

selected poetry and prose read by the author Compiled from his original Folkways recordings and annotated by Faith Berry and Yusef Jones

Featured here is the voice of one of the twentieth century's great writers reading his poetry and prose. Like many of his works, these selections often combine the poetry of speech, the blues, and a myriad of other sounds.

These readings of twenty-one poems, songs, and stories were selected from his eight Folkways albums issued in the 1950s. These express Hughes's passion for justice and everyday people, his creative imagination, and his love of speech, music and sound.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers 0:43 2 I, Too 0:30

The Weary Blues 1:37 4 Homesick Blues 0:42

The Story of the Blues 1:55 6 Night and Morn 0:28

7 Breath of a Spiritual 0:16 8 Prayer 0:15

Prayer Meeting 0:17 10 Ma Lord 1:46

11 I'm Gonna Testify 2:33 (Words by Langston

Hughes, Music by Jobe Huntley) 12 Albert 0:13

13 Mother to Son 0:45 14 Dreams 0:54 15 Youth 0:19

16 The Struggle 3:21 17 Rhythms of the World 7:20

18 Simple—Intro. 2:31 19 Feet Live Their Own Life 5:44

20 Simple Prays a Prayer 1:42 21 As I Go 2:40 (Words

by Langston Hughes, Music by Jobe Huntley)



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# introduction

The Voice of Langston Hughes combines poetry, the Blues, Afro-American history, folklore, humor, jazz, and gospel music—subjects of Langston Hughes's enduring interest during his 46-year literary career. The selections represent an author who was the most versatile and prolific of his generation. His published works include a dozen volumes of poetry, two novels, three volumes of short stories, two autobiographies, five books of humorous sketches, half a dozen biographies and histories, numerous dramatic works, essays, newspaper columns, librettos, foreign-language translations, plus a substantial number of anthologies that he edited.

Over the years, Langston Hughes wrote some books especially for young people. Some of those publications complemented individual Folkways recordings, selections from which are featured here: The Dream Keeper and Other Poems (1955), The Story of Jazz (1954), The Rhythms of the World (1955), and The Glory of Negro History (1955, 1960). All ages can share Hughes's humor in the recorded excerpts from Simple Speaks His Mind (1954). Selections of his poetry can be found on other Folkways recordings: Anthology of Negro Poets (9791), An Anthology of Negro Poetry for Young People, compiled and read by Arna Bontemps (7114) and Anthology of Negro Poets in the U.S.A., 200 years (9792).



# the life and legacy of langston hughes (1902-1967)

Born in Joplin, Missouri on February 1, 1902, Langston Hughes came of age with the twentieth century. He would have an active role as one of its major authors, from his election as class poet at age fourteen until his death over fifty years later. Throughout his career, his prose and poetry portrayed the struggles, aspirations, and achievements of his people and gave voice to his hopes and dreams for social justice throughout the world. No other writer has so fully chronicled the history and culture of people of African descent in the United States or the diaspora. Often hailed as the "poet laureate of his race," he was also the poet who promoted better understanding between the races. The first Afro-American writer to live by his pen, he was likewise the first to achieve an international reputation. through his global travels, humanitarian efforts, and foreign editions.

Langston Hughes's first-hand experience with Jim Crow discrimination and economic hardship linked him to the downtrodden, whose plight he made a life-long crusade. From an early age he counted himself among

the less fortunate, as the offspring of parents who went their separate ways soon after his birth: his father, James Hughes, went to Mexico, where he fulfilled ambitions to acquire property, wealth, and to escape his race; meanwhile, his mother Carrie Hughes moved between Kansas and Colorado, changing towns for better pay as a stenographer, grammar school teacher, or a domestic servant, while aspiring to become an actress.

Most of Hughes's boyhood was spent in Lawrence Kansas, with his maternal grandmother, until her death a few months after his thirteenth birthday. With his itinerant mother he had already spent brief intervals in seven cities; as a teenager he would spend two summers in Mexico with his father. His nomadic formative years shaped the poet who attended grade school in Topeka and Lawrence, Kansas, grammar school in Lincoln, Illinois, high school in Cleveland, Ohio, and college at Columbia University, which he left after a year to travel as a merchant seaman in Africa and Europe. He resumed his studies at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, graduating in 1929.

