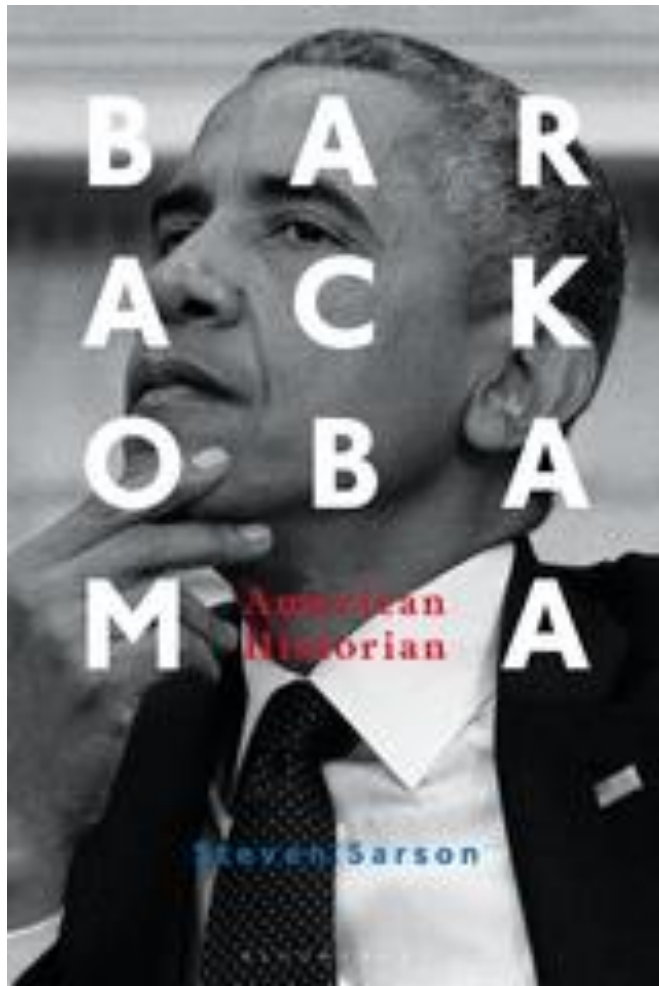


“All men are created equal?
Barack Obama and the American Revolution”

steven.sarson@univ-lyon3.fr





WITH A NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR
BARACK OBAMA

*Dreams from
My Father*

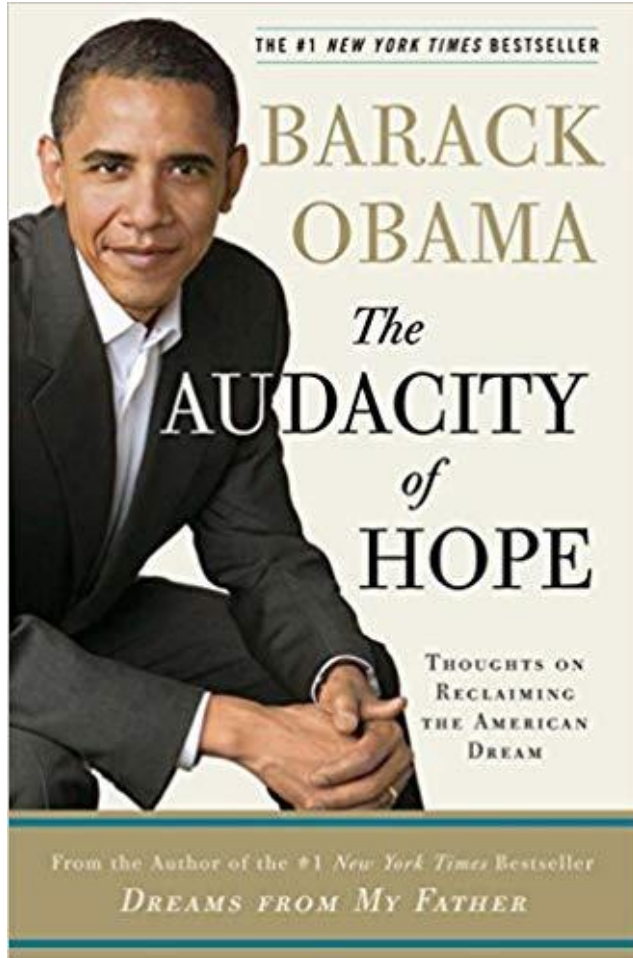


A Story of Race and Inheritance

"Perspective and wit, this book will tell you
something about yourself, whether you are black or white."

—MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN





THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

BARACK
OBAMA

The
AUDACITY
of
HOPE

THOUGHTS ON
RECLAIMING
THE AMERICAN
DREAM

From the Author of the #1 New York Times Bestseller
DREAMS FROM MY FATHER

Change We Can Believe In: Barack Obama's Plan to Renew America's Promise (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008)

Mary Frances Berry and Josh Gottheimer, *Power In Words: The Stories Behind Barack Obama's Speeches, from the State House to the White House* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010)

E. J. Dionne, Jr. and Joy-Ann Reid, eds., *We Are the Change We Seek: The Speeches of Barack Obama* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017)

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room>

“Our pride is based on a very simple premise, summed up in a declaration made over two hundred years ago: ‘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.’”

