

**Tribhuvan University**

**Expression of Racial Revolt in Langston Hughes's Poetry**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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**April 2010**

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Letter of Recommendation

Mrs. Parwati Lekhak has completed her thesis entitled “Expression of Racial Revolt in Langston Hughes’s Poetry” under my supervision. She carried out her research from 2065/02/02 B.S. to 2066/12/23 B.S. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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This thesis entitled “Expression of Racial Revolt in Langston Hughes’s Poetry” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mrs. Parwati Lekhak has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

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## Acknowledgement

I welcome this opportunity to thank Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, Lecturer at the Central Department of English, T.U. who supervised this research work. His wide-ranging knowledge and study have led to many improvements in the substance and helped me give the final shape of this thesis.

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head of the Central Department of English for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research. I am especially grateful to my brothers-in-laws, Hari Awasthi and Damaru Chandra Bhatta, and my elder sisters, Vijaya Awasthi and Kalyani Bhatta, for their invaluable suggestions. I am equally indebted to my parents and brother, Dipak Lekhak, who constantly supported and encouraged me to carry out this research work.

Similarly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my dear and loving husband Narendra Raj Ojha and daughter Prathistha, who have not been only very patient with me but have also been a continuous source of motivation and support. He had to bear an untold suffering to help me to complete the work.

I would like to thank my friends and all those who supported and encouraged me directly or indirectly in this course. Last but not least, I would like to thank Mr. Nandaraj Bhatta, an official at the Central Department of English, for his invaluable support.

April 2010

Parwati Lekhak

## Abstract

This thesis analyzes the theme of protest in Hughes's selected poems in order to explore new horizons in the field of cross-cultural and race studies linking the Afro-American poetic tradition with its counterpart in Africa. This thesis argues that the protest poetry of Hughes is a response to the painful experience of the black people in Africa and the American Diaspora which transforms blackness into a powerful mechanism of anger and revolt. Dismissing the policy of systematic interpretive betrayal advocated by those who attempt to ignore the black experience of agony and pain, Hughes in his poetry recalls crucial episodes from the black history of struggle against tyranny and racism in Africa and the United States. Being convinced that black culture survives through the centuries as an underlying force that threatens to rise to the surface in protest against oppression and hegemony, Hughes creates counter-poetics to dismantle narratives which aim to distort history and obscure the sacrifices of the black people in Africa and the United States during the eras of slavery and colonization.

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## **I. Introduction**

### **Langston Hughes as a Representative African American Writer**

This research work argues that the protest poetry of Hughes is a response to the painful experience of the black people in Africa and the American Diaspora which transforms blackness into a powerful mechanism of anger and revolt. Langston Hughes copes with the reality of race in his works and with the social tensions beset the black community. The poetry of Langston Hughes is challenging. It derives from a different tradition from most American poetry, a tradition of black culture, of jazz, and of protest. Hughes celebrated his racial identity, something few poets had done before. He was said to speak for the black masses, and he took this responsibility much to heart. Hughes' poetry seems to come from somewhere deep inside and to explode as a spontaneous utterance, however carefully designed it may actually be. For the black man, society demands a certain level of behavior, denying individuality, while at the same time denying full membership in the society imposing these rules. Hughes feels the force of this paradox in his life and expresses this idea in his poetry, asserting an individual vision through his work that is difficult for the average black man to achieve in society. He accomplishes this by making use of the black experience in America and by drawing upon black idioms, language, music, and cultural elements to evoke a vision of the black man in American life.

Born in Joplin, Missouri, James Langston Hughes was a member of an abolitionist family. He was the great-great-grandson of Charles Henry Langston, brother of John Mercer Langston, who was the first Black American to be elected to public office in 1855. Hughes attended Central High School in Cleveland, Ohio, but began writing poetry in the eighth grade, and was selected as Class Poet. His father

did not think he would be able to make a living at writing, and encouraged him to pursue a more practical career. He paid his son's tuition to Columbia University on the grounds he must study engineering. After a short time, Langston dropped out of the program with a B+ average; all the while he continued writing poetry. His first published poem was also one of his most famous, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," and it appeared in *Brownie's Book*. Later, his poems, short plays, essays and short stories appeared in the NAACP publication *Crisis Magazine* and in *Opportunity Magazine* and other publications.

One of Hughes' finest essays appeared in the magazine *The Nation* in 1926, entitled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" It spoke of Black writers and poets, who would surrender racial pride in the name of a false integration, where a talented Black writer would prefer to be considered a poet, not a Black poet, which to Hughes meant he subconsciously wanted to write like a white poet. Hughes argued, "No great poet has ever been afraid of being himself" (8). In this essay, he wrote:

We younger Negro artists now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they aren't, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. . . . If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, as strong as we know how and we stand on the top of the mountain, free within ourselves (qtd. in Swaim 14).

Here, Hughes talks about Black people's courage to express their feelings and thoughts in America. He also speaks out against the discrimination and Black people's desire for freedom.

In 1923, Hughes traveled abroad on a freighter to the Senegal, Nigeria, the



Cameroons, Belgium Congo, Angola, and Guinea in Africa, and later to Italy and France, Russia and Spain. One of his favorite pastimes whether abroad or in Washington, D.C. or Harlem, New York was sitting in the clubs listening to blues, jazz and writing poetry. Through these experiences a new rhythm emerged in his writing, and a series of poems such as “The Weary Blues” were penned. He returned to Harlem, in 1924, the period known as the Harlem Renaissance. During this period, his work was frequently published and his writing flourished. In 1925 he moved to Washington, D.C., still spending more time in blues and jazz clubs. He said, “I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street (these songs) had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going” (qtd in Borden 34). At this same time, Hughes accepted a job with Dr. Carter G. Woodson, editor of the *Journal of Negro Life and History* and founder of Black History Week in 1926. He returned to his beloved Harlem later that year.

Langston Hughes was a prolific writer. In the forty-odd years between his first book in 1926 and his death in 1967, he devoted his life to writing and lecturing. He wrote sixteen books of poems, two novels, three collections of short stories, four volumes of editorial and documentary fiction, twenty plays, children's poetry, musicals and operas, three autobiographies, a dozen radio and television scripts and dozens of magazine articles. In addition, he edited seven anthologies. The long and distinguished list of Hughes' fictional works includes: *Not without Laughter* (1930); *The Big Sea* (1940); *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), his autobiographies. His collections of poetry include: *The Weary Blues* (1926); *The Negro Mother and other Dramatic Recitations* (1931); *The Dream Keeper* (1932); *Shakespeare In Harlem* (1942); *Fields of Wonder* (1947); *One Way Ticket* (1947); *The First Book of Jazz* (1955); *Tambourines To Glory* (1958); and *Selected Poems* (1959); *The Best of*

*Simple* (1961).

African-American poet, novelist, and playwright, who became one of the foremost interpreters of racial relationships in the United States, influenced by the Bible, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Walt Whitman, Hughes depicted realistically the ordinary lives of black people. Many of his poems, written in rhythmical language, have been set to music.

In the 1950s Hughes published among others “Montage of a Dream Deferred” (1951), which included his famous poem “Harlem”, “Pictorial History of Negro in America” (1956), and edited *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958) with Arena Bontemps. For juveniles he did a series of famous biographies, beginning with *Famous American Negroes* (1954). His popular comic character Jesse B. Simple, or “Simple,” appeared in columns for the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Post*. Hughes had met the prototype of the character in a bar. The ironic comments of the street-wise Harlem dweller were first collected into *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950). In the last Simple collection, *Simple's Uncle Sam* (1965), Hughes wrote: “My mama should have named me Job instead of Jesse B. Simple. I have been underfed, underpaid, undernourished, and everything but undertaken - yet I am still here. The only thing I am afraid of now - is that I will die before my time” (Nelson 2).

In his later years Hughes held posts at the Universities of Chicago and Atlanta. The poet also witnessed that doctoral dissertations already begun to be written about him - the earliest book on his work appeared already in the 1930s. Hughes never married and there have been irrelevant speculations about his sexuality. Several of his friends were homosexual, among them Carl Van Vechten, who wrote the controversial novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926) – Hughes had recommended the choice of the title – but several were not. Hughes died in Polyclinic Hospital in New York, on

May 22, 1967, of complications after surgery. His collection of political poems, *The Panther and the Lash* (1967), reflected the anger and militancy of the 1960s. The book had been rejected first by Knopf in 1964 as too risky. Hughes's own history of NAACP appeared in 1962; he had received a few years earlier the NAACP'S Spingarn Medal.

