

## **Women in the Garvey Movement**

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### **Summary and Keywords**

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), considered to be the largest, and most successful black nationalist association in world history, included the significant participation by women. At its height, the UNIA had more than 500 affiliates, and a membership into the millions across several continents including North America, Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean. Garvey developed this association with the support of women. Women probably made up the majority of UNIA members by the mid-1920s. Historians such as Ula Y. Taylor and Keisha N. Blain have noted the broad influence that women exercised in the development of the Garvey Movement. Garvey's first wife Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey, his second wife, played vital roles in the establishment and success of the UNIA. This does not suggest that only the Garvey wives were integral to the UNIA but rather a host of women working at the local level also clearly played roles in the advance of the UNIA agenda. In his biography of Amy Ashwood Garvey, Lionel Yard has argued that Garvey's first wife should be recognized as a co-founder of the UNIA; though this claim has been challenged by some scholars such as Tony Martin. Karen S. Adler has identified Amy Jacques Garvey as "the most important woman in Garveyism." The second Mrs. Garvey was actively involved in the UNIA as an organizer, writer, and activist intellectual eventually becoming the association's leader during Garvey's imprisonment. Amy Jacques Garvey was a prolific writer as evidenced by her books and many articles that appear in a UNIA organizational paper *Negro World*. Her

*Negro World* column, “Our Women and What They Think,” highlighted the views of black nationalist women. She also preserved a documentary record of Garveyism and chronicled the history of the UNIA in her important books *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, *Garvey and Garveyism*, and *Black Power in America*. These writings also provide an in-depth account of her work with her husband in building the UNIA.

Audley Moore and Mittie Maude Lena Gordon are two more important women who helped to facilitate the spread of Garveyism as women came to dominate the organization. Most scholars including Taylor, Adler, Blain, and Yard agree that women such as Amy Jacques Garvey were key figures in the Garvey Movement. This narrative is structured around a topical-thematic approach, as opposed to a rigid chronological framework, to more effectively illustrate the expansive role that women had in the history of the Garvey movement; and, this is coupled with a consideration for clarity and brevity. Women were fundamentally instrumental in the development and success of Garveyism in North America and beyond.

Key words: Amy Jacques Garvey, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Universal Negro Improvement Association, Women, Gender, Black Nationalism, Feminism, Separatism, Jim Crow, Integration

### **Discussion of Literature**

African American historical studies expanded greatly during the height of the Civil Rights era in the 1960s and 1970s. There was a shift in focus with the rise of intellectual history at this time. *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Dell, 1964) by E.U. Essien-Udom represented this shift in focus. Essien-Udom’s text is one of the first scholarly studies published on the Nation of Islam. This text was followed by works such as *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Beacon Press, 1972) edited by Sterling Stuckey, *The Roots of Black Nationalism*

(Associated Faculty Press, 1975) by Rodney P. Carlisle, and *Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 1976) by Alphonso Pinkney. This trend continued with work on black thought including texts such as *Emigration vs. Assimilation: The Debate in the African American Press, 1827-1861* (McFarland Publishing, 1988) by Kwando Mbiassi Kinshasa. African American history texts with a focus on black nationalism was further advanced with texts such as *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Oxford University Press, 1988) and *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) both by Wilson Jeremiah Moses. These works by Moses place an emphasis on the origins of ideas such as Afrocentrism and the concept of race as understood by black people advanced by individuals such as Marcus Garvey.

Tony Martin, Winston James, Robert A. Hill, editor of the Garvey papers, and Colin Grant are among the scholars who have played an integral role in defining Garvey as one of the most successful black leaders during the New Negro era.<sup>1</sup> Martin with his text *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (The Majority Press, 1976) wrote one of the earlier texts on Garvey and his ideas. Hill's multivolume texts have ensured the wide availability of primary sources related to the Garvey Movement.

The rise of women's history, and the wider use of gender analysis in historical studies, has led to an increasing number of texts on black women. That said, the post-Civil Rights era has yielded a proliferation of scholarship on black women in the struggle for black equality since the late 1970s to the present. This is evident with biographies, edited volumes, journal articles, and historical monographs published on black women involved in the long Civil Rights-Black Power era. There have been an increasing number of works on black women in black nationalism. More

specifically, some of the first publications on women in the history of black nationalism focused on the women of the Garvey Movement. Much of this scholarship was first focused on the lives of Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey and their role in the development of the UNIA.

Some of the early significant scholarship on black women in the UNIA appeared in the form of biographies, journal articles, and book chapters on Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey. Mark D. Matthews published one of the first scholarly analyses on Amy Jacques Garvey entitled “Our Women and What They Think: Amy Jacques Garvey and the *Negro World*” that appeared in the *Black Scholar* in 1979. Matthews, in this article, reveals the significant contributions that Amy Jacques Garvey made in the pages of the *Negro World* through “editorials, articles, interviews and letters to the editor” and this article signaled to other scholars the importance of the *Negro World* as a key primary source for understanding the role of women in the history of the UNIA.<sup>2</sup> Lionel Yard’s book *Biography of Amy Ashwood, 1897-1969: Cofounder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Associated Press, 1988) is the first book length biography of Amy Ashwood Garvey. Yard, in this analysis, makes the bold claim that the first Mrs. Garvey was the cofounder of the UNIA. This argument challenged a prevailing view at the time that women in the Garvey Movement were primarily “helpers” to Marcus Garvey. Scholars such as Karen S. Adler, among others, began to challenge more vociferously the view that women in the Garvey Movement were mere helpmates. Adler identified Amy Jacques Garvey as a “key architect of Garveyism” in an important journal article she authored in 1992.<sup>3</sup> She further notes in this same article that the second Mrs. Garvey was “a daunting intellectual, orator, writer, social activist, and leader.”<sup>4</sup> Ula Taylor in her article “Negro Women Are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers: Amy Jacques Garvey and Community Feminism

