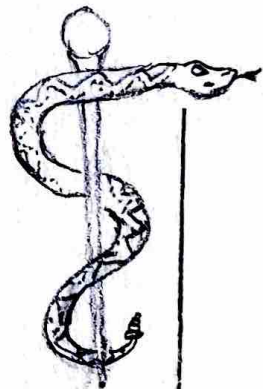


MOVEMENT,  
MOTIVATION,  
& MEDICINE



an ethnographic look into pre-med  
experiences from immigrant students  
in California

by emma lalor

# TABLE of CONTENTS

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Part 1: Movement ————— page 1

Part 2: Motivation ————— page 13

Part 3: Medicine ————— page 21

Works Cited ————— page 29

## A NOTE ON NAMES & MEANING

---

All participants were asked if they would like to pick their own pseudonym or if I should pick for them, and all but one asked me to pick for them. Names have been changed for privacy purposes.

Crystal: Greek; something clear or precious

Max: Latin; greatest, great stream

Rdita: Assyrian; she who is beautiful by her deeds

Sanuthi: Sinhalese; an intellectual woman, one with good brains

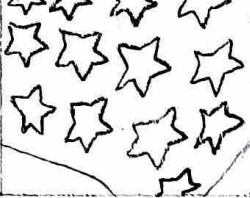
Tabeeb: Turkish; doctor

PART 2  
—MOTIVATION—

The first big question

I wanted to look into  
in my research was  
why do so many move  
to America, not just

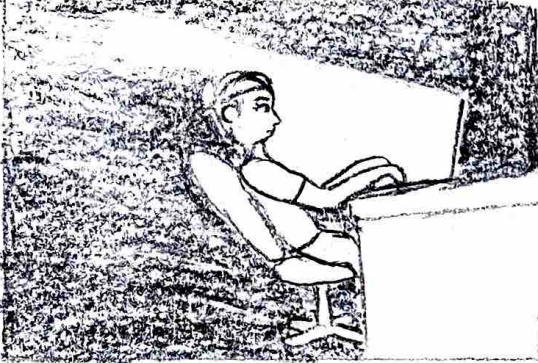
for medical pursuits??



Especially with countries  
with rocky histories  
with the United States,  
why choose to come  
here?

Why America?

Through interviews and  
through my own research,  
three big factors emerged,  
some of which surprised me.



1. American living conditions



2. American job market

3. American advertisement

1.

### AMERICAN LIVING CONDITIONS



"with a few exceptions such as  
Singapore, Hong Kong, New  
Zealand, and Switzerland - the  
United States enjoys more  
economic freedom than other  
nations."

And because of the relationship  
between policy and prosperity,  
this means that Americans tend  
to have much higher living  
standards than their counterparts  
in other nations" (Mitchell).

TRAVEL  AMERICA

This pull factor, which often coincides  
with undesirable living conditions in  
a home country - such as Sanuthi's  
family living through civil war -  
provides a strong initiative to  
the United States. Additionally, "data  
analysis has even shown that there is an  
increase in the immigrant's quality of  
life due to migration" (Cortel).

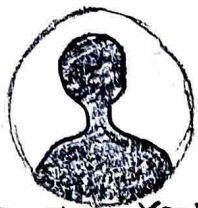


Mitchell, Daniel J. "Why Americans Have Much Higher Living Standards than Almost Everyone Else." FEE Freeman Article, Foundation for Economic Education, 2020.  
Cortel, "Why Do People Migrate? - the Different Causes of Immigration." LIRS, 2021.

2.

## AMERICAN JOB MARKET

Again, because America is one of the leading developed nations, more developed forms of networking have emerged, from online resources to in-person job fairs, in order to help people develop professional relationships and to have more job opportunities available. This is not in every country.



JOIN YOUR NETWORK

### AN IMPORTANT NOTE:

## LOW vs. HIGH SKILL JOBS

Many sources refer to jobs that do not require a college (and often a high school) degree as "low-skill." In this piece, low-skill only means low formal education requirement - many "low-skill" jobs require precision and utmost skill.

