Marcus mosiah garvey, 1887-1940 essay sample

Marcus Garvey remains a vitalising, inspiring force today. He touches Jamaicans closely because he raises questions of race and social commitment with which they still have to come to terms. His message is as relevant now as it was in the 1920s and 1930s, when he formed the People's Political Party. As an independent and predominantly black nation, Jamaicans now have the power to reach decisions on issues he raised. A study of his life and times shows that he has been urging us to assume a larger role in the scheme of things. He has deepened and enriched our knowledge of ourselves, of our past and our potential as a society. We become aware, also, of a prophet, a man who throughout his life lived his message; and did so through triumph and disaster, in the face of derision and oppression, of imprisonment and of rejection. From the beginning he was driven by a passionate concern for the African-Jamaican people, and indeed for all peoples of African origin throughout the world. He reminded African-Americans of their background of slavery and of having been let loose in the world without a cent in their pocket or land to settle on that they could call their own.

From the beginning they had to fight their own way up to where they are today. Some have done well but the great majority remained propertyless and almost helpless. If they were to improve themselves they had to focus on personal success. In revering Marcus Garvey as a national hero, Jamaicans pay tribute also to a leader who pioneered a role for Africa and Africans in world affairs. His vision was of black United Nations governed by black leaders. Garvey had a profound respect for books, education and scholarship. He was a philosopher as well as a man of action, a thinker who

arrived at his conclusions by analysing the West Indian experience. He grew up in Jamaican colonial society at a time when, as Rupert Lewis points out: Colonial ideological policy consistently debased Africa as well as people and things African. The future, the coloniser claimed, belonged to Europe. Hence colonial subjects were made to identify progress with the ideals of their master. In the process of the formation of Jamaica as a nation the negation of Africa and blackness has been constant. And so has the resistance to [this negation] by black people. (Lewis: 1987)

The Jamaican people identify with Garvey as one who built their self-esteem, challenged them to affirm their racial identity and reunited them with Africa as homeland. That this should be so is a measure of the cultural and social revolution that has been taking place in Jamaica. This evolution is radically changing the Jamaican self-image to one of assertiveness and racial equality. It has projected Jamaica onto the world stage politically and has moved increasing numbers of black people into leader roles in their country. By examining some of his major statements and reflecting on his method of reaching conclusions, we come to understand the magnitude of Garvey’s achievement and the quality of his mind. We need to do this because those in the centres of white power and influence in Jamaica, in the United States and Europe saw Garvey as a formidable threat and used the means in their power, the law included, to obstruct and vilify him. They projected the image of a black racist subversive, a rabble-rouser, a confidence man and trickster.

The Jamaican upper and middle classes of the 1920s rejected his challenge “ to formulate a program of racial preservation and to develop a settled racial outlook”. In them the terrified consciousness of the sugar-and-slave

plantocracy period still lingered. Some kept their distance, not because they disagreed with Garvey’s philosophy, but because they feared victimisation if they were seen to be supporting the challenge to the status quo. In the words of a Jamaican peasant, Marcus Garvey was “ not a usual man”. Born and schooled in rural Jamaica, he became by his own effort a scholar who understood that nations make, and are made by, their history. He was an educator and an exceptionally gifted communicator of ideas. His richly stored mind linked the particular with the universal, the past with the present, the local or national with the global.

To read even a few of his statements and reflections is to encounter a mind that illumines the Jamaican historical experience. In his analysis of colonial society in the 1920s, for example, he demonstrates his methods of basing conclusions on observation and analysis. Writing to the president of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1916, he said that the Jamaicans were not as racially conscious as the American black because they lived under a common system of sociological hypocrisy (Hill) He observed: We have no open race prejudice here, and we do not openly antagonise one another. The extremes here are between white and black… The black people here form the economic asset of the country, they number 6 to 1 of coloured and white combined and without them in labour or general industry the country would go bankrupt…The black people have had seventy-eight years of Emancipation but all during that time they have never produced a leader of their own, hence they have never been led to think racially but in common with the destinies of the other people with whom they mix as fellow citizens.

Garvey noted the increase of race consciousness 22 years later in 1938: The West Indians generally, have developed more of the white psychology than of black outlook; but gradually, in some of the islands, the consciousness of race is dawning upon the people which may develop, to place the competent Negroes there in the right frame of mind to be of service when needed. There is much hope for the West Indies as for anywhere else in the outlook of the Negro toward nationalisation and independence.

Garvey’s advocacy of a Jamaican national spirit and his critical appraisal of those blacks who regarded England as the mother country were a continuation of the work of Dr Love and his associates who laboured at the end of the nineteenth century to improve the racial consciousness and social conditions of the Jamaican working classes. Love encouraged them to unite, to form themselves into unions and organisations and elect representatives to the legislative council who would be concerned with their welfare. He knew that Jamaica’s long overdue political awakening had to come from within, not from without. Garvey was one of the few of his time who understood how seriously the inner world of the African had been damaged, and in some instances destroyed, by the experience of enslavement combined with alienation; by a transfer of authority and by total immersion in a wholly materialistic society.

