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The Impact of Racial Identity on 20th Century

African American Poetry:

A Selective Study of Langston Hughes' Poems

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Declaration

I, undersigned do hereby declare that this submitted work is my original work and has not previously been submitted for any institution or university for a degree. I also take full responsibility for any future possible issues related to the originality of this work. I equally declare that a list of references is provided forward indicating all the sources of the cited and quoted information. This work was certified and completed at Mohammed KHEIDER University of Biskra.

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Acknowledgments

At the start, I thank **God** and praise Him for granting me success

I take this opportunity, to express my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor,

“Mr Senouci Zakaria”

His proficient guidance enabled me to persevere through all of the difficulties of exploration and successfully complete this project.

It was an honor to conduct this research under his supervision.

Thanks, and appreciation to everyone who helped me complete this work,
whether from near or far.

FATIMA

Dedication

I dedicate this humble work

This is where we can understand Hughes' motivation for being interested in black

race identity. The sake of God, my source of blessings

My great parents, the most precious blessing in my life

To those who shared my joys and sorrows with me

, to my brothers and sisters, their husbands and wives

To my nephews

To all my friends, and colleagues.

FATIMA

Abstract

After several centuries of marginalization by the white race community, the twentieth century witnessed an important shift in the history of African-American writers, especially after the mass migration led by blacks from the American South to the North and the emergence of many writers and thinkers who dedicated their writings to the concept of the black race to raise awareness of it in order to search for identity and achieve self-esteem. Several literary movements arose in order to solidify these ideas. The "Harlem Renaissance Movement," which included an important group of black writers and technicians, is an example of this. The most prominent pioneer was the poet and writer Langston Hughes, who played an important role in enriching African American literature with a number of works, mostly on the subject of the black race. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Negro," and "The Theme of English B" are among the most important poems he presented in this context. The common thread running through these three poems is the adoration of the black race, expressing the historical legacy through a collection of symbols the great for blacks, through their roles in the construction of significant landmarks around the world, as well as his interest in music, which Hughes considers an integral part of black identity and culture, as well as his pride, while in some of his poems he worked on the issue of self-esteem by calling for equality with white people. According to "The Theme of English B".

Key Words: African American poetry, Langston Hughes, Racial Identity.

المخلص

شهد القرن العشرين نقلة مهمة في تاريخ الأدباء الأفارقة الأمريكيين، وخاصة بعد الهجرة الجماعية التي قادها السود من الجنوب الأمريكي الى الشمال، وبروز العديد من الكتاب والمفكرين، الذين كرسوا كتاباتهم حول مفهوم العرق الأسود لرفع الوعي انداك، من اجل البحث عن الهوية وتحقيق التقدير الذاتي، بعد قرون عدة من التهميش من قبل مجتمع العرق الأبيض. برزت العديد من الحركات الأدبية من أجل ترسيخ هذه المفاهيم. ومثال ذلك "حركة نهضة هارلم" التي اشتملت على مجموعة مهمة من الادباء والفنبيين السود، ومن أبرز روادها الشاعر والكاتب لانغستون هيوز، الذي لعب دور مهم في اثراء الادب الافريقي الأمريكي بجملة من الاعمال تتركز في اغلبها على موضوع العرق الأسود. ومن اهم القصائد التي قدمها في هذا السياق "الزنجي يتكلم عن الأنهار"، "الزنجي"، وكذلك "قضية الإنجليزية ب".

العامل المشترك بين هاته القصائد الثلاث، انها تتمحور حول تمجيد العرق الأسود، بالاعتماد على مجموعة من الرموز التي تعبر عن الإرث التاريخي العظيم للسود، من خلال ادوارهم في تشييد معالم مهمة في العالم، كذلك الاهتمام بالموسيقى والتي يعتبرها هيوز جزءا لا يتجزأ من هوية وثقافة السود، وكذلك فخره. في حين اشتغل في بعض اشعاره بقضية تقدير الذات، من خلال الدعوة الى المطالبة بالمساواة مع الانسان الأبيض. مثل ما عبر عنه في قصيدة "قضية الإنجليزية ب".

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الافريقي الأمريكي، لانغستون هيوز، الهوية العرقية.

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General Introduction

Background

For many centuries, black people faced many hardships of segregation and racism within American society, and their voices were not heard until the end of the nineteenth century, which is considered an important crossroads in their lives, after the emergence of many scholars, artists, and even African American writers, who presented perceptions and new insights reflecting the value of black identity and sought the characteristics of an experience with African roots.

With the increasing interest in the issue of blacks and the rise of their voices by the turn of the twentieth century, many literary movements arose to support racial identity because they were proud of their African ancestors and sought respect from the rest of the world. The Harlem Renaissance was one of the most significant of these movements. In the Americas, black writers began to delve deeper into their African souls in order to create art that demonstrated its worth through a musical and poetic perspective. Because it addresses the recipients' conscience and feelings, the latter has gained popularity among blacks.

Langston Hughes was a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance and one of the most influential black poets of the twentieth century. He used his poetry to address issues such as segregation and racial identity as an African American critic of racism. His attention was always drawn to the subject of race, which he interpreted in many of his works and expressed in many of his sayings, such as "A very high mountain indeed for the would-be racial artist to climb in order to discover himself and his people" (Hughes 01). As a result, the purpose of this study will be to investigate the role of Langston Hughes' poems in the struggle for African American identity.

Research Problem and Question(s)

African Americans' intellectual awareness in the twentieth century was crucial in shaping and directing their literary writings. Their focus shifted to their culture and the symbols of their identity, and they sought to embody these concepts for the renaissance and the advancement of the black race. Langston Hughes was regarded at that time as one of the most important pioneers of African American literature. He wanted to express his distinct black identity through his written works, particularly poetry. Thus, the present research investigates the following questions:

- To what extent did Langston Hughes' poems reflect his racial identity?
- What are the fundamental precepts of the concept of racial identity?
- What were the most significant intellectual transformations in the twentieth century that contributed to the rise of the concept of identity among African-American poets?
- How did Langston Hughes define the concept of racial identity in his poems?

Research Aims

The result of this study is expected to contribute to the development of literary study by giving a useful reference for those who are interested in Langston Hughes poetry. It also aims to shed light on the historical background of the African American poetry, and it analyzes how it served in the cultural awakening of the black population.

Hughes addresses racism in his poems, refusing to be seen as inferior to the white and encouraging his people to raise their heads and make the white see the beauty behind the black skinned people. As a result, the focus of this research is to look at how selected poems represent black identity.

Methodology

The current research relies on both primary and secondary sources. to grasp the various concepts used in this research, by discussing relevant papers on the research topic.

The study will be based primarily on a thematic examination of how twentieth-century African American poetry reflected the racial identity theme.

The research focuses on two major theories. Critical race theory and New Historicism Theory. **The New Historicism Theory** looks into the historical context of Langston Hughes' poems. The New Historicists aim to do two things: first, they want to study how a work of literature reflects its historical and socio-cultural context. Second, they want to understand how a literary work comments on and relates to its context (qtd.in, Feredj, Chaddadi 06). It sees the relationship between history and literature quite differently. Today, most literary scholars think of history as a dynamic interplay of cultural, economic, artistic, religious, political, and social forces. They don't necessarily concentrate solely on kings and nobles, or battles and coronations. In addition, they also focus on the smaller details of history, including the plight of the common person, popular songs and art, literature ("New Historical Criticism"). **Critical Race Theory** is interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious (Delgado 14,15).

