

On Being Brought from Africa to America

(1773)

By Phillis Wheatley

"Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,
May be refin'd and join th'angelic train.

Let America Be America Again (1938)

By Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.) 5

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed --
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.) 10

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me, 15
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the
stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars. 20
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek --
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope, 25
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!

Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed! 30

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry mean --
Hungry yet today despite the dream. 35
Beaten yet today -- O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.
Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings, 40
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas 45
In search of what I meant to be my home --
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free." 50

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay? 55
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung
The millions who have nothing for our pay -- 60
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again --
The land that never has been yet --
And yet must be -- the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine -- the poor man's, Indian's, 65
Negro's, ME --
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again. 70

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose --
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America! 75

O, yes,
I say it plain.
America never was America to me,

And yet I swear this oath --
America will be! 80

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain -- 85
All, all the stretch of these great green states --
And make America again!

These Yet to be the United States (1990)

By Maya Angelou

Tremors of your network
cause kings to disappear.
Your open mouth in anger
makes nations bow in fear.

Your bombs can change the seasons, 5
obliterate the spring.
What more do you long for?
Why are you suffering?

You control the human lives
in Rome and Timbuktu. 10
Lonely nomads wandering
owe Telstar to you.

Seas shift at your bidding
your mushrooms fill the sky
Why are you unhappy? 15
Why do your children cry?

They kneel alone in terror
with dread in every glance.
Their rights are threatened daily
by a grim inheritance. 20

You dwell in whitened castles
with deep and poisoned moats
and cannot hear the curses
which fill your children's throats.