#6

So long,
So far away
Is Africa.

HONORABLE LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR (Former President of Senegal): Langston Hughes is the one who has had the most influence on the movement for Negritude. Other writers too, such as Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown, James Weldon Johnson, but we believe that Langston Hughes was the greatest poet of the Negro Renaissance.

Not even memories alive
Save those things that history books create,
Save those that the songs
Beat back into the blood--
Beat out of blood with words sad-sung
In strange un-Negro tongue--

JAMES BALDWIN (Writer): I thought, I really thought of him as a very gentle, very gallant -- really gallant, a beautiful man. A weary, weary -- a weary man too.

So long,
So far away
Is Africa.
(ACTOR, "Afro-American Fragment")

L A N G S T O N H U G H E S

THE DREAM KEEPER

LANGSTON HUGHES:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load

Or does it explode?

(ACTOR, "Dream Deferred")

LANGSTON HUGHES: The people who are apart from the mainstream of life develop certain ways of talking, certain social characteristics of their own, and in the case of the negro, of course, although we've been free almost a hundred years, we are still not entirely by any means integrated into American democracy. And our big cities have their great negro ghettos, and Harlem is one. (ARCHIVAL INTERVIEW)

MILTON MELTZER: That was the voice of Langston Hughes, who wrote about negro life with warmth and humor. Monday night, May 22, Mr. Hughes died. In his honor, "In Memoriam"... (RADIO)

RAOUL ABDUL (Assistant to Langston Hughes): As I had a letter of introduction to him from Roweena Jellife, I called Langston up and asked him if he needed anybody to do any typing,

and he did. He would wake up quite late, and he would just call out of the room, without opening the door, "I know you're there, Abdul, I can hear you, you're reading my mail! I know you're reading all my private mail." Because I read all of his mail before he did to kind of line it up in terms of its importance. He felt, I think, toward the end, that too much was expected of him. Here he was, churning out like a machine articles, books anthologies, scripts for television, plays, and I think that he was tired.

FAITH BERRY (Biographer/Anthologist): He was a very complex man, a very private man, who did not let the public know his innermost feelings.

GEORGE HOUSTON BASS (Executor, Hughes Estate): When we begin to explore the complexity of Langston Hughes, who appears on the surface to be a very simple and humble personality, both as artist and as man, I think it's important to understand that there was a tension between the ordinary and the commonplace and the poetic imagination. I am of the tribe, yet I must be a bearer of the light within the tribe.

LANGSTON HUGHES: When I came to Harlem in the 1920's, I was young, Harlem was young, Harlem was the center of negro artistic activities, and I, as a writer, was attracted to this

center of negro culture in America. (ARCHIVAL INTERVIEW)

FAITH BERRY: It so happens that the Harlem Renaissance paralleled the rise of Hughes' early career. He wrote his literary manifesto, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," in THE NATION magazine in June 1926.

LANGSTON HUGHES: "We younger Negro artists 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, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too... 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." (ACTOR, from "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.")

GEORGE HOUSTON BASS: In that he clearly states that he is concerned about the cultural imagination, the folk sensibility of Afro-American tradition, he is concerned about a celebration of the beauty, the strength, the weakness, the ugliness of ordinary, everyday, common experiences of everyday, ordinary common black folk.

LANGSTON HUGHES: But I grew up in the Middle West. I was born in Missouri, and I grew up in Lawrence, Kansas, Topeka, and Kansas City. And in Kansas City particularly I used to hear blues a lot. Negro folk blues are really very sad songs, and

they're songs about being out of work, or disappointed in love, or a long way from home. Yet there's something about them somewhere along the line that makes people smile.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Sweet girls, sweet girls,
Listen here to me.
All you sweet girls,
Listen here to me:
Gin an' whiskey
Kin make you lose yo' 'ginity.

I used to be a good chile,
Lawd, in Sunday School.
Used to be a good chile,--
In de Sunday School,
Till these licker-headed rounders
Made me everbody's fool.