in the United States, 1924-1927,” published in 2000, argues that Amy Jacques Garvey advanced a “community feminism” that made her more than a “helpmate” as a personal secretary, writer, editor and community leader.<sup>5</sup> Taylor’s *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002) is the first major scholarly book-length biography of Amy Jacques Garvey. Tony Martin’s *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan Africanist, Feminist, and Mrs. Garvey No. 1 or a Tale of Two Amies* (The Majority Press, 2007) situates women and Garveyism into an internationalist framework as one of the more important critical biographies of Amy Ashwood Garvey.

Barbara Bair, a historian with the Manuscript Division in the U.S. Library of Congress, produced some of the earliest scholarly writings on women in the Garvey Movement. Bair has assiduously demonstrated that women were key to the UNIA’s survival, while sometimes acquiescing to and challenging traditional gender norms that emanated from the ranks of the association. Some of the pivotal and ground-breaking works by Bair include “True Women, Real Men: Gender Ideology and Social Roles in the Garvey Movement” in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women’s History* (Cornell University Press, 1992) edited by Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby, “Pan Africanism as Process: Adelaide Casely Hayford, Garveyism, and the Cultural Roots of Nationalism” in *Imagining Home: Class, Culture, and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (Verso, 1994) edited by Sidney J. Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley, and “Ethiopia Shall Stretch Forth Her Hands unto God”: Laura Kofey and the Gendered Vision of African Redemption in the Garvey Movement” in *A Mighty Baptism: Race, Gender and the Creation of American Protestantism* (Cornell University Press, 1996) edited by Susan Jester and Lisa McFarlane. These works by Bair not only demonstrate the important role of women in the UNIA; but, they are scholarly analyses that also situate women in the association

within a global context reflective of an international turn taking place in historical studies in the early 1990s.

There emerged an international turn in historical studies and the social sciences that emerged alongside an increase in globalization by the mid-1990s. This international turn in historical studies was evidenced with the rise of global history and transnational studies of black women in the history of black nationalism as illustrated with recent scholarship. Anne Macpherson, Honor Ford-Smith, Henrice Altnick, Rhoda Reddock and Keisha N. Blain are among a group of scholars who have written about black women and black nationalism from an internationalist perspective following the lead of Bair. Macpherson's article "Colonial Matriarchs: Garveyism, Materialism, and Belize's Black Cross Nurses, 1920-1952" demonstrates how Belize's Black Cross Nurses advanced a "materialist politics of racial uplift" that was unrivaled in the colonial context taking us beyond a discussion of black women and Garveyism in a North American setting.<sup>6</sup> Garveyism in Jamaica is understood as a "practice" of "anticolonial performance" and not merely a fixed set of ideas argues the author.<sup>7</sup> Ford-Smith contends that Garvey women resisted the militant modernist black masculinity displayed by the UNIA parades by advancing a feminist critique that ultimately reveals "multiple unruly forms of resistance."<sup>8</sup> This article counters the helpmate notion of Garvey women in significant ways once embraced by scholars of Garvey and the UNIA. Rhonda Reddock<sup>9</sup> in several of her writings has discussed black women and Garveyism in the context of the African Diaspora, while Keisha N. Blain's *Set the World of Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018) argues that black women "created spaces of their own" within the matrix of the international movement that was black nationalism.<sup>10</sup> She devotes a large portion of this survey to black women, Garveyism, and the evolution of the UNIA. Blain's

*Set the World on Fire* is the most important comprehensive scholarly text to date on the history of black women in the history of black nationalism.

### **Primary Sources**

There are a wide variety of primary sources on Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. These sources include speeches, writings, public addresses, essays, newspaper articles, images and prints scattered across a wide array of publications, archives and digital media. Amy Jacques Garvey published several collections of Garvey's words such as the multivolume work *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (Universal Publishing House, 1923), that contains Garvey's speeches and writings, and her memoir *Garvey and Garveyism* (Collier, 1976). The UNIA also maintained several publications including *The Negro World*, *The Black Man*, and the *Blackman* in Jamaica while hundreds of local affiliates worldwide maintained pamphlets, leaflets, and chapter publications. Amy Jacques Garvey's writings appear throughout *The Negro World* and her memoir remains a critical source of information of her life and ideas. This material has been made increasingly available in archival collections in North America and Jamaica. Robert A. Hill's twelve volume work *Marcus Garvey Life and Lessons* (University of California Press, 1987), published between 1987 and 2015, is the definitive published collection of Garvey related documents.

Some of the most important archival repositories for information on Garvey and the UNIA include the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture located in the Harlem section of New York City, as an extension branch of the New York Public Library system, Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University, and the Africa Studies Center at UCLA located in Los Angeles, California. There are several sources associated with Garvey at

the Schomburg including the records of the UNIA Central Division while at Fisk the Amy Jacques Garvey Memorial Collection is housed. The Library of Congress and the National Archives both have primary sources related to Marcus Garvey and the UNIA and Emory University's Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book division houses some records associated with Thomas W. Harvey, a former UNIA president, organized into twenty-four boxes grouped into six series.

