

Langston Hughes

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James Mercer Langston Hughes, (February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, novelist, playwright, short story writer, and columnist. He was one of the earliest innovators of the new literary art form jazz poetry. Hughes is best-known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance.

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James Langston Hughes



Langston Hughes

Born	February 1, 1902 Joplin, Missouri United States
Died	May 22, 1967 (aged 65) New York City, New York, United States
Occupation	poet, columnist, dramatist, essayist, lyricist, novelist, social activist, writer
Nationality	American
Ethnicity	African American, Caucasian and Native American
Writing period	1926-1964

Biography

Ancestry and childhood

In 1869 Mary Patterson Leary married again, into the elite, politically active Langston family. Her second husband was Charles Henry Langston, of African American, Native American, and Euro-American ancestry.^{[1][2]} He and his younger brother John Mercer Langston worked for the abolitionist cause and helped lead the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in 1858.

Charles Langston later moved to Kansas where he was active as an educator and activist for voting

and rights for African Americans.^[1] Charles and Mary's daughter Caroline Mercer Langston was the mother of Langston Hughes.^[3]

Hughes' father left his family and later divorced Carrie. He went to Cuba, and then Mexico, seeking to escape the enduring racism in the United States.^[4] After the separation of his parents, while his mother travelled seeking employment, young Langston was raised mainly by his maternal grandmother Mary Patterson Langston in Kansas. Through the black American oral tradition and drawing from the activist experiences of her generation, Mary Langston instilled in the young Langston Hughes a lasting sense of racial pride.^{[5][6][7]} He spent most of childhood in Lawrence, Kansas. After the death of his grandmother, he went to live with family friends, James and Mary Reed, for two years. Because of the unstable early life, his childhood was not an entirely happy one, but it was one that heavily influenced the poet he would become. Later, Hughes lived again with his mother Carrie in Lincoln, Illinois, who had remarried when he was still an adolescent, and eventually in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended high school. The Hughes' home in Cleveland was sold in foreclosure in 2009; the 21/2-story, wood-frame house on the city's east side was sold at a sheriff's auction in February for \$16,667. Wells Fargo bank plans to put the house on the market.

While in grammar school in Lincoln, Illinois, Hughes was elected class poet. Hughes stated in retrospect he thought it was because of the stereotype that African Americans have rhythm.^[8] "I was a victim of a stereotype. There were only two of us Negro kids in the whole class and our English teacher was always stressing the importance of rhythm in poetry. Well, everyone knows — except us — that all Negroes have rhythm, so they elected me as class poet."^[9] During high school in Cleveland, Ohio, he wrote for the school newspaper, edited the yearbook, and began to write his first short stories, poetry, and dramatic plays. His first piece of jazz poetry, "When Sue Wears Red", was written while he was still in high school. It was during this time that he discovered his love of books. From this early period in his life, Hughes would cite as influences on his poetry the American poets Paul Laurence Dunbar and Carl Sandburg.

Relationship with father and Columbia

Hughes had a very poor relationship with his father. He lived with his father in Mexico for a brief period in 1919. Upon graduating from high school in June 1920, Hughes returned to live with his father, hoping to convince him to provide money to attend Columbia University. Hughes later said that, prior to arriving in Mexico again:

“ I had been thinking about my father and his strange dislike of his own people. I didn't understand it, because I was a Negro, and I liked Negroes very much.^{[10][11][12]} ”

Initially, his father had hoped for Hughes to attend a university abroad, and to study for a career in engineering. On these grounds, he was willing to provide financial assistance to his son. James Hughes did not support his son's desire to be a writer. Eventually, Langston and his father came to a compromise. Langston would study engineering, so long as he could attend Columbia. His tuition provided, Hughes left his father after more than a year of living with him. While at Columbia in 1921, Hughes managed to maintain a B+ grade average. He left in 1922 because of racial prejudice within the institution, and his interests revolved more around the neighborhood of Harlem than his studies, though he continued writing poetry.^[13]



Langston Hughes, 1923

Adulthood

Hughes worked various odd jobs, before serving a brief tenure as a crewman aboard the S.S. Malone in 1923, spending six months traveling to West Africa and Europe.^[14] In Europe, Hughes left the S.S. Malone for a temporary stay in Paris.

During his time in Paris in the early 1920s, Hughes became part of the black expatriate community. In November 1924, Hughes returned to the U. S. to live with his mother in Washington, D.C. Hughes again found work doing various odd jobs before gaining white-collar employment in 1925 as a personal assistant to the historian Carter G. Woodson at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Not satisfied with the demands of the work and its time constraints that limited his writing, Hughes quit to work as a busboy in a hotel. It was while working as a busboy that Hughes would encounter the poet Vachel Lindsay. Impressed with the poems Hughes showed him, Lindsay publicized his discovery of a new black poet. By this time, Hughes' earlier work had already been published in magazines and was about to be collected into his first book of poetry.

