



EVA CARTER BUCKNER

Collected Poems

CLUB SONGS, SUFFRAGE VERSE, AND PUBLIC POEMS

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Portrait, biographical witnesses, and civil-rights record



MRS. EVA CARTER-BUCKNER
Poetess.

*Eva Carter Buckner in Delilah L. Beasley's *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (1919).*

A NEGRO POETESS.

We have in our city a negro woman poetess who was the personal friend of Paul Lawrence Dunbar. She highly prizes a letter written to her by Dunbar, upon the publication of her poem, "Lines to Dunbar." Mrs. Eva Cartar Buckner is a contributor to the "Gems of Poesy," published by the Delhay Publishing Company of Chicago. She has written for many eastern magazines and papers, and she holds the copyright from the Library of Congress of a musical composition, "The City of Sunshine." A number of her poems have been set to music, and

"A Negro Poetess," the Los Angeles Times profile of Buckner, February 12, 1909.

4/8/13
June 21, 1926.

Mrs. Eva Carter Buckner,
320 N. Burlington Avenue,
Los Angeles, California.

My dear Mrs. Buckner:

Thank you for your letter. I shall
see that sample copies and literature go
to the names enclosed.

Very sincerely yours,

WEBB/PF

First page of W. E. B. Du Bois's letter to Buckner, June 21, 1926.

**T. H. HICKS, Chairman Arranged by
ELMER BARTLE**

Original Poem

Dedicated to Charlotte Spear-Bass by
by Eva Carter Buckner on Occasion of
a Welcome Home, Wednesday Evening,
September 26, 1917.

Oft we hear the mooted question—

“Now, what is a woman's sphere?

What should be her work, her calling?

And some answers are so queer.

Very much like—well, you've heard it

To a certain people said:

“Just to this, or that, you're suited;

Be not by your impulse led.”

Just as though an aspiration

Could be crushed, or hope be killed

When the atmosphere so generous

Is with inspiration filled!

We believe a woman's calling

Is whate'er she choose to do,

Just so long as it is noble,

And to self she can be true.

Aspirations are so varied,

And the field so very wide,

When a woman's fitted for it,

Why, then, should she be denied?

She is forging into channels

Where, one time, she dare not tread.

Yes, the Negro woman also

By the same impulse is led.

And we need her—let us cheer her—

If we nothing else can do—

Put no obstacles before her;

Ways are hard enough to hew!

Yes, we need courageous women

Who will ever dare and do—

Acting well the part they've chosen—

Ah, dear one, we've need of you.

Give a message to your people—

Give it out unto the world!

May it help to make it better,

As to all the truth is hurled.

THE SOLDIER'S CREED

Many of our soldier boys go seriously about this business of war. They know what it may mean to them. It is not easy for them to surrender their personal liberty and to be swallow-

“Original Poem” in the California Eagle, September 29, 1917; the complete text was recovered for this edition.

INTRODUCTION

Eva Carter Buckner, c. 1861/1864–1946

Eva Carter Buckner made poetry part of public life. Born in Washington, Iowa, and formed in Colorado's Black club movement, she arrived in Los Angeles by 1909 with a reputation as a poet, songwriter, and friend of Paul Laurence Dunbar. Her surviving poems address women's freedom, Black citizenship, wartime sacrifice, literary fellowship, and collective advance; her public career joined that writing to suffrage, the California Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the Los Angeles Forum, Republican organizing, and early NAACP work. No poetry book by Buckner has been located. This edition gathers every complete poem presently recovered from original pages, restores stanza structure and intentional indents, and records the songs and recitation pieces whose texts remain lost.

