



## **African-American Poetry: An Anthology, 1773-1927**

*Joan R. Sherman (Editor), Phillis Wheatley Peters (Contributor), Mary Weston Fordham (Contributor), James Weldon Johnson (Contributor), Paul Laurence Dunbar (Contributor), Langston Hughes (Contributor), Countee Cullen (Contributor), Goerge Moses Horton, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Alberry Alston Whitman (Contributor), more... George Moses Horton (Contributor), Frances Wellen Watkins Harper (Contributor), Alberry Alston Whitman (Contributor), Henrietta Cordelia Ray (Contributor), Daniel Webster Davis (Contributor) ...less*

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Rich selection of 74 poems ranging from the religious and moral verse of Phillis Wheatley Peters (ca. 1753–1784) to 20th-century work of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. Other contributors include James Weldon Johnson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, many others. Indispensable for students of the black experience in America and any lover of fine poetry. Includes 4 selections from the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

### African-American Poetry: An Anthology, 1773-1927 Details

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## **From Reader Review African-American Poetry: An Anthology, 1773-1927 for online ebook**

### **India Lavoyce says**

Deep & emotional, especially for me. I'm a black woman born, raised, & still living in Alabama. I know innocent blood was shed like crazy in this State & in this Country. It's still happening & it's still legal.

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### **Jake says**

Great poems about slavery, and the black americans struggle against marginalization by the White Majority

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### **Marsha says**

Meaningful poems about the African-American Experience -- with little snippets of history about the poets represented.

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### **Emily Dybdahl says**

Beautiful poetry, both the regular and the dialect.

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### **Vincent says**

*African-American Poetry: An Anthology, 1773-1927*, is a slim volume which gives a taste of the African American experience from the dawning of the Revolution to the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance. There are many fine pieces found within, and it is interesting to see the attitudes change over time, such as when Phillis Wheatley, an Eighteenth Century slave, expresses gratitude for have left Africa to learn about Christ (“On Being Brought from Africa to America”), gives way to Langston Hughes’s romanticism of his ancestral roots in the continent’s past “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”).

The only grievance which I can muster lies in a lack of notation that may have given many of the poems their proper context. This is especially so in the many dialectical poems where frames of reference would have been helpful. In particular, James Edwin Campbell’s “The Cunjah Man” was so dialectically dense that I had to read it several times to get even a sense of what the subject was. As it stands, I am not sure the “Cunjah Man” is a hoodoo conjurer, the Devil, or something entirely unrelated.

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### **Sharrice Aleshire says**

Best poetry book I've read so far this year.

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### **TheSkepticalReader says**

It's difficult to rate a collection or an anthology of anything given the diversity of the material, but I'd say this collection was a solid 3 star read.

Some poets and their works were extraordinary and became some of my favorite poems of all time. However, as the collection progressed, I enjoyed some of the more Christian and religious poetry even less over time. Majority of my appreciation was for the critique of the Western civilization and what it has done to the African cultures and its people.

If you're looking for a place to start reading African American poetry, this is a nice read. But as a slightly more advanced reader, I wanted something more fulfilling.

A few of my favorites from the collection:

- Joshua McCarter Simpson: To the White People of America
  - James Monroe Whitfield: How Long?
  - Claude McKay: Enslaved, If We Must Die, and Harlem Dancer.
  - By Phillis Wheatley, an all-time favorite I adore rereading: On Being Brought From Africa To America
  - Another all-item favorite is Langston Hughes: I, Too and The Negro Speaks of Rivers.
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### **J.M. Hushour says**

As an academic exercise, this collection is easily successful in its goal: offering the reader a brief glimpse at various African-American poets over the last few centuries. Although it gives short shrift to the 20th century once we get to that point, it does what it says. Unfortunately, most of the poems presented here are pretty terrible. Now, I am not a fan of traditional, narrative, polemical rhyming poetry which is what most of this is, so many better poetry aficionados besides me might find much of value here, I just didn't enjoy the poetry so much, save for the Langston Hughes and a few early 20th century selections.

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### **Patrice Jones says**

This poetry collection was wonderful. A great place to start with African American poetry because of the various names and types of poetry. It has famous names and not-so-famous names. It has poetry of faith, determination, survival, and experience. It is both happy poetry and sad poetry.

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### **Dayna Smith says**

A wonderful collection of African American poets and their wonderful contribution to literature in America. A must read for poetry fans everywhere.