In the Schomburg Center, several collections contain materials related to Garveyism including in the photographs and prints division of the library. These include the Universal Negro Improvement Association Central Division, New York Records, 1988-1959, the Universal Negro Improvement Association Miscellaneous Collection, 1918-1948, the Garvey Club Collection, 1927-1948 and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Philadelphia Division Records, 1919-1920. Central Division files include correspondence, membership lists, meeting minutes, financial records, programs, leaflets and newspaper clippings. In the Miscellaneous Collection there are receipts, certificates, and letters by both Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey. There are also letters, contracts, newspaper clippings, cards, and song lyrics contained in the Garvey Club Collection while the Philadelphia Division Records provide rare insight into the activities of a local UNIA chapter through membership lists, letters, and flyers. The New York Public Library system also has short recorded interviews of Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey.

At the Duke University Rare Book and Manuscript Division in the Robert A. Hill Collection, 1890-2014 there are 30,000 documents that are associated with the writings and research of Robert A. Hill, Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles, a major scholar of Garvey and the UNIA. Hill has maintained a wealth of information related to



the history of Garvey and the UNIA as one of the foremost scholars of Garveyism. In this collection, there are photographs, prints, newspaper clippings, video and sound recordings, FBI transcripts, letters and other documents on Garvey and the UNIA. The Hill Collection specifically has materials associated with the work of women in the UNIA including photographs and the FBI file transcripts of women such as Mittie Maude Lena Gordon.

By far the largest repository of primary sources related to Garvey and the UNIA, is at the James S. Coleman Africa Studies Center at UCLA located in Los Angeles, California. This project of the University of California has included both printed publications and digital media pertaining to Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. This project has expanded exponentially over the years in terms of the digital presence and it has become the premier primary source collection on Garvey and the UNIA. There are now writings, speeches, photographs and other documents available online derived from this voluminous collection. Garvey's writings, speeches, and sayings have been published in several multivolume collections by the Center. It is pertinent to note here that there also exists several smaller primary source collections around the globe on Garveyism. These include the Amy Ashwood collection in Kingston Jamaica and the Amy Ashwood Memorabilia Collection in Trinidad located at the University of the West Indies.

### **Links to Digital Materials**

- [\*\*The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers Project\*\*](#)
- [\*\*African & African Diasporan Transformations in the 20th Century\*\*](#)
- [\*\*History Matters Primary Sources on the Garvey Movement\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Collage of Newspaper Clippings About Marcus Garvey\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Primary Source Articles from the "Negro World"\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Marcus Garvey-Lesson Plans and Primary Source Documents\*\*](#)

- [Oxford African American Studies Center](#)



*Amy Ashwood Garvey*

### **Amy Ashwood Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association**

Amy Ashwood was born into a well-to-do family in Port Antonio, Jamaica on January 10, in 1897. Port Antonio is located on the northeastern coast of Jamaica. She was one of three children, and the only girl, born to Michael Delbert and Maudriana Ashwood. When Amy was still young, her family moved from Jamaica to Panama City, Panama where her father ran a bakery and restaurant.<sup>11</sup> Amy spent most of her formative years in Panama until, in 1904, at age eleven, her family decided to return to Jamaica where she attended Westwood High School—a prestigious private school for girls.<sup>12</sup> This school offered an expansive curriculum for the young women who attended and included courses in history, English, science, math, homemaking and Bible studies.<sup>13</sup> According to her recollections, Ashwood later contended that she did not learn

much about black history and culture at this school; but, she learned about “the virility” of her “people” from her great-grandmother Boahima Dabas (Grannie Dabas).<sup>14</sup> She met Marcus Garvey at the East Queen Street Baptist Church Hall in Kingston, Jamaica of 1914, when she was seventeen, and together they formed the most successful black nationalist association in world history: the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

“Together, Garvey and Ashwood worked in tandem to launch what would become the largest and most influential Pan Africanist movement of the twentieth century,” states Keisha Blain in her masterful text *Set the World on Fire* about the history of black women nationalists. Amy Ashwood was an educated woman who came from a well-off family with social connections and financial resources. She had already developed an evolving black consciousness by the time she met Marcus Garvey. Scholars have debated concerning the first Mrs. Garvey’s role in the formation and early development of the UNIA; but, scholars such as Blain and Rhoda Reddock, among others, note that the UNIA had a type of dual sex structure from the beginning with women occupying some administrative positions and key leadership posts. Reddock argues that, “From the age of seventeen, Ashwood worked with Marcus in establishing the early UNIA in Jamaica.”<sup>15</sup> While Blain claims that, “working closely together,” Ashwood and Garvey planned the first meeting of the UNIA which took place at the home of Ashwood’s parents.<sup>16</sup> But, Ashwood was, at the time that she met Marcus, already committed to the core goals of black nationalism, including race pride, economic self-determinism, and political independence; and, through their “joint love of Africa,” the couple created and developed the idea of the UNIA.<sup>17</sup>