Keynote Speech, Democratic National Convention, Boston, 2004

“The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.”

First Inaugural Address, 2009

“What makes us exceptional—what makes us American—is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’”

Second Inaugural Address, 2013

“... the conviction that we are all created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Farewell Address, 2017

“We the people, in order to form a more perfect union.” Quoting the first line of the Constitution.’

Two hundred and twenty one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America’s improbable experiment in democracy. Farmers and scholars; statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.

The document they produced was eventually signed but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by this nation’s original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least twenty more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations.

Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution – a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.”

“A More Perfect Union,” Philadelphia, 2008

“What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this, what greater form of patriotism is there than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals?”

That’s why Selma is not some outlier in the American experience. That’s why it’s not a museum or a static monument to behold from a distance. It is instead the manifestation of a creed written into our founding documents: ‘We the People...in order to form a more perfect union.’ ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’

These are not just words. They’re a living thing, a call to action, a roadmap for citizenship and an insistence in the capacity of free men and women to shape our own destiny. For founders like Franklin and Jefferson, for leaders like Lincoln and FDR, the success of our experiment in self-government rested on engaging all of our citizens in this work. And that’s what we celebrate here in Selma. That’s what this movement was all about, one leg in our long journey toward freedom.”

“For We Were Born of Change,” Selma, Alabama, 2015

“WE HOLD THESE truths to be self-evident, that all men are Created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness’: “our common creed.”
The Audacity of Hope, p 53

“Creed”

“1 a. A form of words setting forth authoritatively and concisely the general belief of the Christian Church, or those articles of belief which are regarded as essential; a brief summary of Christian doctrine: usually and properly applied to the three statements of belief known as the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds.

1 b. A repetition of the creed, as an act of devotion.

1. c. More generally: A formula of religious belief; a confession of faith, *esp.* one held as authoritative and binding upon the members of a communion.

2 a. An accepted or professed system of religious belief; the faith of a community or an individual, *esp.* as expressed or capable of expression in a definite formula.

2 b. *transf.* A system of belief in general; a set of opinions on any subject, *e.g.* politics or science.

2 c. Belief, faith (in reference to a single fact). *rare.*”

Oxford English Dictionary

“Words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part—through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk—to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.”

“A More Perfect Union,” Philadelphia, 2008

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

**To The Honorable Counsel & House of [Representa]tives for the State of
Massachusitte [Massachusetts] Bay in General Court assembled, Jan. 13, 1777.**

The petition of A Great Number of Blackes detained in a State of slavery in the Bowels of a free & Christian Country Humbly shewith [showeth] that your Petitioners apprehend that thay [they] have in Common with all other men a Natural and Unaliable [inalienable] Right to that freedom which the Grat Parent of the Unavers hath Bestowed equalley on all menkind and which they have Never forfeuted by any Compact or agreement whatever—but thay wher Unjustly Dragged by the hand of cruel Power from their Derest friends and sum of them Even torn from the Embraces of their tender Parents—from A popolous Pleasant and plentiful contry and in violation of Laws of Nature and off Nations and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity Brough hear Either to Be sold Like Beast of Burthen & Like them Condemnd to Slavery for Life—Among A People Profesing the mild Religion of Jesus A people Not Insensible of the Secrets of Rational Being Nor without spirit to Resent the unjust endeavours of others to Reduce them to a state of Bondage and Subjection your honouer Need not to be informed that A Life of Slavery Like that of your petioners Deprived of Every social privilege of Every thing Requisit to Render Life Tolable is far worse then Nonexistence.

[In Imitat]ion of the Lawdable Example of the Good People of these States your petitioners have Long and Patiently waited the Evnt of petition after petition By them presented to the Legislative Body of this state and cannot but with Grief Reflect that their Success hath ben but too similar they Cannot but express their Astonishment that It has Never Bin Consirdered that Every Principle form which Amarica has Acted in the Cours of their unhappy Dificultes with Great Briton Pleads Stronger than A thousand arguments in favowrs of your petioners they therfor humble Beseech your honours to give this petion [petition] its due weight & consideration & cause an act of the Legislatur to be past Wherby they may be Restored to the Enjoyments of that which is the Naturel Right of all men—and their Children who wher Born in this Land of Liberty may not be heald as Slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty one years so may the Inhabitance of this Stats No longer chargeable with the inconsistancy of acting themselves the part which they condem and oppose in others Be prospered in their present Glorious struggle for Liberty and have those Blessing to them, &c.

