Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA): With Special Reference to the “Lost” Parade in Columbus, Ohio, September 25, 1923

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Abstract
Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) made a tremendous impact on the social consciousness of African descended peoples throughout the world in the 1920s–1930s. African Americans were particularly influenced by the philosophy and opinions of Garvey and the UNIA. The key scholars in Garveyism (such as Amy Jacques Garvey, E. David Cronon, Tony Martin, Robert A. Hill, Rupert Lewis, and John Henrik Clarke) have mainly focused on the macro aspects of the Garvey movement with little focus on the micro characteristics. For example, what was the nuanced Garvey experience at the local branch/chapter level in various cities? This question leads into this exploratory study of a Mid-Western US city: Columbus, Ohio. Marcus Garvey and the UNIA had tremendous support in Ohio and this article will put the movement in context via what can be deemed a “lost” parade that took place in Columbus, Ohio, on Tuesday September 25, 1923. What is most significant about this knowledge is that it provides an insight into and establishes the popularity of the UNIA during a time when Marcus Garvey was being hounded by the established order.

Introduction
The scholarship and analysis regarding the Marcus Garvey movement is varied and profound in relation to the macro perspective. Today there are both contemporary and secondary sources available that provide great insight into the philosophy and practice of Garveyism and its key organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Arguably, most notable among these studies are: Amy Jacques Garvey (1970), E. David Cronon (1955), John Henrik Clarke (1974), Robert A. Hill (1983–1986, 1989–1990), Tony Martin (1976, 1983), and Rupert Lewis (1988). In addition, we must acknowledge the sterling editorial work of Garvey’s second wife, Amy Jacques Garvey (1895–1973), in compiling The Philosophy & Opinions of Marcus Garvey, contained in two volumes and published in 1923 and 1925 respectively (see Garvey, 1986; Taylor, 2002, p.3). Collectively, the above scholarship provides a significant foundation in comprehending the greatest example of Black Nationalism to have impacted the modern world. Indeed, nothing has emerged since the high point of the Garvey era (1920s) to surpass its impact as a Pan-African movement in organizing the masses of Black peoples of African heritage.

In regard to the extent of Garvey’s UNIA infrastructure throughout the world during the 1920s, Martin (1976, p. 15) estimates there being almost one thousand organized branches. The majority of the UNIA branches were located in the United States, with over 270 covering most parts of the world, but mainly in

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Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America. As Martin (1976, p. 17) contends: "No area of significant black population in the world was without a UNIA branch. This included Canada, Europe and Australia." By any measurement one uses to estimate it is plain that in the early 1920s Marcus Garvey's message of radical Black Nationalism was cogent and lucid enough to mobilize millions of African descended peoples.

The Message of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA

The message of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA has largely been either distorted or discredited. Distorted in the sense that history, until the onset of the Civil Rights and Black Power eras in the 1960s, did not appreciate the influence of Garveyism; and discredited in terms of Garvey being portrayed largely as a naive businessman and radical demagogue. However, a careful study of the Garvey papers and scholarship reveals a very different picture (see Hill, 1983–1986; Martin 1976). Garvey was a complex man who was, for example, inspired by the renowned accommodationist, Booker T. Washington. Washington sought both social separation, to appease white southern hegemony in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a "self-reliance" program for African American social advancement, primarily in the southern states. However, unlike Washington, Garvey’s radical self-reliance message was based on the need to find a solution to the disenfranchised experience of African descended peoples all over the world. Rupert Lewis (1988, p. 50) maintains that the initial aims and objectives of the UNIA were as follows:

- To Establish a Universal Confraternity among the race [Black people].
- To promote the spirit of race, pride and love.
- To reclaim the fallen of the race.
- To administer to and assist the needy.
- To assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa.
- To strengthen the Imperialism of independent African States.
- To establish Commissionaries or Agencies in the principal countries of the world for the protection of all Negroes, irrespective of nationality.
- To promote a conscientious Christian worship among the native tribes of Africa.
- To establish Universities, Colleges and Secondary Schools for the further education and culture of the boys and girls of the race.
- To conduct a worldwide commercial and industrial intercourse.

