

**JAZZ POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES:  
THE VOICING OF BLACK AMERICA**

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the  
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**I, Henry Lalmawizuala, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the result of the work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any degree to me, or to anybody else to the best of my knowledge, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University or Institute.**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Jazz Poetry of Langston Hughes: The Voicing of Black America**” written by **Henry Lalmawizuala** has been written under my supervision.

He has fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D. Regulations of Mizoram University. The thesis is the result of his own investigations. Neither the thesis as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted to any other University for any research degree.

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Henry Lalmawizuala

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*Jazz is not a solitary art. Its form does not only reveal itself in the music.*

Sawyer A. Theriault

Sascha Feinstein described jazz poetry as, "... any poetry that has been informed by jazz music" (2) while Miriam Zolin in her essay "The Quickening Art of Jazz Poetry" described it as, "A poetry that doesn't exactly mimic the sounds of jazz, but does incorporate rhythms, repetitions, syncopation and space so that its performance can evoke what jazz evokes" (2). A lot of definitions have stemmed from many critics, scholars, musicians and poets but from all these definitions, it is clear that jazz poetry should ideally contain the following: it should be inspired by the music jazz; it should have the same effect that jazz music has on its audience and the vocal performance should be interwoven to the music.

The amalgamation of two art forms i.e., poetry and jazz music is quite extraordinary. No other forms of music have entered the poetic space as much as jazz music did. Though certain poets like Carl Sandburg (1878 – 1967), Hart Crane (1899 –1932), Vachel Lindsay (1879 –1931) and Mina Loy (1882 –1966) had attempted to write in this new style of writing poetry, it was Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967) who eventually found success with it. Hughes' jazz poems are described by Meta DuEwa Jones as resembling "the creative invention and alteration essential to jazz" (Jones 50). Moreover, Hughes' predecessors were not categorized specifically as jazz poets since their writings did not satisfy the most accepted definition of jazz poetry which is "poetry necessarily influenced by jazz". Yet they were instrumental in the evolution of the new genre.

This research will situate the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as an instrument for establishing an African American cultural identity and also, creating a major tool for African American intellectual revival with a predominant focus on the cultural theories propagated by Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Using Raymond Williams's theory of 'Structures of feelings' which is concerned with 'meanings and values as they are lived and felt and is often antagonistic to system of values and beliefs to the dominant ideologies within a society' (Barry 177), an attempt will be made to define the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as opposing the status quo. Meanwhile, the seminal essay of Stuart Hall "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" asserts that, "Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Rutherford 222). In the same essay Hall defined two different types of cultural identity wherein he explained his second view of cultural identity as "...a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (ibid 225). Hall continues to state that cultural identities "are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (ibid). This research, therefore, will attempt to identify the role played by the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes in shaping the cultural identity of the African American which underwent constant transformation.

Upon their arrival on the American soil as slaves in 1619, African Americans were forcibly stripped of their identity, tradition, culture and heritage. They were no

longer accorded the freedom to think, act and live as normal human beings and they were kept in bondage for two and a half centuries (1619 to 1865). After emancipation, African Americans realized the need to establish a new culture and an identity in order to ascertain their existence in America as free citizens having equal rights as their white counterparts. This new identity would preserve the ethnicity of every African Americans and also ensure the survival of their race. But, slavery had a very debilitating impact on the mindset of the African Americans and the formation of a new culture or an identity was a herculean task for the African American leaders and intellectuals. African Americans were identified and labeled as uncultured, barbaric, animalistic, savages, and were scorned upon; they were not accepted in the American community as Americans. Much to the dismay of the African American community, emancipation and the abolition of slavery did not guarantee or deliver total and absolute freedom. Racism became institutionalized, the Ku Klux Klan was formed (1865), and the Era of Reconstruction (1865 – 1877) was a total failure in terms of rehabilitating the African Americans. To make matters worse, the Jim Crow Law was legislated in 1877 which enforced racial segregation officially. Therefore, even after emancipation African Americans still faced challenges economically, socially and politically on a very large scale. Charles E. Farger on the subject of the uniqueness and the genuineness of the African American culture said:

The American Negro is different from American whites. He has his own history, centering around the experience of slavery and its effects, and more recently including the rediscovery of his African heritage. The Negro has distinct cultural patterns—patterns of speech, patterns of music and dance, patterns of self-expression and relationship—which may have been produced by this history, but which have



outlived it and are now surviving on their own creative energy and integrity. These like white ethnic characteristics will not and should not disappear in the future. It is indeed insidious “subterfuge for white supremacy” to expect blacks to abandon this heritage as the price explicit or implicit for integration via assimilation into America’s “mainstream” (qtd. in Scott 4).

Attempts to establish or define the African American identity and culture often lead scholars, intellectuals and leaders of the African American community to search for a source in the music, dances, habits, mannerisms, beliefs, literatures and dialects of the African Americans. All these components of the African American communities in America were crucial to the establishment of the African American identity and culture. The formation or evolution of the African American culture and identity will be further studied extensively in Chapter 3.

Literature is one of the most important expressions of any culture or society and most cultures can be easily understood through an examination of their literature. Hence, this thesis will closely examine the literary history of the African Americans in order to properly understand the role it plays in the formation of a new culture during the 1900s. African American literature or black literature underwent strong resistance and rejections before it was finally accepted by the American public. Black literary artists had to write under a pseudonym or rather publish their works anonymously since slaves were forbidden to read and write. However, there were many African Americans who wrote during slavery. After emancipation, African American literary artists were again faced with a dilemma - while some writers chose to write for the white intelligentsia, others chose to adhere to African American roots. James Weldon Johnson wrote in 1932 that:

The record of the Negro's efforts in literature goes back a long way, covering a period more than a century and a half, but it is only within the past ten years that America as a whole has been made consciously aware of the Negro as a literary artist. It is only within that brief time that Negro writers have ceased to be regarded as isolate cases of exceptional, perhaps accidental ability, and have gained group recognition. It is only within these few years that the arbiters of American letters have begun to assay the work of these writers by the general literary standards and accord it such appraisal as it might merit. (qtd. in Warren 6).

Much like literature, music too serves an important role towards the establishment of culture. Ethnomusicologist such as Alan P. Merriam and Richard Middleton stressed upon the significance of music as an inherent object for several cultures of the world to base their beliefs, experiences and activities in order to achieve a new cultural identity. Alan P. Merriam in his book *The Anthropology of Music* wrote, "...music is a part of culture, culture moves through time, and thus through music we can approach certain kinds of history" (Merriam 280). Richard Middleton also opined, "...any attempts to study music without situating it culturally are illegitimate..." (Clayton, Trevor and Middleton 3). This research therefore will explore and have a close study of theories propagated by such ethnomusicologists in order to establish the importance of music in shaping one's own cultural identity thereby subsequently linking Hughes' jazz poetry as an important source for the formation of the new African American cultural identity.

African Americans have contributed greatly towards music and its development in America. Some of the most widely known forms of music in the

world today, such as the blues, jazz and Negro spirituals are products of a culture which was once severely discriminated and not tolerated in America. Charley Gerard a composer, writer and publisher while talking about the role of jazz towards the formulation of the African American identity wrote, “Jazz has been and continues to be a music whose developments are closely linked to the ways in which African Americans have adopted different strategies of achieving sociopolitical goals. Their music reflects these goals and acts as a rallying force” (xix). Charley Gerard’s observation of jazz as an instrument for African Americans to pursue their identity and sociopolitical needs is what this research will attempt to establish – through the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes which became the core tool to achieve this end. An in depth study will be made on the influence of jazz on the poetry of Langston Hughes and also Hughes’ motive for the adaptation of the music art form to produce and formulate a new genre of poetry which became an instrument of instilling the feeling of a new black ideology – socially and artistically, and also jazz poetry as aesthetic medium of representation for a culturally oppressed race or marginalized society.

Many African American leaders strived to create a new identity and culture for the African Americans after emancipation. W.E.B Du Bois (1868-1963) was one of the most influential leaders of the African American community during the 1900s. DuBois through his essay “Criteria of a Negro Art” (1926) advocated that art should be propaganda and Alain Locke (1885–1954), another important figure in the field of African American literature, in his *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925) believed in the promise of high art to bring relief from racial issues. Locke suggested that by giving the white audiences a more refined and cultured art, African Americans could relieve the racial tension. But Langston Hughes preferred to identify with African American roots and based his writings on black lower classes, capturing the idioms of

their art, particularly their music, in his own art - Jazz Poetry. Kenneth Rexroth one of the most prolific jazz poet described what he personally understood by jazz poetry is in his essay "Jazz Poetry". He explained:

It isn't anything complicated to understand. It is the reciting of suitable poetry with the music of a jazz band, usually small and comparatively quiet. Most emphatically, it is not recitation with background music. The voice is integrally wedded to the music and, although it does not sing notes, is treated as another instrument, with its own solos and ensemble passages... (qtd. in Chang 5)

This thesis will situate Hughes' jazz poetry as a tool to voice the subdued voices of African Americans. The rejection of received standards and the hegemony of the white masters, advocated by Langston Hughes through his jazz poetry, were later followed by Beat generation poets such as Kenneth Rexroth (1905 – 1982) and Kenneth Patchen (1911 – 1972) who adapted jazz poetry into their arsenal. They also advocated the rejection of blind acceptance of dictated norms and materialism.

Jazz music, the music chosen by Langston Hughes as a model to base his poetry, is characterized mostly for its improvisational style which includes the call and response and syncopated rhythm. Jazz musicians had a tendency to change melodies rhythmically sometimes embellishing the melody. They also had the freedom to improvise on the spot, during performances. Thus, the freedom that the African American craved for was realized through this form of music. Early jazz musicians never had musical scores; jazz performances were solely based on the creative ability and musical prowess of the musician. Unlike the blues whose formation and inception has never been questioned, jazz was a musical genre which

attracted many disputes and debates regarding its formation and innovators. Len Weinstock in his essay “The Origin of Jazz” credited the New Orleans black Creole sub-culture originally from the West Indies for the development of Jazz. The black Creole sub culture of New Orleans during 1800 onwards consisted of highly versatile musicians who through the decades incorporated many different styles of music such as, ragtime, Dixieland, swing, marching band and blues. An odious racial segregation law enacted in New Orleans in 1894 forced them to co-exist with the newly freed black slaves who were economically poor and uneducated. The communities belonging to the black Creole sub culture of New Orleans were able to sight read musical scores and they took keen interest in composing while this was not the case with the newly freed black slaves who were unable to sight read and therefore took less interest in written musical scores. Weinstock wrote, “It was the musical sparks that flew on the clashing of these very different cultures in the ensuing decade that ignited the flames of Jazz” (Weinstock, *redhotjazz.com*).

The roots of the blues can be found in the annals of the rural lives and experiences of the African Americans, whereas jazz was predominantly an urban music. Jazz dominated the music scene of America during the Prohibition Era, the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment also known as the Volstead Act prohibited the sale of liquor in America which led to the establishment of many secret undercover bars or ‘speakeasies’. The prohibition started the ‘Jazz Age’ and the ‘flapper generation’ and the era also came to be known as the ‘roaring twenties’. However, the liquor prohibition was very poorly enforced by the law officials. Bootleggers and gangsters took the utmost advantage of this and supplied the secret bars with liquors. These secret bars employed a lot of jazz musicians (mostly African Americans) to entertain the crowd. Jazz became instrumental in creating a fusion of culture between the black

and white communities of America through the secret night clubs. However, when the stock market crashed in 1929 it signaled the end of the Jazz Age.

During the 1900s America witnessed a rare occurrence in its history known as the Great Migration. The first wave of the Great Migration (1910 to 1919) saw more than one million African Americans migrating from the South towards the Northeast, Midwest and Western states of America in search of better prospects. Some of the main reasons for the migration were segregation, lynching and lack of social and economic opportunities in the south. The Great Migration was also an indirect result of the shortage of cheap labour from Europe due to the First World War, which provided many job opportunities in the northern states of America. “After World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, industrialized urban areas in the North, Midwest and West faced a shortage of industrial laborers, as the war put an end to the steady tide of European immigration to the United States.” (*History.com* Staff). Many of the newly migrated African Americans settled in large cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit and New York as a result of the harmonious atmosphere enjoyed by the black community in these districts. Harlem neighbourhood in New York was already host to many African Americans from different cultural backgrounds (as mentioned earlier in the previous paragraph); the arrival of the migrating southern blacks intensified the amalgamation of the black community thus somehow aggravating the growth of the African American culture and community in Harlem. The Great Migration deeply affected jazz music as the journey was also undertaken by many jazz musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie (1917 – 1993), John Coltrane (1926 – 1967), Thelonious Monk (1917 – 1982) and Ray Charles (1930 – 2004) who all became legends of the musical genre (“*In Other Great*”). Jazz music, therefore, gained momentum during the 1920s at Harlem, and as such, one of the greatest attributes of the Harlem Renaissance

(1918 – mid 1930s) was jazz music. The freedom that the African American community enjoyed in Harlem fueled the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance which will be discussed at length in the upcoming chapter.

Sawyer A. Theriault in his article “Jazz Writing: Identity and Multiculturalism in Jazz Literature” wrote, “...jazz narrates a people’s emotional reaction to oppression, expresses the artistic abilities of African-Americans, and provides a voice for those whose voices have been beaten into submission” (1). Jazz also allowed the emergence of self-expression creating a counter identity to oppression and white supremacy. Jazz allowed the process of self-creation and was a social phenomenon influencing the liberation of woman and race. Jazz, therefore, liberated the African American soul. Phillip L. Mason defined the African American soul by stating that, “The phenomenon among African Americans identified as soul is none other than the contemporary manifestation of Africanism”. He continued, “The essence of soul is the essence of functionalism” (51). The term Africanism is in turn defined as “... both a science and a philosophy aimed at freeing the black man from bondage to a culture and values which have been forced upon him. It seeks to liberate the mind of the black, enabling him to search for old concepts and values, African in origin, and to explore and create new ones” (Njaka 12).

W. A. Jeanpierre also defined the African American soul as, “Négritude, but expressed in terms of the existential experience lived by black men in America. It is more peculiar to the present-day American scene, as it is currently being manifested, and emerges more as a mood rather than a project with well-defined goals. It too is a response to the black-white encounter,” (10). Jeanpierre continued, “‘Soul’ seems to mark the coming of age of the rejects, of the previously unheard from black masses. It is a felt presence that eludes definition; it is a mood, a recognition, and an attitude

with its own dialectical justification. 'Soul' is the American black mystique in embryonic form. It is not concerned with protest, having gone beyond this stage to a recognition of self that needs not be justified nor explained" (ibid).

'Négritude' was a term developed in the thirties by intellectuals of the African Diaspora. Some of the most notable founding members of the Négritude movement were Aimé Césaire (1913 – 2008), Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906 2001) and Léon Damas (1912 – 1978). It was a movement which disavowed colonialism and promoted Pan-Africanism. Camara Laye writing on the subject of African American Art wrote:

If a man's body has needs, so also has his soul; and the soul comes before the body... the soul easily suffocates under the mechanical accumulation; it finds itself dominated by mechanisation, by all the progress flowing around it which has nothing really to do with the soul, and it is always constrained. The soul chooses, in order to escape, all roads, all issues. (58)

The African American soul, therefore, was the integration of African American and the African sentiments which sought to establish equality and acknowledgement. It was a sense of pride, displaying the rich heritage and culture of the African sub-continent juxtaposed with the varied assimilated black cultures of America. It was a feeling, a mood, a notion, a sense of being that rejected white supremacy and advocated black emergence which could be experienced solely by African Americans.

As stated earlier, jazz music became a counter culture motive for the African Americans and it dictated many things in the life of an African American. Jazz to the African Americans was like apple pie to the whites, a cultural and social identity.



Henry Osgood calls jazz, “a protest against ...the monotony of life...an attempt at individual expression” (247). This statement goes on to show that jazz was not merely a type or genre of music but a movement against the system particularly that of the white hegemonic order. Gerald Early in his article mentioned “...jazz was more than just music; at the height of its influence, jazz was a cultural movement, particularly influencing the young in dress, language, and attitude” (2). This astonishing characteristic of jazz as a force which counters the dominant ideology or dominant power is what this research will delve into. Jazz poetry as an offshoot of jazz not only was a genre of literature which represented literary aesthetics, but it also was a channel, an instrument and a tool through which resistance was voiced.

However, Jazz too had its share of negative criticism and was sometimes associated as the devil’s music and was even banned for a certain period of time. In the September 1908 issue of *Current Opinion* Vol. LXV, No. 3 an article titled ‘Why “Jazz” sends us back to the jungle’ wrote, “One touch of jazz makes savages of us all”. By the year 1924 many whites had started to play jazz music and the general idea that the whites possessed were, “...when black people play jazz, it is jungle noise”. The whites deliberately associated jazz as a music which might invoke savage instincts. *The New York Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1922 article “Rector calls Jazz National Anthem” states jazz “is retrogression. It is going to the African jungle for our music. It is a savage crash and bang” and again on the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1924 issue *The Times* stated that jazz “is merely a return to the humming, hand clapping, or tom-tom beating of savages”. It is also interesting that Jazz received harsh criticism not only from the white Americans but African Americans as well; Maude Cuney-Hare, the music editor of *The Crisis*, articulates that jazz is, “common combination of unlovely tones and suggestive lyrics” she continues “Music should sound not screech; Music should

cry not howl; Music should weep not bawl; Music should implore not whine” (qtd. in Levine, 12). These are but some of the attacks on jazz music, but in spite of the criticisms it faced, jazz did survive and outlived its many detractors. Hughes fell in love with jazz which he considered to be a true African American art construct. As a poet who had been constantly trying to absorb and imbibe the African American culture into his poetry, Hughes started writing his poetry in the form of jazz.

Jazz during the 1920s was already undergoing various changes. At the onset, jazz was considered to be an uncultured music by the whites. Even though a lot of jazz musicians were whites, African Americans proved to be far more influential in its growth as a new genre of music. As such, there was a lot of rejection and resentment hurled towards this new genre of music from the white community. Jazz music stimulated and influenced a lot of changes in the American society. Not only was it a new genre of music, it became a lifestyle, a new system of opposing the white regime. Jazz inspired a new way of thinking and subsequently brought about changes in almost every aspect of the American culture. Sawyer A. Theriault strongly expressed that jazz, “...is an art that allowed for the emergence of self expression in an overtly oppressed race” (1).

The ambiguity surrounding the formation of jazz music is deeply intriguing. There has never been a unified acceptance of its inception and formation. Several people have claimed to be its innovator such as Jelly Roll Morton (1890 – 1941). However, what is certain is that Jazz is a fusion and an amalgamation of the tribal music of West Africa and the European concert music. As Lee Konitz observed in his essay *All the Things "All the Things You Are" Is*, “The elements usually picked out are

African rhythm and European harmony, but the blend is richer than these stereotypes suggest” (Hartman, 9). Jazz in its formative years was performed not by trained musicians who could read musical scores but rather by black slaves who in their solitude found solace in their music. This makes it very complicated to accurately study early jazz. Jazz in simple terms is a genre of music that is claimed to have originated from and popularized by the African American community of America during the later part of 1800.

The focus of this thesis being jazz poetry, the history of its development will be thoroughly studied and examined. Jazz poets in the early 1920s till the 1950s were mostly African Americans, and therefore the contents and contexts of their poetry stem from a deep feeling of abhorrence for the white Americans. The sense of improvisation that the music jazz generated was incorporated in these poetry and therefore jazz poetry was not properly constructed in terms of style and rhythm (as opposed to other forms of writing poetry which follows the conventional methods of rhyming and other poetic stylistics) which, according to the white community reflected the lifestyle and mannerisms of the African American community. Much of the theme that reverberates through these poems in its initial stages was the identification of the African American identity, social issues concerning the African Americans and racial tensions. The concept of jazz being a cultural movement is primarily what Langston Hughes incorporated in his jazz poetry. Through his poetry he communicated with the African American community of his age, urging them to be aware of their social and national status and to strive artistically to represent themselves in mainstream America. Barry Wallenstein says, “Hughes brought [black] ethnic consciousness to the general awakening of the white intelligentsia” (605).

Jazz poets during the 1920s and 1930s were inspired richly by popular and acclaimed jazz musicians like John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong to name a few, all of whom achieved fame from the 1920s onwards up to the 1960s. During the Harlem Renaissance Langston Hughes through his writings influenced several other poets to write in this newly formed genre. Much like jazz music, Hughes' jazz poetry therefore incorporated the syncopated rhythm and the freedom in form and composition thus associated with jazz music. Jazz to Langston Hughes was:

...one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile” (Hughes, “The Negro”).

Sean Singer in his essay “Scrapple from the Apple: Jazz & Poetry” wrote, “For Hughes, jazz is an anodyne to suffering; it is symbolic of a response to struggle, and it is the lexicon of Harlem’s street, its nightlife, its emotional trajectory” (2). He devoted and perfected his skills and passion for writing towards adopting this new form of music into his poetry. Hughes though not a musician by any means, effectively combined his poetic writing skills with jazz and became most famous for developing and popularizing this new style of writing poetry. Hughes experimented with the concept of jazz poetry and in the prefatory note for the book *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) explained it thus:

In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it progressed— jazz, ragtime, swing, blues, boogie-woogie, and be-bop—this poetry on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked

by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of a jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition (qtd. in Brinkman 89).

During the 1900s, although slavery had already been abolished in America, African American communities were still facing many challenges in almost every facet of their lives; racial segregation was still looming large in America. It was at this dark yet challenging point in time that Langston Hughes was born, on the first of February 1902 in the city of Joplin, Missouri. Arnold Rampersad distinctly mentioned the sad plight of the living conditions of the African American community in his book, *The life of Langston Hughes Volume 1: 1902 -1941* (1986) in which he wrote, “By the time of Langston Hughes’s childhood, all African Americans were barred from formerly open churches, hotels, restaurants, and other social establishments” (8). Even the *Time Line of African American History, 1825 - 1925* issued by the Library of Congress clearly depicted the horrifying experiences African Americans still had to face during the 1920s by stating that eighty-five black Americans were known to have been lynched in 1902 alone. Hughes painfully recalled the difficult times he had to undergo as a child in his autobiography *The Big Sea* wherein he wrote, “...the kids would grab stones and tin cans out of the alley and chase me home” (14). In one of his poetry titled “The White Ones” Hughes questioned the prevailing hate crimes that still existed during his time, “...why do you torture me, / O, white strong ones, / Why do you torture me?” (Rampersad - Roessel, 37).

In his essay “My Adventures as a Social Poet” published in *Phylon* Vol. VIII, No.3 in 1947, Hughes glaringly realized his position in the society by writing,

“Unfortunately, having been born poor – and also colored – in Missouri, I was stuck in the mud from the beginning. Try as I might to float off into the clouds, poverty and Jim Crow would grab me by the heels, and right back on earth I would land” (205). Hughes therefore was acutely aware of the racism and oppression that the African American communities were facing, since he had a firsthand experience of the same. However, his experiences later proved to be useful in shaping and cementing his understanding and sympathy for his community and race.

Amidst all these prevailing hate crimes Hughes grew up mostly with his maternal grandmother Mary Langston, who frequently told him stories of heroism, of slavery and the freedom of the African Americans. Mary Langston had a huge impact on the life of Langston Hughes. She was his source of information with regards to the struggle of the African American community towards achieving their freedom. Hughes remembered his grandmother’s stories which taught him important lessons in life. In his autobiography Hughes wrote, “Through my grandmother’s stories always life moved, moved heroically towards an end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother’s stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying” (*The Big* 17). Hughes’s mother Carrie Langston after separating with James Hughes remarried and tried her best to make ends meet. In the same autobiography Hughes reminisced, “...my mother traveled about the country looking for my step-father or for a better job, always moving from one house to another” (ibid 36). Hughes furthermore, was never fond of his father James Nathaniel Hughes who was “living in self imposed exile in Mexico”. He painfully recollected the immense resentment he had for his father and blatantly wrote, “...when I thought of my father, I got sicker and sicker. I hated my father” (ibid 49). His father had wanted him to become an engineer but Hughes had his mind set on becoming a writer. During his time with his father in

Mexico, Hughes underwent a lot of psychological and mental breakdowns mostly due to the disagreements he and his father would have regarding his future and the love he had for the Negroes. Having been raised in a broken family where he never got to establish an emotional connection with his mother and where he developed a very strong sense of bitterness towards his father, he questioned his existence at a very early age. Hughes wrote in his autobiography, lines such as, "I began to wish i had never been born under such circumstances" and "...most of the time I was depressed and unhappy and bored." (ibid 47). Arnold Rampersad wrote, "... [Hughes] lived in a state of suspended identity" (*The Life Vol 1* 35). His father hated the Negroes, their lack of discipline and their laziness and he often spoke ill about the whole Negro race. However, Hughes strongly felt otherwise, he had an innate sense of love for his people and when his father tried to urge him to move away from America where he'll "live like a nigger with niggers" Hughes retorted, "But I like negroes" (*The Big* 62).

Hughes' talent for the art of writing poetry was discovered at a very early age. He was elected as the class poet when he was in eighth grade in 1916 and he published his first poetry "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in 1921 at the age of 19. Although he often stayed with his father in Mexico, who was strongly opposed to the idea of his son becoming a poet, Hughes never let go of his dream to become a full-fledged poet. In 1925 his poetry "The Weary Blues" won the first prize in a contest sponsored by the *Opportunity* magazine and in 1926 his first book titled *The Weary Blues* was published. He was driven by profound love for his race and motivated by the social injustice that befell the African American community. He wanted to be a poet, a champion for the underprivileged African Americans. In one of his poetry "My People" Hughes proclaimed what the African Americans meant to him by comparing his race to the beauty of the natural world,

The night is beautiful,  
So the faces of my people.  
The stars are beautiful,  
So the eyes of my people.  
Beautiful, also, is the sun.  
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people. (*Selected* 13)

Hughes wanted to write about the pain, the sufferings, and the hardships his ancestors had to tolerate in order to survive. In his poetry “Negro” Hughes depicted the sufferings endured by the Negroes and wrote:

I’ve been a victim:  
The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.  
They lynch me still in Mississippi. (ibid 8)

Hughes’ poems bravely illustrate the afflictions of the African Americans. However, Hughes not only writes about the miseries of the African Americans, he also writes about hope. One of his most famous poetry “I, Too” (1926) clearly illustrates the ill treatment and the wretched living conditions of the African Americans but the poetry ends with hope, hope that one day his race will overcome their callous state of existence.

I, too, sing America.  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,



And grow strong.  
Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.  
Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed –  
I, too, am America. (Ibid 275)

Through his jazz poetry, Hughes continued the element of establishing a racial identity for the African Americans in the same poem where he juxtaposed irony with humour and a vision for African Americans in America. Again, in "The Weary Blues" taken from his first book of poems *The Weary Blues* (1926), he clearly depicted the isolation and desolation of the African American community in America through the lines, "Ain't got nobody in this world, / Ain't got nobody but ma self" (Hughes, *Selected* 33). The same sentiment is again expressed in "Vagabonds" wherein he wrote:

We are the desperate  
Who do not care,  
The hungry  
Who have nowhere  
To eat,

No place to sleep,  
The tearless  
Who cannot  
Weep. (Hughes, *Selected* 91)

David Chinitz with reference to Hughes's "Rejuvenation through Joy" a short story included in *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), claims that, "Hughes continues to believe, at times almost mystically, that jazz expresses and addresses a realm of the human psyche that Western civilization had suppressed; that the African American retains easier and more immediate access to this spirit; and that implicit within jazz is an alternative mode of being" (69 – 70). Yet, in spite of his endless efforts to promote jazz poetry, the new genre did not achieve the fame or popularity he had hoped for. The Beat generation writers like Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982), Kenneth Patchen (1911–1972), Amiri Baraka (1934–2014), Bob Kaufman (1925–1986) and Jack Kerouac (1922–1969) during the 1940s up to the 1960s later used this unique style of writing poetry and therefore were highly instrumental in re-popularizing and re-vitalizing the genre. Kenneth Rexroth expresses his views on Jazz poetry stating that it "returns poetry to music and to public entertainment as it was in the days of Homer or the troubadours. It forces poetry to deal with aspects of life which it has tended to avoid in the recent past" (Academy, "Kenneth").

Though Hughes was always intrigued, baffled and disturbed by the injustice shown towards the African American community in America from a very early age, he was also, at the same time, very moved by the ability of this community to cope with the negativity, and their capacity to resist the pitiable conditions of their lives. He, however, could not take the vilification lightly and he lived his life trying to prove that African Americans were as competent as the whites in every respect. Through his

writings he urges the African American writers to adhere to their roots and seek their place in the white dominated world they lived in.

After the abolition of slavery in 1865, the African American community in America attempted to create a new identity. In their quest for establishing an identity paralleling the whites Alain Locke longed to bring black and white together as members of the intelligentsia. "Locke's primary goal in the essay "The New Negro" is to migrate from monolithic notions of an "Old Negro", as well as from the exhausted frameworks of bourgeois intellectual black leadership toward an idea that gives creative agency and credibility to the "rank and file" of Negro life. His motive here is to posit the idea of a "New Negro" as a means of rediscovering individuality of voice in the context of community" (Locke and the New Negro). Locke believed that High Art (of the African Americans) could bring relief from racial issues. Meanwhile, W.E.B. Du Bois in his essay "Criteria of a Negro Art" also advocated the need to upgrade the art of the African Americans:

I do not doubt that the ultimate art coming from black folk is going to be just as beautiful, and beautiful largely in the same ways, as the art that comes from white folk, or yellow, or red; but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels [*sic*] recognition they will not be rated as human. (DuBois, Criteria)

According to Du Bois art must be propaganda, and the art of the African Americans must also be propaganda for equality. Under the leadership of eminent and influential leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 - 1968) and many others who strived to create a better place for the African American community in America, African Americans, as they prefer to call themselves, started establishing a niche for

themselves in the highly amalgamated and rich American culture, popularly referred to as a melting pot (though ‘salad bowl’ is now the preferred term). Bartholomew Brinkman expressed the need for such a revival saying, “...blacks are as neglectful of black oppression and resistance as whites are” (87).

