



America Will Be!

SATB choir, a cappella

OF EQUALITY—AS IF IT HARM'D ME,
GIVING OTHERS THE SAME CHANCES AND RIGHTS AS MYSELF—
AS IF IT WERE NOT INDISPENSABLE TO MY OWN RIGHTS THAT OTHERS POSSESS THE SAME.
— WALT WHITMAN, "LEAVES OF GRASS," THOUGHTS (1867)

WHEN SHALL WE ARISE FROM THIS DEATH-LIKE APATHY?
— DAVID WALKER, APPEAL, ARTICLE IV (1829)

WE HAVE WAITED HERE LONG IN THE DUST;
WE ARE TIRED AND HUNGRY;
BUT THE TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION MUST APPEAR AT LAST.
— MARGARET FULLER, "WOMAN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1843)

The Composer's Note

While continually searching for statements on America as it stood tinged with a hope for where it could be—in this case for a Cantus program titled “Before Us”—I read a lot of poetry from abolition through the civil rights movement to today. Langston Hughes’ poetry stuck out to me for its unyielding support of the black identity and fierce clarity around the black experience in America. That said, I felt I couldn’t accurately depict his vision in setting his texts since the vast majority is focused solely on the black experience, of which I still know so little. I decided that if I were ever to set something of Hughes’, it had to involve a universality to the message for anyone who was or is under the thumb of American injustice. “Let America Be America Again,” then, was a bit different given that he included phrases focused on multiple marginalized groups (“the poor white” and “red man” being a few of them). My intent with this was not to lessen his message to the black community, but to support his goal of American change with regard to *any* marginalized group.

Along these lines, while the Langston Hughes Estate gave permission for this edited version and libretto, it is important to state that unused parts of the poem are no less important. I made the choice to not include certain portions because, as mentioned above, I have limited knowledge of the black experience yet wanted to support Hughes’ overall vision for the poem. So that these unset stanzas are not forgotten while considering this work as it stands, I’ve included the full poem alongside Hughes’ biography on the final page.

Finally, the staging notes on the first page are only suggestions. These were borne out of a surprising number of audience members misunderstanding Hughes’ intent, sometimes celebrating the “American” fanfare feel and ignoring the difficult parts. It occurred to me that, while in the 21st Century, we collectively might be further along than when Hughes wrote this poem (1935), some still haven’t digested the realities of the black experience or even the concept of American oppression or marginalization. My hope is that this piece clarifies both for them.

The Text

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)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be the 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)

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,
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 (black one) bearing slavery's scars.
I am the (native) driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek

I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,

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
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."

The free?

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—
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(one) is free.
The land that's mine—
the poor (one's), (native's), (black one's), ME—

O, yes, I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

The Poet



Langston Hughes (1902?-1967) – American writer who was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance and made the African American experience the subject of his writings, which ranged from poetry and plays to novels and newspaper columns.

Hughes documented African American literature and culture in works such as *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America* (1956) and the anthologies *The Poetry of the Negro* (1949) and *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958; with Bontemps). He also wrote poetry until his death; *The Panther and the Lash*, published posthumously in 1967, reflected and engaged with the Black Power movement and, specifically, the Black Panther Party, which was founded the previous year.

The Full Poem

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)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed —
Let it be the 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)

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,
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.
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,
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!

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.
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,
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
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."

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?]
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 —
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, 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.

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!]

O, yes, I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath —
America will be!

[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 —
All, all the stretch of these great green states —
And make America again!]

Dedicated to those who could and should do more.

America Will Be!

For SATB choir

Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

Paul John Rudoi (b. 1985)

PERUSAL

This is a limited theatrical work.

The opening section should show the disparity between the confidence of the masses and the quiet clarity of the outcast. Consider having the soloist alone in the middle with the choir split and announcing at a diagonal (aka a brass fanfare line).

Only when acknowledged (letter C) does the choir interact with the soloist.
One by one, individual soloists join through their own realization (letter E, possibly walking toward the first soloist), slowly transforming the entire ensemble into a changed group with common ground (letter H), though not without the occasional holdout who has difficulty accepting change (letter E).
Ultimately, the entire ensemble is determined to find a better way of life for everyone, including the marginalized and forgotten.

