

# Let america be america again essay sample

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“ The day America experiences true freedom through equality and love of one another. Is the day I'll be a happy man, knowing I've done what this country needs.” Interviewed in 1935, social activist and an African American poet Langston Hughes rallied his people with these words of optimism to unite and strive for opportunity, freedom and equality. It was a brave call because it contested the dominant attitude, values and beliefs to colour and class during in an era of strict racial segregation and severe economic depression.

Whilst Hughes' voice represented hope and leadership, it also critically highlighted whether the American dream was something all could obtain. In this seminar presentation, Langston Hughes' poem, “ Let America Be America Again” is deconstructed to explore those marginalised in American society. He positions the reader to question the Negro human condition and their struggle for triumph. In addition to the ideological analysis of the text, an aesthetic interpretation of the language is also presented.

Hughes was convinced that being “ black” was something beautiful. Yet he was born during a time when the discriminatory Jim Crow Laws were enforced. These laws created a division between the whites and the blacks in their day-to-day lives. As a result of this Hughes father abandoned his family to escape this racial prejudice that stopped him from practicing law. For Langston Hughes the impact of this was significant on his early attitudes and beliefs about fairness and equality. It was also the underpinning theme of his poetry.

Raised in the southern states of America, it was a lonely childhood living with his stern but proud, black grandmother who taught him to stand up for the underdog and not to let racial segregation control his life. As a consequence of this, Hughes' poems position the reader to value and support all Americans no matter what colour their skin. This concept is foregrounded in the third stanza, " Equality is in the air we breathe."

Langston Hughes was preoccupied with not only the oppression of Negro people but of all minority groups within America. " I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars. I am the red man driven from the land, I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek— And finding only the same old stupid plan." The repetition of the self referential lines ' I am' position the reader to perceive the mistreatment of each minority groups, Hughes includes himself as not only Negro but Native American and Immigrant; all of whom have been subjugated under white imperialism.

In doing this, the representation serves to enhance the polarisation of power between white America and ' others'. Furthermore the use of symbolism creates a vivid image of the struggle ' slavery's scars' and disappointment ' clutching the hope', serves to foreground their subsequent marginalisation. It is however ironic, that Hughes has a purpose to serve for all minority groups, who have been marginalised, yet the voices of women have been silenced. The reason for this, it has been speculated, is that Hughes was Homosexual and as such he never referred to women in his texts.

Langston Hughes political ideologies were shaped by his experiences of American capitalism and corruption, which he saw as a direct influence upon

the continued marginalisation of minority groups within Western society and as incongruous to his socialist beliefs. Langston Hughes positions the reader to believe that equality for all Americans should be seen as an achievable goal. At the time the poem was written, however, there was vast inequality amongst class, races and gender.

Hughes privileges these cultural attitudes with the words “ dog eat dog of mighty crush the weak.” Dog eat dog connotes the idea that everybody is only looking out for themselves, much like a stray or feral dog will do what it takes to keep alive. Thus Hughes effectively portrays the idea that the upper class of aristocrats and bureaucrats as dehumanized predators of the lower classes to sustain their own wealthy and extravagant lifestyles. Similarly the white masses tend to prey on the ostracized coloured minorities. Hughes political ideology upheld the belief that it was the capitalist greed and corruption of Western society that served to perpetuate the continued marginalization of minority groups.

As an activist Langston Hughes strongly campaigned for a society that embraced equality across all races and classes, his ultimate goal was to emancipate minority groups; this emancipation was internal as well as external. Hughes, sorts to promote the intrinsic beauty of race to free minorities from ideological oppression as well as advocating political freedom as a release from physical bondage. One of his famous lines, foregrounds this beauty implicitly through delicious connotations of food and drink. He writes, “ molasses taffy/ Coffee and cream/ Liquorice, clove, cinnamon/ to a honey-brown dream.”

By using appealing symbolism to position the readers to draw parallels to their own life and positive connection to food to empower their own spirituality and self-image. The intertextuality of freedom is shown through Hughes quest for political emancipation as reflected in the line, “ Equality is in the air we breathe.” The use of a metaphor to connect the intangible air to the tangible concept of equality within America’s political framework. Reminds the reader that equality is the basic right of all humans.

In concluding it is clear to see that by challenging dominant ideologies, Langston Hughes was an activist to the ethnic minorities of America and the ostracized lower classes, Hughes inspires the readers to question the validity of America’s fundamental attitude, values and beliefs in relation to the treatment of minority groups. In the eyes of the Negro public, Langston Hughes quickly stood up to power becoming an unappointed monumental figure. By making a stand and speaking out during the time of the 1930’s where racism tore through the streets and killed many blacks, is evidence of the bravery he displayed. His dream still lives on today.