



The Negro Mother

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“The Negro Mother” is the title poem in the collection of poetry that Hughes wrote to reach the masses of black people. The twenty-page book and the poem were such an instant success that Hughes told his friend Carl Van Vechten that in Birmingham, Alabama, the book “sold like reefers on 131st Street.”

The voice in the poem is that of the black mothers through the ages. In the opening line, the narrator addresses her children. In the narrative that follows, “the Negro mother” depicts the capture and hardship of black slaves and speaks of the will to endure that kept them going. The voice of the Negro mother urges the children to transform the future so that they may live in dignity and freedom from white oppression.

The poem, often referred to as a heritage poem, is highly lyrical, employing both a regular rhyme scheme (couplets) and meter. It was Hughes's intention, he said, that the poems be pleasant to recite and easy to remember. “The Negro Mother” and the success of the volume show how keenly in tune Hughes was with his audience.

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