Marcus Garvey & the Universal Negro Improvement Association

Context: The environment of intolerance and a new KKK prompted a drastic response by MARCUS GARVEY. Garvey believed that equality for African Americans could never be achieved in the United States. He formed the UNITED NEGRO IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION to promote economic cooperation among black businesses. Garvey made fiery speeches and created uniforms and flags to symbolize a new black pride. The ultimate goal for blacks across the world should be to return to the "Motherland." Only in Africa could a strong nation dedicated to promotion of black culture flourish. After amassing about 80,000 followers, Garvey founded the Black Star Steamship Company to begin transporting African Americans "BACK TO AFRICA." Closely watched by government officials, Garvey was convicted of mail fraud in 1923 and deported to Jamaica.

Directions: Independently read the document assigned to your group. Work with your team to address the guiding questions. As a class, we will convene and have a Socratic discussion on why Marcus Garvey was considered a controversial figure during the 1920s.

Timeline: Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Garvey founds UNIA in Jamaica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Garvey leaves Jamaica for New York City.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Thirteen members join to form the New York branch of the UNIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Garvey starts Negro World newspaper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Garvey starts Black Star Line shipping company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FBI instructs New York and Chicago offices to begin monitoring Garvey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black Star Line signs contract to purchase its first ship, which will be re-named “Frederick Douglass.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>The U.N.I.A. holds its first International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World at Madison Square Garden and schedules a massive parade in Harlem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNIA adopts and signs a Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World, adopts a &quot;nation&quot; flag with the colors of the Red, Black, and Green, and elects officials for its government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garvey himself is elected Provisional President of Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>A 16-man UNIA delegation leaves for Liberia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Garvey is arrested for mail fraud (he allegedly sent out brochures advertising a Black Star Line ship that he had not yet purchased).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Black Star Line is dissolved due to financial failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garvey meets with the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, resulting in a &quot;Garvey Must Go&quot; campaign headed by black leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Second UNIA delegation heads to Liberia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garvey arrested and sentenced to 5 years in prison for mail fraud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>President Calvin Coolidge commutes Garvey’s sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garvey deported to Jamaica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Garvey dies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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

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

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

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

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

Guiding Questions:

1. What type of document is this? When was it written?
2. What do you know about the author? Can you make any predictions about what he might say about Marcus Garvey?
3. According to Malcolm X, why was Garvey “controversial?”
4. Why did the pictures of Garvey make such an impression on Malcolm X?
Harry M. Daugherty, U.S. Attorney-General Jan 15, 1923

Department of Justice, Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

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

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

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

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

The signers of this letter are:

Robert S. Abbott, Chicago, editor and publisher of the "Chicago Defender."

Dr. Julia P. Coleman, New York City, president of the Hair-Vim Chemical Co.

William Pickens, New York City, field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

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

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

Guiding Questions:

1. Who wrote this letter and who was it sent to? What types of jobs did the authors have?
2. When was this letter sent? Look at the timeline. Can you make any predictions about what the letter might say?
3. How does this document describe the UNIA? Provide a quote to support your answer.
4. Why do the authors think Garvey and the UNIA are dangerous?
Guiding Questions:

1. **What type of document is this? When was it written?**
2. **Why does Hoover think Garvey is dangerous? Provide a quote to support your answer.**
3. **What is “unfortunate,” according to Hoover?**

---

Document D: Marcus Garvey’s Autobiography (Modified)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Guiding Questions:**

1. What type of document is this? When was it written? What do you predict Garvey will say in this document?
2. According to Garvey, what happened to the UNIA? Provide a quote to support your answer.
3. How does he explain why other African Americans turned against him?
4. Why does he oppose the ideas of “certain black leaders?”