

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" Turns 100

05/14/2021

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" Turns 100



Shane Graham, English, and the cover of The Langston Hughes Review.

USU English Professor Edits Two Issues of Langston Hughes Review

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

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.

Share

Related Stories

USU professor of English Shane Graham has helped commemorate the centennial of Langston Hughes' famous debut poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by editing two special issues of *The Langston Hughes Review* around the theme of "'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' at 100." This follows a roundtable and panel that Graham co-organized at the Modern Language Association Annual Convention in January on the same theme.

The articles in the special issues explore how the themes Hughes established in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" developed in his later writings. They discuss topics such as how those themes have continued to influence the works of other writers; how "Rivers" and other poems by Hughes have been translated and circulated in Spain and Korea; and how the poem and its themes have been adapted by musicians and artists.

Crisis magazine first published "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in June 1921. As Graham writes in his foreword to the first issue, "The poem helped inaugurate the Harlem Renaissance, became Hughes's calling card, and established certain core themes of the vast body of work he would publish in the next half-century. Today it feels as important as ever, in part because it was born into a time of crisis that resonates powerfully with our own moment."

The first issue of *The Langston Hughes Review* was published at the end of April, with the second issue scheduled for publication in Fall 2021. The issues include original poems and artworks selected by Graham's co-editor, Chiyuma Elliott of the University of California-Berkeley.

Graham published his book *Cultural Entanglements: Langston Hughes and the Rise of African and Caribbean Literature* with the University of Virginia Press in 2020.

For more information or interviews please contact shane.graham@usu.edu.