

Loving and Hating Philadelphia

Qing Zhang

It was late at night. Out of the window, I could not see anything, except for my own shadowy outline.

I was leaning on my seat of the plane leaving for Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. The dim light around the passenger compartment failed to drag me into a respite. The moment I thought that I was going to step on the land of Eastern United States, excitement from within started to burn my heart.

It was where Philadelphia is located!

Philadelphia, the place from which I confirm my belief and where my dream begins to fly, is so special to me, initially because of a man, Allen Iverson. He was an NBA basketball player, who looked upon his every game as if his last chance to win the championship. This MAN is definitely being and going to be my spiritual guide, the breath of my entire life. Whenever I feel like I were on the edge of desperation, his unyielding courage and strong conviction displayed in the game would surface in my mind and at that time a voice rings, "Have faith! You cannot give up here! Head up!" Iverson had devoted his best golden 10 years to Philadelphia 76ers (an NBA basketball team) and been seen as one of the greatest icon in its history. As a faithful and loyal fan, it is this man who has established a closely knitted link between Philadelphia and me. This peculiar affection, to make it sound normal and understandable, reminds me of a parallel case that a pilgrimage makes his arduous journey annually the Mecca. Now I was on my way.

On the tourist bus the scenery outside of the window along the road was totally beyond my expectation. In my words, I would describe it as ugly. Unlike other cities in the U.S. after the

snow, Philadelphia did not show any clear signs- dilapidated manufacturing equipment, bald streets, unpainted buildings. Is this Philadelphia I have been dreaming for decades? Even with such enormous disappointment, the moment I took my first step on the soil, I asked my friend to picture me.

The day was gray, so was everything around me.

Under such depressing circumstances, I could not refrain from thinking about something negative, such as crime problems in this city. In fact, the problems did have achieved national and even international attention. Last year, according to the British “Times”, sociologists pointed out that Philly (a nickname for Philadelphia) has become the most violent city in the United States. Since 1988, nearly 3,000 murders have occurred in Philly. 85% of the victims are young black men, and they are killed by other blacks. A Philadelphia police said the city’s drug dealing and gangs are rampant and they are not able to control the street gunfight.

Without LA’s sunshine and New York’s glamour, I guess few people would opt the city as their permanent settlement. Unfortunately, my disappointment gradually transformed into dislike.

In front of a bell I paused.

“The bell is so poorly decorated.” I said.

“I’m afraid, yes,” a young lady smiled. She was a local tourist guide. “During the American Revolution, Philadelphia played an instrumental role as a meeting place for the Founding Fathers of the United States, who signed the nation’s Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776 and the Constitution on September 17, 1787.” Thanks to my history teacher, I remembered all the details.

“The Liberty Bell is an iconic symbol of American independence. During the Cold War, the Bell was used as a symbol of freedom and was a popular site for protests in the 1960s.”

By Professor Constance M. Greiff’s writing of the Liberty Bell, “It is not as beautiful as some other things that were in Independence Hall, and it is irreparably damaged. Perhaps that is part of its almost mystical appeal. Like our democracy it is fragile and imperfect, but it has weathered threats, and it has endured.”

And the very second, the Bell was not shabby at all. Its brilliance of freedom and independence shined radiantly. At this moment, Philadelphia was not only a place where my faith ends, but more a place where my pursuit for freedom and independence commences.

The deep-rooted history gives a sacred color to the city, so that walking in it is a constant education in improving one’s characters and recalling tough struggles of its ancestors. No other cities in America can be compared to Philadelphia in people’s fight for their independence, The conviction to my faith, the perseverance in my life and the desire for freedom draws me to Philly. Loving Philadelphia has already a dominant mood since my first glance on Allen Iverson fighting on this land. To me, being capable of studying in the U.S. in the future proves to the world that I succeed to achieve my dream and feel my value, finally.