

"No," said Simple, "but you can blame folks if they don't do something about history! History was yesterday, times gone. Yes. But now that colored folks are willing to let bygones be bygones, this ain't no time to be Jim Crowing nobody. This is a new day."

"Maybe that is why they are resolving to do better," I said. "I keep telling you, it has come time to stop *resolving*!" said Simple. "They have been *resolving* for two hundred years. I do not see how come they need to *resolve* any more. I say, they need to *solve*."

"How?"

"By treating us like humans," said Simple, "that's how!"

"They don't treat each other like human beings," I said, "so how do you expect them to treat you that way?"

"White folks do not Jim Crow each other," said Simple, "neither in past have a segregated army—except for me."

"No, maybe not," I said, "but they blasted each other down with V-bombs during the war."

"To be shot down is bad for the body," said Simple, "but to be Jim Crowed is worse for the spirit. Besides, speaking of war, in the next war I want to see Negroes pinning medals on white men."

"Medals? What have medals to do with anything?"

"A lot," said Simple, "because every time I saw a picture in the colored papers of colored soldiers receiving medals in the last war, a white officer was always doing the pinning. I have not yet seen a picture in no papers of a *colored* officer pinning a medal on a white soldier. Do you reckon I will ever see such a picture?"

"I don't know anything about the army's system of pinning on medals," I said.

"I'll bet there isn't a white soldier living who ever got a medal from a colored officer," said Simple.

"Maybe not, but I don't get your point. If a soldier is brave enough to get a medal, what does it matter who pins it on?"

"It may not matter to the soldiers," said Simple, "but it matters to *me*. I have never yet seen no *colored* general pinning a medal on a *white* private. That is what I want to see."

Source:

Langston Hughes, *The Best of Simple* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 80-83, 196-198.

| Simple on Military Integration

"Now, the way I understand it," said Simple one Monday evening when the bar was nearly empty and the juke box silent, "it's been written down a long time ago that all men are borned equal and everybody is entitled to life and liberty while pursuing happiness. It's in the Constitution, also Declaration of Independence, so I do not see why it has to be resolved all over again."

"Who is resolving it all over?" I asked.

"Some white church convention—I read in the papers where they have resolved all that over and the Golden Rule, too, also that Negroes should be treated right. It looks like to me white folks better stop resolving and get to *doing*. They have resolved enough. *Resolving ain't solving*."

"What do you propose that they do?"

"The white race has got a double duty to us," said Simple. "They ought to start treating us right. They also ought to make up for how bad they have treated us in the past."

"You can't blame anybody for history," I said.

"Colored generals did not command white soldiers in the last war," I said, "which is no doubt why they didn't pin medals on them."

"I want to see colored generals commanding white soldiers, then," said Simple.

"You may want to see it, but how can you see it when it just does not take place?"

"In the next war it must and should take place," said Simple, "because if these white folks are gonna have another war, they better give us some generals. I know if I was in the army, I would like to command white troops. In fact, I would like to be in charge of a regiment from Mississippi."

"Are you sober?" I asked.

"I haven't had but one drink today."

"Then why on earth would you want to be in charge of a white regiment from Mississippi?"

"They had white officers from Mississippi in charge of Negroes—so why shouldn't I be in charge of whites? Huh? I would really make 'em toe the line! I know some of them Southerners had rather die than to *left face* for a colored man, buddy-o. But they would *left face* for me."

"What would you do if they wouldn't *left face*?"

"Court-martial them," said Simple. "After they had set in the stockade for six months, I would bring them Mississippi white boys out, and I would say once more, '*Left face!*' I bet they would *left face* then! Else I'd court-martial them again."

"You have a very good imagination," I said, "also a sadistic one."

"I can see myself now in World War III," said Simple, "leading my Mississippi troops into action. I would do like all the other generals do, and stand way back on a hill somewhere and look through my spyglasses and say, 'Charge on! Mens, charge on!' Then I would watch them Dixiecrat boys go—like true sons of the old South, moving down the enemy."

"When my young white lieutenants from Vicksburg jumped back to Headquarters to deliver their reports in person to me, they would say, 'General Captain, sir, we have taken two more enemy positions.'"