George Lamming, in eloquent moving words, describes the outcome: The result was a fractured consciousness, a deep split in its sensibility which now raised difficult problems of language and values; the whole issue of cultural allegiance between the imposed norms of White Power represented by a small numerical minority and fragmented memory of the African masses:

between White instruction and Black imagination. The totalitarian demands of White supremacy in a British colony, the psychological injury inflicted by the sacred rule that all forms of social status would be determined by degrees of skin complexion; the ambiguities among Blacks themselves about the credibility of their own spiritual history. . Could the outlines of a national consciousness be charted and affirmed out of all this disparateness? And if that consciousness could be affirmed, what were its true ancestral roots, its most authentic cultural base? (Lamming: 1988)

Lamming's analysis, written long after Garvey's death, underscores why Garvey challenged African-Jamaicans and indeed all persons of African descent to set themselves the task of building a racial as well as a national consciousness, to liberate themselves from colonialism, to build self-esteem and race-pride. These were, and remain, the imperatives of decolonisation. Garvey had the capacity for penetrating beyond process to inner causes and needs and he went beyond anti-colonialism to advocate a programme of decolonization. (Lewis: 1987) The irony is that Garvey probably learned the importance of racial pride, self-esteem and a settled racial outlook from books he used in elementary school, readers written for English children that built pride in the English way of life, in the English landscape, in the heroes of England, in its victories and achievements.

With his love of reading and elocution, young Garvey learned the importance of racial pride from authors who glorified English achievements; from William Shakespeare's " This England never did and never shall/Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror"; or from John Milton's vision of " a mighty and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her

invincible locks”. Garvey grew to understand that the key to racial harmony lay in the open acceptance of racial differences and respect for them. He advocated racial consciousness but attacked and rejected racial discrimination of any kind. Race consciousness and a sense of self-worth are important elements in national development. They are essential for self-respect, for as Isaiah Berlin emphasised in his essay on nationalism, “ To be made an object of contempt, amused condescension, or patronizing reliance by proud, successful neighbours is one of the most traumatic experiences that individuals or societies can suffer.” (Berlin: 1981)

Pomp and circumstance are as essential elements in the culture of blacks as they are for people of all other races. In the same way that other nations establishing their hierarchy of honours, awards and titles, so Garvey established his own system of honours for his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA): honours such as Earl of the Congo, Viscount of the Niger, Baron Zambezi and Knight of the Nile. In this regard he brooked no condescension. He was a Universalist, concerned with the Africans of the diaspora and of the African continent. He saw racial consciousness as an active and independent program of upliftment. As a result, he never descended to the level of the apostles of white superiority. His vision was Pan-Caribbean, Pan-American, and Pan-African. Two very different groups of Jamaicans have broadened and deepened our understanding of Marcus Garvey. The Rastafarians have consistently given Africa the central place that belongs to a homeland, affirmed their Africanness and revered Garvey.

Alongside them stand scholars such as Robert Hill and Rupert Lewis who, on the basis of rigorous academic scholarship, have shown the significance and

importance of Garvey’s work and of Garvey as a world leader. Garvey was born on 17 August 1887, in the small rural town of St Ann’s Bay. He was christened Marcus Mosiah but early assumed the name of Marcus. At St Ann’s Bay he spent his formative years under the influence of two self-educated men, his father, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, and his godfather, Alfred E. Borrowes. From them young Marcus learned certain positive attitudes which guided his life. He was an avid reader and developed a passion for learning. He always carried a pocket dictionary from which he learnt three or four words each day and as a result built up a phenomenal vocabulary. This he utilised to the fullest extent as a public speaker and orator, and as a writer and newspaper editor. His exposure to a wide range of subjects in his father’s and godfather’s book collections developed his enquiring mind and an interest in social issues. On his return to Jamaica from the United States at the end of 1927 he owned one of the finest libraries in the island.

His collection included works on science, history, African history, religion and art and was consulted by a number of prominent persons in Kingston. Garvey’s first exposure to race prejudice was as a child and it obviously left a deep hurt and possibly more than any other single experience, helped to frame his philosophy on race consciousness. He used to play with a white girl, the daughter of the Methodist minister in the town, until the day came when she was told by her mother that she could no longer associate with Marcus because he was black. The skills acquired in his godfather’s printery equipped him to earn a living wherever he went. Most important of all, he understood the power of the press and never failed to use it to mobilise people of African descent and to lead them to a clearer understanding and

appreciation of their black heritage. Robert Love was one of Garvey's mentors and gave him elocution sons when he moved to Kingston. From Love, Garvey also learnt much about pride in race and challenging colonialist prejudices.

The young man from St Ann's Bay was all the time refining his ideas on racial consciousness. His involvement in the printers' strike in 1908 and his championing of these underpaid workers seemed a natural thing to do, although it cost him his job with the P. A. Benjamin Company, a firm of manufacturing chemists. At that time they were also publishing a small advertising sheet, The Commercial Messenger, on which Garvey may have worked. While with the company Garvey made his first venture into publishing. He began Garvey's Watchman but this small journal apparently ran for only three issues.

Garvey became a regular contributor to the local newspapers and often addressed social issues affecting the working classes, but the establishment press of the day, as they had done to Love earlier, did not always approve of his radical views and did not always publish his letters; Garvey began seriously improving his oratorical skills by visiting different churches and observing their preachers; he practised reading aloud, entered and organised elocution contests, and took advantage of every opportunity to appear on public platforms. A contemporary remembers his first visit to the East Queen Street Literary and Debating Society. The chairman gave him permission to speak during the " open" half-hour on the topic under debate and as would be expected, this strange awkward looking young man, not so long ago from the country, made us all sit up and listen. (Murray: 1969)

The anti-colonialist National Club of Jamaica attracted him and he soon became a regular speaker at their public forums. Eventually he was elected the club's secretary. The founder was Sandy Cox, a Kingston barrister who had been discriminated against in the Civil Service and was strongly anti-colonialist. Cox advocated that the only way that coloured and black people in Jamaica could better their condition was to unite with other members of the black race in all parts of the world. The club attracted some prominent persons of like views, but after a time it became primarily a platform for Cox, the politicians H. A. L. Simpson and Alexander Dixon, whom Love had supported in his political bid to get into the House of Representatives, and also Marcus Garvey. Eventually out of frustration and disappointment Cox emigrated to the USA. Referring to that period of his life, some 17 years later, Garvey noted: " The people were [then not sufficiently racially conscious to appreciate a racial movement because they lived under a common system of social hypocrisy that deprived them of that very racial consciousness." (Black Man: 1933)

