



## FORUM

### Vision, Voice and Influence

#### The Rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association

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*This article will challenge and dispel many of the myths and misconceptions associated with the onset of organised Aboriginal political protest. The paper examines the rise in the 1920s of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, highlighting international influences that impacted on the directives of this early Aboriginal political organisation. By identifying and describing such influences, the article necessitates a re-evaluation of Australian Aboriginal political history.*

THE AUSTRALIAN Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) is today recognised as the first united politically organised Aboriginal activist group to form in Australia.<sup>1</sup> The AAPA was formed in 1924 under the leadership of Frederick Maynard, to defend Aboriginal people's rights, and fought a bitter four-year public campaign against the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. This group provided an inspiration to Aborigines both then and in the future. The AAPA saw Aboriginal people for the first time voicing their disapproval in public through a pan-Aboriginal united political organisation: holding street rallies, conducting meetings and conferences, using newspaper coverage, and writing letters and petitions to government at all levels.

Yet, during the past two decades, academic and historical appraisals of the genesis of Aboriginal political protest have given scant regard to this early Aboriginal political organisation and many have assumed that the AAPA and the later Aboriginal Progressive Association (APA) were one and the same group.<sup>2</sup> In reality the 1920s AAPA and the APA—established in the 1930s under the leadership of Bill Ferguson and Jack Patten—were entirely different organisations, with different platforms and agendas. Many studies have mentioned the AAPA in a paragraph and most of these appraisals have been repetitious of earlier studies. They have largely been in error on many counts: when the organisation began and ended, the platform taken, the impact made, and

<sup>1</sup> R. Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788–1980* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1996), 166; see also N. Peterson and W. Sanders, *Citizenship and Indigenous Australians* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998); J. Chesterman, & B. Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 1997); P. Grimshaw et. al. (eds), *Creating a Nation 1788–1990* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble 1994); J. Maynard, 'Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA): One God, One Aim, One Destiny', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 21 1997, 1.

<sup>2</sup> B. Atwood and A. Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1999); see also A. Haebich, *Broken Circles* (Freemantle: Freemantle Arts Centre Press, 2000).

the makeup of the organisation.<sup>3</sup> The most startling revelation, previously missed, is that the Aboriginal leaders of the AAPA drew their inspiration and determination not from white influences but from contact with international black activists. Over decades they had fostered a deep knowledge of international events and black issues which they later moulded to their own political directives.

#### Perspectives on the history of Aboriginal political activism

The 1960s has been widely recognised as the ignition point of Aboriginal political protest. Certainly the 1960s were a decade of great change, excitement and confrontation. There was an enormously divisive war in Vietnam, the Cold War was at its height and the threat of nuclear war was ever present. In the United States there was a highly visible and vocal civil rights movement led by Dr Martin Luther King. None of this went unnoticed by Aborigines. They began to make their presence felt and they generated widespread media coverage of the inequality of Aboriginal existence. They marched, protested, spoke out and wrote of the injustices of both the past and present. Charlie Perkins emulated the 'Freedom Ride' of the black civil rights movement in the United States; the Gurindji, seeking equal wages and opportunity, walked off the station at Wave Hill; and Aboriginal people played a significant part in achieving the overwhelming 'YES' vote in the 1967 Referendum to secure the right to full citizenship. All of this political action and activity culminated in the Aboriginal Tent Embassy protest in Canberra 1972. To many people, the period seemed to mark the origins of an awakening black political consciousness in Australia.

However, those with a deeper knowledge or memory of oral history were aware of William Cooper, Bill Ferguson, Jack Patten and Pearl Gibbs. These eminent Aboriginal freedom fighters were prominent during the late 1930s and instigated the 'Day of Mourning' protest in Sydney during the 150 years of settlement celebrations in 1938. It was not until 1974, when Jack Horner published his benchmark study of Bill Ferguson and the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) that any post-war mention of an even earlier group, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, surfaced. Activist Charlie Leon related to Horner a meeting with Bill Ferguson, where they had discussed the need to establish an Aboriginal political voice:

[Leon] reminded Ferguson that an organisation called the Australian Aborigines Progressive Association had been active in Sydney from about 1924 to 1927 led by a 'livewire' Aboriginal named Fred Maynard: but nobody heard of it now. Yes, I've heard of them,

<sup>3</sup> Peterson and Sanders, *Citizenship and Indigenous Australians*, 10; Read, *A Rape of the Soul So Profound*, 167; Chesterman and Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights*, 136; M.J. Norst, *Burnum Burnum: A Warrior for Peace* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1999), 56.