The Constitution of the United States (1787)

Branches of government/separation of powers/checks and balances

Legislature: Congress—Senate/House of Representatives

Executive: President

Judiciary: Supreme Court

Federalism: federal and state governments

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

The Bill of Rights (1791)

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Amendment II

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Amendment III

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Amendment V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Amendment VI

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

Amendment VII

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

Amendment VIII

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

Amendment IX

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

Amendment X

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

Constitutional clauses concerning slavery

Article I, Section 2, Clause 3

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.

Article I, Section 9, Clause 1

The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.

Article IV, Section 2, Clause 3

No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.

“John Kerry calls on us to hope. John Edwards calls on us to hope.... It’s the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs. The hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores.”

Keynote Speech, Democratic National Convention, Boston, 2004

“Words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part – through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk - to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.”

“A More Perfect Union,” Philadelphia, 2008

... it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things ... who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom. For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and travelled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and ploughed the hard earth. For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sahn.”

First Inaugural Address, 2009

“When our children look at Harriet Tubman’s shawl or Nat Turner’s bible or the plane flown by Tuskegee Airmen, I don’t want them to be seen as figures somehow larger than life. I want them to see how ordinary Americans could do extraordinary things; how men and women just like them had the courage and determination to right a wrong, to make it right.

I want my daughters to see the shackles that bound slaves on their voyage across the ocean and the shards of glass that flew from the 16th Street Baptist church, and understand that injustice and evil exist in the world. But I also want them to hear Louis Armstrong’s horn and learn about the Negro League and read the poems of Phyllis Wheatley. And I want them to appreciate this museum not just as a record of tragedy, but as a celebration of life.

When future generations hear these songs of pain and progress and struggle and sacrifice, I hope they will not think of them as somehow separate from the larger American story. I want them to see it as central—an important part of our shared story.”

National Museum of African American History and Culture, Groundbreaking ceremony, 2012

“Slavery was wrong in every sense. Stealing men, women, and children from their homelands. Tearing husband from wife, parent from child; stripped and sold to the highest bidder; shackled in chains and bloodied with the whip....

It’s antithetical not only to our conception of human rights and dignity, but to our conception of ourselves—a people founded on the premise that all are created equal.”

Remarks commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment, 2015

“On behalf of the great state of Illinois, crossroads of a nation, Land of Lincoln, let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention.”

Keynote Address, Democratic National Convention, Boston, 2004

“It was here, in Springfield, where North, South, East and West come together that I was reminded of the essential decency of the American people - where I came to believe that through this decency, we can build a more hopeful America....

And that is why, in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln once called on a divided house to stand together, where common hopes and common dreams still, I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for President of the United States....

In the face of secession, we unified a nation and set the captives free....

For that is our unyielding faith - that in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it.... That's what Abraham Lincoln understood. He had his doubts. He had his defeats. He had his setbacks. But through his will and his words, he moved a nation and helped free a people. It is because of the millions who rallied to his cause that we are no longer divided, North and South, slave and free....

By ourselves, this change will not happen. Divided, we are bound to fail. But the life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible. He tells us that there is power in words. He tells us that there is power in conviction. That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people. He tells us that there is power in hope. As Lincoln organized the forces arrayed against slavery, he was heard to say: ‘Of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought to battle through.’ That is our purpose here today. That’s why I’m in this race. Not just to hold an office, but to gather with you to transform a nation.... Together, starting today, let us finish the work that needs to be done, and usher in a new birth of freedom on this Earth.”

Announcement of presidential candidacy, Springfield, Illinois, 2007

It [the election campaign] drew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on doors of perfect strangers, and from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized and proved that more than two centuries later, a government of the people, by the people and for the people has not perished from the Earth.

Those are values that we all share. And while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress.... As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours, we are not enemies but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.

Presidential election victory speech, 2008

“The best I can do in the face of our history, is remind myself that it has not always been the pragmatist, the voice of reason, or the force of compromise, that has created the conditions for liberty. The hard, cold facts remind me that it was unbending idealists like William Lloyd Garrison who first sounded the clarion call for justice; that it was slaves and former slaves, men like Denmark Vesey and Frederick Douglass and women like Harriet Tubman, who recognized power would concede nothing without a fight. It was the wild-eyed prophecies of John Brown, his willingness to spill blood and not just words on behalf of his visions, that helped force the issue of a nation half slave and half free.”

