

Textbook Passage

Many African Americans and other minorities worked together to protect their rights and fight racial hatred. African American leaders urged black people to take pride in their culture and to become economically independent. These leaders became known as black nationalists. Marcus Garvey was an important black nationalist. Born in Jamaica, he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. This group wanted to end imperialism in Africa and discrimination in the United States. Two years later, Garvey moved to New York City, where he started a UNIA chapter. In his speeches, Garvey encouraged African Americans to learn about their heritage. “You must fall back on the intelligence of others who came before you and have left their records behind.”

Garvey started a number of businesses to offer economic opportunities for African Americans. However, he was arrested in connection with his business activities and served two years in jail. Despite his difficulties and limited success in fighting discrimination, Garvey influenced millions of people around the world. As the *Amsterdam News*, a New York newspaper, wrote, Garvey “made black people proud of their race. In a world where black is despised he taught them that black is beautiful.”

Call to Freedom, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 2003, pp. 708-709.

Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association

**Note: this timeline focuses on Garvey and the UNIA during the years he was based in NYC. Garvey continued to be active after 1927, and the UNIA continued to exist after his death in 1940.*

1914 Garvey founds UNIA in Jamaica.

1916 Garvey leaves Jamaica for New York City.

1917 Thirteen members join to form the New York branch of the UNIA.

1918 Garvey starts *Negro World* newspaper.

1919 Garvey starts Black Star Line shipping company.

FBI instructs New York and Chicago offices to begin monitoring Garvey.

Black Star Line signs contract to purchase its first ship, which will be re-named "Frederick Douglass."

1920 The U.N.I.A. holds its first International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World at Madison Square Garden and schedules a massive parade in Harlem.

UNIA adopts and signs a Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World, adopts a "nation" flag with the colors of the Red, Black, and Green, and elects officials for its government. Garvey himself is elected Provisional President of Africa.

1921 A 16-man UNIA delegation leaves for Liberia.

1922 Garvey is arrested for mail fraud (he allegedly sent out brochures advertising a Black Star Line ship that he had not yet purchased).

The Black Star Line is dissolved due to financial failure.

Garvey meets with the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, resulting in a "Garvey Must Go" campaign headed by black leaders.

1923 Second UNIA delegation heads to Liberia.

Garvey arrested and sentenced to 5 years in prison for mail fraud.

1927 President Calvin Coolidge commutes Garvey's sentence.
Garvey deported to Jamaica.

1940 Garvey dies.

Document A: Autobiography of Malcolm X

When my mother was pregnant with me, she told me later, a party of hooded Ku Klux Klan riders galloped up to our home in Omaha, Nebraska, one night. Surrounding the house...the Klansmen shouted threats and warnings at her that we had better get out of town because “the good Christian white people” were not going to stand for my father’s “spreading trouble” among the “good” Negroes of Omaha with the “back to Africa” preachings of Marcus Garvey.

My father, the Reverend Earl Little, was a Baptist minister, a dedicated organizer for Marcus Aurelius Garvey’s U.N.I.A. (Universal Negro Improvement Association). . . . Garvey, from his headquarters in New York City’s Harlem, was raising the banner of black-race purity and exhorting the Negro masses to return to their ancestral African homeland—a cause which had made Garvey the most controversial black man on earth. . .

[My father] believed, as did Marcus Garvey, that freedom, independence and self-respect could never be achieved by the Negro in America, and that therefore the Negro should leave America to the white man and return to his African land of origin. . .

I remember seeing the big, shiny photographs of Marcus Garvey. . . The pictures showed what seemed to me millions of Negroes thronged in parade behind Garvey riding in a fine car, a big black man dressed in a dazzling uniform with gold braid on it, and he was wearing a thrilling hat with tall plumes. I remember hearing that he had black followers not only in the United States but all around the world, and I remember how the meetings always closed with my father saying, several times, and the people chanting after him, “Up, you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will!”

Vocabulary

Exhorting: encouraging

Thronged: crowded

Source: Excerpt from The Autobiography of Malcolm X, 1964, pp. 1-6. Malcolm X was a political activist who was a strong advocate for black rights. He initially advocated for black separatism but later moderated his views. He was assassinated in 1965.

Document B: Letter to U.S. Attorney-General (Modified)

Harry M. Daugherty, U.S. Attorney-General
Department of Justice, Washington, D. C.

Jan 15, 1923

Dear Sir:

(1) There are in our midst certain Negro criminals and potential murderers, both foreign and American born, who are moved by intense hatred against the white race. These undesirables continually to proclaim that all white people are enemies to the Negro. They have become so fanatical that they have threatened and attempted the death of their opponents, actually assassinating in one instance.

(5) The U.N.I.A. is composed chiefly of the most primitive ignorant element of West Indian and American Negroes. The so-called respectable element of the movement are largely ministers without churches, physicians without patients, lawyers without clients and publishers without readers, who are usually in search of "easy money." In short, this organization is composed in the main of Negro sharks and ignorant Negro fanatics.

