

# An analytical comparison of i hear america singing and i, too

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Born ten years after the death of Walt Whitman, there was no possible way for Langston Hughes to ever meet or communicate with Whitman, but that did not mean Hughes could not establish a connection to him, or at least his work. In 1925, Hughes wrote a poem titled "I, Too" which was inspired by and directed in response to the poem "I Hear America Singing", which was composed by Whitman much earlier. Whitman's poem consisted of a variety of different American laborers who "sing" as they do their jobs.

This well-known poem never specifically addresses the ethnicity of these singing laborers of the American population, but Hughes sets about to rectify that omission. Walt Whitman is sometimes considered a pioneer of free verse and non-esoteric subject matter with focus on the working-class using realistic imagery. Whitman's poem "I Hear America Singing" demonstrates no end rhyme, but we hear a sense of melody in his repetitions and rhythm in the length of his lines that substitutes for the pattern we would expect to perceive in conventional poetry.

Though beyond that we can tell that the tone of the poem is muscular, its beat vibrant, and its mood proud. Each tradesman in the poem performs his labor with the same pride and triumph that one might hear from a singer. There is no promotion of importance attached to the jobs performed or the performers who carry out those jobs. In the end of the poem he mentions the inclusion of female voice with "delicious singing" along with "the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing".

With attention to include both sexes, Whitman seems to be taking in all aspects of America's working class, but it has been drawn out many times that this poem does not specifically detail African-Americans as part of the <https://assignbuster.com/an-analytical-comparison-of-i-hear-america-singing-and-i-too/>

cluster. It is this detail that Hughes believed should have been incorporated and led to his follow-up poem, "I, Too". As Langston Hughes was going up, African-Americans were not accepted and were discriminated against; separated from using the same facilities and being in the same place as Caucasians, just to name a few.

The division between whites and blacks was clearly prevalent and the United States of America was a racially discriminatory society reinforced by its racist laws. Hughes took the initiative to speak his mind via poetry, resulting in his piece "I, Too". In this poem, Hughes clearly signifies one thing: Just because his skin color is different from whites, does not mean that they get to sing the National Anthem louder. Arguing that all American citizens are the same, disregarding their skin color, Hughes applies in this poem a master-slave relationship.

The assumed white master shows disrespect to his servant by sending him away whenever visitors come over, because he is ordered to eat secluded from the company. However he seems to not be faze by this and actually finds it funny, supported by "But I laugh". Furthermore, not only does he find amusement in this unpleasant situation, but the isolation has a positive effect on him "And grow strong", implying that even though he submits to his master, his spirit will not be diminished.

In every line of "I Hear America Singing", the word "singing" appears to help emphasize and describe the melody of the working American citizens, yet there is no song in particular. Perhaps they are singing the National Anthem? America's people doing American jobs all united by an unidentified

melody that shrouds them all. It would seem a bit peculiar for Whitman to exclude African-Americans.

The people in Whitman's poem are common folk without individual names or true identities, but they are all idealized as each one finds joy in the dignity of his or her laboring task. The heart of Hughes's poem demonstrates the strength of a black slave who stands up for what is right and says enough is enough. Though it is meant to be a response to " I Hear America Singing", it feels as though " I, Too" misses the message of Whitman's work and perhaps Hughes was only too troubled by segregation to understand.