

# Margaret Walker Alexander Reads Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes



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**Margaret Walker Alexander  
Reads Poems of  
Paul Laurence Dunbar  
and James Weldon Johnson  
and Langston Hughes**

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DRAWING, "MUST GO ON" BY TOM FEELINGS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9796

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# Margaret Walker Alexander Reads Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes

NOTES TO THE RECORDINGS  
By Margaret Walker

## INTRODUCTION

Citations which accompanied the presentation of honorary degrees to Margaret Walker at the following Universities:

Doctor of Fine Arts degree conferred at Denison University, June 1, 1974. Citation reads:

"Margaret Walker Alexander, insightful student and teacher of literature, celebrated poet and novelist, courageous worker for racial equality."

Doctor of Literature presented at Northwestern University Commencement, June 15, 1974. Citation reads:

"Margaret Walker Alexander inspired many young black poets, especially by her poem, 'For My People.' All black Americans revere her. She has dedicated her life to teaching those who need her most. She has always sought to liberate the human spirit - - We are proud indeed of this Northwestern graduate."

An Alumni Merit Award from Northwestern University was presented to Mrs. Alexander on May 4, 1974 at the Northwestern University Alumni Awards Program. "The Alumni Merit Awards are presented to Alumni who have distinguished themselves in their particular profession or field of endeavor in such a way as to reflect credit upon their alma mater."

The following CITATION FOR ACHIEVEMENT, awarded to Dr. Margaret Walker Alexander by Mississippi Valley State College, November 29, 1967, reads:

"In recognition of extraordinary accomplishments in the unique presentation of the Negro in the 'Chorus For Survival,' with great appreciation for the scholarly grandeur in which our struggle for full fruition has been recorded for history in JUBILEE, and with cognizance of the contribution you made to Negro uplift through a revelation of truth and dynamic thought, using a style made magnificent by elegance of diction, brilliance of metaphor, and the poetry of imagination befitting the highest ideals of contemporary literature."

THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE COLLEGE

Proudly dedicates and presents this Award to

DR. MARGARET W. ALEXANDER

An educator, thinker, author, poet, teacher, and distinguished public servant whose contribution to the cause of education molded minds and characters and inspired the youth of our generation.

## BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET WALKER

Margaret Abigail Walker (Mrs. Firnist James Alexander, Sr.), was born July 7, 1915, Birmingham, Alabama. She is the daughter of Marion Dozier Walker, Musician, and The Reverend Sigismund Constantine Walker, Methodist Minister and Professor of Religion and Philosophy (deceased). Her maternal grandfather, The Reverend Edward Lane Dozier, was a Baptist Preacher. She has two sisters and one brother, all of whom teach school. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander are the parents of four adult daughters - Marion Elizabeth and Margaret Elvira; sons - Firnist James, Jr., and Sigismund Walker.

She is a poet, novelist, educator and professor of English at Jackson (Mississippi) State University, where she is also director of the Institute for the Study of History, Life, and Culture of Black People. In addition to her illustrious teaching career here at the University, she organized and directed the 75th Anniversary Literary Festival, the Humanities Program, the National Evaluative Conference in Black Studies, several Summer Institutes in Black Culture and the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival, which brought world-wide recognition to the Institution.

Miss Walker earned the A.B. degree from Northwestern and the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Iowa. She has taught in Livingstone College, West Virginia State College, the University of Iowa, and the Cape Cod Writers Conference. In 1969, she was visiting professor in Creative Writing at Northwestern University.

## CONCERNING THE POEMS

Margaret Walker's poems were first published during the decade of the thirties in such magazines as: *Crisis*, May, 1934; *Poetry*, magazine of verse, November, 1937, 1938, 1939; *New Challenge*, 1937; *Creative Writing*, 1938; *Opportunity*, 1938, and *American Prefaces*, 1939. In 1941, she appeared in *The Negro Caravan*; *Phylon*, 1944; *Virginia Quarterly*, 1955; *Northwestern Tri-Quarterly*, 1965; *Encore*, 1973 and *Ebony*, 1974.

In 1942, she won the Yale Award for Younger Poets and her first book, *FOR MY PEOPLE*, a volume of verse, edited and introduced by Stephen Vincent Benet, was published by Yale University, October 20, 1942. The book has had seven printings and is now out of print. Her Civil War Novel, *JUBILEE*, a Houghton Mifflin Literary Award winner for 1966, has become internationally known and has had some 33 printings: 12 in hardcover and 21 in paperback published by Bantam Books. Opera South has commissioned the distinguished Afro-American Composer, Ulysses Kay to write an Opera based on *JUBILEE* and Miss Walker's poetry with Donald Dorr as Librettist. This Opera will be presented in it

World Premier, April 10, 1976 as a feature of the Nation's Bicentennial and to celebrate the Centennial of Jackson State University where Miss Walker has been teaching since 1949. Her two most recent books of poetry are *PROPHETS FOR A NEW DAY* (Civil Rights poems of the 1960's), published by Broadside Press, 1970 (also available on tape) and *OCTOBER JOURNEY* (a small group of published poems not yet gathered in a volume), published by Broadside Press, 1973. A *POETIC EQUATION*, Conversations between Nikki Giovanni and Margaret Walker, was published by Howard University Press, 1974. Since the thirties, Miss Walker's poems have been anthologized in some twenty-five or more anthologies and have been translated into Dutch, German, Slavic and Japanese languages. These Anthologies are: *The Negro Caravan*, *Black Voices*, *New Black Voices*, *Beyond the Angry Black*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Calvacade*, *Beyond the Blues*, *I Saw How Black I Was*, *I Am The Negro*, *The Black Man and the Promise of America*, *Black Insights*, *Black American Writing*, *Black Poets*, *Poetry of the Negro*, *Right-On*, *Afro-American Literature*, *Understanding the New Black Poetry*, *Broadside Treasury*, *From the Roots*, *From the Dark Tower*, *Black Orpheus*, *You Better Believe It*, *Cernoska*, *Oh Being Black*, *I Am the Darker Brother*, *Famous American Negro Poets*, *People in Poetry*, and *Deep Rivers*, a Portfolio - *20 Contemporary Black American Poets*.

