

DARIA PEOPLES-RILEY

AMERICA

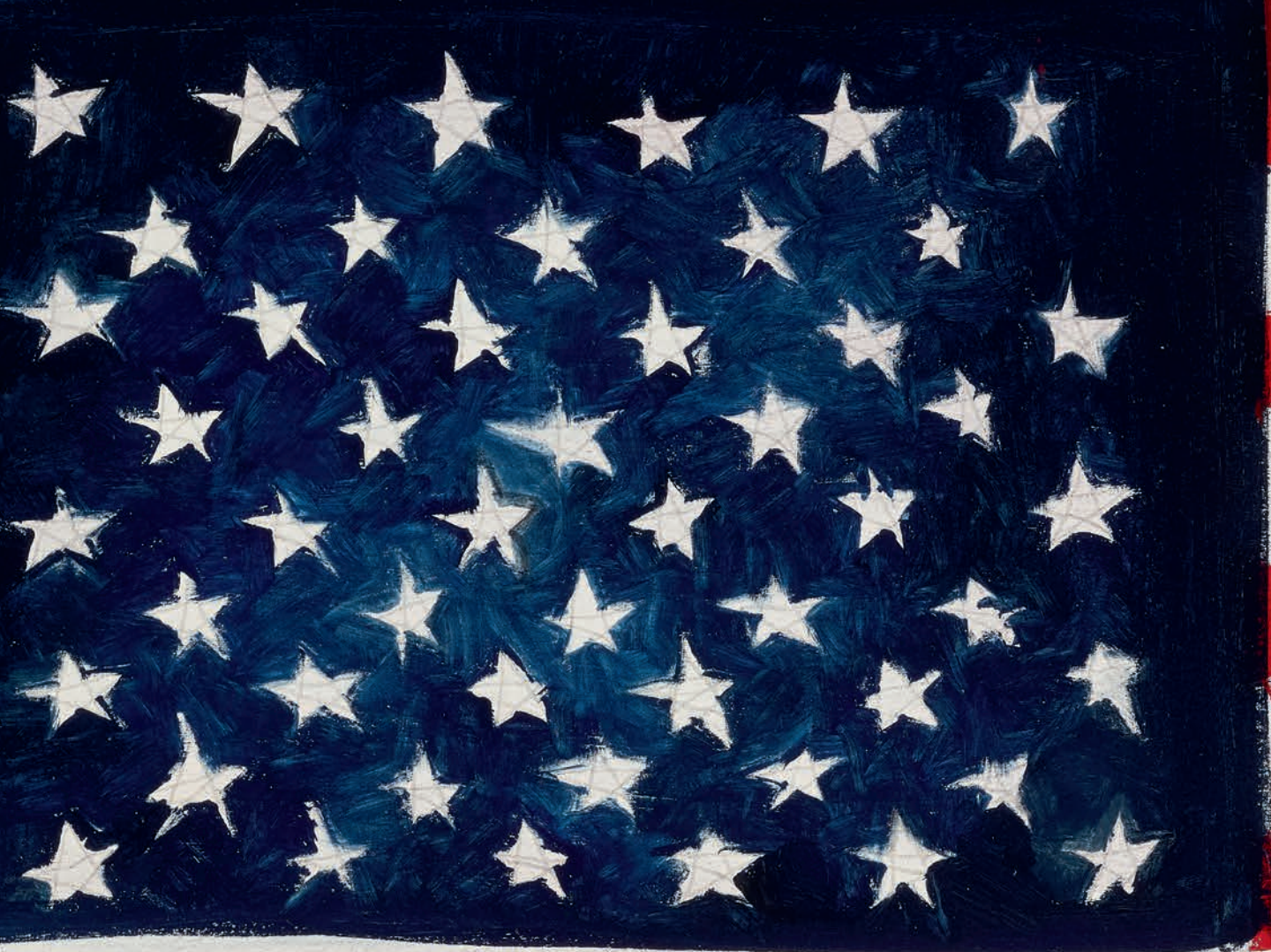
My Love

AMERICA

My Heart







I pledge allegiance
to the Flag of the
United States of
America, and to the
Republic for which it
stands, one nation
under God, indivisible,
with liberty and
justice for all.

