

Prologue on Garvey

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On 10th November 1964, a British Overseas Airways plane from London carrying a casket draped in a Red, Green and Black flag, landed at the airport in Kingston: the casket was accompanied by Mr and Mrs Thomas Watson Harvey and Mrs J. Alfred Ferguson, all African-Americans and respectively the President-General and his wife and the special representative of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). In the casket was the body of Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Association, who died in London in 1940 and whose remains were to be in Jamaica on the 45th anniversary of Armistice Day at a permanent memorial site, after state ceremonies proclaiming him as the first National Hero of Jamaica. At the airport to meet this small entourage and take delivery of the casket with the body were Mrs. Amy Jacques Garvey, Garvey's second wife and her two sons, Marcus Garvey Jr and Julius Winston Garvey and their families and some members of the UNIA of Jamaica. There was also a representative of the Government of Jamaica, in the person of Edward Seaga, Minister of Development and Culture, significantly a Jamaican of non-African descent.

On the morning of the following day, 11th November 1964, the casket was taken on board a launch of the Jamaican Defence Force of Victoria Pier and then, accompanied by thousands of people in a procession led by Sir Alexander Bustamante, it was taken to the Roman Catholic Cathedral on North Street, Kingston and there the body laid in state. Thousands of people of all races and colours and from every walk of life, and from every clime filed past and paid their last respects to departed merit. The body was then taken by motorcade to the National Heroes Park (then known as King George VI Memorial Park) where the ceremonies proclaiming him National Hero were held and where he was finally laid to rest. Several questions must have suggested themselves to the many Pan-Africanists and others who witnessed or followed the events in Kingston, Jamaica on those two memorable days.

Why did it take so long after the independence of Jamaica for the body of Garvey to be moved from London to Jamaica? Was he named the first National Hero by the Bustamante Government in order to pre-empt the newly formed Organization of African Unity proclaiming him the first Hero of Africa and having his body buried in Addis Ababa, the headquarters of the organization, to the embarrassment of Emperor Haile Selassie whom he had ruthlessly condemned in his lifetime? An interesting question which might not have occurred to many of those present, was the role of the British Labour Government under Harold Wilson in the decision to repatriate the body to Jamaica. The Atlee Labour Government had persistently refused to sanction such an act and the Conservative Governments of Churchill, Eden and Macmillan that followed had similarly refused to allow such repatriation on the ground that such an act would arouse political unrest in Jamaica. The campaign by Nkrumah for the establishment of a Union Government for Africa in furtherance of Garveyism was then at its height and it was from Southern Rhodesia that the Wilson Administration sought to sabotage it. It was not by coincidence that the infamous UDI was proclaimed exactly a year after Marcus Garvey had been claimed as the first National Hero of Jamaica. The claim by Garvey to represent Africa had not been recognized even by his fellow Jamaicans; the leadership of a Union Government of Africa by Nkrumah or any other Pan Africanist was not likely to be conceded.

Marcus Garvey, a person of pure African descent from Jamaica, British West Indies, started and inspired the greatest ever 'Back to Africa' campaign among the Africans in the Diaspora; he was fiercely condemned and robustly opposed by Du Bois, a person of mixed African and Caucasian blood from the United States of America. Garvey died in war time London, at the age of 53 in June, 1940 with no African leader to present him reverence, and was denied the benefit of a decent burial for a quarter of a century. He never set foot on African soil and like Moses never led any of his people to their God-given land of Africa. Du Bois died at the age of 95 in Ghana, the first British colony in Africa to become independent; and this independence was attained under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, the first African leader to acknowledge his indebtedness to Marcus Garvey. The mortal remains of Du Bois rest in a marble tomb at the Du Bois Centre, a cultural research and study facility specially set up in Ghana in honour of his memory as a Pan-Africanist guru. Every secondary school student in Africa has heard of the Pan African Congresses and associated them with Du Bois; not one in ten has ever heard of the series of conventions of all African Negroes of the World organized by Marcus Garvey, not even after Nkrumah and George Padmore had modelled on them the epoch making all African Peoples Conference held in Ghana in 1958. There is nothing fortuitous or accidental about this ironic twist of fate.

Given the special historical background of slavery and forcible separation from Africa and motherland, any and every voluntary 'Back to Africa' movement from the diaspora is likely to involve a claim however disguised or vague that Africa is home of the Africans or, put in the form of a political slogan, 'that Africa is for Africans home and abroad'. While in America, Garvey made this claim forcibly and unequivocally and conjoined it with a robust anti-colonial demand for the end of European or white rule in Africa. The European imperial powers in Africa felt threatened by the activities of Garvey and his supporters which were spreading discontent with white supremacy among the African populations in their colonies in Africa and the West Indies. Du Bois on the other hand made no claim to Africa on behalf of those abroad and only objected to capitalism, but not to European or white settler rule as such, in Africa. Logically therefore, there should have been no room for conflict between the two; Garvey claimed Africa for Africans; Du Bois did not; at least not during the lifetime of Garvey.