(27) The Garvey organization, known as the U.N.I.A., is just as objectionable and even more dangerous as the KKK, inasmuch as it naturally attracts an even lower type of crooks, and racial bigots.

(29) The signers of this appeal have no personal ends or political interests to serve. Nor are they moved by any personal bias against Marcus Garvey. They sound this alarm only because they foresee the gathering storm of race prejudice and sense the danger of this movement, which cancer-like, is eating away at the core of peace and safety -- of civic harmony and interracial coexistence.

The signers of this letter are:

Robert S. Abbott, Chicago, editor and publisher of the "Chicago Defender."
Dr. Julia P. Coleman, New York City, president of the Hair-Vim Chemical Co.
William Pickens, New York City, field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Chandler Owen, New York City, co-editor of "The Messenger" and co-executive secretary of the Friends of Negro Freedom.

Robert W. Bagnall, New York City, director of branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Document C: Memo from J. Edgar Hoover (Modified)

J. Edgar Hoover to Special Agent Ridgely
Washington, D.C., October 11, 1919

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. RIDGELY.

I am transmitting information that has come to my attention about the activities of Marcus Garvey. Garvey is a West-Indian negro and in addition to his activities in endeavoring to establish the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation he has also been particularly active among the radical elements in New York City in agitating the negro movement. Unfortunately, however, he has not as yet violated any federal law whereby he could be proceeded against on the grounds of being an undesirable alien, from the point of view of deportation. It occurs to me, however, from the attached clipping that there might be some proceeding against him for fraud in connection with his Black Star Line propaganda and for this reason I am transmitting the communication to you for your appropriate attention.

The following is a brief statement of Marcus Garvey and his activities:

- * Subject a native of the West Indies and one of the most prominent negro agitators in New York;
- * He is a founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League;
- * He is the promulgator of the Black Star Line and is the managing editor of the Negro World;
- * He is an exceptionally fine orator, creating much excitement among the negroes through his steamship proposition;
- * In his paper the "Negro World" the Soviet Russian Rule is upheld and there is open support of socialism.

Respectfully,
J. E. Hoover, Bureau of Investigations (FBI)

Vocabulary

Agitating: arousing public concern and attention

Promulgator: promoter

Orator: public speaker

Document D: Marcus Garvey's Autobiography (Modified)

My downfall was planned by my enemies. They laid all kinds of traps for me. They scattered their spies among the employees of the Black Star Line and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Our office records were stolen. Employees started to be openly dishonest. . . . I had to dismiss them. They joined my enemies, and thus I had an endless fight on my hands to save the ideals of the UNIA and carry out our program for the race. My negro enemies, finding that they alone could not destroy me, resorted to misrepresenting me to the leaders of the white race, several of whom, without proper investigation, also opposed me. . . .

My trial is a matter of history. I know I was not given a square deal, because my indictment was the result of a "frame-up" among my political and business enemies. . . .

The temporary ruin of the Black Star Line in no way affected the larger work of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which now has 900 branches with an approximate membership of 6,000,000. . . .

Being black, I have committed an unpardonable offense against the very light colored negroes in America and the West Indies by making myself famous as a negro leader of millions. In their view, no black man must rise above them. . . . The Universal Negro Improvement Association has been misrepresented by my enemies. They have tried to make it appear that we are hostile to other races. This is absolutely false. We love all humanity. . . .

We believe in the purity of both races. . . . It is cruel and dangerous to promote social equality, as certain black leaders do. The belief that black and white should get together would destroy the racial purity of both.

We believe that the black people should have a country of their own where they should be given the fullest opportunity to develop politically, socially and industrially.

Source: Excerpt from Marcus Garvey's autobiography, written in September 1923.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

Document A: Autobiography of Malcolm X

Sourcing

1. What type of document is this? When was it written?
2. What do you know about the author? Can you make any predictions about what he might say about Marcus Garvey?

Close reading

3. According to Malcolm X, why was Garvey “controversial?”
4. Why did the pictures of Garvey make such an impression on Malcolm X?

Document B: Letter to U.S. Attorney-General

Sourcing

1. Who wrote this letter and who was it sent to? What types of jobs did the authors have?
2. When was this letter sent? Look at the timeline. Can you make any predictions about what the letter might say?

Close Reading

3. How does this document describe the UNIA? Provide a quote to support your answer.
4. Why do the authors think Garvey and the UNIA are dangerous?

Document C: Memo from J. Edgar Hoover

Sourcing

1. What type of document is this? When was it written?
2. What do you predict is the purpose of this document?

Close Reading

3. Why does Hoover think Garvey is dangerous? Provide a quote to support your answer.
4. What is “unfortunate,” according to Hoover?

Document D: Marcus Garvey’s Autobiography

Sourcing

1. What type of document is this? When was it written? What do you predict Garvey will say in this document?

Close reading

2. According to Garvey, what happened to the UNIA? Provide a quote to support your answer.
3. How does he explain why other African Americans turned against him?
4. Why does he oppose the ideas of “certain black leaders?”

Name _____

Using evidence from Documents A-D, write two paragraphs that answer the following question:

Why was Marcus Garvey a controversial figure?