Ferguson agreed. They held three annual conferences, I heard, but they were hounded by the police officer acting for the Protection Board.<sup>4</sup>

This short acknowledgement established that there had been a much earlier organised Aboriginal political group. However it also fuelled the misconception that the AAPA ceased operations in 1927, and that the organisation was only active within the region of Sydney. In private correspondence and conversation Jack Horner remarked that at the time he wrote his book, there was little or no information on the AAPA or Fred Maynard. He came across scant information and assumed that they had either made little impact or that no substantial records remained of the organisation.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent historians followed Horner's lead and concluded that Ferguson and the APA had signalled the onset of an organised Aboriginal political agenda. No-one had gone back further than the late 1930s or been fortunate enough to uncover substantive material to argue against the theory.

This changed in 1982 when Heather Goodall produced her doctoral thesis, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in NSW 1909-1939'. Over the course of the past fifteen years Goodall has worked with and within many Aboriginal communities, often assisting oral history projects. Her most recent publication, *Invasion to Embassy*, examines the fight for Aboriginal land rights in NSW. During the course of her research Goodall discovered material relating to the AAPA, most notably letters and petitions written by Fred Maynard to the NSW state government and the NSW Protection Board. Her most important discovery was the Newcastle newspaper, *Voice of the North*, produced by the fierce nationalist, J.J. Moloney, and his wife Dorothy. The Moloneys became fervent supporters of Aboriginal people and both penned strong editorials highlighting the injustice of Aboriginal life. Moloney gave Aboriginal leaders like Fred Maynard and Tom Lacey editorial space and significant press coverage. The *Voice of the North* established that the AAPA was much more than a small, Sydney-centred organisation. Goodall's work on *Voice of the North* uncovered information on the makeup of the organisation and its platform, which centred on land rights, a concerted attempt to stop the Aboriginal Protection Board's practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families, a campaign for citizenship and a strong stance in defending Aboriginal cultural identity.

The measure of the AAPA's success at generating widespread knowledge and interest through Aboriginal communities across vast distances can be gauged by comparison with the later APA. The western branch of the APA, headed by Bill Ferguson, attracted sixty Murris to its second annual general meeting in Dubbo in 1939,<sup>6</sup> while the coastal faction of the APA, led by Jack Patten, by mid-1938 had an active membership of 118 members.<sup>7</sup> In 1925 the AAPA, after only six

<sup>4</sup> J.C. Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1994), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Horner 1986, personal correspondence; Horner 1996, personal communication.

<sup>6</sup> Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1996), 241.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

months operation, had a membership that exceeded 500 Kooris, and had established eleven branches. The area the AAPA covered included the South Coast, Sydney, Newcastle, Mid to Far North Coast and centres in western New South Wales. The AAPA attracted over 250 Kooris to their first annual general conference in Sydney and nearly tripled that with over several hundred Kooris attending their second conference in Kempsey in 1925.<sup>8</sup>

#### Jack Johnson and the Coloured Progressive Association

The AAPA made a dramatic and instant public impact in 1925. However the high profile Aboriginal leaders of the AAPA had in fact been fermenting and formulating their political knowledge and agenda for at least two decades. There had been an even earlier black organisation in Sydney, operating some seventeen years before the rise of the AAPA. This group, The Coloured Progressive Association, primarily comprised a majority of foreign transitional seamen, including African-Americans, but West Indians and Aborigines were also involved. The early years of the twentieth century marked a period that witnessed high levels of racist hysteria, as illustrated by the extension of the White Australia policy, which, with its significant long-term ramifications, was a product of the era. Aboriginal men, including Fred Maynard, worked in Sydney as wharf labourers in the environment of the Coloured Progressive Association and were subject to its influence. It seems likely the very name of the latter Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association was adopted and incorporated as a result of connections with the Coloured Progressive Association.

The Coloured Progressive Association itself may never have been documented except for the arrival in Australia in 1907 of high-profile heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson. Johnson was an internationally familiar, charismatic and talented sporting identity. Certainly Johnson's arrival in Australia gave Aboriginal people an identifiable black icon. He was articulate, confident and outspoken; and he had won all but one of his sixty-five fights.<sup>9</sup>

An article in *The Referee* in December 1906 alerted the Australian public to Johnson's imminent arrival. An American correspondent reported:

By the way, I see by one of our own papers here where Jack Johnson, the big coloured heavyweight, is going to Australia to fight someone. Now if he lands on your side I want to tell you that he will beat any man you have there, for he can beat anyone we have here. He is better than Peter Jackson was in his palmiest days. He is clever, can hit hard and can stand the gall. Not one of our heavies here would box him. Be sure you have a bet on him if he ever comes to your town to fight, for as I said before he is the best big man in the world to-day, and I don't bar anyone.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Voice of the North*, 11 January 1926.

