

The Negro Speaks of Rivers:

Langston Hughes
(Introduction)



“Harlem is not merely a Negro colony or community, it is a city within a city, the greatest Negro city in the world. It is not a slum or a fringe, it is located in the heart of Manhattan and occupies one of the most beautiful and healthful sections of the city...It strikes the uninformed observer as a phenomenon, a miracle.”

Harlem: The Cultural Capital (1925) by
James Weldon Johnson.



Background

- Civil War (1861-1865)
- Ku Klux Klan (founded in 1865) and “Jim Crow Laws”
- Great Migration (1915-1960)
- World War 1 (1919)
- Harlem Renaissance (1920)

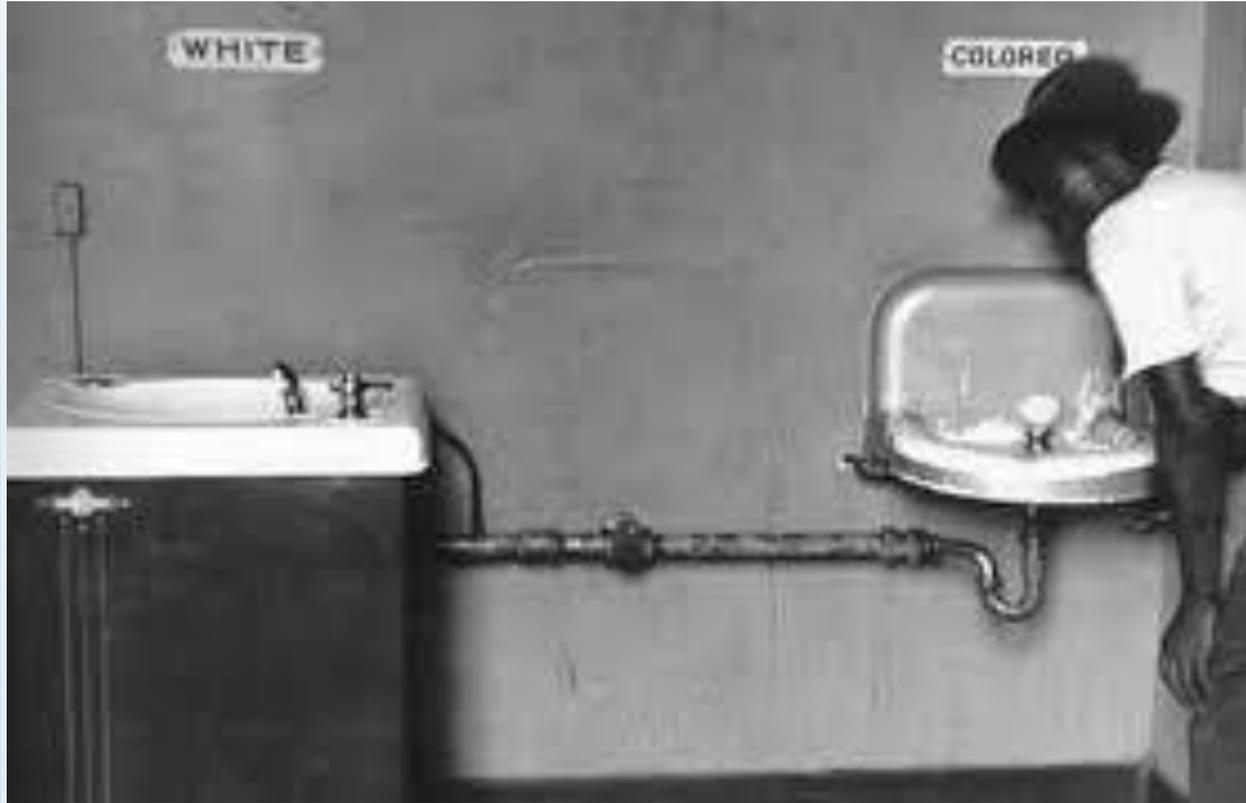


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Examples:





Langston Hughes



Zora Neale Hurston



Aaron Douglas





Jeunesse, by Palmer Hayden

.Jeunesse is about the newness of people's situations during the Harlem Renaissance. The title, Jeunesse, resembles what could be a feminine version of the French word for young, jeune. It is also about the joy that can be found during difficult times, as shown by the dancing and pastel colors in some areas in contrast to the dark pallet of the painting as a whole.



**Harlem: Jazz music and
Dance.**





Hughes, Langston

Langston Hughes, photograph by Gordon Parks, 1943.



Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

- James Mercer Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri.
- In 1930 his first novel, *Not Without Laughter* (Knopf, 1930), won the Harmon gold medal for literature.
- Hughes, who claimed Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg, and Walt Whitman as his primary influences, is particularly known for his insightful portrayals of black life in America from the twenties through the sixties.
- Unlike other notable black poets of the period such as Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen,, Hughes refused to differentiate between his personal experience and the common experience of black America. He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including their love of music, laughter, and language itself alongside their suffering.



Poems and Other Works

- First published in 1921 in *The Crisis* — official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) — "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", which became Hughes's signature poem, was collected in his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* (1926).
- In 1925, Hughes' poem "The Weary Blues" won first prize in the *Opportunity* magazine literary competition, and Hughes also received a scholarship to attend Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania.
- After his graduation from Lincoln in 1929, Hughes published his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*. The book was commercially successful enough to convince Hughes that he could make a living as a writer.
- In 1934 he published his first collection of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks*.



Poems and Other Works

- In July 1936 he published one of his most celebrated poems, "**Let America Be America Again**" in *Esquire*, which examined the unrealized hopes and dreams of the country's lower class and disadvantaged, expressing a sense of hope that the American Dream would one day arrive.
- In 1951 Hughes published one of his most celebrated poems, "**Harlem (What happens to a dream deferred?)**," discussed how the American Dream falls short for African Americans.
- His one of the best play *Mulatto*, was published in 1935 (renamed *The Barrier*, an opera, in 1950)





LANGSTON HUGHES

WRITER | 1902–1967

Langston Hughes was an American poet, novelist and playwright whose African American themes made him a primary contributor to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. He published his first poem in 1921 and first book in 1926.

QUICK FACTS



Dropped out
of Columbia



First poetry book,
The Weary Blues



Chicago Defender
columnist



"Harlem" poem starts "What
happens to a dream deferred?"



First Broadway play,
The Mulatto

*"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life
is a broken winged bird that cannot fly."*

BIOGRAPHY.

Photo: Hulton Archive/Getty Images.



To be continued...

