

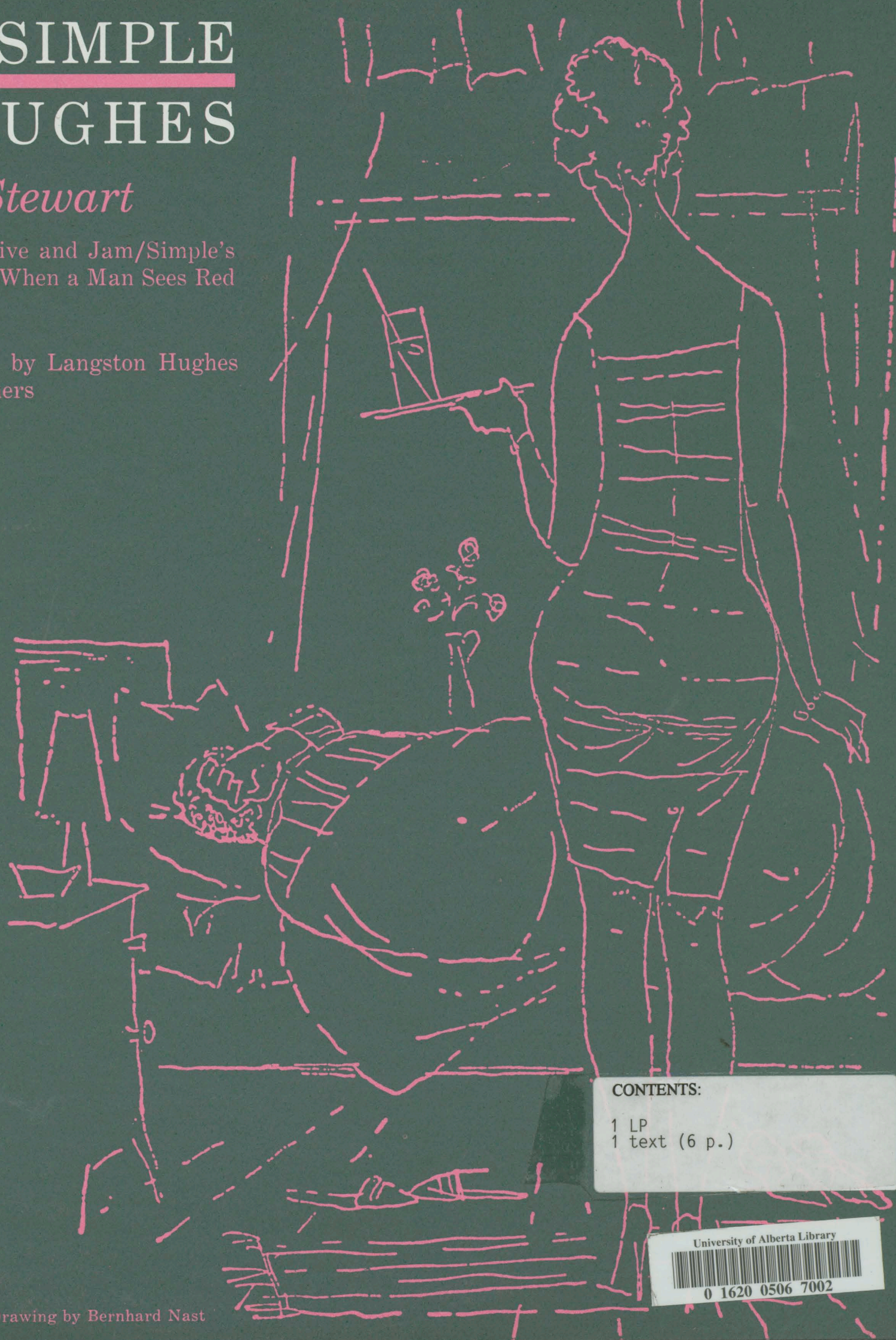
FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9789

THE BEST OF SIMPLE LANGSTON HUGHES

read by Melvin Stewart

Simple's Soliloquy from "Hamlet"/Jazz, Jive and Jam/Simple's Platform and End/Mississippi Monologue/When a Man Sees Red Banquet in Honor

Based on the book, "The Best of Simple" by Langston Hughes Hill and Wang, Publishers



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1 text (6 p.)

