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Abstract:	Harlem was the right place for the author Langston Hughes during the trying years of World War II. Thoroughly committed to the war effort and to defeating fascism, Hughes, like other important American writers, did not hesitate to lend his talents to programs meant to produce unity and raise necessary funds. Jesse, a fictional character, became Hughes's primary means of sharing hard-hitting common sense with a broad African American reading public. Like few other American writers, Hughes had truly become an international citizen and sympathetic speaker for working people everywhere.
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THE RETURN HOME

Harlem was the right place for Langston Hughes during the trying years of World War II. It provided him with a safe and secure home base from which to continue his participation in the war effort. Perhaps even more important, Harlem provided him with a close circle of friends who were able to assist him with the care of his mother, who now resided in New York. Thoroughly committed to the war effort and to defeating fascism, Hughes, like other important American writers, did not hesitate to lend his talents to programs meant to produce unity and raise necessary funds.

In the mid-1940s, Hughes had become very popular, even if critics sometimes expressed concern that his art had not fully developed. Some readers wondered why he remained committed to simple forms that explored and documented everyday experience. His book Shakespeare in Harlem was celebrated by some as a great breakthrough, while others vigorously derided it as repetitive of his 1920s work. Not only was Hughes still committed to the basic idea that common people could hold and share great ideas, but he was just about to shape his greatest creation.

On February 13, 1943, Hughes first introduced his most enduring character and voice, Jesse B. Semple, in a regular column he wrote for The Chicago Defender (see pages 2-5). Jesse, a fictional character, became Hughes's primary means of sharing hard-hitting common sense with a broad African American reading public. He appeared in Hughes's columns for more than 23 years and described and interpreted community feelings about racism, poverty, violence, and war.

As the 1940s came to a close, Hughes began to accumulate the honors that came with a long and successful writing career. He earned visiting professorships at prestigious

universities and was often awarded honorary doctoral degrees. But great struggles awaited Hughes in the 1950s. Because of his associations with the Communist Party and other political organizations, Hughes was subject to great scrutiny from the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee and from Senator Joseph McCarthy. This committee was dedicated to rooting out communist influence in American life. Committee members often resorted to unethical high-pressure tactics to get individuals to confess past associations and, more disturbing, to identify others who participated in such groups.

In 1953, the committee called Hughes to testify about "subversive" writers in American libraries overseas. His appearance led to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) adding his name to its security index. As a result, Hughes made fewer public appearances. When putting together a collection of his poems later in the 1950s, he made a decision to leave out some of his most powerful political poems. Yet, even if he appeared less often in public as a lecturer and speaker, this did not keep him from finding new audiences and telling them about the richness of African American history and culture. He wrote more books for children, general popular histories of African Americans, poetry, plays, and another autobiography, I Wonder as I Wander. In total, he published almost 20 books during that stressful decade.

In the 1960s, he published his final book, Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, which effectively combined his interests in African American folk wisdom and the poetic possibilities of jazz. As times changed, restrictions on his travel were eased, and the U.S. State Department came to rely upon him to represent American writers abroad.

Unlike some people of the 1960s protest era who focused on discarding the moderate strategies of the past, Hughes managed to remain a much-respected elder figure. One of the most important plays of that decade, Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, took its title from Hughes's poem "Harlem." He visited Africa once again and was honored at the first Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. He was also elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In general, he was celebrated for his dedication to the beauty of the whole of African American life and culture and for his belief that the language of the common folk could express the greatest of ideas.

Langston Hughes died in New York City on May 22, 1967. His death was mourned around the world. Like few other American writers, Hughes had truly become an international citizen and sympathetic speaker for working people everywhere.

Fascism is a system of government characterized by rigid one-party dictatorship, forcible suppression of opposition, hostile nationalism, and militarism.

Subversive refers to secretly undermining or attempting to overthrow a government or political system from within.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Opposite: Henry "Red" Allen and his band play jazz at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., around 1940 as an accompaniment to Langston Hughes's poetry.

PHOTO (COLOR): Top: Providence Black Rep Company member Sylvia Ann Soares performs Hughes's poem "Madam and the Minister." Bottom: Providence Black Rep Company members perform Hughes's poem "Flatted Fifths."

PHOTO (COLOR): Providence Black Rep Company member Ghislaine Jean performs Hughes's poem "Numbers."

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By James C. Hall

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