Langston Hughes was of the opinion that literature and art produced by the African Americans need not adhere strictly to the definition and more accepted form of *high art* as particularly advocated by W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke in his New Negro agenda, and did not see the need to conform to the forms of art generally accepted by white discourse. In his essay “The Negro artist and the racial mountain” published by *The Nation* in 23 June 1926, Langston Hughes strongly vented his opinion on the matter and wrote:

...this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible” (*Essays on Art* 32).

However, after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther Jr. in 1968, Amiri Baraka started his Black Art Movement (BAM) which again was predominantly a struggle towards the perfection of African American art.

Hughes disassociated himself with the views of Du Bois and Locke and insisted on adhering to the folk tradition of the African American, particularly that of the oral tradition. Anita Haya Patterson wrote, “...the stylistic complexity of many of the poetry Hughes wrote...creates a clarifying perspective on the folk tradition and distances him from racial separatist explanation of culture” (667) Patterson

continues, “Hughes’s poetry more often than not call attention to the African American folk origins of the blues ...” (673). Hughes’ views were also mirrored by Bartholomew Brinkman who wrote, “[Hughes] insistence on the authenticity of jazz as an African American art form as well as a form of social critique, most evident in his depiction of bebop in *Montage*, is asserted against the standardization of jazz...”(85). Hughes’ strong desire to establish the African American identity through his poems is again mentioned by Brinkman who wrote, “Hughes’s poetry serves to help articulate a point of political resistance beyond the realm of the poetry” (85).

Hughes grew up admiring great poets such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872 – 1906), Walt Whitman (1819 – 1892), Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell (1874 – 1925) and Vachel Lindsay. Arnold Rampersad wrote, “His admiration for Whitman would last the longest; Carl Sandburg, however, became his guiding Star” (Rampersad, *The Life Vol 1* 29). In Rowan Ricardo Phillips’ essay “The Blue Century: Brief Notes on Twentieth-century African-American Poetry”, the author wrote his assessment of the African American poetry and surmised, “It is impossible to ignore the strong and seemingly unshakeable correlation between music and African American poetry” (qtd. in Phillips 137). Although none of the poets who influenced and inspired Hughes wrote like him, they were however unequivocally instrumental in shaping his mindset on the importance of music and its influence on the formation of a poetry. African American poets in particular were greatly motivated by their music. Rowan Ricardo Phillips again emphasized that, “...it is African-American poetry’s powerfully successful tendency to revel in music’s transformative qualities as a catalyst for poetry that makes for such a unique example of American literary art.” (ibid 138). Hughes claimed that his primary influences were Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman. Paul Lawrence Dunbar mostly wrote in traditional

English lyric form, but he had another side to him and this other side utilizes the African American rural speech and it is this particular trait and style which captivated Hughes. In one of his most popular poetry “Sympathy” Dunbar clearly illustrates the fading hope and the distressed incessant prayers of his people while confronting the harsh realities of being a captive, when he wrote,

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,  
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—  
When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
But a prayer that he sends from his heart’s deep core,  
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—  
I know why the caged bird sings! (Dunbar, Web)

Hughes, much like Dunbar, also focused on the pain and the existence of a never ending struggle for his people in many of his poetry. In one of his poetry “Mother to Son” Hughes brings to light the continuity of struggle for an African American woman,

I've been a-climbin' on,  
And reachin' landin's,  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So, boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps.  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—

For I'se still goin', honey,

I'se still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. (Rampersad - Roessel, 30)

Walt Whitman broke tradition when he opted to write in the style of *free verse*, a style that some argued he invented and a style that suited Hughes perfectly. Whitman was of the belief that there was a relationship between the poet and the society, and much like Carl Sandburg, wrote for the people and about the people. He influenced a lot of future poets not just through his poetry but also with his lifestyle. Beat movement poets such as Allen Ginsberg (1926 – 1997) and Jack Kerouac (1922 – 1969) were also greatly inspired by him. Hughes too preferred free verse to other forms of writing poetry. The influence of Carl Sandburg on Hughes, on the other hand, was very different. Carl Sandburg was a poet who used to perform his poetry using the guitar as accompaniment. He was a great guitar player and thus music played a significant role in his poetry. Carl Sandburg also uses the language of the people as means of expression, and as Sandburg himself said, “I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass. Did you know that all the work of the world is done through me?” (Sandburg, *Biography*). Apart from being a devoted admirer who greatly appreciated Sandburg’s poetry, Sandburg’s representation of the people of his time and his musicality greatly affected Hughes’ literary career.

In the course of his life, Hughes travelled far and wide touring different states in the country and visiting different countries such as France, Mexico, Africa, Soviet Union, Korea, China, Japan etc. In his travels as a literary figure from America, one of his primary motives was the representation of the African American community. His deepest concern and topic of interest, in most of his travels, was how the

underprivileged class of the society presented themselves through writings, especially poetry. He often made acquaintances with local poets who were mostly political in their views. All his travels, personal and professional, helped him understand human nature a lot deeper than most other poets. The experiences he gained with different communities and different races of the world made him realize the importance of being true to one's own race and culture.

In terms of African American culture, one can now look back and say that the age in which Hughes lived was fortunately conducive for an African American literary artist to make his voice known and heard in the world. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the portrayal of the African American culture was, "grotesque, stereotypical and inaccurate" (Bodenner 3) and since slaves were forbidden to learn how to read and write they did not possess any means to express themselves. In the field of literature only very few African American writers emerged into mainstream American literature. Prior to 1922 only a few African American writers had published works. Barry Wallenstein recognizing the contribution Hughes made to African American culture remarked, "[Hughes'] strategy was first to offer jazz poetry for humor and relaxation, then political poetry and those with social messages for serious consideration ... Hughes needed to gauge audience response" (604).

The thesis is divided into five chapters and arranged in the following manner:

### **Chapter One - Introduction**

This chapter now being dealt with includes a brief biography of Langston Hughes, and the historical and cultural context of his literary growth as a jazz poet. This chapter has also attempted to define and clarify key terms such as jazz music and jazz poetry, in other words, defining and clarifying the research title, followed by a



statement of research proposal and approach within both cultural and interdisciplinary parameters.

A brief introduction to the cultural theories of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams is included, explaining the mode within which the research will operate on culture, identity and cultural identity. This chapter has also briefly focused on a key event in African American history which sheds light on the current study the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance boosted the life and works of many African American literary artists including Langston Hughes. William C. Banfield reflecting on the primary goals of the movement wrote, “The primary goal was to express a new social, cultural awakening deed to diffuse racial stagnation imposed by racial hatred of Black in White America” (25).

The publication of *The Weary Blues* in 1926 and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in 1927 became an important landmark for the history of jazz poetry and also for Langston Hughes. It paved the way for Hughes to establish himself as the ‘Poet Laureate’ of the African Americans, during a period when there was an abundance of budding poets in Harlem. Jazz dominated the nightlife in many cities during the 1900s in America. It was an era of the flappers, the Charleston and the speakeasies; the period itself came to be known as the Jazz Age. Prior to the publication of *The Weary Blues* the world had not seen such a beautiful amalgamation of poetry and music. Hughes’ style, versification and selection of theme redefined the relationship between two different art forms – poetry and jazz.

## **Chapter Two - Cultural History of jazz**

The connection between music and culture is best described by ethnomusicologist Richard Middleton who opined, “...any attempts to study music

without situating it culturally are illegitimate...” (Clayton, Trevor and Middleton 3). In one his best-known poems “Lennox Avenue: Midnight” Langston Hughes wrote, “The rhythm of life / Is a jazz rhythm” (*The Weary* 21), accentuating the importance and role of jazz to the African Americans. This chapter deals with jazz music as a distinctive genre created by blacks as an indigenous form of expressing their own individual and collective moorings that covers the gamut of their primal, spiritual and even religious selves also jazz poetry as a sub-genre or offshoot of jazz that has further enriched the genre by catering to the artistic, aesthetic aspects. This will be rounded off by bringing in Langston Hughes as one who initiated and popularized it. This chapter also studies in detail the history of jazz music from its conception, to its reception in white America and then to its acceptance as one of the music genres conceived indigenously in America. The inherent quality of resistance embedded within its fabric is the focal point of the study finding its manifestation in the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes. The study of the development of jazz requires the understanding of the earlier African American forms of singing particularly the slave songs and the spirituals. John Davis in his article "The Influence of Africans on American Culture" wrote:

...the American Negro's great contributions to the world of music have been his spirituals and his gospel songs ... Spirituals are widely held to be the result of a blending of Protestant and African music created out of the slave and Christian experience of the American Negro. (77)

The technical features of jazz such as the call and response technique, improvisation and syncopated rhythm makes jazz unique and distinctive from other forms of music. All these aspects characterizes its authenticity as a genre of music different from any existing form, and it also legitimizes the claim of the African American race towards

its conception since all these aspects of it represents the culture of the African American much more than it did the whites. Hughes' affiliation with jazz and his obstinacy in incorporating it into his poetic art signifies his unvarying love for his race and his people. His poem "The Weary Blues" clearly depicted the African American and his jazz, "In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone / I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan - / Ain't got nobody in all this world, / Ain't got nobody but ma self" (*Selected Poems* 33). In his biography *The Big Sea* Hughes wrote,

I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street – gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes...Their songs – those on seventh street – had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going. (209)

Hughes affirmed that the people's music which represented their sorrows and joys was jazz, therefore, he held on to it and used it as a tool to redefine the identity of his people.

### **Chapter Three - The Jazz Poetry of Langston Hughes as expressions of cultural identity**

In this chapter the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes will be studied in detail situating Langston Hughes as the primary orchestrator of the Jazz poetry movement with emphasis on the theme, agenda and concepts of his poetry. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" published in *The Nation* on 23 June 1926 Hughes explained why he chose to write his poems in the form of jazz by writing:

Jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt

against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile. (*Essays on Art* 23)

Much like jazz music, jazz poetry was a very powerful instrument of establishing an African American identity especially in the artistic and social arena. This chapter brings out the inherent representation of the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes in establishing an African American cultural identity. Stuart Hall and Raymond William's definition of cultural identity are used as foundation to define, identify and situate the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as expressions of meanings generated and utilized by the African American communities in America, in order to distinguish themselves from the white hegemonic order.

After the abolition of slavery in 1865, the process of forming a cultural identity for the African Americans was not a simple task. Sellers et al. studied the difficulties faced by the African American communities towards forming their own culture by writing:

African Americans were not afforded the choice of whether to assimilate into the new culture or retain their indigenous culture. As a result, traditional African culture has had to be grafted onto the cultural practices of the European/American society to form an original cultural expression. (18)

This chapter also studies the DuBoisian's theory of Double Consciousness and his concept of the veil in order to essentially mitigate the dilemma faced by the African Americans towards their identity formation. Explaining his theory on 'Double Consciousness' DuBois wrote in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* that it is the, "sense

of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2). Langston Hughes' jazz poetry are thus studied in detail here focusing on the construction of his themes, the identification of his agendas and the formation of his concepts.

#### **Chapter Four - The Jazz Poetry of Langston Hughes as expressions of Black Art**

African Americans did not have an identity, apart from that of a freed slave, during post slavery abolishment in America. Many black literary figures like Alan Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois attempted to create a new social and intellectual identity of the blacks through theorization of their own propaganda such as 'The New Negro' movement and Black Art. This chapter locates the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as the means of cultural and social movement towards the identification and emancipation of the African American Black Art as seen and defined by him. This chapter also traces the development of the Black Arts movement towards the establishment of a new black aesthetic. Explaining the ideology of *black aesthetics* Larry Neal wrote, "The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world" (30).

The chapter goes back to African American history to better grasp and put into context the importance of the formation of the African American arts. To Langston Hughes, art was fundamentally, "a reflection of life or an individual's comment on life" (*Essays on Art*, 32). The Black Arts movement sought to revolutionize America through the Negro art forms. The founder of the Black Arts movement Amiri Baraka wrote, "Black Art...meant not only an art that was an expression of black life, but revolutionary art" (23). In this context, Langston Hughes and his controversial

connection with the communist party is also examined as it had a tremendous impact on his poetic output. The production of many of his revolutionary poems such as “Scottsboro”, “Good Morning Revolution”, “One more ‘S’ in the USA” etc...even spawned a US Government Senate committee investigation. This chapter also traces the growth of the African American literary history to emphasize the importance of the formation of the African American arts and to grasp its development better.

### **Chapter Five - Conclusion:**

Though not popularly received by many, jazz poetry emerged, sank and re-emerged as an important tool in determining the effects of black literature on American society. Observing the importance of poetry influenced by music Meta DuEwa Jones wrote, “Poetic forms that are influenced by music...seek to transcend the boundaries of both speech and music to inhabit the intangible realms of the spirit, the emotional and the soulful” (88). Presently, jazz poetry has morphed as a sub-genre of popular culture of performative art / oral poetry, hugely popular with the current generation which includes serious academic circles across the globe. Its growth, popularity and message are facilitated by information technology. Poetry slams and poetry jams are now conducted across the globe in many academic and non-academic circles, promoting jazz poetry and ultimately reaching new heights.

This research has deduced that the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes were tools which were critical for the establishment of a new African American cultural identity after the abolishment of slavery in America. This research also concluded that the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes incessantly resisted the cultural hegemony of the dominant white culture through promoting the African American art and culture. The

concluding chapter summarizes the key findings of the previous chapters and critical observations made.

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**CHAPTER 2**  
**CULTURAL HISTORY OF JAZZ**

*The rhythm of life is a jazz rhythm.*

Langston Hughes

The first documented African slave brought to America was in Jamestown, Virginia in the year 1619, predating even the arrival of the pilgrims by a year. The Africans brought to Jamestown were from Angola region of West Central Africa. They were originally transported by a Portuguese ship bound for Vera Cruz, Mexico. But, before their arrival in Mexico they were attacked by English privateers who then took them to Jamestown. It is believed that the first Africans worked as slaves in the English tobacco fields. Ted Gioia contemplating over the musical tradition of the African Americans and in an attempt to comprehend the genesis of jazz music wrote:

Forcibly taken away from their homeland, deprived of their freedom, and torn from the social fabric that had given structure to their lives, these transplanted Americans clung with even greater fervor to those elements of their culture that they could carry with them from Africa. Music and folk tales were among the most resilient of these. Even after family, home, and possessions were taken away, they remained. (7)

Addressing the importance of the role music plays in human culture, Robert Garfias opined, “Music adds to the culture and is an important form and avenue for personal and group expression in it. It is also very much a product of that culture and of all the influences, historical, political, economic as well as aesthetic which have played upon it” Garfias continued, “...music has a place, a role, a function, in each culture. That is to say that in addition to being an outgrowth of the culture as well as a reflection of it, music has a status and function in each culture” (7). Garfias

understands that music is a product of culture and that it has an enormous role and functionality within a culture. It is a medium of expression and also a reflection of the culture that produces it. This understanding of Garfias will be adopted to situate jazz as a product of the African American race which underwent many transformations along its journey of establishing itself and asserting its authenticity in America.

Music was rooted in the lives of the Africans who were first brought to America as slaves. In *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* LeRoi Jones wrote, “The African slave continued to chant his native chants, sing his native songs, at work, even though the singing of them might be forbidden or completely out of context. But being forbidden, the songs were after a time changed into other forms that weren't forbidden in contexts that were contemporary” (20). Jones affirms that during slavery the oral tradition of African Americans was filled with tales and lores of Africa initially and later filled with struggle, despair and hope. Cultures, traditions and customs of Africa were fondly remembered through songs and dances. This musicality that existed within the fabric of the black culture continued to drive them even when they were facing dreadful experiences.

African Americans upheld their ancient tradition of singing and dancing, accompanied by music which was produced through whatever resources they could find. Gioia again, in the opening chapter of his book *The History of Jazz*, aptly titled ‘The Africanization of American Music’, gave a vivid description of African American culture through a scene which Benjamin Henry Latrobe witnessed at Congo Square located in the Tremé neighbourhood of New Orleans, Louisiana in February 21, 1819. Gioia wrote:

An elderly black man sits astride a large cylindrical drum. Using his fingers and the edge of his hand, he jabs repeatedly at the drum head — which is around a foot in diameter and probably made from an animal skin — evoking a throbbing pulsation with rapid, sharp strokes. A second drummer, holding his instrument between his knees, joins in, playing with the same staccato attack. A third black man, seated on the ground, plucks at a string instrument, the body of which is roughly fashioned from a calabash. Another calabash has been made into a drum, and a woman beats at it with two short sticks. One voice, then other voices join in. A dance of seeming contradictions accompanies this musical give-and-take, a moving hieroglyph that appears, on the one hand, informal and spontaneous yet, on closer inspection, ritualized and precise. It is a dance of massive proportions. A dense crowd of dark bodies forms into circular groups — perhaps five or six hundred individuals moving in time to the pulsations of the music, some swaying gently, others aggressively stomping their feet. A number of women in the group begin chanting. The scene could be Africa. In fact, it is nineteenth-century New Orleans. (3)

The vivid scene described by Gioia, as witnessed by Latrobe, clearly illustrates the music that is engraved within the souls of African Americans. Music occupies the core values and system of an African American; it is an essentiality, a necessity and also a key part of their identity formation. Music to the African American was an escape, a means to counter the harsh and unpleasant conditions they were subjected to live in. Music paved the way for them to face another day. They sometimes danced their miseries away and sometimes crooned their hearts out into the dead of the night.

Music provided what nothing else could and that was release. Laying stress on the importance of music on the African American race Duke Ellington (1899 – 1974) once said, “The music of my race is something more than the ‘American idiom,’ ” (qtd. in Edwards 1). Due to this inherent musicality embedded in the life and culture of the African Americans, their influence on the American culture is also remarkable.

Josephine Wright in her essay “Songs of Remembrance” wrote of how, Frederick Douglass in his autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), remembered how a slave was expected to sing while working and she quoted: “A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers. “Make a noise,” “make a noise,” and “bear a hand,” are the words usually addressed to the slaves when there is silence among them. This may account for the almost constant singing heard in the southern states” (414). The ingenuity of the African Americans in incorporating their condition and using it to their advantage is noteworthy. Black slaves used songs to their credit and as means of communication. Hidden meanings embedded in the songs often only understood by the slave community were used as a signaling device. One of the greatest example of such song was ‘*Wade in the river*’ which actually was a song to tell escaping slaves to get off the trail and into the water, making sure that the dogs could not track their scent. Another song named ‘*Follow the drinking gourd*’ is another example of a coded song, sung by black slaves while making use of the Underground Railroad.

Both the great awakening of the 1740s through the 1780s affected the religion of the black community in America. Though the earlier generation could not easily let go of their African gods and beliefs, the new generation of African Americans accepted Christianity and once they became converts, it paved the way for them to accept America as their home. African Americans found solace in religion and this is



reflected in many of the slave songs credited to songs of the Underground Railroad. Some of the songs like, “Go Down Moses”, “Let Us Break Bread Together”, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Steal Away (To Jesus)” were all gospel songs. Due to the fact that African Americans were slaves, the notion of freedom was deeply associated with the freedom of the Holy Spirit. Though they were in chains, they could free their soul through their music. Black Christian songs gradually evolved into what we now call Negro Spirituals. John Davis in his article "The Influence of Africans on American Culture" wrote:

...the American Negro's great contributions to the world of music have been his spirituals and his gospel songs, the former truly without parallel in the field of religious music and poetry, and his jazz, with its variations and continuous development to swing, bebop, neoclassic jazz, and modern atonal jazz. Spirituals are widely held to be the result of a blending of Protestant and African music created out of the slave and Christian experience of the American Negro. (77)

African Americans were known for their musical ingenuity, their music is often characterized by a deep bonding of the soul and the body. Blues which existed alongside jazz distinctly belonged to the black community of America. Regarding its origination Ed Kopp wrote, “It's generally accepted that the music [blues] evolved from African spirituals, African chants, work songs, field hollers, rural fife<sup>1</sup> and drum music, revivalist hymns, and country dance music.” (1). Hayden Carruth traced the development of both blues and jazz in his book *Sitting In: Selected Writings on Jazz, Blues, and Related Topic* and wrote, “The blues were probably invented and were certainly developed by blacks whose musical sensibilities had been assimilated to the

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<sup>1</sup> A small shrill flute used with the drum in military bands.

European diatonic mode, however much or little of African feeling for microtonal purity may have lingered in their subconscious or semiconscious musical imaginations” (55). Meanwhile, Ornette Coleman in his essay “The Shapes of Jazz” wrote:

Yet no art, certainly no evaluation of artistic work, is wholly separable from its social context. Jazz derives its special power (and its resonance for those who contemplate relations among the arts) partly from the way it expresses and transmutes tensions within that social context as a black music in a white society, an American music in a culture derived from Europe. (57)

Coleman’s observations on the inseparable nature of the social context with its artistic work, supports the relevance of attributing black American culture in the foundation of jazz. Since African American culture is deeply rooted in music, African root sees its manifestation in jazz. Blues and Jazz, therefore, shared a common ground in terms of the impact or the influence African Americans have on its creation. Albert DeGenova wrote that the elements presents in both blues and jazz “represent freedom within the context of music. Not the freedom white Americans are so proud to attribute to the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, but the freedom that slaves could not enjoy and, after slavery was abolished, the freedom a racist society would not afford an African-American in either the North or South of this country” (8).

Jazz is uniquely characterized by a *call and response* method which gives it one of its authenticity and its defining characters. What Latrobe witnessed in Congo Square was exactly what the scene used to be among black folks during many of their intense musical sessions. This wonderful phenomenon is explained by John Gennari

who wrote that Jazz, “has challenged the norms of Western art in regard to the relationship between artist and audience, shunning formal behavioral codes and audience passivity...in favor of active, spontaneous response through vocal and bodily participation” (450). Robert O’Meally also explains the *call and response* method by writing that in,

*Jazz, call and response* also identifies complicated exchanges between a single voice and other voices: soloist and the chorus of other players; soloist and the congregation of listeners and dancers. These conversations in the language of jazz may be friendly or exhortative in the mode of the preacher and the amening congregation. They may be mutual praise songs or friendly games of leap frog. (5)

The *call and response* is a distinctive feature of the African culture which has latched on to the musical genre of jazz. It can be traced way back to the time when African Americans were slaves working on their master’s fields, singing and hollering during their demanding work schedule. A leader would call out a phrase and the other singers would respond to it. Call and response is incorporated by almost all the musical genres associated with African Americans. It was a method by which musicians communicate with each other and a singer with their audience; it represented the spirit of oneness and the connection within the musical performance. The song “I wonder What’s the Matter” is one of the best example of the early African American call and response. The lyric of the song goes like this:

Leader: I wonder what the matter

Chorus: Oh – o, Lawd!

All: Well, I wonder what’s the matter with my long time here

Leader: Boys, I woke up early this mornin’.

Chorus: Hey, Lawd!

All: Boys, I woke up early this mornin’.

‘Bout the break of day

(The break of day. Hear it, hear it.)

Leader: Well, the big bell sho was tonin’.

Chorus: Oh – o, Lawd!

All: Well, the big bell sho was tonin’.

Sho was. Good Lawd

Just a while fo’ day.

Judge right. Oh, yah! Everybody talk.

Leader: Well, the bully turn over in the bed a-grumblin’.

Chorus: Oh – o, Lawd.

All: Bully turn over in the bed a-grumblin’.

‘Bout that night so short.

Oh, Lawd.

Don’ hurt nobody.

Night so short.

Leader: Well, it look like it been one hour.

Chorus: Oh – o, Lawd.

All: Well, it look like it been one hour.

Oh, Lawd.

Pardner, since I lay down.

Oh, Lawd, since I lay down.... (Pekar and Judy)

Jazz is also most popularly characterized for its improvisational technique and syncopated rhythm. The tendency to improvise could be a direct manifestation related to the improvisational habits adopted by African musicians during many of their sacred rituals, which often do not have particular timings and was mostly driven by passion and an overdrive of intense feelings and emotions. Richard Middleton in his Introduction to his book *The Cultural Study of Music* wrote, "...any attempts to study music without situating it culturally are illegitimate..." (Clayton, Trevor and Middleton 3). On applying the observation of Richard Middleton to African American's music and their culture whilst situating it to the production or the creation of jazz, it becomes more fitting to lay a claim that African Americans were directly responsible for the existence of jazz.

Many jazz scholars, historians and musicians are still in dispute over the credibility of the claim made by African American jazz historians and musicians regarding the contribution or rather the creation of jazz which, "is perhaps the only indigenous American art form of world significance" (Fiehrer 21). Amiri Baraka was one of the first African Americans who argued that jazz essentially belonged to the African Americans, through his book *Blues People* (1963) and he offers many arguments supplementing his claim. Though several African Americans scholars support this claim, many others especially white Americans refuse to accept it. Pierro Scaruffi wrote,

Unlike blues music that was exclusively performed by blacks, jazz music was as inter-racial as the melting pot of New Orleans. Blacks were not the only ones who played jazz. Jazz groups were formed by Italians, Creoles and all sorts of European immigrants. The "African"

roots of the music may or may not have been obvious to the practitioners, but clearly it did not stop them from adopting it. (1)

However, Scott Deveaux in his attempt to define jazz argues that, “Jazz is strongly identified with African-American culture, both in the narrow sense that its particular techniques ultimately derive from black American folk traditions, and in the broader sense that it is expressive of, and uniquely rooted in, the experience of black Americans” (487). Meanwhile, Jerry Roll Morton a Creole who was named Ferdinand LaMenthe at birth claimed to be the inventor of jazz in 1902. His claim however, has been unanimously termed absurd by jazz historians. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., boldly claims that, “There is evidence that early jazz can be traced directly to African ceremonial music used in ring shouts.” (qtd. in McKay, 2). It became certain that jazz was not a creation of one person, nor was it a genre that suddenly emerged out of nowhere. Len Weinstock in his essay “The Origin of Jazz” said, “Both African and European rhythm were employed. African music supplied the strong underlying beat ... European music provided formal dance rhythms.” (2). Lee Konitz also, agreeing with Weinstock, wrote:

Jazz – everyone realizes - combines essential elements of West African music and European concert music. The elements usually picked out are African rhythm and European harmony, but the blend is richer than these stereotypes suggest. In jazz the improvised nature of African music adapts to and transforms a European framework of more or less elaborate prior composition. (Hartman 9)

Ornette Coleman once said, “I think black people in America have a superior sense when it comes to expressing their own convictions through music.” (qtd. in Gerard,

27). Though there are very little evidence to support any claim made by any scholar regarding which particular race of men were responsible for the invention, discovery or creation of jazz, most scholars hesitantly agree that jazz was a distinctive genre created by the black culture in America and also that the blues, ragtime, hymns, spirituals and brass band music played an important role in shaping this new genre of music.

Scholars including Ted Gioia, Len Weinstock, Cory McKay, Thomas Fiehrer, Jerah Johnson and many others seem to agree that jazz originated from New Orleans, Louisiana. Louisiana was, “perhaps the most seething ethnic melting pot that the nineteenth century world could produce. This cultural gumbo would serve as breeding ground for many of the great hybrid musics of modern times; not just jazz, but also Cajun, zydeco, blues, and other new styles flourished as a result of this laissez-faire environment” (Gioia 7). Len Weinstock circuitously credited the black Creole subculture of New Orleans as the originators of jazz, however Cory McKay was a bit more careful because, “It is relatively very difficult to find direct proof that early jazz could be found in places other than New Orleans, but it is also proportionally difficult to find direct proof that New Orleans was exclusively the birthplace of jazz.” (McKay 1). Conditions in New Orleans during the late 1880s and early 1900s were very conducive for the birth of jazz. Two black communities existed in New Orleans from the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. One of the communities were a group of French speaking Catholics who were commonly known as Creoles or Black Creoles who were free people of colour. They were given social prestige and privilege that black people anywhere else in America did not enjoy. However, this privilege was taken from them by the Louisiana Legislative Code in 1894, classifying them equal with all other black Americans.

The other black communities were English speaking Protestants who were made up mostly of slaves brought to New Orleans by the Americans who flooded New Orleans after the purchase. They were well versed in African American folk music while the Creoles were educated in European music. These two black communities often play together as M.W. Stearns observed, “Creoles of Color were hard hit. Bit by bit they were pushed out of any job a white man could use, and they lost their place in the downtown... Eventually and against their will, they went uptown and "sat in" with their darker brothers.” (qtd. in Johnson, 244). So, when the two sections of the black community in New Orleans came together, it resulted in the fusion of many different styles and genres of music, which in turn resulted in the emergence of one of the most popular music style or genre in the world, jazz. Jazz is defined and understood by many jazz musicians, historians and scholars in many different ways. Louis Armstrong was once asked what jazz was, to which he cynically replied, “If you have to ask, you’ll never know”. However, many have made an attempt to define it. William H. Tallmadge collected eight definitions of jazz from different sources and put them down in his essay “What is Jazz?” the definitions he collected were:

1. Jazz is the right beat.
2. Jazz is inspired improvisation in a syncopated style.
3. Jazz is syncopated syncopation.
4. Jazz is the right swing.
5. Jazz is free syncopated polyphony over a steady beat.
6. Jazz is African rhythms united with European harmony.
7. Jazz is continuous syncopation.



