MARCUS GARVEY

IS HE THE TRUE REDEEMER OF THE NEGRO?

MARCUS GARVEY
Founder and President-General
of the Universal Negro
Improvement Association

By
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Editor of “The Negro World”
I.—THE NEGRO IS CONFUSED

The Negro is a DARK man in the United States, and in fact all over the world. But life for him has been DARKER and unkindlier than for anybody else in the world. And now when the entire world is in the cruellest grip of a devastating depression everything has become the DARKEST for him.

The Negro is generally considered to be a gay being, a carefree creature, a happy-go-lucky fellow. He is supposed to rush for lines of least resistance. He is said to avoid initiative, planning, self-help, hard thinking on his own account and above all responsibility—in fact all the virtues that go for making a race worth surviving.

Judging by the actions and activities of Negro men and women that are considered by white Americans as leaders of their race, the indictment against the Negro as drawn above is true to a fault. Such “leaders” being in most cases of the older generation are still the children of the SLAVE ERA and carry all its attributes and drawbacks unimpaired in their thinking and planning. Therefore they have not been able to conceive of a Negro who could think for himself, who could plan for himself, who could create for himself, who would redeem himself and his race by self-help. Such a Negro, in fact, would be in the estimation of these “leaders”, an INSULT to their race!

Because of such psychological twists the Negro “leaders” in America have been depending and too often upon not only the good will but also on the good graces of their white neighbors. They LOOK UP to the whites to such an extent that they are mortally afraid of thinking thoughts that may displease them (the whites). They would not do things, even to save their lives, without first consulting and getting a bonafide endorsement by their white compatriots. And it is for such reasons that all the movements in America that purport to exist for the good of the Negro, or as they euphemistically say, of the “colored man”, have been either started or are controlled by the whites. As far as these Negro “leaders” are concerned they are still living in the plantation days before the Civil War, LOOKING UP to their white “mastah” to give them not only advice but to give them bread and clothing. Only their “mastah” now is the entire white population instead of the plantation owner.

“Looking up” to the whites is no crime in itself. It might be at times even diplomatic to do so for a long oppressed and suppressed race of people. But when this “looking up to” leads
to looking always to the whites for support, for work, for funds, for charity—in short, for everything that enables a man to live his life and live it with dignity, it becomes a nuisance not only to those who “look up to” but also to those who are “looked up to”. And now things have gone beyond this stage.

The entire Negro press in the country carries each week tens of heart-rending sob-stories which tell how the Negro is being displaced even in the menial jobs that were hitherto reserved as his lot in the national economy of America. The present depression has turned the thoughts of white employers to the needs of their own kind, a perfectly human reaction to understand, however depressing for the Negro to sympathize with it.

The same tales of woe are told about other Negro institutions such as schools, colleges, libraries, charitable organizations, etc., which are effectively being starved out for lack of funds which to the extent of ninety-eight per cent., if not higher, come from the whites. But now the latter kind people are either unable to rescue the Negro any longer because they themselves have been caught in the grip of depression, or they feel it their first duty to help their own white people.

The American Negro “leaders” now find themselves completely baffled when they discover that the bowl of alms which they pass around comes back to them EMPTY. They cannot understand what has happened to bring about such a SUDDEN change in the behaviour of their white benefactors. In fact the Negro “leaders” are just now discovering the depression, nearly three years after the white man knew that he had been caught by the cruel economic forces. No wonder the Negro is reputed to SING and DANCE THROUGH LIFE!

The sum total of this cause and effect upon both the Negro “leaders” and masses in America has been utter confusion among them. They have no place to turn to. They have no industry, no business, “NO NOTHIN’” of their own that could sustain them even for a day. They are so dependent, so helpless!

But are the Negro “leaders” who are responsible for the welfare of over twelve million Negroes in these United States, caught unawares, unwarned in the present predicament? Not so.

Sixteen years ago there came a Negro to these people who preached to them SELF-HELP, who beseeched them to create their own industries, business, commerce, agriculture and even a government and nationhood of their own, but these American Negro “leaders” laughed at and intrigued to get him out of “their” country. They thought that this man by preaching
self-help was INSULTING them. They were all and unani-
mously FOR ALMS.

