

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Langston Hughes**  
**- poems -**

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# Langston Hughes(1 February 1902 – 22 May 1967)

Hughes was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form jazz poetry. Hughes is best known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance. He famously wrote about the period that "Harlem was in vogue."

## Biography

### Ancestry and Childhood

Both of Hughes' paternal and maternal great-grandmothers were African-American, his maternal great-grandfather was white and of Scottish descent. A paternal great-grandfather was of European Jewish descent. Hughes's maternal grandmother Mary Patterson was of African-American, French, English and Native American descent. One of the first women to attend Oberlin College, she first married Lewis Sheridan Leary, also of mixed race. Lewis Sheridan Leary subsequently joined John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 and died from his wounds.

In 1869 the widow Mary Patterson Leary married again, into the elite, politically active Langston family. Her second husband was Charles Henry Langston, of African American, Native American, and Euro-American ancestry. He and his younger brother John Mercer Langston worked for the abolitionist cause and helped lead the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in 1858. Charles Langston later moved to Kansas, where he was active as an educator and activist for voting and rights for African Americans. Charles and Mary's daughter Caroline was the mother of Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, the second child of school teacher Carrie (Caroline) Mercer Langston and James Nathaniel Hughes (1871–1934). Langston Hughes grew up in a series of Midwestern small towns.

Hughes's father left his family and later divorced Carrie, going to Cuba, and then Mexico, seeking to escape the enduring racism in the United States. After the separation of his parents, while his mother travelled seeking employment, young Langston Hughes was raised mainly by his maternal grandmother, Mary Patterson Langston, in Lawrence, Kansas. Through the black American oral tradition and drawing from the activist experiences of her generation, Mary Langston instilled in the young Langston Hughes a lasting sense of racial pride. He spent most of his childhood in Lawrence, Kansas. After the death of his

grandmother, he went to live with family friends, James and Mary Reed, for two years. Because of the unstable early life, his childhood was not an entirely happy one, but it strongly influenced the poet he would become. Later, Hughes lived again with his mother Carrie in Lincoln, Illinois. She had remarried when he was still an adolescent, and eventually they lived in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended high school. The Hughes' home in Cleveland was sold in foreclosure in 1918; the 2.5-story, wood-frame house on the city's east side was sold at a sheriff's auction in February for \$16,667.

While in grammar school in Lincoln, Hughes was elected class poet. Hughes stated that in retrospect he thought it was because of the stereotype that African Americans have rhythm. "I was a victim of a stereotype. There were only two of us Negro kids in the whole class and our English teacher was always stressing the importance of rhythm in poetry. Well, everyone knows, except us, that all Negroes have rhythm, so they elected me as class poet." During high school in Cleveland, Ohio, he wrote for the school newspaper, edited the yearbook, and began to write his first short stories, poetry, and dramatic plays. His first piece of jazz poetry, "When Sue Wears Red", was written while he was in high school. It was during this time that he discovered his love of books.

### Relationship with Father

Hughes had a very poor relationship with his father. He lived with his father in Mexico for a brief period in 1919. Upon graduating from high school in June 1920, Hughes returned to Mexico to live with his father, hoping to convince him to support Langston's plan to attend Columbia University. Hughes later said that, prior to arriving in Mexico: "I had been thinking about my father and his strange dislike of his own people. I didn't understand it, because I was a Negro, and I liked Negroes very much." Initially, his father had hoped for Hughes to attend a university abroad, and to study for a career in engineering. On these grounds, he was willing to provide financial assistance to his son but did not support his desire to be a writer. Eventually, Hughes and his father came to a compromise: Hughes would study engineering, so long as he could attend Columbia. His tuition provided; Hughes left his father after more than a year. While at Columbia in 1921, Hughes managed to maintain a B+ grade average. He left in 1922 because of racial prejudice, and his interests revolved more around the neighbourhood of Harlem than his studies, though he continued writing poetry.

### Adulthood

Hughes worked various odd jobs, before serving a brief tenure as a crewman aboard the S.S. Malone in 1923, spending six months traveling to West Africa

and Europe. In Europe, Hughes left the S.S. Malone for a temporary stay in Paris.

During his time in England in the early 1920s, Hughes became part of the black expatriate community. In November 1924, Hughes returned to the U. S. to live with his mother in Washington, D.C. Hughes worked at various odd jobs before gaining a white-collar job in 1925 as a personal assistant to the historian Carter G. Woodson at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. As the work demands limited his time for writing, Hughes quit the position to work as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel. There he encountered the poet Vachel Lindsay, with whom he shared some poems. Impressed with the poems, Lindsay publicized his discovery of a new black poet. By this time, Hughes's earlier work had been published in magazines and was about to be collected into his first book of poetry.

The following year, Hughes enrolled in Lincoln University, a historically black university in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He joined the Omega Psi Phi fraternity. Thurgood Marshall, who later became an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, was an alumnus and classmate of Langston Hughes during his undergraduate studies at Lincoln University.

After Hughes earned a B.A. degree from Lincoln University in 1929, he returned to New York. Except for travels to the Soviet Union and parts of the Caribbean, Hughes lived in Harlem as his primary home for the remainder of his life. During the 1930s, Hughes became a resident of Westfield, New Jersey.

Some academics and biographers today believe that Hughes was homosexual and included homosexual codes in many of his poems, similar in manner to Walt Whitman. Hughes has cited him as an influence on his poetry. Hughes's story "Blessed Assurance" deals with a father's anger over his son's effeminacy and "queerness". To retain the respect and support of black churches and organizations and avoid exacerbating his precarious financial situation, Hughes remained closeted.

Arnold Rampersad, the primary biographer of Hughes, determined that Hughes exhibited a preference for other African-American men in his work and life. However, Rampersad denies Hughes's homosexuality in his biography. Rampersad concludes that Hughes was probably asexual and passive in his sexual relationships. He did, however show a respect and love for his fellow black man (and woman). Other scholars argue for Hughes's homosexuality: his love of black men is evidenced in a number of reported unpublished poems to an alleged black male lover.

## Death

On May 22, 1967, Hughes died from complications after abdominal surgery, related to prostate cancer, at the age of 65. His ashes are interred beneath a floor medallion in the middle of the foyer in the Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. It is the entrance to an auditorium named for him. The design on the floor covering his ashes is an African cosmogram titled Rivers. The title is taken from his poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". Within the center of the cosmogram, above his ashes, is the line: "My soul has grown deep like the rivers".

## Career

First published in *The Crisis* in 1921, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", which became Hughes's signature poem, was collected in his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* (1926). Hughes's life and work were enormously influential during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, alongside those of his contemporaries, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Aaron Douglas. Except for McKay, they worked together also to create the short-lived magazine *Fire!!* Devoted to Younger Negro Artists.

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Hughes and his contemporaries had different goals and aspirations than the black middle class. They criticized men who were known as the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance: W. E. B. Du Bois, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Alain LeRoy Locke, as being overly accommodating and assimilating eurocentric values and culture for social equality. Hughes and his fellows tried to depict the "low-life" in their art, that is, the real lives of blacks in the lower social-economic strata. They criticized the divisions and prejudices based on skin color within the black community. Hughes wrote what would be considered the manifesto published in *The Nation* in 1926,

"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"

The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express

our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.  
If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not,  
it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too.  
The tom-tom cries, and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people  
are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure  
doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow,  
strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain  
free within ourselves

Hughes was unashamedly black at a time when blackness was *démodé*. He stressed the theme of "black is beautiful" as he explored the black human condition in a variety of depths. His main concern was the uplift of his people, whose strengths, resiliency, courage, and humor he wanted to record as part of the general American experience. His poetry and fiction portrayed the lives of the working class blacks in America, lives he portrayed as full of struggle, joy, laughter, and music. Permeating his work is pride in the African-American identity and its diverse culture. "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind," Hughes is quoted as saying. He confronted racial stereotypes, protested social conditions, and expanded African America's image of itself; a "people's poet" who sought to reeducate both audience and artist by lifting the theory of the black aesthetic into reality. An expression of this is the poem "My People":

The night is beautiful,  
So the faces of my people.  
The stars are beautiful,  
So the eyes of my people  
Beautiful, also, is the sun.  
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

Hughes stressed a racial consciousness and cultural nationalism devoid of self-hate that united people of African descent and Africa across the globe and encouraged pride in their diverse black folk culture and black aesthetic. Hughes was one of the few black writers of any consequence to champion racial consciousness as a source of inspiration for black artists. His African-American race consciousness and cultural nationalism would influence many foreign black writers, such as Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire. Along with the works of Senghor, Césaire, and other French-speaking writers of Africa and of African descent from the Caribbean, such as René Maran from Martinique and Léon Damas from French Guiana in South America, the works of Hughes helped to inspire the *Négritude* movement in France. A radical black self-examination was emphasized in the face of European

colonialism. In addition to his example in social attitudes, Hughes had an important technical influence by his emphasis on folk and jazz rhythms as the basis of his poetry of racial pride.

