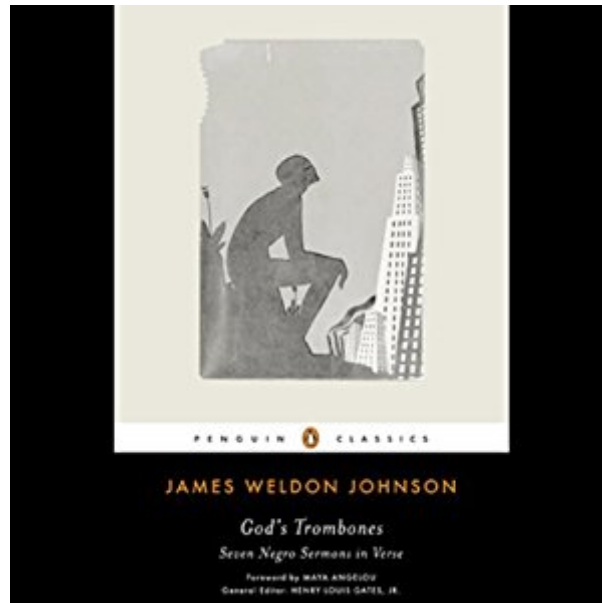


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# God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons In Verse



## Synopsis

Introduced by Maya Angelou, the inspiring sermon-poems of James Weldon Johnson. James Weldon Johnson was a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, and one of the most revered African Americans of all time, whose life demonstrated the full spectrum of struggle and success. In *God's Trombones*, one of his most celebrated works, inspirational sermons of African American preachers are reimagined as poetry, reverberating with the musicality and splendid eloquence of the spirituals. This classic collection includes "Listen Lord (A Prayer)," "The Creation," "The Prodigal Son," "Go Down Death (A Funeral Sermon)," "Noah Built the Ark," "The Crucifixion," "Let My People Go," and "The Judgment Day." For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 1 hour and 12 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Penguin Audio

Audible.com Release Date: May 13, 2009

Language: English

ASIN: B0029TCGCA

Best Sellers Rank: #245 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Poetry #451 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > United States > African American #549 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Literary Criticism

## Customer Reviews

James Weldon Johnson's "God's Trombones" is a tour de force of literature. Unfortunately this EDITION gets only one star - it does great disservice to Johnson's great work. This book has undergone great violence in this Penguin Classics edition (2008). It suffers from several defects: 1. The book has been published as part of Penguin's "African American Classics" series, and the Foreward (Penguin's spelling) by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (General Editor) takes away from the

power of Johnson's own Preface. This Foreward drifts far away from Johnson's work. Johnson was a great pioneer in race relations in the USA, but "God's Trombones" is not a book about race - it's a book about the Black preachers Johnson heard in his youth and his homage to them. By narrowing the book into the genre of "Black literature" it takes away its significance as simply a great piece of American literature.<sup>2</sup> Maya Angelou's additional Foreward is simplistic and attempts to frame Johnson's poems in the context of slavery and the Black experience that resulted from slavery. The problem with this is that Johnson himself - in his excellent Preface that fortunately is still in this edition - doesn't frame his poems that way. Johnson mentions slavery in one sentence of his Preface; Angelou wants us to think the poems are about a subject - slavery - rather than people - the great black preachers of Johnson's time.<sup>3</sup> The wonderful illustrations - which were tipped into the original publication in 1927 - are poorly reproduced, appearing to be low-quality scans of previous paperback editions. The pixilating of the images is unfortunate.<sup>4</sup> Penguin has laid out the poems anew, taking away Johnson's original layout.

James Weldon Johnson (1871 -- 1938) is best-known as the author of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the "Negro National Anthem" written in 1900 for Lincoln's birthday. Johnson had extraordinary gifts as a poet. His celebration of the African-American preacher in *God's Trombones*, published in 1927, is a masterpiece of American poetry. Johnson was inspired to write "*God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*" after hearing a stirring African-American preacher in Kansas City in 1918. Johnson wrote seven free-verse poems on biblical themes to capture the rhythm, content, language and religious commitment of the African-American preacher. Johnson also wrote a celebrated prose introduction to the book in which he described the place of the preacher in African-American life and explained his decision not to use dialect in writing the poems. Johnson also explained why he used the trombone as the guiding figure of his poem. Johnson wrote of his experience with the Kansas City preacher: "He strode the pulpit up and down in what was actually a very rhythmic voice, a voice -- what shall I say? -- not of an organ or a trumpet, but rather of a trombone, the instrument possessing above all others the power to express the wide and varied range of emotions encompassed by the human voice -- and with greater amplitude. He intoned, he moaned, he pleaded, -- he blared, he crashed, he thundered. ... [T]he emotional effect upon me was irresistible." The poetry opens with a short preliminary call to prayer, "Listen, Lord" followed by the seven sermons. The sermons open with the preacher's account of "The Creation"; and they conclude with a sermon on the end of days, "The Judgment Day".

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