

The Periscope

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THE NEW MAN OF LETTERS

By Lucien V. Alexis

Among American men of letters there will soon appear the New Negro. He will be marked by an analytic proclivity directed with excruciating effect upon Christianity and democracy. His most irritating characteristic will be a desire to see, to know men, things, and movements as they are—free from the veil put upon them by an environment dominated by Christianity and democracy.

If in his analysis, based upon the experiences of a people, those two concepts yield sufficient life to Negroes, this new man of powerful influence will rally to the cross and the flag that race of men known as devout to an ideal, loyal to a cause, and supple to influences of environment. If, however, he finds that those two concepts stand between the Negro and larger life, he will teach the brushing aside of Christianity and democracy for such new concepts as he, in the light of his American experience, may evolve from his environment or as he may arise from the loud batterings of socialism, bolshevism and anti-christianism.

The most irresistible weapon, offensive and defensive, of this new man of letters will be his humor, his ever poking fun at black Americans for their ignorance in an environment from which other races of men have won so much and at white Americans for their inability to make their practice in religion, government, and life gibe to their vaunted theories. Compelled by the experience of the American Negro to the conclusion that neither is Christianity the last word in religion nor democracy the last word in forms of government, this new teacher, while wandering through the lost or neglected literature in Negro life, will chide with laughing frankness the weakness of a people whose language, religion, barbaric government, and mode of personal life will tell how the African dialect, fetishism, tribal life and tribal independence, gave way to the language, the religion, and the serfdom of America.

Yet, with fearless non-bizarre humor, the New Negro will ask of Christianity and democracy why since the African Negro, even though by compulsion, surrenders so completely to them do they break down when black men seek the efficacy of their tenets. Involved in this questioning, which this New man will prompt among his own people, will be the passing of the dominion of white Americans over the thought of black Americans, a dominion which palliates, veneers, and covers over the breaking down of those two master concepts. He will teach, preach, write, and sing of desirable human life as life not based on Christianity and democracy or at least as life not based upon Christianity and democracy as per the dictum of white Americans. Taught by the experience of Negroes in America that common language, common religion, common country does not, cannot bind black and white men in brotherhood, the New Negro as man of letters with his characteristic analytic proclivity will quickly grasp and glorify the conclusions compelled by the ways of white Americans: color transcends language, religion, democracy, and country taken singly or combined; men are eternally of two classes, white and black—master and man; Christian and democratic white Americans are determined to risk the long, long future on that eternal division.