The applied study is based on an analysis of selected poems by Langston Hughes on racial identity. which seeks to reveal through Hughes' poems the struggles of blacks to maintain their identity in the face of racism and injustice.

Significance of the study

The study stems from the fact that the issue of race continues to preoccupy the minds of scholars due to its role in determining identity. As a result, the study could be very useful for future research in this field.

The study and analysis of Langston Hughes' poems to highlight his views on race and identity demonstrates the value of literary works in tackling issues in their various forms.

Structure of the Study

The current dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, "**Racial Identity: An Overview**," would look into the first variable, which is related to the idea of racial identity. The second chapter is titled "**20th Century African American Poetry: A Socio-Historical Context**." It focuses on major literary movements and themes addressed by African American poets at that time. The third chapter entitled "**Racial identity's impact on Langston Hughes' poetry**," would be a practical one for analyzing selected poems by Langston Hughes; "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Theme of English B," and the extent to which they reflect the concept of racial identity among blacks.

Chapter One

Racial Identity: An Overview

Introduction

The first chapter focuses on the first variable related to the concept of racial identity as a complex concept based on two components: race and identity, so a separate component was addressed in this framework in an attempt to present a comprehensive concept and remove ambiguity about this variable, and the research also touched on black racial identity, which is the focus of this study.

1. Identity

The Oxford English Dictionary offers a Latin root *identitas*, from *idem*, ‘the same’ – and two basic meanings: “the sameness of objects, as in A1 is identical to A2 but not to B1;” “the consistency or continuity over time that is the basis for establishing and grasping the definiteness and distinctiveness of something” (Jenkins 16).

“Identity” denotes the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities (Jenkins 18).

Studies about “identity” deal with the opposition between the individual and the social; and that opposition is codified according to the distinction made between “personal identity” and “social identity” (Worchel 02).

This distinction was already made - although not explicitly - at the beginning of modern psychological thinking. At the end of the last century, William James 1890 wrote about the distinction between the I and the me and came up with the idea of duality in self-representation (qtd, in Worchel 02).

1.1 Personal Identity

Eric T. Olson states “personal identity” usually refers to certain properties to which a person feels a special sense of attachment or ownership. Someone’s personal identity in this sense consists of those features she takes to “define her as a person” or “make her the person she’ (qtd, in Schneider 70).

“Personal identity” is not well defined. However, it indicates how an individual is aware of his difference with respect to others. That feeling can only be experienced in relation to others and “personal identity” refers to the fact that the individual perceives himself as identical to himself; in other words, he is the same in time and in space, but that is also what specifies him and marks him out from others. “Personal identity” is what makes you similar to yourself and different from others (Worchel 03).

‘Personal identity’, which differentiates the unique self from all other selves, is different from ‘social identity’, which is the internalization of, often stereotypical, collective identifications. Social identity is sometimes the more salient influence on individual behavior (Jenkins 112).

1.2 Social Identity

Tajfel famously defines social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Vignoles 01).

Social identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object. Social identities are at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine ‘who I am/we are’ in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations (Fearon 05).

Social identity refers to the fact that the individual perceives him- or herself as similar to others of the same background (the we), but it also refers to a difference, to a specificity of that we in connection with members of other groups or categories (the them). We have then a double motion which combines ingroup similarities and intergroup or categorial differentiation. The stronger the identification with a group, the more significant the differentiation of that group from other groups will be (Vignoles 02,03).

Thus, "Identity" is our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us). It is a very practical matter, synthesizing relationships of similarity and difference. The outcome of agreement and disagreement, and at least in principle always negotiable, identification is not fixed (Jenkins 18).

2. Race

The modern meaning of the term *race* with reference to humans began to emerge in the 17th century. Since then, it has had a variety of meanings in the languages of the Western world. What most definitions have in common is an attempt to categorize peoples primarily by their physical differences. In the United States, for example, race refers to a group of people who share some visible physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair texture, facial features, and eye formation (Smedley 690).

The term "race" has also been applied to linguistic groups (such as the "Arab race" or the "Latin race"), religious groups, and even political, national, or ethnic groups with few or no physical characteristics that distinguish them from their neighbors (such as the "Irish race," "French race," "Spanish race," "Slavic race," and "Chinese race") (Smedley 690).

Before the 1500s, the term race was used to identify groups of people with a kinship or group connection, but as a categorizing term referring to human beings it was first used in the English language in the late 16th century. Until the 18th century, it had a broad meaning, similar to other classification terms like type, sort, or kind. Shakespeare's time occasionally referred to a "race of saints" or "race of bishops" ("Historical Foundations of Race").

By the 18th century, race was widely used for sorting and ranking the peoples in the English colonies Europeans who saw themselves as free people, Amerindians who had been conquered, and Africans who were being brought in as slave labour and this usage continues today ("Historical Foundations of Race").

2.1 Race as a biological construct

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, biological realism was the dominant view. Two definitions of 'subspecies' were offered. First there was the typological subspecies concept, which treats subspecies as natural kinds defined in terms of essential properties possessed by all and only the members of a subspecies (qtd.in Andreasen 654).

Later, the concept of geographical subspecies emerged. A phenotypically and genetically similar breeding population that inhabits its own geographic range and differs significantly from others, such populations is referred to as a "geographical subspecies." Although both ideas were eventually rejected, they each had a long reign as the accepted definition of the human race (654).

2.2 Race as a Social Construct

A shift in perspective occurred in the mid-twentieth century. Many modern anthropologists and biologists in the West have come to regard race as an invalid genetic or biological designation. Because it was widely recognized in the 1970s that the biological concept of subspecies, that is, populations of conspecifics that are genetically and morphologically different from each other, could not be applied to humans, social

constructionism became prevalent. It was assumed that the racist tenet that skin color and other skin-deep properties distinguish different biological groups was false (Machery and Luc 1208).

Today scholars are beginning to realize that “race” is nothing more and nothing less than a social invention (Smedley 690). It is a real social construction that gives or denies benefits and privileges. American society as an example developed the notion of race early in its formation to justify its new economic system of capitalism, which depended on the institution of forced labor, especially the enslavement of African peoples (“Historical Foundations of Race”).

The social construction of race is fundamentally a power story, in which those in positions of political, economic, and social authority create and recreate categories of difference, and assign meaning and value to those categories in order to maintain and naturalize their own dominance. However, it is also a story of resistance, in which African Americans have consistently challenged pervasive inequality and negative stereotypes, creating identities for themselves in the process (Stein 01).

3. Racial Identity

Racial Identity, is composed of two important factors; race and identity. Whereas the first links it to the black people in the world, and especially America; the second constitutes the process of self-definition resulted from the oppression, suffering, and discrimination as being a member of the black race (Abdulrahman 43).

Racial identity has been defined by Cokley (2007) as the “collective identity of any group of people socialized to think of themselves as a racial group.” It is thought to be a concept describing how individuals create their identities in response to oppression (qtd.in Allen 12,13

Racial identity is a multidimensional construct that includes the strength of one's identification with one's racial group, a sense of attachment to other group members, an evaluation of group membership and may include group-relevant attitudes and behaviors (Broman 833).

