



The North Meridian Review

Manuscript 1086

Woman Singing

Nancy Cook

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/thenorthmeridianreview>

“WOMAN SINGING”

NANCY COOK¹

America, for thee we sing.
This December day, our song an aria.
not choked by blind history. Breathe
the open-air promise of emancipation.
Stand tall. Hear: Woman singing.²

We'll walk hand in hand. For I have a dream -
that we shall all be free. O sweet soprano
of harmony: Woman singing.
Testimony to the fierce urgency of Now.
We are not afraid. We will live in peace.³

Sing with me! Celebrate the election
of America's first Black president.
Can you hear? Woman singing!
America, America, God shed his light
on thee. America, we are one.⁴

Solidarity white on the darkest
of Saturday Nights. Nothing is funny.
Below a cracked glass ceiling: Woman singing.
And even though it all went wrong... Stand
before the Lord of Song, sing Hallelujah.⁵

¹ *Woman Singing* is the title of a short story by Simon Ortiz. The story's protagonist falls in love with another man's wife because her singing takes him back to his native homeland. Turning to the music he hears into his own song, the man finds the strength to return to his People. A central theme of the story is that language can help heal damage done by racism and poverty.

² On Easter Sunday, 1939, contralto Marian Anderson gave a concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial before an estimated crowd of 75,000. The concert was arranged by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, at the urging of first lady Eleanor Roosevelt and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People executive secretary Walter White, after Anderson had been denied the opportunity to perform at DAR Constitution Hall explicitly on the basis of her race. *America* ("My Country Tis of Thee") was the first song Anderson performed, and the words "for thee we sing" were substituted for "of thee I sing."

³ On August 28, 1963, at the conclusion of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial, in which he referenced "the fierce urgency of now." Among the performers at the event was 22-year-old Joan Baez, who sang what was rapidly becoming the anthem for the Civil Rights Movement, *We Shall Overcome*.

⁴ "We are One" was the theme of Barack Obama's 2008 inauguration. Beyoncé sang *America the Beautiful* at the event, then invited everyone on stage and in the audience to join in to sing it.

⁵ Singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen died on November 7, 2016, the day before Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton in that year's presidential election. Dressed in Suffragette white, Kate McKinnon, cast member of NBC's *Saturday*

O, say can you see the rockets' red glare -
it's a perilous fight, and shame will get you
blacklisted. But this night, see: bright stars,
bursting, on the world stage. Women singing,
star-spangled, living hope, dawn's light.⁶

The dulcet echo of a French horn.
More than music, heroism: Woman singing.
For every woman. My country tis of thee.
I have not lost my voice. Persist. Find one word
and then another. This the promise of. America.⁷

Night Live who often played Clinton in comedy sketches, opened the November 12 *SNL* episode with a somber rendition of Cohen's most venerated song, *Hallelujah*.

⁶ The Chicks (formerly the Dixie Chicks) sang the National Anthem on the final day of the 2020 Democratic National Convention. They had last performed the song at the 2003 Super Bowl, just months before publicly expressing "shame" over fellow Texan George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq. The group was blacklisted by country music stations and performance venues for the comment.

⁷ Former Arizona Congresswoman (2003–2012) Gabby Giffords spoke at the 2020 Democratic National Convention. Her brief talk, which was preceded by a clip of her playing *America* ("My Country Tis of Thee") on the French Horn, was remarkable not only for its focus on gun control but because Giffords herself was the victim of an assassination attempt in 2011. Shot in the head at close range with a 9 mm pistol, she is still recovering from her injuries which include aphasia, an impairment of speech and language.