Stage I | Iowa, Colorado Springs, and first publications, c. 1861/1864–1908

Eva Carter Buckner was born on February 26 in Washington, Iowa, but the year remains unsettled. Her cemetery memorial gives 1864, a modern biographical profile gives 1861, and Los Angeles historic-context research gives 1863. The surviving evidence does not yet justify choosing among them, so this edition records the conflict rather than converting an estimate into a fact. She spent part of her childhood in Des Moines before her family moved to Colorado Springs, where she attended public school. Later accounts say that she entered and won a poetry contest sponsored by the mayor's wife, Mrs. J. D. Robinson; the original contest notice has not been located, but the story appears repeatedly in the biographical tradition around Buckner. She supported herself in domestic work and as a seamstress, and her grandnephew, the California legislator William Byron Rumford, remembered her as a painter as well as a writer.

She married Edward H. Buckner, a painter, and their son Garrie was born about 1886. A 1900 notice concerning his education at Tuskegee provides firmer evidence for this son than later online family summaries, some of which also name daughters Mabel and Eugenia without adequately distinguishing Eva Carter Buckner from another woman of the same name. Buckner's Colorado years placed her inside a vigorous network of Black newspapers, churches, women's clubs, and music publishing. Later profiles reported that her verse had appeared in the *Denver Post*, the *Colorado Springs Sun*, the *Western Enterprise*, and New Mexico newspapers, although most of those texts have not been recovered. A Denver newspaper announced her song "The City of Sunshine" in 1905, and Tolbert R. Ingram's Denver publishing catalog listed "Gathering the Wild Flowers." Neither sheet music nor a reliable complete text for either song has been found.

Buckner's first presently recoverable publication is "Onward," printed in the *Denver Statesman* on June 8, 1906. Written for the Colorado Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and fitted to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," it turns club work into a marching song of racial solidarity, moral reform, education, and ascent. In 1907, "Lines to Paul Laurence Dunbar" appeared in *Gems of Poesy*, a Chicago anthology edited by William H. A. Moore and J. E. McGirt. Buckner's poem describes Dunbar's writing as a sustaining banquet and treats literary admiration as an intimate act of reading. A Los Angeles profile two years later called her Dunbar's friend and reported that she possessed a letter from him. It also mentioned a tribute to John Greenleaf Whittier, stories in eastern periodicals, and her copyright in "The City of Sunshine"; no complete witness of the Whittier poem has yet surfaced.

Stage II | Los Angeles, suffrage, and civil-rights work, 1909–1921

Buckner had moved to Los Angeles by February 1909, earlier than the 1910 date often repeated in modern summaries. There she joined a Black civic world shaped by women's clubs, newspapers, churches, and campaigns for political rights. She became active in the California Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and chaired suffrage work. Her "Original Poem," published in the *California Eagle* on September 29, 1917, was written for a welcome-home gathering for the newspaper's editor Charlotta Spear Bass. The poem answers the question of "a woman's sphere" by insisting that a woman's calling is whatever noble work she chooses and is fitted to do. Buckner's argument embraces the "Negro woman" entering previously forbidden channels, and it asks the community to remove obstacles rather than policing ambition. The complete text, missing from earlier drafts of this edition, has been recovered from the original newspaper page.

The First World War sharpened Buckner's language of citizenship and sacrifice. Her song "In the Ranks" was performed at a 1918 California Federation gathering, but its words and music are presently missing. "Let's Go," published in the *Ottawa Guardian* in January 1919 and dedicated to the "Negro Liberty Boys," honors Black servicemen who fought for freedom abroad and then asked for the freedom they had defended. Delilah L. Beasley reprinted two further Buckner poems in *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* that year. "If Lincoln Could Return Today" tests technological and national progress against emancipation; "What Constitutes a Negro?" confronts racial classification, prejudice, cultural achievement, and the one-drop rule in the historical vocabulary of its moment. Beasley credited the latter to an earlier appearance in the *California Eagle*, although that original printing has not been identified.

