

Compare and contrast of “the lesson” and “the hammon and the beans”

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



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By Lester J. Tavis Smiley an author and Radio/T. V. host once said there is " 2 Americas." The minority glamorous America we and rest of the world can only dream of, and the poverty majority America, the glum true face of our country. Social divides in America leads to more than just racial tensions. Social inequalities are seen in almost every aspect of the American society; to the open eye. As seen in Paredes " The Hammon and the Beans" and Bambara " The Lesson", both authors illustrate through different experiences the negative attributes of poverty, class division and the vast difference in their social living. In " The Hammon and the Beans" Paredes does a brilliant job in showcasing the difference between Chonita the poor girl of the town and the soldiers staying in Fort Jones. The soldiers in Fort Jones are depicted by Dr. Zapata as a kind of occupying power totally indifferent to the townspeople, isolating themselves. The soldiers pay no attention to the children who gather outside their fence to watch the activities in the fort. Even when Chonita, is brave enough to enter the fort, she must put up with scolding from the cooks before they give her " hammon and beans" which was leftovers from the soldiers meal. The reason why Paredes paints this picture of irony and symbolism is to reveal to the reader the theme of poverty just one of the many dilemmas facing poor Mexican immigrant children. Although the soldiers have plenty to eat, many of the town's children suffer from malnutrition, and Chonita's family lives in a shack, the poster of poverty. The divide and her fate is a heart felt eye-opener. Another theme is problem of cultural assimilation and the tensions that come along with it. Which is evident by the attitudes expressed towards the soldiers in

the story. The soldier came to old fort Jones because of border troubles. Some people admired the soldiers while others hated them. Paredes describes how they admired the soldiers and how they hated them when they remembered the border troubles. Chonita would join other people to mock the soldiers. " But we did not hate them for that; we admired them even at least sometimes. But when we were thinking about the border troubles instead of Marion the Fox we hooted them and the flag they were lowering, which for the moment was theirs alone, just as we would have jeered an opposing ball team, in a friendly sort of way". Most children in the story live under tension. This is because they do not know if they are Americans or Mexicans. This is shown by Chonita as she does not know if she is an American or Mexican. The children in the story salute United States when they feel it's their country, and when studying the American Revolution. They don't salute US if they do not feel it's their country. This further supported that the children lived under tension. " The Lesson" by Bambara on the other hand presents the same theme of social divide but in a different context; economics. " The Lesson" is not just a spirited story about a poor girl out of place in an expensive toy store, it is a social commentary. " The Lesson" is a story about one African-American girl's struggle with her growing awareness of social inequality. The character Miss Moore introduces the facts of social inequality to the distracted group of Harlam youngsters, of whom Sylvia, the main character is the more roady of the bunch. Flyboy, Fat Butt, Junebug, Sugar, Rosie, Sylvia and the rest of the gang all think of Miss Moore as a bourgeois educator, " who dress up all the time when there is no need to, and her college degree." Another issue for

another time, but you can already start to feel the tension between Sylvia and Miss Moore. Although F. A. O. Schwartz is just a small part of that world, the trip here with Ms. Moore shows the children a great deal about what the outside world is like and how anyone can have that piece of the pie. Even though the children could never afford the toys, Ms. Moore brings them to the store to show them they have just as much right to be there and just as much right to live the rich life as anyone else. This shows the clear distinction between the rich and the poor and the difficulties the poor children face as they try to reach the level the rich have attained. The poor in the society have to struggle very hard in order to live a better life. Thus the author has shown how inequality is common in the society and how people in the society lack concern for the poor. But for Sylvia, achieving class consciousness is a painful enlightenment, and for her to accept that she is underprivileged is shameful for her, and Sylvia would rather deny it than admit a wound to her pride. And it ends "ain't nobody gonna beat me at nuthin." The theme in the Bambara's "The Lesson" and Parades "Hammon and Beans" short story is very similar. We see the divide in the social lines between those fortunate and those less fortunate. In essence the 2 Americas are easily portrayed, and we see poverty has no color preference.