8. Jazz is an African art form which, arising in this country, utilized and transformed much European material. (31)

Jazz received a poor reception from the white Americans in the early 1900s; this could be due to the fact that black musicians were gaining more acceptance and prominence in the jazz scene. White musicians ordered their colleagues to not play ragtime, white preachers used their platform to speak against it, and magazines owned by the whites used their columns and articles repeatedly to denigrate jazz. Maureen Anderson in her article “The White Reception of Jazz in America” delved deep into the subject and wrote, “Motivated by political and racial concerns many jazz critics during the Harlem Renaissance publicized their dislike of jazz music in order to express their dislike of African Americans” (135). Popular magazine of the time shelled out attacks on jazz by publishing articles with titles such as “Unspeakable Jazz Must Go”, “Students in Arms against Jazz”, and “Why ‘Jazz’ send us back to the Jungle”. Maureen Anderson continued, “...the articles on jazz that appeared in mainstream magazines between 1917 and 1930 reveal the racial prejudice that white jazz critics had against African Americans” (ibid 135). Most white critics were, therefore, biased towards their reception of jazz due to their inherent racial prejudice directed mainly towards the African Americans. Lawrence W. Levine in his article “Jazz and American Culture” wrote on the same subject and remarked, “American society has done far more than merely neglect jazz; it has pigeonholed it, stereotyped it, denigrated it, distorted its meaning and its character” (6). Although it received many criticisms, the emergence of jazz somehow managed to usher African Americans into mainstream America. Hence, African American art became instrumental towards propelling the status of the African Americans. Jazz planted the seed by which African Americans would recreate their identity.

It is, however, very fascinating to consider that many white jazz musicians still claimed that the music originated not from the black community but from the white community. Though many white Americans initially refused to accept jazz, it grew significantly popular outside America. Levine asserted that, “The striking thing about jazz is the extent to which it symbolized revolt wherever it became established” he continued, “...the phenomenon of jazz as a potent and potentially dangerous form of alternative culture became well established throughout the world” (15). Jazz evolved and gave birth to many different forms; its versatility as a music genre is clearly seen in its evolution. Some of the forms are represented in the table below:

Table 1

Different categories/genres of Jazz

Sl. No	JAZZ VARAINTS	YEAR	INSTRUMENTS
1	Early Jazz / Trad jazz	1900	Trumpet is frontline.
2	Chicago Jazz	1920	Inclusion of tuba and banjo
3	Swing / Big Band	1930	(12 to 25 musicians) Saxophones, trumpets, trombones, piano, double bass, vibes, drums
4	Dixieland Jazz Revivals	1930	Trumpet (or cornet), trombone, clarinet, guitar, banjo, string, bass or tuba, piano, drums.
5	Bebop	1940	Consisted of saxophone (alto or tenor), trumpet, piano, double bass, and drums.
6	Cool Jazz	1940	Drums, piano, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, double bass
7	Soul Jazz / Hard Bop	1950	<i>Hammond organ</i> , piano, saxophone, guitar, double bass, electric bass, drums
8	Free Jazz / Avant-Garde	1950	Emphasizing structure and organization by the use of composed melodies.
9	Modal Jazz	1950	Piano, saxophone, trumpet, double bass,

			drums
<b>10</b>	Jazz/Rock – Jazz Fusion	1960	<i>Electric guitar, piano, electric piano, drums, Saxophone, trumpet, electronic keyboards, bass guitar, vocals</i>
<b>11</b>	Smooth Jazz	1960	Guitar, saxophone, <i>bass guitar</i> , piano, trumpet, Flute, <i>drums, synthesizers</i>
<b>12</b>	Jazz-funk	1970	Electric bass guitar, drums, analog synthesizers, electric piano, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, Piano, guitar, vocals
<b>13</b>	Acid Jazz	1980	Direct-drive turntables, synthesizer, saxophones, Flute, trumpet, trombone, clarinet, piano, guitar, Bass, drums, strings, organ
<b>14</b>	Nu Jazz	1990	No improvisational aspects, experimental in nature.

Source: *Self prepared from various sources*

Jazz after it became popular in the night clubs of New Orleans gained much attention. It evolved from just being a mere dance music of the 1900s and has developed or given birth to many different forms. It gave women opportunities of getting jobs in the music industry thus freeing them from unemployment; it influenced a new style of dancing known as the Charleston which inadvertently affected a new trend in fashion known as ‘flapper’. After influencing the cultural dynamics of America through its representations such as the nightlife, the dance culture and the music scene, jazz continued to influence and inspire artistes of different genres to incorporate jazz into their art form.

Poetry was one such art which was greatly affected by jazz. Although many jazz enthusiasts have made an attempt to define jazz poetry Rexroth’s definition of jazz poetry sums it up best. Rexroth defined jazz poetry as, “...the reciting of suitable

poetry with the music of a jazz band” where the “voice is integrally wedded to the music” (qtd. in Chang 5). Much like jazz itself, an attempt to define jazz poetry’s true nature is rather impractical because different writers’ perception of the art form varies in degrees. Hao Huang gave a very practical definition of jazz poetry by saying, “Jazz poetry mines jazz music for inspiration, influence, and interlocution. In doing so, jazz poetry alludes to the lived black experience in America, as does jazz music, a cultural practice derived from socio-historical realities of African American communities” (9). Huang also accepted that black experience was essential in order to substantially interpret jazz into poetry. Meanwhile, Jean-Phillipe Marcoux commenting on the important role jazz poetrys have for the black community wrote, “jazz infused poetry “reclaims” black historiography” (14). Hughes, explaining his jazz poetry performance, once told Nat Hentoff who was a renowned jazz critic, that:

The music should not only be a background to the poetry, but should comment on it. I tell the musicians...to improvise as much as they care around what I read. Whatever they bring of themselves to the poetry is welcome to me. Then I listen to what they say in their playing, and that affects my own rhythms when I read. We listen to each other. (qtd. in Jones 49)

Jazz poetry, much like other forms of poetry, is in its core a performance art. The direct connection needed between the poet and the musician is an essential quality for the success of the reading or performance. Since jazz poetry incorporates the qualities of jazz, improvisation is a key concept and a major component to jazz poetry reading.

Several poets attempted to write poetry in the form of jazz. Though they paved the way for the emergence of a new type of poetry, none of the predecessors of

Langston Hughes were jazz poets in the full sense of the term. According to Sascha Feinstein, Hughes was “the first major jazz poet...who pioneered the reading of poetry to jazz accompaniment at intimate, semi-private gatherings” (qtd. in Huang 21). Sandburg’s “Jazz Fantasia”, Vachel Lindsay’s “The Congo: A study of the Negro Race”, Mina Loy’s “Songs to Joannes” and Hart Crane’s “Voyages” are laudable attempts towards capturing the essence of jazz. The syncopated rhythmic structure employed by Crane and Lindsay, the deliberate description of jazzmen with their musical instruments incorporated by Sandburg and the typographical complexities employed by Mina Loy are all examples of a beautifully executed workmanship. It is, at the same time, a very interesting fact that Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Mina Loy and Hart Crane were not African American. Perhaps it is due to this one fact that they could not accurately translate jazz in the form of poetry. Perhaps, a black soul was needed to fully comprehend jazz, because jazz meant more than just music to the black soul, as already argued earlier. Jazz was the result of two and a half centuries of slavery, pain, fear, and suffering; it was a re-incarnation of African music, jazz was freedom. No white soul could have penetrated it in its purest sense. In this regard Charley Gerard quoted Amiri Baraka and wrote, “The most open-minded black music ideologists concede that whites can learn to play the music, but because they are not African American, they do not have the blues as a way of life. As a result of not being “blues people” they enter jazz with a world view that in Baraka’s opinion is “not consistent with the making of jazz” (17). Hao Huang writing on the same subject also noted that, “Jazz poets gain their lyric mastery not by merely gaining complete control over academic studies of recorded written and aural sources of jazz and blues lore, but by immersing themselves in the actual cultural traditions from which that music comes. Deep knowledge and artistry comes from familiarity with how jazz is played

and blues is moaned” (37). What the blacks enjoy while playing jazz was some kind of freedom, an artistic exuberance which was often experienced at an intense musical or jam sessions. Duke Ellington also once said that, “...the music is so free that, man, people say it is the only unhampered, unhindered expression of complete freedom yet produced in this country” (qtd. in Ladson-Billings 11).

Sandburg, Lindsay, Loy and Crane, however, were instrumental in inspiring Langston Hughes who later emerged as the one who popularized jazz poetry. Among the forerunners of Hughes, Carl Sandburg influenced Hughes the most. As already mentioned in the first Chapter, Hughes was greatly influenced by a whole lot of poets including Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Walt Whitman and Amy Lowell to name a few. However, his greatest inspiration was Sandburg. In an interview conducted by Nicolás Guillén in 1929, Hughes revealed his reasons for writing a poetry by saying, “...this was my way of reacting to the misery of poverty, to the terrible condition in which Blacks live in my country.”, he continued, “I realize that I had to be their friend, their voice, their leader, their poet. My greatest ambition is to be the poet of the Blacks. The Black poet” (56). In his autobiography *The Big Sea* Hughes referring to the color of his skin he said, “...unfortunately, I am not black.” (11). By using the word ‘unfortunately’, his disappointment in the colour of his skin is apparent and it clearly shows his love for his people, and his sadness for not being black enough. Langston Hughes was born to both Negro parents; however, his skin colour was not very dark like most African Americans. In *The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume I* Arnold Rampersad wrote about Hughes’ trip to Africa where Hughes encountered the native Africans who did not believe that he was black. Hughes recounted his experience, “The Africans looked at me and would not believe I was a Negro...they looked at my

copper-brown skin and straight black hair – like my grandmother’s Indian hair, except a little curly - and they said ‘You – white man’” (78).

Hughes was very clear about why he wanted to write poetry, and due to his instinctive love for the black people, he chose to write his poetry in a form best suited to the black communities in America. Hughes started writing poetry at the age of fourteen, and achieved recognition at a very early age. His poetry reflects the lives of the African Americans. In the same interview with Nicolás Guillén, Hughes in a very humble tone described himself by saying, “I’m simply a poet. I live among my people. I love them, and the way they’re treated hurts me deeply. So I sing their blues and translate their sorrows, I make their troubles go away.” (57). He expressed his desire and motives for writing and concluded, "My only aspiration is to make sure Blacks don't lose their openness and forget their origins. I think white civilization can destroy Black heritage by dressing it in white clothes which will never really be their's" (57).

Hughes at a very early age was very clear about his position as a poet. Whatever decisions he took for the production of his poetry can be attributed to the deep love he had for his people and his intense desire to represent them. In his *Autobiography: I Wonder as I Wander* he said, “I wanted to write seriously and as well as I knew how about the Negro people” (40). Hughes not only stood as an ambassador of the African Americans but he also played a crucial role in shaping a new cultural identity for the African Americans as a literary artist. However, as much as Hughes loved his people, he disliked African Americans who would accept the ways of the white. This is clearly depicted in his poetry, “Low to High” with which he challenges the African Americans to reformulate their priorities as a race. In the poetry Hughes portrays the agony of a black man neglected by a loved one:

How can you forget me?  
But you do!  
You said you was gonna take me  
Up with you —  
Now you've got your Cadillac,  
you done forgot that you are black.  
How can you forget me  
When I'm you?  
  
But *you do*.  
  
How can you forget me,  
fellow, say?  
  
How can you low-rate me  
this way?  
  
You treat me like you damn well please,  
Ignore me—though I pay your fees.  
  
How can you forget me?  
  
*But you do.* (Hughes, *The Collected* 411)

Hughes loved jazz, to him jazz was “...a montage of a dream deferred. A great big dream—yet to come—and always yet – to become ultimately and finally true” (“Jazz as Communication”). Although representation in its simplest sense in any literary form or manner could have sufficed the need of the hour, Hughes chose jazz as a medium of representation due to the inherent quality of resistance associated with the musical genre. Jazz gave the African Americans release from the persisting discriminations and racial prejudices. Jazz was a new concept of music which defied



all other forms of music that previously existed. Jazz celebrated improvisation while other genres of music conformed strictly to original compositions and movements. Jazz resonated with the African American psyche which was overwhelmed with frustration and resentment. Arnold Rampersad in his book *The Life of Langston Hughes Volume One* mentioned an occurrence where Hughes was approached by a stranger while he was singing the jazz and blues, asking him if he was ill because he thought he was groaning.

Hughes' love for jazz became more apparent when he decided to write poetry in the form of jazz. Rampersad wrote, "In a year in which he consolidated his position as a poet rather than broke important new ground, he also confirmed his basic criterion as an artist. At the center was a vigilance about the need to find new ways, based on a steadfast loyalty to the forms of black culture, to express black consciousness – and, in so doing, to assist at its passage in to the hostile modern world." (102). In *The Big Sea* Hughes while in Washington explained that he, "...was cold and half-hungry, so I wrote a great many poems. I began to write poems in the manner of the Negro blues and the spirituals." (205). In the same book he continued, "I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street – gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes...Their songs – those on seventh street – had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going." (209). The seventh street was where, "the ordinary negroes hang out, folks with practically no family tree at all, folks who draw no color line between mulattoes and deep dark-browns, folks who worked hard for a living with their hands." (208). Hughes consciously chose jazz poetry as a medium to represent his people who were not given the same privileges as a white man, who were still victims of racial harassment and discrimination and who were still lynched and wrongfully

accused. In one of his poems “Share-Croppers”, Hughes beautifully penned the sufferings of the African Americans working in the cotton fields:

Just a herd of Negroes  
Driven to the field,  
Plowing, planting, hoeing,  
To make the cotton yield.  
When the cotton’s picked  
And the work is done  
Boos man takes the money  
And we get none,  
Leaves us hungry, ragged  
As we were before.  
Year by year goes by  
And we are nothing more. (Hughes, *Selected* 165)

His decision to write poetry in the form of jazz was not received very well by his contemporaries as Rampersad wrote, “...Cullen wondered exasperatingly whether the jazz and blues pieces were really poems at all.” (129). However, Hughes persisted in adhering to his style and found success with his readers. Hao Huang expresses the importance of jazz poetry for expressing the African American culture by writing,

Black poetic practice is marked by history, and that collective history problematizes the expression of black subjectivity. By taking up vernacular forms of the black community, a jazz poetry cannot be read simply as a discourse of individualization and internalization, but,

rather, also as a product of a more generalized African American culture. (15)

Hughes' use of the Black folk's vernacular therefore implicated the African American culture into his jazz poetry. It ushered in a new form of Black artistic and aesthetics experience which was in total contradiction to the teachings of W.E.B. Dubois and Alain Locke who were advocating their own concept of a New Negro. In an attempted adherence to the verbal rhythms of blues, Hughes realized his artistic expectation of expanding and enriching the black literary art form.

Hughes benefitted providentially by living in an era which was favorable for an artist to grow artistically. Harlem hosted an amalgamation of many literary intellectuals during the 1900s. Many of his black contemporaries who made remarkable contributions to literature such as Carl Van Vechten, W.E.B DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Ama Bontemps, Wallace Thurman, Richard Bruce Nugent, Aaron Douglas and Alain Locke were all in Harlem. During the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro movement, Hughes was one of the most famous black poets, recognized and admired by everyone who knew him. Though the Harlem Renaissance was considered by many to be a turning point for the African Americans, Hughes had a different view towards it. In his autobiography *The Big Sea* he said, "All of us know that the gay and the sparkling life of the so called Negro Renaissance of the '20's was not so gay and sparkling beneath the surface as it looked.", Hughes continued, "The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance. And if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any" (227 – 228).

Harlem Renaissance or The New Negro movement took place after the end of World War I (1914-18) and ended at the beginning of the Great Depression (1930s). It

was a period when the African American culture in Harlem blossomed and flourished in almost every field of arts and literature, hence the name, Harlem Renaissance. Although no one seems to agree on the exact time when the Harlem Renaissance started, there were four things or events that took place which proved pivotal to the emergence of the renaissance according to Kelly King Howes. The first was the return of the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to Harlem after World War I. This regiment had more than one thousand black soldiers and “served bravely in the 16th and 161st divisions of the French Army. The admiring French had nicknamed them the Hellfighters, and they had been the only American unit awarded France’s high military honor, the *Croix de Guerre* medal”(23). The second was the Silent Protest Parade which took place on July 28, 1917. The parade was organized by DuBois, James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), real estate agent John Nail, and the Reverend Frederick Asbury Cullen. The parade was organized as a protest against lynching. The third was the opening of the Broadway show *Shuffle Along* in 1921. The fourth was the publication of two poems by Claude McKay (1889 -1948) in an all literary white magazine named *Seven Arts* under the pseudonym Eli Edwards. Howes wrote, “Some observers felt this heralded the beginning of the literary surge that fueled the Harlem Renaissance” (ibid 25).

Harlem was a small corner in New York, at the tip of Manhattan. The failure of the Reconstruction era, lynching and the harsh racial laws in the south saw many African Americans moved to the northern states in search of a better future. These migrating African Americans found solace and home in Harlem. The arrival of the African American community in Harlem was initially resented by the white residents; however, they failed in their attempts to prevent the African Americans from residing in Harlem; eventually they themselves moved out of Harlem. The population of the

African Americans grew in Harlem and businesses owned by them began to flourish. Harlem became a centre for the African Americans where they could live, work and enjoy life freely. Due to the exciting atmosphere of Harlem many young African American intellectuals, writers, musicians and artists were drawn to the area. Harlem was also already home to a few older intellectuals such as W.E.B DuBois, Alain Locke, Marcus Garvey, James Weldon Johnson and Jessie Redmon Fauset. Guided by the older intellectuals the talents of the young intellectuals, writers, musicians and artists began to flourish.

In May 1910 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed by a group of white social reformers and black leaders which was devoted to helping the blacks achieve equality in America. One of the most important features of the Harlem Renaissance was the emergence of the NAACP's monthly journal named *The Crisis*. DuBois was the first editor of the journal. *The Opportunity* was another magazine which was established in 1923 by the National Urban League with Charles S. Johnson as its editor. *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* published articles and poems by many great writers of the African American community, helping them establish their name in the literary world. Some of the most prominent literary artists of the Harlem Renaissance were Jean Toomer (1894 – 1967), Countee Cullen (1903 – 1946), Claude McKay and Langston Hughes. Although the Harlem Renaissance was short lived, it helped in creating a space for the African American artists in the artistic sphere in America and propelled the African American arts and literature to new heights. Due to the Harlem Renaissance many white Americans began to acknowledge the talent and geniuses of the African American artistes and developed a new-found respect for their art.

Hughes' view on the Harlem Renaissance is a testament to his unique love for the minorities, especially black minorities and his innate desire to represent them. Though he admitted to having "a swell time" during the renaissance, he couldn't help but find it ridiculous that some African Americans thought it would last and that the race problem had been solved. Hughes in a sense of absolute wonder mixed with a tinge of sarcasm remarked, "For how could a large and enthusiastic number of people be crazy about Negroes forever?" (228). His ability to perceive reality in a somewhat outlandish atmosphere made him successful as a poet, because he possessed the natural talent of seeing differently, and then capturing that very sentiment and perception into his poetry. Anita Haya Patterson wrote, "Hughes broke new ground in his poetry, partly because he saw that his engagement with canonical texts and his interest in traditional English and American prosody would provide a much-needed, clarifying distance from the rich but potentially formulaic idioms he borrowed from African American folk culture." (662).

Hughes' jazz poetry conveys the importance of possessing black consciousness for the African American community by unabashedly addressing the sufferings, pains and dreams of the African American. Hughes, explaining in a tone which is serious and painful on the reason why the subjects for his poems are mostly concerning the blacks' experiences, wrote:

I limited the subject matter of my poems to roses and moonlight. But, unfortunately, I was born poor – and colored – and almost all the prettiest roses I have seen have been in rich white people's yards – not in mine. That is why I cannot write exclusively about roses and moonlight – for sometimes in the moonlight my brothers see a fiery cross and a circle of Klansmen's hoods. Sometimes in the moonlight a

dark body swings from a lynching tree – but for his funeral there are no roses. (Phylon 212)

Hughes acceptance of his reality and the reality of his people are depicted in many of his poems. His inability to write about things and matters trivial to him and his people is a testament to his devotion towards the collective desires of the African American race. His love for his people is clearly expressed in his poetry “My People”:

The night is beautiful,  
 So the faces of my people.  
 The stars are beautiful,  
 So the eyes of my people.  
 Beautiful, also, is the sun,  
 Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people. (Hughes, *Selected* 13).

By depicting blackness or his people as beautiful, Hughes unknowingly fanned a flame, a cultural movement of the blacks which later took prominent form in the 1960s known as the ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement. It was a movement, a cultural resistance, which began as a counter action of an idea prevailing in the American culture depicting or featuring blacks as less attractive than the whites. The movement was very important because many African Americans were affected by the definition of beauty as promoted by the whites and “Blackness in general has been associated with discouragement, despair, depression, coldness, the unknown, the haunting shadow, and the nightmare. This negative blackness concept, no doubt originating from the associations with day and night, has fused with skin color devaluation” (Anderson and Cromwell 76). African Americans “adopted the negative blackness concept” and “resigned himself to the fact that he was “negative” inferior and less

attractive” (ibid). Tracey Owens Patton argued that, “the continuance of hegemonically defined standards of beauty not only reify White European standards of beauty in the United States, but also that the marginalization of certain types of beauty that deviate from the "norm" are devastating to all women” (26). Hughes’ use of the medium of poetry as a platform for vocalizing his views not only on racial issues but other issues such as the acceptance of one’s own skin and colour was effective and it impacted many African American lives.

Hughes not only used his skill as a poet to motivate African Americans sentiment and to instill black consciousness among his people, he also used his skill as a jazz poet to advocate peace between black and white Americans. In his poetry “Cultural Exchange” which is the first poetry from the book *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*, Hughes wrote, “*CULTURE, THEY SAY, IS A TWO WAY STREET*” (9) suggesting the ambivalence of the white culture towards the acceptance or non-acceptance of the black culture in America. Scott Saul in his book *Freedom is Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the making of the Sixties* observed, “Hughes was taking the principle of cultural reciprocity ... and he was amplifying it into the realm of action, of redistributive justice.” (140). Hughes, therefore, was instrumental in asserting the need for conformity of cultures in America. Hughes also fervently advocated the plight of the black race through his jazz poetry, thereby utilizing art as a protest discourse for African American culture.

Many poets followed Langston Hughes in writing jazz poetry. Some of the most notable persons include white poets of the beat generations such as Jack Kerouac (1922 – 1969) and Allen Ginsberg (1926 – 1997) and other black poets like Amiri Baraka (1934 – 2014), Gil Scott-Heron (1949 – 2011) and Maya Angelou



(1928 – 2014). Acknowledging the influence Hughes had on many writers all over the world Wikipedia in its page for Langston Hughes published:

His African-American race consciousness and cultural nationalism would influence many foreign black writers, including Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire. Along with the works of Senghor, Césaire, and other French-speaking writers of Africa and of African descent from the Caribbean, such as René Maran from Martinique and Léon Damas from French Guiana in South America, the works of Hughes helped to inspire the Négritude movement in France. (*Wikipedia*)

Hughes travelled all over the world visiting countries such as Mexico (as a child living with his father), West Africa, Netherlands, Paris (he lived there for a while), Cuba, USSR (as a member of a black movie crew), China, Japan, Korea, and toured many states within America including New York (He even went on a car trip with Zora Neale Hurston to the south collecting black folklore) promoting and at the same time popularizing his poetry through readings in universities and colleges. His audiences would gladly devour what he had to offer with pure delight. His readings would often incite reactions which were favourable for the black intelligentsia as well as the ordinary black folks.

Hughes was also one of the first poets who performed his poetry to the accompaniment of jazz music. His performances would later influence poets such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Rexroth, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and many others to record their poems accompanied by jazz. Hughes also performed amazingly well with famous jazz musicians such as the legendary double bass player Charles

Mingus, British born jazz pianist Leonard Feather and Phineas Newborn Jr. another gifted American jazz pianist. Hughes was featured recording his poems on the album “Weary Blues” (MGM, 1959) and was supported musically by both Mingus and Feather.

Using his poetry as a medium of representation, Hughes strived to create a new identity for the African American race in both the artistic and the social arena. He represented the African American race using various themes and agendas while employing the language of the common Negro folk. The establishment of a new cultural identity or the New Negro was deemed very crucial by the African American intellectuals of the 1900s, to ensure the survival of the African American race in America during the 1900s. There was a growing trend among the middle-class section of the African American community to resent their own race and people and leaned more towards the adaptation to the ways of the whites. Langston Hughes was vehemently against such class of the African American community and he spoke and wrote harshly against them. Hughes’ purpose was driven by a very strong love for his people irrespective of class and wealth. He advocated the need to unite in order to establish an identity which will solidify their existence in America as equal citizens possessing equal rights.

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### CHAPTER III

#### THE JAZZ POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES AS EXPRESSIONS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

*Music...describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social.*

Simon Firth

Stuart Hall defined culture as, "... the production and the exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group", he further explained *meaning* by saying that it is, "...what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we – 'belong'" (*Introduction* 3), Hall also defined identities as, "...constantly in the process of change and transformation," and that they are "constituted within, not outside representation" (*ibid* 4). Stuart Hall in addition suggested two views on the true nature of cultural identity. His first view, which he termed 'shared culture', explained that "...cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" ("Cultural Identity" 223) and his second view on cultural identity "recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become'." (*ibid* 225).

Raymond Williams in his article "Culture is Ordinary" described two aspects of the nature of culture, "the known meanings and directions" and "the new observations and meaning" ("Culture is Ordinary" 4). According to Williams "every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meaning...The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions" (*ibid* 4). Raymond



Williams again in his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977) also laid down what he calls “Structures of Feelings” by which he meant “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt ... thought as felt and feeling as thought” (132). Williams stresses on the point that focus is laid on defining “social experiences which is still *in process*” (ibid 132).

Based on the theories advocated by Stuart Hall on culture, identity and cultural identity, and Raymond William’s “Structure of Feelings” this chapter attempts to identify and situate the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as expressions of meanings generated and utilized by the African American communities in America, in order to distinguish themselves from the white hegemonic order. Hughes’ poetry also catered to the dynamics of identity formation for the African Americans hence, this chapter shall also focus on the formation of a new African American identity crucial for the development of the African American Cultural Identity, after the abolition of Slavery in 1865.

There are many factors which can be held responsible for the formation or rather the evolution of the African American cultural identity. Africans were stripped of their identity and culture once they were brought to America and a new identity was forcibly imposed upon them, that of a slave. Daina Miniotaite writing on this subject wrote, “African-Americans were viewed as people with no history, no cultural heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white America” (5). Miniotaite further wrote that the ruthless treatment of the African Americans was a calculated action to further the dominance of the whites. She observed that:

... the numerous literary portrayals and treatment of black-skinned people as the “Other,” as failing to live up to the standards of

“normalcy” of white people by imposing negative meanings and stereotypes on them, were meant to legalize hierarchical racialized system and justify oppression in a white hegemonic American society.

(6)

The new identity forced upon the African Americans degraded them to a status much lesser than that of a human. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote that even after gaining freedom racism still “...classed the black man and the ox together” (18). LeRoi Jones writing on the imposed condition of the African American described that, “The African who was unfortunate enough to find himself on some fast clipper ship to the New World was not even accorded membership in the human race” (2). Jones continued, “Africans were forced into an alien world where none of the references or cultural shapes of any familiar human attitudes were available”. However, the insane treatment subjected to the African Americans resulted in the development of a strong resistance and determination which paved the way for the emergence of a new culture with a new identity. LeRoi Jones observed that the formation of the new African American culture happened through “... the retention of some parts of these cultures in America, and the weight of the step culture...” which ultimately “produced the American Negro. A new race” (7).

With the absence of an identity (apart from that of a slave) and the possession of any form of power, forming a new culture was not an easy task for the African Americans. Any acts to subvert the power dynamics were met with serious punishments. There were a few cases of slave uprising or slave rebellion (many of which are kept secret) such as the Prosser conspiracy of 1800 in Richmond, Virginia, the conspiracy of Denmark Vesey and the rebellion of Nat Turner of 1831. However, slave policing was executed almost to perfection in America which prevented many

such rebellions. The natural dynamics for the evolution of a culture, therefore, was not afforded. Raymond Williams suggested that culture has 'meaning and directions' which are the 'ordinary processes of human societies' (93). However, the African American slave community was deprived of anything 'ordinary'. The slaves were not given proper rights, slave owners could inflict and impose any kind of punishment they deemed fit and necessary. Sellers et al. studied the difficulties faced by the African American communities towards forming their own culture by writing:

Because they were brought to the United States against their will and systematically deprived of access to their indigenous culture, African Americans were not afforded the choice of whether to assimilate into the new culture or retain their indigenous culture. As a result, traditional African culture has had to be grafted onto the cultural practices of the European/American society to form an original cultural expression. (18)

The experiences faced by the African Americans while being enslaved (for two and a half centuries) and after emancipation were deeply traumatic. There were an estimated four million African Americans during the time of emancipation in America. These freed slaves were estranged by their former masters, and since the government could not provide land to the newly emancipated slaves, freed slaves had to fend for themselves in order to survive in a white world. Describing how the traumatic experience became instrumental in the formation of the African American identity Ron Eyerman writes:

The notion of a unique African American identity emerged in the post-Civil War period, after slavery had been abolished. The trauma of

forced servitude and of nearly complete subordination to the will and whims of another was thus not necessarily something directly experienced by many of the subjects of this study, but came to be central to their attempts to forge a collective identity out of its remembrance. In this sense, slavery was traumatic in retrospect, and formed a “primal scene” which could, potentially, unite all “African Americans” in the United States, whether or not they had themselves been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling for Africa. Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory. (1)

Eyerman credited the traumatic experiences of the African Americans as a catalyst for the formation of an identity which by nature was not individualistic but rather collective or shared. He explained, “...collective memory provides the individual with a cognitive map within which to orient present behavior. From this perspective, collective memory is a social necessity; neither an individual nor a society can do without it”. Eyerman continued to say that, “Collective memory specifies the temporal parameters of past and future, where we came from and where we are going, and also why we are here now” (6).