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Drawing by Bernhard Nast

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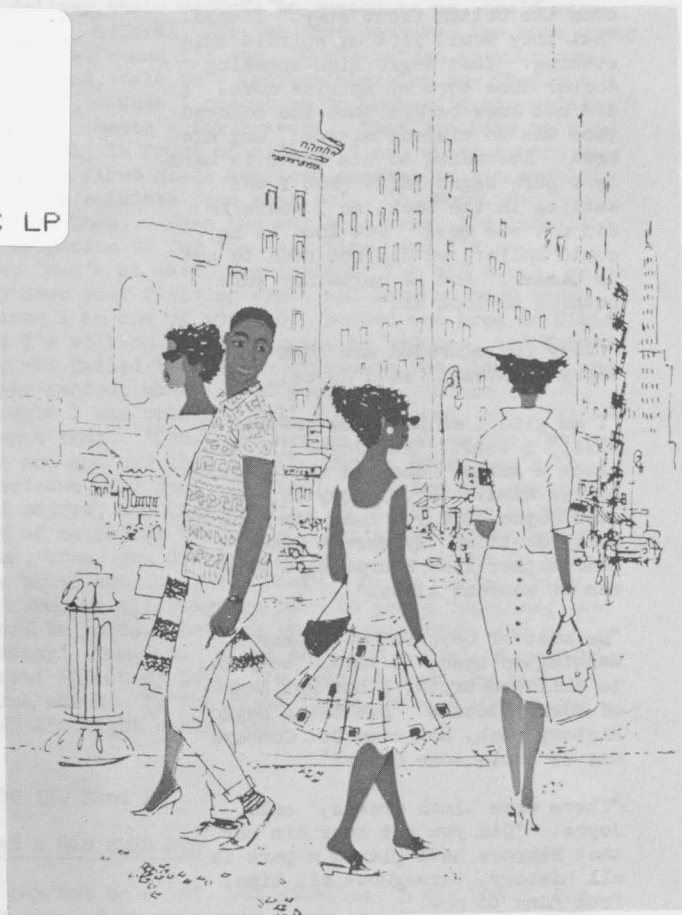
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DESIGNED BY IRWIN ROSENHOUSE

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Melvin Stewart - Biography

Born in Cleveland, Ohio. Entered the entertainment field as a jazz musician (tenor saxophone) before becoming interested in acting at Cleveland's well known Karamu Theatre, where he fast became a favorite of both critics and patrons. During the five years he spent there, his work was seen in such plays as "SKIN OF OUR TEETH", "TIME OF YOUR LIFE", "ANGEL IN THE PAWNSHOP", "THE RAINMAKER" and many others, before coming to New York in 1956. One year after his arrival he made his initial contact with theatre goers here in Langston Hughes' "SIMPLY HEAVENLY" in a run that went from off-Broadway to Broadway, then to London and back to New York TV. For his work in this show, Mr. Stewart received personal reviews comparable only to David Wayne's in "TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON". Since that time he has not received critical appraisal less than this caliber. Since then his work has moved within all three mediums, Broadway: "SIMPLY HEAVENLY", "THE COOL WORLD", "THE HOSTAGE"; off-Broadway: "MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS", "THE CONNECTION", "BROUHABA". (he was eighty years old in "Highlands" and a bit younger in "Cool World") Films: "ODDS AGAINST TOMORROW", "THAT KIND OF WOMAN", "ROOFTOPS OF NEW YORK", "THE HUSTLERS" (soon to

be released), and just recently, "GREENWICH VILLAGE" (where he portrayed a jazz musician utilizing his musical talents and playing with an actual jazz combo, thereby eliminating the usual dubbing done for actors not musically inclined). TV credits also include "Raid On Beatnik Village" - Armstrong Circle and "S.H." - Play of the Week. In addition there are to his credit three recordings, "S.H." on Columbia, a jazz narrative with "The Charley Mingus Jazz Workshop" on Bethlehem, and soon to be released "The Best of Simple" for Folkways, a selection of monologues taken from three books by Mr. Hughes. In addition to the Karamu Theatre and a short term at Western Reserve, Mr. Stewart's formal training has been with such notables as Joshua Shelley, Nola Chilton, and the team of Lloyd Richards, three years at Paul Mann's Actor's Workshop, which has had among its alumni, Ruby Dee, Sidney Poitier, Christopher Plummer and others.

SIDE I, Band 1:

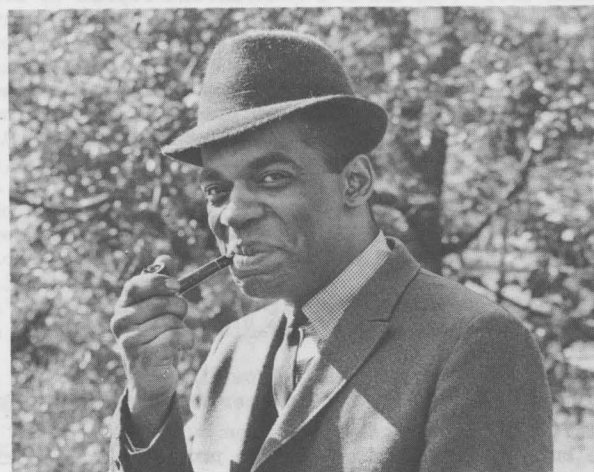
SIMPLE'S SOLILOQUY FROM "HAMLET"

TO BE OR NOT TO BE JIM CROWED,
THAT IS THE QUESTION.
WHETHER 'TIS NOBLER IN THE FLESH TO SUFFER
THE BRICKS AND BATS OF DIXIECRATS
OR TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST A SEA OF NUISANCES
AND BY OUR SIT-INS END THEM.
IN THE U.S.A. ENOUGH! IN MISSISSIPPI, TOO!

