Anthems, Sonnets, and Chants
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ON THE SLAVE SHIP

We must not pray that death which now has passed
Too many times for fear will sleep again,
Or swim to other galleys till the last
Black exile dies or smites these pallid men,
Oh tears that fall like splinters from the stars
We would dry up your source, for salty tears
Will never wear away these iron bars
Or drown the ominous pounding of our fears.
Oh groaning men whose bodies sweat in pain,
Oh women with your infants on your breasts
Who chant your agonizing songs, the rain
Will come and wash these rancid nests,
The rain will come, be silent, we must wait
For time to change the destinies of fate.

PAST AND FUTURE

“You must not damn the future or the past;
That death will come in season and delay
The disillusion of this life (the last
Slow breath will come to cleanse the clay
You know, yet knowing beat your dusky wings
And curse the men who made your blackness pain,
And chant your agonizing hymn that brings
An ointment in its notes to wash your stain.”
This worshipper of dying is like a breath
Of hopeless resignation at the end
Of flaming autumn—forecasting death,
Blotting out the hope that we will mend
The patches of these transitory years
With swords, with hate, in spite of frequent tears.

POST EMANCIPATION

Rescind the hope that we may walk again
Without the heavy chains of servitude
That bind our flesh to soil and heartless men
Who mould our lives to fit each fickle mood.
Rescind the hope although it was decreed
That freedom would be ours to wear and keep
For centuries, aye, for eons till the seed
Of freedom died or earth was rocked to sleep.
The parchment that declared that we were free
Is now collecting dust in some dark spot,
Despite the promise and the certainty
We thought its words would give, but gave them not.
Distrust all words that echo to the stars
When earth is bound with unrelenting bars.

HARLEM

Harlem—deep, dark flower of the west
With girls for hollow stamens ribbed with joys,
Reject the easy sun, be wary lest
It shrivel up the pollen of your boys.
Together you must grow your flowers anew,
Not asking whose the gain or whose the gold;
Together you must silence winds that blew
Your fragrant copper petals to be sold
And not for beauty’s dress or beauty’s walls.
Remember that the ex-ray of the years
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Reveals the rotting of the shallow halls
Within the petal’s veins, reveals the fears
The copper must be conscious of
If they would hold their life. Grow strong or starve.

WELBORN VICTOR JENKINS

Almost nothing is known about Welborn Victor Jenkins (1879–?), a resident of Atlanta, Georgia. Aside from his volume of poems Trumpet in the New Moon (1934), his books are The “Incident” at Monroe: A Requiem for the Victims of July 25th, 1944 (1948), a long Whitmanian protest poem; We Also Serve: (Apologies to O. Henry) (1920), a collection of short stories; and an essay, “Who Are the Thespians?” (ND).

TRUMPET IN THE NEW MOON

You have work to do, America—
You have work to be done.
The goal which was set for you in the dreams of your founders
Has not been realized.
You are off the trail, America—
You are wandering in the Wilderness like the Israelites of old.
You are worshipping strange gods, America—
You have lost your first love and fallen
From grace.

In your early garb, I thought you beautiful.
Your coon-skin cap, your leathern breeches, your brogans,
your axe and your flintlock were beautiful to me, America,
Because your motives were pure.
Then was your Love boundless,
Then was your Hope boundless,
Then was your Enthusiasm boundless
Because
Your faith was boundless.
The clean wild air, the free new world seemed to animate
you with a fraternal benevolence; and I even condone
your questionable treatment of the Indians
Because
You were honor bright; and, at least, your heart was right.
And you have a rich heritage, America—
Your history reads like the songs of the bards
When the earth was young,
Remember the twilight years—
Remember the years of the dawn—
Sing of the heroic days of the Scandinavian Rovers
Who first saw your shores.
Sing of Cabot and Drake and Magellan and Balboa and De Soto
And Columbus, who gave you your song-name and
    started you on your way to Plymouth Rock and Yorktown!
Nay, sing of the slave-ships and Christopher Attucks.
Sing of the Declaration of Independence; there is
No grander human document.
I hear the opening lines which read like the cry of a
    new-born man-child—
lusty and defiant!
I hear the closing lines which read like a lover's sacred oath.
I see a young man riding out of Boston in the night;
I see a signal flashed to him from the belfry of a church;
And "embattled farmers firing the shot heard round the world."
I see suffering and sacrifice and trails of blood across
    the snows of Valley Forge;
And a dignified, Virginian gentleman looming to the
    stature of Hannibal, Alexander, Napoleon, Marlborough
Anon; and then I saw a mighty nation born into the world!
I saw that nation spreading toward the westward.
Horace Greeley gave good advice to the young men—
St. Louis, Kansas City, Denver, San Francisco
Took form and grew like mushrooms in the night.
New Orleans, child of the Mississippi, basking in the
    rich cotton fields of the Delta,
Glanced proudly at the rising suns of Promise and Fulfillment.
Erelong I heard the boom of a cannon athwart the
    ramparts of Ft. Sumpter.
I saw Puritan and Cavalier come to grips over an idea:
Bull Run—Vicksburg—Missionary Ridge—
    Antietam—The Wilderness—
Lee—Grant—McClelland—Beauregard—Stone-wall Jackson—
And the finality of Appomattox!
Above all, I heard the peroration at Gettysburg:
“May not perish from the earth,”
Like a benediction
And a prayer . . .
O you came from that fire like pure gold, America,
With high Purposes:
With noble Resolutions:
And lofty Aspirations.
I saw your write the “Fourteenth Amendment” in the Book
I saw you wish the Freedman “God speed”
As he launched his frail bark upon the sea of Emancipation.
I saw you “bind up the nation’s wounds” while rebuilding
your prosperity upon a sounder foundation.
Came now the matchless Grady
Wrapped in sunlit clouds of eloquence—
He of the silver tongue and the golden throat—
With the earnest hope for a new orientation;
With the hope that there should be “no further misunderstanding;”
With the hope North and South should make common
cause to “consummate our great destiny;”
I saw you build great railways; rear factories; dig mines.
I saw the black man patiently helping you to perform these miracles.
I saw you reorganize the Empire that was to amaze the world.
I saw your commerce begin to whiten every sea.
I saw you apply your mind to Experimental Science—
Sing, O Sing, of strange secrets wrested from nature—
Telegraph!—Telephone!—Phonograph!—Incandescent!
I saw mighty orators step forth into the arena of debate
With the winged words that challenged days of Ancient Greece.
I heard the voices of gifted poets rise in harmonious cadences,
Else in the dissonance of raw truth and highest art—
Emerson—Whittier—Whitman—Sandburg—Lindsay.
I saw you take on girth; your pockets bulge—
Astor—Vanderbilt—Harriman—Rockefeller—Ford—

