Langston Hughes's *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods For Jazz*

An Explication of Hope In The Midst of Protest

---

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the School of Humanities

Morehead State University

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of English

---

by

William J. Read

July 1, 1982
Acknowledgment

I give all praise, honor, and glory to God the Father and His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I thank my thesis committee, Dr. Judy Rogers (director), Dr. Donald H. Cunningham, and Dr. Mark Glasser. Their encouragement and advice aided clarity of expression and cultivated greater critical thought in the evaluation of the explicated poems.

I heartily thank the staff of the Camden-Carroll Library, especially the inter-library loan department and Carol Nutter; thank you for helping me to obtain the materials I so desperately needed.

Finally, I thank those who lived the good and bad times of this thesis and continued to love and understand me: Karen, Chris, and Mandie. I love you, too.
Accepted by the faculty of the School of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of English degree.

Master's Committee: Judy R. Rogers, Chairman

July 6, 1982
Langston Hughes's *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods For Jazz*

An Explication of Hope In The Midst of Protest

William J. Read, M. A.
Morehead State University, 1982

Director of Thesis: [Signature]

Langston Hughes is considered by many critics to have been a lifelong experimenter and innovator in poetic form and style. One of his last and most experimental and innovative works, especially in using jazz and poetry together, is *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods For Jazz*.

*Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods For Jazz* is primarily a volume of social protest. However, this protest is tempered by hope, evident in "Cultural Exchange," "Blues In Stereo," "Ask Your Mama," and "Show Fare, Please." Since these poems have a greater flavoring of hope than any of the other poems in the volume, they have been chosen for explication.

The need for explication is acknowledged when one realizes that the charge of time has removed the contemporary reader twenty plus years from the scene which so concerned Hughes. What was then common knowledge, the politicians and entertainers, and readily known to the Negro community and a few concerned Whites, is today lost in history. Fur-
ther, no explication of any of the poems in ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ has been found.

The primary source for these poems is Langston Hughes's ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961) which contains twelve poems: "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," "RIDE, RED, RIDE," "SHADES OF PIGMEAT," "ODE TO DINAH," "BLUES IN STEREO," "HORN OF PLENTY," "GOSPEL CHA-CHA," "IS IT TRUE?" "ASK YOUR MAMA," "BIRD IN ORBIT," "JAZZTET MUTED," and "SHOW FARE, PLEASE."

The protest against White oppression and the hope that it will end begins in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE." Here two possible ways of ending White oppression are presented. The first way to end oppression is through revolution, and Hughes makes this point clear by presenting several world leaders who, through revolution, have led their countrymen to self-rule. However, the persona dreams of a different way, thereby presenting the second method of ending oppression: negotiation. Here the persona dreams that the Negroes have combined their political might and have voted the segregationists out of, and themselves into, power. This effectively exchanges the White-Negro socio-economic situation and expresses hope in the political process.

In "BLUES IN STEREO" the persona celebrates his non-American counterparts' independence victories with jubila-
tion reminiscent of ancient tribal celebrations. Although religious disparity is a major thought in the central section of this poem, "BLUES IN STEREO" ends on the hope that minor adjustments on the persona's part will bring him true blessings.

With "ASK YOUR MAMA" Hughes comments that the only sure and easy prize in life is an increasing number of sorrows, especially for the Negro. However, hope that the oppression sorrows will end comes in the guise of Leopold Senghor who peacefully negotiated his nation's independence. He stands as an example that a communal spirit can be manifested if the oppressor and the oppressed can have a mutual exchange of thoughts and ideas.

"SHOW FARE, PLEASE," the concluding poem of the volume and the last poem explicated, protests the inequalities which the Negro endures. Therefore, in a last attempt to elicit White America's response, the poet ends "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" with lines which contain progressively fewer words and stronger requests. Finally, the persona demands "SHOW FARE!" This demand emphasizes that White oppression must end, and the persona stands ready to negotiate or rebel; the choice is mama's.

Thus, Hughes ends the poem and the volume with exclamatory clauses, shouts, which are demands filled with expecta-
tion. Why shout if no one is expected to hear the shout, and why demand if there is no hope that someone, someday, will not comply?

Accepted by:

Judy R. Rogers, Chairman

Donald H. Cummins

Marc Flaherty
Poem Abbreviations

CULTURAL EXCHANGE  C.E.
RIDE, RED, RIDE  R.R.R.
SHADES OF PIGMENT  S.O.P.
ODE TO DINAH  O.T.D.
BLUES IN STEREO  B.I.S.
HORN OF PLENTY  H.O.P.
GOSPEL CHA-CHA  G.C.C.
IS IT TRUE?  I.I.T.
ASK YOUR MAMA  A.Y.M.
BIRD IN ORBIT  B.I.O.
JAZZTET MUTED  J.M.
SHOW FARE, PLEASE  S.F.P.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgment .................................................. ii
Poem Abbreviations ............................................... iii

I. Introduction ................................................... 5
The Days Before *ASK YOUR MAMA* ......................... 6
An Overview of *ASK YOUR MAMA* ......................... 17

CULTURAL EXCHANGE (By Langston Hughes) ............ 50

II. "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" .................................... 56

BLUES IN STEREO (By Langston Hughes) ............... 86

III. "BLUES IN STEREO" ....................................... 88

ASK YOUR MAMA (By Langston Hughes) .................. 102

IV. "ASK YOUR MAMA" ....................................... 106

SHOW FARE, PLEASE (By Langston Hughes) ............ 121

V. "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" ................................... 123

VI. Conclusion and Exhortation ............................... 138

Notes (Introduction) ........................................... 142
Notes ("CULTURAL EXCHANGE") .......................... 145
Notes ("BLUES IN STEREO") ................................. 150
Notes ("ASK YOUR MAMA") ................................ 152
Notes ("SHOW FARE, PLEASE") ............................ 155

Appendix 1 ..................................................... 156
Appendix 2 ..................................................... 157
Appendix 3 ..................................................... 160
Bibliography .................................................... 161
I. Introduction

Langston Hughes's work with poetry spanned his adult life. Though he was a prolific writer in many genres, he used poetry combined with jazz to reach the broadest audience. Always striving for freshness of expression, Hughes spearheaded innovation, especially in the use of jazz music in conjunction with his poetry. But as an innovator, Hughes and his works often came under severe critical evaluation because few European standards existed for judging his innovations.

Recognizing this, and realizing that innovators were often ridiculed for their experiments, Hughes disregarded the critics' attacks and continued his innovation: this is best illustrated by Hughes's remarks after Benjamin Brawley, whom Hughes described as "our most respectable critic," reviewed Fine Clothes to the Jew stating, "it would have been just as well, perhaps better, if the book had never been published." To him and many like him, Hughes answered: "I have never pretended to be keeping a literary grazing pasture with food to suit all breeds of cattle." The reputation study of this chapter further illustrates this attitude.

ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ (1961) is one of the most experimental and innovative of his works. One of his
last poetry experiments, it differs from the others by employing the physical characteristics of jazz as well as jazz rhythms to develop his themes. These themes, protest and hope, are worked out on multiple levels: shape and color scheme, and individual as well as book-length poem levels. When *ASK YOUR MAMA* was first released, it met with scathing criticism as well as ecstatic praise. This difference in opinion came about because critics were not prepared to evaluate a volume of this nature. This chapter will discuss these matters and set the course for what follows.

The Days Before *ASK YOUR MAMA*

**Choice of Subject**

Langston Hughes was a lifelong experimenter with poetic style and form. From *The Weary Blues* (1926) to *The Panther and the Lash* (1967), Hughes used an extensive amount of folk material—blues, spirituals, work and dance songs, and sermons—to communicate with Negroes and Whites.

But this use of the folk idiom and Hughes's insistence on innovation often exceeded conventional standards. Since critics most often evaluate from established guidelines, anyone who deviated from those standards were unfairly labeled as inferior, bizarre, or stunt-like in their attempts
at and achievements in manipulating form and use of materials before untried or considered unacceptable in poetry. On this, Professor Nancy B. McGhee, in her article "Langston Hughes: Poet in the Folk Manner," wrote:

Because the materials of the black folk heritage became the acknowledged milieu which Hughes found most congenial to his artistic tastes, his creativity led him into bizarre experiments in verse forms and styles. Eventually, his simpler, earlier "blues" and "jazz" could be regarded as unsuccessful preliminaries to the more complex and unconventional verse, laying the poet open to criticism for seeming to seek extremes of experiment for the sake of the new.²

Hughes's poetry undoubtedly seemed bizarre to critics who were accustomed to Euro-western meter, rhyme scheme, and poetic subject matter. The Negro folk idiom, before Hughes, received little serious, socially important, poetic attention. Thus the few standards that existed for the analysis of the humorous use of Negro folk material in poetry did not provide a substantially valid means of evaluating this increasingly emergent form which used the idiom in a socially serious manner.
Further, all innovators were (and are) charged with extremism in search of the new: consider Ezra Pound or E. E. Cummings; both met similar criticism.

Facing such criticism early in his career, Hughes wrote an article in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" for Nation (June 23, 1926) in which he states:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If the white folks seem pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know them, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

This statement shows Hughes's ability to ignore inappropriate criticism and to continue writing with self-confidence.

Again, when the Pittsburgh Courier headlined Fine Clothes to the Jew, Hughes's second published volume of poetry, as trash, Hughes answered his critics. On April 16, 1927, in a rejoinder entitled "These Bad Negroes: A Critique on Critics" Hughes wrote:

My poems are indelicate. But so is life.
I write about "harlots and gin-bibers." But they are human. Solomon, Homer, Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman were not afraid or ashamed to include them.

"Red Silk Stockings." An ironical poem deploring the fact that in certain Southern rural communities there is little work for a beautiful colored girl to do other than the selling of her body—a fact for one to weep over rather than disdain to recognize. 4

Thus Hughes answered his critics and then turned back to writing of the life he knew best, showing that such criticism had little effect on him. The folk idiom was Hughes's environment regardless of critical approval.

**Literary Reputation**

Hughes's literary reputation has primarily rested with the people. From his beginnings as a poet during the Harlem Renaissance until his death, it was the common people, Negro and White, rather than the academic hierarchical and critical establishments who came to see and to hear him with more than a cursory interest.

James Mercer Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri
February 1, 1902 and, primarily because of his parents' separation, moved many times during his childhood. As an adult, Hughes became a world traveler and reflected this restlessness in his poetry. In 1921 he came to New York and studied briefly at Columbia University before signing onto the S. S. Malone bound for Africa (some thirty West African ports of call) and Holland. After reaching Africa and having the Africans consider him a White (due to his mixed Negro and European lineage), Hughes shipped out to Holland and eventually came to Paris where, dismissed from the ship, he worked in several hotels as a dishwasher.

After living as a beachcomber in Genoa (1923), Hughes returned to the United States and began working as a bus boy in the Washington, D. C. Wardman Park Hotel. Here he "slipped" three of his poems, "Jazzonia," "Negro Dancers," and "The Weary Blues," to Vachel Lindsay who introduced him to the Washington press corps as the Negro bus boy poet; he quickly rose as one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance, meeting many people who aided his career. Two of these people were Charles S. Johnson, editor of Opportunity, who constantly encouraged him, and Alfred A. Knopf, owner of Knopf Publishing which published many of Hughes's works.

When the Harlem Renaissance ended in 1929, Hughes once again began traveling. From 1931-1933 he went to Cuba,
Haiti, Russia, Korea, Tokyo, Shanghai, and finally New York where he took up permanent residence until the end of his life (1967). In 1936 he was employed by Baltimore's Afro-American to cover the activities of Negroes fighting the Spanish Civil War in the International Brigades; his journalistic abilities proved successful enough that he was able to sell several war articles to both the Cleveland Call-Post and Cleveland's Globe newspapers.

After he returned to the United States from the Spanish Civil War, Hughes began work on his autobiography (The Big Sea, 1940), and his "Simple" articles as well as resuming his interest in poetry. But when World War II broke out in 1942, Hughes did not keep his talents to himself. He wrote jingles, verses, and slogans for the Treasury Department's bond sales, and he wrote articles concerning Negro servicemen.

Beyond his war effort, Hughes continued to work on song lyrics ("Just Around The Corner," 1948), and translations (Cuba Libra, poems by Nicolas Guillen, 1948), as well as his own original works. He did not cease writing until his death.

Hughes found the most enduring prominence in poetry. In his poetry of the 1920's, The Weary Blues (1926) and Fine Clothes to the Jew (1927), he portrayed Negro daily life, its gospel blues and jazz rhythms. He continued to inter-
weave these folk materials into several of his subsequent volumes of poetry. His use of the folk idiom continued to develop through each of these works with his experimentation with jazz rhythms reaching a peak in Montage of a Dream Deferred (1951) and *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961).

However, Hughes was more than a poet; he wrote in every genre as an innovator and guide to many writers from the 1920's on. He wrote short stories collected in *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), *Something in Common and Other Stories* (1963), and *The Best of Simple* (1963), which was compiled from the Chicago Defender newspaper; these "Simple" stories of the late forties and mid-fifties are perhaps his most famous short story collections. Further, he wrote plays that were collected and published in *Five Plays by Langston Hughes*, 1963; autobiographies (*The Big Sea*, 1940 and *I Wonder as I Wander*, 1956); and musicals (*The Sun Do Move*, 1942); as well as children's books and historical studies concerned with the condition of Negro culture in Africa and America.5

Hughes's volumes are found world-wide. Of over forty volumes published by the time he died, twenty-seven are still in print with *The Negro Mother* (1931) and *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956) having been constantly reprinted since 1976.6

Although Hughes was picketed and demonstrated against by such groups as an ultraconservative Los Angeles YMCA
faction in 1935 for his supposed Communist sympathies, (Hughes toured Russia in 1931, see page 11), and a group of Birchite pastors and angry taxpayers in Wichita in 1965, he continued to write and be read. Even the Senate Committee on Permanent Investigations which questioned him concerning alleged Communist sympathies in the early 1930's could not quench his popularity with the populace.?

This popularity, as well as his own literary merit and production, won him several grants and awards. Beginning in 1930 with the Harmon Gold Award for Literature, Hughes went on to receive the Guggenheim Fellowship (1935) for creative writing, the Rosenwald Fellowship (1941), a one thousand dollar grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1946), and the Ainsfeld-Wolfe Award (1954). 8

Though Hughes received these awards, he never forgot that it was his audience which made him famous. On his reading tours, night-clubs and college auditoriums would fill to capacity or near capacity with people wanting to hear him. Thus it was that after one such college tour in 1963, during which he visited such campuses as Wayne State University, Fairleigh Dickinson University, and Columbia University, 9 that the academic community started taking serious note of Langston Hughes and began writing articles and theses on him. Yet many remain to be written.
Marriage of Poetry and Jazz

When Hughes spoke of his poems in the Nation article "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," June 23, 1926, he said: "Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know. In many of them I try to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz." Hughes felt that by remaining as close to the people as possible, including their music, the people would give the world its great Negro poet.

So the feeling Hughes had for jazz grew within him. More and more he used jazz rhythms to communicate his concern for social reform. McGhee feels that in so doing "Hughes devises and creates a new style, the uneven, and according to [Saunders] Redding, 'the jarring dissonances and broken rhythms of be-bop.'" Thus, Hughes's innovation with poetic style requires a new form able to accommodate jazz's broken and non-harmonious rhythms.

Hughes's experimentation with jazz rhythms and folk forms, as Arthur P. Davis states:

... reached its most brilliant peak in two later works: Montage of a Dream Deferred (1951) and Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods For Jazz (1961). In the first work the poet tries to capture, as he
stated it, "the conflicting, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song. . . . "12

Davis' statement is best illustrated in "Dream Boogie," one of the poems in Montage of a Dream Deferred:

Good morning, daddy!
Ain't you heard
The boogie-woogie rumble
Of a dream deferred?

Listen closely:
You'll hear their feet
Beating out and beating out a--

You think
It's a happy beat?

Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
something underneath
like a--

What did I say?

Sure,
I'm happy!
Take it away!

Hey, pop!
Re-bop!
Mop!

Y - e - a - h ! (1951)13

The sharp and impudent interjections indicated by the exclamation mark, are line 1 and lines 16 through 21. A
normal greeting, such as line 1 presents, would be a simple declarative statement. By using the interjection, the author makes the greeting bold and forceful, as lines 16 through 21 are.

The sudden nuances are found in the use of "a's" as a sort of "catch"—a slight stumble in a rapid movement. This is most apparent in the single "a" at the end of the third line of stanza two and the fourth line of stanza four which are used to "catch" the reader—slow his reading pace—before allowing him to move on into the next movement. To a degree, these "catches" work as a stanza stopper, allowing for a short, sassy cadenza—an ornamental passage for a voice or solo instrument in an aria or concerto—"break," as it is called in jazz, before moving on with the controlling theme. This "break" with its improvisation-like wording is an element of the jazz jam session.

According to Davis, "Montage of a Dream Deferred technically is a subtle and highly successful experiment in the poetic use of jazz rhythm." As "Dream Boogie" illustrates, the poem blares out at the reader in the first line and then moves smoothly with sudden variations in movement as the "catches" and "breaks" are reached, all in the manner of jazz rhythm.
An Overview of

ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ

Introduction

Although ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ also has the previously mentioned qualities, it exhibits a different kind of experimentation. It employs a multi-media presentation which draws on the reader's aural, visual, and intellectual capacities, often simultaneously. Individual characteristics such as the book's shape, the word sounds and meanings, and the use of a jazz melody as accompaniment, each present jazz in a manner before untried; collectively, they present jazz with all its nuances and subtleties—in all its fun—and life in all its seriousness. This volume makes a strong social comment that can be seen, read, and heard by all people. Hughes apparently uses this multi-media approach because it peaks curiosity by being different rather than alienating anyone.

Further, the use of jazz music, essentially a Negro invention, draws people in; in the 1920's White people flocked to Harlem and other places to hear it; they have been lis-
tening to it throughout the world since that decade. When poetry is combined with the magnetic effect of this lively music, the combination reaches a double audience—jazz lovers and poetry lovers. Thus, Hughes uses jazziness to help break down the barriers inhibiting understanding: "Let the blare of the Negro Jazz bands . . . penetrate the closed ears of the near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand. . . . The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs."  

Physical Characteristics of the Book  
The design and shape of ASK YOUR MAMA separate this book from all around it. Its shape is that of a 45 r.p.m. record album, while the binding has a highly decorative, abstract, cubist illustration in blues, greens, reds, and black, which grabs the eye. (Ulysses Lee, in his review of ASK YOUR MAMA, reports that the dust jacket uses this design also.)  

Juxtaposed to this, the poems' type face is bold, yet unobtrusive 10 point sans serif (ASK)—without the short cross-lines at the ends of the main strokes of many letters in some type faces; by using this type face Hughes avoids distractions caused by other type faces and thereby gives the reader freedom to pay full attention to the meaning of the words without becoming more interested in fancy type. The type face of the titles is assertive, yet non-demanding
18 point modern (A S K)---a style of type distinguished by extreme contrast between thick and thin strokes;\(^{18}\) by using this type face in the titles, Hughes seems to demand that the reader take note that someone is talking and should be listened to; Hughes may be making a subtle statement on the disparity of wealth---the thick strokes represent those who receive plenty while the thin strokes represent those who receive little. Additionally, all the letters are printed in upper case (capital letters) representative of the assertion of self---in this case an entire race---and a show of boldness. This use of all capital letters in printing of a volume of poetry had not been tried before by a major, modern poet.

The ink and paper colors are also a juxtaposing of different elements. The inks are alternatingly blue and brown (throughout the volume) on a laid paper---paper with a pattern of parallel lines at equal distances giving a ribbed effect\(^{19}\)--which is the color of faded roses. This contrast of ink color with page color, though not an obtrusive clash, lacks the contentment that a neutral color, such as black or white, on this pink paper would give. On this aspect of color coordination, Ulysses Lee states:

The contrast of desiccated pink and the crisp blue
and brown ink comments on the method of the poems; the juxtaposition of the unlikely to produce a syncopated view of the paradoxes of our racial times.20

Just as the ink and paper colors do not harmonize, so society does not harmonize, but gives a feeling of discontent. Further, this alternating of color does not allow the reader to become lethargic due to boredom with one color.

