Anna Cornelius

Heather Wright

English 113

29 October 2013

Hardships Colored People Face

Throughout Hughes’ poetry, he shows the hardships that black people face. Hughes says that blacks should not try to be white, but they should be themselves. The overarching theme in the poetry of Hughes is talking about what life is like to be black in relation to the life that he has lived.

 In the poem called “Mother to Son,” the Mother tells her son that life being black is not easy. She says that life “ain’t no crystal stair.” Life has rough places in it, but she just keeps going. Even when it is dark, she doesn’t stop then either, and she encourages her son not to turn back and give up, because she is still climbing, and he must keep going also. She says that they must keep going despite the poverty and hardships they face.

 In the poem, “Ballad of Landlord,” the poet is showing how hard life is for black people because they are not always treated right. In this incident, the Landlord would not fix the house, but wanted the rent money. The character in the poem is frustrated and refuses to pay the rent until the house gets fixed. However, he knows that if he continues not paying the rent, the landlord can take away his heat, his furniture, and even his house, if he does not pay the rent. The poet expresses the anger that some black people have because they can’t get the help they need, and they don’t have the money to do it themselves. The tenant in this poem was so angry at the negligence of the Landlord, he did not care about what would happen to him if he threatened the Landlord and ended up in jail for 90 days.

In the poem, Harlem, the poet explains how life is hard on the colored people in the city. As a result of the racism, colored people cannot find a job, and therefore cannot afford to buy the things they need when the prices go up. The poet explains how the colored people feel hurt when they cannot get the jobs need because of being colored. The poet refers to how white people promise them help, but never do it when he says, “Remembering the old lies, The old kicks in the back, The old ‘Be patient’ They told us before.” The poet says that they stand there and look out at everything they possibly could do if they weren’t colored and wonder what they are going to do.

 In the poem, “Theme for the English B,” the character is told to go home and write a page paper that night. The instructor said, “Let that page come out of you – then, it will be true.” As the character went home and wrote, he said that if his page came out of him, it would be colored because he is colored. At this point, he realized, that he could only be what he is. If he tried to be white, then it would not be him.

 Langston Hughes reflects in his essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” on another young black poet who said he wanted to write like he was white. Hughes said that a truly great poet must not be “afraid of being himself.” He mentions that this young poet’s family reared him to act like a white person, and taught him that doing something bad was being like a black person. Hughes refers to the family of the young poet as being a middle class black family who worked for white people and therefore lived a comfortable life. He describes this class as desiring to be white and running away from their race. Therefore, Hughes sees this young poet as having a bad connotation of black people, and not wanting to be like them or write like them. This bothers Hughes because he believes that people should not be ashamed of who they are. He says that there is a beauty to being unique or different.

 Throughout Hughes’ poems, he portrays the poverty that black people live in, the racism against them, and the feelings they have because of the difference between them and the white people. He also talks about the constant awareness of separation between blacks and whites. Hughes believes that if a person is going to be a great poet he should not try to be something other than he is. He wanted to write about the life he knows as a black person. Hughes shows the poverty that blacks suffer because of racism. He clearly depicts the hurt, the bad feelings, and the distrust toward the white people in his writings. Throughout all these poems one can see the overarching theme of life as a black person in relation to Hughes’ life.