CHAPTER TWO

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And I ride ride I ride on to the end --
Where glowers my continuing Calvary [My emphasis].... \textsuperscript{121}

WHEN I GOT TO CALVARY
UP THERE ON THAT HILL
ALREADY THERE WAS THREE --
AND ONE, YES, ONE
WAS BLACK AS ME.... \textsuperscript{122}

A Black experiences a life of oppressions and constraints. In fact, his sufferings could be traced to the slave past when the African American had to court only misery and pain. His life has been a continuous struggle. Calvary experience has been repeated in the life of the Black. His gullibility has been exploited and manipulated. He has been overlooked and trampled upon. The American world is wondering as Brooks remarks:

... how she [America] was so long grand,
flogging her dark one with her own hand,
watching in meek amusement while he bled.... \textsuperscript{123}

A backward glance reveals how deep-rooted had been the animosity between the Blacks and the Whites. Moreover, this tracing of the African history takes one to the slave past of the Blacks and their sufferings.

\textsuperscript{121} Brooks, "Riders to the Blood-Red Wrath," in \textit{SP}, p.118.

\textsuperscript{122} Hughes, \textit{Ask Your Mama} * (New York: Knopf, 1961), p.52.

* Hereafter referred to as \textit{AYM}.

\textsuperscript{123} Brooks, "In the Mecca," in \textit{WGB}, p.395.
The innocent, unsuspecting Africans were captured and wrenched out of their native homeland and transported in slave ships into slavery. They had to perforce give up their own language and African roots. The innumerable sufferings they underwent during the voyage in the slave ships is detailed by Tom Skinner in his *Black and Free* as follows:

They were packed -- often as many as a hundred -- in a small hold of the slave ship. Here they remained, locked and chained in the cramped, smelly brig for the entire voyage. There were no facilities for sanitation and human excrement. Things were so bad that the crew members could not go near the hold. They poured a slop of food scraps down the hatch over the hold. Meanwhile, the slaves were all but out of their minds. Not used to confinement, frightened and seasick, weak from lack of food and water, and cramped in the tiny hold, they fought and madly tried to climb out of the hold whenever it was opened for feeding time....

Only the sturdy ones survived the tedious voyage. As Hughes reveals, "Sometimes whole groups of Africans, taken on deck at night for air, would leap into the sea -- committing mass suicide rather than go into slavery." The survivors were sold on auction and Skinner recounts how the plantation owners bought them "as easily and disinterestedly as they would buy a draft horse or milk cow" and how the Blacks were just animals added to the hoard of animals in their plantations. Skinner relates how the Black was used by his master to generate more of his kind:


* Hereafter referred to as LHR.

Whenever his [the Black's] master felt there was a need for additional slaves, he merely selected a healthy male and a healthy female and he had them cohabit until a child was conceived. When the woman was pregnant, the man was moved to other quarters to impregnate another woman. On and on went the pattern, so that within ten years, a slave male could have sired more than a hundred sons and daughters....

The master's house was referred to as "the big house." The slaves' own quarters were neither comfortable nor decent. They were dumped into a row of hovels behind the master's house. This row of hovels not only formed a boundary for the master's house but also prevented them from escaping. Their feeble efforts to escape were immediately detected and put down by the vigilant overseers. The slaves knew that they had to obtain their freedom by paying the dear price of leaving behind their loved ones in the same miserable condition from which they themselves were trying to escape.

Frederick Douglass in "Life and Times of Frederick Douglass," traces the deplorable living conditions of the poor Black slaves:

Old and young, male and female, married and single, dropped down upon the common clay floor, each covering up with his or her blanket, their only protection from cold or exposure. The night, however was shortened at both ends. The slaves worked often as long as they could see and were late in cooking and mending for the coming day, and at the first grey streak of the morning they were summoned to the field by the overseer's horn. They were whipped for oversleeping more than for any other fault. Neither age nor sex found any favor. The overseer stood at the quarter door, armed with stick and whip, ready to deal heavy blows upon any who

127 Tom Skinner, Black and Free, p.17.
might be a little behind time. When the horn was blown there was a rush for the door, for the hindermost one was sure to get a blow from the overseer....

The overseer callously employed the whip on the Blacks. Douglass quotes the case of a woman called Nellie who was whipped for "impudence" and continues that "this crime [of impudence] could be committed by a slave in a hundred different ways, and depended much upon the temper and caprice of the overseer as to whether it was committed at all." They were mercilessly whipped, leashed and beaten to extract maximum physical labour. They were treated like animals to plough the lands and work in the cotton plantations. They were pitilessly chained in order to prevent them from escaping. These chains caused festering wounds which received no medical attention. The deceased were given unceremonial burials.

One safely argues that there is a running parallel between the sufferings, indignities, injuries and humiliation experienced by the Blacks and the Adivasis, Harijans, and the Tribals of India. In fact, the latter and the Blacks of emerging Black nations pass through a continual suffering whereas the state of the African American is getting altered for the better. Lynching was the most severe but the most common punishment for any petty offence. Brooks quotes a heart-rending account of one of the Mississippi lynchings in her Report from Part One: An Autobiography:


* Hereafter referred to as Images.

129 Ibid., p.3.
When the two Negroes were captured, they were tied to trees and while the funeral pyres were being prepared, they were forced to hold out their hands while one finger at a time was chopped off. The fingers were distributed as souvenirs. The ears of the (victims) were cut off. Holbert was beaten severely, his skull was fractured and one of his eyes, knocked out with a stick, hung by a shred from the socket. Some of the mob used a large cork screw to bore into the flesh of the man and woman. It was applied to their arms, legs and body, then pulled out, the spirals tearing out big pieces of raw, quivering flesh everytime it was withdrawn. Then the couple was burned 'at the stake,'...\textsuperscript{130}

The White master allowed a mere pittance for all the hard manual labour put in by the Blacks in the form of black bread and a marginal ration. The slaves were given food and clothing of poor quality. The food that was supplied was sometimes fit more for animals than for men. The discarded clothes of the White master which were given to the slaves were either tight or loose fitting. With such dresses on, with the used hats and boots of their masters, the Blacks appeared as so many ridiculous and incongruous figures.

Booker T. Washington has bitter memories of his own childhood:

\begin{quote}
I cannot remember a single instance during my childhood or early boyhood when our entire family sat down to the table together, and God's blessing was asked, and the family ate a meal in a civilized manner.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

No Black child was given education during the period of slavery. This is illustrated when Booker T. Washington recounts how he, as a boy, on several occasions...

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130] Ralph Ginzburg, quoted in Gwendolyn Brooks, \textit{RPO}, pp.200-201.
\end{footnotes}
occasions, went as far as the school house door with one of his young mistresses, carrying her books but never once went in to study himself.¹³² Thus a Black was denied educational attainments and kept in a state of ignorance. If their eyes were opened, they might come to know about their fundamental human rights. Moreover, by keeping them in a state of continual poverty, they were also kept in a state of dependency. Martin Luther King, Jr. precisely gives a commentary on the devices adopted by the Whites to keep the Black suppressed:

In the days of slavery, this suppression was openly, scientifically and consistently applied. Sheer physical force kept the Negro captive at every point. He was prevented from learning to read and write, prevented by laws actually inscribed in the statute books. He was forbidden to associate with other Negroes living on the same plantation except when weddings or funerals took place. Punishment for any form of resistance or complaint about his condition could range from mutilation to death. Families were torn apart, friends separated, cooperation to improve their condition carefully thwarted. Fathers and mothers were sold from their children and their children were bargained away from their parents. Young girls, were in many cases, sold to become the breeders of fresh generations of slaves. The slaveholders of America have devised with almost scientific precision their systems for keeping the Negro defenseless, emotionally and physically [My emphasis]....¹³³

The sufferings of the Black woman, both at the hands of the White and the Black male were untold. The Black women were raped by the slave masters without moral compunction and with sheer indifference to the sentiments of the Blacks. The Black women were compulsorily used as the bedmates of the Whites. The poor Black male could only nod at this abuse of his woman. It is apt to quote Tom Skinner in this context:

¹³³ Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Sword that Heals," in Images, p.106.
... whenever a master had guests in his home who came from distant places it was considered part of hospitality to offer any one of the slave women to sleep with that man for the night....

