

## **Dubois's Talented Tenth and Garvey's Back to Africa Movement Converge in Liberia**

### **Introduction**

Amidst the disillusionment of the post-World War One moment Marcus Garvey of the Universal Negro Improvement Association(UNIA), and W.E.B DuBois of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People(NAACP), would look to shape the future of Black America. Each movement set its eyes on a nation across the ocean in West Africa with an intimate connection to the racial complexities of America: Liberia. Liberia was first established as a colony of 15,000 African American expatriates under the banner of the American Colonization Society in 1820(Ruetten, 5). This nation because of its origins and unique possibility for being both the potential point of return for desiring members of the African Diaspora in the Western Hemisphere and an outstanding example of Black self-government, piqued the interest of African American leaders even before Garvey and DuBois. With this in mind Garvey and DuBois the two fathers of Pan-Africanism, saw Liberia as the perfect opportunity to fulfill their respective versions of this ideology which can most simply be described as reuniting the people of the African diaspora with the location of their origin politically, socially, and economically. In Liberia, however, Garvey's "Back To Africa" movement and DuBois's philosophy of "The Talented Tenth" came into stark conflict. The primary question would be: whose vision would win out? Ultimately, DuBois would work to thwart Garvey's Liberian emigration plan and promote his vision of attracting American capital for the modernization of Liberia. This episode came with great personal conflict rife with

colorism and classism. Additionally, It provides a keen insight into the pressures that influenced an era of American imperialism in Liberia, and leads to the question: were DuBois and Garvey only ever pawns in a larger geopolitical conflict over the fate of Liberia? Through these two men and their competing visions, we see the diversity of the Black experience in America, and the conflict between facets of such experience greatly informed and influenced the foreign policy of the United States towards Liberia in the 1920s.

### **Garvey's Liberian Emigration Plan**

Marcus Garvey would come to America from Jamaica seeking to pay his respects to his greatest role model Booker T Washington and replicate his technical education model the Tuskegee Institute in Jamaica. However, what he found in America in 1916 and the succeeding years was bloody race riots, white mob rule, and African American discontent with World War One's promise to finally bring democracy to African American communities. As a result, he would be radicalized setting up his organization the UNIA in Harlem, New York, and subsequently building it into a thriving organization of over four million members worldwide(Hill). Garvey was a racial separatist believing that Black people should live separate from whites, free from racial discrimination. As a result, the UNIA aimed to set up one independent nation on the continent of Africa where Black individuals from the United States and West Indies develop, thrive, and "civilize backward tribes of Africa" to bring about African Redemption(Garvey).

His program of Back To Africa caught fire instantly with the masses of working-class Americans who made up the membership of the UNIA. Nowhere was this more evident than in the development of the Black Star Line(BSL). In 1919 Garvey launched the BSL, a shipping

venture to establish shipping lines between the Caribbean, United States, and West Africa(African Series Volume VIII). With these ships, Garvey would endeavor to relocate the UNIA headquarters to Liberia and set up a UNIA settlement of 500 settlers. In exchange for the government of Liberia granting UNIA land, Garvey would bring schools and commerce to

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Liberia. In addition, Garvey would use his massive membership base to raise four million dollars for infrastructure and to help the government of Liberia back from the brink of default on its foreign debt(Garcia). With the Government of Liberia setting aside 5,000 square miles in Harper, Maryland County, Liberia and several top Liberian government officials such as Gaberial

Johnson the mayor of Monrovia becoming members of the leadership of the UNIA, the Liberian Emigration plan seemed well in hand(Files). However, Garvey underestimated how DuBois's intention to see him fail, the pressure of European colonial interests, and the ire of the United States Government would lead not only to the downfall of his plan but end him up in jail.

