

# Soulful Songs and Stories

With a song and your stories, we co-create a soft place for hard conversations and a brave space for personal and spiritual growth. Then **Magic** Happens.



Photo by Gordon Parks, 1956<sup>1</sup>

**#215: Standing on the Side of Love Sideline: Black Lives Matter as a metaphor for “Talkin’ Loud and Sayin’ Nothing”**

**Hi Soulful Song Lovers and Story Tellers,**

**Claudia Rankine described an encounter that she said is not all that uncommon for her.**

A white man approached to her to tell her how much he appreciated her award-winning 2014 poetry collection *Citizen: An American Lyric*, which describes everyday acts of racism experienced by Black Americans. He then asked her: “What can I do for you?”

“Nothing,” answered Rankine, the Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry at Yale. The man angrily ended the conversation.

The problem with the question, explained Rankine at the awards luncheon, is that it assumed that she was the one with a problem, “as if when a white person is not in the room, I can experience racism by myself.”

<https://news.yale.edu/2018/03/12/poet-claudia-rankine-speaks-about-confronting-racism-head-her-writing>

**Rev. Jaye Brooks:** <https://youtu.be/kBJLo4Y7orA?t=662> 3:37 (Rankine segment ends at 14:39)

**“I Shall Not Be Moved,” Traditional** (predates the 1908 copyright)

**Rhiannon Giddens<sup>2</sup>, Francesco Turrisi** <https://youtu.be/nhhC9sauZPI> 4:58

**Mississippi John Hurt** <https://youtu.be/qCioacoWkzq> 3:29

**The Black Lives Matter Banner, 2017**

At the all-congregation retreat in 2017 there was a discussion of racism, with an emphasis on white supremacy. Two responses stood out. One woman vehemently rejected the term, at least as it applied to her, and launched into an “after all I’ve done for them” speech. Later in the conversation someone asked why we didn’t put up a “Black Lives Matter” banner. One person innocently asked, “Can’t we just give it to the maintenance staff to put up?,” thinking the problem was logistical or personnel related, rather than just not wanting to put it up.

**Moral muteness** is engrained in many organizations' cultures. In Swiss banking, it is the business model. —A former Credit Suisse employee, quoted by David Crane in *Muck Rack Daily*, Feb 21, 2022

There is no more neutrality in the world, **you either have to be part of the solution or you're going to be part of the problem.** —Eldridge Cleaver

**If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.** —Desmond Tutu

**“Talkin’ Loud and Sayin’ Nothing,” James Brown & Bobby Byrd/  
James Brown** <https://youtu.be/qgUBnDiAsww> 3:14

Lyrics: <https://genius.com/James-brown-talkin-loud-and-sayin-nothing-lyrics>

**“I’m Bound For Higher Ground,” Traditional/Hackney  
Pentecostal Apostolic Church** <https://youtu.be/RvIItjDyl4Y?t=240> 4:52

**“Saying One Thing and Doing Another,”**

**South Park, Season 7, Episode 4, April 9, 2003**

<https://southpark.cc.com/video-clips/y6qlhb/south-park-saying-one-thing-and-doing-another> 1:39

**I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is the white moderate,** who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” .... I have watched white church people stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities.

—**Martin Luther King, Jr.**, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963

[https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

**When the Saints Go Marching In** (Traditional folk/gospel>jazz standard)  
**Joshua Stewart & The Bourbon Street Stompers**

[https://youtu.be/R\\_UFFoFKsA](https://youtu.be/R_UFFoFKsA) 8:38

**Doreen Ketchens** <https://youtu.be/jQgBVjsEeGA> 4:09

**“P.O.W.” (Prisoner of Words) Def Poetry Jam, Alicia Keys**

<https://youtu.be/AkSObnpCimA?t=47> 3:21

Are we prisoners of platitudes and clichés? Of pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities?

## “Just Give Me My Equality,” Teresa M. Bejan

Nina Simone’s 1964 song “Mississippi Goddam”<sup>3</sup> ends on a bracing note of bone-weariness. Too many false and broken promises, too many times Black Americans have been told to “go slow” in the battle for civil rights. “You don’t have to live next to me,” Simone sings, “just give me my equality!” This line, propelled by Simone’s voice, punctures her audience’s complacency. The right of every human being, Black or white, to equality: What could be clearer?