As a result of this miscegenation, hoards of mulattoes flooded the Black scenario. Incidentally, it is of interest to record the considered argument of William Faulkner in his Go Down, Moses, particularly through his short story "The Old People":

Think of all that has happened here, on this earth. All the bloodhot and strong for living, pleasuring that has soaked back into it. For grieving and suffering too, of course, but still getting something out of it for all that, getting a lot out of it, because after all you don't have to continue to bear what you believe is suffering; you can always choose to stop that, put an end to that. And even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that's shame [My emphasis]....

Faulkner maintains that the sufferings experienced by the Whites were due to this sin of miscegenation.

It was in such unfavourable and painful life-situations that the Black was looked upon as subhuman as indicated in the short story, "Was":

"Go to the back door and holler. Bring the first creature that answers, animal mule or human, that can deal ten cards"....

134 Tom Skinner, Black and Free, p.17.
136 William Faulkner, "Was," in Go Down, Moses, p.27.
Alain Locke's point of view establishes this fact:

... for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being -- a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be 'kept down', or 'in his place,' or 'helped up,' to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden.... 137

Slavery in America, by now, had become a convenient and "economic way of life, sanctioned by some of the most noble, the most elite, the most legal, philosophical, legislative minds." 138 Slavery was strongly supported and recommended even by the Church. Skinner traces the arguments of the Church thus:

It soon began to be argued by even the church that slavery was a divine institution ordained by God. Others quoted scripture, from the book of Genesis, of how Ham was cursed and how through Noah his children were all given a low position. "Why," they said, "the word 'Ham' even means black." They argued that all black people had been relegated by God to a condition of slavery, to serve the white man for the rest of his life. Therefore, they reasoned, "God has ordained it to be so," and as one individual wrote from Texas not too long ago, "Woe be unto any white man that seeks to raise a black man out of the condition that God has cursed him." ... 139

Other than the spark of Christian faith, their entire existence was engulfed in despair. 140 It was in such a condition that the Black slaves had a new streak of hope in the form of the Civil War. Booker T. Washington remembers and observes:

138 Tom Skinner, Black and Free, p.17.
139 Ibid., pp.17-18.
140 Ibid., p.18.
Even the most ignorant of my [Booker T. Washington’s] race on the remote plantations felt in their heart, with a certainty that admitted of no doubt, that the freedom of the slaves would be the one great result of the war, if the Northern armies conquered....

The slaves’ wishes, however, came true. The war ended with the Emancipation Proclamation in the year 1865. The Black was proclaimed a free individual. This change was so sudden that the Black man was at a loss. Skinner explains how "overnight, the Negro was told ... he must live according to the culture he served and by their standards" as follows:

They [The Whites] turned to this man who was bred like cattle, who perhaps did not even know his children, and asked him to raise his family... Suddenly he was taught that he must live with one wife and raise and teach his children. Children who never knew what it was to have a father were suddenly told they must honor, obey and respect their parents....

The Blacks were very much thrilled over their new-found freedom and every effort was taken to merge with the American cultural society. All their attempts to stand on their own legs and be independent were either thwarted or restrained. If the Blacks showed signs of progress, the Whites, especially the poor Whites saw to it that the Blacks were put down and kept in their place. The Blacks were deliberately prevented from entering the mainstream of the White American society through segregational polices and they became the victims of the Whites’

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142 Tom Skinner, Black and Free, p.19.
143 Ibid., pp.19-20.
"arrogant neglect." So such a state was worse than slavery itself. Frederick Douglass makes a pointed observation in this regard to show how the Blacks' much-yearned freedom was quite weak compared to the slavery which had been strong in its implementation:

...now slavery is abolished. Its reign was long, dark and bloody. Liberty is now the baseline of the Republic. Liberty has supplanted slavery. Where slavery was strong, liberty is now weak.

In the field of politics, there was total suppression. The Blacks were not recognized as persons with a right to vote or stand for elections. Through legislative means and violent postures, the Blacks were prevented from exercising their franchise. Hughes points out how a Black was illtreated and denied the right to vote:

Well, they rocked him with road-apples because he tried to vote and whipped his head with clubs and he crawled on his knees to his house and he got the midnight train and he crossed that Dixie line....

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145 Frederick Douglass, "Life and Times of Frederick Douglass," in Images, p.11.
146 Hughes, "Not a Movie," in SPLH, p.231.
Hughes' alter ego, namely, Simple, bemoans his lot in the race conscious society:

I (Simple) have had so many hardships in this life that it is a wonder I'll live until I die. I was born young, black, voteless, poor and hungry, in a state where white folks did not even put Negroes on the census.... ¹⁴⁷

In fact, the Black vote was not sought after by any White contender because of a deep-seated hatred towards him.

Every calculated effort was taken to distort the picture of the Black and show that he was incapable of leading a nation. This fact is substantiated by the observation by Milton Meltzer in his biography of Hughes:

Negroes were always being made fun of in the stories and cartoons of the popular magazines... Many a novel savagely caricatured the Negro, and in the movies and on the stage, audiences saw Negroes only as clowns, servants or helpless victims.... ¹⁴⁸

The White man had an inherent fear of the energetic and active Black man who might supercede him in course of time. So, he kept him segregated in all possible ways even after emancipation from slavery. The dependent Black was merely expected to cling on to his old routine and be servile to his White master. He had to accept being a Black and be satisfied with the marginal privileges allowed by the White society. This idea is projected in Brooks' "of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery":

¹⁴⁷ Hughes, quoted in Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, p.243.
He was born in Alabama
He was bred in Illinois
He was nothing but a
Plain black boy....

This only implies that the Blacks were never permitted to be ambitious and make their contributions in the fields of art and education. Further, as in Brooks' "We Real Cool," the Black youth took life cool, left school, lurked late, sang and danced and died soon. Beyond this confined realm, they did not let their aspirations grow. To keep them within this stifling life-situation, things were made especially difficult for them.

A Black could not enjoy a sumptuous dinner in a regular restaurant but had to take his meals in the kitchen. He was given third class accommodation for first class rates. He was refused loans from banks to start business ventures. Thus, he had to pass through painful segregated states. Laws were made expressly stringent for a Black American. His none too grave offences were magnified. The same minor lapses which were condoned in the case of the White offender were rigorously dealt with in the case of a Black offender. In Robert Penn Warren's "Brother to Dragons," there is the painful depiction of the nephew of Thomas Jefferson killing the Black boy for a petty offence of breaking his mother's pitcher. Lilburne's callous remark after murdering the Black boy projects the

149 Brooks, "of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery," in WGB, p.23.
mind of the White in the days of slavery:

And Lilburne's voice, far off, is saying:
"That is my mother's pitcher, and she loved it.
If anybody breaks my mother's pitcher --
I'll say no more...."  

