

ISSN : 2395-4132

# THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

**Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal**



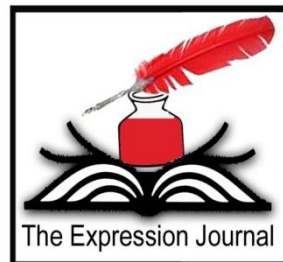
Impact Factor 3.9

**Vol. 6 Issue 3 June 2020**

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : [editor@expressionjournal.com](mailto:editor@expressionjournal.com)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)



**“A DREAM DEFERRED”: A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES**

**Hassan Al-Marwan**

**B.Ed., University of Mosul, Iraq**

**B.A., University of Mosul, Iraq**

**M.A., Andra University, India**

.....

**Abstract**

“The Dream Deferred” was published in 1951 by Langston Hughes. It provides a portrait of the suffering and frustration live for the African Americans and the dividing of American’s society. Hughes’s poem is complex, especially in its images and symbols. The poem is believed to be largely based on segregation and racialism of the African Americans and in the same time it warns of explosion their patient Through this work, I aim to shed light on racism and its effects on societies in all of the world, and from my point of view it is our duty to fight the racism in our world and through this work we seek all good people in the world to stand apart from the racially vulnerable people. As we recently witnessed the heroic stance of the World Health Organization when it objected a proposal of some doctors in France to try a vaccine for Covid19 virus against the Africans because they considered this action racist.

**Keywords**

Langston Hughes, “The Dream Deferred”, African-American Poetry, War, Social Justice, Anguish, Ethnicity.

.....



## **“A DREAM DEFERRED”: A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES**

**Hassan Al-Marwan**

**B. Ed., University of Mosul, Iraq**

**B.A., University of Mosul, Iraq**

**M.A., Andra University, India**

.....

### **Introduction**

“The Dream Deferred” poem is a part of a montage of dream deferred published in 1951 by Langston Hughes. Langston Hughes is a part of that society who takes this problem on his dead. Through his novels, poems and playwrights, he has known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes chooses writing poetry to study engineering. His father could not convince him to study engineering in Columbia University and to stay with him in Mexico, where his father lived after his escaping from United States because of racism. Langston Hughes refused because he preferred writing poetry and he was drawn more to the African American people and he liked Negroes very much. He lived in Harlem as his primary home. He chooses to be as a live of vibrant cultural African American people life, especially when we come to know that Hughes had a complex ancestry. Both of his paternal great grandmothers were enslaved Africans and his paternal great grandfathers were enslaved also. In 1973 *Modern Black Poets: A Collection of Critical Essays*, critic Donald B. Gibson wrote that “Hughes differed from most of his predecessors among black poets in that he addressed his poetry to the people, especially to black people. During the twenties when most American poets were turning inward, writing obscure and esoteric poetry to an ever decreasing and audience of readers, Hughes was turning outward using language and themes attitudes and ideas familiar to anyone who had the ability simply to read”. In this poem, Hughes aims to get the liberty for the black people after the civil war. He portrays the lives of the African Americans under the domination of race. It reveals the background and the causes of the civil war which occurred in the 1861 and ended in 1865 leaves a black spot in American’s society. After that

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)

ISSN: 2395-4132

war, the society started a cold war. It was in 1900, when many African American moved and wanted to live in the north of American seeking for work. They settled in a place called Harlem. The Harlem Dream of social conscious, culture, and combat the criminal justice system in education, in employment and in housing. They wanted to live and started new respected life. They called themselves new blacks and they found the Harlem Renaissance era. It created a new generation of black artists. The Harlem Renaissance originally known as "New Black movement" began with the aftermath of the First World War. They focused on the social consciousness and enlightenment in the black race. Their hopes crashed with racial and segregation from the society of the north America and the authority which supported them so that the injustice pushed a big part of that society to fight for the social justice. Each one of that society struggled for the social justice and according to each one's social site.

