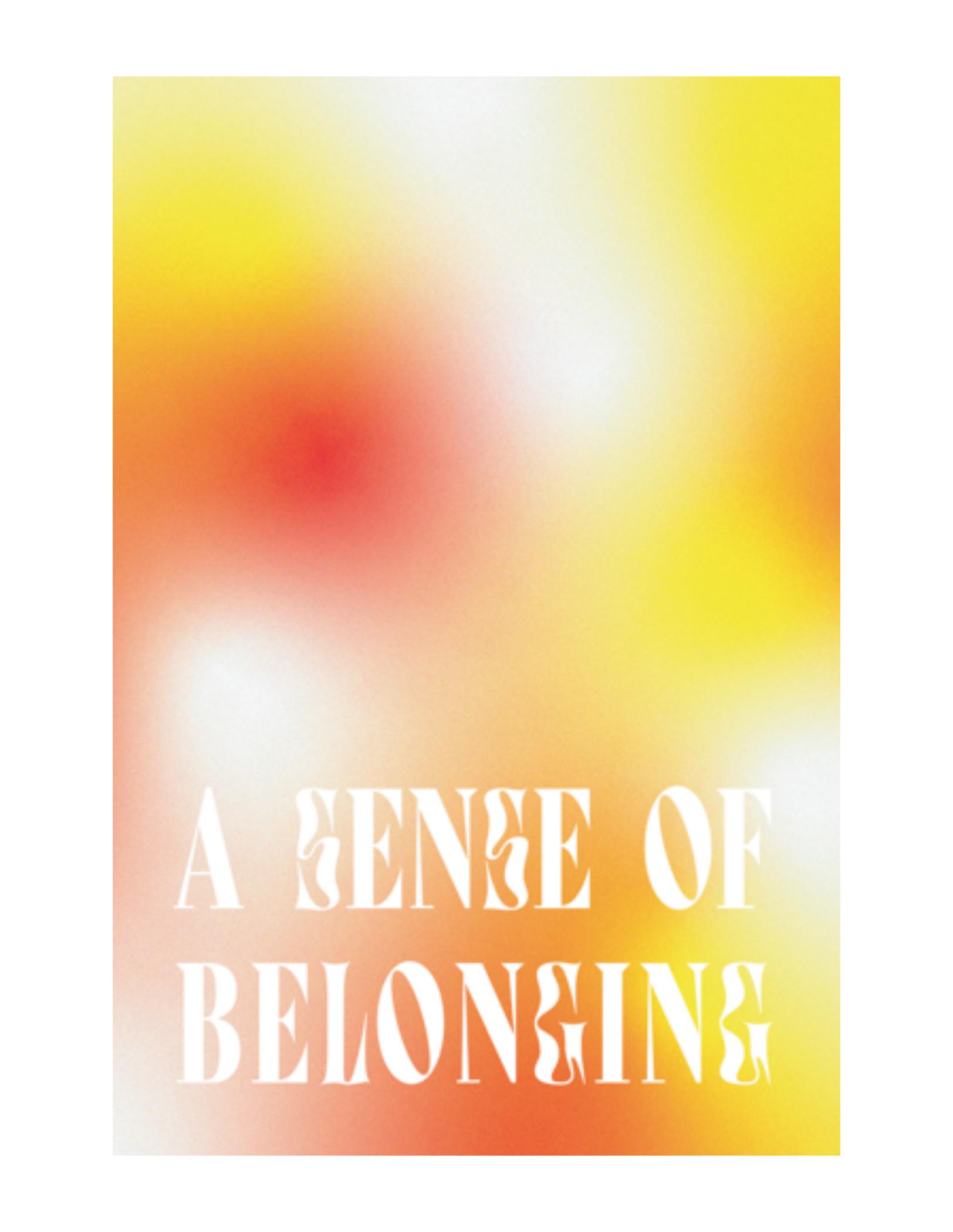
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Boston lies on the traditional Indigenous land of the Wampanoag and Massachusett People. Just as we commit ourselves to recording the experiences of our parents and grandparents, we must also learn and honor the history of the Indigenous people who have cared for the land we live on.

The MIT Asian American Initiative is a student run organization for Asian American advocacy, allyship, and civic engagement. Contact us at aai-exec@mit.edu or on Instagram [@mit.aai](https://www.instagram.com/mit.aai).





A SENSE OF BELONGING