The following year, Hughes enrolled in Lincoln University, a historically black university in Chester County, Pennsylvania. There he became a member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, a black fraternal organization founded at Howard University in Washington, D.C.^{[15][16]} Thurgood Marshall, who later became an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, was an alumnus and classmate of Langston Hughes during his undergraduate studies at Lincoln University.

Hughes earned a B.A. degree from Lincoln University in 1929. He then moved to New York. Except for travels to areas that included parts of the Caribbean, Hughes lived in Harlem as his primary home for the remainder of his life.

Some academics and biographers today believe that Hughes was a homosexual and included homosexual codes in many of his poems, similar in manner to Walt Whitman, whose work Hughes cited as another influence on his poetry. Hughes' story "Blessed Assurance" deals with a father's anger over his son's effeminacy and queerness.^{[17][17][18][19][20][21][22][23]} To retain the respect and support of black churches and organizations and avoid exacerbating his precarious financial situation, Hughes remained closeted.^[24]

Arnold Rampersad, the primary biographer of Hughes, determined that Hughes exhibited a preference for other African-American men in his work and life.^[25] However, Rampersad denies Hughes' homosexuality in his biography as well.^[26] Rampersad comes to the conclusion that Hughes was probably asexual and passive in his sexual relationships. He did, however show a respect and love for his fellow white man (and woman). Still, others argue for Hughes' homosexuality: his love of black men is evidenced in a number of reported unpublished poems to an alleged black male lover.^[27]



Former residence of Langston Hughes in the Dupont Circle neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

Death

On May 22, 1967, Langston Hughes died from complications after abdominal surgery, related to prostate cancer, at the age of 65. His ashes are interred beneath a floor medallion in the middle of the foyer leading to the auditorium named for him within the Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem.^[28] The design on the floor covering his cremated remains is an African cosmogram titled *Rivers*. The title is taken from the poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* by Hughes. Within the center of the cosmogram and precisely above the ashes of Hughes are the words *My soul has grown deep like the rivers*.

The Langston Hughes Memorial Library on the campus of Lincoln University, as well as at the James Weldon Johnson Collection within the Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Career

1920s

First published in *The Crisis* in 1921, the verse that would become Hughes's signature poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", appeared in his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* in 1926:^[29]

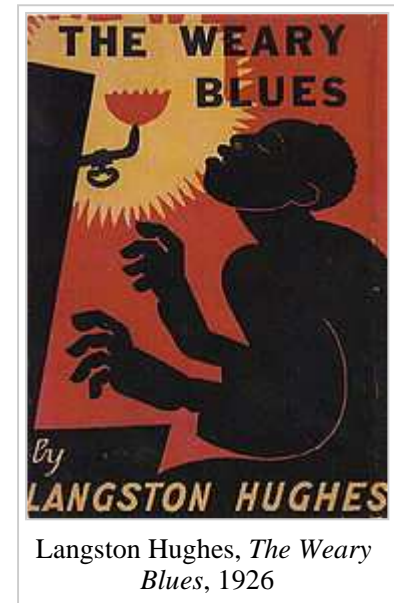
I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I danced in the Nile when I was old
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.



Langston Hughes, *The Weary Blues*, 1926

Hughes' life and work were enormously influential during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s alongside those of his contemporaries, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Aaron Douglas, who, collectively (with the exception of McKay), created the short-lived magazine *Fire!!* Devoted to Younger Negro Artists.

Hughes and his contemporaries were often in conflict with the goals and aspirations of the black middle class, and of those considered to be the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance, W. E. B. Du Bois, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Alain LeRoy Locke, whom they accused of being overly fulsome in accommodating and assimilating Eurocentric values and culture for social equality. A primary expression of this conflict was the former's depiction of the "low-life", that is, the real lives of blacks in the lower social-economic strata and the superficial divisions and prejudices based on skin color within the black community.^[30] Hughes wrote what would be considered the manifesto for him and his contemporaries published in *The Nation* in 1926, *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*:

The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express
our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or
shame.
If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not,



Jessie Redmon Fauset,
Hughes, and Zora Neale
Hurston, 1927, Tuskegee
Institute

it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too.

The tom-tom cries, and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain free within ourselves.

Hughes was unashamedly black at a time when blackness was *démodé*, and he didn't go much beyond the themes of *black is beautiful* as he explored the black human condition in a variety of depths.^[31] His main concern was the uplift of his people, of whom he judged himself the adequate appreciator, and whose strengths, resiliency, courage, and humor he wanted to record as part of the general American experience.^{[32][33]} Thus, his poetry and fiction centered generally on insightful views of the working class lives of blacks in America, lives he portrayed as full of struggle, joy, laughter, and music. Permeating his work is pride in the African American identity and its diverse culture. "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind,"^[34] Hughes is quoted as saying. Therefore, in his work he confronted racial stereotypes, protested social conditions, and expanded African America's image of itself; a "people's poet" who sought to reeducate both audience and artist by lifting the theory of the black aesthetic into reality.^[35] An expression of this is the poem *My People*:^[36]

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of *my people*.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of *my people*

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of *my people*.