### **Langston Hughes as a Canonical Writer**

As Elizabeth Alexander makes a keen study on Hughes and his poetry and thus throws his critical glance “we all have our Langstons, the Langston usually first encountered in childhood through poetry” (9). The work of Langston Hughes has for several generations of readers helped form a sense of an American poetics and the possibilities of African American literature. Especially for many young black readers of more than one generation, Hughes’s work presents a “race-pride” moment par excellence. He is “our” poet laureate, our “Shakespeare in Harlem” (Alexander 12), our Negro man of letters who made his living by the word and who articulated racial issues and strivings through a lens of true love for black people.

In addition to being the best-known, most-read, and most frequently taught African American and, in many cases, American poet, Langston Hughes is also the rare poet for whom one could easily conjure a picture. Think of those lovely early studio portraits, or any number of later images: the photograph with a cigarette dangling from his mouth; at the typewriter from the cover of selected poems; or the famous photo of the Negro busboy poet, newly “discovered” by Vachel Lindsay; or the picture of him in profile and quietly joyful on a Senegalese beach at the 1966 World African Arts Conference in Dakar. We even call him “Langston,” as though something in that face and those poems has invited us to do so.

Of all of the genres that he wrote in, it is foremost as a poet that we remember

Hughes. This is not because he was a better or more prolific poet than he was, say, a playwright, or that he did not accomplish as much in the Jess B. Simple stories.

Certainly by 1926, for example, when he published the influential essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” he was making a name for himself in other forms.

But the face of the poet is the face that stuck, and Hughes himself held that identity dear. In the introduction to poems from Black Africa, he wrote:

Traditionally, poets are lyric historians. From the days of the bards and troubadours, the songs of the poets have been not only songs, but often records of the most moving events, the deepest thoughts and most profound emotional currents of their times. To understand Africa today, it is wise to listen to what its poets say—those who put their songs down on paper as well as those who only speak or sing them.

(Evans 47)

Hughes saw poetry as a representative genre of a people, and he touted its actual power. In 1965, toward the end of his life as that new era in black politics and culture bloomed and flamed, he wrote an introduction for a children’s poetry booklet put out by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This little *ars poetica* articulated what he believed poetry could be.

Poetry possesses the power of imagination and creation. Poetry can both delight and disturb. It can interest folks. It can upset folks. Poetry can convey both pleasure and pain. And poetry can make people think. If poetry makes people think, it might make them think constructive thoughts, even thoughts about how to change themselves, their town and their state for the better. Some poems, like many of the great verses in the Bible, can make people think about changing all mankind, even the whole world. Poems, like prayers, possess power.

By the second half of his career, Hughes was indisputably the poet laureate of African American letters. He edited numerous anthologies in different genres. In 1949 he and his great friend, Arna Bontemps, published *The Poetry of the Negro 1746—1949*, which they then revised at the end of Hughes's life. In 1956 he published *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America*, with Milton Melzer, and in 1958, *Famous Negro Heroes of America*. The legendary African magazine *Drum*, which was published out of Johannesburg, asked him to judge their short-story contest in 1954, which began a period of deep involvement with African literature and its dissemination. In 1960 he edited *African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories, and Poems by Black Africans* and in 1963, *Poems from Black Africa, Ethiopia, and Other Countries*. Perhaps his best-known anthology was the 1967 publication, *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers: An Anthology from 1899 to the Present*.

Little has been written about Langston Hughes, the anthologizer, his role as a shaper of African American culture as well as a maker of it. His lifelong encouragement of younger writers is well known. But more ambitiously, his supporting impulse also represents a move to shape American literature by making the work of black writers available, and to shape African American poetry by putting forth a canon that would articulate a literature that grew and developed dramatically over the course of Hughes's life. Hughes, as an anthologizer demonstrates his participation in the making of the context in which his own work would be read and placed as well as his responsibility to his literary community. And his edited collection *New Negro Poets: USA*, which was published in 1964 after a long and noteworthy incubation, allows us to think about African American canon formation at the beginning of a decade of dramatic change.

Anthologies require a tremendous amount of work of a certain kind, and to

succeed they must implicitly tell a story. The act of consolidating and then distilling invites aesthetic and political choices at every turn, the kinds of choices that subsequently come to appear inevitable when we read the anthology and the editorial hand is made invisible. In his essay “A History of American Poetry Anthologies,” Alan C. Golding discusses Elihu Hubbard Smith’s *American Poems, Selected and Original*, which was published in 1793 and represented the first anthology of American poetry. Golding writes:

Smith’s Federalism underlies what he saw as the use of his anthology: to build America’s sense of identity by gathering an independent national literature to match and strengthen the countries newly achieved political independence . . . did share this common goal. The term “American literature,” rarely used before the 1780s, became commonplace after the 1783 Treaty of Paris. Magazines opened their pages to a flood of American writing, as their editors set out crusading pleas for the creation of a “national” literature. . . . [In the nineteenth century] the country still felt an urgent need to assert that it had an indigenous poetry recognizably different from English poetry. (21)

This analysis can be extrapolated to African American anthologies, particularly poetry collections. In his 1921 introduction to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, James Weldon Johnson states plainly:

A people may become great by many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that people are great until they produce great literature and art. No person that has produced great literature and art has ever

been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior. (31)

In the African American context, the tradition, as such, was still in its youth. Johnson's 1921 offering appeared just forty years before Hughes so enthusiastically embarked on NNP. Not all poets choose to choose, which is to say, many poets have no interest at all in the specific work and responsibility of putting together an anthology. Mollifying the tender feeling of fellow Negro poets is a difficult business.

### **Critical Reception to Hughes's Poetry**

The poems of Langston Hughes share a relationship in that they most typically depict the African American experience in the midst of an oppressive white mainstream culture. Some of the poems are strident political protests or social criticism, while other depicts Harlem life including poverty, prejudice, hunger, hopelessness, and other themes. Hughes tried to maintain an artistic detachment despite his deep emotions with respect to the feelings expressed in his poems. He tried, though unsuccessfully in some poems, to depict the universal while at the same time specifically using African American issues, themes, and speech. We see this in the lines of his poem "Colour," "Wear it / Like a banner / for the proud - / Not like a shroud" (Langston 2). We can see in this poem that Hughes' work depicts the universal experience of being ostracized or oppressed for what one cannot change, but we also see it is directly targeting the black experience with such conditions.

Hughes' poems often have a musical rhythm to them, as his lyrics typically rhyme in the ABAB CDCD ABAB CDCD scheme. The music of Harlem, the spirituals of Negro slaves, and other influences like Walt Whitman and W. E. B. Du Bois are evident in these works. In addition to these influences on his poems, Hughes' own love of music imbues his works with a rhythmical flow that could just as easily be sung as spoken. We see this in Dream Variations among countless others of

Hughes' works, "Rest at pale evening... / A tall slim tree... / Night coming tenderly / Black like me" (Langston 1). We can see the song-like nature of the rhyming stanza, but we also see the use of metaphor since the "night" is "black" like the speaker. The connection between nature and the individual is routinely expressed in Hughes' poems, perhaps a sign of Walt Whitman's influence on him. Poems like the one above align the speaker with nature and celebrate the discovery of self and one's place in nature as much as Whitman's *Songs of Myself*.

Some of Hughes' poems were critical enough of society that during the 1950s and McCarthyism the poet was accused of being a communist. Further, Hughes revised many of his poems in the 1940s and 1950s to make them softer. Despite this, he was often criticized by critics - even African American critics. James Baldwin regularly reviewed Hughes' work. Baldwin felt that Hughes was unable to be "within the experience and outside it at the same time" when writing poetry (Hughes 1). In his review of *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Baldwin wrote in the *New York Times*, "Every time I read Langston Hughes I am amazed all over again by his genuine gifts - and depressed that he has done so little with them" (1).

