***On the Pulse of Morning***

***1993 inaugural poem by MAYA ANGELOU***

***A Poem for Bill Clinton’s Presidential Inauguration***

A Rock, A River, A Tree

Hosts to species long since departed,

Marked the mastodon,

The dinosaur, who left dry tokens

Of their sojourn here

On our planet floor,

Any broad alarm of their hastening doom

Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,

Come, you may stand upon my

Back and face your distant destiny,

But seek no haven in my shadow.

I will give you no more hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than

The angels, have crouched too long in

The bruising darkness,

Have lain too long

Face down in ignorance.

Your mouths spilling words

Armed for slaughter.

The Rock cries out today, you may stand on me,

But do not hide your face.

Across the wall of the world,

A River sings a beautiful song,

Come rest here by my side.

Each of you a bordered country,

Delicate and strangely made proud,

Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.

Your armed struggles for profit

Have left collars of waste upon

My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.

Yet, today I call you to my riverside,

If you will study war no more. Come,

Clad in peace and I will sing the songs

The Creator gave to me when I and the

Tree and the stone were one.

Before cynicism was a bloody sear across your

Brow and when you yet knew you still

Knew nothing.

The River sings and sings on.

There is a true yearning to respond to

The singing River and the wise Rock.

So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew

The African and Native American, the Sioux,

The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek

The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,

The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,

The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.

They hear. They all hear

The speaking of the Tree.

Today, the first and last of every Tree

Speaks to humankind. Come to me, here beside the River.

Plant yourself beside me, here beside the River.

Each of you, descendant of some passed

On traveller, has been paid for.

You, who gave me my first name, you

Pawnee, Apache and Seneca, you

Cherokee Nation, who rested with me, then

Forced on bloody feet, left me to the employment of

Other seekers--desperate for gain,

Starving for gold.

You, the Turk, the Swede, the German, the Scot ...

You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought

Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare

Praying for a dream.

Here, root yourselves beside me.

I am the Tree planted by the River,

Which will not be moved.

I, the Rock, I the River, I the Tree

I am yours--your Passages have been paid.

Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need

For this bright morning dawning for you.

History, despite its wrenching pain,

Cannot be unlived, and if faced

With courage, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes upon

The day breaking for you.

Give birth again

To the dream.

Women, children, men,

Take it into the palms of your hands.

Mold it into the shape of your most

Private need. Sculpt it into

The image of your most public self.

Lift up your hearts

Each new hour holds new chances

For new beginnings.

Do not be wedded forever

To fear, yoked eternally

To brutishness.

The horizon leans forward,

Offering you space to place new steps of change.

Here, on the pulse of this fine day

You may have the courage

To look up and out upon me, the

Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.

No less to Midas than the mendicant.

No less to you now than the mastodon then.

Here on the pulse of this new day

You may have the grace to look up and out

And into your sister's eyes, into

Your brother's face, your country

And say simply

Very simply

With hope

Good morning.