



*No Crystal Stair: A Documentary Novel of the Life and Work of Lewis Michaux, Harlem Bookseller.*

Vaunda Micheaux Nelson. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Lab, 2012. 188 pp.

*No Crystal Stair* tells the story of Lewis Michaux, a Harlem bookseller, an unsung hero for civil rights and follower of dreams. Told in documentary style, the author extensively researched Michaux's life using audio recordings of interviews, family archives, articles, books, and interviews with others who knew Michaux and created this story of his life. The book is set up in seven different sections, ranging from 1906 – 1976. The story unravels through a series of journal entries by various people, including Michaux's father, mother, siblings, and other acquaintances.

From an outside perspective, Lewis Michaux led a troubled existence as a boy. However, his decisions seem sensible once the reader is able to obtain a more comprehensive story of his life and purpose. Michaux was born with an innate awareness of right and wrong, combined with the gift of critical thought. As a youth who lacked a full understanding of consequences, Michaux managed to get himself into a great deal of trouble. Through the support of family members and his own intellectual pursuits, he was able to leave his troubled past behind when he relocated to Harlem in 1937.

Michaux was originally inspired by the work of Marcus Garvey and his weekly newspaper, which provided a voice for the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, an organization also founded by Garvey. He felt passionate about educating the African American community; however, he believed that understanding African history and heritage should also be central to that education. Garvey believed in taking pride in racial heritage through embracing and supporting black institutions as well as black people in leadership positions. Michaux's inspiration for starting the National Memorial African Bookstore came from Garvey as well as other African American scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and Frederick Douglass.

The bookstore took some time to establish, but Michaux worked through it by walking up and down the streets of Harlem, encouraging young African Americans to take a look at what he had and borrow books if they were unable to buy one right away. Through hard work and persistence, Michaux's bookstore became a central location for those interested in civil rights and black nationalism. In fact, Malcolm X often spoke to thousands of people from a platform in front of Michaux's National Memorial African Bookstore.

While my curiosity in *No Crystal Stair* was sparked by my inherent interest in race and social justice, I think that people young and old could enjoy learning about someone who played a pivotal role in the education and inspiration of many in the black community and beyond during such an important time in American history. The layout of the book was also interesting and enjoyable. Come check it out at the library!