This paper is part from a broader project on Black Leninism, which examines black engagement with the ideas and example of Vladimir Lenin. It focuses in particular on questions of political organization: how to bring together oppressed persons in solidarity as an energetic, hopeful, and demanding collective, which then engages in transformative political action. Here, I focus on Langston Hughes, and his engagement with the simultaneously political and poetic problem of representing a black collectivity, and representing it first of all to itself (rather than to a white or “general” public). As he put it in *I Wonder as I Wander*: “I wrote about Negroes, and primarily for Negroes.” I examine the shape this project took in the 1920s and 1930s, as Hughes moved from a poetics oriented around the blues to writing more explicitly communist, propagandistic poetry. What particular forms and modes did Hughes bring to the politically charged poetic project of representing a black collectivity to itself?

In answering this question I hope to suggest that Hughes’s poetry speaks not only to fundamental questions in African-American letters concerning the political import of black writing, but also to basic questions in the Marxist tradition about the role of representation and aesthetic experience in the creation of a revolutionary “class-for-itself.” In so doing, I also hope to make a case for the continuing relevance of Hughes’s poetry to the present moment, when the representation of black lives remains a vital political and poetic task, as the #blacklivesmatter movement and the protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, New York and elsewhere have dramatized so vividly.