Title

This juxtaposing of the unlikely is found again in the title and throughout the rest of the volume. ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ displays the themes of protest and hope immediately before the reader; the title establishes the protest, while the reference to jazz establishes, alludes to, hope.

The Dozens

The idea that Hughes is playing the "dozens" in ASK YOUR MAMA is indicated in the last half of the title, 12--a dozen--MOODS FOR JAZZ. The words "ask your mama," which become a refrain throughout the work are, of themselves, a form of protest; first, it was used against religious ig-
norance, then against the feminine dominance on young Negroes, and finally, as Hughes uses it, against Whites. In using this phrase, and especially the "your mama" retort, Hughes is alluding to the Negro tradition of "dozens" sometimes referred to as "dirty dozens." 21

Initially, the "dozens" was a religious teaching device of the nineteenth century. It was comprised of a canto of twelve--a dozen--verses setting forth essential Biblical facts which were memorized by the children. A typical beginning for a 12-line teaching canto would be:

"Book of Genesis got the first truth

God Almighty took a ball of mud to make this earth." According to Mack McCormick, such 12-line cantos (popularly known as the "dozens") play an important part in educating children. 22

Beyond the religious use, the "dozens" became an important tool in helping young Negro males to overcome their maternal attachment and form male peer group associations. Using the "dozens" for this purpose, the Negro youth knew that if he insulted someone else's mother, his own mother would be insulted. Thus, he was able to face his peers, accept and return insults, and become one with his street companions. These street associations often provided security not found in the home situation.
Dr. Roger Abrahams, explaining the use of the "dozens" in peer group associations, believes that the most important use of the "dozens" is that of the Negro youth ridding himself of:

... his oedipal fixations engendered by the dominance of the mother in the family. ...

The game permits him to abuse someone else's mother in the knowledge that there will be an attack on his own. By so participating in a rejection of the matriarchy he prepares himself for acceptance within the adolescent gang. 23

This need to form male peer group approval comes from the fact that the father frequently leaves home and seldom returns, often due to welfare administration restrictions. Thus, the father has little influence on the male adolescent's manhood which he must discover on the streets.

This street game is, therefore, a verbal contest in which adolescents trade scathing insults (often blatantly sexual), generally rhyming, concentrating on relatives (usually female and, most often, mothers): the more debasing the comment, the more intense the emotion and the meaner the game. However, this game is not restricted to male adolescents; it is employed by adults of both sexes. The
primary function of the game among adults is to initiate a reaction on the part of the less adept player: usually a fight (on the pungency of a "dozens" encounter, see Paul Oliver's The Blues Tradition, page 238).

Relating to this game of "dozens," Onwuchekwa Jemie, in his book Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry, writes:

The dozens is a mean game because, as H. Rap Brown has said, "What you try to do is totally destroy somebody else with words. . . . The real aim of the dozens was to get a dude so mad that he'd cry or get mad enough to fight."

- Let's get off the subject of mothers, cause I just got off yours
- I did it to your mama on the railroad track, and when her ass went up the trains went back
- Your mother is a doorknob, everybody gets a turn
- Your mama has so many wrinkles in her head she has to screw her hat on
- I saw your mother on a bench trying to screw a cock with a monkey wrench.24

Though Jemie calls this "brutal comedy,"25 these examples are kind compared to some unfit to print; all such encounters ended in fights.
In *ASK YOUR MAMA*, Hughes modifies the "dozens" for use as a tool against Whites and their ignorance of Negro customs. But instead of being an abusive user of the full baseness of the "dozens," Hughes becomes a deceptively gentle player. He avoids the intense sexual imagery and adapts this adolescent game of insult and street bravado into a sophisticated adult offensive weapon in the arsenal of democracy. Since this is a street game, it is accessible to anyone who would take time and become involved in Negro life. But since Whites do not get involved in Negro life any more than is required of them, they do not realize that the refrain "ask your mama" is an insult aimed at them. In a sense, this is a private joke between Hughes and other Negroes, or Whites who are willing to involve themselves in the culture of other people. The implication in this is that here are two cultures co-existing, yet one (White) knows little or nothing of even the most readily accessible custom of the other (Negro). For example, when Hughes's Negro suburbanite is asked by his White neighbors, "IF MY BLACKNESS, WOULD IT RUB OFF?" (C.E., line 86), he answers "... ASK YOUR MAMA." (C.E., line 87), thereby hinting at the "dozens" custom of a return cut which never comes because the White man does not understand he has just been insulted. Since this is his first face-to-face encounter with a Negro, he wonders if this new neighbor is
sensitive or what. "THEY WONDERED WAS I SENSITIVE/AND HAD A CHIP ON SHOULDER?" (H.O.P., lines 49-50).

This ignorance on behalf of the White is exhibited again when, "THEY RUNG MY BELL TO ASK ME/COULD I RECOMMEND A MAID/I SAID, YES, YOUR MAMA." (H.O.P., lines 96-98). Once again the White fails to see the insult, for all he can see is an impudent Negro telling him to use his own family.

Perhaps the strongest allusion to all the suggestiveness of the "dozens" is found in "IS IT TRUE?" (lines 54-55): "THEY ASKED ME AT THE PTA/IS IT TRUE THAT NEGROES ...?". That Negroes what? Hughes's Liner Notes (page 90) for "IS IT TRUE?" finish the question: "Everybody thinks that Negroes have the most fun, but, of course, secretly hopes they do not--although curious to find out if they do." Therefore, when the suburbanite answers, "I SAID, ASK YOUR MAMA." (I.I.T., line 56), it is because since pre-slavery days, the Negro has been standing at her back door.

By using suggestiveness rather than explicit statement, Hughes lifts "the dozens out of the school yard into the boardroom and onto the floor of Congress."26 Hughes's greatest impact comes from the use of implied rather than stated insult, thereby making his poems acceptable in places where their protest would do the most good. Further, though the White does not know the "dozens," he knows that the refrain
is not an answer to his question. Thus, he senses that some comment is being made but probably does not get angry. If he is observant enough to realize that a comment is being made, then maybe he will become involved in Negro society and help eliminate the inequality. Even if the White knows the "dozens" and becomes angry, this is better than having him unconcerned; an angry man often takes some kind of action, even if it is only thinking about the Negro situation.

**Jazz and Hope**

Beyond protest, Hughes establishes hope by using jazz and jazz rhythms. This is also stated in the title. Of this music, Hughes writes: "Jazz, America's Music, is fun." When one is having fun, he is no longer absorbed in anger, but assumes a joyful, hopeful attitude toward himself and life. Further, anger drives people away from speakers and causes, whereas "fun" draws people together. So Hughes uses a jazz melody and its dynamics in *ASK YOUR MAMA* to draw readers into the volume in hopes that he can "... penetrate the closed ears of near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand."  

Yet, jazz is protest; it goes against the grain of what is expected in and accepted of western music. It maintains
no strict structure. "Jazz is process-music, a dynamic force whose thrust is forwards towards the future. It is anti-static, developing, moving. . . . It's invitation to joy. . . . Jazz carries within it the vision of an alternative mode of life." Jazz is unstructured improvisation, while the status-quo demands static structure.

Dedication

Hughes dedicated ASK YOUR MAMA to Louis Armstrong, "the greatest horn blower of them all." Hughes admired Armstrong's strength of spirit that enabled him to be an innovator in the early days of jazz. Under Armstrong's guidance, jazz established a standard technique which integrated solo and improvisation as basic elements of this musical genre. In the face of ridicule toward jazz, Armstrong stood firm, becoming a jazz virtuoso who made jazz world famous and himself loved by people everywhere, Black and White. Armstrong achieved with his horn what Hughes hoped to achieve with his poetry: to speak to the people and get them to react.

The Foreword

Hughes employs a foreword in ASK YOUR MAMA to introduce the reader to what a blues melody may look like. Since he
is using the melody "Hesitation Blues" (Traditional, see Appendix 1), he shows the reader what this particular melody looks like.

Directly beneath the bars of music, Hughes offers this explanation concerning the melody as a controlling element for the accompaniment and the freedom for jazz improvisation as well as the use of a musical figurine after each "ask your mama" line:

The traditional folk melody of the "Hesitation Blues" is the leitmotif for this poem. In and around it, along with the other recognizable melodies employed, there is room for spontaneous jazz improvisation, particularly between verses, where the voice pauses. The musical figurine indicated after each "ask your mama" line may incorporate the impudent little melody of the old break, "Shave and a Haircut, Fifteen Cents." \(^{31}\)

Below this statement, Hughes places the music bar for the figurine "Shave and a Haircut" to acquaint the reader with this melody.

In using the "Hesitation Blues," Hughes poses its key questions: "How long must I wait?/Can I get it now?/..."
Or must I hesitate?" Promised justice and equality, liberation and freedom, the Negro waits and dreams of the day when this will come true. But until that day, he will protest the injustice and hope that change will be effected similar to the theme development of ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ.

The Contents

   Theme. ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ is a sequence of twelve poems tied together by two themes which vacillate in their prominence from poem to poem, and within individual poems. The theme develops, nevertheless, from protest to hope in the overall movement of the volume. This book-length progression is first viewed in the title. On the one hand, "ask your mama" is the "dozens" retort, with the number "12" being a subtle echo of the retort protesting White ignorance of this common Negro game and, likewise, of Negro life. On the other hand, "moods for jazz" is joyful in anticipation of the lightheartedness which normally accompanies a jazz gathering and, therefore, is hopeful that Whites will become more aware of Negro life and culture and will make needed reforms.
In achieving the book-length development of this theme, Hughes also interrelates the poems by a conscious effort of repeating certain ideas in several of the poems. According to Hughes scholar, Onwuchekwa Jemie, some of these repeated ideas are:

--Santa Claus and Christmas; white snow and dark shadows; mother, grandmother, and grandfather; river and railroad; quarter (time, money, living space, breathing space, violent death--"a lynched tomorrow . . . tarred and feathered," drawn and quartered)--recur quite often as single words or phrases embedded in alien contexts. . . .

Beyond these ideas mentioned by Jemie are, the question and answer approach, religion and the Holy Ghost, technology and electronics, devices of entertainment--television, phonograph, jukebox, movies--and money and payment. All these motifs help illustrate the themes and the various guises they can take.

ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ consists of twelve poems:

1. "CULTURAL EXCHANGE"
2. "RIDE, RED, RIDE"
3. "SHADES OF PIGMEAT"
4. "ODE TO DINAH"
5. "BLUES IN STEREO"
6. "HORN OF PLENTY"
7. "GOSPEL CHA-CHA"
8. "IS IT TRUE?"
9. "ASK YOUR MANA"
10. "BIRD IN ORBIT"
11. "JAZZTET MUTED"
12. "SHOW FARE, PLEASE"

The Poems

To acquaint the reader more intensely with these poems, I have provided the following brief review of each poem's theme, content comment, and motifs.

1. "CULTURAL EXCHANGE." In "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," the theme develops from protest to hope. Presenting the reader with an example of Negro fears caused by White bigotry, the poet comments on the fullness of Negro participation in White culture and society and protests the lack of White participation in Negro culture and society. This protest is heightened by the poet's use of cataloguing of names and nations which are readily familiar to Negroes and a few Whites,
but not to the majority of Whites. These nations which are gaining self-rule from White oppressors, are a cause for hope. Thus, the persona dreams that the Negroes of the South have effected a political change which clearly illustrates that culture must be a "TWO-WAY STREET." (line 110).

"CULTURAL EXCHANGE" introduces the motifs found in \textit{ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ}. The major motifs introduced are "quarter" (here associated with living space as expressed in the phrase, "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES," which is repeated in every poem, with variations on the phrase found in "IS IT TRUE?", "ASK YOUR MAMA," and "JAZZTET MUTED"), question-response techniques (lines 85-87), and "river" and "railroad" (line 10). The secondary motifs introduced involve light and dark (line 24), religion or religious allusions (line 45), modes of entertainment (line 34), and electronic technology (lines 34, 56). Other ideas mentioned in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" and repeated throughout the volume deal with racial heritage (mother, grandmother, father, and grandfather), and social disparity as illustrated in the many references to Christmas.

2. "RIDE, RED, RIDE." Following the hope that closes "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," is a poem with a dominant theme of protest: "RIDE, RED, RIDE." This protest is centered around oppression and the uncertainties created by the failure of
Whites to fulfill the promises tendered. Thus, the persona cannot be sure he will see his mother "WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED UP YONDER" (line 2). Further, oppression prevents the persona from bettering his economic and social standing by forcing him to remain a servant of White masters ("SEEMS LIKE I MET YOU ONCE/WITH ADAM POWELL FOR CHAUFPEUR," lines 31-32).

The most notable motif of this poem is the variation on the question-response technique presented this time with a "dozens" encounter. In "RIDE, RED, RIDE" the persona voices the question of the "Hesitation Blues" while interspersing the Spanish word for wrath, "ira": "TELL ME HOW LONG/MUST I WAIT?/CAN I GET IT NOW?/CA IRA! CA IRA!/OR MUST I HESITATE?/IRA! BOY, IRA!" (lines 4-9). Following this question episode, the persona continues to question, using allusions which recall racial heritage while alternating English and Spanish lines (lines 10-22).

3. "SHADES OF PIGMEAT." In "SHADES OF PIGMEAT" the protest of White oppression continues ("BELGIUM SHADOWS LEOPOLD," line 2). However, Whites should not be too secure in thinking that they share nothing with Negroes; in a land where ancient racial intermixings were common, though not public, it is hard for anyone to be sure of whose blood is
shading his pigmentation ("AND WHO IS MACK THE KNIFE . . .," line 14). The poem closes with the comment that Whites have and Negroes do not have (lines 31-42), and the only hope is for divine intervention (lines 42-45).

With "SHADES OF PIGMEAT" the religious idea foreshadowed in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" is given some limited development ("DEAD OR LIVE THEIR GHOSTS CAST SHADOWS," line 6). The question technique here uses full octo-syllabic lines which begin to drop words at the end of the stanza so that the stanza finally ends with one or two single syllable words, making the questioning emphatic.

4. "ODE TO DINAH." Opening with the refrain "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES," "ODE TO DINAH" protests the fact that the living conditions in the quarter have not improved since the Negroes fled Southern oppression, and Whites choose to remain ignorant of their situation; economics may be trying for the Whites, but they are almost unbearable for Negroes (WHITE FOLKS' RECESSION/IS COLORED FOLKS' DEPRESSION," lines 125-126). Further protest, with its implied anger at White ignorance and insensitivity, end the poem ("THEY ASKED ME RIGHT AT CHRISTMAS/WOULD I MARRY POCAHONTAS?" lines 127-128). Whites have forgotten that it was a White man, Abraham Lincoln, who saved Negroes and
not an Indian. This insensitive question misses the mark which the last line of the poem comments on ("WHEN THE MAN SHOT AT THE WOMAN/AND BY MISTAKE SHOT OUT THE LIGHT," lines 131-132).

The most evident motif of "ODE TO DINAH" is the juxtaposing of light and dark ("WHERE THE SNOW NOW ACCLIMATED,/ SHADOWS SHOW UP SHARPER," lines 2-3). Beyond this idea, the river and railroad are again used in association with escape as in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE." Further, racial heritage is developed as in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," but is evoked by presenting mother and father instead of grandmother and grandfather.

5. "BLUES IN STEREO." In "BLUES IN STEREO" the theme is hope, and this is in the midst of the protest exhibited in the poems before and after this one. Developing an idea mentioned in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," the poem celebrates the self-rule being found by the Negroes outside the United States. Thus, the persona wonders if a minor change in the United States might not make life better for him.

Contrasting the light and dark motifs differently than was done in "ODE TO DINAH," the poet unfolds more of the religious disparity faced by Negroes (lines 16-19). Further, the poet employs still a different variation on the question-
response technique than is found in any poem to this point. Additionally, while evolving the devices of entertainment idea, Hughes shows concern with electronic technology as displayed in "LP's," (lines 25-27).

6. "HORN OF PLENTY." "HORN OF PLENTY" shifts the theme back to protest by calling attention to the economic disparity experienced in America: though some make a substantial amount of money, not all Negroes are that fortunate. However, even economic stability is no barrier against White insensitivity ("THEY RUNG MY BELL TO ASK ME/COULD I RECOMMEND A MAID./I SAID, YES, YOUR MAMA," lines 96-98).

In "HORN OF PLENTY" the poet mingles the question-response and light-dark motifs by having the White representative asking insensitive questions of the Negro ("YET THEY ASKED ME OUT ON MY PATIO/WHERE DID I GET MY MONEY!" lines 46-47; also lines 48-56 and lines 95-97).

7. "GOSPEL CHA-CHA." "GOSPEL CHA-CHA" is a title that sets the reader up for an expectation of joy and hope, but that expectation is quickly dashed (line 3). Although the cha-cha is a lively and joyous dance, the joy and light-heartedness of the dance is promptly silenced when the musical instruments are made of people (line 6). Try as he might, the persona cannot overcome social deprivation (lines 45-55),
and finds that, even in religion, he is still persecuted and crucified (lines 56-62); when someone is crucified, nothing is happy, regardless of racial heritage.

"GOSPEL CHA-CHA" presents a macabre unfolding of the device of entertainment idea being developed through this volume. Here the instruments of music, "Castanets" and "Maracas" are made out of the persona ("CHA-CHA LIKE CASTANETS/ IN THE WIND'S FRENETIC FISTS/WHERE THE SAND SEEDS AND THE/ SEA GOURDS MAKE MARACAS OUT OF ME," lines 3-6). Another motif variation found in this poem is that of the quarter here used, for the first time in the volume, in association with money. The religious associations in this poem are reminiscent of those found in "SHADES OF PIGMEAT" while fore-shadowing the intense use in "SHOW FARE, PLEASE."

8. "IS IT TRUE?" "IS IT TRUE?" protests White America's inability to really hear what the Negroes are saying because the real message is not being recorded by the record industry ("THE WHISPERS ARE UNECHOED/ON THE TAPES—NOT EVEN FOLKWAYS CAPTURED," lines 33-34). However, this inability may stem from White fears that Negroes do have more fun in life, and so the poem ends by voicing this concern of Whites ("IS IT TRUE THAT NEGROES--?/I SAID, ASK YOUR MAMA." lines 55-56).

The living space motif, which has become so familiar
in the phrase "in the quarter of the Negroes," is here varied in phraseology: "FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE QUARTER," line 1). This is followed by a variation of the technology motif ("IN TONGUES UNANALYZED UNECHOED/UNTAKEN DOWN ON TAPE—/NOT EVEN FOLKWAYS CAPTURED," lines 7-9) which is evident throughout the poem. Once again the question-response technique is employed so as to invite the "dozens" response, "ask your mama."

9. "ASK YOUR MAMA." Presenting predominantly Negro sections of United States cities, the author begins "ASK YOUR MAMA" with a protest against the lack of funds (except for the welfare mentioned in "ODE TO DINAH") for a better life. But hope is found in the idealist who would eliminate segregation around the world. Further hope is exhibited as the poem ends; in the Negro community there is a union of humanity ("WHERE NO SHADOW WALKS ALONE/LITTLE MULES SHARE/THEIR GRASS WITH UNICORNS." lines 75-77).