In 1930, his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*, won the Harmon Gold Medal for literature. The protagonist of the story is a boy named Sandy, whose family must deal with a variety of struggles due to their race and class, in addition to relating to one another. Maxim Lieber became his literary agent, 1933–1945 and 1949–1950. Hughes's first collection of short stories was published in 1934 with *The Ways of White Folks*. These stories are a series of vignettes revealing the humorous and tragic interactions between whites and blacks. Overall, they are marked by a general pessimism about race relations, as well as a sardonic realism. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1935.

The same year that Hughes established his theater troupe in Los Angeles, he realized an ambition related to films by co-writing the screenplay for *Way Down South*. Hughes believed his failure to gain more work in the lucrative movie trade was due to racial discrimination within the industry.

In 1943, Hughes began publishing stories about a character he called Jesse B. Semple, often referred to and spelled "Simple", the everyday black man in Harlem who offered musings on topical issues of the day. Hughes seldom responded to requests to teach at colleges. In 1947, Hughes taught at Atlanta University. Hughes, in 1949, spent three months at University of Chicago Laboratory Schools as a visiting lecturer. He wrote novels, short stories, plays, poetry, operas, essays, works for children, and, with the encouragement of his best friend and writer, Arna Bontemps, and patron and friend, Carl Van Vechten, two autobiographies, *The Big Sea* and *I Wonder as I Wander*, as well as translating several works of literature into English.

During the mid-1950s and -1960s, Hughes' popularity among the younger generation of black writers varied as his reputation increased worldwide. With the gradual advancement toward racial integration, many black writers considered his writings of black pride and its corresponding subject matter out of date. They considered him a racial chauvinist. He found such writers, for instance, James Baldwin, lacking in such pride, overintellectual in their work, and occasionally vulgar.

Hughes wanted young black writers to be objective about their race, but not to scorn it or flee it. He understood the main points of the Black Power movement of the 1960s, but believed that some of the younger black writers who supported it were too angry in their work. Hughes's work *Panther and the Lash*,

posthumously published in 1967, was intended to show solidarity with these writers, but with more skill and devoid of the most virulent anger and terse racial chauvinism some showed toward whites. Hughes continued to have admirers among the larger younger generation of black writers, whom he often helped by offering advice and introducing them to other influential persons in the literature and publishing communities. This latter group, including Alice Walker, whom Hughes discovered, looked upon Hughes as a hero and an example to be emulated in degrees and tones within their own work. One of these young black writers observed of Hughes, "Langston set a tone, a standard of brotherhood and friendship and cooperation, for all of us to follow. You never got from him, 'I am the Negro writer,' but only 'I am a Negro writer.' He never stopped thinking about the rest of us."

## Political Views

Hughes, like many black writers and artists of his time, was drawn to the promise of Communism as an alternative to a segregated America. Many of his lesser-known political writings have been collected in two volumes published by the University of Missouri Press and reflect his attraction to Communism. An example is the poem "A New Song".

In 1932, Hughes became part of a group of black people who went to the Soviet Union to make a film depicting the plight of African Americans in the United States. The film was never made, but Hughes was given the opportunity to travel extensively through the Soviet Union and to the Soviet-controlled regions in Central Asia, the latter parts usually closed to Westerners. While there, he met African-American Robert Robinson, living in Moscow and unable to leave. In Turkmenistan, Hughes met and befriended the Hungarian polymath Arthur Koestler. Hughes also managed to travel to China and Japan before returning to the States.

Hughes's poetry was frequently published in the CPUSA newspaper and he was involved in initiatives supported by Communist organizations, such as the drive to free the Scottsboro Boys. Partly as a show of support for the Republican faction during the Spanish Civil War, in 1937 Hughes traveled to Spain as a correspondent for the Baltimore Afro-American and other various African-American newspapers. Hughes was also involved in other Communist-led organizations like the John Reed Clubs and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. He was more of a sympathizer than an active participant. He signed a statement in 1938 supporting Joseph Stalin's purges and joined the American Peace Mobilization in 1940 working to keep the U.S. from participating in World War II.



Hughes initially did not favor black American involvement in the war because of the persistence of discriminatory U.S. Jim Crow laws existing while blacks were encouraged to fight against Fascism and the Axis powers. He came to support the war effort and black American involvement in it after deciding that blacks would also be contributing to their struggle for civil rights at home.

Hughes was accused of being a Communist by many on the political right, but he always denied it. When asked why he never joined the Communist Party, he wrote "it was based on strict discipline and the acceptance of directives that I, as a writer, did not wish to accept." In 1953, he was called before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Following his appearance, he distanced himself from Communism and was subsequently rebuked by some who had previously supported him on the Radical Left. Over time, Hughes would distance himself from his most radical poems. In 1959 his collection of Selected Poems was published. He excluded his most controversial work from this group of poems.

### Stage and Film Depictions

Hughes's life has been depicted in many stage and film productions. *Hannibal of the Alps* by Michael Dinwiddie and *Paper Armor* by Eisa Davis are plays by African-American playwrights which deal with Hughes's sexuality. In the 1989 film, *Looking for Langston*, British filmmaker Isaac Julien claimed Hughes as a black gay icon — Julien thought that Hughes' sexuality had historically been ignored or downplayed. In the film *Get on the Bus*, directed by Spike Lee, a black gay character, played by Isaiah Washington, invokes the name of Hughes and punches a homophobic character while commenting, "This is for James Baldwin and Langston Hughes." Film portrayals of Hughes include Gary LeRoi Gray's role as a teenage Hughes in the 2003 short subject film *Salvation* (based on a portion of his autobiography *The Big Sea*) and Daniel Sunjata as Hughes in the 2004 film *Brother to Brother*. Hughes' *Dream Harlem*, a documentary by Jamal Joseph, examines Hughes' works and environment.

### Literary Archives

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University holds the Langston Hughes papers (1862–1980) and the Langston Hughes collection (1924–1969) containing letters, manuscripts, personal items, photographs, clippings, artworks, and objects that document the life of Hughes. The Langston Hughes Memorial Library on the campus of Lincoln University, as well as at the James Weldon Johnson Collection within the Yale University also hold archives of

Hughes' work.

## Honors and Awards

1943, Lincoln University awarded Hughes an honorary Litt.D.

1960, the NAACP awarded Hughes the Spingarn Medal for distinguished achievements by an African American.

1961 National Institute of Arts and Letters.

1963 Howard University awarded Hughes an honorary doctorate.

1973, the first Langston Hughes Medal was awarded by the City College of New York.

1979, Langston Hughes Middle School was created in Reston, Virginia.

1981, New York City Landmark status was given to the Harlem home of Langston Hughes at 20 East 127th Street by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and 127th St. was renamed Langston Hughes Place. The Langston Hughes House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

2002 The United States Postal Service added the image of Langston Hughes to its Black Heritage series of postage stamps.

2002, scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed Langston Hughes on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans.

## 50-50

I'm all alone in this world, she said,  
Ain't got nobody to share my bed,  
Ain't got nobody to hold my hand—  
The truth of the matter's  
I ain't got no man.

Big Boy opened his mouth and said,  
Trouble with you is  
You ain't got no head!  
If you had a head and used your mind  
You could have me with you  
All the time.

She answered, Babe, what must I do?

He said, Share your bed—  
And your money, too.

Langston Hughes

# Acceptance

God in His infinite wisdom  
Did not make me very wise-  
So when my actions are stupid  
They hardly take God by surprise

Langston Hughes

# Advertisement For The Waldorf-Astoria

Fine living . . . a la carte?  
Come to the Waldorf-Astoria!

LISTEN HUNGRY ONES!