And then I saw a great cloud overspread the sky.
I saw you mobilize, and shoulder gun and spade and march,
With hearts aflame, to “Make the World
Safe for Democracy!”
Sing of Submarines and Torpedoes! the mud of Brest!
the blood of Verdun! the Fire of Chateau-Thierry!
Sing of “Flanders Fields!” and the “Rendezvous with
Death!” of “Zeppelin Raids!” “Too Proud to Fight!”
“Liberty Bonds!” “Victory!” “Versailles!”
But now I thought I saw another shadow creeping over the epic canvass:

Unrest—The casting Adrift from the Moorings of Faith—

“The Revolt of Youth”—Candor Run Riot—Morals Amuck—

A Break in conduct—A Loss of Respect for many of the Ancient Virtues.

So what have you? I ask you, America—

What have you done? ad what have you come upon?

Cynicism! Disillusionment! Night Clubs! “Legs” Diamond!

“Speakeys!” Capone! Joy Rides! “Whoopee!!!!”

You have work to do America—

Your have work to be done.

Directly I thought I saw the bitter fruit of that “Disillusionment.”

I saw you build a great colossus:

Intolerance!

I saw the zeal with which you fashioned your Idol.

I saw you offer up the incense of Prejudice;

And the smoke rise from the altars of Human Sacrifices!

Go hide your head in Shame, America,

And wrap yourself in Sack-Cloth and Ashes.

Erstwhile I heard your groan under your “white man’s burden;”

Black men shivered while you wreaked vengeance at

Tulsa, Atlanta, Washington, Chicago—

“O Masters, Lords and Rulers of the Land,”

Who are they who drove the shaft of hate between

the working black and the working white?

Why can not a spirit of humane co-operation exist between these two?

You Masters who have exploited the black laborer for centuries,

Held us up as a constant threat to the white working-man,

Causing him to despise us,

Causing him to consider us a perennial menace to his well-being—

Is the light worth the candle?

Does the end justify the means?

Are all the years of the past forgotten?

Forgotten all the loyalties, the faithfulness, the tender care of your children, the genuflections, the service?

Sing of the service—

Remember the service:

”Come Susie, rock the baby—Go Hannah, get the dinner—Uncle Jim, go plough the new-ground—

Here Sambo, grab my satchel and get to hell—“
Remember the service.
Remember the sweat, the cotton fields, the lumber
logs, the brick yards, the saw mills and turpentine
plantations—all black labor.
And in the field of Higher Service, Remember the immortal
"Tenth Cavalry" and the "Hot Time in San Juan when they got there."
"—With regard to the Bravery in Action and the Exceptional
Behavior (under the enemy's continuous fire) of the
Negro Units in the 91st Division, American Expeditionary
Forces, U. S. Army, I have the honor, Sir, to report—"
Remember the Service!
Remember, too, that black soldiers may be needed again.
Some day the Eagle may be wounded;
Some day the Flag may be insulted.
"Black-a-moors" make good cannon-fodder.
The World War seems not to have satisfied certain nations.
Every now and then there is a great rattling of sabers—
"Black-a-moors" make good cannon-fodder.
Black breasts can stop bullets like the Devil!
And Remember their 100% Loyalty—
President Wilson asked for a detail of "Black-a-moors"
to guard the Executive Mansion
In those days when everyman mistrusted every man.
Then, as now, a Black Face was badge of Loyalty no
one doubted.
Remember the Service!
Remember, too, the Rocky Road, the "Deep Rivers"—
Sing of "Deep Rivers!"
Remember the silence and the patience—
Sing of the Patience!
You speak of the burdens—You speak of the "white man's burden!"
But you speak patronizingly,
And you boast overweeningly—
The "white man's burden!"
"A Negro should know his place"—
"A Negro should be taught his place"—
"A Negro should stay in his place"—
The "white man's burden!"
Listen, I shall tell you a true story, America:
There was a young Norseman came up from Obscurity
Upon wings.
Sing, O Sing, of wings—and the dark earth—and
mountain crest—and stormy skies—
Sing of Wings!
He was intrepid; he was “American Youth Incarnate”
Sing of “Youth Incarnate!”
You saw him hover upon the shore of the Atlantic
Like some “Lone Eagle” poised above the rocky promontory;
And then you saw him point straight into the gloom
of the ocean, America,
and the Night and a Silence like Death swallowed him up.
“Flying Fool!” said some;
“God keep his soul!” prayed some.
The World held its breath, America—
The World had one though, America:
Black water, angry—menacing—frightful—deep—
Black night, deep as all Eternity—
Loneliness sublime, infinite—
But Paris and Glory at least! America.
Glory for your Prowess, your Institutions,
Your undismayed and invincible Youth,
Your virile and intrepid Manhood,
Your courageous and Unquenchable Spirit!
Glory for the “Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave”—
A Land where a Rail-splitter may become a King!
Yet what have you Done, America—
How have you rewarded him who pawned his life for your Glory?
Gold you gave him—yes;
Fame you gave him—yes;
But the Dregs in the Cup you gave him to Drink—
Sing of the Bitterness, the Wormwood and the Gall!
Go hide your head in Shame, America.
You speak of burdens;
But you speak condescendingly,
And you boast unbecomingly.
Think, will you, of your underworld, America.
Ah! Here is the sore that is galling your back;
Here is the ulcer that is eating your vitals;
Here is the virus that is chilling your heart;
And the lethal fumes that are choking your spirit.
How can you denominate the black man Burden?
How be guilty of such Travesty upon Justice,
Or countenance such a Distortion of Truth,
Or heap such Humiliation upon him?
Stand forth before the Bar, America,
While I read from the Indictment;
While I enumerate your Transgressions;
While I prosecute before the Jury!
You have made of “Success” a fetish;
“Go-Getters” have been your high priests;
“Fail not” has been your watchword;
“Win out” has been your slogan.
You forgot Love and Justice,
You forgot Truth and Beauty:
You forgot Life and Humanity
In your mad race to “Win.”
You trampled down the finer impulse of the soul
In a wild desire to “Compete”—
In a wild desire for “Riches”
And “Success’ at all hazards.
And you worshipped Gold;
You idolized the Material;
You dwarfed the Spiritual—
Greed was your religion;
Gold was your God!
Vanity was your Raiment;
Prejudice, your Daily Bread;
Class hatred, your Life-Blood;
And Inconsistency, your Castle.
You hero-worshipped Jesse James;
You lionized Bandits—
You have been “Weighed in the Balances, America,
And found Wanting.”
You have let rich murderers escape who had gold;
You have hanged poor wretches who had nothing
You have winked at injustice in high places,
And punished many unfortunates who may have been innocent.
You have Condoned the biting poverty of the many.
Racketeers infest your streets;
Dealers in “hot goods” lurk on every corner.
Kidnappers drive a thriving business;
“Come-on’, men and Crooks consort with Ward-heelers
and “Public Citizens.”
Your children are abducted.
And you call high heaven to witness your sorrow;
But you shell out the “Spondulux.”
Because the Underworld is so Powerful.