The living space idea is here varied in phraseology as it is in "IS IT TRUE?: "FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE QUARTER," line 1). Also, this is the first explicit use of "quarter" as money (line 45). Again, the question-response technique employs the "dozens" reproach as well as a variation of questions (lines 7-14 and 39-60 respectively) similar to "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," "HORN OF PLENTY," AND "IS IT TRUE?"
10. "BIRD IN ORBIT." In contrast to the hopeful ending of "ASK YOUR MAMA" is the protest that opens "BIRD IN ORBIT." White oppression has changed little since the days when women were forced to bare their bodies to public examination, thereby proving their worth as women (lines 48-50). Further, most White people are only superficially involved with Negroes ("THAT GENTLEMAN . . . WHO TIPS AMONG THE SHADOWS," lines 65-67) and refuse to recognize protest sit-ins as anything but communist instigated and, thus, calling for all such "NEGRAS" (line 86) to be investigated; and all the while, the Whites enjoy Negro music without fairly recompensing them for it (lines 88-92).

The question-response motif dominates "BIRD IN ORBIT." Here, the "dozens" retort is only required once (lines 15-17) while the rest of the poem unfolds questions concerning racial heritage, thereby involving the mother, father, grandmother, and grandfather ideas similar to "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" and "RIDE, RED, RIDE."

11. "JAZZTET MUTED." "JAZZTET MUTED" continues the protest of "BIRD IN ORBIT" in a different stream. Here the White oppression keeps the Negro bottled in certain sections of various cities, as mentioned in "ASK YOUR MAMA." These cramped quarters are causing an increase of pressure on the
occupants of the quarter, and unless a release is found, the anger that is smoldering there (line 20) may turn into a destructive fire (line 21), or riot. Therefore, as a possible non-violent release, or the only available release, the persona turns to the screaming music of jazz ("HELP ME, YARDBIRD!/HELP ME!" lines 22-23).

"JAZZTET MUTED" presents a new variation on the living space, or quarter motif. "IN THE NEGROES OF THE QUARTER," (line 1) is different than any phraseology encountered to this point. Another recurring idea found here is that of technology and entertainment devices as illustrated in the lines "IN NEON TOMBS THE MUSIC/FROM JUKEBOX JOINTS IS LAID/AND FREE-DELIVERY TV SETS," (lines 10-12).

12. "SHOW FARE, PLEASE." The last poem of the volume, "SHOW FARE, PLEASE," turns from the desire for release to the request that the oppressor pay his fare and play fairly with the Negro. The promises of the Emancipation Proclamation (mentioned in "ODE TO DINAH") have not been fulfilled yet ("STRIP TICKETS STILL ILLUSION?" line 9). Therefore, the persona asserts that he is an undeniable part of American society and is due his portion of that society's prosperity. Thus, the central theme, as in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" and "ASK YOUR MAMA," shifts to hope. However, the difference here is that the persona becomes increasingly more demanding and
hopeful.

In "SHOW FARE, PLEASE," the author again used the question-response motif, but in a fragmented and interrupted manner which adds emphasis. Also, here is the first time since "ASK YOUR MAMA" that "quarter" has been used in direct reference to money. The religious motif, most notably remembered from "GOSPEL CHA-CHA," is here more intensely developed, especially by presenting allusions to the trinity. Additionally, several recurrent ideas are bound together in this poem. For instance, electronic technology and devices of entertainment are specifically tied in the line dealing with electric bongo drums (line 7).

Side Notes. Hughes once stated that the poems in ASK YOUR MAMA were "... written especially to be read to jazz." Therefore, along the margin of each poem, Hughes provides notation to the musicians who may be accompanying the reader. However, beyond being just notes to the musicians, these notes play an important part in the poem itself clarifying certain points in the poem. A case in point is found in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE"; the side notes call for the music to play a German lieder just before the poem mentions the word--"WHERE THE DOORKNOB LETS IN LIEDER ..." (line 17)
in connection with opera singer Leontyne Price. In several places Hughes calls for the music to give a shrill flute call in imitation of the scream that would be appropriate to the poetic statement ("CULTURAL EXCHANGE," line 88 and corresponding side note). In referring to this use of music and poetry, Hughes said:

the music should not only be background to the poetry, but should comment on it. . . . merely suggest the mood of each piece as a general orientation. Then I listen to what they say in their playing, and that affects my own rhythms when I read. We listen to each other.35

In effect, Hughes is saying that, if the band is in a "hot"--forceful, blaring, fast movement--mood, he recites forcefully--shouting, placing emphasis on the unstressed movements of the poem more forcefully; if he is in a mellow--somber--mood, the band should play accordingly using less treble and more bass, holding notes longer, with little blaring, thereby complementing and commenting on the poetry. To achieve this, the band and the poet listen to each other to discover the other's mood.

It should be noted that the musical notations, like the poems, use standard rather than dialectic words and expres-
sions; this is probably because this is Hughes's first volume aimed at the academia. Further, this tends to draw a White readership who might view the use of dialect in a less favorable light.

Liner Notes. At the end of the volume Hughes includes a section entitled "LINER NOTES For The Poetically Unhep." These prose insights, written by Hughes himself, are intended to help those unfamiliar with the Negro and his music to gain a simple understanding of what the author is saying in his poems. Though these notes are helpful, they are not complete explications.

Style. Stylistically, Hughes was an innovator and experimenter. In *ASK YOUR MAMA* he combined jazz rhythms and movements with "proper" language, foreign as well as American, rather than editing it into the Negro slang dialect. In addition, there is a mixture of interwoven, unrestrained flow of recall, allusion, association, and a juxtaposing of paradoxical objects, ideas, and events.

This immersion in free association gives *ASK YOUR MAMA* a distinct effect of disorganization, devised to heighten the jazz aspect of this work. When one first hears jazz, he notices an apparent disorganization as flat notes are
played, and the instruments all seem to be playing a different song as they move through syncopation and improvisation.

Besides the experiment of putting words to jazz, Hughes uses a montage of free association: relating distant and nearby objects, cataloguing, and rapidly shifting scenes. Thus, Hughes creates a rushed, jumbled, and disjointed approximation of the world we live in. Further, Hughes presents a kaleidoscopic display of the phrenetic disorders of the late 1950's and early 1960's, as well as those of our times.

It is remarkable that, unlike Hughes's other poetic volumes, *Ask Your Mama* is not linguistically Negro, though the title, rhythm, ethos, and musical accompaniment are.

It was Langston Hughes's manner to manipulate form and style, to employ fanciful rhythms, and to use experimental techniques. In so doing, he brought the reader into the poem, often in full empathy with the humor or irony of the scene.

**Reception**

Because Hughes's style differed so much from the accepted norm, and because the nature of *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* was so different and experimental, the volume received mixed reviews. Some critics made intensely negative remarks, while others made ecstatically complimentary remarks. These
widely opposite reviews are best represented by four critics: Collin Clark (Library Journal), Dudley Fitts (New York Times Book Review), Rudi Blesh (New York Herald Tribune), and Ulysses Lee (CLA Journal). Following, I have presented each critic and his remarks concerning ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ.

The first critic, Collin Clark, in the December 1, 1961, issue of Library Journal wrote:

With more than his usual emotional impact, Mr. Hughes has written 12 short, related poems in anger at the Negro condition. His provocation is unarguable. But the product is as thin and topical as much of the beat material it resembles. . . . The best sections concern daily life in Southern shacks and Northern slums; they have a rhythmic drive and intensity well fitting them to be read aloud in front of jazz bands. Concluding notes . . . are pretty useless. There are also, running down the margin, instructions for imaginary jazz accompaniment behind the poetic themes: this trick scarcely came off in Vachel Lindsay's day. . . .

Dudley Fitts, two months earlier, wrote in the New York
Times Book Review:

Langston Hughes' twelve jazz pieces cannot be evaluated by any canon dealing with literary right or wrong. They are nonliterary--oral, vocal, compositions to be spoken or shouted. . . . Ask Your Mama goes back to Vachel Lindsay and his Congo; and I suppose it is fair to say that this is stunt poetry, a nightclub turn. . . . 37

On the other hand, Rudi Blesh, in his November 21, 1961, review for the New York Herald Tribune, considered Ask Your Mama as great an achievement in the use of jazz poetry to move people as Louis Armstrong found in his trumpet: " . . . the poetry of Langston Hughes sings for--and to--all of us."38

Ulysses Lee, two years later, in his "Review of Ask Your Mama," wrote:

The twelve poems are allusive comments on the present situation, especially as it affects American Negroes. . . . the biting humor is always clever and funny even when it borders upon the shocking. Hughes' targets are always the right ones: . . . it always conveys the frenetic disorders of our time. The blend of
politics, economics, and the entertainment world spread against a jazz background must make fascinating sounds when read aloud as intended; it also makes fascinating sense in any case. 39

The reason for the disparity among these reviews is probably because Clark and Fitts are using Euro-western standards to judge this work rather than judging it for the innovative work it is. Further, their life experience, cultural exposure, and academic education did not prepare them as critics for this new volume by Hughes.

On the other hand, Blesh and Lee evaluated this work on its own merits as a work using elements of the common people to reach all people. They have lived, worked, researched, and been educated in such a way as to prepare them to review such a volume. Further, beyond their academic expertise in Negro poetry and jazz, their life experience intimately involved them with the very roots of ASK YOUR MAMA: among the populace.

I see the volume as a strong social commentary on the Negro social and cultural condition in America. Hughes's poignant wit and strong irony are clearly discernible, and for anyone concerned for human rights, his ability to raise social awareness is readily evident.
Conclusion

The Problem

The contemporary reader is now twenty years from the scene which Hughes was so concerned with. What was then common knowledge, the politicians and entertainers, and readily recognized by the Negro community and by concerned Whites, is today lost to history. Further, I know of no explication of any of the poems clarifying the names used or the meaning of the poems. Therefore, I have chosen four poems from the volume to explicate.

These poems, "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," "BLUES IN STEREO," "ASK YOUR MAMA," and "SHOW FARE, PLEASE," have been chosen because, while they emphasize racial protest, they also emphasize hope; they are a comment that though White society often deals unjustly with the Negro, all is not despair for them. As such, these poems are the only truly hopeful poems of the entire volume. Further, each poem illustrates Hughes's irony and wit and develops protest against the White ignorance of the Negro and his culture which leads to the insensitivities of prejudice, bigotry, and social deprivation. The protest developed in these poems mirrors that protest in the rest of the volume as well as the variation on themes and motifs used throughout the volume.
Terminology

I have chosen to use "Negro" over the various other identifying names because Hughes used it throughout his volume, and this allows me to maintain continuity in terminology between the poems and their explication.

Prevision of Chapters

The following chapters are devoted, one chapter per poem, to an explication of each of the chosen poems mentioned earlier: "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," "BLUES IN STEREO," "ASK YOUR MAMA," and "SHOW FARE, PLEASE." Each chapter will have an introduction giving a brief overview of the chapter and, when appropriate, a brief orientation to what has transpired in the intermediary poems.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE
(By Langston Hughes)

IN THE QUARTER
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
WHERE THE DOORS ARE DOORS OF PAPER

5. DUST OF DINGY ATOMS
BLOWS A SCRATCHY SOUND.
AMORPHOUS JACK-O-LANTERNS CAPER
AND THE WIND WON'T WAIT FOR MIDNIGHT
FOR FUN TO BLOW DOORS DOWN.

10. BY THE RIVER AND THE RAILROAD
WITH FLUID FAR-OFF GOING
BOUNDARIES BIND UNBINDING
A WHIRL OF WHISTLES BLOWING
NO TRAINS OR STEAMBOATS GOING—

15. YET LEONTYNE'S UNPACKING.

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
WHERE THE DOORKNOB LETS IN LIEDER
MORE THAN GERMAN EVER BORE,
HER YESTERDAY PAST GRANDPA

20. NOT OF HER OWN GOING—

The rhythmically rough scraping of a guira continues monotonously until a lonely flute call high and far away, merges into piano variations on German lieder gradually changing into old-time traditional 12-bar
IN A POT OF COLLARD GREENS
IS GENTLY STEWING.

THERE, FORBID US TO REMEMBER,
COMES AN AFRICAN IN MID-DECEMBER
25. SENT BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT
AMONG THE SHACKS TO MEET THE BLACKS;
LEONTYNE SAMMY HARRY POITIER
LOVELY LENA MARIAN LOUIS PEARLIE MAE
GEORGE S. SCHUYLER MOLTO BENE
30. COME WHAT MAY LANGSTON HUGHES
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
WHERE THE RAILROAD AND THE RIVER
HAVE DOORS THAT FACE EACH WAY
AND THE ENTRANCE TO THE MOVIE'S
35. UP AN ALLEY UP THE SIDE.

PUSHCARTS FOLD AND UNFOLD
IN A SUPERMARKET SEA.
AND WE BETTER FIND OUT, MAMA,
WHERE IS THE COLORED LAUNDROMAT,
40. SINCE WE MOVED UP TO MOUNT VERNON.
RALPH ELLISON AS VESPUCIUS
INA-YOURA AT THE MASTHEAD
ARNA BONTEMPS CHIEF CONSULTANT
MOLTO BENE MELLOW BABY PEARLIE MAE

45. SHALOM ALEICHEM JIMMY BALDWIN SAMMY COME WHAT MAY—THE SIGNS POINT:
GHANA GUINEA

AND THE TOLL BRIDGE FROM WESTCHESTER IS A GANGPLANK ROCKING RISKY
BETWEEN THE DECK AND SHORE OF A BOAT THAT NEVER QUITE KNEW ITS DESTINATION.

50. IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES ORNETTE AND CONSTERNATION CLAIM ATTENTION FROM THE PAPERS THAT HAVE NO NEWS THAT DAY OF MOSCOW.

IN THE POT BEHIND THE PAPER DOORS WHAT'S COOKING?
WHAT'S SMELLING, LEONTYNE?

60. LIEDER, LOVELY LIEDER AND A LEAF OF COLLARD GREEN,
LOVELY LIEDER LEONTYNE.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES
NKRUMAH

65. IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES
NASSER NASSER
IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES
ZIK AZIKIWE
CUBA CASTRO GUINEA TOURE

70. FOR NEED OR PROPAGANDA
KENYATTA
AND THE TOM DOGS OF THE CABIN
THE COCOA AND THE CANE BRAKE
THE CHAIN GANG AND THE SLAVE BLOCK

75. TARRED AND FEATHERED NATIONS
SEAGRAM'S AND FOUR ROSES
$5.00 BAGS A DECK OR DAGGA.
Filibuster Versus Veto
LIKE A SNAPPING TURTLE—

80. WON'T LET GO UNTIL IT THUNDERS
WON'T LET GO UNTIL IT THUNDERS
TEARS THE BODY FROM THE SHADOW
WON'T LET GO UNTIL IT THUNDERS
continues between verses to merge softly into the melody of the "Hesitation Blues" asking its haunting question, "How long must I wait? Can I get it now—or must I hesitate?" Suddenly the drums roll like thunder as the

I between verses to merge softly into the melody of the "Hesitation Blues" asking its haunting question, "How long must I wait? Can I get it now—or must I hesitate?" Suddenly the drums roll like thunder as the
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES

85. AND THEY ASKED ME RIGHT AT CHRISTMAS
IF MY BLACKNESS, WOULD IT RUB OFF?
I SAID, ASK YOUR MAMA.

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES . . .
NIGHTMARES . . . DREAMS! OH!

90. DREAMING THAT THE NEGROES
OF THE SOUTH HAVE TAKEN OVER—
VOTED ALL THE DIXIECRATS
RIGHT OUT OF POWER—
COMES THE COLORED HOUR:

95. MARTIN LUTHER KING IS GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA,
DR. RUFUS CLEMENT HIS CHIEF ADVISOR,
ZELMA WATSON GEORGE THE HIGH GRAND WORTHY.
IN WHITE PILLARED MANSIONS
SITTING ON THEIR WIDE VERANDAS,

100. WEALTHY NEGROES HAVE WHITE SERVANTS,
WHITE SHARECROPPERS WORK THE BLACK PLANTATIONS,
AND COLORED CHILDREN HAVE WHITE MAMMIES:

MAMMY FAUBUS
MAMMY EASTLAND
105. MAMMY PATTERSON.
DEAR, DEAR DARLING OLD WHITE MAMMIES—
SOMETIMES EVEN BURIED WITH OUR FAMILY!

DEAR OLD
MAMMY FAUBUS!

110. CULTURE, THEY SAY, IS A TWO-WAY STREET.
HAND ME MY MINT JULEP, MAMMY.

MAKE HASTE!

"When the Saints
Go Marching In"
joyously for two
full choruses
with maracas. . . .
II. "CULTURAL EXCHANGE"

Introduction

As the first poem of ASK YOUR MAMA, "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" introduces the motifs of the volume, as has already been discussed in the last chapter, and intensifies the themes of protest and hope suggested by the title of the volume. Consequently, like that title, "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" is dominated by protest with hope replacing it by the end of the poem. This dominance of protest is congruent with the volume; all but one poem, "BLUES IN STEREO," is dominated by protest while only "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," "ASK YOUR MAMA," and "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" show protest shifting to hope.

The protest of "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," like the protest of the rest of the volume, revolves around White prejudice against and ignorance of Negroes and their culture; this protest touches every aspect of life. However, the poet makes the point that, although there is much to protest, especially the fact that Negroes are, for the most part, exploited by the Whites, Negroes and Whites have a mutual concern in America. This concern is advanced when Whites participate in Negro culture to the same extent that Negroes participate in White culture. Therefore, the poet presents the protest with harsh intensity and sprinkles in some hope, trusting
that Whites will recognize the disparity and will act to correct it, thereby effecting a cultural exchange.

Explication

The poet begins the protest of "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" by virtually pulling the reader into the Negroes' living space. To make an intense impact on the reader, the poet uses incremental repetition, or step rhythm as it is known in jazz.

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES (lines 1-3)

This incremental repetition provides the added information needed to answer the questions forming in the reader's mind. The first question that comes to mind follows the first "IN THE": in the what? This is answered in the second line, while the third line completes the association of quarter with those who live there: Negroes. Thus, the reader is made consciously aware of the Negro and his living space, which serves as the location for the poem.

Further, by using the term "quarter," the poet utilizes free association to associate quarter with the slave days living space of the Negroes. Through this association, the poet implies the segregation and maltreatment that were
endured by the Negroes forced to live in such sections; maltreatment and deprivation created by segregation are commonly recognized by all people. Consequently, Hughes, very subtly, juxtaposes the present day living sections with the Negroes' past.

With the orientation into the quarter established, the author presents the fears faced by the occupants of the quarter.

WHERE THE DOORS ARE DOORS OF PAPER
DUST OF DINGY ATOMS
BLOWS A SCRATCHY SOUND. (lines 4-6)

Here, in the living space of the Negro, doors offer no security. Normally, doors are used to allow friends in and shut out enemies. Thus, they are usually made of strong, hard material; but for the Negroes in the quarter fear and despair reign because their doors are like paper, and even the littlest bits of dirt ("DUST OF DINGY ATOMS") come freely through the doors. These doors are never secure and enemies of justice, the intruders of prejudice and inhumane treatment (such as the Klan), come into their homes at will wreaking havoc just like wind through paper doors.

Here the poet makes use of the side notes, intended for the musical accompaniment, to call for the music to comment on what is happening in the verse; the scratchy sound men-
tioned in the poem is to be made by the musicians stroking the guira (a Latin American percussion instrument made of a serrated gourd and played by scraping a stick along its surface) in a monotonous, rhythmic, rough scraping manner. This side note intensifies the protest against the insecurity of the quarter by providing an audible approximation of the nerve-grating fears faced by the Negroes in their everyday life.

Thus, there is a monotony of disharmony in the social realm. The Klan and other such prejudiced groups and individuals create their mischief in many ways and shapes.

AMORPHOUS JACK-O'-LANTERNS CAPER

AND THE WIND WON'T WAIT FOR MIDNIGHT

FOR FUN TO BLOW DOORS DOWN. (lines 7-9)

These intruders, like the wind, come when they want, not waiting for that particularly capricious hour of midnight to work their terror. Like cruel Halloween tricksters, their wild escapades and insensitive racial slurs rain down on the quarter and its inhabitants day and night, and all they can do is watch in fear as their doors are blown down. To emphasize the despairing cry of the people, the musical side note is for "a lonely flute call high and far away. . . . " For such is how the cry for justice from the oppressed is heard
by those in power, if it is heard at all. Further, the use
of this flute call, "high and far away," emphasizes the prox-
imity of White treatment of the Negro during the slave days
and the 1960's.