Langston Hughes, Charles S. Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, Rudolph Fisher, & Hubert Delany. African American writers influenced the Négritude movement in France. Hughes, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Claude McKay were the most influential.

Moreover, Hughes stressed the importance of a racial consciousness and cultural nationalism devoid of self-hate that united people of African descent and Africa across the globe and encouraged pride in their own diverse black folk culture and black aesthetic. Langston Hughes was one of the few black writers of any consequence to champion racial consciousness as a source of inspiration for black artists.^[37] His African-American race consciousness and cultural nationalism would influence many foreign black writers, such as Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire. With Senghor and Césaire and other French-speaking writers of Africa and of African descent from the Caribbean like René Maran from Martinique and Léon Damas from French Guiana in South America, the works of Hughes helped to inspire the concept that became the Négritude movement in France where a radical black self-examination was emphasized in the face of European colonialism.^{[38][39]} Langston Hughes was not only a role model for his calls for black racial pride instead of assimilation, but the most important technical influence in his emphasis on folk and jazz rhythms as the basis of his poetry of racial pride.^[40]

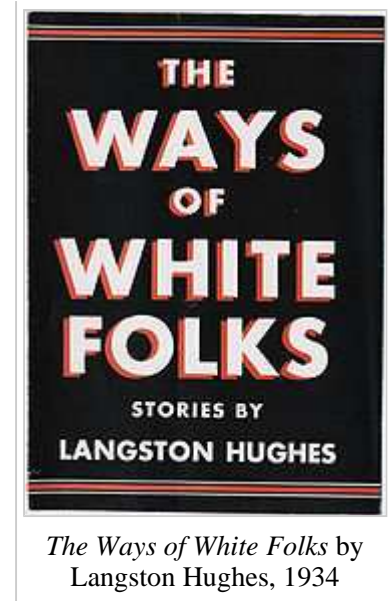
1930s

In 1930, his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*, won the Harmon Gold Medal for literature.^[41] The protagonist of the story is a boy named Sandy whose family must deal with a variety of struggles imposed upon them due to their race and class in society in addition to relating to one another. Hughes's first collection of short stories came in 1934 with *The Ways of White Folks*.^{[42][43]} These

stories provided a series of vignettes revealing the humorous and tragic interactions between whites and blacks. Overall, these stories are marked by a general pessimism about race relations, as well as a sardonic realism.^[44] He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1935.

1940s

The same year Hughes established his theatre troupe in Los Angeles, his ambition to write for the movies materialized when he co-wrote the screenplay for *Way Down South*.^[45] Further hopes by Hughes to write for the lucrative movie trade were thwarted because of racial discrimination within the industry.^[46] Through the black publication *Chicago Defender*, Hughes in 1943 gave creative birth to *Jesse B. Semple*, often referred to and spelled *Simple*, the everyday black man in Harlem who offered musings on topical issues of the day. He received offers to teach at a number of colleges, but seldom did. In 1947, Hughes taught at Atlanta University. Hughes, in 1949, spent three months at University of Chicago Laboratory Schools as a visiting lecturer. He wrote novels, short stories, plays, poetry, operas, essays, works for children, and, with the encouragement of his best friend and writer, Arna Bontemps, and patron and friend, Carl Van Vechten, two autobiographies, *The Big Sea* and *I Wonder as I Wander*, as well as translating several works of literature into English.



1950s and 1960s

During the mid-1950s and -1960s, Hughes' popularity among the younger generation of black writers varied as his reputation increased worldwide. With the gradual advancement toward racial integration, many black writers considered his writings of black pride and its corresponding subject matter out of date. They considered him a racial chauvinist.^[47] He in turn found a number of writers like James Baldwin lacking in this same pride, overintellectualizing^[48] in their work, and occasionally vulgar.^[48]^[49]^[50]

Hughes wanted young black writers to be objective about their race, but not to scorn it or flee it.^[51] He understood the main points of the Black Power movement of the 1960s, but believed that some of the younger black writers who supported it were too angry in their work. Hughes's posthumously published *Panther and the Lash* in 1967 was intended to show solidarity and understanding with these writers, but with more skill and devoid of the most virile anger and terse racial chauvinism some showed toward whites.^[52]^[53] Hughes still continued to have admirers among the larger younger generation of black writers, whom he often helped by offering advice and introducing them to other influential persons in the literature and publishing communities. This latter group, including Alice Walker, whom Hughes discovered, looked upon Hughes as a hero and an example to be emulated in degrees and tones within their own work. One of these young black writers observed of Hughes, "Langston set a tone, a standard of brotherhood and friendship and cooperation, for all of us to follow. You never got from him, 'I am *the* Negro writer,' but only 'I am *a* Negro writer.' He never stopped thinking about the rest of us."^[54]