## Caitlin says

Good, of course, but I want to know more about the lesser known poets.

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## Owen says

A nice smattering of poets at a reasonable price. Good for sometime who wants an introduction to African Poetry from the late 18th century through the Harlem Renaissance of the early 20th century.

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## Jimmy says

Phillis Wheatley Peters (1753?-1784) was a young slave brought from Africa to Boston in 1761. She became well-educated and once met George Washington in a private meeting.

George Moses Horton (1797?-1883?) was a North Carolina slave for 66 years.

On Liberty and Slavery  
by George Moses Horton

Alas! and am I born for this,  
To wear this slavish chain?  
Deprived of all created bliss,  
Through hardship, toil and pain!

How long have I in bondage lain,  
And languished to be free!  
Alas! and must I still complain—  
Deprived of liberty.

Oh, Heaven! and is there no relief  
This side the silent grave—  
To soothe the pain—to quell the grief  
And anguish of a slave?

Come Liberty, thou cheerful sound,  
Roll through my ravished ears!  
Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,  
And drive away my fears.

Say unto foul oppression, Cease:  
Ye tyrants rage no more,  
And let the joyful trump of peace,  
Now bid the vassal soar.

Soar on the pinions of that dove  
Which long has cooed for thee,  
And breathed her notes from Afric's grove,  
The sound of Liberty.

Oh, Liberty! thou golden prize,  
So often sought by blood—  
We crave thy sacred sun to rise,  
The gift of nature's God!

Bid Slavery hide her haggard face,  
And barbarism fly:  
I scorn to see the sad disgrace  
In which enslaved I lie.

Dear Liberty! upon thy breast,  
I languish to respire;  
And like the Swan unto her nest,  
I'd like to thy smiles retire.

Oh, blest asylum—heavenly balm!  
Unto thy boughs I flee—  
And in thy shades the storm shall calm,  
With songs of Liberty!

Joshua McCarter Simpson (1820?-1876) wrote satirical protest poems set to popular tunes and sung by fugitives on the Underground Railroad.

Away to Canada  
by Joshua McCarter Simpson

Sing to "O, Susannah"

Adapted to the case of Mr. S.,  
Fugitive from Tennessee.

I'm on my way to Canada,  
That cold and dreary land;  
The dire effects of slavery,  
I can no longer stand.  
My soul is vexed within me so,  
To think that I'm a slave;  
I've now resolved to strike the blow  
For freedom or the grave.

O righteous Father,  
Wilt thou not pity me?  
And aid me on to Canada,  
Where colored men are free.

I heard Victoria plainly say,  
If we would all forsake

Our native land of slavery,  
And come across the Lake.  
That she was standing on the shore,  
With arms extended wide,  
To give us all a peaceful home,  
Beyond the rolling tide.

Farewell, old master!  
That's enough for me—  
I'm going straight to Canada,  
Where colored men are free.

I heard the old-soul driver say,  
As he was passing by,  
That darkey's bound to run away,  
I see it in his eye.  
My heart responded to the charge,  
And thought it was no crime;  
And something seemed my mind to urge,  
That now's the very time.

O! old driver,  
Don't you cry for me,  
I'm going up to Canada,  
Where colored men are free.

Grieve not, my wife—grieve not for me,  
O! do not break my heart,  
For nought but cruel slavery  
Would cause me to depart.  
If I should stay to quell your grief,  
Your grief I would augment;  
For no one knows the day that we  
Asunder might be rent.

O! Susannah,  
Don't you cry for me—  
I'm going up to Canada,  
Where colored men are free.

I heard old master pray last night—  
I heard him pray for me;  
That God would come, and in his might  
From Satan set me free;  
So I from Satan would escape,  
And flee the wrath to come—  
If there's a fiend in human shape,  
Old master must be one.

O! old master,  
While you pray for me,  
I'm doing all I can to reach

The land of Liberty.

Ohio's not the place for me;  
For I was much surprised,  
So many of her sons to see  
In garments of disguise.  
Her name has gone out through the world,  
Free Labor, Soil, and Men;  
But slaves had better far be hurled  
Into the Lion's Den.

Farewell, Ohio!  
I am not safe in thee;  
I'll travel on to Canada,  
Where colored men are free.