GEORGE BASS: Technically, the blues form had never been attempted before in literature, so Hughes in a real sense added an innovation, a new form of poetry in the English language, a form that has remained popular even until today.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Good girls, good girls,
Listen here to me.
Oh, you good girls,
Better listen to me:
Don't you fool wid no men 'cause
They'll bring you misery.

(BLUES SINGER, "Listen Here Blues")

LANGSTON HUGHES: My first book was called THE WEARY BLUES, and ever since that time I've written a number of poems in the exact form of the negro folk blues.

AMIRI BARAKA (Writer, Activist): Many of the so-called very conservative negro critics who thought that because Langston and people like Claude McKay focussed on working people, you know what I mean, the kind of mass black prototypes, a lot of those people thought that, well, why are you talking about those kind of black folks. The black folks we want you to talk about is the kind who are like socially-mobile and aspiring to move up into the middle class and so forth and so on.

GEORGE HOUSTON BASS: Those people who were the leaders and the shapers of what was deemed significant responded to Hughes initially out of embarrassment, because we had not gained the appreciation of our own cultural traditions, that Hughes had cultivated within his own sensibilities. There are two important traditions out of middle class black America. There is the bourgeois tradition of narcissism and escapism, and there is the service tradition. Hughes comes out of the service tradition.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Consider me,
A colored boy,
Once sixteen,
Once five, once three,
Once nobody,
Now me.

(ACTOR, "Consider Me")

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD (Author, THE LIFE OF LANGSTON HUGHES): From Hughes' early childhood, he knew that he had to do something in relation to his race. He had to assume or aspire to some position of leadership in his race, or else he would have failed his ancestors. His grandmother's first husband had died at Harper's Ferry with John Brown. His grandfather's brother was one of the three most famous black Americans of the nineteenth century. He was named John Mercer Langston, he was a congressman, he was Dean of Harvard Law School, president of a black college, and also represented the United States in the Caribbean.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.
Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.
Summer nights on the front porch
Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom
And tells him stories.

....

And the dark-faced child, listening,
Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.
He knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories
Out of any book at all,
But that they came
Right out of her own life.

The dark-faced child is quiet
Of a summer night
Listening to Aunt Sue's stories.

(ACTRESS, "Aunt Sue's Stories")

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: Loneliness is a very strong element in his work. His grandmother kept him from patronizing places,

for example, that were segregated. By and large, she kept him at home a great deal, so that he became an extremely lonely boy, by his own account.

LANGSTON HUGHES: When I was a child in Lawrence, Kansas, we used to attend a little church. Years later, I wrote a series of poems in which you can quite clearly see the influence of the negro spirituals. (ARCHIVAL INTERVIEW)

LANGSTON HUGHES:

At the feet o' Jesus,
Sorrow like a sea.
Lordy, let yo' mercy
Come driftin' down on me.

At the feet o' Jesus
At yo' feet I stand.
O, ma little Jesus,
Please reach out yo' hand.

(ACTRESS, "Feet o' Jesus")

GWENDOLYN BROOKS (Poet, Author): With Langston, experiencing meant more than picking a poem to pieces. There was such an exhilaration in finding that he was expressing exactly what you had felt. That very often that seemed to be the real significance of the particular poem.

LANGSTON HUGHES: The poet that I particularly liked during my high school days was Carl Sandburg. He wrote about the wheat fields of the Middle West, he wrote about the steel mills in cities like Cleveland and Chicago, where my stepfather worked.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Your soul is young,
your soul is beautiful,
your soul is great...
(ACTOR, "Song of Central")

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: He wrote his first poem in free verse. The poem was addressed to his high school, which clearly he regarded as somehow a kind of representation of the ideal life, the ideal social life, where you had people of different races and colors and creeds living together in harmony.

LOUISE THOMPSON PATTERSON (Colleague, Political Activist): Langston had a strange family life.

