

PROF. KELLY MILLER TELLS LANGSTON HUGHES WHY STUDENTS ARE COWARDS

By KELLY MILLER

The college world at large is put to it to justify its existence in view of its obvious failure to meet the economic, political and social requirements of a changing world. The Negro colleges of today lag far behind the rest in positing a *raison d'être* for its existence. It is mainly the momentum imparted a generation ago that keeps them going. They fall pathetically short of the requirements of the day and hour.

Two recent magazine articles have thrown bomb shells into the circle of the Negro college. One appeared in *Opportunity* for June and the other in *The Crisis* for July. The administration, faculty and student body are taken caustically to task for their delinquencies and shortcomings. Langston Hughes, the noted Negro poet and radical, declares that the colleges are producing cowards. A serious accusation this which is sought to be sustained by a simple narration of facts which came under his personal observation. On reading his severe arraignment I was impressed with the thought that Mr. Hughes failed to grasp or to appreciate the motive, reason, and end in view by those who founded and who now support the higher education of the colored race.

The traditional ideal of the college was to produce the scholar and the gentleman and imbue him with the political, ethical and social aims approved by the dominant social opinion. The ability to make a living is the fourth dimension recently imparted to the collegiate function. Every genuine college must root in its own soil and thrive on its own

nurture. In inception, object and purpose, the Negro college was and is a vicarious plant of altruistic and philanthropic nurture. The philanthropists conceived the place which they wanted the Negro to occupy in the social scheme and founded the Negro college to carry out that conception. No genuine Catholic college could be supported by Protestants nor could a Jewish seminary be managed by Christians.

RACE UNABLE TO FURNISH EDUCATION

But obviously enough, the Negro was and is unable to furnish his own higher education which must needs be supplied altruistically. As long as human nature remains what it is, the man who plays the fiddle will call the tune. Negro education will therefore conform to the tradition and mores of dominant white opinion as long as they fall under white support and direction. The installation of colored instead of white presidents and faculties tend to increase rather than diminish their dependency. The time is not in sight when the Negro can or will maintain or support his own higher education.

The Negro is encouraged to develop himself and to make himself useful and happy so long and so far as it does not jar the accepted mores. With this background of understanding, Mr. Hughes might have saved himself the labor and us the pain of his long narrative of humiliating incidents. After long and varied experience with college presidents and faculties, I am fully convinced that they inculcate upon their student body as much courage, manliness and independence as they judge they can safely do and still be allowed to function. If school must keep it must conform to dominant opinion, which it dares not affront. A capital illustration must suffice. Under the administration of President Durkee, a book describing the workings of the Soviet government in Russia found its way in the Howard university library. Upon the peremptory demand of the chairman of the appropriation committee of the United States Senate, it was forthwith withdrawn. President Mordecai Johnson on an occasion undertook to deplete the Russian scheme of government, but was promptly called to book by the trustee board and bidden to do so no more. Academic freedom is a myth even in white colleges; in the Negro college it is bluntly taboo.

LANGSTON HUGHES A "NEW NEGRO"

Langston Hughes belongs to the New Negro who feels restive under restraints which race prejudice makes inevitable. They have little patience with and no tolerance for the spirit of long suffering and endurance which the white friend sought to promote on part of Negro leadership. He would take up arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them. The Negro intelligentsia has not yet justified itself. They have more wisdom than understanding, more passion than power. They criticize without creating; they destroy, but cannot construct. They have intellectual pertness without originality. They fill the air with screeches against the iniquities of existing conditions without formulating remedial programs of practical action.

Mr. Hughes also seems to labor under the erroneous impression that we must look to the college for dynamic leadership. The college can only furnish leaders in the secondary sense who will carry out the program already laid down. The heroic leader is made by God, not by the college. Page Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler and Lloyd George, or better still George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey.

The college bred Negro today who is lifting his voice in loud protest against the traditional place which is marked out for him by the whites incurs the disfavor of the college which educated him. Langston Hughes is *persona non grata* to Lincoln university, Carl H. Murphy to Howard university, DuBois to Fisk, Pekkens to Talladega and Trotter to Harvard. The Negro colleges have their important sphere and function, but if we look to them for encouragement of down right dynamic and heroic leadership, we look in vain.