$\text{♩} \approx 76$
mf

Alto
mf
Let A - mer - i - ca be A - mer - i - ca a - gain. Let it be the dream it used to

Tenor
Let A - mer - i - ca be A - mer - i - ca a - gain. Let it be the dream it used to

Piano (rehearsal)

5

A
be. Let it be the pi - o - neer on the plain Seek - ing a home where he him - self is

T
be. — Let it be the pi - o - neer on the plain Seek - ing a home where he him - self is

B
Let it be the pi - o - neer on the plain Seek - ing a home where he him - self is

PERUSAL

America Will Be!

Straight out to audience, as if from a distance.

9

Alto Solo

mp

(A - mer - i - ca nev - er was A - mer - i - ca to me)

S

sempre mf

Let A -

A

sempre mf

Let A -

T

sempre mf

Let A -

B

sempre mf

Let A -

free. mm...

The musical score is written for Alto Solo, Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Piano. The Alto Solo part begins with a melodic line in 7/8 time, which then changes to 3/4 time. The lyrics are "(A - mer - i - ca nev - er was A - mer - i - ca to me)". The Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts enter with the lyrics "Let A -" and are marked *sempre mf*. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support throughout. A large watermark "PERUSAL" is visible across the score.

PERUSAL

America Will Be!

A

13

Alto
Solo

Musical score for measures 13-15. The score is for Alto Solo, Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Piano. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: -mer - i - ca be the dream the dream - ers dreamed- Let it be the great strong land of

16

Musical score for measures 16-18. The score is for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Piano. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: love Where nev - er kings nor ty - rants scheme That an - y man be

America Will Be!

19 *mp*

Alto Solo (It nev - er was A - mer - i - ca_

S crushed by one a - bove. oo... oo...

A crushed by one a - bove. oo... oo...

T crushed by one a - bove. oo... oo...

B crushed by one a - bove. oo... oo...

22 **B**

Alto Solo to me) *sempre mf*

A O, let my land be a land where Lib - er - ty is *sempre mf*

T O, let my land be a land where Lib - er - ty is *sempre mf*

B O, let my land where Lib - er - ty is

America Will Be!

24

S

A

T

B

But op - por - tu - ni - ty is real, and life is
crowned with no false pa - tri - ot - ic wreath, But op - por - tu - ni - ty is real, and life is
crowned with no false pa - tri - ot - ic wreath, But op - por - tu - ni - ty is real, and life is
crowned with no false pa - tri - ot - ic wreath, But op - por - tu - ni - ty is real, and life is



27

Alto Solo

mf

(There's nev - er been e - qual - i - ty—

S

A

T

B

free, E - qual - i - ty is in the air we breathe. E -
free, E - qual - i - ty is in the air we breathe. E -
free, E - qual - i - ty is in the air we breathe. E -
free, E - qual - i - ty is in the air we breathe. E -



America Will Be!

C

Alto Solo

for me, Nor free - dom in this "home - land of the free.")

S

- qual - i - ty is real, and life is free, Say-

A

- qual - i - ty is real, and life is free, Say-

T

- qual - i - ty is real, and life is free, Say-

B

- qual - i - ty is real, and life is free, Say-

33 *agitated* **p**

T

Say, who are you that mum - bles in the dark? Say- And who are you that draws your

B

Say- who are you that draws your

America Will Be!

D

rit...... ≈ 60

hesitant mp

37

Alto Solo

S

A

T

B

veil a - cross the stars? Say- Say- Who...

veil a - cross the stars? Say- Say- Who...

f *mf* *mp*

41

Alto Solo

S

A

T

B

am the poor one, fooled and pushed a - part, I am the black one bear - ing slav - 'ry's

Who...

Who...

Who...

Who...

America Will Be!

44

Alto Solo
scars. I am the na - tive driv - en from the land, I am the im - mi - grant clutch -

S
Who... Who...

A
Who... Who...

T
Who... Who...

B
Who... Who...

47

Alto Solo
- ing the hope I seek I dreamt our

S
*add 2 (Soprano)
I am the one who dreamt our ba - sic

A

T

B

mf **E**

mp

*An individual vocalist adds at each of the following markers
(e.g. "add 2 (Soprano) is a 2nd soloist coming from the Soprano section)

America Will Be!