During the Civil War an estimated 180,000 African American served as soldiers in the US Army and another 19,000 served in the navy, and by the end of the war 40,000 African American had lost their lives. African American soldiers faced a lot of racial discrimination and segregation within the US Army. The issue was so serious that President Lincoln ultimately had to issue a “General Order 233, threatening reprisal on Confederate prisoners of war (POWs) for any mistreatment of black troops” (Parker 1). Even after slavery was abolished, the conditions experienced

by the African Americans during the period known as the Reconstruction Era in American history was still very terrible. A total of 2,060 African Americans were lynched out of a total 3,337 during 1882 to 1903 (Cutler 181). One of the reasons for the enormous amount of lynching as observed by Cutler was that the emancipated slaves were,

...far from being a fully developed man capable of exercising the duties of citizenship in a democratic government, but in the legal institutions which were established in the South during the period of Reconstruction it was assumed that he was entitled to an equal share in the government with his former master. A legal system was established which had no basis in the order of society then existing. The result was enmity and bitterness between whites and blacks... (206)

This lynching statistic alone is but a clear indication of the sufferings of the African Americans during the Reconstruction Era. The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in 1909 even started a forty years campaign against lynching (Mills, *The NAACP*). Describing the horrible condition of the freed African Americans in his book *Sick from Freedom*, Jim Downs wrote:

Freed people suffered from sickness and poverty, and struggled to have their voices heard by contemporary officials, who were hell-bent on portraying the South as rebuilt and later by historians, who were in search of heroic icons to shatter racist stereotypes. The destruction of slavery left little rhetorical room for freed people to articulate how emancipation was a glorious achievement but one that brought new struggles that threatened their survival” (6-7).

Downs focused on the historical narratives which contained wrong interpretation of the Reconstruction Era and its history regarding the conditions of the freed slaves. He wrote that historians "...often emphasize the thrill of freedom and the success of escaping from slavery, which has the unintended effect of diminishing the grueling process that was actually emancipation" (23). Maurice E. Stevens wrote, "...those who tell the stories of African-American history and agency work within a social context that has understood African Americans as without historical agency and as lacking full humanity" (12). These narratives fit the white schema and, therefore, wasn't contested or challenged for a long time. Reality was that there was, "massive dislocation, widespread poverty, prolonged starvation, and, most of all, the dramatic outbreak of sickness and disease" (22). John Eaton described the horrific conditions he witnessed in the summer of 1864 when he witnessed the journey of ex-slaves from Southern plantations to federal lines and wrote, "You saw them, of both sexes, of all ages, in every stage of health, disease, and decrepitude, often nearly naked their flesh torn in escaping," (qtd. in Downs 22). The African American culture, therefore, in order to survive their dreadful existence evolved into an interdependent culture wherein, "the self is seen as interdependent with the surrounding social context, and the self is considered in relations to others. This means that one's thinking and acting are influenced by the relevant others in one's social context" (Belgrave & Allison 206).

This connectivity and interdependency among the African American society proved enormously significant for the sustainability of a new interdependent culture where, "relationships are important, and maintaining a connection to others means being constantly aware of others' needs, desires and goals" (Belgrave & Allison 206). The same interdependency and connectivity were also recognized by Tristan L.

Tolman in her research on African American family history. Tristan mentioned that the African Americans "... established family units and welcomed other kin into their families as needed...They valued their family relationships and reserved their harshest judgments for the owners that tampered with their families." Tolman continued to write that the African Americans "...would rather endure the reduction of food or clothing, the increase of their workload, or even the administration of violence than the separation from their loved ones" (9). Therefore, another major factor, apart from shared traumatic experiences, for the formation of a new culture for the African Americans after the Civil War was the family which was deeply and closely knitted and more extended in nature.

The transition from being a slave to being a free man was, consequently, a rather complex, complicated and difficult process. African Americans were ensnared in a very ambiguous position (after the abolition of slavery in 1865) in society where though they were free technically; socially and politically they were still very much enslaved. W.E.B. Du Bois tracing the works of the Freedmen's Bureau vehemently wrote, "For this much all men know: despite compromise, war, and struggle, the Negro is not free" (24). Hence, carving a niche for themselves in order to be culturally identified and accepted was a gigantic challenge for the African Americans. Their identity, culturally and socially, was still a matter of debate. W.E.B. Du Bois named this complex identity position as 'the veil'. African Americans according to W.E.B. Du Bois were in a situation where they viewed themselves "through the revelation of the other world". He termed this state Double Consciousness. The African Americans, according to Du Bois, faced a difficult dilemma because they do not desire to lose their identity both as an American and as a Negro:

He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows the Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (3)

This rather complex status and scenario put African Americans in a similar situation as to what Homi K. Bhabha termed as 'liminal space' (232) in his reference to 'cultural difference' in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). Within the confines of this interstitial space or liminality, African Americans gradually started constructing a new culture for themselves subverting the binary opposites through which they were essentially defined and recognized.

Stuart Hall's first view on the true nature of cultural identity stresses the importance of cultural codes to emphasize oneness among a specific culture. The experiences shared as slaves by the African Americans were primarily instrumental for the formation of the African American culture which is different, in almost every way, from that of the white American culture. Explaining the meaning of cultural codes Hyatt and Simons wrote,

Codes are 'a secret system of words, symbols or behaviours' that are used to convey messages that are contextually bound. Codes are generally expressed at an observable level, through verbal and non-verbal means, but they are the result of the effects of, and interaction with, the other levels of culture. This means that what is observed often



does not make sense to the outsider. The codes are known only to their authors and inventors, the insider group. They can be used as shorthand by such a group for brevity or to allow rapid communication. They can also be used to disguise the 'real message' and to keep it hidden from outsiders. (28)

The African American community had an abundance of codes hidden from the whites which served as a means to deploy meaning in a concealed manner. These codes were used to communicate hidden messages among the African American community. Codes were developed when the African Americans were using the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes built during the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which was utilized by the African Americans to escape to Canada and the free states. Songs and quilts were mainly employed to carry these codes. Dennis Dallmer stated that codes were "... the first civil rights movement and [it] represents a multi-racial effort to achieve freedom. It was a liberation movement in which the heroes were both black and white. And for fugitive slaves it represented a non-violent approach to gaining freedom" (492). The origin of the term the *Underground Railroad* is shrouded in mystery; however, there have been several accounts of slaves following a particular route to escape the southern states of America. The origin of the quilt codes and its practical usage, however, has been doubted by some researchers. Olga Idriss Davis wrote in her paper, "The quilt uncovers the choice of symbols Black women used within their community to create a shared, common meaning of self and the world. Thus, the quilt serves as a vehicle for re-inventing the symbolic expression of identity and freedom" (68). The quilt, therefore, served not only the purpose of a hidden code, but also an expression of identity. Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard in their book *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the*

*Underground Railroad* wrote about the time they interviewed a woman named Ozella McDaniel Williams on May 11 1996, and what they managed to learn through Ozella, namely the ‘Underground Railroad Quilt Code’. Some of the symbols or codes of the quilt code as revealed by Ozella were *Monkey Wrench*, *Wagon Wheel*, *Bear’s Paw*, *Crossroads*, *Log Cabin*, *Shoofly*, *Bow ties*, *Flying Geese*, *Drunkard’s Path*, and *North Star*. All these codes, which were generally stitched onto a quilt, had specific meanings which could be instantly decoded by runaway slaves along their journey on the Underground Railroad.

The spiritual songs of the African Americans also served as a useful tool for hiding codes as well. Spiritual songs such as “Go Down Moses” and “Deep River” are embedded with hidden codes which served as a reminder and also as a device to signal information to escaping slaves. The lyrics of the songs “Go Down Moses” and “Deep River” both contained words which had double meaning or codes for the African Americans. Words such as ‘Jordan’, ‘Jesus’, ‘Israel’, and ‘Egypt’ were used as metaphors to express hidden meanings. Some of the most apparent metonymic metaphors as described by Lawrence-McIntyre were, “*bondage* = slavery; *Satan* = slave master; *King Jesus* = slave benefactor; *Babylon* = winter; *hell* = farther south; *Jordan* = first step to freedom; *Israelites* = enslaved Blacks; *Egyptians* = slaveholders; *Canaan* = land of freedom; *heaven* = Canada (north); *home* = Africa” (389). These codes gave the African Americans meaning, and these meanings separated them from their white masters. These meanings glued them together as a race.

Stuart Hall’s second view on Cultural Identity opines that cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. Systemic oppression became the tool for the demoralization and the dehumanization of the African Americans. Due to the

continued existence of discrimination and oppression, the African Americans began to develop ways and means to survive in an environment hostile to their existence. The African American culture, therefore, became a culture equipped with multiple defense mechanisms in order to sustain whatever could be salvaged from historical experiences.

The theory of Eyerman and Hall correlates with the 'Racial Memory or Collective Unconscious' theory propounded by Carl Jung. Though Jung attributed his theory to the whole human race, more than two centuries of slavery accumulated to the development of a whole new archetype for the African Americans. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, writes about a "...totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society..." which he termed "collective or common consciousness" (39). Based on their common customs values, beliefs and experiences the African Americans formed what Durkheim calls 'Mechanical Solidarity, or Solidarity by Similarities' (Smith 8). This solidarity knitted them together towards their stand and struggle for freedom and equality and strengthened their motives towards achieving their common goal.

Embedded within the collective identity formation of the African Americans is the presence of a strong adherence to cultural and ethnic music. African American's distinctive cultural identity is characterized by many different markers. One such marker is their undying love and attraction towards music as explained earlier in chapter two. Forming a cultural identity through shared memory, collective and common consciousness fuelled by trauma, segregation and discrimination was possible through one other factor i.e., the Black Church. James H. Cone wrote, "The Christian Gospel is a gospel of liberation. The pre-Civil War black churches recognized this, and that was why they refused to accept an interpretation of

Christianity that was unrelated to civil freedom” (49). The church signified freedom for the African Americans. Since African American society was an interdependent culture Tolman observed that the “Slaves forged a culture centered on family and church” (9). The Black church “...served as a bulwark of spiritual and moral strength and a center for the total life of the people and a source of leadership which, through the years, has guided the Black people towards the goal of increasingly fuller participation in American life” (McKinney 453).

The church served many purposes for the African Americans and one of them was that it was as an escape from the everyday harsh realities of life. Langston Hughes wrote in his essay “Songs Called the Blues” that the “... spirituals are escape songs. Looking towards the heaven, tomorrow, and God” (*Phylon* 143). The church provided consolation and an affirmation that though in this life they may have to endure slavery, a promise awaits, assuring freedom from all bondages. The African American church therefore was at best emotional. The reason for this emotionalism was that it “served as a source of tension release” (McKinney 465). Not only did the church provided comfort it also acted as a “power institution” (McKinney 466) it provided emotional comfort but also social and political comfort too. It became a symbol for the African Americans to boldly protest against the white hegemony. Patricia Liggins Hill stressing on the role of the Black Church towards encouraging the black community wrote:

Using the inherited verbal artistry and eloquence of the griots, they crafted sermons, prayers, narratives, hymns, poetries, essays, and songs to educate, uplift, and stir the African American spirit toward social action... from their churches... early ministers founded benevolent

societies that not only aided needy African Americans but offered services to larger communities as well. (qtd. in Barnes 972)

The black church was also predominantly popular for its music. The Negro Spiritual especially began to be widely popular as it deeply represented the life of the African Americans in America. David McD Simms writing on the origin and themes of the Negro spiritual remarked, “The Spirituals which allude to the personal experiences of the slave are permeated with the themes which concerned him most - life, death, freedom, hope. It is in this category of Spiritual that the mention of another world is most often made” (37). John Lovell Jr. said that the Negro spiritual wasn’t always spiritual at the beginning of its inception, he stated that “...the Negro spiritual is a song created by American slaves, dating from the early or middle 1700's to the late 1800's, unusually expressive in words and music, and projecting spiritual and spirited reactions to human experience, potentialities, and aspiration, over a wide scope of symbols, themes, and topics” (92). Sterling Stuckey commenting on the influence of the black church on music wrote:

The black church has been an institution of unusual drama in which the creative process has worked over centuries, despite racist oppression, to a remarkable degree. Du Bois’s exploration of essentials of the church...goes far towards explaining why black religion has been especially conducive to the early development of jazz musicians and composers” (77).

Sterling Stuckey also wrote about how many notable jazz musicians and performers such as Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus and many others were influenced by the music of the church, and how they themselves have

attributed and acknowledged the church as their first main influence. Though one cannot boldly say that Jazz had its beginning within the confines of the black church it sure had its influences from it. Sandra L. Barnes expressed that “Black religious music forms evolved from scripture”. And reiterating many scholars working on the subject she also observed that “...spirituals grew out of call-and-response dynamics between the slave preacher and congregation...” (970); the dynamics of the call and response is what gave jazz its distinctiveness though it is not unique to it. Jazz musicians often utilized this dynamic to elaborate their improvisational style. Jazz with its unique style and syncopated rhythm became a medium of expression, an indispensable tool for communication and mostly a way of life, a life which was saturated with trauma and infested with obnoxious afflictions. In the process of subverting the white Americans, jazz emerges; a medium which was intrinsically present in the cultures of the African Americans. Jazz, therefore, can be argued as the product of an oppressed culture; a mechanism by which identity was claimed. African American music grew and developed into a much more meaningful experience within the church. The church, therefore, which was an important result and a mechanism for the formation of the cultural identity of the African Americans, became an important instrument for the promotion and preservation of African American heritage and its roots through music.

Music has been attributed the characteristics of being able to form both individual and collective identity. Simon Frith once said, “Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective” (110). Frith continues, “...music, an aesthetic practice, articulates *in itself* an understanding of both group relations and individuality, on the basis of which ethical codes and social ideologies are understood” (111). According

to Frith, therefore, music achieves that capacity to provoke identity formation within a person or a group.

The significance of Jazz in American history is enormous, more so for the study of the history of the African Americans. Henry O. Osgood in his book *So This is Jazz* defined jazz musicians as, "...writhing about in simulated ecstasy in the manner of Negroes in a southern camp meeting afflicted with religious frenzy" (5-6). Osgood's observation clearly depicted the connection between jazz music and the religious practices of the African American community. Meanwhile, Lawrence W. Levine in 1989 wrote that, "American society has done far more than merely neglect jazz; it has pigeonholed it, stereotyped it, denigrated it, distorted its meaning and its character" (6). Levine's statement highlights the repulsive attitude of the dominating white culture to repress the strong and powerful influence of the music created by their black counterpart. Levine continued to distinguish jazz as an antithesis to culture because culture, then, was understood as "traditional", "harmonious" and "exclusive" and jazz was "raucous, discordant" and "spontaneous" (7) it was "cultural freedom" (14). Jazz was understood and defined in correlation with the African American way of life, their identity and their culture.

As already pointed out, Langston Hughes was one the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance and his contribution towards black literature is immeasurable. His influence and input towards establishing a new African American cultural identity during the 1920s through his jazz poetry is undeniable. African American's history and stories were poorly and sometimes wrongfully presented by white writers and historians, hence, it needed proper representation. Hughes became the voice of the African Americans because he emerged as one of the few literary artists who attempted to portray the experiences of the African Americans. When Hughes

emerged into the literary scene in the 1920s during the Harlem Renaissance, there were poets who had already attempted to incorporate jazz into their poetry. However, it was Hughes who successfully formed the unusual connection between the two art forms of jazz music and poetry and thus producing what is now known as Jazz Poetry.

Hughes' motive for the creation of such an unorthodox style, nevertheless, is not astonishing. Motivated and driven by the inequality, injustice, and deprivation of basic human rights suffered by the black community in America, Hughes ventured into various themes directly connected to his own experiences and observations. The decision to develop his poetry incorporating the rhythmic pattern and the improvisational technique of jazz proved to be highly appropriate because jazz music represented the black community of America from its roots. His themes such as 'Hope' and 'Dream' became one with the audience who readily subscribed to his poetry.

'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain' published in *The Nation* on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1926 is considered by many as the manifesto of Hughes and his contemporary African American writers. In it he challenged future African American composers by writing, "Our folk music, having achieved world-wide fame, offers itself to the genius of the great individual American Negro composer who is to come" (*The Negro Artist*). Christopher C. De Santos wrote, "'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain' anticipated the themes Hughes would pursue in his essays for the next decade, particularly in its strong critique of white racial prejudice but also in its condemnation of the black bourgeoisie's complicity in perpetuating racist attitudes" (*Essays on Art* 5).

Hughes' primary agenda was to change the mentality of the African Americans by way of representing them in his poetry through vivid imageries and



sometimes through derision. In one of his essays titled “My Adventures as a Social poet” Hughes explained why he, as a poet, could not focus just on the beauty of nature and why he is compelled to write about his people. He credited all his achievements and accomplishments to the pure fact of him staying true to his roots. He wrote, “I have been put out of or barred from quite a number of places, all because of my poetry—not the roses and moonlight poems (which I write, too) but because of poems about poverty, oppression, and segregation” (Phylon 207).

In a conversation Hughes had with Nicolás Guillén in 1929, Hughes explained his reasons for writing poetry by saying, “...this was my way of reacting to the misery of poverty, to the terrible condition in which Blacks live in my country”. Hughes also revealed his true agenda by explaining the effect his visit to Africa had on him,

It was in that part of the world that my soul was strengthened in its love for Black people—a feeling that I'll never lose. In contact with these gentle people, whose arms were severed by the Belgians and who were made to slave in the jungle by the French, as the journalist Alberto Londres has revealed, I realize that I had to be their friend, their voice, their leader, their poet. My greatest ambition is to be the poet of the Blacks. The Black poet. (56)

He further expressed his concern over the current state of mind of the African Americans who seemed to have forgotten their heritage and culture and was more complacent towards the reception of the white hegemony. Addressing this subject Hughes said,

My only aspiration is to make sure Blacks don't lose their openness and forget their origins. I think white civilization can destroy Black

heritage by dressing it in white clothes which will never really be their's. Of course, there are Blacks who don't agree with me because they think my poetrys are only about poor people and low life while they're busy playing at being aristocrats, imitating their old masters. But, what can you do?" (57).

Hughes was also deeply affected by some of his fellow African Americans who deemed it necessary to accept the ways of the white. Many African Americans adopted the ways of the white Americans. Hughes not only chose to remain true to his culture and heritage but further represented the African American culture through his poetry.

In many of his poems, Hughes ventured into the unexplored territory of the true identity of the blacks. In "Laughters" the identities of the blacks are depicted through the odd and menial jobs they had to carry out:

Dream-singers,  
 Story-tellers,  
 Dancers,  
 Loud laughers in the hands of Fate –

#### My People

Dish-washers,  
 Elevator Boys,  
 Ladies' maids,  
 Crap-shooters,  
 Cooks,  
 Waiters,  
 Jazzers. (Collected 27)

In “Beggar Boy” the social identity of the blacks depicted by Hughes became a bit more morbid and gruesome, but it is infused with the identity of a race willing to face harsh living conditions and embrace it with a smile. Hughes wrote:

Is not he but a shadow in the sun –  
A bit of clay, brown, ugly, given life?  
And yet he plays upon his flute a wild free tune  
As if fate had not bled him with her knife! (ibid 29)

In “America” the cultural identity of the blacks is once again revealed and expressed by Hughes in a very defeated tone. In the poem, Hughes wrote:

Who am I?  
I am the ghetto child,  
I am the dark baby,  
I am you  
And the blond tomorrow  
And yet  
I am my one sole self  
America seeking the stars. (ibid 53)

Captured, sold and detained as slaves for more than two centuries, the black community once freed from their captivity could not directly relate to their freedom as it was still denied to them practically on many grounds. Though they were no longer physically enslaved, their freedom was severely exploited. Lynching, racial segregation, and the Jim Crow law still held them under constant scrutiny. Hughes and his literary contemporaries boldly criticized the racial prejudices of their time through their works and it was Hughes’ work which stood out the most. Hughes was a

poet who remained true to his heritage, culture, and tradition throughout his livelihood. In one of his famous poetry “Negro” written in 1922 he wrote:

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,

Black like the depths of my Africa. (*The Weary* 1).

In this poetry, Hughes celebrated the term *Negro* and *black*, a derogatory term and a racial slur, used to describe the African Americans. Hughes, however, chose to own the term and not let it affect him. The poetry “Negro” described the journey of the African Americans from Africa to Rome to Egypt and to America and within its lines are embedded the deep suffering, pain, and hardship faced by the African Americans. Describing the African Americans as *a slave*, *a worker*, *a singer* and *a victim* each of which can be said to represent or express black cultural identity as witnessed by history. The poetry painfully remembers the horrific experiences endured by his race. By using the word ‘I’ Hughes united all African Americans to embrace their past and to celebrate their race. By reminding the African Americans of their history, Hughes painted a picture of their past, their identity as slaves. This identity is what binds them.

Hughes employed two main features of the black community, which made African Americans distinctive and unique, in expressing black cultural identity i.e., their dialect and their music. Jazz was an undeviating illustration of these two chief features of the black community. Jazz was the medium for African Americans to showcase their musical ingenuity alongside their unique speech pattern. By intentionally tapping into these two main sources, Hughes directly represented the black folks through his poetry while establishing a strong connection with them. His

poems such as “The Weary Blues”, “Negro Dancers” and “Song for a Banjo Dance” incorporate words employed solely by the African American community. To cite a few examples, in “The Weary Blues” Hughes used the Negro slang *ma* instead of ‘my’ and *I’s* for ‘I am’. In the “Negro Dancers” he used *ma* again and *de* instead of ‘the’. In the “Negro Dancer” and “Song for a Banjo Dance” he used *mo’* in place of ‘more’. In the poetry “Blues Fantasy” Hughes wrote a simple line in a perfect black speech pattern, “*My man’s done left me,*” which simply means “*My man has had enough of me and has left me*”.

Though Langston Hughes wrote his poetry under various themes the most prominent one remains his undying and lifelong endeavor to elevate the condition and status of black Americans in America. He flagrantly wrote about, and expressed culture and race issues in many of his poems. Hughes’ poems generally are therefore typically characterized by a vibrant and unambiguous desire to champion the plight of his fellow African Americans. His poems are beautifully crafted to highlight the conditions of the African Americans and to serve a deeper purpose of instilling a sense of pride in being an African American. Hughes wrote his poems on many themes, but popular themes such as worshipping love and nature were not his forte. He rather focused on music such as jazz and blues and its impact on society, incorporating the mellow tone while depicting sorrow, loneliness and racial issues. In the poetry ‘The Weary Blues’, Hughes described a negro musician who was making his ‘poor piano moan’ late into the night, the description of the setting is somber, and the mood reflected in the poetry intensifies as the poetry moves along the lines:

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,

Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,

I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lennox Avenue the other night

By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light

He did a lazy sway...

He did a lazy sway...

...

“I got the Weary Blues

And I can't be satisfied.

Got the Weary Blues

And can't be satisfied -

I ain't happy no mo'

And I wish that I had died.” (Hughes *The Weary* 5)

“The Weary Blues” being his most celebrated popular poetry, it clearly elucidates the stark grueling reality of a Negro piano player. The intensity with which the piano player plays his piano makes the instrument moan and the tune played is a ‘sad raggy tune’. The words ‘lazy sway’ also illustrates the blues, which is often characterized by its deep, overly flushed out tune. The blues was another musical genre created by the African Americans. It is one of the base structures for the formation of the jazz. Blues represented the African American communities. “Negro Dancer” is another poem where music is the base as well as the theme. It speaks about a dance called Charleston. The rhythm of the poetry follows the syncopated rhythm of jazz, thus giving it a vibrant mood. Other poems like “To Midnight Nan at Leroy’s”, “Harlem Night Club”, “Trumpet Player”, “Song for a Banjo Dance”, “Blues Fantasy”, “When Sue wears red”, “Misery” all these poems have direct references to jazz music. Hughes also made a reference to African music in his poetry such as, “My People”, “Afro-American Fragment” and “Danse Africaine” where the drum beat is mostly

referred, as the drum signifies the inherent internal rhythm developed naturally by an actual drum which was a very important part of the African culture. Hughes also wrote about the black gospel songs in poems such as “Spirituals”, “Fantasy in Purple” and “Tambourines”. Therefore music, particularly jazz, is featured in many of Hughes’ poetry but music is not the prime focus in all the poems where they are featured. Music is used as a setting, a background to highlight the issues Hughes was more concerned with.

Hughes has a number of poems on the theme of dreams. He often referred to a dream which is deferred, directly suggesting the dream of the African Americans which has been time and again thwarted by white supremacy. Hughes’ dreams are also essentially the American dream for the African Americans. The American dream has been interpreted in many different ways, but for Hughes it was the aspirations and hopes of the African Americans to one day overcome all their problems – social, political, economic and psychological. J.G.E. Mass was quoted by Winterstein as saying, “...we dream most frequently of the things on which our warmest passions are centred. And this shows that our passions must have an influence on the production of our dreams” (qtd. in Freud, 42). Hughes’ ‘dreams’ are in fact direct representation of the shared desires and wishes of the African Americans. Desires and wishes which has been accumulating throughout the many years of systemic slavery and oppression. Sigmund Freud said, “All the material making up the content of a dream is in some way derived from experience” (44). The lived experiences of the African American therefore become the raw material for Hughes to conjure up his theme on dreams.

Hughes, therefore, employed poetry as a medium to articulate his agenda and skillfully utilizes the theme of dream to express the overlooked sufferings, visions and aspirations of the African Americans and also to express the fundamental issue of race

and identity. In his poetry “Freedom’s Plow” Hughes used the theme of dream to convey the importance of the feeling of *oneness* among the African American communities. He wrote:

Thus the dream becomes not one man’s dream alone,  
 But a community dream.  
 Not my dream alone, but *our* dream.  
 Not my world alone,  
 But *your world and my world*,  
 Belonging to all the hands who build. (*Selected Poems* 291)

Hughes wrote this poetry in 1943 and it is one of the most brutal attempts to help the African Americans realize their dream; a dream of uniting for one purpose. In his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues*, Hughes included one of his best known poems “Dream Variation” where he expressed ‘the dream’ of most African Americans by writing:

To fling my arms wide  
 In some place of the sun,  
 To whirl and to dance  
 Till the white day is done. (25)

The line ‘Till the white day is done’ is a double entendre wherein the phrase could be interpreted in two different ways. It could mean a desire to ‘whirl and to dance’ till daylight is over, or a wish for the end of the white power regime. The poetry expresses the inner desire and longings of the African American. Longing for a day when they will be free from the clutches of inequality and discrimination. Hence, the dream extended through the poetry could be interpreted as having a political



agenda. Hughes recognized that, realizing this dream was going to be a herculean task. After being subjugated and oppressed for so long, many African Americans could not maintain a strong resistance towards the opposing force. They started developing "...a negative self-concept and self-denigration as a result of inferior status in this country" (Belgrave and Allison 208). Jean Grambs writing on this subject wrote, "The self-esteem of the Negro is damaged by the overwhelming fact that the world he lives in says, 'White is right; Black is bad'" (ibid). Hughes addressed this issue by writing a telling poetry "As I Grew Older". In the poetry Hughes wrote:

It was a long time ago.  
 I have almost forgotten my dream.  
 But it was there then,  
 In front of me,  
 Bright like a sun –  
 My dream.  
 And then the wall rose,  
 Rose slowly,  
 Slowly,  
 Between me and my dream. (*Selected* 11)

The poetry ends with a passionate and desperate call, a reminder for all African American that it is they themselves and not anyone else who can break this wall; the wall being a representation of all their problems – external or internal. Hughes continued:

My hands!  
 My dark hands!

Break through the wall!  
Find my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness,  
To smash this night,  
To break this shadow  
Into a thousand lights of sun,  
Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun! (ibid)

In “Beale Street” Hughes again, addressing the fading passions of African Americans, admitted that “The dream is vague / And all confused”, he went on with a warning by writing, “The loss / Of the dream / Leaves nothing / The same” (Selected 70). Hughes’ concern for his people is clearly represented in “Beale Street”. Hughes, therefore, uses the theme of ‘dreams’ to effectively express the urgency of retaining self-esteem for the African Americans in order to establish their identity culturally.