With rising rates of education in the United States, more native-born Americans are pursuing more advanced, skilled careers - "when low-skilled positions are filled by migrants, native-born people can seek higher-skilled work elsewhere" (Cortel), but the hope for migrant children to pursue high-skill jobs remains intact.

3.

## AMERICAN ADVERTISEMENT

In one of my first interviews with Redita, she briefly mentioned that her mother is greatly influenced by American advertising, and explained that the United States has some of the best marketing in the world and that is part of why people are drawn to eventually migrate to the United States.

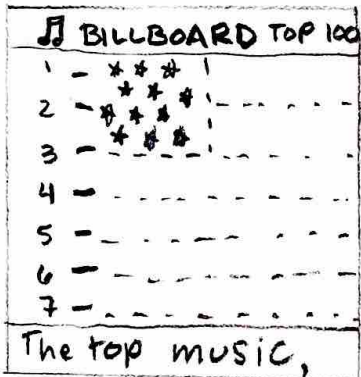
When you say America is good at marketing, do you mean the country, its products, or both?

Ooh, definitely both. America's biggest export is its culture - its movies, music, you know. You get really good at marketing, you start presenting your country the same way.

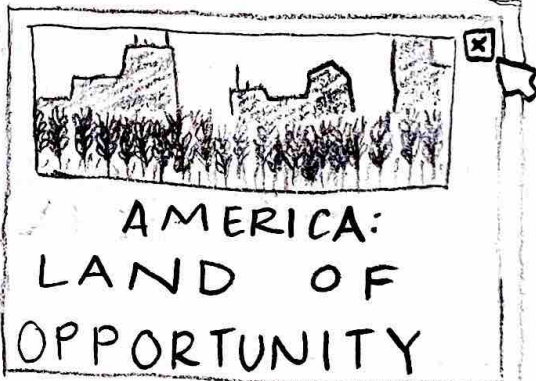


Edita is completely correct - any American company spends millions (if not more) on their advertising and media outreach each year - why would the National Travel and Tourism Office be any different?

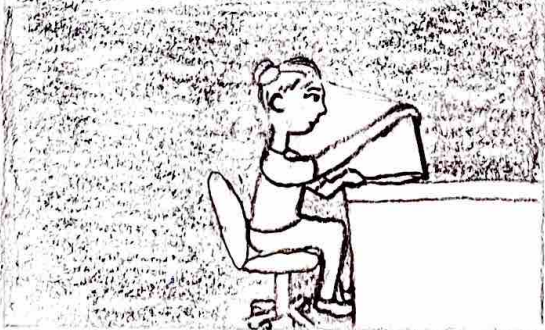
American media is absolutely everywhere too - our music, television, movies, politics, athletics, and academics are publicized, praised, and scrutinized by nearly every other country in the world.



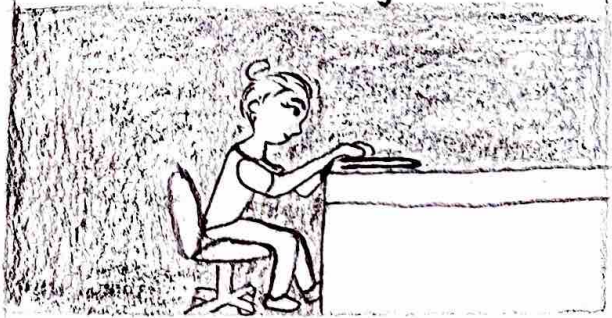
The United States has had chart-topping media for at least the past three decades. It makes sense that many people from outside of America have an idealized view of how they will be treated and hopefully respected in this country.



This point especially surprised me. I realized I've been surrounded by this marketing my whole life and have been indoctrinated into American patriotism since I was born.



This nationalism, this idealized view of the country I've grown up in, has only projected a view of promise toward people born here - the lengthy, arduous process of getting a green card is marketed to immigrants.



A life of luxury is advertised to people who move to the United States - one of endless promise and opportunity. But what is the reality?

Realistically, in order to participate in the opportunity promised in America, you need either a green card or permanent citizenship. A green card is awarded to people for permanent residency, but the resident can still be deported if they are prosecuted.