### **DuBois Thwarts Garvey**

DuBois in the Declaration To The Nations Of The World at the first pan African congress in 1900 would state "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color

line”(Hahn, 34). DuBois was speaking of the Black-White color line that animated American domestic segregation and colonialism abroad. However, DuBois would be famously blind to the other color line between lighter skin and darker skin Black people of which Garvey was acutely aware. Dubois often chastised Garvey for trying ““....to bring Caribbean color politics to the United States” (Kendi). In response, Garvey would argue “The very light element of Negroes do not want to go back to Africa. They believe that in time, through miscegenation, the American race will be of their type. This is a fallacy and in that respect the agitation of the mulatto leader, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois” warning white and Black Americans alike ““That kind of leadership will destroy the Negro in America””(Garvey). Their feud was not only over whether to seek Black Separatism or Social Equality but was deeply steeped in colorism and perceived privilege of DuBois’s middle-class status and Garvey’s working-class movement. With a deep personal dislike for Garvey and all he stood for, though claiming publically to not want to see Garvey fail, DuBois, embarked to do everything to ensure just that happened.

DuBois first started domestically by trying to damage Garvey's reputation in the eyes of the public. He zeroed in on the BLS’s financial trouble associated with both the post-World War One economic slump and pervasive financial mismanagement(Files).In December 1920, He wrote a two-part article in the Crisis, the associated newspaper of the NAACP of which he was the editor, in which in painstaking detail he outlined the transgressions of Garvey and his business partners. DuBois no doubt cheered on the rise of the “Garvey Must Go” movement led by alienated supporters of Garvey like A Phillip Randolph. DuBois's work on the BSL spurred the “Garvey Must Go” movement to petition the Justice Department to bring up Garvey on mail fraud charges, and he ultimately was. The case against Garvey was spearheaded by an all too

familiar persecutor of Black freedom movements: J Edgar Hoover(DuCille). He was sentenced to 5 years in prison and sent to the Atlanta penitentiary on Feb 8th, 1925. Though his sentence was later commuted, his incarceration was enough to put the death nail in his Liberian plan and throw the UNIA into chaos(Ijere, 201).

DuBois understood keenly the pressures exerted on Liberia by European colonial powers namely Britain and France. The United States official policy since 1918 was to contest British control of Liberia and place it squarely in America's sphere of influence. DuBois supported the American government's efforts because he saw the United States as a better conservator of Liberia than Britain. After all, in his view, the political power of African Americans like him could prevent the worst abuses of American imperialism(DuBois, Letter to CDB King). DuBois would work to see the downfall of Garvey's Liberian scheme by leveraging his relationship with the President of Liberia, CDB King. In January 1921 at the same time, the government of Liberia came to an agreement with Garvey's UNIA, CDB King's doubt in Garvey's ability to deliver the much-needed debt relief led him to lead a delegation to New York and Washington to appeal to the U.S. State Department for help. France and Britain disliked Garvey for the perceived threat he posed to their colonial holdings. With Garvey's very public declaration of his Liberian scheme came great pressure from both France and Britain on the government of Liberia. While in New York, DuBois convinced King to take measures to lessen British and French pressure and reassure the US state department that Garvey in Liberia would not become a problem for them. CDB King wrote in an article in the Crisis declaring he wouldn't let "...Liberia allow her territory to be made a center of aggression or conspiracy against other sovereign states" Referring to

French and British neighboring colonies(Files). This very public break was the first shift in the Liberian Government policy towards Garvey's emigration plan and one encouraged by DuBois.

Despite the previous setbacks in July 1924 Garvey's team of experts on the ground in Liberia were set to complete the final preparations before the first wave of settlers arrived at the Liberian settlement. In a sudden turn of events, the CDB King and the Liberian government arrested and deported Garvey's UNIA delegation and barred the UNIA from setting up any settlement in Liberia(Hahn). The Liberian Scheme was over and it was no mistake that as it crashed and burned DuBois alternative ascended.

