

# The Negro Speaks of Rivers

By Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:  
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

## Composition and Publication

.....Langston Hughes wrote "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in 1920 and published it in January 1921 in *Crisis* magazine, a publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

## Dedication

.....Hughes dedicated the poem to W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), editor of *Crisis* (see [above](#)) and a promoter of black pride and black nationalism

## Interpretation

.....Rivers deepen their beds by cutting channels through earth and rock. Black men and women deepen their knowledge, wisdom and character by persevering through trials and tribulations. Their experiences build a collective consciousness that flows, like a river, from one generation to the next. In Hughes's poem, a black man of the early twentieth century—acting as speaker for the Negroid race—tells the reader that he has inherited this collective consciousness from his forebears in Asia, Africa, and North America. In his mind's eye, he sees not only the suffering endured by blacks over the centuries but also their triumph over oppression.

## Point of View

.....Hughes uses third-person point of view in the title and first-person point of view in the poem. In the title, Hughes announces the speaker and topic of the poem. Then he assumes the persona of the speaker (representing the Negroid race) in presenting the words of the poem.

## Assuming a Persona

.....In a novel, short story, or poem, any writer can become part of the work by assuming a persona that may or may not resemble his or her own in real life. In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Hughes assumes the persona of the Negroid race, as if the speaker is a chorus of all blacks since the beginning of human life on earth.

## Themes

### Wisdom and Experience

.....The Negroid race is a deep fund of wisdom and experience accumulated since the dawn of human existence.

### Pride

.....Black men and women have a proud cultural history and record of accomplishment against adversity.

### Perseverance

.....In spite of suffering inflicted on them, black men and women have endured through the ages, never giving up.

## Figures of Speech

.....Examples of figures of speech in the poem are as follows:

### Alliteration

Repetition of a consonant sound

Line 5: I bathed in the Euphrates **w**hen dawns **w**ere young

Line 6: **l**ulled me to sleep, **l**eaving me **e**asy **p**rey

### Assonance

In stressed syllables, repetition of a vowel sound followed by a different consonant sound

Line 13: I **a**thed in the **e**uphrates when dawns were young

### Anaphora

Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of word groups occurring one after the other

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi. . . .

### Metaphor

Comparison of unlike things without using *like*, *as*, or *than*

Line 4: **My soul has grown deep like the rivers** (comparison of spiritual depth to physical depth)

## AL-Maram

### Simile

Comparison of unlike things using *like, as, or than*

Line 4: **My soul has grown deep like the rivers** (Comparison of the change in the depth of his soul to the change in the depth of rivers)

أسئلة الاختبار السابق عن هذه القصيدة -- الاجوبه اللي بالأصفر .

سأل عن اسم القصيده .

وسأل عن موضوع القصيده

1- What could be one of the good themes of this poem ?

**A- Wisdom and Experience**

B-love of nature

C- Death

D-War

2- What is the title of this poem?

**A-The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

B- I've known rivers

## The Rivers

### Euphrates

.....The Euphrates is one of two great rivers that form in Turkey and flow down through Iraq to Al Qurnah in Southern Iraq. The other river is the Tigris. At Al Qurnah, the rivers join to form the Shatt al-Arab, which empties into the Persian Gulf. Recorded history began in a country between the two rivers, Mesopotamia.

### Congo

.....The Congo River forms in central Africa in the present-day country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). From its headwaters, the river flows north in the DRC, then west, then southwest to the Atlantic Ocean. Many Africans were abducted from the Congo region and sold into slavery. King Leopold II of Belgium commissioned the famous Anglo-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley to establish trading posts along the river. Supposedly, these trading posts were set up to civilize and develop the Congo region while ending the slave trade. However, the Belgians exploited the native population while capitalizing on the Congo as a rich source of ivory.

## AL-Maram

### Nile

.....The Nile forms south of the equator and flows northward through Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. Frequent flooding of the river made the soil on both sides of the river ideal for farming and helped Egypt become a dominant North African power in ancient times. Persons of the Negroid race were among those who constructed the pyramids not far from the Nile at Giza, Saqqarah, Dahshur and other sites.

### Mississippi

.....The Mississippi River flows more than 2,000 miles from northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. Black slaves labored along its shores, and slave auctions took place at towns and settlements within site of the Mississippi. After traveling down the Mississippi in 1831, Abraham Lincoln witnessed a slave auction in New Orleans and vowed to do all in his power to end slavery. In 1863, while he was the U.S. president, he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves.

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وأسأل الله التوفيق لي ولكم ..