

**A Poem Commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and  
the Inauguration of Barack Obama, the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.**

*(Read at the Historic Inaugural Ball, January 19, 2009, at the Historical Society of Washington, DC)*

How do you write an American poem?  
A red, white, and *weary blues* poem  
A poem filled with change, like a bag of pennies

in your grandmothers chimney poem  
An American poem, with one hand holding history  
and the other clinching vision

A borrowed poem  
that pays us back by any means necessary poem  
How do you write an American poem?

one with baggage like some Pullman Porter poem  
A rainbow wrapped in chains untenable poem  
A dark and deadly middle passage unspeakable poem

*A this is your land* until we took it indigenous poem  
*A we are not enemies, but friends* unguarded poem  
A we all fought to save an imperfect Union audacious poem

*A we ought to be free and independent* poem  
A surviving Jim Crow reconstruction poem

A where do we go from here renaissance poem  
A return to copper sun *Heritage* poem

How do you write and American poem?

A we shall not be moved invincible poem  
A four girls down south massacred poem  
A where do we go from there militant poem

*A black as the night is beautiful* poem  
A why we can't wait community poem  
A why we don't have to unbelievable poem

that swims across the river of our imagination poem  
and takes us on a journey to the *majestic shores of the promised land* poem

How do you write an American poem?

A few folks still won't get the change memo unfortunate poem  
A that's okay, because *humanity I love you* undeniable poem

A we support the troops, not the trauma poem  
A life, liberty and the pursuit of a joyful noise incredible poem

A new face for our country-unending poem  
A listen can't you hear the ancestors singing unbending poem.  
A *Great day! Great day, the righteous marching* poem

*A shine your light on the world, shine your light for the world to see* poem  
And don't stop to the break of dawn jubilee poem

*A new birth of freedom* revealed poem  
*A tunnel of hope* to heal poem  
A long-time coming not so unreal poem

A sophisticated and unflappable poem  
*A we real cool as a pint of joy* poem  
A the children now know their reach is unlimited poem

How do you write an American poem  
that has not been written yet?

With sacred honor and the audacity to dream.

—*Kwame Alexander* © 2009