

Langston revolt or  
"explode" to force  
their



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Langston Hughes is considered a very prominent author during the Harlem Renaissance and his works guided the African Americans from a state of hopelessness to having hope concerning their ultimate liberation from oppression. At the start of the Civil Rights Movement, in 1951, he authored a poem called "Harlem" depicting the theme of frustration, particularly what happens to dreams when they are put on hold. This is explicitly stated in the first line of the poem, "'What happens to a dream deferred?' (Shmoop University, 7).

He then effectively stirs up the idea of a "dream getting deferred" in his reaction in the poem. The title of the poem, "Harlem," which is the center of activities of the African Americans in the U. S., seems to suggest that the writer intended to invoke a particular image of a particular group of people whose dreams are often deferred. "The dream" is a something that the writer of the poem had in mind for the African Americans, especially during the Civil Rights Era when frustration characterized the mood of the African Americans. Hughes wanted the African Americans to succeed in their pursuit for complete liberation.

He sought after their rise in power above the white people; thus, he did not mince his words in making his opinion, especially because he was regarded to be the poet laureate of the African Americans in all places. The United States was widely regarded to be the land of opportunity where no dreams could get deferred; however, the sentiment of the African Americans during this period was not expressing this (Meyer). After the Civil war in the eighteenth century, the African Americans were set free from slavery other oppressive practices. In addition, various federal laws had given them the

opportunity to vote, own property, and enjoy other rights in the United States. Nonetheless, ongoing discrimination against the African Americans, together with the regulations enacted since the Civil War, resulted in their hopelessness and dreams being deferred. Consequently, the African Americans were regarded as second-class citizens, for example, they had to attend inadequately equipped institutions of learning, opt for menial jobs, use different public facilities from the whites, and had restricted access to other facilities and areas. By the 1950s, the African American's frustration with inferior status in the American society was intolerable and Hughes comprehended well what the future held for them.

He indicates this in the last line of the poem, " Or does it explode?" ((Shmoop University, 7), which alludes to the fact that they can only be held down for sometime before they revolt or " explode" to force their liberation. Besides depicting the frustration of the African Americans in the mid-twentieth century, the poem also strikes a universal chord since many people throughout the ages have had their dreams postponed, which have made them to feel frustrated. Some individuals do nothing and allow their aspirations to " dry up" while others allow their dreams to " fester like a sore,"; that is, aggravate them for a lifetime because they have not been accomplished (Koyesha, para. 2). The sixth line, " Does it stink like rotten meat?", also invokes the aggravation obtained from deferred dreams.

Nonetheless, amidst this frustration, some people still cling on their aspirations, " Or crust and sugar over—like a syrupy sweet?", hoping for their accomplishment.

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