Amy Ashwood played an integral role in the formation and development of the UNIA. She helped lay the administrative and structural foundation of the UNIA through her

involvement in the organizational, planning, financial, and administrative matters of the group. Following the initial meeting at her parent's home in 1914, she relied upon the social networks and financial resources derived from both family and social connections. Not only did the first meeting of the UNIA take place at her parent's home, but the Ashwoods rented an office for the organization.<sup>18</sup> Amy Ashwood was the UNIA's first secretary, a member of the Board of Management, involved in fund raising activities and the planning of meetings.<sup>19</sup> She also was responsible for creating the Ladies Division that eventually became the basis for the Black Cross Nurses, participated in street corner orations, contributed to the success of the *Negro World* by distributing copies door to door, and actively encouraged the participation of women in the UNIA helping to ensure that, as Blain notes, "Each local UNIA division included a male and female president and vice president."<sup>20</sup> Financial backing for the group came from the Ashwood family, though Amy's parents did not support the marriage between the two that took place on December 25, 1919 at Liberty Hall in New York City.

It is clear that Amy Ashwood was more than a helpmate to Marcus Garvey at the founding of the association. This is evident with the successful expansion of the UNIA, in the Harlem section of New York City, until their contentious divorce in 1922. She ensured that women had an active role in the UNIA by supplying both financial and material support for the UNIA and subscribed to the ideas of black nationalism. She also co-financed the Black Star Steamship Corporation, founded in 1919 to help expand trade among Africans worldwide, and became the corporation's director; and she served as the General Secretary of the New York office while ensuring the success of the *Negro World* in New York City.<sup>21</sup> Though their marriage lasted but a few months, they likely were not officially divorced until 1922. Mrs. Garvey continued support her Pan African causes and endeavors after her split with Garvey.

Amy Ashwood Garvey supported Pan Africanism beyond New York. After she relocated to England in 1922, she joined a black ex-patriot community that included West Indians and Africans who settled in places such as London. While there, she worked with Ladipo Solank to organize the Nigerian Progress Union (NPU) to fight colonialism. She also traveled extensively in the United States, England, West Africa, and the Caribbean promoting Pan Africanist ideas by working with individuals such as George Padmore and C. L. R. James to form the International Service Bureau in 1937.<sup>22</sup> In 1945, she was a co-organizer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan African Congress. Amy Ashwood Garvey died in Kingston, Jamaica on May 3, 1969.



*Amy Jacques Garvey*

### **Amy Jacques Garvey and Garveyism**

Amy Jacques was born in Kingston, Jamaica on December 31, 1895 to George Samuel and Charlotte Jacques, born of mixed-race ancestry, the family appeared among the mixed race or “colored” elite of Jamaica. Jacques attended prominent schools and received a formal education at a Wolmer School, one of the oldest more prominent schools in Jamaica, through the high school level. It was rare occurrence in Jamaican society at the time unless one had the monetary resources to support such an education. She acquired clerical experience while

working in a law office after graduating with high honors from the elite Wolmer school system. Like Amy Ashwood, Amy Jacques hailed from a prominent socially connected Jamaican family. Ironically, as many scholars have noted, she was a bridesmaid at the wedding of Amy Ashwood and Marcus Garvey in 1922. She married Garvey shortly after his final separation with Ashwood.

Amy Jacques Garvey worked alongside Marcus Garvey to build up the UNIA. As a writer, journalist, publisher, community activist and administrator in her own right. In 1923, she published the *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* and, between 1924 and 1927, she edited the women's page of the *Negro World* titled "Our Women and What they Think." In this column, she covered subjects such as national liberation, social justice, and the value of black women to nationalist movements.<sup>23</sup> Jacques Garvey's journalistic endeavor was unique among similar women's columns in the black press at the time because she emphasized the connection between black liberation and women's rights in that she "heralded" the modern woman within the context of these writings.<sup>24</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey also covered the global movement for women's rights that was taken place at the time in the context of *Negro World* while also illuminating her concerns about race, class and gender.<sup>25</sup> Her prolific career as a writer is evidenced by the multiple publications she produced. These include *Black Power in America: Marcus Garvey's Impact on Jamaica and Africa*, and her memoirs *Garvey and Garveyism*. She was a towering intellectual for her day and public orator in defense of Garveyism. When Garvey was convicted of mail fraud in 1923, and subsequently imprisoned, the second Mrs. Garvey became the "de facto" leader of the UNIA and assumed responsibility for supervising the "day to day" operations of the UNIA from 1925 to 1927.<sup>26</sup> She also used UNIA publications to raise

money for her husband's defense. At this time, the UNIA had more than 500 chapters worldwide with a membership into the millions.<sup>27</sup>

Amy Jacques Garvey became the face of Garveyism after Garvey's conviction for mail fraud. In this capacity, she traveled the country giving speeches and continued to publish the words of Garvey including the second volume of *Philosophy and Opinions* containing more of his writings and speeches. She also guided the publication of two volumes of poetry including *The Tragedy of White Injustice* and *Selections from the Poetic Meditations of Marcus Garvey*. These writings helped to keep Garveyism sustainable during the mid-1920s. The organizational membership continued to expand while Garvey was in prison. Jacques Garvey did not become the official leader of the UNIA at this time. Garvey did not want to relinquish his authority though his was effectively running the UNIA while he was incarcerated. She followed him to Jamaica after he was released in 1927. They had two sons Marcus Jr. and Julius, born between 1930 and 1933, after he was released from prison and deported. Marcus Garvey relocated to England in 1934 and died in 1940. Jacques Garvey continued to champion black nationalism after his death.