There was an eminent foreigner visited our Country
To observe and study our manners and customs.
Was told of certain Creeds and Laws and Restrictions
That held the two races in separate compartments.
Was told that the Noose and the Rack and Faggot
Are oftimes evoked to maintain these Restrictions.
The visitor listened in grave and respectful silence,
Then asked: “Whence so many octoroons and quadroons
and mulattoes?”
Was told of a ship leaving port at a certain hour:
And that we were grieved he so soon must be going.

Wake up, America!
The black man is not your Real Burden.
Your inconsistence, your Selfishness, your Indifference, your
materialism, your Intolerance, your descent from the Ancient Virtues,
Make up your Real Burden.
Buck up, America!
And “Come out of the Wilderness
Leaning on the Lord.”
Drop some of your Prejudice—
Some of your Intolerance—
Some of your Disdain for the Common Man, the Forgotten
Man, the Man Farthest Down.
Discard some of your Scorn for the Darker Races;
For the Darker Races will be living in their present habitat
When Chicago, London and Berlin are one
With Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Gomorrah,
And all the buried cities of the past.
Gray beard Chinamen will be carrying burdens upon
their backs in their native fields
When your civilization shall lie buried beneath the
rust and dust of forgotten centuries.

Unless
You shall change your ways, America,
And get yourself a new Religion  
Based on Humane Co-operation  
And Brotherly Love twixt Man and Man;  
And unless  
You shall strip your hearts of Intolerance,  
And turn unto the ways of Justice and Love,  
The germs of decay will proceed unrestrained;  
And your paths will lead down to Confusion and Death.

And now particularly to “white” America,  
And the sovereign commonwealths of Georgia and Alabama—  
I address myself to you:  
You are direct descendants of the men  
Who made the greatest contribution  
To the conserving forces of civilization  
This side of the crucified Jesus.  
And it is not your science, nor your art, nor your citadels,  
— nor your political power, nor your industrial efficiency,  
(In all of which you have no peer  
Under the smiling canopy of heaven);  
But in your “Noble English Chivalry”  
You have vouchsafed to mankind  
The nearest approach to a redeeming perfection  
Which has appeared upon this earth.
Emblazoned high in the blue field of your escutcheon  
Is the historic, the immortal legend;  
“LIBERTY—WISDOM—JUSTICE—MODERATION—”  
The germ and essence of Chivalry.  
You are really accountable to no higher tribunal;  
And your own conscience need be your only guide.  
You can therefore afford to be Tolerant;  
You can therefore afford to be Just!  
Chivalry bestows upon the lowliest man  
An inalienable right to Justice;  
And develops in him an pride to have privilege  
To suffer, even die, for his country.  
Look to “ATLANTA,” America—  
Have your been Tolerant?  
Look to “SCOTTSBORO,” America—  
Have you been Just?  
I am appealing to your Heart of Hearts, America—
You can afford to be Just.
I am appealing to the hearts of Georgians and Alabamians—
You can afford to be fair.

There is a classic example
Of High English Chivalry in action:
I see a ship leaving her berth at Southampton
Upon her maiden voyage
She is the ill-fated Titanic,
Largest and fastest boat in all the seven seas.
She points first for Cherbourg,
Steams gracefully past the Isle of Wight,
Then drops anchor at Queenstown
Her port of last call,
At one-thirty p.m., April eleventh, Nineteen-twelve,
The Titanic stands out from Queenstown
With two and twenty hundred human souls aboard.
She ports her helm,
And signals her pilot,
While charting her course for New York
Where she is due in record time.
I see her as she begins her stately march
Across the storm-swept Atlantic,
Measuring her majestic tread to the muffled beat
Of her mighty turbines.
The great Titanic! Queen of the Ocean!
Mistress of the seas!
And “Monarch of all she surveys!”
At midnight all is calm and serene
Aboard the world’s greatest ship,
Although the black water lay beneath her keel
Three thousand fathoms deep.
Suddenly a cry:
“Iceberg ahoy!”
As with the force of a falling mountain,
The ship plunges to her doom.
Panic and Horror!
Men and women crazed with fear!
A scramble for the life-boats!
It is now that Captain Smith
Walks coolly to the bridge
And gives voice to an expression
Which must go down in history:
“The law of the sea is women and children first;
Be British my men.”
Erstwhile frantic men snapped to Attention
And saluted Captain Smith;
And after safely ensconcing what women and
children they could
In what life-boats were available,
One thousand brave men (of the sixteen hundred humans lost)
Went down with Captain Smith to their doom!

