

“For the Freedom of the Black People”:
Case Studies on the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1900-1950

by

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Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Using a case study approach, this dissertation examines the history of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Canada in the early twentieth century. The UNIA, a secular organization intended to unite people of African descent across the globe, has not been studied in-depth in a Canadian context. This dissertation shows that the history of the UNIA cannot be fully understood without an examination of Canadian contributions to the Garvey movement.

By examining various divisions of the UNIA in four Canadian regions (Montreal, Toronto, Cape Breton Island, and Edmonton), “For the Freedom of the Black People” argues that the UNIA served as an important catalyst to the establishment of black communities in Canada. At the local level, the UNIA acted as a community-building tool for black newcomers to Canada from the Caribbean and the United States. Uniquely, the case studies show that the UNIA in Canada maintained close ties to local black churches in order to bolster this growing sense of community. Moreover, the case studies also explain the ways in which local UNIA divisions adapted to meet the unique needs of each black community. In fact, the UNIA evolved to suit a changing demographic as immigration patterns and community goals shifted, and sometimes facilitated the launch of more specific organizations designed to remedy particular social and economic issues.

This dissertation also argues that UNIA members in Canada played a critical role in the growth of the organization internationally, and in its survival after the death of its founder, Marcus Garvey. Beyond the local, Canadian Garveyites (i.e., followers of the UNIA) forged a Pan-African consciousness as members of a transnational confraternity that celebrated African heritage and pushed for racial equality. This Pan-African awareness inspired them to actively participate in the UNIA’s international programmes, like the Black Star Line, *The Negro World* newspaper, and the School of African Philosophy. In this way, Canadian Garveyites added their voice to the global fight against racial discrimination, thereby affirming their place within the African Diaspora.

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Dedication

To my late grandparents, Antonio and Antonietta: Even though you're gone, your example of hard work and sacrifice continues to inspire me.

Table of Contents

Examining Committee Membership.....	ii
Author’s Declaration.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Prologue.....	23
Chapter 1: Garvey’s Canadian Gateway: Montreal and its Ties to the UNIA.....	48
Chapter 2: “We All Used to Meet at the Hall”: The Significance and Evolution of the UNIA in Toronto.....	108
Chapter 3: Building a Community in Cape Breton: The UNIA in Eastern Canada.....	143
Chapter 4: From Oklahoma to Edmonton: The UNIA on the Great Plains.....	193
Epilogue.....	239
Conclusion.....	249
Bibliography.....	257

Introduction

This study seeks to uncover the history of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Canada. Broadly speaking, this dissertation asks the questions: what purpose did the UNIA serve in Canada, and is the UNIA a representation of the African Diaspora in Canada? More importantly, what separates the Canadian faction of the UNIA from its counterparts around the world?

The four case studies conducted in this dissertation attempt to answer these questions. This dissertation argues that the UNIA proved to be an important catalyst to the establishment of black communities in Canada. Conversely, Garveyites in Canada played a significant role in the growth and survival of the Garvey movement around the world. Indeed, the UNIA served to unite and strengthen black communities across Canada while providing its members with the tools they needed to engage in the global Garvey movement and the fight against racial discrimination. Canadian UNIA divisions provided black communities across the country with a secular outlet aimed at celebrating their shared African heritage, creating a united voice in matters of politics and economics, and educating its membership on the issues most prevalent to black peoples across the globe. In doing so, the UNIA helped to bolster local black communities in Canada while forging a Pan-African consciousness in its membership. In turn, UNIA members in Canada put their Pan-African consciousness into action as participants in the association's global initiatives. Canadian Garveyites saw themselves as part of a worldwide black community, and their contributions to the UNIA declared their presence within the African Diaspora.

This dissertation is a continuation of my Master of Arts research which focuses on the reasons why West Indian immigrants in Canada comprised the majority of UNIA members in this country, and the ways in which they used the UNIA as an outlet of West Indian cultural expression.

The UNIA in Canada remains an understudied component of black Canadian studies, thus it seemed pertinent to more fully examine the association's far-reaching effects at the local, national, and international level. Uniquely, UNIA divisions in Canada were often closely tied to the most prominent black church in the community. In three of the four locations under study (Montreal, Edmonton, and Cape Breton), UNIA members used the church as a meeting place, event space, and lecture hall for division activities. In the fourth location (Toronto), the role was reversed as the Afro Community Church held its Sunday services at the UNIA Hall.

Historically the black church has played a fundamental role in the creation of black social identities in Canada. There are essentially two competing perspectives on the influence of this institution on African Canadian people. On one side is the argument put forth by Robin Winks who contends that the black church contributed to the segregation of African Canadians through the establishment of separate institutions of worship¹ On the opposite side is James Walker's approach to black church studies which is distinctly optimistic by comparison. Walker asserts claims that the creation of the black church was a response to deeply seeded racial discrimination which sought to diminish the sense of self-worth among black Canadians. Establishing a black church provided African Canadians with a place where they could safely and freely express themselves and forge a communal identity based on similar Christian values and practices.² I agree with Walker's orientation on the subject, especially if we consider the relationship between the black church and secular organizations. Secular and religious institutions usually had a symbiotic relationship and

¹ Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd edition (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 178, 480. For a more detailed analysis of the varying perspectives on the black church in Canada, see John Coates, John R. Graham, et al., *Spirituality and Social Work: Selected Canadian Readings* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2007), 300-3.

² James W. St.G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (New York: Longman Group Ltd. and Dalhousie University Press, 1976), 79-80. Many others share Walker's point of view. See, for example, Daniel G. Hill, *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Agincourt: The Book Society of Canada Ltd., 1981), 130; and Dorothy Shadd Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church: A Stabilizer* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1983), 13.

overlapping memberships. Both the UNIA and the black church accepted and embraced a fundamental difference between the races. In fact, to be separate was sometimes considered ideal because it allowed African Canadians to openly express their religious and personal beliefs without fear of white retaliation.

It must be noted that this dissertation focuses wholly on the secular organization known as the UNIA and its importance in each of the communities under study. It examines the role of the black church inasmuch as it was tied to the UNIA divisions in each case study; I will discuss only those black churches that were linked to the Garvey movement and members of the UNIA. In this way, this dissertation is not an exploration of the black church in Canada, but more simply draws upon black church scholarship whenever necessary to explain each community's cultural life.

In order to contextualize the Garvey movement in Canada, this dissertation focuses on the period between 1900 and 1950. This allows for an examination of UNIA members' settlement patterns and their cultural backgrounds, two factors which may prove to be pertinent to the history of the UNIA in Canada. Moreover, the periodization of this study encourages a cross-border or transnational approach, given the importance of immigration to the story of the UNIA and the African Diaspora. The UNIA experienced its heyday in Canada in the 1920s, but proved to be important to several black communities well into the 1930s and 1940s. Some time is devoted to understanding the needs of a new generation of immigrants after 1940, and the organizations that were established as a result. However, it should be clarified that this last point should not be understood as a central focus of this project. Rather, the influence and/or legacy of the UNIA can be observed by studying the arrival of new American and Caribbean settlers after 1950 and the organizations they created. The topic of legacy is elucidated in the dissertation's epilogue which provides insight into the existence of the UNIA in Canada after 1950.

The history of the UNIA in Canada is affected by both time *and* space given the distinctive geographical qualities of the country, as well as variations in settlement patterns in various regions. The UNIA spread across Canada throughout the 1920s, establishing divisions in every province except Prince Edward Island. Therefore, it is important to work within a national framework. However, variations in the settlement patterns of black immigrants in Canada compel the author to examine the UNIA according to region. For example, since most black settlers (and UNIA members) in the western provinces were African-American immigrants, it is reasonable to study this as a region. Likewise, since many black immigrants and UNIA members in Atlantic Canada originated from the Caribbean, the eastern provinces can be investigated as a single region. Taken together, this dissertation will draw on regional, national, and even transnational frameworks to provide a more complete picture of the UNIA as a local, Canadian, and global movement.

It is important to provide a discussion on population numbers and distribution in Canada. Although I have consulted and referred to the Canadian census throughout this dissertation, it should be noted that the numbers found therein are not entirely accurate. Leo Bertley explains that “As early as the 1851 census ... many enumerators were guilty of ‘negligence and ignorance.’ Blacks themselves compounded the problem by choosing to classify themselves as ‘Americans,’ ‘West Indians,’ or ‘Natives’ of Canada rather than as ‘Coloured Persons,’ the designation used in the census” for persons of African descent. Moreover, some black persons may not have taken part in the census at all. As a result, population figures for blacks in Canada throughout the period under study are likely grossly underestimated. Winks also maintains that since census enumerators did not provide an exact definition of the term “Negro,” population numbers for blacks in Canada are speculative.³ What the census numbers do reveal is that, compared to the overall population of

³ Leo W. Bertley, “The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979,” PhD Dissertation. (1980), 99; and Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 485.

Canada at any given time, African Canadians comprised only a tiny minority. According to the 1911 census, the total Canadian population was 7,206,643, with only 16,877 categorized as “Negroes.” By 1921 that number had increased only slightly; there were 18,291 “Negroes” out of a total Canadian population of 8,787,949. These numbers did not change very much in the three decades that followed.⁴ That means that blacks comprised less than one percent of the total Canadian population during the years under study.

Approach

This dissertation takes a case study approach. I define “case study” as the in-depth study of an individual group to represent a particular region, especially in relation to a larger unit. The case study approach takes into consideration the environmental and external factors that contribute to a specific group’s identity within the larger unit. By taking this approach, my hope is to demonstrate how geography helped to shape the existence of the UNIA in Canada. The UNIA in Canada had thirty-two divisions, most of which were tiny and relatively inactive. These divisions left few, if any, records behind which makes it near impossible to perform a detailed examination of each individual Canadian division. It is unclear why there is such a lack of historical evidence available on the UNIA divisions in Canada. Perhaps many of the smaller divisions operated mainly as a social hangout, which would not require the level of formal record-keeping of that of a larger division, with regular meetings and auxiliary groups. It could be that UNIA members had a sense of fear or suspicion of whites, given that Marcus Garvey was a controversial international figure. By leaving no records behind, there would be no potential for evidence that could be used against local black

⁴ In 1901 there were approximately 17,500 blacks and 5 million Canadians. In 1931 there were 19,456 blacks out of approximately 10 million Canadians; 1941 shows 22,174 blacks among 11 million, and 1951 shows a slight decline to 18,020 out of a total population of 14 million. See Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941, 1951.

communities. More likely, it may be that documents deteriorated over time, or that members saw no use of saving written records for posterity.

This dissertation examines the divisions for which the most written records exist, in this case, Montreal, Toronto, the divisions of Cape Breton, and Edmonton. Coincidentally, the UNIA divisions in these four areas are representative of the influence of the Garvey movement in these regions in Canada. In other words, the Montreal Division denotes UNIA interest in Quebec; the Toronto Division represents the UNIA in central Canada/Ontario; the three divisions of Cape Breton Island characterize the association in the eastern provinces; and the Edmonton Division epitomizes the rapid rise and fall the UNIA in western Canada. In these ways, the case study approach is the most practical way to examine the influence of the UNIA in Canada.

This work is not based in any one theory, nor does it adopt any particular analytical framework. Instead, theory and analytical frameworks from diaspora studies, religious studies, and social history inspire the types of questions asked of my sources. This project draws inspiration from Robert Orsi's *The Madonna of 115th Street*. His study is based on the theory of "lived religions," which is the study of "religious practice and imagination in ongoing, dynamic relation with the realities and structures of everyday life in particular times and places."⁵ In other words, Orsi explores how religion and religious idioms help to shape our world, and how this world then affects the lived experience of its followers in many other aspects of life. The UNIA, of course, is not a religious institution. However, Orsi's theory inspires a way of thinking which suggests that institutions that are highly valued by its members and are central to their lives can have a significant impact on the daily experiences of a community of people. Orsi's theory that specific communities and their institutions have a reciprocal relationship raises questions about the purpose(s) of UNIA in Canada. For instance, how did UNIA members shape the way(s) in which their local divisions

⁵ Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem* (Yale University Press, 1988), xiii.

operated? How did the UNIA affect the daily lives of its members at the local level? Did a shared belief in Garvey's message mean that Canadian Garveyites lived a similar experience despite regional borders? Or did their locality (for instance, Toronto compared to Sydney) create a unique UNIA experience in each part of Canada?

From a diasporic framework, it is necessary to consider how race, ethnicity, and geography intersect within the confines of a singular organization, the UNIA. Because the UNIA operated at the local, national, and international level, questions arise about the nature of the association and its members at each stage. For instance, how did the cultural, ethnic, and political diversity of UNIA members contribute to its history in Canada? What were the typical needs of UNIA members, and did their local divisions reflect their desire to meet these needs? Were the needs and political views of UNIA members influenced by their cultural and ethnic backgrounds? Did Canada's Garveyites try to connect with fellow members around the world? And is the UNIA in Canada a product or a representation of the African Diaspora?

To answer these questions, this dissertation looks at the day-to-day operations of the UNIA Divisions in Canada. Doing so helps to unpack the ways in which men, women, and children engaged with the association. Studying the UNIA in this way allows one to identify the regional characteristics and the primary concerns of the black communities across Canada.

Historiography

American and Caribbean historians have amassed an extensive historiography on Garveyism over more than fifty years. Naturally, the appeal and impact of this anticolonial and/or black nationalist movement, as it has been labeled in the scholarship, has been examined from a variety of perspectives; Garveyism in America has been studied along racial, class, and gendered lines. Yet despite the United States' close proximity to Canada, the literature on the UNIA provides little

insight into African-Canadian participation in the Garvey Movement. In fact, only a few historians have addressed the UNIA in Canada, albeit briefly.

Edmund Cronon's groundbreaking biography of Garvey, *Black Moses* (1955), sets the pace for a whole school of scholars who study Garveyism as a race movement.⁶ According to Cronon, Garvey ultimately failed to end the colonial rule of Africa and the incessant racism which raged in the West Indies and in the United States. Canada is plainly excluded from Cronon's analysis. Cronon contends that the movement was largely ineffective in ameliorating the race problem in America because Garvey never established the utopian "black empire" for which he so adamantly campaigned. In this strictly binary analysis, agency remains in the hands of the colonizers, making Garvey an insignificant and disillusioned radical. And, not surprisingly for a study of the 1950s, Cronon gives no indication of how gender and class affected Garveyism, thereby disengaging women and the lower classes from the movement entirely.

In *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (1978), Wilson Jeremiah Moses argues that colonial era of the nineteenth century stands in opposition to the twentieth-century age of nationalism and black nationalism. Dean Robinson (2001) builds on this claim by arguing that black nationalism is characterized by its "inability to diverge from what could be considered the 'normal' politics of its day."⁷ In other words, black nationalists like Garvey often use the same strategies as their white oppressors. These strategies, according to Robinson, included resettlement, civilizing, Christianizing, industrializing, and the rhetoric of manhood – an element which is absent from

⁶ One example is renowned Garvey historian, Tony Martin. Unlike Cronon, Martin calls Garveyism a success based on its ability to unite African-Americans and raise race consciousness. However, he ignores Garvey's controversial, even racist, language, thus over-compensating for Cronon's disparaging conclusions. Moreover, race, as the title clarifies, comes first; the issues of class and gender are once again not adequately addressed. And Martin's sweeping survey of the movement lamentably makes only fleeting remarks about Canada's participation in the UNIA. See *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976).

⁷ Dean Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

Moses' study.⁸ However, these strategies are also colonial. It seems that Moses and Robinson forget that the goals of nineteenth-century colonialism and of early twentieth-century black nationalism overlap. But most disappointing is that neither scholar explains that the strength of this movement lay in Garvey's talent to use this colonial and nationalistic rhetoric to gain the support of a specific constituency, be it West Indian or African-American.

The works presented above clearly present race as the primary motive of the movement. However, Judith Stein (1986) and Rupert Lewis (1988) examine why class provides a way to gauge the popularity of the UNIA. Stein argues that class is the best lens through which to view this movement because, as Lewis points out in *Marcus Garvey, Anti-Colonial Champion*, Garveyism was primarily a working-class phenomenon. Both historians opt for a Marxist perspective because Garvey's nationalistic goals were heavily based on capitalism; Garvey believed that an industrially-developed black nation would uplift the race.⁹ Despite these insightful arguments, Stein and Lewis do not consider African Canadians in their analyses. Perhaps more disappointing is Lewis's conclusion that the UNIA's "back-to-Africa" philosophy acted solely as a metaphor for race pride since the successful re-colonization of Liberia was never completed.¹⁰ This ignores how the extreme

⁸ Michele Mitchell argues that the preservation of the black race was directly linked to gender and sexual discourses of the period covered (1877-1930). Mitchell explains that a nationalist ideology informed by gender discourses struck a chord with black men in America, disappointingly omitting any mention of or comparison to Canadian men. Mitchell contends that African-American men trusted that the all-black nation and economic prosperity offered by Garvey and the UNIA would put an end to the frequent sexual exploitation of their women by white men, thus reaffirming their own masculinity. See *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁹ As Stein aptly explains, "working-class progress, not the growth of racial enterprise, became the preferred route to racial economic power, which was both an end in itself and the platform for the fight against racial discrimination." *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 233.

¹⁰ This conclusion ignores the reality that the UNIA was actively constructing a resettlement scheme until 1924 when the Americo-Liberian ruling class realized Garvey's colonial project would challenge their privileged position. See M.B. Akpan, "Liberia and the Universal Negro Improvement Association: The Background to the Abortion of Garvey's Scheme for African Colonization," *Journal of African History* 14, no. 1 (1973): 127. Otis B. Grant offers another perspective on the true meaning behind the "Back to Africa" movement. He contends that Garvey "correctly surmised that capitalism is the cornerstone of righteousness and thus social justice should be evaluated by a capitalistic yardstick." Therefore, the economic ambitions of the UNIA, including the Black Star Line, "did not represent a 'back to Africa'

nature of Garvey's re-colonization plan divided native-born black Canadians, who found the movement to be radical, and their West Indian and African-American counterparts, who viewed the UNIA's strategies as the best way to achieve racial equality.

The role of gender in the UNIA lends another interesting dimension to the movement. Karen S. Adler (1992) and Ula Y. Taylor (2002) examine Garveyism from a feminist perspective through the eyes of Marcus's second wife, Amy Jacques Garvey. For Jacques Garvey, "feminism and black nationalism were inextricably linked"¹¹ in what Taylor calls "community feminism."¹² Community feminism reconciles the so-called "oppositional forces" of black nationalism and feminism. However, to call the two "oppositional" is perhaps an overstatement given their common doctrines of self-determination and liberation. These commonalities in feminist and nationalist discourse allow Adler and Taylor to avoid the incongruous masculinist message of the movement based on citizenship.¹³ Plus, their top-down approach to Garveyism through the eyes of a leader falls short of highlighting the actions of working-class female Garveyites (both in Canada and the

movement but rather African Americans' acceptance of capitalism as a means of progression." See Otis B. Grant, "Social Justice versus Social Equality: The Capitalistic Jurisprudence of Marcus Garvey," *Journal of Black Studies* 33, 4 (March 2003): 490, 496.

¹¹ Karen S. Adler, "'Always Leading Our Men in Service and Sacrifice': Amy Jacques Garvey, Feminist Black Nationalist," *Gender and Society* 6, no.3 (September 1992): 371.

¹² Ula Y. Taylor, "'Negro Women are Great Thinkers as well as Doers': Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism in the United States, 1924-1927," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no.2 (Summer 2000): 105.

¹³ Matthew Pratt Guterl's examination of Garveyism relies heavily upon the dominant masculine ideologies informing the upsurge in nationalism during this period. He argues that Garveyism was essentially the quest for manhood, that is, liberty, citizenship, and statehood. However, the pervasiveness of Guterl's notions of masculinity and race should be questioned. For one, he too emphatically applies the notions of masculinity and race practiced in one city (New York) on a national, and sometimes international, scale, which regrettably excludes Canada. Second, the characters Guterl examines belong to the upper echelon of society (such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Jean Toomer, et. al.), thus undermining any alternative gender ideologies prevalent among the lower classes. See "Bleeding the Irish White," in *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001): 68-99.

United States), not to mention how class and ethnicity produced alternative views on feminism and black nationalism.¹⁴

The topic of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA remains a popular topic within black studies. Colin Grant's *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (2008) is the latest biography on the UNIA's patriarch and it benefits from the eclectic scholarship accrued over the decades, plus the ten volume series compiled by Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Papers* (1983-2000). Grant's most compelling chapters examine Garvey's early life in Jamaica, where colonial authority and a rigid colour hierarchy based on class laid the groundwork for Garvey's later philosophies on race discrimination. Nevertheless, Grant notes that Garvey began to "detach himself from an outlook formed through the prism of a Jamaican colonial world, governed firstly through class privilege and secondly by racial prejudices" because "on American soil that order was reversed: race came first."¹⁵ Though the study is nuanced, Grant, like most before him, falls short of adequately discussing how these colonial, class, and racial dimensions affected Garveyism's connection to African Canadians.

Two more recent studies on Garveyism examine how the rhetoric and unifying principles of the movement had an impact on global black politics. Robert Trent Vinson argues that the language of the Garvey movement was instrumental in helping segregated blacks of South Africa to unify and fight against apartheid. Adam Ewing's work demonstrates how the UNIA connected blacks across the African diaspora in a "sustained project of network building" while giving them the tools and

¹⁴ See Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African-American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 126-129 for a nuanced discussion of racial, class and gender discourses affecting African-American women and the Garvey movement.

¹⁵ Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 93.

opportunity to engage with black politics, both locally and internationally.¹⁶ Current studies of Garveyism like these are beginning to unpack the widespread impact of Garveyism on black communities around the world

There were no Canadian national or international black leaders in the early twentieth century. Rather, most black leaders in Canada were at the local, grassroots level. Perhaps that is why the UNIA, and black history in general, remain understudied in Canadian scholarship. The Canadian component of Garveyism is grossly understudied, producing a sizable gap in the historiography. Canadian historians have been slow to tap into the records of Canada's UNIA divisions, and only very few have. The first was Robin Winks, who provides only a very brief discussion of Garveyism in his sweeping survey, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (1971, 1997). According to Winks, Garvey's "insistence on racial purity" was unappealing to native-born black Canadians who sometimes intermarried with whites and indigenous peoples. In addition, "the pseudo-religious overtones of the UNIA, and the secular preachings of its African Orthodox Church, were uncongenial to many in Canada."¹⁷ Above all else, Winks surmises that the movement was much smaller in scale in Canada than in the United States given its limited following of mainly West Indian immigrants. To Winks, Garveyism in Canada appears to be just a blip on the radar.¹⁸

However, the anecdotes of several former UNIA members show that this movement carried much more significance in Canada. In response to "xenophobic" and "racist" Canadian scholarship,

¹⁶ Robert Trent Vinson, *"The Americans Are Coming!" Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012) and Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garveyism: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5-6.

¹⁷ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 415.

¹⁸ Keith Henry argues the same. In his study on black politics in Toronto, Henry denies that the UNIA was important to Toronto Garveyites, claiming that the Garvey movement was "little more than long-term nationalist education and local political action." He goes on to state that "there was little in Toronto to match the black energy evident in Montreal," which had a larger membership base. See Keith Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto since World War I* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981), 19 and 28.

Dionne Brand (1992) conducted a series of interviews with working-class black women in Ontario to uncover their experiences outside the home.¹⁹ While Brand herself offers little analysis, the sum of oral histories from former UNIA members are telling of the enthusiasm for the Garvey movement in Canada, “perhaps the first secular movement to rival the magnetism of the churches in the Black Community in Canada.”²⁰ According to interviewee, Esther Hayes, a native of the West Indies, “The UNIA [in Toronto] was strong – the group in Montreal was also strong and a group across the border; they had connections, so when they had a convention, everybody and his dog were there – Marcus Garvey and all his men were there.”²¹ Certainly, then, UNIA participation in large cities like Toronto and Montreal was considerable, especially by immigrants from the West Indies.

In fact, Leo W. Bertley’s PhD dissertation on the Montreal Division of the UNIA (1980) delves even deeper on this topic. Bertley argues that the Montreal Division played a vital role in the success of the UNIA, peaking in 1922 with about 700 members who were mostly of West Indian origin.²² Bertley dexterously covers how issues of gender, race, and class, and to some extent, ethnicity, affected member participation in the many UNIA activities and auxiliaries. For instance, Bertley highlights some of the tensions between native-born black Canadians and the West Indian immigrants who they believed to be “loud and aggressive, two alleged traits which, to the native-born, contributed greatly to the difficult relationship which already existed between the black and white communities.”²³ The one visible downfall of this otherwise thorough study is that it covers

¹⁹ Dionne Brand, *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s-1950s* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1992), 11.

²⁰ Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, 16.

²¹ Brand, “Esther Hayes and Eleanor Hayes,” in *No Burden to Carry*, 204.

²² Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 95.

²³ *Ibid.*, 155.

only one of thirty-two Canadian divisions. It is therefore in my interest to see if Bertley's observations apply to these various other divisions.

More recently, scholars such as Jared Toney have grappled with Toronto's role within the African diaspora, with the UNIA serving as a means of connecting black communities around the world. Following Toney's work, this dissertation affirms that Canada, and particularly the four regions discussed herein, should be considered a significant part of the global network we call the African diaspora. My previous work on the UNIA deals more specifically with the reasons why West Indian immigrants comprised the vast majority of UNIA members in Canada. It examines the distinct traits, especially high literacy rates, experience in trade unions, and a strong Pan-African consciousness, that led West Indians to join the UNIA, and how their service in the UNIA granted these immigrants the chance to forge and express a distinct Caribbean identity in Canada.²⁴ Building on this, and inspired by more recent studies on the Garvey movement, this dissertation examines the UNIA at both the local and transnational level, situating the Canadian UNIA divisions and their members within the larger black diasporic framework.

As indicated by the literature reviewed above, the historiography of Garveyism presents an interesting paradox. On the one hand, Garveyism was and continues to be a popular field of study among historians. On the other hand, historians of Garveyism fall short of conveying a judicious and nuanced picture of the movement; race, class, and gender tend to act as opponents rather than as social discourses influencing one another. Furthermore, common among all historians of Garveyism to date is the clear inability to sufficiently confront how the movement was received by Canada's black communities. This dissertation demonstrates that the history of the UNIA cannot be fully understood without an examination of Canadian contributions to the Garvey movement.

²⁴ Jared G. Toney, "Locating Diaspora: Afro-Caribbean Narratives of Migration and Settlement in Toronto, 1914-1929," *Urban History* 38, 2 (Spring 2010): 76; and Carla Marano, "'Rising Strongly and Rapidly': The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940," *Canadian Historical Review* 91, 2 (June 2010): 234-259.

Terminology

Language is in a constant state of flux, and common vernacular is greatly influenced by the passage of time. When dealing with concepts such as race and ethnicity, using terminology that is both sensitive and politically correct is of paramount importance. The UNIA was a “race first” organization, meaning its principles, goals, and membership were based on the unifying element of African ancestry. **Race** is a social construct. Societal attitudes over the course of several hundred years have dictated that there are connections between one’s physical attributes and their behaviour, intelligence, and social standing. Scientifically speaking, we know that human behaviour is *not* predicated on one’s genetically inherited phenotypes, or physical traits. However, the age of European colonial expansion changed all this. In the words of James W. St.G. Walker, race “was the product of a global paradigm emerging from European expansion and conquest.” He explains,

The expansion of Europe into regions with populations bearing dramatically different physical features led to a global stratification of conqueror and conquered, superior and subordinate, by which was created, through military and political means, an observable coincidence between phenotype and social position.

The transatlantic slave trade, which was the cornerstone of European colonialism, illustrates Walker’s point. The Europeans, who were powerful, wealthy, and of lighter complexion, arrived on the African continent and conquered a people that were comparatively weaker, poorer, and of darker complexion. It was at this point that “[p]hysical features had been rendered significant.” Suddenly, people who did not look like the European colonizers were categorized as inferior; physical appearance became a demarcation of one’s social status. In turn, the Europeans rationalized that inferior people were thus only suited for subservient roles in society. “Thus was ‘race’ produced.”²⁵

²⁵ James W. St.G. Walker, “Race,” *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and WLU Press, 1997), 13.

The concept of race became “common sense” by the nineteenth century, and it has affected cultural relations across the globe ever since. From a biological perspective, race is not real. It only exists in society’s psychological realm as an invention passed down by the powerful to maintain the status quo. Helping people of African descent to overcome this imposed “mental slavery,” as Marcus Garvey put it, was the fuel that sparked organizations like the UNIA and human rights activism for decades thereafter.

Because race groups people together based on their physical characteristics, it is easy to overlook the cultural traits that divide them. Cultural differences are those based on one’s country of origin, religious background, native language, and culinary and sartorial traditions. Grouped together, these traits comprise one’s **ethnicity**. Joseph Mensah explains, “Unlike racial groups, which are often distinguished by socially selected physical characteristics, ethnic groups are identified by socially selected cultural attributes. Thus, ‘ethnicity’ connotes a shared cultural heritage.”²⁶ Any work dealing with the UNIA, given its global appeal, should demonstrate the intersection between race and ethnicity and the complexity of black identity. This study requires an examination of ethnic identity among blacks in Canada because UNIA membership in this country was largely associated with one’s ethnicity. Although the UNIA was a race-based organization, one’s ethnic background influenced participation in the UNIA in Canada. As a result it is important to refer to each group by name to help understand where these people were situated, and how one’s background affected their desire to join the UNIA.

From time to time I use the terms “African Canadian” or “black Canadian” in this dissertation. These terms refer to any person of African descent living in Canada, no matter their ethnic background. However, most of the time I distinguish between the three major ethnic groups that comprised Canada’s black (i.e., of African descent) population in the early twentieth century:

²⁶ Joseph Mensah, *Black Canadians: History, Experience, Social Conditions*, 2nd ed. (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), 20.

native-born black Canadians, African Americans, and West Indians. The term “**native-born black Canadian**” refers to those persons of African descent who were born and raised in Canada, and who claimed official Canadian citizenship status. It seems that very few native-born black Canadians joined the rank-and-file membership of the UNIA, but rather preferred to take part in other benevolent organizations as well as their local churches. This dissertation also refers to **African Americans**, or African-American immigrants, throughout. As the terminology suggests, African-American immigrants are those persons who migrated to Canada from the United States and settled in various parts of the country, especially in southern Ontario, Montreal, and in the Prairie Provinces. This group of immigrants tended to be transient, meaning they lived in Canada for short periods of time and typically did not give up their official American citizenship status. The third group referred to in this study are the **West Indians**. West Indian immigrants are those people who migrated to Canada from the Caribbean islands of the British West Indies, most commonly from the Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Antigua, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent.

Although they are from different countries with ethnicities all their own, I have referred to the West Indians as a singular group for a few reasons. For one, scholars agree that immigrants from the Caribbean have a lot in common in terms of their culture, politics, religious beliefs, linguistic characteristics, culinary preferences, and tie to the British Commonwealth. Second, ethnic identity is always in a state of flux. Victor Satzewich and Nikolaos Liidakis explain that ethnicity is “a reciprocal process that varies according to time and place.” They purport that ethnicity depends on maintaining one’s cultural traditions *and* on the ways these cultural traditions are perceived ethnic outsiders. For instance, in the Caribbean people from Grenada, Trinidad, and Jamaica are each recognized as ethnically distinct based on their country of origin. But outside their homeland they are seen differently; in Canada, people from Grenada, Trinidad, and Jamaica may be identified as a

singular group, that is West Indians, because they come from a particular region, share linguistic traits, and have similar traditions in music, food, and dress.²⁷ West Indians immigrants made up the majority of UNIA members in Canada and, as a group, are central to this study.

During the period under study, the two most common terms used to describe persons of African descent were “**negro**” and “**coloured.**” While both terms are now dated and considered offensive by many, they were much more common than the vernacular we use today, including **black, African American, and Afro Caribbean.** At the time, African Canadians preferred the term “coloured” as it was considered a less offensive term by this segment of society. The term “negro” is derived from the Latin word “niger,” meaning “black,” and it was a term used to describe slaves by the Portuguese and Spanish during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, some African Canadians considered it a pejorative term. However, Garvey and some other black leaders of the time decided to take ownership of the term “negro” as a point of pride rather than shame. In fact, Garvey implored blacks in Canada (and everywhere) to describe themselves as negro because there was honour in distinguishing oneself as black. He claimed that being grouped together with other “coloured races” like the Chinese, Japanese, and Indigenous peoples removed a level of individualism from people of African descent. In his words, “You do not form a distinctive group, you do not form a national group, you do not form an imperial group, and so your destiny must naturally link up with the people from which you have sprung.”²⁸ Garveyites in Canada and around the world embraced the term “negro” to describe themselves while members of other organizations with a mixed-race membership, like the Canadian League for the Advancement of Colored People

²⁷ Victor Satzewich and Nikolaos Liodakis, *“Race” and Ethnicity in Canada: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 112.

²⁸ Robert A. Hill, ed., “Speech by Marcus Garvey,” in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1991), 7: 862.

(CLACP) or the Home Service Association (HSA), usually used the term “coloured.” Today it is no longer acceptable to use either term unless quoting directly from a source from the period.

Related to this was Garvey’s own perception of race. In general, when Garvey referred to race, he was specifically referring to persons of African descent. Garvey boasted that his movement helped to raise **“race consciousness”** in persons of African descent. However, today the term “race consciousness” can be viewed as ambiguous, antiquated, and perhaps even offensive to some. This is because “race” in this case was simply a euphemism for “black.” There are many examples throughout the early twentieth century where the term “race” actually meant “black” or “negro.” “Race records,” for instance, were musical albums performed by black artists for black audiences. The same can be said for “race radio shows,” and even for “race newspapers” which were owned and operated by African Americans and reported on stories that would appeal to a black readership. Garvey’s sense of the expression “race consciousness” certainly followed this general rule. The UNIA’s goal of raising one’s “race consciousness” specifically meant instilling in its members a sense of pride in their shared African heritage. Although the meaning remained the same, the terminology to denote one’s pride in their African roots became more precise during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s when “black pride” became the preferred phrase among black activists in Canada and the United States. My use of the phrase “race consciousness” in this dissertation is purely in reference to the vernacular used by Garvey and his peers in the hopes of providing some historical context for the movement. The same is true for the term **“racial uplift.”** Garvey commonly said that the purpose of the UNIA was to uplift the race. This simply meant that the UNIA was targeting people of African descent with programs designed to enrich their lives in the realms of spirituality, education, economics, and camaraderie.