Look! See what Vanity Fair says about the  
new Waldorf-Astoria:

"All the luxuries of private home. . . ."

Now, won't that be charming when the last flop-house  
has turned you down this winter?

Furthermore:

"It is far beyond anything hitherto attempted in the hotel  
world. . . ." It cost twenty-eight million dollars. The fa-  
mous Oscar Tschirky is in charge of banqueting.

Alexandre Gastaud is chef. It will be a distinguished  
background for society.

So when you've no place else to go, homeless and hungry  
ones, choose the Waldorf as a background for your rags--  
(Or do you still consider the subway after midnight good  
enough?)

ROOMERS

Take a room at the new Waldorf, you down-and-outers--  
sleepers in charity's flop-houses where God pulls a  
long face, and you have to pray to get a bed.

They serve swell board at the Waldorf-Astoria. Look at the menu, will  
you:

GUMBO CREOLE

CRABMEAT IN CASSOLETTE

BOILED BRISKET OF BEEF

SMALL ONIONS IN CREAM

WATERCRESS SALAD

PEACH MELBA

Have luncheon there this afternoon, all you jobless.

Why not?

Dine with some of the men and women who got rich off of  
your labor, who clip coupons with clean white fingers

because your hands dug coal, drilled stone, sewed garments, poured steel to let other people draw dividends and live easy.

(Or haven't you had enough yet of the soup-lines and the bitter bread of charity?)

Walk through Peacock Alley tonight before dinner, and get warm, anyway. You've got nothing else to do.

Langston Hughes

# April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you  
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops  
Let the rain sing you a lullaby  
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk  
The rain makes running pools in the gutter  
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at night  
And I love the rain.

Langston Hughes

# Ardella

I would liken you  
To a night without stars  
Were it not for your eyes.  
I would liken you  
To a sleep without dreams  
Were it not for your songs.

Langston Hughes



# As I Grew Older

It was a long time ago.  
I have almost forgotten my dream.  
But it was there then,  
In front of me,  
Bright like a sun—  
My dream.  
And then the wall rose,  
Rose slowly,  
Slowly,  
Between me and my dream.  
Rose until it touched the sky—  
The wall.  
Shadow.  
I am black.  
I lie down in the shadow.  
No longer the light of my dream before me,  
Above me.  
Only the thick wall.  
Only the shadow.  
My hands!  
My dark hands!  
Break through the wall!  
Find my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness,  
To smash this night,  
To break this shadow  
Into a thousand lights of sun,  
Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun!

Langston Hughes

# Bad Morning

Here I sit  
With my shoes mismated.  
Lawdy-mercy!  
I's frustrated!

Langston Hughes

# Bound No'th Blues

Goin' down the road, Lawd,  
Goin' down the road.  
Down the road, Lawd,  
Way,way down the road.  
Got to find somebody  
To help me carry this load.

Road's in front o' me,  
Nothin' to do but walk.  
Road's in front of me,  
Walk...an' walk...an' walk.  
I'd like to meet a good friend  
To come along an' talk.

Hates to be lonely,  
Lawd, I hates to be sad.  
Says I hates to be lonely,  
Hates to be lonely an' sad,  
But ever friend you finds seems  
Like they try to do you bad.

Road, road, road, O!  
Road, road...road...road, road!  
Road, road, road, O!  
On the no'thern road.  
These Mississippi towns ain't  
Fit fer a hoppin' toad.

Langston Hughes

# Bouquet

Gather quickly  
Out of darkness  
All the songs you know  
And throw them at the sun  
Before they melt  
Like snow

Langston Hughes

# Brass Spittoons

Clean the spittoons, boy.  
Detroit,  
Chicago,  
Atlantic City,  
Palm Beach.  
Clean the spittoons.  
The steam in hotel kitchens,  
And the smoke in hotel lobbies,  
And the slime in hotel spittoons:  
Part of my life.  
Hey, boy!  
A nickel,  
A dime,  
A dollar,  
Two dollars a day.  
Hey, boy!  
A nickel,  
A dime,  
A dollar,  
Two dollars  
Buy shoes for the baby.  
House rent to pay.  
Gin on Saturday,  
Church on Sunday.  
My God!  
Babies and gin and church  
And women and Sunday  
All mixed with dimes and  
Dollars and clean spittoons  
And house rent to pay.  
Hey, boy!  
A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord.  
Bright polished brass like the cymbals  
Of King David's dancers,  
Like the wine cups of Solomon.  
Hey, boy!  
A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord.  
A clean bright spittoon all newly polished—  
At least I can offer that.

Com'mere, boy!

Langston Hughes

# Catch

Big Boy came  
Carrying a mermaid  
On his shoulders  
And the mermaid  
Had her tail  
Curved  
Beneath his arm.

Being a fisher boy,  
He'd found a fish  
To carry—  
Half fish,  
Half girl  
To marry.

Langston Hughes

# Children's Rhymes

By what sends  
the white kids  
I ain't sent:  
I know I can't  
be President.  
What don't bug  
them white kids  
sure bugs me:  
We know everybody  
ain't free.

Lies written down  
for white folks  
ain't for us a-tall:  
<i>Liberty And Justice--</i>  
Huh!--<i>For All?</i>

Langston Hughes



# Cross

My old man's a white old man  
And my old mother's black.  
If ever I cursed my white old man  
I take my curses back.  
If ever I cursed my black old mother  
And wished she were in hell,  
I'm sorry for that evil wish  
And now I wish her well  
My old man died in a fine big house.  
My ma died in a shack.  
I wonder where I'm going to die,  
Being neither white nor black?

Langston Hughes

# Cultural Exchange

In the Quarter of the Negroes  
Where the doors are doors of paper  
Dust of dingy atoms  
Blows a scratchy sound.  
Amorphous jack-o'-Lanterns caper  
And the wind won't wait for midnight  
For fun to blow doors down.  
By the river and the railroad  
With fluid far-off goind  
Boundaries bind unbinding  
A whirl of whistles blowing.  
No trains or steamboats going--  
Yet Leontyne's unpacking.

In the Quarter of the Negroes  
Where the doorknob lets in Lieder  
More than German ever bore,  
Her yesterday past grandpa--  
Not of her own doing--  
In a pot of collard greens  
Is gently stewing.

Pushcarts fold and unfold  
In a supermarket sea.  
And we better find out, mama,  
Where is the colored laundromat  
Since we move dup to Mount Vernon.

In the pot behind the paper doors  
on the old iron stove what's cooking?  
What's smelling, Leontyne?  
Lieder, lovely Lieder  
And a leaf of collard green.  
Lovely Lieder, Leontyne.

You know, right at Christmas  
They asked me if my blackness,  
Would it rub off?  
I said, Ask your mama.

Dreams and nightmares!  
Nightmares, dreams, oh!  
Dreaming that the Negroes  
Of the South have taken over--  
Voted all the Dixiecrats  
Right out of power--

Comes the COLORED HOUR:  
Martin Luther King is Governor of Georgia,  
Dr. Rufus Clement his Chief Adviser,  
A. Philip Randolph the High Grand Worthy.  
In white pillared mansions  
Sitting on their wide verandas,  
Wealthy Negroes have white servants,  
White sharecroppers work the black plantations,  
And colored children have white mammies:  
Mammy Faubus  
Mammy Eastland  
Mammy Wallace  
Dear, dear darling old white mammies--  
Sometimes even buried with our family.  
Dear old  
Mammy Faubus!

*Culture, they say, is a two-way street:*  
Hand me my mint julep, mammny.  
Hurry up!  
Make haste!

Langston Hughes

# Daybreak In Alabama

When I get to be a composer  
I'm gonna write me some music about  
Daybreak in Alabama  
And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it  
Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist  
And falling out of heaven like soft dew.  
I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it  
And the scent of pine needles  
And the smell of red clay after rain  
And long red necks  
And poppy colored faces  
And big brown arms  
And the field daisy eyes  
Of black and white black white black people  
And I'm gonna put white hands  
And black hands and brown and yellow hands  
And red clay earth hands in it  
Touching everybody with kind fingers  
And touching each other natural as dew  
In that dawn of music when I  
Get to be a composer  
And write about daybreak  
In Alabama.

Langston Hughes

# Deceased

Harlem  
Sent him home  
in a long box-  
Too dead  
To know why:

The licker  
Was lye.

