

SELECTED  
POEMS *of*  
LANGSTON  
HUGHES

V

VINTAGE CLASSICS · VINTAGE BOOKS

A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC. · NEW YORK

Leave me and my name  
Just like I am!

Furthermore, rub out  
That MRS., too—  
I'll have you know  
I'm *Madam* to you!

Feminism!  
:)  
lol

MONTAGE  
OF A  
DREAM  
DEFERRED

## Dream Boogie

Good morning, daddy!  
Ain't you heard  
The boogie-woogie rumble  
Of a dream deferred?

Listen closely:  
You'll hear their feet  
Beating out and beating out a—

*You think  
It's a happy beat?*

Listen to it closely:  
Ain't you heard  
something underneath  
like a—

*What did I say?*

Sure,  
I'm happy!  
Take it away!

*Hey, pop!  
Re-bop!  
Mop!*

*Y-e-a-h!*

## Parade

Seven ladies  
and seventeen gentlemen  
at the Elks Club Lounge  
planning planning a parade:  
Grand Marshal in his white suit  
will lead it.  
Cadillacs with dignitaries  
will precede it.  
And behind will come  
with band and drum  
on foot . . . on foot . . .  
on foot . . .

Motorcycle cops,  
white,  
will speed it  
out of sight  
if they can:  
Solid black,  
can't be right.

Marching . . . marching . . .  
marching . . .  
noon till night . . .

*I never knew  
that many Negroes  
were on earth,  
did you?*

*I never knew!*

PARADE!

222

A chance to let

PARADE!

the whole world see

PARADE!

old black me!

WCU -  
in the... from

## Children's Rhymes

When I was a chile we used to play,  
"One—two—buckle my shoe!"  
and things like that. But now, Lord,  
listen at them little varmint's!

*By what sends  
the white kids  
I ain't sent:  
I know I can't  
be President.*

There is two thousand children  
in this block, I do believe!

*What don't bug  
them white kids  
sure bugs me:  
We knows everybody  
ain't free!*

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Some of these young ones is cert'ly bad—  
One batted a hard ball right through my window  
and my gold fish et the glass.

*What's written down  
for white folks  
ain't for us a-tall:  
"Liberty And Justice—  
Huh—For All."*

*Oop-pop-a-dal  
Skee! Daddle-de-do!  
Be-bop!*

Salt'peanuts!

*De-dop!*

### Sister

That little Negro's married and got a kid.  
Why does he keep on foolin' around Marie?  
Marie's my sister—not married to me—  
But why does he keep on foolin' around Marie?  
Why don't she get a boy-friend  
I can understand—some decent man?

*Did it ever occur to you, son,  
the reason Marie runs around with trash  
is she wants some cash?*

Don't decent folks have dough?

*Unfortunately usually no!*

Well, anyway, it don't have to be a married man.

*Did it ever occur to you, boy,  
that a woman does the best she can?*

Comment on Stoop

So does a man.

### Preference

I likes a woman  
six or eight and ten years older'n myself.  
I don't fool with these young girls.  
Young girl'll say,  
*Daddy, I want so-and-so.*

*I needs this, that, and the other.*  
But a old woman'll say,  
*Honey, what does YOU need?  
I just drew my money tonight  
and it's all your'n.*

That's why I likes a older woman  
who can appreciate me:  
When she conversations you  
it ain't forever, *Gimmel!*

### Necessity

Work?  
I don't have to work.  
I don't have to do nothing  
but eat, drink, stay black, and die.  
This little old furnished room's  
so small I can't whip a cat  
without getting fur in my mouth  
and my landlady's so old  
her features is all run together  
and God knows she sure can overcharge—  
Which is why I reckon I does  
have to work after all.

### Question

Said the lady, *Can you do  
what my other man can't do—  
That is  
love me, daddy—  
and feed me, too?*

*Figurine*

De-dopl

### Buddy

That kid's my buddy,  
still and yet  
I don't see him much.  
He works downtown for Twelve a week.  
Has to give his mother Ten—  
she says he can have  
the other Two  
to pay his carfare, buy a suit,  
coat, shoes,  
anything he wants out of it.