<sup>9</sup> The one exception was a highly disputed result of a fight against Marvin Hart in San Francisco the previous year. See the *Referee*, 30 January 1907.

<sup>10</sup> *Referee*, 19 December 1906.

Johnson and his manager arrived in Sydney on 24 January 1907.<sup>11</sup> Initial Australian press correspondence was relatively complimentary, describing the fighter as 'a fine specimen of manhood' with 'features more regular than those of the average American negro', and the unrecognised 'champion of the world'.<sup>12</sup> The tone of the press coverage was soon to change. Racial hostility directed at Johnson would remain over the course of his Australian visits. The *Sydney Sportsman* report of Johnson's arrival provides vivid evidence of the racist directives of the media, describing him as being 'of the type of the little coons who may be seen devouring watermelons in a well-known American picture'.<sup>13</sup>

When Johnson arrived in Australia he had already suffered years of disappointment at being denied the opportunity to fight for the World Heavy Weight Championship. Despite his indisputable talent and skill in the ring, the colour bar had always been drawn against him. 'John L. Sullivan the first modern era champion, refused to defend against black contenders and his successors followed the tradition.'<sup>14</sup>

During his Australian stay Johnson had impressive victories over Peter Felix in Sydney and Bill Lang in Melbourne. An advertisement in *The Referee* on 13 March 1907 drew attention to Johnson's imminent return to the United States and the fact that an organising body called the Coloured Progressive Association of New South Wales was holding a farewell function in his honour:

A solid influential Sydney body—of which Mr. W. Grant is grand president, Mr. H. Gilbert treasurer, and Mr. G. Phillips secretary, will tomorrow night, at Leigh House, tender Jack Johnson a farewell, and make him a presentation. The program arranged is a capital one for such an occasion. Some of the leading Tivoli and National Amphitheatre artists, including Miss Casey Walmer, Chas Pope, Harry Ingram and others will assist. Jack himself is billed for a display of ball punching, which should prove a treat in itself. First class music is promised, and dancing and singing will run from 8 till 12.<sup>15</sup>

A photograph of the event shows that Fred Maynard was present at Johnson's farewell. In the past this photograph has been wrongly attributed as the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association in Sydney during the 1920s.<sup>16</sup> Johnson most certainly would have made a dynamic impact on the Aboriginal people who he came into contact with. His contact with Aboriginal men through the Coloured Progressive Association would have given the future Aboriginal leaders great inspiration. He also displayed knowledge and appreciation of traditional Aboriginal life:

I spend most of my spare time in the art galleries and the museum. My principal hobby is archaeology. When I visit your museum and see the numerous specimens of prehistoric

<sup>11</sup> *Evening News*, 25 January 1907.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Sydney Sportsman*, 27 January 1907.

<sup>15</sup> *Referee*, 13 March 1907.

<sup>16</sup> I. Willis, 'Australian Aborigines Progressive Association', in *The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia*, ed. D. Horton (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994), 75.

man's art, your boomerangs of many varieties, your stone axes from various States and the many examples of Paleolithic and Neolithic man's skill—simply I envy you. America had its rude implements but they did not show anything like the same foresight. The Australian natives must have been geniuses to invent such weapons.<sup>17</sup>

The farewell to Johnson by the Coloured Progressive Association was given glaringly sarcastic racist coverage by the *Truth*, which disguised neither antagonism nor prejudice:

Leigh House was the scene of a bosker black beano on Thursday evening, when the gorgeous mirrors of the dance-room reflected the gyrations of the coloured cult of the city. It had been announced that the Coloured Progress Association of N.S.W. was going to entertain Mr. Jack Johnson the American sable slugger, and our miniature Wellington with artist 'Torca' stepped out of the rain and inky blackness of a tempestuous night to behold the shiny blackness of the coon corroboree. At the ballroom entrance several natty young coons attired in faultless raiment, passed in the guests. Just inside the door there was a typical Uncle Tom in evening dress. It was somewhat of a shock to find that his name was Riley. His benevolent appearance and gentle deportment and gracefully poised spectacles on his black boko stamped him as an inimitable Uncle Tom of the prosperous butler days of the immortal character.<sup>18</sup>

The journalist continued his tirade and dismissed the thought that Aboriginal people could have been a part of the evening:

Comfortably disposed about the lounges were ladies white and coloured. Some of the latter were full-blown [N]egresses, and there was a mixture of half-castes, quadroons and octoroons. On each side of the ballroom were seated black wallflowers, interspersed with a few whites. The coloured gentlemen and ladies were almost entirely of the American type. The Coloured Progress Association does not evidently include the La Perouse shade. Captain Grant an elderly coloured gentleman (a former steamtug skipper), who had struggled into a dress suit was the president of the association. Asked what were its aims and objectives he replied 'to make everybody comfortable'. He said, the association had a membership of 40 or 50 and had been in existence about four years. He also let it be distinctly understood that the Black Progressives didn't like the Commonwealth restrictive legislation. They want an open black door, which coons can enter at their own sweet will.<sup>19</sup>

The journalist was probably very fortunate that Jack Johnson was not privy to his thoughts and jottings on the evening, as he may well have become a part of the night's entertainment:

There was however a great shake-up when Mr Jack Johnson arrived. Jack looked bright-eyed and great in a light square-cut tweed suit, and the admiring ejaculations of 'Mistah' Johnson from the big and little coons were numerous and profound ... White men (a very few) ambled around with full black, half, and quarter caste beauties ... Three white ladies

<sup>17</sup> Jeff Wells, *Boxing Day—The Fight That Changed The World* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 1998), 178.

<sup>18</sup> *Truth*, 17 March 1907.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

toed the 'shazzy' in amazing shoulder cut evening dresses. One of these charmers had on a blazing red costume, and she made a paralysing start in a waltz ... Mistah Johnson did not dance (at any rate, up to midnight). He strolled about looking magnificent and impressive as he bestowed dazzling gold tooth smiles upon everybody ... About 10 o'clock Mistah Johnson stowed himself into a hansom and was driven off ... A quadrille was in progress shortly after 11 o'clock, and some sable dancers were displaying bell-bottomed trousers with great effect, when with a mighty flourish, Mistah Johnson swept into the room. Coyly clinging to his ebon wing was Cassie Walmer of the Tiv. The pair accompanied by a select small party did a duck upstairs.<sup>20</sup>

No further mention or account of the Coloured Progressive Association has to date been found. It would be interesting to uncover what became of this organisation.

Late in 1908 Johnson returned to Australia to fight for and finally win the World Heavyweight Championship by defeating Tommy Burns. The Burns/Johnson fight on Boxing Day 1908 remains alongside the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games as the most highly publicised international sporting event staged in Australia during the twentieth century. The fight was international headline news. Twenty thousand people packed into the stadium with a further forty thousand locked outside. Johnson did not just win the fight—he demolished Burns. He appeared to take pleasure in inflicting pain on Burns, and he took great delight in not only mocking Burns but also the one-sided, white crowd. In the fourteenth round police jumped into the ring to stop the fight.

The news of Johnson's win spread rapidly amongst the Aboriginal and Islander communities, where it was greatly relished. A Solomon Islander who was present at the Burns–Johnson fight as a young boy later described it as 'the greatest day of my life'.<sup>21</sup> Years later Johnson himself recounted that during the break between rounds, his eyes surveyed the crowd, and he drew strength from a black man whom he saw in the audience:

As my gaze wandered out into the surrounding territory, I saw a colored man sitting on a fence watching the fight with open mouth and bulging eyes. My glance returned to him again and again. He was one of the very few colored people present, and he became a sort of landmark for me. I became more and more interested in him, and soon discovered that mentally, he was fighting harder than I was. Whenever I unlimbered a blow, he, too, shot one into the air landing it on an imaginary antagonist at about the same spot where I landed on Burns. When I swayed to avert a blow from Burns, the fighter on the fence also swayed in the same direction and at a similar angle. When I ducked he also ducked. But his battle came to an inglorious end when it was necessary for me to make an unusually low duck. He attempted to follow the movement and fell off the fence. This incident so amused me that I laughed heartily, and Burns and the spectators were at a loss to what had so aroused my mirth. Jack London, the late story writer, and Mrs. London

<sup>20</sup> *Truth*, 17 March 1907.

<sup>21</sup> P. Corris, *Lords of the Ring—A History of Prize-fighting in Australia* (Sydney: Cassell, 1980), 94.

were ring-side spectators and I think it was at this time that London got the idea of the golden smile with which he often described me later and which was so frequently mentioned in after years.<sup>22</sup>

Fears of the consequences of such identification of black Australians with Johnson's victory underlay attempts to suppress the news of Johnson's win in such places as the Solomon Islands, 'where it was felt the "natives" might take an inappropriate message from it'.<sup>23</sup> A writer in the *Bulletin* screamed 'Johnson's behavior in the ring was objectionable, so much so that if it had happened in America, someone would have shot him dead to the cheers of the crowd and given the film as defense evidence and got a verdict of "justifiable homicide"'.<sup>24</sup> Randolph Bedford, writing for the Melbourne *Herald*, did not hold back in his scorn of Johnson. 'Already the insolent black's victory causes skin troubles in Woolloomooloo,' he moaned. 'An hour after, I heard a lascar laying down the law of Queensberry to two whites, and they listened humbly. It is a bad day for Australia.'<sup>25</sup> Bedford's article incited a race debate, which raged on the letters page of the Melbourne *Herald*. One black writer, simply signed as 'Uncle Tom', commented dryly:

