

# Contributions of marcus garvey and malcolmx to politics history essay



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Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey, arguably two of the most influential African Americans in the struggle for betterment of African Americans. Their achievements are celebrated not only in America, but also in the Caribbean as well as Africa; Marcus Garvey was recognised as Jamaica's first national hero and Malcolm X has had multiple streets, schools as well as a film based on him. " The King of Swaziland told Mrs Marcus Garvey that he knew the names of only two Black men in the Western world: Jack Johnson... and Marcus Garvey"[1]. When looking at the political achievement they made in America, it is surprisingly small given their prominence. Aside from political achievements, their legacies were arguably greater after they died, than when they were alive. Malcolm X was murdered in 1965, " but despite this his message lived on for some years and the urban riots that wracked America from 1964 to 1968 made it clear that many blacks had given up on the idea that non-violent protest could change conditions"[2]. In many ways, Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X were very similar people in how they believed change would be achieved in America, and particularly in the sense that both rejected the idea of working with whites to achieve equality. While other notable activists like Booker T Washington and Martin Luther King peacefully tried to achieve equality, the former especially flattering towards white people, Garvey and Malcolm X believed peaceful protesting would achieve nothing. The eventual aim was where Malcolm X and Garvey predominantly differed on opinions, Malcolm X was principally focussed on issues with in America, where as Garvey was interested in creating a 'back to Africa' movement and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

Neither Malcolm X nor Garvey had the aim to achieve equality; instead, they both promoted the idea that black people should be proud of their heritage and should not have to gain the white persons recognition. Birgit Aron argues that Garveyism is a " negro racist philosophy"[3]. He goes on to say that, Garveyism frowns upon the free social and cultural intercourse between white and coloured peoples and firmly rejects miscegenation between white and blacks.[4]Malcolm X is generally perceived to have had very similar beliefs about integration; Reverent Albert Cleage says, " Until the day of his death he remained an opponent of ... 'integration'"[5]. However, after Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Mecca, he himself asserted that his outlook on white people had changed. Charles E. Wilson wrote, " His attitude toward whites was affected by his experiences in that holy place.... He became less and less doctrinairely antagonistic toward whites."[6]Despite some people's belief that his pilgrimage affected him, his comments made about white people after his trip to Mecca suggest that he was in reality still hostile towards them; in a statement made with Richard Penn warren after his trip to Mecca, Malcolm X said, referring to the white man, " I'm just telling you about the snakes"[7]. C. Eric Lincoln, author of *The Black Muslims in America*, argued, " Those who saw in the returned pilgrim to Mecca a 'new' Malcolm X were at best probably premature in their judgments".[8]Because of Malcolm X's continuation of negative remarks about white people, Lincoln's assertion is the more credible claim, and that after his pilgrimage Malcolm X was still very much anti-whites.

Both Garvey and Malcolm X reject white people's help in their approach to economic policy, but Malcolm X takes the disregard of Americans to a further

level by criticising capitalism and Reiland Rebaka, author of Malcolm X and critical theory, argues he even took a socialist and Marxist approach to the economy. Garvey may have rejected the idea of integrating and improving African American's position within America's white dominated economy, but he still accepted the American value of capitalism and saw it essential for progression. Garvey founded the Negro Factories Corporation in an attempt to support and promote the idea of black economic independence. Otis Grant says, " Within the law and economic ideology of Garvey, the Black Star Line did not represent a " back to Africa" movement but rather African Americans' acceptance of capitalism as a means of progression." [9] Garvey rightfully saw that power whether it is political or any other means, is much easier to achieve if you have a foundation of economic power and influence. With strong black support for his Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, Garvey was seen as increasingly dangerous threat by the U. S government. This assessment explains the government's urgency and severity of his sentence, to deport him and remove any influence and support from African Americans. " Indeed, even after being convicted on mail fraud, Garvey was able to find investors for his new company, the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company - they saw Garvey as an economic threat which builds to political power" [10]. Never the less, with the troubles of being arrested and his reckless business deals, " Garvey's economic doctrine produced little of lasting benefit to the race" [11]. Malcolm X on the other hand had a different belief and " critiqued capitalism and colonialism" [12]. Reiland Rebaka, asserting that Malcolm X was a socialist, says " From Malcolm X's critical perspective, there is no ruling class, but a ruling race/class".