It could be argued that certain aspects of the above aims and objectives were ingrained with Western paternalism. Nevertheless, his program and message was to become the most popular form of radical Black Nationalism espoused up to then in the modern world, and it has never to date been surpassed as a movement to mobilize and empower Black peoples against the social forces of white racism and hegemony. The prominent Garvey scholar, Tony Martin (1976, p. 360), has described Marcus Garvey as the major Black figure of the twentieth century.

One may consider the question: Why was Garvey’s message so powerful and popular to the masses of ordinary Black peoples throughout the world? Moreover, how was he able to get his message to so many people and establish such a strong international foothold via hardworking and dedicated followers? To answer these questions there ought to be some understanding of the historical context in which Marcus Garvey emerged. First, the early part of the twentieth century was a time of great socioeconomic struggle for most peoples of African descent around the world. European colonialism was at its height, and the oppression endured by African Americans, particularly in the southern states, was manifestly horrific. Jim Crow segregation and lynching were ubiquitous realities that confronted African Americans on a daily basis. Overall, Black peoples throughout the world met with tremendous societal obstacles with the notion and practice of white supremacy. This then is the historical social context in which Marcus Garvey emerged. Prior to Garvey’s arrival in the United States, he had traveled from Jamaica to parts of Central America and Europe. On his travels he was seeing for himself the extent of exploitation and discrimination endured by peoples of African descent. He was also formulating in his mind what can now be deemed "a philosophy
for liberation.” According to Amy Jacques Garvey (1970, pp 10–12), in 1914 Garvey traveled back to Jamaica from Europe and on the journey he contemplated a number of questions: Where was the Black man’s government strong enough to protect him? Where were the Black man’s ships to carry his minerals and produce to make him economically secure? Where were the Black man’s factories to provide employment for their people? Why should Black men always walk hat in hand begging white men for jobs? With the founding of the UNIA Garvey aimed to build an organization that would provide practical solutions to the above questions facing Black people all over the world.

In terms of his Pan-African message, Amy Jacques Garvey (1970. p. 10) states that her husband felt that there was a universal experience of blackness in opposition to white supremacy that brought together peoples of African heritage. As she states:

[Marcus Garvey argued]...A black man seemed to have only one true passport, and that was his black face; no matter what other passport he presented as a subject or citizen of any country in which he was born, his black face finally decided the way he should be treated, and that was usually as less than a white man.

In all things considered it is important to note that at the core of Garvey’s message was the idea of self-pride and self-determination. More importantly, Garvey’s view of “Black separatism” ought to be considered as a consequence of the embedded social relations of his time. After all, mainstream white supremacy was endorsed via Jim Crow segregation laws in state and federal policy. In hindsight, should we now consider Marcus Garvey not as particularly “radical,” but instead “practical”? In fact his philosophy on social separation was merely a response to the status quo relations and general white hostility toward Black peoples, wherever he focused his attention in the world during the teens and 1920s.

There is little doubt that Marcus Garvey had an unwavering devotion and determination to solve the many problems confronting his people, and this was clearly evident in the philosophy and practice of the UNIA (Christian, 2002; Clarke, 1974; Garvey 1970, 1986; Lewis, 1988; Martin, 1976). The Black Nationalist perspective of the UNIA was primarily about the uplifting of African descended peoples globally in order for them to survive culturally, politically, economically, and independently. Crucially, the UNIA was about creating self-determination and the freeing of the African continent and African Diaspora from the yoke of European colonialism and social inferiority respectively (Ackah, 2002, p. 23). In the words of Marcus Garvey from August 1, 1920:

The White world may despise us; the white world may scoff and spurn the idea of a free Africa because they say: “How dare you talk about Africa when Africa is in the possession of England, when Africa is in the possession of France, when Africa is in the possession of Spain?” What logic have you, Mr. White Man? Have you not before you the pages of history recording the rise and fall of peoples, of races and of nations? White Man, can you not learn by experience? Why talk about the permanency of Great Britain in Africa? Why talk about the permanency of France in Africa? (Marcus Garvey cited in Martin, 1976, p. 110).

