

Syllabus: International Studies / English 384
Macalester College, Spring 2011

Langston Hughes: Global Writer

Instructor: David Chioni Moore
Class: T-Th 8:00 – 9:30 a.m., Carnegie 404
Office hours: vary; posted weekly on a sign-up sheet outside my office door, Carnegie 410
Contact: mooredc@macalester.edu

Introduction: The great African American writer Langston Hughes (1902-1967) is widely remembered as the “poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance.” Though richly true, this title masks Hughes’ remarkably wide-ranging and internationalist career. He published in every imaginable genre – children’s story, humor, novel, memoir, drama, song lyric, history, and more – and collaborated with writers from Latin America, Soviet Central Asia, Africa and the Francophone Caribbean. He was also the first black writer of any nation to make his living exclusively from writing. This course ranges chronologically and widely through Hughes’s career, attending to multiple dynamics. Assignments may include research on little-known or archival texts, making use of materials not available to the general public.

Recommended Preparation: Students should come to the course with good background in one or more of a.) literary studies (especially but not only poetry), b.) American race studies, and c.) international or global studies. Nobody is expected to have all three – but the class as a whole will embody all of these preparations.

Course Conduct: The class will be run as a joint exploration, rather than a dispensation of information. Classes will feature close reading and discussion of texts and research.

Assignments/Evaluation:

a. preliminary paper	ungraded, but an absolute requirement
b. <i>your</i> poem in a style or spirit of Hughes (minimum grade A-)	3%
c. brief oral recitation of poetry by Hughes	5%
d. presentation of a book by Hughes not on the syllabus	5%
e. first paper (5-6 pages)	15%
f. second paper (5-6 pages)	15%
g. active and insightful class participation	24%
h. longer (12-15 page) final research paper	33%

Notes: Timely class attendance is integral to the course and its grade. Inform me in advance of conflict with any religious holidays or any relevant disabilities; we’ll arrange acceptable alternatives and/or accommodations, and your grades will be unaffected.

Paper format: See my full roster of paper format requirements and writing advice, found in a PDF file on my homepage, which is linked off the I.S. faculty page. You are responsible for all format requirements. (They include, but are not limited to, double-spacing, numbered pages, 1” margins all around, 12-point font, un-numbered title page with a good title, generous acknowledgements of all helpers and works used at the paper’s end.) Physical papers are due under my office door by the day and time noted, and drop 1/2 grade per day from that point. RTFM.

How to read the schedule:

The date listed for each week is the Tuesday our T-Th class. Unless otherwise specified, have all of the reading for that week completed by your arrival to the Tuesday class.

Schedule:

- 1 J25 Tu: Introduction of course and participants; brief L.H. history
→ preliminary 2-pg paper due Wednesday, January 26th, at 1:00 pm
Th: pre-Hughes poems by Wheatley, Dunbar, McKay, Cullen, and others
Hughes poetry of the 1920s
- 2 F1 Hughes' landmark 1920s poetry, plus "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"
- 3 F8 American analysis: *The Ways of White Folks* (short stories), 1934
- 4 F15 The first autobiography: *The Big Sea: The U.S., Africa, Europe, Mexico*, 1940
- 5 F22 Radical Internationalism I: Poems from the 1930s
→ First paper (5-6 pp, reading in detail) due Friday Feb 25, 1:00 pm under my office door
- 6 M1 Radical Internationalism II: *A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia*, 1934
- 7 M8 Political and social journalism from the 1940s to the 60s:
Hughes in the *Chicago Defender*, and other essays

→ [spring break, week of March 12-20 – no class]
- 8 M22 Poems from the 1940s, and selected Hughes essays including 1953 Senate testimony
- 9 M29 Critical humor from the 40s to the 60s: *The Return of Simple*
→ Second paper due (5-6 pp.) due Friday April 1st, 1:00 pm under my office door
- 10 A5 Global autobiography, 1931 to 1938: *I Wonder as I Wander*, 1956
→ one-page final paper prospecti due in class Thursday; DCM resp. that eve
- 11 A12 Poems from the 1950s: *Montage of a Dream Deferred*
→ four-page unstapled outline/start of final papers due in class Thursday
→ packets available for pickup by 10am Friday
- 12 A19 Letters with South African writers, 1953-1967
Tues: final paper workshop in groups
Thurs: Modisane and Rive letters
- 13 A26 Poems from the 1960s (and a few Amiri Baraka comparisons)
Thurs: final paper presentations/workshop
- 14 M3 Concluding class on Tuesday

Macalester classes end Tuesday May 3rd. Finals period, Thurs-Mon May 5-9

Final papers due Friday May 6, by 1:00 pm under my office door.

