*Let America Be America Again*

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 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!

Thoughts to Consider

Scholar: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What are some structural patterns that you noticed as you read the poem? (words, phrases, stanza lengths, etc.)

Thinking about the variety of texts we’ve experienced over the past week, what have you learned about equality and freedom in America over time? What about equality and freedom in America *today*?

Put yourself in this poem. What would you add to the poem? Think about personal experiences, current events or news stories, issues in this community, ideas from other texts, or any other meaningful connections.

Now that your schema on this poem has grown through the interaction with other texts, documents, photographs, recordings, videos, and discussions, how has your understanding of the poem changed? What specific things do you understand more clearly? *How* do you understand them more clearly?

*You will now be writing the final stanza of this poem on your own. YOU are the poet and the expert, so make this personal. Use your knowledge of the structure of the poem, as well as your knowledge of connecting issues.*