

Primary Sources: Langston Hughes on Scottsboro

Langston Hughes was one of the most important literary voices to emerge from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. His prolific output included poetry, novels, short stories, and plays. Hughes' work frequently focused on the lives and experiences of his fellow African Americans; at age thirty, he penned a volume inspired by the Scottsboro case.

Justice

That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise.
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.

The Town of Scottsboro

Scottsboro's just a little place:
No shame is write across its face --
Its courts too weak to stand against a mob,
Its people's heart, too small to hold a sob.

Christ in Alabama

Christ is a Nigger,
Beaten and black --
O, bare your back...

Most holy bastard
Of the bleeding mouth:
Nigger Christ
On the cross of the South.

Scottsboro

8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL
WORLD, TURN PALE!

8 black boys and one white lie.
Is it much to die?

Is it much to die when immortal feet
March with you down Time's street,
When beyond steel bars sound the deathless drums
Like a mighty heart-beat as they come?

Who comes?

Christ,
Who fought alone

John Brown.

That mad mob
That tore the Bastille down
Stone by stone.

Moses.

Jeanne d'Arc.

Dessalines.

Nat Turner.

Fighters for the free.

Lenin with the flag blood red.

(Not dead! Not dead!
None of those is dead.)

Gandhi.

Sandino.

Evangelista, too.

To walk with you --

8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL
WORLD, TURN PALE!