One records at this point that lynching was a common punishment inflicted upon a Black offender, even after liberation from slavery. In fact, lynching was much easier than holding a legal trial. By temperament, the Black males were drawn towards White women. If they ogled at the White woman or if they attempted a sexual assault on her, they were brutally lynched and publicly hanged. One comes across Sammy boy in Brooks' "The Ballad of Pearl May Lee," paying with his "hide and my (Pearl May Lee's) heart," when he was found guilty of having raped a White girl. One painfully remembers the famous "Scottsboro Case," which shook the Black world including Hughes, where nine Black boys were savagely mob-lynched for having raped two White women. The prejudiced American Press did not hesitate to exaggerate Black crimes. It "made a sensation of every crime committed by or said to be committed by a Negro." To quote Skinner, lynching was imposed on the Blacks for "ridiculous charges as standing too close on the street to a white person or being too friendly with a white person." In his biography on Hughes, Milton Meltzer refers to the case of a Negro coach who was beaten to death because he put his car in a White parking 

151 Brooks, "The Ballad of Pearl May Lee," in WGB, p.47.
152 Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, pp.146-147.
153 Ibid., p.128.
154 Tom Skinner, Black and Free, p.22.
lot by mistake. This humiliation, indignity and painful suffering experienced by the Black is projected by Hughes in "Southern Mammy Sings," where a Black lad is lynched for a trifling cause:

    Last week they lynched a colored boy.  
    They hung him to a tree.  
    That colored boy ain't said a thing  
    But we all should be free.  
    Yes, m'am!  
    We all should be free....

William Faulkner's short fiction Go Down, Moses depicts the painful death of the Black boy under a similar circumstance.\(^{157}\)

Poverty and ignorance impinged on the Blacks and prevented them from achieving material progress. Brooks depicts the effect of poverty on an aged couple in "The Bean Eaters":

    They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair.  
    Dinner is a casual affair.  
    Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood,  
    Tin flatware....

She also chronicles their lives in the "dingy, drab impersonalized 'corner' of a metropolitan center":\(^{159}\)

\(^{155}\) Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, p.158.  
\(^{156}\) Hughes, "Southern Mammy Sings," in SPLH, p.162.  
...men [are found] estranged
From music and from wonder and from joy
But far familiar with the guiding awe
Of foodlessness.

In America, which is the land of dollars, while the Whites wallowed in wealth, the poor Blacks were left penniless. They had no savings to their credit; they were left as George Kent notes "enslaved and impoverished amidst a world of plenty." The only way out of this impoverished state was to continue to depend on the Whites and work under them. The Black servant had to spend "All day subdued, polite, / Kind, thoughtful to the faces that are white." The only jobs open to the Black men were manual and menial jobs. The Black women had to do household chores for Whites, like cooking, cleaning, scrubbing, washing and ironing. In "Cora Unashamed," Cora worked for the Studevants "who treated her like a dog. She stood it. Had to stand it; or work for poorer white folks who would treat her worse; or go jobless. Hughes' "Madam" catalogues a woman's chores which were "too much" for a human being:

But she had a twelve room
House to clean.

Had to get breakfast,
Dinner, and supper, too --
Then take care of her children
When I got through.

162 Hughes, "Negro Servant," in One Way Ticket, p.70.
163 Hughes, "Cora Unashamed," in LHR, p.3.
Wash, iron, and scrub,
Walk the dog around --
It was too much.
Nearly broke me down....\(^{164}\)

Understandably, a Black servant with such a heavy schedule would be left with little time for her own family. Her monotonous daily routine is presented in a capsule form by Brooks in her "Hattie Scott / the end of the day." In fact, dull dailiness and monotonous routine served as a racial determinant to the Blacks:

It's usually from the insides of the door
That I takes my peek at the sun
Pullin' off his clothes and callin'it a day.
'Cause I'm gettin' the dishes done
About that time. Not that I couldn't
Sneak out on the back porch a bit,
But the sun and me's the same, could be:
Cap the job, then to hell with it.

No lollin' around the old work-place
But off, spite of something to see.
Yes, off, until time when the sun comes back.
Then it's wearily back for me....\(^{165}\)

It is disheartening to find that even these odd jobs were not secure. They were employed only on the "last hired, first fired" terms. Their insecurity and their total dependent complex were again the racial determinants for the Blacks. Brooks' Bronzeville woman in a red hat is being employed by Mrs. Miles only as a last resort; when the Irish woman would not tarry, "The Albert Agency had leafed through its files -- / On short notice could offer / Only this dusky duffer."\(^{166}\)


\(^{165}\) Brooks, "Hattie Scott / the end of the day," in WGB, p.35.

\(^{166}\) Brooks, "Bronzeville Woman in a Red Hat," in WGB, p.353.
Emancipation had not ensured the Blacks a rosy future with "human treatment" at the hands of the Whites. They suffered indignities and insults which are made explicit in Brooks' "Bronzeville Woman in a Red Hat." The Black woman has been equated to a list of wild animals and is referred to in the neuter gender:

They had never had one in the house before.
The strangeness of it all. Like unleashing
A lion, really. Poised
To pounce. A puma. A panther. A black
Bear.
There it stood in the door,

The semi-assault of that extraordinary blackness....

Hughes' hungry and unpaid field workers in "Share-Croppers" are no more "Than a herd of Negroes / Driven to the field --/ Plowing life away / To make the cotton yield." Consequently, a Black man was expected not to long for the same things which his superiors desired. Racially, the Blacks were forced to accept the inferiority complex and a lower status. It is the Black writers who rouse the Blacks to shed their negative complexes and adopt positivist approaches. This idea is brought home in "The Theme for English B" by Hughes:

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records -- Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
the same things other folks like who are other races....

The Black ghettos of Chicago and Harlem were overpopulated and highly congested. Millions of people had to lead a cramped life in ghettos, which were rat-infested rundown homes. Arthur P. Davis presents a cross-section of Brooks' Bronzeville:

It is a community of stenches--urine, cabbage, heavy diapers, and chitterlings. It is an old section -- not picturesquely and majestically old -- but plain and generally old, with old wood, old marble, old tile and old dirt....

At the sight of a coloured skin, the landlords "boosted the rents sky-high." They had to pay exorbitantly high rents for places which were nothing more than rat-traps where one may hear "roaches / Falling like fat rain." In Brooks' "Matthew Cole," Matthew Cole lives in a "stove-heated flat," with "red fat roaches that stroll / Unafraid up his wall." His housekeeper forgets to build the fire but promptly drops in to collect the rent. The wretched state of the rented houses is thrown open by Hughes in one of his Madam-poems:

The sink is broke,  
The water don't run,  
And you ain't done a thing  
You promised to've done.  

Back window's cracked,  
Kitchen floor squeaks,

Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, p. 50.  
Idem.
There's rats in the cellar
And the attic leaks....

Enfranchisement did not ensure the Black inclusion in the various fields of the White society. Rather, the White world kept him segregated all the more because of the inner scare that the Black would make inroads into the White domain by sexual virility and strength. The policy of segregation was exercised in all public places like parks, hotels, schools, buses, trains, theatres and even hospitals. Milton Meltzer narrates in his biography of Hughes how a Dean of a Negro College died because she was refused urgent and immediate medical attention in a White hospital nearby, after an auto accident. He speaks of the discrimination the Blacks suffered at the hands of the Whites:

The WHITE and COLORED signs popped up everywhere -- on drinking fountains, in station waiting rooms, on toilets, in movies, over laundries, in restaurants, in parks....

