

Document 5.10.15: Poem “Scottsboro” by Langston Hughes, 1932

During the 1920s, Langston Hughes was one of the most well-known and influential literary figures from the Harlem Renaissance. His poetry, plays, short stories and novels reflected the experiences of African Americans of his time. In response to the Scottsboro case he wrote a play and several poems including “Scottsboro.”

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 Bastile 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!

Source: Hughes, Langston. *Scottsboro Limited, Four Poems and a Play in Verse*. New York: Golden Stair Press, 1932.

www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/scottsboro/filmmore/ps_hughes.html