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University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri 65201

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5 4 3 2 1 05 04 03 02 01

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hughes, Langston, 1902–1967.

[Works. 2001]

The collected works of Langston Hughes / edited with an introduction
by Arnold Rampersad.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0-8262-1339-1 (v. 1 : alk. paper)—ISBN 0-8262-1340-5

(v. 2 : alk. paper)—ISBN 0-8262-1341-3 (v. 3 : alk. paper)

I. African Americans—Literary collections. I. Rampersad, Arnold, II. Title.

PS3515.U274 2001

818'.5209—dc21

00-066601

© This paper meets the requirements of the
American National Standard for Permanence of Paper
for Printed Library Materials, Z39.48, 1984.

Designer: Kristie Lee

Typesetter: BOOKCOMP, Inc.

Printer and binder: Thomson-Shore, Inc.

Typefaces: Galliard and Optima

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In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it has progressed—jazz, ragtime, swing, blues, boogie-woogie, and be-bop—this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition.

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Boogie Segue to Bop

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!

A chance to let

PARADE!

the whole world see

PARADE!

old black me!

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 varmints!

*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!*

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-da!
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 drawed 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, *Gimme!*

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-dop!

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.

*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.

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!

Dig and Be Dug

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,
 now there ain't no Ku Klux
 on a 133rd.

Neon Signs

WONDER BAR

∴

WISHING WELL

∴

MONTEREY

∴

MINTON'S
 (altar of Thelonious)

∴

MANDALAY

∴

Spots where the booted
 and unbooted play

∴

LENOX

∴

CASBAH

∴

POOR JOHN'S

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
 combinate *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.

Dead in There

Sometimes
 A night funeral
 Going by
 Carries home
 A re-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.

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-reet?
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 W.P.A.
If the war hadn't come along

I wouldn't be out of 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.

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

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,
Willie Bryant and Marian Anderson
will sing a duet,
Paul Robeson
will team up with Jackie Mabley,
and Father Divine will say in truth,

Peace!
It's truly
wonderful!

Early Bright

Flatted Fifths

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

Little cullud boys with fears,
frantic, kick their CC 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 Heilbroner, 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.

Tomorrow

Tomorrow may be
a thousand years off:

TWO DIMES AND A NICKEL 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.

Gauge

Hemp
 A stick
 A roach
 Straw

Bar

That whisky will cook the egg.

Say not so!
Maybe the egg
will cook the whisky.

You ought to know!

Cafe: 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?

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.

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.
Don't let your dog curb you!
Watch your step—
Else before you're through
You're liable to find your dog's curbed you!
Them little old mutts
Look all scraggly and bad,
But they got more sense
Than some hustlers ever had.
Cur dog, fice dog, keary blue—
Just don't let your dog curb you!

Up-Beat

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

Tag

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

Pop-a-da!

Vice Versa to Bach

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?
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
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.

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—
 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!

Freedom Train

I read in the papers about the
 Freedom Train.
 I heard on the radio about the
 Freedom Train.
 I went down to the station and seen the
 Freedom Train.
 Lord, I been a-waitin' for the
 Freedom Train!

Down South in Dixie only train I see's
 Got a Jim Crow car set aside for me.
 I hope there ain't no Jim Crow on the Freedom Train,
 No back door entrance to the Freedom Train,
 No signs FOR COLORED on the Freedom Train,
 No WHITE FOLKS ONLY on the Freedom Train.

I'm gonna check up on this
 Freedom Train.

Who's the engineer on the Freedom Train?
 Can a coal black man drive the Freedom Train?
 Or am I still a porter on the Freedom Train?
 Is there ballot boxes on the Freedom Train?
 Do colored folks vote on the Freedom Train?
 When it stops in Mississippi will it be made plain
 Everybody's got a right to board the Freedom Train?

Somebody tell me about this
 Freedom Train!

The Birmingham station's marked COLORED and WHITE.
 The white folks go left, the colored go right—
 They even got a segregated lane.
 Is that the way to get aboard the Freedom Train?

I got to know about this
 Freedom Train!

If my children ask me, *Daddy, please explain*
Why there's Jim Crow stations for the Freedom Train,
 What shall I tell my children? . . . *You* tell me—
 'Cause freedom ain't freedom when a man ain't free.

But maybe they'll explain it on the
 Freedom Train.

When my old grandma in Atlanta, 83 and black,
 Gets in line to see the Freedom,
 Will some white man yell, *Get back!*
A Negra's got no business on the Freedom Track!

But, Mister, I thought it were the
 Freedom Train!

One grandson's name was Jimmy. He died at Anzio.
 He died for real. It warn't no show.
 The freedom that they carryin' on this Freedom Train,
 Is it for real—or just a show again?

Jimmy wants to know about this
 Freedom Train.

Will *his* Freedom Train come zoomin' down the track
 Gleamin' in the sunlight for white and black?
 Not stoppin' at no stations marked COLORED and WHITE,

Just stoppin' in the fields in the broad daylight,
 Stoppin' in the country in the wide open air
 Where there never was no Jim Crow signs nowhere,
 No Welcomin' Committees, nor politicians of note,
 No lily-white Mayors for which colored can't vote,
 And nary a sign of a color line—
 For the Freedom Train will be yours and mine!

Then maybe from their graves in Anzio
 The G.I.'s who fought will say,

We wanted it so!

Black men and white will say,

Ain't it fine?

At home we got a train

That's yours and mine!

Then I'll shout,

Glory for the

Freedom Train!

I'll holler,

Blow your whistle,

Freedom Train!

Thank-God-A-Mighty!

Here's the

Freedom Train!

Get on board our Freedom Train!

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,
 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, s'il-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?*

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.

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?*

Dream Deferred

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.

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 Horne,
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.*

Sliver of Sermon

When pimps out of loneliness cry:

Great God!

Whores in final weariness say:

Great God!

Mothers who've lost their last sons weep:

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,
 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.

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—
 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 met 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
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.

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 knowned
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!*

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.

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.

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.

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

Brothers—you and I—

Likewise

The Jews:
 Groceries
 Suits
 Fruit
 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?

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.

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.

Lenox Avenue Mural

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?

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 busses 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?

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.

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.
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?