The Jim Crow sections in the back seats of buses and trains were so common that a coloured child at a carnival was confused and unable to decide which horse to mount in a merry-go-round, which has "no back":

Where is the Jim Crow section
On this merry-go-round,
Mister, cause I want to ride?
Down South where I come from
White and colored
Can't sit side by side....

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175 Hughes, "Madam and the Rent Man," in SPLH, p.204.
176 Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, p.158.
177 Idem.
178 Hughes, "Merry-Go-Round," in SPLH, p.194.
The White children had the advantage of studying in the best well-equipped schools whereas inferior and substandard schools were particularly maintained for educating Black children. This again was a racial determinant under which the Blacks suffered. In "Blacklash Blues" Hughes complains of such second-class treatment:

You give me second-class houses,
Give me second-class schools,
Second-class houses
And second-class schools.
You must think us colored folks
Are second-class fools....

Even if some schools condescended to admit Black children too, it was found that the Black children of all grades were pooled in a single class for the sole reason that they were Black. It was the same kind of treatment when it came in the arena of sports and games. If some Blacks managed to overcome their racial determinants and triumph over their crippling state to be famous artists, musicians, and creationists, they were not at all recognized. As Milton Meltzer states, "a display of talent was not enough to wipe out racial prejudice." After giving a famous concert, a great artist will have to "spend hours in a despairing search for a meal or a hotel room."

Hughes himself had always had the trouble of finding a place to sleep throughout his wanderings. Once Hughes was served in a restaurant because they assumed

181 Idem.
him to be a Mexican.\textsuperscript{182} On another occasion, Milton Meltzer sketches how Hughes was charged exorbitantly high, while his White friend was charged far less, for the same meals. Hughes had to leave the restaurant much humiliated.\textsuperscript{183} The same store which would sell Hughes' mother soap would not allow Hughes to buy an ice cream because it meant sitting down and eating in the store.\textsuperscript{184}

The Blacks could not aspire to rent a decent house in a White locality. When Rudolph Reed dared to move into a White neighbourhood, his neighbours could not tolerate it:

\begin{quote}
The first night, a rock, big as two fists.
The second, a rock big as three.
The third night, a silvery ring of glass…\textsuperscript{185}
\end{quote}

This had been precisely the painful experience of Lorraine Hansberry when her father purchased a house in a White dominated locality. She depicts the hostile neighbourhood which the Youngers decide to quit thus in her \textit{magnum opus}, \textit{A Raisin in the Sun}:

\begin{quote}
Well, for God's sake -- if the moving men are here -- \textsc{let's get the hell out of here}!…\textsuperscript{186}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{182} Milton Meltzer, \textit{Langston Hughes: A Biography}, p.162.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Ibid., p.50.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid., p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Brooks, "The Ballad of Rudolph Reed," in \textit{WGB}, p.362.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Lorraine Hansberry, \textit{A Raisin in the Sun} (New York: Penguin, 1988), p.149.
\end{itemize}
One detects Hughes laughing away his worries on the problem of segregation in housing:

Here I come!
Been saying all my life
To get a nice home.
For me and my wife.

White folks flee --
As soon as you see
My problems
And me!

Neighborhood's clean,
But the house is old,
Prices are doubled
When I get sold:
Still I buy.

White folks fly --
Soon as you spy
My wife
And I!...187

All such Jim Crow rules and forced segregation pained the Blacks. Their heartbroken cry is voiced by Jesse B. Simple who says, "To be shot down is bad for the body ... but to be Jim Crowed is worse for the spirit."188

All Blacks -- young and old, men, women and children -- were victims of racial oppression alike. The condition of the mulattoes, who were born of miscegenation, was very pathetic because they were looked down upon by both Blacks and Whites. As Jean Wagner makes it clear," American racial categories do not ... allot any special place to the mulatto, so that his lot is

187 Hughes, "Little Song on Housing," in P and L, p.79.

188 Hughes, quoted in CELH, p.185.
neither more nor less tragic than that of any other individual classified as a Negro." 189 Hughes himself admits that the problem of mixed blood in America is "a dramatic one -- one parent in the pale of the black ghetto and the other able to take advantage of all the opportunities of American democracy." 190 The sufferer was the "little yellow bastard boy" 191 who felt rootless and insecure as in Hughes' poem "Cross":

My old man died in a fine big house.  
My ma died in a shack.  
I wonder where I'm gonna die,  
Being neither white nor black?... 192

The Black youth were assuredly the victims of racial oppression. Their reckless and aimless lives as exemplified in Brooks' "We Real Cool" only reflects their "live-fast die-young pattern" 193 of life.

The sufferings of the Black woman exceeded those of the Black man. She always ran the risk of losing her man for a White woman "with sand waves loving her brow." 194 The Black male gets attracted towards fair-skinned females. Sammy boy couldn't get drawn towards dark women; he "grew up with bright skins on

192 Hughes, "Cross," in SPLH, p.158.
193 Redmond, quoted in Harry B. Shaw, Gwendolyn Brooks, p.65.
the brain"^{195} and "bronzy lads"^{196} hurried to "cream yellow shining,"^{197} idolizing White women. Naturally, the Black woman felt her love insecure and it happened that "the guy she gave her all to / dropped her with a thud."^{198} As a woman, she had to suffer all day in a White kitchen and return home to encounter her "hard daddy"^{199} who used to turn his back on her and say, "... a woman's crying's / never gonna bother me."^{200}

In "Queen of the Blues," Brooks presents Mame, the dancing girl, whose lover left her for a "brown-skin chicken"^{201} though she had loved him and had given him all of her money. When Mame dances at the Midnight Club, the men call her "Queen of the blues" but treat her mean:

The M.C. hollered,
"Queen of the blues!
Folks, this is strictly
The queen of the blues!"

But a thought ran through her
Like a fire.
"Men don't tip their
Hats to me.
They pinch my arms
And they slap my thighs.

^{195} Brooks, "Ballad of Pearl May Lee," in WGB, p.45.
^{196} Brooks, "intermission," in WGB, p.121.
^{197} Idem.
^{198} Hughes, "Ballad of the Girl Whose Name is Mud," in SPLH, p.149.
^{199} Hughes, "Hard Daddy," in SPLH, p.150.
^{200} Idem.
^{201} Brooks, "Queen of the Blues," in WGB, p.42.
But when has a man
Tipped his hat to me?"

Men are low down
Dirty and mean.
Why don't they tip
Their hats to a queen?...202

In the same way, in "Lover's Return" by Hughes, the Black woman battles with feelings of insecurity when her "old time daddy / Came back home"203 and wails:

Oh, men treats women
Just like a pair o' shoes.
You men treats women
Like a pair o' shoes --
You kicks 'em round and
Does 'em like you choose....204

Quite often, the Black woman imitated her White counterparts. She bought a hair-straightening comb to tame down her unruly hair. She fought hard to keep her marriage intact. She had nowhere to turn to and share her sorrows which is made explicit in the following poem of Brooks:

There is nowhere for her to go.
There is no tenderness on whom she may frankly cry.
There is no way to unlatch her face
And show the gray shudder
Of this hurt hour....205

* Hereafter referred to as S in H.
204 Idem.
205 Brooks, "For Clarice It Is Terrible Because with This He Takes Away All the Popular Songs and the Moon Lights and Still Night Hushes and the Movies with Star-eyed Girls and Simpering Males," in WGB, p.348.
Unable to find "fuel for the clean flame of joy / That tried to burn within her soul"\textsuperscript{206} by honest means, Hughes' Ruby Brown ended up in the "sinister shuttered houses"\textsuperscript{207} of the White men.

