INTRODUCTION

The present volume marks the second volume to be published of the Caribbean Series within the larger edition of *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers.* It covers a period of twelve months, from the opening of the UNIA's historic first international convention in New York, held in August 1920, to Marcus Garvey's return to the U.S. in mid-July 1921 after an extended sojourn in the Caribbean and Central America. It was a period marked by some glittering political triumphs, but also by intensifying financial problems that would undercut those political gains. The documents in the present volume display both sides of this dual dynamic as it unfolded in both the U.S. and the Caribbean.

The August 1920 convention in many ways marked the high-point of the Garvey movement in the U.S., while Garvey's tour of the Caribbean, in the winter and spring of 1921, registered the greatest outpouring of popular support for the UNIA in its history. In this sense, the period covered in the present volume represents the moment of political apotheosis for the movement, but also the moment when the finances of Garvey's Black Star Line went into free-fall.

The preceding volume, the first of the Caribbean Series, culminated in July 1920, on the eve of the UNIA's historic convention of August 1920. The first volume traced the political and organizational preparation leading up to the convention; by the time that the convention opened, the entire apparatus of the UNIA had moved into high gear for an event unprecedented in the annals of the black world. Only two years previously, Marcus Garvey was still a political unknown; by 1920, he had been transformed into a figure of international political significance, and was arguably the most famous black man in the world.

The present volume shows the centrality of Caribbean people not only to the convention, but also to the movement of which the convention itself was the organizational expression. The reports to the convention discussed the range of social and economic conditions obtaining in the Caribbean, particularly their impact on racial conditions. The quality of the discussions and debates were impressive. Contained in these reports are some of the earliest and most clearly enunciated statements in defense of social and political freedom in the Caribbean. These documents form a hitherto underappreciated and still underutilized record of the political awakening of Caribbean people of African descent.

The convention's message was embodied most eloquently in its "Declaration of Independence," formally known as the "Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World," with its forthright claim for international recognition of the rights of blacks. The declaration marks in many ways the high point, ideologically, of the entire Garvey phenomenon.

The spirit emanating from the convention would find an echo in the Caribbean. J. Ralph Casimir, in his statement "What Ails Dominica?" with its call for the defense of popular liberties, was the leader of Dominica's UNIA division. Casimir would render outstanding literary and organizational service to the movement not only in Dominica, but also throughout the eastern Caribbean. His work stands out among the documents recorded in the present volume. Published and disseminated through the pages of the *Negro World*, Casimir's article created a profound impression on its readers. Letters from UNIA members in St. Vincent, and Trinidad, for example, speak of a deep sense of gratitude and admiration for articulating what many people in the Caribbean had been feeling, but felt unable to express. Casimir's essay pointed to the deep pool of dissatisfaction with colonial rule in the Caribbean that emerged following the trauma of the Great War of 1914–18. Response to its publication confirms the way in which the UNIA served as a vehicle for channeling popular dissatisfaction while incubating a whole new generation of leaders.

Official reprisals against leaders of the movement was swift in the aftermath of the convention. Thus, in Bermuda, in October 1920, the AME church revoked all previous honors and privileges granted to Rev. Richard Hilton Tobitt, following his election as "Leader of the West Indies (Eastern Province)" by the UNIA convention in New York. That same month the Governor of Bermuda cut all funding for the St. George Elementary School run by Rev. Tobitt, due to Tobitt's membership in the UNIA. Thereafter, Rev. Tobitt would serve as a sort of roving ambassador of the UNIA, travelling to Guyana and Trinidad to spread the gospel of Garveyism (Trinidad took the precaution of banning him from landing in its territory).

