

# homage to my hips



## SUMMARY

The speaker declares that her hips are large and need plenty of space to move around in, since they won't fit into small, overlooked places. Her hips, she says, are free, and they dislike anything that might interfere with this freedom or keep them confined. They have always been completely free, and they go wherever they want and do whatever they want. They are, the speaker says, deeply powerful and even magical. In fact, she knows that her hips are capable of putting a man into a trance and spinning him around as though he were a top.

body and her defiance of those who would seek to make her feel anything less than womanly.

### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-15



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-5

*these hips are ...  
... petty places.*

The speaker starts with a clear, straightforward declaration about her body: "these hips are big hips." There's a clear confidence to this simple, declarative statement, which suggests a proud tone of voice and commands the reader's respect.

Rather than apologizing for the space her body takes up, the speaker goes on to declare that her hips "need space to / move around in," [personifying](#) her hips by giving them the agency to do as they please. In turn, the speaker suggests that the surrounding world must accommodate *her*, and this implies that the speaker sees herself as powerful. In other words, she isn't afraid to take up space in the world—space she knows she deserves.

The speaker goes on to say that her hips "don't fit into little / petty places." The word "petty" is often used to describe things of lesser importance, and its usage here suggests that the speaker's hips [symbolize](#) her unwillingness to be shunted to the side or deemed unimportant by society. By focusing on her hips, the speaker achieves a sense of empowerment.

This empowerment is tied to femininity, sexuality, and fertility. This is because of a simple reproductive fact: women tend to have proportionally wider hips than men, which makes it easier to bear children. And though there are many ways to embody femininity or identify as a woman, this poem celebrates wide hips as a symbol of womanhood and a source of strength.

These important thematic and symbolic ideas become clear in the very first line, as the speaker uses [diacope](#) to repeat the word "hips" at the beginning and end of the line: "these **hips** are big **hips**." This creates a musical rhythm, bolstered by the [assonant](#) /i/ sounds in "hips" and "big." In fact, assonance runs throughout these opening lines, as the /ay/ sound appears alongside the /ee/, /oo/, and short /i/ sounds:

these hips are big hips  
they need space to



## THEMES



### FEMININITY, EMPOWERMENT, AND FREEDOM

"homage to my hips" is an empowering celebration of womanhood. The speaker defies traditional (and implicitly white) beauty standards that demand women be thin and "fit into little / petty places." Instead, the speaker declares that her hips are "big" and "need space to move around," and that they won't be hemmed in or "held back" by anyone else's expectations of how a woman should look or behave. Nobody, the speaker implies, will make her feel bad about not conforming to certain ideals of feminine beauty. Her celebration of her body therefore becomes its own form of rebellion, reflecting her independence and resiliency in the face of oppression.

The speaker is straightforward in her self-praise, uplifting her hips as both "mighty" and "magic." Her large hips are a sign of strength, and the speaker's pride in them reflects her refusal to be inhibited or controlled by other people's opinions of her body. The speaker's hips—and her confidence—are in fact part of what makes her so beautiful and intoxicating, capable of completely disorienting men (whom her hips can hypnotize and "spin" around "like a top").

Clifton often focused on Black womanhood in her work, and the speaker's self-confidence in this poem can also be read as a more specific rejection of racist ideals that privileged thin, white female bodies. The speaker's remark that her hips have "never been enslaved" is further an affirmation of her own autonomy, freedom, and dignity in the face of racism and oppression. That her hips (and by extension her entire body) "go where they want" and "do what they want" reflects her essential freedom as a human being, and the idea that nothing society says or does can make her feel differently. In sum, the speaker's pride in her hips reflects her appreciation of her own

move around in.  
they don't fit into little  
petty places.

The speaker uses [consonance](#) here as well, lending these lines a controlled, musical, and pleasant feel. Consider, for example, the /t/ sound in lines 4 and 5: "they don't fit into little / petty places." This sound breaks up the line, giving it a subtly percussive rhythm that also appears in the [alliterative](#) repetition of the plosive /p/ sound in "petty places." The language sounds melodic and satisfying, giving the speaker's tone an assertive quality that is also celebratory and uplifting.

### LINES 5-7

*these hips ...  
... be held back.*

The speaker continues to [personify](#) her hips in these lines, becoming more explicit about the idea that her hips refuse to be confined or restrained. The fact that the speaker goes out of her way to state that her hips are "free" subtly suggests that the speaker doesn't take this freedom for granted. Rather, she celebrates her hips as a way of appreciating her own personal independence, reveling in the fact that her hips "don't like to be held back." The speaker's hips embody her own agency and her unwillingness to let others interfere with her freedom.

