

- written in 1936

Theme: author feels left out of the American Dream

Let America Be America Again

by Langston Hughes

little hope

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

Alliteration

- it once was the America he believed in

Theme:

(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.

- repeated for emphasis

The ideals of equality, liberty, & land of the free don't seem real to everyone.

allit.

hope that it can be what it once was

Theme:

(It never was America to me.)

state of allit.

There are people in power who control others & deprived them of opportunity.

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.

- false promises

America should be for all people

Theme:

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

Sarcasm

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

- for him, the idea of freedom is something covered up

metaphor

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.

imagery

- Not just one group of people; speaking for many who are left out of the A.D.

greed

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!

imagery

- focus in America is power, gain, \$.

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" personalizes and gives a face to the people who feel left out.

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."

- making the poem about the individual
- people came to America with high hopes

sarcasm

The free?

Sarcasm

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.

- he can't say there is freedom
- he is speaking for millions who have been struggling, hoping, dead.
- hopeless

hope for future

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.

he wants to experience the A.D.

there is hope

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!

- reclaiming the idea of America; has to be for everyone.

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,

Poetic devices

- stanzas - vary in length; no exact number of lines
- rhyme - mostly ABABB
- repetition - refrain used to emphasize his theme that he hasn't felt a part of the American Dream.

And yet I swear this oath—
America will be! *-hope*

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! *-hope*

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Poetic Elements
O let America be America again—
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- stanzas - vary in length
- rhyme - ABABB rhyme scheme for most of poem
- repetition - used to emphasize theme

- Tone: begins angry, frustrated, resentful, but by the end, the tone is hopeful
- Purpose: to be the voice that informs America that not everyone has the same liberties; there is a problem of inequality that needs to be fixed

- ends on a positive note; hope that America can be all the things it was meant to be for all. He is not giving up on the idea of the A.D.

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