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My Love

AMERICA

My Heart



 **Greenwillow Books**
An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

For Jordan and Cameron—D. P-R.

Through all these things, you are more
than conquerors through him who loved us.

—Romans 8:37

America

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First Edition

 Greenwillow Books

America, *the Brave.*
America, *the Bold.*




America to Have.

America to Hold.



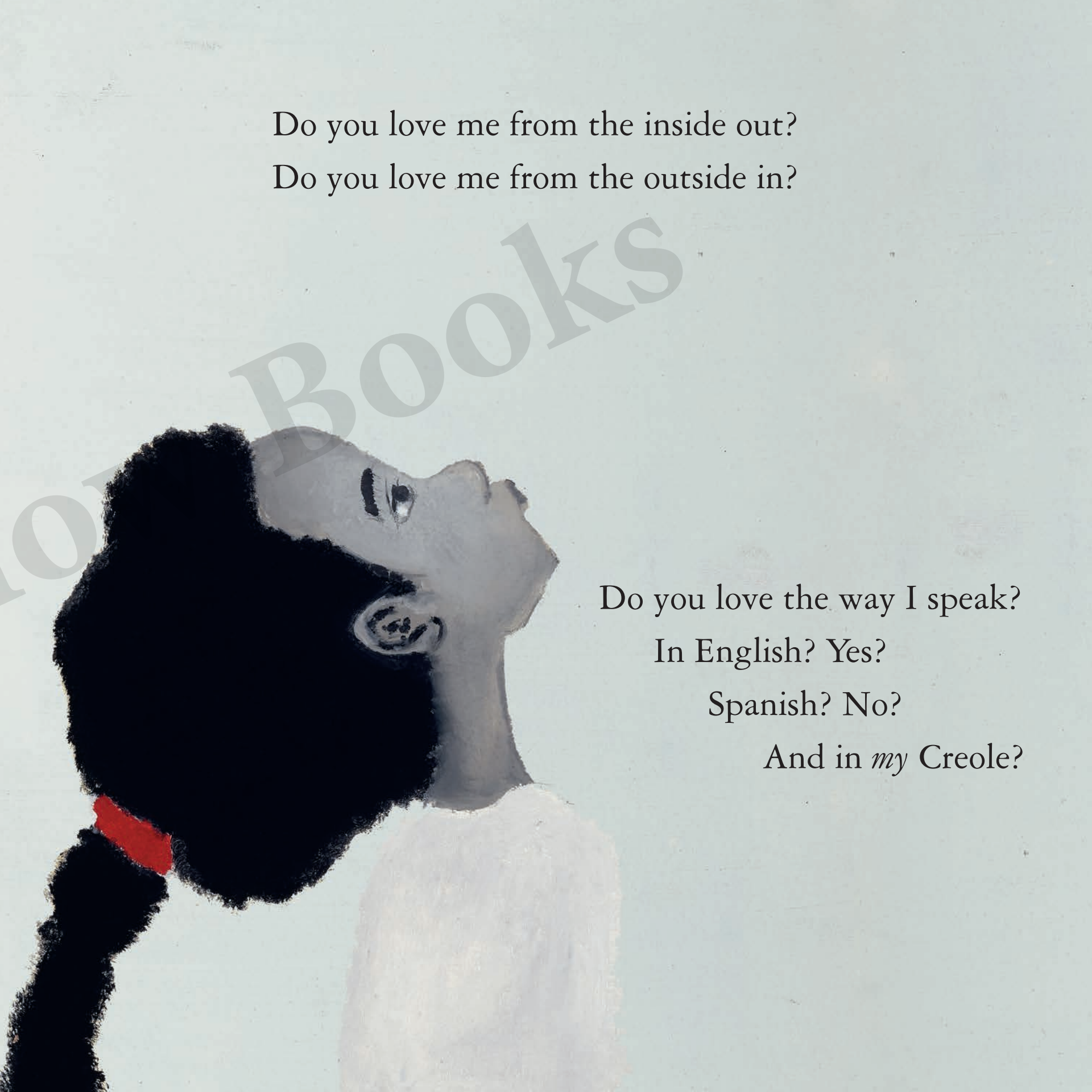
America, My Country.




