**The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

By Langston Hughes

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.

**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?*

**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.

**From the Dark Tower**

By Countee Cullen

We shall not always plant while others reap

The golden increment of bursting fruit,

Not always countenance, abject and mute,

That lesser men should hold their brothers cheap;

Not everlastingly while others sleep

Shall we beguile their limbs with mellow flute,

Not always bend to some more subtle brute;

We were not made to eternally weep.

The night whose sable breast relieves the stark,

White stars is no less lovely being dark,

And there are buds that cannot bloom at all

In light, but crumple, piteous, and fall;

So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds,

And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds.

**Yet Do I Marvel**

By Countee Cullen

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,

And did He stoop to quibble could tell why

The little buried mole continues blind,

Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day die,

Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus

Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare

If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus

To struggle up a never-ending stair.

Inscrutable His ways are, and immune

To catechism by a mind too strewn

With petty cares to slightly understand

What awful brain compels His awful hand.

Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:

To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

**Saturday's Child**

By Countee Cullen

Some are teethed 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.

**The Heart of a Woman**

By Georgia Douglas Johnson

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,

As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,

Afar o’er life’s turrets and vales does it roam

In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.

The heart of a woman falls back with the night,

And enters some alien cage in its plight,

And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars

While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering bars.

**Sonnet To A Negro In Harlem** (1927)

By 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 dispise--

Your shoulders towering high above the throng,

Your head thrown back in rich, barbaric song,

Palm trees and manoes 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!

**Little Brown Boy**

By Helene Johnson (1927)

Little brown boy,

Slim, dark, big-eyed,

Crooning love songs to your banjo

Down at the Lafayerre--

Gee, boy, I love the way you hold your head,

High sort of and a bit to one side,

Like a prince, a jazz prince. And I love

Your eyes flashing, and your hands,

And your patent-leathered feet,

And your shoulders jerking the jig-wa.

And I love your teeth flashing,

And the way your hair shines in the spotlight

Like it was the real stuff.

Gee, brown boy, I loves you all over.

I'm glad I'm a jig. I'm glad I can

Understand your dancin' and your

Singin', and feel all the happiness

And joy and don't care in you.

Gee, boy, when you sing, I can close my ears

And hear tom-toms just as plain.

Listen to me, will you, what do I know

About tom-toms? But I like the word, sort of,

Don't you? It belongs to us.

Gee, boy, I love the way you hold your head,

And the way you sing, and dance,

And everything.

Say, I think you're wonderful. You're

Allright with me,/You are.

**When Dawn Comes to the City**

By Claude McKay

The tired cars go grumbling by,

The moaning, groaning cars,

And the old milk carts go rumbling by

Under the same dull stars.

Out of the tenements, cold as stone,

Dark figures start for work;

I watch them sadly shuffle on,

'Tis dawn, dawn in New York.

But I would be on the island of the sea,

In the heart of the island of the sea,

Where the cocks are crowing, crowing, crowing,

And the hens are cackling in the rose-apple tree,

Where the old draft-horse is neighing, neighing, neighing,

Out on the brown dew-silvered lawn,

And the tethered cow is lowing, lowing, lowing,

And dear old Ned is braying, braying, braying,

And the shaggy Nannie goat is calling, calling, calling

From her little trampled corner of the long wide lea

That stretches to the waters of the hill-stream falling

Sheer upon the flat rocks joyously!

There, oh, there! on the island of the sea,

There would I be at dawn.

The tired cars go grumbling by,

The crazy, lazy cars,

And the same milk carts go rumbling by

Under the dying stars.

A lonely newsboy hurries by,

Humming a recent ditty;

Red streaks strike through the gray of the sky,

The dawn comes to the city.

But I would be on the island of the sea,

In the heart of the island of the sea,

Where the cocks are crowing, crowing, crowing,

And the hens are cackling in the rose-apple tree,

Where the old draft-horse is neighing, neighing, neighing

Out on the brown dew-silvered lawn,

And the tethered cow is lowing, lowing, lowing,

And dear old Ned is braying, braying, braying,

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From her little trampled corner of the long wide lea

That stretches to the waters of the hill-stream falling

Sheer upon the flat rocks joyously!

There, oh, there! on the island of the sea,

There I would be at dawn.

**We Real Cool**

By Gwendolyn Brooks

The Pool Players.   
Seven at the Golden Shovel.  
  
We real cool. We  
Left school. We  
  
Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We  
  
Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We  
  
Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

**The Bean Eaters**

By Gwendolyn Brooks

They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair.

Dinner is a casual affair.

Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood,

Tin flatware.

Two who are Mostly Good.

Two who have lived their day,

But keep on putting on their clothes

And putting things away.

And remembering . . .

Remembering, with twinklings and twinges,

As they lean over the beans in their rented back room that

is full of beads and receipts and dolls and cloths,

tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes.