

Maya Angelou – 1st Amendment Award Recipient 1982, May 9, Northeastern Univ. Ballroom, Boston.
Address: "Responsibility to Speak for Freedom's Sake"

"She does not know her beauty. She thinks her brown body has no glory. If she could dance naked under palm trees and see her image in the river, she would know. But there are no palm trees on the street, and dishwasher gives back no images." Thank you.

Thank you very much. I am honored that you have chosen me; to honor me. I am in my turn, honored. I thank you very much. I know that this city, for the last few hundred years, has interesting histories. I know that the finest moments in American history have taken place here. I know that at your Faneuil Hall Mr. Frederick Douglass and Mr. Martin Delaney and Ms. Sigourney Truth and men and women who were actively opposing an evil in our society were welcomed, and were welcomed by people that sometimes risked and sometimes lost their lives in the abolition of the slave trade in this city. So I am particularly moved that you honor me so, I thank you very much.

That first poem was first written by Wearing Cuni, a black male poet writing in the 30s, late 20s and 30s, of this century. As a piece of poetry, it's perfect. Its lyricism is not debatable, its structure is mysterious. But when one looks into the poem, one sees how Mr. Cuni used his genius to extract a situation which alas, is familiar to us all.

The gist of that condition, what happened with the issue that faces a person, or human family, two people, people in a family, in a neighborhood, in a city, in a town, in a country, what happens to the species when the issues which faces them, it, her, him is the problem of self worthlessness?

The poem again: "She does not know her beauty. She thinks her brown body has no glory. If she could dance naked under palm trees and see her image in the river, she would know. But there are no palm trees on the street, and dishwasher gives back no images."

Perfect pieces of poetry. Now Mark Twain said in 1904, "If you would have a person enslaved, the first thing you must do is convince yourself that the person is subhuman. My italics, of course then you can justify all actions. The second thing you must do is to convince your allies that the person is subhuman. My parentheses, then of course you can garner support. But the third and unkindness cut of all is to convince that person that he or she is just not quite really, you know, to be considered not seriously, not sincerely, as a full human being. A qualitative job has been done ladies and gentlemen on the Black American and the White American, the Native American, the Jewish American, Asian American, the Hispanic American., and all mixtures in between. A qualitative job has been done, particularly, vis-à-vis, the Black American, so that unfortunately that even among liberals, the relationship between black and white American liberals tends to be at its best patronizing, at its best. And yet ladies and gentlemen, only equals make friends, otherwise the relationships are out of order. They are askew, awry somehow.

I chose this evening to talk to you about the gifts, the contributions of black Americans, through the literature, literature. Now literature I know really means that body of written information handed from one generation to the next to encourage that next generation to survive.

But I use the literature as an umbrella word, so that under it I include also oral literature, I include the fact that black people all over the world can hold entire conversations without forming words. I include body behaviors. I include any information handed from one generation to the next under that broad umbrella. Admittedly I am taking all types of licenses.

But when a black woman puts her hands on her hips high up, that's a particular kind of instruction. When a woman is a little bit older and still holding her hands and drops them just off the hip, just about there, and sashays, that's an instruction. But when an older black women, balls up both fists and puts them on

the back of her hip and steps back, beware - caveat - beware. So I include all sorts of things under that umbrella. Now I know that as you know that the first blacks were brought here in 1619. Now I understand how close we are physically to Plymouth Rock and all that. But without meaning to signify or cast dispersions, but I want to remind you that that was one year before the Mayflower docked. That's it. It was sad to say that the Native American, to whose continent we were brought, strangers in chains and slaves more so, the Native American is now less than 600 thousand in the entire United States and Black Americans are upwards of 30 million and that is a conservative estimate.

Because I have a friend Muriel who says there are more than 30 million Black people in the Baptist Church. He's not even including AMEs, CMEs, AME Zions, Mormons - which is another whole program that... I mean why they go in but... I believe that we have survived because of a tremendous love. And by love, I do not mean sentimentality nor mush. I mean that condition in the human spirit, so powerful, so profound, that it allows us to dream of building bridges, gives us the courage to build those bridges, and the gall to cross them, to communicate with each other. That's what I mean by love.

And the love is to be found in the literature. When I look at the imperative of speaking, I am here because I come from a race famous for speaking, for communicating, the misery and the joy, the ecstasy and the horror of the human condition. All over the world people sing my songs without really understanding the conditions under which they were written. No one knows the names of those great artists. James Weldon Johnson wrote "Oh Black and unknown bards how came your lips to touch the sacred fire" Indeed.

So I come from a long line of people who have been communicating seriously, sincerely, and effectively for centuries. Now that their communications have seldom been operated on with honesty, sincerity, and the like courage is not a slur against the givers of that information. When I look at the poetry and think about romantic love in the Black community. Ahh, you know it is sad to say that when a number of non-Blacks write about Blacks and love, they would have us believe that White people make love and Black people just have sex. Going to far...

And yet Miss Georgia Douglass Johnson, a black lady poet, 19th century wrote:

I want to die while you love me,
While yet you hold me fair,
While laughter lies upon my lips and lights are in my hair
I want to die while you love me
Who would care to live 'til love had nothing more to ask and nothing more to give
No, I want to die while you love me
And bear to that still bed your kisses turbulent, unspent,
To warm me while I'm dead.

James Weldon Johnson writing in 1910 wrote:

Seem like to me the moon don't shine so bright,
Seem like to me the sun dun lost it light,
Seem like to me that nothings going right,
Since you went away.
Seem like to me that everything is wrong,
Seem like to me the birds dun lost their song,
Seem like to me the days are just twice as long,
Since you went away.
Seem like to me I just can't help but sigh
Seem like to me my throat keeps getting dry,
Seem like to me a tear stay in my eye
Since you went away.

Mr. Paul Lawrence Dumburg writing in 1892 wrote a Negro love song. It could have been written last week by a newly liberated woman. The refrain in the song is "jump back honey, jump back."

Seen my lady home last night
Jump back honey, jump back.
Held her hand and squeezed it tight,
Jump back honey, jump back.
Heard her sigh that little sigh
I saw that light gleam in her eye,
Saw that smile go flitting by and said
Jump back honey, jump back.
The Mocking bird was singing fine,
Jump back honey, jump back.
And my heart was beating so that when I reached my lady's door
I just couldn't bear to go, I said
Jump back honey, jump back.
So I put my arms around her waist
Jump back honey, jump back.
Raised her lips and took a taste
Jump back honey, jump back.
I said love me honey, you love me true
You love me well as I love you
And then she answered of course I do,
But jump back honey, jump back.

Before I continue and go back and take you back to the 18th century, and the courageous speaking out of the Black American, I want to tell you this true story. Some years ago I was with Porgy and Bess and I was the premier dancer. I sang the role Ruby, but I sang by heart. I had no training in music. The associate conductor simply sat down at the piano and with the right hand played the melody part. And so I learned what I was to sing, but I was not a singer. And we traveled through Europe and North Africa, Israel and arrived in Morocco. And the company sent the sets on to Spain and the conductor informed the singers that the company, including me, that we were obliged to perform in concert. Now there were among 62 people in the company, there were 140 degrees in music. There were so few places for Black singers of European classical music to perform, the company could afford to get a person with one degree from Curtis and another from Julliard just to be in the chorus.

So there they were, singers, trained, stunning, when the conductor informed them that they were to perform in concert, they were delighted. Now black opera singers and white opera singers, and Asian and Hispanic, and Native American and Balinese, all - they're one people, sort of like New York taxi drivers, they are all one tribe, you know. You know that. They were all prepared, and I'm sure they had their portfolios on micro-fiche on the back of their watches or in their ear lobes or something. But I went to the conductor and said, "I am sorry that is not my discipline. I don't know any arias." The conductor was Alexander Smallins, who is a grrreat grrreat Rrrrrussain conductor, with grrreast Rrrrrussain hair and sparkling fiery eyes, and an artistic temperament which I think he heated up every morning in a samovar. He turned to me almost maddened. He said "BUTA, DON'T YOU KNOW A SPIRITUAL?" and I thought, "Is grits groceries?" Do I know a spiritual? I grew up in Arkansas, in a town about half the size of this stage if you don't include the wings. And my grandmother was mother of the church. Mother took me to church on Sunday. I don't me we left. I mean we went to church on Sunday and on Monday night we went to usher board meeting, Tuesday night missionary meeting, Wednesday night was prayer meeting, Thursday night was choir practice, Friday night visit the sick. Saturday we didn't go to church. We used Saturday, all day, to prepare to go to church on Sunday. So it was my life and I knew every long