Some of her speeches and articles have appeared in *Common Ground*, 1943; *Phylon*, 1950; *Negro Digest*, 1951; *Education Age*, 1967; *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 1968; *Many Shades of Black*, 1969; *The Afro-American Studies Journal*, 1970; *American Library Association Bulletin*, 1970; *University of Missouri New Letters*, Volume 38, No. 2, 1971.

She has been reading poetry in public all of her life. Beginning in 1943, she lectured under the auspices of the National Artists and Concert Corporation, Lecture Bureau and has read her poetry in more than half the United States at churches, public schools and private academies, colleges, universities, clubs, municipal auditoriums, town halls, et cetera. She has also appeared on many occasions on radio and television and as a platform speaker for many national organizations and conventions. Among her many such appearances is listed the Library of Congress Conference on the Teaching of Creative Writing, January, 1973 (Washington, D. C.).

In 1944, she received the Rosenwald Fellowship and was a Ford Fellow at Yale University in 1953-1954. She was appointed a Fulbright Fellow to Norway in 1971, and won a Senior Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1972.

Miss Walker first recorded her poetry for Moses Asch in 1954 on Album, Folkways Records #FL9791 - *Anthology of Negro Poets*.

Guidance Associates has prepared eight Profiles of Black Achievement and the first on Mrs. Alexander is introduced as follows:

"Margaret Walker Alexander recalls her culturally rich home life, her journey through depression Southlands to attend Northwestern University, her first success as a poet, creation of her historical novel, *JUBILEE*. She reviews her twenty-nine year teaching career, discusses contemporary black problems. The filmstrip features dramatically read lines (not her voice) from her best known poem, 'For My People.'"

## CONCERNING THE FOLK TRADITION

Margaret Walker justly claims an authentic knowledge of the folk language in these poems she reads. Reading Dunbar's poems in Dayton, Ohio on the Centennial of his birth in 1972, Miss Walker brought down the house with a resounding ovation, especially with her rendition of "The Party," and she discovered at that time that reading Dunbar's dialect poems is fast becoming a lost art in these

last years of the 20th century. She heard her mother read these poems in the well-known dialect of Dunbar's parents generation and, thus, is giving an authentic interpretation to these poems.

Likewise, she heard James Weldon Johnson read his Sermons in Verse when she was still an adolescent girl in New Orleans and at that same time in 1932, she heard Langston Hughes read his Blues-Rhythms in that Southern City for the first time. The Folk Tradition in Afro-American Poetry is amply illustrated in these four black poets: Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes and Margaret Walker. The plantation dialect is captured in the homely, humorous poems of Dunbar - some noted more for pathos than humor. Margaret Walker's poems show a complete integration of all the folk strains in Negro folklore with her heritage from these first three. James Weldon Johnson's Sermons in Verse vividly tell the story of the tradition of the Negro Preacher and the Negro idioms with Bible English or "the idioms of King James English." Note also the "Antebellum Sermon" by Dunbar and the poem - "We Have Been Believers," by Margaret Walker.

The street dialect or urban speech from "The Streets of Harlem" which Langston Hughes so faithfully captures represents another facet of folk life, language and ways which, in turn, have influenced the folk poems of Miss Walker in such examples as "Kissie Lee," "Poppa Chicken," and "Cus, The Lineman." She is, as a matter of fact, deeply influenced by her black predecessors and shows in her poetry the influence of this folk tradition whether it is plantation, sermon, street or even the roustabout and railroad hand for whose work and love songs Sterling Brown is so famous. Note her poems, "Yalluh Hammuh," "Two Gun Buster," and "Trigger Slim." Added to these sources of her folk poems are Black folk legends and Black history. "John Henry" and "Stagolee" are noted Black folk heroes. Miss Walker's "John Henry" poem is taken from the Mississippi Delta and is a version of the deep South. Other versions reflect various other locales. Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Tubman, and the Black leaders in "Ballad of the Free," are all real people in Black literature and history.

In addition, Margaret Walker deals with the subject of sympathetic magic, witches, juju and the long heritage of the witch doctor, medicine man, black religion and the conjure man or the root-worker, and hoodoo-hex - spell-maker. "Molly Means," her first ballad written in the 1930's and "Hoppy Toad," a ballad begun in the 1940's, completed and revised in the 1960's, deal with this completely authentic ingredient in Black folk history, legend and lore.

Not a serious student of anthropology, Miss Walker, nevertheless, reveals a knowledge of the ideas of shifting shapes, transference of the soul, et cetera. These ideas are all inculcated in the "Ballad of the Hoppy Toad." See the highly perceptive essay "A Shoulder Hunched Against a Sharp Concern" by Paula Ciddings in *Black World*, December, 1971 for further elucidation of African (Nigerian) Symbolism of the horse and the toad frog as they are used in this poem by Margaret Walker.

