

America Is My Country: The Heritage of a Free People¹

By Kenneth M. Stamp²

About half of the book is devoted to teaching children how "We Americans Honor the Symbols of Our Democracy" (the flag, the American eagle, the Statue of Liberty, etc.); which are "The Patriotic Landmarks and Monuments Every American Should Know" (Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Mount Vernon, etc.); which are the best-known "Patriotic Poems and Songs for Americans" ("Old Ironsides," "I Am an American," etc.); and which are "The Patriotic Holidays that Americans Celebrate."

The substantive chapters are the following:

1. What It Means to Be an American
3. Our Documents of Freedom
4. Uncle Sam's Government in Washington
5. Washington, Capital of Our Nation
7. Great Americans Express the Spirit of Our Nation
10. Good Americans Make Democracy Work

How the Negro fares in these six chapters is easily described: he doesn't exist—he is never mentioned. He doesn't appear in the index; and, although the book is profusely illustrated, he does not appear in any of the photographs. The explanation for this is not white chauvinism but timidity—the desire not to offend anyone. Since this book was first published in 1955, it was still possible not to be too concerned about offending Negroes.

Actually, the book exudes a vague sort of good will toward all men. On page 3 there is this statement: "We Americans are different in a very important way from the people of most countries. . . . [Unlike other countries] we Americans do not come from one national stock. We are descended from people of many nationalities—English, Scotch, Irish, German, Scandinavian, Italian, Polish, Russian, and so on. . . . We believe that our country is stronger and richer and more vigorous because our people come from many lands." The omission of Negroes, Asians, and Indians in this statement is an example of the timidity characteristic of this book.

¹ Harriett M. Brown and Joseph F. Guadagnolo, *America Is My Country: The Heritage of a Free People*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961. This is a supplementary textbook for grade eight.

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