

MARCUS GARVEY



Message to the People The Course of African Philosophy

Edited by
Tony Martin

Foreword by
Hon. Charles L. James
President-General, Universal Negro Improvement Association

The New Marcus Garvey Library, No. 7

Message to the People: The Course of African Philosophy

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In September 1937, three years before his death, Marcus Garvey assembled a small group of his most trusted organizers. For almost a quarter of a century he had led the Universal Negro Improvement Association, at its peak the largest international mass movement in the history of African peoples. Now he wanted to pass on the lessons he had learned, to the group best suited to carry the struggle forward. For one month he instructed this elite student body, twelve hours a day, seven days a week. The sessions were secret and much of the instruction was not written down. The students did, however receive written copies of twenty-two lessons, which Garvey called the Course of African Philosophy. This fascinating distillation of a great leader's experience is published here for the first time.

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Theophilus (Theo) says

Garvey pulls no punches in his characterizations of the "Negro" populace of his time, in his immediate area. He misses the larger scope of a developing black consciousness in the early twentieth century. The recent immigrant Garvey, looks around him and sees the need for an immediate change in the mindset of the black street hustlers and those mired in despair. He sets out to formulate a personal development plan for his followers to spread throughout the masses. His plan sounds similar to the turn-of-the-century thoughts of W.E.B. Dubois and his "talented tenth" theory, but without the tact and writing skill of Dubois. At times Garvey sounds downright insulting. This may have been his way of emphasizing the urgency he felt for the need for change. In isolation, many of his comments on the African Americans in his world seem apropos today. He points out the need to move away from black English to communicate with the majority population, particularly when a position of employment is at stake. He sees a dire need for blacks to develop a reading habit. A fairly easy read, worth the time to read if you can find it. Try specialty stores that deal in African American culture and history.

Qa'id says

As the Charles L. James notes in the foreword, some of Garvey's notions seem stuck in early 20th century moral assumptions (in particular as they relate to interpersonal relationships). However, the substance of Garvey's philosophy is as strong as ever and hinged upon his insistence on the education and self-determination of Black Americans. Added bonus: this volume is small in size; great for tucking into a pocket or throwing in your bag for some Garvey on the Go.

Bernard President says

A must read. Put aside all the racist black/white stuff, its a great book to guide anyone on their life's journey. Great motivator to help you get where you want in life and tid bits to help you avoid trouble. There's advice on education, character, God, etc. And as we're on the subject of books according to Marcus Garvey in this book, pg. 10; "Never lend anybody the book that you want. You will never get it back. Never allow anybody to go to your bookshelf in your absence, because the very book that you may want most may be taken from the shelf and you may never be able to get one of that kin again."

Amber Renee says

Astounding!

The plan itself is constructed as precise as can be and handed down on a plate in book form :)

"The negro should indulge in every kind of business that is necessary to earn profit; because it is by profit

that he will be able to obtain life's necessities for himself and his race."

Michael Strode says

Organized in 1937 near the end of his physical and organizational life, The School of African Philosophy is perhaps the most complete distillation we have available of the lessons Marcus Garvey was able to draw from his 23 years of leadership over the U.N.I.A. and A.C.L. More than any other single manuscript in the New Marcus Garvey Library, it displays many of the theistic, mystic, agnostic, paternalistic and politically conservative views underpinning the vision Garvey developed within the organization. Traits which would seem to lay the groundwork for the Nation of Islam following his exile and death thereafter.

Garvey was a man shaped by the forces of his American experience. The lectures to the School of African Philosophy display him to be a remarkably deliberate and didactic organizer who was both pragmatic and realistic about the precarious circumstances of black people throughout the world. He therefore sought not so much to analyze the problem as we find with his contemporary W.E.B. DuBois, but to step immediately into correcting the condition of his people. The glaring lack of any strident racial critique of his era elucidates Garvey as the post-reconstruction heir apparent to a bootstrap Black Nationalism which is palatable for white people for it means that eventually all black people will pick up their buckets and go home.

One can see then why Booker T. Washington grew fond of Garvey prior to his death going so far as to extend him an invitation to the Tuskegee Institute in order that Garvey might gain ideas for establishing a similar school within Jamaica. By the same line of reasoning, the adoption of such a strategy also shows why he was the bane of the Black leftist and progressive community of the New Negro Renaissance, most notably "The Messenger" editorial staff including A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen whom felt no need to leave America seeking justice and equality when their ancestors had paid in blood for the right to live here.

While the initial idea of a school never materialized, the time spent organizing and preaching in the streets of Harlem would soon result in the formation of an even more monumental institution. The students in the School of African Philosophy were to use their special instruction in working as state commissioners who would build unity within the black population that the U.N.I.A. might have the massive support necessary to accomplish its goal of repatriation.

The teaching style of Garvey is largely autocratic in nature demanding very specific steps from students in the process of organizing U.N.I.A. affairs including instructions on propagating belief in an African Christ, code switching when engaging black versus white audiences and dismissing Communism as an unfit organizational tool for black people.

Occasionally in his joviality and loose speech with students of the School, Garvey is given to veering off into dishonest, contradictory or patriarchal tangents. In one scenario, he speaks of the danger of dating two people within the same organization and the need to ensure that they live apart in different communities. In another instance, he warns his students to never be immoral, but if they must be immoral in accordance with their nature, they should hide this immorality from those they are leading. In all instruction, whether moral or secular, Garvey's highest goal is always that whatever action is taken benefits the U.N.I.A. and that they should divorce themselves from all actions which might harm the image of the organization or black people.