The Case Studies

This dissertation is divided into four chapters, each one a case study based on the UNIA's usefulness and influence in four different geographic parts of Canada. However, the layout of the dissertation is meant to encompass both the temporal and geographical scope presented above. It begins with a brief prologue outlining the history of the Garvey movement in Canada and abroad in order to provide necessary context on the rise and fall of the UNIA. The prologue also compares Garvey to a few of his most famous contemporaries, including Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and A. Philip Randolph. Doing so allows us to see what made Garvey and the UNIA exceptional, and why his methods appealed to millions of people around the world.

Following this, the case studies are arranged chronologically according to the launch dates of the Canadian divisions under review. Each follows a similar format, beginning with historical context and a measure of the racial climate in each region under study. The case studies then explain the rise of the UNIA in each community and its local impact, followed by each division's participation in the Garvey movement at the national and international level. The chapters conclude with an analysis on the decline of the UNIA in each area by the 1950s.

Chapter One examines the role of the Montreal Division as Garvey's gateway into Canada, as well as its importance at the local level as a hub for the city's black community. It explores the Montreal Division's deep devotion to the Garvey movement throughout the decades, highlighting the service of several important leaders who made large contributions at the international level. The chapter also makes ties to Union United Church and the Negro Community Centre which, in addition to the UNIA, were vitally important to the growth and development of Montreal's black community.

Chapter Two on the Toronto Division highlights the role of the UNIA as a popular community centre for the city's West Indian population. It pays special attention to the importance

of purchasing their own UNIA Hall as a measure of success and strength. The Toronto case study also illustrates the division's commitment to educating future generations of Garveyites at regular Sunday meetings and through Garvey's School of African Philosophy. It also explains the vital role Toronto Garveyites played in spreading the work of Garvey across the province, and maintaining the association during the tumultuous 1930s and 1940s. Finally, the chapter demonstrates the links between the UNIA and the formation of the Afro Community Church.

Chapter Three studies the divisions of Cape Breton Island: New Aberdeen, Sydney, and New Waterford. The chapter argues that the UNIA in Cape Breton was instrumental in establishing a strong black community where one did not exist prior to its foundation. It also demonstrates how the UNIA became an outlet to express one's West Indian heritage. The chapter explores the link between the UNIA and the African Orthodox Church, both of which appealed to Garvey's followers and worked to reinforce a sense of community in Sydney

Chapter Four is the first ever in-depth study of the Edmonton Division and its neighbouring communities. Although short-lived, the UNIA in this province demonstrates the reasons why Garveyism appealed to the group of immigrants who landed on the Great Plains at the beginning of the twentieth century. The UNIA afforded Alberta's black residents with a means of uniting isolated communities, in addition to providing a springboard to other, more specific organizations to meet their particular needs. It also delves into the Edmonton Division's close relationship with Shiloh Baptist Church, as well as the impact of the railway on the spread of Garveyism in Canada.

Lastly, an epilogue revisits the UNIA in each of the four regions discussed above after 1950 to better understand its legacy and impact on African Canadian society. The epilogue gives a sense of the changes that took place within the black communities in these regions, and if/how the UNIA evolved to serve a changing demographic. More than anything, the epilogue hopes to encourage

others to delve deeper into the history of the UNIA post-1950 to unpack its influence on civil rights activism and black community-building in late twentieth-century Canada.

The purpose of this project is to add to the ever-growing scholarship on Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. More specifically, this dissertation serves as the first comprehensive history of the UNIA in Canada. It explores a seriously understudied period in African-Canadian history, especially as it relates to settlement and community-building. Much of the existing historiography on African Canadians has highlighted the history of slavery in Canada and the era of the Underground Railroad. Very little is written about the history of blacks in Canada after the nineteenth century. The period between 1900 and 1950 was one of significant change for blacks in Canada in terms of migration, community-building, and “race consciousness,” and therefore requires a more thorough examination.

In addition, this research connects black Canadians to the wider Garvey movement, and more broadly to the African Diaspora. The UNIA in Canada is a product of the African Diaspora, and reflects political and cultural tones in Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States during the period under study. In this way, this dissertation is based in diaspora studies and Canadian history. Although national in scope, this dissertation has attempted to transcend borders and show that Canadian history should not be studied in isolation from global events. The history of the UNIA in Canada demonstrates that this country and its peoples are integral to global history, and should be approached from a diasporic perspective in order to understand its place in the world.

Prologue

“No one remember old Marcus Garvey”¹

The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) would not exist if not for the visionary mind of Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the son of Malchus Moziah Garvey and Sarah Jane Richards. Richards bore four children with Malchus, with only two surviving into adulthood: Marcus, the youngest, and his older sister, Indiana. Sarah, a domestic servant, and Malchus, a bricklayer by trade, raised their working-class family in Saint Ann’s Bay, Jamaica. Marcus was born on August 17, 1887 and had a typical childhood and was a bright student with a penchant for reading. Although the colour-class system² prevailed in Jamaica at this time, young Garvey was oblivious to racial prejudices and easily befriended both black and white children. It was not until his teenage years that Garvey became aware of racism. One day while Garvey was socializing with his friend, a fourteen-year-old white girl, she explained that her father no longer wanted them to spend time together because he was a “nigger.”³ This was a pivotal moment in young Marcus’ life as his eyes opened to the great racial inequalities facing blacks in Jamaica.

As a teenager Garvey learned more about racism when he became a printer’s apprentice under the tutelage of his godfather, Alfred Burrowes. Reading stories of racial injustices in the Americas, Garvey became more and more curious about how black people were treated in all parts of the world. He also gained valuable experience in politics and labour unionism as a printer, having

¹ Lyrics from the song “Old Marcus Garvey,” performed by reggae artist, Burning Spear. P. Fullwood and Winston Rodney, *Marcus Garvey*, Burning Spear. Island Records, 1975, Vinyl.

² The colour-class system of the Caribbean was a colonial invention instituted by British slaveholders to ensure their dominance over the rest of the population, typically slaves and servants of African origin. In this society the “white” colonialists, who were a tiny minority in the Caribbean, comprised the upper ruling class. The “brown” middle-class comprised those of mixed European and African ancestry, while the “black” majority in the Caribbean occupied the lower classes. In the colour-class system to refer to someone’s skin colour was not only a reference to their race, but also to their social class. Thus, to elevate one’s social status meant accepting and adopting British morals and standards of respectability. See Aggrey Brown, *Color, Class, and Politics in Jamaica* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Books, 1979), 147.

³ Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.

participated in a workers strike in 1908.⁴ After moving from his rural hometown into the capital city of Kingston, Garvey noticed for the first time “the vulgarity of wealth butted up against the perfect squalor of Smith Village,” an impoverished neighbourhood where Garvey lived. City living exposed Garvey to the extreme differences between the various classes of people; the lavish lifestyle and extravagant wealth of the white elite contrasted dramatically with the abject poverty, crime, and disease plaguing the black lower classes. Colin Grant explains that “in Kingston, Garvey was developing a fierce hatred of the iniquities of Jamaican society,” and it was at this point when Garvey began to take an interest in Jamaican politics. He joined Jamaica’s Nationalist Club whose goal it was “to challenge the abuses of the Crown government.”⁵ He traveled around Central America and wrote about the exploitation of migrant plantation workers across the Caribbean. He also worked briefly in London, England, for the Pan-African publication, the *African Times and Orient Review*. It was in this role that Garvey developed the Afrocentric political outlook for which he became famous.

Although Garvey never attended university, he was constantly reading in an effort to compensate for his lack of formal education. During his time in London Garvey read, *Up from Slavery*, the autobiography of the great African-American intellectual leader, Booker T. Washington. It “would prove the most influential [book] on his life.”⁶ Through the book Garvey learned that Washington had begun life as a slave boy, and upon manumission he worked his way up in society through hard work and education. He worked odd jobs to pay his tuition at Hampton Normal Agricultural Institute, and even taught at the Institute after graduating from their program. He is most well-known for his role in helping to establish the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute

⁴ Garvey was vice president of his branch of the printer’s union at the time. See Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

which became a leading school for African Americans. Washington's life story was a perfect example of the "American Dream": that one can improve their position in life through self-help and dogged determination. Through hard work, thrift, and practical education Washington had lifted himself out of poverty to become one of the most distinguished black leaders of the early twentieth century. Washington's biography and personal values struck a chord with Garvey who admitted that after reading the book, "being a race leader dawned on me." He began to question why wherever he had traveled, be it the Caribbean, Latin America, or Europe, there were no black men (or women) holding political power. In his words:

I asked, "Where is the black man's Government?" "Where is his King and his kingdom?" "Where is his President, his country, and his ambassador, his army, his navy, his men of big affairs?" I could not find them, and then I declared, "I will help to make them."⁷

Garvey left London in 1914 and returned to Jamaica, his head teeming with ideas gathered during travels around the world. Garvey formed the UNIA-ACL just five days after landing in Kingston on July 7 1914, although he had been cultivating the plan to establish such an organization for several years. He immediately began to work at attracting members to this nascent organization. For nearly two years in Kingston, Garvey tried to no avail to spark interest in his movement whose goal it was "to establish a brotherhood among the black race." In Jamaica, and indeed all around the Caribbean, the matter of one's social class was of greater significance than one's race. Garvey's association, which was based on the primacy of race, would simply not be able to make roots in his homeland. Therefore, Garvey determined that he must seek support for his movement in the United States where race relations and civil rights were more deeply intertwined.⁸ Robert Hill explains, "Marcus Garvey and the UNIA symbolize the historic encounter between two highly

⁷ Robert A. Hill, ed., "The Negro's Greatest Enemy, by Marcus Garvey," in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983), 1:5.

⁸ Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, 52-72.

developed socioeconomic and political traditions: the social consciousness and drive for self-governance of the Caribbean peasantry and the racial consciousness and search for justice of the Afro-American community.”⁹

The UNIA: A Brief History

Garvey founded the organization in 1914 in Kingston, Jamaica and moved its headquarters to Harlem, New York, in 1916 to reach a larger demographic and to be situated in the American hub of black culture and politics. Garvey imagined the UNIA as the benevolent/fraternal side of the organization while the ACL served as the body responsible for the colonization of Africa.¹⁰ The UNIA-ACL was a black nationalist organization, meaning it stressed the importance of nationhood and unity based on race and one’s African heritage.¹¹ Garvey’s main goal was to unify blacks around the world and migrate to Africa to establish a free country where racism would no longer be a barrier to one’s economic or political success. Garvey proclaimed an “Africa for the Africans,” arguing that blacks living in societies dominated by whites would never be granted equal rights or opportunities because the belief in the racial inferiority of African peoples was too deeply rooted in American society. The result was a “race first” organization that required members to be full-

⁹ Hill, “General Introduction,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 1: xxxvi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1: lix.

¹¹ Wilson Jeremiah Moses argues that black nationalism in the United States “often meant either the desire to return to Africa and establish a modern black state, or to establish a separate black nation in the Americas.” Black nationalism also expresses a sense of Pan Africanism which connotes kinship among persons of African descent and a responsibility for their welfare. During what Moses calls the Golden Age of black nationalism (1850-1925), activists stressed the notions of “progress, the doctrine of *racial uplift* or ‘Negro Improvement,’” collectivism, racial separatism, and “a mystical racial chauvinism.” Based on the aforementioned tenets of black nationalism, the UNIA can clearly be categorized as a black nationalist organization. See Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 19-20; and Dean Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

blooded Africans, meaning that whites and even people of mixed race were not permitted to join the UNIA.¹²

To gain support, Garvey wrote and lectured about the greatness of ancient African civilizations. He reasoned that since human civilization had begun in Africa that God must be black, and therefore considered the dark skin, hair, and eyes characteristic of African peoples the pinnacle of physical beauty. Garvey spoke about the strength and sophistication of African civilizations before the Atlantic Slave Trade wreaked havoc on the lives and homes of hardworking families. Once in the New World, the Africans who once led the world's greatest civilizations were treated as property and were made to feel worthless and inferior. Garvey believed that the impact of slavery on blacks and whites in the Americas was irreversible; because enslaved Africans had been considered chattel for hundreds of years, they could never be viewed as equals in a society dominated by whites. In his proposed African nation there would be no whites to hinder the progress of black citizens. The government, economy, and educational system would all be run by blacks, giving everyone equal opportunity to succeed and to rise to the level of every great world power under European influence. The UNIA-ACL would facilitate the growth of the African nation by instituting programs to stimulate the economy, raise morale among black citizens, and educate the population on leadership, politics, culture, and religion.¹³

To millions of blacks around the world, this message was revolutionary. Although blacks from the New World had begun the trek back to Africa long ago, like the Black Loyalists in 1791

¹² Aside from being of African heritage, members "shall not be married to anyone of alien race; shall be conscientious in the cause of race uplift; shall be free from criminal conviction, and shall be of reputable moral standing and good education." Active members were required to pay an entrance fee and monthly fee of twenty-five cents. See Hill, "Universal Negro Catechism," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), 3: 314.

¹³ Marcus Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey, "Aims and Objects of Movement for Solution of Negro Problem," in *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey or Africa for the Africans* (London: Frank Cass & Company Ltd., 1967), 2: 38.

and the American Colonization Society in the 1820s,¹⁴ no one had ever so brazenly challenged the notion of inherent white supremacy, whether intellectually, physically, or spiritually. In a world where beauty was often measured by white standards, Garvey's declaration that black was beautiful was a bold statement, as was his proposal of a black God. Garvey's claim that blacks had the intelligence and wherewithal to thrive in politics and economics if given the opportunity was a call to action; to speak of blacks on equal terms with whites inspired millions of people to follow Garvey and join their local UNIA divisions. The movement mainly attracted working-class blacks in the United States, Canada, and Caribbean because Garvey's philosophies seemed to resonate most deeply with this segment of society that often struggled economically and felt their political voice was mute.

Garvey's rhetoric reflected his upbringing in the British Crown colony of Jamaica, meaning it was colonial in nature. Garvey came of age during the transitional period between the Victorian and Edwardian eras which were characterized by their imperial conquests and the push to expand and maintain the British Empire. In a speech in 1921, Garvey told the crowd to "prepare for conquest." He clarified, "The conquest I want you to make is not the conquest of Europe; not the conquest of alien races; not the conquest of Asia. I want you to make the conquest of Africa – that

¹⁴ For more on the Black Loyalists, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation and James W. St.G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). The American Colonization Society was organized around 1820 by both black and white abolitionists who believed that manumitted slaves would do best if they could "return" to Africa. Also among the group were those who "felt that [ex-slaves] must be sent out of the country if property in slaves was to be secure." The role of the ACS was to educate the public about colonizing Liberia, to raise money to fund the voyages to Africa, and to entice freed slaves to emigrate. The ACS received support and funds from both state and federal governments, and "[b]y 1830 the society had settled 1,420 Negroes in the colony." As time went on abolitionists began to see that many within the ACS were actually using the organization as a means of banishing blacks from the United States so that freed slaves would not influence those who were still enslaved or incite mutinies against slave owners. Rather than helping freed slaves to resettle the ACS was really trying to deport free blacks so that slave society in America would not be disrupted. In fact, most of the freed slaves who resettled in Liberia were from southern slaveholding states. Conversely the colonization scheme was unpopular in the northern free states because its citizens felt the ACS's real purpose was simply to rid blacks from the United States. Consequently support for the ACS waned as the abolitionists abandoned the society, and by the 1850s it was nearly defunct. See John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, Sixth Edition (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1988), 154-7.

which is yours.”¹⁵ In one of his most famous editorials called “African Fundamentalism,” Garvey wrote, “Remember, we live, work and pray for the establishing of a great and binding RACIAL HIERARCHY[,] the founding of a RACIAL EMPIRE whose only natural, spiritual and political limits shall be God and ‘Africa, at home and abroad.’”¹⁶ And while the UNIA depicted Africa as the land of freedom and salvation for blacks everywhere, Garvey’s opinion of the continent was greatly influenced by a Eurocentric vision of western superiority. He asserted that “Africa can only and will only play her part when properly inducted into the necessary knowledge which is to be her salvation. That knowledge must come from America, the land of present opportunities.”¹⁷ In this way, Garvey portrayed the UNIA and its followers as saviours of the continent and as soldiers for the advancement of Africa.

The UNIA’s programs began at the grassroots level in local divisions. These divisions elected officials to lead their membership.¹⁸ They opened auxiliary groups to stimulate participation and to boost morale within black communities. The auxiliary groups represented the UNIA’s agenda for self-sufficiency also served the purpose of training members in various avenues that would help with the development of the proposed African nation. For example, the Universal African Legion (UAL) was quasi-military and it exposed male members of the Association to military drills, while the Black Cross Nurses (BCN) was meant to introduce female members to the field of nursing. The Youth Club or Juvenile Division was implemented to educate young members and inspire future leadership. These types of groups reflected the kinds of institutions a new black

¹⁵ Hill, “Speech by Marcus Garvey,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 214-5.

¹⁶ Hill, “Editorial by Marcus Garvey in the *Negro World* (‘African Fundamentalism’),” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1989), 6: 163.

¹⁷ Marcus Garvey, “The Confusion in America,” *The Black Man* 1 (December 1935): 7.

¹⁸ The UNIA declared, “Each Local Division is required to maintain as far as possible a building of its own (rented, leased or purchased), in which the general meetings shall be held every Sunday afternoon or evening, presided over by the President.” See Hill, “Universal Negro Catechism,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 315.

nation in Africa would need: a military, a health care and education system, and a generation willing to carry on the work.

The opportunities offered under the umbrella of the UNIA certainly reflected the gender ideals of the period. For example, only women could run the Juvenile Branch because it was understood that they possessed an inherent ability to teach young minds. Similarly, the BCN was only for women because nursing was considered to be a female profession, given their (supposed) inborn knowledge of hygiene, healing, and nurturing. In the same vein, the UAL, which was strictly for men, required its members to dress in military garb and perform marching drills. UNIA followers widely accepted and celebrated these gendered roles, which gave members a sense of pride and purpose. In the early 1900s manhood and womanhood were strictly defined by white, middle-class ideals, with manliness measured by a man's ability to provide for and protect his family while motherhood and domesticity reflected the model woman. For working-class blacks, the reality was that both men and women had to enter the paid workforce to provide for their families. Socio-economic conditions stymied men's ability to become sole breadwinners and prohibited black women from staying at home to raise the children. The roles offered by the UNIA, though, allowed black working-class men and women to lay claim to the qualities that defined respectable manhood and womanhood to whites and middle-class people. As Leo Bertley explains, the UNIA's various roles allowed its members to "build up their self-esteem and morale" while the titles bestowed upon them, such as "Lady President" or "Chaplain," surely "helped the West Indian immigrants to bolster their self-worth."¹⁹

¹⁹ Hill, "Universal Negro Catechism," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 315; and Leo W. Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979," (PhD diss., Concordia University, 1980), 268-9. On gender in the UNIA, see Barbara Bair, "True Women, Real Men: Gender, Ideology, and Social Roles in the Garvey Movement," in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*, ed. Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 155-6; Honor Ford-Smith, "Women and the Garvey Movement in Jamaica," in *Garvey: His Work and Impact*, edited by Rupert A. Lewis and Patrick Bryan (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1991), 73-5; Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), xvii-xviii and 62; Beryl Satter, "Marcus Garvey, Father Divine and the

The UNIA also launched programs at the international level such as the Black Star Line (BSL) which was a shipping company with the purpose of stimulating and developing an African-based economy. Hill explains, “The Black Star Line represented perhaps the most ambitious of Garvey’s efforts to channel his success gospel and the fervor of his followers into racially oriented commercial ventures.”²⁰ The venture invited UNIA members to purchase shares in the BSL to be used to acquire ships and employ crews to sail the vessels. The ships would then facilitate the transport either freight or passengers to various ports along the Atlantic coastline, thereby stimulating a trade-based economy among blacks in North and South America, Europe, and Africa. The UNIA held yearly international conventions at headquarters in Harlem beginning in 1920. The conventions invited delegates from all parts of the world to participate in the annual meeting and encouraged discussion on issues related to racial discrimination. The conventions also permitted time for the delegation to formulate plans and programs to implement at both the local and international level, such as the Liberian Colonization Scheme between 1920 and 1924 and the School of African Philosophy in 1936 and 1937. The rest of the time, Garveyites around the world could remain connected to one another and to the current issues of the movement via *The Negro World*, the UNIA’s official newspaper.²¹

Canadians got behind Garvey and the UNIA, too. An estimated 5,000 blacks in Canada, from coast to coast, participated in the Garvey Movement. Blacks in Canada founded at least one UNIA division in every Canadian province except for Prince Edward Island. Interest in the UNIA

Gender Politics of Race Difference and Race Neutrality,” *American Quarterly* 48, 1 (March 1996): 43-76; and Ula Y. Taylor, *Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

²⁰ Despite Garvey’s good intentions, “the Black Star Line proved to be a financial disaster, with the total operational deficit on its three vessels estimated at \$476,169.58.” See Hill, “General Introduction,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 1: xlvi.

²¹ Garvey claimed that *The Negro World* had a circulation of over 100,000 by 1921. See Correspondence between R. Borden and Marcus Garvey, 18 October 1921, Sir Robert Borden Fonds, MG26-H, Volume 284, Reel C4439, Library and Archives Canada.

typically correlated to one's ethnic background and one's social class. The UNIA appealed mainly to West Indian and, to a lesser extent, African-American immigrants in Canada. By contrast, native-born black Canadians did not join in high numbers. There are many reasons why the UNIA divided black people along ethnic lines. For the African-American immigrants, heinous acts of racism in the United States, such as lynching, segregation, and disenfranchisement, fueled many to seek a more peaceful and enriching life in Canada. These people also found solace in the UNIA's message of racial uplift, self-improvement, and black pride. The West Indian immigrants were typically more literate than native-born black Canadians, had experience with trade unionism in the Caribbean, and had a more developed sense of Pan-Africanism based on their travels around Latin America, the Caribbean, and Europe for work. The West Indians, then, had experience in organizing people for a common good, while their education levels allowed them to easily engage with UNIA materials like *The Negro World*, which helped them to stay informed on pertinent issues. Native-born black Canadians, on the other hand, had lived as a tiny minority in Canada for generations. These people, who had only ever known Canada as their homeland, felt little to no connection to Africa; Garvey's plan to re-colonize the continent was indeed radical, and therefore unappealing, to the black Canadians.²²

Divisions in larger cities like Toronto and Montreal tended to be more active, but so were the divisions on Cape Breton Island where blacks, especially West Indians, were quite densely populated compared to the rest of the country. Canadians proved active at the local level, but also provincially and internationally, too. Divisions held local events and programs to bring the black community together. Annual UNIA picnics like Toronto's attracted blacks from around Ontario,

²² Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 415; and Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1999), 19-24; 32-8; 50-6; 70-2, and 78-89. The West Indians had also been a majority in the Caribbean, while in Canada they became part of a tiny minority of blacks. This caused a new sense of cultural isolation, which in turn inspired the West Indians to form UNIA divisions as a place to reconnect to their friends and compatriots.

and from parts of the United States and Quebec. The UNIA's High Commissioner of Canada, George Creese of Nova Scotia, traveled across the country to encourage black communities from coast to coast to join the movement and open a UNIA division. Canadian Garveyites held an international presence within the organization as well, as they sent delegates to the yearly conventions, purchased stocks in the Black Star Line, contributed reports to *The Negro World*, and hosted regional conferences in the 1930s.

While West Indian immigrants dominated UNIA membership in Canada, African-American immigrants and some native-born black Canadians joined the Association. African-American immigrants joined local divisions in the prairie provinces and in cities located along the U.S.-Canada border, like Windsor, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls, Ontario. These areas had experienced an influx of African-American immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century as southern blacks migrated to the northern states for jobs and security, with some continuing into Canada.

The UNIA was not without its detractors. Many people in America were suspicious of Garvey and his intentions, especially J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation – a point that will be further discussed below. A letter from Bishop Charles Spencer Smith of the AME church to the U.S. Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, provides insight into the ways in which many people, namely whites and upper-class blacks, perceived Garvey and his organization. He writes that the UNIA was an “Association whose methods are calculated to breed racial and international strife,” and that Garvey was “an adventurer and a grafter, bent on exploiting his people to the utmost limit.” Smith goes on to state that the BSL enterprise was “a fake pure and simple” and even suspected Garvey of being a Communist, recommending that he “be deported as an undesirable.”²³ The reviews were mixed among Garvey's contemporaries. While they seemed genuinely impressed by Garvey's abilities to rouse enthusiasm for his movement and to connect to

²³ Hill, “Bishop C.S. Smith to A. Mitchell Palmer, Attorney General,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 1: 446.

the average black man, they ultimately viewed Garvey as a power-hungry despot. Claude McKay, one of the Harlem Renaissance's most prominent literary figures and member of the socialist group known as the African Blood Brotherhood, admitted, "There has never been a Negro leader like Garvey. None ever enjoyed a fraction of his universal popularity." McKay argued that Garvey was much more successful in reaching blacks in the South than other black leaders of the time through his "miraculous" and "magical" rhetoric. He was not, however, complimentary of Garvey's appearance, describing him as "an ugly man" who "was short and ungainly, built something in the shape of a puncheon."²⁴ In 1930 another of Garvey's contemporaries, James Weldon Johnson, described Garvey as "one of the most remarkable and picturesque figures that have appeared on the American scene." These were kind words coming from a leader in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. While he recognized Garvey's strengths, Johnson also pointed out that his failures as a leader were reason enough to eschew UNIA. He wrote,

He stirred the imagination of the Negro masses as no Negro ever had. He raised more money in a few years than any other Negro organization had ever dreamed of. He had great power and great possibilities within his grasp. But his deficiencies as a leader outweighed his abilities. He is a supreme egoist, his egotism amounting to megalomania; and so the men surrounding him had to be for the most part cringing sycophants; and among them there were also cunning knaves. Upon them he now lays the entire blame for failure, taking no part of it to himself.²⁵

In Canada there was no outward opposition to the movement, likely because the black population was so small and thus there was little fear that Garvey would rouse any serious militant threat. That is not to say that Canadian authorities welcomed Garvey and his movement. The government was suspicious but remained discreet about their opinion of Garvey and the UNIA. In 1921 Garvey sent a written request to Prime Minister Robert Borden asking to "contribute a special

²⁴ Claude McKay, "Marcus Aurelius Garvey," in *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 143, 146-8, 159.

²⁵ James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 251, 256-7. *Black Manhattan* was originally published in 1930.

article in the nature of a Christmas message bearing on the higher development of our Race” for *The Negro World*. Before answering Garvey, Borden asked H.V. Tennant of the British Embassy in Washington for his opinion on the organization. Tennant replied, “I understand it is not looked upon favourably by the State Authorities” and that Garvey “has been from time to time under the observation of our Colonial authorities.” Therefore the recommendation was to decline Garvey’s request for an article.²⁶ Garveyites in Canada were oblivious to the government’s unease about their leader as reports from the UNIA’s Second International Convention in 1921 claimed, “Delegates from Canada spoke very encouragingly of that country as a good field for the association, declaring there was little to no opposition to the movement, the chief difficulty being the serious economic conditions existing.”²⁷

Garvey’s quest for an Africa for the Africans was real. He set his sights on Liberia on the West Coast of Africa because, as mentioned above, it had already attracted thousands of African-American colonists in the 1820s.²⁸ It had long been a place of American interest since it provided a place away from the racial discrimination of the United States where blacks could begin a new life. In fact, many of the American immigrants in Liberia “soon came to constitute the ruling class in the Liberian polity, whose prototype was America, in much the same way as the British and the French were the rulers in neighbouring Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast.”²⁹ Garvey and his selected

²⁶ Correspondence between R. Borden and Marcus Garvey, 18 October 1921; Correspondence between R. Borden and A.W. Merriam, 15 November 1921; and Correspondence between A.W. Merriam and H.V. Tennant, 15 November 1921, Sir Robert Borden Fonds, MG26-H, Volume 284, Reel C4439, Library and Archives Canada.

²⁷ Hill, “Convention Reports,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 646.

²⁸ Akpan notes that of the nearly 500,000 inhabitants of Liberia in 1920, only about 5,000 were American-Liberians who “were mostly the Afro-American immigrants and their descendants who settled in Liberia annually from 1822 to the 1900s,” in addition to a few hundred West Indian immigrants from Barbados who had arrived around 1865. See M.B. Akpan, “Liberia and the Universal Negro Improvement Association: The Background to the Abortion of Garvey’s Scheme for African Colonization,” *Journal of African History* 14, 1 (1973): 108.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 108-9. Akpan goes on to state that this American ruling class treated the indigenous African population very poorly, and “largely denied political privileges” such as the right to vote and jobs in within the government. The native-born African population greatly outnumbered the American settlers, thus to give them the vote might “cause the

council of representatives began dealings with the Liberian government in 1920. At first the Liberian government seemed open to Garvey's plan to send over a group of high-achieving blacks from North America. Communications between the UNIA and the Liberian government continued for several years until 1924 after the Liberians took a deal from the Firestone Tire Company "for the lease of vast acres of land on which to grow rubber for export abroad." M.B. Akpan explains, "Not only would the Liberian government charge export duties on the rubber, but also Firestone's activities, besides creating employment for Liberians, would bring improvement to areas like agriculture, health and educational facilities and road transportation, in which Garvey had hoped to assist Liberia."³⁰ Deliberations with the UNIA had really been a matter of finances to the Liberians; with money in hand from Firestone they no longer needed the UNIA's money, programs, and settlers to help stimulate and advance their struggling economy.³¹ Plus, if a large contingent of blacks from the Americas *had* chosen to emigrate, "Liberia, lacking agricultural, business, or industrial enterprises, could offer but few avenues of employment even to skilled craftsmen, artisans, and mechanics," thus increasing the potential for civil unrest in the country. The Liberians also became suspicious of Garvey's intentions when they heard of his self-imposed title of Provisional President of Africa and his "rhetoric about 'forcing Europe out' of Africa." Liberian President,

Africans to swamp them politically, and in consequence to take control of the government." It is because the Liberian government officials were mostly of American origin that the UNIA approached this country first with the Back to Africa scheme, and it is also why the government was initially receptive to the idea. Bringing over more blacks from the Americas might strengthen the political power of the Americo-Liberian ruling class.

³⁰ Ibid., 122.

³¹ As a small country with an underdeveloped economy and infrastructure, Liberia had been relying on loans to stay afloat and was on the brink of financial bankruptcy by the time President C.D.B. King took office in January of 1920. For more on Liberia's struggles to advance their economy, see Akpan, "Liberia and the UNIA," 112-4.

C.D.B. King, said he did not want to put Liberia in the middle of some aggressive scheme to overthrow the whole of colonial Africa.³²

The years between 1922 and 1925 proved a tumultuous period for Garvey and the UNIA. With the BSL up and running and the promise of colonization in Africa looming, Garvey was quickly trying to acquire ships for this economic enterprise. He placed advertisements in *The Negro World* to encourage his followers to purchase shares in the BSL, which was trying to acquire a new ship called the *S.S. Orion*, to be renamed the *S. S. Phyllis Wheatley*. The UNIA required capital to procure the ship, and although the transaction had not yet been finalized the BSL began selling stock to members through the mail for the *S.S. Phyllis Wheatley*. The problem was that the UNIA did not own the ship for which they were running advertisements and granting stock. The FBI viewed it as the illegal solicitation of funds via the U.S. Postal Service, or mail fraud. As mentioned, the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover had long been suspicious of Garvey's political leanings and his motives for assembling such a large contingent of blacks in America. Subsequently Hoover was looking for a good reason to detain Garvey and put an end to his movement. The mistakes made by the BSL executives resulted in Garvey's arrest in January of 1922 on twelve counts of mail fraud. He was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison. Moreover, his reputation was severely damaged by the arrest, with some arguing that the whole thing had been a money-grabbing scheme. The media

³² Raymond Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 167; Akpan, "Liberia and the UNIA," 106-7, 118-9. Garvey's committee was hoping to settle between 20,000 and 30,000 families over the course of two years. Hill explains that King caved "to pressures applied by a group of wealthy and prominent Liberians" to meet with the UNIA's committee, which included Henrietta Vinton Davis, Robert L. Poston, and Milton Van Lowe. However, Liberia's president "rejected 'any proposal for the settling of 3,000 immigrants to Liberia'" from the Americas. He showed no interest in the UNIA's colonization scheme. See also Hill, "Speech by Marcus Garvey," *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1987) 5: 590-1, note 5.

portrayed Garvey as a liar, a cheat, and a con man, and for many Garveyites it was convincing enough to end their membership to the UNIA.³³

Garvey was held briefly at Tombs Jail in Manhattan in 1923 but was later released on bail. He appealed his sentence and during that time Garvey focused on the Liberia negotiations and held another UNIA convention in Harlem in 1924. Unfortunately for him, Garvey's sentence was upheld by the court and he was jailed at Atlanta State Penitentiary on February 8, 1925. Garvey's incarceration ushered in a period of upheaval for the UNIA as he struggled to retain control over his organization from prison. In-fighting among the UNIA's executive council began. Some argued that Garvey's title of President General should pass on to someone else within the executive because he could not effectively lead from jail. Others felt that Garvey's mismanagement of the BSL³⁴ had landed him in prison, and so he was no longer fit to serve as leader of the organization. Still others pledged their undying loyalty to Garvey and felt he should retain the position of President General. The ongoing disagreement between the two sides tore a rift between UNIA members on either side of the debate. In addition, because Garvey was away the Parent Body did not hold their annual UNIA convention in 1925 or 1926. Instead, an emergency convention was held in Detroit in March of 1926 and another small one later that year in New York City, this one garnering only a small attendance. In 1927 Garvey's sentence was commuted and he was ordered by President Calvin

³³ Besides Garvey, the BSL's other officials, Elie Garcia, George Tobias, and Orlando Thompson, were all indicted on counts of mail fraud. See Hill, "Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985), 4: xxxi-xxxiii and 6: xxxv.

