

Effects of Harlem Renaissance on African-Americans: A Study of the Works of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay

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Abstract- The effect of the Harlem Renaissance in the African-American Community and the world at large cannot be overemphasized. The movement came as a result of the marginalization between the whites and the blacks. This research work aims at providing the value and recognition posed by the authors of the Harlem Renaissance on African-Americans and the entire black race through their themes, settings, language, subject matter and style, using research materials from libraries, research journals, published books, information from the internet and anthologies containing all the poems of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay analysed in this research work. This research work shows explicitly the positive effects of the activists and writers of the Harlem renaissance and how they used their works to fight for the African-Americans thereby boosting their confidence and giving them the literary power to find their voice, the voice which is still used today for the safeguarding of their rights and recognition of their literary prowess.

Indexed Terms- Harlem Renaissance, African-American, Langston Hughes & Claude McKay

I. INTRODUCTION

‘We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark skinned slaves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful, and ugly too’ – Langston Hughes, ‘The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain’. (692-694).

The word ‘Renaissance’ simply means ‘rebirth’ or ‘reawakening’ of an existing knowledge. According to T.U Njoku and C.N. Okezie, Renaissance as a period in English literature is described ‘as the

rediscovery of the ancient classics of Greece and Rome which scholars edited, translated, and wrote commentaries on’ (5). It was a great period in which human intelligence and potentials flourished; people became interested in classical knowledge. The new spirit of the Renaissance man reflected in science, in religion, and even in literature and it is marked out as a black literary movement.

In the 1920s, creative and intellectual life flourished within African-American communities in the North and Midwest regions of the United States, but not more than it did in Harlem. The New York City neighbourhood, encompassing only three square miles, teemed with black artists, intellectuals, writers, and musicians. Black owned businesses; from newspapers, publishing houses and music companies to night clubs, cabarets, and theatres, helped fuel the neighbourhood’s thriving scene. Some of the era’s most important literary and artistic figures migrated to or passed through the Negro capital of the world, helping to define a period in which African-American artists reclaimed their identity and racial pride in defiance to widespread prejudice and discrimination. It was the time for a cultural celebration. African-Americans had endured centuries of slavery and the struggle for abolition. The end of bondage had not brought the Promised Land many had envisioned. Instead, white supremacy was quickly, legally, and violently restored to the New South where ninety percent of African-Americans lived. Starting in about 1890, African-Americans migrated to the North in great numbers. This Great Migration eventually relocated hundreds of thousands of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North. Many discovered they had shared common experiences in their past histories and their uncertain present circumstances. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, the recently dispossessed, ignited an explosion

of cultural pride. Indeed, African-American culture was reborn during Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance or The New Negro Movement was inspired by Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Alain Locke, the author of *New Negro* and W.E.B DuBois, editor of *The Crisis Magazine*. This movement expressed the pride in blacks and motivated many African-Americans to celebrate their culture, while adding it own elements to the American's tradition. It offered new ways of seeing and understanding what it meant to be black at this crucial time in history. Jeffrey J. Lloyd popularly known as Aberjhani, an American historian, columnist, novelist, poet, and an editor indicates in his book *Journey through the Power of the Rainbow* that 'The best of humanity's recorded history is a creative balance between horrors endured and victories achieved, and so it was during the Harlem Renaissance' (81). This shows that the movement led to new styles of literature and new philosophical ideas regarding the issues that African-Americans faced in the early twentieth century America. This important change in Africa-Americans mind sets has survived throughout the centuries and persists even to this day

The Harlem Renaissance Movement impacted the changes that took place in the African-American community because this movement included the Great Migration of African-Americans from South to North due to the industrialization in the city. Harlem Renaissance is among literary and artistic movements due to its connection to civil rights and reform organization. It surrounded everything from political writings to jazz poetry, and is especially remembered for poets such as: Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and Claude McKay. Hughes was perhaps the best known Harlem Renaissance poet. *The Crisis Magazine*, and official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) that was mainly subscribed to by blacks and the Negro world, this newspaper of Gravey helped immensely in publishing African-American writings. Harlem Renaissance helped to give African-Americans visibility and opportunity for publications. These published poetry, short stories, and essays sent in by

black writers, and it encouraged them to do more, such as writing and make all forms of art, because expression was one way to freedom.

