

Universal Negro Improvement Association Records, 1916, 1921-1989

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The Most Honorable Marcus Garvey is accompanied in the rear seat of his 1920 Pierce Arrow Limousine by the Rev. R Van Richards at the 4th International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World opening parade in Harlem, NY. His Secret Service (aka Knights of the Roundtable) ran alongside the President-General's parade vehicle. Although it is not visible in this photo, Mr. Garvey is also flanked in the rear by a banner reading Parent Body Division (source: *Negro World* August 16, 1924, p.10).

Collection Description

The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) was founded in Jamaica on August 1, 1914 by Marcus Garvey. The organization is also known as the UNIA-ACL or simply the UNIA. The motto of the organization is "One God! One Aim! One Destiny!"

After traveling throughout the United States in early 1916, Garvey established the New York Division of the UNIA in 1917. In August of 1918, the UNIA began publishing *The Negro World*, a weekly newspaper, which reported UNIA activities until it ceased publication in 1933. By 1920, the UNIA had over 1,000 divisions in more than 40 countries. That same year, it held its first international convention in New York, New York, which put forth a program based on "The Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World."

After Garvey's conviction and imprisonment on mail fraud charges in 1925 and his deportation to Jamaica in 1927, the organization began to take on a different character and internal rivalries prevailed. As a result, the UNIA continued to be officially recognized as the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, but a rival "UNIA-ACL August 1929 of the World" emerged, headed by Marcus Garvey himself after his deportation to Jamaica. From Jamaica, Garvey settled in England where he established and headed the UNIA 1929, until his death in 1940.

Upon Garvey's death, James R. Stewart, a commissioner from Ohio, was named the successor and in 1949 moved the parent body headquarters to Monrovia, Liberia. Unhappy with this development, a rehabilitating committee held a conference in Detroit, Michigan. The committee denounced the leadership of Stewart and the UNIA became fragmented once again. Former High Chancellor Thomas W. Harvey became President General of the new faction and an international UNIA headquarters was established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1951. At the first International Convention held in August 1953, William LeVan Sherrill was elected President General and served until he resigned due to ill health in December 1958. Harvey stepped in to finish Sherrill's term and was then elected President General in August 1959, a post he held for nearly 20 years, until his death in June 1978.

Scope and Content Note

The collection contains records of the Universal Negro Improvement Association from 1916, 1921-1989. The papers include correspondence, administrative records, photographs, writings, printed material, and material relating to other organizations.

The correspondence series includes letters to and from Presidents General Marcus Garvey, Thomas W. Harvey, and William L. Sherrill. The correspondence documents communications between the Presidents General and other officers and the various Division leaders in the United States, as well as those in other countries. The administrative records relate to the UNIA parent body and its divisions and include minutes of meetings, policies and procedures, and various reports.

The photographs include images relating to the UNIA, in the United States, Africa and the Caribbean Islands. The writings series contains manuscripts and typescripts by several key UNIA officials including Marcus Garvey, Thomas W. Harvey, and William L. Sherrill, as well as others associated with the UNIA. The printed material series includes broadsides advertising various UNIA-sponsored events; brochures relating information about the purpose, programs, and goals of the UNIA; and programs of the UNIA events. The final series consists of records and printed materials created by other organizations from 1921-1989 that were collected by the UNIA. The materials include printed matter such as broadsides, brochures, and programs; minutes, resolutions, and other records.



1924 UNIA Women's Brigade (photo by James Van DerZee)

The documents are organized into six series: (1) correspondence, (2) administrative records, (3) photographs, (4) writings, (5) printed material, (6) other organizations. Hence:

Correspondence, 1916, 1934-1980

The series contains correspondence of the UNIA from 1934-1980. The correspondence includes letters to and from Marcus Garvey from 1916, 1931-1940. These letters are mostly between Garvey and Thomas W. Harvey and relate to UNIA business. The correspondence also includes letters to and from Amy Jacques Garvey after her husband's death. These letters are also mainly between Amy Garvey and Harvey and relate to UNIA business.