Who is this Negro? What are his plans? And what are
his aims?

II.—MARCUS GARVEY THE MAN

Marcus Garvey is the man who brought a new dispensation,
a new aspiration, a new outlook toward life to the Negroes of
the world.

Mr. Garvey was born at St. Ann’s Bay, Jamaica, British West
Indies, on August 17, 1887. He was born of full-blooded
Negroes. His father was well off but had lost his fortune before
young Marcus was born. Consequently it was the mother of
Marcus that toiled to support and educate him. He owes all
he is to the heroism of his mother. It was she who taught him
to love his race and be independent.

His early education was received at the St. Ann’s parish
school. From the beginning he showed signs of brooding and
planning and did not like sports for which reason his school-
mates used to call him “Mug.” But he always pursued his
own course, say what others may.

In his early teens he went to Kingston where he furthered
his own higher education, the while working as a printer. He
rose to be the foreman of a printing plant that was specializing
in printing radical literature. While there, he took great interest
in promoting eloquence contests among younger men and women
which became both popular and successful.

Eventually he went to England, traveling through Spain and
France. There he met Duse Mohamed Ali, the great Egyptian
propagandist for his country’s freedom and joined the staff of
“The Africa and Orient Review”, Mr. Ali’s magazine. It was
at this time that Mr. Garvey read voluminously on Africa and
formulated his plan of liberating the Negro race on a permanent
and enduring basis by establishing a Negro government in Africa.

He put his ideas before some leading Englishmen who ap-
proved of them. He then went to his native Jamaica and got
the support of one Dr. J. A. Thorne who brought Mr. Garvey’s
plan of redeeming Africa before the press and public. Apparently
there was not enough enthusiasm in his home island. But Mr.
Garvey was not discouraged because he had faith in his plan.

In the meanwhile the war broke out. His English sup-
porters were too busy to give Mr. Garvey their attention. He,
however, kept on agitating singlehanded and with his limited means, until the end of 1916 when he sailed for New York to try his luck in Harlem.

Mr. Garvey arrived in America at a time when people were greatly excited about "democracy" and "self-determination". He took advantage of this psychological situation and put forward before the Negroes of Harlem his plan for freeing Africa according to the doctrine of "self-determination".

The ideas took root, firstly because the soil was of the right sort and secondly because the fearless personality of Mr. Garvey which was a novelty to the American Negroes who had been accustomed to hat-in-hand leaders, and his fiery oratory had a telling effect. It was thus that the internationally known Universal Negro Improvement Association was born.

III.—GARVEY ON SELF-HELP

Longer Marcus Garvey studied what other Negro leaders, whether in the West Indies or in America, had done and been doing stronger grew his conviction that the Negro was rolling in the mire because he had been taught by his leaders to depend for everything on the dominant white race. The dependence of the Negro was so alarming that it shocked this young dreamer from Jamaica into action.

"Suppose the whites will for some reason change their mind and stop supporting this alien and 'inferior' race? What then?" As he repeated this question to himself Mr. Garvey shuddered. "The Negro has no industry, no business, no agriculture that amounts to anything, no profession, no trade and hence no financial backbone. And what people could hold their own in these competitive days against groups and communities that had vast accumulated reserves and therefore immense sustaining power?"

Looked at objectively and through the prism of Mr. Garvey's logic the Negro situation was hopeless. But he was not content with mere analysis of the situation but wanted to rescue his race through a practical, comprehensive and far-reaching program. He was determined to answer his own questions and bring about a lasting solution of the problems confronting his long suffering people.

Following his diagnosis of his race's ills he proposed to advocate to them SELF-HELP. As a corollary to this philosophy he wanted the Negro to have or rather cultivate self-respect, dignity, race pride and love for his black skin, woolly hair, broad
nose and thick lips. He wanted the Negro not to despise himself because God was delighted to create him thus.

In the modern industrial age industry and commerce are playing the part of vitamins to every society. Since this was axiomatic, Mr. Garvey argued, there was no hope for the Negro as long as he did not develop some industry and be active in some business. He therefore, preached incessantly to the Negroes of America, to the Negroes of the West Indies and to the Negroes of Africa that they must enter industry and commerce and become self-supporting to the greatest possible extent.