Harlem was described by Alain Locke (1886-1954) as 'not merely the largest Negro community in the world but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life' (44). The Renaissance was related with the New Negro Movement because of the anthology *The New Negro* (1925) edited by Locke, whose early essay 'The New Negro' is the closest to a statement of ideals that Harlem Renaissance has. Locke promoted African-American artists, writers, and musicians, encouraging them to look to Africa as an inspiration for their works. His essay 'The New Negro' describes the overall awareness of the potential of black equality. He says '... no longer would black allow themselves to adjust themselves or comply with unreasonable white request' (12). He is just trying to create a political awareness on self-confidence which the blacks have developed. In fact, Huston A. Bake, Jr. in his book *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* indicates that 'Locke succeeded in writing our first national book offering... the sound, songs, images, and sings of a nation', (473). Baker is praising Locke for writing New Negro book because it marks the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance and African-Americans use it to boost their self-confidence.

Harlem Renaissance is therefore a period in American literature when blacks became conscious of their literary power. This cultural movement marked the first time in American history that the white population took notice of the literature of African-Americans. This occurred from the 1920s through 1930s. James Weldon Johnson states that the three major factors that gave rise to this kind of literature are: 'slavery, world war I, and migration of blacks from the southern parts of America, to the Northern parts in search of a racial free society' (21). In the early 1920s, three works signaled the new creative energy and foundation of African-American literature. Claude McKay's volume of poetry *Harlem Schools* (1992) became one of the first works by a black to be published by main stream national publisher, Harcourt Brace and Company. Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), was an experimental novel that combined poetry and prose in documenting the

lives of American blacks. The novel, *There is Confusion* 1924 by the first black female writer and Editor Jessie Fauset, depicts black middle class life from women's perspective. These works according to Sandra L. West and Aberjhani are the 'basic foundation of Harlem Renaissance literature' (9). West and Aberjhani also say that among the events that publically launched Harlem Renaissance are these two:

On March 1924, Charles S. Johnson of the National Urban League hosted a dinner to recognized the new literary talent in the black community and introduce the writers to New York's white literary establishment. The second event was the publication of *Nigger Heaven* (1926) by a white novelist Carl Van Vechten, which was a spectacular expose to Harlem life and helped create a 'Negro Vogue' that, drew thousands of sophisticated New Yorkers black and white to Harlem's exotic and exciting life (9).

Harlem Renaissance was highly influential in the sense that it did not only change the status of blacks in America, it also helped them to find their lost cultural heritage. It also became a thing of international recognition due to the fact that it influenced other racial movements. According to Ikonne 'it also became a thing of international movement that emerged later such as the Paris based Negritude movement' (16).

Given the Renaissance's celebration of racial consciousness and black culture, many scholars consider Harvard graduate DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) its genesis; in this work, DuBois not only delineated the complexity of African-American's experience - from slavery to freedom - but also declared their undeniable gifts to American culture. He wrote, 'And so by faithful chance the Negro folk song-the rhythmic cry of the slave - stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas.. (1) It still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the 'Talented Tenth', members of the black aristocracy who would, through their leadership and vision, move the black race and masses further up the ladder of social progress, had referred to 'The New Negro' in an

essay he submitted to Century Magazine before the turn of the 30th century.

Significant, too as Cheryl A. Wall argues in *Woman of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995) 'The Harlem Renaissance was not a male phenomenon. A substantial number of literary women played significant roles (9)'. As wall carefully points out, this group includes not only the better- known writers, Hurston, Fauset, and Larson, but also 'a host of lesser- known poets' (9), Marita Bonner, Alice Dunbar-Johnson, and Anne Spencer, to name a few, who published in journals and magazines. Johnson's weekend parlour gatherings in Washington D.C provided a central venue for introduction and exposure for many of the Renaissance luminaries.