Langston Hughes

# Demand

Listen!

Dear dream of utter aliveness-  
Touching my body of utter death-  
Tell me, O quickly! dream of aliveness,  
The flaming source of your bright breath.  
Tell me, O dream of utter aliveness-  
Knowing so well the wind and the sun-  
Where is this light  
Your eyes see forever?  
And what is the wind  
You touch when you run?

Langston Hughes

# Democracy

Democracy will not come  
Today, this year  
Nor ever  
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
To stand  
On my two feet  
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,  
Let things take their course.  
Tomorrow is another day.  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted  
In a great need.

I live here, too.  
I want freedom  
Just as you.

Langston Hughes

## Dinner Guest: Me

I know I am  
The Negro Problem  
Being wined and dined,  
Answering the usual questions  
That come to white mind  
Which seeks demurely  
To Probe in polite way  
The why and wherewithal  
Of darkness U.S.A.--  
Wondering how things got this way  
In current democratic night,  
Murmuring gently  
Over fraises du bois,  
"I'm so ashamed of being white."

The lobster is delicious,  
The wine divine,  
And center of attention  
At the damask table, mine.  
To be a Problem on  
Park Avenue at eight  
Is not so bad.  
Solutions to the Problem,  
Of course, wait.

Langston Hughes



# Dream Boogie

Good morning, daddy!  
Ain't you heard  
The boogie-woogie rumble  
Of a dream deferred?

Listen closely:  
You'll hear their feet  
Beating out and beating out a -

You think  
It's a happy beat?

Listen to it closely:  
Ain't you heard  
something underneath  
like a -

What did I say?

Sure,  
I'm happy!  
Take it away!

Hey, pop!  
Re-bop!  
Mop!

Y-e-a-h!

Langston Hughes

# Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes

# Dream Variations

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me-  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening...  
A tall, slim tree...  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.

Langston Hughes

# Dreams

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.  
Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes

# Dying Beast

Sensing death,  
The buzzards gather —  
Noting the last struggle  
Of flesh under weather,  
Noting the last glance  
Of agonized eye  
At passing wind  
And boundless sky.

Langston Hughes

# Easy Boogie

Down in the bass  
That steady beat  
Walking walking walking  
Like marching feet.

Down in the bass  
They easy roll,  
Rolling like I like it  
In my soul.

Riffs, smears, breaks.

Hey, Lawdy Mama!  
Do you hear what I said?  
Easy like I rock it  
In my bed!

Langston Hughes

# Enemy

It would be nice  
In any case,  
To someday meet you  
Face to face  
Walking down  
The road to hell...  
As I come up  
Feeling swell.

Langston Hughes

# Ennui

It's such a  
Bore  
Being always  
Poor.

Langston Hughes



# Feet o' Jesus

At the feet o' Jesus,  
Sorrow like a sea.  
Lordy, let yo' mercy  
Come driftin' down on me.

At the feet o' Jesus  
At yo' feet I stand.  
O, ma little Jesus,  
Please reach out yo' hand.

Langston Hughes

# Final Curve

When you turn the corner  
And you run into yourself  
Then you know that you have turned  
All the corners that are left

Langston Hughes

# Fire-Caught

The gold moth did not love him  
So, gorgeous, she flew away.  
But the gray moth circled the flame  
Until the break of day.  
And then, with wings like a dead desire,  
She fell, fire-caught, into the flame.

Langston Hughes

# For Selma

In places like  
Selma, Alabama,  
Kids say,  
In places like  
Chicago and New York...  
In places like  
Chicago and New York  
Kids say,  
In places like  
London and Paris...  
In places like  
London and Paris  
Kids say,  
In places like  
Chicago and New York...

Langston Hughes

# Freedom's Plow

When a man starts out with nothing,  
When a man starts out with his hands  
Empty, but clean,  
When a man starts to build a world,  
He starts first with himself  
And the faith that is in his heart-  
The strength there,  
The will there to build.

First in the heart is the dream-  
Then the mind starts seeking a way.  
His eyes look out on the world,  
On the great wooded world,  
On the rich soil of the world,  
On the rivers of the world.

The eyes see there materials for building,  
See the difficulties, too, and the obstacles.  
The mind seeks a way to overcome these obstacles.  
The hand seeks tools to cut the wood,  
To till the soil, and harness the power of the waters.  
Then the hand seeks other hands to help,  
A community of hands to help-  
Thus the dream becomes not one man's dream alone,  
But a community dream.  
Not my dream alone, but our dream.  
Not my world alone,  
But your world and my world,  
Belonging to all the hands who build.

A long time ago, but not too long ago,  
Ships came from across the sea  
Bringing the Pilgrims and prayer-makers,  
Adventurers and booty seekers,  
Free men and indentured servants,  
Slave men and slave masters, all new-  
To a new world, America!

With billowing sails the galleons came

Bringing men and dreams, women and dreams.  
In little bands together,  
Heart reaching out to heart,  
Hand reaching out to hand,  
They began to build our land.  
Some were free hands  
Seeking a greater freedom,  
Some were indentured hands  
Hoping to find their freedom,  
Some were slave hands  
Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,  
But the word was there always:  
Freedom.

Down into the earth went the plow  
In the free hands and the slave hands,  
In indentured hands and adventurous hands,  
Turning the rich soil went the plow in many hands  
That planted and harvested the food that fed  
And the cotton that clothed America.  
Clang against the trees went the ax into many hands  
That hewed and shaped the rooftops of America.  
Splash into the rivers and the seas went the boat-hulls  
That moved and transported America.  
Crack went the whips that drove the horses  
Across the plains of America.  
Free hands and slave hands,  
Indentured hands, adventurous hands,  
White hands and black hands  
Held the plow handles,  
Ax handles, hammer handles,  
Launched the boats and whipped the horses  
That fed and housed and moved America.  
Thus together through labor,  
All these hands made America.

Labor! Out of labor came villages  
And the towns that grew cities.  
Labor! Out of labor came the rowboats  
And the sailboats and the steamboats,  
Came the wagons, and the coaches,  
Covered wagons, stage coaches,

Out of labor came the factories,  
Came the foundries, came the railroads.  
Came the marts and markets, shops and stores,  
Came the mighty products moulded, manufactured,  
Sold in shops, piled in warehouses,  
Shipped the wide world over:  
Out of labor-white hands and black hands-  
Came the dream, the strength, the will,  
And the way to build America.  
Now it is Me here, and You there.  
Now it's Manhattan, Chicago,  
Seattle, New Orleans,  
Boston and El Paso-  
Now it's the U.S.A.

A long time ago, but not too long ago, a man said:

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL-  
ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR  
WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS-  
AMONG THESE LIFE, LIBERTY  
AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

His name was Jefferson. There were slaves then,  
But in their hearts the slaves believed him, too,  
And silently took for granted  
That what he said was also meant for them.

It was a long time ago,  
But not so long ago at that, Lincoln said:

NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH  
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN  
WITHOUT THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.

There were slaves then, too,  
But in their hearts the slaves knew  
What he said must be meant for every human being-  
Else it had no meaning for anyone.

Then a man said:

BETTER TO DIE FREE  
THAN TO LIVE SLAVES

He was a colored man who had been a slave  
But had run away to freedom.

And the slaves knew  
What Frederick Douglass said was true.

With John Brown at Harper's Ferry, Negroes died.  
John Brown was hung.  
Before the Civil War, days were dark,  
And nobody knew for sure  
When freedom would triumph  
'Or if it would,' thought some.  
But others new it had to triumph.  
In those dark days of slavery,  
Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,  
The slaves made up a song:  
Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!  
That song meant just what it said: Hold On!  
Freedom will come!  
Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!  
Out of war it came, bloody and terrible!  
But it came!  
Some there were, as always,  
Who doubted that the war would end right,  
That the slaves would be free,  
Or that the union would stand,  
But now we know how it all came out.  
Out of the darkest days for people and a nation,  
We know now how it came out.  
There was light when the battle clouds rolled away.  
There was a great wooded land,  
And men united as a nation.

America is a dream.  
The poet says it was promises.  
The people say it is promises-that will come true.  
The people do not always say things out loud,  
Nor write them down on paper.  
The people often hold  
Great thoughts in their deepest hearts  
And sometimes only blunderingly express them,  
Haltingly and stumblingly say them,  
And faultily put them into practice.  
The people do not always understand each other.  
But there is, somewhere there,  
Always the trying to understand,  
And the trying to say,  
'You are a man. Together we are building our land.'