Despite such criticisms, Hughes is at his best when he is depicting the loneliness and isolation of being an African American in an oppressive white society. In a poem called *Crossing* from a section entitled *Death in Harlem*, we see the sad, hopeless state of such individuals, "Then I went down in the valley / And I crossed an icy stream, / And the water I was crossing / Was no water in a dream, / And the shows that I was wearing / No protection for that stream. / Then I stood out on a prairie / And, as far as I could see, / Wasn't anybody on the prairie / That looked like me" (Colum 3). If such poems fail to keep an objective distance from such an experience, it may be less the fault of the poet than the environment which produced him. A poet



is often polished by the grating forces of society, much as a pearl receives its luster from grating bits of sand. As such, Hughes was raised in an oppressive, racist, hostile environment. It is so difficult to imagine the feelings and emotions this environment engendered in him overpower his abilities? It is not that hard to imagine if we turn to Mary M. Colum's 1942 review for the New York Times of Hughes' Shakespeare in Harlem. In her review we see the awful racism that existed during the period, "We agree with Count Kesselring that great art is bound to come out of the Negro; some has come already, but it looks at the moment as if the richest Negro minds had not gone into literature" (Colum 3). Thus is the speakers in the poems in Shakespeare in Harlem are deeply sad, forlorn, and even hopeless, we might understand why such individuals as artists have limitations.

Hughes is a master of language in his poems. Aside from their lyrical quality, the poems use symbolism and code language because they not only depict the African American experience but they typically criticize white America. This is why in many of Hughes' poems the word choice takes on much more meaning for African Americans than it does for many white Americans. We see this in the beginning of one poem, "Hey, pop! / Re-bop! / Mop!" (Langston 2). These words had much more meaning and significance in Harlem than it does to the average reader.

In conclusion, it is difficult to imagine that any writer ever writes in a fashion that is not influence by his or her personal experiences. These efforts are often limited by a variety of factors including economics, health, culture, religion, education, the environment, and others. While these experiences may engender powerful emotions that are beautifully expressed in poetry, they may also limit or develop the artist. In this way we see that many perceive the works of Langston Hughes as limited. These individuals argue his emotional power is not in yoke with his intellectual abilities.

Hughes does pull back in many of these works to show the universal human being behind the African American human being, but in order to convey the harsh emotional experiences had by African Americans he chooses to make his poems harsh. This is a symbol not artistic limitation.

As such, when Hughes does achieve a perfect mixture of emotion and intellect we truly feel his emotion and our own humanity a little more deeply as Baldwin observes, “To fling my arms wide / In some place of the sun, / To whirl and to dance / Till the white day is done. / Then rest at cool evening / Beneath a tall tree / While night comes on gently, / Dark like me - That is my dream!” (Baldwin 1). All this shows that the major themes in Langston Hughes's work grow out of his personal life, his travels, his involvement in radical and protest movements, his interest in Africa and South America as well as the Caribbean, including black Americans' ongoing pursuit—and consistent denial—of racial equality and the American dream of freedom.

In this way, despite his prolific output in other genres, Hughes was known primarily as a poet. He sought to capture in his poetry the voices, experiences, emotions, and spirit of African Americans of his time. Determined to reflect the everyday lives of the working-class culture, he dealt with such controversial topics such as racism.

## **II. A Study on Racism**

Racism is the belief that race is a primary determinant of human traits and capacities and those racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. In other words, racism can be described as the belief that a certain race or races portray undesirable characteristics for the other race. In the case of institutional racism, certain racial groups may be denied rights or benefits, or receive preferential treatment. Racial discrimination typically points out taxonomic differences between different groups of people, although anyone may be discriminated against on an ethnic or cultural basis, independently of their somatic differences. According to the United States conventions, there is no distinction between the term racial discrimination and ethnic discrimination.

Today, the term racism is widely and variedly used. In the West it appears to be a recent phenomenon. The historical roots of racism disappeared. However, racism itself did not. Rather, new racist ideas evolved all the way from the classical antiquity, utilizing the images of medieval thought and the colour symbolisms of Christianity to expose discriminatory practices right into the modern period. Paul Gilroy says: "The new racism primarily concerned with mechanism of exclusion or inclusion" (250). As there is no direct racism in the world, contemporary form of racism links itself to discourses such as patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, gender differences. These themes combine to provide a definition of race in terms of culture and identity. Racism's link to different institutions of the society is the newness of racism in contemporary approach. Although races are socially imagined and not biologically real categories, human beings continue to act as if they were real; and as long as they do so, race becomes real in its consequences.

Moreover, institutional racism relies on the active and pervasive operation of

anti-black attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group prevails. The statement “whites are better than blacks, therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites” (Racism 12 ) is a racist attitude and it permeates the society, on both the individual and institutional level. Racism is not a stable ideological form consisting of the same assumptions for a long period. It accepts the new scholarly ideas to be maintained in the society. Rather rejecting all the epithets of singularity, it prefers different shapes and different political relations. In Gilroy’s words “Racist ideologies and practices have distinct meanings bounded by historical circumstances and determined in struggle” (248). The struggle of racist ideology takes itself to attachment with other forms of ideology. Consequently racism arises with its distinctive characteristics and shapes.

The notions like Negro race is inferior race which lacks social organization and social action, social fellow feeling, originality of thought and artistic qualities and shows no tendency towards higher development; the achieved a higher social and intellectual civilization, reflect the racist attitude. The principles of race orthodoxy, says George W. Ellis, in Prof. Thomas Pearce Bailey’s words like “the white race must dominate; the negro is inferior and will remain so, this is a white man’s country; no social equality; no political equality; let there be such industrial education of the negro as will best fit to serve the white man; let the lowest white man count for more than the highest negro” (Racism 16) are the essentials of racial creed and action.

Regarding race Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton say, “Racist assumptions of white superiority have been so deeply engrained into the fiber of the society that they infuse the entire functioning of the national subconscious” (31). Thus racism is ubiquitous and informs every level of discourse in American society.

Although the term racism usually denotes race-based prejudice, violence, dislike,

discrimination, or oppression, the term can also have varying and contested definitions. Racism is a related term, sometimes intended to avoid these negative meanings. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, racism is a belief or ideology that all members of each racial group possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially to distinguish it as being either superior or inferior to another racial group or racial groups. *The Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines racism as a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and those racial differences produce an inherent superiority or inferiority of a particular racial group, and that it is also the prejudice based on such a belief.

Similarly, *The Macquarie Dictionary* defines racism as: "the belief that human races have distinctive characteristics which determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule or dominate others." The concept that discrimination can be based on "race" presupposes the existence of "race" itself. However, the US Government's Human Genome Project has announced that the most complete mapping of human DNA to date indicates that there is no distinct genetic basis to racial types. Based on this evidence, "racial characteristics" logically cannot exist either, such as group differences in eye color or human hair color.

The American race situation is very significant since it is the most complex and dynamic. It challenges the further progress of Christianity and civilization in the foremost democracy of the earth. Hence it presents the acid test to the culture of the most modern and progressive branch of the white race. Reflecting factors of American race prejudice George W. Ellis says:

In the United States race prejudice is predicted upon the belief that the colored race is naturally inferior to the white race, physically,

intellectually, religiously, socially and morally. As a matter of fact it is actually based upon the advantages, temporary and imaginary, which the white groups believe they derive from this superior attitude to the colored groups economically, politically and socially. A historical study of these beliefs others to the abnormal American situation and that in their broadest sense they are ethnological and sociological. (11)

Thus, in America the practice of racism that is predicted on the belief that one is superior to another is much more deep-rooted. Though the society is itself plural, the binary projection of whiteness and blackness is much more practiced. Afro-Americans are understood racially “Others” more strongly than the Native Americans and the Asian Americans though the latter, too, are culturally different from Anglo-Americans.

According to Charles V Hamilton and Kwame Ture, “racism is the predication of decisions & policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group (ethnicity) and maintaining control over that group” (5). Some sociologists have defined racism as a system of group privilege. In *Portraits of White Racism*, David Wellman has defined racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs, which, regardless of intentions involved, defend the advantages whites have because of the subordinated position of racial minorities” (6). Sociologists Noël A. Cazenave and Darlene Alvarez Maddern define racism as “. . . a highly organized system of 'race'-based group privilege that operates at every level of society and is held together by a sophisticated ideology of color/'race' supremacy. Sellers and Shelton (2003) found that a relationship between racial discrimination and emotional distress was moderated by racial ideology and public regard beliefs. That is, racial centrality appears to promote the degree of discrimination African American young adults

perceive whereas racial ideology may buffer the detrimental emotional effects of that discrimination. Racist systems include, but cannot be reduced to, racial bigotry. Sociologist and former American Sociological Association president Joe Feagin argues that the United States can be characterized as a "total racist society" (8) because racism is used to organize every social institution.