The poem deals with the issues of the black Americans in the post-war. It reveals hidden things to the entire world such as the social justice and the torment behind the domination of race in the United State of America. Hughes writes, "this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the matter of the jam session" (*Collected* 387). This poem tells the Harlem's dream deferred is the dream of delay freedom and justice and the aspects of this problem. The mentality of domination was one of main reason behind creating the hatred among the individual community in American's society. The white American racial mentality created from the notion of their original belonging to the American home and in the same time denies this belonging to the Afro-Americans. The Afro- Americans who contributed effectively in making Americans the strongest country in the world shocked from the white American's point of view. The feeling of oppression pushed the Afro-American for struggling to get their rights

We can say that dreams like mechanisms and be rise above the odds especially when one stands frustrations and helpless. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary a dream is a "vision, series of pictures or events, presented to a sleeping person "dream". It is also "an idea of vision that is created in your imagination and that is not real" or "a state of mind marked by abstraction or release from reality dream" Oxford English Dictionary adds that a dream is a "realistic self-deluding fantasy". In his Dictionary of literary symbols, Michael Ferber maintains that dreams are "the occasions for interpolated tales within larger narratives, the tales maybe told in a different mode, usually more symbolic or allegorical; and they may bear oblique and subtle connections to their frameworks". Hughes relies on the dream concept to demonstrate and explains that the dreams consider the motif for him and for all black Americans in spending their life and patient themselves, so that the poet uses concrete material in his work to expound his thoughts and feelings and for him these dreams attach to people as individuals, communities or even the whole races.

Each white American has the right of dreams and goals in life but for the blacks there are many obstacles. As they are considered low population dreams

Vol. 6 Issue 3 (June 2020)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

remain dreams, the possibility of achieving those remains difficult. 'Dream of dreams', it is a postpone dream of overcoming anger, prejudice and inequality and realize the dream of freedom and justice. In the poem of 'Dream Deferred' by Langston Hughes, in the first line 'What will happen if my dream is behind' it is an image of emotional explosion due to the deferred of their hopes for wish and their lives. Langston Hughes tackled this catastrophe in many shapes and ways. He represents what blacks suffer from and how they should face the oppression. He tries to depict the difficulties and dangers which most of the blacks suffer from and one should face such things and continuous in life. As a result of racial and apartheid policy that the governments of American used upon the African American people in brutal way and its considered violation and challenge to the principles of human rights, the right of self-determination and international law guaranteed in theory to the people of the whole world, but the USA authorities policy does not give any attention to black people suffering while the USA interferes in the affairs of other nations with such pretexts. The deceptive role of the American authorities represented in covering up and covering on abhorrent racist oppression and the stark social injustice that falls upon the black people which still represent the ugliest forms of racial discrimination, authoritarianism, and political and economic exclusion, except for what is sparked by news of exciting events. Much, much of the daily continuous struggle waged by black movements is still far from the minds of Arabs in particular. And because freedom issues are one and indivisible, and because the goals of the just struggle of the Negroes of America meet the goals of our just struggle against colonialism and Zionism and for the sake of progress and social welfare, and because the Negro struggle is a human experience that can enrich the Arab struggle.

Hoyt W. Fuller commented that "Hughes' chose to identify with plain black people, precisely because he saw more truth and profound significance in doing so. Perhaps in this he was inversely influenced by his father who frustrated by being the object of scorn in his native land, rejected his own people. Perhaps the poet's reaction to his father's flight from the American racial reality drive him to embrace it with extra favor" we can understand from this point of view the psychological liver rooted over decade and the psychological impact and the rooted rejection of racism that makes you feel contempt in your home country. Therefore, emigrations, feelings of frustration and so on were the result of the racial marginalization of an integral part of society. The fragmentation in thinking and behaviours push the black to insistent the reality of their life.

#### **Themes:**

Through the Harlem Dream, Hughes explores many themes during his work. Langston Hughes deals with the theme of music to depict the effect of racialist. He makes use of music theme in a way of mixing the musical structural elements with elements of language to depict the reality of African American oppression. By the music and the effect of musicality, Langston could convey the experience of underprivileged for the black Americans people. He makes excellent when he uses the elements of language such as: his diglossia and various stylistic elements, with



stanzaic and structural elements such as: refrains, onomatopoeias or musical stanza.

