



The Political Plays of Langston Hughes

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Among the most influential poets of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes is perhaps best remembered for the innovative use of jazz rhythms in his writing. While his poetry and essays received much public acclaim and scholarly attention, Hughes' dramas are relatively unknown. Only five of the sixty-three plays Hughes scripted alone or collaboratively have been published (in 1963).

Published here, for the first time, are four of Hughes' most poignant, poetic, and political dramas, *Scottsboro Limited*, *Harvest* (also known as *Blood on the Fields*), *Angelo Herndon Jones*, and *De Organizer*. Each play reflects Hughes' remarkable professionalism as a playwright as well as his desire to dramatize the social history of the African American experience, especially in the context of the labor movements of the 1930s and their attempts to attract African American workers. Hughes himself counted prominent members of these leftist groups among his close friends and patrons; he formed a theater group with Whittaker Chambers, prompting an FBI investigation of Hughes and his writing in the 1930s. These plays, while easily read as idealistic propaganda pieces for the left, are nonetheless reflective of Hughes' other more influential and studied works.

The first scholar to offer a systematic study of Hughes' plays, Susan Duffy provides an informed introduction as well as a detailed analysis of each of the four plays. Duffy also establishes that *De Organizer*, a collaboration with noted jazz pianist and composer James P. Johnson (who also wrote its score) was indeed performed by the Labor Stage.

By making these forgotten texts available, and by presenting them within a scholarly discussion of 1930s leftist political movements, Duffy seeks to spark a renewed interest in Langston Hughes as an American playwright and political figure.

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