

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

We Shall Overcome

ZILPHIA HORTON, FRANK HAMILTON, GUY CARAWAN, AND PETE SEEGER

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This stirring song, derived perhaps from the gospel song “I’ll Overcome Someday” composed in 1901 by Reverend Charles Albert Tindley (1851–1933), became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. Can you understand why? How are the different themes of the various verses—courage, togetherness, truth, the Lord, peace, unity, the whole wide world, community, friendship, racial comity, and freedom—related to each other and to the song’s repeated refrain and title, “We Shall Overcome”? Are the song’s many goals truly harmonizable? Fully realizable? Does it matter if they are not?

For a musical rendition, watch Joan Baez perform “We Shall Overcome” in 1965: www.youtube.com/watch?v=DILh1H3PLtU.

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day,

(Chorus)

Oh, deep in my heart I do believe
We shall overcome some day.

We’ll walk hand in hand,
We’ll walk hand in hand,
We’ll walk hand in hand some day,

(Chorus)

The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free some day

(Chorus)

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The Lord will see us through,
The Lord will see us through,
The Lord will see us through some day,

(Chorus)

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We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day,

(Chorus)

We shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace, someday,

(Chorus)

We are not afraid,
We are not afraid,
We are not afraid some day,

(Chorus)

The whole wide world around,
The whole wide world around,
The whole wide world around some day

(Chorus)

WE SHALL OVERCOME. Musical and Lyrical adaptation by Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan, and Pete Seeger. Inspired by African American Gospel Singing, members of the Food & Tobacco Workers Union, Charleston, SC, and the southern Civil Rights Movement. TRO-(c) Copyright 1960 (Renewed) and 1963 (Renewed) Ludlow Music, Inc., New York, NY International Copyright Secured. Made In U.S.A. All Rights Reserved Including Public Performance For Profit. Royalties derived from this composition are being contributed to the We Shall Overcome Fund and The Freedom Movement under the Trusteeship of the writers. Used by Permission.