Reverse the conditions which prevailed at Sydney and place a white boxer in a ring in a southern State in America, with a huge crowd of hostile blacks, it would be pardonable if he replied to their taunts as Johnson did on Saturday. If Jack Johnson's critics are not satisfied with him I might remind them that there are millions of highly cultured colored gentlemen in America and other parts of the world who possess as high an order of intelligence, and certainly more humanity than Mr. Randolph Bedford.<sup>26</sup>

Johnson returned to the United States where he knocked out Stanley Ketchel, and then the 'Great White Hope', Jim Jeffries. After the Johnson-Jeffries fight, race riots erupted in the United States. Whites reacted angrily when Johnson first toyed with Jeffries and then knocked him out in the fifteenth round. The violence of the race riots made headlines worldwide.<sup>27</sup> The assumption of white supremacy had been knocked out by Jack Johnson. Marcus Garvey once declared, 'A strong man is strong everywhere'. Jack Johnson, he said, 'was a strong man, and he was strong everywhere he went. He had beaten his white opponent in Australia, he had beaten them in the United States and he could beat them wherever they presented themselves. He was strong, and it did not matter where you took him, he was still strong.'<sup>28</sup> Undoubtedly, Jack Johnson's greatest strength was his self-assurance.

<sup>22</sup> Wells, 245.

<sup>23</sup> Corris, 94.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Wells, 197.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, 'Race Riots in America, 19 deaths, many hurt and 5,000 arrested', *Daily Express* (London), 6 July 1910 (headline).

<sup>28</sup> T. Martin, *Marcus Garvey, HERO* (Massachusetts: The Majority Press, 1983), 86.



It is not known how long the Coloured Progressive Association continued after Johnson's departure. However, the contact of Aboriginal wharf labourers like Fred Maynard with African-American seamen continued, and thereby the Aboriginal peoples' understanding of international black issues was enhanced. Johnson's influence on the future Aboriginal leaders of the 'Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association' may have been largely inspirational but most certainly their contact with grass-roots level African-American seamen on the Sydney docks was a major influence on their directives. The policy and political rhetoric espoused by Fred Maynard and other Aboriginal leaders of the AAPA in the early 1920s had been deeply influenced by black American literature. The Aboriginal leaders unpacked the political agenda and demands of black Americans and reformulated them to their own experiences, needs and ideals. Large scale revocation of Aboriginal reserve lands between 1910 and 1920 and the acceleration of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families were the galvanising issues that ignited Aboriginal political revolt and witnessed the rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association. The realisation and understanding of the African-American influence in the political demands of the AAPA refutes many of the misconceptions associated with the rise of this early Aboriginal political group.

#### Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association

Historians on the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association have alluded to white Christian membership or white nationalist influences, and many have assumed that a white woman by the name of Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton was the organisation's secretary. In *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights*, Attwood and Markus concluded 'Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton, apparently the only non-Aboriginal member of the organisation, assumed the position of secretary'. Russell McGregor, in *Imagined Destinies*, also felt 'the AAPA consisted mostly of Aborigines'.<sup>29</sup> The idea that there was white involvement within the AAPA structure stems largely from misunderstanding over McKenzie-Hatton's role and involvement. McKenzie-Hatton deserves recognition as a tireless, committed campaigner and supporter of Aboriginal people and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association. However, contemporary studies have attributed too much credence to the assumption that McKenzie-Hatton must have been the driving force behind the AAPA. Clearly much of this misconception has been derived from archival material: many of the newspaper accounts of the time wrongly described McKenzie-Hatton as the organisation's secretary, overstating white directive. Such journalism suffered common racist assumptions in its appraisal and understanding of Aboriginal people and issues.

<sup>29</sup> Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1997), 115; see also Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 59.

In fact, Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton was never a member, let alone the secretary, of the AAPA. There is no better authority or source than McKenzie-Hatton herself to clarify this point. In 1926, McKenzie-Hatton informed newspaper editor J.J. Maloney that the local Aboriginal community (at Tweed Heads) was very much afraid and intimidated by the local white minister, and consequently no-one would step forward to take office with the AAPA. However, a white man who lived with the Aboriginal community had taken up the seal. This man, Hatton went on to say, was living off some of the Aboriginal people and had been described by the community as an awful liar who had promised all sorts of things. She said 'I wrote at once and told him he could *not* hold office as the AAPA could not allow any to hold any position but Aboriginals'.<sup>30</sup> Three Aboriginal men held the position of secretary during the AAPA's period of operation: Dick Johnson from 1925 to 1926, Sid Ridgeway in 1927 and B. Roundtree in 1928.