Besides juxtaposing past and present, Hughes inundates
the reader with intraline nuances of rhyme, as lines 8-15 il-
lustrate.

AND THE WIND WON'T WAIT FOR MIDNIGHT
FOR FUN TO BLOW DOORS DOWN.
BY THE RIVER AND THE RAILROAD
WITH FLUID FAR-OFF GOING.
BOUNDARIES BIND UNBINDING
A WHIRL OF WHISTLES BLOWING
NO TRAINS OR STEAMBOATS GOING—
YET LEONTYNE'S UNPACKING.

In this section of rhyme, Hughes uses alliteration ("w" in
"WIND WON'T WAIT," "WITH," "WHIRL," "WHISTLES"; "f" in "FOR,
"FUN," "FLUID," "PAR"; "d" in "DOORS," "DOWN"; "b" in "BOUND-
ARIES," "BIND"; "r" in "RIVER," "RAILROAD"), assonance (long
"i" in "BIND," "UNBIND," "MIDNIGHT"; short "i" in "WIND,"
"MIDNIGHT"; "or" in "FOR," "DOOR"), consonance ("t" in "WON'T,
"WAIT," "MIDNIGHT"), and end rhyme (lines 11-15) in his at-
tempt to capture, as Hughes said at the 1962 National Poetry
Festival, "... something of the ... nuances of jazz music." By this, it is assumed that the poet is referring to the fact that jazz music often changes, sometimes ever so slightly, by using variations of notes in the same bar of music without departing from the central melody. Further, this type of repetition pounds the sounds into the mind of the reader; thus, something of the meaning goes in with the sounds whether it is wanted or not.

Since the association of slavery is only a few lines removed, this section calls to mind that, during those days, the river and the railroad (especially the underground railroad which used both means) offered escape to far-off places (Canada); but now, though they both "flow" to and from far-off places, there is no escape for the modern Negro. Though the shackles of slavery have been loosed from him, he is bound by social and prejudicial boundaries; so it does not matter how many whistles blow, he cannot find or board trains or steamboats that will take him where he wants to go.

But someone has gone away and now has come back. Here is an occupant of the quarter who has found a way out of the quarter. However, her way out does not enable her to stay out of the quarter. Thus, she has returned home. With "YET LEONTYNE'S UNPACKING" Hughes signifies that, if one is born in the quarter, he or she inevitably comes back to the quarter.
The allusion here is to Leontyne Price (1927- ), concert and opera singer.²

As this stanza ends, Hughes uses the side note to clarify a point being made in the poem itself; without the side notes, the reader may miss the association of Leontyne (line 15) with the word "LIEDER" in the next stanza (line 17). If the side notes were not used, most readers would not make the association with the German opera and Leontyne's accomplishments in that genre of music.

Leontyne's participation in White opera foreshadows the idea that culture can be shared, yet it tends to hint at and protest the fact that success and escape from the quarter means using White ways. When Hughes, in the side note, calls for a gradual shift into the blues, this protest is further suggested because Leontyne comes back to the quarter and unpacks rather than find, or be allowed to find, a residence outside the quarter.

The side note calls for a shift to the "Hesitation Blues" melody and its haunting questions of "How long must I wait? Can I get it now? . . . or must I hesitate?" which gradually brings one back to the present reality of the quarter. But, still, Leontyne's unpacking is simple and proclaims, in addition to the protest hinted at, a homecoming. Problems seem to be distant from this scene, so calm and even rhythmed.
This calmness allows the reader to collect himself and ponder what has been said so far.

The poem's freewheeling association of the Negro's past and present (lines 1-15) is an approximation of several systems: life, memory, and the progressive, or modern, jazz of the early 1960's. Life is a rapid shifting turn of events as we well know. Further, when the mind ponders on these events, it often finds a rapid and shifting collection of remembrances, present thoughts and observances, and future hopes all jammed into one moment. Progressive jazz is quite similar in that it shifts rapidly and jarringly through notes and tunes well known, remembered or spontaneously created. Thus, Hughes captures both movements and approximates both systems.

The first repetition, or riff as it is known in jazz music, in this work is found in line 16, "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES." This oft-repeated phrase becomes the main motif throughout the volume, setting the scene and bringing the reader back to realize the poet's main concern is the Negroes of the quarter.

Re-establishing the reader "IN THE QUARTER," the poet fixes the scene as an everyday view of home life. The quarter, which has been shown as subject to capricious violence, is now freely welcoming the White opera ("WHERE THE
DOORKNOB LETS IN LIEDER," line 17). Contrasting the scene where the winds, which the people of the quarter cannot control, blow the doors down (see lines 8-9), the doorknob is here used to admit Leontyne. The fact that the doorknob is used implies welcome. Leontyne and her cultured song are equally welcomed. This welcome illustrates Negro receptivity of White culture and the idea that this may be the only way the Negroes of the quarter will get to enjoy the opera since no German has yet entered the quarter and given a performance ("MORE THAN GERMAN EVER BORE," line 18).

By referring to "GRANDPA" (line 19), the poet makes the point that Leontyne's true heritage (her grandparents were probably slaves) has little to do with lieders; she is a Negro. Her true music is the blues, which are called for at this point in the side notes; the side notes strengthen the idea that Leontyne's natural music is the blues, yet here she is singing opera.

Thus, Leontyne stands as a bridge; those who would share cultures and would dare to cross the socially segregated lines, can enjoy and appreciate a fuller cultural heritage. There is a clear cultural exchange, cross-over, exhibited in Leontyne. Of Negro birth and ancestry, she enjoys that heritage ("IN A POT OF COLLARD GREENS IS GENTLY STEWING") while
she also enjoys mastery over the lieder. Negro and White cultures coexist in her, and, therefore, those Whites who wish to participate in Negro culture should be able to. She is the leader (pun on lieder) of all who would follow, Negro or White. But will they? As important as this exchange is, Whites fail to see the value of it. Thus, the well-being of American society is hindered and made more tenuous because "CULTURE, THEY SAY, IS A TWO-WAY STREET" (line 110); if culture is not shared and participated in by all parties to an equal extent, factions will evolve with one faction considering itself better than and oppressing the other.

Turning the reader's attention from basic Negro heritage, Hughes turns to the visit of an African dignitary. To comment on the fact that this dignitary is from Africa and that he is visiting the quarter, the poet again makes use of the side notes ("African drums throb against blues").

Here, the State Department sends the dignitary "AMONG THE SHACKS TO MEET THE BLACKS" (line 26). Following this line, Hughes barrages the reader with a list of names; these names are well-known to Negroes and a few Whites, but the majority of Whites would not know them. Here is a corollary to the classical use of cataloguing; found here, also, is the folk tradition of riddling and word play which requires the speaker to know intimately that which he is talking about.
This technique in poetry, especially Negro poetry, has been labeled "virtuoso naming."  

The State Department sends this African to meet some American Negroes, especially the ones who White people consider "acceptable": entertainers and intellectuals. By rapidly posing the individual names one after the other, they appear to be jammed almost into one name: Leontyne Price--opera; Sammy Davis, Jr., Harry Bellefonte--singers of popular songs, nightclub entertainers; "lovely" Lena Horne--singer and actress; Marian Anderson (1902--)--singer and first Negro to sing in the Metropolitan Opera; Louis Armstrong--jazz trumpet, world famous; Pearlie Mae Bailey--singer; and Dr. George S. Schuyler--author, journalist. These are the creme-de-crop as far as the Whites are concerned. All of them are "MOLTO BENE," very good, which appears almost as a name itself.

This creation of a name, "MOLTO BENE," derived from the Italian "much" or "very" (and most commonly used in musical direction), and the Latin "good," works as an image statement, i.e., it uses the reader's sensibilities to create an image suggested by the words. In this instance, the words are so placed that they also work as the White stamp of approval for those visited by the African.
In the line "COME WHAT MAY LANGSTON HUGHES" (line 30), the poet includes himself in the list. By putting himself outside the "MOLTO BENE," he states that he is not approved, but for what it is worth, he is there for the African to see and for the world--White and Negro--to see.

Although the African is shown what the Whites want him to see, he also recognizes the incongruities of the American system. Here "WHERE THE RAILROAD AND THE RIVER/HAVE DOORS THAT FACE EACH WAY," the visitor sees that transportation is unequal and that there is no westward expansion for the Negro, only North or South, front or back, and the Negro has always been denied the front door. Thus, the visitor comprehends the fact that America is segregated: "... THE ENTRANCE TO THE MOVIES/UP AN ALLEY UP THE SIDE" (lines 34-35). The way of escape, the access to equality is not the same for all people; Negroes must enter through the alleys and the side doors. This inequality is underscored by the lack of a musical accompaniment. The "TACIT" on the music allows the full impact of protest to be carried by the words which forcefully, through intense feeling and compelling rhythms, strike into the consciousness.

At this point the voice pauses, and the side notes instruct the musicians to play a full chorus of "Hesitation Blues"
which asks its haunting questions: "How long must we wait? Can we get it now . . . or must we hesitate?" The promise of equal rights has been made, but when will it be fulfilled? For almost one hundred years the Negro has waited and at almost every turn has been told "wait, go slow" by the White power structure. The dream has been deferred so long, how much longer must the Negro wait? He has seen the "PUSHCARTS FOLD AND UNFOLD/IN A SUPERMARKET SEA," and he has seen that each time prosperity comes, the pushcarts are loaded with Negro talent being exploited and sold just like fish in a supermarket.

Even when a Negro leaves the quarter, he must be aware of his social status. Just because a Negro moves into a White neighborhood does not mean that he is any more socially accepted by Whites, or any less segregated from Whites, than he was in the quarter, as the poet makes clear: "AND WE BETTER FIND OUT, MAMA/WHERE IS THE COLORED LAUNDROMAT,/SINCE WE MOVED TO MOUNT VERNON." However, it would be unfair to say there is no hope in this section. The very fact that a move was made from the quarter to Mount Vernon (Westchester County, New York State, line 48) evidences the hope that one can move out of the quarter.

Shifting back to a catalogue of names, Hughes uses obscure references to people, for the most part, better known to Ne-
groes than Whites. Using Vespucius (the Americanization of Amerigo Vespucci, 1451-1512, who Whites would know) as a metaphor for Ellison, the poet comments on the fact that these map-makers (Ellison in mapping new literary elements with his Invisible Man and Amerigo in mapping the world to update medieval maps) are better known and accepted in a country other than their own: the Americas are named for Vespucius, and Ellison lived in Rome 1955-1957.

The following line, "INA-YOURA AT THE MASTHEAD," (line 42) is an extremely obscure reference. The individual alluded to here is Youra Thelma Qualls (1913- ), and to anyone unfamiliar with the Qualls family (or James A. Emanuel's Langston Hughes, page 165), this name means nothing nor does the term "masthead." Though there is a play on words (masthead of voyaging vessel, newspaper or business and one who stands out), the position referred to is the Professorship and Chairman of the Communications Department at Tuskegee which Youra Qualls held from 1957 to 1964.

Another obscurity is "ARNA BONTEMPS CHIEF CONSULTANT" (line 43). Here the poet alludes to Bontemps' position as Chief Librarian at Fisk University, which Bontemps left in 1965.

With line 44, the reader expects more names, and "MOLTO BENE MELLOW BABY PEARLIE MAE" appears to be a listing of
names, especially with the last two words being an actual name. However, this line is a repetition of sounds, leading up to the reversing of those sounds in "PEARLIE MAE," with the meter being maintained by the elongation of the pronunciation of "MAE." This line serves to draw the reader deeper into the poem by creating a verbal approximation of the percussion and rhythm sounded by the "deep-toned African drums" called for in the side notes.

Continuing the virtuoso naming and a similar, but much less pleasing, repetition of the previous line (the last syllable of "ALEICHEM" and "BALDWIN" and the use of consonance, especially in "JIMMY" and "SAMMY"), Hughes uses the Jewish blessing "peace unto you" ("SHALOM ALEICHEM" with a hard "ch" and short "e") as a name before "JIMMY BALDWIN." There is probably a word play in this line associating the Jewish blessing with one who wrote about a religious conversion (James Baldwin in Go Tell It on the Mountain, 1953), and with one who was converted to Judaism (Sammy Davis, Jr.). Further, by using the Jewish wording rather than its English equivalent, the poet calls to mind that being a convert to Judaism in no way insures smooth and flowing blessings; it only heightens the identity of the oppressed: Jews for over 2,000 years, Negroes for over 200 years.
The repetition of "COME WHAT MAY—," with the propensity of "MAY" to be elongated in pronunciation, creates an unfulfilled expectation by offering a phrase which evokes more information than is given. Positioned as it is in a naming section, one is reminded of line 30 and expects the completion of the line with "LANGSTON HUGHES," but, just as in life, hope and expectation are delayed and left wanting. For the Negro waiting fulfillment of what was promised when he left the quarter, his day of waiting grows longer and longer. Just as the reader may want that line to be completed as before and does not get it, so it is with the Negro in America; he was promised freedom and he's never seen the fulfillment of equality that goes with freedom. The protest of this lack is more intensely emphasized by the use of broken thought than by the words themselves.

However (and America better take note), "COME WHAT MAY" is more than the lack of fulfillment of a promise made; it is also a directional sign that if the social situation in America is not changed, then all indications are ("THE SIGNS POINT") that radical revolution will take place. The Negro will rise and change the power structure in America, just as Negroes have in "GHANA" and "GUINEA." The fact that these Negroes have overcome their oppressors offers hope for the
American Negro; someday they, too, might cast off their oppressors. The accomplishment of these Negroes outside the United States is celebrated later in the volume in "BLUES IN STEREO."

Although the first two lines of the next stanza ("AND THE TOLL BRIDGE FROM WESTCHESTER/IS A GANGPLANK ROCKING RISKY"), flow smoothly and evenly in rhythm, the idea expressed hints of peril. The road out of the quarter and to a better life in the all-White suburb of Westchester offers no security or acceptance. Further, this bridge is more than just a government toll bridge; it is a social, cultural toll. When the Negro improves his social situation, he is not allowed to take the fullness of his cultural heritage with him. White society, especially that of the late 1950's and early 1960's, want the Negroes to be as non-Negro as possible before they are accepted in White society. This foreshadows a comment Hughes makes later in the poem: "AND THEY ASKED ME RIGHT AT CHRISTMAS/IF MY BLACKNESS WOULD IT RUB OFF?" (lines 85-86). Further social implications of doom and peril come in the fact that a Negro in a White neighborhood faces prejudice and bigotry that further alienates him. Thus, he is nowhere ("BETWEEN THE DECK AND SHORE").

In the line just mentioned, the poet changes metering from tetrameter to trimeter to emphasize the disharmony and
lack of sympathy for changing cultural situations, which a newcomer would face in this move. Having staked his life on coming to Westchester or any previously non-integrated area, the Negro who moves is never quite sure he should be there, no matter how successful he becomes.

Here, the haunting questions of the blues melody sound in the back of the mind: "How long must I wait? Can I get it now . . . or must I hesitate?" Even a Negro who is willing to work in this new culture is never sure if his expectations of equality will be fulfilled. Thus, the Negro's hopes of finding satisfaction are commented on. The musical side note further emphasizes lack of fulfillment by dying out and becoming silent as the voice becomes silent.

Ending this silence and stanza break, the poet repeats the phrase "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES" to begin a stanza of unusual occurrences:

ORNETTE AND CONSTERNATION
CLAIM ATTENTION FROM THE PAPERS
THAT HAVE NO NEWS THAT DAY OF MOSCOW. (lines 54-56)

Instead of covering news from Moscow or digging up and presenting some government-released propaganda against Moscow, the newspaper reports "quarter" type news. The news concerns jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman, who is creating
"consternation" in the jazz world with his development of a "free jazz" style. Once again, the poet implies what he means, thereby allowing the reader's mind to associate freely all the connotations of "consternation" and the Negro's social situation. Hughes could be using "consternation" as a euphemism for the anger which inevitably builds in the quarter. The reason he would use a euphemism is that blatant expression of anger alienates people, and Hughes does not want that; alienated people do not aid causes, regardless of their validity. Whatever the consternation is, it and Ornette are more newsworthy than anything coming out of Moscow.

The following stanza brings the reader more closely in touch with the quarter and requires the recall of lines 15-22 as the poet re-emphasizes the fact that Leontyne has fully participated in another culture but has returned to the regional past where she was nourished by a way of life common to others in the quarter--in this case, collard greens. By using his knowledge of a jazz man's predisposition for repeating a note--manhandling it--to increase intensity on a theme, Hughes barrages the reader with repetition of the letter "l" through lines 59-62:

WHAT'S SMELLING, LEONTYNE?
LIEDER, LOVELY LIEDER
AND A LEAF OF COLLARD GREEN,
LOVELY LIEDER LEONTYNE.

This repetition of the same letter in almost every word works as a unifying element in the same manner as the repetition of a single note through several bars of a musical tune; the note is made evident, and the tune is unified. Here the repetition of the letter "l" points out that, in Leontyne, both White and Negro cultures mix and coexist, thus reiterating the comment that Leontyne is a cultural bridge (see pages 64-65). The social comment is both protest against the rarity of such exchange in the White quarter and the hope that such exchange, now clearly shown possible in one person, will become more common. Further, the repetition emphasizes the theme that "CULTURE . . . IS A TWO-WAY STREET" (line 110), as does the juxtaposing of elements loved and nurtured in each culture.

Immediately following the stanza break, Hughes presents a rapid juxtaposing of the quarter with the world scene similar to the effect of the lead in or countdown frames of a movie: first, the living space phrase repetition, then the world scene, then the phrase, etc., to line 69 where the pattern is broken:
These men are the leaders who came forth from the shadows and led their people to independence.

The first leader mentioned, Kwame Nkrumah (1909- ), helped gain Ghana's independence and became its first elected president in April of 1960. Following him comes Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) who, as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Egyptian army, toppled King Farouk's government in 1954 after which he served as Premier under President Naguib whom he succeeded; he was a towering hero to the Arab world. The next national figure mentioned is Namdi Azikiwe (1904- ), who was named Governor General of Nigeria (1960) as it came to independence. Another national figure named is Fidel Castro (1927- ), who led the 1957 Cuban revolt which succeeded in toppling the Batista government in 1959 and empowering Castro. The last name mentioned in this line is that of Sekou Toure (1922- ), who became President of the
Republic of Guinea. These men led revolutions against oppression and gained independence. Juxtaposed to this winning of freedom is the fact that, for Negroes in America ("IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES"), oppression still reigns. If others have thrown off the oppressor and gained freedom, then the "freed" American Negro can, too.

The jazz-like element used throughout these lines (lines 63-69) is that of repetition, as seen in a variety of applications. The most evident repetition is the phrase "IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES," as seen in lines 63, 65, and 67. This jazz-like disposition for repetition is again seen with the double "NASSER" (line 66) which alludes to his double role in Egypt's political scene: he helped topple King Farouk's government and, later, became Egypt's president. In line 68 the repetition is of a different nature; here it extricates what appears to be a syllable taken out of Azikiwe's name, but it is really Azikiwe's nickname.5 With line 69, Hughes uses alliteration in the first syllable of "CUBA" and "CASTRO" and assonance in the last syllable of "GUINEA" and "TOURE." These elements, alliteration, assonance, and repetition, all emphasize the leadership which toppled oppression and gained independence for their people. This emphasis on individual leadership exhibits a call for someone to rise up and lead the American Negroes out of
the shadow.

However, the figures who rise to national and international notoriety are as often used for propaganda as for the needed leadership they provide. When one stands against the existing power structure, that power will use all means at its disposal to discredit the individual to his own people and the world community.