I SAY TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN JAIL,
THAT IS THE QUESTION.
WHETHER 'TIS NOBLER, I ASK, TO SUFFER
JIM CROW'S OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE,
OR PROTEST AGAINST THIS SEA OF AGGRAVATIONS
AND BY PROTESTING END THEM?

TO JAIL-TO SIT--NO BAIL:
BY PICKETING TO SEEK AN END
TO BACK-ACHES AND UNNATURAL SHOCKS
THE SOUTH MAKES NEGROES HEIR TO:
TO BIND THEM UP IN KNOTS OF CIVIL RIGHTS--
'TIS A CONSTIPATION DEVOUTELY TO BE WISHED.

TO SIT--ALTHOUGH IN JAIL-- AY, THERE'S THE RUB!
FOR LOCKED IN JAIL AT NIGHT, COME DREAMS
WHEN WE HAVE THROWN OFF OUR MORTAL FEAR.



Melvin Stewart

Photo by Dave Gahr

DREAMS, OH, SO GREAT--AN END TO ALL
THAT MAKES CALAMITY OF COLORED LIFE!

WHO WOULD LONGER BEAR THE WHIPS AND SCORN
OF OUR OPPRESSOR'S WRONGS AND HATEFULNESS,
PANGS OF DESPISED SOULS, THE LAW'S DELAY,
THE IMPUDENCES OF POLICES AND THEIR DOGS
OUR PATIENCE AND OUR MEEKNESS HAD TO TAKE?

WE CAN PUT QUIETUS ON IT ALL--YES WE CAN!

WHO WILL JIM CROW'S BURDENS BEAR THESE DAYS,
TO GRUNT AND SWEAT UNDER THIS WEARY LIFE?

WHO WOULD, LIKE COWARDS, LIVE A LIVING DEATH--
AS IF ALREADY LOST IN THAT DARK BARN
WHERE MANHOOD FEARS TO RISE AND SPEAK ITS MIND?

WHO WOULD MAKE US BEAR THOSE ILLS WE HAVE
RATHER THAN STAND UP TO KLUXERS WHO OPPOSE US?

CAN NICE WHITE FOLKS MAKE COWARDS OF US NEGROES,
AND OUR BLACK HUE OF RESOLUTION WHITEN
WITH THEIR PALE CAST OF FEAR?

CAN THEY OUR PROTEST WATER DOWN,
OUR SIT-INS BEG US OUT OF,
TO LOSE THE FORCE OF ACTION?
NAY! TWICE NAY! I SAY!

DIXIE, IF TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN JAIL'S
THE QUESTION--IN JAIL I'LL BE.
MISSISSIPPI WILL NOT GET THE BEST OF ME!

TO BE OR NOT TO BE--HELL!
HAMLET WILL BE FREE!
AND WHO IS HAMLET? GUESS WHO?
ME--JESSE B.--OLD SIMPLE HAMLET ME.

SIDE I, Band 2:

JAZZ, JIVE, AND JAM

You know, last Negro History Week, Joyce took me to a pay lecture to hear some famous Negro hysterian speak, and he laid our Negro race low. He said we was misbred, misread, and misled, also losing our time good-timing. Instead of time-taking and money-making, we are jazz-shaking. Oh, he enjoyed his self in that lecture at the expense of the colored race -- and him dark as me. He really delivered a talk - in which, no doubt, there is some truth.

He tore us down good. Joyce come out saying to me, her husband, that he really got my number. I said, "Baby, he did not miss you, neither." But Joyce did not consider herself included in the bad things he said. She come telling me on the way home by subway, 'Jess Semple, I have been pursuing culture since childhood. But you, when I first met you, all you did was drape yourself over some beer bar and argue with the barflies. The higher things of life do not come out of a lickertrough.'

I replied, "But, Joyce, how come culture got to be so dry?" She answers me back, 'How come your gullet has got to be so wet?'

You are sitting in this subway right now looking like you would like to have a beer."

"Solid!" I said, "I would. How did you guess it?" "Joyce says, 'Remember the budget, Jess.' "I says, 'Honey, you done busted the budget going to that lecture program which cost One Dollar a head, also we

put some small change in the collection to help Negroes get ahead. Our budget is busted real good, so we might as well dent it some more. Let's get six cans of beer."

"All right,' says Joyce, 'go ahead, drink yourself to the dogs -- instead of saving for that house we want to buy!'

"Six cans of beer would not pay for even the bottom front step," I said. "But they would lift my spirits this evening. That Negro high-speaking doctor done tore my spirits down. I did not know before that the colored race was so misled, misread, and misbred. According to him there is hardly a pure Negro left. (But I was setting in the back, so I guess he did not see me.) But loud as he could holler, we did not need to set no closer. And he certainly were nothing to look at!"