Langston Hughes's social consciousness and race pride emanated from the maternal side of his family, with its African, Indian, and

Hughes's two autobiographical books, *The Big Sea* (1940) and *I Wonder As I Wander* (1956), present highlights of the people and the world which influenced his life and career: from his family to the poetry of Carl Sandburg, the short stories of D.H. Lawrence; life in Mexico, seafaring in West Africa, working in a Paris nightclub; beachcombing in Italy; becoming a poet during the Harlem Renaissance; traveling to Cuba and Haiti; reading his poetry coast-to-coast in the United States; discovering the

Soviet Union, pre-revolutionary China, and pre-World War II Japan; residing in California; having his first play on Broadway: being a foreign correspondent during the Spanish Civil War: and organizing a theater company in Harlem. His two autobiographies tell only part of his eclectic life story. He once confided to his friend and fellow author Arna Bontemps that, like a cat with nine lives, he would have nine autobiographical volumes. He was ultimately too occupied with writing a weekly newspaper column, as well as plays, scripts for radio and TV, dramatic musicals, operas, cantatas, plus editing anthologies, making public appearances, and mentoring young writers to write additional autobiographies.

So diverse was Langston Hughes's literary canon that some dimensions of it have been obscured—usually by those who prefer to affix a label to Hughes and to exclude works which do not fit the label. His versatility was one of his greatest assets. Although he occasionally dashed off doggerel, he had the skill, talent and knowledge to write in any poetic form: narrative poetry, lyric poetry, sonnets, ballads, dramatic monologues, and free verse. The tone of voice in his verse ranged from irony, comedy, pathos, and despair to anger. Yet, in whatever

tone, all his writing was marked by deliberate simplicity. He did not target it to academic critics, and he steadfastly refused to be identified as an "intellectual." He once said that he preferred his audience be the simple folk he wrote about. He both honored and utilized them by incorporating their vernacular speech in his works. His poetry, with few exceptions, showed no influence from modernist literary American and European poets who were in vogue when he began publishing in the 1920s.

Some of Hughes's readers identify him with his early folk poems of the twenties decade such as "Mother to Son." often called "the crystal stair" poem (track 14). Others associate him with his more militant verses of the 1930s such as "Let America Be America Again" and "Ballad of the Landlord," Theater goers remember his libretto contributions to Broadway, such as the 1947 operatic musical Street Scene and Tambourines to Glory (1963. tracks 2 and 21). Many know him through his 1955 collaboration with photographer Roy de Carava's Sweet Flypaper of Life. Other readers prefer the humor and folk spirit of the wellknown "Simple" prose sketches, which he wrote for over two decades (tracks 18-20).

Langston Hughes's wide-ranging canon con-

tinues to appeal to different readers for different reasons. While his major reputation is for his writings about Afro-American life, and for his brilliant incorporation of jazz rhythms and blues idiom in his poetry, much of his work intentionally transcended race and embraced universal themes, as in *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774) excerpted in tracks 1, 4–6, 8–16.

In the 1940s, after many years of travel, Langston Hughes made Harlem his home and its residents a primary subject of his pen, the most notable of which was the popular folk character Jesse B. Semple ("Simple"), who is also included here (tracks 18–20)

At his death in a Manhattan hospital on May 22, 1967, Hughes was sixty-five, a cultural icon of Harlem, and a noted literary ambassador. He had been a recipient of numerous awards and honors, including Guggenheim and Rosenwald Fellowships and election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Prolific to the end, he died with several manuscripts unfinished. Yet few authors ever left so complete a legacy. In the words of Arthur P. Davis, a critic and friend of Hughes, "he was an American classic and he will outlast this century."—Faith Berry

## Biography of Langston Hughes:

Berry, Faith, Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem. Westport, CT: L. Hill, 1983. Reprinted by Citadel Press, 1992.

#### Bibliography of Langston Hughes's works:

Dickinson, Donald C. A Bio-Bibliography of Langston Hughes, 1902-1967. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967, 1972.

Mikolyzk, Thomas A. Langston Hughes, A Bio-Bibliography. New York: Greenwood Press. 1990.

Miller, Baxter R. Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks: A Reference Guide. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1978.

#### Recordings On Folkways:

The following recordings are all available on high quality audio cassettes with the complete original liner notes. Telephone and written orders accepted at 301/334-2314 (phone), 301/332-1819 (fax), and in writing to Folkways Mail Order, 414 Hungerford Drive Suite 444, Rockville MD 20850.