What did Captain Smith mean: “Be British?”
That was the greatest compliment
Ever paid the British Empire
Upon whose flag the sun is said
Never to go down;
For it means that England sets a very high Standard
For the behavior of her Sons;
A Standard so high
That Mediocrity could never reach it
And none could attain to it
Save Gentlemen and Heroes!
God hasten the day when “Be American”
Shall carry the selfsame Inspiration
To call forth all the heroism and nobility
That lie dormant in the human spirit.
But how can it be thus, O my Countrymen,
While you are so Intolerant.
How can it be thus, O America,
While you are so Unjust.

As they entered into mortal combat
For the entertainment of the pampered patricians,
The gladiators of old used to shout:
“Caesar,
We who are about to die
Salute thee!”
But that was the homage of Despair
To the Iron Imperialism and Tyranny of Rome.
There's higher homage, deeper love for Country,
The grip of Faith, the Substance of Devotion,
The proper ring of unalloy’d Sincerity
Embodied in the Shout of Negro Soldiers:
“America,
Farewell! Goodbye!
You may not always have been kind to us;
We may have much to forgive;
But we’ll return your Sacred Flag
In Honor,

Or else report to God the reason why.”

Spirit of Truth and light, O Sacred Muse,
That didst inspire the Hebrew Harpist to declaim
In days of old:
“Blow up the Trumpet in the New Moon,
And the Appointed Time”—
Inspired by Thee,
Have I now Blown the Trumpet into the air,
That America may hear and well prepare
For the Joys of Rebirth and Regeneration
That shall come
At the solemn Love-Feast of Brotherhood and Democracy.

RICHARD WRIGHT

TRANSCONTINENTAL
(FOR LOUIS ARAGON, IN PRAISE OF RED FRONT)

Through trembling waves of roadside heat
We see the cool green of golf courses
Long red awnings catching the sunshine
Slender rainbows curved above the spirals of water
Swaying hammocks slung between trees—
Like in the movies . . .

America who built this dream

Above the ceaseless hiss of passing cars
We hear the tinkle of ice in tall glasses
Clacks of croquet balls scudding over the cropped lawns
Silvery crescendos of laughter—
Like in the movies
On Saturday nights
When we used to get our paychecks . . .

*America who owns this wonderland*

Lost
We hitch-hike down the hot highways
Looking for a ride home
Yanking tired thumbs at glazed faces
Behind the steering wheels of Packards Pierce Arrows
Lincolns La Salles Reos Chryslers—
Their lips are tight jaws set eyes straight ahead . . .

*America America America why turn your face away*

O for the minute
The joyous minute
The minute of the hour of the day
When the tumbling white ball of our anger
Rolling down the cold hill of our lives
Swelling like a moving mass of snow
Shall crash
Shall explode at the bottom of our patience Thundering
HALT
You shall not pass our begging thumbs
America is ours
This car is commandeered
America is ours
Take your ringed fingers from the steering wheel
Take your polished shoe off the gas
We’ll drive and let you be the hitch-hiker
We’ll show you how to pass ’em up
You say we’re robbers
So what
We’re bastards
So what
Sonofbitches
All right chop us into little pieces we don’t care
Let the wind tousle your hair like ours have been tousled
Doesn't the sun's hot hate feel sweet on your back
Crook your thumbs and smudge the thin air
What kind of a growl does your gut make when meal-time comes
At night your hips can learn how soft the pavements are
Oh let's do it the good old American way
Sportsmanship Buddy Sportsmanship
But dear America's a free country
Sis you say Negroes
Oh I don't mean NEEEGROOOES
After all
Isn't there a limit to everything
You wouldn't want your daughter
And they say there's no GOD
And furthermore it's simply disgraceful how they're discriminating against the
  Children of the rich in Soviet schools
PROLETARIAN CHILDREN
Good Lord
Why if we divided up everything today we'd be just where we are
inside of a year
The strong and the weak The quick and the slow You understand
But Lady even quivering lips can say
PLEASE COMRADE MY FATHER WAS A CARPENTER I SWEAR SWEAR
  HE WAS
I WAS NEVER AGAINST THE CUMMUNISTS REALLY
Fairplay Boys Fairplay
America America can every boy have the chance to rise from Wall Street
to the
  Commintern
America America can every boy have the chance to rise form Riverside
Drive to
  The General Secretaryship of the Communist Party
100% Justice
And Mister don't forget
Our hand shall be on the steering wheel
Our feet shall be on the gas
And you shall hear the grate of our gears
UNITEDFRONT—SSTRIKE
The motor throbs with eager anger
UNITEDFRONT—SSTRIKE
We’re lurching toward the highway
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
The pavement drops into the past The future smites our face
America is ours
10 15 20 30
America America
WOORKERSWOORKERS
Hop on the runningboard Pile in
We’re leaving We’re Leaving
Leaving the tired the timid the soft
Leaving the pimps idlers loungers
Leaving empty dinner-pails wage-cuts stretch-outs
Leaving the tight-lipped mother and the bare meal-can
Leaving the shamed girl and her bastard child
Leaving leaving the past leaving
The wind filled with leaflets leaflets of freedom
Millions and millions of leaflets fluttering
Like the wings of a million birds
AmericaAmericaAmerica

Scaling New England’s stubborn hills Spanning the Hudson
Waving at Manhattan Waving at New Jersey
Throwing a Good Bye kiss to Way Down East
Through mine-pirred Pennsylvania Through Maryland Our Maryland
Careening over the Spinning the steering wheel
Taking the curves with determination
AmericaAmerica
SOFT SHOULDER AHEAD
AmericaAmerica
KEEP TO THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD
AmericaAmerica
The telegraph poles are a solid wall
WASHINGTON—90 MILES
AmericaAmerica
The farms are a storm of green
Past rivers past towns
50 60 70 80
AmericaAmerica
CITY LIMITS
Vaulting Washington’s Monument
Leaping desks of Senators Ending all bourgeois elections
Hurdling desks of Congressmen
Fascist flesh sticking to our tires
Skidding into the White House
Leaving a trail of carbon monoxide for the
President
Roaring into the East Room
Going straight through Lincoln's portrait
Letting
the light of history through
AmericaAmerica
Swinging Southward
Plunging the radiator into the lynch-mob
Giving no
warning
Slowing for the sharecroppers
Come on You Negroes Come on
There's room
Not in the back but front seat
We're heading for the highway of Self=Determination
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
Dim your lights you Trotskyites
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
Lenin's line is our stream line
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
Through October's windshield we see the road
Looping over the green hills
Dipping
toward to-morrow