[13] Characteristically, Marxists emphasise the theory that the ruling class, <https://assignbuster.com/contributions-of-marcus-garvey-and-malcolm-x-to-politics-history-essay/>

that being the white capitalist class for America, has the influence and command to outline problems and establish the terms of how the problem should be discussed and resolved. If Malcolm X was as Marxist in thinking as Rebaka says, then he understood the influence of capitalist power in resolving political and social problems, in this instance racism, but he still decided not to conform to capitalism to achieve change, unlike Garvey. Instead, he took a radical stance against American democracy and capitalism because he believed that there was an " inconsistency between the universal Principles proclaimed by the ruling race/ class and its actual practice"[14]. The American principles being freedom and liberty and the inconsistency being the deliberate unwarranted racism towards African Americans. Despite claims of Malcolm X being a socialist and a Marxist theorist, John White believes that he only took a slight socialist approach later on in his life and even then, " Malcolm never moved beyond a vague critique of capitalism, and never endorsed Marxism." [15] He believed Marxism was just one more white political ideology, which just benefited a different class of white people but had no interest in the wellbeing of black people. Instead, there is evidence that he was more like Garvey in his economic and integration policies. " In several respects, the black Muslims represented a latter day version of Garveyism... to discover their individual and group identity in racial separatism. The group economy by the Muslims... duplicated those of the UNIA"[16].

Although Garvey rejected integration for naturalistic reasons, there is also indication that he rejected it because it crushed black business enterprises. He argued that for black people to rely upon the progression of others for

justice, sympathy and rights is like depending upon a broken stick, resting upon which will eventually consign you to the ground[17]. Garvey did not detach economics from jurisprudence, for Garvey economic prosperity equated to social justice. He believed that African Americans should stop complaining about social equality, letting the white people think we are yearning for their help and recognition, instead we should build our own strong race industrially, commercially, educationally and politically, everything social will come afterwards[18]. Although Garvey was before Malcolm X's time, Otis Grant makes a point, which Malcolm X agreed with Garvey, on the topic of social justice; he says, " Garvey argued that civil rights leaders fail because they erroneously believe that social justice is the same as civil rights. Hence, these leaders unwittingly used their intellectual abilities to promote social equality rather than economic comparability... for Garvey, social justice must include permanent economic foundations that are progressive"[19]

For all of Garvey's logic behind achieving social justice, numerous African Americans leaders consider his efforts to have done very little in addressing racism. John Graves, author of social ideas of Marcus Garvey, argued that Garveyism did not offer any real or lasting solution to America's racial problem and although it gained wide currency at that time, Garveyism has virtually no value today as a solution to the racial problem.[20]Likewise, for Malcolm X many believe he offered no lasting solution to the racism problem or African American politics. Whitney M. Young of the national urban league believed " there aren't ten negroes who would follow Malcolm X to a separate state"[21]. James farmer, of the congress of racial equality, felt that

" Malcolm has done nothing but verbalise - his militancy is a matter of posture, there has been no action"[22]. How much they achieved is hard to judge, although after Garvey died very little actually changed for African Americans. In the final years of Malcolm X's life and after he died the civil rights acts were drawn up, but it is unlikely these were due to pressure from Malcolm X. Changing attitude of American white's would have been a contribution and possibly more important would have been Martin Luther King's (MLK) influence. MLK's influence is likely more a key reason behind the civil rights acts because this was what MLK was trying to achieve. Malcolm's insistence on separatism and identification with Africa was at odds with the intergrationism and 'americanism' of the civil rights movement.[23]

African American support for Garvey and Malcolm X took similar paths, initially they both had many followers, but they lost much support later on in their lives. Garvey never made any particular mandate on religion like the one Malcolm did, According to Adam Fairclough, Malcolm X's rejection of Christianity limited his appeal further.[24]When asked about Christian and gandhian groups in an interview in 1964 Malcolm X replied " Christian, Gandhian? I don't go for anything that's nonviolent and turn-the-other-cheekish." [25]This is not to say that they lost complete support, their legacies and ideas were imbedded in many African Americans minds. The legacy that Garvey left behind though has to be said to be more influential after he died, than that of Malcolm X's. After Malcolm X died and the civil rights acts were passed, the numbers of African Americans who supported Malcolm's ideas dwindled. Fairclough says, " The momentum towards a more violent approach was not, however, maintained for long, and it too had faded

away by the early 1970s"[26]. Even before he died " Established black leaders, already embarrassed and angered by Malcolm's attacks, were in no mood to form alliances with him.[27]Garvey on the other hand left a much more influential legacy; he did however lose a lot of support in his later years. Even his devout followers faded after his death and his movement declined. " To many of his followers Garvey had been a near-God and a savior; to the movement he had been a necessity."[28]Garveyism still had a greater impact on African Americans than Malcolm X did after they passed away. Even Malcolm says in his autobiography, he remembered his father the reverend earl little was a dedicated organiser for Marcus Garvey's UNIA. [29]

