

*Give me a song of hope and a world where I can sing it.*

—Pauli Murray

## Epistle to Pauli

Dear Pauli,  
It's been nearly four decades since you passed,  
You must be with the ancestors now,  
The ones you so fondly wrote about in *Dark Testament*.  
Much has happened since you've gone,  
Mankind communicates now through a world wide web,  
On handheld cordless devices.  
No officially named world wars,  
But a global pandemic.  
We have had a black president.  
Same-sex people can marry now too.  
Sadly, there's a growing banned books list in the schools,  
Lawmakers are erasing mentions of African contributions,  
And America's history of systematic racism,  
From the school books and discussions.  
The Strange fruits of your childhood Pauli,  
Are now behind the BLACK LIVES MATTER banners of mine.

I still have hope though.  
My song of hope,  
Is like a redemption song,  
Freed from mental slavery,  
Protecting our planet and the animals,  
Exploring my history,  
Reclaiming my culture,  
Setting an example for other black youth,  
Promoting pride, community and responsibility.

Hope is a homeschooled black boy in the southern Bible Belt,  
learning of revolutionaries like

Tubman

Zumbi

Garvey

Douglas

Nzinga  
Louverture  
Mandela  
Lumumba  
Pauli.

Hope is my palms beating the djembe in weekly drum lessons,  
Drums banned so long ago to silence black voices,  
To Break our spirits.  
Hope is perfecting my ginga in capoeira class with my mestre and grupo.  
Hope is learning  
the Ifa Pantheon  
Ma'at  
Ubuntu  
Adinkra principles  
Dogon cosmology.  
Seeking the ways and wisdom of the ancestors for strength and guidance.

Pauli, on earth you were the incarnation of Ogun,  
A seeker of truth and justice,  
A way maker,  
Strong as iron,  
A warrior.  
You were woke,  
And ahead of your time.

I have a world to sing my song of hope, Pauli,  
For my generation is woke, awakened,  
We are conscious.

Thanks for your strength, Pauli  
Thanks for your courage,  
Thanks for your voice  
Thanks for your Song.

Sincerely,

Aydin