The politics of Pan-Africanism, like all political discourse has never been logical; the involvement of the issues of race and colour and the relations between the white and coloured people of the world, emotionally a highly charged issue had tended to make Pan-Africanism turn on the highly divisive question of who may be considered an African, rather than when it ought properly to be concerned with the relations between the several African communities scattered around the world. There are Pan-Africanists who are against miscegenation, there are many who keep an open mind on the subject, and there are those who are all for the practice. There are many persons of so-called mixed blood, particularly in the Caribbean and South Africa who feel that because of the lighter colour they are superior to Africans but there are even more of such persons, particularly in the United States of America and the West of Africa who consider themselves not only as of African descent, but as Africans to the bone. Where and when people of mixed blood get involved in Pan-African disputation they always run the risk that their actions would be misconstrued by other Africans or persons of African descent, particularly these disputants come from countries, areas or communities where the social and cultural madness of lighter shade superiority is endemic.

Garvey himself felt that the misfortune that befell him in America had been contrived and was 'the result of a frame up among my political and business enemies'. Extraordinarily, in identifying these 'political and business enemies' Garvey who had lived in Harlem for nearly a decade, settled on people of mixed blood, who were themselves considered as Negroes in America. Garvey claimed 'Being Black' I have committed an unpardonable offence against the very light coloured Negroes in America and the West Indies by making myself famous as a Negro Leader of millions.

He claimed that the UNIA had 'succeeded in organizing the African Negroes all over the world' and they were looking 'forward to a renaissance' that would 'create a new people and bring about the restoration of Ethiopia's ancient glory'.

The foregoing appeared in an article he wrote when he was in prison awaiting the hearing of his appeal against his conviction for mail fraud. Sadly, in the agony of the moment, he unburdened himself of certain ill-considered but apparently long held misconceptions about who had plotted his downfall. In the confines of his prison cell, the early and persistent opposition against him by Du Bois clouded his vision and distorted his judgement; and coloured persons or persons of mixed blood appeared to him as his mortal enemies. This outburst was unfortunate because it was uncalled for and baseless, it did not help him in his appeal or advance in any way his prospects for an early release from prison. It is true that many persons of mixed blood participated in the 'hunt for Garvey' campaign, many of them allowing themselves to be used as tools for mean and foul acts and deeds against his African programme. However many did so because they were provoked and felt themselves personally insulted by Garvey's blunt and unsavoury remarks on miscegenation and interracial hanky panky; the charge that they did so because of fanciful notions of racial superiority does not sound fair or reasonable, and it is unacceptable. It does not show a proper appreciation of the immense contribution to the cause of African liberation by literally thousands of people of mixed blood in America, Europe, West Indies, Africa and indeed in all parts of the world and through the ages. The damage that this unfortunate outburst has done to the image and role of Garvey in the politics of Pan-Africanism has been immense and it might very well have been at the bottom of the sour relations between Garvey and Haile Selassie that emerged during the Italian aggression against Ethiopia and the subsequent difficulties experienced by the founding fathers of the OAU in bringing together in one organization the North African States with light skinned populations and the states south of the Sahara with their dark skinned populations. The position might have been different and the attitude of Garvey less surprising if he had been operating from South Africa or the West Indies where persons of mixed African and Caucasian do not usually consider themselves Africans. In both these countries people of mixed blood are classified either legally or socially as a distinct racial group and referred to as coloureds and term 'African and Negro' are not normally applied to them. In the United States of America, however, unless a person could pass as white he was considered black; and a person could only pass as white if he looked white and was not known or suspected to have any African or non-white ancestors or relatives. In America when the use of a racial term or word became fashionable it was applied by the whites to all non-whites irrespective of colour shades. Thus the term African, Negro, Afro-American, Blacks,

African-American have sometimes even been applied to persons who in other countries might have been considered white or Caucasian.

The truth is that those recruited to hunt down Garvey could have been full-blooded Africans, and indeed quite a few were: that a disproportionate number were of mixed blood only goes to demonstrate the sophistication of those who mastermind the hunt. To pull down an African Unity leader by the use of coloured agents is to indicate from the beginning the intended line of fission along which his support should be splintered and such emotive signals sent to the unreasoning section of the community would most likely set the Africans against the coloureds; divide and rule is the practiced modus operandi of those who rule others. Garvey, with his immensely profound political savvy was no doubt acquainted with the imperial tactics, yet he directed the main thrust of his attack on those who would have been at best only manipulated agents and not the principal masterminds of his downfall.