meter hymn, gospel, doctor Watts, every spiritual of course. So I said, "Yes I, I know a spiritual." Well the singers went out and delivered themselves beautifully, of Rossini, and, Bach and Hayden and lovely little Puccini pieces about that long, and very Britain. They were very well received. When I went out to the stage, there was a 120 piece orchestra in the pit. How could they help me with their violin, cello? I said its all right just lay out, I'll go for myself. So I thought of a song my grandmother sang every Sunday of my life. I went to live with her from California when I was 3 and stayed until I was 13. And every Sunday mama would go into the church and sit in the mother of the church pew. The minister would begin the service, 15 minutes after, every Sunday he would turn and say and now we will be led by a hymn by Sister Henderson- my grandmother, very Sunday.

You know when you're young no one can embarrass you so much than someone your related- your parents, anybody. I used to sit in the children's pew and think, Mama get up and sing. Everybody knows you're going to sing, they even know what you're going to sing. Mama just get up and sing. She'd take her time. She'd put her pocketbook down beside. She'd press her handkerchief in her lap, fold it, press it again, fold it. It looked like that took twenty minutes. While the kids in the children's pew were going. gr, gr, gr. But finally she put her handkerchief down and sang. And every Sunday she sang it, and I sang it in Morocco alone on the stage:

"I am pilgrim soul. I'm lost in this wide world alone. No hope have I for tomorrow. I started to make heaven my home. My mother she's found her sweet glory. And my father still living in sin. And my brothers and sisters won't own me because I am trying to get in. Sometimes I tossed and driven, Lord. Sometimes I don't know where to roam. Oh, but I've heard of the city called Heaven. And I have started to make it my home."

When I finished singing 4,500 Arabs jumped up, hit the floor, started to stomp. Well, Azeme Allah, I Azem e Allah. I was very young. I don't mean just chronologically. I was young because I was ignorant. I had no idea of the power and richness of my inheritance. I had no idea. So I stood there while the people stomped and screamed and I looked stage right and the Bell Canto singers were leering at me. And stage left they were going, nr, nr, nr. And I felt, Oh I'm sorry. Too sorry. Sorry that I have the glory. Now until you've sung "Steal Away" or "Go Down Moses" or "Down by the Riverside" or "Ride on King Jesus" or "Chariot," I suggest you have it sung back to you in French or Spanish or Ahanta or Ashanti or Fanti or Serbo-Croat or Italian, I suggest you have come to grips with the literature. A literature so real that it will not indulge the distance of continents, oceans, languages, centuries, racism, sexism, ageism. It indulges none of those distances. I says I speak through the black experience. That's what I know. I am talking about the human condition. What it is like to be a human being? What stirs us? What makes us weep? What makes us laugh? How do we dare to love and how on earth can we get over an incredible literature?

So I feel free to use it you see for the next three or four hours as we sit here. I'm sure you brought your sandwiches and whatever you need, bagels or lox or something, champagne. In looking in the Black American history. Now at another time when I look at the White American history, it is necessary you know to always say thank you to people who have had courage. Because courage is the most important of all the virtues. Without courage you cannot practice any of the other virtue with consistency. I didn't myself say that first, I think it was Plato, but never mind. Anyway it is a good statement. Its still good, all of those thousands of years later. So but for those people who risked and lost and sometimes did not lose their lives, because they loved right. Not because they loved Black or Asians or Jews, Hispanics. But because they loved right. They must always be thanked so that somebody young who is straddling the fence and might go the other way can be encouraged to take heart and become a hero-shero.

However this evening it is the Black American I must speak about- the Black American, because we are in the most dangerous place we have seen since the Emancipation Proclamation. I think our children are in the most frightful jeopardy. They are our children. They are the Black peoples children. they are white

people children too you know. For they will give us tomorrow. Whatever they give us, we damn well deserve it. They're our children and they are in jeopardy. When we have girls at ten on their own street corners here, in Boston, Boston, who are selling their bodies at ten, at eleven. black girls, some white girls. Those are our children, and those are our tomorrows ladies and gentleman. And so when we dress in our finery and get into our fine automobiles, and go to our fine homes and lock the doors as securely as possible, we are locking them against are children. It is imperative that we see it and take responsibility for the time we take up and for the space we occupy.