Not the least affected by the reverberations that radiated from the convention in New York were officials in the imperial metropolis as well as the colonial outposts of empire in the Caribbean. One month after the conclusion of the convention, the Colonial Office requested that the British Foreign Office secure copies of the UNIA's "Constitution and Book of Laws" for its use and that of the "Director of Intelligence." The range and variety of intelligence reports generated in this critical period help to provide a detailed map of the movement's spread as well as the aspects of the movement that engendered official anxiety. These reports resulted from the tracking of the movement from its headquarters in the U.S. by officials and diplomats working in close consultation. As the movement spread from the U.S. to encompass all of the territories making up the British West Indies and territories where there were concentrations of West Indian migrant communities, such as in Cuba, Haiti,

the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and along the entire Caribbean littoral of Central America, keeping track of something as variegated as the UNIA and monitoring its far flung and at the same time local manifestations and networks of communication was not easy. The transnational character of the movement was revealed in the sustained political discourse that emanated from all these separate as well as overlapping jurisdictions.

A whole new phase in the intelligence monitoring of the UNIA was thus launched in the aftermath of the August 1920 convention. As a consequence, police reports from across the region form a significant portion of the documentation of the present volume. These reports were, essentially, political documents that not only describe the array of UNIA activities, but also identify the leaders of the movement as well as its local composition.

By this time, Garvey's *Negro World* newspaper was already officially proscribed in several territories. Copies had to be smuggled through the post and carried by black seamen travelling aboard vessels from the U.S. In Trinidad, invoking the seditious publications law, government authorities began searching the private residences of individuals suspected of having copies of the *Negro World*, the *Messenger*, and the *Crusader*, all of them proscribed under the law. The authorities in Trinidad also refused a petition from the UNIA to register as a Friendly Society.

One of the highlights of official surveillance in this period of rapid expansion of the UNIA in the Caribbean was the coverage devoted to the setting up and inauguration of local UNIA branches. The unveiling of the charter for each local division was always the occasion for an immense outpouring of popular support. As the day of the unveiling approached and members marshaled themselves, huge throngs of people gathered for the celebration, making each of these events in turn not only a truly historic occasion, but also an affirmation of cultural identity. In the documents that make up the present volume, official reports as well as reports published in the *Negro World* describe the unveiling of charters of several divisions. In chronological order, the divisions for which the present volume contains reports on the occasion of their charters being unveiled are: Roseau, Dominica; Castries, St. Lucia; San José, Costa Rica; Guaico, Trinidad; Belize, British Honduras; Bridgetown, Barbados; St. Thomas, Virgin Islands; Basseterre, St. Kitts; Hamilton, Bermuda; Guantánamo, Cuba; Tela, Honduras; Colón, Panama; Port-au-Prince, Haiti; Ciego de Avila, Cuba; and Niquero, Cuba.

Likewise, the concert programs organized by local UNIA divisions brought out large crowds of people, and the police reports on these proceedings illuminate the various ways in which these events were turned into celebrations that drew upon the entire range of cultural resources available to each community. All across the Caribbean, as communities turned out for UNIA events, it became clear that the UNIA functioned as a kind of bulwark of the community. Particularly was this so in those countries where English-speaking

West Indians formed culturally and ethnically distinct communities. Thus, the reports provide a rich prism through which one is able to see the extraordinary range of social and cultural activities engaged in by the UNIA on a regular basis in each of the communities where it operated. Indeed, in many places the UNIA's local Liberty Hall functioned as the leading cultural center of the community, outside of the church.

In the reports of these community-based initiatives of local UNIA divisions, in which the cultural resources of the community were on display, women occupied a salient role. Clearly, the importance of women as key figures in the organization and leadership of the UNIA was what made it so dynamic and gave it such popular appeal. The documents in the present volume speak eloquently of the recognition attained by women in the various endeavors undertaken in all of the local UNIA divisions. The significance of gender in the articulation of the UNIA as a social movement finds a great deal of supporting documentation in the present volume.

The crux of the UNIA communication network between its headquarters in New York and its divisions spread across the entire Caribbean archipelago was the *Negro World* newspaper. It served as a mirror in which the members of the movement communicated with each other and were enabled to grasp both its worldwide and regional dimensions and the interplay between them. As the main conduit of the movement, the *Negro World* was also its bible. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that government officials were alert to the importance of the newspaper and sought to suppress and/or monitor its circulation and distribution. Indeed, even more numerous than the number of reports describing the meetings of local divisions were reports of the perceived risks posed to the maintenance of the colonial order by the newspaper's circulation.

