

Nation Mourns Loss Of Poet Langston Hughes

NEW YORK--(NPI)--Death last week stilled the pen of Langston Hughes, noted poet and one of the most gifted writers in the Negro idiom.

The creator of the philosophical Negro taproom "Pop Off" called "Simple," Hughes, 65, died of congestive heart failure in Poly-clinic Hospital, where he had undergone surgery only four days previously. He had entered the hospital on May 6.

Immediately after his death, tributes began pouring in from throughout the nation. One came from entertainer Harry Belafonte, with whom Hughes had collaborated in business. Belafonte described Hughes' death as a "tragic loss of one of the world's great human beings and artists."

Hughes had penned the script for Belafonte's mirthful production depicting life in New York's Harlem during the 1920's. The play, starring Belafonte, comedians Nipsy Russell and George Kirby, and narrated by Sidney Poitier, was titled "The Strollin' 20's," and was an immediate hit. It was presented a second time by popular request.

Few, however, knew that Hughes' magic was behind the great success of the play. Few knew also that Hughes was in the midst of two other ambitious projects, one for the Harry Belafonte Enterprises. He was working on the text to accompany an anthology of Negro music being produced by the company in cooperation with RCA Victor and Reader's Digest. Hughes was also penning a new comedy play with a Harlem setting.

In addition to Belafonte, tributes came from Roy Wilkins, NAACP executive director, and Whitney M. Young, Jr., executive director, National Urban League.

Wilkins credited Hughes with being a crusader, in his own remarkable way, "for freedom for millions of people." He expressed "profound sorrow" at Hughes' passing.

Young eulogized Hughes as having been "a great human being" and "a courageous fighter for human rights and dignity."

Hughes was one of the most versatile personalities on the American scene. He was poet laureate, writer, composer, afterdinner speaker and world traveler.

Shortly after graduating from Cleveland's Central High School, Hughes shipped out as a merchant seaman on a freighter bound for Africa. But after seeing the world as a seaman, he returned to America to study for a year at Columbia University. He completed his formal education by graduating from Lincoln (Pa.) University in 1929.

Hughes had entered upon the poet's career by an accident due to his race, while attending school in Lincoln, Ill. He recalled the episode this way:

"I was a victim of a stereotype. There were only two of us Negro kids in the whole class and our English teacher was always stressing the importance of rhythm in poetry.

"Well, everybody knows except us that all Negroes have rhythm, so they elected me class poet. I felt I couldn't let my classmates down, and I've been writing poetry ever since."

Hughes came to national attention as a poet while working as a bus boy at the Wardman Park Hotel in Washington in 1924 when the prominent poet Vachel Lindsay read one of his poems, "Weary Blues" at a dinner. After that Hughes turned out a steady stream of poems, many depicting Negro life and virtually all highly in demand.

Then he became a columnist for the Chicago Defender and began writing in earnest in the Negro idiom, mixing mirth with philosophy about the hardship of life with black folks.

Hughes could be pensive or happy in turn in his personality. His features reflected the traits of an intellectual, with prominent forehead and studious eyes. In later years, he grew a small mustache but no goatee.

Perhaps Hughes' most prominent Defender column was "Simple Speaks," in which he described the encounters of some Negro caught up in the mainstream of life in the Negro idiom. Some said he was writing from actual experience with a man he had met in a Harlem bar.

A prolific writer, Hughes had penned scores of poems, articles and books, including an autobiography titled "The Big Sea."

Langston was born on Feb. 1, 1902, in

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The second husband of his grandmother, Mrs. Mary Sampson Patterson Learn Langston, was active in the underground anti-slavery movement.

Hughes had no known survivors.



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Westside Student Honored



STUDENT HONORED--Jerry Howard, Special Education student at Westside Elementary School, was recent recipient of trip to Disneyland as a reward for his outstanding participation in program which covers three schools. This self-supporting, work-study program develops positive attitudes toward work and training. From left, Westside Principal James Pughsley, Special Education teacher Nathaniel Matthews and counselor Robert Cooper.

VOTERS LEAGUE RALLY FOR COMMISSIONERS

The Nevada Voters League will stage a rousing pre-election rally for City Commissioners Ed Fountain and Reed Whipple, Friday night, June 2 at Red Williams' "The Place". The public is urged to attend and Keep the Faith with the Commissioners who have kept it with Las Vegas residents during their progressive tenure of office.