Clearly, for the year 1920, this was a bold statement from a Black man to the white established order. Garvey’s message to Black people in the United States and beyond, therefore, contained a large degree of confidence in regard to the white society. This was a boldness that had not been evident since, arguably, the words and essays of David Walker (1795–1830). Walker’s “appeal” for African American solidarity, and his commitment to ending enslavement, is akin to Garvey’s uncompromising stance against white racism (see Walker, 1993). Understanding the message of Garvey is at the heart of comprehending its appeal and popularity among the many millions in disenfranchised black communities.

The Negro World, Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Age, and 1920s Economic Affluence

Although Marcus Garvey had a powerful message for the Black masses, this is still not enough to explain how it was to become so popular during the early 1920s in the United States and beyond. Again we have to consider Garvey’s skills, this time as an organizer and as a printer to help explain the phenomenon of his success. At the end of World War I and two years after Garvey’s arrival in New York (1918), he successfully established a newspaper as a key organ for the UNIA entitled The Negro World, which was published in Harlem between 1918 and 1933. Cronon (1955, p. 45) maintains:

One of the most important reasons for Garvey’s amazing success in the rapid organization of the Negro masses was his establishment in January,
1918, of the Negro World... This was one of the most remarkable journalistic ventures ever attempted by a Negro in the United States [even more remarkable given the fact that Garvey had only been in the United States for less than two years]...Within the space of a few months the Negro World became one of the leading Negro weeklies, and as such it proved to be a most effective instrument for the promulgation of Garvey's program. The circulation of the paper has been variously estimated at from 60,000 to 200,000 during its most prosperous years.

Apart from Garvey, among the editors and/or contributors, were the able Hubert H. Harrison, William H. Ferris, T. Thomas Fortune, Hudson C. Pryce, and Eric D. Walrond (Cronon, 1955, pp. 46-47). The Negro World became very popular as it gave opportunities to both well-known and not so notable Black writers and commentators who were encouraged to write openly from the perspectives of peoples of African descent. Moreover, it was popular because it was an affordable weekly to the low-income followers in the UNIA. This was a very adept marketing strategy on behalf of Marcus Garvey as he was able to reach a broad-ranged readership with an effective message in a time when it was needed more than ever: Black self-determination.

The end of World War I ushered in a time of high expectations for African Americans having fought and died in the battlefields of France for the “defense of Democracy.” Bennett (1982, p. 520) gives an insight into the extent of African American participation:

...Official records [for World War I] listed 370,000 black soldiers and 1400 black commissioned officers. A little more than half of these soldiers served in the European Theater. Three black regiments—the 369th, 371st and 372nd—received the Croix de Guerre for valor. The 369th was the first American unit to reach the Rhine. Various individual blacks were decorated for bravery. The first soldiers in the American army to be decorated for bravery were Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts of the 369th Infantry regiment...

Yet regardless of the heroics during World War I, when African Americans returned to the United States they continued to face the hostility of white racism and discrimination. In 1918 alone it is reported that sixty African Americans had been lynched (Bennett, 1982, p. 520). In 1919 there was widespread violence against African American communities. Historians note it as the “Red Summer of 1919” whereby a total of twenty-six serious “race riots” occurred. This same year it is reported that seventy-six African Americans were lynched (Bennett, 1982, p. 521). Indeed the famous poem “If We Must Die” by a Harlem Renaissance writer, Claude McKay, called for the need to resist these catastrophic forces attacking Black life (see McKay, 1970; Watson, 1995, pp. 36-37).

Along with the Marcus Garvey and the UNIA presence, Harlem in the 1920s and early 1930s was the cultural capital of the African Diaspora (Watson, 1995). Most the writers sought to depict the rich complexity and diversity of Black life. The Harlem Renaissance, as it was to become known, brought forth a group of writers that could not escape the influence of the UNIA activities and philosophy that promoted the positive history of African peoples. The Harlem Renaissance writers and artists would largely divorce themselves from the most negative Eurocentric notions of African backwardness and savagery. In defining the Harlem Renaissance, Watson (1995, p. 9) maintains:

The most effective strategy for race-building depended on art and literature, so a dual mission was thrust upon these writers: they were simultaneously charged with creating art and with bolstering the image of their race.