3.1 Black racial identity

Sanders-Thompson (1991, 1995) proposes a multidimensional model of black racial identity. Her model consists of four components. The physical dimension assesses the degree of acceptance of African American physical attributes; the cultural dimension measures awareness of black cultural and social practices; the sociopolitical dimension indicates awareness of black social and political issues; and the psychological dimension reflects pride and belongingness to African Americans as a social group. Her Multidimensional Racial Identification Scale presently includes 30 items (qtd .in Broman 835). She found that physical identity was associated with experiences of racism and greater racial socialization within the family. Psychological racism was associated with experiences of discrimination and greater involvement in the black community; and sociopolitical and cultural identity both reflect greater community involvement and family socialization (835).

Demo and Hughes (1990) factor analyzed items from the National Survey of Black Americans and argued that African American identity had three components: closeness, black separatism, and black group evaluation. Closeness indicates the degree to which respondents feel that their feelings and thoughts are similar to those of other African Americans; black separatism indicates the extent of commitment to black culture and inclination to restrict social relationships to other African Americans; and black group evaluation is the degree to which respondents believe that African Americans

display positive characteristics. They found that integration into mainstream American society is associated with less in-group solidarity but that mainstream integration and higher economic status enhance the positive evaluation of African Americans (834).

Racial identity for Blacks' self-esteem and mental health (qtd. In Brenner., et al 61). Pride comes from associating positive meanings with one's group. For example, Black Americans have long seen themselves as strong and resilient, having overcome many injustices (Campbell, 2017).

Conclusion

At the end of this chapter, it can be stated that the concept of racial identity resulted from intellectual and sociological developments that accompanied the concepts of race and identity since their emergence centuries ago. This concept has sparked so many debates and discussions that it has become a resource for many ideologies as well as research and studies. Despite this, it is difficult to maintain a general concept of this term due to the complexities it has seen with its evolution over time. Because of its interest in these minorities, it has attracted the attention of writers and poets in the modern era, particularly in the field of African American literature.

Chapter Two

20th century African American Poetry: A Socio-Historical Context

Introduction

The second chapter looks at the history of African American poetry in general, as well as some of its most notable founders. This is done so that the reader can understand the concept's historical context. In the same vein, the chapter discusses the impactful stages of African American poetry development in the twentieth century. This is based on research into the most influential literary movements of the time. At each stage, examples of the most prominent black poets and their most significant contributions are provided. The goal of this historical examination is to determine how the concept of racial identity and its various tributaries influenced the establishment of black poets in America.

1. Historical Foundations of African American poetry

Many scholars and thinkers interested in African-American literature believe that African-American poetry is ancient, with roots dating back to the eighteenth century, as Lauri Ramey stated in his book *A History of African American Poetry*, the birth of the Afro-American literary tradition began in 1773 when Phillis Wheatley published a book of poetry. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr (48). Correspondingly, Joyce Patton lists different historical eras of African- American Poetry. They are listed as follows:

(1700-1800) The Eighteenth-Century Beginnings, which include slavery; (1800-1860) The Struggle against Slavery and Racism; (1861-1865) The Black Man in the Civil War - from which no new poets emerged; (1865-1915) Reconstruction and Reaction; (1915-1945) Renaissance and Radicalism-, which also includes the Jazz Age (Patton, 1991, 1). The Poets.org “Poetic Schools & Movements” Web page lists some more current movements in African-American Poetry such as (1945-1959) The

Civil Rights Movement; (1960-1969/70) Black Arts Movement; (1986) Introduction of Slam Poetry; (1988) The Dark Room Collective. (01)

Lucy Terry, Jupiter Hammon, and Horton George are considered founding members of African American poetry because of their late contributions, whereas Phillis Wheatley, who had the opportunity to publish a book of poetry, explains the origins of this literary art to her. As previously stated by Laury.

Lucy Terry (1724–1821) is regarded as the founding mother of African American poetry for her symbolic function rather than her literary contribution. Terry's only recorded poem, "Bars Fight, August 28th, 1746," is widely considered to be the first written by an African American. She was well known for her oratory skills. Despite this, this event is the only poem of hers that has survived. Her birth year is commonly given as 1730, implying that she wrote this poem when she was sixteen (Lauri 52).

From another perspective, the African American poetry tradition begins with *Jupiter Hammon* (1711–1806). Hammon's poem, *An Evening Thought, Salvation through Christ, with Penitential Cries* written around 1760, was published in 1761. Hammon's poem is widely regarded as the first to be published by a person of African descent in the country that became the United States of America. J. Saunders Redding, whom Gates referred to as "the real Dean of Afro-American literary critics," regarded Hammon as "the first Negro writer in America" and "the first American Negro to see his name in print as a poet" (55).

As previously stated, *Phillis Wheatley* published the first collection of poetry in 1773, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, which was widely regarded as the beginning of the emergence of African American poetry. Phillis was born in Africa about 1753 and brought to America as a young girl, (Franklin et al. 89). She was kidnapped from her birthplace in Gambia, West Africa, and sold into slavery when she was only six or seven years old. Wheatley's poems are featured in many anthologies and studies on the history of

African American poetry (02).

Wheatley's central concern is always freedom: spiritual freedom, through religion, from the shackles of sickness and death; political freedom, through independence and rule, from the despotism of British tyranny; and, perhaps most importantly, imaginative freedom, through poetical style and innovation (Levernier 175).

George Moses Horton was the first African American to publish poetry in the South. Horton was born around the year 1797 on a plantation in North Carolina. Throughout his childhood, Horton was drawn to lyrics and began composing poems. Horton worked for what is now the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There, he began writing and reciting poems for college students who paid him. By 1829, Horton was releasing his first poetry collection. It was titled *The Hope of Liberty*. Horton gained the admiration of abolitionists by writing antislavery poetry (Femi 02,03).

Paul Laurence Dunbar was a poet who lived from 1872 to 1906. He is one of the most influential black poets in early American literature. Dunbar explored themes such as racial identity, love, heritage, and injustice in his poems. His works were all published during the Jim Crow Era. This was the period that lasted from the Reconstruction Era to the civil rights movement. The name comes from a collection of laws that discriminated against African Americans (Femi 01). He was haunted by the fear of early death and died at the age of thirty-three, from tuberculosis in 1906. He broke the ground for poets to become in the current upsurge of poetry that reflects black life, black rhythms, and black language (Barksdale 349). As Johnson puts it in the preface of *The Book of American Negro Poetry*:

Paul Laurence Dunbar stands out as the first poet from the Negro race in the United States to show a combined mastery over poetical material and poetic technique, to reveal innate literary distinction in what he wrote, and to maintain a high level of performance. He was the first to rise to a height from which he could take a

perspective view of the race. He was the first to see objectively its humor, its superstitions, its short-comings; the first to feel sympathetically its heart wounds, its yearnings, its aspirations, and to voice them all in a purely literary (Johnson)

2. Historical context of 20th century African American poetry

Twentieth century African American poetry has always been linked to the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance movement in the twentieth century. This perception stems from the movement's accomplishments. It has succeeded in reviving African culture and assimilating it into American culture through literary publications, that are now taught in American universities.

2.1 Pre-Harlem Renaissance

The concept of the *New Negro*, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, denoted the beginning of a new era in the history of African American poetry, it is a term that was first used in 1895 to describe a new class of American blacks who for the first time had access to both money and education (Beach 114).

