

ISSN: 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Vol. 3 Issue 3 June 2017

Impact Factor 1.854

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

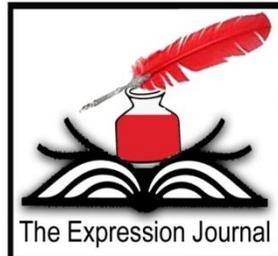
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(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 1.854)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132



ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION IN THE POEMS OF LANGSTON HUGHES

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Abstract

This research paper contains a detailed study of the ethnic discrimination in the selected poems of Langston Hughes. His poems are concerning to the negatively ethnic discrimination that happened to the black people. In this study the writer highlighted the pain that white people have caused to the Black people. The white people were discriminating black people on the basis of skin color and they denied their basic needs. Hughes attitude towards white is very simple and is polite as long as they are respectful. Ethnic discrimination focuses on the problems of skin color and the failure of African-American to realize the American dream. Hughes has written most frequently, though not exclusively, of Negro characters. Consequently the importance of the color line in the America is frequently reflected in his poems. The effect of the ethnic discrimination in the America dream is therefore the integral part of his protest.

Key-Words

Ethnic Discrimination, Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Culture, Social Prejudices, Stereotypes etc.

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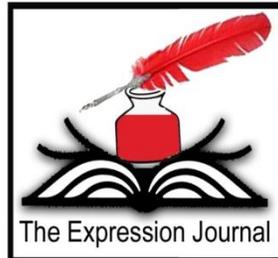
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The term Ethnic once commonly used in physical anthropology to denote a division of humankind possessing traits that is transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type. Today the term has little scientific standing, as older methods of differentiation, including hair form and body measurement, have given way to the comparative analysis of DNA and gene frequencies relating to such factors as blood typing, the excretion of amino acids, and inherited enzyme deficiencies. Because all human populations today are extremely similar genetically, most researchers have abandoned the concept of race for the concept of the cline, a graded series of differences occurring along a line of environmental or geographical transition. This reflects the recognition that human populations have always been in a state of flux, with genes constantly flowing from one gene pool to another, impeded only by physical or ecological boundaries. While relative isolation does preserve genetic differences and allow populations to maximally adapt to climatic and disease factors over long periods of time, all groups currently existing are thoroughly “mixed” genetically, and such differences as still exist do not lend themselves to simple typologizing. “Ethnic” is today primarily a sociological designation, identifying a class sharing some outward physical characteristics and some commonalities of culture and history.

Race or Ethnic discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features). Color discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because of skin color complexion.

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Race discrimination also can involve treating someone unfavorably because the person is married to (or associated with) a person of a certain race or color or because of a person's connection with a race-based organization or group, or an organization or group that is generally associated with people of a certain color. Discrimination can occur when the victim and the person who inflicted the discrimination are the same race or color.

The law forbids discrimination when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other term or condition of employment. It is unlawful to harass a person because of that person's race or color. Harassment can include, for example, racial slurs, offensive or derogatory remarks about a person's race or color, or the display of racially-offensive symbols. Although the law doesn't prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted). The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or someone who is not an employee of the employer, such as a client or customer. An employment policy or practice that applies to everyone, regardless of race or color, can be illegal if it has a negative impact on the employment of people of a particular race or color and is not job-related and necessary to the operation of the business. For example, a "no-beard" employment policy that applies to all workers without regard to race may still be unlawful if it is not job-related and has a negative impact on the employment of African American men, who have a predisposition to a skin condition that causes severe shaving bumps.

During the Harlem Renaissance an explosion in artistic expression among African Americans occurred. Coinciding with this expression was a questioning by African-Americans of racism in white America and of new expressions of identity and success. So, too, the impact of centuries of slavery and racism on subsequent generations also became a focus of black artists. One of the most successful poets and authors of the age was Langston Hughes. In many of his poems the author questions racism and its impact on African Americans. In others he questions the hypocrisy of democratic values that seem to exclude blacks. It is Hughes's own life experiences with racism and prejudice that inspired his creative expression. Throughout these poems, Hughes serves as a voice of hope and justice for African Americans, despite living in a racist society.

In a segregated and racist society, African Americans routinely faced all manner of discrimination, prejudice and even violence. The land of the "free" where all are "equal" did not seem to apply to African Americans. It is these high ideals Langston Hughes refers to in his poem *Let America Be America Again* that also serves as a critique of the hypocrisy and inequality behind the American Dream. Hughes's speaker makes a plea for the America of these high ideals to be again.

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Race issue can be seen in Langston Hughes poem entitled *As I Grew Older*. This poem was published in 1925. The poem starts off pretty negative as Hughes describe the fact that the wall stands in the way of his dream and he gives up. In the first stanza, Hughes represents the birth of a goal or dream, and as the poem progresses Hughes showcases that the dream begins to diminish behind the walls of adulthood, as he grow older. Hughes says that he has a dream which at the time, he really wants to make it come true and was sure can do it. The word of 'dream' may mean as hope, he feels;

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
In front of me,
Bright like a sun—
My dream.