³⁴ The Black Star Line went defunct after the mail fraud conviction. However, the UNIA re-established the shipping enterprise in March of 1924 under a new name, the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company. The first ship acquired under the new name was the *S.S. General Goethals*, rechristened the *S.S. Booker T. Washington*. Its maiden voyage to the Caribbean was disastrous, with the crew on the verge of mutiny. Upon its return to New York City, the UNIA realized it could not pay the repair and dockage fees required to keep the ship, and the *S.S. Booker T. Washington* was auctioned off in March of 1926. See Hill, "Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 5: xxxiv and 6: xxxvi-xxxvii.

Coolidge to leave the United States at once. Garvey was deported in December of 1927, sailing from Louisiana back to his homeland of Jamaica to regroup and plan his next move.³⁵

After taking a year to recharge, Garvey held the first international convention since his imprisonment in 1929 in Kingston, Jamaica. Surprising everyone in attendance, Garvey declared at this congress that he was splitting with the Harlem faction that had not supported him while in prison, and was re-launching the organization under a new name: the UNIA, of the World, August 29, 1929. Canadian Garveyites remained loyal to Garvey and divisions received new charters under the organization's new name.³⁶ It was at this point when Canada began to play a larger role within the organization. Because Garvey could no longer set foot in the United States, he used Canada as his gateway into North America. He made several trips to Canada throughout the 1930s and used them as an opportunity to reach his American followers. Toronto held two regional UNIA conferences in 1936 and 1937, and an international convention in 1938 which drew participants from across North America.³⁷ He also began to change his rhetoric in an attempt to revitalize the movement and regain supporters. Since the deal with Liberia had failed, Garvey now downplayed the need for an all-black nation and instead encouraged blacks to remain patriotic to their homelands. This included making the best of whatever opportunities their governments and employers offered to them. He also began to dial back the discourse of racial purity, realizing that the mixed-race population in Jamaica was quite politically connected, not to mention the fact that the language of racial purity was unappealing to many blacks whose ancestry included some

³⁵ Hill, "Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 6: xxxvi-xxxvii.

³⁶ The original UNIA (known as the UNIA Inc. at this time) in Harlem continued to operate as a separate entity from Garvey's newly-formed association.

³⁷ Hill, "Introduction," and "UNIA Convention Delegates by Gender," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: xlviii and 971, respectively.

European lineage. A kinder, gentler message would also help avoid any recurrence of unwanted attention from the FBI or federal governments.³⁸

The Race Problem

The early twentieth century saw the rise of black intellectual leaders and the ambition to unify the millions of people of African descent scattered across the world. Although Garvey was part of this phenomenon, he was markedly different from three of his most renowned contemporaries: Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and A. Philip Randolph. These leaders recognized a “race problem” that was relegating blacks to the bottom of the social, economic, and political ladders. However, each of their approaches and solutions to the problem were decidedly unique.

For Washington, “the solution of the race problem lay essentially in an application of the gospel of wealth.” August Meier explains, “The central theme in Washington’s philosophy was that through thrift, industry, and Christian character Negroes would eventually attain their constitutional rights.”³⁹ He urged blacks in the south to seek out vocational or industrial education which could lead them to practical jobs in farming and skilled trades. Washington advised blacks to avoid seeking civil rights via protest or agitation, but to lead quiet lives that would “measure up to [white] American standards of morality and material prosperity.” In other words, economic advancement

³⁸ Hill, “Official Minutes of the Second Regional Conference of the UNIA” and “Speech by Marcus Garvey,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNLA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1991), 7: 775 and 790, respectively.

³⁹ August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 100, 103.

would be the means by which African Americans could prove themselves worthy of equal rights and freedoms.⁴⁰

To some Washington's posture appeared conciliatory as it discouraged aggressive political protest and simply accommodated white American values as a means of navigating southern race relations. Some, like W.E.B. Du Bois, criticized Washington's solution to the race problem as it relied on "interracial harmony and white good will" as the keys to black progress in America.⁴¹ Despite the criticisms against him, Washington did emphasize black self-help through practical education and employment, as well as racial solidarity, and these values are what inspired some of Garvey's own philosophies.⁴²

The difference between the two was that Garvey did not put his hope in the hearts of white supremacists. While Garvey and the UNIA employed the principles of self-help and racial uplift, he believed there could be no advancement in a society dominated by whites. Moreover, Garvey wished to focus on more than just industrial education and wanted to help blacks to become more engaged in politics, economics, and cultural pursuits.⁴³ In a speech given in 1895, Washington famously urged blacks to "cast down your bucket where you are." This phrase represented Washington's belief that African Americans should not migrate out of the south in search of better

⁴⁰ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 103-7. Washington encouraged blacks to pursue vocational careers as blacksmiths, farmers, seamstresses, printers, brick layers, and domestic workers over careers that required a higher education. See Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 49.

⁴¹ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 106, 110.

⁴² Hill explains, "Garvey's essential proposition for his black readers and audiences was always the same: success as the basis of equality and recognition." Indeed, "Garvey shared with Booker T. Washington a deep commitment to the success ethic and its application to the goal of racial improvement." Hill, "General Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 1: xl and lvi.

⁴³ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 217-8. Prior to coming to America, Garvey was actually aligned with Washington's view about avoiding political agitation. But he had a change of heart in the aftermath of the First World War which saw an onslaught of race riots across America. After observing this striking level of black resistance against white violence, Garvey realized that the New Negro's problems "must be solved not by the industrial leader but by the political leader." See Hill, "General Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 1: lxxvii; and "Negroes Determined to Do for Themselves in African What white People Have Done in Europe and Elsewhere," *The Negro World*, 22 October 1921.

opportunities, but rather should remain where they are and “to make the best out of their situation by developing skills in agriculture and business.”⁴⁴ This stood in stark contrast to Garvey’s migration-based approach. For blacks to change the hearts and minds of white racists in America would be an impossible task, according to Garvey, especially while living under their thumb. Garvey alleged that effecting change would require a much grander demonstration of authority and aptitude from people of African descent, and that was to establish a nation in Africa that would rise to the ranks of the world’s great powers in Europe and the Americas. Garvey hoped to discuss some of their differing opinions and wrote to Washington at Tuskegee to set up a meeting in 1914. Unfortunately, Washington died in 1915 before the meeting could take place and before the UNIA rocketed into popularity in the United States.

What set Washington and Garvey apart in their attitudes was the effect of racism on the lives of African Americans. Washington essentially ignored the question of systemic racism while Garvey held that racial discrimination since the days of slavery had stunted the mental, emotional, political, and economic growth of African Americans and Afro Caribbeans. To Garvey, the race problem was the mental enslavement of the African race. For generations since their physical enslavement, Africans had been made to believe that they were not worthy of equality nor capable of achieving at the same level as whites. Garvey implored that “[t]he purpose of the U.N.I.A. is to emancipate and our primary duty is to emancipate your minds because it is the mind that makes the man, that directs him.”⁴⁵ Hence, the UNIA launched a program to encourage racial separatism, black self-reliance, and a “Race First” mantra. As one scholar notes, “At a time when most whites considered blacks

⁴⁴ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 51-3.

⁴⁵ Hill, “Speech by Marcus Garvey,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 783.

inferior, every aspect of Garvey's program was designed to build up the black man's self-esteem and to foster race pride."⁴⁶

While millions of blacks in the Americas and abroad felt inspired by Garvey's philosophies, others were not as keen on his ideas. Put frankly, Garvey's black nationalist approach and his defiant, if not radical, concepts did not sit well with W.E.B. Du Bois, the Harvard-educated sociologist and leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). To be sure, Garvey and Du Bois actually agreed on several points. For instance, Du Bois, like Garvey, thought the race problem was "caused by white racism and not by any inherent lack of [black] talent." This went against "common sense" among whites who believed blacks were inherently inferior, especially intellectually. This contrasted with Washington's point of view which simply held that blacks had to prove themselves worthy of equal treatment.⁴⁷ Moreover, Garvey and Du Bois agreed that one's African heritage should be revered. In this way, both leaders had a Pan-African and Afrocentric perspective. Du Bois subscribed to the notion of cultural pluralism. In what he often described as one's "two-ness," Du Bois encouraged African Americans to acknowledge and celebrate both their American-ness and their African-ness. Washington did not share in Du Bois' or Garvey's desire to celebrate black culture or identify as African.⁴⁸

The solution to Du Bois' definition of the race problem (i.e., deeply ingrained racism) was for African Americans to seek higher education so that they may become more effective leaders of the race. He figured that at least one-tenth of black men, whom he called the Talented Tenth, should be highly educated and serve as leaders of their communities. In addition, Du Bois felt

⁴⁶ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 148.

⁴⁷ Du Bois even contended that Washington accepted blacks as inferior based his of his statements discouraging higher education for blacks and protesting for their civil rights. See Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 199.

⁴⁸ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 33; and Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 195.

blacks should protest openly for their civil rights including and especially the right to vote.⁴⁹ Du Bois even condemned Washington for deemphasizing how white racism had largely kept blacks in poverty while placing too much blame on African Americans themselves for not pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. He also criticized Washington for accepting disenfranchisement and segregation as a normal part of daily life until blacks could one day exhibit their deservedness for equal rights.⁵⁰

Du Bois also clashed with Garvey, perhaps even more so than with Washington. What most divided Du Bois and Garvey was the notion of integration versus separatism. Du Bois advocated strongly for African Americans to become fully integrated into American society, to be equal contributors at every level. This was the cornerstone of the NAACP of which Du Bois was a founding member in 1907. The NAACP had both black and white members and appealed mainly to the educated middle and upper classes. Garvey, as mentioned, felt integration was a hopeless pursuit. Garvey admitted that Du Bois' advocacy for integration was "race suicide;" by urging the intermingling and intermarriage of blacks and whites, both races would be destroyed.⁵¹ The two leaders, while both supportive of a Pan-Africanism, differed on their strategies to liberate Africa. Du Bois and his Pan African Congress⁵² "recommended an international system of administration for the former German colonies of Tanganyika and German Southwest Africa" while "Garvey

⁴⁹ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 193, 197; and Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 200.

⁵⁰ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 55.

⁵¹ Ibid., 157; and Hill, "Article by James Weldon Johnson," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNLA Papers*, 4: 79; "Essays on Racial Purity by Marcus Garvey," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNLA Papers*, 6: 217; "Editorials by Marcus Garvey in the *Black Man*," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNLA Papers*, 7: 631.

⁵² The Pan-African Congress was really a series of meetings in the 1920s regarding the decolonization of Africa. It brought together delegates from the Americas, Europe, and Africa to discuss the issue. Du Bois wrote, "The object of the Pan-African Congress is simply to bring representatives of the various peoples of African descent into knowledge and common acquaintanceship so that out of such conferences general policies and actions can be evolved." Because he believed Garvey to be a dangerous demagogue, Du Bois did not invite him to participate as a delegate in the Pan-African Congress. See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to the editor of the *New York Age*, 1919. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

demanded self-determination for the entire continent.” As a result, Garvey felt that Du Bois’ “internationalization” strategy in Africa was “soft” on imperialism. By contrast, Du Bois criticized Garvey for not caring enough about the problems facing blacks at home, like lynching, segregation, and unemployment.⁵³

The two became enemies and their organizations developed an intense rivalry.⁵⁴ The criticisms between the leaders became harsher and more personal. Du Bois publically questioned Garvey’s business acumen, demanding to see financial statements for the BSL.⁵⁵ He also stated that Garvey was lying to his followers and was exaggerating the membership numbers of the UNIA.⁵⁶ Garvey was insulted and annoyed by these gestures and fired back that Du Bois, who was of mixed

⁵³ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 150, 155, 161. Du Bois said this of Garvey and the UNIA: “I do not believe that Marcus F Garvey [sic.] is sincere. I think he is a demagogue, and that his movement will collapse in a short time. His movement is not represe[n]tative of the American negro. His followers are the lowest type of negroes, mostly fr/om/ the West Indies. It cannot be considered an American movement in any sense of the word.” See Hill, “Interview with W.E.B. Du Bois by Charles Mowbray White,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983), 2: 620.

⁵⁴ In a letter from Perry W. Howard, the Special Assistant to the U.S. Attorney General, to Special Agent William J. Burns of the FBI, he writes, “Garvey’s organization and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People are rival organizations among the Negroes of this country, and their rivalry is very tense.” See Hill, “Perry W. Howard to William J. Burns,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 5: 212.

⁵⁵ In a back-handed compliment, Du Bois once said that credit must be given to Garvey for “having foreseen the necessity of a union in business and social uplift between all the African people,” but he “is not the man to carry this out because he lacks poise and business ability.” See Hill, “W.E.B. Du Bois to the Canadian Department of Corporations,” and “W.E.B. Du Bois to the Editor, *New York Age*,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 90 and 480, respectively. See also Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to D. Erastus Thorpe, 17 June 1920, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. In this letter Du Bois claims that Garvey’s organizations are “founded on righteous enthusiasm but very little business sense and not to great honesty. I am very much afraid for their future effect of their downfall on the Negro world.”

⁵⁶ In the NAACP’s newspaper, the *Crisis*, Du Bois writes that “Mr. Garvey’s claims of membership for the U.N.I.A. have been untrue and even fantastic.” According to his own research, he estimated that the UNIA “had less than 300,000 paid-up members” by 1921, while Garvey himself proclaimed a global membership of over four million. Another one of Garvey’s detractors and former UNIA member, J.W. Eason, said that the official records showed only 50,000 members. It is near impossible to provide an accurate number because there was a distinction between active and ordinary members. Article IX of the UNIA’s laws declared, “All persons of Negro blood and African descent are regarded as ordinary members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities’ League, and are entitled to the consideration of the organization. Active members are those who pay the monthly dues for the upkeep of the organization, who shall have first claim on the Association for all benefits to be dispensed.” That being said, there is no telling how many ordinary members claimed membership to the UNIA, thus Garvey’s figure should not be discounted. See Hill, “Article by W.E.B. Du Bois,” and “Article in the *New York Age*,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 5: 208-9 and 48-50, respectively; and “Constitution and Book of Laws,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 1: 266.

race, was a “white man Negro.”⁵⁷ Some argue that Du Bois was jealous of Garvey’s ability to attract such a large and loyal following while Garvey envied Du Bois’ university education and his upper-class social status. Whatever the case, the leaders of America’s two largest black organizations maintained a feud that would last a lifetime.⁵⁸

Garvey had a knack for attracting enemies as his tactics and rhetoric sometimes vexed even his own target audience. For instance, Garvey angered many of his followers when he met with the leader of the Ku Klux Klan, Edward Young Clarke, in 1922. At the meeting Garvey told Clarke that the KKK was a friend to the UNIA because they had similar goals: they both discouraged intermarriage and believed that blacks should build a life for themselves outside the United States. Garvey’s followers were flabbergasted by the meeting while critics like Du Bois publically labelled Garvey as a dangerous man for associating with the extremist group. The meeting also attracted the watchful eye of J. Edgar Hoover, a gaze that followed Garvey for over a year and which led to his eventual imprisonment.⁵⁹

Although black socialist leaders like A. Philip Randolph were first impressed by Garvey’s philosophies and his vocal push against racist America, they eventually became disheartened by his tactics. For Randolph, the race problem was intrinsically tied to labour. Blacks remained at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder because they were not unionized, and were thus exploited by their white employers. Randolph trusted that the union of working-class people, both black and

⁵⁷ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 155; Hill, “Reports by Special Agent P-138,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 125.

⁵⁸ Even nine years after Garvey’s death Du Bois was still making a point to diminish the influence of the UNIA. In correspondence to Edmund Cronon, Garvey’s first biographer, Du Bois says, “I think you are over-estimating the Garvey Movement.” He goes on to state that most of Garvey’s achievements were “incidental and unimportant.” Perhaps most disparaging is Du Bois’ opinion of Garvey’s followers as dim-witted, claiming that “the more intelligent Negroes regarded all this as unimportant fanfare.” See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Edmund D. Cronon, 28 October 1949, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

⁵⁹ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 156, 159, 162-5.

white, across race lines was the best method to solve the race problem. Garvey was not keen on socialism. The two, although “competing for essentially the same clientele,” were diametrically opposed in their views.⁶⁰ Garvey argued, in opposition to Randolph, that white lynch mobs viewed themselves as white first and as working-class second, and that many were either communist or socialist. This struck fear in the hearts of African Americans for whom lynching was a serious concern in the 1920s. Randolph regarded Garvey’s tactic as fear-mongering and declared “Garvey and the UNIA as the most dangerous enemies that black people in America ever faced.” He, along with Chandler Owen, launched a “Garvey Must Go” campaign through their leftist magazine, *The Messenger*. The two fired personal insults at Garvey via *The Messenger* and declared he should be deported because he was a Jamaican, not an American, by birth.⁶¹

Garvey’s distinct take on the race problem is what made his movement both extraordinarily popular *and* particularly volatile. While his rhetoric, business dealings, and bombastic attitude troubled many, Garvey’s passion for change and dedication to the organization thrilled the hearts of millions and sprung them into action. This dissertation will now look at how Garvey inspired thousands of blacks in Canada to join the ranks of the UNIA, and how the association functioned to suit the distinctive needs of Canada’s black communities.

⁶⁰ Wolters, *Du Bois and His Rivals*, 161. Bertley notes that Canadian Garveyites held Randolph in high regard despite the personal squabble between him and Garvey. This is because Randolph was seen as “a fighter for the race and an organizer of black workers who were struggling against their exploiters. In this way, he was carrying on an important aspect of the UNIA programme.” To the many railway employees in Canada, Randolph was considered a hero for forming the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925, which organized black workers in the field under the American Federation of Labor. See Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 144-7.

⁶¹ In a letter to the U.S. Attorney General, Chandler and a committee of eight, which included some members of the NAACP, warned, “The U.N.I.A. is composed chiefly of the most primitive and ignorant element of West Indian and American Negroes. The so-called respectable element of the movement are largely ministers without churches, physicians without patients, lawyers without clients and publishers without readers, who are usually in search of ‘easy money.’ In short, this organization is composed in the main of Negro sharks and ignorant Negro fanatics.” It is plain to see that some of Garvey’s contemporaries held a dismal opinion of him and his association. See Hill, “Enclosure,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 5: 183.

Chapter 1

Garvey's Canadian Gateway: Montreal and its Ties to the UNIA

Introduction

Marcus Garvey swept into Montreal in the winter of 1917 preaching a message of black self-reliance and racial uplift to the city's black population. It was the first time that Garvey had set foot on Canadian soil, and he did so for the purposes of expanding the reach of his fledgling organization. In the city of Montreal, where most black citizens felt the subtle but constant weight of racial discrimination in their daily lives, Garvey's inspiring concept of an Africa for the Africans was met by a very receptive audience. This group, comprised primarily of West Indian immigrants, would become the first Garveyites in Canada, establishing the Montreal Division of the UNIA on June 9, 1919. This chapter illustrates how the city of Montreal, in many ways, served as Garvey's gateway into Canada, and in the UNIA's early years its members helped to lay the foundation for the broader Garvey movement. In the 1920s the Montreal Division grew to be the largest branch of the UNIA in Canada. It also proved to be one of the most important to the growth and survival of the movement worldwide, especially during the tumultuous decade of the 1940s when struggles over the leadership and direction of the UNIA came to a head.

Of the UNIA's Canadian branches, the Montreal Division has been paid the most attention by scholars, primarily Leo and June Bertley. Dr. Leo Bertley's dissertation on the Montreal Division is the most comprehensive piece on any UNIA division in Canada, covering the period between 1917 and 1979 but paying special attention to the heyday years of the 1920s. He argues, "The Montreal Division made its influence felt by active and constructive participation" at the local, national, and international level. June Bertley's MA thesis demonstrates how various black organizations in Montreal, including the UNIA, provided an outlet to educate the black community

using both formal and informal methods. Together, these works provide a thorough description of the daily operations of the UNIA in Montreal and its significance to the city's black population.¹

The Bertleys, who were former members of the Montreal Division, had gained access to a large variety of historical materials pertaining to the UNIA including the division's meeting reports, files on the auxiliary groups, correspondence, membership books, and ledgers, among other things. The Bertleys also conducted numerous interviews with surviving UNIA members in the late 1970s.

These resources are housed in what the Bertleys call the archives of the African Canadian Historical Association (ACHA). In trying to locate and access these archives, I discovered that the ACHA archives is the name given by the Bertleys for their personal collection of historical documents and research notes pertaining to the Montreal Division and the broader history of blacks in Montreal. Unfortunately, the Bertley family would not grant me access to these documents which means that this chapter relies significantly on their historical interpretations of the Montreal Division.

Nevertheless, the Bertleys did not have the advantage of the collection of materials found in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, which began publication several years after their theses were completed. This chapter brings a variety of documents from *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* into play to move beyond the Bertleys' theses, contest some of their conclusions, and present a deeper understanding of the UNIA in Montreal. Documents in the Hill series reveal that the Garvey made first contact with a Canadian audience via Montreal, and it became the place from which the UNIA leader would begin to spread his movement and philosophies to other parts of the country. Early on in its existence Montreal's members, especially Alfred Potter and Dr. D.D. Lewis, played prominent leadership roles in the UNIA both in Canada and abroad. This chapter also relies on twenty-six issues of *The Free Lance*, a black newspaper which was established and published in

¹ Leo W. Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979," (PhD diss., Concordia University, 1980), 8; and June Bertley, "The Role of the Black Community in Educating Blacks in Montreal, from 1910 to 1940, with Special Reference to Reverend Dr. Charles Humphrey Este," (MA thesis, McGill University, 1982).

Montreal during the 1930s by Edward and Ann Packwood.² *The Free Lance*, which the Bertleys did not use in their own research, lends a view into the lives of blacks in Montreal during the Great Depression including their social clubs, opinions, and news dealing with issues of race and racism. These sources shed new light into the history of the Montreal Division, revealing that it held even greater significance to the Garvey Movement than the Bertleys suggested.

Origins and Montreal's Racial Climate

Long before the arrival of the UNIA and the West Indians who followed it, the first blacks to land in Montreal did so in the early 1600s as slaves. Mathieu da Costa is the first black man on record to reach New France. He arrived in 1606 with Samuel de Champlain and served as an interpreter between the French and the Mi'kmaq. However, the first permanent slave in New France is believed to be Olivier Lejeune, who was enslaved in his homeland in Madagascar and brought to the New World in 1628. Slavery was not technically legal in New France until May 1, 1689 when King Louis XIV "gave permission to his subjects of New France to import African slaves." From this point, the colony's population of black persons rose slowly and steadily, with an estimated 1,132 living in New France by 1759.³ This number would increase by a few hundred with the arrival of the Loyalists during the American Revolution, when many British subjects who wished to remain loyal to the crown migrated north and brought with them their African slaves. As the

² I acquired these copies of *The Free Lance* from Montreal historian, Dorothy Williams, who had the issues in her own personal collection of historical documents. Unfortunately for historians of black history in Canada, *The Free Lance*, to my knowledge, does not exist in any library or archives. The only known complete series of the newspaper was owned by the Packwoods who are now deceased. Their daughter, Mairuth Sarsfield, inherited the collection but she, too, passed away a few years ago. Sarsfield's family has been unable to locate this collection of newspapers and believe that it may have been discarded at some point over the years. It is very likely, then, that the twenty-six issues referenced in this dissertation are the only ones left in existence.

³ Dorothy W. Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986: An Urban Demography* (Cowansville: Les Editions Yvon Blais Inc., 1989), 7-8; and Marcel Trudel, *Deux siècles d'esclavage au Québec* (Montreal: Editions Hurtubise HMH, 2004). It should be noted that not all enslaved persons in New France were African; in fact, the majority were indigenous persons, or Panis, as they were called by the colonists.

abolitionist movement grew in the early 1800s it became more and more unpopular to own slaves and by August 1, 1834, slavery was officially abolished in the British Empire.

Records of what happened to these newly-freed slaves are scarce, to say the least. Some freed blacks surely remained in Montreal, while others may have sought new homes in Ontario or the Maritime provinces where the majority of black Canadians were living at this time. By 1871, the census shows only 72 “Africans” living in Montreal; however, this number is very likely underestimated since census-taking methods during this period, as mentioned in this dissertation’s introduction, were subject to inaccuracies.⁴ It really was not until the 1880s that the population of black people in the city grew in significant numbers, and that was due to the coming of the railroads. The Grand Trunk Railway arrived in Montreal in 1856 with steady runs between the city and Toronto. Then in the 1880s the Canadian Pacific Railroad set up shop in Montreal, and by the turn of the twentieth century, “Montreal became definitely the headquarters of these two Canadian systems which are today responsible for the Montreal Negro Community.”⁵ Dorothy Williams notes that around 1886, “the American-owned Pullman Palace Car Company hired Blacks in the U.S. to work as sleeping car porters on the four rail lines that connected in Montreal.” By this time work on the rails, especially as overnight porters, had become a common career option for black men in North America. Beginning in the 1890s, black porters were hired in Montreal and then shipped out on runs from there. As a result, the city saw an influx of blacks from Ontario, Nova Scotia, and especially the United States.⁶

Most of the earliest porters in Montreal were young, transient, and American-born, and they used the city primarily as a layover spot rather than as a permanent residence. In effect, they

⁴ Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 17.

⁵ Wilfrid Emmerson Israel, “The Montreal Negro Community,” (MA Thesis, McGill University, 1928), 69.

⁶ *Ibid.* and Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 21.

remained American citizens and viewed their work and stay in Montreal as temporary. As a result, many did not wish to establish or take part in any community-building endeavours, such as the creation of black clubs or associations. Two more waves of black immigration from the U.S.A. occurred in the first half of the twentieth century which led to the formation of a more permanent and visible black community in Montreal. The first of these arrived during the First World War looking for job opportunities. Williams explains that

After the 'crisis' they were squeezed out of these jobs by a hostile white labour force. With few choices they moved into areas where American porters 'layed over.' Some obtained jobs on the railroads and became an integral part of the permanent community.⁷

The second of these waves were known as the "summer Americans," some of whom came up for the city's racing season, and others (mostly students) came for temporary summer work on the railroads or to avoid American's strict prohibition laws. Needless to say, this group did not stay in Montreal long enough to contribute to the formation of Montreal's black community clubs and committees.

Canadian-born blacks from Ontario and Nova Scotia comprised only a small minority (perhaps only ten percent) of the black population of Montreal. Although they migrated with their families in tow, they, like the African Americans, remained largely ambivalent about the social and political life of Montreal's black community. It was not until the arrival of the West Indians that Montreal's black community began to fully develop.

Like the Americans, the West Indians came in waves. The first group from the Caribbean arrived at the turn of the twentieth century, followed about a decade later another group of immigrants who had first landed in Nova Scotia or the U.S.A. and then decided to move to Quebec for work. The second wave of West Indians came during World War I with hopes of enlisting in the Canadian Armed Forces or to pursue education at McGill University. Estimates from the period

⁷ Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 30.

claim that about 700 blacks from the British West Indies immigrated to Montreal between 1916 and 1928, and by this time Wilfred E. Israel claims that the West Indians made up at least forty percent of the black population. Israel notes that “the West Indian and Canadian Negroes are both British subjects and, as such, are given the privilege of the vote as soon as they have fulfilled their residence requirements.” Therefore, unlike the early Americans, the West Indians tended to readily accept Montreal as a permanent home. While the native-born black Canadians were perceived by some to be apolitical and generally uninterested in community-building, the West Indians were renowned as being very vocal about matters of racial discrimination and for clinging “tenaciously to his customs and endeavors to introduce them into Negro life in the city.”⁸ As a result, the West Indian immigrants are credited with establishing most of the black clubs and organizations in Montreal, which allowed blacks in the city to foster a greater sense of community than ever before.

The Canadian census claims that Montreal had a black population of 862 by 1921; however, estimates given from within the black community at this time suggest somewhere between 1,200 and 3,000.⁹ The majority of these people lived and socialized in the St. Antoine District (known colloquially as Little Burgundy) due to its proximity to the CPR tracks and headquarters, and because of the availability of affordable housing. By the 1920s, this area claimed a hotel, night club, café, barbershop, social clubs, a lodging house for railroad porters, and family dwellings where “rooms were rented to porters and other transients.”¹⁰ Don Handelman even went as far as to call the area the “West Indian ghetto.” This is a misnomer given that African Canadians and African Americans also lived in this neighbourhood, as did many other ethnic groups including Irish, Italian, and Finnish immigrants. In fact, persons of African descent were in the minority in the St. Antoine

⁸ Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 31-3; Israel, “The Montreal Negro Community,” 80, 96-8; and Harold Potter, “The Occupational Adjustments of Montreal Negroes, 1941-48,” (MA thesis, McGill University, 1949), 10.

⁹ Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 115-16; and Israel, “The Montreal Negro Community,” 3.

¹⁰ Potter, “Occupational Adjustments,” 10.

District.¹¹ Nevertheless, thanks to the establishment of numerous social events and black organizations like the UNIA, blacks in Little Burgundy maintained a strong and visible presence in this neighborhood for many years.

To be sure, blacks settled in Little Burgundy for both cultural and economic reasons. Historically, immigrant groups have settled in and around members of their own particular cultural group.¹² Bonded by linguistic, national, religious, racial, and/or familial ties, immigrants like the West Indians and the African Americans in Montreal chose to settle among people with whom they felt a shared social history. In addition, the crowded St. Antoine District became home to most blacks in Montreal because they had been “economically deprived due to labour stratification and underemployment.” The low rents in the St. Antoine neighbourhood made it possible for blacks in Montreal, who worked primarily in low-paying, working-class occupations, to acquire housing. Even if one could afford to move out of the area and purchase a home in a more affluent part of town like Verdun or Mackayville, black Canadians were often met with racist white neighbours and landlords who feared that the intermingling of the races would decrease property values.¹³

During this period it was more common for blacks in Montreal to rent apartments than to own property. For many it was too expensive to purchase a home in the city since the vast majority of black residents worked in low-paying, working-class jobs. Most black men worked for the railroads. In fact, Wilfrid Israel, whose 1928 thesis on blacks in Montreal is now a veritable primary

¹¹ Don Handelman, “West Indian Associations in Montreal,” (MA Thesis, McGill University, 1964), 31-2; Potter, “Occupational Adjustments,” 11; and Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 39.

¹² James Walker contends that immigrants “often settled in self-contained communities where a distinctive life-style could be fostered.” Surely, immigrants to Canada experience a multitude of insecurities and changes as they ease into their new surroundings. As a result they seek comfort in what little familiarity they can find, which leads them to settle among people with a shared place of origin, language, religion, and other cultural markers. Settling in ethnic enclaves allows new immigrants to “retain distinct cultural characteristics.” See James W. St.G. Walker, *The West Indians in Canada*, no.6 of *Canada's Ethnic Groups* (Saint John: Keystone Printing & Lithographing Ltd., 1984), 17.

¹³ Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 38-9 and David C. Este, “The Black Church as a Social Welfare Institution: Union United Church and the Development of Montreal’s Black Community, 1907-1940,” *Journal of Black Studies* 35, 1 (September 2004): 8-9.

source for this period, estimates that about ninety percent of black men in Montreal worked for the railroads in some capacity.¹⁴ By the late 1940s, this number was down to about fifty percent. If one did not work for the railroads, he might choose to be a mechanic, tailor, barber, machinist, carpenter, or general labourer. Across Canada and including Montreal, black women maintained positions as domestic workers in the homes of middle and upper class whites. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century domestic work remained the most common career path for black women in Montreal, with about eighty percent employed in this field by the late 1940s. If they were not hired as domestics, black women sometimes worked as laundresses, seamstresses, and waitresses. Because unemployment among black men was relatively common, black women were sometimes the family breadwinners since their work was more consistent and secure. Additionally, because of the nature of the job sleeping car porters were away from home up to sixteen days out of every month.¹⁵ This meant that in addition to working full-time in the paid labour force, black women performed the lion's share of the familial work and childrearing – perhaps even more than white women within the same socio-economic bracket.

This is not to say that there were not a few blacks in Montreal with higher paying jobs. In fact, there were six black doctors in Montreal throughout the 1920s, including D.D. Lewis, G. Gaspard, Samuel I.T. Wills, J. Horsham, K.I. Melville, and J.R. Williams. All but Lewis, who was a native of Nigeria, were born in the Caribbean and came to Canada to either practice medicine or attend medical school. There were also several other well-educated blacks in Montreal including a few lawyers, engineers, reverends, social workers, and teachers, most of whom were also Caribbean-born. Those people with a higher education and/or social status than the rank-and-file members

¹⁴ Israel, "The Montreal Negro Community," 70.

¹⁵ Este, "Union United Church," 8-9 and Israel, "The Montreal Negro Community," 74.

often became important leaders within Montreal's black community on account of their intellectual and financial resources.¹⁶

Despite evidence that some blacks in Montreal made a comfortable living, the fact remains that most African Canadians in the city strained to make ends meet. This struggle intensified when racial barriers were factored in. By the early 1900s, there was a strong desire among blacks in the city to establish organizations aimed at improving their quality of life. At the turn of the twentieth century, Montreal was known for its exceedingly poor living conditions. Williams notes that "Montreal was far behind the rest of North American cities in improving the health, sanitation, and housing conditions for its citizens" due, in part, to its "open sewers, outside toilets, filthy and crowded tenements" and an overall lack of interest in health and social welfare on the part of provincial and municipal governments. For the black residents living in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Montreal, satisfaction with housing and the standard of living was extremely low. This was exacerbated by the fact that the West Indians, African Americans, and native-born black Canadians battled daily against racial discrimination. As in every other part of the country racism in Montreal was commonplace. It has already been established that in addition to employment discrimination, racism abounded in the housing market where blacks were denied lodging or relegated to undesirable neighbourhoods on account of racist landlords and neighbours. Moreover if they were not denied service altogether, business proprietors would consign blacks to certain sections designated for "Negroes" in places such as restaurants and theatres. Social mingling between the races was strictly taboo and potentially dangerous depending on how the authorities perceived interracial relations. The situation was not any better for black children; although schools were not officially segregated, black pupils "received very little attention from the teachers compared

¹⁶ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 123-8. The college/university-educated blacks named in Bertley's thesis all became members and/or leaders within the Montreal Division of the UNIA.

to White students” and were told “that their only employment opportunities were positions on the railroads or domestic work.”¹⁷ The atmosphere in Montreal, then, was ripe for the arrival of benevolent and communal organizations including the UNIA that would help black residents to address their frustrations with racial discrimination.