The Audacity of Hope, 97

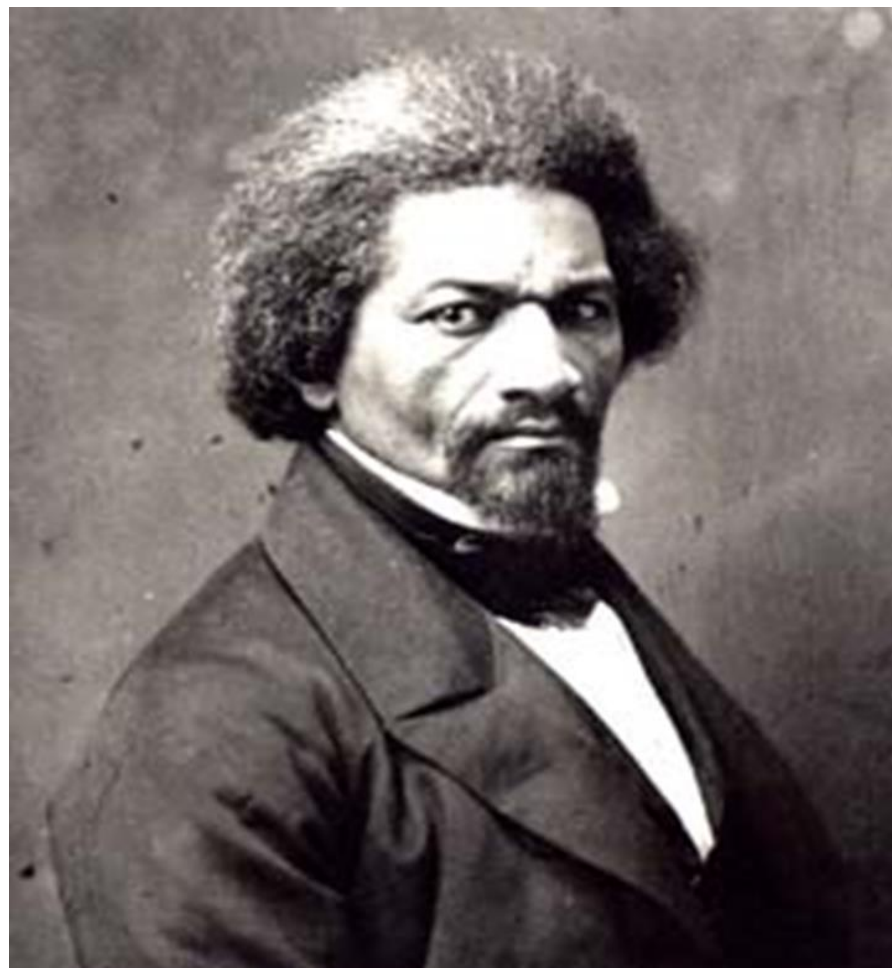
William Lloyd Garrison



Denmark Vesey



Frederick Douglass



Harriet Tubman



John Brown



“I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or to speak, or write, with moderation. No! no! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen;—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.”

The Liberator, January 1, 1830. Online: <http://fair-use.org/the-liberator/>

Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro,” in Philip S. Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings, Abridged and Adapted by Yuval Taylor* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1999), 188 to 205 and online via PBS: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927t.html>

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that 'all men are created equal.'

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who died here, that the nation might live. This we may, in all propriety do. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have hallowed it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; while it can never forget what they did here.

It is rather for us the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863. Online at US National Archives:
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Gettysburg.html>

“Roll, Jordan Roll”:

Went down the River Jordan,
Where John baptized three,
When I walked the Devil in Hell,
Said John ain’t baptized me,