"Very few educated men look like Harry Belafone,' said Joyce.

"I am glad I am handsome instead of wise," I said. "But Joyce did not crack a smile. She had that lecture on her mind. 'Dr. Conboy is smart,' says Joyce 'Did you hear him quoting Harry Stottle? He were a Greek philosopher like Socrates, a great man of ancient times.'

"He must of been before Booker T. Washington then," I said, "because, to tell the truth, I has not heard of Harry Stottle. But being Negro History Week, how come Dr. Conboys has to quote some Greek?"

"There were black Greeks,' said Joyce. 'Did you not hear him say that Negroes have played a part in all history, throughout all time, from Eden to now.'

"Do you reckon Eve was brownskin?" I asked.

"I do not know about Eve,' said Joyce, 'but Cleopatra was of the colored race, and the Bible says Sheba, beloved of Solomon, was black but comely.'

Well, by that time the subway had got to our stop. At the store Joyce broke the budget again, opened up her pocket purse, and bought us six cans of beer. So it were a good evening. It ended well -- except that I honest ain't for going to any more meetings -- especially interracial meetings. Folks, you know, in my opinion, jazz, jive and jam would be better for race relations than all this highflown gav, gaff, and gas the orators put out. All this talking that white folks do at meetings, and big Negroes, too, about how to get along together -- just a little jam session would have everybody getting along fine without having to listen to so many speeches. Why, last month Joyce took me to a Race Relations Seminar which her club and twenty other clubs gave, and man, it lasted three days! It started on a Friday night and it were not over until Sunday afternoon.

They had sessions mammy! Joyce is a fiend for culture. She set through it all. But me, I did not set, I stood. I walked in and walked out. I smoked on the corner and snuck two drinks at the bar. But I had to wait for Joyce, and I thought them speeches would never get over! My wife were a delegate from her club, so she had to stay, although I think Joyce got tired her own self. But she would not admit it. Joyce said, 'Dr. Hillary Thingabod was certainly brilliant, were he not?'

I said, "He were not." Joyce said, 'What did you want the man to say?' I said, "I wish he had sung, instead of said. That program needed some music to keep folks awake."

Joyce said, 'Our forum was not intended for a musical. It were intended to see how we can work out integration.'

I said, "With a jazz band, they could work out integration in ten minutes. Everybody would have been dancing together like they do at the Savoy -- colored and white-- or down on the East Side at them Casinos on a Friday night where Jam holds forth -- and we would have been integrated."

Joyce said, 'This is a serious seminar, aiming at facts, not fun.' "Baby," I said, "what is more facts than acts? Jazz makes people get into action, move! Didn't nobody move in that hall where you were -- except to jerk their head up when they went to sleep, to keep anybody from seeing that they was nodding. Why, that chairman, Mrs. Maxwell-Reeves almost lost her glasses off her nose, she jerked her head up so quick one time when that man you say was so brilliant were speaking!"

"Jess Semple, that is not so!" yelled Joyce. 'Mrs. Maxwell-Reeves were just lost in thought. And if you think you saw me sleeping ----'

"You was too busy trying to look around and see where I was," I said. "Thank God, I did not have to set up there like you with the delegation. I would not be a delegate to no such gab-fest for nothing on earth."

"I thought you was so interested in saving the race!" said Joyce. 'Next time I will not ask you to accompany me to no cultural events, Jesse B., because I can see you do not appreciate them. That were a discussion of ways and means. And you are talking about jazz bands!'

"There's more ways than one to skin a cat," I said. "A jazz band like Duke's or Hamp's or Basie's sure would of helped that meeting. At least on Saturday afternoon, they could have used a little music to

put some pep into the proceedings. Now, just say for instant, they was to open with jazz and close with ham -- and do the talking in between. Start out, for example, with The St. Louis Blues, which is a king of colored national anthem. That would put every human in a good humor. Then play, Why Don't You Do Right? which could be addressed to white folks. They could pat their feet to that. Then for a third number before introducing the speaker, let some guest star like Pearl Bailey sing, There'll Be Some Changes Made -- which, as I understand it, were the theme of the meeting, anyhow -- and all the Negroes could say, Amen!

I wish they would let me plan them interracial seminaries next time. After the music, let the speech-making roll for a while -- with maybe a calypso between speeches. Then, along about five o'clock, bring on the jam session, extra-special. Start serving tea to Tea For Two, played real cool. Whilst drinking tea and dancing, the race relationers could relate, the integraters could integrate, and the desegregators desegregate. You would not have to beg for a crowd to come out and support your efforts then. Jam -- and the hall would be jammed! Even I would stick around, and not be outside sneaking a smoke, or trying to figure how I can get to the bar before the resolutions are voted on. Resolved: that we solve the race problem! Strike up the band! Hit it, mens! Aw, play that thing! It's getting late --

(MUSIC OF "SEND FOR ME" RISES AS SIMPLE TALKS HIS WAY INTO A SONG)

SIDE I, Band 3:

SIMPLE'S PLATFORM AND END

I am standing on my own, which means my own two feet, which covers two feet of space -- which I do not own, but I'm standing on it. The President can stand on the whole United States because he is President. Ralph Bunche can stand on the United Nations, Elder Williams on the pulpit of Bibleway Baptist Church. But I can only stand on what my two feet will cover, when I am, where I am, at the time I am. So that is what I stand on -- as I run for office and ask for your votes.

