

## To Langston Hughes

29 December 1959  
Montgomery, Ala.

*King thanks Hughes for contributing a poem to A. Philip Randolph's upcoming birthday celebration.<sup>1</sup> In "Poem for a Man," Hughes wrote: "Poem for a man / Who plays the checkered game / Of king jump king— / And jumps a President: / That order 8802 / For me and you."<sup>2</sup> Hughes replied on 18 January 1960.<sup>3</sup>*

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1. Stanley Levison forwarded Hughes's poem to King in a 22 December letter (for more on the Randolph tribute, see King, Outline, Remarks for "A Salute to A. Philip Randolph," 24 January 1960, p. 350 in this volume). James Mercer Langston Hughes (1902–1967), born in Joplin, Missouri, received a B.A. (1929) from Lincoln University. Hughes first received attention for his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," which appeared in the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine in 1921. One of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes published numerous books of poetry, fiction, and plays and wrote newspaper columns for the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Post*.

2. Under pressure from Randolph, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 prohibiting racial discrimination in defense industries in 1941.

3. Hughes thanked King and sent a copy of "Prayer for the Mantle-Piece," an arietta from his work-in-progress opera titled "Five Wise, Five Foolish."

29 Dec 1959  
Mr. Langston Hughes  
20 East 127th Street  
New York 35, New York

Dear Mr. Hughes:

I cannot say more to express both my appreciation of your poem to Phil Randolph and of your generosity in writing it, than to say it is just what I expected from you.

You have added another weapon of the pen to our struggle. We are sincerely sorry you cannot read it, but it will be delivered by Ossie Davis who, as you undoubtedly know, is currently starring in "A Raisin in the Sun."<sup>4</sup>

With warmest thanks and good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

[*signed*]

Martin L. King, Jr.

MLK:mlb

(Dictated, but not personally signed by Dr. King.)

THLS. JLHP-C:YBR.

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4. Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 Broadway play *A Raisin in the Sun* took its title from a line in Hughes's poem "Harlem" (1951).