

Teachings of Marcus Mosiah Garvey: Relevance in the post-apartheid South Africa.

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Introduction

Marcus Garvey was the youngest of 11 children and born in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, on August 17, 1887, he moved to Kingston at the age of 14, found work as a printer, and became acquainted with the abysmal living conditions of the labouring people. He quickly involved himself in social reform, participating in the first Printers' Union strike in Jamaica in 1907 and in setting up the newspaper - The Watchman. When he left the island to earn money to finance his projects, he visited Central and South America and found the massive evidence that black people everywhere were victims of discrimination. Marcus Garvey arrived in United States- New York march 23, 1916 after Booker T. Washington encouraged him and he was also deported between 1920 and 1927 (Martin, 1983:5).

He visited the Panama Canal Zone and saw the conditions under which the West Indians lived and worked. He went to Ecuador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia and Venezuela. Everywhere, blacks were experiencing great hardships. Garvey returned to Jamaica unhappy about the situation in Central America, and appealed to Jamaica's colonial government to help improve the plight of West Indian workers in Central America but his appeal fell on deaf ears. Garvey also began to lay the groundwork of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, to which he devoted most of his life. (Martin, 1983:3).

Garvey left for England in 1912 in search of additional financial backing. While there, he met a Sudanese-Egyptian journalist, Duse Mohammed Ali. Whilst he was working for Ali's publications - African Times and Oriental Review, Garvey began to study the history of Africa, particularly, the exploitation of black peoples by colonial powers. He was inspired by the writings of Afro American - Booker T. Washington's (1856 -1915) Up from slavery to become a "race leader" (Draper, 1970:53).

In 1914 Garvey organized the Universal Negro Improvement Association and its coordinating body, the African Communities League. In 1920 the organization held its first convention in New York. The convention opened with a parade down Harlem's Lenox Avenue. That evening, before a crowd of 25,000, Garvey outlined his plan to build an African nation-state. In New York City his ideas attracted popular support, and thousands enrolled in the UNIA. He began publishing the newspaper The Negro World and toured the United States preaching Black Nationalism to popular audiences. His efforts were successful, and soon, the association boasted over 1,100 branches in more than 40 countries. Most of these branches were located in the United States, which had become the UNIA's base of operations. There were,

however, offices in several Caribbean countries, Cuba having the most. Branches also existed in places such as Panama, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Venezuela, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Namibia and South Africa. He also launched some ambitious business ventures, notably the Black Star Shipping Line.

In the years following the organization's first convention, the UNIA began to decline in popularity. With the Black Star Line in serious financial difficulties, Garvey promoted two new business organizations — the African Communities League and the Negro Factories Corporation. He also tried to salvage his colonization scheme by sending a delegation to appeal to the League of Nations for transfer to the UNIA of the African colonies taken from Germany during World War I.

Financial betrayal by trusted aides and a host of legal entanglements (based on charges that he had used the U.S. mail to defraud prospective investors) eventually led to Garvey's imprisonment in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary for a five-year term. In 1927 his half-served sentence was commuted, and he was deported to Jamaica by order of President Calvin Coolidge.

Garvey then turned his energies to Jamaican politics, campaigning on a platform of self-government, minimum wage laws, and land and judicial reform. He was soundly defeated at the polls, however, because most of his followers did not have the necessary voting qualifications. In 1935 Garvey left for England where, in near obscurity, he died on June 10, 1940, in a cottage in West Kensington.

Teachings and Impact of Marcus Garvey

When Marcus Garvey died in 1940 the role of the British Empire was already being challenged by India and the rising expectations of her African colonies. Marcus Garvey's avocation of African redemption and the restoration of the African state's sovereign political entity in world affairs was still a dream without fulfillment.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, the United States would enter, in a formal way, what had been up to that date strictly a European conflict. Marcus Garvey's prophesy about the European scramble to maintain dominance over the whole world was now a reality (Clarke, 2004). The people of Africa and Asia had joined in this conflict but with different hopes, different dreams and many misgivings. Africans throughout the colonial world were mounting campaigns against this system which had robbed them of their nation-ness and their basic human-ness. The discovery and the reconsideration of the teachings of the honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey were being rediscovered and reconsidered by a large number of African people as this world conflict deepened.

In 1945, when World War II was drawing to a close the 5th Pan-African Congress was called in Manchester, England. Some of the conventioners were: George

Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, W.E.B. Dubois, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. Up to this time the previous Pan-African Congresses had mainly called for improvements in the educational status of the Africans in the colonies so that they would be prepared for self-rule when independence eventually came.

The Pan-African Congress in Manchester was radically different from all of the other congresses. For the first time Africans from Africa, Africans from the Caribbean and Africans from the United States had come together and designed a program for the future independence of Africa. Those who attended the conference were of many political persuasions and different ideologies, yet the teachings of Marcus Garvey were the main ideological basis for the 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England in 1945.

Some of the conveners of this congress would return to Africa in the ensuing years to eventually lead their respective nations toward independence and beyond. In 1947, a Ghanaian student who had studied ten years in the United States, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah returned to Ghana on the invitation of Joseph B. Danquah, his former schoolmaster. Nkrumah would later become Prime Minister. In his fight for the complete independence for the Gold Coast later to be known as Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah acknowledged his political indebtedness to the political teachings of Marcus Garvey.

On September 7, 1957, Ghana became a free self-governing nation, the first member of the British Commonwealth of Nations to become self-governing. Ghana would later develop a Black Star Line patterned after the maritime dreams of Marcus Garvey. My point here is that the African Independence Explosion, which started with the independence of Ghana, was symbolically and figuratively bringing the hopes of Marcus Garvey alive.