The bottom line question is what possible objections could any group of coloureds or for that matter any group of Africans in the diaspora have against some of their number voluntarily electing to return to Africa. The same question can be put differently thus 'what possible gains or benefits may accrue or what good can come to any person of African descent from claiming the right to return to mother Africa?' The answer by those who oppose such schemes is straightforward: it is to prevent African-Americans jumping from the frying pan into the fire, and misleading other innocent African-Americans from following suit. African-Americans, according to this view have nothing to gain from Africa and everything to lose by leaving America to settle in the jungles of Africa where 'folk eat folk' and 'monkies jump from tree to tree'. It seems that the number of African-Americans sharing this ridiculous view of Africa has increased since the advent of Martin Luther King Jr. With the increased racial integration in American society coinciding with the period of decolonization, which has in turn exposed the real stark poverty in much of Africa colonial and post-colonial hostility generated by ethnic divisions. It is nevertheless difficult for committed Pan-Africanists to accept that any person of African descent could without any improper pressure, show active hostility to those claiming their African heritage. Some Pan-Africanists might suggest that the expectations or hopes of some reward either in cash or patronage from those who control Africa or who have interests there that need protection from African-American competition might drive some people even of African descent to oppose such ventures. Yet since emancipation was proclaimed by Lincoln in 1863, anytime any person of African descent makes any effort to organize a 'Back to Africa' movement, or to interest any group of Africans in the Diaspora in returning voluntarily to Africa, opposition within America has come principally from those of their own kind who have no visible reason to object. It is possible that these obstructions were suborned from

Imperial Europe though no evidence has even been unearthed or any accusation suggest to that effect. Down the ages if any African-American is recruited to the service of European imperial interests in Africa, he is catapulted by the white controlled media to the leadership of the African-American community without any African-American being the wiser. At the end of the day, after destroying the movement and defeating its objectives, these obstructionists have absolutely nothing to show for their subversive efforts; both the organizers and their opponents subsequently sink back to their traditional role of providing cheap labour to sustain the prosperity of the white communities and the opportunity to transfer some technology to Africa and gain some dignity as a people in the process is made to go by default.

On their part the organizers and promoters of these schemes for 'back to Africa' believe that White Americans do not want any African or people of African descent in the United States, and would prefer a lily-white America: and invariably solicit the support of these underrate racists thereby playing into the hands of those who desire the failure of their movements.

The correct Pan-Africanist explanation of the phenomena of some people of African descent in America opposing programmes for their voluntary repatriation to Africa might be found in their traditional role of providing cheap labour for American white society. In both America and the West Indies, Africans were imported as slaves to provide cheap labour for the white settlers and planters who became the slave owners. In America, it was these slave owners who as the majority gained independence from Europe, and framed the country's constitution in which they incorporated what they claimed as their entitlement to cheap African labour, at that time obtained in the form of slave labour. The vice was hidden behind the façade of a struggle for democracy which was modelled after the constitution of the Greeks, where a people's democracy with an all-white electorate was super-imposed on a solid identifiable and unchanging base of non-voting African slaves. Where a Congress of slave owners proclaims that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their creator with certain inherent rights, they should not be presumed to include their slaves in the endowment, especially where they had been accustomed to treat them as mere chattels.

In the West Indies people of African descent were the majority of the population in almost every island, though it was with extreme difficulty that they eventually gained control of the land and became independent of imperial European control. It is also true that in the West Indies people of African descent occupy the lowest strata of society, but unlike America, they also form the government or exercise the power of government in the several and scattered islands of the Caribbean. The trust that has escaped most Pan-Africanists down the years, is that the white community of

America has never abandoned or given up this constitutional guarantee of cheap African labour which alone provides the white community the abundant leisure enabling them to carry out the training and research that supports their world leadership in every field. These Pan-Africanists forget that Lincoln fought the Civil War to preserve this very Constitution, and purposely to weaken the Confederate States; he used the denial of this privilege intact. The assassination of Lincoln within less than a week after the surrender of Lee made it easy for those who did not want the total loss of this privilege but rather its restoration in a new form to all white Americans to attribute to Lincoln all the permutations and combinations of the various options except the only one which would certainly have put an end to the enjoyment of the privilege for all time, namely the repatriation of the African-American to Africa. They turned Lincoln into a well-protected myth for the promoters of the spurious democratic credentials of America and the deception of the former African-American slaves who remained deprived politically economically and socially. The so-called 'Reconstruction' and its reversal was one gigantic charade to enable to restoration of the privilege albeit in an altered form to those whites who were deprived of it during the Civil War.