The Dream Keeper and Other Poems of Langston Hughes. Read by the author (1955). Folkways 7774

The Glory of Negro History. Written and narrated by Langston Hughes, with actual voices of Ralph Bunche and Mary McLeod Bethune. Female voices: Hilda Haynes. Male voices: Clayton Corbin. Singers: Leon Bibb, Clark Morgan, Hilda Havnes and the George McClain Chorale (1955, 1960), Folkways 7752

Langston Hughes's Jerico-Jim Crow. Directed by Alvin Ailey and William Hairston. 2 cassette set. (1964). Folkways 9671

Tambourines to Glory. Gospel Songs by Langston Hughes and Jobe Huntley & the Porter Singers (1958). Folkways 3538

Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes Read From Their Works (1952). Folkways 9790

The Story of Jazz. Narrated by Langston Hughes (1954), Folkways 7312

Anthology of Negro Poets. Edited by Arna Bontemps. Readings by: Langston Hughes, Sterling A. Brown, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Margaret Walker, Folkways 9791.

#### Langston Hughes Read by Others

Anthology of Negro Poets for Young People. Compiled and Read by Arna Bontemps. Poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Beatrice M. Murphy, Waring Cuney, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, Claude McKay, Wesley Curtright, Frank Horne, Josephine Copeland, Helene Johnson, Fenton Johnson, Sterling A. Brown, Georgia Douglas Johnson. Folkways 7114

The Best of Simple. Read by Melvin Stewart. Folkways 9789

Margaret Walker Reads Langston Hughes and Margaret Walker (1975), Folkways 9797

#### Other Recordings:

Seigmeister, Elie. Ways of Love: Langston Hughes Songs. Composers Recordings CRI SD 532. (1966).

Weary Blues. Hughes reads 33 of his poems to music composed, arranged, and conducted by Charles Mingus and Leonard Feather. Verve, recorded 1958, reissued 1990.

# about the poems

#### 1. The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1921)

"Many of my poems have been about the history of the Negro people. In this poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," I try to link, in terms of the rivers we have known. Africa-the land of our ancestors-and America, our land today:"

I have known rivers. I have 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.

This poem appeared in The Dream Keeper and Other Poems of Langston Hughes, Read by the Author (Folkways 7774, side 1, band 4), which the poet recorded for Folkways Records in 1955. The recording included selections from his 1932 book of poetry, also entitled The Dream Keeper. The book contained sixty poems. twenty-nine of which he chose to read for the recording.

The Dream Keeper poetry volume originated in 1931, and was prepared especially for young readers at the invitation of a Cleveland librarian, Effie Lee Power, who had known Hughes when he attended Cleveland's Central High School. Hughes made a selection of his previously published poems. Miss Power wrote the introduction, and the collection was published by Alfred A. Knopf to a favorable critical reception.

The Folkways recording. The Dream Keeper and Other Poems, features verse on some of Hughes's favorite themes and subjects: dreams, the sea, ships, and foreign seaports, musicincluding jazz, blues and the spirituals—and a love for people, young and old, of all ethnic backgrounds. He introduces each poem with a brief personal anecdote or description.

#### 2. I. Too (1925)

"For a whole race of people freed from slavery with nothing—without money, without work, without education-it has not always been easy to hold fast to dreams. But the Negro people believed in the American dream, Now, since almost a hundred years of freedom, we've come a long ways. But there is still a way for the Negro-and democracy-to go. This is a poem called, I, Too:"

I. too, sing America. I am the darker brother They send me to eat in the kitchen When company comes.

But I laugh. - And eat well.

And grow strong.

Tomorrow.

I'll be at the table

When company comes.

Nobody'll dare

Say to me,

"Eat in the kitchen," Then.

Besides,

They'll see how beautiful we are

And be ashamed-

I, too, am America.

From The Dream Keeper and Other Poems (Folkways 7774 side 1, band 6) For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1. above.

#### 3. The Weary Blues (1925)

"The first poem of mine to receive an award was "The Weary Blues" granted the First Prize in a literary contest conducted by Opportunity magazine in New York City. It is a poem about a working man in Harlem coming home very late at night, very tired, and sitting down at a battered old piano, playing the blues:"

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune. Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon.

I heard a Negro play. Down on Lenox Avenue the other night By the pale dull paller of an old

gas light

He did a lazy sway...

He did a lazy sway...

To the tune o' those Weary Blues. With his ebony hands on each ivory key He made that poor piano moan with melody. O Blues!

Swaving to and fro on his rickety stool He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

0

Coming from a Black man's soul.

O Blues!
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—
"Ain't got nobody but

ma self.
I's gwine to quit my
frownin<sup>fb</sup>

And put ma troubles on

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.