“Amy clearly had a profound impact on Marcus's thought and was undoubtedly a cocreator, if not the creator, of aspects of Garveyite philosophy,” states Karen Adler.<sup>28</sup> As archivist, editor, and publisher of many of Garvey's speeches and writings, the second Mrs. Garvey likely had a great influence on Garveyism as a philosophy. She was also a profound and popular public speaker in her own right who travelled across the nation spreading the message of Garveyism especially during the years Garvey was in jail. Though some note that Garvey referred to Amy as his “helpmate,” and did not officially relinquish his control over the UNIA (it is obvious because, he was in prison that his reach was limited) the survival of his ideas, and

perhaps the UNIA altogether, would have been nearly impossible without her organizational abilities and intellectual prowess. She proved to be a formidable leader of the UNIA organizing conferences, maintaining speaking engagements, writing articles, and meeting with UNIA officials.<sup>29</sup>

Amy Jacques Garvey continued to support black nationalist causes through the 1940s until her death in 1973. She edited the official paper of the People's National Party in Jamaica during the 1940s and was a contributing editor for a black nationalist journal called the *African* from 1945 to 1947. At this time, she also worked to organize the Pan African Congress with leaders across the African diaspora. She also presided over black nationalist study groups and continued to publish her writings including, in 1958, *Garvey and Garveyism* and, in 1968, *Black Power in America: Marcus Garvey's Impact on Jamaica and Africa* one of the first analyses to connect Garveyism to the Black Power era. Amy Jacques Garvey died in Kingston, Jamaica in 1973.



*Black Cross Nurses in Harlem*

### **The African Motor Corps and the Black Cross Nurses**

In the Garvey Movement, women served in various roles. This was primarily done through auxiliary units such as the African Motor Corps and the Black Cross Nurses. Women occupied positions as “lady presidents,” and presided over UNIA juvenile divisions working with children and youth. The main task of the lady presidents was to preside over the women’s auxiliary units.<sup>30</sup> Women also were UNIA convention delegates. These auxiliary units had



various duties. While the Black Cross Nurses Corps focused on healthcare concerns, the African Motor Corps, as the “female version of the all-male paramilitary African Legion,” focused on assisting the Legion in duties such as driving taxis, cars, and buses, as well as becoming familiar with instructions in car repair.<sup>31</sup>

The African Motor Corps also practiced military drills and parades. This Corps, along with the Black Cross Nurses, was integral to the black community development model of the UNIA; and, specifically, the participation of women in the UNIA.<sup>32</sup> Through these agencies, black women embraced race pride, self-determinism, self-help, economic self-sufficiency; and, in some respects, advanced proto-feminist sensibilities as they demanded a greater leadership presence in the UNIA.

The Black Cross Nurses<sup>33</sup> was formed in 1921 by Henrietta Vinton in Philadelphia and it was an international association of nurses with affiliates worldwide. Vinton helped to formalize a preexisting women’s auxiliary presence by making the Black Cross Nurses a more formal entity within the UNIA; and, this included requiring uniforms along with the creation of individual units across UNIA divisions. Many healthcare facilities in the north and the south barred black patients. Thus, the contingent of nurses, doctors, and community volunteers who supported or joined the Black Star Nurses were able to meet a critical need in black neighborhoods while providing women with key leadership opportunities within the auspices of the UNIA.

Black Star Nurses was an association patterned after the Red Cross and it was a women’s auxiliary unit of the UNIA. Health services and education to people of African descent was the primary goal of the Black Cross Nurses. Members were drawn from the ranks of the UNIA between the ages of fifteen and forty-five. This association involved the active cooperation between nurses, doctors, and community members in the various health education and

information programs. There were training sessions available to community members and infant care was also provided as a service. These training sessions were conducted by licensed professional doctors and nurses in programs that lasted from six months to a year and included instruction in food preparation and sanitation. Participants received a diploma upon completion of their program. This association provided black women with a professional public voice in the field of nursing.

Black Cross Nurses voiced their concerns in the pages of the *Negro World* while advocating for health education, good hygiene, birth control, childcare, nutrition, women's health and juvenile rehabilitation while becoming a type of service corps within the UNIA. Members had to be literate to join the Black Cross Nurses. Literacy was another core issue that the group promoted. Isabella Lawrence and Clara Morgan both wrote advice columns in the *Negro World* pertaining to education, childcare, hygiene, disease, and the ethics of medical practices. Mandatory parades and uniforms were required of members as well. These parades often took place during major holidays such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. By the mid-1920s, as Garveyism reached a zenith, there were thousands of Black Cross Nurses in the U.S. Caribbean, and Central America. More specifically, there were nearly forty-chapters in the U.S. alone in places such as Alabama, California, New Jersey, New York, Georgia and Illinois. Chapters also existed in Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Panama, and Cuba. In Belize, members were taught midwifery by medical doctors. Black Cross Nurses also engaged in relief work after a major hurricane in Belize.