Citizenship allows people to vote, sponsor others for citizenship, and disallows deportation.

Children of immigrants who are born into the United States - like Redita - are natural citizens upon their birth in the country and have no need to apply for a green card or citizenship.



Sanuthi's family has had citizenship for 4 years, but were in the States for 7 years before their citizenship was finalized. Similarly, Tabeeb's family has had green card status for 3 years, and can take their citizenship test in the next year, but have been in the States for nearly 6 years.



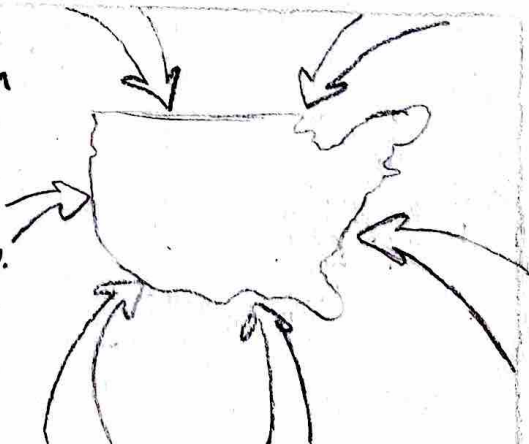
However, this system is nowhere near perfect. Max's family, who have been in America for almost 7 years, applied for green card status 5 years ago and have not heard anything back.

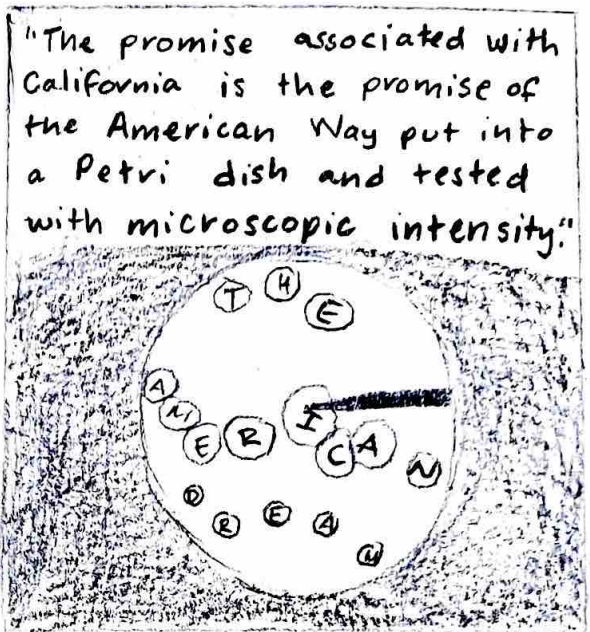
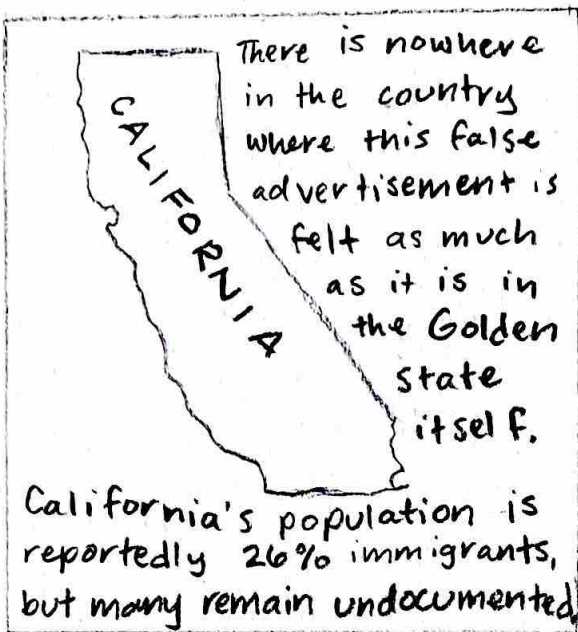


Crystal's family has also been here for nearly 6 years, and are filing for work visas and green cards now.

