

LANGSTON HUGHES AND HIS POETRY

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the enduring legacy of Langston Hughes, one of the most influential figures in American literary history. Focusing primarily on his poetic works, the analysis examines Hughes's exploration of themes such as race, identity, and the American Dream. By delving into the socio-political context of his time and the impact of the Harlem Renaissance, the article highlights Hughes's unique ability to capture the essence of the African American experience through his evocative verse. Through a close reading and select poems, including "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "Harlem," the article elucidates Hughes's mastery of language and his commitment to social justice. Furthermore, it explores how Hughes's poetry continues to resonate with readers today, inspiring new generations to confront issues of inequality and pursue dreams of equality and freedom.

KEYWORDS: Langston Hughes, select poems, poetry, New York City

INTRODUCTION

Langston Hughes, a seminal figure of the Harlem Renaissance, remains an enduring beacon of African American literature. His poetry resonates with the struggles, joys, and complexities of the human experience, capturing the essence of both the African American journey and the broader human condition. From his poignant reflections on identity to his impassioned calls for social justice, Hughes's work continues to inspire and provoke thought, transcending temporal and cultural boundaries. In this article, we delve into the life and poetry of Langston Hughes, celebrating his profound impact on literature and society.

FINDINGS

Growing up in several Midwestern communities, Hughes started writing a lot when he was young. As a young man, he moved to New York City, where he started his profession. After completing his secondary education in Cleveland, Ohio, he promptly enrolled in Columbia University's academic programme in New York City. Despite dropping college, he was recognised by New York publishers and the Harlem artistic community, having first appeared in *The Crisis* magazine and later in book publishers. After all, he received his degree from Lincoln University. Hughes also authored short tales and plays in addition to poetry. He has authored other nonfiction books as well. As the civil rights movement gained momentum, he authored a weekly

in-depth piece for a prominent black newspaper from 1942 to 1962, the Chicago Defender.

His works of fiction and poetry depicted the lives of Black working-class Americans, portraying them as a mixture of joy, laughter, struggle, and melody. Pride in the African-American identity and its rich cultural diversity throughout his art. Hughes is cited as saying, "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all humankind". Raising the notion of the black aesthetic into reality, he was a "people's poet" who challenged racial prejudices, opposed social injustices, and broadened the perception of African America. The Langston Hughes papers (1862–1980) and collection (1924–1969), which include letters, manuscripts, personal belongings, images, clippings, artwork, and artefacts that trace Hughes's life, are kept at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. Archives of Hughes's work can be found at the James Weldon Johnson Collection at Yale University and the Langston Hughes Memorial Library on the campus of Lincoln University. Materials from his travels and interactions are available at Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Centre thanks to Dorothy B. Porter's efforts.

His first published work of poetry, "The Negro Talks of Rivers," was published in 1921, the year he graduated from high school. *The Weary Blues*, his debut poetry collection, was published in 1926. Hughes depicted African Americans from working-class backgrounds in a variety of everyday situations, both happy and unhappy, throughout his body of work. One of the first poets to incorporate jazz rhythms and accent onto paper was this transplant from New York City. His writing was so revolutionary that it took Hughes until 1930 to become confident he could make a livelihood as a writer, making him one of the first Black Americans to accomplish so. Hughes wrote numerous plays and prose pieces, including the well-known "Simple" books, such as *Simple's Uncle Sam* (Hill and Wang, 1965), *Simple Stakes a Claim* (Rinehart, 1957), *Simple Takes a Wife* (Simon & Schuster, 1953), and *Simple Speaks His Mind* (Simon & Schuster, 1950). In addition to leaving us with a vast body of poetry, Hughes also wrote countless prose pieces. Together with Arna Bontemps, he coedited *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746–1949* (Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1949). He also wrote the critically praised autobiography *The Big Sea* (Knopf, 1940) and edited *The Book of Negro Folklore* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1958). Along with Zora Neale Hurston, Hughes also co-wrote the play *Mule Bone* (HarperCollins, 1999)

CONCLUSION

In summary, Langston Hughes's poetry transcends time, offering a profound reflection on the African American experience while resonating with universal themes of identity, equality, and resilience. His words continue to captivate readers, inspiring dialogue and fostering empathy across generations. As we navigate the complexities

of our world, Hughes's enduring legacy serves as a guiding light, reminding us of the transformative power of literature to illuminate the human spirit and ignite social change. However, Hughes captured the subtleties and disappointments of black life more accurately than any other black poet or writer.

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