

Student Name

Professor Name

English 110

Date

Please note: All paragraphs directly prove the thesis (underlined). How? Each paragraph uses the PIE paragraph approach: each starts with the **Point**, an arguable topic sentence—in **bold**—that directly proves the thesis and states the one point that will be addressed in that paragraph; then **Information** from the poem is used in the form paraphrases and smoothly integrated quotes; then this is followed with **Explanation** telling “so what?” is the importance/significance?

Creating Change by Changing Minds

When I log onto Facebook nowadays and scroll through my feed, if it's not advertisements, it's posts talking about the injustices of the world, primarily from racism. These posts are filled with anger and strong hostility. I'm not saying anger is the wrong emotion to feel when faced with injustice, but when that hostility is channeled into violence, this does not bring about justice or change. Long lasting and effective change can only be made through non-violent methods, which is demonstrated by Langston Hughes in his poem, “I, Too.” In this short poem, Hughes gives many examples of how to effectively and non-violently address and combat racism.

Hughes first uses people's religious morality to enlist his readers to resist racism. He starts the poem with his black narrator asserting, “I am the darker brother” (2). Brother to whom? In the Christian religion, a predominate religion during the times of slavery in the U.S and beyond, the terms brother and sister are used to show equality and kinship, and this human connection transcends race. Everyone is equal as children of God, and are all heirs to the promises of divine love and salvation. Simply by the black narrator calling himself a brother, Hughes is attempting to appeal to white Christian Americans, and to deny this connection is to go against the teachings in the Bible about brotherhood. This is very powerful in multiple ways. Firstly, establishing a sense of brotherhood and camaraderie should make anyone who tarnishes that unity feel ashamed. Secondly if anyone truly wishes to receive God's mercy, they would have to treat everyone as equals, or be punished by God, or even be denied eternal life in heaven all together. This technique is effective and long-lasting because the fear of violence inflicted on a person is temporary, but damnation is eternal.

Hughes further combats racism, not through threats of uprisings or reprisals, but rather by transforming hatred into humor and positivity. In response to his segregation, the narrator says, “They send me to eat in the kitchen/When company comes, /But I laugh, /And eat well/And grow strong” (3-7). With this, Hughes rises above racial exclusion and asks his reader to see it for what it is, ridiculous. He also shows how to effectively combat this injustice which is to learn from it and to feel empowered by not letting racist treatment from others hurt, define or hold you back. Additionally, this approach is an invitation to Hughes’ white readers to be “in on the joke” and laugh at the mindless and unwarranted exclusion of this appealing and relatable person who is full of confidence and self-worth. Through his narrator, Hughes diffuses racial tensions in an inclusive and non-threatening way, but the underlying message is clear: equality is coming soon. We know he believes this when the poem’s speaker states, “Tomorrow, /I’ll be at the table/When company comes” (8-10). There is a strong assertion here that racism will not be permitted to continue, but the assertion is not a threat. Hughes carefully navigates the charged issue of racial unity here, particularly at the time he wrote this poem when segregation was in many places in the U.S. the law. The different forms of segregation—emotional, physical, financial, social—that blacks have suffered has and continues to result in violence, but Hughes here shows another path. Hughes shows that despite it all, we can still make amends and sit down at a table together. As a human family, we can overcome our shameful past by simply choosing to peacefully come together.

Finally Hughes uses American patriotism as a powerful non-violent method to unite his readers to combat racism. The poem concludes, “Besides, /They’ll see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed –/I, too, am America” (15-18). Notice how he uses the word America and not American. He is not simply just an inhabitant of America; he IS America in that he represents the promise, the overcoming of struggle, and the complicated beauty that makes up this country. He is integral to America's past, present and future. He is, as equally as anyone else, a critical piece in America's very existence and pivotal to its future. As Hughes united his readers through religion and the use of

“brother,” here he widens the net beyond religion and appeals to all Americans. As we say in our pledge of allegiance, we stand “indivisible with liberty and justice for all.” To hate or exclude someone based on race, therefore, is to violate the foundational and inspirational tenants of this country. Hughes does not force or attack in this poem, and he does not promise retribution for all the harms done to blacks. He simply shows that racism is incompatible and contradictory to being truly American, and this realization, this change of heart, is what can bring about enduring change.

It has been shown over and over that violence leads to more violence. Violence might bring about change temporarily, but when people are stripped of choice, violence will reassert itself. Some of the most dramatic social movements that have brought about real change have used non-violent means as seen in Martin Luther King Jr’s non-violent protests helping to change U.S. laws and ensure Civil Rights for all, as seen in Gandhi’s use of non-violent methods to rid India of centuries of oppressive British rule, and as seen in Nelson Mandela’s persistent and non-violent approaches of finally removing Apartheid from South Africa. However, we are not these men. Most of us are not leaders of movements, but we are each important and influential. We as individuals can be immensely powerful if we choose to be. We can choose to apply the examples and advice from enlightened minds like Hughes, King, Gandhi, and Mandela. When we see on Facebook or in the news on in-person people targeting or excluding others, or inciting violence against a person or group based on race, or sexual orientation, or religion, or any other arbitrary difference selected to divide and pit us against one another, we can choose instead to respond with kindness, with humor, with positivity, and with empathy because this leads to the only kind of change that matters.

Works Cited

Hughes, Langston. "I, Too." *African-American Poetry: An Anthology 1773-1927*, edited by Joan R. Sherman, Dover Publications, Inc. Mineola, New York. 1997, p. 74.