### Juke Box Love Song

I could take the Harlem night  
and wrap around you,  
Take the neon lights and make a crown,  
Take the Lenox Avenue busses,  
Taxis, subways,  
And for your love song tone their rumble down.  
Take Harlem's heartbeat,  
Make a drumbeat,  
Put it on a record, let it whirl,  
And while we listen to it play,  
Dance with you till day—  
Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.

### Ultimatum

Baby, how come you can't see me  
when I'm paying your bills  
each and every week?

If you got somebody else,  
tell me—  
else I'll cut you off  
without your rent.  
I mean  
without a cent.

### Warning

Daddy,  
don't let your dog  
curb you!

### Croon

I don't give a damn  
For Alabam'  
Even if it is my home.

### New Yorkers

I was born here,  
that's no lie, he said,  
right here beneath God's sky.

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*I wasn't born here, she said,  
I come—and why?  
Where I come from  
folks work hard  
all their lives  
until they die  
and never own no parts  
of earth nor sky  
So I come up here.  
Now what've I got?  
You!*

She lifted up her lips  
in the dark:  
The same old spark!

### Wonder

Early blue evening.  
Lights ain't come on yet.  
*Looky yonder!*  
*They come on now!*

### Easy Boogie

Down in the bass  
That steady beat  
Walking walking walking  
Like marching feet.

229

Down in the bass  
That easy roll,  
Rolling like I like it  
In my soul.

Riffs, smears, breaks.

Hey, Lawdy, Mama!  
Do you hear what I said?  
Easy like I rock it  
In my bed!

### Movies

The Roosevelt, Renaissance, Gem, Alhambra:  
Harlem laughing in all the wrong places  
at the crocodile tears  
of crocodile art  
that you know  
in your heart  
is crocodile:

(Hollywood  
laughs at me,  
black—  
so I laugh  
back.)

### Tell Me

Why should it be *my* loneliness,  
Why should it be *my* song,  
Why should it be *my* dream  
deferred  
overlong?

### Not a Movie

Well, they rocked him with road-apples  
because he tried to vote  
and whipped his head with clubs  
and he crawled on his knees to his house  
and he got the midnight train  
and he crossed that Dixie line  
now he's livin'  
on a 133rd.

He didn't stop in Washington  
and he didn't stop in Baltimore  
neither in Newark on the way.  
Six knots was on his head  
but, thank God, he wasn't dead!  
And there ain't no Ku Klux  
on a 133rd.



Neon Signs

WONDER BAR

.  
..

WISHING WELL

.  
..

MONTEREY

.  
..

MINTON'S

(ancient altar of Thelonious)

.  
..

MANDALAY

Spots where the booted  
and unbooted play

.  
..

SMALL'S

.  
..

CASBAH

.  
..

SHALIMAR

.  
..

Mirror-go-round  
where a broken glass  
in the early bright  
smears re-bop  
sound

.  
..

Numbers

If I ever hit for a dollar  
gonna salt every dime away  
in the Post Office for a rainy day.

I ain't gonna  
play back a cent.

(Of course, I might  
combine *a little*  
with my rent.)

What? So Soon!

I believe my old lady's  
pregnant again!

Fate must have  
some kind of trickeration  
to populate the  
cullud nation!

*Comment against Lamp Post*  
You call it fate?

*Figurette*  
De-daddle-dy!  
De-dop!

### Motto

I play it cool  
And dig all jive.  
That's the reason  
I stay alive.

My motto,  
As I live and learn,  
is:  
*Dig And Be Dug*  
*In Return.*

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### Dead in There

Sometimes  
A night funeral  
Going by  
Carries home  
A cool bop daddy.

Hearse and flowers  
Guarantee  
He'll never hype  
Another paddy.

It's hard to believe,  
But dead in there,  
He'll never lay a  
Hype nowhere!

He's my ace-boy,  
Gone away.  
*Wake up and live!*  
He used to say.

Squares  
Who couldn't dig him,  
Plant him now—  
Out where it makes  
No diff' no how.

### Situation

When I rolled three 7's  
in a row  
I was scared to walk out  
with the dough.

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## Dancer

Two or three things in the past  
failed him  
that had not failed people  
of lesser genius.

