

Negroes of New York

Wilbur Young 9/31/39

Sketches of Colorful Characters in Harlem

Prophet Costonie

Costonie, young, handsome, well groomed and glib tongued came to Harlem in 1935 from Baltimore, Md. He established a little storefront mission just off Seventh Avenue and with the aid of a few magic tricks and hocus pocus began to draw a considerable number of curiosity seekers. He built up a sort of streamline religion in which the piano player swung the hymns.

In a short time Costonie who labeled himself Prophet was able to rent a large hall on Eighth Avenue between 142nd and 143rd Streets. He mixed his religious ~~#####~~ spiel with a bit of cold every day logic which included the best methods to get on relief, free employment agencies, clinics and hospitals. However the secret of his ~~###~~ success was his ability to mystify his audience or congregation. He had such a repertoire of tricks that they almost always went away baffled and thoroughly convinced that the man possessed supernatural power.

In proportion to his success, Costonie went about in a big way to capture the town. He engaged several crack newspaper men as press agents, leased a high class apartment on Sugar Hill, purchased a high class car, hired a reception clerk, secretary and maid. He opened another temple on lower Eighth Avenue near 121st Street and engaged a regular office staff. On the nights that he was not busy he could be seen at some of the Harlem hot spots with many # of Harlem's best looking women.

Costonie kept well in touch with current ~~##~~ affairs especially Father Divine and his cult for he had visions of running the Father out

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business one fine day. He also dabbled in boycotts, strikes and employment in Harlem and instructed his followers to register and vote. In spite of all this however, Costonie had a tendency to be a playboy and a weakness for women. He made several enemies and at one time an attempt was made on his life and for a long time thereafter he traveled with two armed bodyguards.

In 1936, Costonie made a trip to Europe. He traveled first class dined with millionaires and ~~###~~ tipped very generously. Many are the incidents he himself tells concerning his experiences at his temple. Once a woman came to him with a mysterious looking envelope that contained some noisey ingredients. He instructed the woman to exercise the utmost care and deliver the package to him. When he received the envelope, he took it to his study and out of the woman's sight proceeded to open it. It turned out to be a harmless bit of onion seeds nevertheless, he told the woman that she narrowly escaped being fixed by an enemy and that he had succeeded in breaking the spell. The poor soul went away convinced more than ever that he had delivered her from a fate worse than death.

On another occasion a woman came to him complaining of unbearable pains in the head. He took her aside and with a few magic words proceeded to anoint her head with what seemed to be plain water. As he dipped his hand in the water and bathed her forehead, the water began to change color. At first the water became green, than blue and than black. When he finished this process he told her that he had drawn all of the evil matter out of her head and strangely enough the woman professed feeling 100% better. Costonie later admitted that this effect was created by bits of colored dye under his fingertips. The rest was a matter of mind over matter.

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At the present time, Costonie has left New York for more fertile fields and has just recently opened a temple in Philadelphia. Probably one of the reasons that caused him to make this decision was the fact that the authorities were beginning to get very curious about his income and Tony's past experiences could not stand too close an investigation.