By the mid-1920s, the vanguard of young black writers and painters had moved to Harlem, making the "New Negro" a reality., and it was there, as *Alain Locke* proclaimed in his 1925 book *The New Negro*, that “Negro life was seizing its first chances for group expression and self-determination.” It was the involvement of black intellectuals like Locke as much as the production of writers and artists that shaped the Harlem New Negro movement (115).

As a result, the "new Negro" was the effect of the Great Migration, which occurred between 1915 and 1920, when over a million African Americans moved from the rural South to the urban North in search of opportunity. From the 1920s to the mid-1930s, Harlem was the cultural capital of African Americans due to the emergence of an African American middle class and a convergence of social forces. The New Negro Movement was strongly

opposed to the separatist Jim Crow laws that governed African American society after the Civil War (Buck 01).

The African heritage of American blacks was held up as a source of pride and the foundation for global racial solidarity by the New Negro movement. Several black poets supported the so-called "Pan-Africanism" movement, including one of its most influential forefathers, W. E. B. Du Bois (Beach 114, 115).

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was the first black poet publicly to break with rhyme and blank verse in *A Litany of Atlanta*. The theme of Africa as a proper and necessary object of black celebration was introduced into black verse by Du Bois in his *Day in Africa*. He was the first to celebrate the beauty of human blackness in his *Song of the Smoke*. *The Burden of Black Women* is the first published poem to dwell on hatred as the consequence of the white destruction of crucial institutions, particularly marriage and motherhood, in black culture (Rampersad 53)

2.2 The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance (c. 1918–37) was the most influential movement in African American literary history. The movement was named after the city of Harlem, which became the center of African American life only in the second decade of the twentieth century, when the great migration of blacks from the rural south to the industrialized north brought a large black population into New York City. Between 1910 and 1930, the black population of New York increased from under 100,000 to over 300,000 (Buck 01).

The Harlem Renaissance Movement was strategically created to use literature as an instructive method to improve the damaged Self ethnic image of African American people. The Movement's Self ethnic literary agenda plan was produced in seven magazines, eighty-five school periodicals, seventy religious' publications, and five music magazines (Howard 35). that had the energy to bring about change. Working within the framework of the Self-

Ethnic Reliance philosophy, these African Americans discovered that imitating white culture did not involve acceptance or equality in the eyes of their white oppressors. The new world view of these New Negro writers was one of embracing a new, positive, Self-ethnic Image that would help improve Racial Pride and Esteem (30).

The centrality of Harlem as a symbolic site of African American life and culture is demonstrated by the extraordinary number of poems and books that include the word in their titles: *Harlem*, *Harlem Dancer*, *Harlem: The Black City*, *Harlem Street Walkers*, *Harlem Life*, *Harlem Wine*, *Harlem Night Club*, *Harlem Night Song*, *Harlem Shadows*, *Home to Harlem*, and *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (beach 117). Amongst its best-known figures were Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay.

The first major poetical voice of the Harlem Renaissance, however, was *Claude McKay* (1889–1948). *McKay* was born in Jamaica, and had worked there as a policeman and published two volumes of dialect verse based on his experiences before coming to the United States to attend college in 1912. He quickly became involved in radical politics and served on the editorial board of socialist magazines such as *Liberator*, and *The Masses*. His bold anti lynching poem *If We Must Die*, first published in *Liberator*, was a militant response to the red summer of racial violence in 1919 (Cary 84).

His work remained central to the “New Negro” movement. McKay’s poetry, as in *If We Must Die*, is unwavering in its condemnation of racial bigotry and declaration of determination to overcome it. McKay’s collection *Harlem Shadows* (1922) established a high standard for other poets a standard that would be met by major poets such as *Countee Cullen* (1903–1946), *Langston Hughes* (1902–1967) (85)

Countee Cullen was easily the most acclaimed and prolific poet of the Harlem Renaissance. His work appeared in a wide range of African American and mainstream journals. He definitely opposed the tendency of some poets to indulge in sensationalized

“primitive” imagery. Other literary critics also expressed weariness with poets who seemed to exploit tawdry urban scenes. In the anthology he edited, Cullen applauded the stylistic diversity of his contemporaries (85).

Though, Cullen desired to “maintain the higher traditions of English verse.” He was aware of the ambivalence in his own position. In his magnificent poem *Heritage* (1925), identifying himself as “one three centuries removed,” Cullen wonders, “What is Africa to me?” Self-doubt, social ostracism because of race, and skepticism about religious faith become powerfully conflicting forces (85).

The leading voice of the Harlem Renaissance was *Langston Hughes* Beginning with “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” published in *The Crisis* when he was nineteen years old, Langston Hughes made a tremendous impact on the Poets; He achieved international fame after publishing his first book in 1926. *The Weary Blues* marked a turning point in African American poetry. He celebrated the common man; chose to write about situations that many thought unpoetic; and, without an apology, used the folk blues stanza as if it were as acceptable as the sonnet (86).

Hughes went on a nationwide tour, giving readings of his work at colleges, churches, and community auditoriums, after becoming popular with a middle-class audience and then an enthusiastic working-class readership. Poems such as *I, Too, Sing America* captured the community’s mood of pride, determination, and impatience with second-class citizenship. The beautiful monologue *Mother to Son*, more than likely drawing on Hughes’s own personal childhood experiences, spoke directly to both elders and the rising generation, reinforcing the need for perseverance in the face of adversity and racism (86).

The major themes preoccupied the poets of that period as the Poet *Sterling Brown* (1901–1989), defined were: (1) the expression of racial pride, which was closely tied to an awareness of African history and culture, (2) the celebration of African American achievers

and heroes the portrayal of black people as capable of great things, (3) the advancement of the black race, (4) the use of elements from the African American folk tradition, and (5) the exploration of self or individual identity (Howes 35).

2.3 Post-Harlem Renaissance

In the mid-1940s, a new generation of African American poets began to emerge. If the work of poets such as *Melvin Tolson*, *Robert Hayden*, and *Gwendolyn Brooks* did not constitute either a “renaissance” or a “movement,” it was at least an important revival of poetry by black Americans.

Both *Tolson* and *Hayden* were strongly influenced by the modernist writing of Eliot, Crane, and Pound. In a 1949 speech, Tolson explicitly distinguished Eliot's writing from that of the Harlem Renaissance. Declaring that the time had come for “a New Negro Poetry for the New Negro,” he proposed that African American poets present a “rich heritage of folklore and history” while using the techniques developed by Eliot, Pound, Williams, and other white poets; conspicuously absent from his list were the names of any black writers. Four years later, Allen Tate praised Tolson’s work as the first instance of a black poet having “assimilated completely the full poetic language of his time the language of the Anglo-American poetic tradition” (beach 128).

2.4 The Black Arts movement

The Black Arts movement also known as *the Black Aesthetic*, *the New Black Consciousness*, The Black arts movement was represented by Amiri Baraka’s founding of Harlem Black Arts Repertory Theatre in 1965 and was based upon an adherence to a strict politics of black aesthetic (Debashree 125). The poetry, prose fiction, drama, and criticism written by African Americans during this period expressed a more militant attitude toward white American culture and its racist practices and ideologies (beach 130).

