

# MASSES

&

*Mainstream*

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## *The Negro Citizen Before the Bar*

By **BEULAH RICHARDSON**

I stand before the bar of justice,  
in the 'star chamber,' lily white,  
I, the Negro citizen must wage battle  
and weigh the price they would exact of me

My peers, with mink enshrouded dignity  
file into their places.  
And fittingly,  
erase the smile of boredom from their faces  
to assume the countenance of civic objectivity.

The Negro clerk, with servile step of one  
who can no longer run in this race for life  
places my case into the hands of the bailiff  
who bids me rise.  
The gavel sounds . . .  
I stand before my judge.

Your honors,  
were I a fool, I would within my tenement tinder box,  
restricted place,  
cautiously feed my thoughts on the rapid progress of my race.  
And even as I flee before the flames that yearly devour  
my childrens' lives,  
join the refrain of gradually,  
and inquire most casually for whom the bell tolls.  
But I am not a fool.  
Nor will I be both your victim and the tool  
of my native land's destruction.  
So I choose to speak.

In the name of all we hope for in the human dream of freedom  
does it seem meet a nation question the loyalty  
of that citizen whom it denies even the right to be  
secure in his person . . .  
safe beneath the eagle's wing?  
Is that not the law, is that not the dream?  
Do you expect I should abandon that dream  
before I've tasted of its fullness?  
Think you I have arrived at such a state of wretchedness  
that you could now order me to finger human liberty?

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## Beulah Richardson

"Come, come," you say,  
 "are you, have you ever been?"  
 "Come," you say, "name names,  
 tell us where, with whom and when?  
 You had better tell us true  
 everything you say will be used against you.  
 Come, incriminate yourself.  
 By God in heaven swear!"

In answer I say here, here,  
 I am he who in the halls of congress you have called  
*God damned black son-of-a-bitch!*  
 Wherefore do you bid me swear in the name of a Deity  
 by whom I am already damned?  
 Or, are there two,  
 One who damns me and One who loves you?  
 And if there is but one can it be  
 that after all he is a respecter of persons?  
 accomplice in your fight against my human rights?

Contempt, you say?  
 I speak not contemptuously.  
 What human utterance could express this court's contempt  
 of me?  
 Though you slay me that is the smallest price  
 as I now count the cost you have placed on life.  
 From behind the blood-stained shield of justice  
 you bid me yield up that which makes me human!  
 But, despite your acts, loopholes, hidden clause  
 your supreme opinion,  
 men are not dogs, to heel, point, roll over and lie down.  
 No kin is he to the blood-hound tracking human prey.  
 His but to do, say according to his conscience.  
 His not to do or die at the order of a master.  
 His always to reason why and avoid the disaster,  
 the awful calamity of being neither man nor beast  
 but beneath all things!  
 This is your price.  
 You would tear from my throat the unearthly cry,  
 "I'm a rat and a spy and I want to die."

Oh NO!  
 Your jails imprison honest citizens  
 who found that price too dear to pay.  
 Charge them as you will.  
 With infamous tongue declare that they with force and violence  
 seek to overthrow the American way.  
 To that I must say this:  
 I've stumbled, trudged along that way  
 and too often have come upon the mangled and dismembered  
 corpse of some black citizen  
 done to death in the true tradition.  
 I've wandered past open doors where labels like iron bars  
 make vast luxurious prisons  
 and the smiling inmates take their pale pleasure  
 from the galling cup of custom.

*Beulah Richardson*

I've boarded a train where the ticket purchased humiliation.  
 Full well, too well  
 I know the crimes of this nation against the souls of man,  
 your American way,  
 so like Rome's Appian road of yesteryear.  
 Along its treacherous curves and turns  
 have met traveling there  
 the many and varied victims of your doctrine of despair.

But then, I wandered upon another path  
 and came upon sacred ground,  
 searching, yea, rising and falling  
 I somehow found that bright, broad highway  
 paved with brotherhood, friendship and love.  
 Won with struggle and courage bold  
 bought with brave patriots' blood.  
 I will march here with these,  
 the soldier citizens,  
 hewers of democracy.  
 the peace loving people of this nation  
 fighting ever to make it free!  
 and speak with these the speech of hope,  
 that even the fearful will dare to whisper,  
 the suffering heave sighs of relief,  
 the army of the toiling millions  
 knot their fists and stamp their feet  
 with a thundering, "AMEN"!

I, the Negro citizen will be numbered among these  
 the many,  
 shouting the alarum,  
 Come, they murder human liberty  
 come stake your claim for freedom  
 never surrender humanity!  
 The amassed and gathering millions  
 will banish from the earth your living hell  
 and together striving onward, upward  
 we will forge a liberty bell  
**THAT WILL NOT CRACK!**  
 To that, I pledge undying loyalty!