Racism, however, is not considered in terms of individuals and groups, but also the spatial community which reflects the institutional and social life of black people. The black community, like other communities, is defined by its sharing of common space, experiences, views and the value systems, social institutions and self-consciousness. Its common space, however, is a bounded area of living—a ghetto—which not only closes blacks in the community, but simultaneously shuts them out from the access to various opportunities available there.

Notions of race and racism often have played central roles in such ethnic conflicts. Historically, when an adversary is identified as "other" based on notions of race or ethnicity (particularly when "other" is construed to mean "inferior"), the means employed by the self-presumed "superior" party to appropriate territory, human chattel, or material wealth often have been more ruthless, more brutal, and less constrained by moral or ethical considerations. According to historian Daniel Richter, Pontiac's Rebellion saw the emergence on both sides of the conflict of "the novel idea that all Native people were 'Indians,' that all Euro-Americans were 'Whites and that all on one side must unite to destroy the other'" (25). Basil Davidson insists in his documentary, *Africa: Different but Equal*, that "racism, in fact, only just recently surfaced—as late as the 1800s, due to the need for a justification for slavery in the Americas" (12).

Racism, as Marxist theory defines, is a reflection of the main population of

workers by the capitalist class to divide them along racial lines and reduce their capacity to struggle against the system. This results in encouraging discrimination against blacks, arguing their inferiority, use of blacks as a surplus, marginal low-paid working force, and establishing privileged better-paid racist white labor force. Thus, racism is a function of class struggle, not an independent variable itself. Racism which begins with the creation and mystification of race is social thought and practice which expresses itself in three basic ways-imposition, ideology and institutional arrangement.

### **Racial Clash**

Racism has been a motivating factor in social discrimination, racial segregation, hate speech and violence (such as pogroms, genocides and ethnic cleansings). Despite the persistence of racial stereotypes, humor and epithets in much everyday language, racial discrimination is illegal in many countries. Ironically, anti-racism has also become a political instrument of abuse. Some politicians have practiced race baiting in an attempt to win votes. In a reversal of values, anti-racism is being propagated by despots in the service of obscurantism and the suppression of women. As philosopher said Pascal Bruckner: "Anti-racism in the UN has become the ideology of totalitarian regimes that use it in their own interests" (64). To Bruckner the anti-racism does not cause any good to the entire structure of the society. In one sense it is a kind of revenge. It is indeed a sort of discourse developed by the people in power.

Racial clash is one of the most prominent elements of contemporary socio-political unrest. The Afro-American was first introduced in America as a slave in 1619. Afro-Americans, the then Negroes, as explorers and as servants in large numbers come with the first Europeans as they set out to exploit the resources of the



New World. From the sixteenth century onward, Europeans range the earth conquering native peoples and establishing themselves as conquering and ruling aristocracies. Then especially during the seventeenth century, ruling white men and subjugate black men become increasingly conscious of their racial differences.

Until the late eighteenth century, thinking on race is distinguished chiefly by its verbosity. In theory, Christianity argues that all men are spiritually alike in the eyes of God, but in practice, all sorts of arguments can be found to prove the inferiority of the black people. By the late eighteenth century, the Enlightenment is full swing, and efforts are made for the first time to assure a scientific understanding of race.

Distinctions are made between “higher” and “lower” races. European whites are placed at the summit in the hierarchy of races. With the onset of imperialism in the late nineteenth century it becomes necessary to show that weaker race should die out to make room for the stronger. Racialism becomes more and more irrational. The only important thing is to prove the inferior races as “outsiders,” a kind of racial proletariat with the firm objective to keep them under subjugation.

The history of America begins with the grabbing of the land from Native Americans and enforcing the blacks to cultivate the land. It consequently creates hierarchies in color and division of land. The whites establish a system of privilege in terms of oppression and exploitation. Harris and Ordonea say:

The social division along the color line crossed class, nationality, language, and religious barriers. The simple fact of “whiteness” meant the overall life, fortune, and destiny of white people. White people were exempt from slavery, land grab, and genocide-the first form of white privilege. Whites enjoyed wide latitude of opportunities, personal freedom, and democratic rights protected by the State. Even

though poor American-born and immigrant whites were viciously exploited by rich white people, they were not on the bottom. The bottom was reserved for Indians, blacks, and other people of color.  
(27-28)

Thus, the American society was clearly based on exploitation. Previously rich white people and later on the whites in general excessively exploited Indians and especially blacks and marginalized them.

The history of American society is a history of oppression and migration. American geographical and cultural space has provided limitless potential to the whites since its settlement, but the blacks have been denied such spaces. Their African heritage and later the southern-ness are repudiated by the larger culture. Over the different historical even-slavery, emancipation, migration, and integration they tried to negotiate their relationship with their cultural traditions. But the white race and its cultural heritage consistently marginalized them. Therefore, it will not be hyperbolic to state that American history itself is a practice of contentious racism. Barbara Trepagnier's research shows that virtually all whites hold some negative stereotypes and assumptions about African Americans and other racial-ethnic minorities, what she calls silent racism.

In her book, *Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide* (2006), Barbara Trepagnier demonstrates “how the negative stereotypes and assumptions of whites reproduce institutional racism, also known as systemic racism” (9). She argues that the oppositional categories commonly used to think about racism—Racist and Not Racist—hide silent racism and other insidious forms such as color-blind racism. Replacing the outdated categories with a continuum labeled More Racist and Less Racist would expose these subtle forms of racism that

are more closely linked to racial injustice than outright bigotry is.

Historically, the Black power era has been seen as dawning in 1965--ushered in by the Watts rebellion, which started just five days after the Voting Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson.

Joseph argues that, in fact, the roots of Black Power run much deeper. He locates them in the miserable conditions Blacks faced in big cities across the North. Malcolm was famous for chiding civil rights activists for focusing on the South when "their own Northern ghettos, right at home, had enough rats and roaches to kill to keep all of the Freedom Riders busy. The North's liberals have been so long pointing accusing fingers at the South and getting away with it that they have fits when they are exposed as the world's worst hypocrites. Long before the rebellions of the 1960s, Blacks rioted in Harlem in 1935 and 1943, and in Detroit, a riot in 1943 was rooted in the same injustices that would produce the most destructive rebellion of its time in 1967.

Joseph details the Black political experience in Detroit where Black political activists regularly organized against racism in housing, employment and police brutality long before the civil rights movement gained momentum. The culmination of much of this early organizing was the Walk for Freedom, which brought out more than 125,000 predominantly Black protesters--two months before the better-known March on Washington in August 1963.

Joseph argues that a combination of existing conditions in the North combined with a series of Third World rebellions and revolutions--in which peoples of color rose up against white colonial domination--established the early political roots of the Black Power era: "While Black Power activists admired civil rights insurgency, and even joined civil rights groups in hopes of pushing them further to the left, black

militants across the country laid the groundwork for turning local initiatives into an alternative national movement” (13). The focus on the politics of Black power predating the "civil rights insurgency" is useful in attempting to convey the scope of American racism--that it extended beyond the Jim Crow South into Northern ghettos, and that Northern Blacks were bound to fight against it. However, to overstate this point is to dismiss or downplay the extent to which the civil rights movement was a central factor in the radicalization of Black students and workers, who witnessed both the federal government and white liberals bend over backwards to get Blacks to accept the political status quo.

Joseph skillfully lays out this intersecting history, depicting characters from both the North and South to underline his theme that the fight against racism was not regional, but involved Blacks across the U.S. The book brings to life little-known actors in the Black freedom struggle and provides a real sense of the breadth of the movement. However, once Joseph reaches the point where Black power is formally introduced, his sweeping style presents some problems.

The main problem is that by trying to capture everything that happens, Joseph misses some of the important high points of the period. For example, Martin Luther King's "open housing" campaign in Chicago is mentioned only parenthetically--even though this represented a major turning point away from the civil rights legislative strategy, and was representative of why many turned to Black power: a major northern city in which Blacks were trapped by racism and segregation in housing, employment and education, even though no law formally restricted their access. Also, the formation of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement in the summer of 1968--a Marxist organization of Black autoworkers that spread through industry across Detroit--was arguably the most important political development of the Black

Power era. But in *Waiting 'Till the Midnight Hour*, it gets no more than a few paragraphs. Joseph has clearly focused on the Black Power movement as experienced by Black students, intellectuals and activists, while not looking as closely as Black Power as an expression of the anger of Black workers.