The new spirit of militance and cultural separatism that characterized the racial

politics of the late 1960s had profound effects on the way African American poetry was written (130).

The most influential of the new black poets was *Amiri Baraka*. Born Leroi Jones in Newark, New Jersey, in 1934, Baraka was more drawn to the poetry and ideas of the Beats and other white *avant-garde movements* than to the politics of black separatism (130).

In the mid-1960s, *Baraka* deeply affected by the death of *Malcolm X*, he made several important changes in his life and focus. He moved to Harlem, he converted to the Muslim faith, he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School in New York City and Spirit House in Newark, He gained fame as a spokesman for the Black Arts movement. In 1969, he published *Black Magic Poetry: 1961–1967*. *Black Magic, Poetry*, as suggested by *Jerry Gafio Watts*, can be read. “As a record of his progression from an entrapment in whiteness to an identification with blackness,” from his “outsider status in [white] bohemia” to his “arrival at a black nationalist sensibility” (132).

Another strong voice in African American poetry since the Black Arts Movement has been *Michael S. Harper*. Harper’s *Dear John, Dear Coltrane*, the title poem of his 1970 collection, is an important subgenre in the poetry of the Black Arts movement: the poem dedicated to or deriving from the work of black musicians. As *Gunter Lenz* puts it, black poetry of the 1960s and 1970s offered “the most promising medium to transform the energy of the forms of black music into the structure and performance of literature (135).

Another significant poet to emerge from the Black Arts movement was *Audre Lorde*. In addition to several volumes of poetry, beginning with *The First Cities* (1968), Lorde’s poems deal with her personal experience as an African American, as well as with the contemporary experience of blacks both in the United States and throughout the world. In her work, she makes frequent references to historical events and figures, often juxtaposing events and images for incongruous effect. In *The Day They Eulogized Mahalia*, for example, she

juxtaposes the public celebration of the black singer Mahalia Jackson with the death on the same day of six black children in an underfunded day-care center (133,134).

In *Sisters in Arms* (1986) she comments on the situation of blacks in South Africa through a series of interlocking narratives: the violent death of a friend's fifteen-year-old daughter, the massacre and imprisonment of black children in a South African province, and the uprising by the warrior queen Mmanthatisi (134).

Along with the late 1960s, the period from the early 1970s to the 1990s also produced a lot of powerful poetry, on various themes presented by a select few acclaimed African American poets. *Nikki Giovanni* became a popular poet during the 1970s. Her work is well appreciated for a wide range of themes including romanticism, family life, sexuality and societal issues (Lilly 134).

Black feeling was one of her early works. *Black Talk* (1968) and *Black Judgment* (1968) were praised for their revolutionary content and anti-oppression message. Her works amplify black pride. In her autobiographical poem, *My House* (1972) she focuses on day-to-day struggles people face both in their family life as well as their social life. In the poems contained in this work, she deals with social ideas from a broader perspective (134).

Giovanni radiates black pride and women's pride and promotes feministic ideals. Most of her themes centered around the growing disharmony that existed in modern day American relationships as observed in her work *The Women and the Men* (1975) (134).

Rita Dove, who won a Pulitzer Prize and served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995 (Ciment 209), her poetry also sublimates the idea that the folk element of the African American language is a creation of its own culture. In her collection, *the Other Side of the House* (1988) the historical significance of the African American culture is strongly portrayed. In her poetry, *Demeter Prayer to Hades*, she expresses the powerful feelings a mother feels when her children leave home (Lilly135).

3. The major Themes of 20th century African American poetry

The researcher can recognize the role of historical debates between blacks and whites, as well as political and social influences, in shaping the content and determining the directions of twentieth century African-American poetry. In terms of establishing identity and language, as well as racial discrimination.

African American poetry in general deals with certain themes such as family, history, Africa, slavery/freedom, urban life, skin color (shade), jargon/dialect, song rhythm, church/call and response, jazz, and blues" (Heidelberg 02).

3.1 Freedom Struggle

Before the New Negro, black poets grappled with issues of identity and displacement that arise as a result of being Africans (or of African descent) in the United States (Hendrickson 04). The nineteenth century presents a lacuna in the scholarship directly addressing or recognizing the contributions of black poets in the larger political discourse of racial identity and ancestry for blacks in the U.S. What's more, attention to the literary tradition's figures of the period has generally been overlooked when compared to literary predecessors, and twentieth-century successors (07).

A body of poetry born of long-suffering, and timeless expressions of the human capacity to refuse to be destroyed by inhumanity. The finest examples stand up to anything produced in the American poetry tradition. Referred to by W. E. B. Du Bois as the sorrow songs, justly claimed that they were "the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas" (Lauri 09).

If We Must Die exploded out of McKay during the turbulent days of the "Red Summer," in which scores of African Americans were beaten and killed. The clashes between blacks and whites in 1919, however, a different voice emerged, one of defiant despair, bitterness, and invective (Tillery 55). The Red Summer was a traumatizing ordeal for

McKay and countless other blacks. At times merely remaining sane seemed to be a "tour de force." For some, like Howard University professor Carter G. Woodson, who helplessly witnessed the brutal execution of an African-American male in Washington, D.C., the memory of that long hot summer lasted a lifetime (57). *If we must die* is McKay's response to the many murders of Black people in the United States in the era immediately following World War I (Braxton 10).

3.2 Black Experience in History and Memory

For many black poets, memory is a moral obligation, an attempt to memorialize their ancestors and sanctify the meanings of their lives, no matter how simple. Along with history is, and has always been, contentious. The Middle Passage and centuries of slavery disrupted the transmission of cultural memory and related practices that would have linked captive African descendants to their ancestral past. This trauma was exacerbated by racist laws and customs. This troubled relationship with history is reflected in the African American poetry tradition. Black poets have consistently used their poetry to create a historical counter-narrative, a counter to the distorted one that has marginalized and denigrated Black people (Shockley 35).

Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," one of the earliest poems he wrote and published, Rivers held great significance in African American culture during the antebellum period: one could be sold "downriver," carried by the Mississippi deeper into slavery. Here is an excerpt from Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers":

Hughes traces Black history back to the African continent and, further, to the area around the Euphrates known as "the cradle of civilization," before redeeming the Mississippi for a post-slavery significance (Shockley 34).

The African American poetry tradition is expanding and diversifying its representation of people, places, and events that exist outside of the official record. For the foreseeable

future, poetic imagination will be an important complement to and conveyor of black history and memory (36, 37).

Hughes states in this poem that Afro-Americans used to be slaves for a long time. They participated in building pyramids in Egypt and they served as slaves under the reign of Caesar. Slavery in the Greek and Roman empires is well known (Mohammad 168).

When Hughes traces African Americans' history as slaves, this does not mean that he shows them as weak or void of determination, on the contrary, they had a long history of fighting Belgians who arrived in Africa and colonized some regions. "The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo. They lynch me still in Mississippi"; these lines show how African Americans had undergone physical torture like cutting off their hands and other kinds of physical pains (169).

3.3 Black Language and Music

The interest in vernacular speech extended to poetry, as *Paul Laurence Dunbar* manipulated the rhythms of African American speech into some of the best-known verses of his time (Reidhead et al. 08). The term vernacular refers to a folk tradition and is frequently used in contradistinction to the more mainstream, dominant tradition. Literature of the vernacular is often oral, rather than written, and collectively authored, rather than the work of one individual. In African American literature, this term can describe texts as diverse as the spirituals, work songs, and folk tales from slavery times, as well as blues and jazz from the 20th century, and hip-hop lyrics from today (Molly 02).