AmericaAmericaAmerica
Look back See the tiny thread of our tires leaving hammer and sickle prints
upon the pavement
See the tree-lined horizon turning slowly in our hearts
See the ripe fields Fields ripe as our love
See the eastern sky See the white clouds of our hope
See the blood-red afterglow in the west Our memory of October
See See the pretty cottages the bungalows the sheltered homes
See the packing-box cities the jungles the huts
See See the skyscrapers the clubs the pent-houses
See the bread-lines winding winding winding long as our road
AmericaAmericaAmerica

Tagging Kentucky Tagging Tennessee
Into Ohio Into the orchards of Michigan
Over the rising and falling dunes of Indiana
Across Illinois' glad fields of dancing corn
Slowing Comrades Slowing again
Slowing for the heart of proletarian America

CHICAGO—100 miles

WOORKERSWOORKERS

Steel and rail and stock All you sons of Haymarket
Swing on We’re going your way America is ours

UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
The pressure of our tires is blood pounding in our hearts
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
The steam of our courage blows from the radiator cap
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
The wind screams red songs in our ears

60 70 80 90
AmericaAmericaAmerica

Listen Listen to the moans of those whose lives were laughter
Listen to the howls of the dogs of the dispossessed
Listen to bureaucratic insects spattering against the windshield
Listen to curses rebounding from fear-proof glass
Listen to the gravel of hate tingling on our fenders
Listen to the raindrops mumbling of yesterday
Listen to the wind whistling of to-morrow
Listen to our tires humming humming humming hymns of victory
AmericaAmericaAmerica

Coasting Comrades Coasting
Coasting on momentum of Revolution

Look Look at the village Like a lonesome egg in the nest of the hills
Soon Soon you shall fly over the hillsides Crowing the new dawn

Coasting Indulging in Lenin's dream

TUNE IN ON THE RADIO THE WORLD IS LAUGHING

Red Baseball

Great Day in the Morning

. . . the Leninites defeated the redbirds 3 to 0.
Batteries for the Leninites: Kenji Sumarira and
Boris Petrovsky. For the Redbirds: Wing Sing and
Eddie O’Brien. Homeruns: Hugo Schmidt and Jack
Ogletree. Umpires: Pierre Carpentier and Oswald Wallings . . .
The world is laughing The world is laughing

. . . Mike Gold's account of the revolution sells
 26 millions copies . . .
 26 million copies . . .
The world is laughing The world is laughing

. . . beginning May 1st the work day is limited to
five hours . . .
The world is laughing The world is laughing
  . . last of the landlords liquidated
  in Texas . . .
The world is laughing The world is laughing

Picking up speed to measure the Mississippi
AmericaAmericaAmerica
Plowing the richness of Iowa soil Into the Wheat Empire
Making Minnesota Taking the Dakotas Carrying Nebraska
On on toward the Badlands the Rockies the deserts the Golden Gate
Slowing once again Comrades Slowing to right a wrong
Say You Red Men You Forgotten Men
Come out of your tepees
Show us Pocahontas For we love her
Bring her from her hiding place Let the sun kiss her eyes
Drape her in a shawl of red wool Tuck her in beside us
Our arms shall thaw the long cold of her shoulders
The lights flash red Comrades let's go
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
The future opens like an ever-widening V
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
We're rolling over tiles of red logic
UNITEDFRONT—SSSTRIKE
We're speeding on wheels of revolution
AmericaAmerica
Mountain peaks are falling toward us
AmericaAmerica
Uphill and the earth rises and looms
AmericaAmerica
Downhill and the earth tilts and sways
AmericaAmerica
80 90 100
AmericaAmerica
Every factory is a fortress
Cities breed soviets
AmericaAmerica
Plains sprout collective farms
Ten thousand Units are meeting
AmericaAmerica
Resolutions passed unanimously
The Red Army is on the march
AmericaAmerica
Arise, ye prisoners . . .
AmericaAmerica
Speed Faster
Speed AmericaAmerica
Arise, ye wretched . . .
AmericaAmerica
Speed Faster
Ever Faster America America
For Justice America America Thunders
AmericaAmericaAmerica

JOAQUIN MILLER

IN CLASSIC SHADES

ALONE and sad I sat me down
To rest on Rousseau s narrow isle
Below Geneva. Mile on mile,
And set with many a shining town,.
Tow rd Dent du Midi danced the wave
Beneath the moon. Winds went and came
And fanned the stars into a flame.
I heard the far lake, dark and deep,
Rise up and talk as in its sleep;
I heard the laughing waters lave
And lap against the further shore,
An idle oar, and nothing more
Save that the isle had voice, and save
That round about its base of stone
There plashed and flashed the foamy
Rhone.
A stately man, as black as tan,
Kept up a stern and broken round
Among the strangers on the ground.
I named that awful African
A second Hannibal.

My elbows on the table sat
With chin in upturned palm to scan
His face, and contemplate the scene.
The moon rode by a crowned queen.
I was alone. Lo! not a man
To speak my mother tongue. Ah me!
How more than all alone can be
A man in crowds! Across the isle
My Hannibal strode on. The while
Diminished Rousseau sat his throne
Of books, unnoticed and unknown.
This strange, strong man, with fact
austere,
At last drew near. He bowed; he spake
In unknown tongues. I could but shake;
My head. Then half achill with fear,
Arose, and sought another place.
Again I mused. The kings of thought
Came by, and on that storied spot
I lifted up a tearful face.
The star-set Alps they sang a tune
Unheard by any soul save mine.
Mont Blanc, as lone and as divine
And white, seemed mated to the moon.
The past was mine; strong-voiced and
Vast

Stern Calvin, strange Voltaire, and Tell,
And two whose names are known too well
To name, in grand procession passed.

And yet again came Hannibal;
King-like he came, and drawing near,
I saw his brow was now severe
And resolute.

In tongue unknown
Again he spake. I was alone,
Was all unarmed, was worn and sad;
But now, at last, my spirit had
Its old assertion.

I arose,

As startled from a dull repose;
With gathered strength I raised a hand
And cried, “I do not understand.”

