

Ballad for Americans

By:Paul Robeson

Music by Earl Robinson; lyrics by John Latouche

In Seventy-Six, the sky was red,
Thunder rumbling overhead,
Bad King George couldn't sleep in his bed,
And on that stormy morn,
Ol' Uncle Sam was born! Some birthday!

Ol' Sam put on a three-cornered hat,
And in a Richmond church, he sat,
And Patrick Henry told him that
While America drew breath,
It was liberty or death! What kind of hat is a three-cornered hat?

Did they all believe in liberty in those days?

Nobody who was anybody believed it.
Everybody who was anybody, they doubted it.
Nobody had faith. Nobody. Nobody but....
Washington, Tom Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Chiam Solomon,
Crispus Attucks, Lafayette.... Nobodies!

The nobodies ran a tea party at Boston.
Betsy Ross organized a sewing circle.
Paul Revere had a horse race.

And a little ragged group believed it,
And some gentlemen and ladies believed it,
And some wise men and some fools,
And I believed it, too,
And you know who I am!

No, who are you, mister?
Yeah, how come all this?

Well, I'll tell you. It's like this....

No! Let us tell you!
Then, Mister Tom Jefferson, a mighty fine man,
He wrote it down in a mighty fine plan,
And the rest all signed it with a mighty fine han',
As they crossed their T's and dotted their I's,
A bran' new country did arise!

And a mighty fine idea!

Adopted unanimously in Congress,
July Fourth, Seventeen-Seventy-Six.

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 rights are life! Yes, sir!
Liberty! That's right!
And the pursuit of happiness.

Is that what they said?

The very words!

That does sound mighty fine.

Building a nation is awful tough,
The people found the going rough,

And thirteen states weren't large enough,
So they started to expand
Into the western lands! "Whoops" and "shouts."

Still, nobody who was anybody believed it.
Everybody who was anybody, they stayed at home.
But Lewis and Clarke and the pioneers,
Driven by hunger, haunted by fears,
The Klondike miners and the Forty-Niners,
Some wanted freedom and some wanted riches,
Some liked to loaf while others dug ditches,
But they believed in it.
And I believed it, too,
And you know who I am!

No, who are you anyway, mister?

Well, you see, it's like this. I started to tell you.
I represent the whole.... Why, that's it!

Let my people go! That's the idea!

Old Abe Lincoln was thin and long,
His heart was high and his faith was strong,
But he hated oppression, he hated wrong,
And he went down to his grave
To free the slave!
Man in white skin can never be free,
While his black brother is in slavery,
And we here highly resolve that these dead
Shall not have died in vain,
And government of the people, by the people, and for the people
Shall not perish from the earth!

Abraham Lincoln said that
On November Nineteenth, Eighteen-Sixty-Three
At Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

And he was right. I believe that, too.

Say, we still don't know who you are, mister.

Well, I started to tell you.

The machine age came with a great big roar,
As America grew in peace and war,
And a million wheels went around and 'round,
The cities reached into the sky
And dug down deep into the ground,
And some got rich and some got poor,
But the people carried through,
So our country grew.

Still, nobody who was anybody believed it.
Everybody who was anybody, they doubted it.
And they are doubting still,
And perhaps they always will.
But who cares what they say when I am on my way?

Say, will you please tell us who you are?
What's your name, buddy?
Where're you goin'?
Who are you?

Well, I'm the everybody who's nobody.
I'm the nobody who's everybody.

What's your racket?

What do you do for a living?

Well, I'm an engineer, musician,
Street cleaner, carpenter, teacher.

How about a farmer? Also.
Office clerk? Yes, sir!
Mechanic? That's right!
Housewife? Certainly!
Fact'ry worker? You said it!
Stenographer? Yes, ma'am!
Beauty specialist? Absotively!
Bartender? Definitely!
Truck driver? Miner? Steamstress? Ditchdigger?

All of them. I am the "etceteras"
And the "and so forths" who do the work.

Now hold on here. What are you trying to give us?
Are you an American?

Am I an American?
I'm just an....
Irish, Negro, Jewish, Italian, French and English,
Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish,
Scot, Hungarian, Litvak, Swedish,
Finnish, Canadian, Greek and Turk and Czech,
And double-check American!
And that ain't all!

I was baptized Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist,
Lutheran, Atheist, Roman Catholic,
Orthodox Jewish, Presbyterian,
Seventh Day Adventist, Mormon, Quaker,
Christian Scientist,
And lots more!

You sure are something!

Our country's strong, our country's young,
And her greatest songs are yet unsung,
From her plains and mountains,
We have sprung to keep the faith
With those who went before.
We nobodies who are anybodies believe it.
We anybodies who are everybodies have no doubts!

Out of the cheating, out of the shouting,
Out of the murders and lynchings,
Out of the windbags, the patriotic spouting,
Out of uncertainty and doubting,
Out of the carpetbag and the brass spittoon,
It will come again,
Our marching song will come again.
Simple as a hit tune,
Deep as our valleys,
High as our mountains,
Strong as the people who made it.

For I have always believed it,
And I believe it now,
And you know who I am!

Who are you?

America! America! America! Ah