

An analysis of symbols in langston hughes on the road literature review sample

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Langston Hughes short story "On The Road" is about a black man who travels across the country on railways. He arrives by freight train and begins to look around for food and shelter, but by finding none finds himself going from door to door. This is one of the constant symbols in Hughes story, doors. Doors represent in this story the greater powers that be that prevent the speaker, Sargeant from attaining his freedoms society keeps him from having. The story was written at the time when the civil rights movement was heating up, and the doors that prevent Sargeant from entering warmth, or on a deeper level fully into the society, are represented by actual, physical doors in the story.

The first door that Sargeant knocks upon is Reverent Mr. Dorset's church house. Despite it snowing outside, and what would seem to be the duties of a Christian reverent, he shuts the door and tells Sargeant to go to a relief center, not giving Sargeant enough time to explain to him that the doors to the relief center are also closed.

Next Sargeant endeavors to try the doors of a church. "It had two doors," the speaker says. The next paragraph goes on to describe these doors, which are "high arched with slender stone pillars." This comes at the same time that he notices there is snow in his eyes. The symbolism of these doors represents the institution of religion, which even despite Jesus's teaching of helping the poor and needed are still closed to Sargeant.

He tried the handle but it is locked and then tries to push against the door until it is open. Joe Benson, a critic who has analyzed this story wrote that "Although Sargeant is technically guilty of attempted breaking and entering, the Reverend Mr. Dorset is fully guilty of prejudice, racism and hypocrisy."

(Kacick, 71)

Sargeant's crime stems from need. The Reverend denying him assistance stems from bigotry. It is not enough to merely break down the doors. After seargent has successfully gained enterance cops and others appear on the scene to drag him out. Presumably, Sargeant goes unconscious and is taken to jail, but in his dream sequence the whole church has collapses and Jesus had come down from the cross and begins walking with Sargeant.

Critic Lyndon Kacick wrote, " Christ was the only person to treat him with equality." This is a powerful symbol. Jesus tells Sargent, " They have kept me nailed on a cross for nearly two thousand years." Jesus is the most powerful symbol for both the religion of Christianity and also Christian ideals. What this symbolizes is that Jesus's message is not being properly followed by a church whose leader will do nothing to help a man based on the color of his skin.

At the end of the dream sequence Sargeant returns to the railway where he can go and sleep because " That place ain't got no doors." It's doors, both physical and imagined that bars Sargeant from society and represents racial discrimination. It story ends with Sargeant waking up in a jail cell. Although a door no traps him, he defiantly vows to free himself from its confines. " I'm gonna break down this door," he hells from his cell. In this, the story depicts not only racial prejudice, but also the struggle against it to " break down the doors."

Work Cited

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