Thus, the subject of political censorship and the mechanics of censorship of not only the *Negro World* but all race conscious publications is one that figures prominently in the coverage of the present volume—from seizures and confiscation of copies in the post and police searches of residences to prevent distribution of copies to outright bans against distribution imposed in several territories. People knew of the official proscription of the newspaper, and this knowledge served to sharpen their criticism of colonial rule and gave the idea of racial loyalty even greater intensity. On this issue of political censorship the opposition between officialdom and the popular was stark and unclouded. By people asking—why must not the *Negro World* be read—they were aroused and made more determined to find ways to circumvent and defeat the official barrier raised against the newspaper. In the end, censorship was to prove ineffective as well as politically counterproductive.

Disaffection toward the policy of censorship could be seen in the prolific contributions from Caribbean readers published in the weekly columns of the *Negro World*, making the newspaper a veritable pan-Caribbean vehicle of print opposition and nationalist formation across the whole region. Even the discovery of two or three copies of the *Negro World* was enough in certain territories

to cause major anxiety. In spite of the various preventive measures, it is clear from the reports in the present volume that the *Negro World* achieved a fairly large circulation in the Caribbean.

The importance of the work performed by the *Negro World* in spreading the gospel of the Garvey movement in the Caribbean, while simultaneously promoting the various drives of the UNIA, cannot be exaggerated. In a real sense, Garveyism came into the Caribbean in the form of the *Negro World*, a newspaper. Although the ships of the Black Star Line might not arrive, clandestine copies of the *Negro World*, however fugitive, would come. In this way, the UNIA became woven into the Caribbean culture of literacy and political discourse. Long before there was any overt nationalist mobilization or movement in the Caribbean, there was a bedrock culture of literacy that was celebrated. Garveyism in the colonial Caribbean never pretended to represent a direct challenge to colonial rule. Thus, rather than some sort of 'failed' political movement, the UNIA should be seen as part of a political culture in the making that to a large extent was fuelled by the popular quest for and enjoyment of literacy, of which the struggle over the denial of access to the *Negro World* was just one expression of the way that the UNIA acted as a conduit for the cultural aspirations of Caribbean people.

The bulk of the volume is taken up with Garvey's tour of Cuba, Jamaica, Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize in the winter and spring of 1921. Garvey left the U.S. at the end of February 1921, and he did not return until the middle of July. It was not Garvey's intention to spend this much time away from his base of operations in New York, but once it became J. Edgar Hoover's declared policy of preventing his reentry into the U.S., Garvey found himself denied a visa whenever he applied to U.S. consulates in the region, until his legal representatives in the U.S. succeeded with the U.S. department of state in surmounting Hoover's opposition. It took months before this could be achieved, during which time Garvey was delayed time and again from returning. It came at an especially critical time for the movement, particularly for the fate of the Black Star Line back in New York, as events would shortly prove.

The purpose of the trip ostensibly was to raise funds for the "Liberian Construction Loan," also known as the "African Liberty Loan," which had as its goal the raising of $2,000,000 from UNIA members to build railroads, schools, churches, and other infrastructure in Liberia in preparation for the UNIA's African colonization program in Liberia. More immediately, the purpose was to sell shares in the Black Star Line to shore up its rapidly foundering finances. Away from the giddy euphoria in which the UNIA's August 1920 convention was swept up, storm clouds were fast gathering over the financial affairs of the Black Star Line. While Liberty Hall in Harlem reverberated daily with impassioned calls for "Africa for the Africans, those at home and abroad," the Black Star Line, the centerpiece of which the movement's hopes for economic independence were symbolically pinned, teetered on the brink of collapse. Three days before the UNIA convention adopted the historic declaration and

delegates affixed their signatures to the document amid great fanfare, the Black Star Line steamer S.S. *Yarmouth* arrived at the port of Charleston, South Carolina, having made a detour on its return trip to the U.S. from Haiti. Originally, the ship was intended to land in New York, but short of coal and provisions and with a case of smallpox on board the ship, the *Yarmouth* was forced to put in at Charleston. Indebted for supplies and other expenses that the Black Star Line was unable to pay, the vessel was thereupon libeled. A few days later, Luc Dorsinville resigned his position as manager of the Black Star Line in Haiti, giving as his reason the treatment meted out to Haitian passengers who had purchased tickets with the intention of going to New York.