A painting of a city skyline with an American flag on a tall building. The sky is overcast and grey.

Do you love me?

Do you love me from the inside out?
Do you love me from the outside in?

A painting of a woman with dark skin and hair, wearing a white top and a red collar, looking upwards. The background is a plain, light grey color.

Do you love the way I speak?
In English? Yes?
Spanish? No?
And in *my* Creole?



Do you love mi fuerza?
Mo batay?

The way my fists clench against my hips?
The way my legs stretch strong?

Do you love mi historia?
Mo vwayaj?

From then to now?

From shore to shore?
East to West?
South to North?

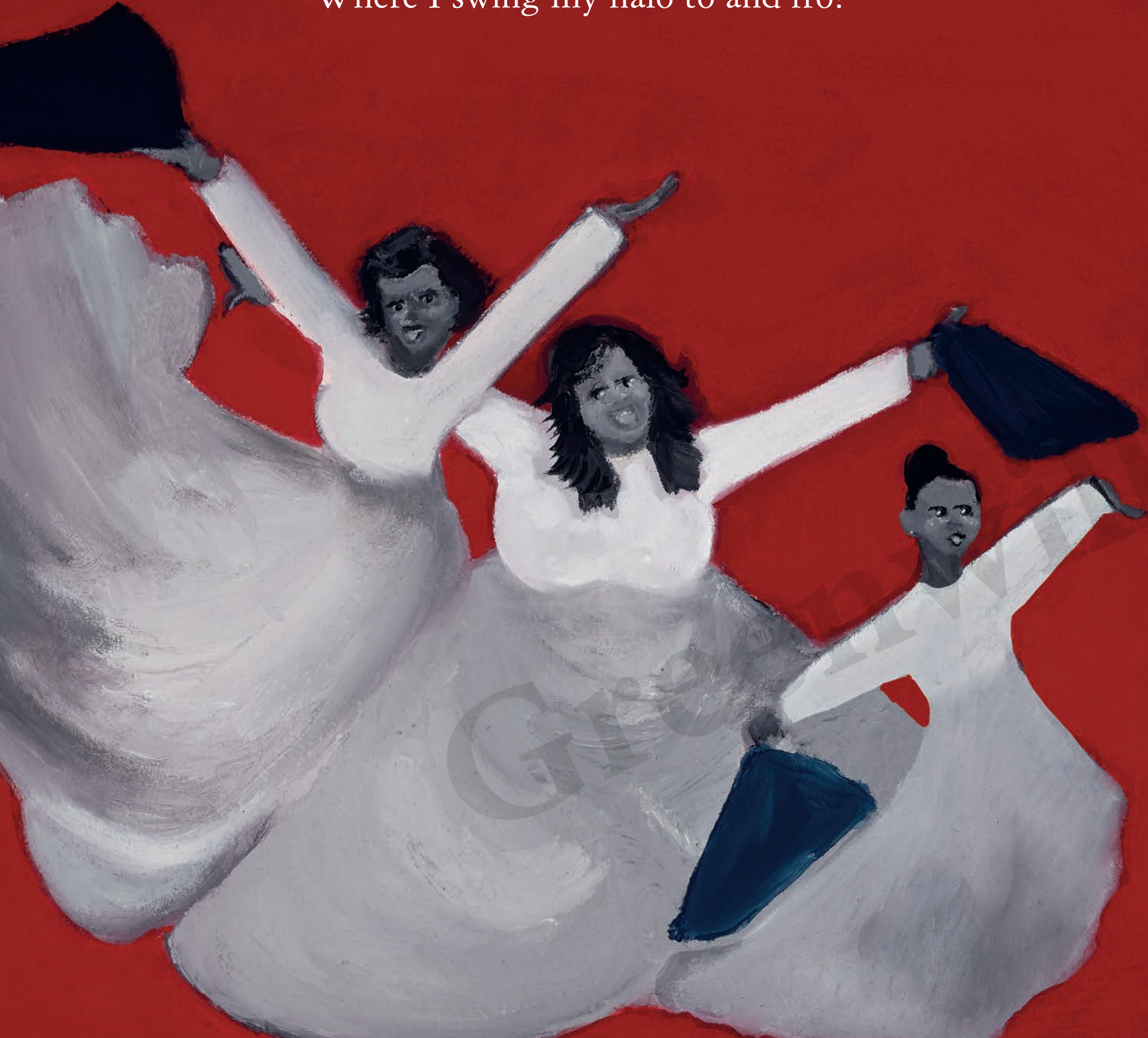


A painting of a landscape. In the foreground, two children are walking through a field of tall, thin, white flowers. The child on the left is wearing a white dress and a red skirt, and the child on the right is wearing a red shirt. In the background, there is a hill with a small white church with a cross on top. The sky is blue with a large, bright sun or moon. A bird is flying in the sky. The overall style is soft and painterly.

From there to here?

Where my glory rises
in the belly of my soul?

Where I swing my halo to and fro?



Where I am loved?
Where I am whole?



Do you love me when I raise my hand?

My head?

My voice?



When I whisper?

When I SHOUT?



Do you love me when I stand?




Stand in?
Stand up?
Stand out?



Do you love my yes?
Do you love my no?

When I shrug my shoulders . . .
no se,
mo pa kone,
I DON'T KNOW.





How long will it be,
how long will it take.

How long must I wait . . .

for you to love me

from sea to shining sea.



America, *Mi Amor*.

America, *Mo Kè*.

Do you love my black?

Do you love my brown?

Do you love my throne?

Do you love my crown?





Do you love my brave?
Do you love my bold?

Am I to have?
Am I to hold?

America, Land of the Free.
America, 'Tis of Thee.



America, *I am you.*

Greenwill



America, *you are me.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Like many children of color, I often experienced racism and biases at school. Back then, I didn't know the words to describe how I was treated, but I do remember feeling as though my classmates and my teachers liked one another more than they liked me. My experiences caused me to question many things about myself.