The Rise of Community Organizations and the UNIA

Perhaps the first black organization to make roots in the St. Antoine District was the Coloured Women’s Club of Montreal (CWCM) in 1902. This was, of course, a women’s-only club with a limited membership of only fifteen, and its goal “was to aid black people in Montreal in every way possible.” The Club was comprised of the wives of railway porters and it only admitted American-born black women; this would remain a policy of the CWCM until 1928. The Club collected and distributed food and clothing to black Montrealers in need, and also helped to find suitable housing for newcomers to the city.¹⁸ Then in September of 1907, the black community in Montreal established Union Congregational Church as a means to unite blacks of various denominations under one umbrella. This was in response to frustrations over a lack of control over their own religious institutions and divisions between the British Methodist Episcopal (BME) and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches in the city. The church would become affiliated with the United Church in 1925 under the guidance of Rev. Charles Este, officially becoming Union United Church (UUC) in that year. Over the course of these years, UUC became the primary black church in Montreal, and in addition to providing religious and spiritual counseling the congregation offered social assistance to black people in need. For example, in 1908 the Coloured Women’s Club

¹⁷ Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 36.; Este, “Union United Church,” 9-10; Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 39-41; and Potter, “Occupational Adjustments,” 15-16, 29.

¹⁸ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 50-2. The first West Indian woman was admitted to the Club in 1928.

worked in conjunction with the Church to conduct a clothing drive which administered warm winter clothes to black newcomers to the city, while some of the city's black women operated the city's first black day care service out of the Church. The influence of UUC cannot be overestimated; Williams explains that "for almost two decades, Union Church was the only institution serving the Negro population in Montreal."¹⁹ That is, of course, until the arrival of the UNIA.

The UNIA had a presence in Montreal before its residents decided to formally open a division of the association. The year 1917 seems to mark a rise in black activism in Montreal, an apparent reaction to the iniquities experienced by blacks during the First World War. For the first two years of the war, minority groups were repeatedly denied enlistment into combat battalions. By 1916 the war had lasted much longer than anyone had predicted, and with casualties rising the Canadian Expeditionary Force needed more recruits. By that summer the CEF was finally accepting visible minorities into their ranks; however, instead of being allowed to fight alongside their white countrymen the African Canadians who wished to serve in the war were referred to the No. 2 Construction Battalion. The No.2 Battalion operated as a labour company and was tasked with laying railroad tracks in France which would allow for the transport of goods to the front lines. While they proudly accepted this opportunity to serve their country, African Canadians could hardly ignore the overt racism that kept them from performing on equal terms with their white counterparts. Moreover, many black veterans believed that they would be rewarded for their loyal service to the Dominion. Black Canadians anticipated greater opportunities and social equality after the war, but this was not the case. As James Walker notes, "the efforts of 'visible' enlisted men did not gain recognition for themselves or for their communities at home."²⁰ Segregation persisted,

¹⁹ Este, "Union United Church," 11-13, 15; and Williams, *The Road to Now*, 53-5.

²⁰ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 56; Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 1997), 318-9; James W. St.G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* 70, 1 (1989): 12, 24. Walker notes that racism in military

even in the Canadian Legion Halls, and job opportunities did not improve in any significant way after the war. As a reaction to their disappointment, blacks in Montreal established clubs and associations to help them cultivate a greater sense of self-worth and a collective identity, and to lend greater support to their community since it seemed clear that white Canadians were unwilling to change.

Noting that the government did not view “visible” Canadians as equal to whites, blacks in Montreal realized that they needed to become more vocal at the political level. In October of 1917, a group of blacks in Montreal founded the Coloured Political and Protective Association. The CPPA helped to inform its members on political matters and encourage them to vote for the party that best represented the interests of black Canadians. Members had to be “qualified Negro voters” and pay monthly dues of ten cents. Early membership numbers were quite low, around fifteen, and meetings took place in the homes of its members. After a couple of years, meetings moved to the Porters Mutual Benefit Association Hall with an expanded membership of seventy-five, and which “included all three groups in the [black] community.”²¹ This association, which is quite similar to the Negro Political Association in Edmonton (Chapter 4), lasted until 1925. It also reflects a common trend of the period among blacks in Canada to engage more directly with their government.

This trend is echoed in the Association of the Universal Loyal Negroes (AULN). Blacks from the Caribbean and Central America established the AULN in Panama during World War I.

recruitment affected many visible minority groups in Canada, including Indigenous Peoples, East Indians, and Japanese Canadians.

²¹ Israel, “The Montreal Negro Community,” 109-11. The CPPA was also known to challenge the unjust treatment of blacks in Montreal. For example, in 1919 the CPPA tested the segregated seating policy at Loew’s theatre in Montreal. The CPPA sent four representatives, Messrs. Sol Reynolds and Norris Augustus Dobson and their wives, to the theatre where they purchased general admission tickets. They proceeded to find seats in the main orchestra area but were asked to leave when staff insisted that they must sit in the balcony. Reynolds and Dobson protested and filed lawsuits against the theatre. Eventually, the courts ruled in favour of Loew’s arguing that the “ticket was not for a specific seat; the theatre’s discriminatory regulations were legal.” See James W. St.G. Walker, “Race,” *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 147-9.

From here it spread across Central America and reached the U.S.A. and Canada rather quickly. By 1917 a branch of this organization found its way into Montreal thanks to the West Indian immigrants who had previously worked around Latin America. “Its members had pledged to fight for Britain in the war, on condition that the British government would undertake to intensify efforts to alleviate the circumstances under which her black subjects lived.”²² Additionally, AULN members believed that African people under colonial rule by Britain, Belgium, France, and Germany should be given sovereignty.²³ Members of the Afrocentric AULN soon realized that their association aligned very well with Garvey’s nascent UNIA which similarly pleaded the case of an “Africa for the Africans.” The popularity of the Garvey movement was growing at a much faster pace than the AULN and both groups were competing for the same demographic. By 1919 AULN leaders began to make efforts to formally merge with the UNIA. According to Bertley the Secretary-Treasurer of Montreal’s AULN branch, Dillon C. Govin, wrote to Garvey in January of 1919 asking for permission to make this branch an affiliate of the UNIA. Garvey replied that “the branch in Panama had already taken that step” and welcomed Govin’s request with open arms, encouraging the group to acquire an official UNIA charter. By March 10, 1919, Govin wrote to Garvey again to inform him that he had organized a UNIA division in Montreal and would be applying for a charter.²⁴

²² Bertley, “The UNIA in Montreal,” 40-1. Wilfrid Israel incorrectly assumed that the AULN branch in Montreal was the work of African Americans, and that this group later became a branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). See Israel, “The Montreal Negro Community,” 111-2.

²³ Letter from Association of Universal Loyal Negroes to the *Crisis*, November 19, 1918. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; and Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1971), 109-10.

²⁴ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 42-3. Govin later moved to New York City where he became involved with the UNIA division in Harlem. Govin, recognized by *The Free Lance* as one of the original organizers of the UNIA in Montreal, was visiting the city on business in November of 1934 along with Captain Cockburn, who was master of the Black Star Line’s *S.S. Booker T. Washington*. See “Prominent Harlemit Visit Montreal,” *The Free Lance*, December 1934.

This was not the first time that black Montrealers had heard about the UNIA. In fact, Marcus Garvey himself visited Montreal in the Winter of 1917 for the purpose of recruiting followers and growing the UNIA in Canada. He addressed a crowd of black residents at a hall on Chatham Street where he was eagerly received. For many, Garvey's message of race pride and the significance of African history and heritage to world civilizations made blacks everywhere, including in Montreal, believe that "no white person was better than any Negro." As Bertley reminds us, "In those days, that was revolutionary thinking."²⁵ It is also possible that blacks in Montreal had heard or read about Garvey before his visit. The UNIA, as mentioned, began in Jamaica in 1914. From here it spread to Harlem, New York, which was the epicentre of black life and culture at this time. The West Indians who had immigrated to Canada might have heard about the UNIA from their friends or relatives back in the Caribbean or living in New York. News about this growing organization also appeared in black newspapers across the U.S.A., which inevitably landed in the hands of sleeping car porters. Scholars agree that with their great mobility across borders, sleeping car porters served as channels of information on race issues between Canada and the U.S.A.²⁶ As previously stated, Montreal was the headquarters for Canadian railways and porters made frequent runs from here to northern U.S. cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Boston. Therefore, Montreal porters brought back interesting stories and black newspapers from America to share with the black community in the St. Antoine District, including news on Marcus Garvey and the UNIA.

On June 9, 1919, Montreal Garveyites received an official charter from Garvey's headquarters and became division number 5 of the UNIA. As in most other parts of Canada, UNIA members in Montreal were primarily immigrants from the Caribbean; indeed, the Montreal Division,

²⁵ Israel, "The Montreal Negro Community," 111; and Bertley, *The UNIA of Montreal*, 10.

²⁶ Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (London: Penguin Press, 2004), 11 and Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 5, 18.

with its origins in the AULN, had been organized by West Indians. This is not to say that African Americans and Canadians did not join. Certainly, the Montreal Division drew participants from all three ethnic groups, but in general it seemed that the UNIA's philosophies and activities appealed to those from the Caribbean. Bertley notes that while there was some divisiveness among the various black ethnic groups in Montreal, they mostly cooperated within the UNIA because it was an organization that stressed the common bond of race over place of origin. As mentioned above, most blacks in Montreal were of the working class, and therefore so was the Montreal Division's membership. The few well-educated or well-positioned blacks in Montreal often held leadership roles within the Division.²⁷

The Montreal Division's first president was Henry Hall. Hall is credited with launching a very successful membership drive in 1919 which saw the division grow to 400 members within its first year of existence. The division reached its peak membership by the end of 1922 with 700. To be sure, this number reflects the "regular" membership of the UNIA and not necessarily the "active" members. Registered active members of the UNIA paid their annual dues whereas regular members were simply those who enjoyed participating in the Montreal Division's events and activities, but did not necessarily pay a membership fee. In fact, Bertley's records show that the number of active (i.e. dues-paying) members in the Montreal Division reached a high point of ninety-two in 1921, which was a peak year overall for the UNIA as an organization worldwide. Nevertheless, interviews with former Garveyites indicate that they remember many more members than what appears in their records. This could mean that the division had problems collecting dues,

²⁷ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 114-27 and 154-6. Bertley contends that some of the native-born black Canadians perceived the West Indian immigrants as loud and aggressive, even calling them "monkey chasers" and ridiculing their accents. The West Indians, in turn, saw the native-born blacks as "lazy, unambitious, and timid."

and/or that they included the children in the Juvenile Branch, and/or they incorporated the spouses or friends of members who attended UNIA functions into their numbers.²⁸

Regular and active members alike joined several auxiliary groups offered under the umbrella of the UNIA, including the Black Cross Nurses, Juvenile Branch, and the Literary Club. The primary focus of the Montreal Division was to bring the black community together for the purpose of boosting morale and presenting the chance to expand their knowledge and skills. Division leaders achieved this by providing various programs, events, and clubs through which the black community could be both educated and entertained. For the UNIA, education was key to boosting the confidence of black youths and instilling members with important life skills. The Montreal Division played a significant role in educating the black community via formal and informal methods. June Bertley advances this argument, claiming that the UNIA's auxiliary groups and mass meetings provided informal outlets of learning for blacks in Montreal. In her words, UNIA members "were exposed to methods of organization, brotherhood relationships, fund-raising activities, opportunities for public display of drama, elocution, oration, information and knowledge, and the acquisition of some skills and techniques." In addition, Sunday Mass Meetings (SMM) specifically informed the Division on "matters pertaining to the advancement and betterment of Black people locally, nationally or internationally." During its heyday (1919 to 1928), the UNIA appealed to members and non-members alike because it offered the community an outlet to witness the talents of African Canadians on display and to hear moving lectures on the beauty of African history and heritage.²⁹

²⁸ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 10, 93-8; and Robert A. Hill, "Constitution and Book of Laws," in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983), 1: 266.

²⁹ J. Bertley, "Educating Blacks in Montreal," 84-5. Mass meetings were held on Sundays for the public. The Montreal Division also held regular business meetings for members which occurred twice weekly between 1919 and 1926 and twice monthly from 1926 to 1940. While the Sunday Mass Meetings were geared toward entertainment and education, "the normal business of the division was planned, discussed, and evaluated at the regular meetings." L. Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 225-6.

At SMMs the audience could expect a program of lectures, sermons, and artistic displays put on by the UNIA's leaders and auxiliary groups. The Montreal Division hosted guest speakers as often as they could, including dignitaries from the Parent Body such as Amy Jacques Garvey, Madame Maymie de Mena, Vernal Williams, G.O. Marke, and Marcus Garvey himself. The UNIA Choir and Orchestra were fixtures at Division events since their establishment in 1921. For many it was thrilling and inspiring to see the talents of young black Canadians on display each week, especially when they performed the work of black artists. On July 14, 1926, the Montreal Division introduced its Boys Band. The purpose of the Boys Band was, at its core, to build the confidence of its young members (who numbered about a dozen at first) through public performance and the development of their artistic talents. They performed at the SMMs for ten years until the 1930s when the Division fell on hard economic times.³⁰ During SMMs there was often a presentation about black history which served to both educate and inspire the audience since such stories were not featured in the regular school curriculums. Members also read *The Negro World* aloud so as to properly inform the members on international affairs pertaining to the African diaspora and the wider Garvey movement. Liberty Hall served as an ideal space for these events as members draped UNIA banners and flags around the Hall and displayed the photographs of black heroes and intellectuals like Garvey and A. Philip Randolph.³¹

Besides the Orchestra, Choir, and Boys Band, the Black Cross Nurses (BCN) was another auxiliary group that provided its members with an informal education. Launched on March 29, 1921, the small auxiliary group was comprised completely of women and held meetings in the homes of its members, primarily its leader and Division Lady President, Mrs. Georgiana O'Brien.

³⁰ J. Bertley, "Educating Blacks in Montreal," 114-16 and L. Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 229. The UNIA Orchestra also stopped playing sometime during the Great Depression when its long-serving director, Charles Dyall, migrated to Detroit for work. See L. Bertley, 294.

³¹ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 138-41.

The BCN aided in educating the black community on issues of health and hygiene through the distribution of pamphlets and newsletters, but did not actually care for the sick as a professional nurse would do. June Bertley explains that the “aims and objectives” of the BCN in Montreal “proved beyond the professional and organizational capabilities of the unit” which only lasted about four or five years. The women involved were not trained nurses and had limited financial resources. However, in the Montreal Division’s early years the BCN learned to plan social events like dinners and concerts as well as bake sales and bazaars. In this way, the women of the BCN gained valuable experience in organizing, planning, and fundraising.³²

The Montreal Division also briefly hosted the Universal African Legion (UAL) auxiliary group. The UAL was the paramilitary branch of the UNIA and it was meant for men aged eighteen to fifty-five who were in good health and could theoretically provide military service. They wore formal uniforms and performed drills. However, the UAL was an unpopular auxiliary group in the Montreal Division (and elsewhere in Canada) because of Canada’s “relatively non-militaristic tradition.” Leo Bertley explains that “while it may be a right under the constitution of the U.S.A. for citizens of that country to ‘openly bear arms,’ Canada, as part of its British heritage, looks suspiciously on such practices.” Plus, the black population of Canada was mostly “small” and “peaceful,” and thus an auxiliary group like the UAL would not appeal to blacks in Canada.³³

Nevertheless, auxiliary groups like the UAL, BCN, Orchestra, Choir, and Boys Band granted blacks in Montreal with a means of bolstering their sense of self-worth through participation and leadership. These groups helped to boost community morale since there were few “avenues of

³² The BCN only lasted about five years because there was simply too much work and not enough support for the auxiliary group. Only about fifty women had joined over the course of its five-year existence, but mainly operated with a core group of between five and ten women at any given time. See L. Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 268, 272, and 275 and J. Bertley, “Educating Blacks in Montreal,” 100-6.

³³ L. Bertley estimates that the UAL launched sometime around 1927. This comes near the end of the UNIA’s peak years and shortly before its decline during the 1930s, two factors that also contributed to the UAL’s failure. Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 278-80.

social activities open to blacks in Montreal” between the wars, while official titles granted to members like “nurse,” “officer,” or “soloist” granted black Montrealers with a sense of respect and purpose that their regular occupations as porters and housekeepers did not provide.³⁴

The Montreal Division’s programs also offered what June Bertley calls “formal education” to the black community. She contends that “[t]he Montreal Division was highly ambitious and concentrated auxiliaries and units not only to reinforce the UNIA philosophy, but also to give support and help in the traditional courses and subjects pursued by students in the regular public school system.” The Montreal Division offered educational programs for every age group and every level, from early childhood to adulthood. The most popular auxiliary group to offer a type of formal education was the Literary Club. Established on November 26, 1920, “it organized classes to deal with reading skills, debating techniques, elocution and other related subjects, and a library to promote and encourage the reading of Black History.”³⁵ The Literary Club was unique to the Montreal Division as it was not an official auxiliary group under the UNIA Constitution. The Literary Club, which appealed primarily to teenagers and young adults, was the Montreal Division’s most active auxiliary group because it had a well-educated leadership base. Its vice president, for example, was Rev. Charles Este who was the pastor of Union United Church and the club’s librarian, Lucille de Shield, became the first woman of African descent to be hired by the Montreal Public Library. Under the tutelage of well-educated leaders, the Literary Club focused primarily on improving literacy skills but also taught seminars on black history, public speaking, art, and debating.³⁶ The Literary Club operated until 1928 when the Division began to experience a decline

³⁴ L. Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 269, and J. Bertley, “Educating Blacks in Montreal,” 48.

³⁵ Bertley, “Educating Blacks in Montreal,” 55-6.

³⁶ Ibid., 56, 90-2 and L. Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 282-5. The Literary Club also organized public speaking engagements at Liberty Hall, including one featuring *The Negro World’s* editor, William Ferris, and another with Richard Tobitt, UNIA commissioner for the Caribbean. The Literary Club also held fundraisers, plays, and socials under the auspices of the Montreal Division.

in active membership, and at a time when the Negro Community Centre had recently launched and offered new programs to entice black youths.³⁷

The Montreal Division maintained a Juvenile Branch throughout the 1920s which offered classes on black history, spirituality, the arts, and public speaking in addition to more hands-on skills such as handicrafts. The Juvenile Branch seems to have provided academic programming for youths ranging from pre-school age to adolescence. The “Infant Class,” or “Kindergarten” as it was called colloquially, was for children aged one to seven years. Children of this age learned about the UNIA and African heritage through song, dance, recitation, and the study of numbers and letters. This benefitted the children greatly as it supplemented their public school educations and provided insight into black history which was not usually taught in their regular school curriculum. The kindergarten program also profited the adults/parents of the community as it “afforded a much needed baby sitting service and accommodation” for working mothers.³⁸

Children between the ages of seven and thirteen enjoyed a weekly program held on Saturdays which presented them the opportunity to learn works of poetry, drama, and music, usually by prominent black artists. These children, along with some from the Kindergarten program, frequently performed musical numbers, short plays, and poems for audiences at the regular SMMs. The Saturday program teachers also provided “remedial programs, vocational courses, and general academic work” to help improve the children’s academic skills.³⁹

According to June Bertley, the UNIA Constitution laid out four categories of formal education to be offered to black youth: The Infant Class for children aged one to seven; The Souvenir Class for ages seven to thirteen; The UNIA and ACL Cadets for boys aged thirteen to

³⁷ Bertley, “Educating Blacks in Montreal,” 97.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 56-7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

sixteen; and the Preparatory Nurses Class for girls aged fourteen to eighteen. Together, these four courses could fall under the umbrella of the division's Juvenile Branch. The Montreal Division did not offer the cadets or nursing programs because neither the UAL nor the BCN had the resources to administer these courses. The Souvenir Class was meant to manufacture of trinkets to sell at UNIA events as a fundraising scheme; the handicrafts made by children in class would be sold as UNIA keepsakes. However, the Montreal Division focused more on traditional school subjects rather than handicrafts and therefore did not use the moniker of "Souvenir Class." The Infant Class in Montreal was the only one of the four official UNIA youth programs that operated under the specifications of the UNIA Constitution.⁴⁰

Aside from the Juvenile Branch, the Montreal Division also offered separate classes for adolescents and adults throughout the 1920s and 1930s who wished to enrich their knowledge in subjects like English, Math, Geometry, History, and Reading. Moreover, the Montreal Division had classes for those who had an interest in handicrafts and hobbies, including knitting, sewing, dress-making, and sports.⁴¹ These supplementary courses were enjoyed by people of all ages and promoted a sense of comradery among UNIA members.

The Juvenile Branch and the Montreal Division's various educational programs were under the direction of Mrs. Clara de Shield. De Shield was a college-educated woman from New York and was a prominent leader within the Montreal Division, serving once as Lady President in the mid-1920s.⁴² With a couple notable exceptions, like Mr. Earl Swift (holding a degree from McGill University in Economics) and Mr. Ellis Tucker, most teachers of the Montreal Division's educational programs were women.

⁴⁰ Bertley, "Educating Blacks in Montreal," 56-64.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 67-9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74. Clara de Shield was also an active member of UCC and the NCC.

That women were more likely than men to serve as teachers in the UNIA falls directly in line with the association's beliefs on respectable gender roles for the sexes. Garvey came of age during the Victorian and Edwardian eras and subsequently his perceptions of what defined manhood and womanhood were deeply influenced by what he had experienced as a youth. The middle to upper classes expected men to be providers and protectors of their wives and families, while a woman's role was primarily in the home as a mother and homemaker. This was based, in part, on the belief that women were inherently more nurturing and thus were best suited to care for the home and the children in a domestic capacity. For working-class Jamaicans like Garvey this strict division of labour was simply not feasible as both men and women had to work in the public sphere in order to make a livable wage. And because they were relegated to the lowest rung on the socio-economic ladder, blacks in Jamaica wielded little political power. As has been made certain, Garvey wanted this reality to change for blacks not only in the Caribbean, but around the world. Consequently, he espoused the gender roles of the more powerful classes as a guide for dividing up labour within the UNIA.

At the time, nursing and teaching were among the most respectable professions for unmarried, middle-class white women. Hence, the UNIA implemented auxiliary groups like the BCN and Juvenile Branch in order to encourage women's supposed innate abilities. Once married, the ideal "profession" for a woman was dutiful wife and mother. Indeed, the UNIA held motherhood as the pinnacle of womanhood because it was the women who raised the next generation of Garvey's followers. Thus, to be a teacher in the Juvenile Branch represented more than educational leadership; it was also a form of "community mothering," a tradition dating back to the nineteenth century among working-class African Americans. Because working-class black women usually worked outside the home, securing reliable childcare was a daily challenge. To remedy this situation, African-American women formed a communal network of childcare that was

administered primarily by senior women who no longer worked in the public sphere.⁴³ As noted above, the teachers at the Montreal Division's Kindergarten filled this role very well, as they also did with the after-school and weekend programs for young people.

Because it was women's responsibility to raise respectable children, the task of outlining "a new social policy for the Negro" fell on the female members of the UNIA. At the 1922 International Convention, Mrs. Georgiana O'Brien was part of an all-female committee to create such a document for all UNIA members to implement. The women in this group discussed creating a code of conduct for black persons so that there was a standard of respectability in place, and the delegation felt that enforcing such a policy was largely in the hands of the women since they usually planned the social events.⁴⁴

Considering that the Juvenile Branch was intended to train the younger generation to take over the work of the UNIA in their adult years, Leo Bertley contends that "the juvenile branch did not meet with unqualified success. The juveniles of the 1920's and 1930's did not give any appreciable support to the UNIA in the 1940's, 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's."⁴⁵ While part of Bertley's argument holds merit, it remains inherently negative in its outlook. Bertley's point ignores the fact that the UNIA's programs helped young black children to hone skills, make friends within the community, and to boost their sense of self-confidence – elements which are indispensable in one's formative years. Moreover, during the Depression years it is possible that children left Montreal with their parents who may have been seeking job opportunities elsewhere, thereby making it

⁴³ Beryl Satter, "Marcus Garvey, Father Divine and the Gender Politics of Race Difference and Race Neutrality," *American Quarterly* 48, 1 (March 1996): 49. For more on gender and the UNIA see Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7-9; Barbara Bair, "True Women, Real Men: Gender, Ideology, and Social Roles in the Garvey Movement," in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*, edited by Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Ula Y. Taylor, *Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Satter, "Marcus Garvey, Father Divine," 43-76.

⁴⁴ Hill, "Convention Report," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985), 4: 936

⁴⁵ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 297-8.

impossible for these young people to carry on the work of the Montreal Division. And, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the youths of the Montreal Division took an active interest in Montreal's Negro Community Centre after its launch in 1927. So while they may not have stayed active in the UNIA as adults, they certainly took the skills and interests fostered within the Division to other organizations operating for the advancement of the black community.

Aside from the auxiliary groups, the Montreal Division strived to bring the black community together by hosting events and entertainment. As mentioned, the SMMs included entertainment from its auxiliary groups, such as performances from the Choir, Orchestra, or Boys Band, not to mention poetry readings and dramatic presentations from the Juvenile Branch. Beyond the SMMs the UNIA and its auxiliary groups put on various events like dances, socials, concerts, banquets, and excursions for the enjoyment of Montreal's black residents. These types of events, which usually required an entry fee, served the dual purpose of raising funds for the division and bringing members together as a cohesive group. Summertime picnics proved to be popular events among blacks in Montreal and, as will become apparent in the following chapters, in cities and towns across Canada. The *Dawn of Tomorrow* reported that the Sunday schools of the UCC, UNIA, and AME church held a joint picnic on July 26, 1923 at Fletcher's Field. The event "was the first of its kind in the History of Montreal and was one of the grandest feats of the season, being immensely enjoyed by all."⁴⁶ The most popular picnic was hosted annually by the UNIA and it was celebrated on or near Emancipation Day. The picnic was a means of uniting the community and promoting the UNIA's philosophies and goals. They were commonly held at Pine Grove Park or Otterburn Park, the largest taking place on August 2, 1923. A crowd of about 500 people attended this picnic; while not nearly as large as Toronto's annual UNIA picnic it was still considered a major social event for

⁴⁶ "Montreal notes," *Dawn of Tomorrow*, 11 August 1923.

blacks in Montreal.⁴⁷ In fact, it attracted the support of the city's other black associations, like the Masons, Oddfellows, and the churches. Attendees would enjoy a host of activities including speeches, musical entertainment, games, and sports, much of which was for the enjoyment of the children. The annual picnics continued up until the Second World War after which this "UNIA premier summer event no longer met the demands of the new Montreal Negro."⁴⁸

The Montreal Division also held more serious events including lectures and guest speakers from the Parent Body. For example *The Negro World's* editor, William Ferris, gave a lecture on "Negro History and the UNIA" in Montreal on April 15 and 16, 1921 before traveling down to Toronto for a few more speaking engagements.⁴⁹ Members of the Montreal Division also held their own local UNIA convention between August 19 and 26, 1923. At this time Garvey had been indicted on mail fraud charges which prevented the Parent Body from hosting the annual international convention in Harlem. Instead, the headquarters instructed local divisions to hold their own conferences. The Montreal convention encouraged members and the general public to discuss "very important questions of interest to the Colored community" including topics related to education, society, and politics. According to a news report from the period, Garvey's imprisonment and the subsequent cancelation of the international convention did not dishearten the Montreal Division's members. "[O]n the contrary, and not unlike other divisions, [it] would seem to

⁴⁷ This figure was reported by the *Dawn of Tomorrow* which claims one-fifth of the black population of Montreal attended this picnic. Leo Bertley's figure is slightly lower at 343 attendees. Just a few weeks prior, the Montreal Division also organized a moonlight steam boat excursion along the St. Lawrence River which attracted about 300. These people enjoyed music, dancing and refreshments that evening. See "The U.N.I.A. Convention at Montreal," *Dawn of Tomorrow*, 25 August 1923.

⁴⁸ The Sports Committee of the Montreal Division organized the annual picnic at Otterburn Park in 1937. The programme included swimming, fishing, boating, plus an orchestra and a dance. The cost for of admission was \$1.00 for adults and \$0.50 for children. See "U.N.I.A. Picnic," *The Free Lance*, 12 June 1937; L. Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 264-8; and J. Bertley, "Educating Blacks in Montreal," 69.70.

⁴⁹ Hill, "Marcus Garvey to William H. Ferris, Literary Editor, *Negro World*," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), 3:424 note 2.

have added zest, zeal, enthusiasm and increased determination to stand by the U.N.I.A. and uphold its principles of unified race consciousness and a redeemed Africa.”⁵⁰

Many, if not most, of the UNIA’s events took place at Liberty Hall, named after the headquarters in Harlem. Consequently, it became a hub for the city’s black community in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet despite the central role the Montreal Division played within the city’s black community, it struggled for years to acquire a property of their own in which to hold their meetings and events. The Montreal Division’s first meeting place was located in Little Burgundy at 243 St. Antoine Street in the CPR building for sleeping car porters. It seemed a logical place to position the fledgling organization since this building “was a veritable drop-in centre and meeting place for Blacks in this city.” Most of Montreal’s black residents lived in this neighbourhood which made it a convenient place to gather. However, the Montreal Division soon began looking for a larger place to accommodate an expanding membership. In the meantime, they held meetings in the home of Alfred Potter and eventually rented a place on Guy Street from February 1920 to March 1922.⁵¹

Unlike the Toronto Division, whose members hurriedly saved enough money to put a down payment on a property, the Montreal Division struggled with this for decades. The Division moved often over the course of their existence and found it difficult to acquire property insurance since they were a “Negro Association.” This left Montreal’s UNIA members at the whim of white landlords. The Division moved from its rental space on Guy Street to 134 Chatham Street in 1922 where they stayed until May of 1931 when a larger place opened up on Fulford Street (now Georges-Vanier Boulevard). However, acquiring a lease here proved a bit of a challenge for Montreal Garveyites as the landlord required them to first submit a petition of at least fifty signatures from neighbourhood residents. The landlord felt that the many white Europeans who

⁵⁰ “The U.N.I.A. Convention at Montreal,” *Dawn of Tomorrow*, 25 August 1923.

⁵¹ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 10, 43-7. Potter’s address was 308 Aqueduct Street.

lived on this street might oppose having black neighbours. Perhaps the landlord did not realize that the Montreal Division had been located in this general neighbourhood for over a decade and had had no conflict with the white residents of Little Burgundy during this time. It was landlord himself, not the neighbourhood residents, who did not want black tenants. Much to the landlord's chagrin, UNIA members were able to secure the required signatures with relative ease and the Montreal Division moved into their new Liberty Hall. They would lease this building until 1943 when finally the Montreal Division purchased the property from their former landlord.⁵²

The Montreal Division had actually proposed to some of the various other black organizations in the city if they would like to pool their resources together for the purchase of one communal building. A few fraternal organizations found roots in Montreal in the 1920s beginning with the male-only Grand United Order of the Oddfellows in 1920, and then its women's auxiliary, the Household of Ruth, in 1922. Four years later, the International and Benevolent Protective Order of Elks established a chapter in the city known as the Pride of Montreal 678. The Elks, whose membership was primarily West Indian like that of the UNIA, also had a women's auxiliary called Beaver Temple 578. These organizations focused on mutual aid and charity work. Dorothy Williams notes, "The humanistic precepts of 'Elkdom' – brotherly love and charity, encouraged blacks to join for protection, mutual aid, and recreation." Membership in these chapters was give-and-take, meaning that members had to contribute their time, money, and efforts to their programs and charities, and in doing so would guarantee themselves some security benefits should they fall on hard times. "Members were cared for when sick, visits were made to shut-ins, and sickness and

⁵² Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 47-61. That the Montreal Division would purchase the building in the 1940s seems oddly timed given the decline of the Garvey movement both in Canada and abroad. Yet, reports in *The Free Lance* indicate that Montreal's Garveyites remained determined to own their Liberty Hall. In 1935, for example, as the Depression continued to send property values plummeting, *The Free Lance* posed the question: "Now that prices are low, will the new local president of the U.N.I.A. urge on the advisability of purchasing a hall?" Other reports suggest that Montrealers were greatly upset when Rev. Charles Este opined that the Montreal Division should not purchase the Hall because it would become a financial burden to the association. See "Things We Would Like to Know," *The Free Lance*, 11 May 1935; "Inauguration Held at U.N.I.A." and "Spiritual Leader Lacks Vision," *The Free Lance*, 1 June 1935.

death benefits were paid out to members” in addition to providing scholarships to young students and raising moneys to help fund special programs put on by the UNIA and other cultural centres in the city. Moreover, these fraternal orders had a good international reputation among both blacks and whites, and thus even carried considerable clout with the federal government which “favoured immigrant sponsorship backed by the resources by fraternal associations.”⁵³ The Elks, Oddfellows, and their auxiliaries had been renting out Liberty Hall for their monthly and bimonthly meetings for years, so UNIA members had hoped that they might be willing to chip in for a building fund and become co-owners of the Hall. However, they refused the proposal and left the Montreal Division to come up with the down payment on their own.⁵⁴

The division had collected a modest amount of money in their Building Fund and had also invested \$500 in a Victory Bond when the Second World War had begun. Despite these efforts they were still short of the required \$3,500 needed for a down payment. In a significant display of solidarity, UNIA supporters from other locations sent in donations to help the Montreal Division reach the financial goal, including a generous \$1,000 contribution from the Toronto Division.⁵⁵

In spite of the Montreal Division’s long struggle to own their building, Liberty Hall in its various incarnations/locations had become a central meeting place for the black community. Certainly the UNIA held their own events at the Hall, from bake sales to dances to lectures. As mentioned above, other black organizations in the city frequently rented the space for their

⁵³ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 66, 94. Williams adds, “Two new branches of the Elks became active in the black community during the war years,” including Elk’s Victory Lodge #1088 Inc. in 1941 and its women’s auxiliary group, the Eastern Temple #779 (established in 1944).