# THE COMPLETE POEMS OF PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1952

## THE PARTY

Dey had a gread big pahty down to Tom's de othah night;  
Was I dah? You bet! I nevah in my life see sich a sight;  
All de folks f'om fou' plantations was invited, an' dey come,  
Dey come troopin' thick ez chillun when dey hyeahs a fife an'  
drum.  
Evahbody dressed deir fines—Heish yo' mouf an' git away,  
Ain't seen no sich fancy dressin' sence las' quah'tly meetin' day;  
Gals all dressed in silks an' satins, not a wrinkle ner a crease,  
Eyes a-battin', teeth a-shinin', haih breshed back ez slick ez  
grease;  
Sku'ts all tucked an' puffed an' ruffled, evah blessed seam an'  
stitch;  
Ef you'd seen 'em wif deir mistus, couldn't swahed to which was  
which.  
Men all dressed up in Prince Alberts, swaller-tails 'u'd tek yo'  
bref!  
I cain't tell you nothin' 'bout it, y' ought to see it fu' yo' se'f.  
Who was dah? Now who you askin'? How you 'spect I gwine to  
know?  
You mus' think I stood an' counted evahbody at de do'.  
Ole man Babah's house-boy Isaac, brung dat gal, Malindy Jane,  
Huh a-hangin' to his elbow, him a-struttin' wif a cane;  
My, but Hahvey Jones was jealous! seemed to stick him lak a  
tho'n;  
But he laughed with Viney Cahteh, tryin' ha'd to not let on,  
But a pusson would'a' noticed f'om de d'rection of his look,  
Dat he was watchin' ev'ry step dat Ike an' Lindy took.  
Ike he foun' a cheer an' asked huh: "Won't you set down?" wif  
a smile,  
An' she answe'd up a-bowin', "Oh, I reckon 't ain't wuth while."  
Dat was jes' fu' style, I reckon, "cause she sot down jes' de same,  
An' she stayed dah 'twell he fetched huh fu' to jine some so't o'  
game;  
Den I hyeahd huh sayin' propah, ez she riz to go away,  
"Oh, you raly mus' excuse me, fu' I hardly keers to play."  
But I seen huh in a minute wif de othahs on de flo',  
An' dah wasn't any one o' dem a-playin' any mo';  
Comin' down de flo' a-bowin' an' a-swayin' an' a-swingin',  
Puttin' on huh high-toned mannah all de time dat she was  
singin':  
"Oh, swing Johnny up an' down, swing him all aroun',  
Swing Johnny up an' down, swing him all aroun',  
Oh, swing Johnny up an' down, swing him all aroun'  
Fa' you well, my dahlin'."  
Had to laff at ole man Johnson, he's a caution now, you bet—  
Hittin' clost onto a hunderd, but he's spry an' nimble yet;  
He 'lowed how a-so't o' gigglin', "I ain't ole, I'll let you see,  
D' ain't no use in gittin' feeble, now you youngstahs jes' watch  
me,"  
An' he grabbed ole Aunt Marier—weighs th'ee hunderd mo'er  
less,  
An' he spun huh 'roun' de cabin swingin' Johnny lak de res'.

Evahbody laffed an' hollahed: "Go it! Swing huh, Uncle Jim!"  
An' he swung huh too, I reckon, lak a youngstah, who but him.  
Dat was bettah'n young Scott Thomas, tryin' to be so awful  
smaht.  
You know when dy gits to singin' an' dey comes to dat ere paht:  
"In some lady's new brick house,  
In some lady's gyahden.  
Ef you don't let me out, I will jump out,  
So fa' you well, my dahlin'."  
Den dey's got a circle 'roun' you, an' you's got to break de line;  
Well, dat dahky was so anxious, lak to bust hisse'f a-tryin';  
Kep' on blund'rin' 'roun' an' foolin' 'twell he giv' one gread big  
jump,  
Broke de line, an' lit head-fo'most in de fiah-place right plump;  
Hit 'ad fiah in it, mind you; well, I thought my soul I'd bust,  
Tried my best to keep f'om laffin', but hit seemed like die I must!  
Y'ought to seen dat man a-scramblin' f'om de ashes an' de grime.  
Did it bu'n him! Sich a question, why he didn't give it time;  
Th'ow'd dem ashes and dem cindahs evah which-a-way I guess,  
An' you nevah did, I reckon, clap yo' eyes on sich a mess;  
Fu' he sholy made a picter an' a funny one to boot,  
Wif his clothes all full o' ashes an' his face all full o' soot.

Well, hit laked to stopped de pahty, an' I reckon lak ez not  
Dat it would ef Tom's wife, Mandy, hadn't happened on de spot,  
To invite us out to suppah—well, we scrambled to de table,  
An' I'd lak to tell you 'bout it—what we had—but I ain't able,  
Mention jes' a few things, dough I know I hadn't orter,  
Fu' I know 't will staht a hank'rin' an' yo' mouf'll 'mence to  
worter.  
We had wheat bread white ez cotton an' a egg pone jes' like gol',  
Hog jole, bilin' hot an' steamin' roasted shoat an' ham sliced  
cold—  
Look out! What's de mattah wif you? Don't be fallin' on de flo';  
Ef it's go'n to 'fect you dat way, I won't tell you nothin' mo'.  
Dah now—well, we had hot chittlin's—now you's tryin' ag'n to  
fall,  
Cain't you stan' to hyeah about it? S'pose you'd been an' seed it  
all;  
Seed dem gread big sweet pertaters, layin' by de possum's side,  
Seed dat coon in all his gravy, reckon den you'd up and died!  
Mandy 'lowed "you all mus' 'scuse me, d' wa'n't much upon my  
she'ves,  
But I's done my bes' to suit you, so set down an' he'p yo'se'ves."  
Tom, he 'lowed: "I don't b'lieve in 'pologisin' an' perfessin',  
Let'em tek it lak dey ketch it. Eldah Thompson, ask de blessin'."  
Wish you'd seed dat colo'ed preachah cleah his th'roat an' bow  
his head;  
One eye shet, an' one eye open,—dis is evah wud he said:  
"Lawd, look down in tendah mussy on sich generous hea'ts ez  
dese;  
Make us truly thankful, amen. Pass dat possum, ef you please!"  
Well, we eat and drunk ouah po'tion, 'twell dah wasn't nothin'  
lef',  
An' we felt jes' like new sausage, we was mos' nigh stuffed to def!  
Tom, he knowed how we'd be feelin', so he had de fiddlah 'roun',  
An' he made us cleah de cabin fu' to dance dat suppah down.  
Jim, de fiddlah, chuned his fiddle, put some rosum on his bow,  
Set a pine box on de table, mounted it an' let huh go!  
He's a fiddlah, now I tell you, an' he made dat fiddle ring,  
"Twell de ol'est an' de lamest had to give deir feet a fling.  
Jigs, cotillions, reels an' breakdowns, cordrills an' a waltz er two;  
Bless yo' soul, dat music winged 'em an' dem people lak to flew.  
Cripple Joe, de old rheumatic, danced dat flo' f'om side to middle,

