

# Langston hughes's "the negro artist and the racial mountain"



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Langston Hughes was one of the most prolific writers of Harlem Renaissance era. Hughes's works are best known for the sense of black pride they convey and Hughes's implantation of jazz into his poetry. In 1926, Hughes wrote the critically acclaimed essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" for The Nation magazine. In this essay, Hughes scolds artists who shy away from their racial identity to satisfy fearful Negroes and white audiences. Hughes's message to white audiences recognizes their interest in black art for means of stereotypical entertainment. Some of Hughes's most powerful poems, including "I, Too" and "Freedom," serve as keen evidence of the blasphemous behavior of Negro artists and white audiences of his time. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes speaks of a young Negro poet who has proclaimed he does not want to be an African-American poet, but instead, just a poet. Hughes associates this comment with the Negro poet meaning he would rather be a white poet and a whiter person. Nina Baym cites the evidence of Hughes's outspoken protest on this matter, stating, "Early and late, Hughes's poems demanded that African Americans be acknowledged as owners of the culture they gave to the United States and as fully enfranchised American citizens" (Baym 2027). If this is so, it means that the young Negro poet understands the prevalent issue of racism in the United States at that time. This goes to say that the young Negro poet believes that the work of a white person is more easily accepted than that of a Negro. Hughes wanted African-American artists to show pride in their racial legacy. He recognized that many artists were fleeing from their culture. Most of Hughes's poems are a result of his own life experiences and encounters with racism. Therefore, Hughes is not ashamed to be an African-American artist writing about African-American culture for an African-American

<https://assignbuster.com/langston-hughess-the-negro-artist-and-the-racial-mountain/>

audience. Hughes also uses jazz as a staple of his poems and their connections to African Americans. Hughes states that he writes so many jazz poems because "jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America" (1512). Hughes's use of jazz guarantees that the artistic elements of the Harlem Renaissance and African-American culture will be preserved despite Negroes that are ashamed or fearful of its power. Langston Hughes originally wrote the poem "I, Too" in 1925. At this time, America's society was racially discriminating and the operation of this particular society was backed by its racist laws. In "I, Too," Hughes sends a simple but strong message in only 18 lines. Overall, the poem demonstrates the courage and strength of a Negro/slave fed up with the way white people treat him. In the first line — "I, too, sing America" — the speaker clarifies that although he is a Negro, he is American and sings the national anthem just as any white man does. In this poem, Hughes speaks for equality and freedom for the Negro just as he does in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountains." The poem "I, Too" is proof that no Negro should be ashamed of his race or the products of his race to please white America. Langston Hughes's poem "Freedom" was originally entitled "Democracy." Hughes addressed his views about freedom and democracy in the poem. Hughes states that he does not want to wait for freedom to come to him, and he is bothered by submissive Negroes who say, "Let things take their course / Tomorrow is another day." In his book *The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes*, R. Baxter Miller speaks of Hughes's literary imagination, stating that, "it is the process by which he mediated between social limitation and the dream of freedom" (Miller 2). Hughes was aware of the social limitations placed upon his people, and his poetry became his outlet to have the voice of an activist. "Freedom"

<https://assignbuster.com/langston-hughess-the-negro-artist-and-the-racial-mountain/>

and Hughes's literary imaginations are proof of Hughes's argument in the "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Because Langston Hughes was one of the most popular writers of the Harlem Renaissance era, he used that advantage to speak to his people through his work. He also used his position to raise awareness about the issues of the African-American community and to address those who were afraid of progress. Hughes's works reflect his life experiences and those of his people, and he believed this to be enough to encourage others that the current social status of the African-American community needed to be changed. Hughes did not shy away from the issues others were afraid to discuss. He even took a shot at white America by informing them and his African-American audience that whites only read African-American literature for stereotypical entertainment. Everything Hughes stood for and against is implemented into his poetry; "I, Too" and "Freedom" are good examples, and these particular poems are evident of Hughes's argument in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Works Cited Baym, Nina. "Langston Hughes: 1902-1967." Introduction. The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 7th ed. Vol. D. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 2026-27. Print. Baym, Nina. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 7th ed. Vol. D. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 1512-13. Print. Hughes, Langston. "I, Too." The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 7th ed. Vol. D. Nina Baym. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 2028. Print. Hughes, Langston. "Freedom." The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 7th ed. Vol. D. Nina Baym. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 2034-35. Print. Miller, R. Baxter. "Introduction." The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes. Lexington (Ky.): UP of Kentucky, 2006. 2. Print. <https://assignbuster.com/langston-hughess-the-negro-artist-and-the-racial-mountain/>