

Dustin' off the NEWS

By LUCIUS C. HARPER

WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

DEMOCRACY, it has been said, is less efficient than dictatorship because it cannot act promptly and decisively in a crisis. At other times it may be more pleasant or even



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more durable, but when peril threatens, it is a luxury which is unfit to survive. Observations like these are now on the lips of many who see what is going on about us throughout this country. Any historian or strategist would say that the present moment

offers a critical opportunity which may be utilized by America to disprove this theory.

One enormous advantage Hitler has had over his enemies has been his assurance that he was preparing a true world-wide revolution while the democracies only wanted to preserve the status quo. His statement, of course, is false as regards Nazi aims; not only are they not truly revolutionary, they are in most aspects reactionary to the last degree; but there is just enough truth in his gibe against the democracies to make it hurt.

In the past, the democracies have certainly not done enough to bring to all people under their rules the material, mental and spiritual satisfactions that are possible. They have accepted too easily the fact that millions of fellow citizens are living under heavy handicaps of prejudice and poverty; they have been too complacent about exploitation by representatives of the democracies in other parts of the world. Democracy cannot win the world unless it has a genuine bargain to offer—a better bargain than fascism

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IF DEMOCRACY tries merely to maintain the status quo, it runs a good risk of not even being able to do that. What democracy needs now as its main spearhead is the determination that it can and must make our world over as soon as it has destroyed Hitler's menace to democratic security, and indeed as part of the process. What sort of world can we envisage, when we think in these terms? Let us begin with domestic matters; these are closely related to world-wide efforts at reconstruction. It is now possible, as the war rapidly engulfs us, to suggest the broad directions toward

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which our efforts must turn. To do this is not to engage in the unfruitful occupation of writing outlines for Utopia; it is, on the contrary, to project into the future lines that are already clearly visible.

It goes without saying that America, as a democracy, must make itself over. It must charter a new course in the process. It cannot preserve the status quo. The democracy that the American white man is fighting to preserve is not the democracy that the black man desires; the democracy that the black man desires is in total contradiction to that which the white man has maintained these many years for his own benefit both in the North and the South. Whether white America realizes it or not, black America is engaged in this global war to destroy every vestige of "white democracy" that does not now accept it on the same and equal terms.

The "status quo" in American democracy is without question an insult to the thinking and intelligent Negro. The Negro has no such viewpoint that he is now giving up his life to merely maintain things as they are in America with relation to his manhood status. In juxtaposition to the Negro's determination to re-make America along social lines is that element of whites, numbering millions, who are just as doggedly determined that democracy here will be retained in status quo, delegating as of yore, a definite "place"—a secondary one—for the Negro. This disunity that now faces us must be corrected at home, before the influence of democracy can be cherished as a dominating and conquering force over fascism.

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SUCH A NATIONAL character as Roger Baldwin, director of the American Civil Liberties Union, shocked Chicagoans at a luncheon here this week when he said there was widespread pro-axis sentiment among Negroes disgruntled about discrimination against them in jobs and in certain parts of the army and navy. Many of them, Mr. Baldwin said, would like to see the Japanese win the war and deflate the white man's sense of superiority, and he added, that there is not one white man in the nation who is giving his full time to fighting for the rights of the Negro. "Both labor and the Negroes have to fight their battles alone," he explained. Mr. Baldwin, however, did not shock his Negro listeners at this luncheon, for daily in their communities they are constantly hearing the hurrahs from their own folk when evidence becomes apparent that the white man has been somewhat deflated in his "holier-than-thou" status.

There is no doubt, however, that the race problem is at least a latent issue with almost everyone, not only in the South where it has been terribly mishandled and bungled, but everywhere within the United States. For America is a nation in name only. In point of fact, it is a social form containing racial, national and cultural groups which the existing economic, political and social systems tend to keep divided and repellent. Moreover, each group is left to feel, and often taught and urged to believe, that some other group is the cause of its misfortune. Against the actual and potential antagonisms thus caused, many of our churches and other orders of so-called brotherhood and goodwill do no more than make feeble, and, often enough, hypocritical gestures to tackle and remedy.

The first World War gave the present day Negro his opportunity to fight for democracy, whereas he had heretofore inherited it. He was somewhat fooled at the outcome,

but, nevertheless, it strengthened within him certain of the forces and factors to enjoy the real thing at the next granting of the opportunity. Therefore, the new Negro of today is more American than was the old Negro of 50 years ago, and is determined to enjoy fully that for which he fights.

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WITHIN THE Negro world there has come about a parallel growth and organization of economic and professional activities rivaling other groups in this commonwealth, and, consequently an increased group independence and the emergence of a fairly well defined middle class. The tendency of this class is to get out of America what America fully promises as a democracy, and nothing less. It is determined to embarrass democracy on every hand for its erring conduct; make a sham of it, or develop it to full manhood. It wants to participate—and lead its race to full participation—not as Negroes, but as Americans in the general life of America. And that is the class that wants to join with liberal whites to remake America: make it what it now pretends to be in the sight of the world.