Th'owed away his crutch an' hopped it; what's rheumatics 'ginst  
a fiddle?  
Eldah Thompson got so tickled dat he lak to los' his grace,  
Had to tek bofe feet an' hol' dem so's to keep 'em in deir place.  
An' de Christuns an' de sinnahs got so mixed up on dat flo',  
Dat I don't see how dey'd pahted ef de trump had chanced to  
blow.  
Well, we danced dat way an' capahed in de mos' redic'lous way,  
"Twell de roostahs in de bahnyard cleahed deir th'oats an'  
crowed fu' day,  
Y'ought to been dah, fu' I tell you evahthing was rich an' prime,  
An' dey ain't no use in talkin' we jes' had one scrumptious time!

#### WHEN MALINDY SINGS

G'way an' quit dat noise, Miss Lucy—  
Put dat music book away;  
What's de use to keep on tryin'?  
Ef you practise twell you're gray,  
You cain't sta't no notes a-flyin'  
Lak de ones dat rants and rings  
F'om de kitchen to be big woods  
When Malindy sings.

You ain't got de nachel o'gans  
Fu' to make de soun' come right,  
You ain't got de tu'ns an' twistin's  
Fu' to make it sweet an' light.  
Tell you one thing now, Miss Lucy,  
An' I'm tellin' you fu' true,  
When hit comes to raal right singin',  
"T ain't no easy thing to do.

Easy 'nough fu' folks to hollah,  
Lookin' at de lines an' dots,  
When dey ain't no one kin sence it,  
An' de chune comes in, in spots;  
But fu' real melojous music,  
Dat jes' strikes you' hea't and clings,  
Jes' you stan' an' listen wif me  
When Malindy sings.

Ain't you nevah hyeahd Malindy?  
Blessed soul, tek up de cross!  
Look hyeah, ain't you jokin', honey?  
Well, you don't know whut you los'.  
Y'ought to hyeah dat gal a-wa'blin',  
Robins, la'ks, an' all dem things,  
Heish dey moufs an' hides dey faces  
When Malindy sings.

Fiddlin' man jes' stop his fiddlin',  
Lay his fiddle on de she'f;  
Mockin'-bird quit tryin' to whistle,  
'Cause he jes' so shamed hisse'f.  
Folks a-playin' on de banjo  
Draps dey fingahs on de strings—  
Bless yo' soul—fu'gits to move 'em,  
When Malindy sings.

She jes' spreads huh, mouf and hollahs,  
"Come to Jesus," twell you hyeah  
Sinnahs' tremblin' steps and voices,  
Timid-lak a-drawin' neah;  
Den she tu'ns to "Rock of Ages,"  
Simply to de cross she clings,  
An' you fin' yo' teahs a-drapin'  
When Malindy sings.

Who dat says dat humble praises  
Wif de Master nevah counts?  
Heish yo' mouf, I hyeah dat music,  
Ez hit rises up an' mounts—  
Floatin' by de hills an' valleys,  
Way above dis buryin' sod,  
Ez hit makes its way in glory  
To de very gates of God!

Oh, hit's-sweetah dan de music  
Of an edicated band;  
An' hit's dearah dan de battle's  
Song o' triumph in de lan'.  
It seems holier dan evenin'  
When de solemn chu'ch bell rings,

Ez I sit an' ca'mly listen  
While Malindy sings.

Towsah, stop dat ba'kin', hyeah me!  
Mandy, mek dat chile keep still;  
Don't you hyeah de echoes callin'  
F'om de valley to de hill?  
Let me listen, I can hyeah it,  
Th'oo de bresh of angels' wings,  
Sof' an' sweet, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,"  
Ez Malindy sings.

#### AN ANTE-BELLUM SERMON

We is gathahed hyeah, my brothahs,  
In dis howlin' wildaness,  
Fu' to speak some words of comfo't  
To each othah in distress.  
An' we chooses fu' ouah subjec'  
Dis—we'll 'splain it by an' by;  
"An' de Lawd said, 'Moses, Moses,'  
An' de man said, 'Hyeah am I.'"

Now ole Pher'oh, down in Egypt,  
Was de wuss man evah bo'n,  
An' he had de Hebrew chillun  
Down dah wukin' in his co'n;  
"Twell de Lawd got tiahed o' his foolin',  
An' sez he: "I'll let him know—  
Look hyeah, Moses, go tell Pher'oh  
Fu' to let dem chillun go."