49 *mp*

Alto Solo
dream while still a serf of kings, Who dreamt a dream so

S
dream In the Old World while still a serf of kings, Who dreamt a dream so

T
**add 3 (Tenor) p* Who are you? *mp*

52 *mf*

S
strong, so true, in

A
strong, so true, in

T
so brave, so true, That e - ven yet its might - y dar - ing sings In eve - ry brick and stone, —

B
**add 4 (Bass) mp* That e - ven yet its might - y dar - ing sings In eve - ry brick and stone, —

America Will Be!

rit.....

Tutti

Tutti

mf

mf

F Even slower (♩ ≈ 54)

*add 5 (Alto) mf

mp

mp

mp

mp

America Will Be!

61 *mp*

S you and Po - land's plain, and
A I'm the one who left dark Ire - land's shore, and plain, and
T I'm the one who left dark Ire - land's shore, and Eng - land's
B

63

S grass - y lea, And torn from Black Af - ri - ca's strand I came To build a
A grass - y lea, And torn from Black Af - ri - ca's strand I came To build a
T grass - y lea, And torn from Black Af - ri - ca's strand I came To build a
B — Who are

America Will Be!

65 *f* *molto rit.*

S "home - land of the free." The free? The free? The free? The free?

A "home - land of the free." The free? The free? The free? The free? For

T "home - land of The free? The free? The free? For

B you of the free? The free? The free?

68 **G** a tempo (♩ ≈ 54)

S And all the hopes we've held And all the

A all the dreams we've dreamed And all the songs we've sung

T all the dreams we've dreamed And all the songs we've sung

B And all the hopes we've held And all the

America Will Be!

71

S flags we've hung, The mil - lions who have noth - ing for our pay - Ex - cept the dream that's al - most dead

A The mil - lions who have noth - ing for our pay - Ex - cept the dream that's al - most dead

T The mil - lions who have noth - ing for our pay - Ex - cept the dream that's al - most dead

B flags we've hung, The mil - lions who have noth - ing for our pay - Ex - cept the dream that's al - most dead

H

rit.....Tempo I (♩=76)

74

S — to - day. — O, let ah... O, let the

A — to - day. — O, — let ah... O, let the

T — to - day. — O, let A - mer - i - ca be A - mer - i - ca a - gain - let the

B — to - day. — O, let A - mer - i - ca be A - mer - i - ca a - gain - let the

America Will Be!

molto accel......

78

S land that nev - er has been yet— and yet must be— the land where eve - ry - one is

A land that nev - er has been yet— and yet must be— land where eve - ry - one is

T land that nev - er has been yet— yet— must be— the land where eve - ry - one is

B land that nev - er has been yet— yet must be— the land where eve - ry - one is



82 ≈ 92

S free. the poor one's— ME— O,

A free. the na - tive's, ME— O, yes,—

T the black one's, ME— O, yes, O,

B The land that's mine— ME— O,



America Will Be!

determined

85

sub. mf

S
yes, I say it plain, A - mer - i - ca_ nev - er was A - mer - i - ca_ to me, And

A
I say it plain, A - mer - i - ca_ nev - er was A - mer - i - ca_ to me, And

T
yes, I say it plain, A - mer - i - ca_ nev - er was A - mer - i - ca_ to me, And

B
yes, I say it plain, A - mer - i - ca_ nev - er was A - mer - i - ca_ to me, And

I

rit......*a tempo* (♩ ≈ 92)
cresc. poco a poco

88

S
yet I swear this oath— A - - -

A
yet I swear this A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i -
cresc. poco a poco

T
yet I swear this oath— A - mer - i - ca, A - -

B
yet I swear this oath— A - - -

America Will Be!

91

S -mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will

A ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will

T -mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will

B -mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will

93

S be! A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will

A be! A - mer - i - ca will

T be! A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will

B be! A - mer - i - ca will

America Will Be!

95

S
A
T
B

be A - mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will be! A -
be! A - mer - i - ca will be! A -
be! A - mer - i - ca will be! A -
be! A - mer - i - ca will be! A -

f

98

$\text{♩} = 64$ molto rit..... Broadly ($\text{♩} \approx 46$)

S
A
T
B

- mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca Ah!
- mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will be! Ah!
- mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca will be! Ah!
- mer - i - ca, A - mer - i - ca Ah!

solo 1
sub. mp

solo 3
sub. mp

mf