During the Harlem Renaissance, vernacular forms were regarded as legitimately artistic rather than inferior to Western forms. Perhaps the most famous artist of this era is poet Langston Hughes, who deliberately abandoned the traditional English meter in favor of the rhythms of jazz and blues, which evolved from indigenous African music (04).

"Weary Blues" by Langston Hughes exemplifies his racial pride. He embraces the blues tradition and highlights African-Americans' common language in Harlem while remaining "literary" through "official" language and appealing to traditional poetical tropes and embellishments such as alliteration and meticulous rhyming patterns. When he says "To the tune of those Weary Blues," for example, he alternates between the voices of his dual consciousness. "He held each ivory key in his ebony hands"(Riederer 01).

Hughes chose the phonically vernacular "O" over the grammatically correct "of" to emphasize his open admiration for Black folk traditions and language. Furthermore, when Hughes describes the voice of the blues' pianist, his speech is written in the "folk" dialect (01).

3.4 Black Identities

The tragedy was that the African- American's quest for identity began over the things for which he was not responsible his black color, his race, his ancestors, and his physic (Bishwajit 82). In the New World, the Negro, not only lost his culture but his personal name. He was either given a Christian name or the surname of his master so that he could be easily identified that belonged to a particular master. The Negro, in this process, lost his personal indicator of identity, he was displaced from their native land and culture (83).

In their passage through slavery, the African Americans had to struggle to establish a sense of identity, find a voice, and claim a political and cultural space in the United States of America. This murderous transit has formed and reinforced a sense of black autonomy (83).

We wear the mask poem by Dunbar highlights the idea that oppression can impact one's identity, as a person who is a victim of oppression. Dunbar's poem suggests that to protect themselves, physically and psychologically, African Americans must shield themselves by cynically, strategically, performing stereotypes of Black joviality and insouciance (Muyumba 19).

Conclusion

The reader will discover the qualitative shift in African American poetry that occurred in the twentieth century at the end of this chapter. This shift is compared to what was presented by the founding poets, led by Wheatley, especially in terms of shape. After the popularity of blues and jazz, However, the most striking observation to be drawn from this chapter is the prevalence of racial identity in most of these poems. They attempted to embody their experiences in an oppressive, racist milieu by attempting to represent them. Some of them adopted the idea of struggle, and some of them focused on history, memory, and language. Through all these elements, the concept of pride and belonging to the black race was conveyed. This concept remained with many of their writings even after they reached prominent positions in American literature and became an integral part of it.

Chapter Three

Racial identity's impact on Langston Hughes' poetry

Introduction

“Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know” (Hughes 02). Thus, in most of his literary works, especially poetry, Langston Hughes expressed his interest in race-related topics, such as the issue of racial identity for African Americans. It is worth noting that many of his poems explore various aspects of African American identity in terms of overall culture and race, as well as the intricate topics of social injustice. This chapter will examine three of his poems, "The Negro Speaks of the River," "Negro," and "Theme for English B," which deal with major issues of racial and cultural identity. It looks at Hughes' black voice, which is used to analyze the racial discrimination theme represented in each poem and how it leads to black pride. The ideologies explored in these poems are examined using *Critical Race Theory*, because it is about people expressing themselves through their work (Delgado 09).

1. The Negro Speaks of Rivers: The Poem

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (Hughes, Langston, et al. 23)

1.1 The Negro Speaks of Rivers: Poem Analysis

Langston Hughes wrote "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" when he was just 17. Having recently graduated from high school, he was on a train heading to Mexico City (Socarides). Jones said that the train reached Saint Louis and began the long crossing of the Mississippi River. Langston stared at the muddy waters. Words came to him from deep inside. He jotted a poem on the back of an envelope. He wrote about knowing old rivers (22). He attempted to write it as if he were the entire black race growing up beside rivers around the world (23).

The main themes of this poem are memory and history, which are embodied in the relationship between black people and rivers. By mentioning many major rivers around the world, including the Euphrates, Nile, Congo, and Mississippi, Hughes was attempting to emphasize the significance of African Americans' historical heritage. He develops a theory of racial community whose strength derives not from geographical isolation, but from movement, from cultural flow among communities of color across both space and time (Bloom 187).

In June of 1921, this poem was first published in *The Crisis* (Rampersad 08). It is a free verse poem divided into five stanzas, each with a different number of lines. Hughes employed literary devices to emphasize the work's importance and value. The following are the most crucial: The poet expresses his feelings and thoughts through "Symbolism." For instance, "the river" could represent the African-American experience and its evolution over time. The word "dusky" is a symbol of blackness that represents the black man in the fourth stanza. Those symbols are meant to convey his racial pride message. The poem's use of "imagery" to elicit the reader's emotions, such as the line "I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset." It adds to his work's overall impact. In addition, the poet used "personification" to personify the river, saying in the second line of the third stanza, "I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me

to sleep." It's the same in the fourth. "I heard the Mississippi sing," says the speaker, as if the rivers were human beings.

The poem's title, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," indicates that the speaker is a black or African-American person speaking about rivers. He refers to himself with the first personal pronoun, "I." He addresses the readers in the first stanza, saying:

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

The phrase "I've known rivers" is repeated to emphasize the depth of knowledge and experience. It's about having a deep connection to the black race as one of the races that once existed. Based on what he said, I've known rivers ancient as the world. It proves that they have existed since antiquity. To demonstrate his historical race, the poet uses the words "ancient," "older," and "deep." It had a profound effect on their emotions and thoughts, causing them to become as deep as rivers.

Hughes used the first-person pronoun "I" at the beginning of almost each sentence to show pride. Although "I" expresses the singular, in this poem "I" expresses a collective voice (Anitha 100), which the reader can only realize through the temporal and spatial sequence indicated by the poet through a set of symbols in the following stanza:

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

Through a series of words such as bathed, built, lulled, looked, raised, heard, seen, that depicts the movement of black people through time, the speaker was able to embody the concept

of belonging to these rivers. Hughes writes this poem from the perspective of the black experience, which is important for understanding how rivers are used throughout the poem.

Langston Hughes connects the African American race to rivers, particularly ancient rivers, to demonstrate the African race's worth. In this poem, he mentions four rivers: the Euphrates, the Congo, the Nile, and the Mississippi.

Hughes mentions the Euphrates River. This river represents the beginning of life and civilization. This river represents the youth of African Americans. It refers to their beginning. Hughes then discusses the Congo River in Africa. For many African Americans, this is an image of home. It symbolizes a haven of peace and tranquility in their lives. Hughes writes about the Nile River and Egypt's great pyramids. Many people associate the pyramids with slavery because of the slave labor required to build these massive structures (*“What Does the River”*).

Finally, the great Mississippi River is mentioned. It remains an iconic presence in the African American memory, as Dorothy said:

Although rivers have long been included in the historical record, whether through a geographical, spiritual, aesthetic or recreational perspective, the juncture where human lives intersect with rivers, constructing memory and identity, remains overlooked despite a plethora of cultural artifacts such as song, prose, and poetry that distinguish experiences. These cultural artifacts, in turn, differentiate reciprocal relationships with the river based on race and class. For the African-American community (85).

