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## HUGHES' HOPE FOR FUTURE

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### ABSTRACT

*Hughes was a man with a hope for change and he never forgot his roots or the importance of preserving pride in his people. He advocated a policy of racial desegregation. Equality was an idea whose time had come. So, when the times were right, Hughes voiced the most telling issue of his life with great moral authority; and when they were wrong, he pointed to better times that would surely come. He stresses the need of serious efforts to translate the deferred dream of American ideals into a reality so that all the marginalized and deprived sections including the African Americans get integrated into America's collective identity as a nation. He hopes that one day his loneliness will definitely come to end and will wipe away every tear, every lament and every sense of pain. Evidently, he radiated joy and humanity and this was how he was remembered after his death.*



**KEYWORDS:** hope, desegregation, Equality, deferred, marginalized.

### INTRODUCTION

To David Daiches, Hughes was documentary poet- a term Langston liked at once and began to use about himself. "The ultimate meaning, the subtler vision of reality, the oblique insight into man's fate are not for him," Daiches judged; Hughes had "a more urgent and immediate problem, to project the living American Negro onto the page. And he does so, on the whole, with success."<sup>1</sup>

Hughes was a man with a mission for change and he never forgot his roots or the importance of preserving pride in his people. "While Hughes remained optimistic, he saw that other black writers were slipping into pessimism, focusing on the pain and suffering of racism, not the triumphs, the heroes, or the possibility of change."<sup>2</sup> He was determined to inspire his people for getting freedom as it is birth right to everybody. Nobody has the courage to stop them for hoping a better future. As Blacks have very few rights and privileges in society due to the color of their skin for that Hughes suggests that until black people think of themselves as not inferior to anyone, no one else will because they are:

...strong in will.

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.<sup>3</sup>

When the bells rang in the New Year (1940), Hughes' life had already changed for the new decade. For him and most of the people he had known during the turbulent thirties, it was the end of an era. The 1940s added new dimension to Hughes' career. By the forties, some of the finest lyrics appeared as artistic relief to the racial lynching at the time. Hughes advocated a policy of racial desegregation. Equality was an idea whose time had come. So, when the times were right, Hughes voiced the most telling issue of his life with great moral authority; and when they were wrong, he pointed to better times that would surely come. Although he had opposed everything about the Second World War, he made every effort to help America to

win it. Battling with his pen to defend the nation and boost morale, he was just as determined to fight Jim Crow. His song lyrics, radio scripts and verses expressed the hope that America would be victorious abroad and end racial discrimination at home. In the poem *How About it, Dixie*, he wrote:

Looks like by now  
Folks ought to know  
It's hard to beat Hitler  
Protecting Jim Crow. (“How About It Dixie”, CP, 291)

Demanding equal opportunity for his people in the society Hughes openly clarified:

Freedom's not just  
To be won Over There.  
It means Freedom at home, too —  
Now—right here! (“How About It Dixie”, CP, 291)

He acquires a long term perspective and writes about future hopes in an equable and sober mood. His attitude is now based on achievement of a long term objective involving preservation of an African American's ethnic identity which is consistent with their active participation in American social life. He stresses the need of serious efforts to translate the deferred dream of American ideals into a reality so that all the marginalized and deprived sections including the African Americans get integrated into America's collective identity as a nation. He advocates the harmonized and unified working of all the ethnic groups to create a society without any discrimination, oppression, segregation or exploitation. Langston Hughes writes about social struggles and hardships, but also imparts a message of hope for the future of blacks in America. Thomson had first castigated Langston Hughes for his role as a writer in the reactionary Hollywood film *Way Down South*, then reached out sympathetically to him:

“In you I feel one whose whole life has been a dedication to the things you have believed in and wanted to do. And that has resulted in the high place you hold today, Lang... The things you are doing I am confident are bringing to you that sort of satisfaction that can't be measured in dollars and cents.”<sup>4</sup>

With good reason Hughes considers himself one of the heroes who had inspired a generation of the youth of black America. Modesty prevented him from saying so, but he didn't wish the future to see him mainly as a coward or backslider. He admits that “We know we are not weak, ignorant, frustrated, or coward. We know the race has its heroes whether anybody puts them into books or not. We know we are heroes ourselves and can make a better world.”<sup>5</sup>

Hughes' overriding sense of a social and cultural purpose tied to his sense of the past, the present and the future of black America commends his life and works as having much to learn from to inspire us to move forward and to inform and guide our steps as we move forward to create a great future. The poem “I, Too” is about the segregation of African Americans and whites and how this segregation will come to an end as he says:

Tomorrow  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
Eat in the kitchen,  
Then.  
Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed —

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I, too, am America. (“I Too”, CP, 46.)

