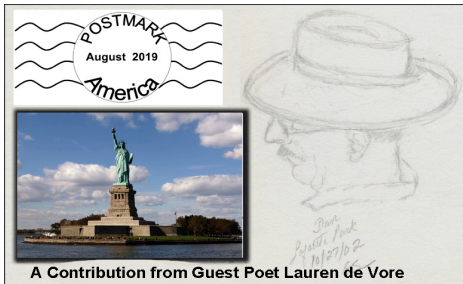


## The Lady In The Harbor — An Attempt to Revise Her Welcome



The Statue of Liberty has welcomed immigrants to America since 1886. It has proudly displayed Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" as the key statement of that welcome since 1903. The poem has been a central element of our American heritage ever since. — PapaDan

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### A Startling News Story

On Tuesday, August 13, Ken Cuccinelli, acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (essentially, the head of the nation's legal immigration system) raised eyebrows, and a lot of hackles, when he rewrote a central line of the poem at the base of the Statue of Liberty. (<https://www.denverpost.com/2019/08/14/ken-cuccinellis-statue-of-liberty-poem/>)

He rewrote the line this way: "Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge." This "revision" of this essential part of our American heritage was part of his explanation of rule changes that make it more difficult for immigrants to obtain green cards if they take advantage of government benefits, such as food stamps and other assistance programs. Cuccinelli's so-called "public charge" doctrine clearly targets poor immigrants and those most in need of sanctuary.

The details — and the purpose — of this new immigration doctrine, along with Cuccinelli's edit of the poem on our welcoming statue, combine in a stark refutation of the entire spirit of Emma Lazarus' poem. Lazarus wrote the poem in 1883 as part of fundraiser sponsored by newspaper tycoon Joseph Pulitzer to raise money for construction of the base for the Statue of Liberty. Lazarus herself came from a well-to-do Jewish family and became an advocate for immigrants in the early 1880s after witnessing the plight of thousands of newly arrived Eastern European Jews, forced to live in squalid overcrowded tenements, with little to no access to clean water, sanitation, education, or decent jobs. Her compassionate vision for America, a vision held by many others of that time (since her poem was selected from among many other submissions to be permanently mounted on the statue's base) is clearly articulated in the sonnet's closing lines:

#### **The New Colossus,**

*by Emma Lazarus (1883)*

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "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-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

As a member of an immigrant family, I find the continuing attack on immigrants to be powerfully hypocritical. It could be comical if it weren't such a serious attack on the fundamental values of this nation's identity, long held to be "a nation of immigrants." My own grandparents came here to escape the poverty they knew in Southern Italy. They came with nothing to offer — they were illiterate and without valuable skills. A check of Mr. Cuccinelli's family tree reveals that the rule change he is championing would likely have excluded his own Italian immigrant ancestors.

(<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/08/cuccinellis-family-tree-suggests-his-new-immigration-rule-might-have-blocked-his-ancestors/>) To our nation's embarrassment, this rule change is just the latest in a series of immigrant exclusion efforts, counteracting the stated purpose of the immigration and asylum system imbedded in American law. Despite this recent disappointment, I must remember, even though this country sometimes falls short of its stated values, those values are still the ideals that have guided this country and its people for a long time.

But enough from me — let's move on to a more interesting question: What would a revision of Emma Lazarus' poem look like if one tried to "bring it up to date?" To answer this question, we turn to a familiar *ConVivio* contributor — our favorite local published poet, Lauren de Vore. You have seen her poetry presented in this space several times before.

What follows is Lauren's description of her process in writing her revision of the original Emma Lazarus poem to fit our modern era — and, of course, the poem itself: "Cry Shame!"

### **Lauren's Contribution**

I first wrote this revisiting of "The New Colossus" in the fall of 2014. If you cast your mind back five years, you'll remember the waves of immigrants flooding out of North Africa into Europe and the nationalistic backlash there. You'll also remember President Obama's sweeping executive action on immigration that attempted to do what Congress could not or would not do — revamp the nation's broken immigration system in a practical, humane, and just way. Perhaps the most notable element of Obama's effort was the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA program. The resulting media coverage, political grandstanding, and public discourse (much of it, to my West Coast liberal perspective, surprisingly anti-immigrant) spurred me to write my first version of "Cry Shame!", for I felt then, as now, that many of the political and popular positions regarding immigration were shamefully hypocritical in light of the fact that America is a nation of immigrants. For most of us, I would wager that our immigrant forebears are only a few generations before us — our grandparents or great grandparents, probably the very people the exclusion acts of the day were aimed at.

I have sent "Cry Shame!" to both of California's U.S. Senators, to the half-dozen or so East Bay Congressional Representatives, to California's Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Education, and to most of the East Bay's state legislators. I have also sent it to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, urging all of these recipients to publish it, post it, enter it into congressional and legislative records, use it on websites or in campaign materials. Not surprisingly, it was met with a resounding silence, not even a canned "thank you for your comment" email. Nonetheless, I persevere, recognizing that rejection is the writer's lot. And so, I offer it to all of you *ConVivio* readers. Should "Cry Shame!" resonate with you, please — feel

free to run with it, share it with friends, send it on into the wide world so it can do its small part to counteract the toxic hypocrisy and mean-spiritedness of today's immigration debate.

### **Cry Shame!**

*A revisiting of the Statue of Liberty poem*

#### ***I. Hypocrisy***

Not like Ms. Liberty whose outstretched hand  
And flaming torch did mutely bid welcome  
To exiles seeking sanctuary from  
Injustice in their far-off native land,  
A barrier in fact and mind's been built  
Against newcomers yearning to breathe free.  
Whence came such coldness and hypocrisy?  
Have we forgotten all the blood we spilt  
For freedom's sake on foreign soil that would  
Now turn our backs on those who seek the same  
On our own shores, and doing so defame  
Th'ideals for which America once stood?  
A travesty that now our borders shout,  
"You homeless, poor, and tempest-tost—keep out!"

#### ***II. Truths Self-Evident***

How short, how fickle is the memory  
Of those who'd shut this country's golden door,  
And in the closing willfully ignore  
That not so long ago t'was they, t'was we  
Who were the immigrants. For then, as now,  
The hunger for a better life did drive  
Them on to seek a place where they could thrive,  
This land where founding fathers did avow,  
As truths self-evident, that all men are  
Created equal (women too) with right  
To life and liberty and chance to fight  
For happiness 'neath freedom's beacon star.  
Such is the dream of all of life's outcasts,  
As true today as generations past.

#### ***III. Cry Shame***

Cry shame on all false patriots, on all  
Who stain their heritage fear-mongering  
'Gainst incomers with nonwhite skin, who sling  
Their vitriol on any who'd forestall  
Such bigotry. There is no honor in  
A land that claims to champion liberty  
Yet fences out th'oppressed, that piously  
Hides prejudice behind flag-waving din.  
Never forget, this country's built upon  
The backs, the blood of immigrants. They are  
Our past, they are our future too, they are  
America. If welcome be withdrawn,  
Our star will dim, our greatness will decay.  
We must with Liberty relight our way.

© Lauren de Vore (September 2014; revised August, 2019)

See Lauren's previous Guest Poet offerings: <https://convivio-online.net/lauren-celebrates-national-poetry-month/>