



NEW JERSEY NAACP

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY

LANGSTON HUGHES

READING TRIBUTES”

February 1st Every Year

The Children's "Dream Keepers" Reading Everywhere We Can!

Since 2005 many Units in the New Jersey State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) have led the community in **HAPPY BIRTHDAY LANGSTON HUGHES READING TRIBUTES** on February 1st. New Jersey NAACP members and their supporters have begun Black History Month reading the works of Langston Hughes to children throughout their state. Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri and he died on May 22, 1967 in Harlem, New York. Best known for the art form through which his genius first appeared-- poetry – Langston Hughes writes about every subject, event, or nuance within the Black experience. Whether with a very simple gesture or an elaborate project, join our new NAACP tradition for beginning Black History Month. Please read Langston Hughes to your children on the great poet's birthday – February 1st!

Although Langston Hughes will always be remembered as a great cultural symbol for the Harlem community, New Jersey also celebrates four very special connections that the poet had to its history. Jessie Redmon Fauset, the Lawnside, NJ native; the Township of Westfield where he lived briefly after graduating from Lincoln; his college classmate and Kean University's first Black Professor, Dr. James Dorsey; the first Black woman elected to the New Jersey Senate, Dr. Wynona Moore Lipman, all link Langston Hughes to New Jersey. One of Langston Hughes' earliest literary influences was reading the essays of Dr. W.E.B. DuBois in the NAACP *Crisis Magazine*. Hughes would often call the Magazine's Literary Editor, Jessie Fauset, “the mid-wife of the Harlem Renaissance” because she first published his poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” in a 1921 issue of *CRISIS*. A young “Lord Jim Dorsey” sang on the programs where Hughes read his poetry as they performed in many venues around Lincoln University. In 1947, Langston Hughes spent a semester at Atlanta University as a Visiting Professor of Creative Writing. Hughes began a friendship with a young Wynona Moore who was teaching French at Morehouse College. Langston Hughes was a member of the NAACP throughout his life and he received the Spingarn Medal in 1960. Hughes was a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.

In 1923, Hughes traveled abroad as a seaman on a freighter to Senegal, Nigeria, the Cameroons, Belgium Congo, Angola, and Guinea. Then he traveled to Italy, France, Russia and Spain. Later, he would also spend a considerable amount of time in Cuba and Haiti. Traveling the world as a seaman and learning many languages, Hughes translated the works of Mexican, Cuban, Chilean, Haitian and Spanish writers such as Federico Garcia Lorca and Guillen. Having rhythm was always important for Langston Hughes, and his unique poetry uses the rhythms of Black music throughout the Diaspora.

Hughes returned to Harlem, in 1924. By 1925, Langston Hughes was an emerging voice in the Harlem Renaissance. James Weldon Johnson, the Harlem Renaissance poet who wrote the words to the Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” was also an official in the NAACP. Johnson was an established and revered poet who served as a Mentor for Langston Hughes. During 1925, James

Weldon Johnson publicly recited Hughes' poem, "The Weary Blues" and this event led to the publication of Langston Hughes first book, The Weary Blues, in 1926.

On February 1, 2002, the poet's Centennial, the US Postal Service issued a Langston Hughes stamp at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. Langston Hughes used the collections of the Schomburg Center throughout his career. He donated part of his papers to the Center and his remains are interred in the atrium of the Center's Langston Hughes Auditorium. In his beloved Harlem, Hughes' block of East 127th Street was renamed "Langston Hughes Place."



Whether he is being praised as "the Negro Poet Laureate," or what former New Jersey Poet Laureate Amiri Baraka called, "the jazz poet," the New Jersey NAACP and the young people that it touches must not ever fail to fully appreciate the life and works of Langston Hughes. In 2005, the State Education Committee of the New Jersey NAACP conducted its inaugural campaign to have New Jersey school communities begin Black History Month with "Happy Birthday Langston Hughes Reading Tributes" In 2010, New Jersey's Camden County East NAACP successfully submitted a resolution at the National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri, the city where a young Langston Hughes was first introduced to the cultural arts. The NAACP National Board of Directors resolved that NAACP Units throughout the country encourage local learning institutions to enrich their curricula by beginning Black History Month with reading tributes to Langston Hughes on his birthday, February 1st.