In the first place  
he didn't have much sense.  
He was no good at making love  
and no good at making money.

So he tapped,  
trucked,  
boogied,  
sanded,  
jittered,  
until he made folks say,  
*Looky yonder  
at that boy!*  
*Hey!*

But being no good at lovin'—  
the girls left him.  
(When you're no good for dough they go.)  
With no sense, just wonderful feet,  
What could possibly be all-rect?  
Did he get anywhere? No!

Even a great dancer  
can't C.P.T.  
a show.

## Advice

Folks, I'm telling you,  
birthing is hard  
and dying is mean—  
so get yourself  
a little loving  
in between.

## Green Memory

A wonderful time—the War:  
when money rolled in  
and blood rolled out.  
But blood  
was far away  
from here—  
Money was near.

## Wine-O

Setting in the wine-house  
Soaking up a wine-souse  
Waiting for tomorrow to come—  
Then  
Setting in the wine-house  
Soaking up a new souse.  
Tomorrow . . .  
Oh, hum!

## Relief

My heart is aching  
for them Poles and Greeks  
on relief way across the sea  
because I was on relief  
once in 1933.

I know what relief can be—  
it took me two years to get on WPA.  
If the war hadn't come along  
I wouldn't be out the barrel yet.  
Now, I'm almost back in the barrel again.

To tell the truth,  
if these white folks want to go ahead  
and fight another war,  
or even two,  
the one to stop 'em won't be me.

Would you?

## Ballad of the Landlord

Landlord, landlord,  
My roof has sprung a leak.  
Don't you 'member I told you about it  
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,  
These steps is broken down.  
When you come up yourself  
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

238

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?  
Ten Bucks you say is due?  
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you  
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?  
You gonna cut off my heat?  
You gonna take my furniture and  
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.  
Talk on—till you get through.  
You ain't gonna be able to say a word  
If I land my fist on you.

*Police! Police!*  
*Come and get this man!*  
*He's trying to ruin the government*  
*And overturn the land!*

Copper's whistle!  
Patrol bell!  
Arrest.

Precinct Station.  
Iron cell.  
Headlines in press:

MAN THREATENS LANDLORD

TENANT HELD NO BAIL

JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL

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### Corner Meeting

Ladder, flag, and amplifier:  
what the soap box  
used to be.  
The speaker catches fire  
looking at their faces.  
His words  
jump down to stand  
in listeners' places.

### Projection

On the day when the Savoy  
leaps clean over to Seventh Avenue  
and starts jitterbugging  
with the Renaissance,  
on that day when Abyssinia Baptist Church  
throws her enormous arms around  
St. James Presbyterian  
and 409 Edgecombe  
stoops to kiss 12 West 133rd,  
on that day—  
Do, Jesus!  
Manhattan Island will whirl  
like a Dizzy Gillespie transcription  
played by Inez and Timme.  
On that day, Lord,  
Sammy Davis and Marian Anderson  
will sing a duet,  
Paul Robeson  
will team up with Jackie Mabley,  
and Father Divine will say in truth,

240

*Peace!*  
*It's truly*  
*wonderfull*

### Flatted Fifths

Little cullud boys with beards  
re-bop be-bop mop and stop.

Little cullud boys with fears,  
frantic, kick their draftee years  
into flatted fifths and flatter beers  
that at a sudden change become  
sparkling Oriental wines  
rich and strange  
silken bathrobes with gold twines  
and Heilbronner, Crawford,  
Nat-undreamed-of Lewis combines  
in silver thread and diamond notes  
on trade-marks inside  
Howard coats.

Little cullud boys in berets  
*oop pop-a-da*  
horse a fantasy of days  
*ool ya koo*  
and dig all plays.

241

## Tomorrow

Tomorrow may be  
a thousand years off:

### TWO DIMES AND A NICKLE ONLY

says this particular  
cigarette machine.

Others take a quarter straight.

*Some dawns  
wait.*

## Mellow

Into the laps  
of black celebrities  
white girls fall  
like pale plums from a tree  
beyond a high tension wall  
wired for killing  
which makes it  
more thrilling.

## Live and Let Live

Maybe it ain't right—  
but the people of the night  
will give even  
a snake  
a break.