Buckner's literary and political work overlapped with Beasley's. Rumford recalled that Beasley lived for a time in the family's Burlington Avenue home while preparing *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, and he remembered Buckner as one of the women who encouraged and assisted her. Address records variously identify 318 and 320 South Burlington Avenue, a discrepancy left unresolved by the available documents. Buckner also belonged to the Los Angeles Forum, one of the city's most important Black literary and civic

organizations. At its anniversary program in 1932 she recited a piece called “Lending Books,” but no complete text has been located. Family memory preserves another title, “The Tulsa Song,” apparently connected to the 1921 destruction of Tulsa’s Greenwood district; it too remains unrecovered.

She was an early Los Angeles participant in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As chair of a school committee, she investigated discrimination affecting Black children, and in June 1926 W. E. B. Du Bois wrote to her about NAACP work. Buckner also wrote a poem dedicated to Du Bois during a fundraising drive associated with NAACP president Moorfield Storey, but its title and text have not been found. Her surviving 1921 poem “The Man of Faith, The Man of Love,” occasioned by Marshal Ferdinand Foch’s Los Angeles visit and his greeting of Black troops, makes military command subordinate to faith, duty, and an explicitly color-blind ideal. The newspaper printed the entire poem in italics, a feature retained in this edition.

Stage III | Political organizing and the late public record, 1922–1946

Buckner remained active in public affairs through the 1920s. She organized for Republican candidates, supported Friend W. Richardson in 1922, spoke at an Oakland political meeting in 1924, participated in the 1925 convention of the California Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and worked in the 1928 Hoover campaign. These affiliations complicate any simple division between her literary and civic identities: the same language of uplift, disciplined collective action, faith, and promised citizenship moves through her club song, suffrage poem, wartime verse, and organizational life. Her poetry is public in form and occasion, often designed for performance, commemoration, or communal use rather than private publication in a book.

Eva Carter Buckner died in Los Angeles on February 15, 1946, and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery. No separate collection of her verse has been found, and the surviving record is therefore unusually vulnerable to newspaper loss, inaccessible sheet music, and titles preserved only in programs or family memory. The seven complete poems gathered here nevertheless show a coherent writer: one who understood poetry as praise, argument, song, historical witness, and organizing instrument. Her career also reveals how much early Southern California poetry circulated outside conventional literary books—in Black newspapers, women's clubs, anthologies, political gatherings, and musical performance—and how essential those settings are to recovering the region's literary history.

Editorial Note and Sources

No stand-alone poetry book by Buckner has been found. This edition gathers the seven complete poems presently recoverable from original newspaper and anthology pages published between 1906 and 1921. The poems are arranged chronologically by first located publication, with each newspaper or anthology identified after the text. Original pages—not earlier reading editions, layout files, or OCR exports—are the authority for wording and form.

Lineation, stanza divisions, italics, subtitles, and clearly intentional inset lines follow the original scans. Breaks caused only by a narrow newspaper column have been rejoined. Hanging indents produced by the source page are not treated as authorial indents. Period spellings and grammatically irregular readings have been retained when the witness is clear; OCR debris has been removed. The 1919 source prints “Brace” before “Toussaint L’Ouverture” in “What Constitutes a Negro?” and that reading is retained with a textual note.

Several works are known only by title or contemporary report: “The City of Sunshine,” “Gathering the Wild Flowers,” the Whittier tribute, “In the Ranks,” the Du Bois tribute, “The Tulsa Song,” and “Lending Books.” Their complete texts have not been located, and they are recorded below rather than reconstructed. A purported eight-line text for “The City of Sunshine” appears in later working notes, but without an original witness it has not been admitted to the edition.

Buckner’s birth year remains disputed. The cemetery record gives 1864, a modern scholarly biography gives 1861, and Los Angeles historic-context research gives 1863. Her February 26 birth date and February 15, 1946 death in Los Angeles are consistently reported. The date line preserves the uncertainty rather than selecting a year without decisive evidence.

Works by Eva Carter Buckner

“The City of Sunshine.” Song announced in the *Denver Statesman*, March 31, 1905. Music and complete text not located.

