

America
West Side Story: 1961 Film
Song Analysis

Lyrics	Notes
<p>ANITA Puerto Rico, My heart's devotion— Let it sink back in the ocean. Always the hurricanes blowing, Always the population growing, And the money owing, And the sunlight streaming, And the natives steaming.</p> <p>I like the island Manhattan— Smoke on your pipe and put that in!</p> <p>GIRLS (chorus) I like to be in America, O.K. by me in America, Everything free in America—</p> <p>BERNARDO For a small fee in America.</p> <p>ANITA Buying on credit is so nice.</p> <p>BERNARDO One look at us and they charge twice.</p> <p>ROSALIA I'll have my own washing machine.</p> <p>JUANO What will you have, though, to keep clean?</p> <p>ANITA Skyscrapers bloom in America.</p> <p>ANOTHER GIRL Cadillacs zoom in America.</p> <p>ANOTHER GIRL</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Puerto Rican Women are expressing the affection they have for America. They prefer it over Puerto Rico and are convinced that they have better opportunities given to them without a cost in America. 2. Bernardo has a more doubtful attitude of America compared to the girls. He believes that nothing in America is in fact free, that there are fees when it comes to living and pursuing one's dreams in America, especially as a Puerto Rican 3. Bernardo believes that the racism towards Puerto Ricans in America prevents them from having an equal opportunity to chase their dreams. As Anita mentioned having a credit card in the previous line, Bernardo doesn't think a Puerto Rican would be able to buy on credit without being discriminated because of their ethnicity. 4. During the 1950s, immigrants, such as the Puerto Ricans in West Side Story, lived in tenements and slums. They were crammed into little apartments, with many people due to what at

Industry boom in America.

BOYS

Twelve in a room in America.

ANITA

Lots of new housing with more space.

BERNARDO

Lots of doors slamming in our face.

ANITA

I'll get a terrace apartment.

BERNARDO

Better get rid of your accent.

ANITA AND THREE GIRLS

Life can be bright in America.

ALL BOYS

If you can fight in America.

ALL GIRLS

Life is all right in America.

ALL BOYS

If you're all-white in America.

(an interlude of WHISTLING and DANCING)

ANITA AND CONSUELO

Here you are free and you have pride.

BERNARDO

Long as you stay on your own side.

ANITA

Free to be anything you choose.

ALL BOYS

Free to wait tables and shine shoes.

BERNARDO

Everywhere grime in America,

the time were high prices for immigrants. They didn't live in what is now an "ideal" living space.

5. During this time, a "regular" American was a white American. So, although Puerto Ricans were in fact Americans, they weren't treated with the same respect as white Americans. This created conflict between the races, which can be evidently seen through the conflicts among the Jets and the Sharks in West Side Story.
6. During the 1950s, America was considered by many to be a place of freedom and a place where you can be what you want. In this case, the girls were happy to have left Puerto Rico because then they wouldn't have been able to chase their dreams as they can now in America.
7. The boys are suggesting that they will only be able to hold humble, lower class jobs with a low pay because of their ethnicity.
8. Anita is basically saying that if Bernardo does go back to Puerto Rico, everyone he knew there will already have moved to America because of the better lifestyle that is provided.

Organized crime in America,
Terrible time in America.

ANITA

You forget I'm in America.

(An interlude of MORE DANCING)

BERNARDO

I think I go back to San Juan

ANITA

I know a boat you can get on.

BERNARDO

Everyone there will give big cheer!

ANITA

Everyone there will have moved here

Music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.
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