

**Black Ore (1956), René Depestre**  
**Translated by Norman R. Shapiro**

When all of a sudden the stream of Indian sweat was dried up by the sun  
When the gold-fever drained out the final drop of Indian blood in the marketplace  
And every last Indian vanished from around the mines  
It was time to look to Africa's river of muscle  
For a changing of the guard of misery

And so began the rush to that rich and limitless  
Storehouse of black flesh  
And so began the breathless dash  
To the noonday splendor of the black-skinned body  
Then all the earth rang out with the clatter of the picks  
Digging deep in the thick black ore

How many a chemist all but turned his mind  
To making some new precious alloy formed  
With this black mineral  
How many a lady almost set her heart on finding pots and pans  
Of black Sengalese or a fine tea-service  
Of stocky Caribbean pickaninny

Who knows what parish padre somewhere  
Almost gave his solemn word  
To get a churchbell cast in the sonority of black blood  
Or what nice Santa Claus almost dreamed  
Of little black tin soldiers for his yearly rounds  
Or what valiant man at arms  
Would have gladly hewn his blade from his ebony metal

The earth rang out with the shake and shatter of the drills  
Deep in the entrails of my people  
Deep in the black man's muscled mineral bed  
From centuries now they have dug from the depths  
The wonders of this race

O mines of ore that are my people  
Limitless vein of human dew  
How many pirates have plunged their weapon deep  
To probe the recess of your flesh  
How many plunderers have hacked themselves a path  
Through the lushed illumined vegetation of your body  
Strewing over your passing days, dead stalks and pools of tears

O pillaged people dug up from top to bottom  
Like land beneath the plough  
People harrowed to enrich  
The great markets of the world  
Store up your firedamp deep in your body's secret dark of night  
Then none will dare to cast more cannons and more golden coins  
From that black metal of your fury's rising flood.