Perhaps because of this, Joseph does not respond to the incoherence of Black Power in its ascendancy--Black power for whom; how was that "power" to be achieved; and to what end was "power" to be established? These became important questions as self-described revolutionaries, Black nationalists and Black Marxists, as well as Black businessmen, Black conservatives, and even Richard Nixon looked favorably on what they all referred to as Black Power.

Moreover, as movement activists shifted their focus to electoral politics within the Democratic Party by the mid-1970s, even more questions were raised. Joseph seems to embrace this turn to electoral politics, commenting on the largest political convention of the Black power era. In "Embracing Protest and Politics," Gary illustrated the new political understanding that revolution, far from being the hundred-yard dash that many predicted during the late 1960s, was in fact a marathon that required a community of long-distance runners" (43). While this was always undeniable, in his epilogue, Joseph ducks the historical fallout from the turn to the Democratic Party. He fails to review any of the records of Black mayors and Black elected officials from the mid-1970s to the present. Instead, he offers cover for them, with this formulation:

In the post-Black power era African Americans took control over metropolitan centers at the very moment that cities were, due to federal neglect, shrinking tax bases and loss of industries, made most vulnerable to crime, poverty and failing public schools. We can guess how Black Power activists might have helped ease the

heartbreaking transition from the hopeful Great Society rhetoric of the 1960s to the conservatism that characterized the Reagan revolution of the 1980s. (32)

But we do know that many who were active in the movement of the 1960s went on to become political players in big city politics, and far from attenuating the degree to which racism defined the lives of Black workers, many of the activists-turned-politicians sought to manage budget crises on the backs of Black workers--using their movement credentials to get away with it. These issues are still critical. Many of the same conditions that inspired the Black Power "mood" exist today--racism, unemployment, segregation, discrimination and inequality. Moreover, after 35 years of Black political leaders operating within the fold of the Democratic Party, the majority of Blacks have little to show for it--raising the inevitable question about the viability of that strategy, then as well as today. Despite these issues, however, Penile Joseph's book is a great introduction into this very important and sometimes marginalized period of the 1960s.

In the revolt against historical exploitation, beatings, jailing, and killings of Civil Rights activists, blacks in the communities across the nation began striking out in rage; in Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, Newark and Detroit in 1967 and nearly every city in the nation in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Responding to the needs of the black lower class, some groups promoted the development of an indigenous African-based cultural value system, ritualized in the ceremony of Kwanzaa, a holiday celebrated from December 26 through January 1 to reinforce the spiritual ties of black Americans to Africa. Others, such as the Black Panther party, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), the Republic of New Africa, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, adopted the ideology and strategy of achieving black self-determination by any means necessary, including

armed struggle.

The Afro-American literature, Afro-American novel in particular, is concerned with illuminating the meaning of the black American experience and the complex double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision which is the special burden and blessing of Afro-American identity. Contributing to the complexity and diversity of the Afro-American novel is the fact that the first generation of novelists did not rely solely on folklore for creative inspiration and form, but drew heavily on abolitionist literature-the Bible, and popular fiction. The Afro-American literature, after the Civil War, revealed a preoccupation with the struggle of black Americans for freedom from color and caste discrimination as they affirmed their humanity in the process of defining and developing themselves as an ethnic community and as individuals.

Almost all Afro-American novelists and poets, more or less, focus on bringing home to their reader, especially the white American reader, the irrationality of the color line that prevents blacks from a full and free participation in American life. Afro-American poem relates to the problems of an individual existence that is caught in the difficulties of extricating itself from the surrounding images, myths, stereotypes, and values in order to see it and to be seen clearly and unflinchingly as it really is. Moreover, the Afro-American poets especially Hughes expresses their moral values as part of their uncompromising dedication to truth. Many afro-American novelists and poets seem to suggest that an individual runs the risks of creating problems and tensions within himself when his self concept is tied not to his own experiences but to others' perspectives on his personality. Similarly, many Afro-American novelists and poets see the precarious closeness of black American life to white middle-class values as the primary sources of the confusion and anguish that an

individual experiences in his progress towards self-understanding. These poets and novelists do express their concern for the individual by revealing the emptiness and pathos in the lives of their characters and personas that seem to have little freedom to find their moorings in a society from which they have no escape.

Hughes' poems are of revolting nature and carry on the seeds of political and social consciousness. Basically his poem "Harlem" reflects on the fact that the dream Afro-Americans have ever seen remains unfulfilled and the very dream refers to the Black American people's dream for the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; for equality, liberty and fraternity; for opportunity in the land of prosperity; for a respected life and dignified ethnic identity and so on which America is good at promising in loud voice. The images used in the poem represent American dreams of equality and success that are denied to most Afro-Americans. A sweet gone bad is all of the broken promises of emancipation and reconstruction, integration, equal opportunity. The dream Martin Luther King Jr. had seen for integration between blacks and whites of America, is getting postponed. This is why Hughes is much worried and expresses his anguish through his poems. His other poems planned for this research do talk about the problems that are still unsolved regarding the political and social rights of blacks in the United States. Pertaining to the poems composed by Hughes, R. Baxter Miller states:

Hughes's poetry is a much powerful weapon to reveal the tormenting plight of the Afro-Americans and how they are deprived of the human rights in every aspect of their life. Indeed his poems add a precious asset to the black literature to crave out problems the blacks have ever faced in America and felt prevented from getting the respectful social status. (21)



The criticism made above makes it crystal clear that Hughes a revolutionary poet who through his writings has cooperated with the entire team of black writers intensely gathered in Harlem to fight against the white hegemony and create milieu for their respectful citizenry life in America.

The following chapter explores racial revolt in Hughes's poems: "Harlem," "Cross," "Dream Variations," "Democracy," "Oppression," "The Weary Blues," "A New Song," and "Song for a Dark Girl."

### **III. Expression of Racial Revolt in Hughes' Poetry**

Langston Hughes' poetry often deals with themes of national and racial identity, frequently focusing on the problems inherent in being black in the United States during the period in which he was writing. Another popular theme that unites the other two is the period Hughes looked forward to in which there was no more racism, in which the African American will be as free from racism as the white person. These themes are central to his poems which speak of the oppression of blacks in the first half of the twentieth century and the conflicting emotions caused by that oppression.

"Harlem" focuses on the conditions of a people whose dreams have been limited, put off, or lost in the post-World War II Harlem. More broadly, the dream in this poem refers to the Black American people's dream for the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness;" for equality, liberty and fraternity; for identity, and so on, which America is good at promising in loud voices, if not to let them have or give. Hughes has attempted to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America. Harlem questions the social consequences of so many deferred dreams.

The poem is in the form of a series of questions a certain inhabitant of Harlem asks: what happens to a dream deferred? He does try to answer tentatively, but his questions are more telling than the attempt at an answer. The poem develops a series of images of decay and waste, representing the dream or the dreamer's predicament. While many of the possible consequences affect only the individual dreamer, the end of the poem suggest that when despair is widely prevalent it may "explode" and cause larger social damages.

The first image in the poem proposes that the dream dries up like a raisin. This simile likens the original dream to a grape, which is round, juicy, green and fresh.

Since the dream has been neglected for too long, it has probably dried up. The next simile of the sore conveys a sense of infection and pain. Comparing the dream to a sore on the body, the poet suggests that unfulfilled dreams become part of us, like longstanding injury that has gathered pus! Neglected injuries may lead to infection, even death. The word “fester” connotes seething decay and “run” literally refers to pus. From the viewpoint of the speaker, this denotes to the pain that one has when one’s dream always defers. A postponed dream is like a painful injury that begins to be infected.

The next question, “Does it stink like rotten meat?” intensifies the sense of disgust. A dream deferred may also stink. With the smell of rotten meat, Hughes suggests that dreams deferred will pester one continually, making one sick until they are cared for. The rotten meat is also deadly to eat. The poet de-escalates the disastrous results of ignoring or blacking one’s dreams. A crusted, syrupy sweet will not kill people as meat or sores may, but the image again connotes waste, neglect, and decay. A sweet treat, like a dream, begins as something one yearns for and anticipates eagerly. If it sits unused too long, however, it spoils and leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Onwuchekwa Jemic notes: “the sweet may represent American dream of equality and success that are denied to most African Americans. The American dream itself may have gone bad from misuse and false promises” (7). Hughes implies that although neglecting dreams may yield varied and unforeseeable horrors, one thing is certain: deferred dream itself may go down physically and emotionally as heavily as a load of bricks.