Such was the case of Jomo Kenyatta (1895-1978). Fighting against British oppression, Kenyatta was imprisoned by the British and exiled for his association with the Mau Mau terrorist group of which he was the supposed founder. However, when Kenya gained its independence, he was elected (1960) president of what was the newly liberated Kenya African National Union. He was quickly labeled a communist sympathizer when he turned to Russia for arms and foreign aid, after exhausting all other avenues of attaining aid.

Continuing the kaleidoscopic juxtaposing of near and far without a stanza break, the poet uses a jam—one right after the other—of images ("TOM DOGS," "COCOA," "CANE BRAKE," "CHAIN GANG," and "SLAVE BLOCK") that drive into the consciousness a realization that, since the distant days of slavery oppression, little has changed in the quarter, irrespective of the changes going on worldwide. Compelling the reader to note the continued oppression, Hughes employs harsh "k"
sounds throughout lines 72, 73, and 74 to imply the clang of cell doors and the click-clack of chains on the legs of prisoners. Oppression fosters oppression and nations, or communities, tar and feather their Negro inhabitants without shame, leaving the Negro to find release from oppression in a whiskey bottle ("SEAGRAM'S AND FOUR ROSES") or "nickel" bags ("$5.00 BAGS") of mind-altering substances: "DECK" is slang for a bag of narcotics, and "DAGGA" is slang for marijuana.7

While the Negro is seeking escape and refuge in his way, movements in Congress to gain freedom from oppression, civil-rights legislation, face either filibuster or veto. The hesitation of fulfilling a one-hundred-year-old promise is further hesitated as the blues accompaniment side note indicates.

Here (lines 78-82) Hughes sets a simile with a blues structure stanza--three lines with the second line repeating the first, and the third line being a comment/increment/reaction/resolution line.8 The comparison is made between the legislative body, or law, and a snapping turtle that has clench onto an object. Like the turtle, this legislative body must be forced to act by some greater force (thunder) than itself, before it will take action and let the civil-rights bill get out of committee.9
The repetition of the line "WON'T LET GO UNTIL IT THUN-DERS" indicates this section as a blues stanza; therefore, the next line (line 82) makes the comment that, when the greater, elemental, natural force causes action, there will be violence attending it ("TEARS THE BODY FROM THE SHADOW") for the Negroes will combine forces and violently move from the quarter. To emphasize this thunderous happening, the musical accompaniment suddenly overshadows the blues with a drum roll in approximation of thunder. Further emphasis is gained by repeating "WON'T LET GO UNTIL IT THUN-DERS" (line 83) followed by the poem's oft-repeated phrase "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES" which also strengthens the comment that the thunder will come from the quarter. 10

Throughout this long section (lines 65-84), the reader has been exposed to name coining, repetition, and compressed images, all to a purpose: the approximation of a life suppressed by social denial. This feeling of compression is intensified by the obscurity of the references and created names, all of which confuse the reader causing him to hesitate from too quickly saying, "I understand." Only those in similar situations truly understand. Hughes repeats the now familiar "IN THE QUARTER" phrase as a pause in the poem's tension before moving into a "dozens" encounter.

White ignorance of Negro life is hyperbolically imaged
in lines 85 and 86: "AND THEY ASKED ME RIGHT AT CHRISTMAS/IF MY BLACKNESS, WOULD IT RUB OFF?" Here at the whitest time of year, the most loving and giving time of year, ignorance of the Negro culture is made most evident. The implication of the question being asked here is, "Now that you are in a White neighborhood, why do you not become White?" Essentially, this person is being asked to recant his cultural heritage, take on new cultural roles and ways while denying his own. Another implication of the question is that if he did not want to be White, why would a Negro leave the quarter? This implication is reminiscent of the persona's uncertainty encountered when he moved out to Westchester and found himself "BETWEEN THE DECK AND SHORE" (line 50). Still another implication could be the White fear that if he associates with Negroes, and their color rubs off, it would rub off on him making him black.

Thus, to their ignorance and perhaps in an attempt to educate his questioners, this Negro answers "... ASK YOUR MAMA." Here the author uses the "dozens" retort to cause the White man to consider his words, but the White does not make a reply; he does not learn. However, since the White can sense the impudence of such an answer, he may question the Negro as to why such a remark was made. Then the White can be taught. This retort is a phrase that can be understood
on more than just the literal level. Here the literal meaning is clearly evident: the first authority in one's life, his mother. But on a deeper, more intense level, Hughes is telling the reader to ask his country, "FOR ONE'S COUNTRY IS YOUR MAMA" (H.O.P., line 58).

The musical direction following this "dozens" encounter is for an "impish" (lively) rendition of the musical figure "Shave and a Haircut, Fifteen Cents." This figure creates a tension pause because the "dozens" encounter, as well as the section before it, is racially and emotionally straining (especially this "dozens" encounter). After one chorus of the figure, the mood remains lively as the accompaniment plays "Dixie." This musical rendition ends on a high, shrill flute call approximating a scream, such as one would give when waking from a nightmare.

The poem's lines correspondent to this scream (lines 88-90) begin the hope-filled dream section of this poem (lines 88-end). Often, to those oppressed, dreams are the same as nightmares, but something has changed for now the "NIGHTMARES" are "DREAMS"! This realization takes time to sink in; thus, the poet emphasizes "OH!" Here the situations are switched: where once the dreams of the oppressors brought nightmares to the oppressed, now the dreams of the oppressed are the oppressors' nightmares. And what could cause the
oppressor to have a nightmare?

DREAMING THAT THE NEGROES
OF THE SOUTH HAVE TAKEN OVER—
VOTED ALL THE DIXIECRATS
RIGHT OUT OF POWER— (lines 90-93)

The Negro is now in power, and the Whites now stand in the
Negroes' place.

In this dream, leading Negro figures occupy exalted
positions: the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King (1929-1968)
"IS GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA," with author-educator Doctor Rufus
Clement (1900-1967) "HIS CHIEF ADVISOR," and United Nations
delagate (1960) Zelma Watson George (1903- ) his "HIGH
GRAND WORTHY."

The wonders of this dream continue. Not only have the
Negroes attained political dominance, they also have social
and economic dominance. They own the "WHITE PILLARED MANSIONS"
and sit on their verandas. These "WEALTHY NEGROES HAVE WHITE
SERVANTS" (line 100) and "WHITE SHARECROPPERS WORK THE BLACK
PLANTATIONS" (line 101). So completely has the social scene
changed that "COLORED CHILDREN HAVE WHITE MAMMIES" (line 102).

With the reference to Mammies, Hughes is holding Whites
up to ridicule because no Southern White person could socially
accept being referred to as a Mammie, especially with all its
racially degrading connotations. However, Hughes does not hold all Whites to ridicule, only those most adamant against civil rights. The three chosen here for ridicule are:

MAMMY [Orval E.] FAUBUS
MAMMY [James O.] EASTLAND
MAMMY [John M.] PATTERSON

These politicians intensely supported segregation.

The exchange is almost complete when the poet says that the Mammies are "SOMETIMES EVEN BURIED WITH OUR FAMILY" (line 107), which was the greatest honor bestowed upon a slave in the ante-bellum South. Culture has made a change. Finally, the Negroes are above their oppressors.

By singling out "MAMMY FAUBUS" the poet employs the blues shout to get her attention for the next line. Then he goes on to teach her: "CULTURE, THEY SAY, IS A TWO-WAY STREET" (line 110). Negroes and Whites can coexist, and their cultures can be equally enhanced by sharing in each other's culture. But apparently, this Mammy cannot understand this, so she resumes her servant duties.

Here the social comment portends a desire for social supremacy by Negroes equivalent to that previously enjoyed by the Whites until this dream. White society has refused to recognize the potent force resting in the quarter, and if the segregationist attitudes of Whites are not changed, that
force will be used to debar and oust political candidates. Further, if the segregationists do not re-evaluate their ideology, then the Negroes will pool their vote, oust the segregationists, and elect Negroes in their places. Once the power is in the hands of the Negroes, these Whites will either learn the value of and need for cultural exchange, or be left out of the new social setting, just as the Negroes had been, and are, ostracized from White society; just as the Mammy, the segregationist will have no worth in the new fullness of society except that of a servant.

The full expression of hope is found in line 110. As the dream illustrates, dominant powers can change, but the fullest enjoyment of life comes when cultural heritages are equally shared by all people. This fact lives in reality as Leontyne has shown in her ability to sing German lieder and still enjoy a Negro heritage such as collard greens. So, hurry up White America, "MAKE HASTE!" and share in a fuller life.

By ending with the shout, "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" expresses joy mixed with command that shifts the mood. The reader is lifted up as the socially oppressed must be. The musical side note comments on this joyousness by calling for a lively rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In." This is very hopeful indeed.
BLUES IN STEREO
(By Langston Hughes)

YOUR NUMBER'S COMING OUT!
BOUQUETS I'LL SEND YOU
AND DREAMS I'LL SEND YOU
AND HORSES SHOD WITH GOLD

5. ON WHICH TO RIDE IF MOTORCARS
   WOULD BE TOO TAME—
   TRIUMPHAL ENTRY SEND YOU—
   SHOUTS FROM THE EARTH ITSELF
   BARE FEET TO BEAT THE GREAT DRUMBEAT

10. OF GLORY TO YOUR NAME AND MINE

ONE AND THE SAME:
YOU BAREFOOT, TOO,
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
WHERE AN ANCIENT RIVER FLOWS

15. PAST HUTS THAT HOUSE A MILLION BLACKS
   AND THE WHITE GOD NEVER GOES
   FOR THE MOON WOULD WHITE HIS WHITENESS
   BEYOND ITS MASK OF WHITENESS
   AND THE NIGHT MIGHT BE ASTONISHED

20. AND SO LOSE ITS REPOSE
IN A TOWN NAMED AFTER STANLEY
NIGHT EACH NIGHT COMES NIGHTLY
AND THE MUSIC OF OLD MUSIC'S
BORROWED FOR THE HORNS
THAT DON'T KNOW HOW TO PLAY
ON LPs THAT WONDER
HOW THEY EVER GOT THAT WAY.

WHAT TIME IS IT, MAMA?
WHAT TIME IS IT NOW?

MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO ME—
BUT I'M ASKING ANYHOW.
WHAT TIME IS IT, MAMA?
WHAT TIME NOW?

DOWN THE LONG HARD ROW THAT I BEEN HOEING
I THOUGHT I HEARD THE HORN OF PLENTY BLOWING.
BUT I GOT TO GET A NEW ANTENNA, LORD—
MY TVKEEPS ON SNOWING.
III. "BLUES IN STEREO"

Introduction

As "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" ends, the hope it presents quickly diminishes. Throughout the next three poems, "RIDE, RED, RIDE," "SHADES OF PIGMEAT," and "ODE TO DINAH," protest dominates. The protest in these poems is against White oppression which prevents Negroes from being more than mere servants ("RIDE, RED, RIDE") and keeps them from gaining socio-economic equality ("SHADES OF PIGMEAT") while forcing them to live in sub-standard, segregated housing, subjecting them to White ignorance and insensitivity to the Negroes' plight or human rights ("ODE TO DINAH").

Then, in the midst of the anger, comes "BLUES IN STEREO," a poem of abundant joy and hope. As a matter of fact, this is the most hope-filled poem of the volume. Here is a mood of celebration for the new, independent nations like Guinea and Ghana (C.E., lines 63-71) which have overcome White oppression. These nations stand as emblems of hope that the American Negro may also be able to overcome oppression.

"CULTURAL EXCHANGE" and "BLUES IN STEREO" share several motifs. The now familiar phrase "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES" (line 13) establishes the scene from which this celebration is coming, as well as the locale of the interspersed protest of the poem (lines 14-20). Next, there is
an allusion to the river and its flowing followed by a juxtaposing of light and dark, similar to "CULTURAL EXCHANGE."
The questioning approach in "BLUES IN STEREO," though similar to that employed in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" (lines 85-87), is a variation of that technique.

Explication

The title, "BLUES IN STEREO," for the majority of Whites, signals that the poem will be one dealing with the depressed emotional state Whites generally concede to being the blues. However, to the Negro, and a few Whites, the blues connotes much more; though the Negro is subjected to oppression, he has learned how to keep the situations he faces from causing him to despair. Thus, the Negro has developed a verbal expression of his emotional states whether they are happy or sad, jubilant or despondent: the blues. Therefore, even though the poem presents a celebration, the title is congruent with the content.

The last half of the title is significant in itself. Just as stereophonic sound presents complementing music from two different places to create one unified melody, this celebration is made of the victory celebrations of the newly independent world nations and the joy felt by the oppressed
in America (the victories of others who were oppressed stand as a signal of hope for the American Negroes). These two complementing jubilations, from two sides of the world, create one joyous melody.

In order to insure that the desired mood will be established, Hughes relies on the voice instead of the music to set the mood (the side notes call for "TACIT," silence, from the musicians). The most probable reason for this use of the voice is because, through the proper use of inflection and tone, the desired mood of joy, anger, sorrow, etc., can be quickly established; to use music in establishing this mood to the same degree of specificity gained with the voice would require several bars of music, while the voice requires only four words. Thus, the voice joyously shouts, "YOUR NUMBER'S COMING OUT!" (line 1).

At the very beginning of this poem, the reader is met with the fact that the nations mentioned ("GHANA" and "GUINEA," line 47) or alluded to (lines 63-71) in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" are winners in their life's struggle against oppression. Here the numbers are coming up right for the players, and now is the time of celebrations because the numbers do not always come up right for a person, as "ASK YOUR MAMA" later demonstrates. The numbers game that these oppressed peoples have been involved in is the fight for home rule and the over-
throw of those oppressing them. By using the words "COMING OUT," Hughes is commenting that these people are finally achieving their goal.

Therefore, pride and hope fill the heart of this persona. Thus, he will send "BOUQUETS," the symbol of victory and love, and "DREAMS" of freedom, of equality, and of a cultural exchange. Further, he will send gayly arrayed "HORSES," the primal mode of transportation and the best way of moving through crowds because such victory celebrations saw cities flooded with thousands of people. All of this is reminiscent of ancient, triumphal marches.

The idea of the "HORSE" being "SHOD WITH GOLD" (line 4) carries with it an allusion to the spiritually victorious saints walking on streets of gold in heaven (Revelation 21:21). This victor is in his own heaven and walking on gold.

A juxtaposing of the near and far runs throughout this poem beginning with this celebration. Here it is made evident by the repetition of "SEND YOU" (lines 3, 7). Further association of near and far is made, somewhat ambiguously, by the reference to "BARE FEET": African Negroes and the Negroes of the quarter.

In an allusion to Christ's triumphal entry to Jerusalem recorded in Luke 19:29-44, the persona calls for the earth itself to join in the celebration, especially if the voice
of the people, is throttled. Luke 19:39, 40 (KJV) states:

And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.

And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

The implication of this allusion is that White prejudice does not want the achievements of the oppressed sounded abroad because such hope could create a revolution that would replace the White power structure in America or, at the very least, give American Negroes the idea that they can gain independence from their White oppression and equality with the oppressors. Thus, they desire to silence the voices.

But, regardless of what happens to the voice, whether it is silenced or not, the actions of the victorious ones speak louder than their words, and the Whites cannot stop this from going abroad. Just as the Christ walked on the earth to free the spiritually oppressed, the leaders throughout the world are walking among the people, fighting side by side with them in the effort to free them from White political oppression. Thus, the walking and marching feet of the people are making the earth shout the joyous news of liberation from White
oppression. Using the percussion gained by alliteration, assonance, and consonance, the poet declares:

BARE FEET TO BEAT THE GREAT DRUMBEAT
OF GLORY TO YOUR NAME AND MINE (lines 9-10)

The dream of liberation is becoming a reality in Africa, so there is hope for the Negro in America. Oppression can be thrown off, and praise will come to Negroes of both America and Africa.¹

Still freely associating the near and far as a jazz ensemble does with a readily known tune and the improvisation of an unknown tune far removed from the central melody, Hughes shifts continents and then blends both into one by using the ancient river, huts, and White religious images. In America, just as in Africa, the ancient river of primal life, the same cultural heritage, flows through their veins whether they live in multi-storied tenement houses or in grass and mud huts.

However, in this village where all is dark (Negroes and night), "THE WHITE GOD NEVER GOES" (line 16). This line creates a disharmony that is continued through line 20 and is used to comment on the inequality in White religion. Further, it comments on the unequal blessings of the White God who never goes to the quarter and who, apparently, has nothing in common with them, unlike the true God who became flesh and blood and lived among the people ("And the Word was made flesh,
and dwelt among us . . . " (John 1:14, KJV). Since the White God has nothing to do with the Negroes in this life, it is no wonder that the persona feels so uncertain about seeing his mother "WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED UP YONDER" (R.R.R., line 2). If God has nothing to do with a person in this life, it is doubtful that one could go to heaven with such a God; if his followers are prejudiced and segregationists, then he must be also.

Where the true God came into the darkness to shed light ("And the light shineth in darkness" John 1:5, KJV), this White God refuses to go in because his bigotry would be revealed by the natural light provided by the moon, a creation of the true God to provide light in the night (Genesis 1:16) enabling men to see in the physical dark. The reason this White God never enters the quarter is because his followers wear masks (an obvious allusion to the Ku Klux Klan), and when the true God's moon comes out, catching them in the quarter, the fear of their hearts would be revealed on his face as his mask of White is removed ("FOR THE MOON WOULD WHITE HIS WHITENESS/BEYOND ITS MASK OF WHITENESS," lines 17-18). Thus, the true God's moon helps unmask spiritual exploitation for what it really is: White supremacy. If the Klan were ever caught in the quarter and its spiritual falseness fully revealed, the Negroes might revolt as they never have before.
"AND THE NIGHT MIGHT BE ASTONISHED/AND SO LOSE ITS REPOSE,"
lines 19-20).

The recurrence of the word "WHITE" (lines 16-20) presents the idea that Whites are the source of religious disparity; historically, Whites have sent the military and the missionary into foreign lands, like Africa, simultaneously—the military conquered the people politically and the missionaries presented the accepted, state-sanctioned religion to the newly subjugated. If the conquered did not accept the state religion, the missionaries eliminated them. But, regardless of how they tried, these Whites could not supplant the true Lord because the elements declare Him ("The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.") Psalms 19:1, KJV), and nature can be observed without White society's interference.

In the next line, "IN A TOWN NAMED AFTER STANLEY" (line 21), Hughes refers to Stanleyville, a town in the Belgian Congo (now known as Zaire). As is the custom with the more powerful force, in this case the Belgians, they impose their culture on the lands they conquer without regard to the culture already present in the land. Therefore, the Belgians named the town with a White man's name.

But the idea that a town has a White man's name does not stop the Negroes of that land from using the town to their
own purposes. With "NIGHT EACH NIGHT COMES NIGHTLY" (line 22), the poet uses the repetition of "night" to allude to the three day meeting of the Congolese National Movement (October 29-31, 1959). In this instance, "night," used for its slang association as a term for Negro as well as its literal meaning, is repeated three times to comment on the fact that the Congolese Negroes gathered three days for the meeting, with more Negroes coming each day of the meeting. At this meeting, they heard Patrice Lumumba, the President of the Congolese National Movement, call for civil disobedience and election boycotts. 

Hughes then subtly shifts back to the United States by using the common connector between both continents--music. With "AND THE MUSIC OF OLD MUSIC'S" (line 23), the poet uses free association to connect the Congolese meeting with the tribal music that undoubtedly was heard there, while employing enjambement to associate that primal music with what is heard on American records.

The primal music played by the American Negroes' ancestors, and still used in tribal meetings, has been forgotten by the Negro. But the lively, heady rhythms of this music are transmuted for use on horns--trumpets, trombones, and saxophones--instead of drums ("BORROWED FOR THE HORMS," line 24), albeit unconsciously. However, even though the horns do not
remember where their rhythms come from, they are being recorded by the record companies. Thus, the "LPs" (line 26), a White society invention and industry, wonder at how the horns are able to play the music that is being recorded on the long-play records (lines 25-27). Hence, the past and the distant (heritage and Africa) are shown relevant to the present.

