



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Pamphlet: A Negro Looks at War**

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## THE NEGRO SOLDIER

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

My brother died in France, but I came back.  
We were just two colored lads, brown and black,  
Who joined up to fight for the U.S.A.  
When the nations called us that mighty day.  
We were sent to the training camps, then overseas  
And me and my brother were happy as you please  
Thinking we were fighting for democracy's true reign,  
And that our dark blood would wipe away the stain  
Of prejudice and hate and the false color line  
And give us the rights that are yours and are mine.  
They told us America would know no black or white,  
So we marched to the front, happy to fight.

Last night in a dream my brother came to me  
Out of his grave from over the sea  
Back from the acres of crosses in France  
And said to me, "Brother, now you've got your chance,  
And I hope you're making good and doing fine,  
For when I was living I didn't have mine.  
Black boys couldn't work then, anywhere like they do today.  
Could hardly find a job that offered a decent pay.  
The unions barred us, and factories too,  
But now I know we've got plenty to do.  
We couldn't eat in restaurants, had Jim-Crow cars,  
Didn't have any schools and there were all sorts of bars  
To a colored lad's rising in wealth and station.  
But now I know that's not our situation.

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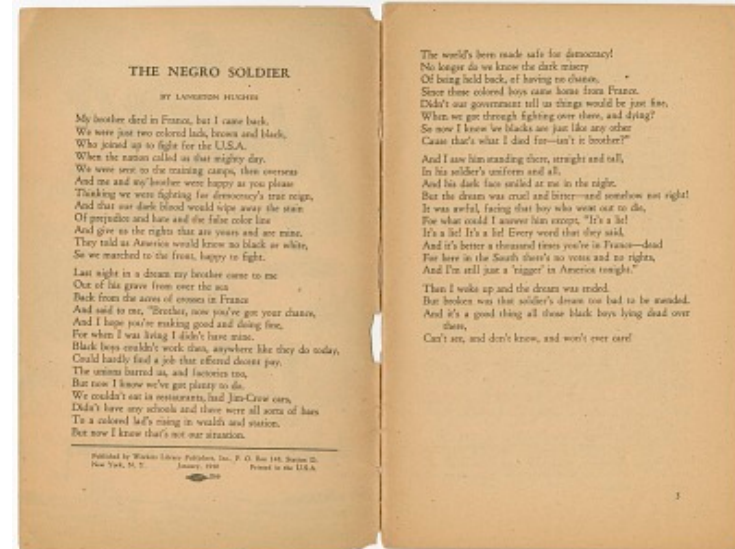
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The world's been made safe for democracy!  
No longer do we know the dark misery  
Of being held back, of having no chance,  
Since those colored boys came home from France.  
Didn't our government tell us things would be just fine.  
When we got through fighting over there, and dying?  
So now I know we blacks are just like any other  
Cause that's what I died for - isn't it brother?"

And I saw him standing there, straight and tall,  
in his soldier's uniform and all.  
And his dark face smiled at me in the night.  
But the dream was cruel and bitter - and some how not right!



It was awful, facing that boy who went out to die,  
For what could I answer him except, "It's a lie!  
It's a lie! It's a lie! Every word that they said,  
And it's better a thousand times you're in France - dead  
For here in the south there's no votes and no rights,  
And I'm still just a 'nigger' in America tonight."

Then I woke up and the dream was ended.  
But broken was the soldier's dream too bad to be mended.  
And it's a good thing all those black boys lying dead over there, can't  
see, and don't know, and won't ever care!

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