The speaker uses an [anaphora](#) in this section, saying the words "these hips" at the beginning of the phrase in line 5. This creates a [parallel](#) structure with the poem's first line, giving the poem a sense of predictability and momentum. The speaker also uses [diacope](#) for the second time in the poem here, repeating the word "hips" in lines 5 and 6: "these hips / are free hips." As with "these hips are big hips" in line 1, this creates a sense of rhythm and music.

The [enjambment](#) here adds to that music as well:

[...] these hips  
are free hips.

This enjambment creates a sense of space—and, indeed, of freedom—between the two lines.

### LINES 8-10

*these hips have ...  
... want to do.*

Using an [anaphora](#) to begin line 8, the speaker says, "these hips have never been enslaved." This builds upon the speaker's previous suggestion that her hips are "free hips." Now, though, the speaker explicitly references the institution of slavery. The fact that she goes out of her way to say that her hips *haven't* been enslaved implies that she is Black and most likely would have been in danger of enslavement in another era. As it stands, though, both she and her hips are free to "go where they want

to go" and "do what they want to do."

That the speaker's hips have "never been enslaved" might be due to the simple fact that the poem takes place after the abolition of slavery (perhaps in the 1980s, when Lucille Clifton wrote it). However, it's also possible that the speaker's hips have "never been enslaved" because they are so powerful and independent—after all, the speaker has already noted that they "don't fit into little / petty places" and "don't like to be held back," indicating that they can't be constrained by outside influences. With this in mind, her hips emerge as a force of resiliency in the face of even the most dire and pronounced forms of racial oppression. Indeed, they have "never been enslaved" and clearly never will be.

Once again, the speaker uses [repetition](#) to give the poem a pleasing, song-like rhythm and to add a feeling of insistence to her declarations. Take the [parallelism](#) in lines 9 and 10, which both use the same sentence construction:

they go where they want to go  
they do what they want to do

The speaker adds to the musicality of this section with some subtle [assonance](#), repeating the long /ay/ sound in the words "enslaved" and "they." What's more, there's also a prominent moment of [consonance](#) in line 8, in which the speaker leans heavily on the /n/ and /v/ sounds: "these hips have never been enslaved." This intensifies the language, making the speaker's words seem all the more passionate.

The section also features [alliteration](#), as the speaker repeats the /h/ sound in the words "hips" and "have," and the /w/ sound in the words "where," "want," and "what." On the whole, this maintains the poem's catchy sound, making it feel like a song and, in doing so, imbuing it with a sense of joy and celebration.

### LINES 11-15

*these hips are ...  
... like a top!*

As the poem works its way toward its final lines, there is a slight sense of escalation. The speaker continues to praise her hips, this time calling them "mighty" and "magic." Whereas the speaker began the poem by simply acknowledging the size of her hips, now she implies that they possess immense strength and are even magical, ultimately capable of putting men into trances and making them lose their senses.

This last detail is particularly remarkable because the speaker most likely lives in a male-dominated society. The [simile](#) comparing a man to a "top"—a toy that whirls around its own vertical axis when spun—suggests that the speaker's hips have so much control over men that they can play with them like mere toys. There are also sexual connotations here; while society might demand that women be demure and virginal, here the speaker displays unapologetic sexual power and

agency.

In this sense, the celebration of the speaker's hips is actually a celebration of the power and authority the poem suggests is inherent to womanhood. Although the speaker has undoubtedly faced various forms of oppression, the "might[iness]" of her hips makes her feel empowered and capable of pushing back against the various people and societal practices that would otherwise threaten her freedom and independence.

This section features several soft [consonant](#) sounds, including the [sibilant](#) /s/ and the humming /m/. This gives the end of the poem a soft, soothing sound reflective of the fact that the speaker's hips can put a "spell" on men and hypnotize them with their allure. The [alliteration](#) here also makes important words stand out: "mighty," "magic," "spell," and "spin." The sound of the language, then, helps the speaker draw attention to descriptions of her hips and their undeniable power.



## SYMBOLS



### THE SPEAKER'S HIPS

The speaker's hips are, of course, a literal part of her body, but they also [symbolize](#) womanhood—and its power—more generally.