The Mississippi River has long been associated with slavery and oppression in America, and the blacks who lived along its banks suffered greatly. However, with the arrival of Abe Lincoln, it became a portal to hope and freedom.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

Thematically, the magical transformation of the Mississippi from mud to gold by the radiance is mirrored in Abraham Lincoln's proclamation transforming slaves into free men (Muslih 16).

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Hughes describes the river as dusky, and it refers to the complexion of black people to reinforce the idea of blackness in their lives, caused by racial discrimination against black people and the neglect of their rich heritage. "My soul has grown deep as if the rivers," the speaker expresses his connect to geographical features. The depth of his soul cannot be separated from the depth of his historical legacy, which has roots in various parts of the world.

2 Negro: The Poem

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I've been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:

Under my hand the pyramids arose.
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I've been a singer:

All the way from Africa to Georgia

I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.

I've been a victim:
The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
They lynch me still in Mississippi.

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa. (Hughes, Langston, et al. 24)

2.1 Negro: Poem Analysis

The poem "Negro" was published in *The Crisis* in January 1922 (Tracy 68). Langston Hughes tells the readers about his experiences as a black man, and he is proud of the life he has led. He expresses his emotional state. Hughes depicted the Negro in various situations, in separate stanzas. This distinction reflects the black man's strength and solidity on the one hand, and on the other, the speaker seeks to convey historical experiences that had an impact on the construction of the most important civilizations, based on important symbols such as pyramids, and others.

This poem is made up of six short stanzas, with roughly the same number of lines in each, except for the fourth, which is made up of four lines. Using a variety of literary devices, the poet was able to express his ideas and improve his poem. Hughes uses a simile to compare the "negro" to the night, saying, "black as the night is black," referring to the darkness as well as the grief. "I carried my sorrow songs," for example, is an example of imagery. Shows how difficult it was for the speaker at that time. "Caesar told me," "the boots of Washington," Julius Caesar are allusions in this poem. ruler of Rome in 49 BC ("Julius Caesar"), and Washington whom served as the 1st president of the United States from 1789 to 1797("George Washington").

Starting the poem with the phrase "I am a Negro" establishes his identity and his

belonging to the black race.

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,

Black as the depths of my Africa.

The following stanza mentions Caesar and George Washington, who are both symbols of power and leadership. In the following lines, the poet vestiges the concept of slavery: "Cesar told me to keep his door-steps clean." "I brushed Washington's boots." Because of the influence of certain concepts on human thought, such as racial discrimination, race, and white supremacy, the slavery of black people has a long history. The speaker used a somber tone to present those two different faces in time and place in order to convey what they experience as Negroes with slavery and abusive practices.

The third stanza, shows the contributions black people made in the past through the identification of them as workers. The pyramids' references are related to the poem The Negro, as in the poem the Negro speaks of rivers, where the speaker insists on their role in the building of the pyramids as well. This section contains the blacks' association with the pyramids and suggests that people of African descent continue to play an important role in creating the world's great civilizations, also in contemporary America with the creation of the Woolworth Building. This shift from one continent to another emphasizes the contributions of African descent to major historical achievements.

This is a transformation from slave to negro worker. It is an attempt by the poet to shift the mood from pain to pride by mentioning the dark accomplishments of the past and present.

I've been a singer: All the way from Africa to Georgia

I carried my sorrow songs.

I made ragtime.

The lines above make a connection between forced African migration to the United States and music. The Music and singing have long been a part of African American culture, and have been used to express thoughts and feelings. "I carried my sorrow songs" and "I made ragtime," as the poet intended. Hughes has always been interested in music because he sees it as a characteristic of the black race. According to the expression, he is one of the symbols of black racial identity, such as Jazz and blues songs . This was mentioned in his article *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*:

But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile (Hughes 02).

The reader can see the impact of music on the lives of African-Americans through this excerpt, as it expresses their feelings and, in another direction, embodies the idea of pride in the symbols of their identity. This explains Hughes' use of it in his poetry.

The following stanza shows the past oppression in the Congo and how they were lynched in Mississippi. They were described as victims by the speaker. As he stated in the fifth stanza.

According to Hughes' belief that racist thought still dominates white-black relations, black skin made him a victim from ancient times, In the fifth stanza, the word "now" expresses the current time, which corresponds to the twentieth century's twenties. The poet aspires to expose the truth about racism's abolition. The adoption of the abolition law was insufficient to change the white race's mentality, which is based on the principle of superiority over the black race due to skin color differences.

The poet concludes his poem by repeating the final stanza. On the one hand, he confirms their identity, and on the other, he affirms their self-esteem despite everything they've been through. And what the poet alluded to in the four middle stanzas when defining the negro in a variety of situations reflects their experience over time. Furthermore, by using the possessive pronoun "my Africa," he conveys a sense of pride and belonging to his origin.

3 The Theme for English B: The Poem

The instructor said,

Go home and write

a page tonight.

And let that page come out of you —

Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?

I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.

I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.

I am the only colored student in my class.

The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,

Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me

at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what

I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:

hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.

(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records —Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white —
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
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.

This is my page for English B. (Hughes, Langston, et al.409,410)

3.1 The Theme for English B: Poem Analysis

This poem was originally appeared in *Common Ground*. “Spring 1949” (Rampersad 675). This lyrical poem is made up of five stanzas of varying lengths. Hughes uses narrative form to communicate his message about "who am I?" In an attempt to find a way to express his identity, he created a piece on the main theme of racial segregation. The speaker is a young African-American student from Harlem. In an English paper he was assigned to write, he pursued a quest for the truth. In the context of the poem, the speaker goes about his daily activities as any other

person, leading the reader to believe that the speaker was looking for specific reasons for racial discrimination. This poem was not devoid of literary devices, which were crucial in deciphering the poem's meanings. Alliteration, imagery, and personification are examples. In "or records Bessie, Bop, or Bach," there is alliteration in the repetition of the sound of /b/. Readers' perceptions of things involving their five senses are aided by imagery. "Up to my room, sit down, and write this page," for example, or "This is my page for English B." As in the first stanza, personification is used. Allow that page to emerge from you as if it were capable of making its own decisions. There is also an anaphora in the fourth stanza, which refers to the repetition of the phrase "part of you."

The poem's title "Theme of English B" identifies the nature of the topic, as it revolves around a teacher's assignment in English B, but the paradox here is in the use of the term "theme." This exposes the reader to various perspectives on the subject of the assignment. The relationship between the assignment and the truth reinforces this.

The second stanza, the speaker explains his age, academic background, and identity. "I am the only colored student in that class". It means Hughes wants people to know about the speaker as a black person, and he asserts himself as a member of the black race. It is a part of the racial pride of the poet. Also, this means that the poet wants to encourage everyone to understand the importance of human rights. By showing both races, whites and blacks, the same level of education,

To understand what black people were going through at the time, West Salem and Harlem are mentioned. Harlem is a neighborhood associated with the Harlem Renaissance, during which blacks fought whites for civil rights. It conveys a sense of white superiority:

The step from the hill lead down into Harlem,

Through the park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eight Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
The Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
Up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

This section depicts the speaker's journey from class to his living quarters. This long path represented the difficulties that African Americans faced. Hughes may wish to send a message to the black community by encouraging them to pursue their dreams, implying that there must be a path in life that humans must follow in order to achieve their goals. It could have been influenced by the poet's personal experience. Referring to "Harlem," "Harlem Branch Y," and the "St. Nicholas" street that connects the school, and the house that "I" pass through every day.

