

## Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

→Hughes wanted to capture the dominant oral and improvisatory traditions of black culture in written form

→Hughes described the immense difficulties in store for the serious black artist “who would produce a racial art” but insisted on the need for courageous artists to make the attempt (“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” essay)

→Hughes was drawn to by the American Communist Party

- \*made racial injustice an important plank in its platform

- \*promoted an image of the working-class solidarity that nullified racial Boundaries

→Hughes faced difficulties in writing self-proclaimed “Negro” poetry:

- \*Could or should any individual speak for the entire race?

- \*Would that speech homogenize and stereotype a diverse people?

- \*Would a “particular” image of black people hurt or harm their cause?

- \*The work risked lapsing into racial primitivism

- \*To avoid this, Hughes turned, in his writing, from the rural black population toward the city

- \*With this turn, he could be a realist and a modernist

- \*He could also use stanza forms deriving from blues music and adapt the Vocabulary of everyday black speech to poetry without affirming stereotypes

- \*He could assert that all Americans (no matter the difference between blacks and whites) were equally entitled to liberty, justice, and opportunity