



## The Ways of White Folks

*Langston Hughes*

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## **The Ways of White Folks** Langston Hughes

One of his best-known works, Hughes wrote ***The Ways of White Folks*** while living in Carmel, California. In it, he shares acrid and poignant stories of blacks colliding--sometimes humorously, but often tragically--with whites throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The book consists of fourteen moving stories:

- "Cora Unashamed"
- "Slave on the Block"
- "Home"
- "Passing"
- "A Good Job Gone"
- "Rejuvenation Through Joy"
- "The Blues I'm Playing"
- "Red-Headed Baby"
- "Poor Little Black Fellow"
- "Little Dog"
- "Berry"
- "Mother and Child"
- "One Christmas Eve"
- "Father and Son"

## **The Ways of White Folks Details**

Date : Published September 12th 1990 by Vintage (first published 1934)

ISBN : 9780679728177

Author : Langston Hughes

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Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Classics, Cultural, African American, Race, Poetry

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## From Reader Review The Ways of White Folks for online ebook

### Melinda says

This book is a definite must-read. I picked it up because I thought it had a funny name, and the leaps and bounds it took beyond my expectations have made me wonder how it has not won awards and how we are not all expected to read this book in school.

I admit that my common conclusion upon reading a famous author's short stories is: "genius." F. Scott Fitzgerald, Kurt Vonnegut - in many ways their short stories impressed me more than their full-length novels. I don't think I've ever read other Langston Hughes, but this compilation astounded me.

How rare that everyone reading can relate to every story in a collection? How rare that every story teaches you, entrails you, encaptures your imagination in the first three paragraphs, convincing you that you have known these characters all your life, that you ARE these characters or your friends are these characters - and the stories all take place in Jim Crow area no less.

Who are you? Who do you know? Who do you see in the faces of your family, your neighbors, the people you cross on the street and see in the supermarket and read about in the newspaper? Do you know the white family who "adopts" an African-American child out of love, but out of pity, and raises a child who can't fit in any world? Are you the other or the backbone of the story? Do you see the impact of the white man conceiving multiple children, who he later disowns for their race with his black servant? My entire paragraph sounds unbelievably cliche, but Hughes' stories melt into the reality that is America.

I read these stories as being judgmental towards "white folks," but maybe I'm biased. I'm pretty sure it just shows the truth of how things were in a different time, and how that time has affected this time.

While this book is gripping for its historical significance in relaying the way things were, every single story is enchanting for the way it is told and how gripping the characters are.

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### Adam says

This collection of stories explores themes of race and race relations in the early twentieth century. The issues addressed in the collection will ring familiar to people schooled in the racial history of the United States prior to the Civil Rights Era. Consequently, the character types, plots, and outcomes are fairly predictable. Nonetheless, many of the stories are powerful. Undoubtedly, they were even more so when originally published in the 1920s and 1930s. The themes addressed in the stories include segregation (de facto and de jure), vigilantism and social control, primitivism, passing, and sexual taboos and transgressions. Hughes shows how the constructions of race in the period adversely affected both black and white people. In a few of the stories, he artfully contrasts the racial dynamics in the United States with Europe to show that the absence of a color line helped foster healthier personal and familial relationships. Several of the selections would work very well in history, literature, and American Studies courses. Some of the best stories in the collection are: "Father and Son," "Berry," and "Slave on the Block."

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## **Kusaimamekirai says**

When I think of the power of the short story to grab you and shake up the core of who you are, there are three that immediately come to mind. Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery", Raymond Carver's "Popular Mechanics", and Stig Dagerman's "To Kill a Child". After reading Langston Hughes collection "The Ways of White Folk" and the story "Home" however, I now have a fourth.

In truth, all of these stories about interactions between whites and blacks are incredible in their own right. Sometimes these interactions are humorous, sometimes sad, all too often deadly. Hughes, best known for his poetry, had an amazing ability to penetrate the souls of his subjects. Male or female, rich or poor, black or white, he does more than simply convert hopelessness. The characters here try in a variety of ways to transcend their station in life and achieve something more than those around them, only to be inevitably beaten down and reminded that such dreams aren't likely to be realized here.

And about "Home".

(view spoiler)

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This is a brutal collection to read at times, leaving you waiting for the inevitable pain waiting at the end, simple hoping that at the very least no blood will be shed. More often than not however, it is spirits, both black and white, that are left broken.

