

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" • 1921

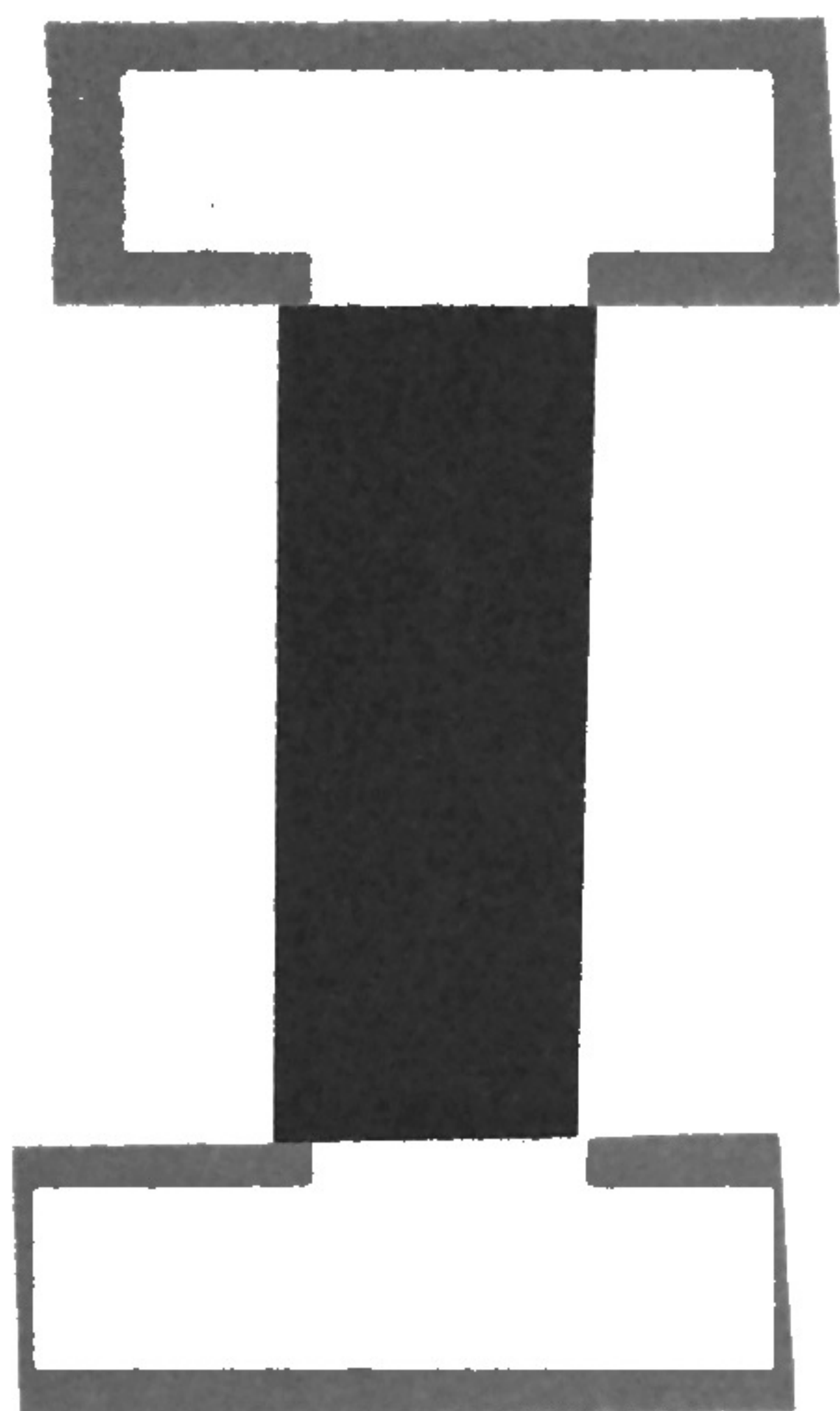
LANGSTON

1902-1967

HUGHES

The Harlem Renaissance was a period of great cultural and artistic accomplishment by African Americans. During this period of the 1920s and 1930s, many African Americans produced great works of literature, art, and music. And much of what these artists, writers, and musicians produced focused on black pride and black cultural heritage. Harlem, located in New York City, was the

primary meeting place for the artists. Most of them visited Harlem, and many lived there during the height of the Renaissance. Some of the leading figures during this period included James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Alain Locke, and Jean Toomer. Langston Hughes, one of America's most prolific writers, was a major participant in the Renaissance.



'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 ★



**"THERE ARE
MANY BARRIERS
PEOPLE TRY TO
BREAK DOWN.
I TRY TO DO IT
WITH POETRY."**

—Langston Hughes

THE AUTHOR

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri. He began writing at an early age, serving as class poet and editor of his high school yearbook. He attended Columbia University in New York and graduated from Lincoln University, a historically black college in Pennsylvania. Hughes's work focuses on African-American life. During a long, distinguished career, he wrote poetry, plays, novels, lyrics, magazine articles, and children's books. He also edited anthologies that gave other African-American writers an opportunity to be published. Hughes won numerous awards, and is considered a leading writer of the twentieth century.

THE RESPONSE

Langston Hughes wrote "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" while visiting his father, who had moved to Mexico. Published in *The Crisis* magazine, this poem launched Langston Hughes's writing career. Other poems were published in *The Crisis*. In 1925 *Opportunity* magazine awarded Hughes first prize in its literary contest for the poem "The Weary Blues." This recognition helped him land a book contract, and in 1926 he published his first collection of verse, entitled *The Weary Blues*. Langston Hughes was one of the most celebrated writers of the Harlem Renaissance. His body of work, which continued into the 1960s, earned him the title "Poet Laureate of the Negro Race."