LANGSTON HUGHES: My father was a lawyer. He didn't like the United States very much, so he'd gone to Mexico to make his way in the world. And he didn't like negros very much either, although he was distinctly negro himself.

LOUISE PATTERSON: His father left this country, and his whole thought was about money. As a matter of fact, when I visited him in Mexico, he asked me how Langston was doing, and when I tried to tell him what a famous poet he was, he said to me, is he making any money? I said, I don't know. He said, if he's not making any money, it doesn't mean a thing, 'cause the golden eagle is your only friend.

ROWENA WOODHAM JELLIFFE (Co-founder, Karamu House): His mother was loving, cared very much for him, and he for her. But

when he began to show interest in poetry and writing poems, she didn't see how a young man growing up could ever make a living at that kind of thing. So she began to do the thing you would expect a mother to do, I guess. She began to say to him, why don't you get a job in the Post Office, so you can go out and take care of me?

LOUISE PATTERSON: So, there he was. On the one hand, his father didn't admire his work, because he wasn't making money. His mother was furious about his work because he wasn't making enough money from his work. As a matter of fact, she said, if you can't make it this way, get a job. So that, on neither side did he have the appreciation of a parent proud of this young man who was this genius.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

> This is a song for the genius child.
> Sing it softly, for the song is wild.
> Sing it softly as ever you can--
> Lest the song get out of hand.
>
> Nobody loves a genius child.
>
> ....
>
> Kill him--and let his soul run wild!
>
> (ACTRESS, "Genius Child")

LANGSTON HUGHES: My father wanted me to become a mining engineer. He wanted me to study in Switzerland, where he said I could learn three languages at once. Well, I didn't want to go to

Switzerland to study, I didn't want to learn three languages at once. I wanted to stay in Harlem! So I finally persuaded him to allow me to come to Columbia. (ARCHIVAL INTERVIEW)

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: He spent one year at Columbia, from 1921 to 22. His father decided to finance him for at least one year.

LANGSTON HUGHES: By that time, I'd made up my mind that I'd like to be a writer, so at the end of the year I wrote my father in Mexico City, and if he didn't approve of my plans, he needn't send me any more money. Well, he didn't send me any more money.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

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 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.

(ACTOR, ACTRESS, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers")

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: This is a very important poem in Hughes. It's the first great poem he wrote. In many ways it remains his benchmark poem. What is particularly interesting about it to me is the way it combines a number of important elements. It combines what one might call anger, except that you don't really see anger in the poem. But when you look at what it is talking about, about the Mississippi and Abraham Lincoln, slavery and so on, the Euphrates, the Congo, when you look at these references you know that Hughes is aware of black history, a lot of which has to do with exploitation, slavery and so on. But that anger is subsumed, it's concealed, and Hughes is able to move from it, to transcend it into, and to deliver his art towards the service, towards the production of images of affirmation rather than images of anger.

LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR: There are close links between the American Negro Renaissance and Negritude, the movement we founded in Paris. And we were influenced from the beginning by the theories of Du Bois, and by the works of writers like Langston Hughes, and we considered Langston Hughes to be the greatest black American poet because it was Langston Hughes who best answered to our definition, an image, or a group of images, analogical, melodious and rhythmical.

LANGSTON HUGHES: After working on the book, I decided one day in Rotterdam that I'd like to see Paris. I worked for a time in a nightclub in Paris, where I was technically called the second cook, but actually dishwasher at the Grand Duc on the rue Pigalle in Paris. Every night I used to hear this jazz band playing, and I tried to put the syncopated rhythms of jazz

into my poetry.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Play that thing,
Jazz band!
Play it for the lords and ladies,
For the dukes and counts,
For the whores and gigolos,
For the American millionaires
And the love-night painted faces
Of American millionaires,
And the school teachers
Out for a spree.
Play it!
Jazz band!
You know that tune
That laughs and cries at the same time.
You know it.

....