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## **J. Kenyarta says**

I found this golden nugget in my neighbors attic library and HAD to ask if I could borrow it! Upon seeing the excitement in my eyes, she smiled and said to use it as long as I'd like. I started this evening saying I'd only read a bit, and now I'm nearly half done!

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## **Willow says**

*"No," said Oceola simply. "This is mine. . . Listen! . . . How sad and gay it is. Blue and happy -- laughing and crying. . . How white like you and black like me. . . How much like a man. . . And how much like a woman. . . Warm as Pete's mouth. . . These are the blues. . . I'm playing."*

I love that line. What a beautifully written, powerful and sad book. I think I shall remember it for a long time.

I'll write a full review this weekend.

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## **J says**

(FROM JACKET)Perhaps more than any other writer, Langston Hughes made the white America of the 1920s and '30s aware of the black culture thriving in its midst. Like his most famous poems, Hughes's stories are messages from that other America, sharply etched vignettes of its daily life, cruelly accurate portrayals of

black people colliding-sometimes humorously, more often tragically-with whites. Here is the ailing black musician who comes home from Europe to die in his small town-only to die more quickly and brutally than he had imagined. Here are the wealthy bohemians who collect Negroes like so many "objects d'art"...the moonlighting student who becomes the reluctant confidante of a boozy white Don Juan...the elegant charlatan who peddles "real, primitive jazz out of Africa" as a nostrum to the spiritually starved elite....

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### **La Tonya Jordan says**

This book is a collection of short stories of interactions of every day encounters of black people and white people. From small towns to big cities and overseas, we get a glimpse of how each side thinks of the other. The stories are humorous, sad, truthful, and at times you want to scream. Langston Hughes writing style puts you the reader in the mist of the story. When he writes about Cora, the name sounds simple. But, he magnifies the persona.

The tale of the lonely white woman in the company of black waiters she counts as one of her only friends. A story of the bi-racial son of a plantation owner. A yard-nigger who wants his respect. The lyric writing of Langston Hughes will make you holler for more. A Good Read.

Quote:

But, Arnie thought he wouldn't mind being poor in a land where it didn't matter what color you were. "Yes, you would mind." Vivi said.

O, if I could holler

sang the blues,

Like a mountain jack,  
I'd go up on de mountain

sang the blues,

And call my back,

"And I," said Mrs. Ellsworth rising from her chair, "would stand looking at the stars."

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### **Rebecca says**

This book made me ache inside. Hughes is an excellent writer and his stories are like razor blades that draw fine little lines in your heart. You don't even realize you're bleeding until it's done.

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### **Kate says**

I do not recommend finishing this book while sitting on the bus at the end of a work day, particularly while the cutest little black boy sits laughing on his father's lap in a seat across from you.

This book took me longer than I expected to finish. Often, after a story, I would have to put it down and leave it for a few days. It just isn't possible to move into the next tragic tale, like the nightly news. Happy endings were few. Thank you for this book, Langston Hughes, and fuck you all who made these stories too real.

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### **Babydoll says**

After reading this brilliant African-American fiction composed of numerous short stories, I was compelled to reflect on a piece of American history that was not honorable, in regards to the morale of a society. I appreciated the blunt honesty that Langston portrayed within his work in the series of short stories. He presented stories that contained content that has been echoed within Black families for decades. I am grateful for the major progress in this country and hope that we continue to make strides toward a more unified and peaceful nation.

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### **Maleficent (Chelsea) Lord says**

This should be required reading in schools and it is something poignant for this short month to remember Black History. Langston Hughes shows us very clearly that Black History is American History. Hughes' short stories in this phenomenal work, although written fairly long ago, still--sadly--apply to current issues of varying degrees of racism. Hughes gives the reader many various race-related situations and tells how all the characters (black or white) deal with the situations presented. Many poetic, heart-wrenching gems in this book.

[spoiler alert]

The story titled, "Home", hit me the hardest. In the end, you know something terrible is going to happen, but the way Hughes wrote this you-know-it-is-coming tragic ending made me tear up. A Jazz player comes home after years of living in Europe (where he felt little effects of racism) and who has become an excellent violinist. This man, Roy, gets lynched for talking to a white woman, who he knew, since he played music for her a her music students at the local school. Hughes interjects immediately after the description of the black man and the white woman talking, the angry words and/or thoughts of the angry mob. He does it all violently in capital letters, ending with: "RAPING A WHITE WOMAN". That is what a conversation escalated to and while the mob is beating him, Hughes writes, "He knew he would never get home to his mother now...Some one spat in his face. (It looked like his old playmate, Charlie Mumford.)" (47).