We could also see the usage of two dialects ( the African American English and the Standard American English) in his famous poem” The Negro Speaks of Rivers” :

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep  
I’ve known river:  
Ancient dusky rivers

To depict the depth of portrayal of the African Americans and their community, Hughes uses along with tactic elements such as: racial slurs and pathos in order to clear the reality of the racial injustice in front of the reader. He also tries from this using to convey the hope of African American for change as they considered that the poetry is one of the means of depicting the harsh reality of African Americans community. So that the poetry of Langston Hughes can act as a form of shelter segregation, as the African American use the poetry to express the lack of acceptance of status inveterate. The poet tries to make the audience feel the burden of racial injustice and in the same time expressing joy and hope for the situation to get better, showing that change is possible and necessary.

The theme of dignity is the most important theme. The pride soul of the African Americans considers the major motive behind developing confront between the blacks and the whites American. Through the theme of dignity Hughes explored Africans American lives, hopes, fears, their past and their dreams. He writes about the dignity in their struggle and their purity of their souls that is in spite of their frustrated dreams, they have a fair beauty soul. They could defy the racial hatred by their pride and dignity. Hughes wrote in his poem “Song for a Dark Girl” ‘Way down South in Dixie / (Break the heart of me)/ they hung my black young lover /To a cross roads tree.’(Hughes, 1927, P.71).Through these few and strong lines, the poet could portrait the racial hatred and was quite familiar to the black population in the South of America.

In the poem ‘Negro’, Hughes clearly portraits the sense of pride when he says ‘I’ve been a worker/under my hand the pyramids arose’. (Hughes, 1921, p. 28). Hughes makes mixing of agony and pride in his writing. One of the most important elements that cleared and complicated the scene was dignity and pride from the African Americans. In one of his articles that were published in 1926, Hughes wrote about Harlem renaissance, “We younger Negro artists now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they aren’t it doesn’t matter.” (Hughes, 1926). As the black Americans felt with a lotof dignity in accepting that they belonged to the African American community. This sight of pride, we can clearly see it in the style of writing in Hughes’s poetry. He considered the first bard who uses vernacular language in portraying the racial hatred in spite of it was considered to be crass and lowly when we compared it to the high literary language which was used by the scholars. Hughes was very pride in his lineage and origin as he took great pride in his language.

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)

ISSN: 2395-4132

The ambition of achieving the African Americans' dreams from the period of slavery and how they were treated them as second-class citizens in the date of the Jim Crow era. Langston Hughes tackles the theme of aspiration and he clears up how the black Americans fought for achieving these dreams. He compares the aspiration that it is like a dream from the time of slavery to the prolonged cruel and the unsuited treatment of the Jim Crow era. The African American as that time treated very badly in the eyes of the American law. Regarding to this miner social status, most of African American forced to hide their dreams beyond a safety psychological block. Hughes explores and clears up the power ambition of achieving these hidden dreams, lost dreams, and regained the dreams in many different ways. During his work, Hughes expresses his point of view that despite the hell of reality behind these dreams and the difficulty of realizing these dreams and African Americans should keep these dreams alive as it is a good way to bear the wile of the racial society to live. He cautions that if these dreams stay moribund for a long time, then these disenfranchised people might explode.

Langston Hughes denounced racism as it was complicated issue due to the supporting of American state and American law to the segregation of race, gender and class in many ways and forms. The African Americans lived under this pressure of American's society and America's authority and law so such complex problem caused the feeling of being upset as they felt of inability to change. They felt frustration and in the same time they have inner dream of willing to gain their rights and especially getting respect from another Americans. They lived with together hope to be saved from racism and the fright of authority's supporting to racism. The prejudice and racism overburdened the black Americans and pushed them to defend the oppression upon themselves. Hughes accused the patriarchal system of default and failing to take the decisive role in achieving justice and standing up to racism as this system is considered a social system and has manifested itself in many field of life in the social, legal, political, religious and economic organization of a range of different cultures. As the oppression upon the African Americans has exacerbated so much that these peoples can no longer afford it and these vicissitudes foreshadow an outbreak of injustice against the oppressor. Hughes shoved off from his realistic point of view about the discriminatory environment that he lives in and in the same time hoping that this racial inequality in America will finish.

