

Langston Hughes 1902-1967

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, but his journey, arriving in Washington, D.C., in 1924, included graduating from high school in Cleveland, a year at New York City's Columbia University, a brief stay with his father in Mexico, and world travels as a seaman on a cargo ship. In Washington, he worked briefly for the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and then as a busboy (715). Although he had several poems that had been published, Hughes got his "first publicity break" when he was working at a hotel and gave three of his poems to a diner, the famous poet Vachel Lindsay, resulting in "a newspaper interview and photograph heralding Lindsay's 'discovery' of a 'busboy poet'" (715). Success, as well as a degree from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania followed soon after.

Using his position as a prominent writer, editor and newspaper columnist, Hughes "sought to affirm and celebrate the 'deep soul' of the black masses...the beating pulse of urbanized black life...[and the]common sorrows, struggles, and triumphs" of African Americans (715). Hughes first heard the "sounds of American jazz that permeated Parisian nightlife" when he was traveling, and later, he "re-create[d] the structures and rhythms of blues and jazz music" in his poetry (715). Hughes wanted his work to "encompass...the essence of the black experience" (715).

"Langston Hughes." In Donald T. Hollenbeck and Julie West Johnson eds., *Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, 1984.