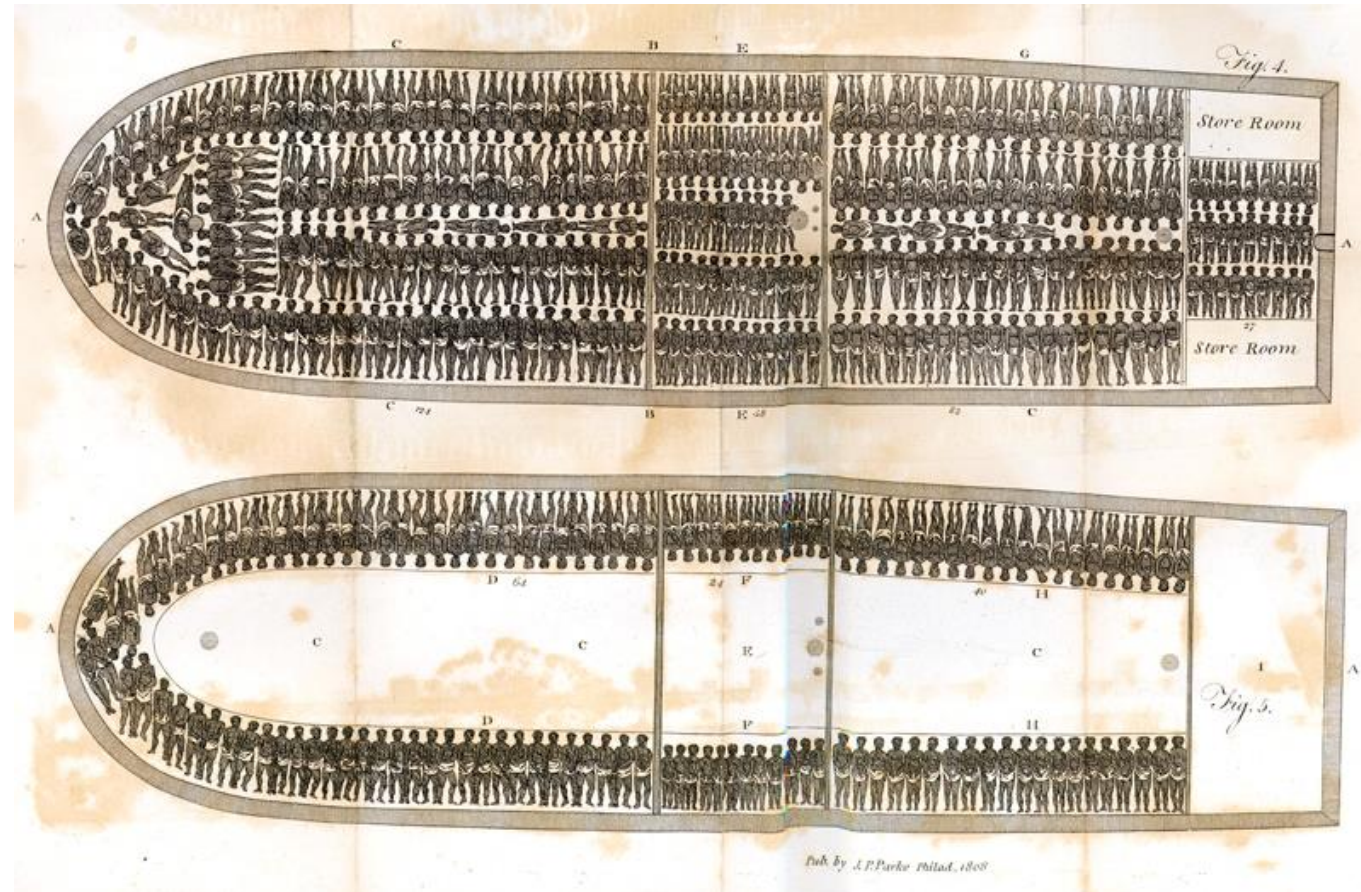
*I said, roll, Jordan, roll,
Roll, Jordan, roll,
My soul ought to rise in heaven, Lord,
For the year when Jordan rolls,*

Well, some say John was a Baptist,
Some say John was a Jew,
Well, I say John was a preacher,
And my bible says so too,

*I said, roll, Jordan, roll,
Roll, Jordan, roll,
My soul ought to rise in heaven, Lord,
For the year when Jordan rolls, Hallelujah....*



From Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, & Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-trade by the British Parliament*



“Am I Not A Man and Brother” Wedgwood abolitionist images



Slave Auction Advertisement, South Carolina, 1769

TO BE SOLD on board the
Ship *Bance-Island*, on tuesday the 6th
of *May* next, at *Ashley-Ferry*; a choice
cargo of about 250 fine healthy



NEGROES,
just arrived from the
Windward & Rice Coast.
—The utmost care has
already been taken, and
shall be continued, to keep them free from
the least danger of being infected with the
SMALL-POX, no boat having been on
board, and all other communication with
people from *Charles-Town* prevented.

Austin, Laurens, & Appleby.

N. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the
SMALL-POX in their own Country.

Slave Runaway Advertisement, Kentucky, 1838

\$150 REWARD



RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of the 2d instant, a negro man, who calls himself *Henry May*, about 22 years old, 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, ordinary color, rather chunky built, bushy head, and has it divided mostly on one side, and keeps it very nicely combed; has been raised in the house, and is a first rate dining-room servant, and was in a tavern in Louisville for 18 months. I expect he is now in Louisville trying to make his escape to a free state, (in all probability to Cincinnati, Ohio.) Perhaps he may try to get employment on a steamboat. He is a good cook, and is handy in any capacity as a house servant. Had on when he left, a dark cassinett coat, and dark striped cassinett pantaloons, new—he had other clothing. I will give \$50 reward if taken in Louisville; 100 dollars if taken one hundred miles from Louisville in this State, and 150 dollars if taken out of this State, and delivered to me, or secured in any jail so that I can get him again.

WILLIAM BURKE.

Hardstoun, Ky., September 3d, 1838.

“We saw justice turn a blind eye to mobs with nooses slung over trees. We saw bullets and bombs terrorize generations.”

Remarks commemorating of 150th Anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment, 2015

“And when commemorating the March on Selma the same year, he noted that “Fifty years ago, registering to vote here in Selma and much of the South meant guessing the number of jellybeans in a jar or bubbles on a bar of soap. It meant risking your dignity, and sometimes, your life.”

“For We Were Born of Change,” Selma, Alabama, 2015

“How far we’ve come from the days when the son of sharecroppers would huddle by the radio as the crackle of Dr. King’s dreams filled his heart with hope. He was often forced to leave school to work in the fields and the public library was off-limits to his kind, and yet young John Lewis sought knowledge.”