After so much disillusionment, what role can equality possibly still play in our visions of a more just world? In her unsettlingly brilliant new book, *Unconditional Equals*, British political theorist Anne Phillips cites Simone as evidence of the profound power and urgency of equality as a political ideal while also exploring the ways that discussions of equality, whether in politics or philosophy [or theology], can go wrong. Amidst growing suspicion that **equality talk is cheap**, Phillips emphasizes just how far self-professed egalitarians still have to go in the realization of their ideals.

—*Boston Review*, Feb 7, 2022 <https://bostonreview.net/articles/just-give-me-my-equality>

## “A Change Is Gonna Come,” Sam Cooke

<https://youtu.be/wEBlaMOMKV4> 3:10

## “What it Means to Be in the Arena,” Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

There is no movement, there is no effort, there is no unionizing, there is no fight for the vote, there is no resistance to draconian abortion laws, if people think that the future is baked in and nothing is possible and that we’re doomed. Even on climate—or especially on climate. And so the day-to-day of my day job is frustrating. So is everyone else’s. I ate shit when I was a waitress and a bartender, and I eat shit as a member of Congress. It’s called a job, you know?

So, yes, I deal with the wheeling and dealing and whatever it is, that insider stuff, and I advance amendments that some people would criticize as too little, etc. I also advance big things that people say are unrealistic and naïve. Work is like that. It is always the great fear when it comes to work or pursuing anything. You want to write something, and, in your head, it’s this big, beautiful Nobel Prize-winning concept. And then you are humbled by the words that you actually put on paper.

And that is the work of movement. That is the work of organizing. That is the work of elections. That is the work of legislation. That is the work of theory, of concepts, you know? And that is what it means to be in the arena.

—Interview with David Remnick, *New Yorker*, Feb 14, 2022, <https://bit.ly/InTheArena>

## The Black Lives Matter Banner, 2022

Shelter Rock’s **Eighth Principle Taskforce** is charged with coordinating and challenging all entities of the congregation to engage in actions that eradicate racism and oppression in all aspects of congregational life. On February 17, the Task Force presented a recommendation to the Board of Trustees to put a Black Lives Matter banner at the entrance driveway on Shelter Rock Road, knowing that this would violate North Hills Village Ordinance 140. The Social Justice Committee thought this was so important that they encouraged supporters to attend the meeting.

After the presentation, the Board's Members-at-Large and Social Justice Committee guests were blindsided when the Board held discussions of the proposal in secret (aka "executive session") with a bevy of lawyers apparently "more devoted to 'order' than to justice." The proposal was rejected.

**Hypocrisy can afford to be magnificent in its promises, for never intending to go beyond promise, it costs nothing.**

—Edmund Burke

**Politeness: The most acceptable hypocrisy.** —Ambrose Bierce

**Hypocrisy: prejudice with a halo.** —Ambrose Bierce

**"Love Will Tear Us Apart," Joy Division/Amythyst Kiah**

<https://youtu.be/iuuLiX6IYxc> 2:51

You cry out in your sleep / All my failings exposed / And there's taste in my mouth  
As desperation takes hold / Just that something so good / Just can't function no more

**"This Little Light of Mine"<sup>4</sup>**

**Bruce Springsteen, Sessions Band** <https://youtu.be/RoqAYqIGVec> 3:08

**Gene Harris** <https://youtu.be/OIC3muh6Tag> 8:23

**Odetta** <https://youtu.be/SR9pjERlryA?t=93> 3:22

**If you're shocked, you're not paying attention.**

**"I am shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here."** —Captain Renault, in *Casablanca* <https://youtu.be/HMIyDf3gBoY> 7 sec.

**Action speaks louder than words but not nearly as often.**

—Mark Twain

**I wore black because I liked it.** I still do, and wearing it still means something to me. It's still my symbol of rebellion—against a stagnant status quo, against our hypocritical houses of God, against people whose minds are closed to others' ideas.