He sets off and italicizes to emphasize the larger consequences of mass dissatisfaction. Here he implies that an explosion may occur hurting, or killing those in the vicinity of the explosion as well as the afflicted individuals. Hughes is implying

that whereas the dream is deferred primarily weighs on, infects, bothers, and saddens the frustrated dreamer; eventually the epidemic of frustration will hurt everyone.

The poem talks about two types of dreams – African American and American Dream, both deferred in the case of Blacks. Blacks could never experience that unalienable rights ensured (even in papers) by the American Declaration of Independence. The dream of Blacks of equality did not actually come true but only became burden, and it is the central issue of the poem. Structure of the poem also suggests the ugly and jagged condition of Blacks. Langston Hughes' poetry expresses a sense of racial revolt against white-dominated racist American society through succinct and absorbing visual images to foreground the sufferings of African Americans and to suggest ways to correct discriminatory social phenomena.

But in reality, if black people are fighting because of racial inequality, which is the rule in the United States, the origin of this inequality resides in the division of society into classes. It is because they belong to an oppressed racial minority that black people live in slums, are super-exploited, and are "the last hired into the worst jobs and the first fired." But because society is divided into classes there exist badly paid labor, slums and unemployment. All this was not specially invented to oppress black people: these are the products of industrial capitalism. Racial discrimination has simply made sure that the most super-exploited strata of the proletariat are black in a society based on exploitation, whether that exploitation be veiled or openly brutal, those set off by any particularity whether of race, religion or culture are always at a disadvantage. The dominant class quickly finds biological, religious or legal justifications for the situation it imposes on other classes.

Since the situation of the black population derives from the division of society into classes, the black revolt poses a danger to American capitalism. The American

bourgeoisie can do nothing for black people. To eliminate racism, the bourgeoisie would have to be capable of eliminating super-exploitation, slums and unemployment. Of course, blacks are not fighting to eliminate unemployment: they are fighting so as not to be its main victims, so that the color of one's skin doesn't automatically determine who is fired and who is hired. But this is impossible in American society so long as there is a single unemployed worker. The division of society into classes exists independent of racial oppression. But when racial division and social oppression exist simultaneously, social oppression easily follows the paths worn by habit and custom, by national and racial prejudices. The only minorities who escape this general rule are those who have been endowed by a fluke of history with more culture than the racial group composing the majority of the population, or whom historical development has integrated into the ruling class.

Although Langston Hughes's parents were both black, he well understood the confusion and conflict that a person of mixed heritage experienced and expressed a sense of revolt on behalf of those mulattoes. This shows how racism has tortured them especially in the poem, "Cross." The title of the poem contains several meanings, all of which underscore the main theme, that is, the inner turmoil the speaker feels because of his/her mixed racial heritage. In "Cross," Hughes writes:

My old man's a white old man  
 And my old mother's black.  
 If ever I cursed my white old man  
 I take my curses back.  
 If ever I cursed my black old mother. (1-5)

The speaker has been angry, or "cross," with his father and mother for passing on to him an admixture of genes. After his anger subsides, he forgives them but remains in

turmoil over his mixed heritage. The speaker "carries a cross," for his mixed racial heritage. The title also symbolizes the crucifixion. The speaker hangs nailed to a cross, like Christ, suffering persecution even though he has done no wrong like the blacks of mixed race. After forgiving his father and mother, the speaker stands at a crossroad. The road to the right is for white people. The road to the left is for black people. This is how Hughes revolts against racial ideology.

In another poem, "Dream Variations," Langston Hughes utilizes repetition, tone, and foreshadowing to convey the message of revolt for freedom. Initially, this poem was written against racism. Langston Hughes' tone in this poem is used to express an aspiration towards the end of racial barriers. The tone of the poem provides a visual of a gentleman who describes his desires for freedom. Freedom to dream and to have an average life as any other people could. The tone is also found within the title, "Dream Variations", it conceals that the poem is going to convey certain dreams that are of much importance to him.

Furthermore, in the line "Night coming tenderly Black likes me," (Line 16), the poet's attitude is optimistic that soon there will non be race barriers and we will all learn to give each other personal freedom. Langston Hughes' use of foreshadowing highlights important factors in the mid-1960s. Hughes' use of dreams is a foreshadowing device to illustrate the relation among different races. Everyone has a dream, and a simple dream such as a "Dance! Whirl! Whirl!" should be given to anyone/ Till the white day is done" (12-13). The poet shifts the poem and the reader is left to wonder, will things change for African Americans?

Moreover, another device used by Langston Hughes is repetition. Hughes' use of repetition restates the fact that every race has dreams, which concludes that we are all the same deep inside. This quote demonstrates how the speaker alike other race has

similar dreams of freedom. “To fling my arms wide in some place of the sun,” (Line 1), the speaker has simple dreams that should be simple rights of any human-being. There is also symbolism within the title, it describes a variation of dreams an African American has at a time of racism in America. Thus, Langston Hughes’s “Dream Variations” is an example of racial inequalities and his revolt throughout the use of repetition, tone, and foreshadowing.

Hughes’ racial revolt is reflected from the poem, 7 “Oppression,” as he writes:

In some lands  
 Dark night  
 And cold steel  
 Prevail  
 But the dream  
 Will come back,  
 And the song  
 Break  
 Its jail. (6-14).

Although the poet expresses his helplessness in the first stanza of this poem, Hughes expresses his strong belief that the black’s “dream will come back” and their “song” – of revolt – “break its jail”. This means the songs of blacks can have the potentiality to break all the barriers.

Black people are more and more ready to resort to violence because of the inability of American society to meet their demands. And this prompts the so-called friends of black people on both sides of the Atlantic to say that their revolt is not "constructive." A primary expression of this conflict was the formers’ depiction of the "low-life", that is, the real lives of blacks in the lower social-economic strata and the

superficial divisions and prejudices based on skin color within the black community” (32). Hughes wrote what would be considered the manifesto for him and his contemporaries published in *The Nation* in 1926, *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*.

Hughes, a typical black himself speaks on behalf of the all exploited blacks due to their color and class in the United States of America and when suppression crosses the limit of tolerance, he pens and revolts by sowing the seed of revolution and consciousness among those black fellows who have been slumbering since the time immemorial. Thus Hughes says in “A New Song”:

I speak in the name of the black millions  
Awakening to action.  
Let all others keep silent a moment  
I have this word to bring,  
This thing to say,  
This song to sing:  
Bitter was the day  
When I bowed my back  
Beneath the slaver's whip.  
That day is past. (1-10)

Hughes confesses the fact that he speaks the voice of millions of the blacks who have ever been the victims of trials and tribulations in their own nation which claims to be the most democratic and advocates in the favor and respect of freedom and human rights. Hence Hughes finds the citizens due to being black and not being whites in very dominated and suppressive situation. He tends to awaken people of black color from their slumbering stance and let them be precautionary about the diplomatic and



strategic steps of the whites who are preoccupied with the heinous concept that they are superior to the blacks. This is why it is their human duty to civilize the fellow citizens. In fact this sense of superiority complex has overpowered them to oppress the black race and make them live the second class citizens in their own nation.

But Hughes throws the sparks of change in the life of blacks who used to be slaves to the whites and remained silent and docile even if they were exploited and punished physically by the white masters. Now the situation has changed in such a way that the blacks can feel and understand the exploitation done over them. He further attempts to energize people to stand up and fight for their looted rights. He does see the relief and welfare of the blacks only in revolution and takes revolt as means to grasp their life that is raped in a much degrading way. Thus he says:

Tense,  
 Unyielding,  
 Strong and sure,  
 They sweep the earth-  
 Revolt! Arise!  
 The Black  
 [...]The past is done!  
 A new dream flames  
 Against the  
 Sun! (45-54)

The language he uses hereby is full of revolts and suggestions. He indirectly warns the whites that the situation of the blacks has changed and now they are aware of their life, liberty and pursuit of happiness which they have been deprived of for long time. They cannot bear torture and domination of the whites and even they are not going to

live slavish life any more. After all the past which was much miserable and beyond tolerance is over now.

The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express their individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased the blacks are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. The blacks know they are beautiful and ugly, too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased the artists are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. The artists build their temples for tomorrow, strong as they know how, and they stand on top of the mountain free within them.