⁵⁴ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 70. The fraternal organizations’ refusal to contribute to the UNIA building fund seems an odd choice considering their shared belief in enriching and supporting the black community. In addition, memberships to these clubs very likely overlapped, especially those of the Elks and UNIA which both drew from the West Indian population. This leads me to conclude that the choice was based on finances rather than philosophy.

⁵⁵ Aside from the monetary support, the Toronto Division’s president, B.J. Spencer Pitt, greatly encouraged the Montreal Division to acquire the property and provided legal counsel prior to the purchase. *Ibid.*, 61-4, 73, 77 and “Montreal notes,” *Dawn of Tomorrow*, 9 February 1924. This newspaper report notes that the Oddfellows held their monthly sessions at Liberty Hall.

meetings. For example, the Montreal Colored Political Club rented the UNIA Hall in October of 1935 when they invited Conservative candidate in the federal election, R.S. White, to speak to Montreal's black community regarding the party's policies and platform. Sometimes community members rented the space for their own social gatherings, such as Miss Emily Harper who held her eighteenth birthday party at Liberty Hall in 1934.⁵⁶

The Montreal Division's International Influence

From social events to educational opportunities to the foundation of a communal meeting place, it is clear that the UNIA in Montreal contributed to the enrichment and well-being of the city's black community. Furthermore, the Montreal Division also played a significant role in the growth of the Garvey movement worldwide and contributed to its survival during times of upheaval. One way that Montreal Garveyites showed their support for the movement was through participation in UNIA conventions and conferences. UNIA members in Montreal regularly attended the international conventions held in Harlem which attracted members from around the world. The Montreal Division sent delegates to these international conventions in Harlem every year between 1920 and 1922, and then again in 1924. These delegates were elected by the local membership to represent the division. The selected delegates were usually the division President and/or Lady President, or at least a member of the executive – a natural fit since they already represented the membership at the local level.⁵⁷ Garvey's indictment for mail fraud in 1923 led to a tumultuous period between 1923 and 1929 in terms of the Parent Body's ability to host the

⁵⁶ "R.S. White Speaks at U.N.I.A. Hall, Thursday, October 3rd," *The Free Lance*, 28 September 1935 and "Birthday Party Social Event," *The Free Lance*, 13 July 1935. The A.M.E. Mission also held regular meetings at Liberty Hall in Montreal during the 1930s. See "A.M.E. Mission," *The Free Lance*, 24 April 1937 and "Minister's Wife to Speak at U.N.I.A. Hall, Sun. July 25th," *The Free Lance*, 10 July 1937.

⁵⁷ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 326. Dr. D.D. Lewis and Mrs. G. O'Brien represented Montreal in 1920; Mr. Alfred Potter and Mrs. G. O'Brien attended the 1921 convention; Mr. Potter, Mrs. O'Brien, Mr. W.G. Mackintosh (auditor), and Mr. Hebert Julien attended the 1924 convention.

conventions. While briefly jailed in 1923 at Tombs Prison in Manhattan, Garvey and the executive council abruptly canceled that year's international convention and asked local divisions to hold small regional conferences instead. Montreal held theirs in August, as mentioned above. The Parent Body was able to host the larger conclave again in Harlem in August of 1924 because Garvey had been released on bail pending an appeal against his conviction.

While that convention was met with great success, it would be the last international congress in Harlem under the leadership of Marcus Garvey. Garvey's appeal was denied and the courts upheld the UNIA leader's conviction on one count of mail fraud. He was sentenced to five years at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary on February 8, 1925. At this point, the UNIA's Vice-President, William Sherrill, became the Acting President-General. Garvey's colleagues sent him regular reports on Sherrill's performance which led Garvey to conclude that his fill-in was mismanaging the affairs of the UNIA's headquarters. Subsequently, Garvey called an emergency convention to be held in Detroit (which was the UNIA's second largest division after Harlem) in March of 1926 for the purposes of impeaching Sherrill. Montreal sent their Lady President at the time, Mrs. Clara de Shield, to the Detroit convention which saw the election of a new Acting President-General, Mr. Fred Toote of Philadelphia. She was, in fact, the only Canadian representative at this conference.⁵⁸

After much public pressure and with the urging of Garvey's lawyers, Garvey's sentence was eventually commuted and, under the order of President Calvin Coolidge, Garvey was scheduled for immediate deportation in December of 1927. This obviously left the UNIA leader unable to host a convention in New York since he was now residing in his home country of Jamaica. As such, no convention was held that year. In fact, there would be no international convention until the 1929

⁵⁸ The Parent Body did hold an international convention later that year in August, but no Canadian delegates attended. This would suggest that there was not enough money left in the division coffers to sponsor another trip, or that the division did not support the second meeting in Harlem. It was becoming well-known at this time that the UNIA was experiencing infighting among its top leaders, with Garvey's absence prompting a struggle for power and a conflict over how to run the organization. See Hill, "Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1989), 6: xl-xli.

conclave in Kingston, Jamaica. It was at this convention when Garvey broke ties with the UNIA Incorporated in New York City due to infighting over where the UNIA's headquarters should be after Garvey's deportation and an internal battle over control of the organization. Garvey reorganized the association and renamed it the Universal Negro Improvement Association-African Communities League, August 1929, of the World with a new headquarters in Kingston. This pronouncement caused the existing rift between UNIA factions to widen, leaving his supporters to choose a side in the battle for control over the association. While some remained loyal to the UNIA Inc. in Harlem, the Canadian divisions sided with Garvey and received new charters, including the Montreal Division which was re-chartered Division number 334 on January 8, 1931.⁵⁹

Alfred Potter, who was the Montreal Division's president at the time, was present at this historic convention in Kingston. As will be described below, Potter was an ardent Garvey supporter and had worked very closely with the President-General in the early years of the association. It is unsurprising, then, that the Montreal Division would remain loyal to Garvey's faction. While at the convention Potter took part in several discussions. The topic of black-owned businesses in particular appealed to Potter who told the convention "that there was great potential for trade between Montreal and the West Indies, particularly Jamaica." As such, he requested "that a special business committee be formed to investigate this matter more thoroughly, and this was unanimously accepted."⁶⁰

It is remarkable that the Montreal Division would sponsor a delegate to this convention in Kingston given the high cost associated with travel to the Caribbean and the fact that most UNIA members made a very modest wage. According to Bertley, of the \$305.75 allotted to Potter for travel in 1929, a total of \$223.25 was pledged "from members and supporters in a direct appeal for

⁵⁹ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 350-1.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

assistance.”⁶¹ The act of sending Potter to the 1929 convention surely represents Montreal’s continued allegiance to Garvey and his organization, but also a willingness to contribute to the restructuring of his global movement. The Montreal Division also took extra efforts to send a delegate to the 1929 convention to make up for the previous year’s embarrassment when Garvey was detained by immigration officials in Montreal. Garvey had travelled to Quebec with the intention of touring the country in the autumn of 1928 and to “meet with UNIA officials to plan an international convention to be held in Canada in the following year.” American diplomats had warned Canadian officials that Garvey “might use his proximity to the United States to urge his American followers to vote for the Democratic presidential challenger, Governor Alfred Smith of New York.” After Garvey was questioned by a board of enquiry, he was released and allowed entry into Canada for a period of one week. He was also “required to sign a document to the effect that while here he would do nothing to stir up trouble of any kind, either in Canada or elsewhere, and in that connection would give no more interviews nor give any public addresses whatever.” After his poor treatment in Quebec, Garvey and his high commissioners halted plans for a Canadian convention in 1929 and instead hosted the event to Kingston, Jamaica.⁶²

It would seem that the financial woes caused by the Great Depression forced Canadian Garveyites to miss the next convention in Kingston in 1934. Existing records indicate that no Canadian delegates attended this convention. This would change in 1936 when Garvey decided to hold the UNIA’s first regional conference in Toronto. With few divisions from North America

⁶¹ This is in comparison to the previous years when delegates traveled by rail to Harlem (or Detroit in 1926); Mr. Potter traveled first to Harlem by train and then by ship to the Caribbean for the 1929 convention which would take a considerable amount of money and time. Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 347.

⁶² Hill, “Introduction,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1991), 7: xxxix and “Article in the *Montreal Gazette*,” 7: 288-9. Prior to the Quebec incident, Garvey had intended to hold the 1929 convention in Toronto. See also “Deportation for Marcus Garvey,” *The Gazette*, 17 November 1928; and “La detention de Marcus Garvey,” *La Presse*, 27 October 1928. A clipping of these articles appears in Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 2006), 10: 481.

attending in 1934 Garvey moved the location of the conference to Toronto in the hopes of attracting more of his American followers. At Garvey's personal request the Montreal Division assisted in organizing the event in Toronto which drew a larger crowd than the previous two conventions in Kingston. The event was touted a success and thus Toronto was chosen as the conference location once again in 1937. Montreal also helped the Toronto Division to plan, advertise, and finance this congress and, of course, sent delegates to represent the division.⁶³

The last UNIA international convention before Garvey's untimely death happened in Toronto in 1938. "Montreal performed its customary role in helping to organize the event as well as working to have it as widely publicized in this country as the circumstances permitted." Montreal President, E.J. Tucker, who represented Montreal at the convention, noted that the delegation unanimously voted to elect Garvey as President-General for a term of four years. The convention also concentrated intensely on the upkeep of the School of African Philosophy which had begun the previous year in Toronto, so as to properly train the next generation of UNIA leaders.⁶⁴

The Montreal Division's consistent participation in the UNIA conventions and conferences, especially in planning the three gatherings in Toronto, demonstrates the essential role that its members played in the development, reorganization, and survival of the Garvey movement both at home and abroad. One must remember that with Garvey's deportation from the United States, "he vanished from the American scene and the goals he represented diminished in the public mind."⁶⁵ This is why Canadian divisions stepped into such a prominent position; with their commitment to the UNIA's leader and close proximity to the United States, Canadian Garveyites played a key role in

⁶³ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 353. Division President, E.J. Tucker, and Secretary Z. Chambers represented Montreal in 1936, and just Tucker attended in 1937. Given the close proximity of the two cities, other members from Montreal may have attended the conferences in Toronto (and paid their own way), but not as official representatives of the division.

⁶⁴ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 365-6.

⁶⁵ Hill, "Introduction," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 6: xxxv.

keeping Garvey's organization and philosophies alive for his North American supporters during some of the association's most tumultuous years.

The Role of Montreal Garveyites

As we know, Montreal was almost certainly the first Canadian location that Garvey visited, sometime in the winter of 1917. It also became the first official division of the UNIA in Canada in June of 1919. Later that year Garvey and his first wife, Amy Ashwood, decided to honeymoon in Canada, splitting their time between Montreal and Toronto from December 26, 1919 to January 8, 1920. Perhaps the term "honeymoon" is a misnomer in this case as sources show that the newlyweds spent their time in Canada doing the business of the UNIA rather than vacationing. The Garveys held two meetings under the auspices of the Montreal Division followed by three more in Toronto on the evenings of January 5, 6, and 7. The events must have inspired many in attendance as the Garveys reportedly returned to New York City with about \$8,000 in earnings from Montreal and Toronto Garveyites.⁶⁶

The massive task of getting the movement up and running in Canada required help at the grassroots level. This meant that some of Garvey's early Canadian followers became important to the foundation of the Garvey Movement in Canada. One such member was Mr. Alfred Potter. Potter worked as a baggage porter for the Canadian Pacific Railway out of Montreal and was known as a leader among his peers. According to a letter written to FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, in 1921, Potter is described as Garvey's "right hand man." In this role Potter "received all of Garvey's mail, does all of his advertising, and is cognizant of all of Mr. Garvey's connections." The letter also states that Potter "runs down to New York a lot," presumably to meet with Garvey on matters

⁶⁶ Hill, "Black Star Line to the Canadian and United States Border Authorities" and "British Military Intelligence Report," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983), 2: 171 and 205, respectively.

related to the UNIA in Canada.⁶⁷ Potter was an apt choice for such a role given his career as a railway porter. The CPR made regular runs from Montreal to New York, thus Potter's job provided him with a means to travel relatively frequently and without any personal financial burden to the UNIA headquarters in Harlem. Perhaps this is why Potter also became the stock representative of the Black Star Line in Montreal in 1919. By June of 1920, BSL stock sales were well underway. However, earlier that year a report in the *Chicago Defender* had questioned the validity of the BSL enterprise, accusing Garvey of being a fake and a liar while swindling his followers out of their hard-earned money. The article caused a bit of a stir among blacks in Montreal, who Potter estimated to be numbered between 2,000 and 3,000. Potter noted that at least thirty people had directly approached him to inquire about the article's claims. As a result, Potter spoke at several public meetings to assure blacks in Montreal that the BSL was, in fact, a legitimate business initiative with moneys going toward the purchase of new steamships.⁶⁸

I have found no evidence to suggest that there were BSL stock representatives in other Canadian cities. Therefore, Potter may have served as Garvey's sales representative for all Canadian divisions. If this is the case, then Potter's position as a railway porter once again comes in handy. As mentioned above Montreal became the headquarters for both the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific Railways which offered routine voyages between Montreal and New York City. In theory, Canadian Garveyites could send their BSL contributions to Potter in Montreal who would then be able to carry the funds to New York City where it could be converted to U.S. dollars and deposited into the account of the UNIA's Parent Body. Having a sole Canadian BSL representative would have also been convenient for Garvey as he could consult directly with one person on stock sales in Canada, in this case, Potter, rather than one from every Canadian division or region.

⁶⁷ Hill, "William L. Hurley to J. Edgar Hoover," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 130-1.

⁶⁸ Hill, "Report on *Black Star Line v. The Chicago Defender*," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 367.

According to Bertley, Potter also paid his own way to attend the 1920 UNIA convention in Harlem. He was not chosen as an official delegate of the Montreal Division, who received stipends for their travels to New York, but rather covered his own expenses so that he could “be a part of this historic occasion.” Bertley seems somewhat surprised by Potter’s choice to pay his own way and asserts that, in hindsight, Potter should have been appointed an official representative of the Montreal Division in addition to or instead of the two that had been chosen: Dr. D.D. Lewis and Mrs. Georgiana O’Brien. This is because Potter sent detailed reports on the convention proceedings back to Montreal more consistently than either Lewis or O’Brien so that the division members could stay well-informed on the event.⁶⁹ Bertley makes no mention of Potter’s role as either Garvey’s right-hand man or as BSL stock representative, and was therefore unaware that Potter and Garvey had formed a working relationship between 1919 and 1920. Surely Potter had a vested interest in attending the 1920 convention to show fellow Montrealers his dedication as a leading figure in the Division and to ensure that Mr. Garvey recognized his commitment to the wider movement.⁷⁰

Bertley’s summary of the 1920 convention also omits a significant detail: that Garvey appointed Dr. D.D. Lewis to the position of Surgeon General of the UNIA. This made Lewis, who was the Montreal Division’s president at this time, a top official in the organization, granting him a salary of \$6,500 per year.⁷¹ Garvey structured the UNIA’s executive council much in the way a government would establish a cabinet of leading officials specializing in a particular department.

⁶⁹ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 316-8. Lewis and O’Brien were chosen as the official delegates to the convention because they served as division President and Lady President, respectively.

⁷⁰ Potter attended as an official delegate to the 1921 convention with O’Brien in Harlem and again in 1929 as the only Canadian delegate at the convention in Kingston, Jamaica. Potter was serving as the Division President in 1928 and 1929. See Hill, “Appendix IV,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 3: 786-7 and “Appendix I,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 962; and Bertley, “Educating Blacks in Montreal,” 97.

⁷¹ Hill, “Report of the Convention,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 645. Dr. D.D. Lewis, MD, had been a medical student in Montreal and upon graduation he founded a sanitarium in the early 1920s. “He later moved to New York City, associating himself with the division there and becoming one of the persons who tried to ‘rehabilitate’ the organization from the morass in which it found itself after the death of Marcus Garvey.” See Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 124.

Just as the American or Canadian surgeon general would be in charge of matters of public health, so, too, would Lewis do for the UNIA and its planned black nation-state in Liberia. To be named to the UNIA's executive assembly would have been considered a significant honour and accomplishment for Lewis. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that details the type of work Lewis would have conducted in this role, or for precisely how long he held the position, although it seems to have been for a period of one year since such appointments were made annually at the UNIA convention. Nevertheless, Lewis' appointment to UNIA Surgeon General serves to show how prominent a figure the Montreal Division's president was among his peers and the foundational role the division served to the UNIA as an organization.

Reports from that first convention in Harlem provide a glimpse into Lewis' passionate leadership style. In fact, Lewis played a key role in directing the first few sessions of the convention.⁷² According to one report, Lewis gave a speech at the beginning of the 1920 convention during which he "spoke forcefully" and "struck a responsive chord in the hearts of his auditors."⁷³ He addressed the convention several more times on the topic of the condition of blacks in Canada. He observed that in Quebec the "laws there are very loose." This, in turn, "tends[s] to make colored people lazy and indolent, and live what is generally termed a 'happy-go-lucky life.'" Lewis explained that this pertained only to the working-class blacks in Montreal who worked primarily as railway employees; middle-class blacks, he claims, "are scattered all over the city and it is difficult to get them together. The result is that when this movement was first introduced in Quebec it was only the toiling class, – the railroad men – who took kindly to it."⁷⁴ Toward the end of the convention Lewis received a telegram which stated that his wife had taken ill, so he decided to

⁷² Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (Ramparts Press, 1971), 111-12.

⁷³ Hill, "Opening of UNIA Convention," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 476-77, 481.

⁷⁴ Hill, "Reports of the Convention," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 523.

return home early. But before he left the event he gave one final, lengthy address. To great applause Lewis acknowledged that “we are determined to have a government, a government for the black people and by the black people for the freedom of the black people.” Lewis and O’Brien also marched in the convention’s opening parade which departed from Liberty Hall and went up Lenox Avenue to 138th Street. A report of the parade notes that the event drew both black and white spectators, indicating that

[t]here was no laughing, no indulgence in mockery of the pageant as it passed by, but rather expressions of approval and hearty applause. It was an unusual, soul-stirring scene, and sent a thrill of pride through every colored man and woman who saw it, whatever his previously considered opinions or views have been regarding the efficacy of the U.N.I.A.⁷⁵

This was, in essence, a public demonstration by the UNIA to show the world that they were to be considered a viable force against white supremacy.

Lewis and O’Brien also signed the UNIA’s Declaration of Rights. The Declaration was a manifesto against decades of racist treatment of black peoples, delivering fifty-four statements to outline “their fair and just rights.” The document demanded, for instance, that there be an end to European colonization in Africa, to segregated neighbourhoods and institutions, and to unequal treatment in education, politics, and economics. It also specified that blacks around the world should be given a fair trial in courts and judged by a jury of their own peers, that black physicians be given “the right to practice in the public hospitals of the communities in which they reside,” and that it should be unlawful for countries “to enact laws tending to hinder and obstruct the free immigration of Negroes on account of their race and color.” The document was to be the backbone of the organization, with Garvey stating that it “shall be the Holy Writ of this Negro race of ours. It shall be the very Scriptures by which we shall know ourselves.”⁷⁶ Therefore, to be part of the

⁷⁵ Hill, “Report of the Convention,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 646.

⁷⁶ Hill, “Report of the Convention,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 614, 619-20; “Report of UNIA Parade,” 2: 493; “UNIA Declaration of Rights,” 2: 571-80; and “Editorial Letter by Marcus Garvey,” 3: 9.

drafting of such a document was significant; Lewis and O'Brien, along with the other Canadian signatories, showed that blacks in Canada were challenging racist ideals as part of a global network of protesters.

Bertley rightly asserts that “Dr. Lewis was one of the most active participants” at the 1920 convention. Bertley draws evidence for this claim from the two kinds of correspondence that Lewis sent back to the Montreal Division regarding the convention’s proceedings: the “pep talk” reports meant for the general membership, and the personal letters to division secretary, E. Vaughn. The “pep talk” messages communicated all the positive ideas coming out of the convention meetings so as to assure the Montreal membership that the event was a grand success. The private letters to Vaughn, by contrast, reveal Lewis’ criticisms of the event. He felt that too much time had been devoted to certain topics, like drafting the Declaration of Rights, and not enough effort was dedicated to issues he felt to be of greater importance, such as the composition of a “good and solid constitution.”⁷⁷ Lewis was extremely vocal throughout the conference proceedings and seems to have had a clear vision about where the delegation should direct their efforts. Bertley argues that “from the moment he arrived in New York, he had been fighting to redirect the conference.” Lewis gained a reputation at the convention for challenging Garvey directly on various points, which garnered respect from his peers and made him one of the most influential delegates at the convention. Moreover, Bertley alleges that Lewis openly contested Garvey for the positions of President-General and Provisional President of Africa, suggesting that Lewis believed himself more qualified for the roles because of his university education and because he was born in Nigeria, Africa. Bertley goes on to say that Lewis, having lost to Garvey in that election, was then nominated for the position of Leader of Africa. Lewis declined the nomination because, as Bertley speculates,

⁷⁷ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 319-20. It is not well understood why Lewis would comment on the need to write a constitution given that the Association had completed their constitution in 1918, two years before the convention. Maybe Lewis felt that the UNIA constitution required some amendments or perhaps even a total re-write.

most of Africa was still under the control of European powers and therefore Lewis would wield no influence in such a role.⁷⁸

Because Bertley's research materials are not publicly available, I cannot corroborate his statements regarding Lewis and the positions offered to him at the convention. My sources on this subject, which are the official convention reports found in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, make no mention of Lewis' bid for the role of President-General or the nomination for Leader of Africa. In fact, the position of Leader of Africa either did not exist or perhaps Lewis confused it for another title role elected by UNIA members, the closest being the position of Potentate which was held by the mayor of Monrovia, Gabriel Johnson.⁷⁹ As mentioned above, the convention reports only indicate that Lewis was named Surgeon General in 1920. This matter aside, our sources concur that Lewis had a seemingly powerful impact on the delegation through active and impassioned participation. It appears the delegation strongly wished to bestow Lewis with a prominent position within the Association. As a practicing doctor in Montreal, Lewis accepted the role of Surgeon General because it was closely aligned with his education, qualifications, and beliefs. Just prior to being sworn in as Surgeon General, Lewis admitted to the delegation that "[t]here is no subject that interests me more than that of health. It is the keynote to success." In the same speech Lewis also presented a strong alliance with Garvey, stressing to the delegation, "I want us to look after our president, our leader," and "to see to it that we keep him perfectly healthy; that we keep him

⁷⁸ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 321-3. According to Judith Stein, Lewis, who was extremely keen on the UNIA's goal of "Pan-African economic enterprises," left the Association after deals with the Liberian government failed in 1924. However, Bertley believes that Lewis remained a member of the UNIA well into the 1940s. See Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 139 and Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 124.

⁷⁹ Hill, "Report of the Convention," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 645. The UNIA offices as elected by the membership are as follows: Potentate, Supreme Deputy, President General, Assistant President-General, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, Chaplain General, International Organizer, Chancellor, Surgeon General, Speaker in Convention, Commissioner and General, Minister of Legions.

surrounded with men that are able to help him go over the top, sending not only America but taking America to Africa and making that country the greatest country in the world.”⁸⁰

Drawing Connections: The UNIA, Union United Church, and the Negro Community Centre

The UNIA in Montreal was closely linked to Union United Church (UUC), previously known as Union Congregational Church (UCC). Although black Montrealers eagerly joined secular organizations like the UNIA, the Black Church was deeply rooted within African-Canadian culture. Scholars of the Black Church have noted that religion played a central role in the lives of blacks in Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean since the days of slavery. Enslaved Africans often turned to religion, mainly Christianity, as a means of finding salvation amidst the atrocities of the slave trade. The Black Church as an institution continued to develop after Emancipation, guiding black congregations in their spiritual and social lives and thus remaining a fixture in many black communities across North America. In a society that often barred them from public institutions, the Black Church went beyond serving as a place of worship. Churches often hosted a variety of activities outside the realm of religion including concerts, plays, lectures, education, and social gatherings. Blacks in Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean used their churches as a social hub and sanctuary. Given Canada’s own history with slavery and the church, and since Canada’s black population was comprised of immigrants from across the continent, it comes as no surprise that the Black Church would be an important institution in the lives of African Canadians. Montreal’s black population was a mostly religious one, and the most well-attended black church in the city was UUC.

⁸⁰ Hill, “Report of the Convention,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 619.

According to David Este, African Americans are responsible for the founding of the UUC. When African Americans migrated to Montreal they found that the existing white congregations were anything but welcoming. Not only were black church-goers relegated to the upper loft seating or the back pews, they were also excluded from participating in the affairs of the church in administrative positions. “As a result, members of the Black community attempted to organize church services that suited its own needs.” The UUC was born of the inspiration for a united black church in Montreal. Blacks in Montreal had grown tired of these discriminatory policies within the white churches. Moreover, there was a sense of divisiveness between the two main black congregations in Montreal, BME and AME churches, on issues of policy and organization. In short, the African-American immigrants felt that neither church was adequately serving the needs of the black population and were not promoting unity among black Montrealers.⁸¹

To remedy the situation a small committee of African-American immigrants decided that the community would benefit from a new Congregational Church. The Union Congregational Church opened to the people on September 1, 1907. As the name suggests, congregational churches were governed by members of the congregation rather than bishops, cardinals, or elders. Both men and women could serve the church as deacons and deaconesses, clerks, treasurers, and various other administrative roles. Este notes that in the UCC’s first two years it focused greatly on establishing a centre for the black community as a means to provide a type of safety net to people in need. For example, in conjunction with the Colored Women’s Club of Montreal, the UCC led a clothing drive to help black immigrants prepare for their first winter in Canada, and “provided the less fortunate community members with food and shelter.”⁸² As the years progressed and the congregation

⁸¹ David Este, “Union United Church,” 10-11.

⁸² Este, “Union United Church,” 11-12.

steadily grew, so, too, did its influence on the community. The UCC continuously engaged in social welfare programming to support African Canadians in the city.

When the UNIA arrived in Montreal, it offered a secular alternative to the UCC. However, members of the church found common ground in Garvey's philosophies of racial uplift and unity. Thus, "relations between the two organizations were very cordial." In fact, Este notes that "the UNIA often donated its Liberty Hall to the church for special activities and participated in fundraising campaigns." Like the UNIA, which had a strong focus on youth enrichment, the UCC offered programming for black children including Sunday School and the Young People's Club, which held its weekly meetings at Liberty Hall.⁸³

The partnership between the UCC and UNIA was further strengthened in 1925 with the arrival of a new pastor named Charles H. Este. Two years prior some members of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches had decided to amalgamate into a singular church called the United Church of Canada. Montreal and most of Canada had experienced a momentary economic slump between 1920 and 1922, and the UCC had been struggling to generate income from its tiny congregation.⁸⁴ Therefore its members decided to join the merger in an effort to save the church, officially becoming the Union United Church in June of 1925. David Este claims that it "was the only Black church in Canada that participated in the merger, which proved to be a blessing for the church as the United Church of Canada reduced the rent of the church property from \$25

⁸³ Ibid., 13-14.

⁸⁴ The end of World War I inadvertently caused a brief economic downturn as several industries, including farming, manufacturing, and the railway, felt a sudden decline. This was compounded by the arrival of ex-servicemen returning from war who flooded the Canadian job market. For example, "from 1918 to 1922 pig iron production fell 64 per cent, and steel output declined by 71 per cent." The production of softwoods, bricks, and cement also dropped considerably after the war, while "rail output fell by 53 percent, so that it was only one-quarter of what it had been in 1913." The cost of farming steadily increased while wheat prices dropped to lower than they had been in 1914 between 1922 and 1923. Certainly munitions factories such as Dominion Arsenal in Quebec City saw a major decline in production and employment as there was no longer a need to manufacture heavy ammunition for the war. Indeed, employment in manufacturing dropped 23 per cent from what it had been between 1917 and 1920. For a more detailed analysis of the post-war Canadian economy, see Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada, 1900 – 1945* (Toronto: UTP, 1987), 170-4, 185.

per month to \$1 per year.”⁸⁵ After joining the newly-formed United Church, the UUC’s congregation grew significantly as its members began to recognize its value within the black community of Montreal.

David Este argues that the UUC’s growth was thanks to the Rev. Charles Este who “repeatedly stressed the need for cooperation between all organizations and the church committees.”⁸⁶ D. Este’s claim holds merit as the Reverend would become an active member in various community groups including the UNIA. However, D. Este, who says the UUC became known as the “coloured” church in Montreal, does not correlate the rise of the UNIA with the strengthening of the church. While the UNIA in Montreal experienced a surge in popularity during the early 1920s, the UCC was fighting to expand the congregation and raise revenues to maintain the church. The magnetism of the UNIA in Montreal, with its message of racial unity and its role as a hub for the black community, positively impacted the formation and growth of the UUC. The UUC’s congregation, as mentioned, also aspired to unify black Montrealers. Therefore, UNIA members in Montreal saw a clear benefit to having a church supported by the black community, a black religious centre to complement the UNIA’s secular activities. Offering support to the UUC fell in line with the UNIA’s values of confraternity and self-reliance. A community thrives if its institutions are strong. Thus, by helping to strengthen the black church UNIA members would also be bolstering the black community as a whole. The arrival of a pastor like Charles Este, who saw the value in cultural partnerships such as this, made collaborations between the UNIA and UUC that much more cordial.

⁸⁵ David Este, “Union United Church,” 15-16.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

The relationship between the UUC and the UNIA was reciprocal. For example, Rev. Este served as a leader in the UNIA's Literary Club and as the division Chaplain.⁸⁷ Likewise, UNIA members in Montreal actively joined the UUC's congregation and took part in its community activities. Sources on the Montreal Division agree that members enjoyed a Sunday itinerary of church services at the UUC in the morning followed by a regular mass meeting at the UNIA Hall in the afternoon.

June Bertley contends that in the late 1920s "the demands [of the black community] became more acute" as the cost of living bore heavily upon the shoulders of the average Montrealer. Rev. Este believed the church could aid in relieving this burden if they established a community centre to better serve the people. In the Fall of 1927, Rev. Este and a group of people, including some UNIA members, met to brainstorm how the church might achieve this, and the result was the Negro Community Centre (NCC). The NCC was financed by local businessmen, both black and white, and thus the Board of Directors was likewise racially mixed. In addition, Bertley explains that "one of its tenets was 'to break down barriers and thus provide an environment' to encourage a spirit of sympathetic understanding between the white and colored races." In other words, the NCC believed problems of an economic and social nature were best solved through interracial cooperation.⁸⁸

To be sure, this was a distinct departure from UNIA doctrine. There was some expected pushback from the West Indian community who felt "that the Centre's presence would further isolate blacks from the white community and help and maintain prejudice and discrimination."⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the NCC appealed to some members of the UNIA for its diverse programming and

⁸⁷ Bertley, "Educating Blacks in Montreal," 49.

⁸⁸ Este, "Union United Church," 17; Bertley, "Educating Blacks in Montreal," 85, 124-8; and Williams, *The Road to Now*, 67.

⁸⁹ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 68.

their shared goal of racial uplift. Of primary concern on the eve of the Great Depression was the issue of discriminatory employment practices in Montreal which left African Canadians out of contention for white collar jobs. The NCC, which operated out of the basement of the UUC, helped the community to procure gainful employment. June Bertley explains that “[j]ob interviews would take place when the Centre would act as an intermediary between a company or institution and an individual, or the individual would be briefed with regard to the type of job and its demands.” This type of employment counseling was offered at the NCC in addition to free advice on issues of citizenship, immigration, and housing.⁹⁰

All of this was, of course, in the time-honoured tradition of social welfare programming administered by the UCC/UUC. In fact, in 1929 the NCC became an official member of the Welfare Federation of Montreal in order to be better equipped to help the community with financial problems. As the Great Depression began to set in and the needs of the black community became more urgent, the NCC was there to support them and offer outlets of relief.⁹¹ David Este asserts that by 1933, a staggering eighty percent of the UUC’s congregation was unemployed. These people turned to the church and NCC for help. They hosted bake sales to raise money for the most impoverished and distributed food and clothing that had been “donated by those Blacks who were fortunate to be employed and by charitable organizations.” In addition to dispensing spiritual counseling to disheartened parishioners, Rev. Este also “ensured that the city provided relief to the Blacks who were unemployed.”⁹²

Like the UNIA, the NCC provided activities for youths including summer camps and winter programs. There was also a popular after-school program for children who needed remedial help

⁹⁰ Este, “Union United Church,” 17 and Bertley, “Educating Blacks in Montreal,” 136.

⁹¹ Bertley, “Educating Blacks in Montreal,” 122.

⁹² Este, “Union United Church,” 19.

with their schoolwork. This was in addition to the many concerts, plays, and dances held at the NCC for community enjoyment. The NCC also cultivated several clubs similar to the UNIA's auxiliary groups to meet specific interests, including the Arts and Crafts Club, Rainbow Club, and Bridge Club. Many members of the NCC and its clubs were also regular members of the UNIA and, of course, the UUC. For example, the NCC's Excelsior Debating and Dramatic Club was led by Earl Swift, a valuable member of the UNIA in Montreal. Along with offering social welfare and community programming, the arrival of the NCC created an alternative rental space besides the UNIA's Liberty Hall for social gatherings and parties; it provided a safe and convenient place for the likes of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) and the Woodworkers Union to meet regularly.⁹³

The NCC reached a peak membership of 700 in 1935, precisely the same number of UNIA members that Leo Bertley estimates for the Montreal Division. While the membership figure is identical, the period during which each club reached this number is quite different. The Montreal Division, as mentioned above, achieved a membership high in 1922. The UNIA's popularity hit a high point at a time when African Canadians had developed a keen awareness of the global plight of blacks everywhere following the First World War. In contrast, the NCC reached its pinnacle during the worst years of the Depression when African Canadians had to rely on their local community centres more than ever. The NCC, with ties to the UUC's resources and penchant for social welfare, was much better equipped than the UNIA to dispense aid during the Depression years. This may help explain why UNIA membership declined throughout the late 1920s and 1930s while the NCC's gradually increased.⁹⁴

⁹³ Bertley, "Educating Blacks in Montreal," 130-4. Nevertheless, the NCC still held some events at Liberty Hall. For example, in 1935 the Excelsior Dramatic and Debating Society held a debate at Liberty Hall. The topic was "Resolved that Segregation is beneficial for the Negro." See "Interesting Debate Held," *The Free Lance*, 11 May 1935.