He played a few chords then he sang some more—

"I got de Weary Blues And I can't be satisfied— I got de Weary Blues And I can't be satisfied— I ain't happy no mo! And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed.

that's dead.

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head He slept like a rock or man From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774 side 2, band 2) For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1, above.

#### 4. Homesick Blues (1926)

The railroad bridge is A sad song in the air. The railroad bridge is A sad song in the air. Ever time the trains pass I wants to go somewhere.

I went down to the station.
My heart was in my mouth.
Went down to the station.
Heart was in my mouth.
Lookin' for a box car
To roll me to the South.

Homesick blues, Lawd,
'S terrible thing to have.
Homesick blues, is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin'
I opens mouth and laughs.

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774 side 2, band 2). For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1, above.

#### 5. The Story of the Blues (1954)

Excerpt from *The Story of Jazz*. Hughes recorded *The Story of Jazz* in 1954 to complement his *The First Book of Jazz* (1955, to be reprinted in 1995 by The Ecco Press), a pictorial and historical introduction especially for children, but with appeal for adults. The book was popular in the United States and abroad, with editions published in Arabic, French, German, Japanese, and a Croatian dialect in Yugoslavia. The recording was directed at young audiences, and features examples from the various periods.

In the recording The Story of Jazz, Hughes

explains the origins and characteristics of "America's Music Made in the U.S.A." and the contributions to it of black American musicians—from the early beginnings to the mid-1950s. He knew the story was a continuing one; had he lived longer he might have written a sequel. His interest in jazz, however, did not end with publications or recordings; it extended to his last will and testament, with a request for a jazz combo at his funeral. The wish was granted by the Randy Weston trio, in a memorial concert of blues and jazz, with Hughes in repose in his coffin, at the Benta Funeral Home in Harlem.

"Jazzaholic" is the best word to describe
Hughes's relationship to jazz. In the Soviet
Union, where he spent a year from 19321933, he carried around a Victrola record player and jazz records (despite raised eyebrows
from those Russians who considered jazz
"decadent" music). Nearly a decade earlier, he
had listened eagerly to after-hours jam sessions
of jazz music at the Montmartre night club
where he worked as a dishwasher.

In the late 1920s, after publication of his first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues* (1926)—he began reading his jazz-oriented poems publicly to jazz accompaniment—a pattern he introduced long before American "beatnik poets" adopted it. Until the late 1940s, jazz poems appeared like distant drum beats in the background of his poetry collections, but they increased and reached a resounding note by 1961, when, after more than a dozen drafts, he published *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz.* He dedicated it "To Louis Armstrong, the greatest horn blower of them all."

The trumpeter Louis Armstrong, featured in The Story of Jazz, was a favorite of Hughes, who had seen him perform many times, including at the first Newport Jazz Festival in July 1956. Hughes spoke there on "Jazz as Communication" at a seminar and later published his remarks in *The Chicago Defender* and *The* Langston Hughes Reader.

#### 6. Night and Morn (1932)

"One of the most famous of American popular songs is "The St. Louis Blues" which begins, 'I hate to see de evenin' sun go down.' Here is a little Blues of mine that I call 'Night and Morn:"

Sun's a settin'.

Sun's a settin',
This is what I'm gonna sing:
I feel the blues a-comin',
Wonder what the blues'II bring?
Sun's a-risin',
This is gonna be my song.
Sun's a-risin',
This is gonna be my song.
I could be blue—
But I been blue all night long.

This is what I'm gonna sing.

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774 side 2, band 2) For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1, above.

#### 7. Breath of a Spiritual (Feet O' Jesus, 1926)

"In the style of the Spirituals—those beautiful old religious songs of the Negro people—I have written many poems, too. One of mine that Marian Anderson has used on her concert programs is so short it might almost be called the Breath of a Spiritual:"

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

At de feet o' Jesus, At yo' feet I stand. O, my precious Jesus, Please reach out yo' hand.

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774 side 2, band 2) For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 18.

# 8. Prayer (1925)

"Another poem of mine in the same mood, although not in the style of a Spiritual, is this one called, 'Prayer:'"

I ask you this:
Which way to go?
I ask you this:
Which sin to bear?
Which crown to put
Upon my hair?

I do not know, Lord. God.

I do not know

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774 side 2, band 3) For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1.

# 9. Prayer Meeting (1923)

"And here is a very short little poem called, 
'Prayer Meeting:"

Glory! Hallelujah!