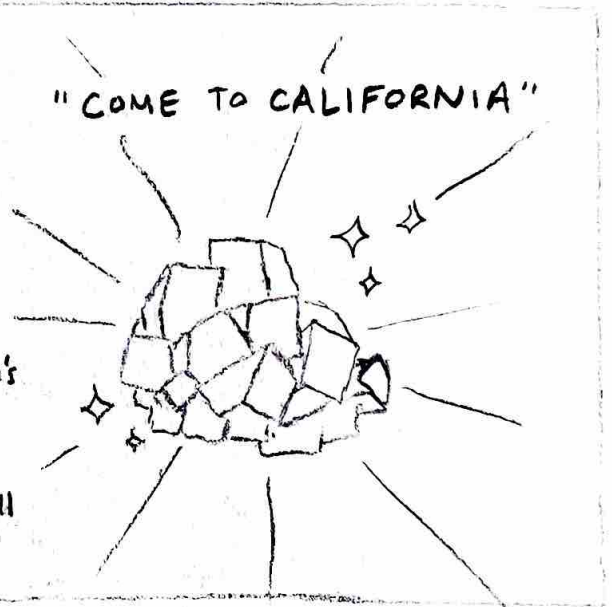


The United States claims that the process from green card application to receiving your green card should take less than a year, and following that, it should take less than 3 years to gain permanent citizenship. I have yet to hear of any people - in this research or otherwise - that it actually takes that little of time.





"California has stood in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the place where liberalism and capitalism's promise of egalitarian access to the pursuit of happiness glitters in the sunshine. Perhaps it glitters like fool's gold, but a perusal of California's visual culture over the last century reveals that people really do imagine California will somehow "be different" —



"— and their disappointments are even more substantial for having so believed" (Gudis).  
California's policing of immigrants has only gotten more strict in recent years, too, with stricter border patrol policies and more rigid guidelines on what services immigrants can utilize.

I understand that no country or state will market themselves completely honestly. It makes sense from an economic standpoint — if you focus on the beaches and glamor and Hollywood of California, you're sure to overlook the ICE detention centers and scrupulous border checks down south, right?

Gudis, Catherine. "I Thought California Would Be Different: Defining California Through Culture." Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.



Regardless of marketing ploys and tourism advertising, my research is uncovering that there are massive flaws in the process of immigration. The people who want to come here cannot do anything - we, the natural and permanent citizens, we, the people, must.

America is one of the most diverse countries in the world, yet it "has one of the most restrictive immigration systems in the developed world" (Bier). We need a better system - either by creating vast reforms on the current system, or by creating a new process or office entirely.

The people I have interviewed have mainly moved for safety, or family. All people deserve some semblance of safety, of belonging, and of freedom.

Especially for people whose home countries are unsafe, they cannot just put their lives on hold for several years for a single application to be processed - or be lost within the system.

There needs to be better legal representation for detained immigrants as well - "immigration court is one of the few parts of the U.S. legal system in which a person's freedom is at stake but the person has never had the right to government-provided counsel" (Beir).



These people have fought tooth and nail for a home and a life in the United States, and have abided by the legal pathways to get here - and still, our system fails them. They have less access to things natural citizens take advantage of - healthcare options, housing options, and even a life without judgement. They do not deserve this. America was built by immigrants. Why do we treat this next generation of immigrants so poorly? If nothing else is taken from this work, I hope this stands out: treat people with respect, regardless of their birthplace.

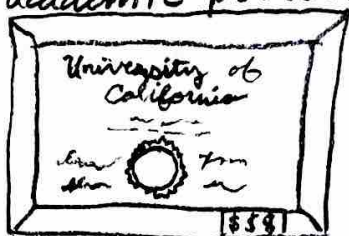
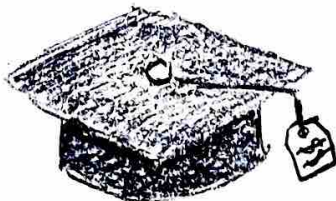
Bier, David J. "Reforming the Immigration System: A Brief Outline." CATO Institute, 2020.

PART 3  
— MEDICINE —

So what does this broken system of entering the United States have to do with pursuing a career in medicine? For starters, if people cannot enter the country, they cannot study here.

