

"I'VE SEEN BLACK HANDS"

(by Richard Wright, born in Mississippi)

I AM BLACK AND I HAVE SEEN BLACK HANDS, MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF THEM---
 OUT OF MILLIONS OF BUNDLES OF WOOL AND FLANNEL TINY BLACK FINGERS HAVE REACHED RESTLESSLY AND HUNGRILY FOR LIFE. REACHED OUT FOR THE BLACK NIPPLES AT THE BLACK BREASTS OF BLACK MOTHERS,
 AND THEY'VE HELD RED, GREEN, BLUE YELLOW, ORANGE, WHITE, AND PURPLE TOYS IN THE CHILDISH GRIPS OF POSSESSION,
 AND CHOCOLATE DROPS, PEPPERMINT STICKS, LOLLYPOPS, WINEBALLS, ICE CREAM CONES, AND SUGARED COOKIES IN FINGERS STICKY AND GUMMY,
 AND THEY'VE HELD BALLS AND BATS AND GLOVES AND MARBLES AND JACK-KNIVES AND SLING-HOTS AND SPINNING TOPS IN THE THRILL OF SPORT AND PLAY,
 AND PENNIES AND NICKELS AND DIMES AND QUARTERS AND SOMETIMES ON NEW YEAR'S, EASTER, LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY, MAY DAY, A BRAND NEW GREEN DOLLAR BILL,
 AND THEY'VE HELD PENS AND RULERS AND MAPS AND TABLETS AND BOOKS IN PALMS SPOTTED AND SMEARED WITH INK,
 AND THEY'VE HELD DICE AND CARDS AND HALF-PINT BLASKS AND CUE STICKS AND CIGARS AND CIGARETTES IN THE PRIDE OF NEW MATURITY.....

I AM BLACK AND I HAVE SEEN BEACK HANDS, MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF THEM---
 THEY WERE TIRED AND AWKWARD AND CALLOUSED AND GRIMY AND COVERED WITH HANGNAILS,
 AND THEY WERE CAUGHT IN THE FAST-MOVING BELTS OF MACHINES AND SNAGGED AND SMASHED AND CRUSHED,
 AND THEY JERKED UP AND DOWN AT THERTHRÖBBING MACHINES AND MASSING TALLER AND TALLER THE HEAPS OF GOLD IN THE BANKS OF BOSSES,
 AND THEY PILED HIGHER AND HIGHER THE STEEL, IRON, THE LUMBER, WHEAT, RYE, THE OATS, CORN, THE COTTON, THE WOOL, THE OIL, THE COAL, THE MEAT, THE FRUIT, THE GLASS, AND THE STONE UNTIL THERE WAS TOO MUCH TO BE USED,
 AND THEY GRABBED GUNS AND SLUNG THEM ON THEIR SHOULDERS AND MARCHED AND GROPED IN TRENCHES AND FOUGHT AND KILLED AND CONQUERED NATIONS WHO WERE CUSTOMERS FOR THE GOODS BLACK HANDS HAD MADE.
 AND AGAIN BLACK HANDS STACKED GOODS HIGHER AND HIGHER UNTIL THERE WAS TOO MUCH TO BE USED,
 AND THEN THE BLACK HANDS TREMBLING AT THE FACTORY GATES THE DREADED LAY-OFF SLIP,
 AND THE BLACK HANDS HUNG IDLE AND SWUNG EMPTY AND GREW SOFT AND GOT WEAK AND BONY FROM UNEMPLOYMENT AND STARVATION, AND THEY GREW NERVOUS AND SWEATY, AND OPENED AND SHUT IN ANGUISH AND DOUBT AND HESITATION AND IRRESOLUTION.....

I AM BLACK AND I HAVE SEEN BLACK HANDS, MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF THEM---
 REACHING HESITANTLY OUT OF DAYS OF SLOW DEATH FOR THE GOODS THEY HAD MADE, BUT THE BOSSES WARNED THAT THE GOODS WERE PRIVATE AND DID NOT BELONG TO THEM,
 AND THE BLACK HANDS STRUCK OUT DESPERATELY IN DEFENCE OF LIFE AND THERE WAS BLOOD, BUT THE ENRAGED BOSSES DECREED THAT THIS TOO WAS WRONG,
 AND THE BLACK HANDS FELT THE COLD STEEL BARS OF THE PRISON THEY HAD MADE, IN DESPAIR TESTED THEIR STRENGTH AND FOUND THEY COULD NEITHER BEND NOR BREAK THEM,
 AND THE BLACK HANDS FOUGHT AND SCRATCHED AND HELD BACK BUT A THOUSAND WHITE HANDS TOOK THEM AND TIED THEM,
 AND THE BLACK HANDS LIFTED PALMS IN MUTE AND FUTILE SUPPLICATION TO THE SODDEN FACES OF MOBS WILD IN THE REVELRIES OF SADISM,
 AND THE BLACK HANDS STRAINED AND CLAWED AND STRUGGLED IN VAIN AT THE NOOSE TIGHTNED ABOUT THE BLACK THROAT,
 AND THE BLACK HANDS WAVED AND BEAT FEARFULLY AT THE TALL FLAMES THAT COOKED AND CHARRED THE BLACK FLESH.....

I AM BLACK AND I HAVE SEEN BLACK HANDS RAISED IN FISTS OF REVOLT, SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE WHITE FISTS OF WHITE WORKERS, AND SOME DAY--AND IT IS ONLY THIS WHICH SUSTAINS ME--
 SOMEDAY THERE SHALL BE MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF THEM, ON SOME RED DAY IN A BURST OF FISTS ON A NEW HORIZON