The underlying thought was that the Negroes as menial servants could not accumulate enough savings which constitute the real capital of any nation or people, and capital meant power. This led him to the conclusion that the Negroes without capital meant Negroes without power, which lack of power was the real source of the race’s countless ills. If the Negro really wanted to redeem himself he must acquire power for which control of some capital is necessary, which in turn could not be accumulated in any appreciable quantity without entering industry and commerce. Hence Mr. Garvey’s emphasis on Negro owned and Negro conducted industrial and commercial enterprises.

This central and positive philosophy of his Marcus Garvey has been preaching to the Negroes everywhere for the last sixteen years with undiminished zeal and with dogged persistency, and that too in the face of malicious ignoring on the part of his future beneficiaries. And by now Mr. Garvey has been able to talk of nothing else but self-help, industry and commerce to the Negroes. Repetition and emphasis have made him a perfect master of his philosophy.

IV.—A NEGRO NATION

As he pursued further his philosophy of a complete redemption of his race Mr. Garvey searched for the weapons that would lead to successful industry and commerce and to the eventual accumulation of capital with its resultant power. This led him to consider the field of government with full sovereign power.

It was not very hard for Mr. Garvey to see that the Negro had no pretension to the control of any sovereign government anywhere in these days. The Negro has been consigned in most cases to the place of dumb animals. Whether in the South of the United States, or in Africa the Negro is not treated politically and economically any better than horses and cattle. Indeed, the latter have been treated better than the Negro.
Even in the North of the United States where the Negro is nominally enjoying his "political rights" he is a non-entity. His opinions, his votes are worthless, for they are empty shells. The Negro is not contributing a penny to the campaign funds of any political party to force and make his influence felt in their inner councils. Hence although the Negro is the largest minority, being twelve million strong out of a population of 120 millions, he is politically non-existent in the United States.

But could the Negro by organization, through education and by industry, rise some day to claim his just rights in America? And if he could, how long would it take and how much struggle would it involve?

Allowing that the Negro could claim his rights some day in America, Mr. Garvey came to the conclusion that the Negro would have to fight for a long time, possibly for centuries, and against odds that the black man may never be able to overcome in the American environment where he was at each turn at the mercy of the white man whom he would have to force and deprive of some of his long-enjoyed power. And this long Garvey was not willing to wait even if the end was extremely hopeful and assuring. Besides he never believed that a mere ten per cent Negroes against ninety per cent whites could achieve much in America.

For such reasons Garvey's thoughts turned to Africa, the land of his forefathers. There, yes, there were only Negroes, with a sprinkling of whites who had just now usurped and grabbed everything in Africa, but at that they were still a sprinkling.

Africa, a vast continent! And a huge black majority! Could not the Negroes create a government there, a government of, by and for the black men and women? The second largest continent and the solid black humanity, are they not worth organizing and redeeming? Would not a Negro National State, powerful and strong, solve all the problems of the Negro race wherever they may be? Would it not give protection and impetus to Negro commerce and industry unfettered by any other motives but those of the welfare of the Negro race? Would not then Negroes rise to any heights according to their merits, and not according to the sufferece of their masters?

Therefore it was a supreme necessity to foster the ideal of and form a Negro National State in Africa if the Negro were to be redeemed in reality, if he were to become self-helping, if he were to develop and control his own industry and commerce. Without a government of his own all the endeavors of the Negro, Mr. Garvey argued, would lead only into the void.
The ambition of creating a National State in Africa was and is not, of course, strewn with roses. There are more thorns in it than for instance in the Negro’s ambition of becoming a Senator in the United States. But the African people, divided into tribes and petty kingdoms as they are, will have to be organized one day and by somebody. They could not and would not be ruled eternally by foreigners of an odd half a dozen nations. Why not then undertake to organize them and overthrow the over-grabbing imperialists and form a colossal black state in Africa?

V.—GARVEY’S DARING EXPERIMENTS

Mere preaching and planning were not the things Marcus Garvey was satisfied with. He wanted to organize his forces and prove that his plans were practical. Thus New York came to know the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and Harlem became the provisional capital of Black Africa, in 1916.