242

## Gauge

Hemp . . .  
A stick . . .  
A roach . . .  
Straw . . .

## Bar

That whiskey will cook the egg.  
*Say not so!*  
*Maybe the egg  
will cook the whiskey.*  
You ought to know!

## Café: 3 A.M.

Detectives from the vice squad  
with weary sadistic eyes  
spotting fairies.  
*Degenerates,*  
some folks say.

But God, Nature,  
or somebody  
made them that way.

Police lady or Lesbian  
over there?  
*Where?*

243

### Drunkard

Voice grows thicker  
as song grows stronger  
as time grows longer until day  
trying to forget to remember  
the taste of day.

### Street Song

Jack, if you got to be a rounder  
Be a rounder right—  
Just don't let mama catch you  
Makin' rounds at night.

### 125th Street

Face like a chocolate bar  
full of nuts and sweet.

Face like a jack-o'-lantern,  
candle inside.

Face like slice of melon,  
grin that wide.

244

### Dive

Lenox Avenue  
by daylight  
runs to dive in the Park  
but faster . . .  
faster . . .  
after dark.

### Warning: Augmented

Don't let your dog curb you!  
Curb your doggie  
Like you ought to do,  
But don't let that dog curb you!  
You may play folks cheap,  
Act rough and tough,  
But a dog can tell  
When you're full of stuff.  
Them little old mutts  
Look all scraggly and bad,  
But they got more sense  
Than some people ever had.  
Cur dog, fice dog, kerry blue—  
Just don't let your dog curb you!

### Up-Beat

In the gutter  
boys who try  
might meet girls  
on the fly

245

as out of the gutter  
girls who will  
may meet boys  
copping a thrill  
while from the gutter  
both can rise:  
But it requires  
plenty eyes.

### Jam Session

Letting midnight  
out on bail  
*pop-a-da*  
having been  
detained in jail  
*oop-pop-a-da*  
for sprinkling salt  
on a dreamer's tail  
*pop-a-da*

### Be-Bop Boys

Imploring Mecca  
to achieve  
six discs  
with Decca.

246

### Tag

Little cullud boys  
with fears,  
frantic,  
nudge their draftee years.

*Pop-a-da!*

### Theme for English B

The instructor said,

*Go home and write  
a page tonight.  
And let that page come out of you—  
Then, it will be true.*

I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me  
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what  
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

247



Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me *not* like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?  
Being me, it will not be white.  
But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.  
You are white—  
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.  
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.  
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.  
But we are, that's true!  
As I learn from you,  
I guess you learn from me—  
although you're older—and white—  
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

#### College Formal: Renaissance Casino

Golden girl  
in a golden gown  
in a melody night  
in Harlem town  
lad tall and brown  
tall and wise

248

college boy smart  
eyes in eyes  
the music wraps  
them both around  
in mellow magic  
of dancing sound  
till they're the heart  
of the whole big town  
gold and brown

#### Low to High

How can you forget me?  
But you do!  
You said you was gonna take me  
Up with you—  
Now you've got your Cadillac,  
you done forgot that you are black.  
How can you forget me  
When I'm you?

*But you do.*

How can you forget me,  
fellow, say?  
How can you low-rate me  
this way?  
You treat me like you damn well please,  
Ignore me—though I pay your fees.  
How can you forget me?

*But you do.*

249

**Boogie: 1 a.m.**

Good evening, daddy!  
I know you've heard  
The boogie-woogie rumble  
Of a dream deferred  
Trilling the treble  
And twining the bass  
Into midnight ruffles  
Of cat-gut lace.

**High to Low**

God knows  
We have our troubles, too—  
One trouble is you:  
you talk too loud,  
cuss too loud,  
look too black,  
don't get anywhere,  
and sometimes it seems  
you don't even care.  
The way you send your kids to school  
stockings down,  
(not Ethical Culture)  
the way you shout out loud in church,  
(not St. Phillips)  
and the way you lounge on doorsteps  
just as if you were down South,  
(not at 409)  
the way you clown—  
the way, in other words,  
you let me down—

250

me, trying to uphold the race  
and you—  
well, you can see,  
we have our problems,  
too, with you.