Play it, jazz band!
You've got seven languages to speak in
And then some.
Can I go home wid you, baby?
Sure.

(ACTOR, ACTRESS, "To a Negro Jazz Band in a Parisian ~~Cafe~~ CABARET")

FAITH BERRY: Two of Hughes' constant companions were talent and luck.

LANGSTON HUGHES: I worked as a busboy at the Waldman Park Hotel, and it was there that the great poet Vachel Lindsay came to have luncheon one day. And so I quickly wrote out three of my poems and I put these poems down beside Vachel Lindsay's plate. And when I got out to the Waldman Park Hotel about 7 o'clock the next morning,

the head waiter said to me, you've been discovered!

FAITH BERRY: Many people have said that Vachel Lindsay discovered Langston Hughes. That is not true. Because, at that time Hughes' first poetry volume, THE WEARY BLUES, was already in press and soon to be published in early 1926. Each time he was in trouble financially, there was always some fairy godmother or some friend who emerged to keep him from falling off what was a continually financial precipice. He had one patron whom he had for about three and a half years, and that was Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason. She was more patron than friend, and I make a distinction between his friends and his patrons, because his patrons were not always his friends.

JAMES BALDWIN: White people were discovering that niggers could not only sing and dance, but they could sculpt, they could paint, my god, they could write, you know. And so here the white world came, bearing gifts. But you had to be very very careful of people bearing gifts.

LOUISE PATTERSON: One night, Langston comes to my house. He had been down to Mrs. Mason's. She was a very very wealthy woman who had been a patron of the arts all of her life. Her particular interest was in what she called primitive people. She did not want him to write poems or articles of social protest. She wanted him to remain primitive, as he said. She had to control you. When she couldn't control you, she threw you out of her life. He was heartbroken. And he had been very grateful to have somebody that, for a time that he didn't have to worry

about his brother, who went to school in New England. He was at Lincoln going to college. He was able to get his book out. He had me to work for him. So here was a woman who just had to rule or tried to ruin. And she made it very hard for Langston for a long time.

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: In 1931, he was in many ways at a low point in his career, in his life, even because of various disappointments, and because of the Depression, for one thing. And he believed that it was the time then to reaffirm his sense of himself as a social poet, reaffirm his commitment to the masses of people.

FAITH BERRY: Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune was the person who first suggested that he take his poetry south. He took his poetry to the people throughout the South, and then he went to the West, as far as California.

LANGSTON HUGHES: I would say that in writing truthfully about the life of the negro people, and the relationships of negros and whites in this country, it helps to teach negro children that there is a culture within their own people, and therefore I think that negro writers help to uplift the whole mass of the people.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking the home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

(ACTOR, "Let America Be America Again")

AMIRI BARAKA: The kind of development that Langston went through in the twenties, his poetry was what you'd call "Black is Beautiful," black consciousness, you know, African history. In the thirties he began to take on more of an internationalist content. First a kind of pan-Africanist view that identified black people all over the world as being oppressed from a common source, that is, he began to identify imperialism. And then finally, more and more socialist ideas were incorporated into his work.

LOUISE PATTERSON: There was at that time, in 1932, there was among young black intellectuals a curiosity as to what Russia was all about. James Ford came back from the Soviet Union with an invitation inviting a group of young blacks to come to the Soviet Union to make a movie. Langston was on a speaking trip. I wrote him and asked him would he be a member of the committee to sponsor the group. So there we were, twenty-two, one playwright and writer, Langston Hughes, one actor, Wayland Rudd, and one young woman who could sing, Sylvia Garner, whose father was pastor of the Congregational Church in Harlem. The rest of us, contrary to what many white folks think, that

all blacks can sing and dance, we couldn't sing, we couldn't dance, we weren't actors. We were just a group of young people out on a wild adventure.

LANGSTON HUGHES: I was in that ship, and I went to make a motion picture for Meschrabpom Films. The picture was to have been about the race relations in the United States, and the labor struggles here.

