

I Hear America Singing

BY [WALT WHITMAN](#)

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing
on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he
stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at
noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl
sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust,
friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

1867

Source: *Selected Poems* (1991)

I, Too

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

1945

Langston Hughes, "I, Too" from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1994 by The Estate of Langston Hughes. Reprinted with the permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated.

Source: *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Vintage Books, 2004)

America

BY CLAUDE MCKAY

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

1921

Claude McKay, "America" from *Liberator* (December 1921). Courtesy of the Literary Representative for the Works of Claude McKay, Schombourg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Source: *Liberator* (The Library of America, 1921)