His black face brightened as I spake;
He bowed; he wagged his woolly head;
He showed his shining teeth, and said,
“Sah, if you please, dose tables heah
Am consecrate to lager beer;
And, sah, what will you have to take?”

Not that I loved that colored cuss
Nay! he had awed me all too much
But I sprang forth, and with a clutch
I grasped his hand, and holding thus,
Cried, “Bring my country’ s drink for two!

For oh! that speech of Saxon sound
To me was as a fountain found
In wastes, and thrilled me through and through.

On Rousseau s isle, in Rousseau s shade,
Two pink and spicy drinks were made,
In classic shades, on classic ground,
We stirred two cocktails round and round.
ISABEL FISKE CONANT
HAMPTON INSTITUTE
(REMEMBERING GENERAL ARMSTRONG)

There is more here than you can be aware of,
Even you who know it best, beyond the rules
Administered that you have the wise care of;
Something significant past other schools
Of learning or of actual education,
For here the movement of historic force
Is shaping the future of a forming nation
Into an altered but a destined course.

He builded even better than he knew
Working for those who gave our land their song,
Its rich, dark wine, the sunlight pouring through,
Cadence that now to all the States belong;
That haunting rhythm and that poignant metre
That make life more significant and sweeter.
Opportunity, Nov. 1937: 329

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Sonnet 130 is addressed to a woman, sometimes called “the dark lady.”
While there has been much speculation about her identity (most recently, she has been identified as Aemilia Lanyer), there is nothing conclusive to link any woman or man with the lovers Shakespeare addresses.

My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips’ red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

**LANGSTON HUGHES**

**AIR RAID OVER HARLEM**
**(SCENARIO FOR A LITTLE BLACK MOVIE)**

You're not talking 'bout Harlem, are you?
That's where my home is,
My bed is my woman is, my kids is!
Harlem, that's where I live!
Look at my streets
Full of black and brown and
Yellow and high-yellow
Jokers like me.
Lenox, Seventh, Edgecombe, 145th.
Listen,
Hear 'em talkin' and laughin'?
Bombs over Harlem'd kill
People like me—
Kill ME!
Sure, I know
The Ethiopian war broke out last night:
BOMBS OVER HARLEM
Cops on every corner
Most of 'em white
COPS IN HARLEM
Guns and billy-clubs
Double duty in Harlem
Walking in pairs
Under every light
Their faces
WHITE
In Harlem
And mixed in with 'em
A black cop or two
For the sake of the vote in Harlem
GUGSA A TRAITOR TOO
No, sir,
I ain’t talkin’ ‘bout you,
Mister Policeman!
No, indeed!
I know we got to keep
ORDER OVER HARLEM
Where the black millions sleep
Shepherds over Harlem
Their armed watch keep
Lest Harlem stirs in its sleep
And maybe remembers
And remembering forgets
To be peaceful and quiet
And has sudden fits
Of raising a black fist
Out of the dark
And that black fist
Becomes a red spark
PLANES OVER HARLEM
BOMBS OVER Harlem
You’re just making up
A fake funny picture, ain’t you?
Not real, not real?
Did you ever taste blood
From an iron heel
Planted in your mouth
In the slavery-time South
Where to whip a nigger’s
Easy as hell—
And not even a living nigger
Has a tale to tell
Lest the kick of the boot
Baring more blood to his mouth
In the slavery-time South
And a long billy-club
Split his head wide
And a white hand draw
A gun from its side
And send bullets splaying
Through the streets of Harlem
Where the dead’re laying
Lest you stir in your sleep
And remember something
You'd best better keep
In the dark, in the dark
Where the ugly things hide
Under the white lights
With guns by their side
In Harlem?

*Say what are yuh tryin' to do?*
*Start a riot?*
*You keep quiet!*
*You niggers keep quiet!*

BLACK WORLD
Never wake up
Lest you knock over the cup
Of gold that the men who
Keep order guard so well
And then—well, then
There'd be hell
To pay
And bombs over Harlem

AIR RAID OVER HARLEM

Bullets through Harlem
And someday
A sleeping giant waking
To snatch bombs from the sky
And push the sun up with a loud cry
Off to hell with the cops on the corners at night
Armed to the teeth under the light
Lest Harlem see red
And suddenly sit on the edge of its bed
And shake the whole world with a new dream
As the squad cars come and the sirens scream
And the big black giant snatches bombs from the sky
And picks up the cop and lets him fly
Into the dust of the Jimcrow past
And laughs and Hollers
Kiss my
!x!&!
Hey!
Scenario for a Little Black Movie,
You say?
A RED MOVIE TO MR. HEARST
Black and white workers united as one
In a city where
There'll never be
Air raids over Harlem
FOR THE WORKERS ARE FREE
What workers are free?
THE BLACK AND WHITE WORKERS—
You and me!
Looky here, everybody!
Look at me!
I'M HARLEM!

JAY N. HILL

ETHIOPE IN SPAIN

(This verse was inspired by the activities of Ghvet son of Ras Imru of
Ethiopia who is now fighting for the International Brigade in Spain.)

No jewel shone in this Ethiope's ear,
No gay cloth draped his form.
Dust bespattered his dusky limbs,
Sweat covered his stern face,
Determination furrowed his brow,
As he stood, half-erect half-crouching
On Spanish soil,
Fighting his old enemy.

Silent man of the past, he seemed heroic,
Through disillusion and forced exile,
Through faded visions of Adowa,
Of ancient streets in Addis Ababa,
Of mountains and muddy roads in Abyssinia,
Where barefoot men
Trudged their way through centuries
Of peace, and calmly roamed the hills.
Silent man of the hour is he,
Hurling back the ejector,
Loading, firing grimly;
Exchanging few words with his company,
For he spoke neither Italian
Nor Spanish.
Though little English
And some French,
For the most part he spoke Amharic.
And that was not necessary.
For language could not match
The eloquence of his silence.

A distant radiance shines in his eye—
A kindred light, that some men claim
Set the flame
At Runnymede
At the Bastille
At Boston
At Moscow
At Madrid.

