

Image: Black bird



*Sing: Burden down, Lord, burden down. Since I laid my burden down. Burden down Lord, burden down. Since I laid my burden down.*

My people come from the deep south red dirt village of Natchez, Louisiana. They worked as sharecroppers on the surrounding plantations of Cane River. Yes, they were free, but free to go where and to do what? They stayed where they could afford to stay and did what they knew how to do. Picked cotton, stitched garments, cared for children, and cooked for big crowds. They served their Misterns and Missus, and they hung from trees.

They raised their children to have better lives than they did. They took them to church, instilled the love and fear of God in them. They loved the cross yet feared its burning silhouette on their houses.

*Sing: Ain't gwine lay my lignon down. No, ain gwine lay my lignon down, Children. Ain gwine lay my lignon down. Ain gwine lay my lignon down. - From "I Been Boked"*

They sent them to school to learn all they could. They raised them to leave the fields and dirt. They raised their children to believe that education would be the key to real freedom.

I am the first generation not born on a plantation. I am the first generation to go to college.

But freedom comes at a cost. We are saddled with debt and passed over for promotions. Redlined and rebuked for making so called bad decisions. We receive inordinately long jail sentences for what is now viewed as legal. We are beaten and beg for solitary confinement. We are shot on the street for all to see by those sworn to protect us. We offer respect and it is not returned.

*Sing: Who'll be a witness for my Lord? Who'll be a witness for my Lord? Who'll be a witness for my Lord? My soul is a witness for my Lord.*

But we, like our people before us, shall overcome. We shall not be moved. We, too, have a dream. We, too, are America. And we shall look back and wonder how we got over. Because now we know that true freedom resides within.

*Sing: I feel better, so much better, since I laid my burden down. Glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burden down.*