Women acquired a measure of autonomy in the Black Cross Nurses on many levels. This women's unit had an organization structure within the UNIA that included leadership positions such as matrons and head nurse that were occupied by black women. These duties were taken seriously as women were seen as "the mothers" or caretakers of the race and no task was more

important than providing assistance and advice on matters of health and childcare to women. Women also acquired professional experience by working in health clinics, hospitals and providing home care as a result of their training with the Black Cross Nurses. The Free Community Medical Clinic in New Orleans created in 1928 provided employment opportunities for black women involved in the Black Cross Nurses. Black Cross Nurses elevated the visibility of the UNIA in several arenas as they took part in community healthcare endeavors, parades, burial rights and the dissemination of information on a variety of subjects through UNIA publications. This group continued to be active into the 1960s.

### **Black Women, Black Nationalism, and the African American Freedom Struggle**

There is a long Civil Rights Movement from which black nationalism and calls for integration emerged. This long movement has come to be understood as the struggle for black equality in the historiography of the black freedom struggle more generally. Historians of the Civil Rights era have introduced phrases such as the “struggle for black equality” and “organizing tradition” to define the long movement for black civil rights while raising concerns about gender, ideology, geography and strategy. Harvard Sitkoff in his book *The Struggle for Black Equality* (Hill and Wang, 1991) advanced the notion that the “struggle for black equality” is a more accurate term to describe the ongoing demand for civil rights by African Americans that stretches far beyond the parameters of the “Montgomery to Memphis” narrative. John Dittmer’s book *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (University of Illinois Press, 1994) emphasizes the role of local civil rights activists such as Amzie Moore, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Medgar Evers in the fight against Jim Crow in Mississippi as opposed to national leaders such as King. Charles Payne in his book *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 1995) echoes

the work of Dittmer and promotes the notion of an “organizing tradition,” that has always been a part of African American life and society, involving both middle class and working class or “local people.” In other words, organizing to demand civil rights is at the heart of the black experience from the creation of the Free African Society in colonial times, established to educate free blacks, and speak out against slavery, to the development of SCLC in 1957. Sitkoff, Dittmer, and Payne have written works that expand the chronological parameters, as well as class dimensions, of the movement opening the door for scholars to further interrogate questions related to region, gender, ideology, and strategy.

Timothy B. Tyson has argued in his book *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Black Freedom Struggle* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999) that, historically, African American activists have always employed a wide array of strategies and ideologies in the history of the long movement including armed self-defense. Robert F. Williams was an NAACP leader in North Carolina who organized a group of armed black activists to combat Jim Crow. Tyson notes that nonviolent resistance worked in tandem and tension with armed insurgency as major strategies of black civil rights activists. Similarly, in his book *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), historian Lance Hill tells the story of a contingent of middle aged African American men, mostly Korean War veterans, known as the “Deacons for Defense and Justice,” created in 1964, and based in Jonesboro, Louisiana. The Deacons for Defense engaged in gun battles with the Klu Klux Klan and the police in their efforts to protect civil rights workers in the Deep South. The incorporation of local people, including women who employed a series of strategies and ideologies to advance black civil rights, into the narrative prompted other historians to further explore the role of women in a long civil rights movement in both the North and South.

Historian Barbara Ransby, in her biography on SCLC organizer Ella Baker entitled *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), has argued that Baker was at the center of the movement as founder of SNCC and executive director of SCLC. Further, Ransby demonstrates that Ella Baker had long been engaged in black-leftist circles emergent in the 1930s and 1940s. In 2005, historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall wrote an essay titled “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past” that appeared in the *Journal of American History* calling for the extension of the “Montgomery to Memphis” narrative that connects black civil rights activism in the 1950s and 1960s to a labor-leftist front with origins in Depression era America. This has now led some historians of the civil rights movement to utilize the “long” view of the movement championed by Dowd-Hall.<sup>34</sup>

Garveyism is inextricably bound up with the long movement for black equality and the activism of black women in this movement. This tradition of struggle has involved both a nationalist impulse as well as a demand for integration. African American women have long played a role in the variant overlapping struggles for black equality; like men, they embraced a multiplicity of strategies and ideologies to advance the cause of black freedom. There were women, as aforementioned, who played an integral role in Garveyism but they also had connections to the more traditional organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Sometimes black women held memberships, embraced variant ideologies, or gave their allegiance to multiple organizations at once. This was the case with Charlotta Bass, editor and publisher of the *California Eagle*, and Rosa Parks, who also advocated armed self-defense. Jeanne Theoharis, in her book *The Rebellious Life of Mrs.*

*Rosa Parks* (Beacon Press, 2013), notes that Parks was a militant activist and that her maternal grandfather was a supporter of Marcus Garvey.

Charlotta Bass, newspaper editor, civil rights activist, educator and the first African American woman to be nominated by political party in the U.S. for vice president (she is also considered to be the first African American woman to publish and edit a major black newspaper) was born on February 14, 1874 in Sumter, South Carolina.<sup>35</sup> She was the sixth child of Hiram and Kate Spears who had a total of eleven children. Bass married Joseph Bass the editor of the *California Eagle* in 1913. This paper had a readership of 60,000 by 1925 making it the most popular black newspaper on the West Coast at the time. Bass, worked with her husband, from 1912 to 1951, her husband died in 1934, to produce the *California Eagle* while supporting civil rights causes. She used the paper to criticize discrimination in housing, the public-school system, and in employment actively joining both local and national organizations to advance black equality. In the 1920s, Charlotta Bass occupied the position of president of the Los Angeles chapter of the UNIA while also supporting and becoming involved with the activities of the local NAACP.