In general, the Black world survived amidst all odds and pressures. Like the "old yellow pair... who are Mostly Good. / Two who have lived their day,"\textsuperscript{208} they remembered their past with painful memories but kept on living:

\begin{quote}
And remembering...
Remembering, with twinklings and twinges,  
As they lean over the beans in their rented back room that is full of beads and receipts and dolls and cloths tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes...\textsuperscript{209}
\end{quote}

Bevcrly Guy Sheftall observes:

\begin{quote}
Although their [Blacks'] world is drab and ordinary, and sometimes even fraught with danger, they go about their daily lives accepting their plight and somehow managing to survive....\textsuperscript{210}
\end{quote}

The Blacks in the modern Eucharist suffered as victims and the exploited. They experienced suffering in full measure. Each Black, then, is a type of the suffering self. And in continual struggle is the existence of the Black.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{206} Hughes, "Ruby Brown," in \textit{SPLH}, p.166.  
\textsuperscript{207} Idem.  
\textsuperscript{209} Idem.  
\end{flushright}
The oppression endured by the Blacks can be summed up in the words of Jesse B. Simple:

I've been fired, laid off and last week given an indefinite vacation, also Jim Crowed, segregated, barred out, insulted, called black, yellow, and red, locked in, locked out, locked up, also left holding the bag. I have been caught in the rain, caught in the raids, caught short with my rents, and caught with another man's wife... but I am still here!... My mama should have named me Job* instead of Jesse Simple. I have been underfed, underpaid, undernourished and everything but undertaken.... In this life I have been abused, confused, misused, accused, false-arrested, tried, sentenced, paroled, blackjacked, beaten, thirddegreed, and near lynched!...

Under such dampening and frustrating situations, the Blacks felt desperate and disconsolate. They carried with them several constrictions which hampered their progress. Poets like Brooks and Hughes felt it their responsibility to help Blacks break the shackles of these constraints and racial determinants and stand steady, liberated and free within themselves.

The first racial determinant which stifles their upliftment is their intrinsic longing for Africa from where they were uprooted and deported. This nostalgic yearning stood in the way of the Black entering the mainstream of the American society. He feels alienated and estranged in an unfriendly and hostile environment and clings on to the scattered yet strong memories of his past-- a glorious past --

* It is interesting to note that Jesse B. Simple identifies with Job from the point of view of a suffering self. The Christian aspect is that the sufferings undergone by Job are the trials and tests imposed on him by the Living God to test Job's faith.

in "that long leaplanguid land"²¹² where he enjoyed unrestricted freedom. Brooks recapitulates the blissful past in "Riders to the Blood-Red Wrath":

I remember my right to roughly run and roar.
My right to raid the sun, consult the moon,
Nod to my princesses or split them open,
To flay my loins, eat blood with a spoon.
You never saw such running and such roaring!--
Nor heard a burgeoning heart so craze and pound!--
Nor sprang to such a happy rape of heaven!
Nor sanctioned such a kinship with the ground!...²¹³

Being used to such unbridled existence, the Black man feels entrapped in a White society:

I recollect the latter lease and lash
And labor that defiled the bone, that thinned
My blood and blood-line. All my climate my
Foster designers designed and disciplined....²¹⁴

He slips into a dream of noisy and colourful land agreeable to his character and temperament. Brooks, in her "old laughter," muses over the "land of gold and green and red"²¹⁵ where the "men and women richly sang."²¹⁶ Brooks' deep-felt desire for the old times can further be traced in "On the Occasion of the Open-air Formation of the Olde Tymers' Walking and Nature Club":

²¹⁴ Idem.
²¹⁶ Idem.
And we shall push our laughter like a bell,  
Trying to make it ring in the old way...  

In Hughes' poems one detects the longing on the part of the African American to claim kinship with the Africans which only reveals his wistfulness:

We're related -- you and I,  
You from the West Indies,  
I from Kentucky.

Kinsmen -- You and I,  
You from Africa,  
I from the U.S.A.  
Brothers -- you and I....

The African American's languishing mood is strikingly evident when he envisions a vibrant and variegated land in "Our land":

We should have a land of trees,  
Of tall thick trees  
Bowed down with chattering parrots  
Brilliant as the day,  
And not this land where birds are grey....

"Uprooted from a natural environment of palms and forests and silver moons," Onwuchekwa Jemie declares, "blacks in America suffocate in a prison of sky scrapers and industrial smog."
The Blacks draw strength nostalgically, which is again a racial determinant:

Deep down the whirlwind of good rage I store
Commemorations in an utter thrall....  

In Hughes, one finds Aunt Sue telling stories to the brown-faced child. She "has a head full of stories ... a whole heart full of stories." As she narrates,"dark shadows ... cross and recross / Aunt Sue's stories." The critic Harry B.Shaw concedes that nostalgia plays a significant role in the mental make-up of the Black man:

... the memories of Africa are extremely important for his survival....

Arthur A. Schombury corroboratingly argues thus:

The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future... For him, a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away....

From one angle, the craving for the African past is a source of strength, vigour and vitality. Viewed from another angle, it proves to be a dampener on him. As

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222 Hughes, "Aunt Sue's Stories," in SPLH, p.6.
223 Idem.
224 Harry B.Shaw, Gwendolyn Brooks, p.87.
such, this racial determinant of nostalgia operates positively and negatively on the mind and heart of the Black. Nostalgia hinders his progress. It makes him feel displaced and disoriented. Nostalgia, instead of strengthening his spirit, and claiming his due right in America, overpowers him and dispirits him.

To deter the Blacks from surrendering to nostalgia as a racial determinant, Brooks and Hughes reiterate the fact that they are part and parcel of America. Along with the nostalgic pictures, they do present simultaneously the importance of their identification with their real mother, America. Brooks stresses the idea that the Black man should feel that he is an integral part of America. For her, the Black man is "her [America's] dark one." Again, she subtly hints at the fact that the Black has every right in America having "toyed" with his life to save the American democracy, in "Negro Hero."

This identification with America is more pronounced in Hughes than in Brooks. When Madam gets her calling cards printed, she wants the man to use "American" letters and thus reveals her attachment to America:

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Shall I use old English
Or a Roman letter?
I said, Use American.
American's better.

There's nothing foreign
To my pedigree:
Alberta K.Johnson --
American that's me....
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226 Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, p.395.

227 Hughes, "Madam's Calling Cards," in SPLH, p.203.
Hughes asserts that America is what she is today because of the signal contributions of the Blacks. He justifiably argues that America was built both by white and dark hands. It belonged to all the people who built it:

.... [America was] 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.  ...  

It is of interest to study the poem of Claude McKay in conjunction with Hughes' "Freedom's Plow." If Hughes' poem underscores the total identification struck by the Blacks with America, the land of freedom, the composition of Claude McKay traces the wrath of the Black against America that torments the Blacks. All the same one detects McKay's qualified admiration for America. The poem of McKay runs thus:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back. ...


Hughes poses a rhetorical question, "Who is America?" and answers, "... You, me! / We are America!" If he appreciates and adores Africa, he does not become an African, but lives an African American still. Jean Wagner defends Hughes' celebration of Africa thus:

If he celebrates Africa as his mother it is -- because America, which should be his real mother, had always behaved toward him in a stepmotherly fashion...  