Whereas many of the Harlem Renaissance writers and artists focused their work primarily on art-related endeavors, Marcus Garvey and his followers were concerned with the social and political struggle faced by African descended peoples all over the world. The UNIA met at Carnegie Hall in New York City for a mass meeting on August 25, 1919. Marcus Garvey, in his keynote address that night, gave a Pan-African message for solidarity among peoples of African descent. He also referred to the contribution of African descent servicemen in Europe during the fight to “save democracy,” and how their collective contribution to the war effort had not yet empowered Black peoples. Garvey maintained (cited in Hill, 1983, p. 501):

We are here because the times demand that we be here. We are now living in a world that is reorganizing itself. It is reorganizing itself out of a bloody war as fought for four and one-half years, a war in which men were called from all parts of the world, from the four corners of the world, to die for the sacred cause of democracy: to give liberty to all mankind; to make all men free; and in the war as
fought for 4 years, they took out 2,000,000 black men from America, from the West Indies and Africa, to fight for this farcical democracy they told us about; and now we, after winning the fight, winning the battle, we realize that we are without democracy; and we come before the world, therefore, as the Universal Negro Improvement Association, to demand our portion of democracy... and we say woe betide the man or the nation who stands in the way of the Negro fighting for democracy!

The above message from Marcus Garvey obviously had a powerful impact on African Americans and other peoples of African descent, such as African Caribbean residents (especially fellow Jamaicans) in the United States, as membership and branches in the UNIA grew more rapidly after the 1919 meeting. It is in this context on the macro-level of Garveyism that we come to understand the rank-and-file branches of the UNIA. Garvey had a message with a “universal plan and vision for redemption” (Stephens, 2004, p.463). It was a philosophy that attracted both the working and middle classes in Black communities throughout the world (Clarke, 1974).

The end of World War I and its aftermath ushered in the “roaring twenties” and characterized by the “jazz age” and “speakeasies” defying the Volstead Act of 1919 that prohibited the consumption of alcohol. Until its repeal in 1933, the United States “prohibition era” effectively led to the growth of an underworld that fed into the hedonism of mainstream society. In short, this is the backdrop to the 1920s and context in which Marcus Garvey and UNIA emerged. Let us now consider a micro UNIA experience that gives a local insight into the support Garvey received at the height of his troubles with federal authorities. These were grassroots UNIA supporters and organizers in the city of Columbus, Ohio.

Ohio: A Marcus Garvey and UNIA Stronghold

The Garvey movement had its strongest following in the United States. According to Martin (1976, p.15), Louisiana boasted the highest number of UNIA branches, a remarkable seventy-four in total. Ohio was the seventh highest out of a total of 38 states recorded in 1926 with thirty-nine branches involving UNIA activity. Each of the major cities in Ohio: Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus had a strong UNIA presence. Smaller towns in Ohio could also claim strong support, especially Hamilton, Middletown, Youngstown and Dayton. It is evident that there was an appeal for Garvey’s message in the Midwest of the United States, to a degree that was only rivaled in the South.

Columbus, Ohio, 1923

As previously highlighted, the scholarship on Garvey to date has tended to focus on the general history of the Marcus Garvey movement. There are few existing studies that give an insight into the grassroots workings of a UNIA branch, division or chapter. Stephens (2004, p.465), who has conducted a micro-study of Garveyism in Idlewild, Michigan, maintains there are only a handful of “community studies” that have focused on the functioning of a specific community in its relationship with the Garvey movement. Considering the vast extent of the UNIA at its height in the 1920s, rectifying this dearth is something that ought to be an integral aspect in future Garvey scholarship.

Indeed there is much to acknowledge and learn from regarding the many cities and Black communities in the United States and beyond that established a UNIA branch or presence. Unfortunately, with most Garvey contemporaries now passed, life histories will be less forthcoming than actual analysis of primary sources such as newspaper archives, diaries, and other documentary sources relating to a particular UNIA branch and its membership activities.

Columbus, Ohio is one such city that has not been fully researched regarding the Garvey movement. Mark (1928, p.16) states that the area most populated with African Americans in Columbus back in 1923 was the East Long Street or Champion Avenue District located on the Near East side of Columbus. The Mount Vernon Avenue area near Champion Avenue and East Long Street was almost totally comprised of African Americans and other African descended groups, such as the migrant Jamaicans. This area of Columbus could well be deemed a “mini Harlem” back in the 1920s and up to the 1950s, until the city’s construction of an Interstate wrecked the community infrastructure in the 1960s–1970s.

