



Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

*And as we let our own light shine, we
consciously give other people permission
to do the same.*

Marianne Williamson

"This Little Light of Mine" is a beloved children's tune recognized around the world. But it's also a spiritual, which was transformed by the nation's civil rights movement into an anthem of singular power. And, I believe the song has the same impact in today's times. Demonstrators still leverage its message to push back against injustice.

I can say I grew up during tough times for humanity in racially divided America. The timeframe is generally considered from 1955 to 1970. Me, a six-year-old in the Panhandle of Texas had little idea of what was happening throughout the country, but I became more and more aware as television gained prominence. Newscasts of human beings being beaten, attacked by dogs, and bombarded by full force firehoses where there was no fire. In 1971 the six-year-old became a twenty-two-year old drafted to military service in a war that made no sense to me or most of my peers.

One of my favorite Rhythm and Blues singers from the 60's is Sam Cooke. He sang "This Little Light of Mine" live at the Copa in 1964. Although the song was an integral part of the Civil Rights movement during the late 50's and ultimately through the decade of the 60's, Sam's version coupled with the "Amen" stanzas has been a standout in my mind.

Amen...

This little light of mine

I'm going to let it shine

This little light of mine

I'm going to let it shine

This little light of mine

I'm going to let it shine

Let it shine, let it shine

To show my love

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine [x3]

Even in my home, I'm gonna let it shine [x3]

When I see my neighbor coming [x3]

I'm gonna let it shine

It was noon on April 5, 1968. I remember standing with other students at the Hardin-Simmons University Administration building and flagpole. It is the day following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Students gathered with a plea to lower the flag in Dr. King's honor, but the request was refused. The crowd of students numbered seven male and one female African American students, and a large contingency of white students amassed in support.

I didn't think of myself as a protester. I was just a kid that loved hanging out with seven men that I didn't consider different from me. We all loved to gather in me and my roommates dorm room and listen to Motown music by The Temptations, The Supremes, Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, Gladys Knight, and many more.

Waiting to hear from the administration that day in April, Carolyn, the lone black woman started singing "This Little Light of Mine". We all joined in, and I remember that we sang it a few times with the same words I had learned in Vacation Bible School in Kingsmill Texas, and I was getting bored. Then magic happened People began to change the first line. "Standin' by the fountain", "Walkin' round the Chapel", and energy and resolve grew substantially.

Freedom Singer Rutha Mae Harris expressed nationally what we experienced for two hours in Abilene Texas. She said, "You can't just sing *This Little Light of Mine*. You gotta shout it."

*"Everywhere I go, Lord, I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!"*

"Music was an anchor. It kept us from being afraid," Harris says. "You start singing a song, and somehow, those billy clubs would not hit you. It played a very important role in the movement."

Being there in the era was far different from "being there" in the pits with oppressed people. I never faced the absolute fear associated with being face to face with powerful adversaries. Watching on black and white televisions made it real, but not real at the same time. Frightening to watch, easy to escape to the quiet quarters of my bedroom. That was the time I first experienced "it".

Now "it" is happening all over again. Perhaps "it" never changed. Perhaps now is time to reexamine the anger prior to 1970, and the peace we all thought would follow when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

I did a search for pictures by Kodachrome Photographs from the riots and protest marches during the 1960's. The results are abundant. I compared them to the digital photo scenes and footage for the past year, and I honestly can't tell which was in 1963 and which was in 2020.

In current times we have the added burden of Covid 19. I see and feel similar fighting among what is thought to be civilized people. The virus is an enemy that should be confronted by human beings globally. The simple tasks of masking and sanitizing and distancing seem to lead to taking sides rather than unifying to end "it".

I believe now is the time to fully endorse the lines from Marianne Williamson. *And as we let our own light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same.* Maybe we should start a new version of “this little light of mine” by singing:

Covid 19 can't dim my light

I'm gonna let it shine.

Let's sing and shout together and be leaders to bring the world to a better place. Worth a try?

Peace always

Ted