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5/11//2015

English 111/enf 3

Moments in Life that Defined Langston Hughes’s Writings

Langston Hughes was an author who wrote poems. He was also an activist and a playwright. He wrote about an incident in his life and he called it, “Salvation.” When Hughes was 12 years old he went to a church function, where they were being brought to Jesus, for about three weeks continuously. At one of the revivals, they had a special meeting for children, one night, where he was brought to the mourners bench for those who had not been saved yet. He sat there waiting for Jesus, waiting for a light and to, “feel Jesus in your soul,” Hughes said (Hughes). His aunt told him that he would see the light and something would happen to him on the inside. The preacher was preaching and kept asking the children to come to Jesus; some went right away and others just sat there. Many of the older people there prayed around them, but he still sat there and waited for Jesus. The children went, but Hughes and one other boy. The other little boy got tired of sitting there and got up and went to the bench. So Hughes was there by himself, and the entire church prayed around him. Still, he was waiting and there was no Jesus. Langston wanted to see Jesus. The preacher kept asking him to come to Jesus. It was really getting late, and Langston started feeling guilty about holding everyone there late. He was looking at the other boy smiling down at him, knowing the other boy had lied about seeing Jesus, so Hughes got up and did the same. Everyone was relieved and his aunt hugged him, and everyone began singing and praising. Later that night, he cried because he did not want to tell his aunt that he lied and did not see Jesus and now did not believe there is a Jesus (Hughes).

James Mercer Langston Hughes was his full name and he held many titles, which include, a poet, activist, novelist, playwright, communist and many other things. The church revival was a defining moment in his life that emanated in all of his work. Langton Hughes was born February 1, 1902. Hughes was of African, White and Native American descent. He was a great grandchild of white slave owners of Kentucky. Mary Patterson was his maternal grandmother. She married into the Langston family in 1869 and was considered to be a very political family. Her second husband was an abolitionist and his name was Charles Henry Langston. Mary and Charles had a daughter named Caroline who was Hughes’s mother. He was born to Caroline Mercer Langston and James Nathaniel Hughes in Joplin, Missouri, and he was her second child He was a leader of the Harlem Renaissance and a lot of his poetry was considered new-age and innovative. He started a new form of poetry called jazz poetry. Langston Hughes was one of the most prolific writers of his time. His style of writing and the depths that he went to avoid segregation and gain the respect that he deserved is shown in his work. He was determined to break the molds of what everyone expected of him and proved to be brilliant beyond his time (Wikipedia).

Hughes grew up in many small towns and eventually ended up with his grandmother throughout his childhood. When his father divorced his mother, he was raised mainly by his grandmother, Mary Patterson, in Lawrence, Kansas. His mother traveled looking for employment. Growing up with his grandmother is where he was instilled with racial pride. He went and lived with family friends, James and Mary Reed, after the death of his grandmother. He soon went to live with his mother in Lincoln, Illinois and then to Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended high school. He was appointed class poet in grammar school. It was then that he felt stereotyped for being black, because African Americans had rhythm. His teacher talked about how important it was to have rhythm in your poetry at that time. In high school he wrote short stories, plays, the school newspaper, and edited the yearbook. In high school is where he wrote his first piece of jazz poetry (Wikipedia).

Hughes graduated from high school in June 1920, he returned to live with his father in Mexico, after having lived with his father for a short time in 1919. They did not have a great relationship. His father moved to Mexico to escape racial discrimination and did not like his own people. Langston did not understand why his father did not like black people. Langston wanted his father’s approval of attending Columbia University. His father wanted him to study engineering, and that was the only way he would support his education financially. Langston studied engineering to appease his father, and was still writing poetry. He left his father over a year later and left Columbia due to the racial discrimination and returned to Harlem, where he placed his focus on Harlem (Wikipedia).

Langston Hughes became a member of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920’s. They were a group of black writers who engaged in intelligent debate over the role of African Americans in life and politics. Black writers wanted to be more respected for their work as writers. They were greatly stereotyped, and not considered to have “high art” in their poetry (Matterson).

Hughes held different jobs as an adult, such as a crewman on the S.S. Malone ship, and a busboy. As a busboy, he met the poet, Vachel Lindsay, who was impressed by him and put him in contact with Knopf publishing, who would publish his first book, “The Weary Blues.” He enrolled in Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and earned a B.A. degree, then returned to New York. After college, he wrote his first novel, “Not without Laughter.” He traveled to the Soviet Union to make a movie about black racial prejudices in the United States, but the movie was never completed (Wikipedia).

Langston Hughes was thought of by people as being the anti-Christ or and atheist. Hughes described himself as having no religion at all. He wrote a poem called, “Goodbye Christ,” and this poem would haunt him for the rest of his life. The poem took stabs at celebrity preachers at that time. The preachers were not happy about that, and went after Hughes and protested against him. The preachers described him as being the anti-Christ and an atheist. The poem truly described his resistance to fit into a society that was not under his terms (Best).

Langston was a political activist who would promote racial pride among his culture. His poems helped to unite the African American race and all races across the country with the emphasis of folk and jazz rhythms. He influenced many black foreign writers and helped to influence radical black movements in France and in everything he was a part of. He was an activist against stereotypes, racial injustice, and social conditions. Langston Hughes died on May 27, 1967 at age 65 of prostate cancer.

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