

Negro Hero: to suggest Dorie Millerⁱ

A recent publication by *The New York Times* on November 8, 2020 on Dorie Miller may also be of interest to you:
[*Opinion: A Black Hero in the Jim Crow Navy - Dorie Miller saved lives at Pearl Harbor. He's finally getting his due.*](#)

Gwendolyn Brooks

I had to kick their law into their teeth in order to save them.
However I have heard that sometimes you have to deal
Devilishly with drowning men in order to swim them to shore.
Or they will haul themselves and you to the trash and the fish
beneath.

(When I think of this, I do not worry about a few
Chipped teeth.)

It is good I gave glory, it is good I put gold on their name.
Or there would have been spikes in the afterward hands.
But let us speak only of my success and the pictures in the
Caucasian dailies

As well as the Negro weeklies. For I am a gem.
(They are not concerned that it was hardly The Enemy my
fight was against
But them.)

It was a tall time. And of course my blood was
Boiling about in my head and straining and howling and
singing me on.
Of course I was rolled on wheels of my boy itch to get at
the gun.
Of course all the delicate rehearsal shots of my childhood
massed in mirage before me.
Of course I was child
And my first swallow of the liquor of battle bleeding black
air dying and demon noise
Made me wild.

It was kinder than that, though, and I showed like a banner
my kindness.
I loved. And a man will guard when he loves.
Their white-gowned democracy was my fair lady.
With her knife lying cold, straight, in the softness of her
sweet-flowing sleeve.
But for the sake of the dear smiling mouth and the stuttered
promise I toyed with my life.
I threw back! — I would not remember
Entirely the knife.

Still—am I good enough to die for them, is my blood bright
enough to be spilled,
Was my constant back-question—are they clear
On this? Or do I intrude even now?
Am I clean enough to kill for them, do they wish me to kill
For them or is my place while death licks his lips and strides
to them
In the galley still?

(In a southern city a white man said
Indeed, I'd rather be dead;
Indeed, I'd rather be shot in the head
Or ridden to waste on the back of a flood
Than saved by the drop of a black man's blood.)

Naturally, the important thing is, I helped to save them, them
and a part of their democracy.
Even if I had to kick their law into their teeth in order to
do that for them.
And I am feeling well and settled in myself because I believe
it was a good job,
Despite this possible horror: that they might prefer the
Preservation of their law in all its sick dignity and their
knives
To the continuation of their creed
And their lives.

ⁱ This poem is included in Gwendolyn Brooks, *The World of Gwendolyn Brooks*. New York: Harper & Row, 1st edition 1971. Available through Open Library:
https://openlibrary.org/books/OL5089232M/The_world_of_Gwendolyn_Brooks.