

Harlem

Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
5 And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet? **A**

10 Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

Langston Hughes



The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1998), Phoebe B

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins. **B**

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

5 I bathed in the Euphrates¹ when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans,² and I've seen its muddy
10 bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky³ rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. **C**

1. **Euphrates** (yŏŏ-frā'tēz): a river flowing through present-day Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was the site of one of the world's earliest civilizations.
2. **when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans**: Lincoln's first glimpse of the horrors of slavery reportedly came on his trip to New Orleans as a young man.
3. **dusky**: dark; shadowy.

I, Too

Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,

5 But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong. **D**

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

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

I, too, am America.

The *Weary* Blues

Langston Hughes

Droning a drowsy syncopated¹ tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lenox Avenue² the other night
5 By the pale dull pallor³ of an old gas light
He did a lazy sway. . . .
He did a lazy sway. . . .

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.

With his ebony hands on each ivory key
10 He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
Sweet Blues!

15 Coming from a black man's soul.
O Blues!

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—

20 "Ain't got nobody in all this world,
Ain't got nobody but ma self.
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more— **E**

25 "I got the Weary Blues
And I can't be satisfied.
Got the Weary Blues
And can't be satisfied—
I ain't happy no mo'

30 And I wish that I had died."
And far into the night he crooned that tune.
The stars went out and so did the moon.
The singer stopped playing and went to bed
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
35 He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

1. **syncopated** (sɪŋ'kə-pə'tɪd): characterized by a shifting of stresses from normally strong to normally weak beats.

2. **Lenox Avenue**: a main north-south street in Harlem.

3. **pallor** (pəl'ər): lack of color.