"I would say, 'Mens, return to your companies—and tell 'em to *charge on!*'"

"Next day, when I caught up to 'em, I would pin medals on their chests for bravery. Then I would have my picture taken in front of all my fine white troops—*me*—the first black American general to pin medals on white soldiers from Mississippi. It would be in every paper in the world—the great news event of World War III."

"It would certainly be news," I said.

"Doggone if it wouldn't," said Simple. "It would really be news! You see what I mean by *solving*—not just resolving. I will've done solved."

ored restaurants—which in small towns is generally greasy spoons. They should also wait an hour for a colored taxi in the places where white cabs won't haul Negroes. Also let my white friends what plan to stay in the South awhile, send their children to the colored not-yet-integrated school, which is most generally across the railroad track in a hovel. And when they get on the buses to come home, let them ride in the back of the buses. If the back seats for colored is crowded, then let them stand up, even if some of the white seats is empty—which colored dare not set in for fear of getting shot through the windows. When nice white folks got through with all that Jim Crow, from eating to sleeping to schools to Jim Crow cars, then we would see how they feel for real."

"If you are expecting our good white friends to go through all of that, then you are expecting them to be superhuman," I said.

"I ride in Jim Crow cars and I am not superhuman."

"You ride in them because you have to," I said.

"I believe in share and share alike," declared Simple. "Them white folks that really loves me should share them Jim Crow cars with me, and not be setting back up in the hindpart of the train all air-cooled and everything whilst I rides up by the engine in an old half-baggage car. Also, I want my white friends to experience a Jim Crow toilet. There is nothing like a colored toilet in a Southern train station! Half the time, no mirror, no paper towels, sometimes no sink even to wash your hands. They is separate, all right, but not equal. Let them try one, then them nice white folks, who are always asking me what more do I want since the Supreme Court decided I could vote, would understand what I want. I wants me a train-station toilet with everything in it everybody else has got."

"You know it is against local law for white people to use colored waiting rooms down South, or for colored people to use white. Do you want decent white folks to get locked up just to prove they love you?"

"I'd get locked up for going in their waiting rooms, so why shouldn't they get locked up for going in mine? It ain't right for friends to be separated."

| Duty Is Not Snooty

"I REMEMBER one time you told me that you thought that if white people who say they love Negroes really *do* love them, then they ought to live like Negroes live. Didn't you say that?"

"I did," said Simple, "especially when they go down South."

"That means then that our white friends should ride in Jim Crow cars, too?"

"It does," said Simple.

"Why?" I asked.

"To prove that they love me," said Simple, "otherwise, I do not believe them. White folks that love me and care about my race ought to sleep in colored hotels when they travel—which are mostly not built for sleeping. They also ought to eat in col-

"What good would it do us for our white friends to get locked up?"

"It would teach them how dumb it is to have WHITE and COLORED signs all over Dixie."

"Liberal whites already agree that is stupid," I said.

"They would agree more if they experienced it," said Simple.

"And if they got locked up a few times, them signs would come down! White folks do not put up with whatever they don't like.

Just let a white man get turned down when he goes in a restaurant hungry. He will turn the joint out. If I get turned down,

all they do is turn me out. White folks has got a theoretical knowledge of prejudice. I want them to have a real one. That

is why I say when these nice white folks from up North goes down to Florida in the winter, let them go Jim Crow. When

they get there let them stay at one of them colored hotels where they don't have no bell boys to wait on them hand and foot, also

no valet service, and no nice room service for breakfast on a push wagon, and where the elevator is liable to be broke down,

if they got one. Let them live colored for just *one* vacation. I bet they will not be so sweet-tempered then. They would not

like it. They would be mad! It is not enough for white folks just to be nice and shake my hand and tell me I am equal. I

know I am equal. What I want is to be *treated* equal. So maybe if the nice white folks really find out *what* it is like *not* to be

treated equal—after they live Jim Crow themselves—I bet you, things will change! You know, white folks would not put up

with Jim Crow—if they ever got Jim Crowed themselves. They don't really know what Jim Crow is. But it is their duty to find

out, and duty cannot be snooty."

"Your flights of fancy are rather intriguing," I said, "but you know none of what you are saying is going to happen. Good

people are not *that* good. To tell the truth, if I were white, no matter how much I loved Negroes, I doubt that I would submit

myself to Jim Crow living conditions just to prove my love."

"Neither would I," said Simple.

"Then you would not be very good, either."

"No," said Simple, "but I would be white."