

SING OUT AMERICA

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The people who first came to this country from Europe three hundred years ago were running away from a country where they were not free to live as they wished. Members of different religious groups came here to set up a governemtn where they could run things as they wished. Sadly, these same people often were unkind to others, and rights were denied to those who came later and who happened to worship God in a different way. Even when religious freedom came to America through the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, many people were looked down on because of their religion. Some people could not hope to be elected to public office because of their religion. Many people could not get a good job because of their religion. Even today in our great country, there are hotels where some people cannot stay because of their religion, and there are businesses which will not hire some people because of their religion.

But in 1968 the big problem in America is not religious prejudice. This problem has been getting better all the time. The big problem in 1968 has to do with skin color. For some reason this is a problem which our country has tried not to see. In 1860 our country was almost 100 years old. ^{america} it was called the greatest democracy in the world, yet the people had to fight a civil war then to free the slaves. A civil war is a war between brothers who have not learned to live together in the same house. So there was war. Tens of thousands of white men killed each other to settle this point. When the war was over, the point seemed to be settled. Not only white men would be free in America, but black men also.

One poet wrote a song in those years, a song called the "Battle Hymn of the Republic". The poet wrote, "God is sifting out the hearts of men". That is, he is getting rid of the bad in men's hearts, so that the pure and honest part will remain. The poet tried to say that sometimes God acts through people, he acts through people who try to help other people. Let us sing now this song called, "Battle Hymn of the Republic".

For a while in America, it seemed that God was "marching on". ^{it seemed} That the people who believed in total freedom were "marching on". It seemed that justice was on the way for all people - but somehow the march ended before it passed God's reviewing stand. Somehow the marchers got tired, and broke ranks, and each one went his separate way. The parade was over. Today 100 years after the

Civil War, 200 years after the beginning of our country, a new march is beginning, a new wave of energy and desire and hope is on its way. The situation reminds me of thousands of years ago when the Romans ruled the land of the Jews. The Jews were sharply divided then into three different groups. One group, called the Zealots, wanted to go to war against the Romans, even though the Romans were far stronger. One group, called the Essenes, gave up completely and ran away to the desert. Another group, called the Pharisees, tried to find the only practical way, the way of being alert and doing whatever you can, short of violence. This group helped Judaism to survive. The other groups were of no help to it.

So today, in America there are men who say the only way out is violence, burning, killing. Some of the people talking this way are white. Some are black. But there are many good and wise men in the middle, people who say, let's not have any shooting and burning because we are all brothers, and we will find a way. This is the way of work. This is the way of honesty. This is the way of watchful trustfulness, of controlled agitation, of patient pressing, of willing sacrifice, of deliberate sharing.

Those who think this way are those who trust the soul of America. It is these who have the "patriot's dream," the King's dream, the dream of "gleaming cities undimmed by human tears." People cry, you know, because they are lonely or hurt. They cry because they think nobody loves them, because they're hungry, because life seems to have no purpose. The poet dreamed of gleaming cities in America undimmed by human tears, undimmed by hunger and hatred and ignorance. And gleaming cities, - - not lit up by the destructive fires of hate gone astray - but lit up by understanding and forgiveness and caring. To make America in this image, we must first be able to dream, the dream as the prophets dreamed, to dream as Martin Luther King dreamed, to dream the dream of children who have not yet learned to hate and who still know how to sing. Now, let us join in singing, a song about the dream, it's called, "America The Beautiful".