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I didn't really come to preach to you because you all are good. Oh, oh no? I figured to hear more laughter. Oh no you are too good for that. In the course of looking at the courage and love of the Black community, it has to be said that for centuries we were obliged to laugh when we were not tickled and to scratch when we did not itch. And those gestures have come down to us as "Uncle Tom." I suggest that the people who employed those humiliating ploys were successful. Heros and Sheros who were successful. Or there are some people here this evening who wouldn't be here listen to me, who wouldn't be here to talk to them.

I don't think we often enough stop to wonder how that black man's throat must of ached each time he said "yes sir boss you alls are right I sure are stupid." So he could make enough money so he could go home and feed someone. Or that black woman who said "No ma'am Miss Ann you didn't hurt me when you slapped me. No ma'am I ain't tender-hearted." So she could make money so she could go home and feed someone. There is a woman who rides this bus in New York City. If the bus stops to abruptly she says "Ahh, haha!" She's a maid, she sits at the back with two shopping bags. "Oo hoo hoo." Bus passes up somebody, picks them up "Ah. Ha ha" I watched this woman for nine months. I thought you know, if you don't know black features, you may think she's laughing. She's not laughing. Nothings happening to her eyes. She extending her lips and making a sound. "Ha ha ha ha."

So I wrote a poem for her and her survival apparatus:

When I think about myself,
I almost laugh myself to death, ha ha!
My life has been one great big joke.
A dance that's walked and song that's spoke, ha ha.
I laugh so hard I nearly choke when I think about myself, ha ha.
60 years in these folks world,
The child I works for calls me girl.
I say Ah! Yes ma'am, the workers say,
I'm too proud to bend and too poor to break, ah, ha, ha.
I laugh until my stomach aches when I think about myself.
And my folks can make me slit my side,
I laughed so hard I nearly died.
The tales they tell sound just like lying,
They grow the fruit but eat the rind.
I laugh until I start to cry.
When I think about myself, and my folks, and the children.
We wear the mask that grins and lies.
It shades our cheeks and hides our eyes
This debt we pay to human guile.
With torn and bleeding hearts, we smile
And mouth myriad subtleties.
Why should the world over-wise in counting all my tears and sighs?
Let them only see me only when I wear the mask.

We smile, but Oh my God, our tears could be from tortured souls arise
Oh we sing, the clay is vile beneath my feet
But let the world think otherwise, Ha ha ha ha
We wear the mask. Ha Ah Ha Ha Ha

You know there are many African "isms" still current in America life. White American life and Black American life. But I don't know if you give the same award to the same person twice. Maybe in about 15 years I'll come back and do that. That's another lecture. Or I can just tag along when you give it to somebody I know.

So I'm going to recite a poem of Langston Hughes:

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 that 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!

Mr. Langston Hughes.

We are a potent people, enriched by all the bloods of this planet. We are people with a potential so great, incredible courage, exquisite love, and we have a future. Ladies and gentlemen we have one future. We will all share it. It will be marvelous. It will be difficult, painful, hard work. But we will all share the ecstasy or it will be grotesque, and horrible, and miserable, and murderous, and we shall all share it. It is our land. We are one people. I have refused years ago to allow any human being to set barriers between me and any other human being. Fortunately, I was able to internalize when I was about 14 a statement of Terence. Terence said "homo sumi: humani nil a me alienum puto." "I am a human being. Nothing human can be alien to me." It is interesting to see when you look into any encyclopedia, under Terence with one "r", you'll find in italics Terentius Afer- an African slave sold to a Roman senator, freed by that senator. He became the most popular play write in Rome. Six of his plays and that statement have come down to us. In 154 B.C., this man, not born free, not born a citizen, nor born a Roman citizen, not born a white, said "I am a human being, nothing human can be alien to me." It is a vast concept to grapple. It is a tremendous concept. And as far as I can see, one can diligently spend ones life trying to internalize and to ingest, all that that means and maybe reach around the periphery, maybe.

But it a marvelous thing, it frees and elevates when one knows because it means of course on one hand if a person does the most heinous, a person commits the most heinous crime, you can no longer say I could never do that, because a human did it. Now if it was an elephant or an alligator, something like that, you could say it. But you could say I hope and pray and mean that all my energy are used constructively as opposed to destructively. But if a human being did it, I could do it. Now of course what that does is it frees one to think that if someone else can dream a great dream, compose, paint, write a masterpiece, have a child, dare to love someone, have the unmitigated gall to accept love in return, you can do it because it was a human being who did it.

