

# Graduation: black people and negro national anthem



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Graduation is one of the most memorable moments in a lifetime. Maya Angelou's graduation was an exciting moment, yet it was a very hurtful experience because of racism/segregation. This badly affects Angelou at her graduation.

The overall point in Graduation is racism and segregation. Her choice of words is very powerful and emotional: It was awful to be a Negro. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense. We should all be dead.

I thought I should like to see us all dead, one on top of the other. A pyramid of flesh with white folks on the bottom as the broad base, then the Indians with their silly tomahawks and teepees and wigwams and treaties, the Negroes with their mops and recipes and cotton sacks and spiritual sticking out of their mouths. The Dutch children should all stumble in their wooden shoes and break their necks. The French should choke to death on the Louisiana Purchase (1803) white silkworms ate all the Chinese with their stupid pigtailed. As a species, we were an abomination. All of us.

(110) This explains her emotions about racism, and how horrible it is. She closes it off by saying we are all the same species, and no one is different. This proves she believes racism is wrong. Because of segregation, the white schools are totally different from the black schools.

Angelou defines the overall point by comparing the white schools to the black schools: "Unlike the white high school, Lafayette County Training School distinguished itself from having neither lawn, nor hedges, nor tennis court, nor climbing ivy" (103). This reveals what kind of luxuries the white  
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schools had and how unfair the education system was. When Donleavy, a white man comes to speak at the graduation he focuses on the improvements coming to the schools. The white schools had new academics and classroom equipment and the black schools had new tool boxes and athletic equipment.

The writer refers to her anger as if African Americans could not achieve anything academic or intellectual. Donleavy is also a racist, “ The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys would try to be Jesse Owenses and Joe Louises” (109). Angelou dramatizes an experience involving segregation and racism. At the graduation, the graduates expect certain things to happen, The National Anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance and the “ Negro National Anthem”: “ The song every black person knew called the Negro National Anthem. All done in the same key, with the passion and most often standing on the same foot” (108).

This proves there is segregation in this time period because they sing their own song, which makes them feel separate from the nation. In the beginning of the ceremony, Angelou was thrilled to graduate. Once Donleavy speaks, the African Americans lose hope, “ The man’s dead words fell like bricks around the auditorium and too many settled in my belly” (110). Donleavy is unconscious about the effect on his words: Graduation, the hush-hush magic time of frills and gifts and congratulations and diplomas, was finished for me before my name was called.

The accomplishment was nothing. The meticulous maps, drawn in three colors of ink, learning and spelling decasyllabic words, memorizing the whole of *The Rape of Lucrece*- it was for nothing. Donleavy had exposed us. 110) After Donleavy's speech the writer understands the words to the " Negro National Anthem" for the first time, because of how badly he put down the African Americans.

To get the overall point, Angelou leads the readers as if they were sitting alongside her at her graduation. She describes the black community, and the graduating class. Angelou starts out the essay by describing the community in Stamps: " The children in Stamps trembled visibly with anticipation. Some adults were excited too, but to be certain the whole young population had come down with graduation epidemic" (103).

She also describes the teachers, " Even the teachers were respectful to the now quiet and aging seniors, and tended to speak to them, if not as equals, as beings only slightly lower than themselves" (103). She uses effective similes to make the story come to life, " But the graduating classes themselves were nobility. Like travelers with exotic destinations on their minds, the graduates were remarkably forgetful" (103). This makes the readers understand the graduates' excitement, and how they were forgetful of the aspect of life, like to bring their books to school.

As travelers with exotic destinations, the graduates have their whole future ahead of them, full of exotic experiences. She also uses another simile to describe herself on her graduation day: " I was going to be lovely. A walking model of all the various styles of fine hand sewing and it didn't worry me

that I was only twelve years old and merely graduating from eight grade”  
(105). She was so happy and filled with joy because of the accomplishments she had made, in which she felt beautiful like a model.