

Mahalia Jackson sings "We Shall Overcome" during her European Tour of 1971. She was in failing health when she gave this performance.

About three years before, Halie Jackson (as she was known by her family and friends) sang at the funeral of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His death, and the death of Bobby Kennedy, which followed King's assassination by two months, devastated Jackson.

Despite all the obstacles, the assassinations, the prejudices she (and other people of color) faced in America, Mahalia continued the struggle. She believed, firmly, that "one day" her people would "overcome." She believed the only way forward was to keep moving ahead:

When I sang "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" at Martin Luther King's funeral, my grief seemed almost too much to bear. But when a reporter came to me after Dr. King and Senator Kennedy had been killed and said, "How do you carry on?" I said to him, "There can be no turning away. There's a right to feel doubtful and despondent about things, but that is the time when you can't let your spirit and determination weaken. We've got to remember these men lived for the good because it's needed so much now." (Quoted by Robert Darden in *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music*, at page 220.)

In this recorded performance, Mahalia Jackson moves away from the microphone before she actually finishes the song. It is an incredibly moving moment from a woman who was once called "the most powerful black woman in America."

When she waves goodbye to the audience, it is like she knows they will never see her alive again. Her words "one day" hang in the air, almost prophetically, to remind everyone to continue the struggle.

The next year, Mahalia died (on the 27th of January, 1972). About 50,000 people lined-up in Chicago to walk past her glass-covered coffin. Then her body was flown to New Orleans - her hometown - for another wake at Rivergate Convention Center.

After people had said their goodbyes to one of the world's most-loved singers, a funeral cortege (which included 24 limos) carried Ms. Jackson's remains to Providence Memorial Park in Metairie, Louisiana where she lies entombed.

Thanks to her many recordings, we can still hear her music and watch her performances. They bring to mind the way Dr. King described her talents:

A voice like this one comes not once in a century, but once in a millennium. (Darden, at page 220.)

The lyrics of the song, by Charles Tindley (1900), are set to the music of a pre-Civil-War tune entitled "No More Auction Block for Me."

1.
*We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome some day*

CHORUS

*Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome
some day*

2.

*We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand some day*

CHORUS

3.

*We shall all be free
We shall all be free
We shall all be free some day*

CHORUS

4.

*We are not afraid
We are not afraid
We are not afraid some day*

CHORUS

5.

*We are not alone
We are not alone
We are not alone some day*

CHORUS

6.

*The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around some day*

CHORUS

7.

*We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome some day*

Credits:

Clip of Mahalia Jackson, singing "We Shall Overcome," during her 1971 European Tour, online courtesy YouTube.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/-We-Shall-Overcome-Mahalia-Jackson0)

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