

Between The Lines

By GORDON B. HANCOCK

The So-Called "New Negro"

THE World War and the precepts evolved therefrom fired the imagination of Negroes, and rightly so; for so was fired the imagination of the world! Above the din and confusion of reconstruction could be heard a louder and more insistent voice in behalf of Negro rights; it was the voice of those calling themselves "New Negroes."

They proposed, it seemed, to force the issue and make a short cut towards the goal of full citizenship in this country. They styled themselves "New Negroes" in contradistinction to the old Negroes who are committed to the policy of watchful waiting and by a slow and studied procedure finally achieving by attrition what is not possible by force. These "New Negroes" proposed to show the shortcomings of all those Negroes who believed, even as Booker T. Washington believed, that the way to full citizenship is necessarily tedious and toilsome and tortuous.

Those who faced this ugly fact were branded "Handkerchief Heads," "Uncle Toms," and what not. This New Negro had fight in his race and blood in his eyes if we judge him by his oratory and his vaunted manhood. Our Negro journals were filled to overflowing with the term "New Negro" and a volume was written entitled "The New Negro." We were led to believe that a new spirit had possessed the Negro and that what Negroes of a former generation had hoped for and prayed for would be speedily demanded and secured by the "New Negro."

After ten years how changed are things as they pertain to the so-called "New Negro." Our journals scarcely employ the term, and that once louder and insistent voice has been subdued to an inaudible whisper. Mind you, we are not decrying the ideal embodied in the emergence of the "New Negro"; we are just deploring the fact that he quailed before the challenge of the hour! At a time when we need somebody to cry out and spare not, the "New Negro" has skulked away to his tents.

The iron is hot today and we have nobody to strike for us. The spirit that possessed the New Negro could not stand the impact of these trying times and so he recanted from the line of conflict. It all goes to show that we are yet a long way from the Promised Land for the reason we lack the spirit that carries on in spite of all.

We are thus amazed before the sudden passing of the "New Negro" for we once had

hopes that he might find a better way; but he failed us ingloriously. He is standing today where his forefathers stood two generations ago and it remains to be seen whether he can bequeath to the next two generations the equivalent of what has been bequeathed to him.

It must be remembered that our present foundation in education and economic endeavor was laid by former slaves, their sons and daughters. It is tragic to see the so-called "New Negro" quail before the outstanding challenge of modern times—the challenge of the future of the Negro.

A few months ago these New Negroes proposed to drive Amos and Andy from the air. Although this writer never cared for these entertainers, he has always felt that as a matter of business they could not be driven out after the manner suggested. If, however, by a united front the "New Negro" spirit could accomplish its ends, I was willing to give my assent.

Today, Amos and Andy are going strong and what is more I hear from no quarter the protest that reverberated so strongly just a few months ago. George Schuyler proposed to organize these "New Negroes" into a band of cooperatives. They called themselves "militant" and we hoped that they would actually come through with something constructive for these trying times. Today we hear little or nothing about the Schuyler movement and its votaries. Just another concrete illustration of the lack of stamina in the so-called New Negro.

It may be argued that these critical times are poor times for the launching of racial endeavor; but where such endeavor is largely spiritual, these above all other times are the times suited for spiritual growth. If the Negro's spirit does not show in times like these we are doomed beyond hope.

The Jew wrought his spiritual ideals in sweat and blood; the world-dominating Nordics acceded to power through suffering and sacrifices that beggar description; Gandhi by an ideal steeped in asceticism is building into the suffering heart of India a spirit that cannot die.

After all the flop of the so-called radical Negro and the inglorious failure of the so-called "New Negro" showed that they were in no way different from the old Negro save in zeal for notoriety and in a prepossession of an aggravated egoism that exploits the foibles of human nature. Where is the "New Negro" now?