"An' ef he refuse to do it,  
I will make him rue de houah,  
Fu' I'll empty down on Egypt  
All de vials of my powah."  
Yes, he did—an' Pher'oh's ahmy  
Wasn't wuth a ha'f a dime;  
Fu' de Lawd will he'p his chillun,

You kin trust him evah time.

An' yo' enemies may 'sail you  
In de back an' in de front;  
But de Lawd is all aroun' you,  
Fu' to ba' de battle's brunt.  
Dey kin fo'ge yo' chains an' shackles  
F'om de mountains to de sea;  
But de Lawd will sen' some Moses  
Fu' to set his chillun free.

An' de lan' shall hyeah his thundah,  
Lak a blas' f'om Gab'el's ho'n,  
Fu' de Lawd of hosts is mighty  
When he girds his ahmor on.  
But fu' feah some one mistakes me,  
I will pause right hyeah to say,  
Dat I'm still a-preachin' ancient,  
I ain't talkin' 'bout to-day.

But I tell you, fellah christuns,  
Things'll happen mighty strange;  
Now, de Lawd done dis fu' Isrul,  
An' his ways don't nevah change,  
An' de love he showed to Isrul  
Wasn't all on Isrul spent;  
Now don't run an' tell yo' mastahs  
Dat I's preachin' discontent.

'Cause I isn't; I'se a-judgin'  
Bible people by deir ac's;  
I'se a-givin' you de Scriptuah,  
I'se a-handin' you de fac's.  
Cose ole Pher'oh b'lieved in slav'ry,  
But de Lawd he let him see,  
Dat de people he put bref in,—  
Evah mothan's son was free.

An' dah's othahs thinks lak Pher'oh,  
But dey calls de Scriptuah liar,  
Fu' de Bible says "a servanth  
Is a-worthy of his hire,"  
An' you cain't git roun' nor thoo dat,

An' you cain't git ovah it,  
Fu' whatevah place you git in,  
Dis hyeah Bible too'll fit.

So you see de Lawd's-intention,  
Evah sence de worl' began,  
Was dat His almighty freedom  
Should belong to evah man,  
But I think it would be bettah,  
Ef I'd pause agin to say,  
Dat I'm talkin' 'bout ouah freedom  
In a Bibleistic way.

But de Moses is a-comin',  
An' he's comin', suah and fas'  
We kin hyeah his feet a-trompin',  
We kin hyeah his trumpit blas'.  
But I want to wa'n you people,  
Don't you git too brigity;  
An' don't you git to braggin'  
"Bout dese things, you wait an' see.

But when Moses wif his powah  
Comes an' sets us chillun free,  
We will praise de gracious Mastah  
Dat has gin us liberty;  
An' we'll shout ouah halleluyahs,  
On dat mighty reck'nin' day,  
When we'se reco'nised ez citiz'—  
Huh uh! Chillun, let us pray!

#### A COQUETTE CONQUERED

Yes, my ha't's ez ha'd ez stone—  
Go 'way, Sam, an' lemme 'lone.  
No; I ain't gwine change my min'—  
Ain't gwine ma'y you—nuffin' de kin'.

Phiny loves you true an' deah?  
Go ma'y Phiny; whut I keer?

Oh, you needn't mou'n an' cry—  
I don't keer how soon you die.

Got a present! Whut you got?  
Somef'n fu' de pan er pot!  
Huh! yo' sass do sholy beat—  
Think I don't git 'nough to eat?

Whut's dat un'neaf yo' coat?  
Looks des lak a little shoat.  
"T ain't no possum! Bless de Lamb!  
Yes, it is, you rascal, Sam!

Gin it to me; whut you say?  
Ain't you sma't now! Oh, go 'way!  
Possum do look mighty nice,  
But you ax too big a price.

Tell me, is you talkin' true,  
Dat's de gal's whut ma'ies you?  
Come back, Sam; now whah's you gwine?  
Co'se you knows dat possum's mine!

#### IN THE MORNING

'Lias! 'Lias! Bless de Lawd!  
Don' you know de day's erbroad?  
Ef you don' git up, you scamp,  
Dey'll be trouble in dis camp.  
T'ink I gwine to let you sleep  
W'ile I meks yo' boa'd an' keep?  
Dat's a putty howdy-do—  
Don' you hyeah me, 'Lias—you?

Bet ef I come crost dis flo'  
You won' fin' no time to sno'.  
Daylight all a-shinin' in  
W'ile you sleep—w'y hit's a sin!  
Ain't de can'le-light enough  
To bu'n out widout a snuff,  
But you go de mo'nin' thoo,  
Bu'nin' up de daylight too?

'Lias, don' you hyeah me call?  
No use tu'nin' to 'ds de wall;  
I kin hyeah dat mattuss squeak;  
Don' you hyeah me w'en I speak?  
Dis hyeah clock done struck off six—  
Ca'line, bring me dem ah sticks!  
Oh, you down, suh; huh, you down—  
Look hyeah, don' you daih to frown.

Ma'ch yo'se'f an' wash yo' face,  
Don' you splattah all de place;  
I got somep'n else to do,  
'Sides jes' cleanin' aftah you.  
Tek dat comb an' fix yo' haid—  
Looks jes' lak a feddah baid.  
Look hyeah, boy, I let you see  
You sha'n't roll yo' eyes at me.

Come hyeah; bring me dat ah strap!  
Boy, I'll whup you 'twell you drap;  
You done felt yo'se'f too strong,  
An' you sholy got me wrong.  
Set down at dat table thaih;  
Jes' you whimpah ef you daih!  
Evah mo'nin' on dis place,  
Seem lak I mus' lose my grace.