**Lady's Boogie**

See that lady  
Dressed so fine?  
She ain't got boogie-woogie  
On her mind—

But if she was to listen  
I bet she'd hear,  
Way up in the treble  
The tingle of a tear.

*Be-Bach!*

**So Long**

*So long*  
is in the song  
and it's in the way you're gone  
but it's like a foreign language  
in my mind  
and maybe was I blind  
I could not see

251

and would not know  
you're gone so long  
so long.

### Deferred

*This year, maybe, do you think I can graduate?  
I'm already two years late.  
Dropped out six months when I was seven,  
a year when I was eleven,  
then got put back when we come North.  
To get through high at twenty's kind of late—  
But maybe this year I can graduate.*

Maybe now I can have that white enamel stove  
I dreamed about when we first fell in love  
eighteen years ago.  
But you know,  
rooming and everything  
then kids,  
cold-water flat and all that.  
But now my daughter's married  
And my boy's most grown—  
quit school to work—  
and where we're moving  
there ain't no stove—  
Maybe I can buy that white enamel stove!

*Me, I always did want to study French.  
It don't make sense—  
I'll never go to France,*

252

*but night schools teach French.  
Now at last I've got a job  
where I get off at five,  
in time to wash and dress,  
so, si'l-vous plait, I'll study French!*

Someday,  
I'm gonna buy two new suits  
at once!

*All I want is  
one more bottle of gin.*

All I want is to see  
my furniture paid for.

*All I want is a wife who will  
work with me and not against me. Say,  
baby, could you see your way clear?*

Heaven, heaven, is my home!  
This world I'll leave behind  
When I set my feet in glory  
I'll have a throne for mine!

*I want to pass the civil service.*

I want a television set.

*You know, as old as I am,  
I ain't never  
owned a decent radio yet?*

253

I'd like to take up Bach.

*Montage  
of a dream  
deferred.*

Buddy, have you heard?

### Request

Gimme \$25.00  
and the change.  
I'm going  
where the morning  
and the evening  
won't bother me.

### Shame on You

If you're great enough  
and clever enough  
the government might honor you.  
But the people will forget—  
Except on holidays.

A movie house in Harlem named after Lincoln,  
Nothing at all named after John Brown.

254

Black people don't remember  
any better than white.

If you're not alive and kicking,  
*shame on you!*

### World War II

What a grand time was the war!  
Oh, my, my!  
What a grand time was the war!  
My, my, my!  
In wartime we had fun,  
Sorry that old war is done!  
What a grand time was the war,  
My, my!

Echo:

*Did  
Somebody  
Die?*

### Mystery

When a chile gets to be thirteen  
and ain't seen Christ yet,  
she needs to set on de moaner's bench  
night and day.

255

*Jesus, lover of my soul!*

Hail, Mary, mother of God!

*Let me to thy bosom fly!*

Amen! Hallelujah!

*Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.*

Sunday morning where the rhythm flows,  
how old nobody knows—  
yet old as mystery,  
older than creed,  
basic and wondering  
and lost as my need.

*Eli, eli!*

*Te deum!*

*Mahomet!*

*Christ!*

Father Bishop, Effendi, Mother Home.  
Father Divine, a Rabbi black  
as black was born,  
a jack-leg preacher, a Ph.D.

*The mystery  
and the darkness  
and the song  
and me.*

256

### Sliver of Sermon

When pimps out of loneliness cry:  
*Great God!*

Whores in final weariness say:  
*Great God!*

*Oh, God!*

*My God!*

Great

God!

### Testimonial

If I just had a piano,  
if I just had a organ,  
if I just had a drum,  
how I could praise my Lord!

But I don't need no piano,  
neither organ  
nor drum  
for to praise my Lord!

### Passing

On sunny summer Sunday afternoons in Harlem  
when the air is one interminable ball game  
and grandma cannot get her gospel hymns  
from the Saints of God in Christ  
on account of the Dodgers on the radio,

257

on sunny Sunday afternoons  
when the kids look all new  
and far too clean to stay that way,  
and Harlem has its  
washed-and-ironed-and-cleaned-best out,  
the ones who've crossed the line  
to live downtown  
miss you,  
Harlem of the bitter dream,  
since their dream has  
come true.

