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The Garvey Movement and Economic Independence

Worrill's World

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In this present era of economic and educational onslaught against the African Community in America, it is important that we understand that the rise of the African Centered Education Movement should be linked to our quest for economic independence. We must free the "African mind" through African Centered Educational activities so that we might better understand the importance of economic self-reliance.

One model that we draw strength from in pursuing economic and educational liberation is the model established by the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the 1920s.

The more I read and study about Marcus Garvey, the more I am amazed at the great contributions he made to African people to become a self reliant and self sufficient people. At the core of Marcus Garvey's program was his urging of African people to acquire education and economic power. As he always started, "A race without power is a race without respect."

When we examine the economic condition of Africans in America, and throughout the world, we find one glaring problem - African people do not control our economic resources at the level we should. This is primarily due to our miseducation as a people. In a disproportionate manner, African people depend on the European and Asian world for food, clothing, and shelter. More often than not, the European and Asian worlds are the producers, processors, distributors, and wholesalers. African people are the consumers.

This was one of the major problems that the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey addressed during his lifetime and that Minister Louis Farrakhan continues to address.

As Dr. Tony Martin writes in his book *Race First*, which is one of the best books written on the works of Marcus Garvey, "Marcus Garvey, unlike his major rivals in the United States, built a mass organization that went beyond civil-rights agitation and protest and based itself upon a definite, well thought out program that he believed would lead to the total emancipation of the race from white dominion."

To implement his program, Garvey set up the Negro Factories Corporation (NFC). Its objective was to build and operate factories in the big industrial centers of the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, and Africa. The NFC established a chain of cooperative grocery stores, a restaurant, a steam laundry, tailor and dressmaking shop, a millinery store, and a publishing house. Mr. Garvey also established a steamship company, The Black Star Line. He envisioned a fleet of steamers carrying passengers and establishing trade among African people of the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, and Africa.

In the summer of 1920, Garvey launched his full blown program at the First Annual Convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) of which he was the founder and first President General. On August 2, 1920, after a massive parade of thousands of well drilled, uniformed ranks of the UNIA, 35,000 delegates from all over the United States and some twenty-five countries convened at Madison Square Garden, in New York City. It was, according to the *New York Times*, one of the largest gatherings in the history of the hall.

Dr. Martin explains that, "Central to the ideological basis underpinning Garvey's program was the question of race. For Garvey, the Black man was universally oppressed on racial grounds, and no matter how much people try to shy away from this issue, the fact is, this is still true today."

As Malcolm X used to say, it was our Blackness "which caused so much hell not our identity as Elks, Masons, Baptists or Methodists." If we are ever to become a liberated people this idea must be deeply rooted in the day to day organizing and mobilizing of our people as we seek

economic and educational liberation. Far too many Africans in America have abandoned this idea in their organizing projects.

Mr. Garvey understood that the foundation of our liberation is economic and educational independence based on racial solidarity. There are numerous lessons we can learn from the legacy of the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey. Without economic independence tied to the acquisition of political power, African people in America and African people everywhere will continue to be the subjects of the whims of other people.

In this regard, Garvey said, "...you can be educated in soul, vision and feeling, as well as in mind. To see your enemy and know him is a part of the complete education of man... Develop yours and you become as great and full of knowledge as the other fellow without entering the classrooms."

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