(As I Grew Older, 1-6)

But in the second stanza, Hughes says that the dream is difficult to make it come true because of a 'wall' which can be assumed as Skin Color actions toward Blacks by Whites. The White people make Hughes almost gives up on his dream until he realizes he cannot let them succeed and take away his pride.

And then the wall rose,
Rose slowly,
Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose slowly, slowly,
Dimming,
Hiding,
The light of my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky—
The wall

(As I Grew Older, 7-12)

Hughes then says that the 'wall' raises then dims and hides his dream because he is a Black man. The "wall" represents the hardship of that Black people and all the struggles they deal with before they can overcome their dreams. It is pictured in the lines of stanza3:

Shadow
I am black

(As I Grew Old, 13, 14)

Although the 'wall' keeps him not to reach his dream, he has never given up reaching it. In the fourth stanza, Hughes may want to let the reader know that through the racial of skin color, there is hope and that dreams can be fulfilled when one fights for their

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rights. So, he will make effort to reach it.

I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.

(As I Grew Old, 15-19)

Then, he emphasizes that he will reach the dream by breaking the 'wall' to the utmost of his strength. He also wants that other people will help him so they can reach the dream—the equality of race, as it pictured in the stanza 4 and 5:

My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall
Find my dream!
Help me shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams of sun!

(As I Grew Old, 20-28)

Prejudice issue can be found in Langston Hughes poems entitled *Dinner Guest: Me* (1965). In the poem, Hughes presents at the dinner table is a representation of the African American people as a whole and their place in society. The dinner table represents society, and Hughes sitting at this table exemplifies the efforts made to make Blacks feel equal, as it pictured in the lines of stanza 1:

I know I am
The Negro Problem
Being wined and dined,
Answering the usual questions
That comes to White mind
Which seeks demurely?
To Probe in polite way
The why and wherewithal
Of darkness U.S.A.--
Wondering how things got this way
In current democratic night,
Murmuring gently
Over fraises du bois

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"I'm so ashamed of being White."

(*Dinner Guest: Me, 1-14*)

The overall concept of *Dinner Guest: Me* refers to the definition of humanity. The poem does not give a formal definition of what a person is, but it does give the grounds of which an American should not be judged, which is by their skin color.

Langston Hughes tries to convey about Discrimination in his poem entitled, *Theme of English B*. Langston Hughes is a Black man and the only colored student in his class when he studied and lived at the Y in Harlem. He had different background from his instructor who was White. When he studied in the university, the Black students were not accepted to live in the dormitories. He was a Columbia student, unsure, unknown and unwelcome but finally he had a room in the Hortly Hall although the universities yield it grudgingly. But even though he is Black he is still just like his White instructor in many ways. Hughes may want to say that the Blacks also have the same position although different in skin color. But Langston Hughes, like others, also likes to 'eat, sleep, drink and be in love' and 'work, read, learn, and understand life'. He also likes 'Bessie, bop, or Bach'. The Bessie and Bop style of music are listened mostly by the Black people. However he also likes Bach, which is typically listened to mostly by the White people. In this poem, He may want to say that the music common to all races include the Blacks even the music common to the White people. Langston Hughes also says that he does not want to be a part of White people and believes that his White instructor does not want to be a part of his people either. He said that he can learn from his instructor and hopes that his instructor can learn from him too although the instructor was older than Hughes. As it is pictured in these lines of stanza 4:

Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me--although you're older-- and White--
And somewhat more free.

(*Theme for English B, 34-40*)

Another example poem of Langston Hughes concerns about discrimination is *Democracy* that published in 1949. Langston Hughes feels compelled to speak his mind for equality and his birthright freedom via poetry; he clearly addresses his point of views about democracy in of this poem Democracy implies free and equal representation of people; in more concrete language, it implies free and equal right of every single soul to participate in a system of government, which was nonexistent to Blacks at the juncture due to Jim Crow laws-were state and local laws in the United States enacted between 1876-1965, mandate de juro segregation in al public facilities, with supposedly "separate but equal" status for Black Americans. In the poem, he obviously wants to change and gets

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equality in the present when he is alive, and not in the future because he thinks that for a dead man has no right to freedom. Approximately, he had a pessimistic view of democracy because Blacks were treated badly and suffered greatly. He believes his rights should parallel those to White people, without compromising his dignity in any way. He declares he is an American and should have the rights to stand on his land, supported in the second stanza:

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own the land.