### **DuBois's Alternative**

DuBois felt that Liberia would benefit most from the American capital to stimulate its modernization and stabilize its debt situation. Thus, when DuBois first visited Liberia as a special envoy for President Coolidge following his appointment in December 1923 he was naturally attracted to an ever ripening opportunity for American business. Britain as of 1922 had controlled 75 percent of global rubber production(Hahn, 37). The US relied on its rubber supply and as a result, had to pay steep tariffs. When DuBois arrived in Liberia he saw British rubber plantations that had failed to be cultivated and in his optimism for the potential benevolent impact of American enterprise on Liberia contacted US ambassador Solomon Porter Hood, a Black leader of great stature and friend of DuBois's. He urged him to contact Firestone Tire and Rubber company and encourage them to explore developing rubber plantations in Liberia(DuBois, Firestone). What came out of this interaction was a multi-year negotiation process between Firestone and the Government of Liberia. The resulting deal was a sweetheart deal for Firestone giving them a lease on 99 million acres for 6 cents an acre in exchange for

building port and rail infrastructure and contingent on a 5 million dollar loan from City Bank of New York to consolidate foreign debt.

DuBois saw this deal as benefiting his vision of the “talented tenth” in two ways. First, he thought preventing the default of the government of Liberia would thereby legitimize the Americo-Liberian elite who ran the country and show the world competent Black self-government. Second, he thought that Firestone's employment of African American experts in their endeavors in Liberia would give talented African American professionals a stake in the modernization of Liberia. Though his objectives may seem more realistic than Garvey, it is no mistake that they aligned so succinctly with the interest of the United States Government and its business interests(Kendhammer). DuBois’s alternative revealed a glaring weakness in his pan African philosophy at the time. It was intimately tied to the Black elites ceasing on the efforts of Imperial powers and therefore endorsed one of the starkest examples of “The color-line”: Imperialism. Selfishly DuBois’s pan African vision rested on the exploitation of native labor on Liberia's rubber plantations. This system was so inhumane it attracted the attention of the League Of Nations in the early 1930s into forced labor practices in Liberia and ultimately would lead to the downfall of Americo-Liberian elites like DuBois’s close friend President CDB King.

## **Conclusion**

Both Garvey and DuBois’s pan African visions for Liberia would play out throughout the 1920s, with the unfortunate consequence of one coming at the expense of the others. However, neither Garveys nor DuBois' vision worked out in practical terms. They were corrupted by personal feuds and the overbearing presence of imperial interests. DuBois' relentless efforts to aid those who wanted to keep Garvey from succeeding in implementing his Liberian Emigration

plan would deprive the world of ever seeing what may have come to fruition. While at the same time Garvey's flamboyant nature helped lead to his downfall. DuBois's backward stumble into the Firestone deal would prove to be misguided and lead to a situation that further ensnared Liberia in colonial debt entrapments and resource pillaging. Despite the destructive ends of the conflict between DuBois and Garvey, it is remarkable that two Black leaders had such a great impact on American foreign policy only some 60 years removed from the abolition of slavery. Garvey believed that the emigration of the masses of the Black diaspora back to Africa would prove central in breaking the colonial status quo. DuBois believed that the elevation of Black elites in all aspects of American life foreign and domestic, would be more consequential in reshaping the color line. They both believed in the transformative influence and power of Black Americans steering US foreign policy to correct the injustices of racism at home and abroad, a legacy we still strive to continue today.



## **Appendix (Main Primary Source)**

National Humanities Center Marcus Garvey, *Aims and Objects of Movement for Solution of Negro Problem*

Generally the public is kept misinformed of the truth surrounding new movements of reform. Very seldom, if ever, reformers get the truth told about them and their movements. Because of this natural attitude, the Universal Negro Improvement Association has been greatly handicapped in its work, causing thereby one of the most liberal and helpful human movements of the twentieth century to be held up to ridicule by those who take pride in poking fun at anything not already successfully established.

The white man of America has become the natural leader of the world. He, because of his exalted position, is called upon to help in all human efforts. From nations to individuals the appeal is made to him for aid in all things affecting humanity, so, naturally, there can be no great mass movement or change without first acquainting the leader on whose sympathy and advice the world moves.