There have been lots of arguments concerning the beginning of the exact date of the Harlem Renaissance. Regardless of the exact date, during the first quarter of the 20th century, African-American culture was ebulliently celebrated from one end of the colour spectrum to the next. Popular culture scholars often refer to this period as the Jazz Age, Renaissance or not, as Huggins points out;

The experience of Harlem in the 1920s was not for naught. It left its mark as a symbol and a point of reference for everyone to recall... the very name continued to connote a special spirit, new vitality, black urbanity and black militancy. Through the activities of the writings, the promotion of Negroes in the 1920s, Harlem and become a racial focal point for knowledgeable black men in the world over (303).

Indeed, the New Negro has arrived and has come to take his place in this attempt; his past is rekindled and this past is none other than Africa. He acknowledges the impact his past has on him because he cannot suppress the African blood that flows in his veins. According to Ikonne, DuBois recognizes this blood in his veins and thanked his god that the 'flood of Negro blood' in his veins had no strain of the Anglo-Saxon (14). This by implication means that they became proud of who they were and their race. Hear Mathew Henry in 'The Harlem Renaissance and Leftism'; 'in searching for their heritage; they found not only quickly losing its negative connotations but becoming almost fashionable' (8).

Ikkonne goes on to quote Hughes in his book saying: ‘We young Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful and very ugly too. The tom tom cries and the tom tom laughs’ (6).

Indeed, black is beautiful and ugly as well, as portrayed in the image of Africa in this literary movement. This is a period when the majority of black people in the United States are born as free people- the first generation when they are not largely born as slaves, says MintahMakalani, assistant professor of African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

Even though some critics cannot view the importance of Harlem Renaissance on black literature, George E. Kent, an African-American professor of literature at Wesleyan University believes that the movement has provided American literature with some very important accomplishments. He specifies in the *Black Weed Magazine* that ‘the short story in the hands of Eric Waldron and Langston Hughes became a much more flexible form..while no Harlem Renaissance author created a truly new form of novel, these writers did provide stories that occasionally stopped just short of greatness’ (13). Kent is basically appreciating the literature of the period. Mike Chasar, a poet and an author the article. ‘The Sounds of Black Laughter and the Harlem Renaissance’, says that ‘These poets variously build on, and take part in a long tradition of African-American humour, music, and song; their work thus accords America’ (58).Chasar indicates that the literature produced gave black Americans happiness because this period opened the door of opportunity for all other African-Americans around the world.

The Harlem Renaissance was a rebirth of African-American culture in New York City. Literature from the Harlem Renaissance inspires many modern writers such as; Amiri Baraka, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and many others. It also influenced Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have A Dream’ speech because the speech seems to be clearly related to Langston Hughes poem ‘Let America be America Again’. Harlem Renaissance provided a very important

advancement in Africa-American Art and Literature, Inspiration from Hughes and Locke are witnessed in modern culture and society. Even though the movement has been over since, the effects of the authors and words written are still generally known today, Aberjhani also says in an interview done by Kinamore Angela on ‘*interview with the authors of the Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*’ that he has been influenced more by literary movements such as that of Harlem. Without Harlem Renaissance the African-American literature would not be successful because the coming together of such a diverse body of artistic talents, great work of arts, and the interconnected collaboration on many regarding diverse subject matters, together with the ability to demonstrate their gift and talent would not have been possible. Harlem Renaissance brought new visionary insights and the concept of excelling inner consciousness to the literature of African-Americans. In conclusion, the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance has opened doors for today’s African-American writers. The Harlem Renaissance was the internal spring for African-Americans branching out into the world on their own desire. The Renaissance opened a new dimension for African-Americans and brought about the realization of ‘I can do it, and do it with dignity, grace, and style’. This time period in history was not just a national movement, but an impact creating a revolution of sorts. Harlem saw a never-seen-before work per excellence in various fields, which gave African-Americans a renewed image and a fresh outlook. Harlem Renaissance has been the breeding ground for creative endeavours by authors, poets, and artists. Harlem in itself was an idea of cultural excitement that progressed throughout the twentieth century. Black visual artists experienced an explosion in ideas and energy during the movement. The Harlem Renaissance produced novelists, poets, artists, and musicians who are today considered some of the finest that America ever produced, regardless of race. In other words, the Harlem Renaissance is not just a celebration of Negro literature and arts but an uncompromising demand for equal rights and opportunities by the Negroes in America. The Negro took time to trace the long odious historical process, which has its foundation from slavery as it enters the emerging Negro middle class of enlightened intelligentsia.

