

APPENDICES

Four Poems of Margaret Walker

FOR MY PEOPLE

For my people everywhere singing their slave songs repeatedly:
their dirges and their ditties and their blues and jubilees,
praying their prayers nightly to an unknown god,
bending their knees humbly to an unseen power;

For my people lending their strength to the years,
to the gone years and the now years and the maybe years,
washing ironing cooking scrubbing sewing mending hoeing plowing
digging planting pruning patching dragging along never gaining
never reaping never
knowing and never understanding;

For my playmates in the clay and dust and sand of Alabama
backyards playing baptizing and preaching and doctor
and jail and soldier and school and mama and cooking
and playhouse and concert and store and hair and Miss
Choomby and company;

For the cramped bewildered years we went to school to learn
to know the reasons why and the answers to and the
people who and the places where and the days when, in
memory of the bitter hours when we discovered we
were black and poor and small and different and nobody
cared and nobody wondered and nobody understood;

For the boys and girls who grew in spite of these things to
be man and woman, to laugh and dance and sing and
play and drink their wine and religion and success, to
marry their playmates and bear children and then die
of consumption and anemia and lynching;

For my people thronging 47th Street in Chicago and Lenox
Avenue in New York and Rampart Street in New
Orleans, lost disinherited dispossessed and happy
people filling the cabarets and taverns and other
people's pockets needing bread and shoes and milk and
land and money and something--something all our own;

For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time
being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when
burdened, drinking when hopeless, tied, and shackled
and tangled among ourselves by the unseen creatures

who tower over us omnisciently and laugh;

For my people blundering and groping and floundering in
the dark of churches and schools and clubs and
societies, associations and councils and committees and
conventions, distressed and disturbed and deceived and
devoured by money-hungry glory-craving leeches,
preyed on by facile force of state and fad and novelty, by
false prophet and holy believer;

For my people standing staring trying to fashion a better way
from confusion, from hypocrisy and misunderstanding,
trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people,
all the faces, all the adams and eves and their countless
generations;

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a
bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second
generation full of courage issue forth; let a people
loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of
healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing
in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial songs be
written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now
rise and take control.

I WANT TO WRITE

I want to write

I want to write

the songs of my people.

I want to hear them singing melodies in the dark.

I want to catch the last floating strains from their sob-torn throats.

I want to frame their dreams into words;

their souls into notes.

I want to catch their sunshine laughter in a bowl;

fling dark hands to a darker sky

and fill them full of stars

then crush and mix such lights till they become

a mirrored pool of brilliance in the dawn.

SOUTHERN SONG

I want my body bathed again by southern suns, my soul
reclaimed again from southern land. I want to rest
again in southern fields, in grass and hay and clover
bloom; to lay my hand again upon the clay baked by a
southern sun, to touch the rain-soaked earth and smell
the smell of soil.

I want my rest unbroken in the fields of southern earth;
freedom to watch the corn wave silver in the sun and
mark the splashing of a brook, a pond with ducks and
frogs and count the clouds.

I want no mobs to wrench me from my southern rest; no
forms to take me in the night and burn my shack and
make for me a nightmare full of oil and flame.

I want my careless song to strike no minor key; no fiend to
stand between my body's southern song--the fusion of
the South, my body's song and me.

WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS

We have been believers believing in the black gods of an old land, believing in the secrets of the seeress and the magic of the charmers and the power of the devil's evil ones.

And in the white gods of a new land we have been believers believing in the mercy of our masters and the beauty of our brothers, believing in the conjure of the humble and the faithful and the pure.

Neither the slaves' whip nor the lynchers' rope nor the bayonet could kill our black belief. In our hunger we beheld the welcome table and in our nakedness the glory of a long white robe. We have been believers in the new Jerusalem.

We have been believers feeding greedy grinning gods, like a Moloch demanding our sons and our daughters, our strength and our wills and our spirits of pain. We have been believers, silent and stolid and stubborn and strong.

We have been believers yielding substance for the world.

With our hands have we fed a people and out of our
strength have they wrung the necessities of a nation.
Our song has filled the twilight and our hope has
heralded the dawn.

Now we stand ready for the touch of one fiery iron, for the
cleansing breath of many molten truths, that the eyes
of the blind may see and the ears of the deaf may hear
and the tongues of the people be filled with living fire.

Where are our gods that they leave us asleep? Surely the
priests and the preachers and the powers will hear.
Surely now that our hands are empty and our hearts too
full to pray they will understand. Surely the sires of
the people will send us a sign.

We have been believers believing in our burdens and our
demigods too long. Now the needy no longer weep and
pray; the long-suffering arise, and our fists bleed
against the bars with a strange insistency.

BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET WALKER (1915-1998)

Margaret Abigail Walker was born on July, 1915, in Birmingham, Alabama. She was the eldest of five children. Her father, Sigismund C. Walker, was a Methodist minister, a professor and a linguist who loved literature. Her mother, Marion Dozier Walker, was a musicologist and a professor. At the age of sixteen, Walker already completed high school and was halfway through college. In 1932, Walker transferred to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois and received her Bachelor of Arts in English in 1935.

In 1936, Walker began working for the Federal Writers' Project under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), thus mingling with many great writers of the era such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks. She began her first job teaching at Livingstone College in 1941. She was recognized as a distinguished American poet through her collection of poems entitled For My People. It was not only a volume of poetry chosen for the Yale Series of Younger Poets in 1942 but also Walker's published book. After marrying feminist James Alexander in 1968, she created and directed the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black people.

Besides her poems, Walker is known for her novel, *Jubilee*, a neo-slave narrative based on the collected memories of her maternal grandmother, Elvira Ware Dozier. The novel, which was published in 1966, was very popular and it won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Award (1968); it has been translated into seven languages and has never gone out of print.

This Is My Country; New and Collected Poems (1989) proved that she was an outstanding poet. During Walker's final public appearance on October 17, 1998, at the Gwendolyn Brooks Writers' Conference at Chicago State University, she was

introduced into the African American Literary Hall of Fame. On November 30, 1998, after suffering from breast cancer, Margaret Abigail Walker died at the age of 83. Before her death, Walker had written more than ten books and a great number of poems, short stories, essays, letters, reviews and speeches.