It is because of this, and more so because of a desire to be Christian friends with the white race, why I explain the aims and objects of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association is an organization among Negroes that is seeking to improve the condition of the race, with the view of establishing a nation in Africa where Negroes will be given the opportunity to develop by themselves, without creating the hatred and animosity that now exist in countries of the white race through Negroes rivaling them for the highest and best positions in government, politics, society and industry. The organization believes in the rights of all men, yellow, white and black. To us, the white race has a right to the peaceful possession and occupation of countries of its own and in like manner the yellow and black races have their rights. It is only by an honest and liberal consideration of such rights can the world be blessed with the peace that is sought by Christian teachers and leaders.

### **The Spiritual Brotherhood of Man**

The following preamble to the constitution of the organization speaks for itself:

“The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities’ League is a social, friendly, humanitarian, charitable, educational, institutional, constructive, and expansive society, and is founded by persons, desiring to the utmost to work for the general uplift of the Negro peoples of the world. And the members pledge themselves to do all in their power to conserve the rights of their noble race and to respect the rights of all mankind, believing always in the

Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God. The motto of the organization is: One God! One Aim! One Destiny! Therefore, let justice be done to all mankind, realizing that if the strong oppresses the weak confusion and discontent will ever mark the path of man, but with love, faith and charity toward all the reign of peace and plenty will be heralded into the world and the generation of men shall be called Blessed.”

The declared objects of the association are:

“To establish a Universal Confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of pride and love; to reclaim the fallen; to administer to and assist the needy; to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; to assist in the development of Independent Negro Nations and Communities; to establish a central nation for the race; to establish Commissaries or Agencies in the principal countries and cities of the world for the representation of all Negroes; to promote a conscientious Spiritual worship among the native tribes of Africa; to establish Universities, Colleges, Academies and Schools for the racial education and culture of the people; to work for better conditions among Negroes everywhere.”

### Supplying a Long-Felt Want

The organization of the Universal Negro Improvement Association has supplied among Negroes a long-felt want. Hitherto the other Negro movements in America, with the exception of the Tuskegee effort of Booker T. Washington, sought to teach the Negro to aspire to social equality with the whites, meaning thereby the right to intermarry and fraternize in every social way. This has been the source of much trouble and still some Negro organizations continue to preach this dangerous “race destroying doctrine” added to a program of political agitation and aggression. The Universal Negro Improvement Association on the other hand believes in and teaches the pride and purity of race. We believe that the white race should uphold its racial pride and perpetuate itself, and that the black race should do likewise. We believe that there is room enough in the world for the various race groups to grow and develop by themselves without seeking to destroy the Creator’s plan by the constant introduction of mongrel types.

The unfortunate condition of slavery, as imposed upon the Negro, and which caused the mongrel- ization of the race, should not be legalized and continued now to the harm and detriment of both races.

The time has really come to give the Negro a chance to develop himself to a moral-standard-man, and it is for such an opportunity that the Universal Negro Improvement Association seeks in the creation of an African nation for Negroes, where the greatest latitude would be given to work out this racial ideal.

There are hundreds of thousands of colored people in America who desire race amalgamation and miscegenation as a solution of the race problem. These people are, therefore, opposed to the

race pride ideas of black and white; but the thoughtful of both races will naturally ignore the ravings of such persons and honestly work for the solution of a problem that has been forced upon us.

Liberal white America and race loving Negroes are bound to think at this time and thus evolve a program or plan by which there can be a fair and amicable settlement of the question.