"Immigration status itself is not a hindrance. The characteristics of the immigrants, such as their country of origin, race, and parental socioeconomic status, in addition to the communities, schools, and legal barriers that greet them in the United States, explain most of that variation" (Baum and Flores).

In other words, people who move here for postsecondary education - especially premed students - are not any less skilled or hardworking, but their financial and legal differences often exacerbate academic pursuits.



My interviews and fieldwork have only supported this point. Most of my fieldwork doubled as study groups, or study "dates." These people work unspeakably hard.

Most of them have also mentioned that they are either on financial aid, working throughout college, or both.



### WORK-STUDY OPTIONS

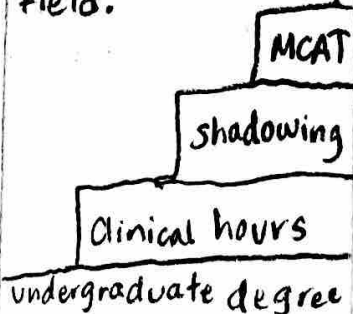
LAB TECH, \$15/hour  
 Wanted: Research background, lab work required. Job entails cleaning lab glassware and surfaces, minimum 20 hours/week.

**APPLY HERE!**

Their acceptances into UC Berkeley in itself speaks to their intelligence and work ethic as well.



Their diligence cannot stop here if they want to continue into the medical field.



In fact, the medical school preparation and application process is even more difficult for immigrants than getting into a four-year university, which seems true for everyone, even if they are not an immigrant.

**CONGRATULATIONS!**  
 You were accepted into this year's cohort.  
**ACCEPTANCE RATE: 3%**  
 (if you're lucky)

That is the whole gimmick of medical school, right? Only the best of the best get into schools they really want to go to.

13. Are you a U.S. citizen?  
 Citizen  
 Non-citizen  
 Please exit the application. Thank you for your time.

But for people who cannot gain permanent residency or citizenship before applying, the process becomes so much more difficult.

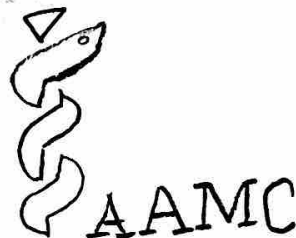


To start, if you cannot gain access to a work visa, you can only volunteer to gain patient contact hours, which is essential for your application.

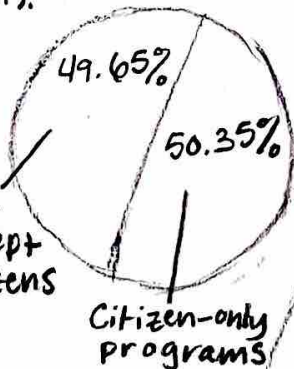
This is not in itself a bad thing - but if your situation is also affected by your finances, getting experience by working is going to be much more helpful.



In addition, preparing for the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) is costly and takes an average of 300 hours to study for. Again, this could clash with school or financial issues further.



The biggest issue with being premed as an immigrant is your access to citizenship. "Of the 141 accredited medical schools, about only 70 medical schools will accept your application" if you are technically an international applicant, or cannot get citizenship (Gutman).



MCAT: 523  
 GPA: 3.95  
 SGPA: 4.00  
 Clinical Hours: 1000  
 Shadowing Hours: 250

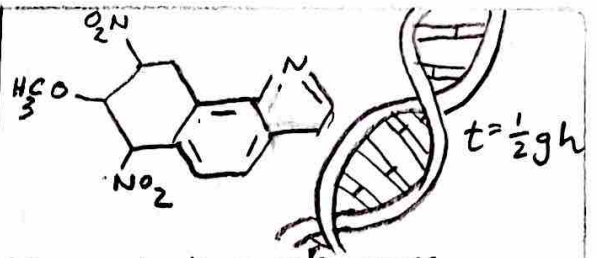
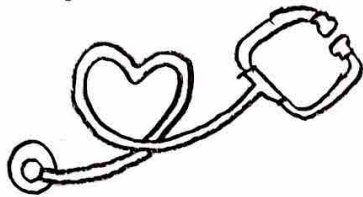
**APPLY**

Dear Applicant,  
 We regret to inform encourage you to Thank you for con  
 Rest of luck,

So imagine everything goes well for you - your GPA and MCAT are stellar, you have over the recommended amount of shadowing and patient contact hours - and your options are halved.