### Nightmare Boogie

I had a dream  
and I could see  
a million faces  
black as me!  
A nightmare dream:  
*Quicker than light*  
*All them faces*  
*Turned dead white!*  
Boogie-woogie,  
Rolling bass,  
Whirling treble  
of cat-gut lace.

258

### Sunday by the Combination

I feel like dancin', baby,  
till the sun goes down.

But I wonder where  
the sunrise  
Monday morning's gonna be?

I feel like dancin'!  
Baby, dance with me!

### Casualty

He was a soldier in the army,  
But he doesn't walk like one. \* ☹  
He walks like his soldiering  
Days are done.

Son! . . . Son!

### Night Funeral in Harlem

Night funeral  
In Harlem:

*Where did they get*  
*Them two fine cars?*

Insurance man, he did not pay—  
His insurance lapsed the other day—

259

Yet they got a satin box  
For his head to lay.

Night funeral  
In Harlem:

*Who was it sent  
That wreath of flowers?*

Them flowers came  
from that poor boy's friends—  
They'll want flowers, too,  
When they meet their ends.

Night funeral  
In Harlem:

*Who preached that  
Black boy to his grave?*

Old preacher-man  
Preached that boy away—  
Charged Five Dollars  
His girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral  
In Harlem:

When it was all over  
And the lid shut on his head  
and the organ had done played  
and the last prayers been said  
and six pallbearers

260

Carried him out for dead  
And off down Lenox Avenue  
That long black hearse done sped,  
The street light  
At his corner  
Shined just like a tear—

That boy that they was mournin'  
Was so dear, so dear  
To them folks that brought the flowers,  
To that girl who paid the preacher man—  
It was all their tears that made  
That poor boy's  
Funeral grand.

Night funeral  
In Harlem.

### Blues at Dawn

I don't dare start thinking in the morning.  
I don't dare start thinking in the morning.  
If I thought thoughts in bed,  
Them thoughts would bust my head—  
So I don't dare start thinking in the morning.

I don't dare remember in the morning  
Don't dare remember in the morning.  
If I recall the day before,  
I wouldn't get up no more—  
So I don't dare remember in the morning.

261

## Dime

Chile, these steps is hard to climb.

*Grandma, lend me a dime.*

Montage of a dream deferred:

*Grandma acts like  
She ain't heard.*

Chile, Granny ain't got no dime.

*I might've knowed  
It all the time.*

## Argument

White is right,  
Yellow mellow,  
Black, get back!

*Do you believe that, Jack?*

Sure do!

*Then you're a dope  
for which there ain't no hope.  
Black is fine!  
And, God knows,  
It's mine!*

262

## Neighbor

Down home  
he sets on a stoop  
and watches the sun go by.  
In Harlem  
when his work is done  
he sets in a bar with a beer.  
He looks taller than he is  
and younger than he ain't.  
He looks darker than he is, too.  
And he's smarter than he looks,

*He ain't smart.  
That cat's a fool.*

Naw, he ain't neither.  
He's a good man,  
except that he talks too much.  
In fact, he's a great cat.  
But when he drinks,  
he drinks fast.

*Sometimes  
he don't drink.*

True,  
he just  
lets his glass  
set there.

263



### Evening Song

A woman standing in the doorway  
Trying to make her where-with-all:  
*Come here, baby, darlin'!*  
Don't you hear me call?

If I was anybody's sister,  
I'd tell her, *Gimme a place to sleep.*  
But I ain't nobody's sister.  
I'm just a poor lost sheep.

Mary, Mary, Mary,  
Had a little lamb.  
Well, I hope that lamb of Mary's  
Don't turn out like I am.

### Chord

Shadow faces  
In the shadow night  
Before the early dawn  
Bops bright.

### Fact

There's been an eagle on a nickel,  
An eagle on a quarter, too.  
But there ain't no eagle  
On a dime.

264

### Joe Louis

They worshipped Joe.  
A school teacher  
whose hair was gray  
said:  
*Joe has sense enough to know*  
*He is a god.*  
*So many gods don't know.*

"They say" . . . "They say" . . . "They say" . . .  
But the gossips had no  
"They say"  
to latch onto  
for Joe.