De dawn's a-comin'!

Glory! Hallelujah!

De dawn's a-comin'!

A black old woman croons

In the amen-corner of the

Ebecaneezer Baptist Church.

A poor old woman croons
De dawn's a-comin'!

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774 side 2, band 3). For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1, above.

#### 10. Ma Lord (1927)

"In the church when I was a child, there was an old woman, like the one in this poem, who was very poor. But she was always neat and clean, although her clothes were quaint and old-fashioned. She wore a satin shirt-waist with a high

front in the amen corner. Sometimes some of the young people might be inclined to giggle a little bit at this funny old lady. One Sunday morning she heard them and stopped in the aisle of the church, and turned around and said, "That's all right. You-all can laugh if you want to. You can be stuck-up if you want to —but my Lord ain't stuck up." With that the old lady went on to her seat. Years later I remembered what this old lady had said. It came out like this in a poem I called, 'Ma Lord:"

Ma Lord ain't no stuck-up man.

collar, and her wide skirts came marching down

the aisle on Sunday morning. She always sat in

Ma Lord, he ain't proud. When He goes a-walkin' He gives me his hand. "You ma friend," He 'lowed.

Ma Lord knowed what it was to work.

He knowed how to pray.

Ma Lord's life was trouble, too,

Trouble every day.

Ma Lord ain't no stuck-up man.
He's a friend o'mine.
When He went to heaben,
His soul on fire,
He tole me I was gwine.
He said, "Sho you'll come wid Me
An' be ma friend through eternity."

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774, side 2, band 3). For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1.

#### 11. I'm Gonna Testify

Words by Langston Hughes; music by Jobe Huntley.

Performed by The Porter Singers. Hugh E. Porter, piano and leader; Hampton Carlton, organ; Yvonne Cumberbatch, guitar; Benjamin Snowdon, tambourine; Carl McWilliams, saxophone; Ernest Cook, Audrey Ryan, Ellen Courts, and Florence Strachen, vocals.



Chorus:

I'm gonna testify!
I'm gonna testify!
I'm gonna testify
Till the day I die.
I'm gonna tell the truth
For the truth don't lie.
I'm gonna testify!

Sin has walked this world with me. Thank God a-mighty, from sin I'm free! Evil laid a Cross my way. Thank God a-mighty, it's a brand new day!

Chorus:
I did not know the strength I'd find .
Thank God a-mighty, I'm a gospel lion.
Things I've seen I cannot keep.
Thank God a-mighty, God don't sleep!

This song was originally issued on *Tambourine's to Glory* (Folkways 3538) in 1958. After Professor Faith Berry had prepared the initial sequence for this recording, she and Yusef Jones decided to add two musical selections from Langston Hughes's and Jobe Huntley's gospel play, *Tambourines to Glory*. The two songs "I'm Gonna Testify" and "As I Go" were written by Langston Hughes and gospel composer Jobe Huntley and recorded at the Second Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem, New York. The 1958 Folkways recording was used by the

authors to find backers for the successful Broadway appearance of the play in 1963.

Based on the gospel play *Tambourines To Glory*, adapted from Langston Hughes's second novel, published in 1958. "Testify" and "As I Go" by Hughes and Huntley add to the depth and richness of this CD, and are part of a testament to the Langston Hughes recording legacy with Folkways Records that spanned nearly twenty years.

#### 12. Albert (1927)

"I like to write poems about people. This is one about a mother calling her baby":

Albert!
Hey, Albert!
Don't you play in dat road.
You see dem trucks

A-goin'by.
One run ovah you
An' you die.

Albert, don't you play in dat road.

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774, side 2, band 4). For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1.

#### 13. Mother to Son (1922)

"And here is a poem picturing an old woman talking to her son who is discouraged. She says:"

y" and "As I

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Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it, and splinters,
and boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on, and reachin'
landin's, and turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark

Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it kinder hard.
Don't you fall now For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no
crystal stair.

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774, side 2, band 4). For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track

#### 14. Dreams (1932)

"What she's really telling her son [in "Mother to Son"] is:"

Hold fast to dreams—
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot My.

Hold fast to dreams For if dreams go Life is a barren field Frozen with snow.

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774) side A number 2 "Dreams" (1932). For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1.

#### 15. Youth (1924)

"And that is just what the poems are about in my book, *The Dream Keeper*. Its final poem is this one, called 'Youth.' It's dedicated to all the girls and boys, young men and young women today:

We have tomorrow Bright before us Like flame.

