One-Way Ticket
by Langston Hughes

I pick up my life
And take it with me
And I put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton.
Any place that is
North and East—
And not Dixie.

I pick up my life
And take it on the train
To Los Angeles, Bakersfield,
Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake,
Any place that is
North and West—
And not South.

I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws.
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run.
Who are scared of me
And me of them.

I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket—
Gone up North,
Gone out West,
Gone!

Primary Source 27

Langston Hughes
Born in 1906 in Joplin, Missouri, the poet
Langston Hughes experienced a migration
in his own life when he enrolled at Columbia
University in New York City. There he
launched his successful literary career as a
writer, publishing his first poem, “The Negro
Speaks of Rivers,” in The Crisis, a magazine
edited by W.E.B. Du Bois (Primary Source 34).
Hughes’s writing was a product of both the
Harlem Renaissance and his personal desire
to create poems that epitomize the beauty and
variety of the African American experience.
Hughes’s poems cover a diverse range of
emotions, thoughts, and dreams that express
pride and empathy for African Americans,
future generations, and humans in general. As
universal as his message is, Hughes’s poems
always remained firmly rooted in issues of
race and racial pride.