

## **Dreams** by Langston Hughes

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.

## **America** by Claude McKay

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,  
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,  
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess  
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!  
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,  
Giving me strength erect against her hate.  
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.  
Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,  
I stand within her walls with not a shred  
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.  
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,  
And see her might and granite wonders there,  
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,  
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

## **If We Must Die** by Claude McKay

If we must die—let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursed lot.  
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;  
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,  
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!  
What though before us lies the open grave?  
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

## **I, Too** 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.

### **Harlem** 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?*

### **After the Winter** BY CLAUDE MCKAY

Some day, when trees have shed their leaves  
And against the morning's white  
The shivering birds beneath the eaves

Have sheltered for the night,  
We'll turn our faces southward, love,  
Toward the summer isle  
Where bamboos spire the shafted grove  
And wide-mouthed orchids smile.

And we will seek the quiet hill  
Where towers the cotton tree,  
And leaps the laughing crystal rill,  
And works the droning bee.  
And we will build a cottage there  
Beside an open glade,  
With black-ribbed blue-bells blowing near,  
And ferns that never fade.

### **Harlem Wine** by Countee Cullen

This is not water running here,  
These thick rebellious streams  
That hurtle flesh and bone past fear  
Down alleyways of dreams

This is a wine that must flow on  
Not caring how or where  
So it has ways to flow upon  
Where song is in the air.

So it can woo an artful flute  
With loose elastic lips  
Its measurements of joy compute  
With blithe, ecstatic hips.

## **Black Woman** by Georgia Douglas Johnson

Don't knock at the door, little child,  
I cannot let you in,  
You know not what a world this is  
Of cruelty and sin.  
Wait in the still eternity  
Until I come to you,  
The world is cruel, cruel, child,  
I cannot let you in!

Don't knock at my heart, little one,  
I cannot bear the pain  
Of turning deaf-ear to your call  
Time and time again!  
You do not know the monster men  
Inhabiting the earth,  
Be still, be still, my precious child,  
I must not give you birth!

## **Foredoom**

BY GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON

Her life was dwarfed, and wed to blight,  
Her very days were shades of night,  
Her every dream was born entombed,  
Her soul, a bud,—that never bloomed.

## **Smothered Fires**

BY GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON

A woman with a burning flame  
Deep covered through the years  
With ashes. Ah! she hid it deep,  
And smothered it with tears.

Sometimes a baleful light would rise

From out the dusky bed,  
And then the woman hushed it quick  
To slumber on, as dead.

At last the weary war was done  
The tapers were alight,  
And with a sigh of victory  
She breathed a soft—good-night!

### **Saturday's Child** BY COUNTEE CULLEN

Some are teathed on a silver spoon,  
With the stars strung for a rattle;  
I cut my teeth as the black raccoon—  
For implements of battle.

Some are swaddled in silk and down,  
And heralded by a star;  
They swathed my limbs in a sackcloth gown  
On a night that was black as tar.

For some, godfather and goddame  
The opulent fairies be;  
Dame Poverty gave me my name,  
And Pain godfathered me.

For I was born on Saturday—  
“Bad time for planting a seed,”  
Was all my father had to say,  
And, “One mouth more to feed.”

Death cut the strings that gave me life,  
And handed me to Sorrow,  
The only kind of middle wife  
My folks could beg or borrow.

### **Mother to Son** BY LANGSTON HUGHES

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.

## **Speech to the Young : Speech to the Progress-Toward** Gwendolyn Brooks

Say to them,  
say to the down-keepers,  
the sun-slappers, the self-soilers,  
the harmony-hushers,  
"even if you are not ready for day it cannot always be night."  
You will be right.  
For that is the hard home-run.  
Live not for battles won.  
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.  
Live in the along.

### Democracy: By Langston Hughes

*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.*

# I Have A Rendezvous With Life

## Countee Cullen

I have a rendezvous with Life,  
In days I hope will come,  
Ere youth has sped, and strength of mind,  
Ere voices sweet grow dumb.  
I have a rendezvous with Life,  
When Spring's first heralds hum.  
Sure some would cry it's better far  
To crown their days with sleep  
Than face the road, the wind and rain,  
To heed the calling deep.  
Though wet nor blow nor space I fear,  
Yet fear I deeply, too,  
Lest Death should meet and claim me ere  
I keep Life's rendezvous.

# A Black Man Talks of Reaping

BY ARNA BONTEMPS

I have sown beside all waters in my day.  
I planted deep, within my heart the fear  
that wind or fowl would take the grain away.  
I planted safe against this stark, lean year.

I scattered seed enough to plant the land

in rows from Canada to Mexico  
but for my reaping only what the hand  
can hold at once is all that I can show.

Yet what I sowed and what the orchard yields  
my brother's sons are gathering stalk and root;  
small wonder then my children glean in fields  
they have not sown, and feed on bitter fruit.

## Helene Johnson

*Ah my race,*

*Hungry race,*

*Throbbing and young-*

*Ah, my race, Wonder race,*

*Sobbing with song,*

*Ah, my race,*

*Careless in mirth*

*Ah, my veiled race,*

*Fumbling in birth*

— "My Race"

## Sonnet To A Negro In Harlem

Helene Johnson

You are disdainful and magnificent--  
Your perfect body and your pompous gait,  
Your dark eyes flashing solemnly with hate;  
Small wonder that you are incompetent  
To imitate those whom you so despise--  
Your shoulders towering high above the throng,  
Your head thrown back in rich, barbaric song,  
Palm trees and manes stretched before your eyes.

Let others toil and sweat for labor's sake  
And wring from grasping hands their meed of gold.  
Why urge ahead your supercilious feet?  
Scorn will efface each footprint that you make.  
I love your laughter, arrogant and bold.  
You are too splendid for this city street!