When I taught high school level United States history, I would incorporate into my lessons a few poems by Hughes. I discussed this in advance with English teachers, and a few suggested that I employ (at least subtly) the concept of the critical lens approach, by focusing on the style of the wording and character interactions in some of the poems, to show themes which Hughes explored. I did this, as well as weaving in paintings and photography of the Harlem Renaissance (especially the paintings by Jacob Lawrence, such as the Migration Series). These lessons were among my favorites, and I could tell that they touched many students, be they African-American or others.

Hughes encouraged the African American to show more wisdom even when the road is hard and he expressed that wisdom is courage. Using the poetry as a

Vol. 6 Issue 3 (June 2020)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

mean of wisdom, a person can learn how to treat the others. So by this civilized form can get the rights and achieving the dream deferred.

### **Critical Analysis of The Dream Deferred:**

Langston Hughes's "Dream Deferred" presents the suffering of African Americans in many images to present the feeling of great depression. He pointed out to Africans American as dreamers of society without racism but they put on hold.

Through the poem, the poet makes a compare between the dream deferred and items such as: Raisin, Sore, rotten meat, syrup sweet, and heavy load, because these items considered universal items things, as each of these items conjures up a distinct visual. Hughes titled the poem "Harlem" as it was the center of Black expression their point of view and it was very important place for African Americans culture. The shocking of African Americans from the situation of the post war kept them in a case of dream, as they thought that things will be better immediately after the end of the war. Hughes through the poem and in the last line makes it clear when he pointed to the word "explode", as these people will not stay forever dreaming.

In order to reach their voice to the world, Langston Hughes and many other authors were crucial stood up to the formation, abuse and excellence according to the basis of skin that had no income in them. Many who are scientists, writers, thinkers, engineers, and in many various fields and they have a distinctive role in building the United States of America, but they have been rewarded with persecution, denial, racial discrimination by a small group of the whites complex that topped this scourge and spoke in the name of whites in order to seize their cities and their capabilities. They are gangs charged with bad ideas that lead to the demolition and dismantling of society and consequently the loss of the country.

The prosecution of African Americans is one of the most important topics covered by Langston Hughes in his poem. Sorrow and the dream of delay, which are the most important topics of African Americans concern that Langston addresses in his poem. At beginning of the poem, the poet referred to a significant question that can stir public opinion and the world conscience.

### **What Happens to a Dream Deferred?**

As the dream is the motive of life. Most people take advantage of their dreams as a plan of setting future goals for themselves. Through this open question the poet tries to present the psychological case for the African-Americans people and the psychotherapy for such catastrophe can be by moving in all areas of society.

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

The poet uses literary devices in this poem to express his ideas. He inters a consonance device when he repeats the consonant sounds in the same line. For example, the sound of /n/ in "likes a raisin in the sun. And he uses an apparent image that is a simile technical to compare the black Americans dream to a raisin. Like a raisin, a dream deferred shrivels up. There is a genial image that the dream was living thing and now it has been dried up as a grape when you have leave it



under the sun, it will dry. Besides drying must also mean shrink, become minimal. The simile likes the original dream to a grape which is round, juicy, green and fresh. Therefore, from the poet point of view is that if the dream neglects for too long, surely, it will dry up.

Or fester like a sore

And then run?

Here the poet uses a simile when he compares ones dream to a sore and it is left without treatment and thus turns into a disease. Therefore, the poet here expressed his negative narration of what is happening of injustice toward the black Americans and what might happen if the dream puts aside.

The poet draws attention to the way the dream is handled and how may turn to become infected with regret and frustration. Therefore, the poet was able to embody a social problem in such a wonderful way in an attempt to communicate the voice of this important segment of society and what happens when a dream is not fulfilled, in reference to the African Americans struggle for equal rights and opportunity in America.

The poet expresses that the racial discrimination likes a “sore” in America’s society for decades and was untreated due to racism. Therefore, this “sore” of racial discrimination would be spoiled with the disappointment of the African Americans people and started to catch all across the American society and as a result of that shift, many black people protest, riots and death. This explains what could happen if issues go unresolved, would be surely worse and spreading and could be also stronger like a disease in a wound and this picture is similar to the issue of racism in America.

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet?

Here the poet points out to the dreams when they are broken and he compares these broken dreams to decaying food items, so the poet uses a simile figure of speech in comparing the broken dreams with decaying food items in attempting to make the meaning clear to reader. ‘Does it stink like rotten meat’, both the food and the dream spoil when they are neglected so deferring dream is not allowed.

