

“Marcus Garvey: Angel of Black Success”

By

Geoffrey Philp*

In the early 1900s, one of the unfortunate outcomes of the fratricidal battle between the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which was founded by Marcus Garvey, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was founded by W.E.B. DuBois, was the further splintering of the Black community—a state from which the latter has never fully recovered. It may be argued that the NAACP “won” the battle. Sadly, the models of entrepreneurship and self-reliance that Garvey advocated were partially lost by the Black community due to the NAACP’s emphasis on legal redress and governmental assistance to resolve issues that Garvey said should be resolved within the Black community.

As a student of Booker T. Washington’s principles of economic progress through self-help and education, Marcus Garvey founded the Harlem branch of the UNIA with just thirteen members in May 1917. Modeling closely Booker T. Washington’s National Negro Business League, Garvey established the [Negro Factories Cooperation](#):

In 1919 he also established the Negro Factories Corporation and offered stock for African Americans to buy. He raised one million dollars for the project. He wanted to produce everything that a nation needed so that African Americans could completely rely on their own efforts. It generated income and provided jobs by its numerous enterprises, including a chain of grocery stores and restaurants, steam laundry, tailor shop, dress making shop, millinery store (clothing, fashion, hats, accessories, etc.), publishing house and doll factory. In New York City alone, Garvey owned several buildings, owned a fleet of trucks and had over 1,000 Black people working in his businesses.

Of course, with these unqualified successes Garvey drew the attention of a young attorney in the Department of Justice, J. Edgar Hoover, who was determined [to stop Garvey at all costs](#):

Hoover targeted Marcus Garvey, naming him a "notorious negro agitator," and began searching for any evidence that would cause Garvey to be charged with a crime. In December of 1919, afraid of Garvey's growing influence, Hoover hired the Bureau's first black special agent, James Wormley Jones. Jones was sent to gather intelligence on Garvey, and the resulting information led Hoover and his group to sabotage Garvey's Black Star Line—a series of ships that were intended to transport goods between the black communities of North America, the Caribbean, and Africa.

Hoover did manage to stop Garvey. On June 21, 1923, Garvey was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of mail fraud. The largest movement (the UNIA had as many as 6 million members) for the economic empowerment of Black people in the United States and the world came to a sudden halt. The demise of the UNIA was also aided by members of the NAACP, who wrote to Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty requesting the continued [“prosecution of Garvey](#)

[on charges of mail fraud.](#)” After Garvey’s imprisonment, the NAACP became the voice of the Black community—a position it has continued to hold, however tenuously, until today.

However, as the centenary of the UNIA draws near, the question arises about the wisdom of the NAACP’s complicity in Garvey’s conviction and imprisonment. Has the NAACP’s model of legal and political redress without economic development helped or hurt the Black community?

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, once said, "No man ever steps in the same river twice." Certainly, the Black community has changed since Garvey’s time, but the principles that he codified in his seminal work, *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, have proven time and time again to be effective. Throughout our history when Garvey’s ideas have been implemented, there has been a renaissance of the arts and a boom in economic activity in the Black community.

A reexamination of Garvey’s legal treatment in the United States is overdue, and it is for this reason that the Coalition for the Exoneration of Marcus Garvey has not only petitioned President Barack Obama (http://signon.org/sign/exonerate-marcus-garvey?source=c.url&r_by=4631897) and the Congress (<http://www.causes.com/actions/1722148-urge-congress-to-exonerate-civil-rights-leader-marcus-garvey>) for Garvey’s exoneration, but it has also begun a RESPECT Garvey campaign based on the principles that Garvey lived by and espoused: **Redemption, Education, Self-reliance, Purpose, Entrepreneurship, Community and Tradition.**

Called “the angel of Black success,” the economic miracles that Marcus Garvey engineered can be replicated today. Garvey said, and I believe, that “We have a beautiful history, and we shall create another in the future that will astonish the world.”

*--Geoffrey Philp, author of the e-book, *Bob Marley and Bradford’s iPod*, has also written two short story collections, six volumes of poetry, and two children's books. A multi-award winning writer, whose work explores the themes of individuality, family, community in a Caribbean context, Philp is one of the few writers whose work has been published in the *Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories* and the *Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. His popular blog, geoffreyphilp.blogspot.com, covers literary events in the Caribbean and Miami. He teaches creative writing at Miami Dade College where he is the chairperson of the College Preparatory Department.