

The New Negro Looks Forward To Better Day

By ROI OTTLEY
(This is the fifth in a series of 12 articles digesting the sensational best-seller "New World A-Coming." This exclusive "Amsterdam-News" condensation by S. W. Garlington was made possible through the courtesy of Mr. Ottley, the author, and his publishers, Houghton - Mifflin Company. — The Editor.)

The Apostles of Race
WITHOUT the fireworks of the Back-to-Africa organization or the gingerbread of the Divine mission, a sober, well - advertised movement fostering pride of race had been under way since early in the twenties. That racial esthete, Doctor Alain Locke, Negro critics and Howard University professor, celebrated the initial transformations in the inner life of Black American in his book, *The New Negro* (1925), by recording the 'dramatic flowering of a new race-spirit.' The movement extended into the thirties with greater power and vitality.

Today, Negro scholars zealously rewrite those chapters of history which ignore or minimize the part Negroes have played in the development of the United States. W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, reinterpreted the events of the Civil War and Reconstruction period in his book, *Black Reconstruction* (1935), to refute aspersions cast on the Negro.

"Today solid contributions are being made on the Negro's racial heritage by such serious-minded groups as the American Negro Academy, The Negro Society for Historical Research, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History which sponsors an annual "Negro History Week."

"The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future," said Arthur A. Schomburg, the Negro bibliophile. " . . . For him (the Negro), a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generation must repair and offset."

At times, this movement almost took on the aspects of a vogue. Popular writers fictionalized and some glamorized Negro figures in history. Formidable assault was made on the concept of the Negro as superstitious, lazy, happy-go-lucky, religious, ostentatious, loud and musical. To combat these stereotypes—sometimes as even mouthed by Negroes themselves—intellectuals wrote and preached of Negro inventors, Negro senators, black leaders of slave rebellions, African kings and warriors.

To give the canvas sweep and diversity, they included Negro prize-ring champions, Negro Kentucky Derby winners, black cowboys, and even Negro slaveholders and a 'Black Joan of Arc.' Composers, lyricists, and artists, too, had a fling at these racial themes — and more than one painter did a 'Black Christ' in oils. The pamphleteers performed most of the early spadework.

Pamphleteer, Extraordinaire
Besppectacled J. A. Rogers, lecturer and traveler and once a member of Garvey's inner crowd, was—and is today—the most widely read pamphleteer in Black America. He is regarded by certain nationalist elements as something of a "Black Karl Marx," or theoretician of the



REV. JOHN H. JOHNSON

race movement. His importance in Negro life stems from the influence he exerts on the minds of many Negroes, though orthodox historians frown upon his work.

A typical work is his pamphlet, *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro*, which now is in its eighteenth edition. It is a small paper-covered copy of fifty pages, and is written in simple language, each 'fact' being tersely itemized in numerical fashion. It is the 'Bible' of soapbox speakers and lecturers throughout the country, and it is this group which provides his main source of distribution. Here are a few items chosen at random to illustrate.

"Beethoven, the world's greatest musician, was without doubt a dark mulatto. He was called 'The Black Sanpilar'."

"Ethiopians, that is Negroes, gave the world the first idea of right and wrong and thus laid the basis of religion, and of all true culture and civilization."

"There were three African Popes of Rome: Victor (189-199 A. D.); Melchisedech (311-312); and St. Gelasius (496 A. D.). It was Melchisedech who led Christianity to final triumph against the Roman Empire."

Black nationalism, torn from its circus aspects, and made more palatable to a wider section of the Negro population, permeated every phase of Negro life.

With the Italian assault on Ethiopia in the winter of 1935, a tailor-made issue arose for the racialists, one cut in nice precise proportions. Here, at long last, was some sort of tangible idealism — certainly a legitimate issue—around which the black nationalist could rally, and indeed rally a great section of the black population.

Clearly Negroes in America had cast their lot with colored peoples elsewhere in the world!

The Campaign for Jobs

WHILE the Negro's eyes were lifted toward a racial utopia of some sort, the Depression had picked his pocket of its final shekel. Along with the heat about Ethiopia, mass - action organizations sprang up to grapple with the stern realities of every day living. This movement, an aspect of the Negro's new racialism, was not confined to any one city but was in fact national in sweep — though actions were localized — and came to be known as the Jobs-for-Negroes Campaign. The gains made were not momentous but they were significant of a trend. Actually, and more important, the campaign served to dramatize the unemployment prob-



J. A. ROGERS

lems of Negroes and served as well further to stimulate racial unity.

The movement had its first expression in the midwest, and as it swept east gathered momentum. In St. Louis, for example, when a white-owned chain store which did

business almost exclusively with Negroes refused to employ Negro help, the local Urban League organized a boycott. Later, this campaign extended to the employment of Negroes in trucking companies and bakeries, and as motion-picture operators in houses that catered to Negroes.

Mass-Action Drives

Biggest of these mass-action drives was the one launched in Harlem, and it had a profound effect upon affairs in Black America. In the summer of 1933, The Citizens' League for Fair Play was organized by the Reverend John H. Johnson and Editor Fred R. Moore. It attempted to persuade white merchants doing business in the community to employ Negroes, and argued—as other groups had argued elsewhere in the country—that white businessmen in the Negro neighborhood received the bulk of their trade from Negroes and therefore should employ them.

To strengthen its argument, the league started a campaign to collect the sales receipts of purchases made at stores that were the targets of this drive. A typical case occurred at Blumstein's, the largest department store in Harlem. One morning a neatly tied bundle was thrown on the desk of William Blumstein,

the store's owner. He remained adamant to requests or persuasion to employ Negroes as clerical workers and salesgirls. As a sponsor of Negro charitable institutions, and as the employer of Negro elevator operators, porters, and maids, he explained that he had done his share for Negroes, and refused to budge an inch in response to the demand for more jobs.

Months of similar negotiations with other shopkeepers led nowhere. Finally the league began to picket the stores on 125th Street, Harlem's main shopping district, and a vigorous boycott was carried on with the slogan "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work!" Harlem supported the drive, loudly and wholeheartedly. Everyone in the community, it seemed, participated in the boycott, even to giving social affairs to raise funds.

Business Dropped

Business dropped to the vanishing point — with a good deal of strong feeling on both sides. The white merchants changed their attitude somewhat, and a handful of young Negroes were placed in jobs as salesclerks. But as soon as the league relaxed its vigilance, they lost their jobs.

About this time, the movement brought forward Sufi Abdul Hamid, who drew heavily on the Koran for authority but who made his appeals in the streamlined terms of modern Harlem. When the huge statuesque figure of Sufi, with his brown bearded face, searching eyes, resplendently dressed in turban, green velvet blouse, Sam Browne belt, riding habit, patent leather boots, and wearing a black crimson - lined cape carelessly around his shoulders, strode out on Lenox Avenue, he was an immediate sensation. He set up offices in a loft at 135th Street, which served as a combination meeting hall, butcher-shop, and grocery store. There he established the Negro Industrial Clerical Alliance, and — as Harlem would say—the panic was on!

Harlem reeled dizzily under the rain of propaganda. No business owned by a white man was too small, or too big, for them to tackle. They swept through the community and put the heat under grocers, druggists, butchers, and owners of other small establishments, bludgeoning them into signing up with the Sufi organization — which, meant paying tribute for 'protection' against violence. The 'take' was several hundred dollars a week.

These roughhouse tactics drove the white merchants into the lap of the conservative Citizens' League, which once more was able to place a few young people in jobs.