Hughes himself proclaims what he is really, in response to the undue expectation of his White patroness to be primitive:

She wanted me to be primitive, and know and feel the intuitions of the primitive. But unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, and so I could not live and write as though I did. I was only an American Negro -- who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythms of Africa -- but I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem. And I was not what she wanted me to be....

Hughes is an African American and is a component of America. It is evident in his "Dark Youth of the U.S.A."

American am I, none can deny:
He who oppresses me, him I defy!
I am the Dark Youth
Seeking the truth
Of a free life beneath our great sky...  

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231 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.395.
232 Hughes, The Big Sea, p.325.
In fact, Onwuchekwa Jemie rightly argues thus:

The black man's roots in American soil are as deep, indeed deeper than the roots of most whites....

The Blacks have every right to claim the right of citizenship and equality as in the following poem of Brooks:

A garbageman is dignified
as any diplomat.
Big Bessie's feet hurt like nobody's business
but she stands -- bigly -- under the unruly scrutiny, stands in the wild weed.

In the wild weed
she is a citizen
and is a moment of highest quality; admirable....

Hughes calls forth his Black kinsmen to rise and own the land instead of allowing the yearning for Africa hinder their progress:

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own the land....

Thus Brooks and Hughes want to drive home to the Blacks that there is nothing wrong in loving African traits and exulting in them but it should not be a constraint on them as to prevent them from participating in the American life.

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They should not remain in the periphery of the American society, hesitant and uncertain, but develop an "at-homeness" in America. They should culture themselves to possess that sense of belongingness to America in the spirit and intention of Robert Frost whose striking poem read at the Presidential Inauguration of John Fitzgerald Kennedy is a healthy pointer not only to African Americans but also to every sane nationalist:

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become.
We asked for rain. It didn't flash and roar.
It didn't lose its temper at our demand.
And blow a gale. It didn't misunderstand
And give us more than our spokesman bargained for;
And just because we owned to a wish for rain,
Send us a flood and bid us be damned and drown.
It gently threw us a glittering shower down.
And when we had taken that into the roots of grain,
It threw us another and then another still,
Till the spongy soil again was natal wet.
We may doubt the just proportion of good to ill.
There is much in nature against us. But we forget:
Take nature altogether since time began,
Including human nature, in peace and war,
And it must be a little more in favor of man,
Say a fraction of one percent at the very least,
Or our number living wouldn't be steadily more,
Our hold on the planet wouldn't have so increased....

There is an additional constraint which the Blacks carry with them -- the several complexes under which they suffer. The most conspicuous complex manifest in them is that of their Black colour. The Blacks themselves despise their colour; adore the fair skins and lighter shades; adhere by the policy of "White is best." Some even tend to try various methods to tone down black colour. They attempt to look attractive, as the young girl in Brooks' "obituary for a living lady":

And as a young girl
She was interested in a brooch and
pink powder and a curl.... 238

Milton Meltzer makes a pointed remark on the colour-prejudice entertained by both the Whites and the Blacks of America:

This color business was strange and paradoxical. At home, [America] a dark skin automatically meant the denial of opportunity. And the darker the skin the darker your future. The color prejudice of the Whites had even spread to many Negroes, who drew color lines within the color line. Most dark- skinned Negroes at that time did not like to be called black. They would rather be called brown-skinned. People of lighter color looked down on those of darker color, and the darker were often jealous and resentful of the lighter.... 239

One finds Jessie Mitchell's light-skinned mother rejuvenating her own "yellow"

238 Brooks, "obituary for a living lady," in WGB, p.18.
239 Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, p.84.
youth and proudly looking down upon her daughter's "black" colour:

... Jessie's black  
And her way will be black, and jerrier even than mine.  
Mine, in fact, because I was lovely, had flowers  
Tucked in the jerks, flowers were here and there... 

George Kent quotes Brooks recalling the intraracial prejudice against which she had to struggle as a young girl:

A dark skinned girl just didn't have a chance  
if there was light skinned competition... 

Hughes himself had to confront the colour prejudice in his wandering career, because of "the strange unwhiteness of his own features." 

Because of colour discrimination even among Blacks the colour prejudice prevails. Poets like Brooks and Hughes want the Blacks to admire and accept their own black sheen, and shed their inferiority complex born out of colour bias. They themselves set an example by declaring the beauty of their rich colour and by expressing their liking for their dark-skinned selves. They declare that to be black is to be beautiful. They are unique exceptions among the Black poets who groan under colour prejudice and lament, "... somehow it was borne upon my 

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241 Brooks, quoted in George E. Kent, A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks, p.25.  
242 Hughes, quoted in Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, p.129.  
* This bears repetition.
brain / How being dark, and living through the pain / Of it is courage more than angels have."\(^{243}\) Brooks exults over blackness in her title poem in Primer for Blacks:

Blackness
is a title,
is a preoccupation,
is a commitment Blacks
are to comprehend --
and in which you are
to perceive your Glory ....\(^{244}\)

She asserts that there is beauty and strength in being a Black when she precisely draws our attention towards the same:

... Blackness stern and blunt and beautiful,
organ-rich Blackness .... \(^{245}\)

Like Brooks, Hughes articulates his faith in Blackness through Jesse B. Simple:

I just want to know how come Adam and Eve was white. If they had started out black, this world might not be in the fix it is today. Eve might not of paid that serpent no attention. I never did know a Negro yet that liked a snake .... \(^{246}\)

Hughes identifies "black" with the dark depths of Africa. He exquisitely correlates "black" with a number of positive concepts like gentleness, kindness, quietness, strength, productivity and beauty in "Me and My Song":

\(^{243}\) Countee Cullen, quoted in Onwuchekwa Jemie, *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry*, p.159.

\(^{244}\) Brooks, quoted in George E.Kent, *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*, p.251.

\(^{245}\) Brooks, "In the Mecca," in *WGB*, p.401.

\(^{246}\) Hughes, "Temptation," in *LHR*, p.177.
Black
As the gentle night,
Black as the kind and quiet night,
Black as the deep and productive earth,
Body
Out of Africa,
Strong and black...
Kind
As the black night
My song
From the dark lips
Of Africa...
Beautiful
As the black night...
Black
Out of Africa,
Me and My song...247

By employing the poetic medium to the best possible advantage, these two artists advocate to the Blacks not to underrate themselves and their colour but to celebrate the same.

Apart from the obvious colour-complex, the Blacks suffer from deeprooted inferiority complex. Jean Wagner, in his Black Poets of the United States, traces the cause for this feeling of inferiority:

... the experience of slavery has left a deep imprint on the personality of the Negro. Some one hundred years after Emancipation, the traumas that still afflict his psyche heal all the more slowly because his current status in American society does basically nothing more than psychologically prolong his status under slavery. Despite his freedom, despite the demolition of all the pseudo-scientific demonstrations of his inferiority and alleged congenital defects, he continues to be regarded very much as he was in the past. While he is no longer inferior essentially, the self-image thrown back at him by his human environment still mirrors his presumed inferiority....248


Brooks and Hughes feel it is their duty to help the Blacks shed their inferiority complex. The Blacks must understand that they belong to a distinct race endowed with an individuality of its own and feel good about it. Harry B. Shaw's observation on Brooks holds good in this context:

... while the American social climate was trying to tell her [Brooks] she was inferior, she had always the secret belief that it is good to be black...249

Hughes himself had never once felt depressed and bad for being a Black. In fact, he considers being born a Black, a rare privilege. In the words of Arna Bontemps, "He would not have missed the experience of being what he is for the world."250

Brooks and Hughes further instil hope in the Black man that a day will dawn when others will recognize their exceptional and unparalleled strengths like sexual virility, physical prowess, and capacity to endure pain. It is an acknowledged fact that a Black male possesses remarkable strength and sustaining power. He is able to compete with others and gain universal recognition in the fields of sports, music, arts and literature. Hughes pronounces how in spite of racial handicap the Blacks are not inferior to the Whites. They could contribute to each other's development and mutually progress as in his "Theme for English B":

As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me --
although you're older -- and white --
and somewhat more free....251

249 Harry B. Shaw, Gwendolyn Brooks, p.31.
251 Hughes, "Theme for English B," in SPLH, p.248.
The Blacks need to realize that underneath their rugged exterior marked by characteristic wiry hair, typical thick lips, and large head, all of which contribute to their inferiority complex, they have a gentle interior qualified by their humanistic concerns. With all these plus points on their side, the Blacks could lead a life of dignity, honour and self respect and thereby maintain their individuality.