Hips generally represent femininity and sexuality in literature, given that they're associated with fertility and childbearing. In this poem, however, the speaker's focus on hips has less to do with fertility and more to do with the ways in which embracing one's own femininity can lead to a sense of empowerment and freedom.

The speaker is adamant that her hips need ample space to "move around in," suggesting that they cannot and will not be "held back" by anything. In keeping with this strong sense of independence, the speaker notes that her hips have "never been enslaved," implying that even the most aggressive forms of racial oppression are no match for the power she derives from her own body. She also says that her hips can put a spell on a man and "spin him like a top," suggesting that she can use her sexuality to overwhelm and disorient men. As a result, it becomes clear that her hips don't just represent femininity, but also the strength and power associated with womanhood itself.

#### Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-15



## POETIC DEVICES

### REPETITION

[Repetition](#) is an important part of "homage to my hips." It adds a sense of rhythm and musicality to the poem, and also repeatedly draws readers' attention to the star of the show: the speaker's hips.

The speaker uses [diacope](#) in the first line, saying, "these hips are big hips." This spotlights the obvious fact that the poem is, indeed, an "homage" (a kind of ode or tribute) to the speaker's hips, but it also establishes a pattern that will appear throughout the following lines.

The speaker brings this sentence structure back in lines 5 and 6, saying, "these hips / are free hips." This line repeats the first's use of diacope while also serving as an example of [anaphora](#), since the speaker once more begins a phrase with the words "these hips."

This happens yet again in line 8, with "these hips have never been enslaved," as well as in lines 11 and 12:

these hips are mighty hips  
these hips are magic hips

The combination of anaphora and diacope creates [parallelism](#) that, in turn, makes the poem sound rhythmic and insistent.

The speaker uses more anaphora in beginning subsequent lines with the word "they," going on to clarify what, exactly, her hips do. Take, for example, the way lines 5 through 9 alternate between "these hips" and "they":

[...] these hips  
are free hips.  
they don't like to be held back.  
these hips have never been enslaved,  
they go where they want to go

This alternating pattern gives the poem a feeling of consistency and predictability. It also adds a certain rhythm to the speaker's words, making the speaker's language musical and celebratory. Finally, repetition helps the speaker's confidence and pride shine through.

#### Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "these hips are big hips"
- **Line 2:** "they"
- **Line 4:** "they"
- **Lines 5-6:** "these hips / are free hips."
- **Line 7:** "they"
- **Line 8:** "these hips"
- **Lines 9-10:** "they go where they want to go / they do"

what they want to do.”

- **Lines 11-12:** “these hips are mighty hips. / these hips are magic hips.”

## PERSONIFICATION

The speaker [personifies](#) her hips, making them seem like they have a mind of their own. Instead of saying, “I am free” or “I don’t like to be held back,” the speaker turns to the [symbolic](#) image of her hips, personifying them by suggesting that *they* are the ones that don’t like to be held back. This takes on even more significance when the speaker says that her hips are “mighty” and “magic,” implying not only that they’re free and full of their own personal agency, but that they’re more remarkable and powerful than the average human being.

By personifying her hips, then, the speaker manages to frame them as untouchable, elevating them to an almost mystical, divine level. Because her hips obviously belong to her, though, this means that she, too, possesses this kind of power.

The poem would probably feel quite different wouldn’t be quite as easy for the speaker to illustrate this feeling of empowerment if she simply spoke in the first person, since saying things like “I go where I want to go” or “I do what I want to do” doesn’t quite have the same impact. By focusing on a body part closely associated with femininity, the speaker also makes her words feel more universal—like any woman could read the poem and see themselves in it.

### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-15

## ASSONANCE

There are pops of [assonance](#) throughout “homage to my hips,” as the speaker uses short bursts of repeated sounds to add to the poem’s musicality. Take line 2, when the speaker briefly repeats the long /ay/ sound: “they need space.” Similarly, the short /i/ sound appears three times in quick succession in line 4: “they don’t fit into little.” This assonance helps the line sound cohesive and melodic while also giving the rhythm of the language a subtle boost by stringing the same sound together quickly.

Although most of the poem’s assonance appears in short blasts like this, there are also several instances in which the speaker weaves a single sound through multiple lines. For instance, consider the way the long /ee/ sound works its way through the first six lines:

these hips are big hips  
they need space to  
[...]  
petty places. these hips

are free hips.

The assonance throughout these lines creates rhythm and melody, adding to the poem’s celebratory and triumphant tone.