In looking at UNIA presence in Columbus we can gauge much in terms of social analysis of the movement’s popularity and impact. Few contemporary Columbus citizens have knowledge that it once had a firm UNIA stronghold in the early 1920s to mid-1930s (The best source for this study has been via researching The Negro World, which then led to more archival research at the Ohio State University library, the Co-
In terms of The Negro World archives one can study the local reports that were published weekly in the paper referring to the activities that had taken place at the branch. For example, here is part of a report published in The Negro World (March 31, 1923) written by G. Rupert Christian, Executive Secretary, for the Columbus Division No. 142 and its branch chapter, The American Addition, relating to the visit of a high-ranking UNIA official:

Much enthusiasm was aroused in the Columbus Division and American Addition Chapter over a telegram received by the Executive Secretary, Mr. G. R. Christian, from the President General [Marcus Garvey], on Thursday, March 1, to raise FIFTY DOLLARS on Sunday, March 4, for important work in Liberia.

The Secretary got busy. Hand bills were procured and letters written to big men in the city to give addresses [speeches at the Sunday meeting of March 4, 1923].

There was a fairly large attendance out on Sunday, and stirring addresses were delivered by W. S. Lyman, attorney-at-law, and Rev. D. W. Bowen of Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church.

Attorney Lyman in his address impressed his hearers that the U.N.I.A. was the one organization that has taught the Negro to know himself. He made a fine illustration of the lion and sheep. He said if the Negro knew himself as a lion, then he would get the respect that is due to him. The sheep, on the other hand, was lowly, and cringing, and meek, and therefore no one feared it. So it is with this old and new Negro, as shown by the members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

The Rev. Bowen followed with a masterly defense of the organization. He aroused much mirth by his breezy talk, and our members are always glad to have him at our meetings.

The Division is taking a forward step in getting in closer touch with the big churches. The secretary sent the Rev. R. D. Phillips a letter bearing on “closer relationships.” For the sake of the race, we sincerely hope that the organization and the different churches will line up for the cause of negro uplift and solidarity.

Attached herewith is a list of those who subscribed to the fund. The Chapter did exceedingly well. It was very much enthused over the matter and raised $15, whilst the Columbus Division raised $57.

List of subscribers to fund March 4, 1923, from Columbus, Ohio: [List follows and this ends the report]

The above report for The Negro World certainly gives evidence that the Columbus, Ohio, region was particularly active in supporting the UNIA. The personal telegram from Marcus Garvey also gives notice that he had a degree of faith in this branch of the organization. In addition, the report gives insight into how a specific UNIA branch functioned. We can assume confidently that there was an influential middle class leadership. This is made evident with the speakers for the March 4, 1923 meeting being an attorney-at-law and a Reverend respectively. From a reading of these reports we also know that the UNIA meetings took place most often on Sunday afternoons, with the occasional midweek meeting. Finally, the fact that Marcus Garvey had asked the Columbus Division via telegram to raise $50 for the Liberia project, and in fact they raised a total of $72, is another indication of strong support and loyalty to the UNIA cause emanating from Columbus.

Another significant sign regarding the level of support Garvey received in Columbus, Ohio, relates to the fact that by 1923 he was under tremendous pressure as leader of the UNIA. The movement had been infiltrated with federal spies, and Garvey had been accused of mail fraud in selling shares for the UNIA’s Black Star Line shipping company (Hill, 1986, Martin 1976, pp.174-214). He actually lost this controversial and dubious trial and was given a $1000 fine and sentenced to the maximum five-year jail term for such a crime (Cronon, 1955, p 118). On his release from New York’s Tombs Prison on bail, pending an appeal, September 10, 1923, he immediately organized a tour and Columbus, Ohio, was one of the cities that he visited. This visit by Marcus Garvey provides scholars with local archival evidence showing a high degree of support for the UNIA leader.

Amy Jacques Garvey recalled that her husband had been advised by doctors to travel to warmer states to help him recuperate from his asthmatic condition, something that had caused him problems during his three-month confinement in the Tombs Prison. Amy Jacques Garvey maintained (1970, p. 129):

Much to the delight of the people out west he planned an itinerary that took him through the following states: New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado,
She stated further that their return journey would be (1970, p. 130):

...by the southern route- Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington D.C., Maryland, New Jersey and New York.