My platform is EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL. I also stand for AFRICA FOR THE AFRICANS, plus NO MORE PRIVATE LYNCHINGS IN MISSISSIPPI. I am tired of reading about Negroes getting killed down there. I am tired! So I stand for NO MORE KILLINGS IN MISSISSIPPI Whilst I am running for office in Harlem. (Of course, I would be running for safety, if I were in Mississippi).

Now, as to my party, it is neither Democratic nor Republican. It is my own party -- so I do not have to cut nobody in on my graft. I will not run on no dishonest ticket for a dishonest purpose. I will just come right out and say, "Gimme all that is coming to me." I believe in Negroes being in on graft, too, just like all these other politicianers. Then, when I get elected, I will raise sand in office -- before I get voted out for not getting the results I wanted before getting in. But, anyhow, by then everybody

will know that I have been in Washington, particularly white folks. Oh, yes, were I ever a Senator, I would leave my mark on politics forever. I would be writ up in books, put down in history, and raised up on monuments. My name would be carved in the Hall of Fame with Booker T. Washington, George Washington, and Dinah Washington. I would be one politicianer people would remember, me, Jesse B. Semple. Grandfathers would tell their children's children about how they voted for me, Jesse B. -- how I won... and lost, and how my head were bloody, but unbowed.

When I go down to my grave in death and defeat, I would leave a large sum of money behind me -- like all good politicianers do. And in my will I would leave Five Thousand Dollars to some fine funeral-preaching minister like Elder Williams. I would tell him, "Rev. preach me a great funeral, and let my light so shine in your sermon that no man will ever forget who I were, me, Jesse B. Semple."

Come to think of it, since I ain't dead yet, I might as well cast flowers on my own grave today and compose my own sermon right now -- so any ministers who's settin here listening can preach it for me after I am gone. Rev. this is what I want you to say --. Of course, in the first part, reading my obituary which I would have writ out myself before I died:

"The late deceased Jesse B. Semple, born in Virginia, married twice in life for better or worse - the first time for worse in Baltimore, the last time for good in Harlem. Jesse B. Semple, beloved Jess, he were a good man. Hear me, mourners, yes he were! Raised good, lived good, did good, and died good! Amen!"
(CHORUS)

Whereupon, from my coffin, I would say, "Rev. you lied good. Keep on!"

And my old minister would preach on: "Jesse B. Semple deserves to rest in peace, deserves to pass on over to the other shores where there is light eternal, where darkness never comes, and where he will receive a crown upon his noble head, that head that thought such noble thoughts, that head that never studied evil in this world, (AD LIB) that head that never harbored harm - that head, (AD LIB) that head, (AD LIB) oh, that head of Jesse B. Semple that receiveth his crown. And slippers! Golden slippers on his feet with heel plates of silver to make music up and down the golden streets. Oh, Jesse B. Semple, walking on the golden streets! Hailing a celestial cab to go whirling through eternal space down the Milky Way to see can he find some old friends in the far off parts of heaven. Angel after angel passes and he does not know any of them. Semple does not know this angel, (AD LIB) not that angel. (AD LIB) But here, oh, here at last is an angel that knows him."

"Rev! Rev!" I would whisper from my coffin, "You will have to tell me that angel's name, because I don't recollect who it is. I think all my friends must have gone to hell!"

Rev. would preach on: "Tis an angel from your youth-hood, Semple, a young angel you grew up with, but whom you cannot recognize since this angel died before the age of sin, but is now whiter than snow, as all are here in heaven. No matter how dark on earth you may be, in heaven you are whiter than snow, Jesse B. Semple, whiter than snow!"

"Aw, now Rev." I would say, "with me you do not need to go that far." But

old Rev. would keep on, because that sermon would be getting good to him by now: "Though your sins be as scarlet, in heaven, I say, Jesse B. Semple, old earthly Semple, down-home Semple is whiter than snow. White! On, yes, whiter than snow!"

"Then, Rev." I would have to holler, "I would not know my own self in the mirror, were I to look."

"In God's mirror all are white," says Rev: "white wings, white robe, white face, white neck, white shoulders, white hips, white hands, white soul! Oh, precious soul of Jesse B., worth more than words can tell! Worth more than tongues can fabulate, (AD LIB) worth more than speech can spatulate, (AD LIB) than throat can throttle, (AD LIB) than human mind manipulate! (AD LIB) This soul, this Jesse B. of a soul! This simple soul! Gone to glory, gone to his great reward of milk and honey, manna and time unending, and the fruit of the tree of eternity."