Another example of this comes in the final two lines, when the speaker repeats an /a/ sound twice in a row before immediately transitioning to the short /i/ sound, which also appears in consecutive words:

to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!

On the whole, these little moments of assonance make the lines sound richer and more poetic, adding a pleasant sense of melodic quality that reflects the speaker’s joyful attitude.

### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “these,” “hips,” “big”
- **Line 2:** “they,” “need,” “space”
- **Lines 2-3:** “to / move”
- **Line 4:** “they,” “fit into little”
- **Line 5:** “petty,” “places,” “these”
- **Line 6:** “free”
- **Lines 8-9:** “enslaved, / they”
- **Line 10:** “to do”
- **Line 11:** “these,” “mighty”
- **Line 12:** “these”
- **Line 14:** “man and”
- **Line 15:** “spin him”

## ENJAMBMENT

The speaker uses [enjambment](#) throughout the poem. This gives the poem an off-kilter, syncopated rhythm that pushes the reader forward in certain moments while also making the poem sound fresh and interesting throughout. For example, the second line of the poem is enjambed in a way that makes it feel as if the words are tipping into line 3:

they need space to  
move around in.

This is also the case in lines 4 through 6:

they don’t fit into little  
petty places. these hips  
are free hips.

In both examples, the enjambment subtly reflects the lines’ content: enjambment makes it so the speaker’s discussion of her hips *literally* takes up more space on the page.

These lines fall forward, adding a sense of momentum that then

comes to an abrupt stop with line 6. The poem then uses [end-stopped lines](#) through line 12 ("these hips are magic hips."), creating a steady, plodding rhythm that reflects the speaker's confidence and authority. Finally, the poem ends with three more enjambed lines as the speaker describes the way her hips are able "to put a spell on a man and / spin him like a top!" Here, again, the enjambment seems to evoke the lines' content, speeding up the poem's pace and pulling the reader forward to the next line as though they, too, are under a "spell."

All in all, then, the push and pull of enjambment and end-stop makes the poem's descriptions all the more vivid and creates a quirky rhythm that aligns with the speaker's playful spirit.

#### Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "to / move"
- **Lines 4-5:** "little / petty"
- **Lines 5-6:** "hips / are"
- **Lines 13-14:** "them / to"
- **Lines 14-15:** "and / spin"

## CONSONANCE

The speaker uses [consonance](#) to intensify the poem's overall sound and make the language more memorable in certain moments. Take line 8, when the speaker [alliterates](#) the consonant /h/ sound, in addition to repeating the /v/ and /n/ sounds:

these hips have never been enslaved,

The combination of the /h/ and /v/ sounds is soft and almost soothing, as if the speaker is whispering in the reader's ear. The /n/ sound, however, adds a bit more structure and solidity to the line. Taken together, the line feels rich and poetic, calling attention to the speaker's words and, thus, to the fact that her hips are free.

The last two lines of the poem are also packed with consonance, as the speaker uses the /p/, /l/, /n/, and /m/ sounds, along with the [sibilant](#) /s/:

to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!

This is quite a lot of consonance to include in two lines that are so short! The dizzying array of sounds reflects the image at hand: of the speaker essentially hypnotizing men with her hips and using them as her playthings.

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "these hips," "hips"
- **Line 2:** "space"

- **Line 3:** "around in"
- **Lines 4-5:** "fit into little / petty"
- **Line 5:** "places," "these hips"
- **Line 6:** "are free"
- **Line 7:** "like," "be," "held," "back"
- **Line 8:** "hips have," "never," "been," "enslaved"
- **Line 9:** "where," "want"
- **Line 10:** "what"
- **Line 11:** "mighty"
- **Line 12:** "magic," "hips"
- **Line 13:** "have," "them"
- **Line 14:** "put," "spell," "on," "man and"
- **Line 15:** "spin," "him," "like," "top"

## ALLITERATION

The [alliteration](#) in "homage to my hips" gives the poem brief moments of emphasis, as when the speaker repeats the /p/ sound in line 5, saying that her hips don't fit into small, "petty places." The repetition of the /p/ sound at the beginning of each of these words adds strength to this phrase, but it also conveys a certain harshness, since the sound itself is percussive. This, in turn, communicates the speaker's refusal to let herself be confined or limited by outside forces. Her hips, in other words, shouldn't have to tolerate spaces that are unable to accommodate them—after all, they "don't like to be held back."