America!  
Land created in common,  
Dream nourished in common,  
Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!  
If the house is not yet finished,  
Don't be discouraged, builder!  
If the fight is not yet won,  
Don't be weary, soldier!  
The plan and the pattern is here,  
Woven from the beginning  
Into the warp and woof of America:  
ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.  
NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH  
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN  
WITHOUT HIS CONSENT.  
BETTER DIE FREE,  
THAN TO LIVE SLAVES.  
Who said those things? Americans!  
Who owns those words? America!  
Who is America? You, me!  
We are America!  
To the enemy who would conquer us from without,  
We say, NO!  
To the enemy who would divide  
And conquer us from within,  
We say, NO!  
FREEDOM!  
BROTHERHOOD!  
DEMOCRACY!  
To all the enemies of these great words:  
We say, NO!

A long time ago,  
An enslaved people heading toward freedom  
Made up a song:  
Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!  
The plow plowed a new furrow  
Across the field of history.  
Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped.  
From that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow.  
That tree is for everybody,

For all America, for all the world.  
May its branches spread and shelter grow  
Until all races and all peoples know its shade.  
KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW! HOLD ON!

Langston Hughes

# Genius Child

This is a song for the genius child.  
Sing it softly, for the song is wild.  
Sing it softly as ever you can -  
Lest the song get out of hand.

*Nobody loves a genius child.*

Can you love an eagle,  
Tame or wild?  
Can you love an eagle,  
Wild or tame?  
Can you love a monster  
Of frightening name?

*Nobody loves a genius child.*

*Kill him* - and let his soul run wild.

Langston Hughes

# God

I am God—  
Without one friend,  
Alone in my purity  
World without end.  
Below me young lovers  
Tread the sweet ground—  
But I am God—  
I cannot come down.  
Spring!  
Life is love!  
Love is life only!  
Better to be human  
Than God—and lonely.

Langston Hughes

# Gods

The ivory gods,  
And the ebony gods,  
And the gods of diamond and jade,  
Sit silently on their temple shelves  
While the people  
Are afraid.

Yet the ivory gods,  
And the ebony gods,  
And the gods of diamond-jade,  
Are only silly puppet gods  
That the people themselves  
Have made.

Langston Hughes

# Harlem [dream Deferred]

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes

# Helen Keller

She,  
In the dark,  
Found light  
Brighter than many ever see.  
She,  
Within herself,  
Found loveliness,  
Through the soul's own mastery.  
And now the world receives  
From her dower:  
The message of the strength  
Of inner power.

Langston Hughes

# I Continue To Dream

I take my dreams and make of them a bronze vase  
and a round fountain with a beautiful statue in its center.  
And a song with a broken heart and I ask you:  
Do you understand my dreams?  
Sometimes you say you do,  
And sometimes you say you don't.  
Either way it doesn't matter.  
I continue to dream.

Langston Hughes



# I Dream A World

I dream a world where man  
No other man will scorn,  
Where love will bless the earth  
And peace its paths adorn  
I dream a world where all  
Will know sweet freedom's way,  
Where greed no longer saps the soul  
Nor avarice blights our day.  
A world I dream where black or white,  
Whatever race you be,  
Will share the bounties of the earth  
And every man is free,  
Where wretchedness will hang its head  
And joy, like a pearl,  
Attends the needs of all mankind-  
Of such I dream, my world!

Langston Hughes

# I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes

# In Time Of Silver Rain

In time of silver rain  
The earth puts forth new life again,  
Green grasses grow  
And flowers lift their heads,  
And over all the plain  
The wonder spreads

Of Life,  
Of Life,  
Of life!

In time of silver rain  
The butterflies lift silken wings  
To catch a rainbow cry,  
And trees put forth new leaves to sing  
In joy beneath the sky  
As down the roadway  
Passing boys and girls  
Go singing, too,

In time of silver rain When spring  
And life  
Are new.

Langston Hughes

# Jazzonia

Oh, silver tree!  
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret  
Six long-headed jazzers play.  
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold  
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh, singing tree!  
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes  
In the first garden  
Just a bit too bold?  
Was Cleopatra gorgeous  
In a gown of gold?

Oh, shining tree!  
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret  
Six long-headed jazzers play.

Langston Hughes

# Juke Box Love Song

I could take the Harlem night  
and wrap around you,  
Take the neon lights and make a crown,  
Take the Lenox Avenue busses,  
Taxis, subways,  
And for your love song tone their rumble down.  
Take Harlem's heartbeat,  
Make a drumbeat,  
Put it on a record, let it whirl,  
And while we listen to it play,  
Dance with you till day--  
Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.

Langston Hughes

# Justice

That Justice is a blind goddess  
Is a thing to which we black are wise:  
Her bandage hides two festering sores  
That once perhaps were eyes.

Langston Hughes

# Kids Who Die

This is for the kids who die,  
Black and white,  
For kids will die certainly.  
The old and rich will live on awhile,  
As always,  
Eating blood and gold,  
Letting kids die.

Kids will die in the swamps of Mississippi  
Organizing sharecroppers  
Kids will die in the streets of Chicago  
Organizing workers  
Kids will die in the orange groves of California  
Telling others to get together  
Whites and Filipinos,  
Negroes and Mexicans,  
All kinds of kids will die  
Who don't believe in lies, and bribes, and contentment  
And a lousy peace.

Of course, the wise and the learned  
Who pen editorials in the papers,  
And the gentlemen with Dr. in front of their names  
White and black,  
Who make surveys and write books  
Will live on weaving words to smother the kids who die,  
And the sleazy courts,  
And the bribe-reaching police,  
And the blood-loving generals,  
And the money-loving preachers  
Will all raise their hands against the kids who die,  
Beating them with laws and clubs and bayonets and bullets  
To frighten the people—  
For the kids who die are like iron in the blood of the people—  
And the old and rich don't want the people  
To taste the iron of the kids who die,  
Don't want the people to get wise to their own power,  
To believe an Angelo Herndon, or even get together

Listen, kids who die—  
Maybe, now, there will be no monument for you  
Except in our hearts  
Maybe your bodies'll be lost in a swamp  
Or a prison grave, or the potter's field,  
Or the rivers where you're drowned like Leibknecht  
But the day will come—  
You are sure yourselves that it is coming—  
When the marching feet of the masses  
Will raise for you a living monument of love,  
And joy, and laughter,  
And black hands and white hands clasped as one,  
And a song that reaches the sky—  
The song of the life triumphant  
Through the kids who die.

Langston Hughes



# Let America Be America Again

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,  
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
I am the red man driven from the land,  
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek--  
And finding only the same old stupid plan  
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
I am the worker sold to the machine.  
I am the Negro, servant to you all.  
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--  
Hungry yet today despite the dream.  
Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!  
I am the man who never got ahead,  
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,  
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,  
That even yet its mighty daring sings  
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned  
That's made America the land it has become.  
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas  
In search of what I meant to be my home--  
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,  
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,  
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came  
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?  
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?  
The millions shot down when we strike?  
The millions who have nothing for our pay?  
For all the dreams we've dreamed  
And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,  
The millions who have nothing for our pay--  
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again--  
The land that never has been yet--  
And yet must be--the land where every man is free.  
The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME--  
Who made America,  
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,  
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,

Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--  
The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
We must take back our land again,  
America!

O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath--  
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain--  
All, all the stretch of these great green states--  
And make America again!

Langston Hughes

# Life Is Fine

I went down to the river,  
I set down on the bank.  
I tried to think but couldn't,  
So I jumped in and sank.

I came up once and hollered!  
I came up twice and cried!  
If that water hadn't a-been so cold  
I might've sunk and died.

But it was Cold in that water! It was cold!

I took the elevator  
Sixteen floors above the ground.  
I thought about my baby  
And thought I would jump down.

I stood there and I hollered!  
I stood there and I cried!  
If it hadn't a-been so high  
I might've jumped and died.

But it was High up there! It was high!

So since I'm still here livin',  
I guess I will live on.  
I could've died for love--  
But for livin' I was born

Though you may hear me holler,  
And you may see me cry--  
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,  
If you gonna see me die.

Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!