In the Caribbean Islands the concept of Federation and Political union of all the islands was now being looked upon as a realizable possibility. Some constitutional reforms and changing attitudes, born of this awareness, were improving the life of the people of these islands.

In the United States' Supreme Court's decision of 1954, outlawing segregation in school systems was greeted with mixed feelings of hope and skepticism by African-Americans. A year after this decision the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Freedom Rides and the demand for equal pay for Black teachers that subsequently became a demand for equal education for all, would become part of the central force that would set the fight for liberation in motion.

The enemies of Africans, the world over were gathering their counter-forces while a large number of them pretended to be sympathetic to the African's cause. Some of these pretenders, both Black and White, were F.B.I. and other agents of the government whose mission it was to frustrate and destroy the Civil Rights

Movement. In a different way the same thing was happening in Africa. The overthrow of governments and counter-coups kept most African states from developing into the strong independent and sovereign states they had hoped to become.

While the Africans had gained control over their state's apparatus, the colonialist's still controlled the economic apparatus of most African states. For example, in South Africa whites still own more than 90 percent of land. Africans were discovering to their shock that a large number of the Africans, who had studied abroad were a detriment to the aims and goals of their nation. None of them had been trained to rule an African state by the use of the best of African traditional forms and strategies. As a result African states, in the main, became imitations of European states and most of their leaders could justifiably be called Europeans with black faces. They came to power without improving the lot of their people and these elitist governments continue until this day (Clarke, 2004).

In most cases what went wrong was that as these leaders failed to learn the lessons of self-reliance and power preparation as advocated by Marcus Garvey and in different ways by Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X. Africa became infiltrated by foreign agents. Africans had forgotten, if they knew at all, that Africa is the world's richest continent, repository of the greatest mineral wealth in the world. They had not asked themselves nor answered the most critical question. If Africa is the world's richest continent, why is it so full of poor people? Marcus Garvey advocated that Africans control the wealth of Africa. He taught that control, control of resources, self-control, control of nation that requires preparation, as Garveyism was and still about total preparation.

Brief overview

- The early leaders in South AFRICA had linkages with activist and shared information with our fellow Blacks in diasporas in United States as 1912, leaders like Solomon Plaatjie- the co-founder of South African Native National Congress (later became African National Congress) as Martin highlights that Du Bois refused to publicise the work of Solomon Plaatjie's Native Life in South Africa (Martin, 1983:21).

- Garvey built the largest Pan-African mass organisation of all times of which had branches all over the world from North, South, Central Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and Australia (Martin, 1983:2).

- Garvey gave rise to the early political consciousness in the African continent even South Africa (Walshe, 1971: 25).

- Garvey planted political seeds of black/ race consciousness, African nationalism and Pan-Africanism (Martin, 1983: 5). For example, Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movements.

- “Africans and Afro-Americans shared an earlier common independence as people in Africa who became separated under different but similar forms of dependency: slavery and colonisation” (Cromwell, 1987: 115).

- As struggles continue for independence and seeking complete self-reliance.

Basic central principles defined:

Purity of race

Garvey believed in “purity of black race just as how all respecting whites believe in a pure white race, as far as that can be” (Draper, 1970:52). He also regarded Ku Klux Klan, the Anglo Saxon clubs and whites American society as far as Negro is concerned as better friends of the race than all other groups of hypocritical whites put together and this stated clear that Negro there was no place in the United States, so that led him to strike to repatriate Negroes to Africa where they belong (Draper, 1970:52). According to Martin, Garvey insistent message of race pride and loyalty, self-reliance and African redemption (1983:21).

Self-reliance

Marcus asserted that black communities should strive for self determination rather integration of Afro American which was favoured by Du Bois (Pan Africanism) into white imperialism and he implied that Afro-American leadership of the cause and cause interests of Africans throughout the world, especially in Africa (Draper, 1970:49). Garvey practiced what he preached as he opened up businesses such as hotel, printing plants and Black Star Line of ships but could not succeed as he was operating within white United States economy (Draper, 1970:54).

Cromwell highlighted that “self reliance does not mean isolation or separation from those who surround us or those who might have formerly oppressed us”(Cromwell, 1987: 115).

Black power

Refer mostly to black self-reliance, racial pride, self-control, control over the means of economy of Africa and political control and empowerment.

Black Nationalism

“Nationhood” – the highest ideal of all peoples as Africans needs a nation and country of their own. Garvey believed that “Nationhood” is the strongest security of any people and they must strive to attain that goal and that “African Republic” should be on the African soil. The example of that Republic he set it up in New York (Draper, 1970:51). Martin argues that Black Nationalism is for mobilizing the Black World resources of their own community, community control (1983: 1-2).

There is still no unified force in Africa calling attention to the need for this kind of preparation. This preparation calls for a new kind of education if Africans are to face the reality of their survival. Africans in the United States must remember that the slave ships brought no West Indians, no Caribbeans, no Jamaicans or Trinidadians or Barbadians to this hemisphere. In the 500-year process of oppression the Europeans have displaced our God, our culture, and our traditions. They have abused African women to the extent that they have created a bastard race that is confused as to whether to be loyal to its mother's people or its father's people and for the most part they remain loyal to neither. African people cannot succeed in the world until they hear again Marcus Garvey's call: AFRICA FOR THE AFRICANS, THOSE AT HOME AND ABROAD. We must regain our confidence in ourselves as a people and learn again the methods and arts of controlling nations. Clarke (2004) argues in closure that African must hear again Marcus Garvey calling out to us: UP! UP! YOU MIGHTY RACE! YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH WHAT YOU WILL!

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