The Lincoln fetish taught the African-Americans the wrong reason why they were tolerated in America: they were wrongly taught that because chattel slavery had been abolished they had become free citizens; it concealed from them the basic truth that they were indispensable as the reservoir of cheap labour and that white America would go to any length to serve and support African-American quislings to sabotage any 'Back to Africa' movement. The European imperial powers that ruled Africa were content to keep African-Americans and the technologies and other progressive knowledge that they undoubtedly possessed out of Africa. These European imperialists knew that the secret to their power to rule Africa was not so much their possession of the maxim gun but the mystique surrounding themselves and their lifestyles which the Africans in their ignorance could not fathom. They knew that all African-Americans and their parents had lived with white men in their time and did not consider them as gods. A successful 'Back to Africa' by African-Americans would surely as the day follows the night make Africa ungovernable by or from Europe. It only stands to reason that the European imperial powers took some steps to thwart the plans of Garvey. It was clearly in this interest and to their benefit that Garvey should be silenced by incarceration for a period to allow the destruction of the Movement. The circulation of *The Negro World*, the Garvey paper, was banned and proscribed by the European imperial powers throughout half the globe yet these powers were careful not to provide the American public with any indication that they were operating within America against an American registered Association albeit African or Negro organized. Now Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and other

European nations with colonies inhabited by African subjects, all, like America, held themselves out to be resolutely opposed to the spread of socialist Marxist dogma. The Socialist and Communist parties in America on their part held themselves out to be resolutely against colonialism and imperialism, which Lenin had proclaimed to be the highest stage of capitalism. Africa-Americans could not in the circumstances have imagined that the European nations could recruit the socialist or communist parties in America on their side to fight any 'Back to Africa' movement among Africans in the Diaspora.

He regarded the black communists or socialists who came out against his movement as misguided. Invariably confession as to the proper racial nomenclature has arisen within the non-white community itself; some resent the name African, others object to the word Negro; some would prefer a reference other than 'black'. The terms 'Afro-American and African-American' seem to have generated less heat because each recognizes the Americanness of the non-whites.

Undoubtedly the most disliked racial term among the American non-white population is the word 'Negro' because of its prerogative allied term 'Nigger' which every white child was taught to use in taunting, and every compiler of an English dictionary included as a proper description of persons of African descent. In the West Indies, especially in Jamaica, it was not thought wise to teach white children to taunt those of African descent who were the overwhelming majority of the population. Moreover the term 'Negro' was not usually applied to people of mixed blood; resentment at the use of the term Negro was not as intense and as widespread as in America. The choice of the word 'Negro' for his organization in Jamaica might not have provoked too much resentment but Garvey should have known that its use in America was bound to attract negative and unfavourable response from some leaders of African descent who preferred other terms for their organization. Du Bois chose 'coloured' for his National Association and Cyril Briggs chose 'African' for his Blood Brotherhood, both were of mixed blood and their respective organizations were early opponents of the Garvey movement.

With the advent of the electronic media it takes the form of constant organized mass media campaigns of ridicule of the African continent and its people, to kill the urge in Africans in the diaspora to be associated with the place. To be sure there always would be a substantial number of white Americans and even Europeans who would support a 'Back to Africa' movement not because they are in sympathy with the aspirations of Africans in the diaspora but solely because they want to keep America white. Their fear however is that the American culture of risk-taking which is essential for capitalism, and indeed for every type of development, would be lost without the buffer of African cheap labour which prevents their living standards from

ever hitting rock bottom, and protects them from the consequences of bold economic risk.

The independence attained by several African colonies in the post-war years has not made any difference to the prospects of economic progress. Each of these former colonies entered independence with a couple or more European controlled multinational corporations occupying a dominant position in its economy and wielding an influence on the government not unlike that of Firestone over the Liberian Government at the time. It is not likely that any group of Africans from the diaspora, however determined to come back to Africa to settle and help develop the motherland, would have access to surplus finance or be in a position to compete in this regard with these European multinationals. The IMF and the World Bank have been of no assistance whatsoever to African development. The Garvey strategy remains the only option open to Pan-Africanists.

So long as the global recognition of Africa as the home of Africans and people of African descent remains the central tenet of Pan-Africanism, the story of Marcus Garvey will be relevant to the conduct of race relations and world affairs. The rate of progress in this century of all Africans, both on the African continent and in the diaspora has been in direct proportion to the degree of control they have gained over this home: it is this control that determines the nature of the relations between the so-called white races and the African races in the 20th century and is bound to continue to do so in the new millennium.