(Democracy, 5-9)

He does not want to wait for freedom; he wants to fight for freedom and make a change. Moreover he is not too fond of passive individuals. Tomorrow is another day because the kind of attitude significance submission. As it pictured in the third stanza:

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread

(Democracy, 10-14)

He indicates that everybody should have the right to exercise their freedom because that's birthright, for Whites, Blacks, and whoever. Their needs no interpretation because the clarity of what he wants is obvious. It can be seen in the last stanzas:

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.
I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you.

(Democracy, 15-21)

Stereotypes issue can be seen in Langston Hughes poem entitled *Argument*. In the poem, Hughes begins with praising the Whites and their goodness, he says contrast about the Blacks that they will get badness as they look like. Blacks have known as the minority class which has some values, such as: Unemployment, Uneducated, poor, unrespectable, broken-home, criminal, etc. Hughes asked Jack (he may be a Black man) whether he believes the values that adhere to the Blacks. It can be seen in these lines of stanza 1:

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White is right,
Yellow mellow,
Black, get black!
Do you believe that, Jack?

(Argument, 1-4)

In the next stanza, Hughes said that Jack will surely believe it and Jack is fool man because he has not a hope to change the values. According to Hughes, as the Black man, in God eyes everyone has the same right to do the good things. Therefore, everyone in the same race has not same characteristics. Blacks, like Whites are also fine. It can be seen in these lines of stanza 2:

Sure do!
Then you're a dope
For which there aren't no hope.
Black is fine!
And, God knows,
It's mine!

(Argument, 5-10)

Cross is another example poem of Langston Hughes that talks about Stereotype. In the first stanza, Langston Hughes being telling that his father was a white man. He then reports that he has curses his white old man, but now he wants to take his curses back. As it is pictured in these lines of stanza 1:

My Old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

(Cross, 1-4)

In addition to cursing his father, Langston Hughes has cursed his mother and he also wish she were in hell. But now again, he wants to apologize for the "evil wish", and he even wants to wish her well Langston Hughes has changed his point of view regarding his parents; he used to curse the~ but now he writes he could rescind those curses. As it is pictured in these lines of stanza 2:

If I ever cursed my back old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

(Cross, 5-8)

In the stanza, Langston Hughes may say that he was probably not raised by both parents. His father died wealthy, symbolized by the "fine big house", while his mother died poor,

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symbolized by the “shack”. But Langston Hughes’s true purpose in revealing his victim status may finally explored when he says that he wonder where he will die, and asks “being neither White nor Black?” He may reasons that White people always die in fine big houses, and Black people always died in shacks. As it is pictured in these lines of stanza 3:

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I’m gonna die,
Being neither white nor black? (*Cross*, 9-12)

Langston Hughes tries to convey about racial segregation issue in his poem entitled, *I Too*. This poem was written when Langston Hughes in Genoa, Italy. The poem shows how Black people are treated unequally during the slavery. The Darker brother (Black) is waiting for his opportunity to share the table of freedom with all Americans. The Blacks have black skin and it is used, as the sign that make them became the law class in society. The Black man was often treated as although they were not human. The Black suffered when the White treated them as an inferior class. In American society the Black has been kept in the bottom economic class in the bottom status group and in the most ineffectual power position. The example of Racial Segregation actions, such as: the Black must eat in different place from the White, the general facilities that provided by government are differentiated among Blacks and White.

But, there are the optimistic statements that they were increasing rapidly and they become a strong human although the Blacks get bad treatment. As it can be seen in the next lines of stanza 2:

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

(*I, Too*, 2-7)

In the next stanza, Hughes conveys the willing and the optimistic feeling of Black. One day, there will be no more racial segregation. Black and White will eat in the same place and get the same facilities. It can be seen in the next lines of stanza 3:

Tomorrow,
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare

Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen," then. (*I, Too*, 8-13)

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Then Langston Hughes may also want to say that the White could not only see the aspect of Blacks' badness but also their kindness. So, if the Whites know their kindness. They will be ashamed. It is stated in these lines of stanza 4:

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--
I, too, am America.

(*I, Too*, 14-17)

Langston Hughes poem entitled *Merry Go-round* also concerns of racial segregation issue. In the poem, Hughes tells about a Black child in a carnival. He wants to ride a horse of merry go-round but he does not know where his horse. He has mindset that Blacks and Whites cannot sit side by side. As in Down South—his hometown, there is a place in a train named Jim Crow where it is back side of the train. The Blacks must sit at the place. So, the child is confused where he should sit. As we know, merry go-round shape is round—there is no front and back. In the poem *Weary Blues* a black man plays his blues in an old piano in a Harlem bar. “The dull pallor, lazy sway, gas light “reveals the atmosphere of sadness. He made a sad rangy syncopated tune. The Negro sings that he got nobody in this world except himself and he felt hopeless and wishes to die rather than to live. This shows the life of the blacks in America. He sings all over the night and went to sleep overnight and slept like rock or a dead. From the above to analysed it obvious that as Langston Hughes a Mullato, he shows that he had been tormented as inferior race by the white people.

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