"Rev." I would be forced to say laying there in my coffin, thirsty by now, "Your words are as dry as popcorn and rice. You have mentioned neither beer nor wine -- and I am paying you to preach this sermon."

"The juice! Sweet juice of the Vine! Rev. would say. "Oh, yes, Jess Semple is partaking today of the juice of the Vine, and the fruit of the tree, and the manna of time unending, and the milk and honey of the streets of gold, and the wine of the vine of timeless space in that blessed place beneath his crown of gold, wrapped in the white robes of purity, with white wings flapping, his immortal soul winging its way through immortal space into that eternal place where time shall be no more, and he shall rest in peace forever and forever, ever more. (AD LIB COMMENTARY HERE)

"Semple were born good. He were raised good. He lived good, did good, and lied -- I mean, died ---- good. Amen!"
(ALL: AMEN! CUE FOR MUSICAL)

When the Saints

Go Marching In

Oh, when the Saints,

Go Marching In

SIDE II, Band 1:

MISSISSIPPI MONOLOGUE

Now if it were me going in to the Army today, now that we is intergrated, I'd be a general. I'd rise right to the top and be a General, and be in charge of white troops. In fact I'd like too command a regiment from Mississippi. In the last war they had white officers in charge of negroes, so why shouldn't I be in charge of whites, -- General Simple. I'd really make 'em

tow the line. I know some of them Dixiecrats would rather die than left-face for a colored man, but thy'd left-face for me. I can see myself now--In world war III---leading white mississippi troops into action. OH HOP!, I'd do just like all those other Generals do, and stand waaay back on a hill somewheres and I'd look through my spy glasses, and I'd say "Charge on mens, charge on." Then I'd watch those dixiecrat boys go--like true sons of the old south--mowin' down the enemy. Then, when my young, white lieutenants from Vicksburg jeeped back to headquarters to deliver their reports in person to me, the'd say--"Captain, General, Sir, we have captured two more enemy positions."--and I'd say, "Men's return to your companies and, tell to - Keep-on charging on- Then the next day, --When I caught up to them--I'd pin medals on their chests - for bravery. Then I'd have my picture took, in front of all my fine, white troops,--me-- The first Black American general to pin medals on white soldiers from Mississippi...Oh, Hop!, Map, then... Then... When the war be's over, I'd lineall my companies up for the last time, and I'd say to 'em, "Men's at ease, Gentlemen of the old south, relax. Lay down your fighting arms, and lend me your ears. 'Cause I am one of you too. Borne and bred in Dixie and I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, and forget how you failed to obey my orders in the old a w t, and Right-facded, when I told you Left! 'Cause you thought I was colored, well I am colored, but I'll forget that. 'Cause you are me, and I am you, and we are one and now that our fighting's over, let's be Americans, for once, for fun! Captains and generals and majors, and Lieutenants. Hopkins, open up another keg of nails for the men's. Let's all drink from the same, brew, you drink to me and, I'll drink to you, you brave sons...of the South. Drink men's, drink. And when we all staggers back to peace together, let there be peace. Between you, Mississippi, and me. Company! Ten-Hut! Right shoulder, Arms! Forwarrrd March! C'mon my boys, I'm leading you...by the left flank march! By the right flank, March! Go on my boys I'm right behind you.

SIDE II, Band 2:

WHEN A MAN SEES RED

"I may not be a red, but sometimes I see red." The way some of these people a man has to work for talks to a man, I see red. The other day my boss come saying to me that I was laying down on the job---when all I was doing was just thinking about Joyce. I said, "What do you mean, laying down on the job? Can't you see me standing up?" The boss said, "You ain't doing as much work as you used to do." I said, "A dollar don't buy as much for me as it used to do, so I don't do as much for a dollar. Pay me some more money, and I will do more work". "You talk like a red," he answers back. "What do you mean, red?" I asked. "You know what I mean--red, communist. After all this country has done for you Negroes, I didn't think you'd turn out to be a red." I said, "In my opinion, a man can be any color except yellow. I'd be yellow if I did not stand up for my rights." The boss said "You have no right to draw wages and not work." I said, "I have done work, I do work, and I will work--but also a man is due to eat for his work to have some clothes, and a roof over his head. For what little you are paying me, I can't hardly keep body and soul together. Don't you reckon I have a soul?" I said. The Boss said, "I have nothing to do with your soul. All I am concerned with, is your work. You are talking like a communist, and I will not have no reds in my plant." I said, "It wasn't long ago you wouldn't have no negroes in your plant. Now you won't have no reds. You must be color-struck!" That got him. That made him maaad. He said, "I have six Negroes