In other moments, the speaker simply uses alliteration to call special attention to specific words. For instance, the speaker repeats the /m/ sound in lines 11 and 12:

these hips are mighty hips.  
these hips are magic hips.

The repetition of the /m/ sound ties the words "mighty" and "magic" together—something that makes sense, considering that the two lines are exactly the same except for these words! As such, the speaker's use of alliteration in this moment helps her maintain a specific sound in both lines while still underlining the notion that her hips aren't only powerful, but also magical. In this sense, alliteration highlights important words and concepts while also bolstering the various sonic qualities of a given line.

#### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "petty places"
- **Line 6:** "hips"
- **Line 7:** "held"
- **Line 8:** "hips have"
- **Line 9:** "where," "want"
- **Line 10:** "what," "want"
- **Line 11:** "mighty"

- **Line 12:** "magic," "hips"
- **Line 13:** "have"
- **Line 14:** "spell"
- **Line 15:** "spin"

## SIMILE

The speaker uses a [simile](#) in the final line of the poem to illustrate the extent to which her hips are capable of confusing or disorienting men. She says that her hips can put "a spell on a man and / spin him like a top."

A [top](#) is a small, rounded toy meant to be spun so that it stands upright. In order to keep a top from falling on its side, one must spin it very quickly, ensuring that it has enough momentum to gyrate around its vertical axis. In other words, it has to be spinning fast to work properly. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the speaker believes her own hips are capable of manipulating men so thoroughly that they go crazy, twirling around like a top spinning at great speeds.

The speaker's ability to make men lose their wits by spinning them "like a top" is a significant reversal of power in a society where men often hold positions of authority over women. After all, the speaker plays with men as if they're mere toys. In this sense, the simile in the poem's last line helps the speaker more vividly illustrate the power she draws from her hips. There are sexual undertones here as well, with "spin" perhaps referring to sex itself. The simile thus also reflects the fact that the speaker is a person with her own sexual agency.

### Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-15:** "i have known them / to put a spell on a man and / spin him like a top!"



## VOCABULARY

**Spell** (Line 14) - A magical enchantment.

**Top** (Line 15) - A small, pointed toy that, when spun quickly, balances upright.



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"homage to my hips" consists of a single 15-line stanza that doesn't follow any specific poetic structure. Instead of adhering to a strict form, the poem simply unfolds in an easy, fluid manner that matches the speaker's playful, celebratory tone. This free-flowing, undefined format is appropriate, since it aligns with the fact that the speaker's hips refuse to "fit into little / petty places." In the same way that her hips resist

confinement, the poem itself resists formal structure.

### METER

The poem is written in [free verse](#), meaning that it doesn't adhere to a set [meter](#). Instead, the length and rhythm of the lines varies throughout the poem, especially since the speaker often subtly displaces certain beats using [enjambment](#). Consider, for example, the last two lines:

to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!

By including the word "and" at the end of line 14 instead of at the beginning of line 15, the speaker destabilizes the flow of this section, making it sound disjointed and [syncopated](#) (a musical term that refers to the displacement of rhythmic beats). This loose approach aligns with the poem's interest in freedom, since each line sounds free-flowing and unconfined.

### RHYME SCHEME

"homage to my hips" doesn't follow a [rhyme scheme](#). There are no [end rhymes](#) in the entire poem, nor are there many significant [slant](#) or [internal rhymes](#).

Having said that, the phrase "they don't fit into little" does include an internal slant rhyme between "fit" and "little." The last line also features an internal slant rhyme, this time between the words "spin" and "him": "**spin him** like a top!" Because there are so few rhymes in the poem, these moments stand out as particularly musical, thereby drawing extra attention to the speaker's language.

On the whole, though, the speaker ends up creating musicality through the use of [repetition](#) and [enjambment](#) instead of using rhymes. By playing with the rhythm and pacing of each line, the speaker makes up for the lack of a rhyme scheme, which would most likely feel too predictable and constraining for a poem that champions the speaker's unwillingness to compromise her freedom.



## SPEAKER

Although there's nothing in the poem that explicitly clarifies the speaker's gender, "homage to my hips" is generally viewed as a celebration of womanhood and female empowerment. This is largely because hips often [symbolize](#) femininity, female sexuality, and fertility in literature. As such, the fact that the speaker is paying "homage" to her hips makes it relatively safe to assume that she's a woman (though of course people of any gender can appreciate their hips).

