Good morning everyone. And welcome.

My name is Jesus Diaz Gonzales and I’ll be leading this orientation today.

You are in this classroom because you’ve recently decided to immigrate to this country.

[Pause] Some of you are probably expecting me to say “congratulations”. I’m not going to say it.

My job is to give you honest information - no bullshit. I will tell you what you should expect from your life in the upcoming years. To mentally prepare you for the road ahead. Forget about the American Dream - that shit is a lie. A nice, attractive, lie. But I’m here to tell you the truth.

Now, some of you might notice my accent and say: ‘Oye Jose, talk to us in spanish, man!’. And I want to address that right from the beginning. Learn the language and learn it quick. Learn it the right way. Get rid of your accent. I’m still working on mine. It’s hard - but that is something you should be getting used to. As immigrants, we know that life is hard. In some of our cases, it has been a fucking nightmare. So, I know you’re not scared of hard work. But listen….this is a different game. It’s not about the work you’ll have to put in. It is about how much dignity you will be willing to compromise.

Wherever you came from - you had an identity. That shit does not exist anymore. You do not have a country. The game is binary - you are an american or you’re not an american. White, or not white. Simple. This is stage one. You need to put your pride to one side.

You’re going to hear a lot of ignorance - don’t pay too much attention to it. You will probably get asked if you speak Mexican, for example. And you may get asked these questions in moments when you feel extremely frustrated, tired from working all day, angry at life. And it is in those moments that you are at risk of fucking up. Because that is the time when you need to be as strong as ever to suppress the voice in your head. The voice that wants to snap back at the ignorance and yell:

“no motherfucker! I don’t speak mother-fucking Mexican. That’s not even a language, gringo ignorante. I speak Spanish….Español, entiendes?”

You have to fight that impulse….that’s the type of fight you’re going to have to get used to. And you’ll have to do it day in and day out.

Some people are going to call you lazy, not knowing that you just finished a 12 hour shift and that you’re getting ready to go to your second job. And they’ll call you lazy while they sit on the porch, under the shade, sipping on some iced lemonade, freshly squeezed from the lemons people like you just picked for them. Hay que ser bien hijo de puta. But that’s what it is in the beginning - making lemonade when you get lemons; even if you don’t get to drink it.

Oye - but it’s not all bad, you know? You eventually get to move to stage 2. Make a little money...right? Enough to become prey for banks. They’ll open their doors…..you walk in…...and by the time you walk out you will owe more than what you can make. That is part of the game. Now you get a little house, and your family starts to grow. Maybe you have son or daughter - and they remind you why you did this in the first place. All that shit was not for you. It was for them. And it’s a good time to be reminded of that, because it will distract you from the problems you constantly think about. You know? The bills that start to accumulate. The debt you’re struggling to pay. The American Dream was built on debt. And now you feel like you’re part of it.

Stage 3 - your child gets an education. Her english is perfect - no accent. In fact, at this point, she’ll make fun of you for the way you pronounce stuff. And that shit will be funny for some time….until it turns to shame. You see, she’ll be trying her hardest to fit in - and it won’t be easy. Even though she’ll speak the language perfectly, her skin color and features will get in the way. And this will make her push even harder. And the harder she pushes, the more distant she will become - distant from her culture, distant from the identity you once had. Oye but don’t take my word for it. Keep your eyes open. You’ll see these latin kids and you’ll go: “Oye chico! Como estas?” And they’ll stare back - they don’t speak spanish. And then, you will have to be ok with that. That is the decision you took. That is the decision that brought you here. You came looking for the American Dream. That shit is expensive. Not just in the work you have to put in - you already knew that. But in the things you have to give up. That’s the shit that hurts the most.

So when the time comes, don’t you ever thank the American Dream. You’ve earned everything you’ve got though hard work and dedication and sacrifice. And America is not the only country where you can do that. You don’t owe anyone anything. Besides, you’ll have nothing else to offer by the end of this. So, if you’re ok with all that, then I want you to sign the sheet on your way out. Manuel will show you where you’ll be working.

Eso es todo.

A trabajar!