Yesterday A night-gone thing, A sun-down name.

And dawn-today

Broad arch above
The road we came.

We march, Americans together!

We march!

From *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Folkways 7774) side 1, band 2 "Dreams" (1932). For a discussion of the recording, see the notes to track 1.

## 16. The Struggle (1955)

"It is glorious—this history of ours! It is a great story—that of the Negro in America! It begins way before America was American, or the U.S.A. the U.S.A. It covers a wide span, our story. Let me tell it to you..." So begins Langston Hughes' dramatic presentation on The Glory of Negro History (Folkways 7752). Hughes was instrumental in representing the history of the United States in a way that demonstrated the often ignored contribution of Africans and African Americans to the nation. The recording is dedicated to Carter G. Woodson, who established the Society for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915. Hughes worked briefly as a personal assistant to Dr. Woodson in Washington in 1925. This short selection is taken from the first minutes of the longer recording, and describes

the presence of African Americans with the Spanish explorers. Side 1, "The Struggle" begins with the explorers and ends with a section on Abraham Lincoln. Side 2 is simply called "The Glory" and presents subsequent speeches by Booker T. Washington, the development of blues and jazz, and the increasing tyranny of segregation, using speech of Ralph Bunche and Mary McLeod Bethune, as well as music from a variety of genres.

## 17. Rhythms of the World (1955)

From the Folkways recording *The Rhythms of the World, Created and Narrated by Langston Hughes, using documentary recordings.* (Folkways 7340, side 1. This recording was based on Langston Hughes's *The First Book of Rhythms* (Franklin Watts, Inc.) and is probably the most ambitious illustrated discussion of sounds on record. Hughes presents over 60 sound illustrations that begin with the human heart, and move through a variety of sounds, songs, rhythms, music and poetry to illustrate the rhythms of everyday life and music.

All animal sounds from Folkways recordings; children's game songs from Folkways 7004; "Brought Me a Cat" sung by Pete Seeger, from Smithsonian/Folkways 45020; Haitian chant

from Folkways 4403; Yoruba dance music from Folkways 4441, Coconut shells and voices from Folkways 4504; tuned percussion from 4504; "Tom Tom Workout" from Folkways 2290.

### 18. Introduction of Simple

From "Simple Speaks His Mind" on Folkways recording Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes (Folkways 9790, side 2, band 1). Tracks 18-20 were originally recorded on a single side of this Long Playing recording, "Langston Hughes Reads from His Book, Simple Speaks His Mind." This track explains how he came to invent the character.

Langston Hughes first introduced his fictional urban folk hero Jesse B. Semple on February 13, 1943, in a newspaper column he wrote for *The Chicago Defender*, the nation's largest Black circulation weekly. His dialogues in a Harlem bar with the character he nicknamed "Simple" added up to more than two-hundred pieces by 1949 when he began editing them for his book, *Simple Speaks His Mind*.

The Folkways recording includes four sketches from the book—read by Hughes—as well as an explanation of who "Simple" was. In 1961 Hughes collected these four sketches plus others into *The Best of Simple*, and added pieces

from Simple Takes a Wife (1953) and Simple Stakes a Claim (1957).

Simple lasted almost twenty-three years, in a total of six books, several thousand newspaper columns, several articles in literary journals, and for awhile on stage. From Simple Takes a Wife Hughes created the musical play, Simply Heavenly, which appeared on and off Broadway in 1957, on the London stage for a short run a year later, and once on American television in 1959. That year it also became a book, with lyrics by Hughes and a musical score by his collaborator, David Martin. It was later collected in Five Plays by Langston Hughes, edited by Webster Smalley.

In 1965, Hughes published his last Simple collection, Simple's Uncle Sam, and bid farewell to his "simple-minded friend" that December in The New York Post, The Chicago Defender, and other newspapers of the Associated Negro Press. By then, Simple had been amusing the public since the bleak days of World War II but had begun to upset militant black readers during the strife of the civil rights movement.

For over two decades, Simple was for many people a source of wit and wisdom; cranky, unlettered, but full of common sense, he was ¿

one of the most popular folk figures, Black or white, ever created in American literature.

#### 19. Feet Live Their Own Life

From "Simple Speaks His Mind" on Folkways recording *Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes* (Folkways 9790, side 2, band 2). See notes to track 18.

#### 20. Simple Prays a Prayer

From "Simple Speaks His Mind" on Folkways recording Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes (Folkways 9790, side 2, band 4). See notes to track 18.