Basically, the Harlem Renaissance features a strong rejection of strong racial conservatism. The artists took time to show that African-American artists and intellectuals were not living in a vacuum. At the time, as the large body of both literary and social criticism attest, they were well aware of current events and they struggle to express their culture in legitimized ways, while simultaneously standing against all forms of racism in American society.

In this long essay 'Effects of Harlem Renaissance on African-American Literature – A Study of the Works Langston and Claude McKay'. We are going to analyse their poetry so as to ascertain the extent of their contributions on African-American literature during the Harlem Renaissance.

While it is very clear that African-American literature has a foundation which is Harlem Renaissance many still feel that the Harlem Renaissance did not redefine African-American Expression. Nathan Irvin Huggins, an American historian, author, and educator, thinks that Harlem Renaissance was a failure as both a cultural movement even as a literary aspect. Huggins says in his 1971 book titled, *Harlem Renaissance* that

Writers tried to form a distinctively Negro voice... the more artificial they became finding English or African forms and rhythms that surrogates for the styles of their own American experience' (191). He also questions the exclusiveness of the movement to the nation's black population and postulates that black and white Americans have been so long and so intimately a part of one another's experience that, will it or not, they cannot be understood independently (191).

The problem discussed in this project is to show how underrated the works of Harlem Renaissance are and to expose the low value placed on the significance of the Harlem Renaissance on African-Americans and in their literature.

- On Langston Hughes

In *Listening to what the Ear Demands* by Meta Du Ewa Jones, Harlem Renaissance novelist, Jessie Fauset authored one of the earliest reviews of Hughes debut collection, *The Weary Blues* (1926). In the

Crisis Magazine, Fauset, praises Hughes blues based and jazz-influenced poems for significantly addressing universal subjects served Negro style adding that 'while I am no great lover of any dialect I hope heartily that Mr Hughes will give us many more of comparable poems' (61).

Fauset's ambivalence concerning Hughes' use of dialect may seem ironic, considering that many succeeding critics praised his faithful representations of Black vernacular speech as one of his writing's hallmark features. Yet her emphasis on Hughes' race and its implicit relationship to his poems' representative content and style reflects the nature of much subsequent Hughes criticism (1145).

Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, in their edition of the *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, tell that Hughes' approach to poetry is far too simple and unlearned. Indeed, Hughes' contemporary from the Harlem Renaissance Countee Cullen, considers Hughes' poetry to be so artless that he wonders whether some of Hughes' poems are pomes at all (41).

During the 1960s, some of Hughes' younger literary peers were of the opinion that he did not fully embrace the Civil Rights movement. The increasingly strident, militant rhetoric of the mid-1960s stood in sharp contrast to Hughes's bluesy, gospel song-inspired cadences and gentle tenacity, in a review of *The Panther and the Lash Critic*, Laurence Lieberman writes; 'we are tempted to ask, what are Hughes' politics? And if he has none, why not? The age demands intellectual commitment from its spokesmen' (335). Yet, contemporary critic David Littlejohn writes of Hughes, 'His voice is as sure, his manner as original, his position as sacred as say Edwin Arlington Robinson's or Robinson Jeffers by retaining his own keen honesty and directness, his poetic sense and ironic intelligence, he maintained through four decades a readable newness distinctly his own' (126).