“Gathering the Wild Flowers.” Song listed by Tolbert R. Ingram Publishing, Denver, 1905–06. Music and text not located.

“Onward.” Federation song. *Denver Statesman*, June 8, 1906, 15.

“Lines to Paul Laurence Dunbar.” In William H. A. Moore and J. E. McGirt, eds., *Gems of Poetry*. Chicago: Delhay Publishing Company, 1907, 219.

Tribute to John Greenleaf Whittier. Reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1909. Title and complete text not located.

“Original Poem.” *California Eagle*, September 29, 1917, 4.

“In the Ranks.” Federation song performed in 1918. Music and text not located.

“What Constitutes a Negro?” In Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*. Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1919, 269–70; first printed in the *California Eagle*.

“If Lincoln Could Return Today.” In Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*. Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1919, 270–71.

“Let’s Go.” *Ottawa Guardian*, January 31, 1919, 2.

“The Man of Faith, The Man of Love.” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, December 12, 1921, 26.

Poem dedicated to W. E. B. Du Bois. Reported during an NAACP fundraising campaign; title and text not located.

“The Tulsa Song.” Recalled in family testimony. Text not located.

“Lending Books.” Recited at the Los Angeles Forum anniversary program, April 1932. Text not located.

Works about Eva Carter Buckner

Beasley, Delilah L. *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*. Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1919.

Smith, Cathleen D. Cahill. “Biographical Sketch of Eva Carter Buckner.” *Alexander Street, Women and Social Movements in the United States*.

Los Angeles City Planning. *African American History of Los Angeles*. SurveyLA Historic Context Statement, 2018.

Los Angeles City Planning. *Women’s Rights in Los Angeles, 1850–1980*. SurveyLA Historic Context Statement.

Rumford, William Byron. *Legislator for Fair Employment, Fair Housing, and Public Health*. Oral history conducted by Joyce Henderson, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1973.

Workman, Paul R. “The Voice of People Who Have Traveled Far and Well with the Vibrant March of Progress.” Homestead Museum Blog, February 15, 2026.

COLORADO CLUB AND LITERARY VERSE, 1906–1907

Stage I | Club song and literary tribute

Onward

Federation Song. To the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

We're Colorado's colored women struggling for a place;
We're loyal to our country and we're loyal to our race;
We're holding high the banner, in the dust it must not trail,
As we go marching on.

Onward, upward to the summit,
Onward, upward to the summit,
Onward, upward to the summit,
We're advancing step by step.

Duty calls on every side; this noble work must spread,
Uprooting sin and sadness, planting good and joy instead;
Invincible determination, energy and trust
Will keep us marching on.

The golden gate of hope swings back for this, our struggling race;
The coming generation must prepare to take its place;
There is no standing still in life—we recede or advance,
And we'll go marching on.

We'll ever take our Maker for our leader, and we know
The spark of His divinity will cheer us as we go;
Though the way be rough and steep, like these old rugged hills,
We'll still go marching on.

Publication. *Denver Statesman*, June 8, 1906, p. 15.

Lines to Paul Laurence Dunbar

O for a tongue to put in words
The thoughts that lie so deep.
To tell thee how thy name we love;
Our minds are not asleep.
But e'en the faithful pen has failed
To climb the wall it oft' has scaled.

Impressions deep thy lines have made
Upon the thoughtful mind;
We read them o'er and o'er again
And treasures in them find.
It is a banquet rich and rare
With choicest viands served with care.

We laugh, we smile, we sigh with thee
As we devour thy food.
And find sweet solace at thy board
Suited to each passing mood.
The relishes so dainty and light
Give the most fastidious an appetite.

Long may thy life be spared, Dunbar,
To wield the ready pen.
And when thy work is finished here
May angels guard thee then;
And bear thy spirit safe above
Where all is joy and peace and love.

Publication. William H. A. Moore and J. E. McGirt, eds., *Gems of Poesy* (Chicago: Delhaye Publishing Company, 1907), p. 219.