We cannot put off the consideration of the matter, for time is pressing on our hands. The educated Negro is making rightful constitutional demands. The great white majority will never grant them, and thus we march on to danger if we do not now stop and adjust the matter. The time is opportune to regulate the relationship between both races. Let the Negro have a country of his own. Help him to return to his

original home, Africa, and there give him the opportunity to climb from the lowest to the highest positions in a state of his own. If not, then the nation will have to hearken to the demand of the aggressive, "social equality" organization, known as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, of which W. E. B. Du Bois is leader, which declares vehemently for social and political equality, viz. [namely]: Negroes and whites in the same hotels, homes, residential districts, public and private places, a Negro as president, members of the Cabinet, Governors of States, Mayors of cities, and leaders of society in the United States. In this agitation, Du Bois is ably supported by the "Chicago Defender," a colored newspaper published in Chicago. This paper advocated Negroes in the Cabinet and Senate. All these, as everybody knows, are the Negroes' constitutional rights, but reason dictates that the masses of the white race will never stand by the ascendancy of an opposite minority group to the favored positions in a government, society and industry that exist by the will of the majority, hence the demand of the Du Bois group of colored leaders will only lead, ultimately, to further disturbances in riots, lynching and mob rule. The only logical solution therefore, is to supply the Negro with opportunities and environments of his own, and there point him to the fullness of his ambition.

#### Negroes Who Seek Social Equality

The Negro who seeks the White House in America could find ample play for his ambition in Africa. The Negro who seeks the office of Secretary of State in America would have a fair chance of demonstrating his diplomacy in Africa. The Negro who seeks a seat in the Senate or of being governor of a State in America, would be provided with a glorious chance for statesmanship in Africa.

The Negro has a claim on American white sympathy that cannot be denied. The Negro has labored for 300 years in contributing to America's greatness. White America will not be unmindful, therefore, of this consideration, but will treat him kindly. Yet it is realized that all

human beings have a limit to their humanity. The humanity of white America, we realize, will seek self-protection and self-preservation, and that is why the thoughtful and reasonable Negro sees no hope in America for satisfying the aggressive program of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, but advances the reasonable plan of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, that of creating in Africa a nation and government for the Negro race.

This plan when properly undertaken and prosecuted will solve the race problem in America in fifty years. Africa affords a wonderful opportunity at the present time for colonization by the Negroes of the Western world. There is Liberia, already established as an independent Negro government. Let white America assist Afro-Americans to go there and help develop the country. Then, there are the late [recent] German colonies; let white sentiment force England and France to turn them over to the American and West Indian Negroes who fought for the Allies in the World's War. Then, France, England and Belgium owe America billions of dollars which they claim they cannot afford to repay immediately. Let them compromise by turning over Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast on the West Coast of Africa and add them to Liberia and help make Liberia a state worthy of her history.

The Negroes of Africa and America are one in blood. They have sprung from the same common stock. They can work and live together and thus make their own racial contribution to the world.

Will deep thinking and liberal white America help? It is a considerate duty. It is true that a large number of self-seeking colored agitators and so-called political leaders, who hanker after social equality and fight for the impossible in politics and governments, will rave, but remember that the slave-holder raved, but the North said, "Let the slaves go free"; the British Parliament raved when the Colonists said, "We want a free and American nation"; the Monarchists of France raved when the people declared for a more liberal form of government.

The masses of Negroes think differently from the self-appointed leaders of the race. The majority of Negro leaders are selfish, self-appointed and not elected by the people. The people desire freedom in a land of their own, while the colored politician desires office and social equality for himself in America, and that is why we are asking white America to help the masses to realize their objective.

Ninety odd years ago a thoughtful, liberty-loving white statesman of America made the following speech in Congress

Claims of Africa

Extract from a Speech Delivered in Congress by Mr. Burges, of Rhode Island, May 10, 183

“1. During the last century, a mighty revolution of mind has been made in the civilized world. Its effects are gradually disclosing themselves, and gradually improving the condition of the human race. The eyes of all nations are turned on these United States, for here that great movement was commenced. Africa, like a bereaved mother, holds out her hands to America, and implores you to send back her exiled children. Does not Africa merit much at the hands of other nations? Almost 4,000 years ago, she, from the then rich store house of her genius and labor, sent out to them science, and arts and letters, laws and civilization

“2. Wars and revolutions have exhausted this ancient abundance, and spread ignorance and barbarism over her regions; and the cupidity of other nations has multiplied and aggravated these evils. The ways of Providence cannot always be seen by man. When the Almighty comes out of His cloud, light fills the universe. What a mystery, when the youthful patriarch, lost to his father, was sold into slavery. What a display of wisdom and benignity, when we are permitted to see ‘all the families of the earth blessed’ by the event of their restoration.