Fol' yo' han's an' bow yo' haid—  
Wait ontwell de blessin' 's said;  
"Lawd, have mussy on ouah souls—"  
(Don' you daih to tech dem rolls—)  
"Bless de food we gwine to eat—"  
(You set still—I see yo' feet;  
You jes' try dat trick agin!)  
"Gin us peace an' joy. Amen!"

#### WHEN DEY 'LISTED COLORED SOLDIERS

Dey was talkin' in de cabin, dey was talkin' in de hall;  
But I listened kin' o' keerless, not a-t'inkin' 'bout it all;  
An' on Sunday, too, I noticed, dey was whisp'rin' mighty much,  
Stan'in' all erroun' de roadside w'en dey let us out o' chu'ch.  
But I didn't t'ink erbout it 'twell de middle of de week,  
An' my 'Lias come to see me, an' somehow he couldn't speak.  
Den I seed all in a minute whut he'd come to see me for;—  
Dey had 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias gwine to wah.

Oh, I hugged him, an' I kissed him, an' I baiged him not to go;  
But he tol' me dat his conscience, hit was callin' to him so,  
An' he couldn't baih to lingah w'en he had a chanst to fight  
For de freedom dey had gin him an' de glory of de right.  
So he kissed me, an' he lef' me, w'en I'd p'omised to be true;  
An' dey put a knapsack on him, an' a coat all colo'ed blue.  
So I gin him pap's ol' Bible f'om de bottom of de draw',—  
W'en dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went to wah.

But I t'ought of all de weary miles dat he would have to tramp,  
An' I couldn't be contented w'en dey tuk him to de camp.  
W'y my hea't nigh broke wid grievin' 'twell I seed him on de  
street;

Den I felt lak I could go an' th'ow my body at his feet.  
For his buttons was a-shinin', an' his face was shinin', too,  
An' he looked so strong an' mighty in his coat o' sojer blue;  
Dat I hollahed, "Step up, manny," dough my th'out was so' an'  
raw,—

W'en dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went to wah.

Ol' Mis' cried w'en mastah lef' huh, young Miss mou'ned huh  
brothah Ned,  
An' I didn't know dey feelin's is de ve'y wo' ds dey said  
W'en I tol' 'em I was so'y. Dey had done gin up dey all;  
But dey only seemed mo' proudah dat dey men had hyeahed de  
call.

Bofe my mastahs went in gray suits, an' I loved de Yankee blue,  
But I t'ought dat I could sorrer for de losin' of 'em too;  
But I couldn't, for I didn't know de ha'f o' what I saw,  
"Twell dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went to wah.

Mastah Jack come home all sickly; he was broke for life, dey said;  
An' dey lef' my po' young mastah some'r's on de roadside,—  
dead.

W'en de women cried an' mou'ned 'em, I could feel it thoo an'  
thoo,

For I had a loved un fightin' in de way o' dangah, too.  
Den dey tol' me dey had laid him some'r's way down souf to res',  
Wid de flag dat he had fit for shinin' daih acrost his breas'.  
Well, I cried, but den I reckon dat's whut Gawd had called him  
for,

W'en dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went to wah.

## GOD'S TROMBONES

### Seven Negro Sermons in Verse —

by James Weldon Johnson

The Viking Press. New York, 1928

LISTEN LORD, A PRAYER

O Lord, we come this morning  
Knee-bowed and body-bent  
Before thy throne of grace.  
O Lord—this morning—  
Bow our hearts beneath our knees,  
And our knees in some lonesome valley.  
We come this morning—  
Like empty pitchers to a full fountain,  
With no merits of our own.  
O Lord—open up a window of heaven,  
And lean out far over the battlements of glory,  
And listen this morning.

Lord, have mercy on proud and dying sinners—  
Sinners hanging over the mouth of hell,  
Who seem to love their distance well.  
Lord—ride by this morning—  
Mount your milk-white horse,  
And ride-a this morning—

And in your ride, ride by old hell,  
Ride by the dingy gates of hell,  
And stop poor sinners in their headlong plunge.

And now, O Lord, this man of God,  
Who breaks the bread of life this morning—  
Shadow him in the hollow of thy hand,  
And keep him out of the gunshot of the devil.  
Take him, Lord—this morning—  
Wash him with hyssop inside and out,  
Hang him up and drain him dry of sin.  
Pin his ear to the wisdom-post,  
And make his words sledge hammers of truth—  
Beating on the iron heart of sin.

Lord God, this morning—  
Put his eye to the telescope of eternity,  
And let him look upon the paper walls of time.  
Lord, turpentine his imagination,  
Put perpetual motion in his arms,  
Fill him full of the dynamite of thy power,  
Anoint him all over with the oil of thy salvation,  
And set his tongue on fire.

And now, O Lord—  
When I've done drunk my last cup of sorrow—  
When I've been called everything but a child of God—  
When I'm done travelling up the rough side of the  
mountain—  
O—Mary's Baby—  
When I start down the steep and slippery steps of  
death—  
When this old world begins to rock beneath my feet—  
Lower me to my dusty grave in peace  
To wait for that great gittin' up morning—Amen.

#### THE PRODIGAL SON

Young man—  
Young man—  
Your arm's too short to box with God.

But Jesus spake in a parable, and he said:  
A certain man had two sons.  
Jesus didn't give this man a name,  
But his name is God Almighty.  
And Jesus didn't call these sons by name,  
But ev'ry young man,  
Ev'rywhere,  
Is one of these two sons.

