

EDITED BY LANGSTON HUGHES

NEW

NEGRO

POETS

U. S. A.

FOREWORD BY GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Indiana University Press
Bloomington & London

*PS691
.N4H8
Copy 3

PS591
.N4
H8

FIFTH PRINTING 1966

Copyright © 1964 by Langston Hughes
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 64-10836
Manufactured in the United States of America

FOREWORD

At the present time, poets who happen also to be Negroes are twice-tried. They have to write poetry, and they have to remember that they are Negroes. Often they wish that they could solve the Negro question once and for all, and go on from such success to the composition of textured sonnets or buoyant villanelles about the transience of a raindrop, or the gold-stuff of the sun. They are likely to find significances in those subjects not instantly obvious to their fairer fellows. The raindrop may seem to them to represent racial tears—and those might seem, indeed, other than transient. The golden sun might remind them that they are burning.

In the work of most of today's Negro poets the reader will discover evidences of double dedication, hints that the artists have accepted a two-headed responsibility. Few have favored a trek without flags or emblems of any racial kind; and even those few, in their deliberate "renunciation," have in effect spoken racially, have offered race-fed testimony of several sorts.

In 1950 I remarked in *Phylon*, "Every Negro poet has 'something to say.' Simply because he is a Negro, he cannot escape having important things to say. His mere body, for that matter, is an eloquence. His quiet walk down the street is a speech to the people. Is a rebuke, is a plea, is a school. But no real artist is going to be content with offering raw materials." This is as true today—when we, white and black, are a collective pregnancy that is going to proceed to its inevitability, getting worse before it gets better—as it was before the major flower of the volcano.

New Negro Poets: U.S.A. is officially divided into five parts—"lyrical, protest, personal and general descriptions, and personal,

FOREWORD

reflective statements." The interests overlap, of course, at many points. But on any page the reader is apt to notice passion, or a desperate comedy, or an adult anger which may be intellectual or intestinal, or a wishful joy. He may sight lightning, working through the mesh of a seemingly becalmed body of meditation.

The large triumph here is the realization on the part of the majority of these poets that no matter how important are their informing truths, *poetry* is to be the result of their involvement with emotion and idea and pen and paper. Success is not the reward of every effort. But there is enough magic, enough sure flight, enough meaningful strength to inspire a happy surmise that here are some of the prevailing stars of an early tomorrow.

GWENDOLYN BROOKS