The third stanza, the speaker discusses his classmates' similarities and differences, as well as his relationship with the white instructor. First, Hughes shows the daily activities of the young black man, The poet wishes to emphasize the resemblance of black and white. This implies that these races have equal access to human rights, which can be interpreted as an implicit invitation to pride in his black race. As well as continuing the fight for equality with them. The following lines back it up. I guess being colored doesn't mean I don't enjoy the same things as people of other races. Being black does not imply that you have no rights, which is what Hughes wanted black people to understand in order to boost their self-esteem. He emphasizes that both of them are human beings who are part of the global human population. It is obvious from
Being me, it will not be white.

But it will be
a part of you, an instructor.
You are white —

yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.

That's American.

In the first line above, the speaker addressed the professor directly, stating that there is a difference between blacks and whites in terms of skin color and race. Blacks will not never be whites and whites will not never be blacks because they each have their own race with distinct characteristics. Both, even so, belong in the country known as "America." As a result, they both have equal human rights. Hughes tries to reach both whites and blacks with his message., arguing that they must treat each other as equal. In the lines below:

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!

Each race differentiates itself from the others. Accepting one another as a part of human life is also difficult. It is the reality of life in America. Whites still think that they are superior to blacks. By saying, "Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me," blacks believe that they are inferior.

Hughes underlines his self-confidence as a reflection of his pride in blackness in the end of this stanza, "As I learn from you, I guess you learn from me." Just as blacks can learn from whites, whites can learn from blacks. And if, at the time, blacks were more educated than whites, it was because whites had more freedom than blacks. The speaker said, "although you' re older - and white- and somewhat more free."

"This is my page for English B," the speaker concluded the poem, as if responding to the instructor's words, who had assigned him to write a true expression. "My page" is a symbol of self and identity. He demonstrates his self-esteem to his white instructor, as well as the raising of

a black voice in opposition to racial discrimination. His attempt, nevertheless, remains to seek and redefine his people's continual struggle to assert them against a background of social oppression (Anitha 59).

Conclusion

This chapter attempts to highlight the extent to which Hughes embodies the concept of racial identity through an analysis of three Langston poems, all of which are consistent in the simplicity of Hughes' language, possibly due to the fact that these poems are primarily addressed to the black race community. Its goal is to make them aware of their own beauty while also encouraging them to be proud of their identity and origins in order to motivate them to struggle against white racism in America. Through these poems, Hughes was able to convey important and diverse African American experiences. As the Negro poem shows, their suffering manifests itself at various times and places, while rivers are used as symbols to convey the richness of black racial culture. The poem, the theme of English B expresses the concept of equality and belonging to America, and its meaning is that it is impossible to separate African Americans from American culture. Racial identity is both a source of spiritual pride and a source of racial discrimination, according to Hughes.

General Conclusion

The concept of race dates back to the early centuries of human history, and its definition has varied. Some attribute it to physiological variables, whereas modern studies assert that it is a social invention, driven by intellectual and political ideologies and often based on ethnic and ideological discrimination. Over time, this discrimination has become a source of racism in modern European and American societies. From this arose modern concepts associated with the concept of race, such as black and white race and mixed race. This resulted in the emergence of various visions and perceptions about the concepts of belonging and identity, particularly among people of black skin, so that they suffered for long periods under the guise of ethnicity and superiority, particularly in America after the forced migration of Africans from their countries and their enslavement in the American South. After centuries of marginalization and neglect, these people gained some freedom when Lincoln's father announced the decision to abolish slavery.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, a wave of awareness swept through the black community, with the emergence of writers, and artists whose goal was to embody their culture, beliefs, and intellectual ideologies on the ground, through the so-called racial identity.

The twentieth century saw the emergence of literary and intellectual movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance movement in 1920, which was seen as a symbol of awareness and hope for African Americans seeking to achieve a prominent position in American society. Langston Hughes, one of its most prominent forefathers, stated that he was the voice of blacks because of his literary and intellectual contributions to his community.

Hughes presented a collection of poems centered on themes of black pride, black historical

experiences, the issue of blacks' struggle against racism, and other issues concerning the black race's identity. The poems "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Negro," and "The Theme of English B," are the highlights of Hughes' presentation in this context. through an examination of three poems, all of which are consistent in the simplicity of Hughes' language, possibly due to the fact that these poems are primarily addressed to the black race community. As a consequence, encouraging them to interact with their identity and recognize their beauty in order to be proud of their origins and to oppose racist ideas and practices of the white race. Hughes was able to convey important and diverse African American experiences through these poems. As demonstrated by the Negro poem, their suffering manifests itself at various times and places, while rivers are used as symbols to convey the richness of black racial culture. The poem, which is the theme of English B, expresses the concept of equality and belonging to America, and its meaning is that African Americans cannot be separated from American culture. Thus, from Hughes' perspective, racial identity is both a source of spiritual pride and a source of racial discrimination.

Finally, what Hughes presents in his poetry can be considered a literary vision of social value because it addresses an important issue such as racial identity, which will be a contribution to studies of racial critical theory, The latter, which is concerned with perceptions expressing racist concepts, and the long debate between racial discrimination dialectic and the issue of identity proof, Hughes may have anticipated this when he said:

Now I await the rise of the Negro theater. Our folk music, having achieved world-wide fame, offers itself to the genius of the great individual American composer who is to come. And within the next decade I expect to see the work of a growing school of colored artists who paint and model the beauty of dark faces and create with new

technique the expressions of their own soul-world. (Hughes 02).

This is where we can understand Hughes' motivation for being interested in black race identity.

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Appendix

Langston Hughes Biography 1901–1967

James Langston Hughes was born February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. His parents divorced when he was a small child, and his father moved to Mexico. He was raised by his grandmother until he was thirteen, when he moved to Lincoln, Illinois, to live with his mother and her husband, before the family eventually settled in Cleveland, Ohio. It was in Lincoln that Hughes began writing poetry. After graduating from high school, he spent a year in Mexico followed by a year at Columbia University in New York City. During this time, he worked as an assistant cook, launderer, and busboy. He also travelled to Africa and Europe working as a seaman. In November 1924, he moved to Washington, D.C. Hughes's first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1926. He finished his college education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania three years later. In 1930 his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*, won the Harmon gold medal for literature.



Hughes, who claimed Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg, and Walt Whitman as his primary influences, is particularly known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of black life in America from the twenties through the sixties. He wrote novels, short stories and plays, as well as poetry, and is also known for his engagement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing, as in “Montage of a Dream Deferred.” His life and work were enormously important in shaping the artistic contributions of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Unlike other notable black poets of the period—Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen—

Hughes refused to differentiate between his personal experience and the common experience of black America. He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter, and language itself.

Langston Hughes died of complications from prostate cancer in May 22, 1967, in New York. In his memory, his residence at 20 East 127th Street in Harlem, New York City, has been given landmark status by the New York City Preservation Commission, and East 127th Street has been renamed “Langston Hughes Place.” (*Poets.org*) .