



## I am an American!

We say it without any swagger or brag, just those four words.

We speak them softly; just to ourselves.

We roll them on the tongue, touching every syllable, getting the feel of them, the enduring flavor.

We speak them honorably, thankfully, reverently: **I am an American.**

They are more than words; they are the sum of the lives of a vast multitude of men, women and children.

They are a manifesto to mankind: speak those four words anywhere in the world, and those who hear will recognize their meaning.

They are a pledge. A pledge that stems from a document which says: All men are created equal, and go on from there.

A pledge to those who dreamed that dream before it was set to paper; to those who have lived it since, and those who have served and died for it.

Those words are a covenant with a great host of Americans; Americans who put their share of meaning into them.

Listen, and you can hear the voices echoing, words that sprang while hot from bloody lips, torn bodies and lost limbs.

Don't give up the ship... Fire until she melts... Damn the torpedoes... Full speed ahead!

Laughing words, June warm words, words cold as January ice:

Chants like: I've come from Alabama with my banjo on my knee... Pike's Peak or bust... In God We Trust!

When you say it smile... with malice towards no one, charity for all, and with firmness in the right... I am not a White man, Black man, an Indian or Asian; **I am American.**

You can hear men in assembly summoned to Philadelphia, hear the scratch of their quills as they wrote words for the hour and produced a document for the ages.

You can hear them demanding guarantees for which they suffered through the hell of war, hear a Yankee voice intoning the text of ten brief amendments.

You can hear the slow cadences of a gaunt and weary man at Gettysburg, dedicating not a cemetery, but a Nation.

You can hear those echoes as you walk along the streets, hear them in the rumble of traffic; you can hear them as you stand at the lathe, in the roaring factory, hear them in the clack of train wheels, in the drumming roar of the airliner; hear them in the corn fields and the big woods and the mountains and the valleys.

But they aren't words any longer; they are a way of life, a

pattern of living. They're the dawn that brings another day in which to get on the job.

They're the noon whistle, with a chance to get the kinks out of your back, to get a bowl of soup, a plate of beans or a cup of coffee.

They're evening with another days' work done; supper with the wife and kids; a movie or a computer game, newspaper or a magazine and no Gestapo snooping at the door threatening you because of your race.

They are a pattern of life as lived by a free people, freedom that has its roots in rights and obligations.

The right to go to a church with a cross, a star, a dome, a steeple, or not go to any church at all; and the obligation to respect others in the same right.

To gather on a street corner, to shout your opinion, and the obligation to curb your tongue now and then...

The right to go to school, to learn a trade, to enter a profession, to earn an honest living; and the obligation to do an honest day's work.

The rights to put your side of an argument in the hands of a jury; and the obligation to abide by the laws you and your delegates have written in the statute books.

The right to choose who shall run our government for us, the right to a secret vote that counts just as much the next fellows in the final tally; and the obligation to use that right, guard it, and keep it safe.

We have the right to hope, to dream, to pray; and the obligation to serve your country in some manner.

These are some of the meanings of those four words, meanings we don't stop to tally up or even list.

Only in the stillness of a moonless night, or the quiet of a Sunday afternoon, or in the thin dawn of a new day, when our world is close about us, do they rise up in our memories and stir our hearts.

Not today... for today we are talking of war and remembering Pearl harbor, Korea, Viet Nam, Desert Storm, and September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and muttering the names of madmen who wish to destroy those four words.

They're plain words those four simple words, **I am an American.**

You could write them on your thumbnail or sweep them across the sky, or engrave them in stone, or carve them on the mountain ranges. You could sing them to the tune of "Yankee Doodle Dandy".

But you need not do any of those things, for those words are graven in the hearts of all Americans regardless of their origins.

But when we speak them we speak them softly, proudly, gratefully and as our currency say upon it: **In God we Trust!**

**I am an American!**

*From an American Veteran*