The majority of the general correspondence is addressed to Thomas W. Harvey (Commissioner of New York and then President General, 1951-1953 and 1960-1978) and William L. Sherrill (President General, 1953-1960). The correspondence documents communications between the President Generals and other officers and the various Division leaders in the United States, as well as those in other countries including Africa, Canada, Caribbean Islands (Cuba and Jamaica), Central America (Costa Rica and Panama), etc.

Major correspondents include: U.S. Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, A.L. Crawford (Brooklyn, New York), Ethel M. Collins (New York, New York), Solomon Fitghue (Cincinnati), N.H. Grissom (Chicago), Clarence William Harding (Liberia), Samuel Alfred Haynes, Charles Lynell James (Chicago), James R. Stewart, and Naomi Williams Taylor (Philadelphia). The remainder of the correspondence is comprised of letters from individuals inquiring about the UNIA.

Administrative Records, 1926-1987

The series contains administrative records relating to the UNIA parent body and its divisions from 1926-1987. The parent body records include various versions of the constitution and bylaws; policies, procedures, and guidelines relating to the day-to-day operation of the organization; reports, and minutes and agendas of UNIA meetings including the executive council, rehabilitative committees, and the UNIA international conventions.

Records relating to divisions in the United States as well as in other countries include minutes of meetings, monthly reports of local divisions, charters, and resolutions. Materials may be found from divisions in Brooklyn and New York (New York); Chicago (Illinois); Cincinnati, Cleveland and Dayton (Ohio); Detroit (Michigan); New Orleans (Louisiana); Philadelphia (Pennsylvania); and Raleigh (North Carolina). Records from international divisions include Canada, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Liberia, Nova Scotia, Panama, and South Africa.

Photographs, 1925-1978

The series consists of photographs relating to the UNIA, in the United States, Africa and the Caribbean Islands. There are photographs of individuals associated with the UNIA, as well as images of the 1929 and 1955 UNIA conventions, and locations and events in Ghana, Liberia, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic.

Writings

The series consists of manuscript and typescript writings by several key UNIA officials including Marcus Garvey, Thomas W. Harvey, and William L. Sherrill; as well as others associated with the UNIA. Writings by Garvey include two notebooks containing speeches (1928-1929) and essays, as well as typescripts of speeches and essays, some which are published in his *Philosophy and Opinions*.

Writings by UNIA Presidents Thomas W. Harvey and William L. Sherrill are mainly essays relating to the work of the UNIA. Sherrill's material also includes typescripts of some of his "We, the Negro," a column he wrote as President of the Afro-American Institute and Federated Fireside Group. Additional "We, the Negro" columns may be found in 'Other Organizations, 1921-1989.'

Printed Material, 1928-1989

The series consists of printed materials created by the Universal Negro Improvement Association from 1928-1989. The UNIA material includes broadsides advertising various UNIA sponsored events; brochures relating information about the purpose, programs; and goals of the UNIA; and programs of the UNIA events. Programs relating to the international conferences of the UNIA may be found in Series 2: Administrative Records under Meetings-Parent Body.

Other Organizations, 1921-1989

The series consists of records and printed materials created by other organizations from 1921-1989 that were collected by or sent to the UNIA. The materials include printed matter such as broadsides, brochures, and programs; minutes, resolutions, and other records. Many of the organizations represented here relate to Marcus Garvey, Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and the Back-to-Africa movement.

Notes:

Unrestricted access; all requests subject to limitations noted in departmental policies on reproduction; related materials in other repositories: Universal Negro Improvement Association records, Western Reserve Historical Society; related materials in this repository are in Emory's holdings are pamphlets and periodical literature formerly owned by former UNIA President Thomas W. Harvey, which may be located in the Emory University online catalog by searching for Harvey, Thomas W., the former owner.

Microfilm copy of the Universal Negro Improvement Association records, 1921 1986 from the Western Reserve Historical Society (MCFILM 4025) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, records of the Central Division, New York, 1918-1959 from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (MCFILM 3474 REEL 1). Source: Purchase, 2007. Citation: [after identification of item(s)], Universal Negro Improvement Association records, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; processed by Carolyn Stephens and Susan Potts McDonald, 2008.



Stock certificate for one share (five dollars) of the Black Star Line, Inc. dated November 21, 1919.