

# Primary Source

Langston Hughes, *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, 1926



To what extent did Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice become a reality for African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century?

- I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice in the first half of the twentieth century.
- I can explain how laws and policy, courts, and individuals and groups contributed to or pushed back against the quest for liberty, equality, and justice for African Americans.
- I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
- I can analyze issues in history to help find solutions to present-day challenges.

## Building Context

Langston Hughes was one of the most famous writers of the Harlem Renaissance, the cultural and intellectual blossoming of African American art in the 1920s and 1930s. He is best known for his poetry, but he also wrote novels, plays, short stories, and essays. In the following essay, he explores Source link: the idea of being Black and an artist. Hughes wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their culture, including their love of music, laughter, and language itself alongside their suffering.

## Langston Hughes, *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, 1926

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69395/the-negro-artist-and-the-racial-mountain>

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white

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poet”; meaning behind that, “I would like to be white.” And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness . . . to be as little Negro and as much American as possible. . . .

. . . We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too . . . If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn’t matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. What does Hughes think of the writer who would like to write “like a white poet”? How do you know?

2. What does Hughes say is the goal of young Black artists like himself ?