I've now embarked for yonder shore,  
Where man's a man by law,  
The vessel soon will bear me o'er,  
To shake the Lion's paw.  
I no more dread the Auctioneer,  
Nor fear the master's frowns,  
I no more tremble when I hear  
The baying negro-hounds.

O! old Master,  
Don't think hard of me—  
I'm just in sight of Canada,  
Where colored men are free.

I've landed safe upon the shore,  
Both soul and body free;  
My blood and brain, and tears no more  
Will drench old Tennessee.  
But I behold the scalding tear,  
Now stealing from my eye,  
To think my wife—my only dear,  
A slave must live and die.

O, Susannah!  
Don't grieve after me—  
For ever at a throne of grace,  
I will remember thee.

James Monroe Whitfield (1822-1871) wondered in a poem "How long, O gracious God! how long,/ Shall power lord it over right?" before "all mankind, from bondage free,/ Exult in glorious liberty."

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1824-1911) became famous and financially independent.

Bury Me in a Free Land  
by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Make me a grave where'er you will,  
In a lowly plain, or a lofty hill;  
Make it among earth's humblest graves,  
But not in a land where men are slaves.

I could not rest if around my grave  
I heard the steps of a trembling slave;  
His shadow above my silent tomb  
Would make it a place of fearful gloom.

I could not rest if I heard the tread  
Of a coffin gang to the shambles led,  
And the mother's shriek of wild despair  
Rise like a curse on the trembling air.

I could not sleep if I saw the lash  
Drinking her blood at each fearful gash,  
And I saw her babes torn from her breast,  
Like trembling doves from their parent nest.

I'd shudder and start if I heard the bay  
Of bloodhounds seizing their human prey,  
And I heard the captive plead in vain  
As they bound afresh his galling chain.

If I saw young girls from their mother's arms  
Bartered and sold for their youthful charms,  
My eye would flash with a mournful flame,  
My death-paled cheek grow red with shame.

I would sleep, dear friends, where bloated might  
Can rob no man of his dearest right;  
My rest shall be calm in any grave  
Where none can call his brother a slave.

I ask no monument, proud and high,  
To arrest the gaze of the passers-by;  
All that my yearning spirit craves,  
Is bury me not in a land of slaves.

James Madison Bell (1826-1902) was a plasterer from Ohio.

Charlotte L. Forten Grimke (1837-1914) taught freed slaves in South Carolina.

Alfred Islay Walden ( 1847?-1884) endured 18 years of slavery in North Carolina. He overcame destitution and blindness to earn a teaching degree at Howard University.

Alberry Alston Whitman (1851-1901) was "the Poet Laureate of the Negro Race." He was born a slave and wrote epic length Romantic poems.

Henrietta Cordelia Ray (1850?-1916) was a New York City school teacher for 30 years.

George Marion McClellan (1860-1934) was a teacher and minister. He reminds us in a poem that "Christ washed the feet of Judas!"

Joseph Seamon Cotter, Sr. (1861-1949) was a prominent educator.

Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard (1861-1921) was the daughter of North Carolina slaves.

They Are Coming

by Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard

They are coming, coming slowly —  
They are coming, surely, surely —  
In each avenue you hear the steady tread.  
From the depths of foul oppression,  
Comes a swarthy-hued procession,  
And victory perches on their banners' head.

They are coming, coming slowly —  
They are coming; yes, the lowly,  
No longer writhing in their servile bands.  
From the rice fields and plantation  
Comes a factor of the nation,  
And threatening, like Banquo's ghost, it stands.

They are coming, coming proudly  
They are crying, crying loudly:  
O, for justice from the rulers of the land!  
And that justice will be given,  
For the mighty God of heaven  
Holds the balances of power in his hand.

Prayers have risen, risen, risen,  
From the cotton fields and prison;  
Though the overseer stood with lash in hand,  
Groaned the overburdened heart;  
Not a tear-drop dared to start —  
But the Slaves' petition reach'd the glory-land.

They are coming, they are coming,  
From away in tangled swamp,  
Where the slimy reptile hid its poisonous head;  
Through the long night and the day,  
They have heard the bloodhounds' bay,  
While the morass furnished them an humble bed.

They are coming, rising, rising,  
And their progress is surprising,  
By their brawny muscles earning daily bread;  
Though their wages be a pittance,  
Still each week a small remittance,  
Builds a shelter for the weary toiling head.