The first venture was the publication of “The Negro World”, a weapon indispensable to any first class propagandist. The name was well chosen, which expressed with one sweep what and whom it was to champion. It came into existence in 1917.

The organization grew slowly but surely until the armistice in 1918 when all the Negroes mobilized in industry at home and those mobilized for the fronts in France came back home and listened with a great thrill to the great message of the Negroes having self-determination and their building of a great democratic empire in Africa. They flocked to Garvey’s standard in hundreds of thousands.

The recruiting to Garveyism was so sudden and swift that the state departments of half a dozen imperialist powers became alarmed and made anxious inquiries at Washington. Even the latter began to keep a watchful eye on Garvey, hoping to cripple him when an opportunity arose.

In order to prove to the Negroes that they need not eternally remain menials if they had a nation and government of their own he drew up a constitution of his organization as if of that of a government. In fact, he wanted the Universal Negro Improvement Association to be an embryo government.

Accordingly, Mr. Garvey became the provisional head of the provisional government of Africa. But there was a real cabinet
with portfolios. Foreign relations, defense, treasury, industry and commerce, welfare and similar departments were created. A smart militia was organized. A national flag, a horizontal tricolor of red, black and green, was adopted. Indeed, there was no position that a black man could not fill and there was nobody to tell him not to, if he were capable.

International conventions were held to which delegates from the West Indies, Haiti, West Africa, South Africa, Central and South America, Canada, England and France, came pouring in to spend the month of August (in which Mr. Garvey was born) and confer on the future status of the Negro race. And as these delegates went back Garveyism swept their respective countries like wild fire.

The colonial imperialist powers, and notably Great Britain and France began to ban "The Negro World" and proscribe the U.N.I.A. divisions. The name of Garvey was really a name to conjure with and enough to scare the imperialists out of their wits.

When the civil and military departments of the U.N.I.A. got going well on their way Mr. Garvey turned his attention to industry and commerce. He started a grocery chain, a laundry chain, a restaurant and similar things. Such ventures were also started under the auspices of other divisions of the organization in other cities.

The acme of Mr. Garvey's ventures came about in the launching of the Black Star Line and the Black Star Steam Navigation Company whose purpose was to develop black commerce and carry American Negroes back to Africa to colonize. It is needless to say that the Negro masses became enthusiastic and supported the organization with hundred per cent zeal.

Then a daily was started to round out the educational program. It was called "The Daily Negro Times". Later the "Booker T. Washington University" was started. The Black Cross Nurses were organized. The boy and girl scouts were also organized.

To top all these energetic enterprises two important international diplomatic missions were sent out. The one was to Liberia to obtain a huge concession to colonize western Negroes there as a base and utilize them to build up a political organization to redeem Africa. The other was to the League of Nations at Geneva to petition that the former German East Africa be ceded to the U.N.I.A. for colonization. The latter, from diplomatic standpoint, was a success and the former a failure.
The Liberian mission failed because certain American Negro leaders that were jealous of Mr. Garvey had sent a spokesman to Liberia to frustrate the plans of the U.N.I.A. He worked with the American government, foiled the U.N.I.A. mission and got that concession for the Firestone Rubber Company.

With this success the enemies of Mr. Garvey became bold and conspired against him. They began plotting with various government officials and demanded the deportation of Mr. Garvey. Finally the government arrested him on charges of “using the mail for defrauding” and buttressed their point by using the losses incurred in the shipping ventures. Mr. Garvey pleaded his own case excellently and proved that he had cheated nobody and the losses were ordinary business losses which could be retrieved in time. But he lost his case. He was sentenced to the Atlanta prison, and at the end of his term was deported to Jamaica.

When Mr. Garvey was removed from the scene, his lieutenants who had no imagination, no experience comparable to that of Mr. Garvey, lost all he had accumulated and in losing disorganized themselves. Of all the things that Mr. Garvey created only “The Negro World” is still living.

By the time Mr. Garvey reached Kingston, Jamaica, his lieutenants had almost wrecked the U.N.I.A. and were fighting for its control. To avoid those squabbles Mr. Garvey reorganized his loyal followers in August 1929, under the name of the Universal Negro Improvement Association of August 1929 of the World.

