

(I AM AN AMERICAN TOO)

I am an American, too -- despite the fact that my skin is dark, despite the fact that my forefathers were slaves who came over in chains sweltering in the stifling, musty hold of some ship.

Out of the hate of bondage; out of the bravest acts and words of my people of past generations; out of the necessities of a new and competing world; out of the desire for freedom, security, peace and tolerance I have tried to create and adjust my life.

In my struggle with the intolerance inflicted upon my people, out of my griefs, out of my sins, I have laid by a great store of memories. They are a part of my being -- no mere gushing of words can tell of them. They are too deeply hidden for words.

I have read of many great men of my race and of many great deeds. But I also know of many great men and of many great deeds unsung and unrecorded.....

I remember the black sharecropper kissing his wife and babies as he comes in from his fields, fields so vital, for producing the needs of all mankind, black and white, in peace time as well as in war time.

I remember the tired and grimy factory worker falling asleep on the street car as he rides home from his work, work that is so essential to the maintaining of American industries in peace time and war.

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I remember the young black youth in Mississippi or Michigan kissing his gray-haired mother good-bye as he goes to enlist for the purpose of preserving the American way of life.

I remember the same mother grief stricken and tearful as they bring her son home, his body torn and mangled, not the victim of the Japanese marauder, not the victim of the German storm trooper, but the victim of a bestial, blood thirsty malignant southern, American mob.

I remember a raving, fanatical mob, not in the South, but in Michigan, the heart of the American war industry, abetted by biased policemen, trying to prevent Negroes from moving into homes built for them, homes which were to house them while they labored to produce materials for the protection of all American mankind.

I remember the worker in the street making a song as he plies his drill or electric hammer to the pavement while the steam of black tar floats up and fills my nostrils.

I remember black mothers bending over hot, steaming washtubs, slaving, sacrificing in order to make life easier for their children.

All manner of men and women, planning, working and saving in order to give their children a better schooling than they had received. Reformers crying out against police brutality, against high rents, against discrimination in industry, against segregation in the navy and army, against inequalities in our school system; dreamers battling against the full tide

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of materialism.

I remember all these things and many more. They help to steady me when I lie awake at night or when I walk the streets in the dark nights of injustice and violence that have come over my people. I stand up straight when I walk. These are my people who have suffered but whose spirit has not been broken. Because they are Americans, too, and have faith in this land. They are of one race and of all races. They are free yet bound to the wheel of intolerance.

I turn and look at the faces around me, the black faces and the white faces. Are they not all my people? Are they not all Americans? Have they forgotten so soon the great principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence--"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Have we advanced so far, accomplished so much, suffered so much hoped for so much, all in vain? Is this new civilization to become an old civilization, where man has no regard for another man's life, liberty or happiness?

Have all our brave deeds and acts been in vain? Shall men remain civilized, justful and intolerant for so short a time? Is freedom a lie? Is brotherhood of man a lie?

What was won by courage and bravery must be retained by courage and bravery. Neither can I rest on my memories. I

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must make new memories for my children and my children's children.

However, through it all I can see a vision. Over vast prairies, beyond highest mountain tops and across the great ocean expanses, I see white men fighting side by side with me, in the air, on the seas, on the land, fighting for liberty and freedom, for they have realized at last that I am an American, too.

I Am An American Too

Reprinted from Racial Digest, May 1942

Herschel L. Richey

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Answers to Questions on Page

1. Philadelphia, built by Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Mason with money won from the Irish Sweepstakes. The Masons won \$150,000 when they were on relief in 1939.
2. Tuskegee Institute, July 19, 1941.
3. World renown scientist internationally known for his researches in the biology of the cell. He was the author of two books "General Cytology" and "Jerome Alexander's Colloid Chemistry." He died October 27, 1941.
4. Joe Louis, 1941.
5. Mississippi, 101.
6. 110.
7. Dr. Ambrose Calwer, Specialist in the U.S. Office of Education.
8. The Mason and Dixon Line was surveyed by two Englishmen, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, between 1763 and 1767. The line is of 39° 43' 26.3" north latitude and separates the states of Maryland and Pennsylvania. The line has been popularly regarded as the dividing line between the free and slave states, which in fact it was for the original states bordering on the Atlantic.
9. North Dakota, 201 in 1940.
10. Benjamin Banneker, a Negro astronomer and philosopher, in 1770.