⁹⁴ There were other efforts to help unemployed blacks in Montreal to get back on their feet during the Depression. For example, the Afro-Canadian League opened a "Self Help Depot" in 1937 which served "as a market for the Sale of

The UNIA and NCC could co-exist and attract members from the same population because the scope of each organization was quite different. The UNIA was part of an international movement concerned with improving the economic and social status of blacks across the globe. While the work was often done at the grassroots level in local divisions like Montreal's, there was a clearly-defined international purpose for the UNIA to which Montrealers willingly subscribed. Conversely, the NCC was a community-based cultural centre launched to meet the specific needs of blacks in Montreal. Thus despite a difference in doctrine, claiming membership to both institutions was not seen as contradictory by Montreal's black community. Rather, the two organizations complemented each other and cooperated for the benefit of the local community. That leaders and members of each organization would dedicate their time to both indicates that African Canadians in Montreal wanted to create a tightly-knit social circle and a confidence in self-determination. It also shows that while blacks in Montreal were obviously committed to bettering the local community, they also aspired to be part of something more far-reaching. In short, the co-existence and popularity of these two organizations is evidence of a charitable, multifaceted, and globally-conscious black population in Montreal.

This global or diasporic consciousness is perhaps best demonstrated by the Montreal Division's participation in the 1935-6 conflict between the Italians and Ethiopians which took place in Africa. Known as the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, the conflict saw the Italians under Fascist leader Benito Mussolini invade the east African country in order to gain colonial power over the Abyssinian Empire, which was ruled by Emperor Haile Selassie. The UNIA naturally sided with the

handicraft, art needlework or hobbies made by colored people." The goal was to give unemployed blacks the chance to sell their hand-made products to earn some money. The depot was located at 1314 St. Antoine Street, which was the office of *The Free Lance* editor, Mr. Eddie Packwood. Packwood was himself an ardent Garveyite. In one article about the newly-formed Depot, Packwood provides a quote from Garvey regarding the UNIA's philosophy of self-reliance: "We advocate for the Negro Self Help and Self Reliance not only in one essential but in everything that contributes to racial welfare and human well being." It is clear from this quote and the launching of such an initiative that the UNIA had a profound influence on its members and the local Montreal community. See "Afro-Canadian League Opens Self Help Depot," and "Self Help Depot," *The Free Lance*, 12 June 1937.

Ethiopians who wished to keep their country free of Italian colonial rule; the war embodied the UNIA's quest for an Africa for the Africans and the desire to rid the continent of oppressive white imperialists. Eddie Packwood, a member of the Montreal Division and editor of *The Free Lance*, frequently reported on the problems in Ethiopia in the paper. On July 27, 1935, the paper put out a call for a nationwide peace demonstration to be known as Ethiopia Defense Day, taking place on August 4. The report goes on to state that

The call to Ethiopia's aid was sounded by the Free Lance on Saturday last. On Monday over 200 had signed up as 'able and willing to sacrifice all in defense of Ethiopia.' At the time of going to press 835 had registered at our office. The Free Lance is bearing the entire expense of registering recruits and communicating with Ethiopian authorities.

In other words, the *Free Lance* was collecting and forwarding to Ethiopia the names and credentials of Montreal recruits who were willing to fight on their behalf. High unemployment rates during this period influenced the level of enthusiasm for heading overseas to fight. As the article admits, "While a majority of the men are Negroes, large numbers are white. Some are unemployed and looking for a chance. Some are ex-servicemen and several are college graduates, engineer and science students."⁹⁵

Others preferred to support the Ethiopians in other ways. On August 29, 1935, the Hon. T.A. Marryshow of Grenada founded the Canadian Friends of Ethiopia at Liberty Hall in Montreal. UNIA members quickly became affiliated with this organization which was a branch of the international body (The Friends of Ethiopia) headquartered in London, England. The CFE's policy was as follows:

1. Co-ordinate the efforts of all people in Canada willing to work for justice for Ethiopia.
2. By propaganda and publicity create a more favorable public opinion to Ethiopia.
3. Counteract and expose the malicious attempts that are being made in some circles to vilify Ethiopia and prejudice the minds of the Canadian people against the African Kingdom.

⁹⁵ "Haile Selassie Gets World Support," *The Free Lance*, 27 July 1935.

4. In the event of War, to furnish material aid, such as Red Cross Supplies, gas masks, and other necessary articles.
5. To vigorously attack the growing menace of War and Fascism.⁹⁶

Black organizations in Montreal, including the UNIA, UUC, CFE, and *The Free Lance* organized a Conference for Defense of Peace on October 6, 1935. The 200 delegates in attendance agreed to hold another peace rally the following month and to keep “aloof from any Ethiopian war.”⁹⁷ Much to their disappointment, war was declared later that month and would continue on until May of 1936 when the Ethiopians were finally defeated and Italy began a five-year occupation of the east African nation. Nevertheless, the UNIA worked with the city’s various black associations to help educate the public about the conflict, and “Liberty Hall became, in effect, a coordinating centre for aid to Ethiopia.” They collected money and donations for the Ethiopians and became a source of information on the war. Bertley claims that Marcus Garvey himself relayed a note of congratulations to the Montreal Division for their efforts and for sending money and supplies to the Ethiopian government.⁹⁸ The Montreal Division’s work to defend Ethiopia from imperial powers demonstrates a profound adherence to the goals of the UNIA, especially the need to fight injustices committed against persons of African descent and the dream of a liberated African continent.

Reviving the UNIA Post-1940

After Garvey’s death in 1940, a new President-General was elected at an emergency meeting held in August of 1940 in New York City. Members from Montreal and Toronto wanted Marcus Garvey Junior to succeed his father as President-General. However, Garvey’s son was still a minor

⁹⁶ “Canadian Friends of Ethiopia Formed,” *The Free Lance*, 7 September 1935.

⁹⁷ “Forces United to Stop War,” *The Free Lance*, 12 October 1935.

⁹⁸ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 163, 166, 173. Bertley says that the Montreal Division received correspondence from Winnipeg and New York with questions on the Ethiopian conflict.

and would need an advisory committee to guide him in this role. Logically, this made little sense to the delegation. They believed that James R. Stewart of Cleveland, Ohio, would be better suited to the position because he was a recent graduate of Garvey's School of African Philosophy, a course specifically designed to educate the next generation of UNIA leaders. Despite his apparent credentials Stewart and his executives quickly showed signs of corruption, unjustly firing the UNIA's Secretary-General, Ethel Collins, stealing money from the UNIA and from a fund set aside for Amy Jacques Garvey and her sons, and failing to make payments to the cemetery where Garvey's remains had been stored.⁹⁹

This behaviour rightfully appalled UNIA followers around the world. Members again called an emergency convention in New York City in September of 1942, this time to come up with a plan to deal with the corruption and expel Stewart. This resulted in the establishment of the Rehabilitation Committee of the UNIA-ACL, August 1929 of the World. The Montreal Division's president at the time, E.J. Tucker, was at this meeting and became a founding member of the Rehabilitation Committee. Mr. Henry Langston and Mrs. Elaine Pierre of Montreal held executive positions on the committee, while Montreal Division alum, Dr. D.D. Lewis, joined the Rehabilitation Committee from his new home in New York. Lewis had moved to New York City years prior and had remained loyal to Garvey after the organization split in 1929.¹⁰⁰ The Rehabilitation Committee met yearly between 1942 and 1951, with the Montreal Division hosting a conference in 1944. Seemingly returning a favour owed since 1936, the Toronto Division under

⁹⁹ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 375-92 and Williams, *The Road to Now*, 95. Marcus Garvey divorced his first wife, Amy Ashwood, in 1922 after each had accused the other of adultery. Later that year, he married Amy Jacques; she is the mother of Garvey's two sons, Marcus Jr. and Julius. See Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, 236-40.

¹⁰⁰ Langston was appointed the Committee's Representative for the Province of Quebec in 1945 by B.J. Spencer Pitt and Pierre became the committee's Secretary-Treasurer in 1947. Lewis was a long-time member of New York City's Garvey Club. This faction sided with Garvey after 1929 while the Parent Body formed a separate entity, the UNIA Inc. See Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 394-5.

their president, B.J. Spencer Pitt, helped to plan and promote the event which drew members from Brooklyn, Harlem, the Bronx, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Norfolk.¹⁰¹

In 1951 the UNIA finally elected a new panel of executives, including the position of President-General, at the UNIA's International Convention in Detroit. The new President-General was also a graduate from the School of African Philosophy and former Assistant President-General under Garvey, Thomas Harvey of Philadelphia. With his election, the Rehabilitation Committee was no longer required and this period of upheaval finally ended. In the face of corruption, the Montreal Division along with their colleagues in Toronto had once again proved indispensable to the survival of the UNIA after Garvey's death. The Rehabilitation Committee helped to keep the spirit of the Garvey movement alive during a period of deep internal turbulence, to say nothing of the global unrest produced by the Second World War.

The Montreal Division also remained supremely loyal to Amy Jacques Garvey and her sons after the passing of her husband. Bertley provides evidence of the Garvey family's long standing relationship with the Montreal Division. Montreal Garveyites had demonstrated their allegiance to Garvey during his time in prison, sending donations to help make bail and to fund his defense case. They had also petitioned the Canadian government to release Garvey in 1928 when he and Amy Jacques had been detained at the border. They even sent Garvey a gift of money when his first son was born in 1930.¹⁰² After Garvey's death the Montreal Division continued to show compassion for the Garvey family, sending money to Amy Jacques to go towards the purchase of Christmas gifts for her children in 1940 and to cover any potential medical costs should the children become ill that winter.¹⁰³ When Marcus Garvey's second-born son, Julius, enrolled at McGill University in 1953 the

¹⁰¹ Members from Canada's east coast divisions in New Aberdeen and New Waterford could not attend but sent best wishes. See Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 396-8.

¹⁰² Members from Toronto, Glace Bay, and New Aberdeen also sent money to Garvey for the same purposes.

¹⁰³ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 409-11, 417-9.

Montreal Division's president, Tucker, helped find him accommodations in the city. In Bertley's words, "[s]uch tangible and practical expressions of love and concern for the founder of the organization and his family served to reinforce the impression that Montrealers held the Garveys in high esteem, and were among their most loyal followers."¹⁰⁴ I would add that the UNIA and Garvey himself had a clear and profound impact on the lives of black Montrealers as demonstrated by their generosity toward the Garvey family and their work to maintain the association after his passing. Reciprocally, the Montreal Division helped to shape the history of the UNIA through its consistent and devoted participation, all the while forming a direct bond with Garvey and his family. For these reasons the effect of the UNIA on black Canadians should not be understated.

The Decline

Aside from Garvey's imprisonment and the infighting that followed in the Parent Body in the late 1920s, Montreal's black residents were obviously hit very hard by the economic slump of the Great Depression. Finding work in the city became increasingly difficult as more and more people affected by the loss of jobs had to compete for whatever positions might be left. Young black men and women sometimes chose to go to the United States for work which, consequently, led to a decline in membership at the Montreal Division.¹⁰⁵ *The Free Lance* offers insight into the drop in UNIA participation in the 1930s. In 1935 the paper reports that "a crowd that reminded us of the 'good old days' thronged the U.N.I.A. Hall last Sunday at 12:45 to hear a radio broadcast by Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia." Present at the event was UNIA chaplain, Rev. Charles Este, who

¹⁰⁴ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 413, 426. Julius Garvey did not join the UNIA in Montreal but did play on the city's West Indian Cricket Club.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

addressed the crowd and claimed that the UNIA “was doing nothing.”¹⁰⁶ The phrases “reminded us of the ‘good old days’” and “doing nothing” indicate that the Montreal Division had fallen on hard times during the Depression years and was struggling to keep afloat.

The above quote from Este also suggests that there may have been a level of discord among the black organizations in Montreal at this time. For example, at a UNIA meeting in 1935 Rev. Este gave a scathing speech about the futility of the Montreal Division’s goal to purchase their own UNIA Hall. Este “said it was unwise, due to past failures in our local attempts, for the local body to invest in the purchase of a building, the \$2,000.00 it had raised towards a building fund.” He used the example of the Toronto Division and its UNIA Hall which he claimed to be a “white elephant” to the association. Many in attendance, who had dreamed of owning Liberty Hall for over fifteen years, were upset by Este’s comments and *The Free Lance’s* editor received three letters expressing their displeasure. One letter from a mysterious “King Bruce and the Spider” chided the reverend for insulting the Toronto Division. The letter-writer believed the Toronto Division should instead be commended because “after many years of struggle” they had managed to keep their UNIA Hall “under their personal control.” The letter also took direct aim at Este, claiming that any failures of Montreal’s black community were only due to an absence of solid leadership. Indeed, the letter-writer said that Este should have suggested solutions like pooling the resources of several black organizations together to buy a single building, or consulting with local black-owned real estate businesses that could benefit from the cooperation of the African-Canadian community. There was also noticeable tension between Este and the editors of *The Free Lance*. In one article, the author notes that Este had once denounced the newspaper as being hostile to the Church and to social

¹⁰⁶ “Haile Selassie Broadcast Fails to Materialize,” *The Free Lance*, 1 June 1935. The report goes on to say that the broadcast did not happen and would have to be postponed.

advancement.¹⁰⁷ Este's argument is not convincing given that the newspaper regularly reported on the various black organizations in Montreal and across Canada, and had taken a very active role during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in helping to educate the public about the conflict.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps a widening generational gap made matters worse as the UNIA failed to attract young members in the 1940s and 1950s. Bertley shares that senior members failed to adapt to new issues facing black Canadians after World War II, including the growth of the integrationist movement. The war had ushered in a new wave of rhetoric that focused more on the primacy of universal human rights than the goal of racial separatism which the UNIA had promoted for three decades. Long-time members of the Montreal Division would not give up Garvey's original black nationalist philosophy. In turn, young people who were inspired by the thought of racial harmony felt that "the UNIA was a black separatist, even racist, organization which was trying to block the 'progress' of an integrated society." By 1940, Bertley asserts that the Montreal Division had only eighty registered members, with only about ten of these participating in regular functions and only one that paid their membership dues. By the 1950s young blacks in Montreal perceived the UNIA to be a club for senior citizens. By contrast the NCC, whose "inter-racial Board opened different outreach and funding possibilities" to the black community, retained its popularity because of its integrationist stance.¹⁰⁹

In addition to young people choosing the integrationist movement, their choice to move out of the black neighbourhood also hastened the decline of the UNIA in Montreal. The war brought

¹⁰⁷ The letter suggests Dorwich Real Estate and Eureka Association Inc. See "Haile Selassie Broadcast Fails to Materialize," "Inauguration Held at U.N.I.A.," and "Spiritual Leader Lacks Vision," *The Free Lance*, 1 June 1935.

¹⁰⁸ *The Free Lance* also tried to rally support from the black community during Fred Christie's legal proceedings against the York Tavern which had denied service to Christie on account of his race. One editorial pleads with the black community to establish a united front to combat this and other forms of racial discrimination. See "Wanted – A United Front," *The Free Lance*, 23 July 1938. For more on the Christie case, see Walker, "Christie v. York Corporation," in "Race," *Rights and the Law*, 122-81.

¹⁰⁹ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 107, 109-10; and Williams, *The Road to Now*, 72 and 102.

significant changes to the job market which resulted in upward social mobility for some blacks in Montreal. The war opened up work in factories and offices while railway porters also gained improved wages and working conditions in 1942 as they joined the official labour union, the BSCP.¹¹⁰ Harold Potter's study of blacks in Montreal during the 1940s notes that opportunities for women seemed to change more rapidly as "many young female servants quit domestic employment to enter factories and offices." In fact, he reckons that if a black family in Montreal experienced an upward shift in social status, it was probably because a woman in the household had achieved a better paying job. Potter also contends that older blacks in Montreal tended to keep the same occupation they had before the war, whereas most people who took new and better-paying jobs were under thirty years of age and single, and therefore more willing to risk taking a new job in a different part of the city. This meant that while the older generation stayed in the St. Antoine district, "their children, and young people who had arrived from other parts of the country, left the Negro community in search of work opportunities elsewhere."¹¹¹

As young blacks in Montreal earned better wages, they also moved up in social class. Handelman argues that over the years, blacks in Montreal "have spread out on social class lines, not color lines." By the 1960s many black tenants had "moved into middle class residential areas of the city."¹¹² Residents of the original black neighbourhood gradually scattered during the post-war years as younger generations moved up in class and out of the St. Antoine district. The district had been declining steadily since the Depression. Those who could afford to leave the neighbourhood in the 1950s and 1960s pursued improved accommodations and wished to shed the burden of "dilapidated

¹¹⁰ For more on the BSCP, see Stanley G. Grizzle, *My Name's Not George: The Story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada, Personal Reminiscences of Stanley G. Grizzle* (Toronto: Umbrella, 1998).

¹¹¹ Potter, "Occupational Adjustments," 52-57, 138; and Handelman, "West Indian Associations in Montreal," 51-2.

¹¹² Handelman, "West Indian Associations in Montreal," 33.

housing, and social and living conditions that made it very difficult to get ahead.” They moved to the newer and more modern housing projects in other neighbourhoods which “were usually far from work, churches, and the Black associations of downtown.”¹¹³ Accordingly, the dispersal of the black community furthered to the decline of the Montreal Division as it became less convenient to attend regular UNIA meetings and social events.

As in other parts of the country, Montreal also experienced an influx in Caribbean immigrants during the 1950s and 1960s on account of Canada’s changing immigration laws. In the mid-1950s the government of Canada enacted the Domestic Workers Scheme which opened up immigration from the Caribbean to women willing to work as housekeepers and nannies. The Canadian government opened its doors a little wider in 1962 by signing an order-in-council that emphasized the importance of one’s education and skill level as criteria for immigration over race or ethnicity. The immigration policy of 1967 built onto the existing program by implementing a points system which allowed white and non-white groups to be arbitrated equally. The points system was merit-based, allotting points (up to a maximum of 100) to potential immigrants in nine specific categories including education level, age, proficiency in English and/or French, and occupational skill level. A score over fifty was required for immigrants to be permitted into Canada. Because West Indians tended to be highly skilled and well-educated, many had successful immigration applications and several thousand of them chose to settle in Montreal.¹¹⁴ This group of immigrants, who Handelman calls the Newcomers, clashed with the established black population in Montreal, the Oldtimers. Handelman’s interviews with the Newcomers reveal that they felt “that the Oldtimers had succumbed to the discriminatory policies of Montreal Whites, and that they are staid,

¹¹³ Williams notes that “the relative standard of living, for a good number of Blacks, rose enormously” during the post-war period. See Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 61, 70.

¹¹⁴ Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 61-65. Williams estimates that the black population of Montreal rose to between 10,000 and 15,000 during the late 1960s.

conservative, and content with their lot.” The Newcomers also believed that they were more progressive and active in the quest for civil rights. In contrast, the Oldtimers alleged that the Newcomers had upset “a situation in equilibrium, a social situation in which progress in civil rights and immigration [was] being made.”¹¹⁵ The Newcomers, quite clearly, had no interest in joining Montreal’s existing black clubs that were aligned with the views of the Oldtimers, nor were the Oldtimers keen on inviting these young immigrants into their social circles. These conflicting attitudes certainly limited the UNIA’s ability to endure in Montreal.

Conclusions

As the first UNIA branch in Canada, the Montreal Division served as Marcus Garvey’s gateway into the country. From here, Garvey was able to reach another branch of followers within the African diaspora. Locally the Montreal Division helped an ethnically diverse black population to forge a sense of community during a period when few resources and social safety nets were available to them. Members of the Montreal Division also worked to educate the black population and provide opportunities for entertainment and the celebration of black culture. This, in turn, helped to bolster black Montrealers’ sense of self-worth and pride in their African heritage. In fact, the various leadership roles available within the ranks of the UNIA, such as President, Treasurer, Nurse, and Teacher, gave blacks a sense of pride and purpose that was otherwise lacking in their careers. The UNIA’s Liberty Hall was a principal meeting place for Montreal’s black community throughout the 1920s, and it afforded UNIA members and other fraternal organizations within the city a safe and welcoming space to gather. The UNIA sometimes worked with some of these other black

¹¹⁵ Handelman, “West Indian Associations in Montreal,” 49-51. A similar divide existed between the established (i.e., “Old Line”) black families of Toronto and the incoming immigrants from the Caribbean prior to World War II. When immigration from the Caribbean increased in the 1950s and 1960s, a new generational divide emerged between the newcomers and the pre-war immigrants who had founded the UNIA in Toronto. See Keith Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto since World War I* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981), 6-10, 31.

organizations, like NCC, in a collective effort to support and encourage the African-Canadian community.

Beyond the local, the Montreal Division proved to be a leading UNIA chapter in Canada. The Montreal Division maintained an active role at the UNIA's international and regional conventions, sending delegates to these events on a consistent basis. Influential local leaders like D.D. Lewis, Georgiana O'Brien, Alfred Potter, Clara de Shield, and E.J. Tucker cultivated an international reputation as vocal and prominent UNIA members. Their contributions to the UNIA, especially in the early 1920s, ensured the growth and development of the Garvey movement in Canada and around the world. Beyond the 1920s, Montreal members were crucial to the UNIA's survival in the 1930s and 1940s. They assisted with the organization of regional conferences in Toronto which revitalized the spirit of Garveyism in both Canada and the United States, and played a founding role in the Rehabilitation Committee which eventually ousted Garvey's corrupt successor.

Bertley sees the Montreal Division's engagement with the UNIA and its members via letters, *The Negro World* reports, visits, and conventions as examples of the UNIA's philosophy of confraternity. He writes that since UNIA members wanted Garvey's plans "transformed into workable programmes," they "took pains" to contribute to their development and to ensure "the well-being of the beloved organization."¹¹⁶ This view, while accurate, is perhaps too simplistic because it ignores the possibility that black Montrealers' aspired to make a difference in a worldwide movement against racism. This chapter has made clear that the Montreal Division remained devoted to the Garvey movement both at home and abroad. UNIA members in Montreal took an interest in the UNIA's international initiatives such as the BSL, conventions, and subscriptions to *The Negro World* because they had formed a Pan-African consciousness and wished to make a

¹¹⁶ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 162 and 369.

difference against racism on a global scale. The chance to participate in an international movement allowed blacks in Montreal to become more visible and make public their arguments against racial discrimination, as demonstrated by their contribution to the Ethiopian crisis of the 1930s. Their avid participation in the UNIA is an expression of diaspora and shared cultural identity with people all over the world. In this way, the Montreal Division helped to remind people that the African Diaspora extended beyond the United States and Caribbean into Canada, and that blacks in this country have contributed significantly in the ongoing battle against racial discrimination.

Chapter 2

“We All Used to Meet at the Hall”: The Significance and Evolution of the UNIA in Toronto

Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century Toronto's black peoples began to organize to improve their disadvantaged position in society. Among the organizations that emerged at this time was the Universal Negro Improvement Association, or UNIA. Toronto's UNIA Division, which was established by a small group of primarily West Indian immigrants, would quickly become a cornerstone in Toronto's black community.

This case study discusses the factors that led the UNIA in Toronto to become a central fixture in the city's black community and the Garvey movement as a whole. With working-class West Indian immigrants at the helm, the Toronto Division worked hard to raise race pride and celebrate black culture within the community. In addition, the UNIA brought blacks from across Ontario and parts of the United States together at the annual Emancipation Day Picnic held at Lakeside Park near St. Catharines. Finally, as the site of three UNIA conventions in the 1930s and as members of the Rehabilitation Committee after Garvey's death, the Toronto Division proved itself to be significant not only to the local black community, but also to the Garvey movement on a global scale.

This chapter is based on approximately forty interviews with black Torontonians and UNIA members that were conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and housed in the Multicultural History Society of Ontario's (MHSO) African-Canadian collection. The interviewees reveal much about the Toronto's black communities and leaders, as well as UNIA events and activities. With this considerable number of interviews, my research offers a good spectrum of the various opinions and experiences of Toronto's black peoples. The interviews took place up to sixty years after the

founding of the UNIA in Toronto, so it is possible that the interviewees' memories of specific instances and groups may not be completely clear or accurate. Nevertheless, in many cases more than one of the interviewees recalled the same events and people in a similar way, which indicates a level of accuracy. Related stories are found in several memoirs by Toronto residents, which provide some excellent information on the UNIA and other black groups in the city. Wherever possible I have referred to written primary documents to corroborate the interviewees' recollections and those found in the memoirs. These include the useful, though limited, minutes of Toronto's UNIA Division held by the MHSO. More records on the Toronto Division are in the collection of official UNIA documents edited by Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*. This study also benefitted from a few historical newspapers, most notably the UNIA's official newspaper *The Negro World*, a black newspaper published out of Toronto called *The Canadian Observer*, and *The St. Catharines Standard*.

Origins and Toronto's Racial Climate

Some of the earliest people of African descent living in the Toronto area were slaves. The American Revolutionary War greatly affected slavery and settlement patterns in British North America (BNA) during the mid to late 1700s. Before the war, slavery was more common in New France (Quebec) and in Nova Scotia. As mentioned in the Montreal chapter, those who remained loyal to the British crown during the American Revolution, known as Loyalists, began to settle in various parts of BNA, including Upper Canada (Ontario). By war's end in 1783, thousands of Loyalists had landed in Upper Canada, with some bringing slaves. However, not all black settlers who arrived after the war were slaves; in fact, several thousand were free blacks known as the Black Loyalists. While the vast majority of Black Loyalists settled in Nova Scotia (a topic that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter), some established small settlements around Upper

Canada, mainly around the Detroit River in southern Ontario and in the Niagara Region.

Nevertheless, a few found their way to Toronto. Records show that there were blacks living in York (Toronto) by 1799. Robin Winks and Jason Silverman note that the blacks who arrived after 1783, whether freed or enslaved, found work in a variety of fields including skilled trades.¹

Although Winks and Silverman argue that slaves in BNA were not treated badly, at least compared to those in the United States, Caribbean, and South America, we may never know for sure what type of distress enslaved peoples may have experienced at the hands of their slave owners. It was a thought that troubled Upper Canada's Lieutenant-Governor, John Graves Simcoe. Simcoe, a Loyalist himself, openly condemned the practice of slavery in the House of Commons in 1790, and had written "privately that both Christianity and the British constitution were opposed to the practice." As Lieutenant-Governor, Simcoe began to "challenge the legality of slavery and to turn public opinion against the institution in Upper Canada." After three long years, Simcoe was finally able to sway the opinions of those in Parliament, and in 1793 "An Act to Prevent the further Introduction of Slaves and to limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude within this Province" was passed. Known colloquially as Simcoe's Act, it did not immediately manumit any enslaved persons living in Upper Canada at the time. However, the Act dictated that there would be no further importation of slaves into the province, and that the children of female slaves "born after the act was passed would become free at twenty-five years of age."² While Simcoe's Act was by no means a total abolition of slavery in Upper Canada, it did lead to a gradual decrease of slaves in the province. It was the first example of formal legislation against slavery in the British empire, and Upper Canada

¹ Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd edition (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 46-7; Jason H. Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West's Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800-1865* (New York: Associated Faculty Press, 1985), 4-5. Winks writes that two black contractors named Jack Mosee and William Willis "undertook to open a road from Yonge Street, York, westward through 'the Pinery.'"

² "An Act to Prevent the further Introduction of Slaves and to limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude," Statutes of Upper Canada, 33 George III, Chap. 7, 1793; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 98; and Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests*, 8-10.

was the province in BNA to pass an act specifically targeted at the institution. More importantly, Simcoe's Act represented the shifting mentality among British politicians and a growing segment of society known as abolitionists who felt that the institution of slavery was immoral and should be deemed illegal in Great Britain and its colonies.

The British abolition movement of the early nineteenth century culminated in the passage of an Imperial Act in 1833 which decreed "the permanent and complete abolition of slavery in all British colonies, effective one year later on 1 August 1834." Silverman notes that Simcoe's Act, in conjunction with a growing anti-slavery attitude in the colonies, had led to a significant decrease in the number of slaves in BNA even prior to the passage of the Imperial Act. He says, "Of the approximately eight hundred thousand slaves freed by the Imperial Act of 1833, no more than about fifty resided in British North America at the time of its passage."³ It was not long before slaves in the United States discovered that slavery had been abolished north of the border, and some began to flee their slave owners in search of freedom in BNA. Considered property by their slave owners, those who escaped were, in essence, fugitives who had unlawfully sought manumission. Fugitive slaves had actually been arriving in BNA since the War of 1812 since, as mentioned, the institution of slavery had largely fallen out of favour in most areas. Enslaved people in America had learned that there were freed blacks in the British militia. The lure of freedom in BNA drew thousands of fugitive slaves from the American south to Canada. The number of fugitive slaves entering BNA simply increased after 1834 when freedom was given legal tenure. According to Winks, "the Negroes who came to British North America on their own, without the assistance of the British government, were well received into the 1830s."⁴ However, things began to change as "voices of

³ "An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves," Statues of Great Britain, 3 & 4 Will.4, Chap. 73, 1833; and Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests*, 12-3.

⁴ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 142-3.

protest could be heard in various quarters of white Canada against an unchecked Negro immigration.” These protests only grew louder after the passage of the American Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 “which stipulated that the owner of a fugitive slave could recover him either with the authorization of a warrant or “by seizing and arresting such a fugitive, where the same can be done without process.” The Law “virtually propelled thousands of blacks to Canada West” (Ontario) as the law threatened not only southern slaves who had escaped, but also blacks living in the northern states whether they were freed or fugitive slaves.⁵

Prior to the Fugitive Slave Law, ex-slaves from the United States had “generally stopped quite near to the [U.S.-Canada] border. Without funds, he could not move deeply into the interior; as an exile, he wished to remain close to the frontier for an eventual return.” This changed after the Fugitive Slave Law empowered slave owners to legally retrieve their escaped chattel. Suddenly, it was no longer safe to remain close to the U.S.-Canada border in places like Windsor, St. Catharines, and Amherstburg, and fugitive slaves began to move further inland. The fugitive slaves also formed settlements to help forge support networks and a sense of safety in numbers. Black settlements could be found along the Detroit River in Amherstburg and Sandwich (Windsor), in Colchester, Chatham, and Dresden a bit further north, in the Niagara Region, and in Oro, the Queen’s Bush (near present-day Guelph), and Toronto.⁶ Given the secrecy surrounding the Underground Railroad and the general exodus of slaves leaving the United States, the number of fugitive slaves who landed in Toronto is unknown. However, these ex-slaves formed the foundation of Toronto’s black community for years to come. They formed schools and churches and settled in tightly-knit communities to offer each other moral and physical support in a society that was growing more and more hostile toward black immigration. Keith Henry calls this group of blacks who established

⁵ Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests*, 61.

⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 144.

homes and institutions in Toronto the “Old-Liners.” The “Old-Line” black Torontonians built up a level of security over the course of several generations, trying their best to assimilate and cooperate with the city’s white population.

Despite their efforts, blacks in Toronto, and indeed throughout Canada, never fully achieved the respect and acceptance they desired from their white counterparts. Blacks in Toronto experienced segregation and discrimination in schools, churches, housing, and the workplace. Yet the “Old-Liners,” as a tiny minority in Toronto, did not rouse protest against their unfair treatment for fear of being ostracized. As a result, this type of systematic discrimination continued into the early twentieth century even as the city received a new influx of immigrants, this time from the British West Indies.

Many blacks in Toronto, especially the West Indians, became frustrated with the overt racial bigotry they experienced. They were also dissatisfied with the scarcity of organizations one could join to help alleviate these anxieties. *The Canadian Observer* expressed this longing for co-operation in March of 1915. An editorial observes, “Cordial co-operation will bring the race to prominence. United efforts along the right lines is certain to bring results, which will benefit every member of such an organization. It is not enough to meet once and awhile in a social way at an occasional banquet or entertainment.”⁷ The racial climate in Toronto seemed primed for the arrival of the UNIA.

Prior to 1900, Toronto’s black population was very small and hardly visible. Moreover, until the First World War most blacks in Toronto were Canadian-born.⁸ These people, some of whom were descendants of Underground Railroad survivors, had lived in Toronto or in other parts of southern Ontario for several generations. They were well accustomed to living as a minority in a city

⁷ “Organizations Needed,” *The Canadian Observer*, 6 March 1915.

⁸ Keith Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 2.

where respectability was gauged by white ideals. This set of circumstances likely affected their political and social outlook. Keith Henry explains that these “Old Line” black Torontonians “generally adhered to a philosophy of assimilationism” and believed that progress would be achieved by “co-operating with the ‘best whites’” and “utilizing white philanthropy.”⁹ Blacks in Toronto, then, remained relatively quiet on race issues.

The racial atmosphere quickly changed with the influx of Caribbean immigrants. At the turn of the twentieth century, the sugar economy in the islands collapsed. At the same time, the Boston (United) Fruit Company monopolized the banana trade, inflating the cost of land and making it difficult for the lower classes to purchase homes. Economic difficulties, coupled with consistent natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and droughts proved to be important push factors for the West Indian emigrants who landed in Canada and the United States.¹⁰ But job opportunities also pulled the West Indians to Canada. Indeed, even more West Indians might have immigrated to Canada had immigration policies been more accepting of racial minorities. The Immigration Act of 1906 denied entry to “any specified class of immigrants” whom officials judged to be poor, diseased, criminal, or “feeble-minded.” Then in 1910 the government passed the Canadian Immigration Act which permitted immigration officials to reject individuals “belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada.”¹¹ Immigration officials claimed that given their origins from a warm climate, Afro-Caribbeans were unfit to handle the cold weather in Canada and therefore should not enter unless, of course, big companies demanded otherwise. At the turn of the twentieth century, Canada’s small population could not keep up with labour demands as industry grew steadily. Some companies, such as the Dominion Iron and Steel Company in Nova Scotia,

⁹ Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 6-9.