LOS ANGELES, SUFFRAGE, AND WARTIME VERSE, 1917–1919

*Stage II | The California Eagle, wartime citizenship, and The Negro Trail
Blazers of California*

Original Poem

Dedicated to Charlotte Spear-Bass by Eva Carter Buckner on occasion of a Welcome Home, Wednesday evening, September 26, 1917.

Oft we hear the mooted question—
“Now, what is a woman’s sphere?
What should be her work, her calling?”
And some answers are so queer.

Very much like—well, you’ve heard it
To a certain people said:
“Just to this, or that, you’re suited;
Be not by your impulse led.”

Just as though an aspiration
Could be crushed, or hope be killed
When the atmosphere so generous
Is with inspiration filled!

We believe a woman’s calling
Is whate’er she choose to do,
Just so long as it is noble,
And to self she can be true.

Aspirations are so varied,
And the field so very wide,
When a woman’s fitted for it,
Why, then, should she be denied?

She is forging into channels
Where, one time, she dare not tread.
Yes, the Negro woman also
By the same impulse is led.

And we need her—let us cheer her—
If we nothing else can do—
Put no obstacles before her;
Ways are hard enough to hew!

Yes, we need courageous women
Who will ever dare and do—
Acting well the part they've chosen—
Ah, dear one, we've need of you.

Give a message to your people—
Give it out unto the world!
May it help to make it better,
As to all the truth is hurled.

Publication. *California Eagle*, September 29, 1917, p. 4.

What Constitutes a Negro?

When the first slave-ship was landed
 With its cargo on this side.
There was then no vexing question
 As to which race he's allied;
Just a Negro, pure and simple,
 And as such might have remained,
But—well, here we drop the subject,
 For there is nothing to be gained.

Years have passed, and now we see him
 On him's turned the strongest light;
Every race is represented—
 Black, brown, yellow, red, and white;
And they call him now a problem,
For there's One not been consulted
 And in it He is involved.

There's rise and fall of Nations,
 But, dispute it if you can.
There is just one God and Father
 And the brotherhood of man.
Ten-tenths blood of pure Caucasian,
 This it takes to make you white.
But one drop of Negro blood is
 Just the same, as black as night

For this stamp was put upon him
 And so let it thus remain,
For what is the use contending?
 All contentions are in vain.
It is said ten million Negroes
 On this firm free land doth stand,
God inspires him to mount upward
 Though chains bind both foot and hand.

Read his crimes in boldest letters,
 Negro, and no question then;
And we own him, our heads bowing,
 Grieved to know we have such men.
On the other hand turning,
 We can point with pride to those
Who thought it worth while in striving,
 And to fame and honor rose,

Dumas, known as the French nov'list,
 He his Negro blood could trace;
Tanner, artist known so widely,
 Who has won himself a place.
Yes, and there is the "Black Napoleon,"
 Brace "Toussaint L'Ouverture,"
And the great Edmonia Lewis,
 Sculptress, whose work will endure.

And we claim S. Coleridge Taylor;
 Dunbar, though he's dead still lives;
Booker Washington we all know,
 For the race his best thoughts gives;
Bishop Grant, in sermons, lectures;
 Dubois, John H. Jackson, true;
Chestnut, Vernon, trace 'em; Pushkin,
 Browning, many others, too.

Great Rome had her gladiators,
 And of them was very proud;
We care nothing for the prize-ring
 But, since it has been allowed.
Why not then applaud the winner,
 Whether white or dusky man?
The survival of the fittest
 Is the rule, and it will stand.

Call him Ishmaelite or Arab,
Paraphrase him, if you will;
Say Egyptian, if more pleasing,
But he is a Negro still.
This would be a grander Nation
With the goodness that's innate.
It would be a perfect haven—
But the prejudice—too great.

But, there, friends,
Join us in life's great combat.
Though your skin be dark, what matter?
You're a man, e'en for all that;
And we are using every effort
To make good where e'er we trod,
One hand with the flag a-waving,
And the other stretched to God.