In 1939 Dr. Kenneth B. Clark and his wife Mamie P. Clark conducted an experiment popularly known as ‘The Clark Doll Experiment’ in order to find out, “the genesis and development of racial identification as a function of ego development and self-awareness in Negro children” (169). They published their findings under the title “Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children” in *Readings in Social Psychology*. The result of the experiment shocked many Americans and especially African Americans. A total of two hundred and fifty three Negro children took part in the experiment. The result showed that 60 percent of the test subjects felt that a white doll’s colour looked nicer than the black doll. This simple test clearly showed that African American children felt that the white children were prettier than them. Hughes advocated the acceptance of blackness. Hughes felt that the African

Americans needed to accept themselves in order for them to be accepted by others. They needed to understand that they weren't in any way inferior to the whites. Hence, Hughes celebrated blackness and this celebration became one of his major themes. He wrote many poems under this theme, one such poetry is "A Ballad of Negro History" wherein he wrote:

There is so much to write about

To sing about, to shout about

In the Negro race!

On each page of history

America sees my face

On each page of history

We leave a shining trace

On each page of history

My race!

My race!

My race! (*Collected* 436)

In a short poetry titled "Me and the Mule" Hughes in an intensified tone expressed the importance of self acceptance by proudly writing, "I'm like that old mule- / Black – and don't give a damn! / You got to take me / Like I am" (*Selected* 125). Hughes felt that African Americans should be proud of everything they are including their colour and therefore heralded the beauty of being black as a means to express the identity of the African Americans. In yet another poetry "Note on Commercial Theatre" Hughes attacked the commercial theatre for haphazardly ruining the black culture through misrepresentation. Hughes concluded the poetry on a positive note and hoped that:

...someday somebody'll  
 Stand up and talk about me,  
 And write about me –  
 Black and Beautiful –  
 And sing about me,  
 And put on plays about me! (*Selected* 190)

In yet another poetry advocating the beauty of the African Americans, Hughes focused not only on the external beauty of the African American but rather focused on the qualities embedded within. In the poetry “To the Black Beloved” Hughes wrote in the first stanza, “...thou hast / A loveliness / Surpassing beauty”, in the second stanza “...thou hast / A purity / Surpassing goodness.” and in the last stanza, “Thou art not luminous / Yet an altar of jewels, (*The Weary* 47)”. Hughes intention for portraying the African American as beautiful served a much greater purpose. He paved the way for the African American to accept himself/herself physically. The white hegemony had infiltrated the minds of the African Americans making them accept themselves as inferior in terms of everything including beauty. Hughes acceptance of the colour black as beautiful therefore sets the foundation for the African American to embrace their colour as beautiful which in turn became an expression for their identity. The *Black is Beautiful* movement started in the 1960s and:

... sought to establish a more dignified sense of public representation for African American people. It was a movement that re-claimed black identity by asserting new forms of public authorship within the public sphere based upon looking and feeling good, as a black person. As an identity-based social movement, ‘black is beautiful’ helped establish

‘black’ as a term for mobilising new political action, in the United States and globally” (King 1).

Hughes was way ahead of the movement. Though Hughes profusely wrote to uplift the status of African Americans, it is worth noticing that he did not necessarily attribute the whites as evil. Though the poetry “My People” celebrated blackness, it did not vilify whiteness. In the poetry, Hughes wrote that the ‘night’ and the ‘stars’ are beautiful but he also said the ‘sun’ is beautiful too. This particular philanthropic tone is reiterated in another poetry “Daybreak in Alabama” where Hughes expressed the importance of loving people of different race and colour.

As a self proclaimed social poet, Hughes also focused a lot on the African American family. Being brought up by his grandmother, and having grown a strong dislike for his father, Hughes realized the importance of the family at a very early age. Herbert G. Gutman pointed out that the African American “viewed their families in terms of kin networks” and “These kin networks formed the social basis of African-American communities” (qtd. in Tolman 6). Cassie Damewood in her article “African American Family Values” wrote that the

...separation from blood relatives fostered the practice of designating friends and loved ones as aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces, although they were not technically related; this custom has roots in Africa. To be anointed with such a family title was considered an honor, a testament to the high esteem in which the family held the person receiving the honorary title. The tradition of giving elders in the family the utmost respect was also established during this period, probably

due to the fact that the older family members had endured the most indignation.

However, after the Civil War ended, many African American families migrated towards the urban areas from the rural South. The new urban setting took its toll on the African American families. Many families were not able to maintain the close family bonding upheld in the rural South, “Urbanization with its fast-paced life, long work hours, multiple jobs, and neighborhoods, proved destructive to family life” (“African-American Families”).

The Moynihan report of 1964 stated that, “At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of the Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family” (5) and the reasons for this deterioration were given as Slavery, Reconstruction, Urbanization, Unemployment and poverty. The sufferings inflicted upon the African American community during the era of slavery were felt severely by the African American family structure. Slave owners tried to consolidate their control over their slaves “by undermining and replacing family structures with transient relationships built around identity as slaves owned by others, rather than with a family unit” (“African-American Families”). But these efforts of the slave owners, though fatal, proved unsuccessful because:

In spite of the obstacles, many slaves organized themselves into family structures remarkably similar to nuclear family structures in the rest of America. Intact and committed marital relationships were commonplace among slaves. Men and women joined in monogamous relationships through explicit ceremonies. The children born of these relationships had paternal and maternal relationships, even when the

parents could not exercise complete control over their children's lives. Throughout the period of slavery in the United States, strong families and committed marital relationships were evident even among couples forced to live apart (ibid).

Hughes' poetrys are an attempt to elevate the importance of maintaining a strong bonded family for the survival of the African American society and culture, and the preservation and establishment of a new identity. In his poetry "The Negro Mother", Hughes represented the plight of the African Americans through the voice of a mother. The last four lines of the poetry read:

Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers  
 Impel you forever up the great stairs-  
 For I will be with you till no white brother  
 Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother. (*Selected* 289)

The poetry functions as a perfect *aide memoire* for every African Americans, to remind them of the difficult journeys their ancestors had undergone. It also re-informs the African American community to strive harder and to, "Believe in the right" and to never let anyone push them down. The poetry also compels African Americans to fight for the entire race and commands them to "Lift high my banner out of the dust" (ibid). By employing the voice of the Negro mother, Hughes reaffirms the respect every African American bestows upon their mothers. He also highlights the influence of the Negro mother on her children, and 'black matriarchy'. The Moynihan Report of 1964 ascertained that "Almost one-fourth of Negro families are headed by females" (9). It also stated that:

...Negro families have the largest number of children and the lowest incomes, many Negro fathers literally cannot support their families. Because the father is either not present, is unemployed, or makes such a low wage, the Negro woman goes to work. Fifty-Six percent of Negro women, age 25 to 64, are in the work force, against 42 percent of white women. (25)

The findings of the Moynihan report clearly illustrate the problems underlying the African American family during the 1900s. In one of his poetry “Mama and Daughter”, Hughes brought out the close connection between a mother and her daughter. The poetry also addressed the common fate of many African American women who had to fend for themselves and look after their children because their husbands had left them. “Widow Woman” is also a fine example. In the poetry “S-sss-sh!” Hughes showed the intimacy and love African American families shared with their neighbours; in “Ballad of the Girl Whose Name Is Mud” Hughes commented on how a child is brought up in an African American family and in “Hard Daddy” a daughter is seen approaching her disinterested dad during her misery, highlighting the emotional requirement daughters have from their fathers. The poetry “Graduation” is yet another example of showcasing the undying love of the Negro mother.

Through all these poems where the family is represented sometimes by a mother, sometimes by a father and sometimes by a daughter, Hughes’ primary focus was the connection that existed within the family. This deep family connection which represents the African American’s unique cultural identity was exactly what Hughes found important to be cherished and preserved. He, thus, expressed it with utmost sincerity in his poetry. Langston Hughes, consequently, used his poetry as an expression of the African American cultural identity by employing and incorporating



jazz music and also by advocating the importance of the African American family structure, and promoting self-esteem among African Americans by endorsing the acceptance of one's own colour.

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**CHAPTER IV**  
**THE JAZZ POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES AS**  
**EXPRESSIONS OF BLACK ART**

*... the work of the black man is not always inferior.*

W.E.B Du Bois

Langston Hughes played a significant and important role towards the emergence of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) of the 1960s in America. Many leaders of the movement especially Amiri Baraka aka LeRoi Jones, the founder of the movement, were deeply inspired by Langston Hughes. To comprehend the effects of Hughes' poetry as expressions of Black art, one needs to be cognizant of certain terms like Art, Black Art and the Black Arts movements itself. This chapter will focus on African American literary history in brief, stressing on its production, style and nature of its contents; an attempt is also made to identify the jazz poems of Langston Hughes as direct manifestation of Black art, deliberately intended on promoting and establishing identity consciousness among the African Americans. The term Black art in this context has no affiliation with witchcraft, sorcery or necromancy but rather is a term used exclusively to describe art or arts produced by African Americans within the American framework.

The distinctive quality of man that separates him from all other living beings is his unique ability to create art. Throughout the history of man, art is undoubtedly the most important medium of expression and representation. Different cultures and races around the world have expressed their innermost feelings, desires, visions, skills, and contemplations through many different forms of art. From cave paintings to Computer Generated Imagery (CGI), tribal dance to ballroom dance, war cry to opera;

art has inherently occupied a vital part in man's existence. Lost civilizations are often remembered and rediscovered through residues and remnants of art. Cultures and societies are historically identified, distinguished and classified through detailed studies of art artifacts. Therefore, it can safely be regarded that art is one of the most important means or channel for man to mark his presence and solidify his existence. Understanding the importance of art and its impact on societies and cultures, Aristophanes (446 – 386 BC) in the fourth century said, "Let each man exercise the art he knows". Art resides and exist in every culture throughout the world in the form of songs, architecture, painting, sculpture, music, drama or dance. The level of artistry in different branches of art may differ in every society, culture or civilization. Art and its production invariably depend to a great extent on the natural surroundings or habitat of men, therefore, varied pieces of art exists across various cultures in the world although the medium of art may be the same.

Art is broadly classified into three main forms or branches namely Visual Arts (drawing, painting, photography, architecture, and conceptual art), Performing Arts (music, theatre, and dance) and Literary Arts (prose, poetry, legend, epic, myth). Every man, society and culture has his own art, and every art is an expression. The motive for the expression of art, although, may vary from artist to artist. While some artists choose to express his/her art to convey an agenda or propaganda (as means to an end); some may choose to express art merely for art's sake. The term 'art' does not have a universally accepted definition. Traditional definitions of art by thinkers and philosophers like Plato (427—347 BC), who defined art as 'mimetic', or the definition of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) as 'representation', are met with skepticism by philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 –1951) who proposed that art is 'indefinable'. Many philosophers, thinkers and scholars have propounded different



theories regarding the definition of art, the two most influential and popular ones were the Formalist and the Expressionist. Expressionists hold that “fine art is the expression of feelings”, however, “form, structure and logical continuity are not adequately covered by expressionist theories of art” (Wilson 4). Meanwhile, the formalists defined art as “the construction of significant form,” “the delineation of characteristic form,” or “the achievement of organic form” (ibid 5).

Morris Weitz (1916–1981) in his seminal essay, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” listed five aesthetic theories connected to the purpose of the definition of art, and mentioned the different definitions rendered by them. First was the Formalist theory propounded by Clive Bell (1881-1964) and Roger Fry (1866-1934) who concluded that “Anything which is art is an instance of significant form; and anything which is not art has no such form” (28). Secondly, the Emotionalist theory of Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) and Curt John Ducasse (1881-1969) who rejected the Formalist theory by saying, “the requisite defining property is not significant form but rather the expression of emotion in some sensuous public medium” (ibid) and then goes on to state that “without projection of emotion” art cannot exist. Thirdly, Weitz talked about the Intuitionist theory of Benedetto Croce (1860–1952) which rejected both the Formalist and the Emotionalist theory. According to this theory, “Art is really a first stage of knowledge in which certain human beings (artists) bring their images and intuitions into lyrical clarification or expression” (ibid), and therefore, “it is an awareness, non-conceptual in character, of the unique individuality of things; and since it exists below the level of conceptualization or action, it is without scientific or moral content” (ibid). Fourthly, Weitz brings in the Organicist theory which states that “art is really a class of organic wholes consisting of distinguishable, albeit inseparable, elements in their causally efficacious relations which are presented in

some sensuous medium” Weitz remarked, “...at one time at least it seemed to me that this organic theory constituted the one true and real definition of art” (ibid). And lastly, the Voluntarist theory which defined art as, “...essentially three things: embodiment of wishes and desires imaginatively satisfied, language, which characterizes the public medium of art, and harmony, which unifies the language with the layers of imaginative projections” (29).

Weitz, who was introduced by Davies as an Anti-Essentialist, argued that all five theories were inadequate and incomplete in describing what art truly is because, “...art is an “open concept” contra to logic and or mathematics which are considered “closed concepts”” (qtd. in Doulas 2). He also suggested that art cannot be contained within one single definition and “holds artifactuality as being a necessary condition for an artwork” (Doulas 3). Weitz’s theory was again refuted by other philosophers and thinkers like Nelson Goodman (1906 – 1998), Arthur Danto (1924 – 2013), Stephen Davies, George Dickie, and many others. Leo Tolstoy in his essay “What is Art?” had a simple approach to art when he said, “...it is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity” (50) and Theodor Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory* (1969) claimed, “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident.” Although many theorists, thinkers, philosophers and artists have defined art; no particular theory or definitions have been universally accepted. Amidst the different definitions propounded, for Langston Hughes art was fundamentally “a reflection of life or an individual’s comment on life” (*Essays on Art*, 32), and it is this fundamental conception which propelled him to emanate the African American experience.

Black Art is a term used generously to encapsulate all the different elements and genres of art produced by African Americans in America. In his article “Black Art” Amiri Barak wrote, “Black Art...meant not only an art that was an expression of black life, but revolutionary art” (23). Amiri Baraka wanted Black Art to be about everything black in terms of consciousness which will “create a political statement that would benefit black people” (ibid). Baraka continued defining what he meant by Revolutionary art and said that it was based on the Seven Principles (unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith) or the *Nguzo Saba*. The *Nguzo Saba* is the seven core principles of the *Kwanzaa*, a celebration which honors African heritage in African American culture. The *Kwanzaa* is observed during the 26<sup>th</sup> of December till January 1<sup>st</sup>. The concept of Kwanzaa was developed by Maulana Karenga who initially developed the idea as an alternative to Christmas. Karenga believed that Christianity was a white religion and that all black people should reject it. The term *Kwanzaa* is taken from Swahili an East African language. This chapter will focus exclusively on African American literary art and identify the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes on the basis of the definition of black art given by Amiri Baraka.

African American literary art could be traced back no further than the 1600s. The earliest literary production of African American literary art was the culmination of the oral tradition and slave narratives. Colonial America during the 1600s and the 1700s did not necessarily restrict slaves from acquiring education. In fact, many slave owners believed that educated slaves could perform their duties better and could be more indispensable towards them. C.G. Woodson (1875-1950) in his book *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* stated that the education of the Negroes falls into two periods, “... the insurrectionary movement about 1835, when the majority of

the people in this country answered in the affirmative the question whether or not it was prudent to educate their slaves. Then followed the second period, when the industrial revolution changed slavery from a patriarchal to an economic institution,” (2). Woodson wrote that the Negroes were allowed education during the first period because of three reasons, their master’s desire “to increase the economic efficiency of their labor supply” (ibid), efforts of persons who are sympathetic towards the oppressed, and the works of zealous missionaries. Religion was one of the main keys through which the acquisition of education for the black community in America was realized.

Religious groups felt the need to impart education to the African slaves in order to convert them to Christianity. According to C.G. Woodson, “The first settlers of the American colonies to offer Negroes the same educational and religious privileges they provided for persons of their own race, were the Quakers.” (4). It was the Anglican leader Alexander Garden who founded a school for blacks in 1743 in South Carolina and the school even employed literate blacks as teachers. However, literate slaves “could also move toward the realization of the slaveholders’ worst fears by interpreting for themselves the Scripture and its application to their lives and conditions” (Bruce Jr. 16). Literate Black Christians could deliver sermons and gave testimonies which infuriated the slave owners. Religion, however, gave voice to the blacks, “it allowed for the possibility of an entrance by black people into an intellectual setting, a realm of thought, and a world of skills that might otherwise have been defined as exclusively white” (ibid 17).

Dickson D. Bruce Jr., in his book *The Origin of African American Literature*, showed how African slaves in America during the 1700s were deliberately denied

education, by writing about the colonial legislation passed in 1740 which prohibited the teaching of slaves to learn how to write. Dickson D. Bruce Jr. also wrote that in spite of the efforts of the missionaries and those interested in educational reforms, slave owners in the North and South objected to joint schools. The denial of education towards the Negroes had two main causes according to C.G. Woodson; the first was the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution resulted in “increased demand for cotton fiber” which ultimately made the plantation owners require “larger number of slaves” (7). Slave owners, hence, did not find it profitable any longer to educate their slaves, as they required only hard laborers. The second cause was the impact of abolitionists and educated black refugees from foreign lands. These two groups were accused of inciting revolutionary ideas into the minds of the American Negroes, hence making it impossible for the Southern States to give education to Negroes.

Jupiter Hammon (1711–1806), Lucy Terry (1730-1821), Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784) and Briton Hammon (*birth and death unknown*) are four of the most notable writers of the colonial period. Briton Hammon’s work *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man (1760)* is considered to be the first published autobiography by a black American, Lucy Terry’s “Bars Fight” is considered the oldest known work of literature by an African American, Phillis Wheatley was the first published African American female poet and Jupiter Hammon is considered to be the first African American writer to be published in America. Though Jupiter Hammon, Lucy Terry and Briton Hammon mostly wrote religiously motivated poems and about their personal experiences mainly Phillis Wheatley mostly expressed Christian themes and ventured into the theme of slavery in her poems. Dickson D. Bruce Jr. wrote that the early 1770s black writers, “...aware of their standing in colonial society...began to

cultivate a fairly well defined stance towards society, building on the ambivalences over color and status around them and creating strategies within those ambivalences to gain a hearing for themselves” (55). He continued saying, what these writers, “...helped to create was to provide a foundation for the subsequent elaboration and enrichment of an African American voice through the end of the eighteenth century” (61). Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Ward, acknowledging the importance of the acquisition of education for the African Americans, also wrote, “...the encounter with writing proved to be a decisive factor in the fashioning of a black modernity and a new distinctive idiom of self-expression” (35).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century a concept was formulated by artists and critics known as Art for Art’s Sake. The term was first adopted by Theophile Gautier (1811–1872) and it “set up art above everything else the artists believed that nothing mattered except the search for beauty, and of course an alleged search for exotic beauty became an excuse of self-indulgence” (Hannay 44). The movement started, “as a legitimate reaction against a tendency to value art only for its effect kinds of human activity” (ibid 44). The theorists of art for art’s sake held that art, “was to exist for beauty's sake; and the artist was the expert in beauty” (Singer 346). It was a direct reaction against didacticism. Gautier and his followers were of the opinion that an artist should believe and teach that:

...art has nothing to do with morals in any manner. That an artist may choose any subject, moral, unmoral or immoral, and that so long as he expresses that subject with fine 'artistry' all is well” and that “an artist must refrain from attempting in any manner to shape the conduct of his

fellow-men, either by word or paint or marble or action upon the stage” (“Art for Art” 98).

The concept of Art for Art’s Sake was “...defended by Gautier and his followers in France, Poe and his followers in the United States and the Aesthetic movement in England” (Singer 344). However, the movement received its fair amount of criticism. Albert Guérard (1914–2000) in his article “Art for Art’s Sake” said, “Art for Art's sake ... is an 'artificial paradise,' as Baudelaire would phrase it; a rare, subtle and potent brand of hashish” (263). Victor Hugo (1802 –1885) once stated “Away with your Art for Art's sake, and give me Art for Humanity's sake” and George Sand (1804 –1876) also said, “Talent imposes duties. Art for art's sake is a vain word. Art for the truth, art for the good, art for the beautiful, that is the religion that I seek” (Guérard 276). Black writers such as Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906 – 2001) and Chinua Achebe (1930 – 2013) were also strongly against Art for Art’s Sake. Senghor was even quoted as saying, “In black Africa ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ does not exist; all art is social” (qtd. in Mouralis and Patricia 69). Chinua Achebe, who publicly denounced the movement as “another piece of deodorized dog shit”, also said:

...art is, and was always, in the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose (including no doubt, the excitation of wonder and pure delight); they made their sculptures in wood and terra cotta, stone and bronze to serve the needs of their times. Their artists lived and moved and had their beings in society and created their works for the good of that society. (qtd. in Kalu 51)

Amiri Baraka, who was one of the most widely published African American writers, once wrote, “The white artist talks about art for art's sake, which does not exist. It is a myth. What he is doing is trying to create an elitist concept that somehow art can only be appreciated by the chosen few” (*Black Art* 25). He continued, “Our art must speak of the need for revolution. It must show what obstructs the revolution. It must be inspirational. It must inspire. It must be educational. It must educate. And just as we said our art must be collective, it must be functional” (Ibid 29). What Senghor, Achebe and Baraka advocated was that, art for the black artist was a way, a channel to express the inner complexities and anxieties, so as to champion the cause of the black society. The complete denouncement of the Art for Art’s sake movement by many Black writers is a testament to the overbearing struggle for recognition and acceptance often displayed by Black literary artists.

The contradictory view or opinion, regarding the function of art, have been in dispute among many artistes, theorists and philosophers for a very long time and it is in this exact premise that the African American literary artists too had their differences, especially during the 1900s. There were some who advocated art as a channel to bring out the plight of the African American race and some who felt that African American art should conform to the general white intelligentsia. W. E. B. Du Bois (1868 – 1963) was a sociologist, historian, civil rights activists, author, writer and an editor. He was one of the most influential African American leaders during the 1900s. He was also the main figure in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); he later became a spokesperson for this organization. DuBois was also the founder of the official magazine of the NAACP known as *The Crisis*. It was one of the most important forums for Black writers to launch their literary career and evidently so, every black writer wanted their



works to be published in it. In 1920 on the April issue of *The Crisis* DuBois wrote an article about how art was a means for the salvation of the blacks, “A renaissance of American Negro literature is due; the material about us in the strange, heart-rending race tangle is rich beyond dream and only we can tell the tale and sing the song from the heart” (qtd. in Bernard iii).

In 1926 *The Crisis* published “Criteria of Negro Art”, one of the most important essays in the history of African American literature, written by W. E. B. Du Bois, in their October edition. Du Bois, originally delivered “Criteria of Negro Art” in a speech at a celebration for Carter Godwin Woodson on being a recipient of the Twelfth Spingarn Medal. The celebration was part of the NAACP's annual conference which was held in June 1926. In his speech Du Bois delivered the following:

...all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propoganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propoganda. But I do care when propoganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent. (DuBois)

Through “Criteria of Negro Art”, Du Bois advocated his personal conviction that the Negro Art should function as propoganda. He felt that Negro Art should address the plight of the African Americans and strive towards the elevation of the conditions of the African Americans. He had also written a book titled *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 which became an immediate success. In *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois focused on the state of the African Americans describing it as the Veil. He explained the Veil in his first chapter by writing, “...the Negro is a sort of a seventh son, born

with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world. It is a peculiar situation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (2)

Du Bois believed that the African American artistes were troubled and misguided by a double consciousness, which hinders them to attain their full artistic potential. He wrote, "The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of other people" (Ibid 3). In one of his article "The Negro in Literature and Art" Du Bois opined that the Negro is indeed a born artist. However, due to the colour of his skin the Negro artist have not been accepted and acknowledged but rather censored because the "racial persecution [is] too bitter" (236). Du Bois wrote, "...everything touching the Negro is banned by magazines and publishers unless it takes the form of caricature or bitter attack, or is so thoroughly innocuous as to have no literary flavor" (237) and so "black artist without special encouragement had little or no chance in a world determined to make him a menial" (ibid 237). Du Bois felt that the African American artiste should focus solely on the endorsement and validation of Negro Art rather than try to gratify the white intelligentsia.

Alain Locke (1885-1954), on the other hand, did not subscribe to what Du Bois advocated. He was "an aesthete genuinely moved by art and culture and he sought to cultivate such aesthetic sensibilities in others" (Calo 88). Locke was also one who "sought to historicize, analyze, and classify African American art and to

position it in relation to both black experience and mainstream American culture” (ibid 91). Locke’s influence on the African American art and the New Negro movement was tremendous, he worked tirelessly “To create an appreciative audience for Negro art in the African American community, he involved himself in adult education initiatives such as the Harlem Art Workshop and lent his voice and influence to community and government based projects directed at the betterment of the black population” (ibid 91). However, Locke’s main disagreement with Du Bois was on the nature of Black Art. Locke believed that the Negro artist needed to produce High Art in order for the African American race to be socially and artistically acknowledged in white America. He believed in, “The possibility of peaceful coexistence between diverse cultural communities” (Harris 283). He himself professed in “The New Negro” that, “...more immediate hope rests in the reevaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective” (15). In his essay titled “Art or Propaganda?” Locke intrepidly wrote:

My chief objection to propaganda...is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it. For it leaves and speaks under the shadow of a dominant majority whom it harangues, cajoles, threatens or supplicates. It is too extroverted for balance or poise or inner dignity and self-respect. Art in the best sense is rooted in self-expression and whether naive or sophisticated is self-contained. In our spiritual growth genius and talent must more and more choose the role of group expression, or even at times the role of free individualistic expression, in a word must choose art and put aside propaganda. (Molesworth 219)

Although DuBois and Locke had their differences regarding the functionality of the African American art, they were both sympathetic towards the identification of African American folk art as high art. Bernard Bell recognizing the efforts of DuBois wrote, “DuBois championed the cause of high art but encouraged black Americans to turn to their usable past for inspiration and originality” (158). James Weldon Johnson (1871 – 1938) was one who advocated the recognition of folk art as high art. Bell wrote:

In an apparent attempt to reconcile the difference between folk art and high art, he argues that Afro-American folksongs represent a vast mine of material to be tapped by some genius of the race. Unlike many of his urbane contemporaries, Johnson affirmed the cultural values of the blues and jazz. By folksongs, he meant sacred and secular music, the spirituals and ragtime. (162)

Meanwhile, Olly Wilson whilst identifying Black music as fine art, employs the definition of fine art as given by D.W. Gotschalk, who in his book *Art and the Social Order* explains his “relational theory”. Gotschalk defined fine art as, “the shaping of a four dimensional object – material and form, expression and function – in the direction of intrinsic perceptual interest” (qtd. in Wilson 5). Therefore, Olly Wilson employing Gotschalk’s definition stated that, “...any object so skillfully produced that it invokes perceptual interest has the quality of fineness of art” (5). Regarding the concept of art, he argued further stating that “the concept of art in the West does not exist” in the West African cultural context. In West Africa “art is not separate and distinct from utilitarian function” hence, “The creative dimension of the product or activity is viewed as an inseparable aspect of that product's nature, and is

impossible to detach from its functional reason for existence” (7). Thus, the acceptance of the functional art concept of Africa is significant in comprehending black music as art. It is precisely on this basis that jazz becomes a beautiful expression of African American art, because the functional role of jazz cannot be separated from its utilitarian function. Hughes’ decision to base his poetic talents to the music jazz is in itself a direct representation of Black art.

The difference in opinion between two of the most important leaders of the African American community during the formation of a new Black identity in America proved instrumental in the development of African American movements such as Black Power Movement and The Black Art Movement (1965 -1976). The Black Art Movement or BAM thrived during the 1960s and early 1970s. It was considered to be “the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept” and “it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America” (Neal 29). The existence of the movement has been credited to the assassination of Malcolm X in February 21 1965. LeRoi Jones aka Amiri Baraka founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in 1965 which is symbolically marked as the beginning or birth of the movement. David L. Smith in his article “Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts of Black Art” denoted that, “Baraka's objective was to inspire black people and to do so from the perspective of fundamentally Afro-American cultural values” (248). Explaining his reasons for establishing the movement Amiri Baraka said:

...we wanted to create an art that was an expression of ourselves, but not an expression of ourselves as slaves, although we had to express ourselves as slaves sometimes so that we could see ourselves as slaves and know what to do about that slavery and how to destroy that

slavery. But we wanted an art that would show us beating the slave master. We wanted an art that would show us triumphing. (24)

The Black Art movement sought to establish Black America by defining the world in black terms and it also champions “Afro-American’s desire for self-determination and nationhood” (Neal 29). The movement was devoted to destroy white ideas and perceptions and promote black aesthetics; it, “...was a radical uprising of young Black artists and thinkers. Overlapping in time with the soul movement...The movement, unlike soul, was completely driven by artists living largely on the outside of the mainstream, artists who set the agendas and specifically meant to create a political and “movement” art” (Banfield 32-33). The Black Arts movement, “...focused on art as a concrete expression of sets of political and cultural principles. Their main hope...was that the literary, musical, and visual works of Black artists should be politically engaged and socially uplifting, that artists’ aesthetic and ethical beliefs should be connected” (ibid 33). Though the movement was short lived it “...helped fundamentally change American attitudes about the relation between popular culture and “high” art” (Smethurst 371). The Black Arts movement promoted all forms of art produced by African Americans. Larry Neal explained what the Black Arts Movement stood to gain in literature, when he wrote, “The Black Arts Movement eschews “protest” literature. It speaks directly to Black people” (30). Larry Neal advocated the establishment of a new “Black aesthetic”, a concept which is not new and has been already brought out by other African American leaders such as W. E. B Du Bois. Explaining what he meant by “Black aesthetics” Neal wrote:

The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the

world. The new aesthetic is mostly predicated on an Ethics which asks the question: whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors'? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors? These are basic questions. (Ibid 30)

Therefore, what the Black Arts Movement sought to establish was a new Black aesthetics in arts and in all its fields. Supporters of the movement believed that this new aesthetics should be gained only by denouncing the white race in totality and the main force driving this should be, "the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world" because, "The new aesthetic is mostly predicated on an Ethics which asks the question: whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors'? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors?" (Ibid 30).