Recognition and honors

- In 1943, Lincoln University awarded Hughes an honorary Litt.D.
- In 1960, the NAACP awarded Hughes the Spingarn Medal for distinguished achievements by an African American.
- 1961 - Hughes was inducted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters.^[55]

- 1963 - Howard University awarded Hughes an honorary doctorate.
- In 1973, the first Langston Hughes Medal was awarded by the City College of New York.
- In 1981, New York City Landmark status was given to the Harlem home of Langston Hughes at 20 East 127th Street (40°48′26.32″N 73°56′25.54″W) by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and 127th St. was renamed *Langston Hughes Place*.^[56]
- On February 1, 2002, The United States Postal Service added the image of Langston Hughes to its Black Heritage series of postage stamps.
- In 2002, scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed Langston Hughes on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans.^[57]

Political views

Hughes, like many black writers and artists of his time, was drawn to the promise of Communism as an alternative to a segregated America. Many of his lesser-known political writings have been collected in two volumes published by the University of Missouri Press and reflect his attraction to Communism. An example is the poem "A New Song":^[58]

I speak in the name of the black millions
Awakening to action.
Let all others keep silent a moment
I have this word to bring,
This thing to say,
This song to sing:

Bitter was the day
When I bowed my back
Beneath the slaver's whip.

That day is past.

Bitter was the day
When I saw my children unschooled,
My young men without a voice in the world,
My women taken as the body-toys
Of a thieving people.

That day is past.

Bitter was the day, I say,
When the lyncher's rope
Hung about my neck,
And the fire scorched my feet,
And the oppressors had no pity,
And only in the sorrow songs
Relief was found.

That day is past.

I know full well now
Only my own hands,
Dark as the earth,
Can make my earth-dark body free.
O thieves, exploiters, killers,
No longer shall you say

With arrogant eyes and scornful lips:
 "You are my servant,
 Black man-
 I, the free!"

That day is past-

For now,
 In many mouths-
 Dark mouths where red tongues burn
 And white teeth gleam-
 New words are formed,
 Bitter
 With the past
 But sweet
 With the dream.
 Tense,
 Unyielding,
 Strong and sure,
 They sweep the earth-

Revolt! Arise!

The Black
 And White World
 Shall be one!
 The Worker's World!

The past is done!

A new dream flames
 Against the
 Sun!



Langston Hughes with his friends on board the *Europa*, Meschabpam's American Negro Film Group, June 17, 1932. Seated front center from left to right are Louise Thompson Patterson and Dorothy West.

In 1932, Hughes became part of a group of blacks who went to the Soviet Union to make a film depicting the plight of African Americans in the United States. The film was never made, but Hughes was given the opportunity to travel extensively through the Soviet Union and to the Soviet-controlled regions in Central Asia, the latter parts usually closed to Westerners. In Turkmenistan, Hughes met and befriended the Hungarian polymath Arthur Koestler. Hughes also managed to travel to China and Japan before returning to the States.

Hughes' poetry was frequently published in the CPUSA newspaper and he was involved in initiatives supported by Communist organizations, such as the drive to free the Scottsboro Boys. Partly as a show of support for the Republican faction during the Spanish Civil War, in 1937 Hughes traveled to Spain^[59] as a correspondent

for the *Baltimore Afro-American* and other various African-American newspapers. Hughes was also involved in other Communist-led organizations like the John Reed Clubs and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. He was more of a sympathizer than an active participant. He signed a statement in 1938 supporting Joseph Stalin's purges and joined the American Peace Mobilization in 1940 working to keep the U.S. from participating in World War II.^[60]

Hughes initially did not favor black American involvement in the war because of the persistence of discriminatory U.S. Jim Crow laws existing while blacks were encouraged to fight against Fascism and the Axis powers. He came to support the war effort and black American involvement in it after deciding that blacks would also be contributing to their struggle for civil rights at home.^[61]

Hughes was accused of being a Communist by many on the political right, but he always denied it. When asked why he never joined the Communist Party, he wrote "it was based on strict discipline and the acceptance of directives that I, as a writer, did not wish to accept." In 1953, he was called before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Following his appearance, he distanced himself from Communism and was subsequently rebuked by some who had previously supported him on the Radical Left. Over time, Hughes would distance himself from his most radical poems. In 1959 his collection of *Selected Poems* was published. He excluded his most controversial work from this group of poems.