The side notes complement the poem through this section by using African drumbeats over the blues from the beginning of the stanza (line 21) through the transitional line "BORROWED FOR THE HORNS" (line 24). Then the blues mount in intensity from that line, through the end of the stanza, ending in a call for "TACIT" at the end of the conversational address (line 34).

Following this melange of past and present and the juxtaposing of near and far, Hughes shifts to a conversational address similar to an aside. In this section the persona is concerned with America's ability to discern the time ("WHAT TIME IS IT, MAMA?" line 28) and presents the question directly to the audience, or reader. Further, the persona's intensity of emotion is made explicit by the use of short, quick stanzas (one stanza of two lines and one stanza of four lines), and the repetition of the question throughout these lines; it is repeated in four (lines 28-29; 32-33) of the six lines (lines 28-33).
By his questioning, the persona wants to know if the authority (Mama and country) has taken note of all the revolt in the world? Has she, or it, seen the emerging nations and taken note that the time for the oppressed to throw off the oppressors has come for other peoples: "WHAT TIME IS IT NOW" (line 29)? If so, then maybe the time is right for changes to be made in America so that there is no need for the American Negro to revolt as the others throughout the world have had to do to gain their independence.

"Mama" has two choices facing her: she can make changes willingly, or be forced to make changes as the people revolt. Just as Lumumba led the Congolese, and those mentioned in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" (lines 63-71) led their people in rebellion against White oppression, someone will lead the American Negroes in an armed militant revolt if the oppressors do not make changes. Whichever course "Mama" wants, the persona claims it does not matter to him: "MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO ME—" (line 30). However, this statement is a backhanded, street-wise way of finding out what is eventually going to happen so that the persona can prepare for it. Thus, it would behoove the White man to note all the world activity against oppression and change the inequalities or face the same results as the other White oppressors. The repetition of the question to "Mama" found through this section (lines 28-33)
emphasizes the need for the country to note the time and the
signs of the time, and do so now!

Shifting rapidly from the questioning of "Mama," the
poet comments on the Negro's life and the hope that he has.
His life in America is a hard one; forced to come to America,
he was enslaved and made to work on the farms hoeing long
rows of various agricultural crops, and though he was freed
by the Emancipation Proclamation, his life has not become any
easier. However, with all the changes being wrought around
the world, perhaps the time has come for the Negro to partake
of the cornucopia which lies before him; surely White America
does not want a militant revolution and will, therefore, give
the Negro his full share of the plenty. Thus, the persona
says: "I THOUGHT I HEARD THE HORN OF PLENTY BLOWING" (line
35).

Yet, the persona is not sure he heard the horn blowing
and apparently does not wish to act without the certainty
that he has been subjected to all his life. So, the Negro
decides that a new antenna will clear up the signal and
enable him to receive clearly the incoming signals. But
where can he get an antenna that the White power structure
has not tampered with? The only place is the true, Biblical
Lord. Hence, the persona says "BUT I GOT TO GET A NEW AN-
TENNA, LORD—" (line 36) because, with the White oppressors'
Here is an allusion to the fact that only the Biblical Lord (not the White God whose followers wear masks) transcends color lines, sends the true signal, and provides the correct receiving apparatus for the horn of plenty. This connection between “horn” and “Lord” is reminiscent of Psalm 18:2: “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; ... and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower” (KJV). Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation were and are tampered with and altered so as to benefit the White oppressor, but the true, Biblical Lord showers his blessings without regard to skin color.

The time has come for the bounty of America to be shared by all its people. But "Mama" refuses to answer the Negroes’ questioning, and continues to create interference that stops the blessings of the true God from getting to the people, all the while trying to supplant Him with an invention of their own that is bigoted and prejudiced. Thus, the Negroes must continue to endure White oppression and interference until they get the true, unaltered signal. Therefore, they hesitate from militantly taking the plenty that is theirs. Once again, the hopes that White oppressors would willingly end their oppression and share the plenty, treat the Negro
fairly (the main concern of "SHOW FARE, PLEASE"), is hidden in the interference that defers the dream; thus, the "TV KEEPS ON SNOWING."
ASK YOUR MAMA
(By Langston Hughes)

FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE QUARTER
SHOUTS ARE WHISPERS CARRYING
TO THE FARThEREST CORNERS
OF THE NOW KNOWN WORLD:

5. 5th AND MOUND IN CINCI, 63rd IN CHI,
23rd AND CENTRAL, 18th STREET AND VINE.
I'VE WRITTEN, CALLED REPEATEDLY,
EVEN RUNG THIS BELL ON SUNDAY, YET
YOUR THIRD-FLOOR TENANT'S NEVER HOME.

10. DID YOU TELL HER THAT OUR CREDIT OFFICE
HAS NO RECOuRSE NOW BUT TO THE LAW?

YES, SIR, I TOLD HER.
WHAT DID SHE SAY?
SAID, TELL YOUR MA.

15. 17 SORROWS
AND THE NUMBER
6-O-2.
HIGH BALLS, LOW BALLS:
The 8-BALL

20. IS YOU.
7-11!
COME 7!
FORYG AND BESS
AT THE PICTURE SHOW.

25. I NEVER SEEN IT.
BUT I WILL,
YOU KNOW,
IF I HAVE
THE MONEY

30. TO GO.

FILLMORE OUT IN FRISCO, 7th ACROSS THE BAY, suggests
18th AND VINE IN K. C., 63rd IN CHI, pleasant
ON THE CORNER PICKING SPLINTERS
OUT OF THE MIDNIGHT SKY

35. IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
AS LEOLA PASSES BY
THE MEN CAN ONLY MURNUR
MY! ... MY! MY!

LUMUMBA LOUIS ARMSTRONG

40. PATRICE AND PATTI PAGE
HAMBURGERS PEPSI-COLA
KING COLE JUKEBOX PAYOLA

Delicate post-bop

young as it gradually weaves into its pattern

a musical echo of
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
GOD WILLING DROP A SHILLING

45. FORT DE FRANCE, PLACE PIGALLE
VINGT FRANCS NICKEL DIME
BAGIA LAGOS DAKAR LENOX
KINGSTON TOO GOD WILLING
A QUARTER OR A SHILLING. PARIS—

50. AT THE DOME VINGT FRANCS WILL DO

ROTONDE SELECT DUPONT FLORE
TALL BLACK STUDENT
IN HORN-RIM GLASSES,
WHO AT THE SORBONNE HAS SIX CLASSES,

55. IN THE SHADOW OF THE CLUNY
CONJURES UNICORN,
SPEAKS ENGLISH FRENCH SWAHILI
HAS ALMOST FORGOTTEN MEALIE.
BUT WHY RIDE ON MULE OR DONKEY

60. WHEN THERE'S A UNICORN?
NIGHT IN A SEKOU TOURE CAP
DRESSED LIKE A TEDDY BOY
BLOTS COLORS OFF THE MAP.
PERHAPS IF IT BE GOD'S WILL

Paris
which
continues
until
very
softly
the
silver
call
of a
hunting
horn
is
heard
far away.
African
drums
begin
a softly
mounting
rumble
soon
to fade
65. AZIKIWE'S SON, AMEKA, SHAKES HANDS WITH EMMETT TILL.
BRICKBATS BURST LIKE BUBBLES
STONES BURST LIKE BALLOONS
BUT HEARTS KEEP DOGGED BEATING

70. SELDOM BURSTING
UNLIKE BUBBLES
UNLIKE BRICKBATS
FAR FROM STONE.

75. WHERE NO SHADOW WALKS ALONE
LITTLE MULES AND DONKYES SHARE
THEIR GRASS WITH UNICORNOS.

Repeat high flute call to segue into up-tempo blues that continue behind the next sequence.
IV. "ASK YOUR MAMA"

Introduction

The theme of protest readily re-establishes itself in the three poems ("HORN OF PLENTY," "GOSPEL CHA-CHA," and "IS IT TRUE?") separating "BLUES IN STEREO" and "ASK YOUR MAMA." "HORN OF PLENTY" protests the fact that most Negroes in America are not partaking of America's bounty, and those who are achieving financial success still face White ignorance and insensitivity. "GOSPEL CHA-CHA" protests the White use of vacation spots filled with Negro heritage and Negro servants without fairly recompensing or crediting the Negro. By not recompensing and crediting the Negro, Whites are socially and economically crucifying the Negroes. "IS IT TRUE?" protests the White deafness which cannot hear anything not recorded by the record companies. Thus, they do not hear the whispers for justice and for a cultural exchange issuing from the quarter, and Whites remain ignorant about Negro life. Into all this objection Hughes brings the title poem, "ASK YOUR MAMA," as a break in the protest.

Beginning with protest to connect "ASK YOUR MAMA" to the poems directly preceding it, "ASK YOUR MAMA," like "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" and "SHOW FARE, PLEASE," then shifts to, and ends with hope. Further, it shares with "CULTURAL EXCHANGE"
By calling for no special musical arrangement in the
side note as the poem begins, the poet again (see B.I.S.)
allows the voice to set the mood. The note for music comes
at line 14 where the musical figurine (indicated in the fore-
word), "Shave and a Haircut, Fifteen Cents," is called for
after a "dozens" encounter. When the figurine finishes,
there is no call for music until line 30, at the end of a con-
versational section (lines 12-30), at which point musical
accompaniment is constantly called for to the end of the
poem. In addition, this poem contains an intense use of
allusion throughout.

Explication

The first line of "ASK YOUR MAMA," "FROM THE SHADOWS OF
THE QUARTER" (line 1), is a variation of the reference to
living space found in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE": "IN THE QUARTER
OF THE NEGROES" (line 3). Although the phrase in this poem
is a variation, it still works as the living space motif es-
tablishing the setting and returning the reader to the quarter.
The comment which follows is one of implied frustration, for
all the shouts coming from the various quarters ("5th AND
MOUND IN CINCI, 63rd IN CHI,/23rd AND CENTRAL [Los Angeles], 18th STREET AND VINE [Kansas City], lines 5-6) of America, the discontent and protest are nothing more than whispers from the dark corners--quarters--of the United States heard only by the "SHADOWS" (line 1)--Negroes of the quarter--who utter the shouts.

Hughes's comment that these are parts "OF THE NOW KNOWN WORLD" (line 4) is significant because, with all the world unrest, these boundaries could change any day; "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" shows leaders who were overthrowing the White oppressors, and "BLUES IN STEREO" celebrates their achievements which have changed many boundaries of what was once the "known world."

Into these quarters comes the White man's bill collector. Having tried all the impersonal modes of collecting the bill ("I'VE WRITTEN, CALLED REPEATEDLY," line 7), he has finally come for a personal, face to face meeting to collect, this time on a day when the people should be home ("EVEN RUNG THIS BELL ON SUNDAY, YET/YOUR THIRD-FLOOR TENANT'S NEVER HOME," lines 8-9), but are not.

In talking with the person who answers his visit (an adolescent?), the bill collector flatly asks, "DID YOU TELL HER THAT OUR CREDIT OFFICE/HAS NO RE COURSE NOW BUT TO THE LAW?" (lines 10-11). Although he has done as much or more
than what is expected of his position, the bill collector fails to show human concern by bothering to find out if there are any extenuating circumstances which prevented the timely payment of the bill. Instead, he immediately issues the power structure's standard demand "Pay or we sue!" (see line 11).

But to his demand and question "WHAT DID SHE SAY?" (line 13), this persona answers with a variation on the "dozens retort: "SAID, TELL YOUR MA" (line 14). This response is not all that unexpected. Impatience breeds impatience, and besides, without basic human concern what answer would appease him? Due to his ignorance and lack of involvement with the Negro, the White man does not recognize the implied insult and does not know that a retort is expected. Thus, he does not answer.

At this point, the stanza breaks and the figurine "Shave and a Haircut, Fifteen Cents" is called for in the side notes. Since this is a short, quick musical piece, it serves to break the tension created by the "dozens" encounter when ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ is accompanied by a jazz band.

In lines 15-30, the content deals with the many easy, quick fortune games found in daily life. All of these easy-riches games demand a great deal of luck on behalf of the player if he is to win. However, the one game of life which
requires no luck to win at, and the one game which the Negro is all too familiar a player at, is the game of life's sorrows. Since man's fall in the Garden of Eden, mankind has lived with sorrows, and the White man has inflicted many more sorrows on the Negro; the most visible sorrow was that of slavery. White society has continued to make the Negro's sorrows certain by its continued oppression with prejudice. Therefore, when Hughes begins this long conversational, free verse section (lines 15-30), he gives sorrows a specific number: "17" (line 15).

Because sorrows are a daily affair and the most common game for quick fortune is the daily lottery, the poet uses the numerical relationship of "17 SORROWS" (line 15) and the daily lottery number "6-0-2" (line 17)(the sum of the figures in both lines equal 8) to comment on the recurrence of sorrow. Further, with the daily number, the player continues to play because there is always hope that he will have the winning number tomorrow; with sorrows, the people hope that tomorrow will be a better day.

The next most popular game in the quarter to offer quick money is pool. However, pool always seems to have a hustler, who baits the unwary with feigned loses, promising victory, but snatches it away from the one playing (and betting) against him. This time, the loser is YOU ("THE 8-BALL/IS YOU," lines
The only place left to turn to fulfill the dream of quick fortune is the dice--crap--table. Here the two sure win numbers are "seven" and "eleven," if they come on the first roll; thus, the player shouts at the dice as he throws "7-11! COME 7!" (lines 21-22) in hopes of attaining his dream.

But the only sure numbers that come up are the sorrows number, and the only escape from life's sorrows is the picture show. It just so happens that the most popular Negro blues romance, George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess (1959 movie version of the Broadway production) is playing and the persona will escape to it, but only, he says, "IF I HAVE/THE MONEY/TO GO" (lines 28-30). However, since he has never seen it before, and since he has lost all his money in life's cheat games, his dream of seeing the movie and of attaining the dream of equality or fortune will remain deferred. The vicious cycle of mounting sorrows and dream deferment continues in the quarter, and no matter what one does, he cannot escape the reality of life.

The ideas expressed throughout this section combine to emphasize both protest and hope; protest in that the dream is deferred, hope that regardless of the sorrows felt and experienced, the people of the quarter will not give up, and thus they shout "7-11!/COME ?!"
As the scene shifts with the end of this stanza, Hughes again lists present-day (1955–) quarters: "FILLMORE OUT IN FRISCO, 7th ACROSS THE BAY [San Francisco] /18th AND VINE IN K. C. [Kansas City], 63rd IN CHI [Chicago]," (lines 31-32). Life is somewhat enjoyable and, at the present time, there is nothing more to do than waste time and ogle the women as they pass ("ON THE CORNER PICKING SPLINTERS/OUT OF THE MIDNIGHT SKY/IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES/AS LEOLA PASSES BY/THE MEN CAN ONLY MURMUR/My! . . . My! My! lines 33-38). The interjections at the end of this stanza comment on the one free delight found in the quarter—observing the beauty of a woman.

But while life goes by quietly in the quarter, the national and international life continues in its jumbled and rapid, constantly shifting course. With lines 39-60, Hughes whirls and jumbles distant and local, known and unknown, clear and obscure in a manner approximating the jazz world's use of the same aspects in music as it approximates the real world. Life's incongruities and inconsistencies are here represented.

The montage of lines 39-50 begin with the juxtaposing of a political name and the names of two entertainers, one White and one Negro. By so doing, Hughes contrasts aspiration without success and aspiration with success. In the line "LUMUMBA
LOUIS ARMSTRONG/PATRICE AND PATTI PAGE" (lines 39-40), the poet makes reference to the Congolese National Movement's President, Patrice Lumumba, whose name evokes the idea of aspiration without achievement, and to Louis Armstrong and Patti Page whose names evoke the idea of aspiration with achievement. Thus, Hughes subtly juxtaposes the insecurity of politics with the security of the American entertainment world; White oppressors' disregard skin color if they can entertain them, but Whites refuse to support those Negro leaders who would alter the socio-political system.

Meanwhile, the signs of affluent society continue without interruption ("HAMBURGERS PEPSI-COLA," line 41), and the kaleidoscopic jumbling of life is almost incoherent ("KING COLE JUKEBOX PAYOLA," line 42). The allusions of line 42 become clearer as the reader remembers that prosperity breeds hope, but White oppression dashes that hope to pieces while exploiting the people. The references to Nat "KING COLE" (1919-1965) expresses hope dashed to pieces by the fact that he was the first Negro to have his own nationally broadcast television show (1956), but was forced to drop it because he could not get a sponsor; the "JUKEBOX" plays music for the people, but was just one more way of taking their money; "PAYOLA" refers to 1950's scandal of record company agents bribing disc-jockies to play and promote certain
With the repetition of the phrase referring to the Negroes' living space "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES" (line 43), Hughes re-establishes the wording found in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" and settles the reader in preparation for a rapid world tour of places, especially vacation spots, known for their exploitation of Negroes by Whites, all in the name of development. In these vacation spots (lines 45-49), "FORT DE FRANCE" (Martinique's capitol), "PLACE PIGALLE" (a neighborhood on the right bank of the Seine known for its heady entertainment--jazz, cabarets, etc.--and its "clip" joints), 3 "LAGOS" (Nigeria's capitol), "DAKAR" (Senegal's capitol), "KINGSTON" (Jamaica's capitol), and "LENOX" (Harlem, New York's capitol entertainment street probably best remembered for the "Cotton Club," a famous 1920's White night spot), money of all kinds, French ("FRANCS"), English ("SHILLING"), 4 and American ("NICK-EL," "DIME," "QUARTER," note play on word meaning), flows freely as Whites entertain themselves.

In the "Pigalle," certain night clubs have a reputation for being places that, once a patron entered, he could not leave without paying a certain amount of money. Most often, these establishments charged a patron a minimum of four dollars whether he bought anything or not. Thus, by associating vingt (which means twenty in French) and the value of the
franc in 1960 (twenty cents) as the poet does in "VINGT FRANCS" (line 46), the reader sees Hughes commenting on this "Pigalle" ploy to get money; when the two amounts are multiplied, the total figure is approximately four dollars.

By referring to the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahai (line 47), Hughes calls attention to one of the largest concentrations of Negro and mulatto populations in Brazil. This state is often referred to as Salvador or Sao Salvador. It is known as another White vacation spot. However, in addition to the reference to the city, Hughes is probably using Bahai in its religious context as well. The followers of the Bahai Faith are active fighters against prejudice, discrimination, and racism, believing in the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of mankind; but in these White vacation spots, oneness of mankind is divided into the rich vacationers and the poor natives, the White masters and the Negro servants.

With "PARIS—" (line 49), the poet ends the world-wide image collage and focuses the reader on the capitol of France. Resuming the intense association technique and centering it in Paris, Hughes uses an obscure line, "ROTONDE SELECT DUPONT FLORE" (line 51), to comment that two choices, war and peace, stand before the White power structure and the Negro leaders, in this case France and Leopold Senghor, President of Senegal.
(now known as the Republic of Mali), as the Negroes come to self-rule. The "rotonde" refers to the round dome which tops the Pantheon, or the French Senate Building. Here, many great French revolutionaries, Rosseau, Voltaire, Hugo, Zola, to mention a few, lie in state in remembrance of the wars fought to free the people of France from their various oppressors; it stands as the choice of war. On the other hand, the word "flore," the French word meaning flower (which is a symbol of peace, especially since the 1960's) stands as the choice for peace.