For close to a century, the Pan-Africanist movement has been mesmerized by the clever focusing by Du Bois on the random statement from the first Pan African Congress in London in 1900 that 'the problem of the 20th century will be that of the colour line.' Enormous human and material resources that should have gone into wresting control of their home from European imperialists were expended and largely wasted in quixotic battles to obliterate the colour line. The stark truth is that even at this late closing date in the century, the colour line still exists, though not constantly visible everywhere as at the beginning of the century. The partial eclipse of the colour line everywhere is due to the control gained by Africans over Africa and other way round. The obliteration of portions or parts of the colour line has never preceded any control over the African continent gained by any African.

The political independence and political control gained over Africa by Africans has tended to blur the colour line everywhere; it will be completely obliterated and should disappear the moment Africans gain economic control of the continent. This much was foreseen by Garvey who also foretold that Europe would exploit but never develop Africa. The adoption of the policy of non-alignment by independent Africa has driven former colonies in Africa back into the grip of their former European masters who have substituted neo-colonialism as the new oppressive imposition for

exploitation. Garvey claimed that only the collaboration between the people of African descent in the diaspora and the Africans on the continent in joint ventures could develop Africa. His vision of collaboration was a scenario with the Africans in the diaspora initially contributing funds even in dribs and drabs and technical know-how through African-American and West Indian allies and the Africans on the continent initially providing the land, the natural resources and the labour. This was the pattern he adopted in his plans for the development of Liberia which were sabotaged. The nearly three quarters of a century that has elapsed since that tragic event has seen Africa taken through all manner of development strategies devised by wicked but clever jokers with the result that the economic gap between Africa and the rest of the world has widened. In the circumstances the experience of Garvey would be indispensable to those Africans who would lead the quest for economic independence of Africans and the meaningful and sustainable development of Africa.

The reasoning of Garvey on the relative merits of the terms 'Negro' and 'African' seems unGarveyite and somewhat lacking in foresight. He claimed that the term 'African' is as healthy and original as nature can make it, but unfortunately the white man has invaded the land of the Africans and has within recent years controlled it as to assume for himself the name and title of 'African' – (the Afrikaner) which brings up the question as to who is the African. The proud unchanging African is the black man that everybody knows. He is native of Africa, he is the hero of the ages, but according to the military and political trend of the domination, we have all kinds of Africans endeavouring to force their recognition upon the real African who has not really thought out the seriousness of this change. The African is the man of Africa. He is black in skin. His ethnic origin can never change, but those conditions have so enlarged themselves through which scores of millions of his race have been forcibly removed from Africa to other portions of the world, that a more general name has been given and accepted as a description that includes both the African and his descendants abroad; and that form is 'Negro'. The term 'Negro' is descriptive of the race. It is a strong word and it singles out the black man. Whenever anyone uses the term 'Negro' others know exactly what or who he means.

To use the term 'African' today is still to leave an impression of doubt as to who you mean, whether it is the South African, the West African or a member from any other section of the Continent who may or may not be black. To use the term 'Negro' universally marks the man without any difficulties. This is a term that is adopted by progressive movements because it is healthy, it is strong and it explains itself.

Hitherto not much African attention has been paid to this serious political misjudgement; no direct harm befell Garvey or his movement though his enemies

presented it as another evidence of what they claimed as the reality of the inner contempt that Garvey had for the African lineage.

In the struggle for leadership within the Pan-Africanist Pantheon, organizations like the NAACP showed all the cunning of their Jewish mentors, they were more subtle; and none of them used the term 'Negro'. Du Bois was specifically asked to 'call a Pan Africanist Congress' in 1919 and Cyril Briggs named his organization the African Blood Brotherhood. This choice was to portray African concern and was intended to facilitate the introduction of ridiculous theories to confuse the central claim in Pan-Africanism of 'Africa for Africans at home and abroad'.

With full knowledge of the vast and fundamental difference between the traditional institution of slavery practiced throughout the old world, and the satanic chattel slavery that was established in the new world, they have endeavoured strenuously to persuade some African bootlickers and time servers that Africans in Africa without any means of knowing what was taking place on or across the Atlantic were guilty nevertheless of causing their brethren to be treated as chattel slaves in the New World. This nonsense was obviously formulated to promote friction between Africans in the Diaspora and those on the continent, and not much was heard of it during the lifetime of Garvey. It became fashionable during the period of decolonization and ensured non-alignment between Africans from the continent and those in America at a time when non-alignment was insisted on between newly independent African states and the overwhelmingly white controlled establishments of America.