The coloured people know what it is to be mens sibi conscia recti as revealed in Brooks' "I love those little booths at Benvenuti's":

The colored people arrive, sit firmly down,  
Eat their Express Spaghetti, their T-bone streak,  
Handling their steel and crockery with no clatter,  
Laugh punily, rise, go firmly out of the door....252

By leading high-souled lives, the coloured people prove to the White world that they are no more servile and inferior. On the contrary, they are noble, good, kind and firm.

Like Brooks, Hughes creates a lofty-minded character "Madam" to be emulated by the Blacks. Though employed in performing household chores, Madam does not lose her dignity. She asserts that she is in no way inferior. She is fully conscious of her individuality and separate identity:

I do cooking  
Day's work, too!  
Alberta K. Johnson --  
Madam to you....253

252  Brooks, "I love those little booths at Benvenuti's," in WGB, p.111.
253  Hughes, "Madam's Past History," in SPLH, p.201.
When she encounters the census man who wants to belittle her name, she announces with an air of superiority and in a dignified tone thus:

Leave me and my name  
Just like I am  

Furthermore, rub out  
That Mrs., too --  
I'll have you know  
I'm Madam to you!...

Thus, Brooks and Hughes inject self-esteem into the Blacks and promote an awareness of their worth through their poems.

The Blacks have long been victims of another inhibition which is their obviously significant meek and submissive nature. They have been a suffering race for centuries and their pride and honour were stripped away. "Face like slice of melon / grin that wide" is the usual stereotyped picture of the Black. Generations of slavery, oppression, humiliation, discrimination and degradation resulted in the Black man being meek, humble and docile. He is surrendered to a life of constant submission and subjugation laughing away his tears and complexities of life. He is trained for years to know his place in the society at every turn of his life. He is accustomed to the White's taking advantage of his meekness and taking his timidity for granted. As Brooks' "A Man of the

254 Hughes, "Madam and the Census Man," in SPLH, p.218.

255 Hughes, "125th Street," in SPLH, p.244.
Middle Class" confesses:

I have loved directions
I have loved orders and an iron to stride....

The Black man has learnt to "love" his lot. Hughes also presents their humble nature in his "Negro Ghetto":

I looked at their black faces
And this is what I saw:
The wind imprisoned in the flesh,
The sun bound down by law
I watched them, moving moving,
Like water down the street.
And this is what moved in my heart:
Their far-too-humble feet....

Brooks and Hughes insist on the Blacks' confronting all odds of life with courage, conviction, and will power. Through their poems, they present Blacks who dispense with their servility and assertively claim their rights. Brooks recommends courageous attitudes to the Blacks. They should not allow their timid nature to hold a sway over them and deter them from achieving materiality and recognition in America. They must overcome this inhibition by asserting their blackness. Rudolph Reed is a tough person, determined to move into a good house, though it might be situated in a hostile neighbourhood:

"Oh my home may have its east or west
Or north or south behind it.
All I know is I shall know it,
And fight for it when I find it."...

"Meekness and docility are out of season"\textsuperscript{259} as emphasized by Maria Riley Furman. Like Brooks' Medgar Evers, they must be willing to foreswear "old styles, old tempos"\textsuperscript{260} and ready to "fear no further"\textsuperscript{261} by shedding their fear psychosis. Brooks rouses Black boys to an awareness of their power and exhorts:

Boys. Black. Black boys
Be brave to battle for your breath and bread \ldots{}\textsuperscript{262}

Hughes, in "A New Song," likewise pronounces the strong-willed nature of the Blacks as opposed to their servility in the past:

No longer shall you say
With arrogant eyes and scornful lips:
"You are my servant,
Black man --
I, the free!"

That day is past --

For now,
In many mouths --

New words are formed,
Bitter
With the past
But Sweet
With the dream.
Tense,
Unyielding,
Strong and sure,
They sweep the earth\ldots{}\textsuperscript{263}


\textsuperscript{261} Idem.


\textsuperscript{263} Hughes, "A New Song," in \textit{A New Song}, pp.24-25.
Meekness is misunderstood for weakness in a loveless society. So, Brooks and Hughes urge the Blacks to overcome this impediment to their progress and assert themselves. Obeying Brooks' urgent call they must "have their blooming in the noise of the whirlwind." They must become dignified, bold, assertive and confident human beings, instead of being "spineless Uncle Toms."

The Blacks put up with yet another restriction which checks their advancement. The youth of the race tend to be rebellious, protesting and militant at the least provocation. It is because of the hostile circumstances they have to face everyday in their lives. Because of unstable family lives children are born either out of wedlock or in a mother-dominated society, which produces several negative effects. It is appropriate in this context, to summarize Skinner's views on the Black youths' attitudes to life. A Black boy grows up hating his father who is a "no-good-old man" which ultimately results in hating any sort of male authority, be it a teacher or the police. A teenage girl grows up hard and tough in the Black community with a distorted and thwarted idea about man and manhood; her sole aim being to achieve something in life, she materialises it by becoming a mother herself, even if it be out of wedlock.

Thus having grown up in an atmosphere of frustrations, resentments, poverty, bitterness, crimes, violence and gangwars, the youth of the race turn into aimless addicts or criminals or gangsters or prostitutes.

Again, they have been denied proper education and relegated to

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265 Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography, p.159.
secluded and overcrowded slums. They have been refused opportunities for mental and material enrichment. They have been forbidden from claiming decent and preferred posts. They have been looked down upon as an inferior slavish race. These denials have provoked them to riot, revolt and rebel. The pity of it is, they do not have the means to match the police force or the military. As a result, they get mercilessly whipped, butchered or lynched, as in the case of Scottsboro. Such violent and unruly approaches are no means to achieve political and social ends. In a world which has been brainwashed into thinking the Black as a bad, inhuman and silly being, the Blacks' agitations and brutalities only confirm the already existing prejudiced notions. Hence, Brooks and Hughes have determined to champion the cause of the Blacks in their poetry. Both these poets are conscious of the strengths and limitations of the Blacks. That is why Brooks talks of black solidarity, black love, black vitality and black dignity in her poems. She never forgets to depict the lives of Black boys who hurry to fairskinned ladies and get severely penalized. The unclean slums of Chicago, as projected by Arthur P. Davis, do find a place in her poems as in "The Lovers of the Poor":

But it's all so bad! and entirely too much for them. The stench; the urine, cabbage, and dead beans, Dead porridges of assorted dusty grains, The old smoke, heavy diapers, and, they're told, Something called chitterlings. The darkness. Drawn Darkness, or dirty light. The soil that stirs. The soil that looks the soil of centuries. And for that matter the general oldness. Old Wood. Old marble. Old tile. Old old old. Not homekind. Oldness!...267

Like her, Hughes also does not hesitate to present things as they are. As Onwuchekwa Jemie speculates, "His [Hughes'] treatment of them is stark and unsentimental, capturing at once, the wretchedness and beauty of their lives." By doing so, he intends to open the eyes of the Black people to what they actually are.