Langston Hughes

# Lincoln Monument: Washington

Let's go see Old Abe  
Sitting in the marble and the moonlight,  
Sitting lonely in the marble and the moonlight,  
Quiet for ten thousand centuries, old Abe.  
Quiet for a million, million years.

Quiet-

And yet a voice forever  
Against the  
Timeless walls  
Of time-  
Old Abe.

Langston Hughes

# Lonesome Place

I got to leave this town.  
It's a lonesome place.  
Got to leave this town cause  
It's a lonesome place.  
A po', po' boy can't  
Find a friendly face.

Goin' down to de river  
Flowin' deep an' slow.  
Goin' down to de river  
Deep an' slow-  
Cause there ain't no worries  
Where de waters go.

I'm weary, weary,  
Weary, as I can be.  
Weary, weary,  
Weary as can be.  
This life's so weary,  
'S' bout to overcome me.

Langston Hughes

# Love Song For Lucinda

Love

Is a ripe plum

Growing on a purple tree.

Taste it once

And the spell of its enchantment

Will never let you be.

Love

Is a bright star

Glowing in far Southern skies.

Look too hard

And its burning flame

Will always hurt your eyes.

Love

Is a high mountain

Stark in a windy sky.

If you

Would never lose your breath

Do not climb too high.

Langston Hughes

# Madam And Her Madam

I worked for a woman,  
She wasn't mean--  
But she had a twelve-room  
House to clean.

Had to get breakfast,  
Dinner, and supper, too--  
Then take care of her children  
When I got through.

Wash, iron, and scrub,  
Walk the dog around--  
It was too much,  
Nearly broke me down.

I said, Madam,  
Can it be  
You trying to make a  
Pack-horse out of me?

She opened her mouth.  
She cried, Oh, no!  
You know, Alberta,  
I love you so!

I said, Madam,  
That may be true--  
But I'll be dogged  
If I love you!

Langston Hughes



# Madam And The Census Man

The census man,  
The day he came round,  
Wanted my name  
To put it down.

I said, Johnson,  
Alberta K.  
But he hated to write  
The K that way.

He said, What  
Does K stand for?  
I said, K--  
And nothing more.

He said, I'm gonna put it  
K?A?Y.  
I said, If you do,  
You lie.

My mother christened me  
Alberta K.  
You leave my name  
Just that way!

He said, Mrs.,  
(With a snort)  
Just a K  
Makes your name too short.

I said, I don't  
Give a damn!  
Leave me and my name  
Just like I am!

Furthermore, rub out  
That MRS., too--  
I'll have you know  
I'm Madam to you!

Langston Hughes

# Madam And The Phone Bill

You say I  
LONG DISTANCE?  
it when?  
My goodness, Central  
That was then!

I'm mad and disgusted  
With that Negro now.  
I don't pay no REVERSED  
CHARGES nohow.

You say, I will pay it--  
Else you'll take out my phone?  
You better let  
My phone alone.

I didn't ask him  
To telephone me.  
Roscoe knows darn well  
LONG DISTANCE  
Ain't free.

If I ever catch him,  
Lawd, have pity!  
Calling me up  
From Kansas City.

Just to say he loves me!  
I knowed that was so.  
Why didn't he tell me some'n  
I don't know?

For instance, what can  
Them other girls do  
That Alberta K. Johnson  
Can't do--and more, too?

What's that, Central?  
You say you don't care

Nothing about my  
Private affair?

Well, even less about your  
PHONE BILL, does I care!

Un-humm-m! . . . Yes!  
You say I gave my O.K.?  
Well, that O.K. you may keep--

But I sure ain't gonna pay!

Langston Hughes

# Madam And The Rent Man

The rent man knocked.  
He said, Howdy-do?  
I said, What  
Can I do for you?  
He said, You know  
Your rent is due.

I said, Listen,  
Before I'd pay  
I'd go to Hades  
And rot away!

The sink is broke,  
The water don't run,  
And you ain't done a thing  
You promised to've done.

Back window's cracked,  
Kitchen floor squeaks,  
There's rats in the cellar,  
And the attic leaks.

He said, Madam,  
It's not up to me.  
I'm just the agent,  
Don't you see?

I said, Naturally,  
You pass the buck.  
If it's money you want  
You're out of luck.

He said, Madam,  
I ain't pleased!  
I said, Neither am I.  
So we agrees!

Langston Hughes

# Madam's Past History

My name is Johnson--  
Madam Alberta K.  
The Madam stands for business.  
I'm smart that way.

I had a  
HAIR-DRESSING PARLOR  
Before  
The depression put  
The prices lower.

Then I had a  
BARBECUE STAND  
Till I got mixed up  
With a no-good man.

Cause I had a insurance  
The WPA  
Said, We can't use you  
Wealthy that way.

I said,  
DON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME!  
Just like the song,  
You WPA folks take care of yourself--  
And I'll get along.

I do cooking,  
Day's work, too!  
Alberta K. Johnson--  
Madam to you.

Langston Hughes

# Me And The Mule

My old mule,  
He's got a grin on his face.  
He's been a mule so long  
He's forgotten about his race.

I'm like that old mule --  
Black -- and don't give a damn!  
You got to take me  
Like I am.

Langston Hughes

# Merry-Go-Round

Where is the Jim Crow section  
On this merry-go-round,  
Mister, cause I want to ride?  
Down South where I come from  
White and colored  
Can't sit side by side.  
Down South on the train  
There's a Jim Crow car.  
On the bus we're put in the back—  
But there ain't no back  
To a merry-go-round!  
Where's the horse  
For a kid that's black?

Langston Hughes



# Minstrel Man

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter  
And my throat  
Is deep with song,  
You do not think  
I suffer after  
I have held my pain  
So long?

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter,  
You do not hear  
My inner cry?  
Because my feet  
Are gay with dancing,  
You do not know  
I die?

Langston Hughes

## Morning After

I was so sick last night I  
Didn't hardly know my mind.  
So sick last night I  
Didn't know my mind.  
I drunk some bad licker that  
Almost made me blind.

Had a dream last night I  
Thought I was in hell.  
I drempt last night I  
Thought I was in hell.  
Woke up and looked around me—  
Babe, your mouth was open like a well.

I said, Baby! Baby!  
Please don't snore so loud.  
Baby! Please!  
Please don't snore so loud.  
You jest a little bit o' woman but you  
Sound like a great big crowd.

Langston Hughes

# Mother To Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor—  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I've been a-climbin' on,  
And reachin' landin's,  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So, boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps.  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now—  
For I've still goin', honey,  
I've still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Langston Hughes

# Motto

I play it cool  
I dig all jive  
That's the reason  
I stay alive  
My motto  
As I live and learn  
Is dig and be dug in return

Langston Hughes

# My People

The night is beautiful,  
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,  
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.  
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

Langston Hughes

# Negro Dancers

'Me an' ma baby's  
Got two mo' ways,  
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!  
Da, da,  
Da, da, da!  
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!  
Soft light on the tables,  
Music gay,  
Brown-skin steppers  
In a cabaret.  
White folks, laugh!  
White folks, pray!  
'Me an' ma baby's  
Got two mo' ways,  
Two mo' ways to do de  
Charleston!

Langston Hughes

# Negro Speaks Of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes

# Night Funeral In Harlem

Night funeral  
In Harlem:

Where did they get  
Them two fine cars?

Insurance man, he did not pay--  
His insurance lapsed the other day--  
Yet they got a satin box  
for his head to lay.

Night funeral  
In Harlem:

Who was it sent  
That wreath of flowers?

Them flowers came  
from that poor boy's friends--  
They'll want flowers, too,  
When they meet their ends.

Night funeral  
in Harlem:

Who preached that  
Black boy to his grave?

Old preacher man  
Preached that boy away--  
Charged Five Dollars  
His girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral  
In Harlem:

When it was all over  
And the lid shut on his head  
and the organ had done played



and the last prayers been said  
and six pallbearers  
Carried him out for dead  
And off down Lenox Avenue  
That long black hearse done sped,  
The street light  
At his corner  
Shined just like a tear--  
That boy that they was mournin'  
Was so dear, so dear  
To them folks that brought the flowers,  
To that girl who paid the preacher man--  
It was all their tears that made  
That poor boy's  
Funeral grand.

Night funeral  
In Harlem.

Langston Hughes

# Oppression

Now dreams  
Are not available  
To the dreamers,  
Nor songs  
To the singers.