We have all heard a story like this before, but Hughes writes it in such a way that it makes you think about how all the people involved might be feeling. The other stories have familiar and not-so-familiar tales. I was surprised by how much "Home" made me feel. It ends with an incredibly beautiful and horrifying way....after much emphasis on how Roy's playing made him and others feel and how beautifully he played.....

"The little Negro whose name was Roy Williams began to choke on the blood in his mouth. And the roar of their voices and the scuff of their feet were split by the moonlight into a thousand notes like a Beethoven

moonlight sonata. And when the white folks left his brown body, stark naked, strung from a tree at the edge of town, it hung there all night, like a violin for the wind to play" (47-48).

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### **Rena says**

Excellent stories with heart that really resonated how life used to be for black folks - and still is.

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### **Helen says**

What can you say about Langston Hughes? He isn't a perfect writer as there is no such thing. A man born after the turn of the 20th century, but knew of the plight of the Negroes (his words not mine). These stories are the culmination of the interaction between whites and Negroes, in the city, on the farm, in richness and poverty. It didn't matter if the characters were white, black, or mixed – whether they lived together or were strangers, Hughes had a profound gift of cultural syntax. The down south slave dialect is difficult to write well, but Hughes manages it with as much skill as the snooty rich whites of Boston.

The sun rose burning and blazing, flooding the earth with the heat of early autumn, making even the morning oppressive. Folks got out of bed feeling like over-ripe fruit. (Father and Son)

Hughes tells his stories in poignant honesty with few true happy endings. To understand the human condition and write it in depth takes a true storyteller. He created stories of pathetic white people and downtrodden black. Some stories with little interaction between the two and others with deep genetic and emotional bindings. I like to believe that we, as an American society have grown away from lynchings, labels and that horrid n-word that I refuse to write, even though Hughes used it often. However, I do not have the knowledge to say that these things never happen anymore. Even though these precious literary gifts were written in the 1930's, they still reach into the heart of people today. This honest human portrayal never goes out of style. I can't say that I feel good after reading Langston Hughes, but I do not regret allowing myself to feel what flows from the words to inside of me.

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### **Jenny Schmenny says**

Beautifully written short stories that serve a slice of historical perspective to which I don't usually have access. Hughes' language is rich and detailed.

Hughes' depiction of white people is...unfavorable, ranging from condescending rich liberals fixated on the "primitive" expressions of those exotic dark people - to overt discrimination and brutality. Unsurprising, considering the racial climate of America in the 30's...and today. His depiction of black people is appreciative and broad, if a bit sugar-coated.

However, all the white folks depicted seem to be of a privileged class. There's no real acknowledgment of poor whites, except as some sort of minor "white trash" backdrop.

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## Kenny says

It is time Langston Hughes' reputation be salvaged. Too often, he is thought of as the queer, black poet from Harlem. What Hughes is, is a hugely talented writer, period.

My previous encounters with Langston Hughes had been with his poetry, of which I'm a fan. His stories were a revelation to me. By the time I finished the last page, I was emotionally shattered by these stories. That's how powerful a writer Hughes is.

This collection of short stories is a perfect introduction to Hughes' work. These stories are heart wrenching, painful, and occasionally humorous. The plots are surprising, and the characters very unusual. If you truly want to understand the objectification of Blacks, read this book. It was very eye opening. What saddens me is that over 80 years later this objectification still takes place in the United States.

Of the 14 stories here my favorites are:

- "Cora Unashamed"
- "Slave on the Block"
- "The Blues I'm Playing"
- "Poor Little Black Fellow"
- "Berry"
- "One Christmas Eve"
- "Father and Son"

There is not a weak story in this entire collection. I've read that Hughes was greatly influenced by D. H. Lawrence and his passionate, socialist beliefs when he wrote these stories. While these things may have influenced Hughes' writing in the 1920's, these stories come out of the painful experiences Hughes and blacks in general experienced in America at that time and all too sadly, today.

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