Hughes has proven beyond doubts that he is for civil rights. His writings offer inspiration to attain one's dreams. Critic David Littlejohn is correct with his remarks; poems of Hughes clearly establish his

political view strives for freedom and not to judge anyone by their skin colour.

Unlike Laurence Lieberman, Bose Heyward from the *New York HeraldTribune* agrees that Hughes serves as an intellectual spokesman of his time. He says:

Langston Hughes, although only young, is already conspicuous in the group of Negro intellectuals who are dignifying Harlem with a genuine life. It is however, as an individual poet, not as a member of a new and interesting group, or as a spokesman for a race that Hughes must stand or fall... always intensely, subjective passionate, keenly sensitive to beauty and possessed of an unflinching musical sense. Hughes has given us a 'first book' that marks the opening of a career well worth watching (N.P).

Heyward's reaction to Hughes work is justified because he thinks that Hughes first novel shows people that he had something great to show the world and that his poetry has an intense meaning to it. Hughes tries to incorporate emotions and real problems that were occurring in the world during his time. By doing this, his poetry has more voice like how Heyward thinks that his novel opened a career that was well worth watching.

Hughes tries to defend some of the criticisms laid on him. An online article, showing the type of criticism of Hughes writings is Estace Gay's comments on *Fine Clothes to the Jew* Gay writes:

It does not matter to me whether every poem in the book is true to life, why should it be paraded before the American public by a Negro author as being typical or representative of the Negro? Bad enough to have white authors holding up our imperfections to public gaze, our aim ought to be (to) present to the general public, already misinformed both by well meaning and malicious writers, our higher aims and aspirations, and our better selves (N.P.).

Commenting on reviewer's like Gay, Hughes writes:

I sympathized deeply with those critics and those intellectuals, and I saw clearly the need for some of the kind of books they wanted. But I

did not see how they could expect every Negro author to write such books. Certainly, I personally knew very few people anywhere who were wholly beautiful and wholly good. Besides I felt that the masses of our people had as much in their lives to put into their books as did those more fortunate ones who had been born with some means and the ability to work up to a master's degree at a Northern college. Anyway I didn't know the upper class Negroes well enough to write much about them. I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren't people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard of Bach. But they seemed to me good people too (16).

Hughes is doing the African-American community justice writing about their real life and their struggles. He is not going to sugar-coat or portray inaccuracies but rather he tries to inspire the everyday man who is experiencing hardships. Every poet is entitled to their individuality.

David Littlejohn from *Black on White: A Critical Survey of Writing by American Negroes*, sums it all up by saying:

On the whole, Hughes creative life [was] as full, as varied, and as original as Picasso's, a joyful, honest monument of a career. There (was) no noticeable sham in it, no pretension, no self-deceit; but a great, great deal of delight and smiling irresistible wit. I he seems for the moment upstaged by angrier men, by more complex artists, if different views engage us necessarily, at this trying stage of the race war, he may well outlive them all, and still be there when it's over... Hughes' [greatness] seems to derive from his anonymous unity with his people. He seems to speak for millions, which is a tricky thing to do (3).

This describes exactly what Hughes hopes to achieve. The critic states the poet's greatness derives from his unity with his people, and in his poems, Hughes really tries to speak in the name of all African-American people with great skill. Just as written in this review, his poems are as original as Picasso's

paintings and he could be described as someone who is able to write with great wit and humour while also bringing meaning to the word choice he uses.

Finally, Donald B. Gibson in *Modern Black Poets: A Collection of Critical Essays* perfectly echoes the thought of many African-American readers. He says: Hughes has perhaps the greatest reputation (worldwide) than any black writer has ever had. Hughes differed from most of his predecessors among black poets. And until recently from those who followed him as well, in that he addressed his poetry to the people, specifically to black people. During the twenties when most American poets were turning inward. Writing obscure and esoteric poetry to an ever decreasing audience of readers, Hughes was turning outward, using language and themes, attitudes and ideas familiar to anyone who had the ability simply to read (17).

