

# HARLEM RENAISSANCE TO HIP HOP

**Assignment:** Compare and contrast Langston Hughes' "I, Too" poem & the Harlem Renaissance with Tupac's song "Changes" & Hip Hop.

**Overview:** The Harlem Renaissance is a time period that can be seen as a rebirth of African American arts and culture. It is a significant part of American history, in which the feelings and ideas of African Americans first surfaced into mainstream culture and were recognized. Access to media gave people the voice to express themselves and their needs and wants.

The parallels and contrasts between the Harlem Renaissance and Hip Hop are telling of what remains constant through the times, and what has changed in the last 100 years. Harlem in the early 20th century was the cultural magnet of the black world, which brought a treasure of influential artifacts. Similarly, Hip Hop has become a dominant global force that will shape the future of the world. In both we see that people will work for improved conditions no matter what limitations are set upon them.

While Hughes remains one of the single most notable figures of the Harlem Renaissance, it is not as easy to attach such a label on a Hip Hop artist. We are living in the day of Hip Hop, and who will make the history books can't be predicted. It's hard to imagine that jazz would have had been as loathed and feared (and yet loved) by the public as Hip Hop is by some today, but perhaps in time Hip Hop will too gain similar acceptance. Tupac Shakur is one of the unique Hip Hop artists who were known for both his authentic street persona and his sensitive artistic side. In his life he had a career as both a rapper and an actor, and his style as a writer never strayed entirely from the poetic form.

## I, Too

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

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.



Hint: Poem  
Analysis

*Langston Hughes*



## "Changes"

Come on come on

I see no changes. Wake up in the morning and I ask myself,

"Is life worth living? Should I blast myself?"

I'm tired of bein' poor and even worse I'm black.

My stomach hurts, so I'm lookin' for a purse to snatch.

Cops give a damn about a negro? Pull the trigger, kill a nigga, he's a hero.

Give the crack to the kids who the hell cares? One less hungry mouth on the welfare.

First ship 'em dope and let 'em deal to brothers.

Give 'em guns, step back, and watch 'em kill each other.

"It's time to fight back", that's what Huey said.

2 shots in the dark now Huey's dead.

I got love for my brother, but we can never go nowhere unless we share with each other. We gotta start makin' changes.

Learn to see me as a brother 'stead of 2 distant strangers.

And that's how it's supposed to be.

How can the Devil take a brother if he's close to me?

I'd love to go back to when we played as kids but things changed, and that's the way it is

Come on come on

That's just the way it is

Things'll never be the same

That's just the way it is

aww yeah

[Repeat]

I see no changes. All I see is racist faces.

Misplaced hate makes disgrace to races we under.

I wonder what it takes to make this one better place... let's erase the wasted.

Take the evil out the people, they'll be acting right.

'Cause both black and white are smokin' crack tonight.

And only time we chill is when we kill each other.

It takes skill to be real, time to heal each other.

And although it seems heaven sent, we ain't ready to see a black President, uhh.

It ain't a secret don't conceal the fact...

the penitentiary's packed, and it's filled with blacks

But some things will never change.

Try to show another way, but they stayin' in the dope game.

Now tell me what's a mother to do?

Bein' real don't appeal to the brother in you.

You gotta operate the easy way.

"I made a G today" But you made it in a sleazy way.

Sellin' crack to the kids. "I gotta get paid,"

Well hey, well that's the way it is.

We gotta make a change...

It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes.

Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live and let's change the way we treat each other.

You see the old way wasn't working so it's on us to do what we gotta do, to survive.

And still I see no changes. Can't a brother get a little peace?

There's war on the streets and the war in the Middle East.

Instead of war on poverty,

they got a war on drugs so the police can bother me.

And I ain't never did a crime I ain't have to do.

But now I'm back with the facts givin' 'em back to you.

Don't let 'em jack you up, back you up, crack you up and pimp smack you up.

You gotta learn to hold ya own.

They get jealous when they see ya with ya mobile phone.

But tell the cops they can't touch this.

I don't trust this, when they try to rush I bust this.

That's the sound of my tool. You say it ain't cool, but mama didn't raise no fool.

And as long as I stay black, I gotta stay strapped and I never get to lay back.

'Cause I always got to worry 'bout the payback.

Some buck that I roughed up way back... comin' back after all these years.

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat. That's the way it is. uhh

Some things will never change



Biography

**Tupac Shakur**



## I, Too

1. What societal obstacles at that time did he believe stood in his way? Cite specific examples
2. How do you think this poem influenced African Americans?
3. How did you think this poem influenced White Americans?
4. What societal issues have changed in the 70+ years since Hughes wrote this poem?

*Langston Hughes*  
1902- 1967



What similar societal challenges are both men addressing?

Analyzing both, what is different?

How did the Harlem Renaissance and poets like Langston Hughes set the foundation for other black artists, like Tupac?

**COMPARE**

## Changes

1. What societal obstacles at that time did he believe stood in his way? Cite specific examples
2. The song was chart topper in the 90s, why do you think so many people connected with this song?
3. What societal issues have changed in the 20+ years since Tupac wrote this song?

*Tupac Shakur*  
1971-1996





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