Garvey began reaching out to local artisans, rural peasant farmer labourers searching for recognition and self-assurance. He awakened in them national consciousness and urged them to shake off their economic oppression. But his vision could not be contained within the confines of the Jamaican society and in 1909 he set out for Central America where thousands of African-West Indians were employed on the Panama Canal and on banana and sugar plantations in Costa Rica. There Garvey found employment as a timekeeper on one of the United Fruit Company's banana plantations and this gave him first-hand knowledge of the poor working conditions of Jamaican labourers

employed there. He was moved to protest to the British Consul in Port Limon on their behalf but his representation was ignored. In his determination to create greater social awareness among the suffering masses in the region and throughout the diaspora, he next took his message to Bocas del Toro, Colón, Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia and Venezuela and in 1911 left for Britain in the hope of reaching a still wider audience. There came under the influence of the Egyptian, Duse Mohammed Ali, whose magazines Africa Times and Orient Review, discussed Egyptian affairs a well as conditions of Africans under the imperialist powers. From this experience Garvey learned a great deal about African politics.

For a short time while working on the docks of London, he attempted to improve his education by attending part-time classes at Birbeck College which had been established by London University to serve working-class students without formal qualifications. It was during that year in Britain that Garvey developed and crystallised his idea of one great international organisation of black people, educated, financially independent having pride in race; black people who would take their place as equals on the world stage. Later he explained his vision in these words: “ I saw before me even as I do now a new world of black men, not peons, serfs, dogs and slaves but a nation of sturdy men making their impress upon civilization and causing a new light to dawn upon the human race.” (Lewis: 1987) Garvey returned to Jamaica in July 1914, and on 1 August, emancipation day, he launched the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association (UNIA) the African Communities League, later referred to as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

At first, persons approached the movement cautiously as they were not sufficiently aware of what he was trying to do, and were afraid to speak out on controversial issues. “ Membership was scanty, and hearing was half-hearted. Most people here regarded the young man as an empty dreamer. But he persisted.” (Murray: 1969) The general objectives of the UNIA which were set out in 1914 remained Garvey’s guiding principles to the end of his days. They were to encourage material success through individual effort; encourage educational attainment, race consciousness and racial pride. The stated aim was “ One God! One aim! One destiny!” The UNIA was also: To reclaim the fallen of the race; administer to and assist the needy; assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; strengthen the imperialism of independent African states... establish educational institutions [Universities, Colleges and Secondary Schools] for the further intellectual improvement and cultural awareness of the boys and girls of the race; to develop world-wide commercial and industrial intercourse. (Cronin: 1962)

In 1920 Garvey explained what strengthened his resolve to carry out his dream: Just at that time other races were engaged in seeing their cause through – the Jew through their Zionist Movement and the Irish through their Irish Movement – and decided that, cost what it might, I would make this a favourable time to see the Negro interest through. (Hill: 1987)

The UNIA disseminated Garvey’s ideas of African nationalism, and anti-imperialism through political, ethical and practical instructions and provided its membership with opportunities for literary, artistic and creative expression. Garvey was inspired by Booker T. Washington’s achievements at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and began planning a similar facility in

Jamaica which he hoped would provide opportunities for the advancement of intelligent, ambitious black people. Dr Washington invited Garvey to Tuskegee and planned to visit Jamaica, but he died in 1915 before the visit could materialise. Washington’s successor, Major Robert R. Moton, bug with Dr W. E. DuBois, Pan-Africanist editor of Crisis, the journal of National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People NAACP), visited Jamaica for two days in 1916. However, the First World War was then in progress and the British government, perceiving Garvey a threat to colonial stability, advised Dr Moton not to contact this trouble-maker. (Murray: 1969)

Garvey was determined to meet him, and so at a reception in his honour organised by the Jamaica Union of Teachers at the Mico College. Nothing meaningful resulted from the encounter. Impatient to get his educational institution off the ground, Garvey decided to seek financial assistance overseas. In 1916 he set out on what was to have been a five-month tour of the West Indies and the United States, but it became instead an eleven year odyssey. The Jamaica Institute he envisaged never materialised. Garvey continued to refine much of his political ideology and his concepts of self-actualisation. He launched the first American branch of the UNIA in February 1918 in New York and by the 1920’s UNIA enterprises were employing more than 1, 000 persons in Harlem, New York, and surrounding communities. The movement was also attracting worldwide attention as a black political force. Garvey gave his first public lecture on Jamaica in Harlem on 9 May, 1916, shortly after his arrival in the United States.

It was not well-received because with his unusual appearance and strange accent he seemed out of place in the American environment. His timing was,

however, right because the Harlem Renaissance was becoming popular: black intellectuals in the United States and from other countries were then expressing their radical opinions in publications and speeches on the sidewalks of Harlem. Among these so-called “ new negroes” were: Herbert H. Harrison, the well-known black lecturer; A. Philip Randolph, member of the Sleeping Car Porters Association and editor of The Messenger; Dr W. E. B. DuBois of the NAACP, and the Jamaicans, W. A. Domingo and Claude McKay-. They had all experienced racism and were caught up in the excitement of the Bolshevik revolution and the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky. McKay and others would later denounce communism when they realised that the communist ideals of the citizens’ voluntary fulfilment of their duties and their participation in the affairs of society did not replace the state or create a truly classless society. They crusaded for liberty and equality in American society and challenged their fellow blacks to throw off the yoke of white supremacy’-. They encouraged them to learn more about their African heritage and “ the positive, rich, material content of their Africanity”.