LOUISE PATTERSON: We got there and we found that they had no idea of what black people were like in this country. Langston tried to work on the script.

LANGSTON HUGHES: I said, well, I don't believe we can make a picture from this scenario that anybody would believe anywhere in the world, and eventually the film was cancelled.

LOUISE PATTERSON: We left Langston, because he decided to go into depth writing about that period.

LANGSTON HUGHES: With a press card, I was able to travel all over the Soviet Union, and I particularly wanted to see the Asiatic portions, because there are colored people like myself. So I wanted to go and see how they lived.

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: A friend told Hughes in the early 1930's when he was writing some of his most radical poems, that he would regret having written them. The day did come when Hughes left those poems out of his selected poems. I don't think Hughes

was ever ashamed of having written those poems. I think some of them he was proud of. I think his poems about Madrid, poems that are written when he himself is in Madrid and the bombs are falling and people are dying and people are saying "no pasaran," those poems are very powerful.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Put out the lights and stop the clocks.
Let time stand still,
Again man mocks himself
And all his human will to build and grow.
    Madrid!
The fact and symbol of man's woe.
    Madrid!
Time's end and throw-back,
Birth of darkness,
Years of light reduced:
The ever minus of the brute,
And nothingness of barren land
And stone and metal,
Emptiness of gold,
The dullness of a bill of sale:
BOUGHT AND PAID FOR! SOLD!
Stupidity of hours that we do not move
Because all clocks are stopped.
Blackness of nights that do not see
Because all lights are out.
    Madrid!
Beneath the bullets!
    Madrid!
Beneath the bombing planes!
    Madrid!
In the fearful dark!
(ACTOR, "Madrid--1937")

LOUISE PATTERSON: Spain at that time was a focal point for anyone who any social consciousness at all. Especially writers came from all over the world to be in Spain. And so there

was Langston.

LANGSTON HUGHES: A writer certainly has special duties, I would say, to society, because the written word is a force, and to misuse that power, to use it for false or ugly or lying purposes would seem to me morally wrong.

LANGSTON HUGHES: When Langston came back from Spain in 1938, he said, Lou, I want a theater.

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: Hughes always saw himself essentially as a poet. But poetry could no longer be his major activity, because poetry didn't pay. He moved through a succession of phases that found him as a journalist principally, as an essayist, writing libretti for opera, writing songs.

GEORGE HOUSTON BASS: Hughes understood at least three different roles of the artist. He understood the artist as the celebrant, that is, I am celebrating a tradition that I believe in. He understood the role of the artist as performer. I am performing for the people who want to be entertained and engaged about reflections of our own experience. I am a seer; I am giving illumination to the significance of our experience.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

You've taken my blues and gone--
You sing 'em on Broadway
And sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
And you fixed 'em
So they don't sound like me.
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone.
You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones
And all kinds of Swing Mikados
And in everything but what's about me--
But someday somebody'll
Stand up and talk about me,
And write about me--
Black and beautiful--
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be
Me myself!

Yes, it'll be me.

(ACTRESS, "Note on Commercial Theatre")

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: In 1939, he was involved in the film in Hollywood, "Way Down South," which was heavily criticized as being yet another stereotyping of black life in the United States.

SCENE FROM "WAY DOWN SOUTH"

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: At about the same time, he was picketed by the right-wing for certain of his radical poems, and when he repudiated one of those poems, he was attacked by the left. This led to a very depressed feeling on his part as he faced the forties. In 1942, he began a weekly column with the CHICAGO DEFENDER, out of which came the Simple stories.

LANGSTON HUGHES: The column really originated during the Second World War, for the purpose of giving an opposite viewpoint to the pessimism that pervaded many negro communities in regard to the war. And it put forward the fact that Hitlerism would be much worse than Americanism in any case.

"A Toast to Harlem" (Dramatic Adaptation)

LANGSTON HUGHES: Well, well, well. Bartender! Let's have a drink here for my favorite Negro.

