

## I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

## Refugee in America

There are words like *Freedom*  
Sweet and wonderful to say.  
On my heart-strings freedom sings  
All day everyday.

There are words like *Liberty*  
That almost make me cry.  
If you had known what I knew  
You would know why.

## Freedom's Plow

When a man starts out with nothing,  
When a man starts out with his hands  
Empty, but clean,  
When a man starts out to build a world,  
He starts first with himself  
And the faith that is in his heart—  
The strength there,  
The will there to build.

First in the heart is the dream.  
Then the mind starts seeking a way.  
His eyes look out on the world,  
On the great wooded world,  
On the rich soil of the world,  
On the rivers of the world.

The eyes see there materials for building,  
See the difficulties, too, and the obstacles.  
The hand seeks tools to cut the wood,  
To till the soil, and harness the power of the waters.  
Then the hand seeks other hands to help,  
A community of hands to help—  
Thus the dream becomes not one man's dream alone,  
But a community dream.  
Not my dream alone, but *our* dream.  
Not my world alone,  
But *your world and my world*,  
Belonging to all the hands who build.

A long time ago, but not too long ago,  
Ships came from across the sea  
Bringing Pilgrims and prayer-makers,  
Adventurers and booty seekers,

Free men and indentured servants,  
Slave men and slave masters, all new—  
To a new world, America!

With billowing sails the galleons came  
Bringing men and dreams, women and dreams.  
In little bands together,  
Heart reaching out to heart,  
Hand reaching out to hand,  
They began to build our land.  
Some were free hands  
Seeking a greater freedom,  
Some were indentured hands  
Hoping to find their freedom,  
Some were slave hands  
Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom.  
But the word was there always:  
    **FREEDOM.**

Down into the earth went the plow  
In the free hands and the slave hands,  
In indentured hands and adventurous hands,  
Turning the rich soil went the plow in many hands  
That planted and harvested the food that fed  
And the cotton that clothed America.  
Clang against the trees went the ax in many hands  
That hewed and shaped the rooftops of America.  
Splash into the rivers and the seas went the boat-hulls  
That moved and transported America.  
Crack went the whips that drove the horses  
Across the plains of America.  
Free hands and slave hands,  
Indentured hands, adventurous hands,

White hands and black hands  
Held the plow handles,  
Ax handles, hammer handles,  
Launched the boats and whipped the horses  
That fed and housed and moved America.  
Thus together through labor,  
All these hands made America.  
Labor! Out of labor came the villages  
And the towns that grew to cities.  
Labor! Out of labor came the rowboats  
And the sailboats and the steamboats,  
Came the wagons, stage coaches,  
Out of labor came the factories,  
Came the foundries, came the railroads,  
Came the marts and markets, shops and stores,  
Came the mighty products moulded, manufactured,  
Sold in shops, piled in warehouses,  
Shipped the wide world over:  
Out of labor—white hands and black hands—  
Came the dream, the strength, the will,  
And the way to build America.  
Now it is Me here, and You there.  
Now it's Manhattan, Chicago,  
Seattle, New Orleans,  
Boston and El Paso—  
Now it is the U.S.A.

A long time ago, but not too long ago, a man said:

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL . . .  
ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR  
WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE  
RIGHTS . . .

AMONG THESE LIFE, LIBERTY  
AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

His name was Jefferson. There were slaves then,  
But in their hearts the slaves believed him, too,  
And silently took for granted  
That what he said was also meant for them.  
It was a long time ago,  
But not so long ago at that, Lincoln said:

NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH  
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN  
WITHOUT THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.

There were slaves then, too,  
But in their hearts the slaves knew  
What he said must be meant for every human being—  
Else it had no meaning for anyone.  
Then a man said:

BETTER TO DIE FREE,  
THAN TO LIVE SLAVES.

He was a colored man who had been a slave  
But had run away to freedom.  
And the slaves knew  
What Frederick Douglass said was true.  
With John Brown at Harpers Ferry, Negroes died.  
John Brown was hung.  
Before the Civil War, days were dark,  
And nobody knew for sure  
When freedom would triumph.  
"Or if it would," thought some.

But others knew it had to triumph.  
In those dark days of slavery,  
Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,  
The slaves made up a song:

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

That song meant just what it said: *Hold on!*  
Freedom will come!

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

Out of war, it came, bloody and terrible!  
But it came!  
Some there were, as always,  
Who doubted that the war would end right,  
That the slaves would be free,  
Or that the union would stand.  
But now we know how it all came out.  
Out of the darkest days for a people and a nation,  
We know now how it came out.  
There was light when the battle clouds rolled away.  
There was a great wooded land,  
And men united as a nation.

America is a dream.  
The poet says it was promises.  
The people say it is promises—that will come true.  
The people do not always say things out loud,  
Nor write them down on paper.  
The people often hold

Great thoughts in their deepest hearts  
And sometimes only blunderingly express them,  
Haltingly and stumbling say them,  
And faultily put them into practice.  
The people do not always understand each other.  
But there is, somewhere there,  
Always the *trying* to understand,  
And the *trying* to say,  
"You are a man. Together we are building our land."

America!  
Land created in common,  
Dream nourished in common,  
Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!  
If the house is not yet finished,  
Don't be discouraged, builder!  
If the fight is not yet won,  
Don't be weary, soldier!  
The plan and the pattern is here,  
Woven from the beginning  
Into the warp and woof of America:

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH  
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN WITHOUT  
THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.

BETTER DIE FREE,  
THAN LIVE SLAVES.

Who said those things? Americans!  
Who owns those words? America!

Who is America? You, me!  
We are America!  
To the enemy who would conquer us from without,  
We say, NO!  
To the enemy who would divide  
and conquer us from within,  
We say, NO!

FREEDOM!  
BROTHERHOOD!  
DEMOCRACY!

To all the enemies of these great words:  
We say, NO!

A long time ago,  
An enslaved people heading toward freedom  
Made up a song:  
*Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!*  
That plow plowed a new furrow  
Across the field of history.  
Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped.  
From that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow.  
That tree is for everybody,  
For all America, for all the world.  
May its branches spread and its shelter grow  
Until all races and all peoples know its shade.

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

Sleepy giant,  
You've been resting awhile.

Now I see the thunder  
And the lightning  
In your smile.  
Now I see  
The storm clouds  
In your waking eyes:  
The thunder,  
The wonder,  
And the young  
Surprise.

Your every step reveals  
The new stride  
In your thighs.

Democracy will not come  
Today, this year  
Nor ever  
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
To stand  
On my two feet  
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,  
*Let things take their course.*  
*Tomorrow is another day.*  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted  
In a great need.  
I live here, too.  
I want freedom  
Just as you.