They are coming, they are coming —  
Listen! You will hear the humming  
Of the thousands that are falling into line:  
There are Doctors, Lawyers, Preachers;  
There are Sculptors, Poets, Teachers —  
Men and women, who with honor yet shall shine.

They are coming, coming boldly,  
Though the Nation greets them coldly;  
They are coming from the hillside and the plain.  
With their scars they tell the story  
Of the canebrakes wet and gory,  
Where their brothers' bones lie bleaching with the slain.

They are coming, coming singing,  
Their Thanksgiving hymn is ringing.  
For the clouds are slowly breaking now away,  
And there comes a brighter dawning —  
It is liberty's fair morning,  
They are coming surely, coming, clear the way.

Yes, they come, their stopping's steady,  
And their power is felt already —  
God has heard the lowly cry of the oppressed:  
And beneath his mighty frown,  
Every wrong shall crumble down,  
When the right shall triumph and the world be blest!

Daniel Webster Davis (1862-1913) was a popular orator.

Mary Weston Fordham (1862?-?) wrote poetry that resembled most 19th century sentimental poems.

James Edwin Campbell (1867-1896) wrote folk verses in "Gullah" dialect. They are musical and original. He made fascinating use of dialect.

James David Corrothers (1869-1919) also used dialect.

An Indignation Dinner  
by James David Corrothers

DEY was hard times jes fo' Christmas round our neighborhood one year;  
So we held a secret meetin', whah de white folks couldn't hear,  
To 'scuss de situation, an' to see what could be done  
Towa'd a fust-class Christmas dinneh an' a little Christmas fun.

Rufus Green, who called de meetin', ris an' said: "In dis here town,  
An' throughout de land, de white folks is a-tryin' to keep us down."  
S' 'e: "Dey's bought us, sold us, beat us; now dey 'buse us 'ca'se we's free;  
But when dey tetch my stomach, dey's done gone too fur foh me!

"Is I right?" "You sho is, Rufus!" roared a dozen hungry throats.  
"Ef you'd keep a mule a-wo'kin', don't you tamper wid his oats.

Dat's sense," continued Rufus. "But dese white folks nowadays  
Has done got so close and stingy you can't live on what dey pays.

"Here 'tis Christmas-time, an', folkses, I's indignant 'nough to choke.  
Whah's our Christmas dinneh comin' when we's 'mos' completely broke?  
I can't hahdly 'fo'd a toothpick an' a glass o' water. Mad?  
Say, I'm desp'ret! Dey jes better treat me nice, dese white folks had!"

Well, dey 'bused de white folks scan'lous, till old Pappy Simmons ris,  
Leanin' on his cane to s'pote him, on account his rheumatis',  
An' s' 'e: "Chilun, whut's dat wintry wind a-sighin' th'ough de street  
'Bout yo' wasted summeh wages? But, no matter, we mus' eat.

"Now, I seed a beau'ful tuhkey on a certain gemmun's fahm.  
He's a-growin' fat an' sassy, an' a-struttin' to a chahm.  
Chickens, sheeps, hogs, sweet pertaters—all de craps is fine dis year;  
All we needs is a committee foh to tote de goodies here."

Well, we lit right in an' voted dat it was a gran idee,  
An' de dinneh we had Christmas was worth trabblin' miles to see;  
An' we eat a full an' plenty, big an' little, great an' small,  
Not beca'se we was dishonest, but indignant, sah. Dat's all.

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) was a man of many talents who worked for the NAACP. He once asked this question:

O black and unknown bards of long ago,  
How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?

Priscilla Jane Thompson (1871-1942) and her siblings published seven volumes of verse.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) published prolifically. He described a lynching in "The Haunted Oak."

Anne Spencer [Annie Bethel Scales Bannister] (1882-1975) won national attention in the 1920s.

Claude McKay (1890-1948) wrote a history of Harlem.

If We Must Die  
by Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!  
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!  
What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Jean Toomer (1894-1967) is best known for the experimental *Cane*.

Her Lips are Copper Wire  
by Jean Toomer

whisper of yellow globes  
gleaming on lamp-posts that sway  
like bootleg licker drinkers in the fog

and let your breath be moist against me  
like bright beads on yellow globes

telephone the power-house  
that the main wires are insulate

(her words play softly up and down  
dewy corridors of billboards)

then with your tongue remove the tape  
and press your lips to mine  
till they are incandescent

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was called "the poet laureate of Harlem."

Countee Cullen (1903-1946) taught French in New York City.

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