Stage and film depictions

Hughes' life has been depicted in various stage and film productions. *Hannibal of the Alps* by Michael Dinwiddie and *Paper Armor* by Eisa Davis are plays by African-American playwrights which deal with Hughes' sexuality. In the 1989 film, *Looking for Langston*, British filmmaker Isaac Julien claimed Hughes as a black gay icon — Julien thought that Hughes' sexuality had historically been ignored or downplayed. In the film *Get on the Bus*, directed by Spike Lee, a black gay character, played by Isaiah Washington, invokes the name of Hughes and punches a homophobic character while commenting, "This is for James Baldwin and Langston Hughes." Film portrayals of Hughes include Gary LeRoi Gray's role as a teenage Hughes in the 2003 short subject film *Salvation* (based on a portion of his autobiography *The Big Sea*) and Daniel Sunjata as Hughes in the 2004 film *Brother to Brother*. *Hughes' Dream Harlem*, a documentary by Jamal Joseph, examines Hughes' works and environment.

Literary archives

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University holds the Langston Hughes papers (1862-1980) and the Langston Hughes collection (1924-1969) containing letters, manuscripts, personal items, photographs, clippings, artworks, and objects that document the life of Hughes.

Bibliography

Poetry

- *The Weary Blues*, Knopf, 1926
- *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, Knopf, 1927
- *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations*, 1931
- *Dear Lovely Death*, 1931
- *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, Knopf, 1932
- *Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play*, Golden Stair Press, N.Y., 1932
- *Let America Be America Again*, 1938
- *Shakespeare in Harlem*, Knopf, 1942



LOYAL FRIEND: Because of his interest during the 1930s in Marxist ideas, labor issues, and the Soviet Union, Langston Hughes was called to testify before U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in March 1953. Hughes chose not to testify against friends but only to answer questions about his own political views and writings.

Langston Hughes, before the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in 1953

- *Freedom's Plow*, 1943
- *Fields of Wonder*, Knopf, 1947
- *One-Way Ticket*, 1949
- *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Holt, 1951
- *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 1958
- *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*, Hill & Wang, 1961
- *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times*, 1967
- *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Knopf, 1994
- *Spring*, 2005
- *Madam and The Rent Man*

Fiction

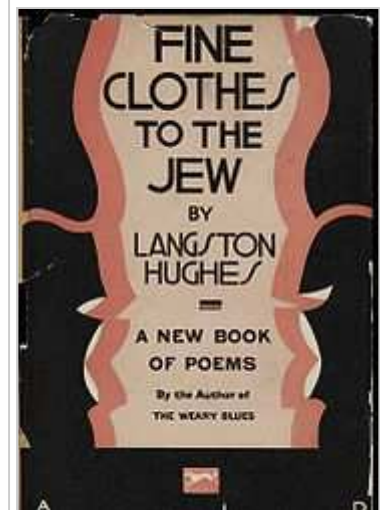
- *Not Without Laughter*. Knopf, 1930
- *The Ways of White Folks*. Knopf, 1934
- *Simple Speaks His Mind*. 1950
- *Laughing to Keep from Crying*, Holt, 1952
- *Simple Takes a Wife*. 1953
- *Sweet Flypaper of Life*, photographs by Roy DeCarava. 1955
- *Simple Stakes a Claim*. 1957
- *Tambourines to Glory* (book), 1958
- *The Best of Simple*. 1961
- *Simple's Uncle Sam*. 1965
- *Something in Common and Other Stories*. Hill & Wang, 1963
- *Short Stories of Langston Hughes*. Hill & Wang, 1996
- *Ardella* by Langston Hughes
- *Negro Speaks of Rivers* by Langston Hughes

Non-fiction

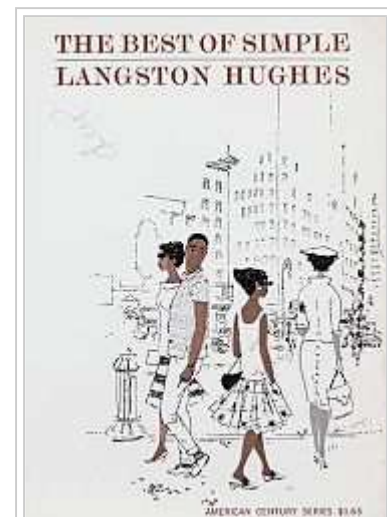
- *The Big Sea*. New York: Knopf, 1940
- *Famous American Negroes*. 1954
- *Marian Anderson: Famous Concert Singer*. 1954
- *I Wonder as I Wander*. New York: Rinehart & Co., 1956
- *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America*, with Milton Meltzer. 1956
- *Famous Negro Heroes of America*. 1958
- *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP*. 1962

Major plays

- *Mule Bone*, with Zora Neale Hurston. 1931
- *Mulatto*. 1935 (renamed *The Barrier*, an opera, in 1950)
- *Troubled Island*, with William Grant Still. 1936
- *Little Ham*. 1936
- *Emperor of Haiti*. 1936
- *Don't You Want to be Free?* 1938
- *Street Scene*, contributed lyrics. 1947
- *Tambourines to glory*. 1956
- *Simply Heavenly*. 1957