And the younger son said to his father,  
He said: Father, divide up the property,  
And give me my portion now.  
And the father with tears in his eyes said: Son,  
Don't leave your father's house.  
But the boy was stubborn in his head,  
And haughty in his heart,  
And he took his share of his father's goods,  
And went into a far-off country.

There comes a time,  
There comes a time  
When ev'ry young man looks out from his father's  
house,  
Longing for that far-off country.

And the young man journeyed on his way,  
And he said to himself as he travelled along:  
This sure is an easy road,  
Nothing like the rough furrows behind my father's  
plow.

Young man—  
Young man—  
Smooth and easy is the road  
That leads to hell and destruction.  
Down grade all the way,

The further you travel, the faster you go.  
No need to trudge and sweat and toil,  
Just slip and slide and slip and slide  
Till you bang up against hell's iron gate.

And the younger son kept travelling along,  
Till at night-time he came to a city.  
And the city was bright in the night-time like day,  
The streets all crowded with people,  
Brass bands and string bands a-playing,  
And ev'rywhere the young man turned  
There was singing and laughing and dancing.  
And he stopped a passer-by and he said:  
Tell me what city is this?  
And the passer-by laughed and said: Don't you know?  
This is Bablon, Babylon,  
That great city of Babylon.  
Come on, my friend, and go along with me.  
And the young man joined the crowd.

Young man—  
Young man—  
You're never lonesome in Babylon.  
You can always join a crowd in Babylon.  
Young man—  
Young man—  
You can never be alone in Babylon,  
Alone with your Jesus in Babylon.  
You can never find a place, a lonesome place,  
A lonesome place to go down on your knees,  
And talk with your God, in Babylon.  
You're always in a crowd in Babylon.

And the young man went with his new-found friend,  
And bought himself some brand new clothes,  
And he spent his days in the drinking dens,  
Swallowing the fires of hell.  
And he spent his nights in the gambling dens,  
Throwing dice with the devil for his soul.  
And he met up with the women of Babylon.  
Oh, the women of Babylon!

Dressed in yellow and purple and scarlet,  
Loaded with rings and earrings and bracelets,  
Their lips like a honeycomb dripping with honey,  
Perfumed and sweet-smelling like a jasmine flower;  
And the jasmine smell of the Babylon women  
Got in his nostrils and went to his head,  
And he wasted his substance in riotous living,  
In the evening, in the black and dark of night,  
With the sweet-sinning women of Babylon.  
And they stripped him of his money,  
And they stripped him of his clothes,  
And they left him broke and ragged  
In the streets of Babylon.

Then the young man joined another crowd—  
The beggars and lepers of Babylon.  
And he went to feeding swine,  
And he was hungrier than the hogs;  
He got down on his belly in the mire and mud  
And ate the husks with the hogs.  
And not a hog was too low to turn up his nose  
At the man in the mire of Babylon.

Then the young man came to himself—  
He came to himself and said:  
In my father's house are many mansions,  
Ev'ry servant in his house has bread to eat,  
Ev'ry servant in his house has a place to sleep;  
I will arise and go to my father.  
And his father saw him afar off,  
And he ran up the road to meet him.  
He put clean clothes upon his back,  
And a golden chain around his neck,  
He made a feast and killed the fatted calf,  
And invited the neighbors in.

Oh-o-oh, sinner,  
When you're mingling with the crowd in Babylon—  
Drinking the wine of Babylon—  
Running with the women of Babylon  
You forget about God, and you laugh at Death.

Today you've got the strength of a bull in your neck  
And the strength of a bear in your arms,  
But some o' these days, some o' these days,  
You'll have a hand-to-hand struggle with bony Death,  
And Death is bound to win.

Young man, come away from Babylon,  
That hell-border city of Babylon.  
Leave the dancing and gambling of Babylon,  
The wine and whiskey of Babylon,  
The hot-mouthed women of Babylon;  
Fall down on your knees,  
And say in your heart:  
I will arise and go to my Father.

#### GO DOWN DEATH A Funeral Sermon

Weep not, weep not,  
She is not dead!  
She's resting in the bosom of Jesus.  
Heart-broken husband—weep no more;  
Grief-stricken son—weep no more;  
Left-lonesome daughter—weep no more;  
She's only just gone home.

Day before yesterday morning,  
God was looking down from his great, high heaven,  
Looking down on all his children,  
And his eye fell on Sister Caroline,  
Tossing on her bed of pain.  
And God's big heart was touched with pity,  
With the everlasting pity.

And God sat back on his throne,  
And he commanded that tall, bright angel standing at  
his right hand:  
Call me Death!  
And that tall, bright angel cried in a voice  
That broke like a clap of thunder:

Call Death!—Call Death!  
And the echo sounded down the streets of heaven  
Till it reached away back to that shadowy place,  
Where Death waits with his pale, white horses.

THE JUDGMENT DAY

And Death heard the summons,  
And he leaped on his fastest horse,  
Pale as a sheet in the moonlight.  
Up the golden street Death galloped,  
And the hoofs of his horse struck fire from the gold,  
But they didn't make no sound.  
Up Death rode to the Great White Throne,  
And waited for God's command.

And God said: Go down, Death, go down,  
Go down to Savannah, Georgia,  
Down in Yamacraw,  
And find Sister Caroline.  
She's borne the burden and heat of the day,  
She's labored long in my vineyard,  
And she's tired—  
She's weary—  
Go down, Death, and bring her to me.

