

Old Lem

I talked to old Lem.
 and old Lem said:
 "They weigh the cotton
 They store the corn
 We only good enough
 To work the rows;
 They run the commissary
 They keep the books
 We gotta be grateful
 For being cheated;
 Whippersnapper clerks
 Call us out of our name
 We got to say mister
 To spindling boys
 They make our figgers
 Turn somersets
 We buck in the middle
 Say, "Thankyuh, sah."
 They don't come by ones
 They don't come by twos
 But they come by tens.
 "They got the judges
 They got the lawyers
 They got the jury-rolls
 They got the law
 They don't come by ones
 They got the sheriffs
 They got the deputies
 They don't come by twos
 They got the shotguns
 They got the rope
 We git the justice
 In the end
 And they come by tens.
 "Their fists stay closed
 Their eyes look straight
 Our hands stay open
 Our eyes must fall
 They don't come by ones
 They got the manhood
 They got the courage
 They don't come by twos
 We got to slink around
 Hangtailed hounds.
 They burn us when we dogs
 They burn us when we men
 They come by tens . . .

"I had a buddy
 Six foot of man
 Muscled up perfect
 Game to the heart
 They don't come by ones
 Outworked and outfought
 Any man or two men
 They don't come by twos
 He spoke out of turn
 At the commissary
 They gave him a day
 To git out the county
 He didn't take it.
 He said 'Come and get me.'
 They came and got him
 And they came by tens.
 He stayed in the county—
 He lays there dead.
 They don't come by ones
 They don't come by twos
 But they come by tens."

1980

GWENDOLYN B. BENNETT
 1902-1981

Poet, artist, and journalist of the Harlem Renaissance, Gwendolyn B. Bennett was born in Giddings, Texas, in 1902—"unofficially" because that state denied official birth certificates to blacks well into the twentieth century. Her parents soon took her to Nevada, where they worked as teachers at an American Indian reservation until 1906 or 1907. They then moved to Washington, D.C., so that Bennett's father could study law. When the marriage failed, Gwendolyn's mother gained custody of her. However, her father kidnapped his eight-year-old daughter and dragged her into a nomadic life of hiding (mainly in Pennsylvania) that lasted until her junior year of high school, when they finally settled in Brooklyn.

An excellent student, Bennett became the first black member of the literary and dramatic societies in her high school, wrote the main graduation speech and lyrics for her graduation song, composed poetry, and took part in art competitions. After graduation, she studied fine arts at Columbia University and the Pratt Institute, where she earned a bachelor's degree in 1924. Having already established herself as a promising member of Harlem's literary and artistic set, she left New York for Washington, D.C., to teach art at Howard University. The next year, she won a \$1,000 scholarship from the Delta Sigma Theta sorority that enabled her to study art in Paris for a year. Returning to New York in the summer of 1926, she found the Harlem Renaissance in full swing and immediately secured a prominent place in its ranks, especially with her poetry ("Heritage" had been published in 1923) and her illustrations for su