—Johnny Cash

**We hang on to our values,** even if they seem at times tarnished and worn; even if, as a nation and in our own lives, we have betrayed them more often than we care to remember. We can make claims on their behalf, so long as we understand that our values must be tested against fact and experience, **so long as we recall that they demand deeds and not just words.**

—Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*

**Speak Strong: Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Don't be mean when you say it.** —Meryl Runion, book title

## **“Benedictus,” from *The Armed Man: a Mass for Peace* Karl Jenkins/2 Cellos; Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra**

[https://youtu.be/f\\_RjIPuqyc](https://youtu.be/f_RjIPuqyc) 7:13

## **Karl Jenkins/Aaron VanderWeele, Euphonium; NY Staff Band**

<https://youtu.be/HyaMg8XpKAY> 4:56

**Today we remember the abolitionists as radicals on behalf of racial equality. But their radicalism is also owed to their civic irreverence.** —Maxwell G. Burkley

<https://thebaffler.com/salvos/apostasy-for-all-burkey>

**As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master.** This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy. —Abraham Lincoln

**“I’ve Been Biked,” Traditional** [https://youtu.be/yqRXo\\_ZIRwY](https://youtu.be/yqRXo_ZIRwY) 4:31 ▼7:30

**“Night Song,” Nina Simone/Nikki Giovanni** <https://youtu.be/c55iAdjzrI>

**Javon Jackson, tenor sax; Jeremy Manasia, piano;  
David Williams, bass; McClenty Hunter, drums**

<https://www.knxx.org/jazz/2022-02-16/saxophonist-javon-jackson-poet-nikki-giovanni-collaborate-on-album-of-gospel-hymns-spirituals>

**And why does it make you sad** to see how everything hangs by such thin and whimsical threads? Because you’re a dreamer, an incredible dreamer, with a tiny spark hidden somewhere inside you which cannot die, which even you cannot kill or quench and which tortures you horribly because all the odds are against its continual burning. In the midst of the foulest decay and putrid savagery, this spark speaks to you of beauty, of human warmth and kindness, of goodness, of greatness, of heroism, of martyrdom, and it speaks to you of love. —Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*

**“Spiegel im Spiegel (Mirror in the Mirror),” Arvo Pärt/Jürgen Kruse, piano; Benjamin Hudson, viola**

<https://youtu.be/TJ6Mzvh3XCc> 10:10

*Who is the more honorable person: the one who says “Black Lives Matter” is racist (as a Shelter Rock member said recently) or the person who endorses the Eighth Principle but continues to believe in white supremacy and remains silent in the face of injustice? Or the person who walks the talk of justice?*

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1. “Her Name Was Shirley,” Dr. Reniqua Allen-Lamphere, *Esquire*, Feb 23, 2022

<https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/a38269023/life-magazine-gordon-parks-photo-true-story-shirley-allie-lee-causey>

2. Rhiannon Giddens is a 2017 MacArthur Fellow

3. “Mississippi Goddam,” Nina Simone, <https://youtu.be/LJ25-U3jNWM>

<https://genius.com/Nina-simone-mississippi-goddam-lyrics>

4. <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/24/679895682/how-the-civil-rights-movement-transformed-this-little-light-of-mine>

For a primer on systemic racism, watch *Critical Race Theory: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*

[https://youtu.be/EICprvGlh\\_U](https://youtu.be/EICprvGlh_U) 28:07 (Feb 21, 2022; strong language)

**Oh God, forgive us** for intellectualizing and romanticizing freedom,  
and thank you for people like Martin Luther King, Jr.  
who live and struggle with the real thing.

You know we find freedom scary.

We're safe and comfy the way we are,  
and we don't want to give up anything we have,  
and we certainly don't want any more responsibility than we have already.  
That's why we've gladly surrendered our freedom—  
to governments and employers,  
to lovers and lawyers,  
to churches and committees,  
to systems and ideologies.

**We celebrate equality** of race, gender, and class,  
but because of our own insecurities, it sure makes us feel good  
to have a little more power and a few tiny little prejudices  
to make us think we're just a little bit better than others.

We celebrate diversity while we embrace unanimity;  
we celebrate your Gospel, but are threatened by those  
who embody its liberating and revolutionary essence.

**We even assuage our liberal consciences** by giving out fish  
instead of teaching people how to fish.

God ... help us.

Help us to stop putting Band-Aids on symptoms,  
and help us to oppose systems that disempower.

Help us overcome our penchant and predilection for oppression—  
of ourselves and others.

Help us realize that freedom is as much of a burden  
as sails are to a ship, or wings are to a bird.

**Thanks a lot for all the saints,**

and for all the good people who may not be so saintly,  
and for our friendly helpers.

Be with us all, but especially with those who are oppressed by poverty, racism,  
bureaucracies, religion, disease, loss, pain, separation, anxiety, and addiction.

**Give to us your grace,**

and the moral vision to know what is good,  
the courage to do the right thing,  
and the strength to do it.

Maybe then we'll know what it means to be free at last,  
and maybe we'll even thank you, God Almighty,  
that we're free at last.

**Amen.**