Similar academic confusion is evident in attempts to decipher the meaning of the AAPA logo, motto and the rhetoric of the Aboriginal leaders.<sup>31</sup> Christian influence or white nationalism are the most prominent theories. However, some have questioned those assumptions. Heather Goodall pointed out that the AAPA letterhead:

carried the motto 'One God, One Aim, One Destiny' suggesting a Christian influence and a unity of interest with whites which was not entirely reflected in the Association's policy. The emblem was an image of an Aboriginal man circled by the words 'Australia for Australians'. The AAPA frequently used the word 'Australian' rather than 'Aborigine'. The emblem was a thinly veiled reference to an indigenous people's assertion of nationhood.<sup>32</sup>

Attwood and Markus concluded that the 'AAPA's symbol had a motto "One God, One Aim, One Destiny", but that Maynard was influenced less by Christianity—although he had been raised in the church—than by his experiences as a young man as a drover and stockman throughout Australia and later as a wharfie and an active member of the Waterside Workers Union, and by those of his family who had lost land when it was leased to white farmers'.<sup>33</sup> So although there have been questions raised, disputing preconceived assumptions relating to the AAPA motto and logo, no-one had been able to unravel the mystery of either its origin or its meaning.

The fact is that the logo, motto and much of the political rhetoric of the AAPA were incorporated from the doctrine of Marcus Garvey and his group, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. This group, at its height, held an estimated four million members and it remains as the largest black political movement ever assembled in the United States.

<sup>30</sup> E. McKenzie-Hatton, letter, 1926, Society of Patriots Archives, Newcastle Region Public Library Local Studies, 3.

<sup>31</sup> McGregor, 115; see also Attwood and Markus, 59.

<sup>32</sup> Goodall, 152.

<sup>33</sup> Attwood and Markus, 58.

Garvey came to the United States from Jamaica in 1916 and, within a year, had organised the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in New York. His initial following was among fellow Jamaicans but, amidst the rising tide of race consciousness in the American Negro after World War I, Garvey's appeal reached thousands in Harlem and other urban areas. In January 1918, he launched the *Negro World*, a newspaper that Claude McKay, another Jamaican dubbed 'the best edited coloured weekly in New York.' In 1919 an attack on his life led to further publicity for Garvey as a persecuted martyr. In the same year, Garvey founded the Black Star Line, a shipping venture that eventually led to his prosecution for mail fraud. In August 1920, the UNIA held a highly successful international convention in New York. There were parades featuring the African Legion and the Black Cross Nurses, and 25,000 gathered at Maddison Square Garden to hear Garvey speak. At the peak of his influence, in 1921, Garvey had organised the largest movement of Negroes in American history.<sup>34</sup>

The clarion call of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was 'One God! One Aim! One Destiny!',<sup>35</sup> the same as the later AAPA. In his poem 'Africa for the Africans', Garvey cried:

Europe Cries to Europeans. Ho!  
Asiatics claim Asia, so  
Australia for Australians  
And Africa for Africans

'Australia for Australians' was the same battle cry as that featured on the AAPA logo. This was surely no coincidence. In his 1927 poem 'The Tragedy of White Injustice' Garvey targeted Australia, when describing how 'white men' tried 'the patience of the goodly natives':

They make new laws to have Africa white  
Precipitating righteous and ready fight ...  
In Australia the same have they done ...<sup>36</sup>

Originally, Garvey had deliberately titled this poem 'The White Man's Game, His Vanity Fair' (it was reprinted as 'The Tragedy of White Injustice'). Garvey ingeniously incorporated and saw parallels of the suffering experienced at the infamous market place Vanity Fair so richly described in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Hill notes:

Garvey employed the name of the town in his 1927 poem to encapsulate its theme of white oppression and decadence. Just as Bunyan's work is a kind of sacred picaresque in which

<sup>34</sup> George Ducas and Charles Van Doren (eds), *Great Documents in Black American History* (New York: Proeger Publishers, 1970), 201.

