

I wrote this poem for an in-school broadcast devoted to Black History Month. "BBL" stands for my school's name, the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning. An amazing actress on the staff read the poem. Off camera, two 5<sup>th</sup> Grade boys and I accompanied her on claves ("beat") and bongo drums ("loud drum roll" and "boom"). YouTube has a video of the performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50BideSTEnQ>

## Black History Month Poem

Black history!

Black history!

Black history!

Black history!

There's no mystery

To Black history!

But there's misery

In Black history!

It makes you sad!

*(beat, beat)*

And it makes you mad!

*(beat, beat)*

Yet through all that was bad,

Some people fought back!

They won their fights,

And won our rights,

And for that we can be glad!

*[loud drum roll]*

"The arc of the moral universe is long

But it bends – toward – justice."

*(beat)*

So said that great man, Martin Luther King,

With words - so - lustrous.

*(beat)*

What was horrible before is now not so,

But face it, folks, we have far to go.

Things are better than then; they can get better yet.

But it needs our smarts, our hearts, our sweat.

*[loud drum roll]*

“The arc of the moral universe is long  
But it bends – toward – justice.” (beat)  
So said that great man, Martin Luther King,  
And he meant it not for just us. (beat)

He meant it for the mother who’s stuck in jail  
‘Cause she can’t afford the courthouse bail.

He meant it for the child who dies in infancy  
‘Cause the family lives in rural poverty.  
(Yes, even though we live in a democracy,  
Doctors still don’t help folks equally.  
Black babies die at twice the rate of white.  
Who could ever, ever, think that’s right?)

*[loud drum roll]*

He meant it for all the young Black men  
Who get stopped by cops again and again.  
And even though it’s frowned upon on CNN,  
“Stop and frisk” mutates like a carcinogen.

He meant it for even the slightest of sleights  
Like when a Black person can’t hail a cab at night.

He also meant it for the most severe wrongs  
Like when Emmett Till was killed for whistling a song.

*[loud drum roll]*

