



Junteenth Poetry

To a Dark Girl

By Gwendolyn Bennett

I love you for your brownness,
And the rounded darkness of your breast,
I love you for the breaking sadness in your voice
And shadows where your wayward eyelids rest.

Something of old forgotten queens
Lurks in the lithe abandon of your walk
And something of the shackled slave
Sobs in the rhythm of your talk.

Oh, little brown girl, born for sorrow's mate,
Keep all you have of queenliness,
Forgetting that you once were slave,
And let your full lips laugh at Fate!

Bury Me in a Free Land

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Make me a grave where'er you will,
In a lowly plain, or a lofty hill;
Make it among earth's humblest graves,
But not in a land where men are slaves.

I could not rest if around my grave
I heard the steps of a trembling slave;
His shadow above my silent tomb
Would make it a place of fearful gloom.

I could not rest if I heard the tread
Of a coffle gang to the shambles led,
And the mother's shriek of wild despair
Rise like a curse on the trembling air.

I could not sleep if I saw the lash
Drinking her blood at each fearful gash,
And I saw her babes torn from her breast,
Like trembling doves from their parent nest.

I'd shudder and start if I heard the bay
Of bloodhounds seizing their human prey,
And I heard the captive plead in vain
As they bound afresh his galling chain.

If I saw young girls from their mother's arms
Bartered and sold for their youthful charms,

My eye would flash with a mournful flame,
My death-paled cheek grow red with shame.

I would sleep, dear friends, where bloated might
Can rob no man of his dearest right;
My rest shall be calm in any grave
Where none can call his brother a slave.

I ask no monument, proud and high,
To arrest the gaze of the passers-by;
All that my yearning spirit craves,
Is bury me not in a land of slaves.

Emancipation

By Priscilla Jane Thompson

'Tis a time for much rejoicing;
Let each heart be lured away;
Let each tongue, its thanks be voicing
For Emancipation Day.
Day of victory, day of glory,
For thee, many a field was gory!

Many a time in days now ended,
Hath our fathers' courage failed,
Patiently their tears they blended;
Ne'er they to their, Maker, railed,
Well we know their groans, He numbered,
When dominions fell, asundered.

As of old the Red Sea parted,
And oppressed passed safely through,
Back from the North, the bold South, started,
And a fissure wide she drew;
Drew a cleft of Liberty,
Through it, marched our people free.

And, in memory, ever grateful,
Of the day they reached the shore,
Meet we now, with hearts e'er faithful,
Joyous that the storm is o'er.
Storm of Torture! May grim Past,
Hurl thee down his torrents fast.

Bring your harpers, bring your sages,
Bid each one the story tell;
Waft it on to future ages,
Bid descendants learn it well.
Kept it bright in minds now tender,
Teach the young their thanks to render.

Come with hearts all firm united,
In the union of a race;
With your loyalty well plighted,
Look your brother in the face,
Stand by him, forsake him never,
God is with us now, forever.

We Are Marching

By Carrie Law Morgan Figgs

We are marching, truly marching
Can't you hear the sound of feet?
We are fearing no impediment
We have never known defeat.

Like Job of old we have had patience,
Like Joshua, dangerous roads we've trod
Like Solomon we have built out temples.
Like Abraham we've had faith in God.

Up the streets of wealth and commerce,
We are marching one by one
We are marching, making history,
For ourselves and those to come.

We have planted schools and churches,
We have answered duty's call.
We have marched from slavery's cabin
To the legislative hall.

Brethren can't you catch the spirit?
You who are out just get in line
Because we are marching, yes we are marching
To the music of the time.

We are marching, steady marching
Bridging chasms, crossing streams
Marching up the hill of progress
Realizing our fondest dreams.

We are marching, truly marching
Can't you hear the sound of feet?
We are fearing no impediment
We shall never know defeat.

My People

By Langston Hughes

Dream-singers,
Story-tellers,
Dancers,
Loud laughers in the hands of Fate—
My People.
Dish-washers,
Elevator-boys,
Ladies' maids,
Crap-shooters,
Cooks,
Waiters,
Jazzers,
Nurses of babies,
Loaders of ships,
Porters,
Hairdressers,
Comedians in vaudeville

And band-men in circuses—

Dream-singers all,

Story-tellers all.

Dancers—

God! What dancers!

Singers—

God! What singers!

Singers and dancers,

Dancers and laughers.

Laughers?

Yes, laughers....laughers.....laughers—

Loud-mouthed laughers in the hands of Fate.