<sup>35</sup> L.W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 112; R.A. Hill, *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), xxxi.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.boomshaka.com/garvey.htm>

evil is pitted against good, so Garvey's poem is a chronicle of the atrocities committed against native peoples by white colonizers ... In referring to *Vanity Fair* in *The Tragedy of White Injustice*, Garvey sought an analogy between the persecution experienced by Bunyan's travelers at the hands of the immoral townspeople and that experienced by Africans, Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians at the hands of Europeans during imperial expansion.<sup>37</sup>

Incredibly there was also a chapter of the UNIA established in Sydney and as with the Coloured Progressive Association it is fair to assume that the future Aboriginal leaders had contact with, or at least were aware of, this organisation's operations. 'The Sydney, Australia UNIA branch was undoubtedly the furthest from Harlem. It illustrated how, in those days before even the widespread use of radio, Garvey and the UNIA were nevertheless able to draw communities from practically all over the world together into a single organization with a single aim.'<sup>38</sup> Garvey and the UNIA went into rapid decline between 1923 and 1924. The decline can largely be attributed to internal factionalism and persecution by the United States government.<sup>39</sup> Garvey was jailed in 1923 and was not released until 1927, shortly after which he was deported from the United States.

He was never allowed to set foot in the U.S. again. This enforced absence accounts in part for the decline of the movement. By the mid 1930s, at the latest, Garveyism had disappeared as an effective organised force. But it remains to this day the largest organised mass-based movement of Black People—and by far the most internationalist one—to ever be established in the U.S. Moreover, its influence is still felt in a number of areas. Elijah Mohammed's Nation of Islam—popularly known as the Black Muslims—and a number of other Black nationalist organizations which began during the 1930s were to a great extent 'Neo-Garveyist' movements.<sup>40</sup>

Notice of the rise and fall of Garvey's Organisation had not been missed in Australia. A contributor to the *Nambucca and Bellinger News* in 1925 highlighted the levels of racist hysteria present at the time. The writer warned that the white race was in decline and decay, 'not in culture or intellect, but numerically; the black race is growing swiftly, relentlessly, ruthlessly for all the rest of us, but for the whites especially. In 100 years from now the blacks may be supreme'.<sup>41</sup> The correspondent went on to remind the readers that in the United States and Canada:

The problem of the [N]egro is always at their doors. They know all about Marcus Garvey ... there was a tendency to underestimate the real strength of the menace represented by the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. ...

<sup>37</sup> Hill, xxxii.

<sup>38</sup> Martin, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Sommer, *Marcus Garvey: The Forgotten Giant of Black Liberation* <http://www.stewards.net/garvey.htm>, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Sommer, 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Bellinger and Nambucca Times*, 27 February 1925.

Garvey, who had been hailed in all sorts of unexpected circles as a new 'Moses' and a reformer of judgement and capacity, was discredited. The hard fact remains, however, that in a relatively short campaign the League had from a nucleus of some fifteen stalwarts to a membership of somewhere in the neighborhood of 2,000,000 organised in hundreds of branches; that it won a good deal of plausible sympathy; that many short sighted Americans even saw in the Negro prophet's dream of a 'Back to Africa' campaign a possible solution of the immediate problems in their own continent; and that there are some 400,000,000 [N]egroes in the world population in the world already with a power of prolific expansion shown by no other race. All the tendencies of white population, in fact, are in the opposite direction ... The vision of Africa for Africans is no new one. In the vast interior tracts of what only the other day we still spoke of as the Dark Continent, the flames of resentment against white intrusion are always smouldering ... all of the elements are present for a conflict of colour by the side of which the late war was a minor calamity.<sup>42</sup>

The evidence of a link between the black American influences of the time and the Aboriginal movement is unmistakable. In their four years in the public spotlight the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association made continued demands through the media. There were frequent statements by Fred Maynard that the AAPA encouraged Aboriginal 'self-respect through spiritual, political, industrial and social ideals'.<sup>43</sup> Garvey had written in his manifesto, 'We are organised for the absolute purpose of bettering our condition, industrially, commercially, socially, religiously and politically'.<sup>44</sup> The UNIA highlighted the importance of promoting a strong cultural identity. The call for recognising cultural significance, and the importance of noting that significance with their own homeland, struck a chord with the Aboriginal leaders. They remodelled Garveyism to suit their own needs. The AAPA platform was all about defending traditional Aboriginal land tenure and cultural identity. Fred Maynard later declared that 'The Australian people are the original owners of the land and have a prior right over all other people in this respect'.<sup>45</sup>

These revelations disprove the assumption that Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton was the major figure in the AAPA's directive and platform. Instead of white influence, this was very much about black influences. In the light of this analysis it comes as no surprise to find McKenzie-Hatton, as the lone white supporter privy to the inner sanctum of the AAPA, expressing these international black ideals. She declared in 1925, 'This association is for uplift, spiritually and socially. It is progressive in policy. We feel that your best interests have not been considered. The government has no policy for your industrial development'.<sup>46</sup> The similarities to Garvey's words are unmistakable. Yet it is inconceivable that she

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Guardian*, 7 May 1925; *Daily Guardian*, 16 July 1925.