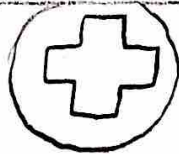
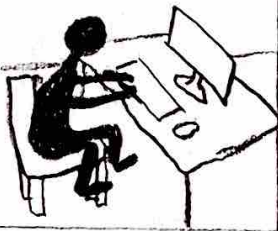
Gutman, Deborah. "FAQ: Can a Non-US Citizen Apply to US Medical Schools." Admissions RX, 2020.

Really, imagine it. You are motivated to help people like you, to help people who have just moved to the States gain healthcare access.

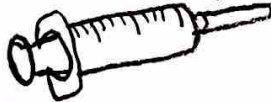


You get through your undergraduate degree - filled with chemistry, biology, and physics, the hardest weed-out courses your university offers.

You shell out several thousand dollars and hundreds of hours for your MCAT.



You work tirelessly and thanklessly in a volunteer position to get access to patients.



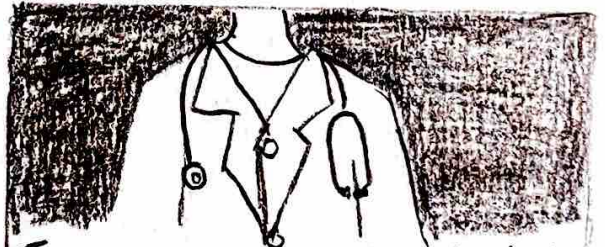
APPLICATION UNAVAILABLE

Unmet criteria

You have worked for a majority of your young adult life - and find you cannot go to your dream school.

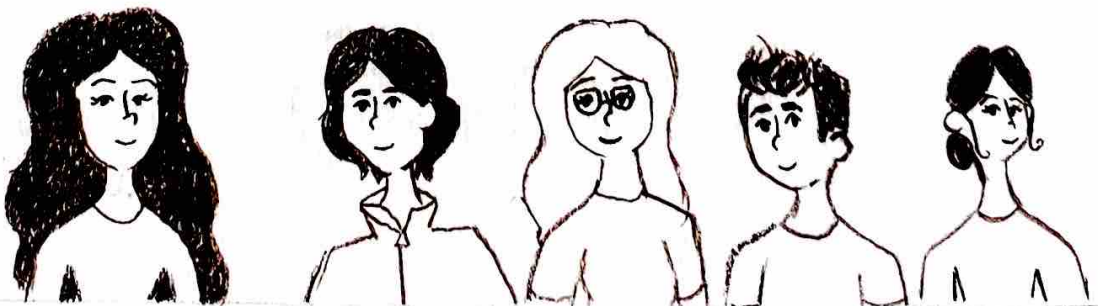
Could you do it? Not just the application process - could you deal with the idea that even the public schools of America will not accept you?

**[REJECTED]**

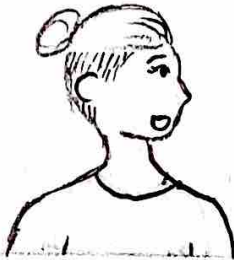


These are the people who truly deserve to be called "Doctor," the people who will fight for the opportunity to be one against all odds.

The medical field will be lucky to have such dedicated, hardworking, caring physicians in the future. I feel lucky to have even met such students - even if some of them are no longer able to pursue medicine at the moment.



Let's say you're in med school. You have to pick your specialty right now - what do you pick?



It would probably be cardiology.



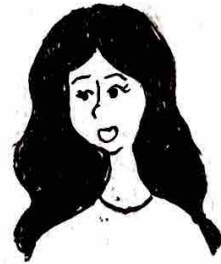
Tabeeb plans to apply in 2024.

Oooh, it's gotta be plastic surgery.



Rdita plans to apply in 2024.

For sure either OB/GYN or pediatric surgery.