Although Langston Hughes wrote many of his poems much before the Black Arts Movement was initiated, his poetry reflected and represented the African Americans race and culture in many ways that the Black Arts Movement later advocated. He was truly a forerunner for the movement. When the movement started, Hughes also took part in it. He played an important role in the emergence of the Black Arts movement in cities such as New York, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, New Orleans etc... James Edward Smethurst realizing the importance Hughes played on the development of the movement described him as, "a bridge between different generations of radical black artists" (8).

Hughes' talent as a poet was recognized at a very early age, he was named class poet at the tender age of fourteen and had a published work by the age of

nineteen which was “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” in *The Crisis*. He published his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* in 1926 when he was only twenty-four years of age, and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) when he was twenty-five. Hughes was also rather fortunate to find a powerful patron in Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason before he graduated from Lincoln University. Hughes, however, parted ways with his patron after being with her for just three years on charges of dishonesty. Hughes recalled the emotional turmoil he had to undergo and wrote, “I found myself in the midst of a depression. I had just lost my patron” (*Autobiography* 39). This turn of event made him realize his position as an artist and as a person; realizing his current status he wrote, “When I was twenty-eight, my personal crash came. Then I guess I woke up. So, when I was almost thirty, I began to make my living from writing” he continued, “If I were to live and write, at all, since I did not know how to do anything else, I had to make a living from writing itself. So, of necessity, I began to turn poetry into bread” (*ibid* 39). Hughes’ works artistically represented the African American’s identity, culture, social status and promoted African American literary art at the same time.

Being a person of colour, Hughes did not achieve his literary dream effortlessly; he had to go through the harsh realities that befall African American writers during his entire journey as a literary artist. Reflecting on the difficulties he faced as a writer Hughes wrote in one of his autobiographies that, “Editorial offices then never hired Negro writers to read manuscripts or employed them to work on their staffs” (*ibid*. 40). Hughes experienced the insecurities of the African Americans and felt African American artists should focus their attention on African American roots. He concluded his essay with a strong message:



We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (*Essays on Art*, 36)

Hughes also realized that African Americans were significantly having an identity crisis. Poverty, racial segregation, cultural abuse and political discrimination had left the African Americans wanting for a better life, which was denied to them, and middle-class African Americans had started aping the white folks and had started to despise their fellow African Americans. Writing about Black literature and African American identity and culture, Daina Miniotaite wrote:

In the history of the African-American literary tradition there are two opposing cultural theories regarding the problem being confronted. One theory is "integrationist" and argues that the Black man must strive to integrate into the American experience, it chooses priority of American values over the Black ones. The other theory considers integration as impossible because America is not a homogeneous country to integrate into. Thus, they speak in favor of group solidarity, ethnic independence and the "negritude." Historically, the African-American writer has always oscillated between these two aesthetic theories. (7)

Hughes' detestation of the attitude and mindset of the middle-class African Americans is made apparent in one of his essays "These Bad New Negroes: A Critique on Critics" wherein he wrote:

- 1.The best Negroes...still think white people are better than colored people.
- 2.The best Negroes believe that what white people think about Negroes is more important than what Negroes think about themselves.
- 3.Many of the so-called best Negroes are in a sort of *nouveau riche* class
- 4....many of the best Negroes...are not really cultured Negroes after all and, therefore, have little appreciation of any art and no background from which to view either their own or the white man's books or pictures. (37-38)

Hughes, being a writer who aimed to promote African American art form especially in literature, advocated the implementation of folk art to be projected as high or popular art. Black art according to Hughes is represented primarily by the African American folk culture.

Hughes' contemporaries such as Claude McKay (1889 – 1948), Countee Allen (1903 -1946) and Sterling Brown (1901 – 1989) all had different concepts and manners of interpreting African American art through their poems. McKay was born in Jamaica and he moved to America in 1912; he rendered, "...beautiful images of nature and vibrant urban scenes" but he was primarily, "a poet of social engagement. He was a dedicated political activist" (Winz and Finkelman 85). After the publication of his famous poetry "If we must die" he was popularly known in New York as a

“militant black poet” (Tagirova-Daley 59). Hughes who had a very high respect for McKay, wrote in one of his essays, “I have always believed Claude McKay to be the greatest living Negro writer in creative literature today” (*Essays on Art*, 46).

Countee Allen never wanted to be identified as a Negro poet, he was once quoted as saying, “If I am going to be a poet at all, I am going to be POET and not NEGRO POET” (qtd. in Vaguero 50). He “epitomized Harlem’s educated and polished upper middle class” (Tagirova-Daley 59). Cullen was also not very approving of Hughes’ jazz poems. In his 1926 review of Hughes’ first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* he wrote, “I wonder if jazz poems really belong to the dignified company, that select and austere circle of high literary expression which we call poetry” (qtd. in Tracy 105). Arnold Rampersad commenting on the difference between Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen wrote:

As a poet Hughes believed in inspiration and improvisation; Cullen practiced sonnets and villanelles, honed his rhymes, and searched mightily for the exact word. Frowning on free verse and the wild men Whitman and Sandburg, he instead adored John Keats and A.E. Housman. And although he wrote touchingly of race, Cullen found no particular beauty in the black masses, as Hughes did; Africa more or less embarrassed him. (Vol I, 63)

Sterling Brown was mentored by Alain Locke and was an active folklore researcher. He was different from his contemporaries due to the fact that he was a scholar who pursued his doctoral degree from Harvard and eventually became a professor in Howard University. He found “beauty and grandeur in ordinary people” (Winz and Finkelman 86). Brown “refused to subscribe to the notion that African

American art should serve as propaganda to further the struggle for civil rights” he also did not “follow the trend in the wider American arts community, which moved towards a modernism that explored form as much as content and had a new interest in primitive cultures” (Beecher 10). McKay and Cullen were different in their approach towards the black aesthetics while Brown was closer to Hughes stylistically, as he too used the dialect of the common black people in his poetry. Hughes wanted most to represent his people through his art. Unlike Dubois who felt art should be a propaganda Hughes felt the needed to represent folk art through his work; in his autobiography *I Wonder as I Wander* he explained his amazement in finding out how art has been utilized by some writers to forward their personal agendas, “To me as a writer, it was especially interesting to observe how art of all sorts—writing, painting, the theatre—was being utilized as a weapon against the evils of the past” (185). The identification of art as propaganda was never the motive of Hughes. Commenting on his writing style and purpose Hughes wrote:

I do not write chiefly because I’m interested in forms, —in making a sonnet or a rondeau. I write because I want to say what I have to say. And I choose the form which seems to me best to express my thoughts. I fail to see why I should be expected to copy someone else’s modes of expression when it amuses me to attempt to create forms of my own...I am not interested in doing tricks with rhymes. I am interested in reproducing the human soul, if I can. (*Essays on Art*, 40)

There were several literary movements that swept America before the emergence of Langston Hughes and the New Negro poets of the Harlem Renaissance period. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the movement known as Realism gained

prominence; it “was an approach adopted by writers who sought to portray in a straightforward way recognizable, representative characters, situations, and settings. Social Realists were concerned with the behaviors of characters interacting within a closely observed society, while psychological Realists were primarily interested in describing the interior experience of a particular individual” (Anderson 8). The movement highlighted the novelist more than it did other forms of literature. The Realism movement was a reaction against the supernatural and the fantastical character of romanticism and sentimentalism. Major poets of this movement included Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886) and Edgar Lee Masters (1868 – 1950). The most celebrated writers of this movement were Henry James (1843 – 1916) and Samuel Clemens (1835 – 1910) who wrote under his pen name Mark Twain. Langston Hughes was also mildly influenced by the movement; Anita Haya Patterson in her article “Jazz, Realism, and the Modernist Lyric” wrote, “Hughes has aligned himself with other avant-garde artists in refusing to satisfy the raging market demand for sensationalist fiction that exacerbated a mass audience’s tendency toward escapism. Even as his poem resists such a flight from reality, however, Hughes also insists on his freedom as an artist: the freedom, that is, to work continually at formal experimentation and to transcend the all-determining, muddy historical contingencies that fatally distort perception” (659). The movement, therefore, had little impact towards Hughes’ jazz poetry as expressions of Black art as he strived to portray African American art as conceived by him in an artistic sense.

Another important movement was Naturalism which was basically the outgrowth of Realism. The movement found expression mostly in novel. Unlike Realism, “Naturalism describes a type of literature that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings” (Campbell

“*Naturalism*”). Some of the most influential figures of this movement were John Steinbeck (1902-1968), Saul Bellow (1915 – 2005), William Faulkner (1897 -1962) and Ernest Hemingway (1899 – 1961). Although Hughes was not a Naturalist himself, he represented the lower folk of the African American community who were anything but, ““natural” types, uncorrupted by the dehumanizing and falsifying forces of industrial capitalism. They may not be primitives per se, but they are still a race apart; their differences from the "civilized" Westerner remain essential” (Chinitz 67). Hughes’ naturalistic representation of the lives of the African Americans became the core component of his jazz poetry which in turn was a direct expression of Black Art.

Imagism was another movement which, “...emphasized form over everything else. It required the poet to remove herself or himself from the poetry and to deliver it as objectively as possible. It also believed that the poetry should be sparse, with no extra flourishes or ornamentation. Adjectives and descriptive were to be avoided. No abstractions were to be used. Words had to be precise and accurate in their meanings. They defined poetry as the presentation of a visual situation in the fewest possible concrete words” (Kaur 65). Ezra Pound (1885 -1972) was the pioneer of the movement and other famous poets of the movement were T.E. Hulme (1883 -1917) and Hilda Doolittle (1886 -1961). Langston Hughes’ portrayal of the Negro life and experience in his jazz poems followed the techniques of the imagists. Hughes employed simple language to describe his subjects; his poem “Young Prostitute” gave a vivid image of a prostitute while his diction remained reasonably simple.

In the 1920s, American poetry gained new grounds with the emergence of Modernist poets like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). Although both Pound and Eliot left America for England, they influenced many distinguished poets in America. The Modernist rejected the Victorian diction and traditional poetic form and

meter and viewed “the poetry of Robinson and Frost as merely continuing an outworn tradition of verse” (Beach 23). The responsibility that the modernist poets had towards society “...was to re-harmonise minds and bodies or means and ends, and reawaken in its readers a sense of what freedom and wholeness would feel like”, and for this purpose the modernist poets, “...observed their society neutrally and were moved to write poetry as a response” (Howarth 11 - 12). In the 1930s, William Carlos Williams (1883 – 1963) adopted a new approach to poetry called Objectivism where the “poetry itself was viewed as an object and its formal structure became as important as the images it presented” (Anderson 9).

Though affected by the different literary movements of his time, Hughes chose to craft his own literary style. Noticing the deliberate refusal of Langston Hughes to adopt current literary trends, Yusef Komunyakaa commented, “...as the other voices grew silent during the Great Depression of 1929 - with modernism and imagism having taken a firm hold and reshaped the tongue and heart of American poetry - the 1930s found a prolific Hughes” (1140). Hughes wrote most of his poems in free verse; his decision to not adhere to form and meter is perhaps one of the few evidences of the influence of the modernist movement on him. Hughes was unique because he employed jazz’s syncopated rhythm and improvisational techniques, and many other literary techniques such as cadence, simile, metaphor, rime, imagery, anaphora and symbolism in his poetry to represent the African American life and experiences. Hughes also incorporated the African American common man’s vernacular in his lyrics to capture the true soul and identity of his race. John Edgar Tidwell wrote:

Hughes artfully deploys language that testifies to the very humanity of a people who were often denied their harmonious nature by being reduced to subjects of caricature and stereotype. Instead of propagandizing and critiquing racial misrepresentation, he moves readers to a deeper and more profound engagement with the meaning of African American life. (Thompson 61)

Having been forcibly deprived of any form of justice, tradition, identity and basic human rights, music was the only medium accessible through which African Americans could establish their unique and distinctive identity and culture. Hughes knew that by tapping in to the music of the African Americans, he could conceptualize a new identity formation; and so, “Forty years before the Black Arts movement Hughes was writing poems that examined the tragic implications of racial separatist logic” (Patterson 668). Hughes understood the importance of art as a medium to instill solidarity among African Americans. He also strongly felt that the African American artists needed to expose themselves as artist equally competent to the whites in producing high art. Hughes’ true purpose of writing was, “To create a Negro culture in America—a real, solid, sane, racial something growing out of the folk life, not copied from another, even though surrounding, race” (qtd. in Thompson 67). David Chinitz commenting on the role played by Hughes towards promoting African American art wrote, “He championed this cause tirelessly and, through artistic skill and energy, contributed much to its success. Few cultural figures can be said to have promoted the legitimacy and viability of an African American “racial” art as influentially” (ibid 67).



Hughes' career as a poet underwent different stages and can be briefly summed up into three periods. The first period extends from 1921 when he first published his poetry "The Negro Speaks of River" in *The Crisis*, up to the publication of his third book of poetry *The Dream Keeper* in 1932 which was intended solely for the young readers. During this first period Hughes' poems were "formally rooted in the secular and sacred musical forms of the blues and gospel music, as well as in black rhetoric and representing as speaking subjects such "low-life" characters as prostitutes, gamblers, murderers, drunks, and suicides" (Smethurst, *The New Red* 94). Hughes' jazz poetry was a representation of the African American race; a race that has been so thoroughly butchered and rebuked; a race that has been uprooted from its natural environment and planted into a foreign land; a race that had to endure over two hundred years of slavery; a race so intensely hated and immensely subjugated. Hughes' jazz poetry are deliberate and intentional; written with unsympathetic verve to acknowledge a culture that is created within the country. Writing on the importance of music as a catalyst to form culture Alyssa Santos wrote, "...music can also function to unify strangers, form subcultures, and become a strong force of social solidarity" (4).

This period marked the initial stages of his endeavour to represent the African American art or Black art through an overwhelming portrayal of the life and experiences of the African Americans. Poems such as "The Negro Speaks of River", "Aunt Sue's Stories", "Negro", "Question [1]", "The South", "Mother to Son", "Shadows", "Migration", "The White Ones", "Lament for Dark Peoples", "A Song to a Negro Wash-Woman", "Porter", "Brass Spittoons", "Elevator Boy", "Star Seeker", "Minstrel Man", and "Negro Servant" highlighted the life and struggles of the African Americans. These poems are a call to remember the dark past of slavery,

racial discrimination, racial segregation and institutionalized racism which haunted and tormented the lives of each and every African Americans. They also provoked the inner - dormant and subdued - spirit of the entire Black race.

Hughes' other poems during this period such as, "My People", "Fascination", "Poetry [4] To the Black Beloved", "Pale Lady", "Ruby Brown", "In the Mist of the Moon" and "Red Silk Stockings" celebrated the beauty of the African Americans as opposed to the idea of beauty that was defined and dictated by the white masters. African Americans were enslaved not only physically, but mentally and psychologically as well. This mental and psychological enslavement is clearly evident in the idea of beauty. Observing the politics of beauty and its impact on power dynamics, Tracey Owens Patton in one of her articles stated, "Beauty is subject to the hegemonic standards of the ruling class" (25). Margaret L. Hunter also observed that during slavery, "beauty operates as a tool of white supremacy and a tool of patriarchy" (178). In order to rationalize slavery, "slaveholding interests espoused a white supremacist ideology which held that persons of African descent were innately inferior to whites. Whiteness became identified with all that is civilized, virtuous, and beautiful; blackness, in opposition, with all that is lowly, sinful, and ugly" (Hill 77). The colour dynamics was exploited especially during slavery where, "Black women who were lighter-skinned and had features that were associated with mixed progeny ... tended to be house slaves and those Black women with darker-skin hues, kinky hair, and broader facial features tended to be field slaves" (Patton 26). African American women were projected negatively through various archetypes such as the oversexed jezebel, the tragic mulatto and the mammy figure. Hughes' deliberations on beauty and the colour of his people became a very important step towards motivating the African Americans to identify and accept themselves as beautiful. Hughes,

through his poetry, sowed the seed for self-acceptance which was lacking among the African Americans. Hughes utilized art as a tool to express issues concerning racial identity and also as a form of resistance.

Hughes also wrote poetry to display the resistance of the white power structure. Poems such as “Militant”, “Black Seed”, “Flight”, “Dreamer”, “War”, “Stars”, “Lonesome Place”, “America” and “I, Too” displays a certain kind of longing and hope through the anguish and the desire to one day overcome. In “Militant” Hughes wrote:

You proffer me poor pay,  
 For honest dreams  
 Your spit is in my face,  
 And so my fist is clenched  
 Today -  
 To strike your face. (*The Collected* 131)

The readiness of the Negro slave to strike the white master is brought out in plain English, highlighting the hidden sentiment of all African Americans. In “Black Seed” Hughes’ words are extremely aggressive describing how America is but “another’s garden” and that the “white-faced gardeners” should be resisted; Hughes urged his fellow African Americans to be brave and to “Tell them to leave you alone!” (ibid 130). The poetry “War” is yet another fine example where the spirit of resistance and the acknowledgement of the ongoing racial tension is beautifully interwoven. Hughes wrote:

The face of war is my face,  
 The face of war is your face.

What color

Is the face

Of war?

Brown, black, white –

Your face and my face. (Ibid 559).

Hughes advocated the realization of power that lies in the hands of the African Americans by choosing the theme of war. Hughes issued a statement through his poetry, forcing his people to realize that the mere color of their skin necessitates war between all minorities and the dominant white culture. Hughes often used “dreams” as an allusion to signify the ultimate desire of freedom of his race, and this poetry reaffirms the potential of the African American to break his own chain that enslaved him. In “Dreamer” the bold resistance of the oppressed towards the oppressor is again beautifully written:

Do you understand my dreams?

Sometimes you say you do

And sometimes you say you don't.

Either way

It doesn't matter.

I continue to dream. (Ibid 111)

The readiness to accept the consequences of deliberately neglecting the powers of the white masters, and the ever-present desire to strive towards the “dream” exemplifies the feeling of resistance which was predominantly present within the conscience of the African Americans. Perhaps the most striking evidence of Hughes’ attempt to implant the feeling of resistance against the white hegemony is seen in “I, too”. The

poetry describes hope in the midst of misery, hope that motivates, and hope that resist. The last line of the poetry “I, too, am America” resonates with every African American who have had hopes of one day defying the odds and overturning the table into their favour. During the first period of his poetic career, Hughes consistently wrote his poetry to serve as a means for social and cultural movement for the African Americans, and also as a step towards identifying an identity which resists the white hegemony.

The second period of Hughes’ journey as a poet started with a tour to Soviet Union in 1932 and lasted till 1953 when Hughes was summoned before the “Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations (aka McCarthy Committee)” led by Senator Joseph McCarthy on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March wherein Hughes denied his involvement with the communist party. In 1932 Hughes was selected to be a part of a team consisting of twenty-two African Americans “invited to take part in a film in the Soviet Union about U.S race relations” (*The Collected* 10) in June of 1932. However, the project in Moscow was abandoned but Hughes decided to stay back. He travelled to Turkmenistan, China and Japan until he finally returned to America in August 1933. During this period, Hughes ventured towards different genres of literature, writing fiction, drama, reportage and songs apart from poetry. It was also during this period when he was engaged with the CPUSA (Communist Party of the United States of America), who published most of Hughes’ revolutionary poems in their journals and press. James Edward Smethurst wrote, “Hughes's participation in the Left increased astronomically during the 1930s and had a marked impact on the form and content ...of Hughes's poetry” (*The New Red* 94). Smethurst continued to write that Hughes’ poetry during this period, because of his affiliation and support of the Communist, was divided into three categories:

"uplift" and comic poems aimed largely at an African-American audience that was outside the cultural orbit of the CPUSA, and outside the groups of black intellectuals associated with relatively elite institutions and journals such as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* in such urban centers as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington; "literary" poems (as exemplified by those in the privately printed collection *Dear Lovely Death*, which if not "high" modernist were aimed at an audience that was consciously "literary" and "modern"); and Hughes's "revolutionary" or militant poems aimed at an audience defined largely by the cultural institutions of the CPUSA and the Comintern. (Ibid 95)

Whether Hughes joined the communist party or became a communist was unclear. But in 1931 *New Masses* magazine, the official organ of the John Reed Club, became the leading outlet for Hughes' poetry. During this period, Hughes' poems focused more towards the expression of political and cultural principles of the African Americans. The 1931 incident at Scottsboro and the trial that ensued affected Hughes immensely and it became the main catalyst for his turn to the left. Hughes published *Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play in Verse* in 1932 where he called out the injustice that was being served against African Americans. Hughes stood out for the social discrimination and the unfair ruling of the court towards the eight African American boys by dedicating a poetry "Scottsboro". In the poetry Hughes wrote:

8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL.

WORLD, TURN PALE!

8 black boys and one white lie.

Is it much to die?  
 Is it much to die when immortal feet  
 March with you down Time's street,  
 When beyond steel bars sound the deathless drums  
 Like a mighty heart-beat as They come? (*The Collected* 182)

The poetry compares the African Americans to Jesus Christ, John Brown, Moses, Jeanne d'Arc, Dessalines, Nat Turner, Lenin, Gandhi, Sadino and Evangelista all of whom fought against the existing powers of their time and eventually achieved victory over their adversaries. The comparison served as an encouragement for the African American community to not lose heart in their struggles and fight for social equality and justice. The feeling of anti-establishment is thus advocated, and the need to unite for the cause is also clearly infused within the poetry.

Another poem of Hughes which depicted the conditions of the African Americans was "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria". Hughes used sarcasm and ridiculed a newly constructed hotel against the background of poverty, racial abuses and social injustice that was served to the African American community. The enormous financial and social gap that existed between the white Americans and the African Americans was brutally brought out by Hughes in this poetry;

Have luncheon there this afternoon, all you jobless.  
 Why not?  
 Dine with some of the men and women who got rich off of  
 your labor, who clip coupons with clean white fingers  
 because your hands dug coal, drilled stone, sewed garments,  
 poured steel to let other people draw dividends

and live easy.

...

Ankle on down to 49th Street at Park Avenue. Get up  
off that subway bench tonight with the evening POST  
for cover! Come on out o' that flop-house! Stop shivering  
your guts out all day on street corners under the EL  
Jesus, ain't you tired yet? (Ibid 144-146)

The NAACP was unwilling to take actions regarding the Scottsboro trial, while the International Labour Party “threw its energies into appealing the case and mobilizing public support for the defendants” (Rampersad, *Vol I* 216). Hughes favored the communist out of total love for his people and Hughes’ frustration towards the NAACP was apparent in his poetrys such as “To Certain Negro Leaders”, “Tired”, “Union”, “House in the World” and “Prayer [2]”.

Some of Hughes’ poetrys such as “Good Morning Revolution”, “Goodbye Christ”, “One more “S” in the USA”, “Ballads of Lenin”, and “Let America be America again” were under close scrutiny by the McCarthy Committee on grounds of Hughes becoming a communist and supporting their cause. In the poetry “Good Morning Revolution” Hughes wrote down the following lines:

On that day when no one will be hungry, cold, oppressed,  
Anywhere in the world again.

That's our job!

I been starvin' too long,

Ain't you?

Let's go, Revolution! (*The Collected* 163)



The lines are but a clear indication of the frustration of Hughes towards the discrimination and the racial bifurcation leading to constant and endless sufferings endured by the African American race. The lines of the politically charged poetry “One more “S” in the USA” run in a similar fashion:

When the land belongs to the farmers  
And the factories to the working men -  
The U.S.A. when we take control  
Will be the U.S.S.A. then.  
...  
But we can't win by just talking.  
So let us take things in our hand.  
...  
But we can't join hands together  
So long as whites are lynching black,  
So black and white in one union fight  
And get on the right track. (Ibid 176 -177)

Hughes addressed the perennial threats faced by minorities within America. He also pointed out that the nation belongs to each and every ‘dreamers’ and not just the conniving kings and tyrants. Hughes not only appeals to the African American community through this poetry, but also to minority groups within the state. The poetry addresses the racial tensions present within American and calls on Americans who wish to get past this idiosyncrasy to join hands and come together.

In the poetry “Let America be America again” Hughes once again wrote in defense of his people the “Negro bearing slavery's scars”, “the Negro, Servant to yon

all” and the Negro “torn from Black Africa’s strand...To build a “homeland of the free”” (ibid 190). Although the allegations made from the contents of these poems were to pin Hughes as a communist, Hughes’ main intent was to bring America to the realization of the evils present within the country and the horrific treatment of his people and other minorities which have led to a growing discontent among many Americans. Hughes denied all links to the communist party when he testified, “I have never been a believer in communism or a Communist party member” (U.S. Cong. House). Although Hughes’ poetry seemed to become more political and in support of the left, he, however, never strayed from his prime objective of expressing the Black American experience.

Hughes’ radical poems of this period “The Colored Soldier”, “The Black Clown” and “The Big Timer” were written in a very unique style and it was particularly very uncommon for its time. The structure of the poetry contained two columns separated by a margin in the middle. The left column contained the mood and the right column contained the poetry. The mood describes the accompanying music as well as the mood of the narrator. This unique style demonstrates the lyrical genius of Hughes. The connection between the music and the poetry is maintained by the mood. Thus, Hughes simultaneously represented two African American art forms, amalgamating both jazz and poetry within the written form of a poetry. Hughes did not just incorporate jazz in the lyrical verses; he gave jazz a unique identity and character in his poetry.

During the third period of his literary career, between 1953 to 1967, Hughes kept his focus back to Harlem and to his people, and wrote several poems which not only cemented his position as the poet laureate of the African Americans but also one

of the most prolific and talented poet of American history. After the senate hearing Hughes “steered almost completely clear of radical politics or international affairs” (Rampersad, *Vol II* 230) and “took increasing comfort in his ties to Africa” (ibid 237). In spite of already being an established writer, Hughes still “found it hard to avoid thinking that, as a black artist, he was still being treated unfairly” (ibid 246). The revolutionary spirit acquired during the second period of his poetic career was overshadowed by his innate love for his people and his unrelenting desire to establish a new identity and culture for the African Americans. Hughes’ poetry more than before became a distinct manifestation of jazz. In a short description written for his new book of poetry *Montage of a Dream Deferred (1951)* Hughes penned down the following lines:

In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it has progressed-jazz, ragtime, swing, blues, boogie-woogie, and be-bop-this poetry on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and distortions of the music of a community in transition. (*The Collected* 387)

Hughes decided to focus more on contemporary Harlem because that was where the Negro community was beginning to take new shape and form. It was the new Negro intellectuals, who had amalgamated in Harlem, who needed proper orientation on how to develop the new Negro. Günter H. Lenz observed that Hughes’ poetry during this period, “are literary approaches to this "new" Harlem that, to him, does not only house

"a beaten people" (Arthur P. Davis) but also is home to a rich community and culture" (272). Lenz continued, "It also represents black music itself as a *political* act of cultural liberation from white domination and of affirmation of a viable black urban ghetto culture and public sphere" (274).

Hughes' poems written during this period laid more emphasis on jazz so as to directly represent the culture of the African Americans. Although jazz was identified by many in Harlem as lively dance music, the musicians themselves didn't necessarily share the popular sentiment. One of the main reasons jazz is highly respected as a musical form by musicians is the unpredictability of the music and the absence of structured form. The experience of the African American race in America is similar in many ways to jazz. Jazz musicians improvised as they played, giving them liberty during performances. Jazz allowed musicians to explore their artistic creativity. During 1953 to 1967, Hughes wrote many poems which were direct representation of the African American culture while promoting African American art or Black Art. "Dream Boogie", "Parade", "Children's Rhymes", "Neon Signs", "Deferred", "Mystery", "Night Funeral in Harlem" and many other poems were written in a format that closely resembled the "conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms" of jazz music. The blending of Hughes' technique and his underlying theme is best represented in "Children's Rhymes":

*What's written down*

*for white folks*

*ain't for us a-tall:*

*"Liberty And Justice-*

*Huh-ForAll."*

*Oop-pop-a-da*

*Skeel Daddle-de-do!*

*Be-bop!*

*Salt' peanuts!*

*De-dop! (The Collected 390)*

In 1961, Hughes wrote *Ask Your Mama 12 Moods for Jazz* which was a direct reaction to the Newport Jazz Festival Riot of 1960. The book contained twelve poems with a liner notes. In an introduction to the 2009 reissued version of *Ask Your Mama*, Arnold Rampersad wrote that Hughes “set out to create an unusual fusion of words and music – words crammed with sometimes arcane allusions to black culture, words that challenged standard form of syntax” (*Introduction ix*). Günter H. Lenz praised the technical genius of Hughes in creating a complex yet simple dynamics of poetry which incorporates music in order to highlight the struggles of the African Americans. Lenz wrote, “Hughes creates a new kind of call-and-response pattern, or dynamic, between poetry and music that recognizes them as separate, independent voices but stages their interplay as one of common sounds as well as of jarring contrasts, discontinuities, and silences” (279), Lenz continued that *Ask Your Mama*, “relocates the African American community in the history of worldwide colonialism and the global liberation struggles in a world after colonialism, a struggle whose success has always been “deferred,”” (ibid 279). *Ask Your Mama* sardonically addresses the oppression, poverty, sufferings, diminishing hopes and aspirations of the American dream of the African Americans in the United States.

