

Essay on langston hughes

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Many leaders in today's society possess characteristics that determine how they are either chosen or self-made. These characteristics could range from being a charismatic, transformational, motivational, or influential leader. Each has its own meaning, but it is possible for leaders to possess more than one characteristic. Being a charismatic leader consists of having a charming and colorful personality. As the text reads, " In the study of leadership, charisma is a special quality of leaders whose purposes, powers, and extraordinary determination differentiate them from others." A transformational leader focuses on accomplishments. They bring about major, positive changes by moving group members beyond their self-interests and toward the good of the group, organization, or society. A motivational and an influential leader basically share the same characteristics. A leader who is motivational and influential encourages those who follow to accomplish whatever task or goal is at hand. The leader we chose to do possess both transformational and motivational/influential characteristics of a leader. This leader motivated and transformed many lives, encouraging many African Americans to engage in more literature, writing, and reading. Langston Hughes, or by birth, James Mercer Langston Hughes impacted many lives during the Harlem Renaissance Era. He was an African American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form jazz poetry who is best known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance. He famously wrote about the period that " the Negro was in vogue" which later changed into " when Harlem was in vogue. " Langston Hughes was born February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, the second child of school teacher Carrie

Mercer Langston and James Nathaniel Hughes. Langston Hughes grew up in a series of Midwestern small towns. Hughes's father left his family and later divorced Carrie, going to Cuba, and then Mexico, seeking to escape the enduring racism in the United States. After separation, Hughes's mother traveled around the states looking for employment, leaving his grandmother, Mary Patterson Langston, to raise him in Lawrence, Kansas. After the death of his grandmother, Hughes left to stay with friends for two years. Before her death, his grandmother instilled in him the importance of literature, writing, and racial significance. This spark influenced him to read and write his thoughts daily in a journal he kept. Soon after, Hughes left and lived with his mom, who remarried, in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended high school. During his school years, Hughes was elected class poet where later he edited year books and began writing poems, short stories, and dramatic plays. His first piece of jazz poetry was entitled "When Sue Wears Red". It was at this point where Hughes discovered his love for books. Hughes worked various odd jobs, before serving a brief tenure as a crewman aboard the S. S. Malone in 1923, spending six months traveling to West Africa and Europe. In Europe, Hughes left the S. S. Malone for a temporary stay in Paris. During his time in England in the early 1920s, he became part of the black expatriate community. In November 1924, Hughes returned to the states to live with his mother in Washington D. C. Hughes worked at various jobs before gaining a white-collar job in 1925 as a personal assistant to the historian Carter G. Woodson at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. As the work demands limited his time for writing, Hughes quit the position to work as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel. There he

encountered the poet Vachel Lindsay, with whom he shared some poems. Impressed with the poems, Lindsay publicized his discovery of a new black poet. By this time, Hughes's earlier work had been published in magazines and was about to be collected into his first book of poetry. The following year, Hughes enrolled in Lincoln University, a historically black university in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He joined the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and was president of the poetry club. Thurgood Marshall, who later became an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, was an alumnus and classmate of Langston Hughes during his undergraduate studies at Lincoln University. After Hughes earned a B. A. degree from Lincoln University in 1929, he returned to New York. Except for travels to the Soviet Union and parts of the Caribbean, Hughes lived in Harlem as his primary home for the remainder of his life. During the 1930s, Hughes became a resident of Westfield, New Jersey. First published in *The Crisis*, a magazine for colored people in 1921, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", became Hughes's signature poem. It was collected in his first book of poetry, "The Weary Blues" in 1926. Hughes's first and last published poems appeared in *The Crisis*; more of his poems were published in *The Crisis* than in any other journal. Hughes's life and work were enormously influential during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, alongside those of his contemporaries, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Aaron Douglas. Except for McKay, they worked together also to create the short-lived magazine, "Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists". Hughes and his contemporaries had different goals and aspirations than the black middle class. They criticized the men known as

the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance: W. E. B. Du Bois, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Alain LeRoy Locke, as being overly accommodating and assimilating Eurocentric values and culture to achieve social equality. The Harlem Renaissance, as stated in the articles of Black Intellect Movements, “was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s and 1930s. At the time, it was known as the “New Negro Movement”, named after the 1925 anthology by Alain Locke. “ Though it was centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, many French-speaking black writers from African and Caribbean colonies that lived in Paris were also influenced by the Harlem Renaissance. It is unofficially recognized to have spanned from about 1919 until the early or mid-1930s. Many of its ideas lived on much longer. The climax of this “flowering of Negro literature”, as James Weldon Johnson preferred to call the Harlem Renaissance, was placed between 1924, the year that “Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life” hosted a party for black writers where many white publishers were in attendance. This was also around the time the Great Depression of 1929 began. His poetry and fiction portrayed the lives of the working-class blacks in America, which he portrayed as full of struggle, joy, laughter, and music. Permeating his work is pride in the African-American identity and its diverse culture. “ My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind, “ Hughes is quoted as saying. He confronted racial stereotypes, protested social conditions, and expanded African America’s image of itself; a “people’s poet” who sought to reeducate both audience and artist by lifting the theory of the black aesthetic into reality. Hughes graduated from Lincoln University in 1929. “Not without Laughter” was his first novel which