Civil conflagration
Sweeps the hills of Guadalajara,
The halls at University City
Tell frightful tales of direst tragedy.
As “Frenchman’s Bridge” becomes a bridge of sighs—
Manzares turns a sanguine hue.
Bilboa chants Niobe’s fateful strain—
As children’s feet—
Beat out a terrified retreat,
Before the roar and scream
Of planes that fleck the sky.

Spain writhes in pain.
Her gates—humanity’s gates—
Withhold a devastating horde,
A pack of ‘hireling wolves’. . .
At one gate, in silence, fights this Ethiope,  
Goaded by the rape  
Of motherland, of sisterland—  
Yesterday, a symbol of black majesty,  
Today a victim of civilized barbarity,  
A prince, with no bright jewel in his ear


**RUFUS GIBSON**

**THE VOICE OF ETHIOPIA**

What voice this be  
That strangely calls to me  
From out the maze of dreams my slumbers bring?  
Ah, no this seems no captive’s cry to be;  
For yesternight I heard its clarion ring  
Within my thoughts dense wilderness, when sleep  
Her somniferous breath upon my eyes  
Had blown, bidding my soul its tryst to keep.  
I heard it say  
“Children arise! arise!  
Now gather to me out of every land  
To which the four-winds bore you long ago,  
Come you to me again, a motley band,  
Come children all that from my loins did grow,  
Bring borrowed jewels from the strangers’ camps  
Yet while in sleep upon their beds they lie,  
Bring to your Motherland oil for her lamps  
To light the path on which your brethren ply  
Through centuries of deep and dark content.  
O come I but not as prodigals to me,  
Or wayward children seeking to repent  
Your sins; for from all guilt are you made free.  
Gird well your loins, take up both sword and shield  
And forthwith march. As warriors, meet the foe  
As did your sires who ne’er to tyrants yield;  
But by their righteous might gave blow for blow  
Until the foes of peace were driven back
Beyond the hills from whence sweet waters flow.
O! sons of mine of regal bronze and black—My queenly daughters, hither come I pray!
Long since have ravenous hordes despoiled our land,
Long centuries did they our trust betray.
Now Ethiopia must stretch forth her hand
First unto God for refuge and for strength,
That we may now our Native land reclaim
And drive usurpers from its breadth and length.
O sons and daughters mine, let not in shame
Men rise to speak of Ethiopia’s name.”
*Crisis, January 1936: 13*

J. HARVEY L. BAXTER

SONNETS (ETHIOPIAN)

THE WORLD

The world’s a mummery of groggy lies,
And we are victims of its undertow.
We turn our backs to Heaven, close our eyes
To probity. Ah! Lord, we’ve fallen low.
Bed-fellows with the filth of gutter trash,
Maggots of slime that know not foot or head;
Bewildered leaders, wary of a crash,
Base minions of the slough of fear and dead.

No more the parliaments of justice work!
Their flaccid pivots ape the maniac;
Man’s bounded duty, now’s to dodge and shirk
And eat his words, postpone each noble act
Great God! this fog, this chaff, must pass away
Ere Thy poor mortals flounder in decay.

AFRICA

For you, long raped and baited, trammeled down,
Black harried Victim of the heels of woe
I forge this thunder-bolt to blast around
Each chain and pillory that bows you low.
I come a singer, yet a champion
Of the undone, benighted folk, forgot;
Of fleshy foot-stool, bleeding stepping-stone,
Whom men beguiled in their despotic lot.

Oh, natal Mother, how your heart bewails!
Bereft of vineyards and of freedom too;
Kissed and betrayed, rifled, rent of sails
By Godless thugs that care not what they do.
Brood no despair, this hell is not your doom,
God is not dead, nor guarded in a tomb!

WELL MAY I SING OF THE PROUD ETHIOPE

Well may I sing of the proud Ethiope
Who ruled before the will of Rome was born;
And did with Israel and Egypt cope
Ere pyramid or temple scanned the morn.
Well may I sing of his primeval speech,
And of his arts and obfuscated past,
Of priests who rose to prophesy and preach
That God Was Soul, Almighty, First and Last.

Of how his blood seeped in the Arab-vein,
And Negrofied the skin of India.
Then leaped from Bosporus and colored Spain,
And mongreled up old Greece and Italia.
These men who wear the night upon their faces,
FOUGHT OFT WITH JEW AND NOMAD
BIBLE RACES.

TO ETHIOPIA

If you must go the way of fallen states
Outnumbered and outbullied by your foes,
If you must quaff the drugs of vengeful fates
Forced by the heavy fist of Fascist blows;
If peace doth cower, and forsake your plight,
And war must break, as likely war's to be,
Up like the Greeks, a bloody Marathon fight
Or die as Spartans at Thermopylae.

Know well the battle-dice are loaded, cast,
And cheating hands, the toss in blood may win;
Yet to the bloody end, war to the last,
Be not debased, nor serve as chattel-men;
Oh, Ethiopia, Now’s the Great Command,
God bids you as of old to stretch your hand.

ITALY TO ETHIOPIA

Salute my flag, make me Protector, Lord,
Or I will smite your kingdom, house by house;
No Nero’s heart, no Caesar’s will as hard
As this great hand, ordained to rule all and oust.
Negate the vested power I maintain,—
And I will bait you foul, speak you base
Crush each sphere and realm of your domain
And swear you hit me first within the face.

Come forth and close embrace me Ethiope
And make me heir of your inviting clime;
Can such as you, outlandish mortals hope
To keep that which for long was counted mine?
Like wolfish hordes along a mountain way
Rome goads itself to fall upon its prey.

ETHIOPIA TO ITALY

Long have I watched world-empires rise and fall,
Defeated foe and foemen at my gate,
Uprooted odds, and triumphed over all
The petty states, and those renowned and great.
I felled the arms of Egypt and the Greek,
I thwarted the order and the might of Rome,
The wanted spoil and wealth they came to seek,
Became no alien’s loot to carry home.

Age on age I dealt them blow for blow,
Age on age I gave them Hell for Hell,
Not then I bowed to ancient spear and bow,
Not now I yield to modern shot and shell.
Be moved these hills and mountains in retreat
Ere I salute your flag, or kiss your feet.