Their publication challenged social inequality and the injustices meted out to Africans throughout the world and in their homeland as a result of colonial exploitation. Thousands of once prosperous and self-sufficient African people were now starving because great numbers of them had been coerced into abandoning their traditional ways of life to work instead on plantations of cotton, cocoa and groundnut for the European market, while – others were being forced to work in miserable conditions in unsafe mines underground from which they received little economic benefit. Garvey helped to keep the African issue alive as he challenged the falsehoods and misrepresentations

of African history spread abroad by European colonisers. He reached out to American blacks who during the First World War had misguidedly left their farms in the South to work under wretched conditions in factories in the North. Black American soldiers returning from the war also found that during their absence discrimination had grown worse, and that promises of equality and opportunity made by the President of the United States were not being fulfilled.

Garvey brought the veterans hope and promoted financial enterprises which it was hoped would provide them with an alternative to a dependency on government largess. Within four or five years the UNIA became both one of the largest Pan-Africanist movements and the largest international movement of black peoples on the African continent and in the countries of the diaspora. At peak it is estimated that there were 1, 700 groups in 40 countries with 1 million members. The largest concentration was in Harlem. Garvey was so committed to the use of the printing press as a means of disseminating his message of black upliftment that wherever he went he started publishing ventures even though they were never successful. Henry Rogowski, publisher of the socialist paper, New York Call, assisted him with the necessary credit to start the Negro World, which first appeared on 17 August 1918, seven months after the inauguration of the New York branch of the UNIA. W. A. Domingo was its first editor and served for a year.

He introduced Garvey to the writings of Edward W. Blyden, the West Indian from St Thomas, in the Virgin Islands, who had migrated to West Africa in the 1850s and had become a revered African scholar. Blyden’s Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race profoundly influenced Garvey. In formulating the

New York manifesto of the UNIA, Garvey was influenced by Booker T. Washington’s body-of-conduct-of-life philosophy. The UNIA emphasised discipline, self-education and a strict code of behaviour. Members learned the UNIA catechism, songs and poetry, attended political and religious instruction and listened to Garvey preach his gospel of success. He motivated them to take pride in self and in race and to develop self-confidence. The same philosophy of moral and intellectua1 improvement and self-discipline pervaded the movement in Jamaica. The UNIA organised training cells to reinforce the organisation’s ideology and paramilitary training for the special guard, the African Legion, which was assigned to protect UNIA officials on ceremonial occasions and was expected to respond to any eventuality in Africa.

Members of the Black Cross Nurses Auxiliary received training in elementary nursing care to enable them to minister to the poor and needy. The Universal African Motor Corps, a women’s group, received driving instruction and training in motor mechanics. Wherever he went, Garvey imbued blacks with pride in self and in race, and strengthened their self-esteem. A report in the Baltimore paper, the African-American dated 13 December 1918, in highlighting the international aspect of his mission, noted: “ In addition to forming a league for political and social improvement of the Negro’s condition in this country, the aim is to establish in Africa a strong Negro nation, which could command respect for the Negro, who resides in white countries.” (Hill: 1987) Garvey promoted “ nationalist agitation against imperialism” primarily through the Negro World which ran from January 1918-1933 and was distributed worldwide as well as through the numbers of

other short-lived publications which he edited from time-to-time. In places with a high of illiteracy, one copy of the Negro World generally served severa1 persons at a time.

Jomo Kenyatta, is reputed to have told C. L. R. James that Kenyan nationalists, unable to read would gather round a copy of the paper and listen to articles being read over and over. It was banned at different times in almost every colonial country in Central America, the West Indies and Africa. In addition to articles on race consciousness, the Negro World carried articles by other black intellectuals in French and Spanish aimed at non-English speaking peoples of the region. Subscribers were encouraged to send comments and many came from all over the world. The newspaper's front page editorial by Garvey, was always addressed to the " Fellowmen of the Negro Race". At its peak the paper had a circulation of 50, 000 but it may even have reached 200, 000 briefly. Garvey's encouragement of black resistance to discrimination and exploitation, as well as his support of Mahatma Ghandi's and Eamon de Valera's Indian and Irish nationalist activities brought him into conflict with imperialist governments. In 1919 the United States Department of Justice, under J. Edgar Hoover, assigned special agents to monitor his activities, and an attempt was made upon his life that year. Efforts were also made to keep him out of the United States by denying him a re-entry visa in 1921.

Garveyism influenced many young African freedom fighters. The Kikuyu employed one of Garvey's " bishops" to train young people and from these schools the Kenyan resistance movement, the Mau Mau, grew. Garvey never lost sight of the movement's international goal. After his deportation to

Jamaica at the end of 1927, he continued to write for the Negro World in New York, telegraphing in his front-page editorials every week. These continued to empathise with the struggles of other colonial nations. Each UNIA branch was independent of the parent organisation, and had its own Liberty Hall headquarters. The UNIA's flag of red, black and green denoted " red for the blood of the race nobly shed in the past and dedicated to the future; black for pride in colour of the skin; green for a promise of a better life in Africa". (Cronin: 1955) From the business section of the movement, the Negro Factories Corporation grew a number of cooperative enterprises which included groceries, a restaurant, a steam laundry, a tailoring and dressmaking shop and a publishing house in the United States. In all cases, however, management was weak and the businesses under-capitalised.