I have not found any major references to this tour of Garvey's, other than the Amy Jacques Garvey source. In explaining the impact of the tour in a general sense it is evident that what took place in each town when Garvey arrived was often tantamount to excitement and celebration. Amy Jacques Garvey (1970, p. 130) describes the scene on her husband's arrival to a town or city to speak during this period:

When [Marcus] Garvey came to town, it was a gala day. Sometimes a reception committee had a small band outside the railroad station; on his arrival they would strike up "God Bless our President." Some carried banners such as: "You can't keep a good man down" and "Hail, the conquering hero comes." Each banner had its own novel way of receiving and entertaining him. The local offices had the mayor or a prominent white politician to either chair the mass meeting or give the welcome address.

There is indeed scope for Garvey scholars to follow the trail of this tour outlined by Amy Jacques Garvey, if only to gauge just how successful it was in terms of the backing for him after he had been released on bail. In terms of Columbus, Ohio, this city can be viewed as one such case study. It was indeed a local response to Garvey and its level of support at a time of significant crisis in his life and the UNIA is evident.

The "Lost" Garvey Parade

The use of the word "lost" when describing the Garvey parade in Columbus, Ohio, on Tuesday September 25, 1923, is to note that there has been no significant research done to acknowledge what is an important chapter in the Marcus Garvey and UNIA experience. Therefore it can in fact be deemed "lost" to researchers, or at the very least an overlooked episode. Indeed, even the Marcus Garvey and UNIA papers edited by Robert A. Hill (1986) do not reference this event in volume V of the Marcus Garvey and UNIA papers, which covers this time period. Neither is it mentioned specifically in the major works of Tony Martin, another preeminent Garvey scholar.

The archival evidence for what took place can be found in The Negro World (October 20, 1923, p.5), The Columbus Citizen (Wednesday September 26, 1923, p.15), The Ohio State Journal (Wednesday September 26, 1923, p. 6), and The Columbus Dispatch (Wednesday September 26, 1923, p.28). Only The Columbus Dispatch remains in circulation today. It was, however, The Negro World that led this researcher to the other mainstream newspapers. The report in The Negro World was not published until almost one month after the event took place, and the reporter is again Mr. G. Rupert Christian. The headline reads, "Columbus Div. Honors Founder of the Movement: Monster Parade Staged." Here is how the reporter depicts in graphic detail the atmosphere and scenes on the day of Garvey's visit:

The visit of the Hon. Marcus Garvey to the Columbus Division was an occasion for a monster demonstration and parade. Huge crowds thronged the streets to catch a glimpse of the great Negro Leader who was recently released on bail.

Tuesday, September 25th [1923], will long be remembered by the colored people in Columbus. At 5 o'clock the street parade started at the corner of Champion and Mt. Vernon Avenues. Through the courtesy of the Chief of Police of this town three mounted officers were supplied, and these led the parade.

A Lincoln car, in which were Issac Kellum, acting President of the Columbus Division; Mr. William Ware, President of the great Cincinnati Division in his uniform as Brigadier General; Mr. George A. Weston, President of the Cleveland Division; Rev. E.G. West, former Commissioner of Panama and Mr. G. Rupert Christian, Executive Secretary for the Columbus Division, who worked hard to make the day a success, followed. Behind the car came the Universal African Legions of Columbus and Cincinnati, led by two mounted officers- Col. Greenlow and Major Reece. Then came the splendid band of the Second Regiment in their new uniforms which lent a picturesque touch to the parade. The Black Cross nurses of Cincinnati and Columbus and the Motor Corps brought up the rear. Thousands of members and well wishers followed the procession on foot and in motor cars. The great Memorial Hall was filled with negroes to hear the

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man who has stirred the entire world with the cry of a "national home for the Negro people of the world."

The article goes on to state that the meeting, introductions, and keynote address took place at "8pm sharp" with Garvey giving a powerful speech in the packed Memorial Hall. As the reporter explains above, the other major cities of Ohio, Cincinnati and Cleveland, each had strong representation in the Columbus parade. We learn also that "thousands of members and well wishers followed the procession" to support Marcus Garvey and the UNIA that day.