¹⁰ Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1999), 32-8.

¹¹ Statutes of Canada (SC) 1906 c. 19, s. 26-30 and SC 1910 c. 27, s. 38. See also Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 78.

convinced government officials that recruiting workers from the United States and Caribbean was necessary. It was commonly believed that blacks were an ideal choice because they could likely handle the heat from blast furnaces much better than immigrants from colder climates.¹²

Many West Indian immigrants in Toronto came by way of Nova Scotia where they had been recruited to work for the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, the coal mines of Sydney, and sometimes even for railways. Others came after a brief stay in New York City.¹³ By 1921, an estimated 1,200 West Indians were living in Toronto.¹⁴ They mainly settled in and around Dundas Street and Spadina Avenue in what is currently known as Toronto's Chinatown. At the time blacks tended to settle in this neighbourhood because members of the sizable Jewish population living there were among the few Torontonians who would rent to African Canadians. One interviewee explained that relations between Jews and blacks were always cordial because they saw themselves as allies facing similar racial oppression.¹⁵

Because railroad tracks and a station were close to the neighbourhood, many West Indian men sought work there. For women the most familiar work was domestic service. Together, the West Indian immigrants established themselves as respectable working-class residents in Toronto's

¹² Elizabeth Beaton, "An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904" *Acadiensis* 24, 2 (Spring 1995): 70.

¹³ K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 3. Harry Gairey, Donald Moore, and Violet Blackman are three examples of immigrants who went from the islands to New York City and finally to Toronto. Harry Gairey and Donna Hill, *Black Man's Toronto, 1914-1980: The Reminiscences of Harry Gairey* (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1981), 5; Violet Blackman, recorded interview by Huguette Casimir, January 1979, African-Canadian Collection, Multicultural History Society of Ontario (hereafter MHSO), and Donald Moore, *Don Moore: An Autobiography* (Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1985), 19-20.

¹⁴ James W. St.G. Walker, *West Indians in Canada*, no. 6 of *Canada's Ethnic Groups* (Saint John: Keystone, 1984), 8. Donald Moore estimates that Toronto's black population had risen to about 4,000 by 1937. Moore, *An Autobiography*, 59.

¹⁵ Dudley Marshall, recorded interview, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Geraldine Williams, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, December 1981, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Leonard Braithwaite, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, August 1982, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Moore, *An Autobiography*, 32. Stanley Grizzle recalls that "Between the two groups, Jews and Blacks, it was a real community of suffering. I made lots of friends in the Jewish community ... when you share a struggle the way we did, you don't let go of the friendships you make." Stanley Grizzle, *My Name's Not George: The Story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada, Personal Reminiscences of Stanley G. Grizzle* (Toronto: Umbrella, 1998), 32.

west side.¹⁶ Few other employment options were available to the West Indian immigrants; a couple of shop owners sold West Indian groceries,¹⁷ and a few were doctors and lawyers.¹⁸ However, interviews with West Indian immigrants indicate that these businesses and professionals were not well supported by Toronto's Canadian-born black population and that the West Indians and native-born black Canadians lived in separate parts of the neighbourhood. Partly because of their outspokenness and partly because of their cultural differences, the local population viewed the West Indians as foreigners, who, in turn, felt as if they did not belong.¹⁹

As early as 1914 *The Canadian Observer* reported on the lack of black co-operation in Toronto. Beginning on 31 July 1915, the editor published "An Open Letter to the Colored Race in Canada," asking them ten poignant questions about the status of blacks in the country. In answering question one, "Why are we not making progress like we should?" a reader replied, "because we are not united on anything." Another reader responded similarly: "I regret to say as a race we are not united; thereby we become our greatest enemy, making no progress." One reader believed that there was an absence of "racial self-respect, the lack of which tends, above all other things, to weaken us as a

¹⁶ K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 7; Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, 31-2; Moore, *An Autobiography*, 28.

¹⁷ "Coffee" Williams and a Mr. George each owned grocery stores and sold West Indian groceries during this period. Caribbean produce and food products could be imported thanks to the West Indies Trading Association, which was incorporated under the Ontario Companies Act on 11 October 1916. J. T. Bishop served as the Toronto branch president. It seems that the WITA and/or its members were closely linked to the UNIA. For example, after Garvey was shot by a disgruntled UNIA member in 1919, Bishop wrote a letter to *The Negro World* to voice his sympathies. Then on 5 January 1920, Bishop spoke about the need "to make our voices felt and heard, to occupy a seat among nations" at the mass meeting held under the auspices of the UNIA. Garvey and his wife, Amy, were also in attendance that evening. See "West Indies Trading Association Limited," *The Canadian Observer*, 22 March 1919; and Hill, "British Military Intelligence Report," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* (1983), 2: 8 and 205.

¹⁸ Gwendolyn Johnston, recorded interview by Ruth Lewis, February 1979, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO, and Lewsey, interview. Some businesses mentioned in the interviews with black Torontonians included Mr. Smith's shoe repair shop, Mr. Jim Belfon's barber shop, and beauty salons for women. Leonard Johnston and Ralph Budd believe that black businesses did not flourish because there simply were not enough African Canadians living in Toronto at the time. See Leonard Johnston, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Ralph Budd, recorded interview by A. Holder, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; and Marjorie Lewsey, recorded interview by Huguette Casimir, March 1979, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

¹⁹ Harry Gairey, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, August 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

people and prevent our advancement as a race.”²⁰ Even the editorials evoked the necessity of unity, proclaiming “[t]he time has arrived when we, as a Race of people, should be getting together and reviewing matters pertaining to our welfare as a race.”²¹

Divisions based on one’s place of origin seemed to contribute to the lack of unity among blacks in Toronto.²² At the turn of the twentieth century, there were four black ethnic groups in Toronto: native-born black Canadians, West Indian immigrants, African Americans, and Nova Scotians. Of these groups, the African Americans, and to a lesser extent the Nova Scotians, tended to be transients, meaning they were less likely to set up permanent residence in Toronto. Rather, they migrated according to job opportunities. As a result, they did not create their own organizations, and they rarely joined existing ones. The West Indians and native-born blacks considered the Nova Scotians to be a-political, choosing not to get involved in black organizations.²³

Given the lack of interest from the African Americans and Nova Scotians, the native-born black Canadians and West Indian immigrants are credited with forming the two dominant black organizations of the period: the Home Comfort Club and the UNIA. Yet, these associations were polarized along the lines of ethnic alliance, political outlook, class, and age. The first black organization to form was the Home Comfort Club. Native-born black Canadians in Toronto launched this association to assist black-Canadian servicemen. A life-long resident of Toronto

²⁰ “What Is the Matter with the Race in Canada?” *The Canadian Observer*, 7 August 1915; “Get Busy on This Once More: ‘What Is the Matter with the Race in Canada?’” *The Canadian Observer*, 28 August 1915; and “We Want a Revolution of Thought by Our People,” *The Canadian Observer*, 2 October 1915. Violet Blackman is very critical of the black population of Toronto. She says that historically its members have failed to support one another. Norman Grizzle notes that there was always a lack of black leadership in Toronto, that there was never one who “speaks for the whole community.” See Blackman interview; and Normal Grizzle, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

²¹ “Solve This Problem,” *The Canadian Observer*, 5 February 1916 and “Getting Together,” *The Canadian Observer*, 11 August 1917.

²² Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 79.

²³ K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 4-5. Some Nova Scotians did become more active in the Afro Community Church in 1936-7 when Reverend Cecil Stewart encouraged blacks to migrate to Toronto from Nova Scotia due to poor housing conditions and overwhelming unemployment.

confirms that black women in the community established the Home Comfort Club during the First World War. They simply wanted to send “home comforts” such as homemade socks and sweaters to black servicemen. After the war, members changed the organization’s name to the Home Service Association (HSA) and operated as a de facto community centre and social club for blacks in Toronto. It also provided scholarships for black youths and ran programs to help the needy.²⁴ Their services were especially helpful during the Great Depression when black families in Toronto were struggling to make ends meet. The HSA’s Annual Report for 1934 notes that it had aided 227 families in Toronto suffering from unemployment, debt, illness, and inadequate parental care. The HSA provided “material relief” in the form of clothing, legal aid, money, and job counselling to 436 adults and 475 children, and hosted their annual twelve-day camp for thirty-three “weary mothers and undernourished children.”²⁵

Many blacks in Toronto, especially those from the West Indian community, recall that the HSA favoured light-skinned and middle-class blacks. A former HSA member, Nellie Rosina Wells, claimed that most families involved were the product of “a great deal of intermarriage.” Most members were of a light complexion and had roots in Canada dating back several generations. Additionally, the HSA was not exclusively a “black” organization: it received financial assistance from white philanthropists and allowed its subsidizers to choose its executive officers.²⁶ As Keith

²⁴ Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 34; Joseph E. Clarke, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, September 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; and Nellie Rosina Wells, recorded interview by Lorraine Hubbard, September and October 1980, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

²⁵ The year ended with a clothing drive and a Christmas charity. See “Toronto Home Service Association,” *The Free Lance*, 29 June 1935. Aside from charitable programs, the HSA also hosted events to entertain the public such as their annual Garden Party held during the summer months. On July 4, 1935, for example, they held the picnic at 15 Grange Road and had such attractions as a candy booth, refreshments booth, home cooking booth, roulette wheel, dart game, fish pond, musical performances, and a raffle draw. See “Toronto Home Service Garden Party,” *The Free Lance*, 27 July 1935.

²⁶ It was not until the second wave of West Indian immigration in the 1960s and 1970s that people from the islands joined the HSA. See Gairey interview; Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 34; K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 16 and 21, and Yaa Amoaba Gooden, “‘Beta Must Come’: African Caribbean Migrants in Canada: Migration, Community Building and Cultural Legacies” (PhD diss., Temple University, 2005), 124.

Henry writes, this type of co-operation with whites demonstrates the Old Line/native-born Torontonians' commitment to assimilationism and "the belief in élite white patronage."²⁷ In the view of Old Liners and those who joined the HSA, working with whites was the route to improving one's status within the community.²⁸

According to the West Indians, the Old Liners and the HSA would not address racism directly and were therefore inward-looking and lacked a wider sense of pan-African identity. In contrast, the West Indians were no strangers to the global plight of persons of African descent. Before immigrating to Canada and the United States, West Indians had traveled the globe for economic opportunities. Winston James confirms that some of them had "worked on the Panama Canal, some on banana plantations elsewhere in Central America, and still others on sugar plantations in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic." Many had worked and lived in urban areas such as New York City, Boston, and Detroit where they had become familiar with the universalism of racial prejudice. They developed a strong sense of pan-Africanism which they felt was deeper than that of native-born black Canadians.²⁹ This is not to say that the native-born population lacked a pan-African identity altogether. Native-born blacks (as well as West Indian and African-American immigrants) had proudly served in the First World War. Many also worked as railway porters and frequently interacted with other blacks across Canada and the United States. Some had work experience in the United States or had family members living in northern cities such as Boston, New York, and Detroit. Yet the UNIA's message of African separatism did not appeal

²⁷ K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 7.

²⁸ The HSA even operated a co-operative grocery store until World War II when the rationing of certain products led to its closure. After the war, the HSA "broadened its base, opened a community house in Toronto, and engaged in social work, providing counseling, recreational opportunities, and educational outlets for those who remained home as well as for returning servicemen." The women took First Aid and nutrition courses at the HSA in case returning veterans needed assistance. See Daniel Braithwaite, recorded interview by Arleigh Holder, August 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Wells interview; and Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 421.

²⁹ James, *Caribbean Radicalism*, 70-2; and Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 154-5.

to native-born blacks who felt a closer tie to Canada than to Africa. Toney argues that black Canadians were more inclined to boast of their Canadian heritage than their African roots. Their service in World War I may have strengthened this sentiment.³⁰

Along with ethnicity, generational differences and social class widened the gap between HSA and UNIA members. The leaders within the native-born black community were much older than even the oldest West Indians immigrants. To the older and more conservative Old Liners, the new arrivals from the islands seemed to be outspoken and radical trouble-makers. West Indians felt that the black Canadians acted superior to those from the Caribbean, ignoring their shared British connection to the Empire. In addition, class divided the two communities. Most West Indians were respectable working-class people and, as Keith Henry notes, even highly educated West Indians found it difficult to be accepted “in the circles to which the more established local blacks had some access.”³¹ Class also affected the UNIA’s relations with and reactions to other black organizations of the period. In the United States, educated middle-class African Americans joined the ranks of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) along with well-to-do whites.³² Unlike the UNIA, the NAACP stressed a program of racial integration rather than separatism. Its most prominent leaders, including W.E.B. DuBois, were skeptical of Garvey’s goals and intentions and did not have cordial relations with the UNIA’s membership.³³

³⁰ Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 83, and James W. St.G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70 (1989): 1-26.

³¹ Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 80 and K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 4, 6-7.

³² Melissa Shaw notes that a small group of blacks in Toronto launched an official branch of the NAACP in November of 1917. The branch only lasted one year, disbanding on November 16, 1918 due to infighting. See Melissa N. Shaw, “‘Most Anxious to Serve their King and Country’: Black Canadians’ Fight to Enlist in WWI and Emerging Race Consciousness in Ontario, 1914-1919,” *Social History/Histoire sociale*, 69, 100 (November 2016): 567-9.

³³ *The Negro World* reported that when NAACP member William H. Pickens came to Toronto to speak at a Methodism convention, he was met by a hostile crowd. The reporter, G. Harris, explains that Pickens’ speech was on the UNIA’s loss of the Black Star Line. Many in attendance were, in fact, UNIA members and they felt that Pickens was “knocking this great universal movement.” The audience refused to applaud when he was introduced to the podium by the bishop. In addition, Harris admits that while Pickens and members of the NAACP were well-educated, “they do not use it to

Relations were slightly better with the Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (CLACP), a London-based organization modeled on the principles of the NAACP. Like the NAACP, the CLACP appealed to blacks and whites of the middle class and maintained the goal of full racial integration in Canada. *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, its official newspaper, sometimes editorialized about Garvey and the UNIA. J.F. Jenkins, the founder of both the CLACP and *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, once wrote that Garvey's notion of a God was "foolish, grotesque and idolatrous."³⁴ Nevertheless, there seems to have been a mutual respect between the organizations. In 1926, the UNIA and the CLACP even joined "under one flag" to protest injustices against black waiters of the Canadian National Railway who had been unjustly fired and replaced with white men. In that same year, Jenkins and his wife attended an event at Toronto's UNIA Hall. "Their impression of the U.N.I.A. is that it certainly knows how to be hospitable."³⁵

Feeling a sense of alienation in their new country and overwhelming frustration with racial discrimination, the West Indian immigrants decided it was time to organize. The UNIA appealed to West Indian immigrants in Canada for many reasons. Firstly, they felt a strong sense of ethnic alienation. Toney argues that initially there was even competition and divisiveness among islanders; Barbadians did not get along with Jamaicans, and so on. However, the UNIA encouraged these divisions to dissipate. Once in Canada, the immigrants became identified as West Indian, allowing their island affiliations to unite rather than divide them.³⁶ Since class differences excluded them

help my poor brothers and sisters to a greater height." See "Prof. Wm. H. Pickens Meets With Cold Reception in Toronto, Can., *The Negro World*, 23 September 1922.

³⁴ "Garvey's Black God," *Dawn of Tomorrow*, 20 September 1924.

³⁵ "London," *Dawn of Tomorrow*, 30 January 1926; and "Act in Concert for Our Own Defense," *Dawn of Tomorrow*, 7 August 1926.

³⁶ Toney, "Locating Diaspora," 79; Victor Satzewich and Nikolaos Lioudakis, *Race' and Ethnicity in Canada: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 112; and Walker, *The West Indians in Canada*, 17.

from other clubs, it was working-class blacks who joined the ranks of the UNIA because they felt that Garvey was the only black leader of the time to stand up for the poor and underprivileged.

Establishing a UNIA in Toronto was also a way to shelter oneself from racism. Toney notes that although racism in Canada was seldom violent, it was a regular presence in the lives of black Torontonians. Whites in Toronto hotels and restaurants often denied service to blacks. Finding suitable housing was a challenge given that few blacks in Toronto could afford to purchase a house, and most landlords (except for Jewish Canadians) discriminated on the basis of race. Blacks in Toronto also experienced discrimination in employment, often forced to take low-paying jobs in the service industry despite having higher educational or occupational credentials.³⁷ Garvey's tenets of self-government, higher education, and an "Africa for the Africans" appealed very strongly to a group of people who felt alienated in a white-dominated society. The UNIA, with its various leadership and membership roles, allowed its followers to feel connected to something bigger than themselves, to a global movement aimed at improving the lives of black people everywhere.

The Purpose and Uses of the UNIA in Toronto

The UNIA had its humble beginnings in the back room of Occidental Cleaners and Dyers store at 318 Spadina Avenue, where a handful of West Indian men established a short-lived club called the Coloured Literary Association (CLA) on 20 April 1919. This was not a book club as the name might suggest. Rather, the term "literary" referred to educating oneself in the fields of law, politics, and economics so as to help black communities progress in these areas. The minutes of the CLA indicate that its few members, about fifteen, organized "for the general uplift of their race in Toronto." The CLA had a President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, and Treasurer. In its first meeting, founding member Dr. Dotten Yearwood said that this group "showed the need

³⁷ Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, 32; and Toney, "Locating Diaspora," 78-9.

of unity among us,” highlighting the point that “other peoples who were united prospered while we suffered much by being separated.”³⁸ The rhetoric of the CLA mimicked that of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. For example, one member, Mr. Marshall, said “that we should not be abusing any race but should strive to be wholly self dependent.”³⁹ As with the UNIA, members of the CLA paid dues of one dollar for entrance, plus twenty-five cents per month thereafter. They discussed topics such as the effects of World War I on blacks in Canada, the economic status of African Canadians, blacks in the farming industry, and the importance of books and education to individuals and the greater community.⁴⁰

The minutes of the CLA end abruptly on 1 June 1919. The memoir of Donald Moore, an original member of the CLA, indicates that perhaps this group evolved into another club, or that they may have changed their name before becoming the UNIA. Moore mentions that the Occidental Cleaners store “had become a handy place for the increasing number of young West Indian railway porters to stop to exchange greetings on their way to Union Station, their headquarters.” Men would meet in the “Boiler Room” on Sunday afternoons to chat, and after a few meetings formed the West Indian Progressive Association which would, according to Moore, become the UNIA.

Among the many topics discussed by the men in the Boiler Room were the UNIA and the philosophies of Marcus Garvey. Moore claims that

[i]n Toronto, Garvey’s philosophy and teaching were like the ‘balm of Gilead’ to the heart and soul of the boys in the ‘Boiler Room.’ Contact was made with the UNIA’s headquarters in New York and arrangements were made to establish a branch in Toronto. Our first open meeting was held in the office of A. Benjamin Thomas, a Jamaican, who was elected the first

³⁸ Minutes of the Colored Literary Association (hereafter CLA), 20 April 1919, Universal African Improvement Association (hereafter UAIA) of Toronto records, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

³⁹ Minutes of the CLA, 27 April 1919, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the CLA, 4, 18, and 25 May 1919, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

president of the Toronto branch. William Otis, an American, was treasurer, and I became secretary.⁴¹

On 1 December 1919, eleven men and two women officially established the Toronto Division of the UNIA. They obtained an official charter from the UNIA headquarters in Harlem, New York, and like all other UNIA divisions Toronto's branch believed in Garvey's philosophy of self-determination, economic improvement, and a deep sense of pride in one's African heritage.⁴²

It is impossible to know exactly how many people joined the Toronto Division because precise membership records do not exist. However, the Division had an estimated 200 to 300 active members at its peak.⁴³ It held regular Sunday afternoon meetings and offered plenty of opportunity to get involved through its executive positions and auxiliary groups. As was practice, the Toronto Division regularly elected a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Chaplain, and Lady President. The most popular auxiliary group was the Black Cross Nurses (BCN). Garvey instructed that the BCN should fall "entirely under the supervision of their own head nurse, who is to seek for them first aid training from some medical institution or individual."⁴⁴ The women who joined the BCN were not professional nurses. Rather, their role was to educate the community on matters of health, hygiene, and sanitation. In Toronto, BCN members were required to take the St. John's

⁴¹ Moore, *An Autobiography*, 32-4. The original owner of the dry cleaning business was Dudley Jefferson, also a founding member of the CLA. Donald Moore later bought the business from him in 1921. Moore writes that with the founding of the UNIA in Toronto, the West Indians also established the West Indian Trading Company, with a store located at 1002 College Street. Its purpose was to import West Indian produce and food into Canada, and to provide housing in the two apartments above the store.

⁴² Minutes of the Universal Negro Improvement Association Toronto Branch, 1 December 1919, UAIA of Toronto records, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO. Dr. A. Benjamin Thomas was one of a few black doctors (an optometrist) in Toronto at this time. His office was located at 339 Queen Street West. He was also the only representative from the Toronto Division who signed the original UNIA Declaration of Rights on 13 August 1920 in New York City. See Hill, "UNIA Declaration of Rights," *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 578.

⁴³ K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 19. Henry believes that the UNIA achieved its highest membership ("an unspectacular two hundred") in the 1940s. From my own research, this seems unlikely given that the UNIA in Toronto was gradually declining by the start of World War II. I estimate that the peak membership of the UNIA in Toronto occurred sometime between 1922 and 1938.

⁴⁴ Tony Martin, ed., "History of the U.N.I.A.," in *Message to the People: The Course of African Philosophy* (Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1986), 187.

Ambulance course in first aid. They also sent flowers to and visited sick UNIA members in the hospital.⁴⁵ In the mid-1930s, during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War, the BCN filled a big trunk of medical supplies to ship to Ethiopia. Esther Hayes recalls that the nurses wore their iconic uniforms, a pristine white gown with matching cap, adorned with a black cross, when Garvey visited the city.⁴⁶ In addition, a UNIA Choir performed at the regular Sunday meetings, and the Juvenile Branch welcomed the Toronto Division's young people.⁴⁷

The leadership roles and titles offered within the Toronto Division and its auxiliaries helped its members to develop feelings of pride and self-worth. It was rewarding to belong to such an organization and to reach out to the black communities of Toronto. In other words, the UNIA ignited in its leaders and participants a sense of purpose, a responsibility to one another and to the wider Garvey movement.⁴⁸

Someone who helped to foster this sense of duty and pride within the community was Bertrand Joseph Spencer Pitt, long-serving president of the Toronto Division. Pitt was born on 8 September 1892 in Grenada, and immigrated to Canada in 1926 to study law at Dalhousie University. By 1928 he was called to the bar in Ontario and set up his practice in Toronto, catering mainly to Polish and black Canadians. Aside from being a very active lawyer, Pitt also proved to be

⁴⁵ In addition, sometimes the Toronto Division sent flowers and fruit baskets to sick or deceased members of the community. See Correspondence, Mrs. Edith Watts to Mr. Braithwaite, 29 April 1932, and R. Mills to UNIA, 18 September 1936, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO

⁴⁶ Marjorie Lewsey and Esther Hayes interviews. The BCN wore their uniforms at various events. For example, correspondence indicates that the BCN attended the 103rd anniversary celebrations of First Baptist Church in uniform. See H. Laurence McNeil to UNIA Toronto, 27 November 1929, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

⁴⁷ Correspondence, Erna Gabourel to Mr. J. Lovell, 16 October 1931, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO. A couple of interviewees refer to this auxiliary as the Negro Youth Club, and claim that it operated mostly in the 1930s and 1940s. See Esther Hayes and Daniel Braithwaite, interviews.

⁴⁸ Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 269.

a mentor to young blacks and strong advocate for racial equality.⁴⁹ Bromley Armstrong, a renowned human rights activist in Canada, remembers being taken under his wing as a young immigrant from Jamaica in 1948. The two met when Pitt cross-examined Armstrong as a witness in an assault case. Shortly after, Pitt wrote a letter to Armstrong inviting him to visit his office. Armstrong began visiting Pitt at his office on weekends and Pitt mentored him in both his personal and professional life. Over time, Armstrong admits that Pitt “became a kind of father to me” as well as an “inspiration” and idol to Toronto’s black community. Since he was the only black lawyer in Toronto at that time, this put him “head and shoulders” above all other black leaders because of his willingness to address racial injustice head-on.⁵⁰ Armstrong notes that Pitt spoke often on the need for “fair practices,” that is to say racial equality, at the UNIA Hall. In tough financial times, Pitt even used his own money to keep the UNIA Hall afloat and offered pro bono legal advice to members of the black community.⁵¹ Pitt’s commitment to black youths and racial fairness made him a natural and trusted leader of the Toronto Division during its heyday, encouraging members to engage with movement in a variety of ways at both the local and international level.

Early on, Toronto’s UNIA members showed great dedication to the Garvey movement. The division did not have a central meeting place, and so members would take turns offering up their homes for weekly meetings. Before long, the Toronto Division’s primary objective was to earn enough money to purchase its own UNIA Hall. The division held many fundraisers for the express

⁴⁹ Constance Backhouse, “‘It Will Be Quite an Object Lesson’: R. v. *Phillips* and the Ku Klux Klan in Oakville, Ontario, 1930,” in *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 376 note 20, and Lance C. Talbot, “The History of Blacks in the Law Society of Upper Canada,” in *The Law Society of Upper Canada Gazette* 24, no. 1 (March 1990): 67-8.

⁵⁰ For example, Pitt wrote a letter to Prime Minister Mackenzie King on behalf of the UNIA in 1937, expressing resentment against the use of a racial slur (“coon niggers in the United States”) in the House of Commons by Liberal party member J. A. Glen. Pitt’s letter demands a retraction and an apology; however, it is unknown whether or not the Prime Minister ever granted these requests. See B. J. Spencer Pitt to Prime Minister Mackenzie King, 20 April 1937, William Lyon Mackenzie King Fonds, MG26-J, Vol. 240, Reel C3728, pg. 1245–7, Library and Archives Canada.

⁵¹ Bromley Armstrong, recorded interview by Lance C. Talbot, February 1990, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; and Gairey and Hill, *Black Man’s Toronto*, 9.

purpose of acquiring a building: bazaars, social events, bake sales, games, raffles, concerts, and dances.⁵² Long-time member Violet Blackman reveals that a large impetus for wanting to purchase a UNIA Hall was Garvey's first visit to the city in 1920. At the time, the Toronto Division was renting a space at 339 Queen Street West. On 5 January 1920, fifty-two members and visitors piled into the small venue to hear Garvey's "very interesting address on the aims and objects of the association." By November of that year, fundraising efforts to secure a down payment on a building were well underway.⁵³

All funds for the UNIA Hall were raised by Toronto Garveyites who by 1925 had pledged enough to purchase a building at 355 College Street West. Almost immediately, it became a hub for blacks in Toronto. It was likely the first black-owned secular building for public use in the city. With the acquisition of the UNIA Hall, blacks would no longer be subject to rejection or discrimination by racist white landlords. Members frequently rented the hall to other black groups in the city, such as the Eureka Lodge, the Order of the Oddfellows, the congregation of the Afro Community Church, and the Negro Citizenship Association.⁵⁴ The UNIA Hall was instrumental, then, in breaking down some of the ethnic and class barriers that divided the black population.

Of course, the members themselves used the hall often. One former member claimed, "Every day of the week there was something going on up in the UNIA."⁵⁵ According to Marjorie

⁵² Blackman interview. A designated social committee carefully planned and executed these occasions and each committee member was responsible for an aspect of the event. For example, if one were to be put in charge of making food for an event, one would be expected to donate it in order to maximize the UNIA's profits.

⁵³ Blackman interview; Minutes of the UNIA Toronto Branch, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO; and Hill, "British Military Intelligence Report," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 205. Although the UNIA minutes indicate that the meeting was held on January 29th, it is more likely that the meeting was held on January 5th given that Garvey and his first wife, Amy Ashwood, honeymooned in Toronto and Montreal between 26 December 1919 and 8 January 1920.

⁵⁴ Marshall, Blackman, and D. Braithwaite interviews. Marshall believes the cost of the Hall was \$15,500 at the time. The UAIA records contain many thank-you notes from various groups noting their appreciation for use of the hall. See, for example, Victoria House of Ruth, No. 5354 to Toronto Division, 16 October 1930; W.E. Pruitt of Eureka Lodge No. 20 to Mr. S. Michaels of UNIA, 10 August 1957; and W.W. Overton of Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees to Mr. J. Lovell of UNIA, 1 June 1938. See also Moore, *An Autobiography*, 54.

Lewsey, whose parents were devoted Garveyites, “We all used to meet at the Hall.” Every week there were speakers, programs, and dances, “and it was a lot of fun.” Gwen Johnston remembers that the UNIA sponsored many community activities and cultural events, including dances, Sunday afternoon concerts, recitals, oratorical contests, and more. Many of these cultural events were meant to provide entertainment to Toronto’s black population and to celebrate its African roots. These events, as Gwen Johnston remembers, were also supposed to help the “young people develop themselves.”⁵⁶

Raising the next generation of Garveyites was a major focus of the UNIA in Toronto. Female members took turns running the youth program each Sunday for a month.⁵⁷ Esther and Eleanor Hayes, the daughters of Garveyites, recalled that in the UNIA’s youth program they learned about black history, performed in plays, and recited poems and literary works by important black writers of the day, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson.⁵⁸ Esther even wrote and recited a poem called “Our President General” about Garvey that was later published in the UNIA’s magazine, *The Black Man*. Toney explains that poems and artistic expressions such as these proved “instrumental in articulating a racial diaspora between local populations.”⁵⁹ In other words, Esther’s poem affirmed her belonging to a diaspora, a race, and a movement.

Perhaps the most popular events for Toronto’s black youth were the UNIA dances. In interviews former members frequently reminisce about the dances, which usually took place on Thursday and Saturday nights. The young women who worked as domestics would refuse to work

⁵⁵ Dionne Brand, “Violet Blackman,” in *No Burden to Carry*, 41.

⁵⁶ Gwen Johnston and Marjorie Lewsey interviews.

⁵⁷ Blackman interview.

⁵⁸ Brand, “Esther Hayes and Eleanor Hayes,” in *No Burden to Carry*, 214; and Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 34.

⁵⁹ Brand, “Esther Hayes and Eleanor Hayes,” in *No Burden to Carry*, 214; “Our President General,” *The Black Man*, July 1938; and Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 83.

those evenings because they did not want to miss the dances. Those who attended had to pay an admission fee (usually about fifty cents) to cover costs and raise a little money for the UNIA treasury.⁶⁰ The UNIA dances provided a safe and fun atmosphere for teenagers and young adults to mingle (and sometimes find a suitable husband/wife) under the watchful eye of their chaperones.⁶¹

Even more than the dances, blacks in Toronto looked forward to the annual Big Picnic in Port Dalhousie, a small town on Lake Ontario near St. Catharines. Starting in 1924, the picnic took place at Lakeside Park on the first Thursday of every August in celebration of Emancipation Day. This event was the idea of Toronto Division president at the time, B.J. Spencer Pitt. Natasha Henry notes that Pitt is “credited with operating the famous, well-organized event for over 27 years.”⁶² Henry explains that the UNIA “used the August First observances in St. Catharines to raise the racial consciousness and pride of its celebrants.” The picnic provided a variety of activities and opportunities to socialize. It always included church services held at the local BME Church and the Salem Chapel. Other picnic activities included amusement rides, baseball games, races, dancing, vendors, restaurants, and, of course, swimming at the beach. Interviewees indicate that for blacks in Toronto, the Big Picnic was the event of the year. One person even said that the picnic was better than Christmas.⁶³ Blacks in the community would not miss the event, even if it meant having to take the day off work. The purpose of the picnic was to get black families together and teach them about the UNIA. The hope was to inspire those in attendance to return home and join black

⁶⁰ Brand, “Esther Hayes and Eleanor Hayes,” in *No Burden to Carry*, 214. The BCN also hosted dances and concerts at the UNIA Hall to raise money for the division. See Correspondence, Lieutenant E. Holloway to the Toronto Division, ca. August 1931, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

⁶¹ Rella Braithwaite, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, September 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; and Williams interview. Leonard Johnston met his future wife Gwen at a UNIA dance. The two were married at age 18. L. Johnston interview.

⁶² Natasha L. Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 149.

⁶³ Lewsey interview. The purpose of the picnic was to get black families together and inspire them to return home and join black organizations and to help one another. See also Clarke interview.

organizations and to help one another. Pitt would always deliver a rousing speech about the UNIA and black unity, and a collection was taken up to help raise funds for the organization.⁶⁴

Over time, the Big Picnic attracted even more Torontonians and attendees from outside Toronto. Natasha Henry explains, “As its popularity grew, more and more Toronto residents of African ancestry took the one-hour steamer ride across Lake Ontario to attend, joining in with busloads of visitors from Rochester, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls, New York.”⁶⁵ At its peak, the Big Picnic attracted upwards of 8,000 visitors.⁶⁶ The picnic brought together black clubs and church congregations, overcoming the ethnic and generational boundaries that so frequently divided blacks in Toronto. Large groups from the BME, AME, and Baptist churches would attend the picnic every year, as would clubs such as the Home Service Association, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Oddfellows, the Eureka Lodge, and many more.⁶⁷ Even some whites came to share in the festivities. One year Marcus Garvey himself served as the guest speaker, warning spectators that the black race was falling behind other races because “the Negro has not a foot of ground in the world to call his own country.”⁶⁸ The Big Picnic carried on into the 1930s and served as a respite from the challenges of the Great Depression. In 1934, for example, a crowd of 3,500, which was the largest it had had in several years, enjoyed the festivities at Lakeside Park. *The Free Lance* commented that “it seemed as though Prosperity had stepped out from ‘just around the corner’ to

⁶⁴ Clarke interview. For example, in 1942 Pitt spoke about the need for black Canadians to join the war effort “so that they would be prepared for the post-war problems” and have a better understanding of how to solve them. “Colored Folk at Picnic,” *St. Catharines Standard*, 7 August 1942.