“3. Shall we question the great arrangements of divine wisdom; or hold parlanche with the Power who has made whole countries the enduring monuments of His avenging justice? Let these people go! They are citizens of another country, send them home. Send them home instructed and civilized, and imbued with the pure principles of Christianity; so may they instruct and civilize their native land, and spread over its wide regions the glad tidings of human redemption. Secure to your country, to your age, to yourselves, the glory of paying back to Africa the mighty arrears of nations. Add another New World to the civilized regions of the globe

“Do you say your State will be depopulated; your fields left without culture. In countries equal in fertility, and under the same laws, you cannot create a void in population; as well might you make a vacuum in the atmosphere. Better, more efficient labor will come to your aid. Free men, observant of the same laws, cherishing the same union, worshipping the same God with you, will place themselves by your side. This change of moral and physical condition in our population will follow the removal of that pernicious cause, now so productive of alarming difference in political opinions; jealousies, incident to our present state, shall give place to a glorious emulation of patriotism; and, O my country! If God so please, thou shalt be united, and prosperous, and perpetual.”

### Help the Negro to Return Home

Surely the time has come for the Negro to look homeward. He has won civilization and Christianity at the price of slavery. The Negro who is thoughtful and serviceable, feels that God intended him to give to his brothers still in darkness, the light of his civilization. The very light element of Negroes do not want to go back to Africa. They believe that in time, through miscegenation, the American race will be of their type. This is a fallacy and in that respect the

agitation of the mulatto leader, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is dangerous to both races.

The off-colored people, being children of the Negro race, should combine to re-establish the purity of their own race, rather than seek to perpetuate the abuse of both races. That is to say, all elements of the Negro race should be encouraged to get together and form themselves into a healthy whole, rather than seeking to lose their identities through miscegenation and social intercourse with the white race. These statements are made because we desire an honest solution of the problem and no flattery or deception will bring that about.

Let the white and Negro people settle down in all seriousness and in true sympathy and solve the problem. When that is done, a new day of peace and good will be ushered in.

The natural opponents among Negroes to a program of this kind are that lazy element who believe always in following the line of least resistance, being of themselves void of initiative and the pioneering spirit to do for themselves. The professional Negro leader and the class who are agitating for social equality feel that it is too much work for them to settle down and build up a civilization of their own. They feel it is easier to seize on to the civilization of the white man and under the guise of constitutional rights fight for those things that the white man has created. Natural reason suggests that the white man will not yield them, hence such leaders are but fools for their pains. Teach the Negro to do for himself, help him the best way possible in that direction; but to encourage him into the belief that he is going to possess himself of the things that others have fought and died for, is to build up in his mind false hopes never to be realized. As for instance, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, who has been educated by white charity, is a brilliant scholar, but he is not a hard worker. He prefers to use his higher intellectual abilities to fight for a place among white men in society, industry and in politics, rather than use that ability to work and create for his own race that which the race could be able to take credit for. He would not think of repeating for his race the work of the Pilgrim Fathers or the Colonists who laid the foundation of America, but he prefers to fight and agitate for the privilege of dancing with a white lady at a ball at the Biltmore or at the Astoria hotels in New York. That kind of leadership will destroy the Negro in America and against which the Universal Negro Improvement Association is fighting.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association is composed of all shades of Negroes \_\_ blacks, mulattoes and yellows, who are all working honestly for the purification of their race, and for a sympathetic adjustment of the race problem.

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