<sup>44</sup> M. Garvey, 'Philosophy and Opinions' in *Great Documents in Black American History*, eds George Lucas & Charles Van Doren (New York: Proeger Publishers, 1923), 55.

<sup>45</sup> Fred Maynard, Premier's Department Correspondence Files, NSW State Archives, A27/915.1927, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily Guardian*, 24 April 1925.

had not been enlightened, encouraged, and directed on the subject matter by the Aboriginal leaders like Fred Maynard and Tom Lacey.

Maynard and Lacey had obviously studied and analysed Garvey's writing. They had shaped and re-modelled this material to their own immediate needs, demands and political agenda. In this capacity it needs to be firmly established that the Aboriginal leaders of the AAPA were eloquent, articulate statesmen far ahead of their time. In an article by Dorothy Moloney in the *Voice of the North* in January 1926, Maynard was described as an 'orator of outstanding ability, and in the not far distant future will loom large in the politics of this country for the reason that the [A]boriginal question is becoming a very important one'.<sup>47</sup>

Self-educated on a wide variety of topics, and a voracious reader,<sup>48</sup> Maynard's awareness of international issues and events is clearly articulated in his correspondence attacking the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board. 'What a horrible conception of so called legislation, re any civilized laws, I say deliberately stinks of the Belgian Congo', he wrote of the Board's repressive legislation.<sup>49</sup> It was undoubtedly his earlier associations with the Coloured Progressive Association and other links to African-American men and women connected to the Universal Negro Improvement Association that later led the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board's attempt to discredit and defame Maynard's Aboriginal heritage and character. In correspondence from the Board to Premier Jack Lang the inference made was quite explicit: Maynard could not possibly be Aboriginal and his representations 'should not be allowed to unduly occupy the Premier's time. Mr Maynard is a full blooded black (either American or South African) whose voluble manner and illogical views are more likely to disturb the Australian Aborigines than achieve for them improvement of conditions'.<sup>50</sup> Despite these attacks it is quite clear that the early Aboriginal leaders were very aware of international events and, like Fred Maynard, were able to utilise that knowledge to their advantage. Treasurer of the AAPA, Tom Lacey, was recognised as:

not only a fluent speaker but a veritable Lincoln of phraseology. He is possibly the best-informed man in the State regarding the movement for the emancipation of the slaves in America and Cuba, and he is bringing all his native intelligence to bear on the subject and is rapidly instilling the prospects into his kinfolk. From end to end of N.S.W the name of Lacey is known and admired. He is a keen debater and will be hailed as a modern Moses. The slogan 'No more slavery in N.S.W' will reverberate throughout the length and breadth of continent, and will not only have the effect of breaking the chains off the [A]boriginals in the prison gangs of West Australia, but will straighten out every grievance which the

<sup>47</sup> *Voice of the North*, 11 January 1926.

<sup>48</sup> M. Kondak, 'Charles Fredrick Maynard: Vision for Justice for Aborigines' in *Unsung Heroes and Heroines*, ed. Suzy Baldwin, (Melbourne: Greenhouse Publications, 1988), 175.

<sup>49</sup> Maynard 1927, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Premiers Department Correspondence Files, New South Wales State Archives, 9/11/1927. A27/915.

native people are enduring under the respective Australian Governments in general but those of New South Wales particularly.<sup>51</sup>

In another appraisal in the *Voice of the North* Tom Lacey was described as 'an impressive speaker [who] claims that the Aboriginals of Australia can attain to the same position as the coloured people of the United States, who have their own colleges and universities. He resents the actions of our parliamentarians whose laws place the Aboriginals in the category of children or imbeciles'.<sup>52</sup>

The material presented in this paper offers evidence that the early Aboriginal political agenda was very much influenced by contact with international black men and women. The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association was an all-Aboriginal group and the leaders of this early Aboriginal organisation had formulated their political platform from decades of experience and knowledge of international black issues. The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association was the product of years of personal hardship observed by Aboriginal men and women. They honed their life experiences with observations and knowledge of people like Jack Johnson. Similarly Marcus Garvey and his ideals offered the Aboriginal leaders a blueprint for their own political objectives. The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association and the Aboriginal men and women aligned with the rise of early Aboriginal activism remain as a source of great inspiration and vision to future generations of Aboriginal people. They felt compelled despite hardship and threats to rise up, speak out and challenge insidious government directives which clearly aimed to erase Aboriginal people from the Australian landscape.

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<sup>51</sup> *Voice of the North*, 10 October 1927.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 January 1926.