working for me now." I said Old Chairman would say, "You must be one of them Red Russians." "No I ain't either", I would say. "I was born down south, too, like you. But I do not like riding a jim crow car when I go home to Dixie. Also, I do not like being a Pullman porter all the time. Sometimes I want to run a train. "I know you are a Red Russian! Yells that old Chairman. "You want to tear this country down!" "Your Honery", I says, "I admit I would like to tear half of it down--the southern half from Virginia to Mobile--just to build it over new. And when I built it over, I would put you in the Jim Crow car instead of me." "Hold that Negra in contempt of court!" Yells chairman Georgia. "I thought you just said I was a Red Russian. Now here you go calling me a Negro, -- Which is I?" "Your both", says the Chairman. "Why?" Because I want to drive a train?" "Yes", yells the Chairman, "Because you want to drive a train! This is a white man's country. These is white men's trains! You cannot drive one. And down where I come from, Neither can you ride in a White coach." "You don't have any coaches for Red Russians", I said. "No, yells the Chairman, 'but we will have them soon as I can Pass a law". "Then where would I ride?" I asked. "In the COLORED coach or in the Red coach?" "You will not ride nowhere" yells the Chairman, because you will be in jail." "Then I will break your jail up," I said, 'because I am entitled to liberty whilst pursuing happiness." "Contempt of court" bangs the Chairman. Too hear me talk sometimes people would say that I talk right simple, and that things aren't that simple. Well that may be true, but then again, tho' things ain't so simple...Neither am I!!

"Yes, out of six hundred men, you wouldn't have them if you could've got anybody else during the war. And what kind of work do you give us? The dirty work! The chea-pest wages! Maintenance department--which is just another way for saying CLEAN UP. You know you don't care nothing about us Negroes. You getting ready to fire me right now. Well, if you fire me, I will be a red for sure, because I see red this mornin'. I will see the union, if you fire, I said. "Just go on and do your work," he said and walked off. But I was hot, baby! I'm telling you! But he did not look back. He didn't want to have no trouble out of that union. I know he thinks that I am a red now, but is it red to want to earn a decent wage? Is it red to want to keep your job?, and not take no stuff off a boss? I am black, also I will be red if things get worse. But one thing sure, I will not be yellow. I will stand up for my rights till kingdom come. They might even have me up before the UN-American committee, for seeing so much red. I wish that old southern chairman would send for me, I'd tell him more than he wants to know. For instant, I would say, "Your Honery, I wish to inform you that I was born in America, I lived in America, and as long as I have been black, I been an American. Also I was a Democrat--but I didn't know Roosevelt was doing to die." Then I would ask them, "How come you don't have any Negroes on your Un-American Committee?" And old Chairman Georgia would say, "because that is un-American." then I would say, "It must also be un-American to run a train, because I do not see any colored engineers running trains. All I see Negroes doing on the railroads is sweeping out coaches and making beds. Is that American?" Old Chairman Georgia would say, "Yes! Sweeping is American". Then I would say, "well, I want to be un-American so I can run a train."

SIDE II, Band 3:

BANQUET IN HONOR

"Well, sir, I went to a banquet the other night, and I

have never seen nothing like it... The chicken was good, but the best thing of all was the speech." This one were a killer, in fact, it almost killed the folks who gave the function. Some women's club that a big fat lady what goes to Joyce's dancing class belongs to, gave it. Her name is Mrs. Sadie Maxwell-Reeves and she lives so high up on Sugar Hill that People in her neighborhood don't even have roomers. They keep the whole house for themselves. Well, this Mrs. Maxwell-Reeves sold Joyce a deuce of Three-dollar ducats to this banquet her club was throwing for an old gentleman who is famous around Harlem for being an intellect for years, also very smart as well as honest, and a kind of all-around artist-writer-speaker and what-not. His picture's in the Amsterdam News this week. I can not recall his name, but I never will forget his speech. "Well, Joyce says the reason that club gave the banquet is because the poor old soul is so old he is about on his last legs and, although he is great, nobody has paid him much mind in Harlem before. This club thought instead of having a dance this year they would show some intelligence and honor him. They did. But he bit their hand, although he ate their chicken. It seems like this old man has always played the race game straight and has never writ no Amos and Andy books nor no songs like "That's why Darkies are Born", nor painted no kinky-headed pictures as long as he has been an artist--for which I give him credit. But it also seems that he did not make any money because the white folks wouldn't buy his stuff and the Negroes didn't pay him no mind because he wasn't famous. Anyhow, they say he will be greater when he's dead than he is alive--and he's mighty near dead now. Poor old soul! The Club give that banquet to catch some of his glory before he passes on. He gloried them, all right! In the first place, he ate like a horse. I was setting just the third table from him and I could see. Mrs. Maxwell-Reeves sort likes Joyce because Joyce helps her with her high kicks, so she give us a good table up near the speaking. She knows Joyce is a fiend for culture, too. Facts, some womens--including Joyce--are about culture like I am about beer--they love it. Well when we got almost through with the dessert, which was ice cream, the toastmistress hit on a cup with a spoon and the program was off. Some great big dame with a high voice and her hands clasped on her boosooms--which were fine-sung 'O carry Me Homey'. Joyce pronounced it 'O Cahro Nome'- Anyhow, hard as I try, daddy-O, I really do not like concert singers. They are always singing in some foreign language. I leaned over the table and asked Joyce what the song meant, but she snaps, 'It is not important what it means. Just listen to that high C above X'--I listened fluently, but it was Dutch to me. I said, "Joyce, what is she saying?" Joyce said "Please don't show your ignorance here." I said, "I am trying to hide it. But what in God's name is she singing about?" Joyce said, "It's in Italian. Shssss-s-s! For my sake, kindly act like you've got some culture even if you ain't." I said, "I don't see why culture can't be in English." Joyce said, "Don't embarrass me. You ought to be ashamed." I said, "I am not ashamed, neither am I Italian, and I do not understand their language." We would have had a quarrel right then and there had not that woman got through and set down. Then a man from the Urban League, a lady from the Daughter Elks, and a gentleman librarian all got up and paid tributes to the guest of honor. And he bowed and smiled and frowned and et because he could not eat fast, his teeth being about gone, so he still had a chicken wing in his hand when the program started. Finally came the great moment. "Shssss-s-s-ssh!! says Joyce. "I ain't said a word," I said, except that I sure wish I could smoke in here." "Hush" Joyce says, "This is a cultural event and no smoking allowed. We are going to hear the guest of honor." You should have seen Mrs. Sadie Maxwell-Reeves. She rose to her full heights. She is built like a pyramid up-