They were also undermined by American bureaucracy, although they were never at any time a threat to the American economy. Garvey organised the first International Convention of the UNIA in August 1920, at Madison Square Gardens in New York. The commencement date was significantly set for 1 August, emancipation day. The convention led off with three religious services and a parade of 2, 000 delegates from 25 countries and four continents. Knowing that they were under surveillance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the group marched in silence to the strains of the UNIA band and choristers. The members of the African Legion, 200 Black Cross nurses, the Black Eagle flying cops and members of the Juvenile Auxiliary were all attired in uniform. Officers of the African Legion in their dark blue military-style dress and dress swords created a stir, and

strengthened rumours that Garveyites were preparing to overthrow the colonial powers.

Some 25, 000 persons gathered on the following day at Madison Square Gardens to hear Garvey’s challenge to the black race. In his wide-ran address he said, “ We are the descendants of a suffering people; we are the descendants of a people determined to suffer no longer. . . We shall raise the banner of democracy in Africa or 400 million of us will report to God the reason why. . . We pledge our blood to the battlefield of Africa where we will fight for true liberty, democracy and the brotherhood of man. (Edwards: 1967) He urged the gathering and millions of other Africans to claim Africa for themselves. “ It will be a terrible day when the blacks draw the sword to fight for their liberty. I call upon the 400, 000, 000 blacks to give the blood you have shed for the white man to make Africa a republic for the Negro.” (Hill: 1987) The Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World, presented at the convention, protested against the oppressive conditions under which black people continued to labour.

It set out 54 demands for black nationalism, political and judicial equality, racial self-determination and a free Africa governed by black people. It established titles and distinctions for officers of the movement. Garvey was declared Provisional President of Africa and President General and Administrator of the UNIA. His official title was His Highness the Potentate. (Edwards: 1967) In 1921 Garvey returned to the West Indies for what was planned as a brief visit but it took him four months to obtain the re-entry permit to the United States. Thereafter, his militant stance seems to have become more conciliatory, although in that same year he condemned

organisers of the Second Pan-African Congress for attempting to amalgamate opposite races, remarking that it was “ a crime against nature”.

He also questioned the hope of achieving social equality in the United States, because it was a white man’s country in which the Negro was physically outnumbered and would ultimately lose out. The Second International Convention held in 1921 was less impressive than the first, possibly because of rumours about the mismanagement of the Black Star Line, his shipping company. But Garvey concentrated upon the African situation and expressed his hope for “ a free and redeemed Africa.” He hoped to establish a settlement of skilled black persons in Liberia, the “ land of opportunity”, where black Americans and West Indians would contribute their skills to the development of a great African republic. Severa1 discussions on the matter followed with the Liberian authorities about possible sites for future settlements. Then in 1925 the Liberian government, obviously under pressure from the United States and other outside influences, repudiated the agreement. It issued a statement to the effect that it was “ irrevocably opposed both in principle and in fact to the incendiary policy of the UNIA headed by Garvey”. (Lewis: 1968)

Garvey had in the meantime purchased and shipped equipment to Liberia to be used to establish a lumber company. The machinery was seized by the Liberian customs and was eventually sold for a fraction of its true value to pay the customs duty. The Liberian project which came to be known as the “ Back to Africa Movement” was not looked on with favour by imperialists and by many black colonials who interpreted it to mean the repatriation of all colonial blacks to Africa. These opponents claimed that Garvey intended to

overthrow the imperialist masters who were in fear of their colonial economies collapsing. Garvey later explained that he had not expected all Negroes to leave America and the West Indies for Africa. He only wished to contribute to the building of an independent black nation. One of Garvey's most ambitious dreams was the formation of a steamship company the Black Star Line. This company was to be owned and operated by black people, in the same way that a white steamship company was owned and managed by white people. He hoped to build up a fleet of five ships between June and October 1919, " to trade in the interests of the Negro race" and to link coloured peoples of the world in commercial and industrial endeavours.

Caribbean and African merchants had been having difficulty getting shipping space on the British Elder Dempster line and it was hoped that the Black Star Line would ease the problem. The company financed by US$5 shares, sold only to blacks netted about US$750, 000. No one was permitted to purchase more than 200 shares. Unfortunately, neither Garvey nor any of his close associates knew anything about finance or the shipping business. They put too great faith in untrustworthy dealers and unreliable crew members, both black and white. Proper records were not always kept and official procedures were often ignored. The first three vessels negotiated for were old and fit only for the scrap heap. They ended up as liabilities, leaving the company to face a deficit of around US$476, 000. By 1922 the Black Star Line Shipping Company was bankrupt. The United States attorney general's office had warned Garvey that it was illegal to sell shares by post for a company that had not yet been properly incorporated. Garvey ignored the warnings and

ran foul of the law. Eventually in January 1922 he and three other company officials were indicted on charges of commercial fraud.

The charges noted that company had knowingly used “ fraudulent representations” and “ deceptive artifices” to sell stocks through the mail and had advertised and sold space on a mythical vessel. (Cronin: 1955) Garvey was indicted on 12 counts, fined US$ 1, 000, held without bail for three months and after an unsuccessful appeal was sentenced to a term of five years in an Atlanta jail. The three other men, referred to as “ conspirators”, were not charged. At the trial he defended himself for most of the time and this did not help his case as his often belligerent manner and gerrymandering lost him public sympathy. He appealed the sentence, lost the appeal and was imprisoned in an Atlanta jail on 3 February 1925. Many, especially those who wished to see this black upstart put in his place, thought that he had received his just deserts, but others felt that he had been unfairly treated The New York Evening Bulletin, a white daily, noted on 12 February 1925: “ He did many strange things, it is true, but he performed many fine acts too...