The struggle for black equality and the history of black nationalism overlap and are ultimately a part of the same tradition. This is evident in the life and work of Bass. While leading the Los Angeles UNIA, she developed the Home Protective Association to combat housing discrimination. She also co-founded the Industrial Business Council that challenged discriminatory employment practice in government agencies and private businesses. She used the *California Eagle* to specifically call for an end to employment discrimination in Los Angeles hospitals and the city transportation system. In the 1930s, she actively participated in the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” supported by members of the NAACP and became director of the

NAACP Youth Movement. Bass worked on Wendell Willkie's presidential campaign in the 1940s, and in 1943 participated in public demonstrations to advance interracial unity in Los Angeles and fair employment practices. She was nominated for vice president of the U.S. by the Progressive Party in 1952. Bass used both radical and traditional pressure group politics to support the struggle for black equality. Her running mate was Vincent Hallinan. Charlotta Bass died on April 12, 1969 in Los Angeles, California.

Garvey exercised a profound influence on the black freedom struggle. Well known figures in this struggle had relatives associated with the UNIA, including Malcolm X and Rosa Parks. Earl Little, father of Malcolm X, was a Garveyite and the founder of the Nation of Islam. W.D. Fard Muhammad was likely a Garveyite. Garveyism has had a long reach in terms of black nationalist ideologies in U.S. history. Parks, as an investigator working for the NAACP, investigated the rape of black women by white men in the deep South, supported militant working-class activism, and embraced self-defense as an ideology. The long reach of Garveyism is intricately bound up with the history of the struggle for black equality.

### **Black Woman and the Global Reach of Garveyism**

By the mid-1920s, the UNIA had hundreds of chapters worldwide with a large contingent of women in the ranks. These global divisions of the UNIA spread the idea of race pride, self-determinism, economic self-sufficiency, and an ideology of Africa for Africans. It is clear that women played an integral role in the global advance of Garveyism from America to West Africa. Asia Leeds has argued that members of the UNIA, including women, sought to liberate blacks from subjugation in America while also seeking to end European colonialism on the African continent viewing these struggles as "joint entangled struggles."<sup>36</sup> The women who embraced Garveyism became the leaders of their own organizations and carried the ideas of Garveyism

beyond the U.S. Mittie Maude Lena Gordon and Audley Moore (Queen Moore) are two such women who facilitated the spread of Garveyism in a global context through the 1960s.

Mittie Maude Lena Nelson was born on August 2, 1889 in Webster Parish, Louisiana one of nine children. She spent her early years in Louisiana but her father Edward Nelson soon moved the family to Hope, Arkansas when she was young. He was a minister in the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church who also followed the teachings of A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner. Turner advocated for the emigration of blacks back to Africa in the late nineteenth century. Nelson was an avid supporter of Turner who “devoted much time to the teachings” of Henry McNeal Turner.<sup>37</sup> Living in a Jim Crow context, Mittie Maude came to embrace black nationalist tenets and a strong race consciousness at an early age having witnessed a lynching before she reached her teens.<sup>38</sup> She married early while still in her teens to Robert Holt a man several decades older than her whom she bore two sons; and, after his death, she joined the Great Migration first to East St. Louis in 1913, then to Chicago after the St. Louis Race Riot of 1917.<sup>39</sup> This riot had a profound impact on her life in that one of her sons was injured in the riot and later died of his injuries.<sup>40</sup> Marcus Garvey publicly condemned the riot and Mittie Maude arrived in Chicago with a growing appreciation of Garvey and his work. She married William Gordon, an iron mill laborer, in 1920.

Mittie Maude Gordon became increasingly involved in the Garvey Movement while in Chicago where she began to attend meetings of the UNIA. She eventually became a “lady president” of the UNIA Chicago division and soon after she opened a restaurant on Chicago’s State Street that became an important meeting ground for black nationalists in the city.<sup>41</sup> Gordon’s restaurant became an expanded establishment by the early 1930s. Gordon and her husband founded the Peace Movement of Ethiopia (PME) while meeting with at least a dozen



Chicago based black nationalists at their restaurant in 1932. This organization was mirrored after the UNIA and at its height had 300,000 members.

The Peace Movement of Ethiopia embraced race pride, black self-determinism, economic self-sufficiency, and black emigration to Africa. Gordon's vision was Pan African and this was due largely to the influence of Garveyism. Gordon also seems to have embraced the idea of the possibility of global solidarity among not only blacks but people of color more generally. During the World War II Era, she associated with the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World that promoted black and Japanese solidarity, and the Japanese nationalist organization, and paramilitary group, known as the Black Dragon Society as she continued to forge alliances with activists of color around the world. She was placed under surveillance by the Federal Government due to her war time activities and eventually arrested on charges of sedition in 1942 remaining in jail during much of the war.

Audley Moore (Queen Mother) was born in New Liberia, Louisiana in 1898 to Ella and St. Cry Moore. Both of her parents died when she was a young child. In 1922, she joined the Great Migration and relocated to the Harlem section of New York where she got involved with the UNIA and a shareholder in the Black Star Line Organization. She also participated in UNIA conventions. Moore was instrumental in the development of several organizations as a long-time advocate of black equality. She employed both black nationalist ideas and the strategies of pressure group politics. Moore founded and participated in groups that advanced reparations for blacks as well as organizations that sought an end to racism in the U.S.