IL DUCE’S CHALLENGE

Away to savage bounds of Ethiope,
Oh, legions, I challenge you to war;
Revenge our noble dead of Audowa!
My every rhythm war; my heart I stoke
With fiery slogans of our people’s hope.
Now, on to Africa, to make or mar
The rising power of the Fascist STAR;
To glory, or to death, for King and Pope!

Imperial realm, great of ancient fame,
Our Caesars ruled as gods of many states,
And kings and monarchs trembled at their name
Ere Vandals felled our mighty doors and gates.
Ah! such did Rome into her whirl and spin
Swallow up a Carthage now and then.

THE EMPEROR’S VOICE

His Thor-like voice shook chancelleries
And rocked each mighty forum, awed each
throne,
With flash of lightning, and of thunder’s tone.
It marshalled allies, stirred auxiliaries
Against the iron-clad yoke of tyrannies;
Its moving tremors shook dry land and foam
And broke volcano-like on hostile Rome,
It rumbled to and fro through Italy’s skies.

The Lion’s roar did echo round the earth,
It rang with pity in Geneva’s ears;
This ancient speech, made modern willed new
birth
To epochs on the horizon of years.
Today I raise my head, to God rejoice,
I’ve heard the thunder of the NEGUS-VOICE.
DIE FREE

Your king's behest, my countrymen, die free!
Die with the spirit that your fathers kept,
While pagan Europe and godless Egypt slept.
Your sires were lords of lands as well as sea,
Ere Sheba rose to guide their destiny.
Over this mountain fastness they have swept
As peer to any foes in war adept.
Arise and strike! This is our God's decree!

We shall not wear this curse of alien chains!
We bid for freedom, otherwise for death;
For it we'll cash our blood, will drain our veins
And die as men; fight to the fatal breath;
Let him who will the scourge of nations spread
Proclaim him Conqueror, when we are dead!

FRANCE, ENGLAND

Oh, I am startled, stripped of all belief,
As France and England's tardy hand and pulse
Feed Haile gall, and mad II Duce mulse.
The eyes of peace are loaded with a grief
As sad and sere as any autumn leaf;
Now, crafty Romans will the League divulge—
Refrigerate its blood, and RIGHT repulse,
Ah! now I know the victim pays the fief.

My hate is one indignant world of fire,
My anger all the madness of a tide;
Yet, over might and its cohorts of war,
I cling to RIGHT, though on the weaker side.
O, God, is Justice only soot and ash,
And all Thy people filthy rags and trash?

TO THE ASKARIS

How could I fight, if I were you, my brother?
I'd rather dodge, be yellow, dally, shirk;
And let the cannon's breath, the Romans smother,
And put their healthy vitals out of work.
I would be dumb to every Fascist trumpet
And swell at each old epithet of race;
I'd swing a carcass; die no motley puppet
Bearing the Stigma of the World's disgrace.

I'd play the role of traitor, of the traitors,
And fight as friend of my old hated foe,
My soul would be a thorn to foreign baiters,
A grim defiance grained from head to toe.
Now, such would be my way if I were you,
Though I were servant, slave and soldier too.

GOD SEND US RAINS

God send us rains, draft every sky and cloud,
And bid them into torrents rise and spill
And plunge below to drown the foemen's will;
Parade the elements, all heaven crowd,
With raging blast in storm and whirlwind loud,
God send us rain, flood every vale and hill,
And turn each parching glade into a rill;
Drop wanton seas and make Thy people proud.

For rains will snuff the breath of barking guns,
And form a Purgatory of the roads;
For rains will shield us from the greedy Huns
And foil the coming of their bloody hordes.
O, Father, God, have pity, send us rains,
Grant us great bounties from Thy high domains!

HAILE SELASSIE

Call up the dead from mute, immortal shade
Name L 'Ouverture, Cromwell, Washington;
Great men who led and flashed the bloody blade,
And left their deathless glory in the sun.
Point out in archives of the musty times
Arch-god or spear-god of the olden days,
Whose ancient prowess into epic chimes
Into old Homer, or old Virgil's lays.

Yet ere you shelve your volumes of the great
Of Israel, of Gentiles of renown,
Name Haile of the Ethiopes and rate
Him King and man; above those whom you
crown.
This man to Jove or unto Arthur's Rings,
Would too have been a master, King of Kings.

FOR A KING AT THE SEPULCHRE

Alas, O, God, the fallen look to Thee!
A kingdom sacked of freedom and her crown;
Alone she prays, as in Gethsemane,
And treads a ruthless Calvary baited down.
Here is the Cross, and there the place of Skull;
Hark! she can hear the pounding hammers ring,
And taste the gall, and see the flow of love
From gory sides of earth's Messiah spring.

This royal group invades the Sepulchre,
The rocks of holy Zion, and the Birth;
They seek a Saviour, ask a Comforter,
Who reigned, and still must reign upon the
earth.
Before Thy face and at Thy tomb of old,
God, hear their prayers, tragic stories told.

OH, HANG YOUR HEADS, A VOICE ACCUSING CRIES
(A King of Kings before the League)

Oh, hang your heads, a voice accusing cries,
And points a finger shaking in your face.
Bewails of sickly treachery and lies,
Of noble oaths that welter in disgrace.
Don the ashy sackcloth, raid the hair
And rid your ghastly togas of the stain;
Albeit that your proffered words were fair,
Time has revealed your pompous speech was vain.
I did not ask for bounties of your blood,
Demand your sons for sacrifice supreme,
Yet I was led, believing that you would
Be succor and a shield to the extreme.
Bereft of friends, by evil foes beset,—
“God will remember, time will not forget.”

P. J. WHITE, JR.

VESTIS VIRUMQUE CANO
A Sonnet on American Officials Greeting
An Ethiopian Potentate

I SEE you bow in state humility,
Welcoming, with the dignity and grace
Due noble sons of distinguished race,
These swarthy men from Afric’s sun-baked lea.
And the Imperial son-in-law I see
Acknowledging your greeting, as his face
Glowes with a Pleasure nothing can efface,—
A man of color—and authority.

Ah, Potentate! How greatly do I fear
(Knowing my Nordic brother and his way)
That, should that beard remove from off thy chin,
Thy rich dress change to occidental gear,
Some of those with thee might be heard to say,
“Now, who the hell let these damned niggers in?”

Opportunity, January, 1936: 10