

Let America be America Again
by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers
dreamed--
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the
stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land.
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek--
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying
need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--

Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!

I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home--
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."
The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?

For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay--
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again--
The land that never has been yet--
And yet must be--the land where every man is
free.
The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's,
Negro's, ME--
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the
rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath--
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain--
All, all the stretch of these great green states--
And make America again!

Harlem
from *A Dream Deferred*
by Langston Hughes, 1951

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Copyright © 1994 the Estate of Langston Hughes.

Let America be America Again

1. What words, thoughts, images, etc. first come to mind after reading this poem?
2. What does Langston Hughes have to say about America and the American Dream?
3. According to Hughes, what specific things have interfered with America reaching its potential?
4. What does the author mean when he says that “America was never America to me?”
5. According to the poem, what groups of people in particular have struggled gaining access to or obtaining the American Dream and why?
6. Are there additional groups of people not necessarily referred to in the poem that have also been deprived of all America is supposed to have to offer? (i.e., women)
7. Is this poem a negative portrayal of America? Explain.
8. Although this poem was written in 1935, do you think the themes still have relevance today? Has America fulfilled its potential in your opinion? Explain.

Harlem

9. What images strike you when reading this poem, either that are explicitly described or that come to mind based on what you read?

10. What is the tone and mood of the poem? If you were to hear the poet read it, how do you think his voice might sound in terms of emotional quality, volume, etc.?

11. Even though the poem includes a series of questions, what statement is Hughes making? What is his message about dreams deferred? Do you agree with Hughes?

12. How does this poem relate to “Let America Be America Again?” Which specific lines in “Let America Be America Again” compare to “Harlem?”

13. Whereas the first poem we read was written by Langston Hughes in 1935, he wrote this one 16 years later, in 1951. Though we haven't discussed it yet, what do you think was different in 1951 than in 1935? What impact do you think the timing in which he wrote this poem had?

American Dream Artwork

- Create two visual representations of Langston Hughes's concept of “The American Dream/The American Reality.”
- Your visuals may be a pencil or ink drawing, painting, photo collage, digital artwork, or mixed media in black & white or color. You can include literal or abstract art and drawings, words and phrases, as well as specific lines from the two poems discussed.
- The first visual should illustrate your reading of Langston Hughes's interpretation of the American Dream.
- The second visual should illustrate what Langston Hughes sees as the American reality as compared to the dream.
- Your artwork will be due Tuesday, 12/1/15.