From Garvey's perspective, the situation looked rather different going the other way, namely, going from the U.S. to the Caribbean. From the moment that he landed in Havana, Cuba, at the beginning of March 1921, until the time that he returned to the U.S., four and a half months later, Garvey's visit proved a spectacular triumph. Everywhere he went, huge crowds of people flocked to see and hear him. The sizes of audiences that turned out to hear him speak, and did so consistently, far exceeded what any West Indian had ever achieved. Nothing quite like it had been witnessed before in the Caribbean. The extensive newspaper coverage that attended his appearances wherever he visited was unprecedented, oftentimes reprinting verbatim large chunks, if not the entire texts, of his speeches. No West Indian before, and for a long time afterward, had ever excited people or raised their hopes in the way that Garvey did in the spring of 1921. Something new, a new kind of popular phenomenon, had presented itself.

Swept along on the crest of this wave of popular acclaim and enthusiasm, Garvey found a fertile environment in which to promote sales of stock in the Black Star Line. It would become the overriding, if not the sole, purpose of his tour, as the Black Star Line fleet hemorrhaged money at an ever more alarming rate. The vagaries, to say nothing of the mishaps that dogged the sailing of the Black Star Line vessel S.S. *Kanawha* (rechristened the S.S. *Antonio Maceo*) wherever it went on its tour of the Caribbean were emblematic of the deepening financial crisis in which the entire enterprise was engulfed. The documents in the present volume allow the reader to follow the vicissitudes of trying to keep the *Kanawha* afloat, while also keeping to anything like a formal travel schedule between appearances.

When the difficulty of securing a reentry visa to the U.S. is added to the host of problems bedevilling the *Kanawha,* it becomes clear why this was also a fraught time for Garvey. And yet, whatever difficulties and challenges he encountered on the tour in 1921, Garvey's supporters do not appear, for the most part, to have lost the least confidence in him, except where, in one instance, during his tour of Panama, he lost his temper and became overly demanding for payment before he would agree to speak, alienating those who had turned out and had waited to hear him speak.

If the tour proved a personal triumph for Garvey, it also represented a historic vindication of the UNIA. Except for the crowds that turned out for parades of the UNIA conventions in Harlem, the outpouring of spontaneous support and the fervor of adherents exceeded anything seen elsewhere. The UNIA was never able again to draw crowds in the Caribbean on anything resembling the scale of 1921. It marked the height of the UNIA's influence in the Caribbean.

A final highlight of the volume is the coverage devoted to the UNIA in south Florida and its struggle for survival in the face of unrelenting racist terror. In June 1921, Rev. T. C. Glashen, a Honduran native and president of the UNIA Key West division, was arrested for "inciting a riot" and deported to Cuba in lieu of standing trial. While in Havana, Rev. Glashen testified to the racial terror inflicted by the Ku Klux Klan in Florida against the UNIA, leading up to his own arrest. The following month, on 2 July, Rev. Richard Higgs, the Bahamian Baptist preacher and president of the UNIA in Coconut Grove, Miami, was kidnapped, beaten, and ordered by his assailants to leave the U.S. Police subsequently arrested more than twenty-five armed black men who turned out to protest the beating of Rev. Higgs, though his white assailants were never apprehended. One week after the incident, Rev. Higgs, with his wife and five children, arrived in Nassau, Bahamas, from Miami.

The documents of both incidents provide a window into the functioning of the UNIA as an ethno-national protective association in the service of the migrant Bahamian community of south Florida at this critical juncture. At the same time, as the documents make plain, the racial violence of 1921 was played out against the backdrop of social tension between the African-American community and the ethnic Bahamian community.