SIMPLE: I am a colored Indian.

LANGSTON HUGHES: I'm sorry. But tell me, my brave buck, how come you find yourself living in a furnished room in Harlem rather than on the reservation.

SIMPLE: I am a Black Foot Indian, daddy-o, not a red one. Anyway Harlem is where I always wanted to be. I love Harlem.

LANGSTON HUGHES: What do you love about Harlem?

SIMPLE: It's so full of Negros. I feel like I got protection.

LANGSTON HUGHES: Protection from what?

SIMPLE: From white folks. Anyway, I love Harlem because it belongs to me.

LANGSTON HUGHES: Harlem does not belong to you. You do not own the houses in Harlem. They belong to white folks.

SIMPLE: I may not own 'em, but I live in 'em.

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: The Simple stories were tremendously successful. The CHICAGO DEFENDER owed a lot to Hughes for these weekly columns. Hughes received a tremendous volume of mail from people who believed they knew simple, as indeed they did.

AMIRI BARAKA: You see, Langston's work was not simple. What he did was focus on the masses, the working class black, and draw a very profound kind of analysis out of that.

"A Toast to Harlem" (continued)

SIMPLE: They drug me over here from Africa, they slaved me, freed me, they lynched me, they starved me during the Depression, Jim Crowed me during the war -- then they come saying that are afraid of me!

LANGSTON HUGHES: There you go. That race-against-race jargon. There'll never be peace that way.

SIMPLE: You're talking about what ought to be. I'll take Harlem. At least if trouble comes, I'll have my own window to shoot from.

LANGSTON HUGHES: What Harlem should hold out to the world from its windows is a friendly hand, not a belligerent attitude.

SIMPLE: It will not be my attitude that I will be holding out my window.

. . . . . .

LANGSTON HUGHES: The reason I have those two characters, I'm trying to give a balance, a balance in thought and a balance in the way that people do things. Because there are many, many colored people, of course, who wouldn't think of going into the street and rioting, or wouldn't think of taking a gun and firing back at the Citizen's Council, as this minister did in the South.

They would instead join the NAACP and try to go to the polls to vote and try to become members of the Republican Party or Democratic Party. On the other hand there are many people who see only direct action, who can only react to a situation by doing something about it then and there.

JAMES BALDWIN: Reading Langston helped me to understand something about my father's rages and my mother's seeming passivity, and the people in the streets, the people in the church, the Deacons, the brothers and the sisters. When I read Langston, it was as though I were reading a book and looking up. And what was on the page was in a sense right in front of my eyes. But he helped me to see it.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

I looked at their black faces
And this is what I saw:
The wind imprisoned in the flesh,
The sun bound down by law.
I watched them moving, moving,
Like water down the street,
And this is what moved in my heart:
Their far-too-humble feet.

(ACTOR, "Negro Ghetto")

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: Although Hughes had withdrawn from leftist activities, he remained a target for the right wing. He had associated himself with so many leftist organizations, this led to his appearance in 1953 before Senator McCarthy's committee.

AMIRI BARAKA: Langston had to appear and actually confess his crimes. I mean, this was the price he had to pay. In other words, they let him know that if he wanted to continue to make it as a writer, if he wanted to read, if he wanted to make these appearances, then he not only had to appear, but this kind of line had to be put out there, about how America had changed, and when he was young and wild he had written these things, but now he had changed up and so forth and so on.

FAITH BERRY: McCarthy was very concerned about his own image. He wanted to project this committee, this outrageous committee, as doing some social good. And he did want Hughes to appear as a hostile witness. And he worked out an arrangement, a behind the scenes scenario with this legal counsel -- with the committee's legal counsel, Roy Cohn, that they would interrogate Hughes and his lawyer in private session. And that this would not become part of the public record. Hughes agreed to this on the condition that he would not be asked to name names.

