

"Lift Every Voice and Sing"

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

Weldon, who also wrote God's Trombones, a collection of seven sermons in poetic form, authored this song in 1900 for a group of schoolchildren to sing in honor of Lincoln's birthday. Today, it is considered by many to be the national anthem of African-Americans.

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the
dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the
present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day
Begun let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our wary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way
That with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path
Through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places,
Our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine
Of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our GOD,
True to our native land.

<http://www.heholidayzone.com/>

Selected Poems for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Remembering A Life

By Nordette Adams

I remember him in the misted vision of toddler years
and again in girlhood, the booming voice on TV,
someone grown-ups talked about, eyelids flapped wide.
Elders huddled "round the screen enraptured,
in fear for him, in awe.

I remember him.
His words swept the land, singing our passion.
Dogs growled in streets. Men in sheets.
Police battering my people. (Water, a weapon.)
Yet my people would rejoice... And mourn.

I remember him, a fearsome warrior crying peace,
a man--blemished by clay, the stain of sin as
any other, calling on the Rock--
Death's sickle on his coat tails,
yet he spied glory.

Shall we walk again and remember him,
not as the Madison Aveners do,
but in solitude and hope
with acts of courage and compassion,
with lives of greater scope
carving fresh paths of righteousness?

I remember.

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A Dream Deferred

by Langston Hughes

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?

I, Too, Sing America

by Langston Hughes

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.

Let America Be America Again

by Langston Hughes

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!