Through this simile, the poet shows the negative effect of ignoring a dream. He mentions when a syrupy sweet food is not taken care of correctly, they usually become consolidated and musty. The poet could compare this ideation of ignoring food to the effects of a deferred dream as the African American people practiced and how they feel trapped in failure.

The feeling of confinement is the idea that the poet wanted to convey through these lines which they show the feeling of being trapped and how the African American people could not accomplish dreams successfully.

The vital personification of syrup as the poet describes as a thick and sweet liquid and these properties are the same properties of the dreams as they seem hopeful and positive but these characteristics collided with the reality that it causes people to become harder and confined. Therefore, the perceptive of being trapped will be common when they see no hope of achieving their dreams.

The poet refers to the bad mentality condition of because of putting a dream aside and how can complicate the life of the black American people and tied up their abilities to move on through their life as the load of life turns out massive. We could also compare these lines to the tied hands in representing the confined mentality of the black American people as they are consumed by the possibilities of success or the reason to why failure occurred. "Maybe it just sags like a heavy load".

The gradual passage of time is what the poet tries to simulate the world with realistic examples in order to communicate their injustice. The using of complex image reflects the depth of the psychological wound that has been injustice. The poet speaks about an advanced stage of pain, whereas meat can go bad within few days, then how will its situation be if months and years have passed. In his attempting to present the effect of a deferred dream as it likes someone stinking into dark water. The image of comparing the dreams to someone weighed is a visual image. As the poet shows that if the black American people weighed with unfulfilled desires would be as a person who got overweight and could not move and became heavy and unable to do his task in the society correctly as the weight person as the black people, they will be tired and exhausted because of oppression upon them. We can depict the deep pain of racism as the disability when socially rejected, this disability will turn into a source of failure for a person in society and normally there will be no dreams, no hope and then this person will turn into something similar to an animal that does not have the right to live like any other human being and he will be discarded from his society. So this is what the poet depicted the depression of losing to the world through this effective image. *Or does it explode?*

The poet warns from the last outcome from a dream deferred and ignoring it, he refers to the theme of anger and violence and he wants to warn from the result of ignoring the dreams and this may push the back people to explode. The poet also warns from dissatisfaction of the black people and their dreams of righteousness and equivalence do not achieve for them. The memory of oppression is something cannot be taken away and for them revolution is always beneath the surface as the images of slavery, segregation, lynching and humiliation did not leave their memories and their daily lives for generation after generation. The physical destruction is the open wound of the power anger because of deferred dreams which consider the source of negative emotions, so this image gives us the expression of anger and subsequently to actions out of anger as it is associated with this feeling that had accumulated for decades.

### **Conclusion:**

Langston Hughes's "The Dream Deferred" discusses many topics related to the African Americans lives with the white Americans and the supporting of the authority of state America to racialism at that time. The work deals with many themes through its images contacted with the effecting of the racism upon the black Americans and their struggle to get their rights. Hughes work is a message to all the people in the world to support them in this big problem and by his poetry as he believed that is the good way to protest and reached their voice clearly. Hughes

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)

ISSN: 2395-4132

dreamed with achieving the equality and justice in American's society without violence.

## References

- Donald B. Gibson. *Modern Black Poets: A collection of Critical Essays (Twentieth century views)* February 1, 1973  
The Langston Hughes Review Langston Hughes Society; Penn State University Press, vol.5, NO.2 (FALL 1986) pp.-28.
- Rampersad, A. *Collected poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Vintage Classic. P23. 2014
- Biondi Marthe. *To Stand and To Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Post-war New York*. Harvard University press 2006
- Belgrad, Daniel. *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.  
<http://www.Guttenbery.Net>.
- Helbling, M. *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many*: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Hughes, N.I, (ed). *Voices from Harlem Renaissance*. New York: OUP, (1976)
- Smethurst, James. *The African American Roots of Modernism: from Reconstruction to Harlem Renaissance*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Gioia, Ted. *The History of Jazz*. Oxford university Press, 1997.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Ways of White Folks*. Alfred. A. Knopf, b1934.