Hughes is a different type of poet in the way that he speaks in his poetry directly to African-American people like him. His style of writing is unique because not many poets in his time wrote directly to one group of people instead wrote to a larger audience considering that the audience reading these poems was decreasing as stated in the quotation. Instead of being like most other American poets, Hughes decides to stick with his style and write to African-American people but made it so that anyone could read his poetry which ended up making his writing to be one of the greatest pieces known.

- On Claude McKay

To explain the presence of incongruous elements in McKay's works, it is more than likely that his work seems paradoxical because it has been read in an appropriate context. Beginning with Johnson's *Black Manhattan (1930)*, critics have concluded, certainly to their satisfaction, that McKay is of the Harlem group and that indeed, he is one of the movement's ornaments. In the latest study of the Harlem school, *The Harlem Renaissance: Revaluations (1989)*, GetaLeseur affirms that: 'Claude McKay remains today part of the acknowledged literary triumvirate of the Harlem Renaissance. He shares this prestigious position with Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer (68).

Her view is typical of the current understanding of McKay's affiliations. He is regarded as the 'voice of Harlem'; his work ranges from vernacular verse celebrating peasant life in Jamaica to poems challenging white authority in America, and from generally straight forward tales of black life both Jamaica and America to more philosophically ambitious fiction addressing instinctual/intellectual duality, which McKay finds central to the black individual's efforts to cope in a racist society.

Consistent in his various writings is his disdain for racism and the sense that its implicit stupidity renders its adherents pitiable as well as loathsome. As Arthur Drayton writes in his online essay; *Claude McKay's Human Pity*:

McKay does not seek to hide his bitterness. But having preserved his vision as a poet and his status as a human being, he can transcend bitterness. In seeing... the significance of the Negro for mankind as a whole, he is at once protesting as a Negro and uttering a cry for the race of mankind as a member of that race. His human pity was the foundation that made all these possible (N.P.).

McKay writes viciously against racism and through his works he gives Negroes a voice and this voice serves as a foundation to his subsequent works.

His works present a substantially bleaker perspective on the plight of Jamaican blacks and contains several poems explicitly critical of life in urban Kingston. Writing in *The Negro Novel in America*, Robert Bone notes the differing sentiments of the two collections: *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* both published in 1912. But he also contends that the volumes share a sense of directness and refreshing candour. He writes: 'These first two volumes are already marked by a sharpness of vision, an inborn realism, and a freshness which provides a pleasing contrast with the conventionality which, as this time, prevails among the black poets of the United States' (32).

The first two volumes of McKay's, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* bring about a new form of

ideology among the blacks. They characterize the radicalism and realism of McKay.

In Black Poets of the United States, Jean Wagner writes on the poem, 'If We Must Die' that it:

Transcends specific of race and is widely prized as an inspiration to persecuted people through the world. Along with the will to resistance of black Americans that it expresses, it voices also the will of oppressed people of every age who, whatever their race and whatever their region, are fighting with their backs against the wall to win their freedom (2).

The poem indeed serves as a source of inspiration to the blacks and also voice to those considered voiceless. This poem has been like an unofficial anthem to the blacks since its publication. These reviews show that scholars have studied the works of Hughes and McKay but none to the knowledge of the present researcher has been able to show how their works have greatly impacted the African-American community. The researcher hopes to use this project to show how these Harlem Renaissance poets use their works to make great impact on black literature and African-American community.

Themes, Styles, and Language In Hughes' Poetry

Hughes is regarded as one of the most significant African-American writers. He writes about the lives of African-Americans before and during the Harlem Renaissance. He has a passion for representation of facts, adequate realism, the lives and experiences of the African-Americans especially during the Harlem Renaissance. As Carrie Smith states, 'in Hughes' poetry, the central element of importance is the affirmation of blackness' (1).