Course Books: seven to buy, and two provided in manuscript by the instructor

1. *African-American Poetry : An Anthology, 1773-1927*. Ed. Joan R. Sherman. Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1997.
2. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. New York: Vintage, 1995.
3. *The Ways of White Folks: Stories* [1934]. New York: Vintage, 1990.
4. *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* [1940]. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.
5. *Langston Hughes and the Chicago defender: Essays on Race, Politics, and Culture, 1942-62*. Ed. Christopher C. De Santis. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.
6. *The Return of Simple*. Ed. Akiba Sullivan Harper. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994.
7. *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* [1956]. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.
8. *A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia* [1934]. Revised and expanded text edited by David Chioni Moore, with the assistance of Jennifer A. Bouta, manuscript, 2010.
9. *From Harlem to Johannesburg: Letters Between Langston Hughes and Pioneering South African Writers, 1953-1967*. Manuscript in progress by David Chioni Moore with the assistance of Harmony S. O'Rourke and Kristen A. Harkness, 2010.

Reading assignment for Thursday, January 27th:

I have asked you to purchase the inexpensive *African-American Poetry: An Anthology, 1773-1927*, so we may briefly sample Hughes's poetic precursors. Since the book is short – just 78 small-format pages – I encourage you to read the whole text. However, within that totality, you should closely read, at minimum, these 21 poems:

Wheatley	On Being Brought from Africa to America
Horton	Liberty and Slavery
Simpson	Away to Canada, To the White People of America
Harper	Bury Me in a Free Land, To the Union Savers of Cleveland, Learning to Read
Bell	from <i>A Poem Entitled the Day and the War</i>
McClellan	The Feet of Judas
Cotter	Dr. Booker T. Washington to the National Negro Business League
Campbell	'Sciplinin' Sister Brown
Corrothers	Paul Laurence Dunbar, An Indignation Dinner
Johnson	O Black and Unknown Bards
Dunbar	Sympathy, An Ante-Bellum Sermon, The Poet
McKay	The Harlem Dancer, If We Must Die
Toomer	Georgia Dusk
Cullen	From the Dark Tower

INTL / ENGL 384

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Macalester College, Spring 2011, Prof. David Chioni Moore

Two Notes: Required Poetry Recitation, and Self-Written Poem

I. Recitation from memory:

There is no richer way to understand a poem – to get it deep in your bones and mind, in both content and form – than to memorize it for oral recitation. Thus 5% of the grade in the course will be for an oral recitation of one poem by Hughes. To make this non-punitive, and not dependent on, for example, theatrical skill, the minimum grade on this assignment will be “B,” and a magnificent voice is not expected.

To calibrate the grading levels, I take as my benchmark Hughes’s first published poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” which is 103 words, as the B+ benchmark. Thus the following grades will be awarded for recitation poems of the following length:

B	75 words or more
B+	100 words or more
A-	125 words or more
A	150 words or more
A+	175 words or more

You may, if you wish, do two or more shorter poems for a larger overall word-count. Extra credit will be given for especially strong recitations and/or for recorded musical accompaniment, if you wish.

II. Your own poem:

Another terrific way to enter into a poet’s forms and ideas is by imitation – a widely practiced way of learning in literature, music, and the visual arts. Thus 3% of the grade in this course will be for your in-class recitation (from a printout in front of you, or from memory, as you prefer) of a poem you have written either in a style of Hughes’s, on a Hughes-ish topic, or in the spirit of Hughes. I expect very wide variation in what people present.

The only requirement is that you write (and then read to the class) verse totaling 100 or more words: hence if you like Hughes’s very short poems, write a few of them. Grading will be A- for most, A for some, and possibly A+ for something truly exceptional. If you are a poet yourself, and would like your Hughesian poetry to count for up to 6% of your grade, we can discuss that in advance.