

### African American Criticism

In “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes, a young man depicts his experience as a college student. His professor assigns a small writing assignment encouraging them to write what is true. The narrator then reveals that he is young and colored and living in New York. He explains his struggle as a young black man trying to get a higher education among his white peers. The narrator tries to call on his white peers to show them they are not as different as they may think, save for the fact that his white peers don’t have the difficulties he does. In doing this, Hughes shows that the peers of the black narrator have an incredible white privilege in the higher education system.

While the narrator goes to school amongst white peers, his inability to stay on campus is an example of an advantage given to said peers. While he goes to school on “the college on the hill above Harlem,” he still spends an inordinate amount of time making an unnecessary commute. After going down the hill, he still has to go “through a park... cross St. Nicholas... Eighth Avenue, Seventh” before finally walking up the steps to his home to sit in his room and “write this page.” Because African American students are not allowed to share dorms on campus at this point in time, the black narrator has to make this trek to get to his room back across town. While he doesn’t directly acknowledge the unfairness of this, the narrator makes a point to explain his entire

commute after class. Hughes does this in order to visualize the ease at which the white students have it. Once class ends, they can simply walk across campus and return to their dorms to begin their assignments. Then, in the morning, they walk back to their classroom and return to class. The narrator has to be concerned with leaving his house with enough time to account for any mishaps they may happen on a longer commute. Hughes here is giving a real-life experience in order to be able to visually convey the white privilege of the narrator's peers.

Additionally, the narrator later calls out his white peers for their white privilege. While they may not understand the chances that have above their black peers, the narrator is using this assignment opportunity to tell them outright. The narrator wants his peers to know that they are "white-- and somewhat more free." Hughes makes a point to say "white" directly to emphasize that that is why they have the advantages they do. They are "more free" because they are white. Because they are more free and white, they have advantages over the narrator that they may not realize. Aside from getting the opportunity to live on campus with the other students, they also have an easier time overall. The narrator has the constant feelings of being alone in his experience. With no reference to any other black peers, the narrator has no one to relate his struggles to. His white peers, on the other hand, have an endless amount of students whom they can befriend and relate to. Everyday the narrator has to sit in a classroom and feel alone and prejudiced in a white classroom. This white privilege has nothing to do with anything the white students have done, but they are free simply because of who they are.