Had the man been given half a fair deal, his financial schemes might have been successful and he might have been able to avoid the unfortunate disasters which led him into the courts and brought punishment upon him.” The Buffalo Evening Times of 24 February, 1925, wrote: “ There is still something that is not pleasant about this whole business.” It questioned the fairness of the judgment and noted that in the past white men charged with similar offences had received much lighter sentences. The colonial governments, challenged by Garvey’s militancy, were relieved at the news of

his imprisonment, but they could not shake his determination or his optimism. His commitment to the establishment of a black shipping line was so fixed that not even the difficulties experienced in the earlier failed attempts could deter him. In 1924, while his appeal was pending, Garvey became involved once again in another shipping company, the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, registered in New Jersey. It negotiated for the purchase of a ship in somewhat better condition than the first three and his supporters, anxious to see a black shipping company become a reality, were enthusiastic.

After many delays, this ship, the General Goethals, which Garvey had planned to rechristen the Booker T. Washington, set out on a voyage round the Caribbean carrying passengers and cargo. Emonei Carter, secretary general of the UNIA was sent along on the voyage to sell stocks at each port of call to raise funds to meet expenses. The vessel reached Kingston on 10 February 1925, but Carter could not raise sufficient money and the ship was tied up in port for a month until its debts were liquidated. It then sailed for Colón, Panama and spent another month there for lack of funds before it was cleared. It was supposed to have sailed for New York via Kingston but there is no certainty that it ever returned to New York. Garvey was then in prison, the image of the organisation had been badly tarnished and it was difficult to get financial support. Garvey’s dream of establishing a black university was realised if only for a short time when Liberty University was opened in the state of Virginia in September 1926.

It too was badly affected by the problems of the UNIA and after three years it closed for lack of financial support. After the UNIA petitioned President

Coolidge in 1927, Garvey’s prison term was commuted to two and a half years. He was released in early December 1927, taken to New Orleans and deported to Jamaica. To his second wife Amy Jacques fell the task of clearing up his financial affairs, selling his Harlem property and shipping his possessions home. The reception he received on his arrival in the island on 10 December 1927 was heartening and fuelled his optimism. Cheering crowds greeted him at the docks and thousands lined the streets to watch him pass by. The Daily Gleaner, 12 December 1927 reported his arrival as follows: A short statue attired in a drab suit and wearing a Panama hat was on the second deck. It was Marcus Garvey the idol of the coloured people and his identity could not be mistaken. Deafening cheers were raised and remarks heard on all sides in the huge crowd showed the high esteem in which he is held by the ordinary people of this country.

The Ward Theatre which seats approximately 1, 000 could not accommodate the gathering which attended the reception in his honour. At home in Jamaica he organised training courses and cultural activity for adults and children, organised street corner meetings in Kingston and travelled to rural parishes, taking his message of black nationalism to who would listen and read. Convinced of the Messianic nature of his mission, in 1928 he visited UNIA branches in Central America in the hope of revitalising the movement and he also visited Europe for a short time. Between 1929 and 1931 he published the Blackman first as a daily and later as a weekly newspaper. This was followed by the evening daily the New Jamaican, from July 1932 to September 1933 and then the Black Man magazine which began late in 1933. Where the Negro was concerned, he said, there were no national

boundaries, nor would he give up struggle until Africa was free. In 1922 the UNIA through Garvey had proposed to the League of Nations that it should take over the former German colonies in Africa, but this was blocked by a ruling which stipulated that petitions could only be considered from existing governments.

In 1928 the UNIA presented another petition in which it recommended that the entire regions of West Africa should be incorporated into a commonwealth of black nations under the government of black men. It also condemned the multinational company, Firestone, for its stranglehold on Liberia, the United States for its occupation of Haiti and the American Fruit Company for its undue influence in Central America. Garvey was also devoting his energies to building up a sense of national pride in Jamaica. Edelweiss Park, an old house and property at Cross Roads in the Corporate Area of Kingston and St Andrew, which he purchased in 1929, became a centre for spiritual upliftment, self-improvement, political indoctrination and purposeful recreation. Political and religious instruction formed part of the weekly programme, and was intended “ to combat ignorance and narrow-mindedness among the masses”.

Thousands thronged to hear Garvey speak on Sunday nights and young and old journeyed from far off rural places, just to get a glimpse of the man who carried the message of inspiration and anti-colonial solidarity. At these meetings they were given a better understanding of their role in society and the confidence to challenge economic and social oppression. For five years Edelweiss Park gave them the will to achieve but in 1934 it had to be sold for debt. Garvey decided to enter local politics and in 1929 formed the People’s

Party. It had mass support and fielded three candidates for the general elections. However as it turned out, many supporters could not meet the necessary voter registration requirements and the party could not command sufficient votes to win a seat. The People’s Political Party was the first of what Garvey hoped would have been a number of political in the Caribbean championing the cause of the faceless masses.

The party manifesto advocated constitutional change to secure Jamaican representation in the British parliament so that the people might achieve a greater measure of self-government. It called for significant social and economic reform: minimum wage legislation, promotion of native industries, land reform and compulsory improvement of urban areas and public housing; the establishment of a Jamaican university, a polytechnic, a national opera house, and a school for domestic science. It also recommended the building of a town hall in Kingston, the establishment of a legal aid department to assist poor people in the courts as well as legislation to protect voters against those who would seek to manipulate the political process unfairly. The manifesto also proposed that there should be a law to impeach and imprison judges who, in defiance of British justice and constitutional rights entered into underhand agreements with lawyers and others to deprive ordinary individuals of their rights in the courts.

When Garvey elaborated on this particular clause at a public meeting he was charged with contempt of court, sentenced to three months in jail, and fined £100. While serving the sentence he won a seat in the local elections for the Allman Town Division of the Kingston and St Andrew Corporation but the Corporation declared his seat vacant. However, when a by-election called to

fill the vacancy, Garvey was re-elected unopposed. He had by then served his prison term. Garvey’s advocacy of social reform gave the Kingston dock workers the courage to demand better wages and working conditions in May 1929 When they were ignored some 500 of them walked off the job leaving 15, 000 stems of bananas on the docks. All they were asking for was four shillings, two pence for loading 100 stems of bananas, instead of the one shilling, fine pence which is what they were receiving. They were also demanding double time on Sundays. Because Garvey was their spokesma1 he incurred the wrath of the powerful United Fruit Company, which saw the possibility of its profits being eroded. Discontent was also spreading on the sugar plantations where workers were facing the same social and economic pressures.