In some lands  
Dark night  
And cold steel  
Prevail  
But the dream  
Will come back,  
And the song  
Break  
Its jail.

Langston Hughes

# Park Bench

I live on a park bench.  
You, Park Avenue.  
Hell of a distance  
Between us two.

I beg a dime for dinner-  
You got a butler and maid.  
But I'm wakin' up!  
Say, ain't you afraid

That I might, just maybe,  
In a year or two,  
Move on over  
To Park Avenue?

Langston Hughes

# Peace

We passed their graves:  
The dead men there,  
Winners or losers,  
Did not care.  
In the dark  
They could not see  
Who had gained  
The victory.

Langston Hughes

# Personal

In an envelope marked:

PERSONAL

God addressed me a letter.

In an envelope marked:

PERSONAL

I have given my answer.

Langston Hughes

# Pierrot

I work all day,  
Said Simple John,  
Myself a house to buy.  
I work all day,  
Said Simple John,  
But Pierrot wondered why.  
For Pierrot loved the long white road,  
And Pierrot loved the moon,  
And Pierrot loved a star-filled sky,  
And the breath of a rose in June.  
I have one wife,  
Said Simple John,  
And, faith, I love her yet.  
I have one wife,  
Said Simple John,  
But Pierrot left Pierrette.

For Pierrot saw a world of girls,  
And Pierrot loved each one,  
And Pierrot thought all maidens fair  
As flowers in the sun.  
Oh, I am good,  
Said Simple John,  
The Lord will take me in.  
Yes, I am good,  
Said Simple John,  
But Pierrot's steeped in sin.  
For Pierrot played on a slim guitar,  
And Pierrot loved the moon,  
And Pierrot ran down the long white road  
With the burgher's wife one June.

Langston Hughes

# Po' Boy Blues

When I was home de  
Sunshine seemed like gold.  
When I was home de  
Sunshine seemed like gold.  
Since I come up North de  
Whole damn world's turned cold.

I was a good boy,  
Never done no wrong.  
Yes, I was a good boy,  
Never done no wrong,  
But this world is weary  
An' de road is hard an' long.

I fell in love with  
A gal I thought was kind.  
Fell in love with  
A gal I thought was kind.  
She made me lose ma money  
An' almost lose ma mind.

Weary, weary,  
Weary early in de morn.  
Weary, weary,  
Early, early in de morn.  
I's so weary  
I wish I'd never been born.

Langston Hughes

# Prize Fighter

Only dumb guys fight.  
If I wasn't dumb  
I wouldn't be fightin'.  
I could make six dollars a day  
On the docks  
And I'd save more than I do now.  
Only dumb guys fight.

Langston Hughes



# Problems

2 and 2 are 4.

4 and 4 are 8.

But what would happen

If the last 4 was late?

And how would it be

If one 2 was me?

Or if the first 4 was you

Divided by 2?

Langston Hughes

## Question [1]

When the old junk man Death  
Comes to gather up our bodies  
And toss them into the sack of oblivion,  
I wonder if he will find  
The corpse of a white multi-millionaire  
Worth more pennies of eternity,  
Than the black torso of  
A Negro cotton-picker.

Langston Hughes

# Quiet Girl

I would liken you  
To a night without stars  
Were it not for your eyes.  
I would liken you  
To a sleep without dreams  
Were it not for your songs.

Langston Hughes

# Sea Calm

How still,  
How strangely still  
The water is today,  
It is not good  
For water  
To be so still that way.

Langston Hughes

# Sick Room

How quiet  
It is in this sick room  
Where on the bed  
A silent woman lies between two lovers-  
Life and Death,  
And all three covered with a sheet of pain.

Langston Hughes

# Silence

I catch the pattern  
Of your silence  
Before you speak

I do not need  
To hear a word.

In your silence  
Every tone I seek  
Is heard.

Langston Hughes

# Snake

He glides so swiftly  
Back into the grass-  
Gives me the courtesy of road  
To let me pass,  
That I am half ashamed  
To seek a stone  
To kill him.

Langston Hughes

# Song For A Dark Girl

Way Down South in Dixie  
(Break the heart of me)  
They hung my black young lover  
To a cross roads tree.

Way Down South in Dixie  
(Bruised body high in air)  
I asked the white Lord Jesus  
What was the use of prayer.

Way Down South in Dixie  
(Break the heart of me)  
Love is a naked shadow  
On a gnarled and naked tree.

Langston Hughes



# Songs

I sat there singing her  
Songs in the dark.

She said;  
'I do not understand  
The words'.

I said;  
'There are  
No words'.

Langston Hughes

## Still Here

been scarred and battered.  
My hopes the wind done scattered.  
Snow has friz me,  
Sun has baked me,

Looks like between 'em they done  
Tried to make me

Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'-  
But I don't care!  
I'm still here!

Langston Hughes

# Suicide's Note

The calm,  
Cool face of the river  
Asked me for a kiss.

Langston Hughes

# Sylvester's Dying Bed

I woke up this mornin'  
'Bout half-past three.  
All the womens in town  
Was gathered round me.

Sweet gals was a-moanin',  
"Sylvester's gonna die!"  
And a hundred pretty mamas  
Bowed their heads to cry.

I woke up little later  
'Bout half-past fo',  
The doctor 'n' undertaker's  
Both at ma do'.

Black gals was a-beggin',  
"You can't leave us here!"  
Brown-skins cryin', "Daddy!  
Honey! Baby! Don't go, dear!"

But I felt ma time's a-comin',  
And I know'd I's dyin' fast.  
I seed the River Jerden  
A-creepin' muddy past—  
But I's still Sweet Papa 'Vester,  
Yes, sir! Long as life do last!

So I hollers, "Com'ere, babies,  
Fo' to love yo' daddy right!"  
And I reaches up to hug 'em—  
When the Lawd put out the light.

Then everything was darkness

In a great ... big ... night.

Langston Hughes

# Thanksgiving Time

When the night winds whistle through the trees and blow the crisp brown leaves  
a-crackling down,

When the autumn moon is big and yellow-orange and round,

When old Jack Frost is sparkling on the ground,

It's Thanksgiving Time!

When the pantry jars are full of mince-meat and the shelves are laden with sweet  
spices for a cake,

When the butcher man sends up a turkey nice and fat to bake,

When the stores are crammed with everything ingenious cooks can make,

It's Thanksgiving Time!

When the gales of coming winter outside your window howl,

When the air is sharp and cheery so it drives away your scowl,

When one's appetite craves turkey and will have no other fowl,

It's Thanksgiving Time!

Langston Hughes

# The Ballad Of The Landlord

Landlord, landlord,  
My roof has sprung a leak.  
Don't you 'member I told you about it  
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,  
These steps is broken down.  
When you come up yourself  
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?  
Ten Bucks you say is due?  
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you  
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?  
You gonna cut off my heat?  
You gonna take my furniture and  
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.  
Talk on-till you get through.  
You ain't gonna be able to say a word  
If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!  
Come and get this man!  
He's trying to ruin the government  
And overturn the land!

Copper's whistle!  
Patrol bell!  
Arrest.  
Precinct Station.  
Iron cell.  
Headlines in press:  
Man Threatens landlord  
Tenant Held Bail  
Judge Gives Negro 90 Days In County Jail!

Langston Hughes



# The Blues

When the shoe strings break  
On both your shoes  
And you're in a hurry-  
That's the blues.

When you go to buy a candy bar  
And you've lost the dime you had-  
Slipped through a hole in your pocket somewhere-  
That's the blues, too, and bad!

Submitted by Denice Jackson

Langston Hughes

# The City

In the morning the city  
Spreads its wings  
Making a song  
In stone that sings.

In the evening the city  
Goes to bed  
Hanging lights  
Above its head.

Langston Hughes

# The Dream Keeper

Bring me all of your dreams,  
You dreamer,  
Bring me all your  
Heart melodies  
That I may wrap them  
In a blue cloud-cloth  
Away from the too-rough fingers  
Of the world.

Langston Hughes

# The Negro Mother

Children, I come back today  
To tell you a story of the long dark way  
That I had to climb, that I had to know  
In order that the race might live and grow.  
Look at my face - dark as the night -  
Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.  
I am the dark girl who crossed the red sea  
Carrying in my body the seed of the free.  
I am the woman who worked in the field  
Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.  
I am the one who labored as a slave,  
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave -  
Children sold away from me, I'm husband sold, too.  
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.

