

About the Author

Walt Whitman (1819–1892), who did not attend college, worked as a journalist, carpenter, and building contractor before publishing a collection of his poems, *Leaves of Grass*, in 1855. Calling himself the “people’s poet,” Whitman’s foundational work featured free verse, used common speech patterns, and celebrated the country’s working class and cultural diversity.

I Hear America Singing

by Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
5 The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand
singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The woodcutter’s song, the plowboy’s on his way in the morning, or at noon
intermission or at sundown.
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl
sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else.
10 The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

About the Author

Langston Hughes (1902–1967) wrote numerous works of prose, poetry, and drama. Fascinated with jazz rhythms and lyrics of blues music, Hughes became a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance. His first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926. His works capture and celebrate the culture of black America.

I, Too, Sing America

by 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.
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.

About the Author

Born in 1890 in Jamaica, Claude McKay traveled to America to attend college, where he experienced the harsh realities of racism. He wrote poetry on political and social concerns and became a major writer of the Harlem Renaissance, a movement in the early 1920s.

“America”

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!
5 Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
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
10 Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
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.