side-down anyhow. But her head was all done fresh and shining with a hair-rocker roached up high in front, and a advertised-in-Ebony snood down the back, also a small bunch of green feathers behind her ear and genuine diamonds on her hand. Man, she had boozoom-glasses that pulled out and snapped back when she read her notes. But she did not need to read no notes, she were so full of her subject. If words was flowers and he was dead, that old man couldn't have had more boquets put on him if he'd had a funeral at Delaney's where big shots get laid out. He were sprayed with the perfume of eloquence. He were welcomed and rewelcomed to that Three-Dollar banquet and given the red plush carpet. Before that lady got through, I clean forgot I wanted to smoke. I were spellbound, smothered in it myself. Well, sir! That old man got up and he did not smile. It looked like he cast a wicked eye right on me, and he did like a snake charmer to Joyce, because nobody could move our heads. He did not even clear his throat before he said, "You think you are honoring me, ladies and gentlemen of the Athenyannie Arts Club, when you invited me here tonight? You are not honoring me a damn bit! I said, not a bit. You could have heard a pin drop. "The way you could have honored me if you have wanted to, ladies and gentlemen, all these years, would have been to buy a piece of my music, and play it, or a book of mine and read it, but you didn't -- Else you could have booted off the screen a few of them Uncle Toms thereon and told the manager of the Hamilton you'd never come back to see another picture in his theater until he put a story of mine in it, or some other decent hard-working Negro. But you didn't do no such thing. You didn't even buy one of my watercolors. You let me starve until I am mighty nigh blue-black in the face -- and not a one of you from Sugar Hill to Central Park ever offered me a pig's foot. Then when the New York Times said I was a genius last month, here you come now giving a banquet for me when I'm old enough to fall over in my grave--If I was able to walk to the edge of it--which I'm not. Now, to tell you the truth, I don't want no damned banquet. I don't want no honoring where you eat as much as me, and enjoy yourselves more, besides making some money for your treasury. If you want to honor me, give some young boy, or girl who's coming along trying to create arts and write and compose and sing and act and paint and dance and make something out of the beauties of the Negro race--give that child some help. Buy what they're making! Support what they're doing! Put out some cash-but don't come giving me, who's old enough to die and too near blind to create anything anymore anyhow, a great big banquet that you eat up in honor of your own stomachs---You hear me, I ain't honored! Thats what that old man said, and sat down. Well, then Mrs. Maxwell Reeves got up and tried to calm the waters. But she made matters worse, and that feather behind her ear was shaking like a leaf. She pulled at her glasses but she could not get them on. She came near blushing, but she couldn't quite make it, being brownskin. I don't know what I did, but everybody turned and looked at me. I said, "Joyce, I got to go have a smoke." Joyce said, "This is so embarrassing! You laughing out loud! Oh! I said, if you ever want to take me to another banquet in honor, I will go, though I don't reckon there will be another one this good. I said, "I didn't know I was laughing." She said, "Everybody else knew it, you was heard all over the hall. I would like you to know that I am not built like you, I cannot just drink and, forget." "No matter how many drinks I drink, I will not forget this." Then I laughed some more. When I took Joyce home she slammed the vestibule door dead in my faee. So I went home to my third-floor-rear, ---and laughed some more. I ain't stingy like them Sugar-Hillers, they wouldn't buy none of his art when he could still enjoy the benefits. But me, I'd buy that old man a beer anytime!