A prolific writer, Maya Angelou’s poetry conveys a message of “survival for African-American people to rise above poverty, prejudice and lack of power” (Nelson16). Born Marguerite Johnson on April 4, 1928, Angelou has moved on from her demoralizing childhood experience with racial bigotry and sexual assault to becoming a writer, editor, essayist, playwright, poet, actress and a civil rights activist. Angelou’s poetry draws heavily on her personal history.

Awarded with numerous honorary degrees and amongst the 2010 winners of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, following the Presidential Medal for the Arts in 2000 and the Lincoln Medal in 2008, Angelou has proved herself to be “phenomenal” through her share of struggles and hardships.

Maya Angelou has presented herself as a role model for African-American women by reconstructing the African-American woman’s image through her works. No African-American woman in the poetic world of Angelou can ever be losers. In her work Angelou has debunked the stereotypes of African-American mothers as breeders and matriarchs, and has presented them as having a creative and personally fulfilling role. According to critic Mary Jane Lupton, Angelou’s journey toward self-discovery takes her from “ignorance to knowledge, from silence to speech, from racial oppression to a liberated life” (46).

The dissertation has been divided into the following chapters:

I. Introduction.

II. The Image of the ‘Caged Bird’ in Maya Angelou’s Early Poems.

III. A Study of the “Phenomenal Woman” in Maya Angelou’s Later Poems.

IV. Living Again and Singing of ‘Freedom’.

V. Conclusion.
Works Cited