### Subway Rush Hour

Mingled  
breath and smell  
so close  
mingled  
black and white  
so near  
no room for fear.



### Brothers

We're related—you and I,  
You from the West Indies,  
I from Kentucky.

265

Kinsmen—you and I,  
You from Africa,  
I from the U.S.A.

Brothers—you and I.

Likewise

The Jews:  
Groceries  
Suits  
Fruits  
Watches  
Diamond rings  
THE DAILY NEWS

Jews sell me things.  
Yom Kippur, no!  
Shops all over Harlem  
close up tight that night.

Some folks blame high prices on the Jews.  
(Some folks blame too much on Jews.)  
But in Harlem they don't answer back,  
Just maybe shrug their shoulders,  
"What's the use?"

What's the use  
in Harlem?  
What's the use?  
What's the Harlem  
use in Harlem  
what's the lick?

266

Hey!  
Baba-re-bop!  
Mop!  
On a be-bop kick!

Sometimes I think  
Jews must have heard  
the music of a  
dream deferred.

Sliver

Cheap little rhymes  
A cheap little tune  
Are sometimes as dangerous  
As a sliver of the moon.  
A cheap little tune  
To cheap little rhymes  
Can cut a man's  
Throat sometimes.

Hope

He rose up on his dying bed  
and asked for fish.  
His wife looked it up in her dream book  
and played it.

267

### Dream Boogie: Variation

Tinkling treble,  
Rolling bass,  
High noon teeth  
In a midnight face,  
Great long fingers  
On great big hands,  
Screaming pedals  
Where his twelve-shoe lands,  
Looks like his eyes  
Are teasing pain,  
A few minutes late  
For the Freedom Train.

### Harlem



What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

268

### Good Morning

Good morning, daddy!  
I was born here, he said,  
watched Harlem grow  
until colored folks spread  
from river to river  
across the middle of Manhattan  
out of Penn Station  
dark tenth of a nation,  
planes from Puerto Rico,  
and holds of boats, chico,  
up from Cuba Haiti Jamaica,  
in buses marked New York  
from Georgia Florida Louisiana  
to Harlem Brooklyn the Bronx  
but most of all to Harlem  
dusky sash across Manhattan  
I've seen them come dark  
wondering  
wide-eyed  
dreaming  
out of Penn Station—  
but the trains are late.  
The gates open—  
Yet there're bars  
at each gate.

What happens  
to a dream deferred?

Daddy, ain't you heard?

269

## Same in Blues

I said to my baby,  
Baby, take it slow.  
I can't, she said, I can't!  
I got to go!

*There's a certain  
amount of traveling  
in a dream deferred.*

Lulu said to Leonard,  
I want a diamond ring.  
Leonard said to Lulu,  
You won't get a goddamn thing!

*A certain  
amount of nothing  
in a dream deferred.*

Daddy, daddy, daddy,  
All I want is you.  
You can have me, baby—  
but my lovin' days is through.

*A certain  
amount of impotence  
in a dream deferred.*

Three parties  
On my party line—  
But that third party,  
Lord, ain't mine!

270

*There's liable  
to be confusion  
in a dream deferred.*

From river to river,  
Uptown and down,  
There's liable to be confusion  
when a dream gets kicked around.

## Comment on Curb

You talk like  
they don't kick  
dreams around  
downtown.

*I expect they do—  
But I'm talking about  
Harlem to you!*

## Letter

Dear Mama,  
Time I pay rent and get my food  
and laundry I don't have much left  
but here is five dollars for you  
to show you I still appreciates you.  
My girl-friend send her love and say  
she hopes to lay eyes on you sometime in life.

271

*Mama, it has been raining cats and dogs up  
here. Well, that is all so I will close.*

*Your son baby*

*Respectably as ever,  
Joe*

### Island

Between two rivers,  
North of the park,  
Like darker rivers  
The streets are dark.

Black and white,  
Gold and brown—  
Chocolate-custard  
Pie of a town.

*Dream within a dream,  
Our dream deferred.*

Good morning, daddy!

Ain't you heard?

WORDS  
LIKE  
FREEDOM