His main concern is the uplift of his people, of whom he judges himself the adequate appreciator, and whose strengths, resiliency, courage, and humor he wants to record as part of the general American experience. Thus, his poetry and fiction center generally on insightful views of the working class lives of blacks in America, lives he portrays as full of struggle, joy laughter, and music. Permeating his work is pride in the African American identity and its diverse culture. "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind,"(36). Hughes is quoted as saying: "Therefore, in his work he confronts racial stereotypes, protests social conditions, and expands African America's image of itself; a 'people's poet' who sought to reeducate both audience and artist by lifting the theory of the black aesthetic into reality. An expression of this is the poem "My People" (37-38)

In several of his poems, Hughes has expressed with ardent voice sociopolitical protests. He portrays people, whose lives are impacted by racism and sexual conflicts, he writes about southern violence, Harlem street life, poverty, prejudice, hunger, hopelessness. But basically he is a conscientious artist, keeps his middle-of-the road

stance and works hard to chronicle the black American experience, contrasting the beauty of the soul with the oppressive circumstance.

Hughes ponders the fact and shows ardent reaction to the music, jazz much instrumental to the colored people to express their protest and revolts against the white hegemony during 1920. He states:

. . . jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile. Yet the Philadelphia clubwoman is ashamed to say that her race created it and she does not like me to write about it, the old subconscious "white is best" runs through her mind (21).

The black people are stereotyped in such a way that they and their tasks are despised by the whites and even the blacks feel ashamed of their life and creation. In the above excerpt, it has been pretty clear that jazz plays has played a commendable and dependable source of expressing the protests and revolts and helped the blacks to fight for their citizenry rights by playing on it. This is why the significance of the jazz music is so high and appreciative.

Hughes as a typical figure does not want democracy where there is fear and compromise. To compromise refers to the weakness and poor state of the blacks. He prefers here to take rights back not being much docile and humble but through revolution and complete rights with pride and prestige should be grasped. Wherever is fear and compromise, democracy cannot be. The fear of something deprives people of enjoying the rights of all sorts. In the poem, "Democracy": Hughes avers:

Democracy will not come

Today, this year  
 Nor ever  
 Through compromise and fear.  
 I have as much right  
 As the other fellow has  
 To stand  
 On my two feet  
 And own the land (1-9)

Hughes sounds much philosophical and political in the sense that he makes it sure that democracy does not exist provided that there is fear and compromise. To compromise signifies the cowardice plight of the one group against another. Hence the dichotomy between the blacks and the whites craves out the picture that the blacks have ever been enslaved and now they do agree with the lives they are obliged to live. If they accept without any dissent, it will become some sort of compromise. In fact they get ready to consent on the prevalent situation is their fear. Thus both fear and compromise must be discarded and wiped out from the domain in order to let it remain democratic.

As a matter of fact Hughes talks about the fundamental and political rights of the blacks and further assures all the blacks that they are as equal as other human beings in the United States of America are especially the whites. He erases the boundary and hierarchy created between the blacks and whites. He despises the false grading system that the blacks are inferior to the whites. Implicitly he evokes the sense of equality and equity among the fellows of his race. In “Democracy” he further says:

I tire so of hearing people say,

Let things take their course.

Tomorrow is another day.

I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.

I cannot live on tomorrow's bread. (10-14)

The dream Martin Luther King Jr. had seen long time before has ever been postponed and the genuine demands of the black race have never been taken into consideration. Hence the poet is much concerned with the lingering process of fulfilling the desires of the blacks and expresses sadness that the blacks cannot wait any more and they need the immediate treatment of their sore which always troubles them. Hence sore is not physical but political. The urgency of their cure must be paid attention to. Hughes on the behalf of all the dominated and oppressed blacks says strongly that they cannot live with hope of getting the bread tomorrow since they are hungry today and this is why their hunger and thirst should be quenched today. They are so tired that they cannot continue their journey with empty belly. On the whole it becomes crystal clear the poet displays the intensity of awareness that is there in the black race.

Freedom sprouts in the field that is much fertile and respects all sorts of plants equally whether they are weeds or corns. Similarly freedom is relative to the people who are dominated and marginalized in the country which claims to have been the most democratic one. The blacks are politically marginalized and are pushed to the powerless position. They stay in the place but do not own the place which is genuinely with them in America. This is why the poet is terribly aggressive and expresses his anger about the need of freedom. He focuses on immediacy of freedom and liberty of the black race that is the bulk of rubbish to the white people. As a matter of fact they need freedom when they undergo distinct challenges and complexities pertaining to the survival and prestigious human and political being of

the nation they live in. In “Democracy” he asserts:

Freedom  
 Is a strong seed  
 Planted  
 In a great need.  
 [...]Oppression  
 Now dreams  
 Are not available  
 To the dreamers,  
 Nor songs  
 To the singers.  
 In some lands Dark night  
 And cold steel  
 Prevail  
 But the dream  
 Will come back,  
 And the song Break  
 Its jail (15-31)

He shows the fact that dream every black has ever seen does not turn true. However, he confides that it will turn true later. With this confidence black Americans are living in America and they do have patience regarding that one as well. Further he craves out the picture where things which are interdependent are not asunder. This is indeed against the law of nature. Such things do not indicate the good omen and may invite many other problems.

In the poem, “The Weary Blues” Hughes appears much implicit while dealing

with the themes of the revolt and protest. The way he expresses his wants and revolutionary ideas is of great prominence. Thus he says:

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon  
 I heard a Negro play.  
 Down on Lenox Avenue the other night  
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
 He did a lazy sway...  
 He did a lazy sway...  
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.  
 [...]Coming from a black man's soul.  
 O Blues!  
 In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
 I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan. (1-12)

The speaker or the singer seems to have in his moaning blues, the revelation of "a black man's soul," and those blues are what helps keep him alive. Part of that ability to sustain is apparently the way the blues help him keep his identity. Even in singing the blues, he is singing about his life, about the way that he and other blacks have to deal with white society. As his black hands touch the white keys, the accepted Western sound of the piano and the form of Western music are changed. The piano itself comes to life as an extension of the singer, and moans, transformed by the black tradition to a mirror of black sorrow that also reflects the transforming power and beauty of the black tradition. Finally, it is that tradition that helps keep the singer alive and gives him his identity, since when he is done and goes to bed he sleeps like an inanimate or de-animated object, with the blues echoing beyond his playing, beyond

the daily cycles, and through both conscious and unconscious states.

Another source of the melancholy aura in the excerpt is the lack of an actual connection between the performer and the speaker. They do not strike up a conversation, share a drink, or anything else. The speaker observes, helpless to do anything about the performer and his weariness save to write the poem and try to understand the performer's experiences and how they relate to his own. Ultimately he finds the man and his songs wistfully compelling; and he hears in his song the collective weary blues of blacks in America and tries to reconcile the sadness with the sweetness of the form and expression.

The above extract combines traditional blues stanzas that emphasize the roots of African-American experience, touches of vaudeville blues as the roots were being "refined," pride in African-American creativity and forms of expression, and a sense of the weariness that ties together generations of African-Americans.

In the same way Hughes discloses the fact how blacks and whites are disintegrated and live in the segregated conditions and have much difficult life which does not seem any close to peace, prosperity and social harmony that reflects the commendable face of humanity. By exposing he conveys the message that till whites and blacks are prejudiced and go on being skeptic to each other, the success will not be achieved. Thus in the poem "Harlem" Hughes says:

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over-

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode? (1-6)



Questions that are answers; a penultimate answer so tentative that it more resembles a question; stanza divisions which partially obscure our perception of the poem as a trio of paired oppositions progressing from outer to inner; a rhyme scheme which--at odds with the typography--reinforces the division into paired oppositions, all result in a poem in conflict with itself, pulled in different directions by some of its most basic constituent elements. Yet this surely calculated failure is the measure of the poem's success. Its disintegration mirrors the continuing failure of American society to achieve harmonious integration of blacks and whites. In this regard Allen says: "Few poems so well illustrate Charles Olson's sometimes puzzling dictum, "Form is never more than an extension of content" (Allen 387).

