



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Delegate Magazine 1982**

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MOVING UP

[[image]]  
[[caption]] LANGSTON HUGHES [[/caption]]

LANGSTON HUGHES  
Poet

Few would quarrel with Langston Hughes' unofficial designation as the "Negro poet laureate" of our day. An established poet and critic, Hughes belongs in the ranks of the major American writers of the 20th century. Born in Joplin, Missouri on February 1, 1902, Hughes moved to Cleveland at the age of 14. Having graduated from Central High School, he spent a year in Mexico before studying for a time at Columbia University. After roaming the world as a seaman and writing some poetry as well, Hughes returned to the United States, winning the Witter Bynner Prize for undergraduate poetry while attending Lincoln University, later his alma mater (1928). Two years later, he received the Harmon Award and, in 1935, with the help of a Guggenheim Fellowship, traveled to Russia and Spain.

The long and distinguished list of Hughes' prose works includes *Not Without Laughter* (1930), a collection of short stories, and *The Big Sea* (1940), his autobiography. To this must be added such collections of poetry as *The Weary Blues* (1926); *The Dream Keeper* (1932); *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942); *Fields of Wonder* (1947); and *One Way Ticket* (1947).

Hughes is also an accomplished song lyricist, librettist, and newspaper columnist. Through his newspaper columns, he has created Jesse B. Simple, a Harlem character who also saw life on the musical stage in *Simply Heavenly*.

[[image]]  
[[caption]] PAUL ROBESON [[/caption]]

PAUL ROBESON  
Actor, Singer

Paul Robeson has earned worldwide fame over the past four decades in a variety of roles—as athlete, actor, singer, and scholar.

Born in Princeton, New Jersey on April 9, 1898, Robeson is the son of a runaway slave who put himself through Lincoln University and later became a Presbyterian minister.

Robeson entered Rutgers on a scholarship, and won a total of 12 letters in track, football, baseball, and basketball. In 1917 and again in 1918, he was named All-American by Walter Camp who later called him "the greatest defensive end that ever tread the gridiron." In addition to his athletic exploits, his academic ability gained him Phi Beta Kappa honors in his junior year.

In 1923, Robeson won a law degree from Columbia, financing his schooling by playing professional football. While at Columbia, Robeson was seen by Eugene O'Neill in an amateur play. After making his professional debut in *Taboo* (1922), Robeson then appeared in O'Neill's



All God's Chillun Got Wings, and Emperor Jones.

Called upon to whistle in the latter play, Robeson sang instead, and his voice met with instant acclaim. In 1925, he made his concert debut with a highly successful program of all-Negro music. He went on to such stage successes as *Show Boat*; *Porgy*, and *Othello*. (When he did *Othello* in 1943 in New York, his ovation was called "one of the most prolonged and wildest...in the history of the New York theatre.")

A world traveller in the Soviet Union, Asia, and Europe, Robeson speaks several languages, including Chinese, Russian, Gaelic, and Spanish.

Robeson's political affiliations have at times tended to attract even more publicity than his artistic career. In 1950, for instance, he was denied a passport after refusing to sign an affidavit as to whether or not he had ever belonged to the Communist Party. Eight years later, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the refusal to sign such an affidavit was not valid grounds for denial of a passport. Robeson subsequently settled in London, making a number of trips to the continent (and to the U.S.S.R. as well) before returning to the United States in 1963.

[[image]]  
[[caption]] JAMES WELDON JOHNSON [[/caption]]

#### JAMES WELDON JOHNSON ON ANGLO-SAXON SUPERIORITY

Is the Negro dangerous to white culture and to the white race? Is it true that "Anglo-Saxon culture" is threatened by aliens? Is it true that "Anglo-Saxons" are the only group fit for leadership, cultural and political, in America?

Yes, seems to be the answer to these questions by the "Anglo-Saxon Clubs" of which Mr. John Powell of Virginia wrote in the *World of Dec. 2*. To the specific questions raised by Mr. Powell and the "Anglo-Saxon Clubs," I am glad, in response to the request of the Editor of the *World*, to make reply, as Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as a Negro and, primarily, as an American.

The attitude exemplified by Mr. Powell is a common one. At its extreme it results in the Ku Klux Klan and its alleged protection of Anglo-Saxondom. At its mildest it issues in such a program as the one Mr. Powell outlines, maintaining virtually the same creed as the Klan, minus the violence. This attitude is grounded on assumptions about what makes an American, what is dangerous to an American, what American culture is and who created it.

...The original American stock, the American Indian, is almost extinct. The white original stock settlers from almost every part of Europe, including Hessians, Scotch, Irish, English, Dutch, French and Spanish. Furthermore, the Negro must be included among the original stock, because he first came to the American Continent in 1525 with the Spaniards. His first coming to the English colony was in 1619, one year before the Mayflower landed at Pilgrim. The negro continued coming, or being brought forcibly and against his will, until the early part of the nineteenth century. None have come in any quantity since then. The Negro is certainly part of the original American stock, whether Mr.

Powell likes it or not.

Many of the best things in America have been created here or brought by people whom Mr. Powell and the Anglo-Saxon Club group would doubtless look upon as aliens. The mythical Anglo-Saxon--and by that term I assume Mr. Powell means people of English descent, though he himself confesses he does not know what it means--the mythical Anglo-Saxon, and his culture as well, never existed. If Mr. Powell means merely people of English descent, they are among the late comers to America, later than French, Spanish and Negro. This leads me to question Mr. Powell's idea of culture. What is culture anyhow? Is it something that belongs to someone, like an automobile? Is it the color of your hair, the pride of family tradition? Is being elected to office a sign of culture?

...If Mr. Powell wants to go back far enough, to Puritan days in New England, for example, one of the traditional American virtues was a willingness to take part in the burning of the witches, men and women; and other virtues and principles included such intolerance as made the settlers fine, flog and imprison

[[image]]  
[[caption]] RICHARD WRIGHT [[/caption]]  
Author of "NATIVE SON"

people for being members of the Society of Friends, better known as Quakers; and drive out Roger Williams from Massachusetts. Those virtues were perhaps understandable in those days, in which rigid social organization was necessary to meet frontier conditions. No one but a maniac would maintain that they would be suited to the years in which we live. So when Mr. Powell talks about the original American stock and weeps a tear over its submergence; when he orates about the original American principles and virtues, he had better be a little more specific as to what he means.

The Negro's case is not so dissimilar from that of other aliens, insofar as culture is concerned. Mr. Powell deplores the "polyglot boarding house" aspect of America with its foreign-language newspapers, its racial and national traditions maintained by immigrants. I say it is better to encourage these people to bring here their cultural heritages, to give us in America the benefit of their songs and dances and literature and customs, than to try to force them to conform to some Anglo-Saxon idea of what is American.

The "Anglo-Saxon" acts as if he had something to fear. He behaves like a coward. The American does not have to. He can receive the contribution of any spirit, any nation and any race. If he cannot, then he had better say so. He had better stop twaddling about democracy, liberty and what-not. Let him then come out boldly and say: This is a country for people who call themselves Anglo-Saxons without knowing what they mean; people who intend to make America their own cozy little club where everyone else can exist on sufferance only.

Former Lt. Governor George L. Brown of Colorado and now Corporate Vice-Pres. for Grumman Corp.

Born July 1, 1925, at Lawrence, Kansas; attended public schools there

and was graduated from Liberty Memorial High School in Lawrence in 1944; pilot training at Tuskegee Air Force Base during World War II; graduated from the University of Kan-

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