VI.—GARVEY AND THE RACE QUESTION IN AMERICA

Marcus Garvey approached the race question in America with a greater realism than anybody else who has tackled it.

We have already learned that the Negro as a minority member would never rise to a man’s level. He could not aspire to be anything according to his ability and character. The color line would be dead against him.

Lynchings pained Mr. Garvey, but he did not get excited. The “rape cases” even if they were true, Mr. Garvey tried to fathom. His analysis was that the Negro was not proud of the beauty of
his own women and of his race. If he was no rape cases would occur.

This led him to preach race purity to the Negroes. He told them to let white women alone but he also warned the white men to let Negro women severely alone. As a double protection he preached to Negro women to exalt their race by keeping it pure from alien mixtures. Thus he became the apostle of race purity and an avowed enemy of miscegenation which was in great vogue among the Negroes in the early twenties.

He invited the lily-whites to co-operate with him to keep his race pure if they wanted theirs to remain pure. He also invited them to assist him to colonize the Negroes in Africa. He was gradually getting the response to his appeals from the thinking whites when suddenly he was removed from the scene.

The Negroes in the western world have, in spite of oppression, learned something of the art of the white man’s civilization. And why not take the best among them to train and organize their blood brothers in Africa and thus bring about the redemption of both the western Negroes and African Negroes? Why should they not help each other? Then back to Africa.

To those Negroes who would not go back to Africa (of course, he did not want to force any Negro to go back to Africa unless he wanted to), he preached that they should enter industry and business and thus create a solid foundation for their economic well-being. He pointed out to them the danger of remaining as mere margin laborers in the economy of an industrial civilization.

How effective were these warnings, whether the Negroes of America ever took to Mr. Garvey’s philosophy I shall consider in the next chapter.

VII.—GARVEYISM IS SWEEPING THE NEGRO

It seemed to laymen that Garvey’s ideas had “failed” and were proved to be “impractical”. But keen observers had noticed that since Mr. Garvey’s presence in Harlem the Negroes had started small grocery stores, fruit stands, newsstands, candy stores, laundries, etc. They were also seen as peddlers of various wares. Later on they opened bakeries, lunch rooms, tailor shops, radio shops, and so on. All these petty ventures on the part of the Negroes were directly due, it has now been acknowledged even by the bitterest adversaries of Marcus Garvey, to his ideas and example.
Until the depression there were very few Negroes outside the ranks of Mr. Garvey’s loyal followers, who would say a kind word about Mr. Garvey’s philosophy. But the depression changed all that. First the masses doubted and finally rejected the leadership of the Negroes that had plotted against Mr. Garvey. These rejected Negro leaders scratched their head and found out that Garvey’s warnings and preachings were right. Presto, they started to appropriate his philosophy wholesale. Of course, they did not give credit to Mr. Garvey for fear that they may be scrapped forever.

Negro businessmen began to band together and appeal to Negroes to support their own enterprises and thus create jobs for themselves. Negro politicians are doing the same. What is more, a person like Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, the bitterest enemy of Mr. Garvey, recommended last summer the entire program of Mr. Garvey minus African redemption, to his organization, the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People.

And too, the Negroes, especially the women, are practicing the tenets of race purity. Even Dr. DuBois, once an avowed champion of intermixtures, has now come out against such mingling of the races.

As far as back to Africa project is considered some of Mr. Garvey’s opponents of the plan have been recently advocating it with a little shifting of the scenery here and there. Some on the Pacific coast have even tried to organize another steamship line to take the American Negroes back to Africa.

It is now clear that the Negroes of America in 1932 are eagerly carrying out the various plans of Marcus Garvey under various disguises. And in the fullness of time it is to be expected that Mr. Garvey’s supreme ideal of a Negro Nation and a Negro Government also will be realized.

In conclusion, it is plain that the Negroes of today are paying a glowing, although without mentioning names, tribute to Marcus Garvey as their true redeemer.
VIII.—THE FUTURE OF THE NEGRO

With the trend of the American Negro adopting partially the program of SELF-HELP of Marcus Garvey, will he solve his problems, not individually but as a race, in the American environment? If he could is it possible to do so without a struggle, a struggle bitter and prolonged? And at the end is he sure of winning?