The Blacks must work hard and earn a name to gain recognition and their recognition cannot come merely through protests. As Ron Welburn convincingly relates:

> The Black arts movement has reached a new level of commitment and sophistication; its focus is no longer protest against white America, but should [be an] embracement and celebration of the black experience....

Brooks projects the same view when she stresses that "the Black emphasis must be not against White but FOR Black." With this perspective in mind, the Blacks must look into themselves and celebrate black experience. It is interesting to record the approach of Lorraine Hansberry to the racial problems of the Blacks:

> Understanding rejection on a personal level, Lorraine Hansberry understood even more the pain of an entire rejected race, her own race. Through her art, she attempted to portray the many injustices one people had inflicted on

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another and the absurdity -- and the danger -- of ignoring a race of people that had produced so many talented leaders. In so doing she found herself faced with a dilemma that many white writers have confronted, but that is especially acute for black writers -- how to combine the necessary detachment of the artist with the commitment of the fighter against oppression. Does the work of art or the struggle comes first?...

Yet again, the argument of Jene Genet in *Les Blacks* reads well in conjunction with the observation of Lorraine Hansberry:

> This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand.... Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do that by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others....

The last racial constraint that permeates the Black world is the consciousness of the cultural divide in which they have been caught. The culture from which they have been wrenched out still beats in their blood even after several generations had experienced freedom. The tom-toms, shout, laughter and warmth which the Black man is accustomed to are to be traced in all his actions, strongly controlling and influencing them. Onwuchekwa Jemie, in his *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry*, summarizes the survey taken by a White liberal scholar

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* This bears repetition.
Melville Herskovits as follows:

.... blacks in the Americas did not lose nearly as much of their African culture and life style as was popularly supposed, but in fact retained so much of it as to distinguish them radically from the White "mainstream" ....

One finds the culture woven in the fabric of their beings as in Brooks' "The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith":

The past of his ancestors lean against
Hundreds of hungers mingle with his own,
Hundreds of voices advise so dexterously
He quite considers his reactions his,
Judges he walks most powerfully alone,
That everything is -- simply what it is ....

Here, the critic Harry B.Shaw's interpretation is able to bring out Satin-Legs Smith's being under the charm and spell of Black experience:

Satin-Legs could not like the classical musicians or accept the "straight tradition" because his early basic experiences did not prepare him to appreciate it. This man is a creature of his ancestors....

Similarly in Hughes, one detects atavistic survivals of Africa and its culture being portrayed:

Subdued and time-lost
Are the drums -- and yet
Through some vast mist of race
There comes this song


275 Harry B.Shaw, Gwendolyn Brooks, p.68.
I do not understand,
This song of atavistic land,
Of bitter yearnings lost
Without a place --
So long,
So far away
Is Africa's
Dark face.... 276

Such inherent characteristics of their culture relevant in their lives are neither understood nor appreciated by the Whites. Rather, they are misjudged to be inappropriate and unbearable. The Blacks swirl, whirl and dance; shout, talk loud and laugh aloud; they sing their way and dance away their worries. Rhythmic dance steps and chants pulsate in their very beings. They have their own music, folksongs, jazz and blues. The Blacks' cultural consciousness is so great as in the poem "Poem - For the portrait of an African Boy after the Manner of Gauguin" by Hughes:

All the tom-toms of the jungle beat in my blood,
And all the wild hot moons of the jungles
shine in my soul.
I am afraid of this civilization --
So hard,
    So strong,
    So cold .... 277

Steven C. Tracy delineates the Blacks' state in America as victims of cultural slavery:

... the Africans brought to this country became slaves -- not only socially and intellectually, but culturally -- to the

276 Hughes, "Afro American Fragment," in SLPH, p.3.
established values of a culture that denied the validity of these Africans' existence except within the confines of a new definition of where they fit into the conquering culture. Therefore, Africans became redefined within American culture as savages without state, sovereignty, court, loyalty, aristocracy, Church, clergy, army and all other forms of "high" civilization.  

Having been caught between two cultures, the Blacks' plight is lamentable. They are in a dilemma unable to choose. But Brooks and Hughes encourage them to determine and keep their own culture alive. The Blacks must strive "to retain and nurture their ethnic and cultural identity," to repeat the words of Steven C. Tracy. Clinging on to their culture will prove to be an antidote to the depressing situations. William Hansell rightly observes thus:

... the folk song kept the racial heritage alive, fostered positive racial consciousness and served as an alternative to frustration and despair.  

Jean Wagner presents how their jubilant dancing and jostling gives an outlet to their thousand emotions:

... human beings who all day have been tense, inhibited, blocked and frustrated in their work with white people now find the identical powerful means of release and forgetfulness in the whirl and frenzy of the dance, whether profane or sacred. In both places [Church and Dance hall] they have come together with their own kind in a brotherly jostling that


279 Ibid., p.253.

banishes all constraint, and their bodily exaltation is thoroughly capable of summing up the thousand emotions which have found no other outlet.... 281

Keeping up their cultural distinctness helps them prove that theirs is a distinct race. No more do they need to seek for an integration with the Whites and their culture. Brooks herself had believed that "integration was the solution to the black man's problems, and that the whites would eventually stop discriminating against blacks," 282 but later she denounced this view and sought to take pride in being a distinct race. The Whites could only "stare" at their cultural patterns but not share. To tell the truth, it was the inner dictates of their culture which sustained them and supplied them with endurance.

Brooks and Hughes do not like their race to be suppressed even after enfranchisement both under Whites' oppressive tactics and their own racial inhibitions. Treating their poems as carriers and vehicles of gentle irony, subtle humour and mild protest, they motivate and prompt the Blacks to rise in life by appreciating their worth. To overthrow the yoke of oppression, Brooks recommends that the Blacks, especially the youth, should be "ready" to live with a new perspective and determination:

I like to see you lean back in your chair so far you have to fall but do not --
your arms back, your fine hands
in your print pockets.

281 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.441.
282 Harry B. Shaw, Gwendolyn Brooks, p.31.
I like to see you wearing your boy smile
whose tribute is for two of us or three.

Sometimes in life
things seem to be moving
and they are not
and they are not
there.
You are there.

Your voice is the listened - for music.
Your act is the consolidation.

I like to see you living in the world....

Like Brooks, Hughes argues that the Blacks can turn their trials into triumphs by determination and self-reliance as the poem "As I Grew Older" proclaims:

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!....

Thus far it had been the modern Eucharist with the Black as the victim of mankind like Christ. The victimizer is the better placed White and the Western Society and Establishment. It is left to the Black to give up his militant posture and endeavour his best educationally and materially, to rise and gain recognition and put an end to the modern Eucharist. This is the specific recommendation of Brooks and

283 Brooks, "To Don at Salaam," in FP, p.16.
284 Hughes, "As I Grew Older," in SPLH, pp.11-12.
Hughes in the manner and spirit of Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright and James Baldwin. Significantly, these two African American creationists do not allow their racial determinants to constrict their art. Though their poetic compositions are rooted in their race, they evolve into poets of universal implications and emphases, and humanistic concerns. It is their universal and humanistic approaches that lend strength, dignity, charm and lasting value to their oeuvres.