The Harlem Renaissance poems as well as other writings of Hughes recapture the fate of being black in the American society. In other words, the themes of Hughes' writings deal on racial discrimination, the violence of society, the unfair educational opportunities and the right to share in the American dream of opportunity and freedom. It is on these themes that we have devoted this chapter as we look into the effects of Renaissance on African-Americans. We shall also discuss how Hughes uses style and language to deliver his message through literature.

On this, illustration will be drawn from his selected poems.

Within these poems, many universal themes are explored especially as they relate directly to the Harlem Renaissance and the experiences. Such themes as racial violence and prejudice, impediments on social progress and lack of hope for a brighter future comprise the themes of Hughes poetry.

Hughes in his article 'To Negro Writers' suggests that: 'Negro writers can seek to unite blacks and whites in our country not on the nebulous basis of an interracial meeting, or the shifting sands of religious brotherhood, but on the solid ground of the daily working class struggle to wipe out, now and forever, all the inequalities of the past' (1). Although this statement comes much later compared to Hughes poems, yet it tends to summarize the yearnings of the Harlem Renaissance which Hughes more often than not, portray in his writings. W.E.B. DuBois in his article 'Race Prejudice' opines that:

The more or – less theoretical problem of race prejudice enters largely into the domain of practical politics, and has become of increasing importance in the United States not only because it involves the Negro in large sections of the country a denial of the principles of democracy, this engendering passionate feelings against such discrimination, but on account of the unwisdom from an economic standpoint of repressing the coloured races (267).

DuBois earlier raised this argument in his book; *Souls of the Black Folks* where he asserted that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line (1). Richard Wright expands this position in his *Black Boy*. The racial discrimination in the American society remains a stumbling block to the healthy development of the Negro and indeed the Central American society.

Many writers and artists of African-American origin were affected by the American racial prejudice. Harlem Renaissance offered them the opportunity of speaking out against this ordeal. Most of the artists rejuvenated the jungle beats of their background and

the Negro experience and life by adopting the Negro spiritual elements in their poetry.

In 'Harlem, Dream Deferred', Hughes reveals the pains of the Negro experiences, especially when the colour bar inhibits him from the opportunity of benefiting from the American wealth which he laboured for:

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun
Or faster like a sore-
And then run?
Does it sink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over
Like a heavy load
Or does it explode? (1).

In a lucid manner, Hughes describes his agony and the life of the Negro. In spite of the fact that the dreams are deferred, there still remains confusion, and in the sense that in most cases the dreams are dried up like 'a raisin in the sun'. This situation clearly shows that most writers of the Harlem Renaissance in their works depict their distorted and unfulfilled dreams in the American society.

In 'Harlem, A Dream Deferred', Hughes enumerates the experiences of dreams and the dreamer. The dream or life goal of any human being is central to what makes the human being a valuable member of the society. But Hughes becomes worried when the dreamer is told or sees that no matter how he struggles he cannot fulfill his goal, and his dream will not be realized and he should wait and infinitum for the institutions and laws to be changed for him to realize his dreams. This is only for the blacks while the whites have nothing to stop any ambition they have

Another important theme of Hughes' Harlem Renaissance poetry is the right to share in the American dream of opportunities and freedom. This has been interpreted as the quest for identity and integration against the Marcus Garvey's 'Back to Africa Movement'. Therefore, they wrestle to be identified and known with full rights and privileges of American citizenship.

In 'I Too', Hughes unequivocally buttresses this agitation. The poet speaker introduces himself as the darker brother. Hughes, however, draws attention to the hyphenated personality of the Negro. This fact is raised by W.E.B. DuBois, who neither leaves America because of the inhuman treatment of the society nor bleaches himself to please the white. However, both the black and the white elements in him have messages for the present and the future world (3).

