



## The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume I: 1902-1941: I, Too, Sing America

By Arnold Rampersad

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### The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume I: 1902-1941: I, Too, Sing America

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Poet, playwright, novelist, a grand figure in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s--Langston Hughes was one of the most extraordinary and prolific American writers of this century. This book is the first installment of a projected two-volume life that will undoubtedly be the definitive biography of Hughes. Based on exhaustive research in archival collections throughout the country and abroad but primarily in the Langston Hughes Papers (previously closed to most scholars) at the Beinecke Library of Yale University, the book traces in detail Hughes's life from his birth in Missouri in 1902 to the winter of 1941. Descended from a family steeped in radical Abolitionism (an ancestor had fought and died with John Brown at Harper's Ferry), Hughes was a driven man who often gave the appearance of a happy wanderer. His nomadic life led him to Mexico in 1919 and 1920, Africa in 1923, Europe in 1924, and the Soviet Union in 1932. After his exhilarating Russian travels, he completed a journey around the world by way of China and Japan, and in 1937, he spent several months in besieged Madrid at the height of the Spanish Civil War. Hughes's greatest devotion, however, was to the word. Inspired by both the democratic chants of Walt Whitman and the vibrant forms of Afro-American culture, he became the most original and revered of black poets as well as a fiction writer and dramatist of considerable power. Although his political vision was often radical and his sense of injustice acute, he faced the world as an open, laughing, and gregarious man. Yet, as this compelling biography shows, there lurked beneath the laughter a gnawing loneliness that Hughes strove to overcome in his devotion to his art and his ideal vision of America.

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## **The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume I: 1902-1941: I, Too, Sing America** By Arnold Rampersad **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Rampersad, one of our foremost African-American scholars, is an apt biographer for Hughes (1902-67), our greatest black poet. *I, Too, Sing America* (volume 1) covers the years during which Hughes produced his best work and was most politically active; *I Dream a World* (volume 2) chronicles his artistic decline due to overwork in response to perpetual financial difficulties. Both volumes are psychologically astute, critically penetrating and masterful in their intermingling of Hughes' story with a chronicle of the enormous changes that took place in black America during his lifetime.

#### Review

"This is a book I have waited half a lifetime for."--Alice Walker. "Excellent....Mr. Rampersad [leaves] you eager to see what he makes of the rest of the story, and confident that his second volume will be as good as his first."--*The New York Times*. "A sympathetic, yet clear-eyed portrait of one of America's most controversial writers that also manages to be a sweeping depiction of the black experience in this country and abroad during the first four decades of the 20th century....A near-perfect example of the biographer's art, balanced and thought-provoking."--*Kirkus Reviews*. "The best biography of Hughes ever written, and in my opinion it is also the best biography of a black American writer ever written."--Arna A. Bontemps. "There can be no question about the importance of Rampersad's biography...without doubt the definitive Hughes biography."--James Olney

#### About the Author

**Arnold Rampersad** is Sara Hart Kimball Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University. He is the author of *Days of Grace: A Memoir* with Arthur Ashe, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography*, and he edited *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. He is winner of the Biographers International Organization's 2012 BIO Award.

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