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I, Too

In America's society today, minorities are faced with the burden of abuse, discrimination, and an unjust system. There have been countless number of events that have occurred in which minority individuals have either been wrongfully accused, hurt or killed, or simply treated as lesser than. In the past, poets have utilized their creativity and art to express their thoughts and ideas about life, societal issues, love, pain, and so much more. Langston Hughes who was born in 1902 was a well-known poet during the 1920s, a period also recognized as the "Harlem Renaissance" ("Langston Hughes", par. 1). Hughes' writing was essentially centered on the lives of African Americans and their frustrations ("Langston Hughes", par. 6). In a way, Langston Hughes was motivated to focus his work on African Americans because of his father, who did not embrace the struggles of his people due to his own personal frustrations as a black man. ("Langston Hughes", par. 4) In Langston Hughes' poem, "I, Too, he voices his dream to be viewed as an American, as equal than, and as a beautiful black individual who is more than a servant for those of another skin color. The white nationalists who were involved in the Charlottesville protest have greatly degraded minorities, and those who retaliated have expressed that," I, too" belong to America.

According to the article published by *CBS News*, on Saturday August, 12th 2017, over 200 white nationalists and supremacists gathered for a "Unite the right" rally "to

protest the removal of a statue of confederate icon General Robert E. Lee.”

(“Charlottesville attack”, 2017, par.2). In the article published by *The Washington Post*, Joe Heim mentions that, the young white males who took part in this protest marched with lit torches while screaming, “Blood and soil!” “You will not replace us!” “Jews will not replace us!” (Heim, 2017, par.10). Counter protestors, both white and black individuals confronted the marches with intentions of standing up for their human rights. Unfortunately, the marchers’ cruel words weren’t enough, this event became very chaotic and dangerous. People were pushed, shoved, punched, injured and killed. In 2017, nearly 200 years post slavery, we have witnessed a travel back in time. It is remarkably disturbing for any individual to have so much hate for another person simply because of the color of their skin. The oppression of African Americans was not only prevalent over 150 years ago, but sadly it is just as common in today’s society. Oppression is the first theme that I identified in Langston Hughes’ poem, “I, Too”. The idea of oppression is represented in the situations of both Hughes’ poem and the Charlottesville protest. In lines 2- 4 of the poem, “ I, Too”, the speaker states, “ I am the darker brother / They send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes.” Although Hughes’ meaning behind these lines represent something literal, there is a deeper significance to it. African Americans were treated as lesser than, we were not thought of as equivalent to Caucasian Americans. Similarly, during the Charlottesville protest, the white nationalists made monkey noises at the black counter protestors and chanted ,“ white lives matter.” (Heim, 2017, par.12). These individuals were treated as inferior and were degraded. The double standards that minorities have to face in today’s society is still an issue. It was found that Law Enforcement’s response to the white nationalist’s violence was insufficient, and

“that the city failed by not adequately communicating or coordinating in advance” (“Charlottesville protest report”, 2017, par. 2). Had the initiators of an event such as this been of another race, law enforcement would have had a different response. The injustice that African Americans and other minorities encounter continues to be a dilemma in the American culture.

Segregation, a pronounced theme in Hughes’ poem was also very evident in the Charlottesville protest. The white nationalists carried sticks, shields, guns, and chemical sprays with which they charged at the counter protestors in hopes of harming and defeating them (Heim, 2017). These protestors didn’t have any intentions of uniting with the counter protestors to find some sort of peace. In the poem, the speaker discusses that because he is black, he is not allowed to eat with the white company, and has no other choice but to be separated (lines 2-4). Although the speaker has been shunned, he doesn’t let this sense of alienation deter him from the idea that “I, too, sing America.”

Interestingly the tone of this poem becomes very optimistic. Lines 5-17 states, “ But I laugh / And eat well / And grow strong // Tomorrow / I’ll be at the table / When company comes / Nobody’ll dare / Say to me / Eat in the kitchen / Then / Besides / They’ll see how beautiful I am / And be ashamed.” The speaker is convinced and believes that the state he and his “ brothers and sisters” are in is only temporary. There will be a time where African Americans will be looked directly into their eyes, instead of being looked down upon. Thus, both the black and white counter protestors (clergy and church members, residents, and civil rights leaders) joined together, despite the series of events that had occurred, and sang “This Little Light of Mine” (Heim, 2017). They united, and didn’t allow the inhumane acts of the nationalists to break them. Regardless of what the counter

protestors endured, rather, what we as people of color endured, we continue to push forward with the hopes that'll get better.

In Langston Hughes' poem, "I, Too" the speaker is very transparent that he takes pride in being a black man in America. Hughes' use of language (symbolism, anaphora, diction, free verse) really highlights the meaning behind his poem. His famous lines, "I, too, sing America" and "I, too, am America" (lines 1 and 18) are repeated because he is sure that no matter what the rest of the country says, his blackness defines America. His poem is written in free verse and the diction is very simple and informal; I believe that Hughes intentionally did this because he wanted his message to be clear and easy to understand. The word sing in the line, "I, too, sing America." (line 1), symbolizes freedom; that one day, African Americans will be freed from the idea that we are not American, that we are unequal, and that we are not beautiful black individuals. I know that what motivated the counter protestors to attend the rally was their pride. Pride in being an African American in a society that continues to belittle them. Pride in being of another race and still supporting their community because they know what's right. It is having pride, that keeps us going.

Langston Hughes understood the very same pain that many individuals experienced on August 12th 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia. His ideas, themes, tone, and language helped bring together the significance of his poem, "I, Too". Although the white nationalists' goal was to place fear into the hearts of any individual who were opposed to their beliefs, the counter protestors along with Langton Hughes still voices that, "I, Too, am America." (line 18).

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