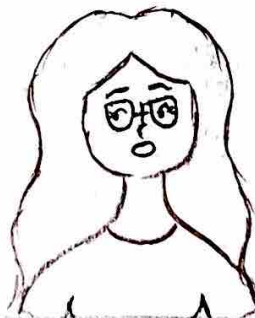
Sanuthi plans to apply in 2024.

You put me on the spot - dermatology.

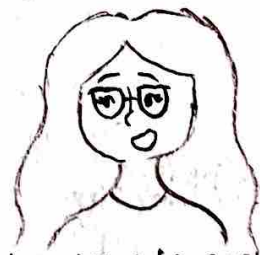


Max plans to apply in 2024.

I talked to my parents, and we realized my immigration status isn't stable enough for med school.



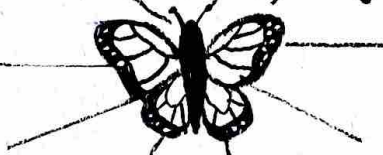
I'm thinking of doing a PhD in chemistry instead. And maybe I can get paid for teaching while I get my degree. Or if not, I'll finish in five years then go teach, then go med school. We'll see!



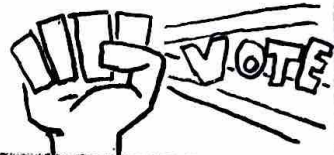
Crystal plans to apply for grad school in 2024.

So what does this mean? What does my research give to you, the reader? Or to me, the researcher?

Let's start with you, the reader. We need to advocate for our immigrant friends and family.



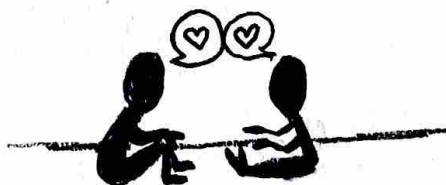
Talk to who you know who has influence - try to help change happen in our current system.



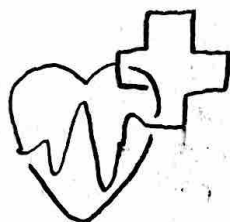
Here's another big one - treat people with respect, no matter their race, home country, or socioeconomic status.



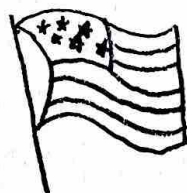
And, if you're able to, reach out and help the people you know who fought to get to the United States.



What does this mean for me? I mean, I'll hold myself to the same standard I hold you to - I am going to reach out and support my immigrant friends more.

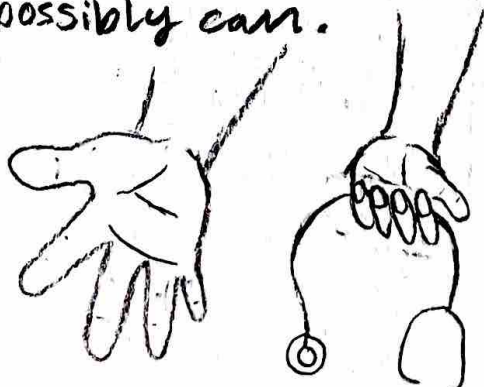


This research has absolutely changed my perspective of medical school application and work.



I realize how incredibly lucky I am to be a natural American citizen and I want to help those who are not however I can.

Especially with my fellow premed students, I want to help people however I possibly can.



That's the true root of medicine, after all - to help all you can, however you possibly can.

The future shall be more  
diverse than anyone  
expects, and our future  
physicians shall  
reflect the same  
diverse nature

The dedication,  
hard work,  
and ambition  
of people  
who come  
to the  
United  
States  
should be  
admired  
and  
appreciated.  
People