The final paragraph of the report is informative as it gives a clue to further evidence from mainstream sources that can corroborate The Negro World version of the parade:

The meeting was well attended by leading ministers, business and professional men who went to hear this great race orator. Reporters from the three daily white papers were present, and the next day several reports of the meeting were published in these journals.

Although none of the "white papers" titles are given in the report, there is enough information to do archival search to find the sources. In doing so it was found that each of these papers, The Columbus Citizen, The Ohio State Journal, and the Columbus Dispatch did actually cover the parade. However, the most useful, arguably, of the three reports is that from The Ohio State Journal (Wednesday, September 26, 1923, p. 6). It is the most elaborate and the reporter’s account of the day gives an insight into another aspect of Marcus Garvey that ordinarily is not portrayed in the existing scholarship: his appearance in September of 1923. The reporter also gives us an assessment of the crowd numbers that packed into the Memorial Hall that evening:

Marcus Garvey, provisional president of Africa, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, black as the ace of spades and very proud of it, stood for 22 minutes before 2, 300 negroes last night in Memorial Hall...

The Ohio State Journal reporter gives an account that is very useful in terms of a hindsight evaluation of the event. Even today a crowd of 2, 300 to hear someone speak is indeed a great achievement, and a sign of success. Moreover, the reporter reveals to us that Garvey gave a radical assessment of the Ku Klux Klan (who were in a revival mode back in early to mid-1920s, and actually marched on Washington D. C. in 1925.) The reporter cites Garvey in his typical forthright style that night in Columbus, Ohio:

"I admire the Ku Klux Klan for its frankness and honesty," Garvey declared. "I’d much rather have a man say ‘Garvey, I’m coming for you at midnight,’ than have him say, ‘Garvey, I’m your friend,’ and when midnight comes there he is!"

"The first man’s the klansman, and I’ve got time to make my preparations; the second man, well, there he is!"

The reporter then goes on to further describe the appearance of the UNIA leader that night:

Garvey is a short, chunky man. He wore a dinner jacket, a shining plaited shirt, the red, green and black button of the African movement in the lapel of his jacket, and a glass that looked like a monocle fastened to the other. He had a goatee.

In all the existing photographs of Garvey today, I have yet to see him with a goatee beard. Therefore the above primary source or eyewitness account is informative archival journalism. The reporter concludes his description by stating that Garvey ended his speech that night with the words:

"We don’t want the white man’s civilization," was how Garvey summarized the object of his organization. "We want a civilization in Africa of our own, the United States of Africa, where 100, 000,000 negroes can build a culture of their own. I hope to live to see the day. We can ask for it twice; once politely, once sternly. Then if they refuse, we can take it."

It seems that Garvey was unequivocal in his message that night in Columbus, Ohio. It was a speech that was uncompromising in its content: "Africa for Africans: At home and abroad." One can argue that it was unrealistic to expect African Americans and other black groups in the United States to agree to uproot and leave for Africa after generations in the African Diaspora. However, Garvey gave a defiant response to the notion of white supremacy. He felt it was necessary for peoples of African descent at to confront what he deemed the reality of white racism and to forge a new life and confidence apart from the dominant white culture. It was very much a psychological attempt to give African descent people self-assurance, a positive knowledge of African history, and a pathway to liberation. Garvey.
gave a message full of hope and it helped eradicate mental “fear,” even it was for just a short moment as he spoke so defiantly. He stood for African humanity without blinking an eyelash in the face of great hostility. This is why, arguably, he was so popular to both middle class and working class Black people. He would “speak truth to power” and this gave a sense of pride and determination to his many disenfranchised followers.

**Conclusion:**

In consideration of the primary sources that speak directly for Marcus Garvey and the UNIA, it seems that September 1923 was a particularly pivotal month. In an article that was published in *The Negro World* (September 22, 1923), from a speech delivered by Garvey in New York on September 13, 1923, he refers candidly to the reason why he was convicted of mail fraud:

*I was convicted, not because any one was defrauded in the temporary failure of the Black Star Line brought about by others, but because I represented, even as I do now, a movement for the real emancipation of my people...*(Garvey cited in Hill, 1986, p. 449).