The use of “I” shows that the African American community will soon rise and be one with the rest of America. In the second stanza he states how his feeling of freedom would be: he will sit at the table when company comes and nobody will tell him to eat in the kitchen, because now he is the powerful one. Before finishing the poem, the “slave” states that “They will see how beautiful [he is] and be ashamed”. He clearly admits that he is not inferior and that he has his personal value. Once people see this value and give him the importance he has, he will be able to sit at the table and be respected. Here Hughes says that once African American's are recognized as equal, everyone will see they are not bad and that they are beautiful as well as part of America. The “darker brother” celebrating America is certain of a better future when he will no longer be shunted aside by “company”.

His poetry celebrates his people and is filled with hope and promise that the circumstances of the time would change. He also hopes for brighter days in Harlem as shown in “Hope for Harlem”:

Now there's a new skyline in Harlem.  
It's rising tall and free-  
And if it keeps on rising  
There'll be a brand new me....(“Hope for Harlem”, CP, 436)

He speaks to the reader in a thundering voice and whispers Freedom! Freedom! Freedom! He urges black folks to hold on to the plow and never let go. He inspires them to have hope and faith in dreams and God by saying:

America!  
Land created in common,  
Dream nourished in common,  
*Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!*  
If the house is not yet finished,  
Don't be discouraged, builder!  
If the fight is not yet won,  
Don't be weary, soldier! (“Freedom's Plow”, CP, 267)

in his poem “Argument” he begins with praising the whites and their goodness and says:

White is right,  
Yellow mellow,  
Black, get back!  
*Do you believe that, Jack?*  
Sure do!  
*Then you're a dope*  
*for which there ain't no hope.*  
*Black is fine!*  
And, God knows,  
It's mine! (“Argument”, CP, 421)

Hughes inspires the black people not to be like Jack who has no hope at all. He encourages his people to hope as hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all. He has a faith that in God's eyes all are equal. Everyone has the same right to

do the good things. Everyone in the same race can not have the same characteristics but it does not mean that they don't have the right for freedom.

Arnold Rampersad points out that:

from the start of his career, the dream has been perhaps the central motif of Hughes' poetry. Langston was the Dream Keeper, who urges others to Hold fast to Dreams. 'I dream a world' an aria from *Troubled Island* has become the amen- piece at his lectures and readings.<sup>6</sup>

His poetry celebrates his people and is filled with hope and promise that the circumstances of the time would change. As James A. Emanuel states "poems of hope and better future are, and ought to be, popular among a writer's followers when written with compelling imagination and sincerity."<sup>18</sup> The same thing we feel in his poem "Hope (1)" he says:

Sometimes when I'm lonely,  
Don't know why,  
Keep thinkin' I won't be lonely  
by and by. ("Hope (1)", CP, 245)

He hopes that one day his loneliness will definitely come to end and will wipe away every tear, every lament and every sense of pain. After all Langston Hughes is familiar to the universal truth that "the mind is its own place, and in itself/can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n."<sup>7</sup>

Evidently, he radiated joy and humanity and this was how he was remembered after his death. From the brutally realistic, to the positive and inspiring, Hughes managed to tell the truth, acknowledging all of the negative aspects of life for African Americans at the time, while also celebrating the vibrant, strong and hopeful spirit of an oppressed people.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: 1941-1967, Vol. 11, 'I, Dream a World'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Harold Bloom, *Bloom's BioCritiques: Langston Hughes*. (Philadelphia: Yale University, Chelsea House Publishers, 2001), 46.

<sup>3</sup>"Ulysses" *In Fifteen Poets*, 1941; rpt. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 410.

<sup>4</sup>Arnold Rampersad, Vol. 11, 1988, p. 34

<sup>5</sup>Arnold Rampersad, Vol. 11, 1988, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Arnold Rampersad, Vol. 11, p. 152.

<sup>7</sup>John Milton, *Paradise Lost: Books 1 and 11*, ed. F.T. Prince (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 38.



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