Hughes reveals the fact that colored women do suffer much and they need much reformation in their group and they feel suffocated and cannot utter their miseries and problems. The whites torture and rape them in order to teach them a sort of lesson that they are inferior to them and thus Hughes carves out a picture of the suffering of the black women by indicating his own experience in the poem "Song for a Dark Girl":

Way Down South in Dixie  
 (Break the heart of me)  
 They hung my black young lover  
 To a cross roads tree.  
 Way Down South in Dixie  
 (Bruised body high in air)  
 I asked the white Lord Jesus  
 What was the use of prayer. (1-8)

Hence the poet complains to the lord Jesus and says if people are exploited and

women are badly and rudely mishandled by the cruel whites and the lord remains silent and avers the fact that there, what is the use of the praying to him. Indirectly Hughes suspects Christianity and gradually keeps losing his faith in the lord. Complaining to the lord is in one way to revolt against the white hegemony and wishes for the betterment, peace and prosperity of the black race regardless to their gender and class. He is much moved due to the killing of his lover who was black by the white people. He is immensely aggressive and further denies the presence of the lord as well. Generally people believe in the lord since he is the safeguard to every human being. But when the helpless and innocent people are severely exploited by the white people and the lord does not save and protect their fundamental rights of humanity, certainly people lose their belief and become much heretic. Hughes' view and stance is justifiable as well simply because the blacks due to their color are oppressed and tormented in the white empire which is much hypocritical and fabricated.

In his poem "Democracy" Langston Hughes expresses a need for African American People to be impatient and not wait for society to work its course. Hughes believes that the Whites wish for the African-American's to be suppressed and to not have the same rights, when in actuality whites have denied themselves of the same rights they create. In the majority of his poetry including "Democracy," Hughes speaks of the need for Rebellion but he never gives his own ideals on how this should be done.

Hughes simply follows the typical revolutionary crowd. It is one thing to speak of change but in none of his poems does Hughes actually mention how to go about this change. Simply taking action is not a solution. How should people take action and what should they do? Langston Hughes uses poetic protest in order to

deliver a message. The problem is he is not specific on his message. He states over and over that African-Americans deserve freedom and equal rights in this poem and not to wait, but because African-Americans were waiting their freedom was coming. African-American people are able to own land in the north and go to jazz clubs in unity with the whites. Maybe waiting is the right thing to do. Dana says in the regard: "I just have one question, Do African-Americans or any other non-white race really have equal rights? Do they have the same rights as White Americans?" (5).

African American writers are African in origin but have contributed their literary works to America. The African American writers basically focus on the theme of slavery and struggle for freedom. This literature tends to subjugate to colonial countries. History recalls the rash impacts of colonization and slavery from the literary composition of African American writings. His poetry is successful to promote the political consciousness and social awareness among the blacks.

Harlem Renaissance is also called New Negro Movement bloomed during 1920s to 1930s in Harlem near to New York City. Harlem Renaissance was the cultural movement that helped to promote African American dance, drama and visual art in America. Moreover, it was a social integration of Africans all over the world that came together to revolt against the issues like equality, racial discrimination and human rights. Hughes is one of the most revolting figures of Harlem Renaissance and his contribution in the African literature is of great importance. The American African literature incarnates African American's sense of belongingness to the American society. This literature puts forth the necessity of equal opportunities and rights for every African American. Fortunately, all these wishes were fulfilled by Americans who believed in individual freedom.

Hughes' poems share a relationship in that they most typically depict the

African American experience in the midst of an oppressive white mainstream culture. Some of the poems are vociferous political protests or social criticism, while others depict Harlem life including poverty, prejudice, hunger, hopelessness, and other themes. Hughes has tried to maintain an artistic detachment despite his deep emotions with respect to the feelings expressed in his poems. He has attempted, though unsuccessfully in some poems, to illustrate the universal while at the same time specifically using African American issues, themes, and communication.

The history of American society is a history of oppression, tyranny, cruelty, repression, coercion, subjugation and migration. American geological and cultural space has provided unbounded latent to the whites since its settlement, but the blacks have been denied such spaces. Their African heritage and later the southern-ness are repudiated by the larger culture. Over the diverse historical even-slavery, emancipation, unrestraint, migration, and integration they tried to negotiate their relationship with their cultural traditions. But the white race and its cultural heritage and legacy consistently marginalized them. Therefore, it will not be hyperbolic to state that American history itself is a practice of litigious racism and bigotry. In the revolt, uprising, rebellion, mutiny and insurrection against historical exploitation, beatings, jailing, and killings of Civil Rights activists, blacks in the communities across the nation began striking out in rage; in Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, Newark and Detroit in 1967 and nearly every city in the nation in 1968 after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. Responding to the needs of the black lower class, some groups promoted the development of an indigenous African-based cultural value system, ritualized in the ceremony of Kwanzaa, a holiday celebrated from December 26 through January 1 to reinforce the spiritual ties of black Americans to Africa. Others, such as the Black Panther party, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM),

the Republic of New Africa, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, adopted the ideology and strategy of achieving black self-determination by any means obligatory, including armed resistance.

Hughes' poems carry on the themes of racial revolt against white-dominated racist American society through succinct and absorbing visual images to foreground the sufferings of African Americans and to advocate ways to correct discriminatory social phenomena. Hughes in his poems, "Democracy," "Harlem" and others immensely advocate in the favor of the preservation of unalienable rights of the Afro-Americans in the United States. He indeed fights for freedom, liberty, prestige, citizenry rights and respect for humanity. His efforts in composing such crucial poems play much vital role to strengthen the dispersed power of the black race in order to let them step ahead for their own existence.

Since the Afro-Americans in the United States of America have ever been behaved in terribly inhuman ways, the writers like Langston Hughes emerged to cooperate with the people of their race and pave the path for the easy and respectful strides. Thus, the poems by Hughes do depict the themes of equality, equity, humanity, democracy, freedom, fearlessness, commendable existence and hope for the betterment of the Afro-Americans' future.

#### **IV. Advocacy of Racial Harmony**

The history of the African-Americans in America has begun since the English colonizers entered America with the purpose of controlling the weak and powerless such as blacks' mind and possessions. They annexed America as explorers and not as slaves. In 1619 the root of slavery began in Virginia. Blacks were considered intellectually inferior to whites. Untold inhuman treatment was meted against them and such a trend continued for centuries. Slavery was legally abolished during the time Hughes lived. But their position in America was very bad. They were treated as second class citizens and they lived in constant humiliation. Langston Hughes creates strong black culture and resists the white hegemonic theory in his poetry and art.

Langston Hughes first encounters a large expression in lyric form of his ancestral memories and of the strange, bitter exactions which his fated involvement in the American reality entails. The confused ethnic passions have promoted many black literary strategists to search for a new black aesthetic have found their most intense expression in many of the poems by Hughes. He encounters the bluntest, the most intrepid and fervidly assertive, statements of the pride in racial heritage and the implacable disallowance of any kind of obliteration for white America that define the location of the new Black radicalism.

Hughes finds the great validating paradigm of his own way of orchestrating the experience of his people, conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjection, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the way of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and distortions of the music of the area in conversion.

Racism, as Marxist theory defines, is an expression of the main population of workers by the capitalist class to divide them along racial lines and reduce their

capacity to thrash about against the system. This results in encouraging discrimination against blacks, arguing their inferiority, use of blacks as a surplus, marginal low-paid working force, and establishing restricted better-paid racist white labor force. Thus, racism is a function of class struggle, not an independent variable itself. Racism which begins with the creation and bewilderment of race is social thought and practice which expresses itself in three basic ways-imposition, thought and institutional understanding.

Hughes accepts the fact that he speaks the voice of millions of the blacks who have ever been the victims of trials and tribulations in their own nation which claims to be the most democratic and advocates in the favor and respect of independence and human rights. Hence Hughes finds the citizens due to being black and not being whites in very subjugated and exploitive state. He tends to awaken people of black color from their slumbering stance and let them be precautionous about the diplomatic and strategic steps of the whites who are worried with the heinous concept that they are superior to the blacks. This is why it is their human duty to civilize the fellow citizens. In fact this sense of superiority complex has overpowered them to oppress the black contest and make them live the second class citizens in their own nation. But Hughes throws the sparks of amend in the life of blacks who used to be slaves to the whites and remained silent and submissive even if they were exploited and punished physically by the white masters. Now the situation has changed in such a way that the blacks can feel and understand the exploitation done over them. He further attempts to energize people to stand up and fight for their looted rights. He does see the relief and welfare of the blacks only in revolution and takes revolt as way to grasp their life that is raped in a much degrading way.

Freedom sprouts in the field that is much fertile and respects all sorts of plants

equally whether they are weeds or corns. Similarly freedom is relative to the people who are dominated and marginalized in the country which claims to have been the most democratic one. The Blacks are politically marginalized and are pushed to the powerless position. They stay in the place but do not own the place which is indisputably with them in America. This is why the poet is terribly aggressive and expresses his anger about the need of freedom. He focuses on nearness of freedom and liberty of the black race.



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