#### 21. As I Go

The Porter Singers with Reverend Ernest Cook. Hugh E. Porter, piano and leader; Hampton Carlton, organ; Yvonne Cumberbatch, guitar; Benjamin Snowdon, tambourine; Carl McWilliams, saxophone; Ernest Cook, Audrey Ryan, Ellen Courts, and Florence Strachen, vocals. Ernest Cook, vocal soloist.

I need some rock on which to stand, Some ground that is not shifting sand, And so I seek my Savior's hand To guide me as I go through this world: Chorus As I go, as I go,
Oh, Jesus, walk by my side
As I go.
As I go, as I go,
Be my guide as I go
Through this world.

This was originally issued on *Tambourines to Glory* (Folkways 3538) in 1958. For a description of this recording, see notes to track 11.

#### Credits

Production compiled and annotated by Dr.
Faith Berry and Yusef Jones
Production Supervision by Anthony Seeger and
Matt Walters

Originally recorded by Moses Asch

Cover Photograph of Langston Hughes from Folkways files, photographer unknown, date unknown.

Rear card photograph, Langston Hughes standing in his office with a typewriter (SC-CN-79-0100) from the Photographs and Prints Division, Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

by Frederic Ramsey, Jr., from the Folkways files Design by Visual Dialogue Mastered by David Glasser, at Airshow, Springfield, Virginia

Photograph of Langston Hughes with children

Archival assistance by Jeff Place and Harris Wray

# About the Compilers:

Faith Berry, compiler with Yusef Jones of the recordings, and principal author, has written and lectured widely on Langston Hughes. Her works on the author include books—Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem, A Biography (1983, reprinted 1992), and Good Morning Revolution: Uncollected Writings of Social Protest by Langston Hughes (1973, reprinted in 1992). She is a founder of the Langston Hughes Society and an advisory editor of its official literary journal, The Langston Hughes Review. A professor of the humanities, she holds a B.A. in history, a M.A. in comparative literature, and a Ph.D. in American literature.

Yusef Jones worked as production assistant at Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings in 1993–4, and took on wide reponsibilities for assembling the various parts of this recording.

Sterling A. Brown was another important African American poet of the twentieth century. Smithsonian/Folkways has just released *The Poetry of Sterling Brown Read by the Author: The Complete Folkways Recordings* 1946–1973 (Smithsonian/ Folkways Recordings SF 47002) on CD and cassette. Ask for this in your local record store, or order from Folkways Mail Order. Telephone and written orders accepted at 301/334-2314 (phone), 301/332-1819 (fax), and in writing to Folkways Mail Order, 414 Hungerford Drive Suite 444, Rockville MD 20850

# African American Spoken Word on Folkways

This recording is just a glimpse of the cultural treasures found on the other Folkways recordings of African American literature listed below. All are available on high quality audio cassettes with the complete original album notes. Telephone and written orders accepted at 301/334-2314 (phone), 301/332-1819 (fax), and in writing to Folkways Mail Order, 414 Hungerford Drive Suite 444, Rockville MD 20850.

# Folkways Recordings by Principal Artists

Abdurahman, Bilal Echoes of Timbuktu and Beyond in Congo Square, U.S.A. (1979) 7755

Brannon, Jean

Blacks in the American Revolutionary War
(1974)

Broonzy, Big Bill Interviewed by Studs Terkel (1957) 9794

Brown, Sterling
Sixteen Poems of Sterling Brown Read by
the Poet (1973) 9794

Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes Read from Their Works (1952) 9790

Carr, James

View from the End of the World, Live Interviews of Life in Prison with James Carr
(1975) 5404

Davis, Angela

Angela Davis Speaks (1971) 5401

#### Davis, Ossie

The Autobiography of Frederick Douglas, Vol 1 (1966) 5522 & Vol 2 (1966) 5526 Douglass' The Meaning of July 4 for the Negro (1975) 5527

Frederick Douglass' Speeches incl. The Dread Scott Decision (1977) 5528

# What If I Am A Woman? Black Women's

Dee, Ruby

Speeches (1977) Vol 1 5537 & Vol 2 5538 Dubois, W.E.B.