Their obvious complaints could no longer be ignored and in February 1930 a royal commission headed by Sir Sidney Olivier was appointed to enquire into the situation. Testifying before the commission, Garvey drew attention at the exploitation of the workers and recommended that wage guide and set hours of work should be instituted as well as legislation to prevent the exploitation of children in the workplace. He called for health accident insurance for people working in the banana and sugar industry and attacked the KSAC for paying too low wages. Garvey’s pleadings went unheeded but he continued to call for social change and warned that if conditions were not improved the oppressed would rise up in rebellion. Seven years later, in 1938 as he had predicted, violence erupted on the Westmoreland sugar plantations. Only then the authorities begin to address better housing and fair employment.

The Sixth International Convention of the UNIA in Kingston August 1929 emphasised international outreach and revitalisation of UNIA.

Representatives were invited from all social organisations in island, including churches, benevolent societies and lodges. On this occasion overseas delegates came from the United States, Central America (Cuba and the Bahamas. The Carib International Association from Guatemala was refused entry and one delegate spoke on behalf of Nigeria. The convention discussed international issues affecting the conditions of black people. It recommended that the political arm of the movement should be revived and given a new mandate to secure the enfranchisement of the black American population; that the UNIA should engage in large-scale agricultural enterprises in the West Indies, Africa and the United States; and that negro consuls should be located in centres of large black populations. The matter of proper black representation at the League of Nations in Geneva was raised but because of the expense involved it was abandoned. In spite of past difficulties with failed shipping ventures, it was recommended that the Steamship Company should be revived and renamed the African Steam Navigation Company, but that was not to be. Because education for blacks was so inadequate, the convention urged that a school building programme should be instituted, especially in isolated communities with predominantly black populations.

Departments to oversee health and public education were also to be instituted. A target of $600, 000, 000 was set for the establishment of three Negro universities in the West Indies, West Africa and America. Daily newspapers were to be strategitegical1y established in several European capitals, in West Africa, Cape Town and in important West Indian islands so

that they could shape sentiment in favour of the entire Negro race. 1 October was designated Health Day, when emphasis would be placed on personal hygiene and sanitation of the surroundings. Among the social activities arranged during the convention was a debate between Garvey and Otto Huiswood, a representative of the American Negro Labour Congress.

The topic was cooperation between black and workers. Garvey’s emphasis on racial solidarity and self-preservation as the first law of nature received overwhelming support from the audience. On the closing night, 22 August, there was a re-enactment of the court of Ancient Africa before some 10, 000 persons at Edelweiss Park. The high dignitaries of the UNIA, accompanied by their bejewelled ladies, appeared resplendent in their rich robes of state, while the officers of the African Legion fairly dazzled the excited black multitude with their dapper uniforms, shiny Sam Brown belts, and gleaming swords. . . As the President General of the UNIA and Provisional President of Africa passed between lines of erect legionnaires holding aloft drawn swords, the vast assemblage gave a mighty roar of greeting. Accompanied by his wife and the High Potentate of the Association, Garvey made his way to a lavishly decorated stage where he informed his audience that they were but celebrating what had gone before in the noble court of Ethiopia, the grandeur of past ages. (Cronin: 1955)

One regrettable occurrence at the convention was the split in the UNIA between the Jamaican and the American representatives. Garvey accused some members of the movement of dishonesty and disloyalty over the failed shipping company and the events which led to his imprisonment. He and some of those loyal to him preferred to start a new organisation but

Henrietta Vinton Davis and some of the other Americans did not agree. This dissension lost the UNIA much public support. The African nations were by this time awakening to the importance – unification and in that same year the National Congress of Black We Africa was convened in Lagos, Nigeria. Jamaica was not represented but Garvey published J. B. Danquah's seminal address to the conference in Blackman and so subscribers were kept abreast of this important international happening. Garvey continued to broaden the perspective of his audiences at both local and international levels. Edelweiss Park became the Mecca cultural events in Jamaica.

One music competition is described thus by a contemporary. Over 2, 000 listeners were packed on the ground floor and in the galleries... Contestants were classified into solos, duets, quartets and choral ensembles. All the items offered were serious, rather than popular music. They included selections from Haydn, Tchaikovsky. Arditi, Eli, Handel; offerings which ordinarily would hardly appeal to the musically unsophisticated. At the beginning Garvey described how polite society here and abroad behaved at concerts, and asked the listeners to show the same polite and encouraging behaviour to the contestants. Throughout the long programme... there was polite... considerate and appreciative reception by the large mixed audience (Mills: 1969)

By including classical music Garvey was demonstrating that there was no difference between black and white people, and that poor people were just as capable of appreciating the finer things of life. His audiences understood his message and responded appropriately. In the Negro World of 26 June 1931, Garvey pointed out the need for a code of ethics for black children

which should be no different from that for white children. He said that in the same way that white children had a philosophy, a set creed to guide their lives, so black children needed similar code. (Hill: 1987) The Seventh International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World was convened in Kingston on 1 August 1934, the centenary of the abolition of slavery. Garvey had by then softened his political stance from militancy to popular mobilisation and compromise. At the convention he said, “ Others are learning that they cannot gain much today by being too aggressive; we have to be more compromising than other peoples. It is because of our peculiar position — a position that we have invited upon ourselves.” (Hill: 1987)