John Lewis’s 65th Birthday Gala, *Atlanta, Georgia*, 2005

“And yet, through all this, the call to freedom survived. ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident.’ And eventually, a new generation rose up to march and organize, and to stand up and to sit in with the moral force of nonviolence and the sweet sound of those same freedom songs that slaves had sung so long ago.... Calling out for basic justice promised to them almost a century before.”

Remarks commemorating of 150th Anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment, 2015

“There are places and moments in America where this nation’s destiny has been decided. Many are sites of war—Concord and Lexington, Appomattox, Gettysburg. Others are sites that symbolize the daring of America’s character—Independence Hall and Seneca Falls, Kitty Hawk and Cape Canaveral. Selma is such a place.

What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this, what greater form of patriotism is there than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals? That’s why Selma is not some outlier in the American experience.... It is instead the manifestation of a creed written into our founding documents: ‘We the People ... in order to form a more perfect union.’ ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

“For We Were Born of Change,” Selma, Alabama, 2015

“Young folks with bedrolls and backpacks were milling about. Veterans of the movement trained newcomers in the tactics of non-violence; the right way to protect yourself when attacked. A doctor described what tear gas does to the body, while marchers scribbled down instructions for contacting their loved ones. The air was thick with doubt, anticipation and fear. Selma—the strength and courage of non-violence.... The courage of ordinary Americans willing to endure billy clubs and the chastening rod; tear gas and the trampling hoof; men and women who despite the gush of blood and splintered bone would stay true to their North Star and keep marching towards justice.”

“For We Were Born of Change,” Selma, Alabama, 2015

“And if there’s anything we can learn from this living saint sitting beside me, it is that change is never easy, but always possible. That it comes not from violence or militancy or the kind of politics that pits us against each other and plays on our worst fears; but from great discipline and organization, from a strong message of hope, and from the courage to turn against the tide so that the tide eventually may be turned.”

John Lewis’s 65th Birthday Gala, *Atlanta, Georgia*, 2005

The Little Rock Nine: “The students who walked passed angry crowds [to] integrate our schools.”

“For We Were Born of Change, Selma, 2015



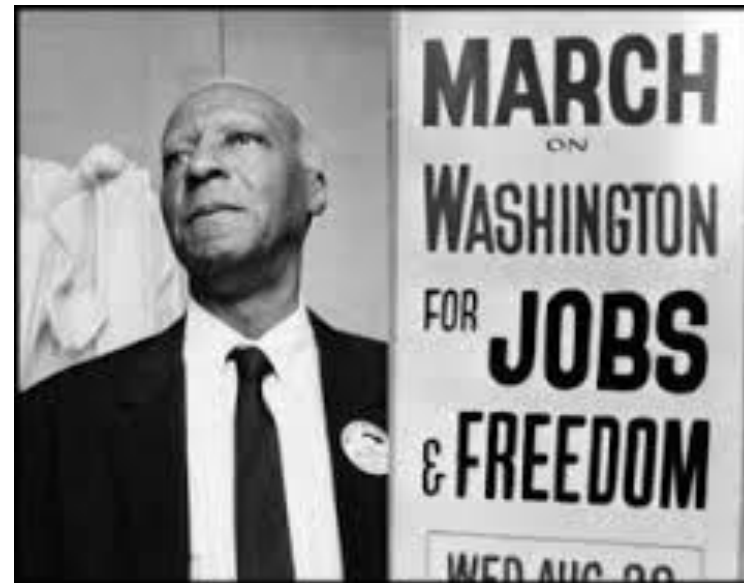
“It’s the maids who decided, you know what, I’m tired of segregation and I’m going to walk for my freedom. It’s the porters who not only worked tirelessly to support their families, but ultimately helped bring about the organization that led to better working conditions for all Americans here in the United States. It’s about our moms and grandparents and uncles and aunts who just did the right thing and raised great families, despite assaults on their dignity on every single day.”

Opening ceremony of National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2016

Rosa Parks



A. Philip Randolph



“In time, their chorus would well up and reach President Johnson. And he would send them protection, and speak to the nation, echoing their call for America and the world to hear: ‘We shall overcome.’”

“We know the march is not yet over. We know the race is not yet won. We know that reaching that blessed destination where we are judged, all of us, by the content of our character requires admitting as much, facing up to the truth. If Selma taught us anything, it’s that our work is never done. The American experiment in self-government gives work and purpose to each generation. Fifty years from Bloody Sunday, our march is not yet finished, but we’re getting closer. Two hundred and thirty-nine years after this nation’s founding our union is not yet perfect, but we are getting closer.”

