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Langston Hughes and The Harlem Renaissance

**Introduction**

           The Harlem Renaissance was an artistic movement that began in the early 1920s, and it was a turning point for African American culture. During this movement, black poets used their poetry to encourage African Americans to revolt against racism by creating literature, music, stage performances, and art. Langston Hughes, one of many, was a great poet and inspiration during The Harlem Renaissance. Not only a poet; Hughes was also a social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. Some of Hughes’ most famous poems of The Harlem Renaissance were Harlem, The Negro Speaks of Rivers, and I, Too, Sing America. The establishment of poetry, art, and music not only was a way of efficiently inspiring The Harlem Renaissance Movement but was also used to manifest African American pride.

**Discussion**

           A comprehensive assessment of the Harlem Renaissance is not possible without considering the literary work presented by Langston Hughes through his poems. The broad idea of the movement of the Harlem Renaissance was greatly apprehended by the poet that turned as a great form of motivation for the stakeholders. He wrote many influential poems during the 1920s and 1930s when the existing issues for African Americans were greatly highlighted by poets of the period. Hughes’s overall poetic work was the representation of the lives of the African American community (Clinton). The central objective of this consideration is to illustrate the intensity of racism as the challenge faced by the community of African Americans. His idea of poetry based on clearly highlighting various concerns and challenges existed in American society. The difference of experience in the case of White and Black Americans was also an aspect of attention to Hughes’s poetry. It is momentous to critically examine important poems of Langston Hughes to better his poetic approach in the context of the Harlem Renaissance.

*Harlem*

           “Harlem” is recognized as the most popular poetic work created by Langston Hughes. This poem is also known as “Dream Deferred” sometimes due to the central message of this literary work. The approach of dreams is the main theme of this poem concerning the combination of different ideas or concepts. The importance of dreams demonstrated and explained by the poet in this poem that helps the audience to figure out the importance of dreams in someone’s life. In this poem, the concept of the dream is greatly linked with the approach of survival that explicitly defines the importance of survival more than anything else. It is clearly conveyed by Hughes in this poem that the element of dreams is a necessary condition to achieve the goal of survival. This main idea is initiated by the poet with the lingering question for the audience that ‘What happens to a dream deferred?’

           The general perception regarding the ‘dream deferred’ is rejected by Hughes as he focuses on the factor of persistence in this context. The idea of a dream compared by the poet with the food as the fundamental feature of survival. He successfully explains the idea that what happens when the phenomenon of dreams is put off. He illustrated the approach that dreams then turned as raisins that are not as juicy as the ripe grapes. Furthermore, he established the idea that fading dreams are like rotten meat that eventually causes immense danger for human beings. Hughes’s central idea through these examples is that it is mandatory for humans to understand the importance of dreams in their lives. The primary domain of human survival is not possible without giving the necessary importance to dreams. Insufficient consideration for dreams eventually disturbs everything connected with them. It is vital to examine the main idea of this poem to the context of the Harlem Renaissance. The risk of faded dreams also explained by the poet as the growing chances of explosion. It is established by the poet that ignorance of the dream of survival can eventually be caused an explosion that destroys everything around it. The context of the time of the 1920s and 1930s is important when survival is one difficult condition for African Americans because they were treated based on inequality. The problem of slavery still existed for the African American community that made it difficult for them to intact their dream of better survival (Huggins, Irvin, and Rampersad). Additionally, he developed the idea that racism is a great restriction for African Americans to achieve their dream of survival and that form of dream deferred might lead to adverse consequences for the entire American society.

*The Negro Speaks of Two Rivers*

           This poem byLangston Hughes is one great representation of an earlier moment of freedom concerning the approach of American slavery. The focal point of consideration in this poem is to focus on standards of living for black people who witnessed and actively participated in the struggle of freedom from the issues of captivity and racism. The cultural roots of African Americans’ culture greatly apprehended by the poet in this piece of poetry. The essence of this poem is to present the community of African Americans as a strong and influential example in human history that provides guidance when it comes to shaping civilization. The ideas of black perseverance and immense efforts are successfully apprehended by Hughes in this poem. The starting lines of this poem explicitly represented the main theme of this poem that focuses on the determination of African Americans as a strong community (Hughes). Black cultural identity and history are the domains of consideration for the poet to describe the efforts of this community. The overall idea of this poem is the representation of African Americans’ experience of slavery and forced migration.

*I, Too, Sing America*

For humans, their freedom is important because there is a certain limit in which they can live in when this limit is crossed, they end up with frustration. In the early ages of America, slavery and oppression were on the peak because of power by a few people such as elite class and colonialists. The poem by Hughes which is also titled “Epilogue,” which has a theme of slavery and oppression. Racism and inequalities were becoming part of societies in America and people belonging to the lower class were suffering through societal inequalities. There was a class difference in American societies and there was a limited power share. Hughes wrote this poem according to a perspective of an African-American, who was in slavery, for the purpose of free man, whether he/she is a domestic servant or not. This poem portrays the experiences of individuals of racial segregation and class differentiation. In every aspect of life, African-Americans faced racial and class discrimination in every sphere of life. They were not given their due rights and they were miss-treated on the society based on their race and background. African-American were segregated, and they were supposed to separate their activities including their work-life, eating and they were also forced to live separately (Hughes). They were being victimized, they had to suffer from violence based on race, and they were economically marginalized. Hughes emphasizes the importance of African-Americans by portraying that, they are also part of a country and they have equal rights to be part of their society as others have. In this poem, he emphasized that regardless of their culture and their experiences they also deserve to be patriotic.

**Conclusion**

           To conclude the discussion on the influential work of Langston Hughes in the scenario of the Harlem Renaissance, it is vital to indicate that all three selected poems are a great representation of the idea of African American’s power. It is established by the poet that the ongoing determination of African Americans is a necessary condition for them to successful struggle for the dream of freedom from the ongoing issue of racism.

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