

from "Pioneers: A View of Home"*

by Nikki Giovanni

They say Home . . . is where when you go . . . they have to take you in. I rather prefer Home . . . when you could go anywhere . . . is the place you prefer to be. I don't think of a home as a house, which is another thing I don't own. Certainly, though, I do live in a house that I have made my home. I won't even pretend living on the streets, sleeping in public parks, washing up at the bus or train station, eating out of garbage cans is a valid alternative to bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchens whiffing good smells every time the furnace blows. But I also readily concede if there is no love a building will not compensate. The true joy, perhaps, of being a Black American is that we really have no home. Europeans bought us; but the Africans sold. If we are to be human we must forgive both . . . or neither. It has become acceptable, in the last decade or so, for intellectuals to concede Black Americans did not come here of our own volition; yet, I submit that just as slavery took away our choice so also did the overcrowded, disease-ridden cities of Europe; so also did religious persecution; so also did the abject and all but unspeakable Inquisition of the Spanish; so also did starvation in Italy; so also did the black, rotten potatoes lying in the fields of Ireland. No one came to the New World in a cruise ship. They all came because they had to. They were poor, hungry, criminal, persecuted individuals who would rather chance dropping off the ends of the earth than stay inert knowing both their body and spirit were slowly having the life squeezed from them. Whether it was a European booking passage on a boat, a slave chained to a ship, a wagon covered with sailcloth, they all headed toward the unknown with all nonessentials stripped away.

A pioneer has only two things: a deep desire to survive and an equally strong will to live. Home is not the place where our possessions and accomplishments are deposited and displayed. It is this earth that we have explored, the heaven we view with awe, these humans who, despite the flaws, we try to love and those who try to love us. It is the willingness to pioneer the one trek we all can make . . . no matter what our station or location in life . . . the existential reality that wherever there is life . . . we are at home.