Sometimes I wondered if they treated me differently because my family was black and theirs weren't. Or because my family was different from the other families in my community. My grandmother and great-grandmother spoke a different language. We ate foods others didn't eat, like red beans and rice and gumbo. Unfortunately, I often changed who I was to fit in. I also pretended that the way I was treated didn't bother me. But it did. It broke my heart.

Every morning our class recited the Pledge of Allegiance. It was a time to be quiet, to reflect. But as the only brown girl in most of my classes, I didn't feel free to be myself in my school, in my classroom, or with my teachers and classmates. My country, America, didn't feel free to me.

I wrote this book because maybe you feel the same way sometimes. And I never want you to make my mistake and feel like you have to change any part of who you are, to fit in with people who don't love *all* of you.

Those people are the ones who need to change. It is their responsibility to learn how to love all of you better—your skin color, your language, your culture, your religion, and anything else that makes you different from them. And the best way you can help them is to always be yourself. You are not wrong to be you.

Louisiana Creole and Spanish Language

My great-grandmother and grandmother learned to speak Louisiana Creole in New Roads, Louisiana—one of the few regions where people speak the language. Louisiana Creole is one type of French Creole. Most of its speakers are descendants of slaves. It is often described as a language spoken

by the uneducated, because it is different from the French we learn in school. Today, Louisiana Creole is an endangered language. Many languages spoken by people of color are no longer in existence, but Granma and Nana retained their first language by speaking with family and friends.

As a young girl, I was fascinated by Nana's ability to navigate language. She spoke Louisiana Creole with Granma, exchanged Spanish greetings with friends and neighbors, and enjoyed sharing her rich culture with us. Unfortunately, I speak only English, but I now have the opportunity to celebrate her love for languages.

My hope is that this book will inspire you to retain, reclaim, and revitalize all of who you are, and most importantly, to write and tell your historia.



(Left) The author with her great-grandmother, Leona Duplessis (Granma).