“For We Were Born of Change,” Selma, Alabama, 2015

AMENDMENT XIII (Passed by Congress Jan 31, 1865. Ratified Dec 6, 1865)

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

AMENDMENT XIV (Passed by Congress June 13, 1866. Ratified July 9, 1868)

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

AMENDMENT XV (Passed by Congress Feb 26, 1869. Ratified Feb 3, 1870)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude--

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896):

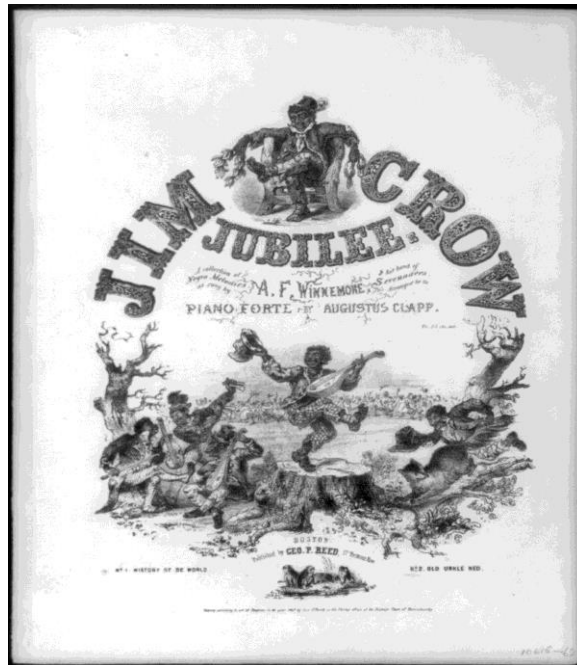
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/163/537/case.html>

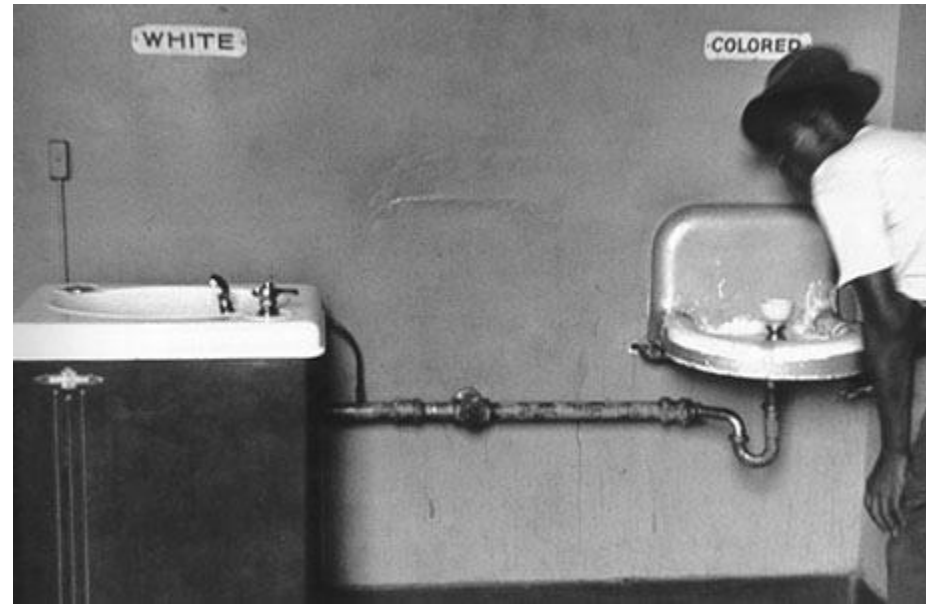
Williams v. Mississippi (1898):

