

HARASSMENT OF NEGROES: AN EXPLICATION IN “BALLAD OF THE LANDLORD”

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Abstract:

One must note that the condition of Negro community in America is not better than Dalits in India. There is great disagreement between Negroes and American. Langston Hughes overtly described Negroes as sweet, meek, docile, humble and kind. It is noteworthy to pay attention on the humiliation of the Negroes. Here, I have made an attempt to focus on the plight of Negroes in relation with the poem “Ballad of the Landlord”. The paper discloses distinction between the Negro and Americans and highlights the inequality in America. It also shows Americans utmost endeavor to crush the lives of Negroes.

Keywords: Negro, Black community, harassment, landlord, race, color, conflict, and slavery.

Introduction:

“To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships”¹

America is the powerful country in the world. It is the leading country in many fields such agriculture, science, arts, architecture, engineering, technology and many other regimes. Though everything is good about America, there is a severe distinction between Negroes and Americans on the basis of race and color. Negroes are considered black, untouchable in American context. This study reminds the poem written by Wole Soyinka, “Telephone Conversation”

Objectives:

- To focus on the Harlem Renaissance.
- To study the economic condition of Negroes.
- To study the distinction between the Negro and the Americans.
- To focus on race and color

Methodology:

For this research paper I made a judicious effort from theoretical point of view. I have used first hand and second hand source material while doing study. It is based on the theoretical foundation to justify the study.

Harassment of Negroes:

“Our Civil War was a blot on our history, but not as great a blot as the buying and selling of Negro souls”²

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri. He was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. He was one of the earliest poets who were writing on theme of harassment, subjugation of the Negro community in America. He belonged to the movement poetry known as jazz poetry which was closely attached their culture. The word Negro is used in the English speaking world to refer to a person of black ancestry or appearance.³ Langston Hughes included the syncopated rhythms and repetitive phrases of blues and jazz music into their writing. He was deeply concerned with racial pride and with the creation of purely African-American poetry. Since jazz music was an important part of African-American culture at the time, Hughes and others like him adapted the musical genre to create their own, singularly African-American voices that could easily be distinguished from the work of white poets. Many of Hughes' poems, such as "The Weary Blues," sound almost exactly like popular jazz and blues songs of the period, and vice versa. His work is also highly evocative of spirituals. Hughes is known for his work during the Harlem renaissance. The term Negro is still used in some historical contexts.⁴

The poem highlights on a black man's experience in a subjugated society. Although this tenant has valid complains about the conditions of his house. The poet very intimately gives us an account of the plight of Negro people in America with the help of the poem. It is written in ballad form. By tradition, a ballad is a love poem but Hughes turns this into a poem with rhythm. The poem narrates the tale of a landlord, a weak tenant, the police and the press embellishes black man's experience in a society subjugated by white Americans. This situation was available in America in late 1930th. The tale is told in the form of dramatic monologues of the landlord, the tenant. Harassment of the black/negro community is described as follows.

The speaker in the poem is the tenant who tells the landlord about the bad condition of the house. The roof of the house is leakage. The tenant has already told that but the action was not taken place. The steps of the house are out of order. The tenant says someone may fall down while climbing them. Then the landlord becomes ready to pay ten Bucks but he has to repair the house. The black poet Hughes is inspired to pour his anger through the poem. He presents precise and detailed description of insignificant events like the leakage of the roof and the broken steps. This shows that the communal inequality in the USA. The landlord is not paying attention towards the tenant. The following lines will explain the situation aptly:

Landlord, landlord,

My roof has sprung a leak,

Don't you remember I told you about it

Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,

These steps is broken down.5 (P.202)



The white Americans remain too aggressive towards black community. They put their plans to crush the lives of black people. The white landlord does not become ready to solve the problems of the tenant. On the contrary, he threatens him of getting the order of driving him out with force. He also threatens him of cutting his head. He would throw his furniture out of the house. The landlord thus wants to make use of the economic force. The poem is a subtle charge against the racial discrimination in the America. He wants to use physical force against the Negroes. I have cited following lines which express the harassment by white people.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?

You gonna cut off my head?

You gonna take my furniture and

Throw it in the street?6 (P.202)

The above lines display the nature of the landlord who becomes angrier. He calls the police and asks them to arrest the tenant. He accuses him of trying to ruin the government and

overturning the land. He calls the tenant as the adversary of the country. The police arrest the tenant and lock up him into the prison. This treatment given to tenant is against the law but they do.

The next day, various newspaper headlines regarding the incident appear in the newspapers. Some of them can be summarized as ‘A black man threatens the landlord’. The tenant is not grants bail and ‘The judge sentences the negro to ninety days imprisonment’. Ironically, the black Negro is harassed by the white landlord and the government of the America. Both of the persons represent the two classes or communities in America and the struggles between them.

Conclusion:

The harassment of Negroes all over the America is truth which is undeniable. Langston Hughes rightly put the situation in front of us how the treatment is given to blacks in America. They always think that the Negroes are less important and ominous in the world. They don't have any right to live. The ending lines of the poem evoke the dramatic intensity and inequality.

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