Beyond this, the speaker also mentions that her hips have "never been enslaved," a statement suggesting that she's Black. Because Lucille Clifton was a Black woman who often wrote about both race and gender, many readers believe that she

herself is the speaker of "homage to my hips." Whether or not this is the case, what's clear is that the poem's speaker is, in all likelihood, a Black woman who views her hips as a feature that ought to be appreciated as a symbol of power and independence.



## SETTING

The speaker never specifies exactly when or where the poem takes place. This allows its message to feel accessible to women anywhere, at any time.

That said, the brief reference to the institution of slavery suggests that it's most likely set in the United States at some point after 1865, when slavery was abolished. It seems reasonable to assume that the poem takes place in 1980 (the year it was published), since the poem's framing of female sexuality as a source of empowerment aligns with popular thinking in feminism at that time.



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

"homage to my hips" was published in Lucille Clifton's 1980 collection titled *Two-Headed Woman*. The poem can be read as a companion piece to Clifton's earlier poem "[Homage to My Hair](#)," which was published in 1975. Both poems celebrate the Black female body as a symbol of power, especially in relationships with men and in the face of racism. In many ways, "homage to my hips" also builds upon the ideas expressed in poems like "[Still I Rise](#)" and "[Phenomenal Woman](#)" by Maya Angelou, in which the speaker celebrates the power and beauty of Black womanhood.

"homage to my hips" engages with a rich history of poetry that uplifts and spotlights the Black experience in America. In this sense, the poem comes out of a tradition rooted in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, a movement that championed the expression and celebration of Black culture in the arts.

In particular, the Harlem Renaissance saw the rise of certain forms of poetry that modeled themselves on the syncopated rhythms found in jazz. Poets like Langston Hughes popularized this poetic style, influencing later writers like Gwendolyn Brooks, whose poem "[We Real Cool](#)" (published in 1960) uses [enjambment](#) in ways that are similar to the use of enjambment in "homage to my hips." Clifton's poem therefore extends not only the tradition of uplifting the Black experience, but also the stylistic trappings that emerged from the Harlem Renaissance and continued throughout the 20th century and—thanks to poets like Clifton—beyond.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"homage to my hips" was published during what's known as [second-wave feminism](#), which began in the 1960s and lasted roughly until the 1990s. This feminist movement went beyond the scope of first-wave feminism, which was specifically centered around political equality and suffrage (the right to vote). Second-wave feminism, on the other hand, pushed society toward a broader embrace of gender equality by focusing on sexuality, reproductive rights, the workforce, family dynamics, and other areas of life that were often impacted by sexism.

This is a relevant historical backdrop for the poem: "homage to my hips" features a speaker who derives a sense of power and independence from her hips, which ultimately symbolize femininity and sexuality. After all, the speaker explicitly states that her hips are capable of spinning men "like a top," suggesting that she can use the sexual appeal of her hips as a source of power. This aligns with the central tenets of Second-Wave Feminism and the emerging cultural acceptance of female sexuality as something to be celebrated.

The poem was published 16 years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which officially declared racial segregation illegal. Until this point, many racist [Jim Crow](#) policies were still largely in effect in the United States (especially in the South). By the 1980s (when the poem was published), such overtly racist policies were less common, but this certainly doesn't mean racism had faded away. This is why it's significant that the speaker says her hips have "never been enslaved," a clarification that underhandedly acknowledges that it wasn't so long ago that deeply racist practices were part of American law.



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [Lucille Clifton Reads the Poem](#) — Watch Lucille Clifton give a reading of "homage to my hips" and talk about her thoughts on body image, societal expectations, and what inspired her to write the poem. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCW4tDKS7Cc>)
- [The Poet's Life](#) — For more information about Lucille Clifton, check out this overview of her life and work. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/lucille-clifton>)
- [A Lucille Clifton "Starter Kit"](#) — Check out this essay by the poet Reginald Dwayne Betts, who assembles a "starter kit" for first-time Lucille Clifton readers. He also writes movingly about the impression her poetry made on him when he was in prison as a young man. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/02/books/lucille-clifton-reginald-dwayne-betts.html>)
- [Spinning Tops](#) — To better understand or visualize a

spinning top, take a look at this brief Wikipedia entry about the toy. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top>)

- [Poetry Foundation Interview](#) – Read about Lucille Clifton's writing process in this interview published by the Poetry Foundation. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68875/she-could-tell-you-stories>)



## HOW TO CITE

### MLA

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