Three hundred years in the deepest South:  
But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth.  
God put a dream like steel in my soul.  
Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.

Now, through my children, young and free,  
I realized the blessing deed to me.  
I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.  
I had nothing, back there in the night.  
Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,  
But I kept trudging on through the lonely years.  
Sometimes, the road was hot with the sun,  
But I had to keep on till my work was done:  
I had to keep on! No stopping for me -  
I was the seed of the coming Free.  
I nourished the dream that nothing could smother  
Deep in my breast - the Negro mother.  
I had only hope then, but now through you,  
Dark ones of today, my dreams must come true:  
All you dark children in the world out there,  
Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.  
Remember my years, heavy with sorrow -  
And make of those years a torch for tomorrow.  
Make of my pass a road to the light

Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.  
Lift high my banner out of the dust.  
Stand like free men supporting my trust.  
Believe in the right, let none push you back.  
Remember the whip and the slaver's track.  
Remember how the strong in struggle and strife  
Still bar you the way, and deny you life -  
But march ever forward, breaking down bars.  
Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.  
Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers  
Impel you forever up the great stairs -  
For I will be with you till no white brother  
Dares keep down the children of the Negro Mother.

Langston Hughes

# The Negro Speaks Of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes

# The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
I heard a Negro play.  
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night  
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
He did a lazy sway ....  
He did a lazy sway ....  
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.  
With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
He made that poor piano moan with melody.  
O Blues!  
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.  
Sweet Blues!  
Coming from a black man's soul.  
O Blues!  
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan--  
"Ain't got nobody in all this world,  
Ain't got nobody but ma self.  
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'  
And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
He played a few chords then he sang some more--  
"I got the Weary Blues  
And I can't be satisfied.  
Got the Weary Blues  
And can't be satisfied--  
I ain't happy no mo'  
And I wish that I had died."  
And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
The stars went out and so did the moon.  
The singer stopped playing and went to bed  
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.  
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

Langston Hughes

# Theme For English B

The instructor said,

Go home and write  
a page tonight.  
And let that page come out of you--  
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me  
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what  
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me--we two--you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York, too.) Me--who?  
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records--Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.  
But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.  
You are white--  
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.  
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.  
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.



But we are, that's true!  
As I learn from you,  
I guess you learn from me--  
although you're older--and white--  
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

Langston Hughes

## To Artina

I will take your heart.  
I will take your soul out of your body  
As though I were God.  
I will not be satisfied  
With the touch of your hand  
Nor the sweet of your lips alone.  
I will take your heart for mine.  
I will take your soul.  
I will be God when it comes to you.

Langston Hughes

# To Certain

You sicken me with lies,  
With truthful lies.  
And with your pious faces.  
And your wide, out-stretched,  
mock-welcome, Christian hands.  
While underneath  
Is dirt and ugliness,  
And rotting hearts,  
And wild hyenas howling  
In you soul's wasteland.

Langston Hughes

# Trumpet Player

The Negro

With the trumpet at his lips  
Has dark moons of weariness  
Beneath his eyes  
where the smoldering memory  
of slave ships  
Blazed to the crack of whips  
about thighs

The negro

with the trumpet at his lips  
has a head of vibrant hair  
tamed down,  
patent-leathered now  
until it gleams  
like jet-  
were jet a crown

the music

from the trumpet at his lips  
is honey  
mixed with liquid fire  
the rhythm  
from the trumpet at his lips  
is ecstasy  
distilled from old desire-

Desire

that is longing for the moon  
where the moonlight's but a spotlight  
in his eyes,  
desire  
that is longing for the sea  
where the sea's a bar-glass  
sucker size

The Negro

with the trumpet at his lips  
whose jacket

Has a fine one-button roll,  
does not know  
upon what riff the music slips

It's hypodermic needle  
to his soul  
but softly  
as the tune comes from his throat  
trouble  
mellows to a golden note

Langston Hughes

# Wake

Tell all my mourners  
To mourn in red --  
Cause there ain't no sense  
In my bein' dead.

Langston Hughes

# Walkers With The Dawn

Being walkers with the dawn and morning,  
Walkers with the sun and morning,  
We are not afraid of night,  
Nor days of gloom,  
Nor darkness--  
Being walkers with the sun and morning.

Langston Hughes

# Warning

Negroes,  
Sweet and docile,  
Meek, humble and kind:  
Beware the day  
They change their mind!  
Wind  
In the cotton fields,  
Gentle Breeze:  
Beware the hour  
It uproots trees!

Langston Hughes



# Wealth

From Christ to Ghandi  
Appears this truth-  
St. Francis of Assisi  
Proves it, too:  
Goodness becomes grandeur  
Surpassing might of kings.  
Halos of kindness  
Brighter shine  
Than crowns of gold,  
And brighter  
Than rich diamonds  
Sparkles  
The simple dew  
Of love.

Langston Hughes

# When Sue Wears Red

When Susanna Jones wears red  
her face is like an ancient cameo  
Turned brown by the ages.  
Come with a blast of trumpets, Jesus!

When Susanna Jones wears red  
A queen from some time-dead Egyptian night  
Walks once again.  
Blow trumpets, Jesus!

And the beauty of Susanna Jones in red  
Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like a pain.  
Sweet silver trumpets, Jesus!

Langston Hughes

# Will V-Day Be Me-Day Too?

Over There,  
World War II.

□

Dear Fellow Americans,  
I write this letter  
Hoping times will be better  
When this war  
Is through.  
I'm a Tan-skinned Yank  
Driving a tank.  
I ask, WILL V-DAY  
BE ME-DAY, TOO?

I wear a U. S. uniform.  
I've done the enemy much harm,  
I've driven back  
The Germans and the Japs,  
From Burma to the Rhine.  
On every battle line,  
I've dropped defeat  
Into the Fascists' laps.

I am a Negro American  
Out to defend my land  
Army, Navy, Air Corps--  
I am there.  
I take munitions through,  
I fight--or stevedore, too.  
I face death the same as you do  
Everywhere.

I've seen my buddy lying  
Where he fell.  
I've watched him dying  
I promised him that I would try  
To make our land a land  
Where his son could be a man--  
And there'd be no Jim Crow birds  
Left in our sky.

So this is what I want to know:  
When we see Victory's glow,  
Will you still let old Jim Crow  
Hold me back?  
When all those foreign folks who've waited--  
Italians, Chinese, Danes--are liberated.  
Will I still be ill-fated  
Because I'm black?

Here in my own, my native land,  
Will the Jim Crow laws still stand?  
Will Dixie lynch me still  
When I return?  
Or will you comrades in arms  
From the factories and the farms,  
Have learned what this war  
Was fought for us to learn?

When I take off my uniform,  
Will I be safe from harm--  
Or will you do me  
As the Germans did the Jews?  
When I've helped this world to save,  
Shall I still be color's slave?  
Or will Victory change  
Your antiquated views?

You can't say I didn't fight  
To smash the Fascists' might.  
You can't say I wasn't with you  
in each battle.  
As a soldier, and a friend.  
When this war comes to an end,  
Will you herd me in a Jim Crow car  
Like cattle?

Or will you stand up like a man  
At home and take your stand  
For Democracy?  
That's all I ask of you.  
When we lay the guns away

To celebrate  
Our Victory Day  
WILL V-DAY BE ME-DAY, TOO?  
That's what I want to know.

Sincerely,  
GI Joe.

Langston Hughes

# Wisdom And War

We do not care-  
That much is clear.  
Not enough  
Of us care  
Anywhere.  
We are not wise-  
For that reason,  
Mankind dies.  
To think  
Is much against  
The will.  
Better-  
And easier-  
To kill.

Langston Hughes

# You and your whole race

You and your whole race.  
Look down upon the town in which you live  
And be ashamed.  
Look down upon white folks  
And upon yourselves  
And be ashamed  
That such supine poverty exists there,  
That such stupid ignorance breeds children there  
Behind such humble shelters of despair—  
That you yourselves have not the sense to care  
Nor the manhood to stand up and say  
I dare you to come one step nearer, evil world,  
With your hands of greed seeking to touch my throat,  
I dare you to come one step nearer me:  
                    When you can say that  
                    you will be free!

Langston Hughes