

**American Dream/ *wanda brown***

my childhood dream of America  
is inseparable from magical words  
allegiance  
indivisible  
majesty  
alabaster

that as a girl, my mouth  
could hold these sounds  
send so many syllables into the world  
made me a small part of  
some great mystery

landlocked at the prairie's threshold  
seeing purple mountains only  
in my mind  
my heart soared in astonishing recognition  
that liberty meant not being  
tethered to the earth  
America was the freedom to be outdoors  
to read a book high in a tree, hidden

I believed pilgrims sailed across  
the shining sea so they could be  
left alone to read  
I so revered their passionate  
yearning for freedom  
I lost a spelling bee  
capitalizing the word pilgrim

in 1960, I argued with Jimmy Kolari  
about two beliefs I absorbed at home  
the Navy was better than the Army  
and Nixon should beat Kennedy

yet, a few months later I stood  
on a curb at Snelling and Larpenteur  
to watch  
a new, young President ride by  
almost close enough to touch

Mother and Dad, who looked war  
in the face overseas,  
holding democracy sacred  
a small flame in cupped hands  
treasured more than politics or party,  
drove our little family, with  
excitement and solemnity  
to honor the President chosen by most,  
leading us all  
in my mind's eye I see his smile  
beaming at me  
through the limousine window

I felt America was my place a large promise  
of something hopeful, an embrace  
now America wages wars her dear  
children yet to be born may never finish  
living in this home for half a century  
I see our hearth is red with blood  
white with death  
blue with mourning