Moore was a founding member of the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women, and occupied the post of president, created in 1950 and presented a petition to the United Nations in 1957 demanding reparations for blacks in America. In 1963, Moore was instrumental in

developing the Committee for Reparations for Descendants of U.S. Slaves. Moore is also credited for cofounding the Republic of New Africa (RNA), a black nationalist organization created in the 1960s. The RNA platform called for black self-determinism, land ownership, and reparations. This reveals the continued impact of Garveyism on the idea of Moore into the 1960s. She was also active in more mainstream civil rights groups such as the Commission to Eliminate Racism, Council of Churches of Greater New York and was active in the sit-in demonstrations to demand adequate funding for schools in black communities in the Brooklyn section of New York City during the late 1960s. Moore worked within and alongside multiple associations to advance black civil rights in the U.S. She continued to remain active in the black freedom struggle also participating in the Million Man March in 1995. She died on May 2, 1997 in Brooklyn, New York.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See for more early works on Garvey and the UNIA: Tony Martin's *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggle of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Greenwood Press, 1976), *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Majority Press, 1983), *African Fundamentalism: Cultural Anthology of Garvey's Harlem Renaissance* (Majority Press, 1983); *Marcus Garvey Life and Lessons* (University of California Press, 1987) edited by Robert A. Hill and Barbara Bair; *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Louisiana State University Press, 1986) by Judith Stein; *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (Verso, 1998) by Winston James; *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) by Ula Taylor; *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007) by Mary G. Rolinson; and *Negro With a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey & His Dreams of Mother African*, 2008 (Oxford University Press, 2008) by Colin Grant.

<sup>2</sup> Mark D. Matthews, "Our Women and What They Think: Amy Jacques Garvey and the Negro World," *The Black Scholar* 10, no. 8/9 (May/June, 1979), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Karen S. Adler, "Always Leading Our Men in Service and Sacrifice: Amy Jacques Garvey Feminist Black Nationalist," *Gender & Society* 6, no. 3 (September, 1992), 346.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, "Negro Women Are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers: Amy Jacques Garvey and Community Feminism in the United States, 1924-1927," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 2 (Summer, 2000), 104.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Macpherson, "Colonial Matriarchs: Garveyism, Materialism, and Belize's Black History," *Gender & History* 15, no. 3 (November, 2003), 508.

<sup>7</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica," *Interventions* 6, no. 1 (2004), 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> See Rhoda Reddock's work in "Gender Equality, Pan Africanism and the Diaspora," *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 2 (2007) p. 255-267, and "The First Mrs. Garvey: Pan-African and Feminism in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Colonial Caribbean," in *Feminist Africa* 19 (September, 2014) p. 58-77. In these essays, she discusses Amy Ashwood Garvey, Pan Africanism, and feminism in a global context.

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- <sup>10</sup> Keisha Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Keisha Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 14.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>15</sup> Rhoda Reddock, "The First Mrs. Garvey: Pan African and Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century British Colonial Caribbean," *Feminist Africa* 19, no. 77 (September, 2014), 62.
- <sup>16</sup> Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 16.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Reddock, "The First Mrs. Garvey," 62.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 18.
- <sup>21</sup> Reddock, "The First Mrs. Garvey," 64.
- <sup>22</sup> Reddock, "The First Mrs. Garvey," 68.
- <sup>23</sup> Mark D. Matthews, "Our Women and What They Think: Amy Jacques Garvey and the Negro World," *The Black Scholar* 10, no. 8/9 (May/June, 1979), 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Matthews, "Our Women and What They Think," 4-5.
- <sup>25</sup> Karen Adler, "Always Leading Our Men In Service and Sacrifice: Amy Jacques Garvey, Feminist Black Nationalist," *Gender & Society* 6, no. 3 (September, 1992), 360.
- <sup>26</sup> Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 24.
- <sup>27</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, "Negro Women Are Great Thinkers As Well As Doers," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 104.
- <sup>28</sup> Adler, "Always Leading Our Men in Service and Sacrifice," 354.
- <sup>29</sup> Adler, "Always Leading Our Men in Service and Sacrifice," 355.
- <sup>30</sup> Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 31.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Amnifu R. Harvey, "A Black Community Development Model: The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League 1917-1940," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 21, no. 1 (March, 1994), 117-118.
- <sup>33</sup> See William Seraile "Henrietta Vinton Davis and the Garvey Movement" in *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 7, no. 2 (July, 1983), 7-24 for more on Davis and the Black Cross Nurses in the Garvey Movement.
- <sup>34</sup> See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," in *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March, 2005), 1233-1263.
- <sup>35</sup> See Emory J. Tolbert's *The UNIA and Black Los Angeles: Ideology and Community in the American Garvey Movement* (Center for African American Studies, 1990) for a more in-depth discussion of Charlotta Bass and the UNIA.
- <sup>36</sup> Asia Leeds, "Toward the Higher Type of Womanhood: The Gendered Contours of Garveyism and the Making of Redemptive Geographies in Costa Rica, 1922-1941," *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 2, no. 1 (2013), 1.
- <sup>37</sup> Keisha Blain, "Confraternity Among All Dark Races: Mittie Maude Lena Gordon and the Practice of Internationalism in Chicago, 1932-1942," *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 5, no. 2 (2016), 155.
- <sup>38</sup> Blain, "Confraternity Among All Dark Races," 155.
- <sup>39</sup> Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 51.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 52.

## Further Reading

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