

## Slaves

Great pyramids, rise up from the desert to challenge the stars.  
Oh monument to pharaoh, the living god, who built thee?  
Surely, not pharaoh and the dead gods he worshipped.

Mighty acropolis, the height of the city,  
The home of the great gods Zeus and Athena;  
Who built thee?

Not Socrates.

Not Plato.

Not the great kings who bowed before thee.  
What rough hands carved thy marble wonder?  
How many backs were lashed to create your beauty?

*Aeterna Roma*, who built your great pagan temples?  
Who built your mighty coliseum?  
How many backs were lashed to create your beauty?  
Who built your aqueducts?  
Aqueducts that perpetually flows into each century.  
Slaves, truly the most came from the least.

Great White House, cradle of democracy, eternal seat of freedom,  
Who cast thy heroic bronze statues?  
Who carved thy pristine white marble walls?  
Did the lazy dark people build this citadel of freedom?  
How many slaves' backs were lashed to create our great White House?  
Truly, the slaves who crawled through your backdoor built your front door.

By

*Tolbert Small*

## Working Man

I am a working man.  
I grow, chopped, and sampled your cotton.  
I toiled the red clay of Mississippi.  
I survived, though denied education and the right to vote.  
I survived your lynchings.  
I survived racism, a living relic of slavery.  
I suffered indignities and injustice because of my color, but  
I did not give up. I kept my manhood.

I moved north to the promised land.  
I built your trucks.  
I ran your factories.  
I scoured your floors.  
I lived in your tenements.  
I too am a working man.

I raised my family with a strong voice.  
I taught them right from wrong.  
I taught them dignity amidst poverty.  
I taught them love and responsibility.  
I taught them the meaning of struggle.  
I built this nation.  
I too am a working man.  
I too am an American.

At the age of eightyeight,  
I embrace death with a kiss.  
Death has ended my suffering.  
To die is not a tragedy,  
If one has lived and fought the good life.  
In my last journey, I will not bow my head.  
For I am a man.  
I am an American.  
I built this nation.

To my father,  
William Monroe Small  
August 13, 1903  
April 18, 1992

By  
To Albert Small

## Harriet Tubman

Before I be a slave, I will be dead in my grave  
and go home to my maker and be free.

Harriet Tubman: "I was a stranger in a strange land;  
I was free and they should be free also."

The Poet: "Like the northstar, love guides the true revolutionist."

John Brown: "You are a general who led your slave troops through the swamps,  
up the mountains, and across our vast lands."

Vox Populi: "Go down Moses, let my people go."

The Poet: "My people were brought to the shores of America  
not for the American dream but for the American nightmare."

Before I be a slave, I will be dead in my grave  
and go home to my maker and be free.

For the love of my people,  
once again I crawl through the embers of hell.  
Through fleeting storms and the scorching sun,  
I carried my precious cargo northward.  
With a sky for a roof, leaves for a mattress,  
and a gully for an outhouse, we struggled forward.  
Our weary bones, aching to see the light,  
struggle through the frigid night.  
My train never stalled;  
my train never lost a passenger.

Before I be a slave, I will be dead in my grave  
and go home to my maker and be free.

Master's blows dented my forehead.  
Master's whip scarred my back.  
Master's lust raped my body.  
Master's greed sacked my clothes.  
Master can steal my body,  
but master can not steal me.  
For slavery can only chain my bones  
but not my spirit.  
The gentle breeze of freedom  
shall forever blow through your chains.

Before I be a slave, I will be dead in my grave  
and go home to my maker and be free.

By Tolbert Small