So having that trying ingest such a large swallow and have it sink to the fingertips and toenails and hair follicles. And really not just think it, but act upon it, is a way to, for me anyway, it helps me to be guided throughout my life. To allow myself to not be minimized by anyone else's prejudice or at anyone else's whim, for their convenience. Indeed not, I shall not, ladies and gentleman I shall not. Since life is our most precious gift and since it was given to us to live but once, let us so live that we will not regret years of useless virtue. And in dying we can say oh my conscious life and energy has been dedicated to the most noble cause in the world- the liberation of human beings.

There's an African statement which is "The trouble for the thief is now how to steal the chiefs bugle, but where to blow it." It is a delicious one to deal with. West Africans call that deep talk because when you think about it, you have immediate sort of wry appreciation. When you really let it sink down deeper, it makes you come to grips with your own responsibility to our present state of affairs, which we all bemoan in public, and so often in the privacy, in the depths of our hearts haven't the courage to speak out against what we see in our streets, and sometimes in our homes, indeed.

I have one last piece that I am obliged to do. I know I'm taking a long time, but I did ask if you brought your hamburgers or sandwiches, your wine or whatever. I believe that women are phenomenal. I do. Applaud yourselves. I know us to be. We remain, however phenomenal, our measure has not been taken ladies because nobody is capable of taking our measure. You have no idea. Now gentlemen, I know that you are also phenomenal. I know, because I know that nature abhors imbalance and will not deal with it for very long and certainly not with any friendliness. And like you, I have been told that all the 98% of the species which have lived in this little blob of spit and sand are now extinct. So I know that you must be as phenomenal as we are, or we wouldn't be here. But I will tell you this, you will have to write your

own poem.

That's it. I wrote this poem for Black women and White women, and Asian and Hispanic and Native American and Aleute and women on the beaches of Bali and Berber wives and non-wives. I wrote it for young Jewish girls with braces on their teeth, I wrote it for women on the cover of Essence Magazine and Vogue, and those women who pose for the before pictures on Weight Watchers. I wrote it for anorexics. We are phenomenal. I believe that.

Many wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
When I start to tell them, they think I'm telling lies.
I say, Oh it's in the reach of my arms
Its in the span of my hips,
Its in the stride of my step,
Its in the curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally. phenomenal woman,
That's me.
I walk into a room just as cool as you please,
And to a man, the fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say, it's the fire in my eyes, and the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist, the joy in my feet.
Men themselves have tried to see what they see in me.
They try so much, but they can not touch my inner mystery.
When I try to show them they say they still can't see.
And now you understand just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about or have to talk to loud.
When you see me walking it ought to make you proud.
I say, it's in the click of my heels,
It's in the bend of my hair,
It's in the palm of my hand,
It's in the need for my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally. phenomenal woman,
And that's my mother and all of your mothers
And then there's my grand mother, and all of your grandmothers
And there's your great-grandmother and all of your great-grandmothers
And then there's my great-great and all of your great-great-grandmothers
Then there's all of you and me.

From a going on, singing on, walking on, praying on, dancing on, dying on, living on, and rising on people, I believe that the gift given to the world by those people is an inspiration to continue. I believe so. I believe it is one of the most exciting gifts any single group has made to the human, to the species. When a Black American or a Black person says "Stay Black and beautiful", it sounds on the face of it extremely simple. But it is so encouraging and exhortation that I think it should be an easy access in Black and Whites and Whites and Asians and Asians and Hispanics and Native Americans, I believe that everybody should be able to use it. Because obviously it doesn't mean just stay a particular color since we range from plum blue to milk white. I think that what the speaker is encouraging the listener to do is survive,

and do better than that, to thrive. And to do better than that, to thrive with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style.

That has been our gift, given not by the free and easy. In fact when the Declaration of Independence was signed, for the most part, my people were illiterate. When the large packets of what Thomas Wolfe calls this Everlasting Earth and divvied up and handed about among the powerful, for the most part, my people couldn't claim, let alone the chains they wore, but not the awkward names they have been given. But there it is, through all of that they have given to the species, the suggestion that it is possible to be a 4th generation welfare recipient and still walk as if you have descended from kings:

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

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