Fine Clothes to the Jew by Langston Hughes, 1927



The Best of Simple by Langston Hughes, 1961

- *Black Nativity*. 1961
- *Five Plays by Langston Hughes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963.
- *Jericho-Jim Crow*. 1964

Works for children

- *Popo and Fifina, with Arna Bontemps*. 1932
- *The First Book of the Negroes*. 1952
- *The First Book of Jazz*. 1954
- *The First Book of Rhythms*. 1954
- *The First Book of the West Indies*. 1956
- *First Book of Africa*. 1964

Other

- *The Langston Hughes Reader*. New York: Braziller, 1958.
- *Good Morning Revolution: Uncollected Social Protest Writings by Langston Hughes*. Lawrence Hill, 1973.
- *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001.



Notes

1. ^a ^b Richard B. Sheridan, "Charles Henry Langston and the African American Struggle in Kansas", *Kansas State History*, Winter 1999, accessed 15 Dec 2008
2. ^a Laurie F. Leach, *Langston Hughes: A Biography*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004, pp.2-4
3. ^a William and Aimee Lee Cheek, "John Mercer Langston: Principle and Politics", in Leon F. Litwack and August Meier, eds., *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, University of Illinois Press, 1991, pp. 106-111
4. ^a West, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, 2003, p.160
5. ^a Hughes recalled his maternal grandmother's stories: "Through my grandmother's stories life always moved, moved heroically toward an end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, schemed, or fought. But no crying." Rampesad, Arnold & Roessel, David (2002). *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, p.620
6. ^a The poem *Aunt Sues's Stories* (1921) is an oblique tribute to his grandmother and his loving Auntie Mary Reed. Rampesad.vol.1, 1986, p.43
7. ^a Imbued by his grandmother with a duty to help his race, Langston Hughes identified with neglected and downtrodden blacks all his life, and glorified them in his work. Brooks, Gwendolyn, (Oct. 12, 1986). "The Darker Brother". *The New York Times*
8. ^a Langston Hughes Reads his poetry with commentary, audiotape from Caedmon Audio
9. ^a *Langston Hughes, Writer, 65, Dead*. (May 23, 1967). *The New York Times*
10. ^a Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* (1940), pp.54-56
11. ^a James Hughes, a wealthy lawyer and landowner and himself a black man, hated both the racism of the North and Negroes, whom he portrayed in crude racial caricature. Smith, Dinitia (Nov. 26, 1997). *Child's Tale About Race Has a Tale of Its Own*. *The New York Times*
12. ^a And the father, Hughes said, "hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro. He disliked all of his family because they were Negroes." James Hughes was tightfisted, uncharitable, cold. Brooks, Gwendolyn, (Oct. 12, 1986). *The Darker Brother*. *The New York Times*
13. ^a Rampesad.vol.1, 1986, p.56
14. ^a *Poem* or *To. F.S.* first appeared in *The Crisis* in May 1925, and was reprinted in *The Weary Blues* and *The Dream Keeper*. Hughes never publicly identified F.S., but it is conjectured he was Ferdinand Smith, a merchant seaman whom the poet first met in New York in the early 1920s. Nine years older than Hughes, Smith first influenced the poet to go to sea. Born in Jamaica in 1893, Smith spent most of his life as a ship steward and political activist at sea--and later in New York as a resident of Harlem. Smith was deported back to Jamaica for alleged Communist activities and illegal alien status in 1951. Hughes corresponded with Smith up until 1961, when Smith died. Berry, p.347

