

Let America be America Again

Langston Hughes, 1936

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!

Literary devices that American writer Langston Hughes uses in the 86 line poem 'Let America Be America Again' include:

1. A rhyme scheme in certain stanzas:

For example, in stanza number 1 the rhyme schemes is ABAB. Line one rhymes with line three; line two rhymes with line four. This rhyme scheme is used again in stanza number two and three.

2. Internal rhyme

Internal rhyme is rhyme within a singular line. In line two of stanza number one:

Let it be the dream it used to be.

The internal rhyme is in the words: be, dream, be.

The internal rhyme in line one of stanza number two is dream, dreamers, dreamed.

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—

3. Alliteration

We can refer back to the above line (line one of stanza number two). Here the alliteration is the repeated “d’s” of dream, dreamers, dreamed.

Later on in the poem alliteration is achieved in the line phrase “Of grab the gold!” The use of “g’s”.

4. Symbolism and personification

Freedom in this poem is symbolized as steel in the line “The steel of freedom does not stain.” In addition, America is symbolized and personified as a pioneer.

5. A main theme

The thrust of this poem, in terms of theme, is of taking action and being positive, to make America dignified and magnificent. Langston Hughes does not believe, despite opinions to the contrary, that America has ever achieved

the greatness within its reach. He makes a litany of what the shortcomings of America are. However, he does believe America can be great – or greater – and therefore, that is the theme of this poem.

6. Mood or atmosphere

With the harsh condemnations of aspects of American society and culture, the atmosphere or mood of this poem is somewhat sombre. Nonetheless, the underlying mood or atmosphere of this poem is optimistic. Langston Hughes is pushing individuals to take charge and do the “doing” to let America be America again.