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/170/213/case.html>

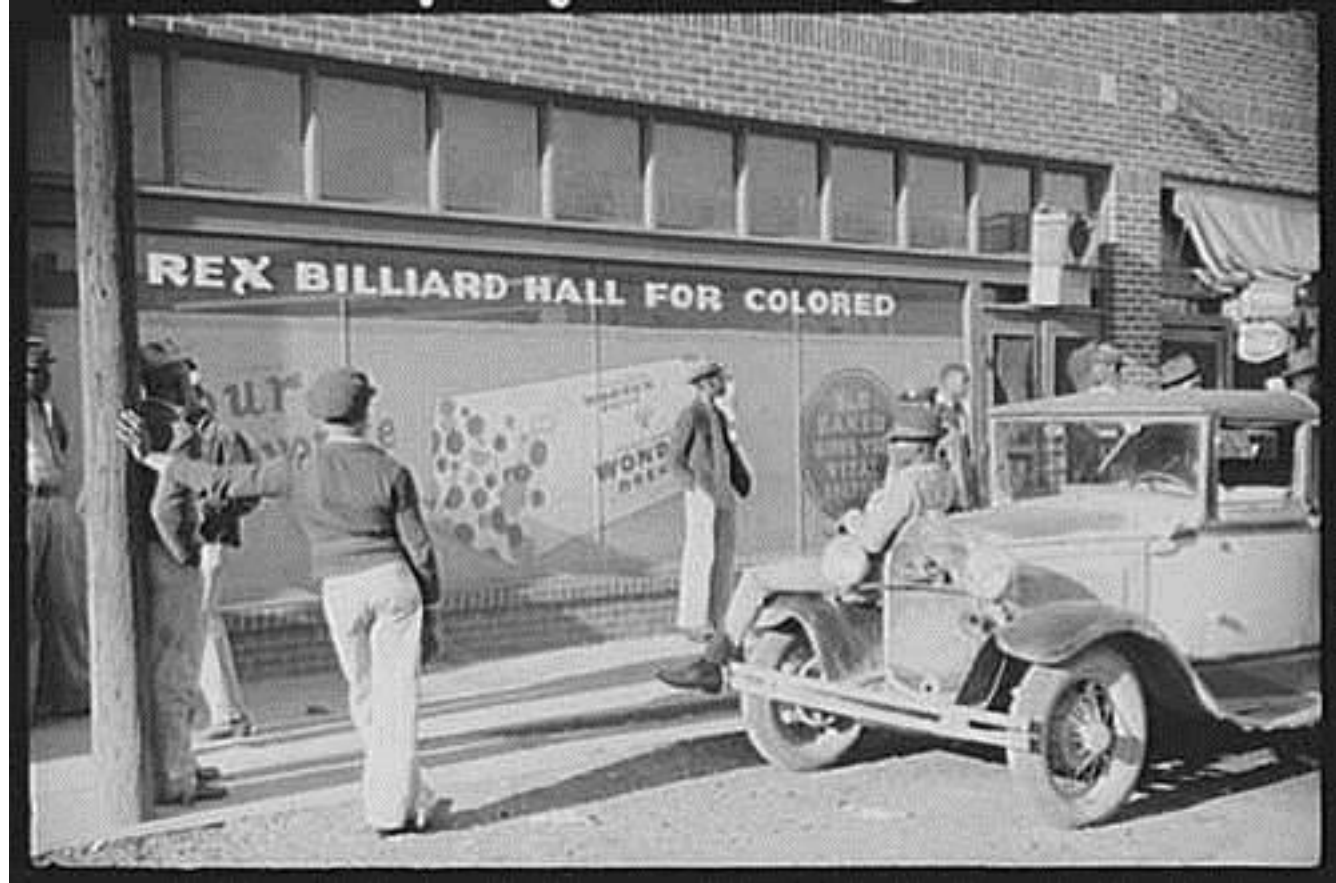
Brown v. Board of Education (1954):

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/347/483/case.html>













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And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."

Martin Luther King, I Have a Dream, 1963

Edmund Pettus Bridge, 1965



Edmund Pettus Bridge, 2015





“For we were born of change,” Selma, Alabama, 2015

“For we were born of change,” he said. “We broke the old aristocracies, declaring ourselves entitled not by bloodline, but endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights. We secure our rights and responsibilities through a system of self-government, of and by and for the people. Look at our history.

We are Lewis and Clark and Sacajawea, pioneers who braved the unfamiliar, followed by a stampede of farmers and miners, and entrepreneurs and hucksters. That’s our spirit. That’s who we are.

We are Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer, women who could do as much as any man and then some. And we’re Susan B. Anthony, who shook the system until the law reflected that truth. That is our character.

We’re the immigrants who stowed away on ships to reach these shores, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free—Holocaust survivors, Soviet defectors, the Lost Boys of Sudan. We’re the hopeful strivers who cross the Rio Grande because we want our kids to know a better life. That’s how we came to be.

We’re the slaves who built the White House and the economy of the South. We’re the ranch hands and cowboys who opened up the West, and countless laborers who laid rail, and raised skyscrapers, and organized for workers’ rights.

We're the fresh-faced GIs who fought to liberate a continent. And we're the Tuskegee Airmen, and the Navajo code-talkers, and the Japanese Americans who fought for this country even as their own liberty had been denied.

We're the firefighters who rushed into those buildings on 9/11, the volunteers who signed up to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq. We're the gay Americans whose blood ran in the streets of San Francisco and New York, just as blood ran down this bridge.

We are storytellers, writers, poets, artists who abhor unfairness, and despise hypocrisy, and give voice to the voiceless, and tell truths that need to be told.

We're the inventors of gospel and jazz and blues, bluegrass and country, and hip-hop and rock and roll, and our very own sound with all the sweet sorrow and reckless joy of freedom.

We are Jackie Robinson, enduring scorn and spiked cleats and pitches coming straight to his head, and stealing home in the World Series anyway.

We are the people Langston Hughes wrote of who 'build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how.' We are the people Emerson wrote of, 'who for truth and honor's sake stand fast and suffer long;' who are 'never tired, so long as we can see far enough.'"

Presidential Victory Speech, Chicago, 2008

This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight's about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing - Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.

She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons - because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.

And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America - the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can.

At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. Yes we can.

When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs, a new sense of common purpose. Yes we can.

When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness, and a democracy was saved. Yes we can.

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that We Shall Overcome. Yes we can.

A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination.

And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change.