It seems that his UNIA followers in Columbus, Ohio, believed Garvey’s perspective on these events. Indeed it was only twelve days after the speech of September 13, 1923 that he arrived to be honored via the UNIA parade in the city. In short, Garvey was still very popular and well regarded as a spokesperson for African descended peoples. An article published in the *Negro Churchman*, from September 1923, substantiates this. The author, Reverend George Alexander McGuire explains the popularity of Garvey in this manner:

*Outsiders will never understand the psychology of those they call “Garveyites.” We doubt, if we who are thus nicknamed, understand it ourselves. The binding spell, the indefinable charm which Mr. Garvey exercises over us boggles description. But we find the reason for it in our conviction that no man has spoken to us like this man, inculcating pride and nobility of race, and clearly pointing out the Star of Hope to a discouraged and downtrodden people...* (Rev. McGuire cited in Hill, 1986, pp.463-4).

To understand the support of Garvey in September 1923 and beyond is to comprehend the need African descended peoples had for the message he gave. At bottom, it was a message of dignity, hope, and self-worth. This is probably the main reason he could find such strong admiration and support in places like Columbus, Ohio. Wherever Garvey traveled around the world he found Black people suffering from some form of racialized discrimination. He also found that people responded to his words and ideas of African emancipation with great enthusiasm. His arguments, though often polemical, were based on the premise of human dignity and the empowerment of his people. These are in fact universal concepts that naturally attract attention and Garvey knew instinctively how to rouse the emotions of his audiences, wherever they happened to be in the world—from Columbus to Cuba. Cronon (1955, p. 220), is correct when he evaluates the draw of Garvey to the Black masses:

*Marcus Garvey was an instrument through which the restless Negro world could express its discontent. His striking success in creating a powerful mass organization in a matter of months was possible only because he spoke the language of his people and told his followers what they wanted and needed to hear- that the black man was as good as any other.*

Regardless of the fact that Marcus Garvey would eventually be brought down by a mixture of government forces and internal mismanagement of the UNIA, his ideas continued to have a powerful impact around the globe. In many ways Garvey was ahead of his time in terms of speaking for the discontent of Black people. In the 1960s there would be a revival of the Garvey movement, and the ideas of Black Pride and Black Self-Determination were to become commonplace (Vincent, [1971]). The ideas of African centered scholarship and/or Afrocentricity are also offshoots to the ideas that Garvey had for understanding African descended peoples and their cultures both on the continent and in the African Diaspora (Asante, 1980).

The legacy of Marcus Garvey and UNIA is now, however, creeping slowly out of the histories where branches of the organization flourished. This brief look at Columbus, Ohio, is one such example of how much more research is needed. For example, there needs to be more local studies concerning this tour and of the reaction to Garvey at that time, as has been found with research in the Columbus/Ohio region. What took place in the other regions of the United States where Garvey traveled in September-October 1923? What did the local newspapers say? What were the crowds in number? How many other “lost” parades can be studied? These
are just a few of the unanswered questions that require further research.

The existing Garvey scholarship is primarily of the macro variety that gives insight to the man and the UNIA on a very broad level. We cannot, therefore, assume that what Garveyites did in New York was exactly the same that took place in Columbus, Ohio? However, I do not want to take such a point too far as Stein (1986, p. 279) has done by suggesting a common fragmentation of the UNIA organization structure over time and geographical space. Instead, I prefer to look for how each branch interpreted Garvey’s message and implemented his ideals in practice. This is more productive in terms of understanding the “universals” of Garveyism, for it had to have a core message that galvanized the branches. This, in my opinion, was done via the use of The Negro World and Garvey’s weekly editorial messages. More research, however, is needed to substantiate this perspective. Crucially, this article has briefly put in context Marcus Garvey’s philosophy, and how he was able to gain broad support even during a very difficult period as leader of the UNIA in 1923. Knowledge of this “lost” Garvey parade in Columbus, Ohio, gives scholars of Garvey and the UNIA an insight into a local event outside the usual New York geographical parameters. There is much to the story of Garveyism that is yet to be told.

References


The Columbus Citizen. (1923, September 26). 2000 Negroes Hear Talk By Garvey, p.15.