Socialism and the American Negro (1960) 5514

W.E.B. Dubois: A Recorded Autobiography, Interview with Moses Asch (1961) 5511

Dupree, Nancy Reality (1969) 7520

Letter to Young Sisters and Other Poems (1979) 9748

Sweet Thunder: My People Is Poems (1977) 9787

Fabio, Sarah Webster

Boss Soul: 12 Poems (1972) 9710 Jujus/Alchemy of the Blues (1976) 9714 Soul Ain't Soul Is: Poems (1973) 9711

Together to the Tune of Coltrane's "Equinox" (1977)9715

Giovanni, Nikki

Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day (1978) 9756 Legacies (1976) 9798

The Reason I Like Chocolate & Other Chil dren's Poems (1976) 7775

Goss, Linda Afro-American Tales and Games (1980) 77865

Johnson, James Weldon God's Trombones Read by Bryce Bond, Music by William Martin (1965) 9788

It's Storytelling Time 77861

Sanchez, Sonia A Sun Lady for All Seasone Reads Her Poetry (1971) 9793

Washington, Booker T. "Child Portia" (1977) 5521

Washington, Dorothy The Negro Woman (1966) 5523

#### Folkways Spoken Word Collections

Anthology of Negro Poets—Readings by Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, others (1954) 9791

Anthology of Negro Poets in the USA. Read by Arna Bontemps (1955) 9792

Black American History in Ballad, Song & Prose (3 Cassette Set) (1977) 5804

Black Drama with Barbara Ann Teer & Charlie Russell (1973) 9712

Feelings of Love Not Yet Expressed: An Album of Poetry by the Neo Black Women in Poetry (1976) 9799

Freedom Songs: Selma, Alabama (1965) 5594

From the Cold Jaws of Prison-Inmates & Ex-Inmates from Attica, Rikers and the Tombs (1971) 5403

Head Start with the Child Development Group of Mississippi (2 Cassette Set) (1967) 2690

Huey! Listen Whitey!-Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton, others (1972) 5402

Lest We Forget-Vol 2 Birmingham, Alabama 1963: Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, others (1980) 5487

Margaret Walker Reads Langston Hughes, P.L. Dunbar & J.W. Johnson (1975) 9796

The Sit-In Story: The Story of the Lunch Room Sit-Ins—Martin Luther King, others (1961) 5502

The Story of Greenwood, Mississippi—Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers, Dick Gregory, others (1965) 5593

Street and Gangland Rhythms (1959) 5589

WNEW'S Story of Selma-Pete Seeger, Les Chandler, others (1961) 5595

We Shall Overcome: Songs of the Freedom Riders & the Sit-Ins - Guy Carawan, Montgomery Gospel Trio, others (1961) 5591

## Smithsonian/Folkways African American Spoken Word Recordings

An Anthology of African-American Poetry for Young People—Poems by Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, others (1955) 45044

Sing for Freedom—The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through it's Songs (1980) S/F 40032

Lest We Forget, Vol 1: Movement Soul, Sounds of the Freedom Movement in the South, 1963-64 (1980) Selections available on S/F 40032

Lest We Forget, Vol 3: Sing For Freedom—The Freedom Singers, Georgia Sea Island Singers, others (1980) Selections available on S/F 40032

The Nashville Sit-In Story (1960) Selections available on S/F 40032

## About Smithsonian/Folkways

Folkways Records was founded by Moses Asch and Marian Distler in 1947 to document music; spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In the ensuing decades, New York City-based Folkways became one of the largest independent record labels in the world, reaching a total of nearly 2.200 albums that were always kept in print.

The Smithsonian Institution acquired Folk-

ways from the Asch estate in 1987 to ensure

that the sounds and genius of the artists would

be preserved for future generations. All Folk-ways recordings are now available on high-quality audio cassettes, each packed in a special box along with the original LP liner notes.

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings was formed to continue the Folkways tradition of releasing significant recordings with high-quality documentation. It produces new titles, reissues of historic recordings from Folkways and other record labels, and in collaboration with other companies also produces instructional videotapes, recordings to accompany pub-

lished books, and a variety of other education-

al projects.

The Smithsonian/Folkways, Folkways, Cook, and Paredon record labels are administered by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies. They are one of the means through which the Center supports the work of traditional artists and expresses its commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding.

and increased understanding.
You can find Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings at your local record store. Smithsonian/Folkways, Folkways, Cook, and Paredon recordings are all available through:
Smithsonian/Folkways Mail Order
414 Hungerford Drive, Suite 444
Rockville, MD 20850

phone (301) 443-2314 fax (301) 443-1819 (Visa and MasterCard accepted) For a free catalogue, write:

The Whole Folkways Catalogue

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings 955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600 Smithsonian Institution Washington, DC 20560 phone (202) 287-3262 fax (202) 287-3699