A five-year plan stressed the international aspects of the movement and reiterated some of the recommendations from the Sixth Convention dealing with the development of shipping, manufacturing, mining, agriculture and other industries in the West Indies, Central and South America and Africa. It approved the adoption of a standard African language, discouraged nonconformist religions and cults with passing reference to the Rastafarians. It condemned birth control. The UNIA had by now lost much of its earlier dynamism and the Jamaican colonial administration added to the pressure by attempting to enforce a US$30, 000 judgment handed down against the old UNIA in a New York court. Creditors auctioned the Kingston headquarters, Liberty Hall, at 76 King Street, although it was later restored to the organisation. They levied on Garvey’s printing press and office equipment, and other items. These adversities broke the organisation financially, but not Garvey’s fighting spirit, or his vision of a mighty black race, triumphant. He

did not give up his vision of a vigorous UNIA with international outreach and continued to prepare UNIA officers for leadership roles.

He continued to write the front-page editorial of the weekly Negro World in New York and maintained contact with UNIA branches in the West Indies, Central America and Canada, confident that black nations would eventually take their rightful place in the world. In 1935, in the face of financial and political adversities, Marcus Garvey decided to emigrate to Britain where he would be nearer the centre of world influence. For the next five years he maintained his international associations and worked steadfastly for the political unification of the black race. He lectured regularly on Black Nationalism, attended UNIA conferences in St Kitts, in other West Indian islands and in Canada. He continued to publish the Black Man journal but at six pence per copy and a small circulation, the journal was not viable. It ceased publication in 1939. After attending a UNIA conference in Toronto in 1936, Garvey decided to open a School of African Philosophy in Toronto with lessons prepared in London.

The main objective was to train blacks for world leaderships in the UNIA. The course started in 1937, and was available “ only to Negroes”. Applicants were expected to have a high school education. Of the fine students who enrolled, eight graduated. Two years later a second correspondence course was offered in London at a cost of US$25. The advertisements named Garvey as principal. He had hoped to attract 1, 000 students but only 11 registered. They came from the United States, Nigeria, Uganda, Cape Province and South Africa. The training course had its greatest influence upon the Africans. Most of them were involved in the liberation of their countries. The

university and technical institute which Garvey had envisaged for Jamaica materialised after his death. The University College of the West Indies was established in 1948, and the College of Arts, Science Arts Technology, in 1958. Social and educational programmes such as public high schools in rural areas, legal aid clinics and the beautification of public parks were all instituted after the island attained political independence in 1962.

Poor health drained Garvey’s energies in England, and in January 1940 he suffered a stroke. He died six months later on 10 June, in straitened circumstances. In spite of his many frustrations and reversals of fortune, Garvey accomplished what no other black leader had done before. He created an international awareness of the right of the black race to coexist with other peoples of the world as equals. He awakened race consciousness and r pride in millions of working-class blacks in Africa as well as in the diaspora He taught them to respect their own worth and to demand their rights human beings. Shortly before his death in 1940, the Boston Guardian wrote: “ Already his name is legend, from Harlem to Zanzibar”. The African, Mazilinko, pointed to his Messianic role when he said, “ After all is said and done. Africans have the same confidence in Marcus Garvey which the Israelites had in Moses”. (Hill: 1987) He fought for freedom, justice and equality and remains a source of inspiration to all popular movements for black people and to all who would aspire to lead the black race.

Twenty-four years after his death, in 1964, the Government of Jamaica honoured his name by declaring him Jamaica’s first National Hero. His remains were brought from England and interred at the National Hero Park. Even a quarter of a century after his death the controversy generated by the

government’s action revealed that a substantial core of middie-c1ass Jamaicans still were not comfortable with Garvey’s message of decolonisation and physical return of black people to Africa. It was left to a handful of liberal journalists to convince their fellow countrymen that “ Garvey’s greatness lay in the massive psychological warfare that he deployed to wipe out the inherited inferiority complex and the facelessness of the Negro in a white word”. (Lewis: 1968) Time, the judge, has gradually adjusted the balance. In 1983 the polls ranked Jamaica’s national heroes as follows: Bustamante 37 per cent, Bogle 19 per cent. Garvey 15 per cent, Manley 14 per cent. By 1987 Garvey had soared to 56 per cent, Bustamante was at 20 per cent, Manley 16 per cent and Bogle 5 per cent.

A January 1988 survey showed that 88 per cent of those polled agreed that Garvey’s life and work should be taught in all schools. Throughout his crowded, often difficult and tempestuous life, Marcus Garvey was above all, a champion of blacks, the one who fought fearlessly for their rights. As a young man, he lost his job at the Benjamin Company for supporting a strike of underpaid employees; at the beginning of his career as a race leader, he protested to the British consul in Port Limon about the victimisation of black banana workers by the American Fruit Company. Throughout his life he championed the cause of people of African origin worldwide, and more than any other leader, he attacked the European partitioning of Africa.

To this day African leaders pay tribute to him. In 1939, the year before his death, he expressed his vision of a liberated Africa. He saw it as “ a country of the future. Her inhabitants, her everything tend toward an Africa of the natives, where they will rise to govern as other men are governing”. (Black

Man: 1939) That dream of black supremacy, at first slow in realisation, has taken on momentum with the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa in April 1994, through the exercise of the ballot by black South Africans for the first time, and the appointment of the first black president in that nation’s history. Today, more than ever before, Jamaicans honour Garvey as a black world leader and as a great national hero who gave his life to guarding over and protecting the rights of blacks. P. Sherlock & H. Bennett (1998) The Story of the Jamaican People, Chapter 24, Kingston: Ian Randle Publisher, pp 292-315