

*A Nation's Strength* (1904)

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

What makes a nation's pillars high  
And its foundations strong?  
What makes it mighty to defy  
The foes that round it throng?

It is not gold. Its kingdoms grand 5  
Go down in battle shock;  
Its shafts are laid on sinking sand,  
Not on abiding rock.

Is it the sword? Ask the red dust  
Of empires passed away; 10  
The blood has turned their stones to rust,  
Their glory to decay.

And is it pride? Ah, that bright crown  
Has seemed to nations sweet;  
But God has struck its luster down 15  
In ashes at his feet.

Not gold but only men can make  
A people great and strong;  
Men who for truth and honor's sake  
Stand fast and suffer long. 20

Brave men who work while others sleep,  
Who dare while others fly...  
They build a nation's pillars deep  
And lift them to the sky.

*America* (1921)

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, 5  
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. 10  
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.