Hughes throughout his career as a poet have always stood for what he is foremost passionate and sensitive about, his love for his people and his self-imposed

responsibility to represent them in ways which could bring out their plight the best. His poems are undoubtedly means of cultural and social movement towards the identification and emancipation of the African Americans and their art. As an expression of Black art, Hughes' jazz poetry delved into many themes as already examined within the Chapter.

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## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

*We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and  
we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.*

Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes as a poet was one of the more versatile and prolific literary artist to have graced the literary world with his authentic style and compelling lyricism. He created a new form of putting words to poetry based on jazz, with an undying zeal and enthusiasm to represent his people. The blues and jazz were not only music developed and created by the African Americans, it epitomizes their culture symbolizing their pain, sufferings, struggles, hardships and also their happiness, contentment and pleasure. Hughes, as the innovator and forerunner of jazz poetry, utilizes the form as a means to subvert the existing white hegemony, to carve a space for African American literary art and also to represent the African American folk culture. Hughes' jazz poetry was also useful medium to promote African American literary art and culture; he valiantly used his poetry to resist the dominant white culture and fought for rights and equality which were denied to his people. Hughes' jazz poetry gave voice to the African Americans; he rallied them up, championed their cause and motivated their spirit to resist the existing powers and evils that were threatening their freedom. Hughes dedicated his entire life to literature, writing to eradicate racism and segregation while fighting for justice for his people.

Hughes had an enormous body of work in almost every genre of literature, but he is most remembered for his jazz poetry. During his lifetime (1902 -1967) he wrote ten books of poetry and in all these books Hughes never strayed from his prime objective i.e., the representation of the African American race, in other words the

voicing of Black America. The jazz aesthetics first displayed in his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* (1926) is consistently carried on to his last book *The Panther and the Lash* (1967) which was published posthumously after his death. Kevin Young emphatically wrote that Hughes' poems "...recognize ecstasy not as a rarified state but a newborn freedom jazz helped him capture on the page" (xv). Jazz represented the African American race to Hughes; it was not just another form of music. Jazz was the manifestation of all the inner longings and desires encapsulated within the psyche and soul of the African Americans. So, when Hughes employed jazz as an inspiration, form and foundation for his poetry, it became a direct representation of his people through literary art form.

This thesis predominantly concentrates upon establishing the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as a necessary instrument and tool for the expression of African American cultural identity, and the emancipation and identification of Black Art. The thesis makes use of the literary theories of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams and ethnomusicologists Alan P. Merriam and Richard Middleton as frameworks for the study. The jazz poetry of Langston Hughes are thus explored to situate Hughes' position as one of the main African American intellectuals of the 1900s within the ambit of the African American cultural identity formation. This thesis also examines the cultural history of jazz tracing its foundation, development, challenges and controversies that surrounded its existence in mainstream American culture and the impact and reception of jazz, in America.

The versatility of Langston Hughes cannot be sometimes understood just by reading one genre of his literary works. On a close reading of Hughes' plays, Jonathan Scott realized that, "Hughes introduces a structure of feeling that would become

dominant in the 1960s through the efforts of the creative artists and intellectuals of the Black Arts movement: a heightened awareness of the assault on the African American family that is one of the hallmarks of white racial oppression” (118). Raymond Williams’ theory of ‘Structures of feelings’ is thus employed to comprehend the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes better as ‘meaning and values’ constructed within an oppressed society or culture which needs representation. The cultural theory of Stuart Hall is also used to identify the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as ‘representation’ through which meaning is ‘produced and exchanged’. Michel Foucault expanded the point laid down by Hall by describing representation not merely as a production of ‘meaning’, but as production of ‘knowledge’ through the use of ‘discourses’. The theory of ethnomusicologist Alan P. Merriam is also touched upon to reinforce the argument proposed regarding the formation of the African American cultural identity and also to gain new perspectives and deeper insights to understand the role played by music in the African American culture formation. These different theories are thus utilized to support the argument presented, crediting the role of Hughes’ jazz poetry towards the establishment of a New Negro and the representation of Black Art.

The realization and acceptance of the cultural identity of a minority group depends largely on the constructs of the dominant culture. ‘Cultural Hegemony’ as proposed by Gramsci is, “a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (Bates 352). This theory of cultural hegemony can be seen manifested clearly in the lives of the African Americans, especially towards the concept of beauty and self-assessment. As a result of constant domination and elaborate exertion of power by the white masters, the subdued African Americans were physically in bondage and psychologically conditioned. The African Americans no longer possessed the ability to determine their

own perception, hence their concept of beauty and power, for example, were directly aligned with the white masters. This horrific inability to determine one's own logic and reasoning was the direct result of cultural hegemony; in fact, almost every facet of the African American life was dominated by this overpowering phenomenon. The African Americans, therefore, never accounted themselves as beautiful as blackness was determined by the dominant power as unattractive. The Blackface character in the Minstrel Shows during the later 1800s and early 1900s is an example of the deflation of blackness associated with the African American race; the African Americans themselves performing as the blackface character clearly demonstrated the accepted cultural hegemony.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the blind acceptance of the terms dictated by the dominant culture in America was rejected by certain intellectuals of the African American community; there were a few figures that stood prominent in this respect. Frederick Douglass (c.1818 – 1895), Marcus Garvey (1887 – 1940), Booker T Washington (1856 – 1915), W.E.B DuBois and Alain Locke were some of the first intellectuals among the African American community who strived to redefine the existing demeaning definition of the African American in America. The main objective of these intellectuals was to create a New Negro, one who was at par with the white counterpart; a Negro that Negroes could proudly identify themselves with. Although the approaches, methods and mechanisms these intellectuals applied were different, they were all striving towards the emancipation of the African American race socially, politically and artistically. It is into this complex conundrum of identity formation that this thesis situates Langston Hughes as one who voiced the underprivileged class against the superstructure of the dominant white race, using jazz poetry as a tool to do so.



In his seminal essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” Hughes addressed the burning issue of African American writers who desired to become not a ‘Negro poet’ but a ‘white poet’. Hughes wrote:

But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America — this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible. (*Essays on Art* 32)

Hughes’ love for his people was unprecedented. He resisted the culture that dominated his race and refused to admit the ‘presumed’ supremacy of the white race. The dynamics of resistance inherently present within the jazz poetrys of Langston Hughes is an integral part of this present study. Even at a tender age in high school Hughes’ love for his people was apparent; in his autobiography *The Big Sea* Hughes remembering his love for the Negroes, wrote:

People just up from the South used to come in for ice cream and sodas and watermelon. And I never tired of hearing them talk, listening to the thunderclaps of their laughter, to their troubles, to their discussions of the war and the men who had gone to Europe from the Jim Crow South, their complaints over the high rent and the long overtime hours that brought what seemed like big checks, until the weekly bills were paid. They seemed to me like the gayest and the bravest people possible — these Negroes from the Southern ghettos — facing tremendous odds, working and laughing and trying to get somewhere in the world. (54-55)

In the same autobiography Hughes remembered how he proudly displayed his love for his people, when he was a mess boy on a ship, in order to debunk a myth that stereotyped the African American race as scared and irrational. Hughes wrote, “They had all seen Negroes in the motion pictures portrayed so often as superstitious and frightened, that I guess that was another reason for my going. I wanted to prove to them Negroes are no more afraid of ghosts than other people” (ibid 96). Hughes frowned upon the division that existed among African Americans themselves, he remarked, “To me it did not seem good, for the “better class” Washington colored People, as they called themselves, drew rigid class and color lines within the race against Negroes who worked with their hands, or who were dark in complexion and had no degrees from colleges” (ibid 206). Hughes addressed this same issue in an essay titled “These Bad New Negroes: A Critique on Critics” which he wrote on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1927. He wrote:

Yet I understand these “best” colored folks when they say that little has been written about them. I am sorry and I wish someone would put them into a nice story or a nice novel. But I fear for them if ever a really powerful work is done about their lives. Such a story would show not only their excellencies but their pseudo-culture as well, their slavish devotion to Nordic standards, their snobbishness, their detachment from the Negro masses, and their vast sense of importance to themselves. (*Essays on Art* 38)

Hughes’ love for his people wasn’t just a feeling or a sentiment. He wanted to bring the African Americans together. Hughes used his poetry as a tool to bridge the gap that existed among the African American community. Hughes assumed the role

of a mother in order to convey a message to his people in two of his poems “Mother to Son” and “The Negro Mother”. In “Mother to Son” Hughes issued a warning to his people in order to educate them of the many difficulties life will offer.

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards torn up (*The Dream* 64)

In “The Negro Mother” Hughes reminded his people of the struggles of the past and of Africa - the motherland. Speaking to his own race as the Negro mother, Hughes stressed upon the sufferings brought to the African American race through slavery and the miserable conditions which their ancestors had to go through.

I am the child they stole from the sand  
Three hundred years ago in Africa's land.  
I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea  
Carrying in my body the seed of the free.  
I am the woman who worked in the field  
Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.  
I am the one who laborcd as a slave.  
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave-  
Children sold away from me, husband sold, too.  
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.  
.....  
Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers

Impel you forever up the great stairs  
For I will be with you till no white brother  
Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother. (*Selected* 288)

The image of the Negro mother is depicted as strong and brave in “The Negro Mother” and the poetry also ends in a positive note. The poetry is a fine display of the actual characters of African American mothers who are always very possessive and mindful of their children. Hughes depiction of the Negro mother certainly solidifies the role of the mother in the African American community.

Hughes poetic development during the 1930s displayed a growing interest in the communist ideology and the idea of a revolution. During this period Hughes appealed not only to the African American public but to all members of the working class. His revolutionary ideals and spirit are imprinted in his poetry “Song of the Revolution”:

Breaking the bonds of the darker races,  
Breaking the chains that have held for years,  
Breaking the barriers dividing the people,  
Smashing the gods of terror and tears,  
Cutting, O flame of the Revolution,  
Fear from the world like a surgeon's knife,  
So that the children of all creation  
Waken, at last, to the joy; of life. (*The Collected* 170)

Hughes’ other poetry “Revolution” is also another fine example of his attempt to unite the underprivileged class of the society who have been suffering under the

cruel dominance of the ruling class. The words of the poetry are direct and leave nothing to the imagination:

Great mob that knows no fear-  
Come here!  
And raise your hand  
Against this man  
Of iron and steel and gold  
Who's bought and sold  
You – (ibid 175)

In another poetry titled “Union” Hughes acknowledged that the sufferings of the black man, resonated with many other underprivileged classes the world over. The root of their sufferings was due to poverty, hence Hughes wanted all poverty stricken persons, irrespective of creed or colour to come together and fight against the power that dominates them. Hughes wrote:

Not me alone-  
I know now-  
But all the whole oppressed  
Poor world,  
White and black,  
Must put their hands with mine  
To shake the pillars of those temples  
Wherein the false gods dwell  
And worn-out altars stand  
Too well defended,

And the rule of greed's upheld-  
That must be ended. (ibid 138)

All these poems clearly demonstrated Hughes' extreme dislike and discontentment for the government or the dominant white power which did not favor the minority groups in America. Hughes' desire for a united America is depicted in his poetry "Let America be America Again":

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. (ibid 191)

One of the most important features of Hughes' jazz poetry is the concept of resistance displayed within his lyrics. Hughes' mode of resistance can be attributed to his main inspiration - jazz. The music jazz itself can be subsumed as an agent of resistance on many levels. Right from its origin the production of the music relied heavily on the instruments permitted to slaves. The earliest instruments that the slaves used to produce music were "washboards, washtubs, jugs, tin whistles, boxes beaten with sticks or bones and a drum made by stretching skin over a flour-barrel" (Roth 305). African slaves were not allowed to even sing while working in the fields as the white masters believed that singing would rile them up and would allow them to communicate secretly without the master's knowledge. In an interview with Martin

Smith for the *Socialist Review* March 2006, jazz musician Courtney Fitzgerald Pine mentioned that, “Playing jazz itself is a form of resistance” because “It is a music that is about being independent and not conforming”. Pine also mentioned that he recently learned that, “jazz was used as a form of resistance to the Nazi occupation in Czechoslovakia” and “South African jazz musicians used it as a form of protest against the apartheid system”.

In 1920 when America enforced the liquor prohibition, jazz was the medium of entertainment, contributing to the resistance of the prohibition, in the secret clubs known as the ‘speakeasies’. The Beat generation poets who rejected the standard narrative values and materialism and celebrated non-conformity and creativity also adopted jazz as their main inspiration. João Viegas Fernandes defined ‘resistance’ as, “...the counter-hegemonic social attitudes, behaviours and actions which aim at weakening the classification among social categories and which are directed against the dominant power(s) and against those who exercise it (them), having as a purpose its (their) redistribution in a more equitable way” (174). Based on the definition of Fernandes, many of Hughes’ poems can be rightfully accepted as fitting the concept of resistance. Hughes was not a violent man, nor was he an aggressive man. He was deeply passionate about arts and his love for his people, persistent and focused. However, due to the enormous amount of love he had for his people, his poems occasionally depicted a side of him which strongly and vehemently resisted the oppression, injustice and domination asserted by the dominant white culture. Hughes was not afraid to show his resistance of the white dominance and the racial injustice that befell his people. Using his poetry as a medium to reach out, he vocalized his opinion on matters relating to racial segregation, Jim Crow law, Scottsboro trial etc.

In his poetry “Freedom [1]” he clearly stated the rights he has as a free man and the freedom he is entitled to. The lines read:

Freedom will not come  
Today, this year  
Nor ever  
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
To stand

On my two feet  
And own land.

I tire so of hearing people say,  
*Let things take their course.*  
*Tomorrow is another day.*

I do not need freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom

Is a strong seed

Planted

In a great need.

I live here, too.

I want freedom

Just as you. (*The Collected* 289)



The lines of the poetry are not grievances or even a complaint, Hughes strongly and directly demanded freedom. In another poetry titled “Uncle Tom [1]” Hughes used the popular character of Uncle Tom from Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to remind the African Americans that the freedom that was denied to Uncle Tom is still being denied to them. Hughes urged the younger African American generation to fight for freedom so that their children will be able to enjoy it. In the poetry he wrote:

But Uncle Tom  
Was long ago.  
Gone is the lash  
And the slaver's blow.  
Ours is the freedom  
Tom did not know-  
So tend your freedom that the lash and the pain  
And his head bowed down be not in vain.  
Tend your freedom that tomorrow may see  
Uncle Tom's children wholly free! (ibid 302)

The present study also posits Hughes' jazz poetry as instruments for the formation of a new African American identity. Hughes' jazz poems are identified as necessarily advocating the idea of constructing a new identity through representation. As a poet of the common folk Hughes employed the ‘language of the common folk’ to situate the position of the African American as a legitimate race, possessing their own idioms and dialect. Hughes employed the music of his people to better represent them in the artistic sphere or arena. This conscious decision proved decisive in his journey as a poet. Hughes represented the African Americans through many different

images and themes within his jazz poetry. Through all his representations, Hughes remained loyal to the underlying core principles that distinguish the African American race from their white counterpart. Hughes focused on their cultural values, religious beliefs and music which the African Americans hold dear to their heart. The music of his people is represented in the poems “The Weary Blues” and “Dream Boogie”. “Dream Boogie” represents a form of jazz known as boogie-woogie. John Edward Hasse, Curator of the Division of Culture and the Arts, National Museum of American History said, “Boogie Woogie is a style of blues quintessentially for the piano” (Smithsonian, 2010). In a boogie woogie musical composition, the left hand of the pianist created a unique rhythm and base while the right hand move about the keys improvising as it goes along. Boogie woogie started becoming popular during the 1920s. It was a type of jazz music which was more associated with dancing. “The Weary Blues” as the name suggests based its rhythm on the typical blues rhythmic structure known as the 12-bar blues which is predominantly based on the I - IV - V chord progression. The 12-bar blues contains 12 bars within its composition where the first line contains four bars so do the remaining two lines. The chord progression basically moved from the tonic to the sub dominant and then the dominant after which it returns to the tonic.

Poems such as “Feet o’Jesus”, “Fire” and “Sunday Morning Prophecy” are distinct representation of the religious side of the African American culture. In “Feet o’ Jesus” Hughes brought out the hope of his people towards Jesus Christ and wrote:

At the feet o’Jesus  
Sorrow like a sea.  
Lordy, let yo’ mercy

Come driftin' down on me.

At the feet o' Jesus

At yo' feet I stand.

O, ma little Jesus,

Please reach out yo' hand. (*Selected* 17)

The dialect employed in the poem is the exact dialect of the African American common folk. Certain words like 'of', 'you' are represented just as they are pronounced. The poetry "Fire" also follows the same lyrical representation:

Fire,

Fire, Lord !

Fire gonna burn ma soul!

Tell me, brother,

Do you believe

If you wanta go to heaben

Got to moan an' grieve? (*ibid* 20)

Just as the previous poetry the word 'my' is replaced by 'ma', 'want to' by 'wanta', and 'heaven' by 'heaben'. This deliberate use of the common Negro folk dialect makes the poetry unique and distinctive. The theme of the poetry characterizes the common problems faced by a sinner. "Sunday Morning Prophecy" is another poetry which clearly depicted the religious side of the African Americans. The poetry subtly mocks a sermon given by a preacher. The scene is beautifully represented by the accents given in the second stanza:

You will turn back

And look towards the mountains.

You will turn back

And grasp for a straw.

You will holler,

*Lord-d-d-d-d-ah!*

*Save me, Lord!*

*Save me!*

And the Lord will say,

*In your days of your greatness*

*I did not hear your voice!*

The Lord will say,

*In the days of your richness*

*I did not see your face!*

The Lord will say,

*No-oooo-ooo-oo-o!*

*I will not save you now! (Ibid 22)*

The scene in the African Americans churches is beautifully depicted with a gentle sarcasm and a mild humour. African Americans are very passionate about their religion mainly because they see hope of deliverance in the Christian belief. This hope is a direct manifestation of their hope of freedom as a race from the evil clutches of slavery. Church services also provided space for the African Americans where they could be themselves without having to fear the watchful eyes of their white masters. The church is a sort of an asylum, a safe haven for the African American race; it is where they are safe and free. The church therefore is an important symbol of hope, freedom and love. The Black Church is also responsible for the development of the

'spirituals'. It is considered to be the largest body of black folk song. Many songs of the spirituals contain songs related to hope for emancipation. Popular black spiritual songs such as "Swing low, sweet chariot" "expresses concern for salvation in the other world" (Simms 37).

The decision of Hughes in choosing jazz as an inspiration to his poetry was something which many of his contemporaries did not recommended. Defending his reasons for using jazz as his inspiration Hughes said, "...jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile" (*Essays on Art* 35). In another one of his essays titled "The Roots of Jazz" Hughes said:

Jazz is such happy music because it grew out of such great sadness. Its rhythms of joy were born from the heartbeats of sorrow...It is this combination of sadness and laughter that gives to jazz its unique quality, that roots its deep syncopations in the human soul, that keeps it from ever being a frivolous or meaningless music or merely entertainment, no matter how much it is played for fun. And jazz is fun music. Its spontaneous improvisations, its syncopations, its infectious rhythms are all tributes to the play spirit in men and women—the will to laugh and live. But behind the fun—in the beat of its drums, the cry of the trumpets or the wail of its sax—lie all the shadows of sorrow and suffering that were first woven into the distant origins of this wonderful music. (Ibid 371)

Commenting on the subjects of his poetry Hughes said that at least two thirds of all blacks were lower class and that “even I myself belong to that class...I have a right to portray any side of the Negro life I wish to” and his decision to write about “harlots and gin-bibers” was that “they are human” (qtd. in Rampersad *Vol I* 144 - 145). Hughes retorted, “My poems are indelicate, but so is life” (ibid 145). One of his friends Countee Cullen even requested Hughes to not be a “racial artist” and to leave out jazz and its rhythms from his poems. W.E.B DuBois who was a prominent African American leader of Hughes’ time also wasn’t very drawn towards jazz and its aesthetics. DuBois wanted the art of the Negro to be propaganda. He wanted art that positively represented African Americans and jazz to him was something that was not refined. DuBois linked jazz with the lower classes of people and the ignorant, but Hughes chose to represent them because:

These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. (*Essays on Art* 33)

Hughes was also one of the most important literary figures among the African American community during the New Negro Revolution or the Harlem Renaissance. He was different stylistically and lyrically. He alone developed and popularized jazz poetry although he himself was inspired by many before him who had attempted to find the link between jazz and poetry.

Under the strong influence of Langston Hughes, jazz poetry has become a style of poetry that has stood the test of time. After Langston Hughes there have been many wonderful poets who have written jazz poetry or poetry in the form of jazz. The Beat generation poets of the 1950s were the first group of poets to embrace jazz poetry; these poets, “rebelled against capitalism, war and middle-class values and they championed freedom, sexuality, spirituality and the mind-expanding use of drugs” (Baekgaard 1). Jack Kerouac (1922 – 1969), Bob Kaufman (1925 – 1986), Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. 1919), and Amiri Baraka (1934 – 2014) employed jazz poetry because they saw jazz poetry as a medium whose powers were refuting the status quo. Beat generation poets were basically anti-establishment who rejected standard narrative values and materialism. Beat poets relate deeply with jazz and the medium because they viewed jazz as, “...the music of the moment that is best able to combine energy and sadness in a primal cry. That is why it is so eminently suited to the Beat Generation” (ibid 3). Some of the most notable jazz poets of the Beat generation were Amiri Baraka, Hayden Carruth, Ted Joans, Bob Kaufman, Jack Kerouac, Sonia Sanchez, Harryette Mullen, Kenneth Patchen and Kenneth Rexroth to name a few.

The popularity of jazz poetry can be credited to its value as performance poetry. Langston Hughes not only performed his poetry to the musical accompaniment of jazz musicians, he also did ‘poetry to jazz’ albums. He recorded *The Weary Blues with Langston Hughes* with music provided by Charles Mingus and Leonard Feather which was produced by Leonard Feather for MGM in 1958. Some of the musicians he worked with were Leonard Feather, Charlie Mingus and Phineas Newborn. The Beat generation poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac followed in the footsteps of Langston Hughes and also did a recording of their poems. Kenneth Rexroth had two albums *Poetry and Jazz at the Blackhawk* released in 1958

and *Poetry Readings in the Cellar (with the Cellar Jazz Quintet): Kenneth Rexroth & Lawrence Ferlinghetti* released in 1957. Lawrence Ferlinghetti another beat poet has six albums *Poetry Readings in the Cellar (with the Cellar Jazz Quintet): Kenneth Rexroth & Lawrence Ferlinghetti* (1957), *Ferlinghetti: The Impeachment of Eisenhower* (1958) Fantasy Records, *Ferlinghetti: Tyrannus Nix? / Assassination Raga / Big Sur Sun Sutra / Moscow in the Wilderness* (1970) Fantasy Records, *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1999) and *Pictures of the Gone World* with David Amram (2005).

T. J. Anderson in his book *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right: Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry* wrote that there has been “a resurgence of interest in jazz poetry” (3), he observed that several writers like Michael Harper, George Elliott Clarke, Ted Joans, Hayden Carruth, Amiri Barak and Clark Coolidge have published collections of jazz poetry and others like Jayne Cortez, Joy Harjo, Quincy Troupe, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Ntozake Shange have made new recordings of jazz influenced poetry. Anderson also noted that the “reemergence of the coffeehouse in the 1980s as a locale for the public performance of jazz poetry” (ibid) helped the resurgence of jazz poetry in popular culture.

In 1991 Yusef Komunyakaa and Sascha Feinstein published *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* followed by *The Second Set* in 1996; in 1993 *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* edited by Art Lange and Nathaniel McKay was also published. These two books have also helped define the re-emergence of jazz poetry in the nineties. Poets who do not necessarily identify themselves as jazz poets have now explored the world of jazz poetry. Jazz poetry as a form of performance poetry has instilled a renewed interest in many poets and scholars; ‘poetry jams’ and ‘poetry



slams' as an offshoot of jazz poetry are now hosted all over the world producing new generation of jazz poets. Poetry Slam is a competition where poets read or recite their original works and is judged by randomly selected judges on a scale of one to ten. American poet Marc Smith is considered to be the person who started Poetry Slam in 1984. The initial purpose of the development of poetry slam was to introduce poetry recitals from academia to popular audience. Poetry Slams are held by many universities and colleges annually to promote the genre. The difference in poetry jams and slams are still unclear to many which often results in the wrong interpretation of such events. Poetry jams are poetry sessions where poets bring their ideas together and improvise towards the performance of a particular poem. The poem need not be original but emphasis is laid mostly on improvisation. Much like music jam sessions, poetry jams are not competition but more about creative and artistic release. Both poetry slam and poetry jam are largely popular among new generation of poets and poetry lovers as a new genre of performance poetry. The growth and popularity of both poetry jams and poetry slams can be credited to mass media and social media. Artists performing within the gambit of performance poetry do not have the prime objective of publication, but spontaneous performances are more craved for. Although both poetry slam and poetry jam finds their root in jazz poetry all performances within the genre need not necessarily be jazz poetry. However, the influence of both jazz music and jazz poetry can be found significantly present in poetry jams.

Langston Hughes indisputably became the poet laureate of the African American race by resisting the white power and by refusing to be dominated by racial prejudices and discrimination. Arnold Rampersad in his essay "*Langston Hughes's Fine Clothes to the Jew*" described Hughes' poetic diction and style by writing, "Using black dialect austerely, Hughes had scraped the blues form down to the bone,

and raised the folk form to literary art” (Bloom 19). Rampersad continued that Hughes was “trying to effect a historic change in poetry by compelling both blacks and whites to admit the power of black language” (ibid 19). His poetry celebrated blackness, promoted black power and instilled black consciousness among the black community. He advocated the New Negro Movement and was instrumental in the formation of the Black Arts movement. His poems have inspired many poets, both black and white, and his legacy still continues to thrive today.

This thesis has examined the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes from different parameters in order to situate it as a tool and an agenda for the voicing of Black America. The motive behind Langston Hughes’ selection of jazz music as a model to create his poetry has been extensively examined within the thesis. This thesis has applied the cultural theories of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall and also the ethnomusicology theories of Alan P. Merriam and Richard Middleton for its methodological framework.

The findings of this research study show that the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes succeeded in being an effective and powerful instrument which gave voice to the formation of a new cultural identity for the African American that totally replaced the inherited slave mentality and its negative complexes. By resisting and countering the powerful hegemony of the dominant white culture through his jazz poetry, Langston Hughes helped facilitate the promotion of the rise and growth of Black Art in the history of the African American culture.

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## **APPENDICES**

1. NAME OF CANDIDATE : Henry Lalmawizuala
2. DEGREE : Ph.D.
3. DEPARTMENT : English
4. TITLE OF THESIS : Jazz Poetry of Langston Hughes:  
The Voicing of Black America
5. DATE OF PAYMENT  
OF ADMISSION FEE : Sl. No. 841, Dt.01.08.2012

## **APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

1. BPGS : 26<sup>th</sup> May 2013
2. SCHOOL BOARD : 07<sup>th</sup> May 2013
3. REGISTRATION NO. : MZU/PhD/514 of 07.05.2013
4. DATE OF SUBMISSION : 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018

(PROF. MARGARET L. PACHUAU)  
Head  
Department of English

**Other Relevant Information:**

i) Attended Pre-PhD Course Work (August – December 2012).

**ii) Seminar/Workshops/Conferences etc:**

- a) **Presented a paper** entitled “Jazz poetry as a device for establishing Black culture consciousness” at the Second International Seminar titled “Claiming the Difference: Literatures and Cultures” organized by the Department of English, Mizoram University during 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 in collaboration with NEC, Shillong and ICSSR, New Delhi.
- b) **Presented a paper** entitled “Re-Imagining Traditional Values: Sex, Sexuality and the Youth Culture of India” at the One Day State Level Seminar on “Popular Cultures and Values of Our Time” organized by the Department of English, Govt. Mamit College during 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2017 at I&PR Conference Hall, Mamit, Mizoram.
- c) **Presented a paper** entitled “A Task Based approach to Teaching English” at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of In-Service Teacher’s Training conducted by Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Mamit District during 18<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2017 at Mamit, Mizoram.
- d) **Presented a paper** entitled “Innovative Methods of Teaching English” at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of In-Service Teacher’s Training conducted by Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Mamit District during 18<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2017 at Mamit, Mizoram.
- e) **Attended** International Seminar on “*Indigeneity: Expression and Experience*” organized by the Department of English, Mizoram University on 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2016 under UGC-DRS-SAP I at Mizoram University.

**iii) Published works:**

- a) “The Orphan Hero in Mizo Folklore” published in *Journal of MIELS* Vol 1. No 1. May 2014. Pages: 61 – 73. ISSN 2348 - 8611.
- b) “Ready or Not Here I come: A study of the ‘closet’ and different ways of coming out of the closet” published in *Journal of MIELS* Vol 1. No 2. October 2015. Pages: 314 – 326. ISSN 2348 – 8611.
- c) “Re-Imagining Traditional Values: Sex, Sexuality and the Youth Culture of India” published in *MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies* Vol IV Issue 2. December 2017. Pages: 159 – 171. ISSN: 2348 – 1188.
- d) “Jazz poetry as a device for establishing Black culture consciousness” published in *Claiming the Difference: Identity in Literatures and Cultures* edited by Sarangadhar Baral. Published by Authorspress, 2018 New Delhi. Pages: 94 – 102. ISBN 978-93-87281-72-1.
- e) *Globalization and Ethnic Identity*. Co-edited with V. Lalmalsawmi published by Scientific Book Centre, Guwahati. ISBN: 978-81-287-0004-0.