The two intermediary words, "select" and "dupont," are both words signifying choice; "select" means to choose and "dupont," which translates "the bridge," alludes to the use of bridges in getting from one location to another without great difficulty. This allusion to crossing-over recalls that cultural exchanges are achieved by crossing-over from one culture to another, as Leontyne Price (C.E.), has done. Further, "dupont" also alludes to the eighteenth century French politician, Pierre Samuel Du Pont; Du Pont was one of the primary leaders of the French Revolution who worked with members of the Controle General in planning reforms. Thus, Hughes is commenting that it is in the hands of the White power structure to choose how they wish to give the Negroes their independence, through war or negotiations.
Into this country where choice is a possibility, comes a "TALL BLACK STUDENT/IN HORN-RIM GLASSES" (lines 52-53). Here (lines 54-55) the reference to the "SORBONNE" located "IN THE SHADOW OF THE CLUNY" combines with the reference to the "CLUNY" to call to mind the same general area of Paris. The Sorbonne is the famous French humanities and science university which is situated in the shadow of the Musee de Cluny (museum). Across the street from the Sorbonne is the Jardin (Garden) Du Luxemborg, a beautiful garden frequented by children and students, especially those living in the Latin Quarter where the Sorbonne and Cluny are.

Into this educational setting comes a "TALL BLACK STUDENT/IN HORN-RIM GLASSES" (lines 52-53) to attend the university. However, this is no mere student. He has glasses with which to see better and, consequently, becomes an idealist ("CONJURES UNICORN," line 56)7 who can speak three languages: "... ENGLISH FRENCH SWAHILI." With all his learning and idealism, this student in Paris "HAS ALMOST FORGOTTEN" that the main food staple of most of his homeland is a meagre corn meal bread called "MEALIE." If this student can forget the basic food staples, then maybe he has lost contact with the everyday facts of life because of his idealism ("BUT WHY RIDE ON MULE OR DONKEY/WHEN THERE'S A UNICORN?" lines 59-60) which stands above corruption.
The next stanza begins with a reference to the President of the Republic of Guinea, Sekou Toure (1922- ), and the "NIGHT," another word for Negro, ties the tall black student to this stanza. The "CAP" refers to a special hat which proclaims rank or occupation, and the line "DRESSED LIKE A TEDDY BOY" (line 62) alludes to the fancy suits cut in the style of Edward VII (most often worn in England by uncouth, rough, low-class, young [15 to 25] delinquents). This one with such high ideals, especially his desire to eliminate the color lines ("BLOTS COLOR OFF THE MAP," line 63) dressed so fancily, and is ranked with the President of Guinea, is probably Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906- ), President of the Republic of Senegal, which gained its independence in 1960 (see note 6).

Once again, juxtaposing opposites, the author relies on the divine will to bring the distant together; the opposites are life and death, while the near is Mississippi and the far is Africa. "AMEKA" is "SON" (line 65) of the Nigerian Governor General, Namdi "AZIKIWE" (C.E., line 68, and mentioned earlier in this paper on pages 76-77), while "EMMETT TILL" is dead in Mississippi (killed by two white men who were never convicted). If these two can shake hands, then it is possible that "BRICKBATS BURST LIKE BUBBLES/STONES BURST LIKE BALLOONS" (lines 67-68).
Here the poet uses the familiar, physical "BRICKBATS" and "STONES" with two levels of meaning: brick fragments and rocks, as well as uncomplimentary remarks and insulting condemnations. Further, he uses simile to inspire hope: "BRICKBATS BURST LIKE BUBBLES/STONES BURST LIKE BALLOONS."

However, this does not happen. Destruction will not end, and people, especially Negroes of the quarter, must always be on the run. Thus, the poet says: "BUT HEARTS KEEP DOGGED BEATING" (line 69), and the reason their hearts beat so doggedly is because rocks and insults (especially that of failing to convict or solve a senseless murder) seldom inflict as little harm as bubbles:

Seldom bursting
Unlike bubbles
Unlike brickbats
Far from stone (lines 70-73)

Destruction and hate never end as easily as they start, and they never do only a little harm. The comment of these lines, a short but relatively even flowing use of verbal improvisation, is intense: seldom do brickbats and stones, regardless of the level of meaning or desire, burst like bubbles.

The musical comment to this point (line 73) is a heart-like drumbeat that ends in silence. This suggests that hearts
can only keep a fear prompted, "DOGGED BEATING" (line 69), for a short period of time before stopping. Therefore, if America wants a healthy life, its leaders (governors and senators, see C.E. lines 87-end) must end the fear created by White oppression which causes America's heart (the common peoples of all races) to beat so doggedly, or America's heart might stop beating.

However, even though the White power structure has segregated the Negro, he knows there is hope for those who live in the quarter; the quarter maintains a communal spirit of sharing and concern. No one lives his life isolated, but is a dynamic part of that community (line 75) and the common people share their lives, livelihoods, and dreams and dream-producing substances ("GRASS," line 77, is slang for marihuana), regardless of a person's ideology or social standing (lines 75-77).
SHOW FARE, PLEASE
(By Langston Hughes)

TELL ME, MAMA, CAN I GET MY SHOW TACIT
TELL ME FARE FROM YOU?
OR DO YOU THINK THAT PAPA'S
GOT CHANGE IN HIS LONG POCKET?

5. IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
WHERE THE MASK IS PLACED BY OTHERS
IBM ELECTRIC BONGO DRUMS ARE COSTLY Rhythmic
TELL ME, MAMA, TELL ME,
STRIP TICKETS STILL ILLUSION?
bop,

10. GOT TO ASK YOU—GOT TO ASK!
ever

TELL ME, TELL ME, MAMA,
mORE
ALL THAT MUSIC, ALL THAT DANCING ironic,
CONCENTRATED TO THE ESSENCE laughs
OF THE SHADOW OF A DOLLAR itself

15. PAID AT THE BOX OFFICE
WHERE THE LIGHTER IS THE DARKER softly
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES into a
AND THE TELL ME OF THE MAMA lonely
IS THE ANSWER TO THE CHILD. flute

20. DID YOU EVER SEE TEN NEGROES
call...
WEAVING METAL FROM TWO QUARTERS
INFO CLOTH OF DOLLARS
FOR A SUIT OF GOOD-TIME WEARING?
WEAVING OUT OF LONG-TERM CREDIT

25. INTEREST BEYOND CARING?

THE HEADS ON THESE TWO QUARTERS
ARE THIS OR THAT
OR LESS OR MOST—
SINCE BUT TWO EXIST

30. BEYOND THE HOLY GHOST.

OF THESE THREE,
IS ONE
ME?

THE TV'S STILL NOT WORKING

35. SHOW FARE, MAMA, PLEASE.
SHOW FARE, MAMA. . . .
SHOW FARE!

"The Hesitation Blues" very loud, lively and raucously. Two big swinging choruses—building full blast to a bursting climax.
V. "SHOW FARE, PLEASE"

Introduction

Although there is a communal spirit in the quarter, this communal spirit cannot create a cultural exchange or end the White oppression; this fact is made explicit in "BIRD IN ORBIT" and "JAZZTET MUTED," the two poems following "ASK YOUR MAMA." Whites continue to oppress the Negroes by remaining ignorant of their heritage and by enjoying Negro music without properly recompensing them ("BIRD IN ORBIT"). This leads to increased emotional pressure in the quarter, and if a release is not found, the possible outcome is a riot.

Therefore, Hughes places "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" at the end of the volume because it demands action on the part of the White power structure, and that without delay. This is the last opportunity for the poet to signal the Whites that Negro socio-economic conditions must be changed. In "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" he shows the hope that the changes will come through the election process, but oppression, and protest of it, continued. Then, in "BLUES IN STEREO" the poet presents a celebration for the non-American Negroes who, through violence, had attained self-rule and independence from their White oppressors. But, as Hughes states at the end of "BLUES IN STEREO," maybe the American Negro need only make a minor adjustment and, with God’s help, the problems will clear.
Thus, in "ASK YOUR MAMA" the poet presents a situation where independence was gained peacefully, fostering a feeling of community in the quarter; this stands as an example to the White power in America. If White America chooses to ignore this possibility, the Negroes may stop looking for non-militant ways of releasing their pressures. Hence, "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" is the last attempt in this volume to get action from the White oppressors. As the last poem of the volume, "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" culminates the protest of White oppression and is the final expression of hope, even though it is mixed with anger.

"SHOW FARE, PLEASE" makes the point that Negroes are kept out of America's prosperity because the people in power charge fees the Negroes cannot afford. Further, although the promise of fair and equal treatment was tendered, the fulfillment is still delayed. If the people in power are not going to fulfill the promises, then it is time to get rid of them as a person would get rid of a TV that quit working.

"SHOW FARE, PLEASE" shares several features with the other explicated poems. Like "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" and "ASK YOUR MAMA," "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" develops its theme from protest to hope mixed with anger. Further, it shares the quarter as living space motif with all the poems with the phraseology being the same as that found in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE." It shares
the religious motif and the light-dark motif with "BLUES IN
STEREO." Additionally, like "ASK YOUR MAMA," it uses the
quarter motif in association with its monetary value. Thus,
Hughes uses many of the same motifs in the last poem of the
volume ("SHOW FARE, PLEASE") as he used in the first poem
of the volume ("CULTURAL EXCHANGE").

Explication

As the voice establishes the mood, the poet interrupts
the question being asked by separating the key words of the
question. With "TELL ME, MAMA, CAN I GET MY SHOW/TELL ME
FARE FROM YOU?" (lines 1-2), Hughes leads the reader to ex­
pect that the question will be asked in line 1; but, when it
is not, the reader gets a taste of the unfulfilled and de­
layed, partial fulfillment of the expected that the Negro
has lived with most of his life. This sudden fragmenting of
the question protests the failure of the White power structure
to play fair on the Negro's behalf.

There is a double pun on the phrase "SHOW FARE." The
first deals with a southern idiom for fair play,¹ or fair
treatment, while the second deals with equitable payment for
services rendered. The splintering of "SHOW" and "FARE" is
compelling because it comments that there is a lack of com­
pleteness on both points. Thus, the poet wants to jar the reader, which he does, into considering the lack of basic human concern rendered to the American Negro.

Note that the movement of repetition (line 2) returns to its source "TELL ME" but does not complete the rest of line 1 nor the question. Instead, it offers the other half of the question, again fragmenting it. Never is the question "... CAN I GET MY SHOW ... FARE FROM YOU" (lines 1-2) brought together, just as the promise of integrated and equal has never been fully realized. The White power structure is always holding something, one part or the other, back, and Hughes poignantly demonstrates that point here.

But Mama, the country, must get its money from somewhere, and the persona knows this. Therefore, he asks if White industry, "PAPA," might not have some money to share:

OR DO YOU THINK THAT PAPA'S
GOT CHANGE IN HIS LONG POCKET? (lines 3-4)

The White exploiter has coats with deep, long pockets so he can transport all the precious coins from the various businesses, night clubs, and jukeboxes to their private storage places. Perhaps, if he reached deep enough, he might find some change, but that change does not seem to exist. All that does exist is the dehumanizing and esteem-stealing welfare
system that effectively keeps the Negro from achieving his potential. There is no fair play in such a system, and there is no answer to the question except the lack of an answer which the Negro knows all too well.

The phrase "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES" (line 5) re-establishes the reader with the persona in America's Negro living sections (quarter). Here the mask, reminiscent of the mask in "BLUES IN STEREO," still represents bigotry and exploitation parading as fulfillment of the dream. By employing a few Negroes primarily in the entertainment industry, the Whites have made enormous profits with little recompense to the Negroes in comparison to those profits. Beyond this, "Papa," big business, in this case "IBM," uses Negro merchants to sell the Negro drums ("BONGO DRUMS," line 7) it has taken and modified with electronic gadgetry thereby making them too expensive to buy: one more example of exploitation. Here (line 7) the poet comments that the best White society offers the Negro is something the Negro had first, and then it was free; White industry uses everything and everybody to its own profit. So the persona must ask again. With the "TELL ME, MAMA, TELL ME" (line 8) repetition, the line is filled with alliteration, assonance and consonance, as are "STRIP TICKETS STILL ILLUSION?/GOT TO ASK YOU—GOT TO ASK!" (lines 9-10), which builds to an emotion-filled shout. The rapid use and
re-use of the same poetic devices in three consecutive lines works almost like a jackhammer pounding the reader until he shouts. The shout, indicated by the exclamation point, and the elongated pronunciation of "YOU" (line 10) combine to work as a pressure release for the emotional build-up provided by the preceding lines.

With the line "STRIP TICKETS STILL ILLUSION?" (line 9), Hughes is commenting that admission to the enjoyments of life, here figured by the association of the strip tickets used for admission to the movie houses, is still an unfulfilled promise. Thus, the promised admission to America's prosperity is still only an illusion; for the Negroes to be able to enjoy the entertainments of life, they must first be able to secure the necessities of life.

Therefore, by using the imperative "TELL" (line 11) after the strongly interrogative "ASK" (line 10), the poet emphasizes the persona's urgency. This use of both "ask" and "tell" to request information shows the persona almost pleading for the answer to his question about how long it will be before the tickets of admission to an equal life, admission to the same human rights and dignities enjoyed by the White population will be more than just a dream, an illusion. Equality is for all people, but an entire sector of society is being denied admission. That is why tense
emotion has built up and the only release is through screaming. The author provides the release with the elongated pronunciation of "YOU" (line 10) in an effort to force the reader to identify himself as the one being addressed: "GOT TO ASK YOU—" (line 10).

Though the shout may have provided a tension release, the next stanza is backhanded, yearning for an answer. The ordering of line 11 causes this desire to be presented even more intensely with direct rather than interrupted repetition: "TELL ME, TELL ME, MAMA" (line 11).

Portrayed in lines 11-15 is the Negro's noting that his music and dances are being performed for money instead of enjoyment. People from all over have come and are coming to see the Negro act on stage, but, when he does get to perform, he is paid very little of the true amount tendered—paid "THE SHADOW OF A DOLLAR"—rather than a fair share.

Further, exploitation and segregation are exhibited in "PAID AT THE BOX OFFICE/WHERE THE LIGHTER IS THE DARKER" (lines 15-16). The White people have shown an unending desire to have only the lightest Negroes available working for them; this is evident in the fact that Whites would rather have Al Jolson portray a Negro rather than hire a real Negro to fill the roles he was paid to play with a black face. Therefore, the most dominant number of Negroes in the White
public eye are those, like Lena Horn, Johnny Mathis, Leontyne Price, all of whom are fair-complected Negroes; here we have an implied play on the title word, "FARE." It is these "light-skinned" Negroes who are being paid at the box office, while the darker Negroes, like Sammy Davis, Jr. and Louis Armstrong, are forced to work night clubs throughout the country and the world to earn their money. Clearly, Whites like Negro entertainment, but prefer that the Negroes who do this entertaining be as light as possible. Further, the White oppressors consider themselves superior to the oppressed; therefore, the more like the oppressors, especially in looks, the more accepted the oppressed are. The side notes for this section (lines 11-16) comment on this idea that the box office hires the lighter Negroes by calling for the musicians to make their instruments produce "more ironic laughs . . . "; this is the first time throughout the volume that the side notes have called for any type of laughter.

However, in the quarter, shading does not matter. The only thing that does matter is that the ever-haunting questions, evident in the "Hesitation Blues" melody, "How long must I wait? Can I get it now . . . or must I hesitate?" continue unanswered; no one is offering a clear response. This is exhibited in "AND THE TELL ME OF THE MAMA/IS THE ANSWER TO THE CHILD" (lines 18-19).
As these lines begin, the reader expects to find out what the "TELL ME" is, but instead finds a run-around. This run-around is reminiscent of a similar incident in "SHADES OF PIGMEAT": "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES/ANSWER QUESTIONS ANSWER/AND ANSWERS WITH A QUESTION" (lines 20-22). In both cases, the run-around is quite evident, intensely commenting on the social run-around the Negroes have been facing ever since they came to this country, and the question they are most often answered with is "What do you want?" because the White society on the whole has little direct knowledge of the Negro's plight and does not know what the Negro wants.

Yet, Mama has given an answer to one question. In "ODE TO DINAH," to the question "I WANT TO GO TO THE SHOW MAMA" (line 95), in which the request is clear, Mama (the country, according to "HORN OF PLENTY" line 58) answers, "NO SHOW FARE, BABY—/NOT THESE DAYS!" (lines 96-97). There will be no admittance to a better life because the country will not give an equal sharing of its wealth to its Negro citizens. And since the answer has not changed and is not changed by or in lines 11 and following of "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" (the last poem of the volume), Mama continues to deny fulfillment of the dream of equality; instead she gives the Negroes of the quarter the run-around.
Due to this inadequate compensation for services rendered, and other aspects of the run-around process, the Negroes are forced to try the impossible. Therefore, the persona poses the following question:

DID YOU EVER SEE TEN NEGROES
WEAVING METAL FROM TWO QUARTERS
INTO CLOTH OF DOLLARS
FOR A SUIT OF GOOD-TIME WEARING?
WEAVING OUT OF LONG-TERM CREDIT
INTEREST BEYOND CARING? (lines 20-25)

Here the poet comments on the reality that many Negroes work for inadequate wages. But to partake in the bounty of America and have a good time, or at least meet the daily requirements of life, the Negro must have dollar bills and that is more money than he is earning. Therefore, the Negroes combine forces to try and do the impossible, pool their meagre funds into a means of making a fortune which would provide the means to a better life for them. But such a miracle has never happened. In fact, just getting by in life has forced most Negroes to borrow money at interest rates so high that people stop caring about it and just borrow more.

Here Hughes shifts the meaning of the quarter motif from the usual living space idea to that of the quarter's monetary
value. With this, the poet makes an associational leap to George Washington as figurehead on the money and founding father of the country. Immediately following the leap to Washington, attention turns to segregation:

THE HEADS ON THESE TWO QUARTERS
ARE THIS OR THAT
OR LESS OR MOST— (lines 26-28)

The segregation here involves the progeny of the Great White Founding Father, George Washington. Here "THAT" and "MOST" refer to his White progeny while "THIS" and "LESS" refer to his Negro progeny. This association is seen in the persona of the poem being Negro, therefore, "THIS," while those he speaks about are "THAT" or White. Further, the Negro has always had and been given "LESS" while the White has always had and received the "MOST."

This contrast is emphasized by the poet's use of italics for all four words. The poet's use of both italics for and the dash after "MOST—" intensifies the contrast, commenting on who gets the most.

The "father" association continues in the next section (lines 29-33) as does the expression of disparity:

SINCE BUT TWO EXIST
BEYOND THE HOLY GHOST
OF THESE THREE
IS ONE
ME? (lines 29-33)

Here Washington is identified with the head of the Christian Trinity. As the head of the Trinity, and as America's prime figure of prosperity ("THE HEADS ON THESE TWO QUARTERS," line 26), his primary goal is to make America "E. Pluribus Unum"-one out of many. But unity (ethnic) and equality (prosperity) have not taken place; there remain two poles: Negro and White ("SINCE BUT TWO EXIST," line 29). The "HOLY GHOST," the third part of the Trinity, in America, is comprised of all the lesser immigrants. The poet knows this, but he wants the White reader to realize the disparity and recognize that the Negro is an intimate part of America. Therefore, he asks a question to help the reader come to terms with the problem.

The last two stanzas of "SHOW FARE, PLEASE" reverse the incremental repetition which Hughes uses to open the volume in "CULTURAL EXCHANGE." The reason for this is that Hughes wants to make as intense a closing impact as he made an opening impact. By taking away the additional information and closing these stanzas with one or two words, Hughes shows that the basic concerns of this poem deal with the oppressed
Negro as presented in, and represented by Hughes in this volume: therefore, "ME" (line 33). Further, Hughes shows that it is up to the Whites to change the socio-economic situation which is causing Negroes to feel so oppressed; therefore, "SHOW FARE!" (line 37). Whites must realize that unless all Americans are partaking of America's bounty and equity, then all of America suffers for the lack of such partaking; if all do not enjoy prosperity because of bigotry, then no one can truly enjoy it, and the founding father's wish for unity will never come to be.