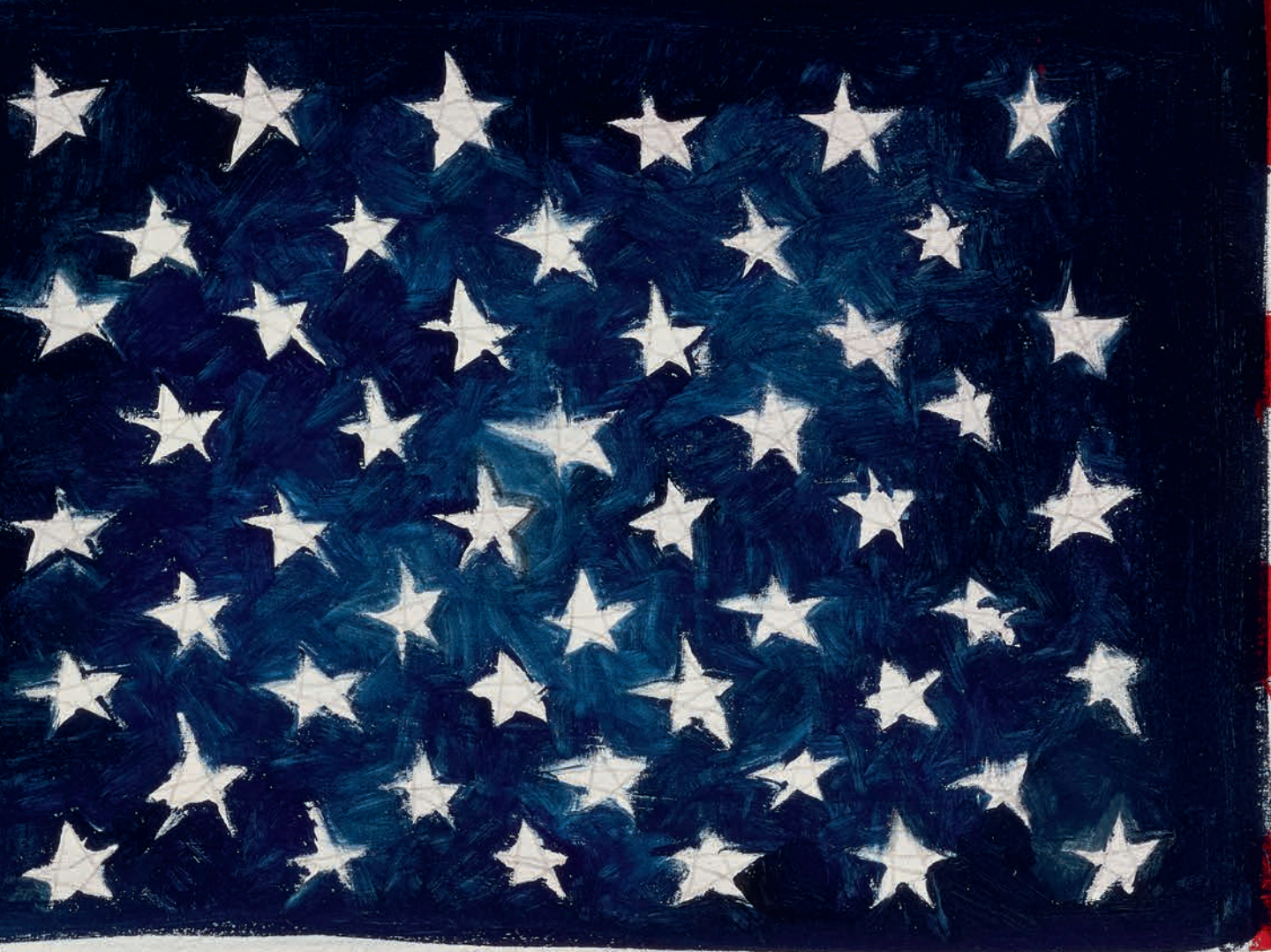


(Right) Leona Duplessis and the author's grandmother, Josephine Duplessis (Nana).



(Left) The author with Leona Duplessis.
(Right) The author with Josephine Duplessis.





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