**f) Translated Works:**

- (1) “Death’s Dragnet” by Mafaa Hauhnar published in *Contemporary Short Stories from Mizoram* edited by Margaret Ch. Zama published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. Pages 10-17. ISBN: 978-93-86771-45-2
- (2) “Dad...” by Zirsangkima published in *Contemporary Short Stories from Mizoram* edited by Margaret Ch. Zama published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. Pages 134 – 139. ISBN: 978-93-86771-45-2

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### Educational Qualification

Class	Board/University	Year of Passing	Division	Percentage
X	MBSE	1993	I	62%
P.U.	NEHU	1995	II	45%
B.A.	KERALA UNIV.	1999	II	58%
M.A.	MADRAS UNIV.	2001	I	64%
NET	UGC	2000	Lectureship	-

(HENRY LALMAWIZUALA)  
Aizawl, Mizoram

**JAZZ POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES:  
THE VOICING OF BLACK AMERICA**

**ABSTRACT**

*SUBMITTED BY:*

HENRY LALMAWIZUALA

(Regn No: MZU/PhD/514 of 07.05.2013)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy to the Department of English, Mizoram University, Aizawl.

Upon their arrival on the shores of America in 1619, African Americans were forcibly dispossessed of their religion, their history, their culture, and their heritage and a new identity was forced upon them labelling them as slaves. They were denied everything that remotely suggested their existence as human being. They were simply a work force that could be bought, sold, punished and exploited. Tracing the history of slavery, LeRoi Jones (1934 – 2014) wrote that all other slaves in history have been treated as human beings by their masters, be it the treatment of the slaves of the Guinea Coast of Africa by their captors from the Gold Coast, Babylonians on Israelites and Assyrians on Chaldeans. The Romans considered their slaves as conquered people and the Greeks too considered theirs as unfortunate people. However, LeRoi Jones asserted that, “The African who was unfortunate enough to find himself on some fast clipper ship to the New World was not even accorded membership in the human race” (2). After the American Civil War (1861 – 1865) ended, slavery was abolished by Abraham Lincoln (1809 – 1865) and the African Americans were finally emancipated from the harsh conditions of slavery. However, the inhumane treatment advocated by the white masters had a very debilitating effect on the African American race as a whole. Having being detained as slaves for nearly two and a half centuries (1619 – 1865) African Americans had developed a severe inferiority complex. When they were finally emancipated from the harsh conditions of slavery by Abraham Lincoln after the American Civil War, many African Americans had by then developed an aversion for their own race considered uncivilized by the white man, and certain terms were viewed and accepted as per the definitions of the white man.

Although emancipation ended slavery, the conditions of the African Americans seemed to gravitate towards an even darker period. The failure of the

Reconstruction period (1865 – 1877) further situated the African Americans in a very vulnerable position within the fabric of the American society. Racism became institutionalized, racial segregation barred them from achieving equal status and their freedom was frequently abused by white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan through extreme forms such as lynching. African Americans, therefore, strived to assert their freedom and existence in the wider context of America through various means affordable to them during the 1900s. Describing the horrible condition of the freed African Americans in his book *Sick from Freedom*, American historian Jim Downs wrote:

Freedpeople suffered from sickness and poverty, and struggled to have their voices heard by contemporary officials, who were hell-bent on portraying the South as rebuilt and later by historians, who were in search of heroic icons to shatter racist stereotypes. The destruction of slavery left little rhetorical room for freed people to articulate how emancipation was a glorious achievement but one that brought new struggles that threatened their survival. (6-7)

Downs focused on the historical narratives which contained wrong interpretation of the Reconstruction Era and its history regarding the conditions of the freed slaves. He wrote that historians “...often emphasize the thrill of freedom and the success of escaping from slavery, which has the unintended effect of diminishing the grueling process that was actually emancipation” (23). Maurice E. Stevens wrote, “...those who tell the stories of African-American history and agency work within a social context that has understood African Americans as without historical agency and as lacking full humanity” (12). These narratives fit the white schema and, therefore, wasn’t contested or challenged for a long time. Reality was that there was, “massive

dislocation, widespread poverty, prolonged starvation, and, most of all, the dramatic outbreak of sickness and disease” (22). John Eaton described the horrific conditions he witnessed in the summer of 1864 when he witnessed the journey of ex-slaves from Southern plantations to federal lines, by writing, “You saw them, of both sexes, of all ages, in every stage of health, disease, and decrepitude, often nearly naked their flesh torn in escaping” (qtd. in Downs 22).

In order to assert their existence and freedom as rightful inhabitants of America and in an effort to secure peaceful co-existence between the whites and African Americans, the establishment of a new identity was deemed to be of paramount importance by African American thinkers and leaders. Daina Miniotaitė writing on the subject of the African American identity opined, “African-Americans were viewed as people with no history, no cultural heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white America” (5). In an effort to establish an identity at par with their white American counterpart, African Americans strived for recognition intellectually, artistically, socially and politically. This thesis therefore is an attempt to situate the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes as a tool towards the effort of achieving this new African American identity.

In an attempt to fully comprehend the formation of the African American cultural identity, this thesis studies the development of the African American art, especially literature, and the manner in which it affected the African American identity formation. The very meaning of art itself is viewed from the spectrum of its two main branches - music and literature, which is proved critical for an accurate estimation of the African American identity formation. This thesis delves into the definitions of key terms like jazz music and jazz poetry focussing on the motive necessitating Langton Hughes to adapt the music art form to produce and formulate a



new genre of poetry in an effort to instil a new black ideology. This thesis also traced the development of both jazz music and jazz poetry to accentuate the role and function of both art forms as an instrument of resistance, antagonistic to the system of values and beliefs.

To further enhance and enrich the study in terms of theoretical approaches, the theories of ethnomusicologist such as Alan P. Merriam and Richard Middleton have been used to justify the study of jazz music in order to determine the role of music in the formation of a cultural identity. Since the form and structure of jazz poetry is based on jazz music, the inherent quality possessed by music towards the formation of a culture is embedded in jazz poetry. The cultural theories of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams have been employed to give more depth and insight into the understanding of the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes, and to serve as theoretical frameworks for the methodology of the research work.

Stuart Hall suggests that identity is a “‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Rutherford 222). He also stated that cultural identity is, “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (Ibid 225). Meanwhile, Raymond Williams posits his theory of ‘structures of feelings’ which is concerned with “meanings and values as they are lived and felt and is often antagonistic to system of values and beliefs to the dominant ideologies within a society” (Barry 177). The African American community belonged to the lowest stratum of the community in America even after the abolishment of slavery; hence, to develop an identity, cultural or otherwise, it needed production from within its own community through an effective medium or mode of representation. This study, thus, situates Langston Hughes’ jazz poems as a medium

and mode of representation through which the production of the New Negro identity was realized.

The 'Cultural Hegemony' theory of Gramsci suggests its manifestation as, "the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class" (Bates 352). This thesis further studies the jazz poems of Langston Hughes as opposing the status quo and as a medium of resistance against the dominant culture and ideologies of his time, enabling thus the creation and the formulation of the New Negro ideology and identity. Hughes' decision to write his poems based on jazz music is also evident of the natural mode of resistance embedded within his jazz poems.

Attempts to establish or create the African American identity and culture often lead scholars, intellectuals and leaders of the African American community to search for a source in the music, dances, habits, mannerisms, beliefs, literatures and dialects of the African Americans. All these components of the African American communities in America were crucial to the establishment of the African American identity and culture.

Upon tracing the evolution and development of the African American literature or black literature, history recorded that it underwent strong resistance and rejections before it was finally accepted by the American public. Black literary artists had to write under a pseudonym or rather publish their works anonymously since slaves were forbidden to read and write. However, there were many African Americans who wrote during slavery. After emancipation, African American literary artists were again faced with a dilemma - while some writers chose to write for the white intelligentsia, others chose to adhere to African American roots. James Weldon Johnson wrote in 1932 that:

The record of the Negro's efforts in literature goes back a long way, covering a period more than a century and a half, but it is only within the past ten years that America as a whole has been made consciously aware of the Negro as a literary artist. It is only within that brief time that Negro writers have ceased to be regarded as isolate cases of exceptional, perhaps accidental ability, and have gained group recognition. It is only within these few years that the arbiters of American letters have begun to assay the work of these writers by the general literary standards and accord it such appraisal as it might merit. (qtd. in Warren 6).

The forerunners of African American literature such as Frederick Douglass (c.1818 – 1895), Marcus Garvey (1887 – 1940), Booker T Washington (1856 – 1915), W.E.B. DuBois (1868 – 1963) and Alain Locke (1885-1954) had different opinions regarding the formation of a New Negro<sup>1</sup> or a new identity for the entire African American race. In the quest for establishing an identity paralleling the whites, DuBois insisted that art must be propaganda and the art of the blacks must as well be propaganda for equality. In his seminal essay “Criteria of a Negro Art” published in *The Crisis* in 1926, he advocated the need to upgrade the art of the African Americans by writing:

...all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. (DuBois)

Meanwhile, Alain Locke longed to bring black and white together as member of the intelligentsia. Locke believed that high art (of the blacks) could bring relief from racial issues. He did not subscribe to what Du Bois advocated. He was “an aesthete genuinely moved by art and culture and he sought to cultivate such aesthetic sensibilities in others” (Calo 88). Locke was also one who “sought to historicize, analyze, and classify African American art and to position it in relation to both black experience and mainstream American culture” (Ibid 91). In his essay titled “Art or Propaganda?” Locke intrepidly wrote:

My chief objection to propaganda...is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it...Art in the best sense is rooted in self-expression and whether naive or sophisticated is self-contained. In our spiritual growth genius and talent must more and more choose the role of group expression, or even at times the role of free individualistic expression, – in a word must choose art and put aside propaganda. (Molesworth 219)

Langston Hughes emerged amidst the two opposing ideas of DuBois and Locke. He was of the opinion that literature and art produced by the African Americans need not adhere strictly to the definition and more accepted form of *high art* as particularly advocated by W.E.B. Du Bois and the New Negro agenda of Alain Locke. He disassociated himself with the views of Du Bois and Locke and insisted on adhering to the folk tradition of the African American, particularly that of the oral tradition. He also did not see the need to conform to the forms of art generally accepted by white discourse. Hughes felt that the African American identity can be best represented by celebrating the life of the common Negro folk. He, therefore, chose to voice the plight of his people through his poetry which was influenced and

motivated by the music of his people, resulting in the development of a new type of poetry – jazz poetry.

Hughes' talent for the art of writing poetry was discovered at a very early age. He was elected as the class poet when he was in eighth grade in 1916 and he published his first poetry "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in 1921 at the age of 19. Although he often stayed with his father in Mexico, who was strongly opposed to the idea of his son becoming a poet, Hughes never let go of his dream to become a full fledged poet. In 1925 his poetry "The Weary Blues" won the first prize in a contest sponsored by the *Opportunity* magazine and in 1926 his first book titled *The Weary Blues* was published. He was driven by profound love for his race and motivated by the social injustice that befell the African American community. He wanted to be a poet, a champion for the underprivileged African Americans. In one of his poetry "My People" Hughes proclaimed what the African Americans meant to him by comparing his race to the beauty of the natural world,

The night is beautiful,  
 So the faces of my people.  
 The stars are beautiful,  
 So the eyes of my people.  
 Beautiful, also, is the sun.  
 Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people. (*Selected* 13)

Hughes wanted to write about the pain, the sufferings, and the hardships his ancestors had to tolerate in order to survive in a land which was hostile to their existence and freedom. In his poetry "Negro" Hughes depicted the sufferings endured by the Negroes and wrote:

I've been a victim:

The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.

They lynch me still in Mississippi. (ibid 8)

Hughes' poetry bravely illustrates the afflictions of the African Americans in an effort to establish their true identity. However, Hughes not only writes about the miseries of the African Americans, he also writes about their hope and spirit of resistance among many other themes.

Hughes' decision to write his poems in the form of jazz music is very important because jazz music is one of the most important representations of black culture in America. The importance of jazz music to the African American is highlighted by Charley Gerard who wrote, "Jazz has been and continues to be a music whose developments are closely linked to the ways in which African Americans have adopted different strategies of achieving socio-political goals" (xix). Jazz is a form of music developed by the African Americans. It is an offshoot of Blues which too is a product of the African American race. Many jazz critics, scholars, historians and musicians are still in dispute over the credibility of the claim made by African American jazz historians and musicians regarding the contribution or rather the creation of jazz which, "is perhaps the only indigenous American art form of world significance" (Fiehrer 21). Amiri Baraka aka LeRoi Jones was one of the first African Americans who argued that jazz essentially belonged to the African Americans, through his book *Blues People* (1963) and he offers many arguments supplementing his claim. Though several African Americans scholars support this claim, many others especially white Americans refuse to accept it. Pierro Scaruffi an Italian-American art critic wrote,

Unlike blues music that was exclusively performed by blacks, jazz music was as inter-racial as the melting pot of New Orleans. Blacks were not the only ones who played jazz. Jazz groups were formed by Italians, Creoles and all sorts of European immigrants. The "African" roots of the music may or may not have been obvious to the practitioners, but clearly it did not stop them from adopting it. (1)

Jerry Roll Morton a Creole who was named Ferdinand LaMenthe at birth claimed to be the inventor of jazz in 1902. His claim however, has been unanimously termed absurd by jazz historians. However, jazz scholar Scott Deveaux in his attempt to define jazz argues that, "Jazz is strongly identified with African-American culture, both in the narrow sense that its particular techniques ultimately derive from black American folk traditions, and in the broader sense that it is expressive of, and uniquely rooted in, the experience of black Americans" (487). Samuel A. Floyd Jr., boldly claims that, "There is evidence that early jazz can be traced directly to African ceremonial music used in ring shouts." (qtd. in McKay, 2). It became certain that jazz was not a creation of one person, nor was it a genre that suddenly emerged out of nowhere. Len Weinstock in his essay "The Origin of Jazz" said, "Both African and European rhythm were employed. African music supplied the strong underlying beat ... European music provided formal dance rhythms." (2). Lee Konitz also, agreeing with Weinstock, wrote:

Jazz – everyone realizes - combines essential elements of West African music and European concert music. The elements usually picked out are African rhythm and European harmony, but the blend is richer than these stereotypes suggest. In jazz the improvised nature of African

music adapts to and transforms a European framework of more or less elaborate prior composition. (Hartman 9)

Ornette Coleman once said, “I think black people in America have a superior sense when it comes to expressing their own convictions through music.” (qtd. in Gerard, 27). Though there are very little evidence to support any claim made by any scholar regarding which particular race of men were responsible for the invention, discovery or creation of jazz, most scholars hesitantly agree that jazz was a distinctive genre created by the black culture in America and also that the blues, ragtime, hymns, spirituals and brass band music played an important role in shaping this new genre of music.

Jazz music is characterized mainly by its improvisational style and its syncopated rhythm. Jazz critics, enthusiasts and historians have developed many theories regarding its form and concept. However, jazz music resists conforming to the normal modes of music of its time by championing improvisation. Sawyer A. Theriault emphatically wrote, “Jazz narrates a people’s emotional reaction to oppression...and provides a voice for those whose voices have been beaten into submission” (1). Early jazz musicians do not rely on sheet music, nor do they write their music in any form. Lawrence W. Levine distinguished jazz as an antithesis to culture because culture, then, was understood as “traditional”, “harmonious” and “exclusive” and jazz was “raucous, discordant” and “spontaneous” (7) it was “cultural freedom” (14). Jazz was understood and defined in correlation with the African American way of life, their identity and their culture. This thesis also studies the jazz poems of Langston Hughes as a mode of resistance, as it proves pivotal in situating Hughes’ poems towards the establishment of an African American cultural identity.



Due to the enormous amount of love he had for his people, Hughes' poems occasionally depicted a side of him which strongly and vehemently resisted the oppression, injustice and domination asserted by the dominant white culture. Hughes was not afraid to show his resistance of the white dominance and the racial injustice that befell his people. Using his poetry as a medium to reach out, he vocalized his opinion on matters relating to racial segregation, Jim Crow law, Scottsboro trial etc. In his poetry "Freedom [1]" he clearly stated the rights he has as a free man and the freedom he is entitled to. The lines read:

Freedom will not come  
Today, this year  
Nor ever  
Through compromise and fear.  
I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
To stand  
On my two feet  
And own land.  
I tire so of hearing people say,  
*Let things take their course.*  
*Tomorrow is another day.*  
I do not need freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.  
Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted

In a great need.

I live here, too.

I want freedom

Just as you. (*The Collected* 289)

The lines of the poetry are not grievances or even a complaint, Hughes strongly and directly demanded freedom.

The development and the emergence of jazz poetry was quite astonishing and extraordinary because it was an amalgamation of two art forms i.e., poetry and music. No other forms of music have entered the poetic space as much as jazz did. Though certain poets like Carl Sandburg (1878 – 1967), Hart Crane (1899 –1932), Vachel Lindsay (1879 –1931) and Mina Loy (1882 –1966) had attempted to write in this new style of writing poetry, it was Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967) who eventually found success with it. Hughes' jazz poems are described by Meta DuEwa Jones as resembling “the creative invention and alteration essential to jazz” (Jones 50). Moreover, Hughes' predecessors were not categorized specifically as jazz poets since their writings did not satisfy the most accepted definition of jazz poetry which is “poetry necessarily influenced by jazz”. Yet they were instrumental in the evolution of the new genre.

Sascha Feinstein described jazz poetry as, “... any poetry that has been informed by jazz music” (2) and Miriam Zolin in her essay “The Quickening Art of Jazz Poetry” also described jazz poetry as, “A poetry that doesn't exactly mimic the sounds of jazz, but does incorporate rhythms, repetitions, syncopation and space so that its performance can evoke what jazz evokes” (2). A lot of definitions have stemmed from many musicians and poets alike but from all these definitions, it is

clear that jazz poetry should ideally contain the following: it should be inspired by the music jazz; it should have the same effect that the music jazz has on its audience and the vocal performance should be interwoven to the music. Although Hughes himself was not a jazz musician, he identified himself with the music as it represented the African American race. This identification became the core thrust for him in developing his jazz poetry. He skilfully used his jazz poems as a medium to effectively voice black America. The decision of Hughes in choosing jazz as an inspiration to his poetry was something which many of his contemporaries did not recommend. Defending his reasons for using jazz as his inspiration Hughes said, "...jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile" (*Essays on Art* 35).

In one of his most celebrated essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", Hughes reflected on the existing imprudent mindset of the African American artists of his time and wrote:

...this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible. (ibid 32)

Hughes felt that the African American artists should provide, "racial individuality", "heritage of rhythm and warmth" and an "incongruous humor" (Ibid. 33) to best depict the African American experience in order to establish the New Negro. This thesis has studied in detail the different aspects of Langston Hughes' jazz poetry,

laying emphasis on themes, agenda and concepts. Anita Haya Patterson wrote, "...the stylistic complexity of many of the poetry Hughes wrote...creates a clarifying perspective on the folk tradition and distances him from racial separatist explanation of culture" (667) Patterson continues, "Hughes's poetry more often than not call attention to the African American folk origins of the blues ..." (673). Patterson's views were also mirrored by Bartholomew Brinkman who wrote, "[Hughes'] insistence on the authenticity of jazz as an African American art form as well as a form of social critique, most evident in his depiction of bebop in *Montage*, is asserted against the standardization of jazz..."(85). Hughes' strong desire to establish the African American identity through his poetry is again mentioned by Brinkman "Hughes's poetry serves to help articulate a point of political resistance beyond the realm of the poetry" (85).

Hughes' representation of his race and people is best seen in his poem "I, too" which is at once emotional and filled with the collective angst of his race:

I am the darker brother.  
 They send me to eat in the kitchen  
 When company comes,  
 But I laugh,  
 And eat well,  
 And grow strong.

...

I, too, am America. (*The Collected*, 46)

Hughes employed two main features of the black community, which made African Americans distinctive and unique, in expressing black cultural identity i.e.,

their dialect and their music. Jazz was an undeviating illustration of these two chief features of the black community. Jazz was the medium for African Americans to showcase their musical ingenuity alongside their unique speech pattern. By intentionally tapping into these two main sources, Hughes directly represented the black folks through his poetry while establishing a strong connection with them. His poems such as “The Weary Blues”, “Negro Dancers” and “Song for a Banjo Dance” incorporate words employed solely by the African American community.

Langston Hughes indisputably became the poet laureate of the African American race by resisting the white power and by refusing to be dominated by racial prejudices and discrimination. Arnold Rampersad in his essay “*Langston Hughes’s Fine Clothes to the Jew*” described Hughes’ poetic diction and style by writing, “Using black dialect austerely, Hughes had scraped the blues form down to the bone, and raised the folk form to literary art” (Bloom 19). Rampersad continued that Hughes was “trying to effect a historic change in poetry by compelling both blacks and whites to admit the power of black language” (ibid 19). His poetry celebrates blackness, promoted black power and instilled black consciousness among the black masses. He advocated the New Negro Movement and was instrumental in the formation of the Black Arts movement. His poems have inspired many poets, both black and white, and his legacy still continues to thrive today.

### **Chapter One - Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the identification and clarification of key terms such as jazz music and jazz poetry. A brief biography of Langston Hughes is included, focussing mainly on his growth as a literary artist both in the historical and the cultural context. The chapter also reveals theories, taken from both literary as well as

ethnomusicology theories, which has been utilized within the present study to locate the hypothesis thus advocated. A brief introduction to the cultural theories of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams will be included, explaining the mode by which the research will operate under their theories on culture, identity and cultural identity. This chapter also briefly focuses and gives introduction to a key moment in African American history which sheds light into the current study which was the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance boosted the life and works of many African American literary artists including Langston Hughes. William C. Banfield reflecting on the primary goals of the movement wrote, “The primary goal was to express a new social, cultural awakening deed to diffuse racial stagnation imposed by racial hatred of Black in White America” (25).

The publication of *The Weary Blues* in 1926 and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in 1927 became an important landmark for the history of jazz poetry and also for Langston Hughes. It paved the way for Hughes to establish himself as the ‘Poet Laureate’ of the African Americans, during a period when there was an abundance of budding poets in Harlem. Jazz dominated the nightlife in many cities during the 1900s in America. It was an era of the flappers, the Charleston and the speakeasies; the period itself came to be known as the Jazz Age. Prior to the publication of *The Weary Blues* the world had not seen such a beautiful amalgamation of poetry and music. Hughes’ style, versification and selection of theme redefined the relationship between two different art forms – poetry and jazz.

## **Chapter Two - Cultural History of jazz**

The connection between music and culture is best described by ethnomusicologist Richard Middleton who opined, “...any attempts to study music

without situating it culturally are illegitimate...” (Clayton, Trevor and Middleton 3). In one his best-known poems “Lennox Avenue: Midnight” Langston Hughes wrote, “The rhythm of life / Is a jazz rhythm” (*The Weary* 21), accentuating the importance and role of jazz to the African Americans. This chapter has dealt with jazz music as a distinctive genre created by blacks as an indigenous form of expressing their own individual and collective moorings that covers the gamut of their primal, spiritual and even religious selves; also jazz poem as a sub-genre or offshoot of jazz that has further enriched the genre by catering to the artistic, aesthetic aspects. This will be rounded off by bringing in Langston Hughes as one who initiated and popularized it.

This chapter also studies in detail the history of jazz music from its conception, to its reception in white America and then to its acceptance as one of the music genuinely conceived in America. The inherent quality of resistance embedded within its fabric is the focal point of the study as it situates its manifestation in the jazz poems of Langston Hughes. The study of the development of jazz requires the understanding of the earlier forms of African American forms of singing particularly the slave songs and the spirituals. John Davis in his article "The Influence of Africans on American Culture" wrote:

...the American Negro's great contributions to the world of music have been his spirituals and his gospel songs ... Spirituals are widely held to be the result of a blending of Protestant and African music created out of the slave and Christian experience of the American Negro. (77)

The technical features of jazz such as the call and response technique, improvisation and syncopated rhythm makes jazz unique and distinctive from other forms of music. All these aspects characterizes its authenticity as a genre of music different from any

existing form, and it also legitimizes the claim of the African American race towards its conception since all these aspects of it represents the culture of the African American much more than it did the whites. Hughes' affiliation with jazz and his obstinacy in incorporating it into his poetic art signifies his unvarying love for his race and his people. His poem "The Weary Blues" clearly depicted the African American and his jazz, "In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone / I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan - / Ain't got nobody in all this world, / Ain't got nobody but ma self" (*Selected Poems* 33). In his biography *The Big Sea* Hughes wrote,

I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street – gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes...Their songs – those on seventh street – had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going. (209)

Hughes affirmed that the people's music which represented their sorrows and joys was jazz, therefore, he held on to it and used it as a tool to redefine the identity of his people.

### **Chapter Three - The Jazz Poetry of Langston Hughes as expressions of cultural identity**

This chapter has studied the jazz poems of Langston Hughes in detail situating Langston Hughes as the primary orchestrator of the jazz poetry movement with emphasis on the construction of his themes, the identification of his agendas and the formation of the concepts of his poems. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" published in *The Nation* on 23 June 1926 Hughes explained why he chose to write his poems in the form of jazz by writing:



Jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile.

Much like jazz, the present study will situate jazz poetry as a powerful instrument of establishing an African American identity especially in the artistic and social arena. This chapter shall bring out the inherent representation of the jazz poems of Langston Hughes in establishing an African American cultural identity. Stuart Hall and Raymond William's definition of cultural identity are used as a backbone to define, identify and situate the jazz poems of Langston Hughes as expressions of meanings generated and utilized by the African American communities in America, in order to distinguish themselves from the white hegemonic order.

After the abolition of slavery in 1865, the process of forming a cultural identity for the African Americans was not a simple task. Sellers et al. studied the difficulties faced by the African American communities towards forming their own culture by writing:

African Americans were not afforded the choice of whether to assimilate into the new culture or retain their indigenous culture. As a result, traditional African culture has had to be grafted onto the cultural practices of the European/American society to form an original cultural expression. (18)

This chapter also studies the DuBoisian's theory of 'Double Consciousness' and his concept of the veil in order to essentially explicate the dilemma faced by the

African Americans towards their identity formation. Explaining his theory on 'Double Consciousness' DuBois wrote that it is the, "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2).

#### **Chapter Four - The Jazz Poetry of Langston Hughes as expressions of Black Art**

African American literary figures attempted to create a new social, cultural and intellectual identity of the blacks through theorization of their own propaganda such as 'The New Negro' concept and the 'Black Arts movement'. This chapter has located the jazz poems of Langston Hughes as means of cultural and social movement towards the identification and emancipation of the African American Black Art as seen and defined by him. This chapter also traces the development of the Black Arts movement towards the establishment of a new black aesthetic. Explaining the ideology of *black aesthetics* Larry Neal wrote, "The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world" (30).

To Langston Hughes, art was fundamentally, "a reflection of life or an individual's comment on life" (*Essays on Art*, 32). The Black Arts movement sought to revolutionize America through the Negro art forms. The founder of the Black Arts movement Amiri Baraka wrote, "Black Art...meant not only an art that was an expression of black life, but revolutionary art" (23). In this context, Langston Hughes and his controversial connection with the communist party is also examined as it had a tremendous impact on his poetic output. The production of many of his revolutionary poems such as "Scottsboro", "Good Morning Revolution", "One more 'S' in the USA" etc...even spawned a US Government Senate committee

investigation. This chapter also traces the growth of the African American literary history to emphasize the importance of the formation of the African American arts and to grasp its development better.

### **Chapter Five - Conclusion:**

Though not popularly received by many initially, jazz poetry emerged, sank and re-emerged as a very important tool in determining the effects of black literature on society. Observing the importance of poetry influenced by music Meta DuEwa Jones wrote, “Poetic forms that are influenced by music...seek to transcend the boundaries of both speech and music to inhabit the intangible realms of the spirit, the emotional and the soulful” (88). Presently, Jazz Poetry has morphed as a genre of popular culture of performative art / oral poetry, hugely popular with the current generation which includes serious academic circles across the globe, its growth, popularity and message facilitated by information technology. Poetry slams and poetry jams are now conducted across the globe in many academic and non-academic circles, promoting jazz poetry and ultimately reaching new heights.

This research has deduced that the jazz poems of Langston Hughes were tools which were critical for the establishment of a new African American cultural identity after the abolishment of slavery in America. This research also concludes that the jazz poems of Langston Hughes incessantly resisted the cultural hegemony of the dominant white culture by promoting African American art and culture. The concluding chapter summarizes the previous chapters with critical observations presented.

**NOTE**

<sup>1</sup>The term *New Negro* was often used by whites in the colonial period to designate newly enslaved Africans. Ironically, that same term began to be used at the end of the nineteenth century to measure and represent the distance that African Americans had come from the institution of slavery. Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, articles and books discussing the *New Negro* were commonplace. African-American leaders, journalists, artists, and some white Americans used the phrase to refer to a general sense of racial renewal among blacks that was characterized by a spirit of racial pride, cultural and economic self-assertion, and political militancy. *Source*: "New Negro." Encyclopaedia of African-American Culture and History. *Encyclopedia.com*. 31 Mar. 2018 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

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