There is a small body of white liberals who wish to do justice to the Negro, but the majority of the white population in America cannot yet think of the Negro but as sort of a national slave instead of an individual slave which he was before the emancipation. Hence his progress, even after his adoption of Garveyism, will not be rapid enough, even enough, smooth enough, to keep his mind off the thoughts of injustice. And no people that always brood of injustice done to them, will make a rapid progress as others would like to see them do. Hence there will be friction and struggle.

For better or worse, Garvey has aroused the Negroes to think in terms of self-respect, dignity, freedom, equality, race-pride. Increasingly more and more Negroes are talking like Mr. Garvey. Hence radical groups like the Socialists and Communists are attracting the Negroes which would have been very hard to do before the war. A casual study will show that these radical Negroes have been nursed in the cradle of Garveyism.

The upshot of all this will be in America that if the Negro is balked in getting what he considers to be just he will join anybody that will promise him a little better opportunity. This will naturally mean that the race question will become worse and worse. The struggle will become more and more bitter and even sanguinary. There will be numerous race riots in which not only Negroes but both groups will become victims of the race feud. But in the end the Negroes will not gain anything in the United States. They are destined to remain an UNPRIVILEGED RACE of people in America for centuries to come.

The only effective way America can achieve social peace, as far as the race question is considered, is by aiding the American Negroes to establish a large enough government somewhere in Africa and repatriate them there just as the Greeks were from Turkey. Since America has developed ingenious machineries she will not
miss the man power for her industries. Hence she will not be
inconvenienced.

As for the Negroes they will undoubtedly miss their environ-
ment for a while, and the change will work hardship on many.
But eventually they will like their new place where they will
be their own masters and architects of their own destiny.

This means the rest of Mr. Garvey’s program. It is only
this step that will bring peace and contentment to both the Ne-
groes and the whites of America.

MARCUS M. GARVEY

Marcus Garvey was born in the little town of St. Ann’s
Bay on August 17, 1887 on the island of Jamaica. Garvey travelled
extensively in Latin America and later came to London. After
discussing the problems of Africa with some Africans he returned
in 1914 to Jamaica to establish the Universal Negro Improve-
ment Association on the 1st of August, 1914. He launched the
“UNIA” with the far-reaching ideal of African Unity in the
background.

The motto of the Organisation was: “One God! One Aim!
One Destiny”. Some of his slogans were “Africa for the Africans“.
“Renaissance of the Black Race” and “Ethiopia Awake”. The
newspaper of the Movement was “The Negro World”.

Marcus Garvey did not advocate that all Black people in
the Western Hemisphere should emigrate to Africa as so many
white as well as black writers have made the world believe. He has
been misrepresented to the world. He deserves more recognition
than he has been given. One only needs to read his Philosophy
and Opinions and other writings to realize the importance of
this great man. Garvey gained little or nothing from the millions
of dollars he received. He never owned a car and lived in an
ordinary Harlem apartment. Garvey was a Messiah who had come
to save a people who for centuries had been exploited by other
races. Garvey gave the Negroes back their self-respect and opened
for them windows of hope that would never be closed. His whole
philosophy was to teach the black man to see beauty in him-
self. Garvey’s philosophy won him both admirers as well as ene-
mies.
There was one man in Chicago called Robert Abbott who was his deadly enemy. When this man came to know that Garvey was planning to sell shares in his Black Star Line in the city, Abbott employed a private detective who trapped Garvey into selling a stock in violation of Illinois laws. Garvey was fined. This man continued to attack him and this attack led to a Court action, each suing the other for libel. Both of them won their case. Garvey was awarded six cents and Abbott $5000. The American Government also used Negroes to destroy Garvey’s organisation.

Marcus Garvey was an honest man. He expressed ably and passionately the monstrous ills and wrongs to which the African populations are subjected, the whole scale of economic and social oppression, the penning up of Africans on reserves where the land is of the worst quality, the infamous code of South African Pass Laws, the equally infamous wage contracts, the disfranchisement of black voters.

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