15. ^ In 1926, a patron of Hughes, Amy Spingarn, wife of Joel Elias Spingarn, provided the funds (\$300) for him to attend Lincoln University. Rampersad.vol.1, 1986,p.122-23
16. ^ In November 1927, Charlotte Osgood Mason, (“Godmother” as she liked to be called), became Hughes' major patron. Rampersad. vol.1,1986,p.156
17. ^ ^a ^b Nero, Charles I. (1997). "Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures." In Martin Duberman (Ed.), *Re/Membering Langston*, p.192. New York University Press
18. ^ Yale Symposium, *Was Langston Gay?* commemorating the 100th birthday of Hughes in 2002
19. ^ Schwarz, pp.68-88
20. ^ Although Hughes was extremely closeted, some of his poems hint at his homosexuality. These include: *Joy, Desire, Cafe: 3 A.M., Waterfront Streets, Young Sailor, Trumpet Player, Tell Me, F.S.* and some poems in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Langston Hughes page[1] Retrieved January 10, 2007
21. ^ ...Cafe 3 A.M. was against gay bashing by police, and Poem for F.S. which was about his friend Ferdinand Smith. Nero, Charles I. (1999), p.500
22. ^ Jean Blackwell Hutson, former chief of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, said, “He was always eluding marriage. He said marriage and career didn’t work.....It wasn’t until his later years that I became convinced he was homosexual.” Hutson & Nelson. *Essence magazine*, February 1992. p.96
23. ^ "Though there were infrequent and half-hearted affairs with women, most people considered Hughes asexual, insistent on a skittish, carefree 'innocence.' In fact, he was a closeted homosexual...." McClatchy, J.D. (2002).*Langston Hughes: Voice of the Poet*. New York: Random House Audio, p.12
24. ^ Aldrich, (2001), p.200
25. ^ "Referring to men of African descent, Rampersad writes "...Hughes found some young men, especially dark-skinned men, appealing and sexually fascinating. (Both in his various artistic representations, in fiction especially, and in his life, he appears to have found young white men of little sexual appeal.) Virile young men of very dark complexion fascinated him. Rampersad, vol.2,1988,p.336
26. ^ "His fatalism was well placed. Under such pressure, Hughes' sexual desire, such as it was, became not so much sublimated as vaporized. He governed his sexual desires to an extent rare in a normal adult male; whether his appetite was normal and adult is impossible to say. He understood, however, that Cullen and Locke offered him nothing he wanted, or nothing that promised much for him or his poetry. If certain of his responses to Locke seemed like teasing (a habit Hughes would never quite lose with women, or, perhaps, men) they were not therefore necessarily signs of sexual desire; more likely , they showed the lack of it. Nor should one infer quickly that Hughes was held back by a greater fear of public exposure as a homosexual than his friends had; of the three men, he was the only one ready, indeed eager, to be perceived as disreputable." "Rampersad, "The Life of Langston Hughes, Vol I. p 69
27. ^ Sandra West explicitly states: Hughes' "apparent love for black men as evidenced through a series of unpublished poems he wrote to a black male lover named 'Beauty'." West,2003. p.162
28. ^ Whitaker, Charles.Ebony magazine In *Langston Hughes:100th birthday celebration of the poet of Black America*. April 2002.
29. ^ *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*: First published in *Crisis* (June 1921), p.17. Included in "The New Negro" (1925), *The Weary Blues, Langston Hughes Reader*, and *Selected Poems*. In *The Weary Blues*, the poem is dedicated to W. E. B. Du Bois. The dedication does not appear in later printings of the poem. Hughes' first and last published poems appeared in *The Crisis*; more of his poems appeared in *The Crisis* than in any other journal. Rampesad, Arnold & Roessel, David (2002). In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. p.23 & p.620, Knopf
30. ^ Hughes "disdained the rigid class and color differences the 'best people' drew between themselves and Afro-Americans of darker complexion, of smaller means and lesser formal education. Berry, 1983 & 1992, p.60
31. ^ "...but his tastes and selectivity were not always accurate, and pressures to survive as a black writer in a white society (and it was a miracle that he did for so long) extracted an enormous creative toll. Nevertheless, Hughes, more than any other black poet or writer, recorded faithfully the nuances of black life and its frustrations." Patterson, Lindsay (June 29, 1969). *Langston Hughes--The Most Abused Poet in America? The New York Times*
32. ^ Brooks, Gwendolyn, (Oct. 12, 1986). *The Darker Brother*. *The New York Times*
33. ^ Rampesad, Arnold & Roessel, David (2002). *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. p.3
34. ^ Rampersad,1988,vol.2,p.418
35. ^ West. 2003, p.162
36. ^ *My People*: First published as *Poem* in *Crisis* (Oct.1923), p. 162, and *The Weary Blues* (1926). The title *My People* was used in *The Dream Keeper* (1932) and the *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1959). Rampersad, Arnold & Roessel, David (2002). In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. p.36 & p.623, Knopf.
37. ^ Rampersad.vol.2, 1988, p.297
38. ^ Rampersad.vol.1, 1986, p. 91