While Garvey is often classified in the mind of the Pan-African and Black Nationalist paradigm as a radical, the chapter on "The Social System" and later in the "History of the U.N.I.A." subsection "Dealing With

Divisions" display him to be largely conservative in his political interaction. This was a period of heated Communist and Progressive intensity where race riots were lighting up cities all over the country. Garvey advises his students "You should help the police to maintain order because if the community loses its peace, you will have riots and probably bloodshed." This makes the previous comparison between the U.N.I.A. and the Nation of Islam even more relevant when we consider Malcolm's struggle with the organization's policy of disengagement where it concerned local politics and police brutality that did not directly concern a Muslim cause or victim.

Overall, the text provides a critical internal portrait of the intellectual complexity of Garvey which might lead him to engage with such strange bedfellows as Senator Theodore Bilbo on the racist repatriation language of the Greater Liberia Act of 1939 or the Ku Klux Klan conference in 1922 where he gave them praise for their "honesty and fair play". While we might deem these actions to have been taken in error from our position of hindsight, he did sincerely believe in the righteousness of his final outcome. It now becomes incumbent upon us to use a fresh analysis of the past while placing our own goals squarely in mind and incorporate those tactics which work and are still necessary into our future processes while rejecting out of hand those which now prove ineffective.

Sevens says

this book explains about about MARCUS GARVEYS child hood hardships and his principles that can be used UNIVERSALLY even after his death, a self taught GENIUS .

Mark Jones says

Great Life lessons and lessons on how to become a true leader of yourself and others.

Gabriel says

This was a doozy. Garvey starts off with dollar store philosophy on how reading books are good for the soul, one should aspire to read more books (but only the thought provoking ones) and that knowing your enemy is half the battle. It delves into the importance of the bible, faith in God and in yourself, and how you should model yourself after the great thinkers of antiquity etc. Then as if out of nowhere he begins a diatribe on the how "the White Man" usurped civilization from "the Negro race", despite (In Garvey's take on history) "the White Man" only being limited to cave dwelling throughout the so called evolution of "Negro" civilization. He later follows this up with a theory that mass immigration of Whites to the Negro Libyan, Egyptian and Carthaginian civilizations, resulted in a miscegenation of the native populace, producing the swarthy mulattos we see today. This however directly clashes with the scientific findings of the Iberomaurusians among other Paleolithic men being 1. Not "Negro" and 2. Having been in North Africa for about 10,000+ years before the most liberal estimates for the beginning of Egypt's dynasties. Not much else can be said that isn't found on "realhistoryww.com" which gives a more in depth and equally ludicrous breakdown of supposed history.

Despite the factual inaccuracies on history in the book, Garvey offers some valuable information on how African minorities could obtain a semblance of unity, and achieve some economic prowess while living in

the "White Man's world", which I believe is as relevant and useful today as it was some eighty years ago at the time of Garvey's political career. He preaches a surprisingly rational distrust of Communism, upholding a healthy yet skeptical admiration for the Nation, an empowerment of the Nuclear family, and the acquisition of wealth and property in the pursuit of agency, which in my beliefs are timeless virtues.

I'd shelve this under "juvenile philosophy" should there be such a thing, and believe that it would've had a larger impact if it was formatted for pamphlets. 3 stars for effort

Mando says

A Must Read

Adana says

it's a good book not great, in the sence it is telling you what to do.....it do have some good points but i don't agree on everything

Bobbie says

Important, but outdated in places. I can't agree with everything he says as that would involve loss of friendships that are important to me, but I love the passion, the cause and his desire to help a marginalised people.

Kiesha says

If possible I'd give this 3.5 stars. This text relies more on strategy than sentiment, which while incredibly worthwhile and necessary didn't always ideologically align with my belief systems. Of course that's just an over-intellectualized manner of saying: too much brain, not enough heart at times. But, then too, perhaps I'm relying too heavily on the value of emotion (and compassion) and failing to accept its dangerous qualities. I also adamantly support unification between racial groups, though I'd never deny the importance and urgency of educating and uplifting Black peoples. So I left the experience a tad ambivalent, yet definitely yearning to learn more about Garvey.

Andre says

I've recently taken to rereading books from my bookshelf to determine if their impact has changed over the years, or rather my perception of the effectiveness of the message has dampened. In the case of Marcus Garvey's Message to the People, I would have to say no. This book wasn't published until 1986, some 46 years after the passing of Garvey, but essentially it is the instructions, training and philosophy he left for all would be members and leaders of the UNIA(Universal Negro Improvement Association).

Garvey was teaching a select group of followers to become his first graduates in 1937 of the course of African Philosophy. The lessons in this book come out of those lectures. From editor Tony Martin's preface: "Garvey's overriding concern was to develop within his organizers a fierce Afro-centric view of the world. He accepted as given the fact that the white race had imposed its viewpoint on the world and he thought that African people would have to adopt similar strategies in their own behalf." His focus was on imploring all African people to think race first and always, and how they could and should prepare themselves for leadership. The book is a collection of 22 lessons, including topics on elocution, diplomacy, personality and propaganda.

There are two things to keep in mind when reading this book. One, these lectures are being put into written form by someone other than Garvey in 1937. Two, these lessons weren't meant for mass consumption, but as Tony Martin says, "In the context of a confidential conclave,....Garvey could be much less guarded in his speech than would have been the case otherwise."

With that in mind his fierce race first position was non-negotiable and absolutely necessary to the advancement and improvement of African people everywhere. There are lessons in here that could have been written yesterday and others that are dated due to their relations to the times.

"Never forget that all other groups in the society of your community are looking after their own individual group interests; and your interests except from the community point of view, is never theirs. Therefore, their interests should never be yours, as far as the particular group interests are concerned." P. 160. As relevant a concern today as it was almost eighty years ago.