portrays an African American boy, Sandy, caught between two worlds and two attitudes. The boy's hardworking and respectable mother provides a counterpoint to his energetic, easygoing, footloose father. The mother is oriented to the middle-class values of the white world; the father believes that fun and laughter are the only things worth pursuing. Though the boy's character is blurred, Hughes's attention to the details of African American culture in America gives the novel insight and power. Some academics and biographers today believe that Hughes was homosexual and included homosexual codes in many of his poems, similar in manner to Walt Whitman. Hughes has cited him as an influence on his poetry. Hughes's story "Blessed Assurance" deals with a father's anger over his son's effeminacy and "queerness". To retain the respect and support of black churches and organizations and avoid worsening his unstable financial situation, Hughes remained closeted. Hughes was unashamedly black at a time when blackness was "out of style". He stressed the theme of "black is beautiful" as he explored the black human condition in a variety of depths. His main concern was the uplift of his people, whose strengths, resiliency, courage, and humor he wanted to record as part of the general American experience. His poetry and fiction portrayed the lives of the working class blacks in America, lives he portrayed as full of struggle, joy, laughter, and music. Throughout his work is pride in the African-American identity and its diverse culture. "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind," Hughes is quoted as saying. He confronted racial stereotypes, protested social conditions, and expanded African America's image of itself; a "people's poet" who sought to

reeducate both audience and artist by lifting the theory of the black aesthetic into reality. An expression of this is the poem "My People": "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. " Hughes stressed a racial consciousness and cultural nationalism lacking of self-hate that united people of African descent and Africa across the globe and encouraged pride in their diverse black folk culture and black aesthetic. Hughes was one of the few black writers who expressed and wrote about racial consciousness as a source of inspiration for black artists. His African-American race consciousness and cultural nationalism would influence many foreign black writers, such as Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire. Along with the works of Senghor, Césaire, and other French-speaking writers of Africa and of African descent from the Caribbean, such as René Maran from Martinique and Léon Damas from French Guiana in South America, the works of Hughes helped to inspire the Négritude movement in France. A radical black self-examination was emphasized in the face of European colonialism. In addition to his example in social attitudes, Hughes had an important technical influence by his emphasis on folk and jazz rhythms as the basis of his poetry of racial pride. In 1943, Hughes began publishing stories about a character he called Jesse B. Semple, often referred to and spelled "Simple", the everyday black man in Harlem who offered musings on topical issues of the day. Hughes seldom responded to requests to teach at colleges. In 1947, Hughes taught at Atlanta University. Hughes, in 1949, spent three months at University of Chicago Laboratory Schools as a visiting lecturer. He wrote

novels, short stories, plays, poetry, operas, essays, works for children, and, with the encouragement of his best friend and writer, Arna Bontemps, and patron and friend, Carl Van Vechten, two autobiographies, *The Big Sea* and *I Wonder as I Wander*, as well as translating several works of literature into English. During the mid-1950s and 1960s, Hughes' popularity among the younger generation of black writers varied as his reputation increased worldwide. With the gradual advancement toward racial integration, many black writers considered his writings of black pride and its corresponding subject matter out of date. They considered him a racially superior. He found such writers, for instance, James Baldwin, lacking in such pride, over-intellectual in their work, and occasionally vulgar. Hughes wanted young black writers to be objective about their race, but not to scorn it or flee it. He understood the main points of the Black Power movement of the 1960s, but believed that some of the younger black writers who supported it were too angry in their work. Hughes's work "Panther and the Lash", published after his death, in 1967, was intended to show solidarity with these writers, but with more skill and lacking of the most damaging anger and short racial prejudice some showed toward whites. Hughes continued to have admirers among the larger younger generation of black writers, whom he often helped by offering advice and introducing them to other influential persons in the literature and publishing communities. This latter group, including Alice Walker, whom Hughes discovered, looked upon Hughes as a hero and an example to be emulated in degrees and tones within their own work. One of these young black writers observed of Hughes, "Langston set a tone, a standard of brotherhood and friendship and cooperation, for all of us to

follow. You never got from him, 'I am the Negro writer,' but only 'I am a Negro writer.' He never stopped thinking about the rest of us." On May 22, 1967, Hughes died from complications after abdominal surgery, related to prostate cancer, at the age of 65. His ashes are interred beneath a floor medallion in the middle of the foyer in the Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. It is the entrance to an auditorium named for him. The design on the floor covering his ashes is an African cosmogram titled Rivers. The title is taken from his poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". Within the center of the cosmogram, above his ashes, is the line: "My soul has grown deep like the rivers". Hughes was an inspiration and motivational novelist and activist of his time. Through his works in literature, theater, and poems, Hughes encouraged many African American writers. ----- [1]. Pg. 1 Andrew J. DuBrin; Leadership; Pg. 73