39. ^ Mercer Cook, African American scholar of French culture: "His (Langston Hughes) work had a lot to do with the famous concept of *Négritude*, of black soul and feeling, that they were beginning to develop." Rampersad.vol.1, 1986, p. 343
40. ^ Rampersad.vol.1, 1986, p. 343
41. ^ Charlotte Mason generously supported him (Hughes) for two years. She supervised the writing of his first novel, *Not Without Laughter* (1930). Her patronage of Hughes ended about the time the novel appeared. Rampersad. *Langston Hughes*. In *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 2001, p.207
42. ^ Noel Sullivan, after working out an agreement with Hughes, became a patron for him in 1933. Rampersad. vol.1, 1986, p.277
43. ^ Sullivan provided Hughes with the opportunity to complete the *The Ways of White Folks* (1934) in Carmel, California. Hughes stayed a year in a cottage Sullivan provided for him to work in. Rampersad. *Langston Hughes*. In *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, 2001, p.207
44. ^ Rampersad. "*Langston Hughes*." In *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*.2001.p.207
45. ^ Co-written with Clarence Muse, African American Hollywood actor and musician. Rampersad.vol.1, 1986, p. 366-69
46. ^ Gwendolyn Brooks, who met Hughes when she was 16 says, "I met Langston Hughes when I was 16 years old, and saw enough of him in subsequent years to observe that, when subjected to offense and icy treatment because of his race, he was capable of jagged anger--and vengeance, instant or retroactive. And I have letters from him that reveal he could respond with real rage when he felt he was treated cruelly by other people. Brooks, Gwendolyn, (Oct. 12, 1986). *The Darker Brother*. *The New York Times*
47. ^ Rampersad,1988,vol.2,p.207
48. ^ Langston's misgivings about the new black writing mainly concerned its emphasis on black criminality and on profanity. Rampersad, vol.2,p.207
49. ^ Hughes said, "There are millions of blacks who never murder anyone, or rape or get raped or want to rape, who never lust after white bodies, or cringe before white stupidity, or Uncle Tom, or go crazy with race, or off-balance with frustration." Rampersad, p.119, vol.2
50. ^ Langston eagerly looked to the day when the gifted young writers of his race would go beyond the clamor of civil rights and integration and take a genuine pride in being black....he found this latter quality starkly absent in even the best of them....Rampersad, vol. 2, p.310
51. ^ Rampersad.vol.2, 1988, p. 297
52. ^ "As for whites in general, Hughes did not like them...He felt he had been exploited and humiliated by them." Rampersad, 1988,vol.2,p.338
53. ^ Hughes's advice on how to deal with racists was "'Always be polite to them...be over-polite. Kill them with kindness.' But, he insisted on recognizing that all whites are not racist, and definitely enjoyed the company of those who sought him out in friendship and with respect." Rampersad, 1988,vol.2,p.368
54. ^ Rampersad, 1988, vol.2, p.409
55. ^ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A32779164>
56. ^ Jean Carlson(2007).[2] Retrieved June 30, 2007.
57. ^ Asante, Molefi Kete (2002). *100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia*. Amherst, New York. Prometheus Books. ISBN 1-57392-963-8.
58. ^ *A New Song*: The end of the poem was substantially changed when it was included in *A New Song* (New York: *International Workers Order*, 1938). The first version, in *Opportunity* (Jan. 1933), p. 123, and *Crisis* (March 1933), p.59. reads after line 39:

New words are formed,
 Bitter
 With the past
 And sweet
 with the dream.
 Tense, silent,
 Without a sound.
 They fall unuttered--
 Yet heard everywhere:
Take care!
 Black world
 Against the wall,
 Open your eyes--
The long white snake of greed has struck to kill!
 Be wary and
 Be wise!

Before
The darker world
The future lies.

Rampersad, Arnold & Roessel, David (2002). In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. p.170 & p.643, Knopf

59. ^ Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives
60. ^ Langston Hughes (2001), *Fight for Freedom and Other Writings*. p.9, University of Missouri Press
61. ^ Irma Cayton, African American, said "He had told me that it wasn't our war, it wasn't our business, there was too much Jim Crow. But he had changed his mind about all that." Rampersad,1988,vol.2,p.85

See also

- Langston Hughes Society
- Harlem Renaissance
- African American literature
- Pan-Africanism
- Négritude

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External links

- Yale College Lecture on Langston Hughes audio, video and full transcripts from Open Yale Courses

- Poems by Langston Hughes at PoetryFoundation.org
- The Collected Works of Langston Hughes
- Langston Hughes on Poets.org With poems, related essays, and links, from the Academy of American Poets
- A Centennial Tribute to L. Hughes at Howard University
- Representative Poetry Online, University of Toronto
- A selection of Langston Hughes's more political poetry
- Langston Hughes Elementary School, Lawrence, KS, including photos and texts of the writer
- Smithsonian "The Music in Poetry: Langston Hughes & His use of the Blues"
- The Langston Hughes Papers Digital collection from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University
- Langston Hughes & His Poetry, Library of Congress
- The Worlds of Langston Hughes, Ford Foundation Report
- The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain by Langston Hughes
- Beinecke Library, Yale University, Langston Hughes at 100
- Langston Hughes in Lawrence, KS: Photographs & Biographical Resources
- An Analization of Langston Hughes
- Phat African American Poetry Book
- Sweet Flypaper of Life with Roy DeCarava
- Langston Hughes -- "Dream Deferred,"Clip from the Langston Hughes program the Voices & Visions video
- Langston Hughes Papers on deposit at Yale
- America's Library, Library of Congress, Langston Hughes
- I Hear America Singing, PBS.ORG
- Obituary of Langston Hughes, The New York Times
- Atrium where the ashes of Langston Hughes reside in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem
- List of previewable works on Google Book Search by and concerning Langston Hughes
- "My Adventures as a Social Poet" by Langston Hughes on NegroArtist.com
- Langston Hughes FBI File

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