In other words, the Negro is a personality of two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving, and two warring ideals in one dark body and he is determined to make it possible for man to be both a Negro and an American.

It is obvious that the whites have a strong hatred for the Negro. Most of the laws and constitutions in America stipulate different things for the blacks and whites. As ChidiIkonne has noted, 'in most cases the Negro has had doors of opportunity closed in his face' (18). But in the poetry of Hughes, Ikonne asserts that Langston Hughes does not only assert his Americanness, he is also optimistic that his full citizenship will be acknowledged one day' (24).

This is clearly portrayed in 'I Too' where he notes that

Tomorrow
I'll sit at the table
When company comes
Nobody I'll dare
Say to me
Eat in the kitchen (275).

In 'Theme for English B', Hughes enumerates the experience of the Negro school boy. Though talented, he was not able to attend an establishment as his white peers. In this poem, Hughes strongly establishes that whites are freer than the blacks. This he illustrates in 'democracy', where he practically demands his freedom like other Americans: 'I have as much height/As the other fellow has to sand/On my two feet/And own the land (285).

Hughes also emphasizes this in another poem 'Let America be America Again'. In one of his verses, he

puts it plainly: ' Listen America/I live here, too/ I want freedom/just as you *283).

In other words, the quest for identity and freedom is at heart of the Harlem Renaissance. Though the Renaissance may have exhibited some celebrities, yet it is not the major focus for it is majorly an opportunity to express the fate of the Negro in the American society, as reflected by the themes.

The focus reflects in the language and style of Hughes poetry and writings. The Negroes are drawn together at Harlem by common experience; this also forms their common consciousness, which is racial segregation. This, Hughes has described with the image of the image of the communication instrument the tom-tom. In 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain', he notes that like the tom-tom, the Negro is capable of laughing and also crying depending on the situation. This describes his language and style.

Hughes creates the Negro who while singing can enjoy the rhythms and at the same time express the inhuman treatment meted on him. Because of his audience, Hughes adopts simple and assessable language. Although as Adam Smitherman has observed: 'For African-Americans, the semantics of race have been recurring themes in the 1619 when the first cargo of African slaves landed at Jamestown' (78).

The societal complexity of the black American condition necessitates a self-conscious construction of language which is also a mark of identity. From the Negro spirituals to the writings of the Harlem Renaissance, the Negro writers have always used their language to represent their experiences and racial peculiarities. This socio-linguistic reality reflects a distinct consciousness which the African-American uses to express both his conditions and his anticipation. David C. Ward notes that: ' In socio-linguistics and the sociology of language, attitudes have traditionally been of great importance. People's reactions to language varieties reveal their perception of the speakers. Thus, language attitudes are linked to check identity (95).

The language of Harlem writers has indicated that black idioms, black dialect, Black English vernacular,

black language, Ebonics, inner-city English and Africanized English were popular labels in the Negro expressions.

Hughes using these adopts most of the stereotype words that are peculiar to the Negro audience. These include: Negro, Uncle Tom, Sly Mulatto, etc with these, he is able to represent the people's experiences. In 'Uncle Tom', he explains the use of the slang; 'Uncle Tom' as one, the white folks taught well to know his place' (168).

Beyond the language assess ability and revelation of the Negro identity, Hughes adopts the style and language of jazz and blues. He revives the ancient form and musicality of the Negro spirituals and the blues in his Harlem poems. Poems like the 'Songs of Sorrow' unequivocally address the Negro in his beauty and ugliness.

Hughes has his major influence as Walt Whitman's free verse. This style serves his expression of the Negro heart beats in the loose rhyme and rhythms. In other words, the free verse liberates him from the ancient rigid observation of the beat and rest and introduces a free flowing musical poetry that are often sang to the beatings of instruments.

In conclusion, there are consistently developed themes, centred on racial discrimination and the fate of the Negro in an American society, where the most fundamental rights and opportunities are denied. These themes are expressed by Hughes in language and style that has localized his poems to the experiences of African-Americans.

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