As the poem closes, the reader is told "THE TV'S STILL NOT WORKING" (line 34). Remembering that the Negro persona has been living with TV problems since "BLUES IN STEREO" ("BUT I GOT TO GET A NEW ANTENNA LORD—/MY TV KEEPS ON SNOWING," lines 36-37), it is assumed he has made adjustments, and now it is the White man's turn (which is made clear by the subsequent request for fair treatment: "SHOW FARE!" line 37). The persona puts up his new antenna, but "THE TV'S STILL NOT WORKING" (line 34). His adjustments should have brought him clearer reception, equality, yet it is still being denied him.

He knows that he has done all he can. Somebody else must act, and that somebody is Mama, the country (H.O.P., line 58). Therefore, the persona politely asks "SHOW FARE
MAMA, PLEASE" (line 35). When he gets no reaction to his request, he becomes sterner in his request ("SHOW FARE, MAMA . . . " line 36), and finally demands action with an emphatic shout ("SHOW FARE!" line 37). This final command for fair play shows an intensity that hints at an attitude change that states NO LONGER WILL THE NEGRO ALLOW THE DREAM TO BE DEFERRED (emphasis added). Mama's answer of "NO SHOW FARE, BABY—/NOT THESE DAYS" (0.T.D., lines 96-97) will no longer be accepted. Action must come (as commented on by stressing "SHOW" throughout lines 35-37), and equality must prevail.

By ending with the command and shout, there is explicit anger and implied hope, like one yelling at a person in expectation of action from the one being yelled at, or like one shouting for help in expectation of receiving that help. Here the anger is that the dream has been so long deferred and the bounty so meagerly apportioned; the hope is that the Whites will cease their miserly ways in concerns of the oppressed and will render to the worker his fair recompense for services. Just making this bold, lively demand, generates hope that the White power structure in America will hear this shout, recognize the demand and justified anger of the oppressed, and react accordingly with fair play.
Hughes ends the poem, and the volume, by using the side notes to comment on the intensity of hesitation endured and the hope of coming fair play. Thus, the musical notation in the side margin reads:

"The Hesitation Blues" very loud, lively and raucously. Two big swinging choruses—building full blast to a bursting climax.
VI. Conclusion and Exhortation

Content Summary

Hughes's primary emphasis in *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* is that of social protest, especially protest of White oppression and its results such as ignorance of Negro culture and White refusal to fairly recompense the Negroes for services rendered. To present this protest in the most effective manner, the poet refrains from using the dialectical diction employed in his earlier volumes of poetry. By using the "proper" English, French, or Spanish, he is attempting to appeal to White and Negro academia as well as the common man.

Although protest dominates, this volume exhibits hope that White oppression will end. As the explicated poems show, this hope is bound in two possibilities: negotiation or revolution. In "Cultural Exchange," both possibilities are presented; there are many countries throughout the world gaining independence from White oppression through revolution, but the persona dreams that the Negroes will use the political system to end the oppression. Therefore, at this point, he does not consider revolution.

The three poems following "Cultural Exchange"—"Ride, Red, Ride," "Shades of Pigmeat," and "Ode to Dinah"—show that White oppression continues to prevent the Negro from bettering himself economically or socially. For those few
Negroes who become economically successful, White ignorance and insults (intended or otherwise) prevent these from being socially accepted.

Therefore, the most hope-filled poem of the volume, "BLUES IN STEREO," celebrates the revolutionary victories of non-American Negroes in their fight against White oppression. Coming in the midst of protest as it does, and being as hope-filled as it is, "BLUES IN STEREO" presents the idea of revolution as a viable possibility for the American Negro in his quest for an end to White oppression. But, the persona feels that, with divine help and a minor adjustment on his part, maybe White oppression can be stopped without the violence of a revolution.

Yet, oppression continues. The next three poems, "HORN OF PLENTY," "GOSPEL CHA-CHA," and "IS IT TRUE?" make clear that Whites allow only a few Negroes to partake of America's bounty while the majority of the Negroes remain economically and socially crucified by White oppressors who, because of their segregationist attitudes, believe that Negroes have more fun in life than Whites do. Thus, Hughes uses "ASK YOUR MAMA" in an effort to teach Whites that life is not easy for the Negro. Further, Hughes presents the hope that negotiations with the White power structure in America can end op-
pression and foster a communal spirit as it has in one foreign
land.

Still White ignorance and oppression continue. In the
two poems after "ASK YOUR MAMA"—"BIRD IN ORBIT" and "JAZZ TET
MUTED"—the poet shows that Whites remain ignorant of the
Negro's deprivation while enjoying his music without fairly
recompensing him for that music. The fact that Negro enter-
tainers are deprived of fair wages for their entertaining
and the fact that the majority of Negroes are prevented from
partaking of America's bounty create intense emotion in the
quarter resulting in the possibility of a riot unless a non-
violent release can be found. Therefore, "SHOW FARE, PLEASE,"
the last poem of the volume, states that the time has come
for change, but the choice of how that change is to come,
through peaceful negotiation or violent revolution, is left
for the Whites to decide; the Negro stands ready for either.

As such, Hughes closes the volume with exclamatory
clauses, shouts, which are demands filled with expectancy;
why shout if no one can hear, and why demand if there is no
hope that someone, someday will comply?

Style. As a work of innovation and experimentation,
ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ, as illustrated in "CUL-
TURAL EXCHANGE," "BLUES IN STEREO," "ASK YOUR MAMA," and
"SHOW FARE, PLEASE," demonstrates Hughes's ability to use style to reach a diversified audience. In these poems, the poet employs "standard" languages (American and foreign) rather than maintaining the dialect style which appears in his many other works, poetic and otherwise. Further, Hughes uses allusion and repetition combined with assonance, alliteration, and consonance to penetrate the reader's apathetic attitude and to make him take note of the American Negro's socio-economic situation. Also, Hughes uses these elements (especially repetition) combined with the side notes for jazz accompaniment in a jazz-like approximation of the hesitations which the Negro endures. Throughout the volume, Hughes clearly demonstrates his stylistic versatility.

Exhortation

Since only four poems of *ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ* have been explicated, the remaining poems await examination. Such fertile ground as this volume stands ready to be analyzed and should not be neglected. Further explication of *ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ* is clearly merited.
Notes
Chapter One: An Overview


5 Alan Trachtenberg and Benjamin DeMott, America in Literature Vol. 2 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), pp. 999-1000.


7 Emanuel, p. 173. [Hughes went to Russia with twenty-two Negro film-makers in 1931, and when the film production was canceled, he extensively toured Russia. Upon completion of this tour, Hughes was more critical of Marxism than when he began. Therefore, when he was accused of having belonged to several supposed communist front organizations in the]
1930's, Hughes never bothered to deny them but said he had never been a communist.

When told that some of his early works had been removed from the shelves of United States information libraries, "Mr. Hughes told investigators that he was surprised they had been on the shelves in the first place. He suggested that they be replaced by some of his later works. That ended the matter." (The New York Times, May 24, 1967, p. 32.)


9 In December, 1967, the students and faculty of Columbia University held "A Langston Hughes Memorial Evening." During this event a Professor Shenton said: "I am here partly as a way of saying for Columbia that we owe some apologies . . . For a while, there lived a poet down the street from Columbia and Columbia never took the time to find out what he was about." (Anon. "Hughes at Columbia," New Yorker, 43, December 30, 1967, p. 21.)

10 Hughes, p. 694.

11 McGhee, p. 59.


13 Langston Hughes, "Dream Boogie," in America in Literature, ed. Alan Trachtenberg and Benjamin DeMott

14 Davis, p. 33.

15 Hughes, p. 694.


18 Bruno, p. 38.

19 Bruno, p. 185.

20 Lee, p. 225.


22 Oliver, p. 236.

23 Oliver, p. 246.


25 Jemie, p. 83.

26 Jemie, p. 83.

28 Hughes, p. 694.
29 Jemie, p. 22.
31 Hughes, *ASK YOUR MAMA*, Foreword.
32 Jemie, p. 84.
33 Jemie, p. 81.
35 Langston Hughes cited in Jemie, p. 81.
Notes

Chapter Two: "CULTURAL EXCHANGE"


2 Leontyne Price (1927- ), is perhaps most noted for her appearance as Bess in Gershwin's Porgy and Bess (1935), while on tour in Europe and the United States from 1952-1954 under the auspices of the United States' State Department, as well as many other appearances throughout the 1950's and early 1960's.


5 "Better Known as Zik," Newsweek, Vol. 56 (November 28, 1960), pp. 43-44.

6 Moritz, p. 243.


I was first introduced to the folk tradition that a snapping turtle would not let go (of me) until it thunders as a child. This old-wife's tale was used to exhort young people (in this case, myself) to keep away from the vicious snapping turtle. My own random inquiry has shown that this tale/tradition was not regionally restricted. I have found no written record of this tale to date.

In the Library of Congress transcript of Hughes's reading of "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" on page 308, lines 63-84, as well as lines 53-56, have been omitted or ellipted, as I believe the marks **** indicate (see Appendix 2). The reason for this omission and the authority who omitted them (the author of the Library) has not yet been ascertained. However, both sections contain references to Moscow, communism, and figures considered by America to be communistic (i.e., Jomo Kenyatta, Nasser, etc.) because they turned to Russia for arms and aid after the United States failed to acknowledge their requests (see World Reports, Facts on File, etc. for the period). Further, lines 72-86 imply continued slave-days oppression. Both of these issues were politically and racially explosive during the 1960's.

The dream section, from line 90 to the end of the poem, was originally published as a separate poem entitled "Two-Way Street" in the August-September, 1961 issue of
The credit line at the bottom of the poem makes it appear that the author's original intention was to have this as a separate poem/mood in ASK YOUR MAMA: 12 MOODS FOR JAZZ. The reason for these variations has not been ascertained.

When "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" was read for the National Poetry Festival in October, 1962, it was read as it stands in ASK YOUR MAMA except for what has already been mentioned (see note 9).

However, when Hughes recorded "CULTURAL EXCHANGE" in 1964 (as found on Caedmon's Poetry and Reflections CDL51640, 1980), he made a change in the following lines: line 96, Dr. Rufus Clement (1900-1967) is replaced by Dr. Ray Wilkins (1901- ) probably because Wilkins was becoming better.
known through his N.A.A.C.P. Executive Secretaryship, 1955-
line 105, he drops Patterson for the more renowned opponent
to civil rights, Herman E. Talmadge (1913- ) Democratic
Senator from Georgia, and then Hughes inserts another mammy,
George C. Wallace (1919- ), Judge and later Governor of
Alabama, another opponent of civil rights and integration;
then, after line 109 he inserts "MAMMY WALLACE"; in the last
line of the poem Hughes adds "HURRY UP!" before "MAKE HASTE!"
These changes show us that Hughes updated the political fig-
ures, thereby keeping current with the times.

I have found no mention of these differences in any of
my research.

12 Orval E. Faubus (1910- ) was Governor of Arkansas
(1955-1967) who tried to prevent integration. In his efforts,
he activated the Arkansas National Guard in Little Rock
(September, 1957) which was countered by then President
Eisenhower's sending in federal troops to insure peaceful
integration.

James O. Eastland (1904- ) was elected to the United
States Senate as a Democratic Senator from Mississippi in
1948. As a Senator, he fought segregation through the 1950's
and into the 1960's.

John M. Patterson (1921- ) was Governor of Alabama
(1959-1963) and was an adamant supporter of segregation.
As a lawyer, he led legal attacks against the N.A.A.C.P. and took legal action against Negroes boycotting Tuskegee stores and Montgomery buses during the early and mid-1950's.
Outgrowths of Negro glory are the Black Pride Movement of the late 1960's and the 1970's and the phrase "Black is beautiful."

Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961) was founder (1958) and leader of the Congolese National Movement and first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (now Zaire). When the Congolese National Movement endorsed his call for civil disobedience and election boycotts, crowd reaction turned into riots. Police and government troops fired on bystanders, as well as looters, gathered along the Congo River. Lumumba was arrested on November 1, 1959 and charged as an instigator of the Stanleyville riots. He was murdered in January, 1961 by the Katanga secessionist regime.

As the riots of the 1960's illustrated, it would have behooved White America to heed the signs of the times and make some badly needed civil rights changes well before the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
Notes
Chapter Four: "ASK YOUR MAMA"

1 When Lumumba asked the United Nations to expel the Belgians who invaded Katanga, a northern Congo province, they refused to help him. Instead, the United Nations supported a Lumumba rival, Kasavubu. Although Lumumba aspired to lead the Congo into a united independence, Kasavubu's forces, under the leadership of then Colonel Joseph Mobutu (now President of Zaire), captured Lumumba, arrested him, and turned him over to the Katanga secessionists group who killed him. His murder caused a scandal throughout Africa and in retrospect, his enemies hail him as a "national hero." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, 1971, Vol. 11, "Lumumba, Patrice," pp. 185-187.)


4 In 1960 the monetary value of the franc was twenty cents, while the shilling was worth twelve pence or twelve cents. Both are compared to U. S. monetary value. (Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary, Vol. 1 & 2, [New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1975]).

6 Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906- ) led Senegal (now Republic of Mali) to independence in 1960. He wore horned-rim glasses and had attended the Sorbonne, learning to get along with all peoples early in his life. This poet-politician espoused a philosophy of negritude which he defines as "the sum total of cultural values of the Negro African World." A man of contradictions (i.e., poet-politician, educated—intensely supported by the peasants, Catholic—gets along with Moslems, etc.) he believes in the eventual emergence of a planetary civilization and advocates the brotherhood of all races. While President (1960- ), he has forged stronger ties with the French (former ruling power of Senegal) and has worked to establish peaceful worldwide relations. (Encyclopedia Britannica, Macropaedia, 1971, Vol. 16, "Leopold Senghor," pp. 541-42.)

7 The unicorn is a mythological beast attainable only by the pure at heart, using a virgin as bait.


9 Emmett Till was a fourteen year old Negro boy from Chicago who was kidnapped, beaten, killed, and thrown into Tallahatchie River of Le Flore County, Mississippi in August, 1955 for allegedly whistling at a White woman (Mrs. Roy
Bryant). Two White men, Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam, were indicted for murder, tried and acquitted. They were never indicted for kidnapping even though Bryant and Milam admitted to peace officers that they had kidnapped the Till youth. The murder was never solved. (New York Times Index, 1955, 56, 57, 58 and 59; Facts on File.)
Notes

Chapter Five: "SHOW FARE, PLEASE"

1 Emanuel, p. 166.

2 It is common knowledge that Whites flocked to Harlem to visit night clubs such as the "Cotton Club" to enjoy Negro night life.

3 Jemie, pp. 90-91.
APPENDIX 1

HESITATION BLUES

Mitch Greenman

Well, standing on the corner with a dollar in my hand,
G' P#' G' P#
Lookin' for a woman who's looking for a man.
G' P'# G' P'

Refrain: Tell me how long, do I have to wait?
C ... C7 G G+bb ... G+e#
Can I get you now, Or must I hesitate?
D7 g- e#- d-c-b-g ... G ... B7 ...

Well, the eagle on the dollar say, "In God we trust,"
Woman wants a man, she wants to see a dollar first,
Tell me ... (As before)

Well, pussy ain't nothin' but meat on the bone,
You can ---- it you can ---- it you can leave it alone,
Tell me ...

Well, you hesitate by one, and you hesitate by two,
Angels up in heaven singing hesitatin' blues,
Tell me ...

Note: P#' chord does not exactly fit the "A" note of "corner", "hand", and "woman" but it is used anyway.

APPENDIX 2

Of course, I think that our country is big enough and rich enough to have a horse for every kid, and someday it will.

This final poem that I’m going to read to you is from a book—my new book called Ask Your Mamu, a long book-length sequence of poems written especially to be read to jazz. Kenneth Rexroth and myself have been reading jazz poetry for quite a time, and I guess you might call Kenneth and me the nearest approximation to beatniks that they have in the Library of Congress. Unless we were to include Randall Jarrell, who has a beard, a very good beard. This particular poem tries to capture something of the force and determination and humor and nuance of jazz music. This section has a title very appropriate, I think, to our times. It’s “Cultural Exchange.”

In the
In the quarter
In the quarter of the Negroes
Where the doors are doors of paper
Dust of dingy atoms
Blows a scratchy sound.
Amorphous jack-o’-lanterns caper
And the wind won’t wait for midnight
For fun to blow doors down.

By the river and the railroad
With fluid far-off going
Boundaries bind unbinding
A whirl of whistles blowing
No trains or steamboats going—
Yet Leontyne’s unpacking.

In the quarter of the Negroes
Where the doorknob lets in lieder
More than German ever bore,
Her yesterday past grandpa—
Not of her own doing—
In a pot of collard greens
Is gently stewing.

There, forbid us to remember,
Comes an African in mid-December
Sent by the State Department
Among the shacks to meet the blacks:
Leontyne Sammy Harry Poitier
Lovely Lena Marian Louis Pearl Mae
George S. Schuyler molto bene
Come what may Langston Hughes
In the quarter of the Negroes
Where the railroad and the river
Have doors that face each way
And the entrance to the movie's
Up an alley up the side.

Pushcarts fold and unfold
In a supermarket sea.
And we better find out, mama,
Where is the colored laundromat,
Since we moved up to Mount Vernon.

Ralph Ellison as Vespucius
Ina-Youra at the masthead
Arna Bontemps chief consultant
Molto bene mellow baby Pearly Mae
Shalom Aleichem Jigumy Baldwin Samm
Come what may—the signs point:
Ghana Guinea

And the toll bridge from Westchester
Is a gangplank rocking risky
Between the deck and shore
Of a boat that never quite
Knew its destination.

In the pot behind the
Paper doors what's cooking?
What's smelling, Leontyne?
Lieder, lovely lieder
And a leaf of collard green,
Lovely lieder Leontyne.

And they asked me right at Christmas
If my blackness, would it rub off?
I said, ask your mama.

Dream and nightmares ...
Nightmares ... dreams! oh!
Dreaming that the Negroes
Of the South have taken over—
Voted all the Dixiecrats
Right out of power—
Comes the Colored Hour.
Martin Luther King is Governor of Georgia,
Dr. Rufus Clement his chief advisor,
Zelma Watson George the High Grand Worthy.
In white pillared mansions
Sitting on their wide verandas,
Wealthy Negroes have white servants.
White sharecroppers work the black plantations,
And colored children have white mammys:

    Mammy Faubus
    Mammy Eastland
    Mammy Patterson.
Dear, dear darling old white mammys—
Sometimes even buried with our family:
Dear old
Mammy Faubus!
Culture, they say, is a two-way street.
Hand me my mint julep, mammy.
    Make haste!

"Thrust to freedom". Surely, in the world ahead, will come the day when the traffic will be cleared and from the legislative, judicial and executive branches of our government will come the count-down for the Stage Three rocket trip to freedom.

Segregation's walls will fall. Discrimination's towers will tumble. And Americans, those stemming from the original Indians, the Nor dias, Slaves and Latins from Europe, our fathers, the survivors of the infamous African slave trade, and those whose immigrant parents were of yellow, brown and mixed bloods—all will enter a new realm of true democracy, under our Constitution, under the Stars and Stripes, under God!

---

**TWO-WAY STREET**

*By Langston Hughes*

Dreaming that the Negroes
Of the South have taken over
Voted all the Dixicrats
Right out of power...

There comes the *Colored Hour*:
Martin Luther King is Governor of Georgia,
Dr. Ralph Clement his Chief Advisor.
In white pillared mansions
Sitting on their wide verandas,

Wealthy Negroes have white servants,
White share-croppers work the black plantations
And colored children have white mammys:
Mammy Eastland
Mammy Patterson
Mammy Faubus

Dear, dear darling old white mammy!
Sometimes even buried with our families.

Dear old Mammy Faubus!

Culture, they say, is a two-way street:
Hand me my mint julep, mammy,
Make haste!

*From: ASK YOUR MAMA.*

12 Moods For Jazz,
by Langston Hughes,
to be published by Knopf, October, 1961.
Bibliography

Primary


Supplemental