100% Diversity  
Injection, USP 500mL

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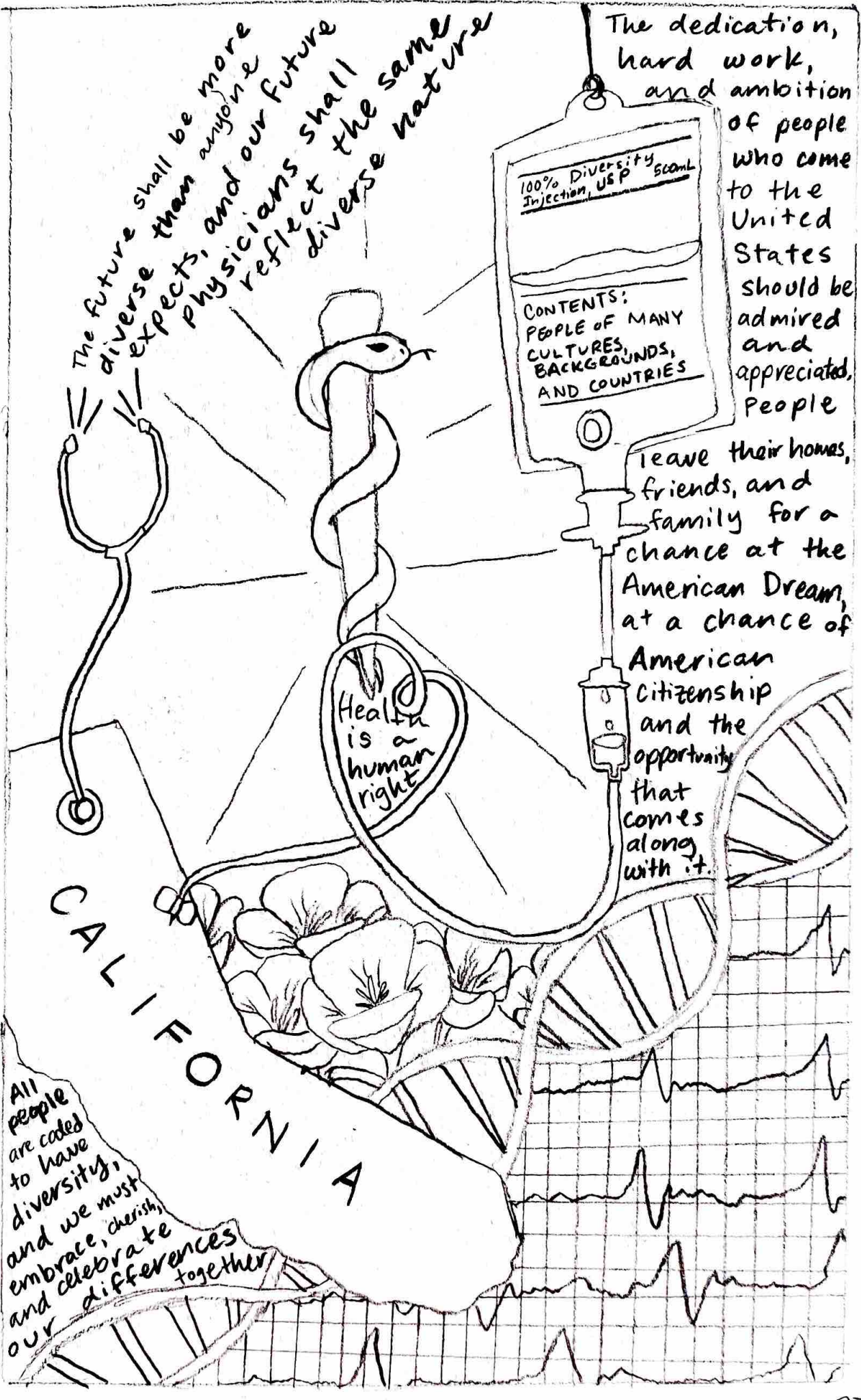
CONTENTS:  
PEOPLE OF MANY  
CULTURES,  
BACKGROUNDS,  
AND COUNTRIES

leave their homes,  
friends, and  
family for a  
chance at the  
American Dream,  
at a chance of  
American  
Citizenship  
and the  
opportunity  
that  
comes  
along  
with it.

Health  
is a  
human  
right

CALIFORNIA

All  
people  
are called  
to have  
diversity,  
and we must  
embrace, cherish,  
and celebrate  
our differences  
together





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An enormous thank you to my  
incredible interviewees for  
trusting me with your stories.  
Another huge thanks to Dr. Seth  
Holmes, Rae Willis-Conger, and  
Bri Matusovsky, without whom  
this project would never come  
into existence. Thank you all.

- Emma

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