In relation to the impact made upon political parties with in America, Garveyism swung Negro support from the Republican to the Democratic Party. " He began to distrust the hide-bound traditionalism of republican political leaders and specifically the Negro element in this group".

[30]Malcolm X on the other hand never really advocated either party but he did criticise the democrats. He proclaimed in his 'The ballot or the Bullet speech, " The [Democratic] Party that you backed controls two-thirds of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and still they can't keep their promise to you, 'cause you're a chump. Anytime you throw your weight behind the political party that controls two-thirds of the government, and that Party can't keep the promise that it made to you during election time, and you're dumb enough to walk around continuing to identify yourself with that Party, you're not only a chump, but you're a traitor to your race."[31]The main reason behind criticising the democrats over the



republicans was because the democrats offered welfare and Malcolm was notorious with rejecting this idea of white help, especially welfare that has a feeling of pity money towards the blacks. At least the republicans supported enterprise and creation of business, which Malcolm believed would be the only way black people could stand on their own and support a strong black society in the long run. Considering the republicans focus on enterprise, while the democrats supported welfare, which can be taken away at any point, it is surprising that Garvey backed the democrats. It has to be noted though that in the nineteen twenties the idea of social welfare was nothing like it was in the nineteen sixties. In the nineteen twenties, the democrats would have never supported welfare to the degree they did in the sixties, even more so to avoid any association to communism with the Russian revolution so recent and fresh in people's minds.

As well as sharing common economic aims and paths to political power, Malcolm X also shared a similar belief to Garvey on moving back to Africa. Malcolm maintained the idea that African Americans should revert back to their African routes, much like Garvey's back to Africa idea. It was the extent of this idea which Malcolm differed from Garvey, Garvey believed in a physical move of all black people back to Africa to create their own strong society without the restraints of white people. Malcolm X did not go as far as a complete move to Africa, he said in a conversation with Robert Penn Warren, " I believe that a psychological, cultural, and philosophical migration back to Africa will solve our problems. Not a physical migration"[32]. Even though he still supported separatism, he realised that times had changed and that the idea of a migration to Africa " did not appeal to the black youth

of the ghettos"[33]Although both Garvey and Malcolm shared similar economic aims, it was how they went about them that set them apart. Garvey stressed the importance of African Americans making their own economic destiny as the key to betterment; whilst Malcolm likewise stressed this point, he also spent a lot of time and persuasion pushing the idea of self-defence and violence. Malcolm's emphasis on violence inevitably effected his image and stood out in people's minds, greater than his call for economic enterprise; thus Garvey was always likely to be more successful if the government had not intervened. Both Malcolm X and Garvey were unpopular with many white people, but by criticising capitalism, however small the criticism, and advocating violence on a larger scale than Garvey ever did, many white people held Malcolm X in even lower contempt. Among African Americans, these criticisms and actions were not seen as quite an issue, but the reality was, to make effective headway for African American politics within the broader spectrum of the American political system, white support was needed. Based on the assessment that economic power helps pave the way to political power, Garvey again was always the more hopeful candidate for African American politics. Malcolm X's attempts to achieve political change through violent means were regarded as hostile among many Americans, limiting and holding back potential support and political developments that could have been achieved if he had not isolated members of the public. If Garvey could achieve an increase in black importance through capitalist means, then he would have at least stood a better chance of receiving white support, having gained the influence through the values of capitalism; hence the government's eagerness to crumble any economic foundations and support he was building. His arrogance and rash business

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decisions though made his demise that much quicker and began the end of African Americans first real experience, and hope, of big business and the consequent political interest and influence that comes intertwined in America's capitalist society. " If he had been more successful in human relations and less reckless in business dealings, the movement might have grown... Even Garvey's most vociferous enemies have often expressed that belief.[34]