Publication. Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1919), pp. 269–270; Beasley identifies an earlier printing in the *California Eagle*.

Textual note. The source prints “Brace” before “Toussaint L'Ouverture”; the reading is retained.

If Lincoln Could Return Today

If Lincoln could return today,
I wonder what he'd think and say
About this great and glorious land
O'er which he once had full command?
With all the progress he would see,
I know he would astonished be.

The lightning speed of which we boast,
A touch, a sound from coast to coast;
The clearly, distinct spoken words,
Ships sailing through the air like birds;
Numerous inventions, small and great,
Too many to enumerate.

With all these things so strange and new,
I'm sure he'd scarce know what to do.
And, like a wanderer on the strand,
A stranger in his own homeland—
Until he'd look around and see
That same old flag of liberty.

I wonder then if he'd recall
The greatest deed he did for all,
And that if he would sorry be
That he had set the captives free?
Ah, yes, the world knows it was he.

But 'twas a mightier hand, you see,
Guided the pen. 'Twas so to be
That all his legacy might share
What you and I love best, free air;
And, too, his knowing eye could see
That, to advance, all must be free.

And Nature says, and it is true,
To crush the one we crush the two,
And all who love their country true
Love Lincoln's name, naught else to do.
And, O! could he take one survey—
I wonder what he'd think and say?

Publication. Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1919), pp. 270–271.

Let's Go

Dedicated to the Negro Liberty Boys.

Distress! Our sister nations cried
 Across the waters deep.
“We come!” To arms, the speedy call,
 This is no time to sleep!
The fight’s by land and air and sea,
 But we must crush the foe,
This is a fight for Liberty,
 The Black Boys said, “Let’s Go.”

They asked for prayer to make them strong—
 A little word of cheer—
Determined victory they meant,
 These boys who knew no fear.
Old Glory ne’er must touch the ground;
 For it their blood would flow.
But they immortalized the words
 When called, and said—Let’s Go.

The Negro soldier fought and fell
 With others true and brave;
On foreign field, from home and friends,
 He fills a Hero’s grave.
And on the firing line was he
 When God seemed to say “No.”
Yes, ready to be offered up,
 And with the words—Let’s Go.

What doth he ask—not vain applause,
 Nor fame, nor medal bright,
Nor empty honor, glorious name;
 No, that was not the fight.
He only asks for what he fought,
 And what the world would know;
Just that for which he offered life
 When called, and said, Let’s Go.

LATER PERIODICAL VERSE, 1921

Stage II | The late recovered newspaper poem

The Man of Faith, The Man of Love

Written after Marshal Ferdinand Foch greeted Black troops at the Los Angeles station.

*We do not marvel at the man
Who marshalled that great allied host
In Flanders fields, in far off France,
Nor of his glorious victory won.*

*But rather, we in silence bow
In reverence to the One above,
Who gave us this courageous man,
The man of faith, the man of love.*

*For ever since the world began
God always had a man reserved
To carry out His own great plan,
Who from his duty never swerved.*

*Foch knew no color, race nor creed;
Too great was he to know and see.
He only knew and saw the need
Of freedom and of liberty.*

*Enshrined in every loyal heart
Is he who looked to Him above,
The one who trusted, conquered, prayed;
The man of faith, the man of love.*

Publication. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, December 12, 1921, p. 26.

Colophon

Compiled from the Eva Carter Buckner source scans and research archive, with additional bibliographic research, August 2026. Designed in EB Garamond at six by nine inches for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. The user-created, unlettered cover artwork is cropped within the Green cover system, and all cover lettering remains live in the PDF.

The edition was collated from the original newspaper and anthology pages archived with the production files. Newly located biographical and bibliographic sources, including the complete 1917 *California Eagle* page, have also been saved with the project. The edition is intended to remain extensible as further verified witnesses are recovered.