And Death didn't say a word,  
But he loosed the reins on his pale, white horse,  
And he clamped the spurs to his bloodless sides,  
And out and down he rode,  
Through heaven's pearly gates,  
Past suns and moons and stars;  
On Death rode,  
And the foam from his horse was like a comet in the  
sky;  
On Death rode,  
Leaving the lightning's flash behind;  
Straight on down he came.

While we were watching round her bed,  
She turned her eyes and looked away,  
She saw what we couldn't see;  
She saw Old Death. She saw Old Death,  
Coming like a falling star.  
But Death didn't frighten Sister Caroline;  
He looked to her like a welcome friend.  
And she whispered to us: I'm going home,  
And she smiled and closed her eyes.

And Death took her up like a baby,  
And she lay in his icy arms,  
But she didn't feel no chill.  
And Death began to ride again—  
Up beyond the evening star,  
Out beyond the morning star,  
Into the glittering light of glory,  
On to the Great White Throne.  
And there he laid Sister Caroline  
On the loving breast of Jesus.

And Jesus took his own hand and wiped away her tears,  
And he smoothed the furrows from her face,  
And the angels sang a little song,  
And Jesus rocked her in his arms,  
And kept a-saying: Take your rest,  
Take your rest, take your rest.

Weep not—weep not,  
She is not dead;  
She's resting in the bosom of Jesus.

In that great day,  
People, in that great day,  
God's a-going to rain down fire.  
God's a-going to sit in the middle of the air  
To judge the quick and the dead.

Early one of these mornings,  
God's a-going to call for Gabriel,  
That tall, bright angel, Gabriel;  
And God's a-going to say to him: Gabriel,  
Blow your silver trumpet,  
And wake the living nations.

And Gabriel's going to ask him: Lord,  
How loud must I blow it?  
And God's a-going to tell him: Gabriel,  
Blow it calm and easy.  
Then putting one foot on the mountain top,  
And the other in the middle of the sea,  
Gabriel's going to stand and blow his horn,  
To wake the living nations.

Then God's a-going to say to him: Gabriel,  
Once more blow your silver trumpet,  
And wake the nations underground.

And Gabriel's going to ask him: Lord  
How loud must I blow it?  
And God's a-going to tell him: Gabriel,  
Like seven peals of thunder.  
Then the tall, bright angel, Gabriel,  
Will put one foot on the battlements of heaven  
And the other on the steps of hell,  
And blow that silver trumpet  
Till he shakes old hell's foundations.

And I feel Old Earth a-shuddering—  
And I see the graves a-bursting—  
And I hear a sound,  
A blood-chilling sound.  
What sound is that I hear?  
It's the clicking together of the dry bones,  
Bone to bone—the dry bones.  
And I see coming out of the bursting graves,  
And marching up from the valley of death,  
The army of the dead.

And the living and the dead in the twinkling of an eye  
Are caught up in the middle of the air,  
Before God's judgment bar.

Oh-o-oh, sinner,  
Where will you stand,  
In that great day when God's a-going to rain down fire?  
Oh, you gambling man—where will you stand?  
You whore-mongering man—where will you stand?  
Liars and backsliders—where will you stand,  
In that great day when God's a-going to rain down fire?

And God will divide the sheep from the goats,  
The one on the right, the other on the left.  
And to them on the right God's a-going to say:  
Enter into my kingdom.  
And those who've come through great tribulations,  
And washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb,

They will enter in—  
Clothed in spotless white,  
With starry crowns upon their heads,  
And silver slippers on their feet,  
And harps within their hands;—

And two by two they'll walk  
Up and down the golden street,  
Feasting on the milk and honey  
Singing new songs of Zion,  
Chattering with the angels  
All around the Great White Throne.

And to them on the left God's a-going to say:  
Depart from me into everlasting darkness,  
Down into the bottomless pit.  
And the wicked like lumps of lead will start to fall,  
Headlong for seven days and nights they'll fall,  
Plumb into the big, black, red-hot mouth of hell,  
Belching out fire and brimstone.  
And their cries like howling, yelping dogs,  
Will go up with the fire and smoke from hell,  
But God will stop his ears.

Too late, sinner! Too late!  
Good-bye, sinner! Good-bye!  
In hell, sinner! In hell!  
Beyond the reach of the love of God.

And I hear a voice, crying, crying:  
Time shall be no more!  
Time shall be no more!  
Time shall be no more!  
And the sun will go out like a candle in the wind,  
The moon will turn to dripping blood,  
The stars will fall like cinders,  
And the sea will burn like tar;  
And the earth shall melt away and be dissolved,  
And the sky will roll up like a scroll.  
With a wave of his hand God will blot out time,  
And start the wheel of eternity.

Sinner, oh, sinner,  
Where will you stand  
In that great day when God's a-going to rain down  
fire?

THE WEARY BLUES  
By Langston Hughes  
Alfred A. Knopf. New York, 1926

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!



Langston Hughes

"Negro Dancers" Continued

"Me an' ma baby's  
Got two mo' ways,  
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!"

THE CAT AND THE SAXOPHONE  
(2 A. M.)

EVERYBODY  
Half-pint,—  
Gin?  
No, make it  
LOVES MY BABY  
corn. You like  
liquor,  
don't you, honey?  
BUT MY BABY  
Sure. Kiss me,  
DON'T LOVE NOBODY  
daddy.  
BUT ME.  
Say!  
EVERYBODY  
Yes?  
WANTS MY BABY  
I'm your  
BUT MY BABY  
sweetie, ain't I?  
DON'T WANT NOBODY  
Sure.  
BUT  
Then let's  
ME,  
do it!  
SWEET ME.  
Charleston,  
mamma!  
!

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 gonna die,  
Being neither white nor black?

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.