JAMES BALDWIN: It was unfair, it was unjust to penalize him for doing what a poet or a person should be able to do. To look at something.

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: Hughes could not really do anything that would jeopardize his relationship with the black community. So he exchanged the right to criticize from a leftist point of view for the rights to continue being effective as a writer and a poet. After 1953, his career flourished. The work came, and he was able to do better and better financially.

FAITH BERRY: He was called the dean of negro writers, a reputation which he had very well earned. But I think he had earned it because of what he had done, and not what he was doing at the time.

JAMES BALDWIN: He no longer, in a sense, created the blues. He began to recite the blues, if you see what I mean. And the blues is a form which is always -- which is quicksilver. You know, it is not a quotation. If it becomes a quotation, then it becomes irrelevant.

FAITH BERRY: I think his legacy during the fifties and sixties was to encourage and to publish and to anthologize and to edit other writers. To translate them, which he had done earlier too, but he did more of that.

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: The major way in which he tried to help young black poets in the late fifties and the early sixties was in trying to awaken in them a sense of the importance of race, when they were saying race was not that important. Of course, within a few years the young black poets were making statements that he would find too extreme. And they would be seeing him as a reactionary when but three or four years before he was really to the left of them.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Good morning, daddy!
Ain't you heard
The boogie-woogie rumble
Of a dream deferred?

AMIRI BARAKA: When the sort of black arts movement began to rise, you know, along with the civil rights movement and the black liberation movement, Langston then began to take another fresh look, and began to write poems fully as important as some of the poems he wrote in the twenties and thirties.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

Listen closely:
You'll hear their feet
Beating out and beating out a--

You think
It's a happy beat?

Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
something underneath
like a--

What did I say?

Sure,
I'm happy!
Take it away!

Hey, pop!
Re-bop!
Mop!

Y-e-a-h!

(ACTOR, "Dream Boogie")

LANGSTON HUGHES: There is pressure on the younger negro writers to not write as negros but to write as Americans, and people will say to you, well, why do you write about Harlem, why don't you just write a story? Well, of course, I live in Harlem

and I write about Harlem because I live there and because I like it.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

When Susanna Jones wears red
Her face is like an ancient cameo
Turned brown by the ages.

Come with a blast of trumpets,
Jesus!

When Susanna Jones wears red
A queen from some time-dead Egyptian night
Walks once again.

Blow trumpets, Jesus!

And the beauty of Susanna Jones in red
Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like pain.

Sweet silver trumpets,
Jesus!

(ACTOR, "When Sue Wears Red")

ARNOLD RAMPERSAD: During the mid-sixties, Hughes continued his lifelong concern with things Afro-American and things African. Hughes was invited to take part in the Dakar festival. During the preparation it became clear that he was one of the Americans that the Africans were most interested in seeing.

LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR: We gave this prize to Langston Hughes owing to the influence that Langston exercised on the French-speaking Negritude movement on the one hand. It was also to point out that in this festival of black art there was not only Africa, but America too.

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.

(ACTRESS, "My People")

GEORGE BASS: From the crowds of those who adored him in Dakar, Langston Hughes came home to Harlem, home to his self-imposed isolation, an isolation which, throughout his career, had enabled him to write about the significance of his race.

JAMES BALDWIN: And I think, in a sense, the loneliness overtook him, which is, you know, it's everybody's -- it can overtake anyone of us at any hour. And I think it overtook him. And that is what makes you weary, and that's when you close your eyes.

AMIRI BARAKA: I think that Langston's greatest contribution to literature is that he was an author, you see, that he was principally a very skilled intellectual with a great deal of energy and optimism, but he was an unrelenting publicist for black arts and black people.

LANGSTON HUGHES:

I've been scarred and battered.
My hopes the wind done scattered.
Snow has friz me, sun has baked me.

Looks like between 'em
They done tried to make me
Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'--
But I don't care!
I'm still here!

(ACTOR, "[redacted]'Still Here")

E N D

transcript:sa