

Introduction

The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was founded in Jamaica in 1914 by Marcus Garvey. Originally signed as a fraternal and philanthropic organization advocating pan-Africanism, based partially on the writings of Booker T. Washington, the UNIA developed into a radical political organization that at one time advocated the repatriation of Blacks to Africa. Garvey came to the United States in 1916 with hopes of expanding the UNIA. By 1925 approximately nine hundred divisions were chartered in the United States, and nearly five hundred more were chartered world wide.

Garvey's philosophy emphasized material and economic success, and to these ends the UNIA established several businesses, including the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company and the Black Star Steamship Company. These enterprises failed, and Garvey was arrested in 1922 on charges of mail fraud in connection with these and other UNIA business ventures. He was imprisoned and, finally, deported to Jamaica. In an effort to salvage the UNIA, Garvey moved its base of operations to London, England, where he ran the organization until his death in 1940.

Following Garvey's death, the UNIA's Parent Body headquarters was moved to New York city, and the organization was managed by the secretary general. At an emergency conference in August 1940, James R. Stewart, commissioner for the state of Ohio, was elected acting president general, succeeding Marcus Garvey in that office. UNIA headquarters was again moved, this time to Cleveland. An international convention held in 1942 reelected Stewart as president general. At the same time a group of UNIA members who were disenchanted with Stewart met in New York and formed the Rehabilitating Committee, whose goal was

to rebuild the organization based on the principles of Marcus Garvey, which the committee believed that Stewart had abrogated. This committee functioned independently of Stewart's organization throughout the 1940s.

In 1949, Stewart took Liberian citizenship and moved the UNIA Parent Body headquarters to Monrovia, West Africa. His departure from the United States prompted the Rehabilitating Committee to elect its own president general. Henceforth, two separate organizations, both calling themselves the Universal Negro Improvement Association, operated in the United States. Stewart continued to govern from Africa, and a new headquarters was established by the Rehabilitating Committee in Philadelphia, presided over by Thomas Harvey, the former UNIA high chancellor.

Stewart ran the UNIA until his death in 1964. The parent body office was then moved from Monrovia to Chicago, where it was run by James A. Bennett (1965-1968) and Vernon Wilson (1968-1975). Upon Wilson's death the president generalship fell to Cleveland Chapter President and Executive Vice President Mason Hargrave, who moved the organization's headquarters back to Cleveland.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association Records, 1921-1986 consist of correspondence, reports, conference and convention proceedings, speeches, minute and ledger books, magazine articles, lessons, printed materials, and miscellany including manuscript pages, stock and membership certificates, petitions, reports, and correspondence. The major portion of the collection dates between 1940 and 1950 and is arranged into six series.

Series I, Parent Body Records, consists of the UNIA constitution and by-laws established ca. 1938, materials from the president general's office including correspondence; stock certificates issued for the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, the Black Star Lines, and the Negro Factories Corporation; and miscellaneous materials including legal documents pertaining to the controversy over the UNIA headquarters building in Cleveland. **Series I** also contains the records of the secretary general's and chancellor's offices including daily report sheets, correspondence, and notebooks. Monthly reports of local divisions to the Parent Body are arranged alphabetically by state and city. An appendix at the end of this register lists the reporting local divisions. Records from the commissioner's Advisory Council, Executive Council, National Public Relations Committee, the International Organizer's office, and executive secretary's office (encompassing the years 1950 to 1968) consist of correspondence, notebooks, minutes, and miscellany. Conference and convention proceedings (encompassing the years 1938 to 1970) include agenda, minutes, resolutions, and miscellany. Bound ledgers consist of receipt and disbursement records, and membership and dues books.

Series II, *The New Negro World* magazine, is composed of ledger books, correspondence regarding publication, and divisional reports and contributions dating from 1940 to 1953. Much UNIA philosophy can be gleaned from these contributions, which include historical accounts, poems, and essays.

Series III, School of African Philosophy, consists of handwritten copies of nineteen lessons (lessons 14, 15, and 18 are missing) designed by Marcus Garvey to instill in future UNIA leaders the philosophy of the organization. Topics range from universal knowledge, leadership, the aims and objectives of the UNIA, and elocution to God, the

universe, diplomacy, economy, propaganda, and communism. **Series III** also contains miscellaneous undated materials pertaining to the School of African Philosophy.

Series IV Universal African Legions, contains conference proceedings, a ledger books, and miscellany dating from 1924 to 1957 pertaining to the military branch of the UNIA. Most of the material deals with the Cleveland branch of the Legions.

Series V, Cleveland Division #133, consists of monthly reports, daily report sheets, ledger books, and miscellaneous records covering the years 1919 to 1972. Ledger books contain membership and dues records, minutes of meetings, rent receipts and tenant information for the UNIA building on East 40th street, and miscellaneous financial records.

Series VI, Printed Materials and Miscellany, contains issues of UNIA publications including *The Black Man*, *The Black Pilot*, *Garvey's Voice*, *The New Negro Voice*, *the New Negro World*, the *UNIA State Herald*, and *Stewart's Voice*. Other black publications in this series include the *Negro History Bulletin*, *Our Book-Goodwill Magazine*, *Headlines*, *African Opinion*, the *National Scene*, and *Oua*. Miscellaneous materials consist of certificates of membership, dues cards, petitions, partial unidentified minutes and reports, essays, and notes.

In addition, there are membership and dues books dating from 1926 to 1955. The arrangement within each series is topical or alphabetical, where applicable, and chronological within each topic.

The materials in this collection provide valuable insight into the ,operation of a pan-African organization that espoused a radical pro-Black racial philosophy and was beset by legal, philosophical, and economic problems. Saddled with a complicated and conservative organization, the UNIA suffered severe financial setbacks, failed to entice

large numbers of Blacks to membership, and was unable to see the fulfillment of its programs. The collection provides valuable insights into pan-Africanism and the national Garvey movement, as its components relate not only to national administration of the UNIA but also include records of various branches. Records relating to the movement in Cleveland are particularly strong. government activities, such as publishing and education, are heavily reflected in the collection.