⁶⁵ N. Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 149-50.

⁶⁶ “Picnic Sets Record,” *St. Catharines Standard*, 1 August 1936.

⁶⁷ Verda Cook, recorded interview by Lorraine Hubbard, August 1980, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

⁶⁸ “Thousands at Picnic,” *St. Catharines Standard*, 5 August 1938.

turn the laugh on Old Man Depression for the day at least.”⁶⁹ The Big Picnic, then, provided an opportunity to make blacks and black culture in Ontario more visible. Thanks to the Toronto Division of the UNIA, the Big Picnic became “the premier African-Canadian social event in Ontario and a prime example of the cultural life of the Black Community.”⁷⁰

The Big Picnic illustrates the Toronto Division’s importance to the local and provincial black population. But from the beginning, Toronto Garveyites engaged with the movement on a global scale, firmly asserting themselves as members of a growing African diaspora. The Toronto Division regularly contributed news on their events and activities to *The Negro World* which had a worldwide circulation of over 200,000.⁷¹ The division’s news appeared in the paper alongside news from other divisions and the editorials of Marcus Garvey himself. Around the world, Garveyites could learn about the lives of blacks in Toronto. Conversely, *The Negro World* was read aloud at UNIA meetings in Toronto so that members could be informed on the latest news of the association. *The Negro World* exhibited the far-reaching exchange of ideas between Toronto’s black peoples and UNIA members around the world. Jared Toney and Sarah-Jane Mathieu argue that railway porters were also “instrumental in the spread of black culture and news across North American borders.” With so many black men in Toronto working as porters and serving as members of the UNIA, they doubtlessly contributed to the development of a diasporic identity within the city.⁷²

⁶⁹ “U.N.I.A. Picnic at Lakeside Park,” *The Free Lance*, September 1934.

⁷⁰ N. Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 136-7, 150, and 214. Henry argues that “Emancipation Day served as a political tool as well, a role that changed in each successive generation. It shifted from opposing segregation in public spaces and obtaining suffrage to equal employment access.”

⁷¹ Bernie Morris Evans, *Garvey and DuBois – A Race to Nowhere: A Feud to Change All Time* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2014), 18. The newspaper had such a wide readership because it was published in three languages: English, French, and Spanish.

⁷² Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 81-2; Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 36; and Sarah-Jane Mathieu, “North of the Colour Line: Sleeping Car Porters and the Battle against Jim Crow on Canadian Rails, 1880-1920,” *Labour/Le Travail* 47 (Spring 2001): 9-41. Several other Canadian divisions also reported their news to *The Negro World*, including Montreal, Sydney, Vancouver, and New Aberdeen/Glace Bay.

Toronto also connected with the global movement by financially supporting various UNIA enterprises. Toronto members bought shares in the BSL and donated to the African Redemption Fund for the UNIA's recolonization scheme in Liberia. They also contributed to the UNIA Conventions Fund and to the Garvey Defense Fund, a charity set up to pay for the President-General's legal fees prior to his imprisonment. Garveyites across Canada and the world made financial contributions to all of these projects, expressing their dedication to the main goals and principles of the UNIA and to their fellow members within the diaspora.⁷³ The pan-African connection among Toronto Division members was so profound that they even supported global initiatives that fell outside the realm of the UNIA, but which affected blacks in various parts of the world. For example, the Toronto Division also set up a West Indian Relief Fund in 1930 after a devastating hurricane in the Caribbean left many in need. They petitioned the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to advertise the relief fund so as to spur on humanitarian efforts in Toronto. The Toronto Division also showed great concern over the war against the Ethiopians between 1935 and 1936. In fact, soon after the launch of the Second Italo-Abyssinian War in October of 1935 the Toronto Division held a rally in conjunction with the Young Communist League for the purpose of bringing "black and white people closer together in the struggle against Italian aggression in Ethiopia."⁷⁴

The Toronto Division's international influence extended well into the 1930s. Between 1936 and 1938, Toronto was chosen as the site of two UNIA Regional Conferences and an International Convention.⁷⁵ A regular target of J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Garvey

⁷³ Brand, "Marjorie Lewsey," in *No Burden to Carry*, 239; and "Marcus Garvey Defense Fund," *The Negro World*, 25 November 1922.

⁷⁴ Correspondence, Mrs. Allan Mayers to Mr. Boswell of the CBC, 1930, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO; and "Toronto U.N.I.A. Holds Rally," *The Free Lance*, 16 November 1935. The rally was held on November 12, 1935.

⁷⁵ Toronto was supposed to be the site of the 1929 International Convention. However, UNIA officials changed their minds in late 1928 after the appalling treatment of the President-General at Montreal. In October of 1928, Canadian

had been arrested on eleven counts of mail fraud in 1922 in relation to the Black Star Line. Garvey served a jail sentence at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, and upon his release in 1927 was deported to Jamaica. While in prison, Garvey had tried to consolidate power within the organization, resulting in internal strife and animosity between West Indians and African Americans. The conflict was too much to overcome, and in 1929 Garvey split from his Harlem faction, forming the “UNIA, August 1929, of the World” with its new headquarters in Jamaica, and later London, England. Toronto Garveyites felt that Garvey had been wronged and was innocent of the charges against him, and most Canadians remained loyal to Garvey’s faction.⁷⁶

The annual UNIA Conventions were normally held at the headquarters in Harlem and later Kingston, Jamaica, but after Garvey’s deportation Canada provided the best outlet to reach his loyal American followers. Toronto, as the largest and closest UNIA division to the American border, offered the perfect meeting place for North American Garveyites, and the events drew significant international attendance. In fact, the three conventions drew significantly more attendees than those conferences held in Kingston, Jamaica in 1929 and 1934.⁷⁷ Reports from the 1936 conference demonstrate the UNIA’s new style of rhetoric which no longer focused on the back-to-Africa scheme. For instance, the delegation in 1936 went on record to endorse Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt, then-President of the United States, for a second term, and commended his Social Security Programme which had “been of great social and economic benefits [sic.] to the Negro citizens.” The delegation also praised the Canadian government and Prime Minister William Lyon

immigration authorities detained Garvey and forced him to leave the country within seven days because he had served jail time and was considered an undesirable visitor. See Hill, “Article in the Montreal Gazette” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 288 and 313, note 14.

⁷⁶ Hill, “Introduction,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* (1989), 6: xxxv; and “Report by UNIA Secretary General Henrietta Vinton Davis in the *Negro World*,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 403–4. See also Blackman and Gairey interviews.

⁷⁷ Records show that 87 delegates attended the 1929 Convention, while only 22 attended in 1934. However, the attendance in 1936, 1937, and 1937 was 144, 148, and 116, respectively. See Hill, “UNIA Convention Delegates by Gender” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 971.

Mackenzie King for allowing Toronto to host the conference without objection.⁷⁸ This language is a sharp change from the 1920s when Garvey and members of the UNIA did not readily show public appreciation for white world leaders or their policies.

The 1937 conference centred on the UNIA's Five Year Plan which was first introduced in 1934. The plan was essentially an economic scheme "through which the Association could rehabilitate itself, and carry out the major objects of the organization." Over the five years, members would be asked to contribute financially, not less than one dollar per year, to the UNIA. The funds would be used to carry out UNIA initiatives the way nations like America, Canada, and England used tax dollars to administer their national programmes.⁷⁹

Also out of the 1937 conference emerged the School of African Philosophy, a course aimed to educate the next generation of UNIA leaders. In Garvey's words, the course would "make everyone a Marcus Garvey personified." Garvey had actually been envisioning the launch of such a school for over a decade; a report from the UNIA's third International Convention in 1922 reveals that Garvey had proposed to the delegation that division officers and leaders should have to undergo formal training.⁸⁰ However, it was not until the mid-1930s when planning commenced to establish such a school. The curriculum was developed over a period of three years, having been first proposed at the 1934 conference in Kingston. Garvey himself acted as principal/instructor in the school's first year and taught at Toronto's UNIA Hall in September 1937. Tony Martin explains that "Garvey's overriding concern was to develop within his organizers a fierce Afro-centric view of

⁷⁸ Hill, "Editorial by Marcus Garvey in the *Black Man*," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 710-11.

⁷⁹ Tony Martin, ed. "The Five-Year Plan of the U.N.I.A.," in *The Course of African Philosophy*, 190; and Hill, "Official Minutes of the Second Regional Conference of the UNIA," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7:761.

⁸⁰ In response to the proposal, Mr. W. G. Mackintosh from Montreal relayed his concerns over the feasibility of getting officially-trained officers in each division. See Hill, "Convention Report," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 4: 1044.

the world.”⁸¹ The course had a program of twenty-two lessons (covering forty-two subjects) that adhered to the tenets of the UNIA, including Leadership, Diplomacy, The Purpose of Institutions, Propaganda, Commercial and Industrial Transactions, and The History of the UNIA, among others. Charles L. James, a graduate of the school’s first class who would later become President-General of the UNIA, summarizes the students’ experiences:

The class became one family. We ate together, roomed together, studied together ... For thirty days and nights, with two sessions per day, mass meetings at 8 o’clock p.m., studying until the early morning hours, we had no time for anything else but study, study, study.⁸²

Among the ten pupils in this first class were two Canadians: Arthur Clement Moore and Abraham R. Roberts, both of Toronto. After graduating from the course, they immediately became commissioners of Ontario on behalf of the UNIA with the purpose of spreading awareness of the Association.⁸³

After this initial year in Toronto, Garvey extended the course to members around the world. Some of the graduates from the first class later taught the School of African Philosophy in various American cities. Beginning in 1938, Garvey offered it as a correspondence course based in London, England. In 1939, seven graduates were listed in *The Black Man*: four Americans and three Africans originating from Uganda, South Africa, and Nigeria.⁸⁴ Toronto proved itself to be a springboard for the diffusion of Garvey’s ideas across the diaspora. That Toronto would be chosen to host the

⁸¹ Hill, “Speech by Marcus Garvey” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 782; and Martin, “Preface,” in *The Course of African Philosophy*, xvi–xxi.

⁸² Martin, “Preface,” in *The Course of African Philosophy*, xi.

⁸³ Hill, “Official Minutes of the Second Regional Conference of the UNIA,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 755 and 770-1, note 2. The minutes explain that graduates of the program would be “the first authorized trained representatives of the Organization in the United States and Canada.”

⁸⁴ C.L. James taught the course in Gary, St. Louis, and New Orleans, and James Stewart offered it in Cleveland. See Martin, “Preface,” in *The Course of African Philosophy*, xix-xx.

conventions and the School of African Philosophy illustrates that the Toronto Division was vital to the UNIA's survival in the late 1930s.⁸⁵

Garvey was the leader of the UNIA from its creation in 1914 until his sudden death on 10 June 1940 due to a massive stroke. African-American James R. Stewart, one of the school's first class graduates, became the first President-General of the UNIA after Garvey's passing. Two other graduates, Charles L. James and Thomas W. Harvey, also became heads of the association in later years.⁸⁶ Since Garvey had trained a group of potential leaders in Toronto, choosing his successors proved to be fairly straightforward. Somewhat by chance, the Toronto Division and its School of African Philosophy played a critical role in allowing the UNIA to continue after Garvey's death, while serving as a gateway for the spread of Garvey's teachings.

After 1940

While the UNIA in Toronto remained active and engaged in the community throughout the 1930s, the situation would quickly change in the 1940s. When Garvey passed away unexpectedly in 1940, his followers in Toronto immediately felt the loss. Esther Hayes believed that no one would be as capable and driven as Garvey to carry on the work of the association. Without its fearless leader at the helm, the Toronto Division seemed to lose motivation. Hayes mentions that people still attended UNIA meetings and the Big Picnic, but no one ever *did* anything anymore. While members frequently talked about problems and issues, they did little to find solutions.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ The delegation at the 1938 convention discussed a number of topics, including unemployment, the School of African Philosophy and its role in preventing crooked and inexperienced leadership, and the Five Year Plan. See Hill, "Official Minutes of the Eighth International UNIA Convention," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 840-859.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Esther P. Hayes, recorded interview by Roy Thompson, January 1983, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

Locally, the UNIA was trying to adapt and stay relevant among Toronto's black residents. By the 1930s the UNIA in Toronto was finding it difficult to attract young members to take part in the association's events and activities. At the 1938 UNIA Convention in Toronto, one delegate from Chicago summed up the problem of attracting youths to the UNIA: "You will find that the young people are interested only in fine clothes, theatres and dance halls, and we must get those things if we want the young people in the U.N.I.A."⁸⁸ With the rising popularity of jazz music among black youths, the Toronto Division saw an opportunity to evolve to stay alive. Before it became socially acceptable for black jazz acts to perform for white audiences in Toronto, the UNIA Hall became a *de facto* jazz concert venue in the 1930s and 1940s and became a breeding ground for local musical talent. One such musician was Archie Alleyne, a Member of the Order of Canada (2012). Alleyne was born in Toronto 1933 and developed a taste for jazz music early on. He played regularly at the UNIA Hall in his youth before breaking out into larger clubs in the 1950s where he was able to play for both black and white audiences.⁸⁹ By the 1950s black musicians were finally welcome to perform in white clubs; while it was a positive step toward equal treatment, it led to a period of stagnation for Toronto's UNIA as young people were able to find their entertainment elsewhere.

As mentioned in the Montreal case study, the UNIA and its members called an emergency meeting in New York City after Garvey's death for the purposes of electing a new President-General. Pitt felt strongly that Marcus Garvey, Jr., should succeed his father in this capacity, an opinion which garnered support from the Montreal Division president, E.J. Tucker. Leo Bertley argues that Pitt "saw this as one way of avoiding the almost inevitable and bitter struggle for the

⁸⁸ Hill, "Official Minutes of the Eighth International UNIA Convention," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 842.

⁸⁹ Jabbari Weekes, "The Life and Times of Archie Alleyne, Toronto's Greatest Jazz Drummer," Noisy Canada Website, 8 March 2015, https://noisy.vice.com/en_au/article/6wq5ex/the-life-and-times-of-archie-alleyne-torontos-greatest-jazz-drummer (accessed 9 March 2017); and Neil Armstrong, "Veteran Jazz Musician Bats for Youth," *The Gleaner*, 26 January 2012, <http://old.jamaica-gleaner.com/extra/article.php?id=1436> (accessed 10 March 2017).

leadership of the organization.” With this in mind Pitt attended the meeting in August of 1940 in New York with the express goal of nominating Garvey, Jr., for the position. Pitt represented both the Toronto and Montreal divisions at this meeting because, according to Bertley, the Montreal Division was experiences difficulties at this time.⁹⁰

Much to Pitt’s surprise, the delegation at this meeting rejected the notion of choosing a successor along familial lines. They felt doing was too monarchical or dynastic. Instead, four prominent leaders within the organization, each one a division president, were nominated for the position of President-General: James R. Stewart of Cleveland, Ohio; Charles L. James of Gary, Indiana; Thomas W. Harvey of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Mr. Pitt himself. The delegation elected Stewart because he was a top graduate from Garvey’s first School of African Philosophy, and thus it was presumed that he had the capability to lead the organization as well as Garvey had done. As a result, UNIA headquarters was moved to Stewart’s hometown in Cleveland.⁹¹

According to Bertley, no Canadians were able to attend the 1941 UNIA Convention in Cleveland. However, Pitt sent a letter on behalf of the Canadian divisions with recommendations to be considered by the delegation in attendance. President-General Stewart felt there was a note of hostility toward him in the letter and thus did not bring it up during the convention. Perhaps Pitt was holding a grudge against the new leader since the organization had shot down his suggestion to have Garvey, Jr., take the position. Or perhaps the astute Pitt could sense that Stewart would make an inadequate leader. Indeed, the UNIA suffered financial corruption under Stewart’s leadership almost immediately. Stewart had taken money from UNIA coffers and from a fund set aside for Garvey’s widow and sons.⁹²

⁹⁰ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 375-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 377-8.

⁹² Ibid., 382-92.

Unsurprisingly, “[s]ome of the divisions which had become completely disgusted with Stewart ... organized a conference in New York City during the fourth week of September, 1942. The outcome of the meeting was the establishment of the Rehabilitation Committee of the UNIA and ACL, August 1929 of the World.” The committee pursued only one goal: to oust Stewart and his corrupted associates. Pitt was chosen as the committee’s chairman and two members from Montreal, Henry Langdon and Elaine Pierre, served on the executive council.⁹³ Pitt helped to organize and promote the committee’s conference in 1944 held in Montreal, which attracted participants from Toronto and from around the United States. The committee operated until 1951 when a new President-General, Thomas Harvey, was elected at the UNIA Convention in Detroit. The UNIA proved much happier under Harvey’s leadership and the Rehabilitation Committee disbanded. But its creation with Pitt at the helm shows the Toronto Division’s dedication to the UNIA and its role in keeping the association afloat after Garvey’s untimely death.

Decline

In addition to Garvey’s death, the 1940s had ushered in World War II. Priorities had changed and the focus shifted overseas where many black Canadian men aided in the defeat of Hitler and the Nazi regime. After the war conditions began to improve at home for blacks in Toronto. Rella Braithwaite, a former UNIA member, notes that her husband had experienced some racial prejudice in the military early in the war but felt that conditions improved over time, and even more so after the war. More work was available for black men and women in Toronto. As their financial situation improved, some black families began to move out of the core of Toronto and into the suburbs.⁹⁴

⁹³ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 386-7, 395.

⁹⁴ R. Braithwaite interview.

The decline of the UNIA in Toronto was further exacerbated by the arrival of a younger generation of West Indian immigrants in the 1950s. Donald Moore recalls that at this time, “the unequal treatment of black West Indians seeking entry to Canada became public knowledge. Close relatives and visitors of Canadian citizens were refused entrance and the few who managed to get in were detained ... or deported to their native lands.”⁹⁵ Moore, along with other UNIA members, formed the Negro Citizenship Association and began petitioning the government to change restrictive immigration policy. The NCA can be seen as a product the UNIA’s efforts to unify blacks in Toronto. As Moore explains, the NCA had the support of “ninety per cent of the Negro organizations in Toronto,” including the Home Service Association, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and the Toronto Women’s Negro Club.⁹⁶ NCA sent a delegation to Ottawa to protest racist immigration laws in 1954, and in 1955 the Canadian government consented to their demands to grant permanent residency after a period of one year to West Indian women who worked as domestics.⁹⁷ Over time, more and more young men and women from the Caribbean made their way to Canada. This new crowd seemed generally uninterested in joining the UNIA, seeing it as a social club for old folks. Keith Henry notes that the feeling was mutual, as the older members of the Toronto Division “overwhelmingly rejected any additions to its paltry membership of eleven.”⁹⁸ As UNIA membership waned in the 1950s, so did interest in the Big Picnic. Pitt retired from his career as a lawyer in 1954 and also gave up his post as President of the Toronto Division and the event coordinator of the Big Picnic. In addition, the two steamships that carried guests over Lake Ontario

⁹⁵ Moore, *An Autobiography*, 87. Harry Gairey was also a founding member of the NCA and served as treasurer. He notes that the organization was born in the home of Donald Moore and eventually members established a branch of the association in Montreal. See Gairey and Hill, *Black Man’s Toronto*, 32-6.

⁹⁶ Moore, *An Autobiography*, 79, 105-6, 108.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁹⁸ K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 31. Henry’s membership estimates are from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. I have found no evidence to corroborate the accuracy of this number. Leonard Johnston also testified that the youths in the community were not welcome to join the UNIA during this period. L. Johnston, interview.

to Port Dalhousie, the *S.S. Dalbousie City* and the *Northumberland*, were both lost to fires in the 1950s.⁹⁹

Conclusion

For black people in Toronto, the UNIA served as a unifying force as well as an outlet to celebrate and strengthen their connection to the African diaspora. The charter members of the Toronto Division founded this branch to unite blacks in the community. The division doubtlessly succeeded in achieving this goal by providing plenty of activities and cultural events for African Canadians. The UNIA Hall itself served the wider black community of Toronto. Local black clubs and church congregations frequently rented the Hall, which provided them a safe and welcoming place to meet. A former UNIA member, Violet Blackman, sums up its importance: “that was one building where I felt within myself that, even if I’m gone from here my young children ... could open that door, and no one could tell them that they can’t come in.”¹⁰⁰ More importantly, the UNIA in Toronto encouraged its followers and their children to take an interest in black history and culture. The Toronto Division took the message of black pride outside the confines of the city to the Big Picnic in Port Dalhousie. The Big Picnic connected blacks from Canada and the United States and is remembered fondly by UNIA members and non-members alike for its focus on fun and community. Perhaps most significantly, the Toronto Division proved vital to the survival of the UNIA and the Garvey movement after 1940. The Toronto conferences in the 1930s brought Garveyites from around the world together to discuss plans on how to advance the race, and even trained the next generation of UNIA leaders at the School of African Philosophy. The Toronto

⁹⁹ N. Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 150. One interviewee even claims that the picnic became an occasion for vice in the late 1940s: “There was an awful lot of drinking and fighting.” See Verda Cook interview.

¹⁰⁰ Brand, “Violet Blackman,” in *No Burden to Carry*, 45-6.

Division, then, remained an indispensable community-builder not only to the local black population, but also to Garveyites across the African diaspora.

Chapter 3

Building a Community in Cape Breton: The UNIA in Eastern Canada

Introduction

Nova Scotia had the most UNIA divisions of any province in Canada with twelve. Considering the comparatively small size of the province, this is a remarkable number. However, if one considers the population *density* of blacks in Nova Scotia, especially in comparison to other provinces, the number of UNIA divisions begins to make sense. The two provinces with the highest number of blacks were Ontario and Nova Scotia. According to the 1911 census, there were a total of 6,541 blacks living in Nova Scotia, a province with a total area of 55,283 square kilometres. Nearly the same number of blacks, 6,747, was tallied in Ontario; however, this much larger province has a total area of over one million square kilometres.¹

The Garvey Movement was able to spread quickly among the densely-populated blacks living in Nova Scotia. Yet the province's most active divisions were located not on the mainland, but on Cape Breton Island. Blacks had been living on Nova Scotia's mainland since the 1600s, and over a period of several hundred years they developed a distinct identity and sense of community based on shared histories. The situation was quite different for blacks on Cape Breton Island who did not arrive in large numbers until the early 1900s. These newcomers, who were mainly immigrants from the Caribbean, would create a new identity and communal bond in Canada which was largely facilitated by opening UNIA divisions in their towns. The UNIA, whose message of black pride and self-government appealed to working-class blacks, provided an ideal conduit for the West Indian immigrants of Cape Breton to develop a community grounded in their common bond as labourers, as immigrants, and as descendants from Africa. UNIA members in Sydney further

¹ Census of Canada, 1911, 1921. The number of blacks in Nova Scotia remained almost the same in 1921 with 6,175, and only slightly more in Ontario with 7,220.

strengthened the bonds of community by establishing a new church that transcended religious denomination and was also centred on the notion of a shared African heritage. Known as St. Philip's African Orthodox Church (AOC), it was separate from, but inextricably linked to, the UNIA. Collectively, the UNIA and St. Philip's AOC unified blacks on Cape Breton Island along both secular and religious lines.

This chapter explains how the UNIA and St. Philip's AOC reflected the black population's desire to create a strong community to overcome the isolation associated with island living. Both institutions were spearheaded by West Indian immigrants who were the most populous black group on Cape Breton Island. That UNIA members in Sydney would launch a new church connected to their primary secular organization is unparalleled; no other UNIA division in Canada attempted to blend religious and non-religious institutions in quite the same way.

Several newspapers from the period are helpful in providing both historical context for the arrival of the UNIA in Nova Scotia, as well as its impact on the black communities of Cape Breton. These include the *Sydney Record*, *Nova Scotia Gleaner* (of which there is only one known issue left in existence, but which affords a great deal of useful information on the three divisions on Cape Breton Island), *The Free Lance*, and, of course, *The Negro World*. A number of recorded interviews with former residents of Cape Breton Island have enriched this chapter. Located at the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University, the interviews provide first-hand accounts of life on the island and the importance of institutions like the UNIA and St. Philip's AOC to the black community. Documents in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* lend insight into Nova Scotia's role in the Black Star Line, which has not yet been explored in scholarly works.

The Glace Bay UNIA Cultural Museum, which is the former UNIA Hall for the New Aberdeen Division, houses some physical artifacts of the association such as pins, badges, sashes, and membership certificates. These were the belongings of former members of the New Aberdeen

Division. While they do not supply documentary evidence for this paper, the artifacts gave the author a sense of understanding of the ritual and pageantry of the UNIA, and its importance in the lives of its members. As is the case in most other UNIA divisions in Canada, the divisions of Cape Breton Island did not preserve written records such as meeting minutes, membership lists, speeches, and UNIA programs for posterity. An interview with the museum's director, Theresa Brewster, filled in the blanks left by the lack in documentary evidence.

Origins and Nova Scotia's Racial Climate

There have been people of African descent in Nova Scotia since the arrival of Mathieu Da Costa in the early 1600s. Da Costa, a free black man, served as an interpreter for French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Indigenous traders in North America. Although documentary evidence on Da Costa is scarce, historians believe he worked and traveled freely along the Atlantic coast of Canada and along the shores of the St. Lawrence River. Nova Scotia was a society with slaves, meaning that the economy did not rely completely upon the work of slaves as it did in the southern United States and South America.² It was lawful to own slaves in the British Empire until 1833 and so it was quite common for the owners of large estates or farms in Nova Scotia to purchase a few slaves to help tend the fields and care for the household. Enslaved Africans were dispersed across the province, with higher concentrations in the French colony of Ile Royale (present-day Cape Breton Island) and in the mainland's urban centre at Halifax. Harvey Amani Whitfield explains, "Before the American

² A "slave society" is one in which the economy relies almost completely on the work of slaves and the slave-owning class becomes the ruling elite. This contrasts with "societies with slaves" where slavery exists but the economy does not solely rely on it.

Revolution, the actual population of people of African descent did not exceed 300 people at any one time.”³

A much larger contingent of black settlers, this time free men and women, landed in Nova Scotia beginning in 1776. Known as the Black Loyalists, this group of settlers were those who had remained loyal to the British during the American Revolutionary War. Tens of thousands of enslaved black men fled their slave owners at the heed of Lord Dunmore, Governor of Virginia, who promised freedom and reward for those who joined “his Majesty’s troops.” According to James Walker, of the 30,000 Loyalists who landed in Nova Scotia, about ten percent (3,000) were black. Their names, ages, personal information, and military records were recorded in the now famously-known Book of Negroes.⁴ The Black Loyalists were also joined by the still-enslaved blacks owned by white Loyalists numbering around 1,200.⁵ This mixture of freed and enslaved blacks “naturally presented a problem to slave owners.” Some slaves, who were desirous of the freedom held by the Black Loyalists, bolted from their slave owners’ homes and headed toward free black settlements. Conversely, since Nova Scotia was a colonial society with slaves there were “severe limitations on the freedom and opportunities of the Black Loyalists.” The Black Loyalists were expected to perform the duties of citizenship like paying taxes, but were “deprived the privileges of British subjects,” like trial by jury.⁶ In other words, whites in Nova Scotia were unable to reconcile their economic opinion of blacks with the freedom guaranteed to the Black Loyalists. To whites, to

³ Harvey Amani Whitfield, “The Development of Black Refugee Identity in Nova Scotia, 1813-1850,” *Left History* 10, 2 (Fall 2005): 10; and Joan Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny: African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton* (Sydney: Centre for Cape Breton Studies, 2007), 9-10.

⁴ James W. St.G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto: UTP, 1992), 1-3; 9-12.

⁵ Whitfield views the arrival of slaves along with the Loyalists as a turning point for the institution of slavery in the Maritimes; it marked the expansion of slavery on Canada’s east coast. See Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016), 8-16.

⁶ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 40-2; 55.

be black equated to enslavement and inferiority. This negative attitude led the Black Loyalists to develop a distinct identity based on their shared experiences with racism and their strong Christian convictions. Nearly 1,200 Black Loyalists, about one-third of the free blacks in Nova Scotia at this time, migrated to Sierra Leone in 1792 to a settlement aptly named Freetown in search of greater independence, security, and land.⁷

Shortly after the move to Freetown, another contingent of black settlers arrived in Nova Scotia. In 1796 an influx of 500 Jamaican Maroons landed in Halifax. These were people who had been exiled because of their defiance of British policy in the Caribbean. Like the Black Loyalists, the Maroons grew frustrated with racial discrimination in Nova Scotia, not to mention the cold and wet climate. As a result, most of them joined the 1,200 Black Loyalists who had left for Freetown.⁸

This sudden decrease in Nova Scotia's black population at the end of the eighteenth century would be recouped between 1813 and 1815 with the arrival of some 2,000 Black Refugees from the War of 1812. Similar to the Black Loyalist experience, the Black Refugees, also known as Late Loyalists, was a group that developed out of the British's need for increased military enrollment in their fight against the Americans. During the War of 1812, Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane announced that any American who would claim loyalty to the British and serve in their militia would be guaranteed freedom and settlement in either British North America or in the West Indies. The offer enticed nearly 4,000 enslaved people in the United States, and of these about 2,000 went to Nova Scotia. The Refugees claimed their freedom one of two ways: either by escaping the plantation on their own, or British soldiers would invade and occupy an area and free the slaves as they went.⁹

⁷ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 64; 124-6.

⁸ Harvey Amani Whitfield, *From American Slaves to Nova Scotian Subjects: The Case of the Black Refugees, 1813-1840* (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2005), 1-3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-2.

The Black Refugees received settlement lands beginning in 1815 but they only got a fraction of what the white Late Loyalists were given; most plots for Black Refugees in the areas of Halifax, Preston, and Hammonds were ten acres, while whites received upwards of 100 acres or more. In addition, the white settlers were given official titles to their lands while the Black Refugees were only given licences to occupy their plots. The tracts commissioned to blacks were of such poor quality that growing crops was a constant struggle, if not impossible. The Black Refugees petitioned the government for better lands and equal allotments but they were refused. At this point, the Black Refugees became acutely aware of the preferential treatment given to whites, but they were not completely disheartened. They remained resilient and built communities and institutions in spite of their mistreatment, as well as a sense of identity based on their collective histories as slaves, Refugees, and Nova Scotians.¹⁰

While Black Nova Scotian culture can trace its origins to the Black Loyalists and Black Refugees on the mainland,¹¹ West Indians played a much larger role in developing black communities on Cape Breton Island. Beginning around 1900, Cape Breton Island saw an influx of immigrants from Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean. They were drawn by the opportunity to work for Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO), renamed Dominion Steel

¹⁰ Whitfield, *From American Slaves*, 37-41; 52-7. See also Bridglal Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land: The Survival of Nova Scotia's Blacks*, Volume II: 1800 – 1989 (Halifax: The Black Educators Association of Nova Scotia, 1990), 69; Judith Fingard, "Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20 (1992): 169-95; and David Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7, 1 (1996): 36-8; 43-4. A main institution established by the Black Refugees was the Baptist Church. Richard Preston, a former slave, became an ordained Baptist minister and is credited with starting Halifax's Cornwallis Street Baptist Church. He would help open eleven churches in total in mainland Nova Scotia.

¹¹ One of the most famous African Nova Scotian communities was Africville, located on the shores of the Bedford Basin in Halifax. Although people of African descent had been living on the south shore of the Basin since at least 1749 (Halifax's founding), the land was not officially purchased by black settlers until 1848. A sizeable black community developed here, but were treated poorly by city officials who refused to provide the area with adequate services and infrastructure, such as sewers and paved roads. Undesirable industries were also put in Africville, such as a fertilizer plant, a prison, and a railroad track that ran right through the centre of the community. The City of Halifax ordered the community razed in the 1960s due to blight, even against protests from residents who did not wish to be relocated. For more see Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill, *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999); and Jennifer Jill Nelson, *Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism* (Toronto: UTP, 2008).

and Coal Company (DOSCO) in 1929, which had just opened in the neighbourhood of Whitney Pier in Sydney. They were also recruited to work for its sister company, Dominion Coal, which had opened a few years prior in 1893 and which had mines in the neighbouring towns of Glace Bay and New Waterford. The steel and coal industries quickly became the foremost employers on the Island, and nearly all the black men in Sydney were employed by DOSCO or Dominion Coal.¹² This differed significantly from the main sources of work for mainland blacks in Nova Scotia who, not unlike black men in Quebec and Ontario, worked either on the seas or on the railroads as porters, stewards, cooks, and waiters.¹³ In fact, this may be why the UNIA divisions on Cape Breton Island were more active than the divisions on the mainland; since the men worked very close to home as compared to railroad and the seafaring workers who were away from home for extended periods, black Cape Bretoners could more easily and more frequently organize and participate in community events and social clubs.

DOSCO actually recruited hundreds of black workers from the southern United States, namely Alabama¹⁴, and the Caribbean¹⁵ because executives believed that because they came from warm climates they would be able to withstand the extreme heat from the blast furnaces “which produced molten iron from iron ore.”¹⁶ While many of the African Americans had come to Sydney

¹² Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds*, 105-6; Cape Breton Black/West Indian Community Scrapbook, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Beaton Institute; and Robert A. Hill, “Reports from the Convention,” in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983), 2: 535.

¹³ Some blacks on the mainland also worked as farmers or were entrepreneurs like barbers or shop owners. Judith Fingard, “From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c. 1870-1916,” *Acadiensis* 24, 2 (Spring 1995): 49, 54.

¹⁴ The African Americans had prior work experience in the steel industry in the United States, thus making them desirable recruits to DOSCO. See Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 11.

¹⁵ Aside from Americans and West Indians, foreign workers from various countries including Italy, Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine were all part of the recruitment program “carried out under an agreement between Nova Scotia’s government and DISCO.” Elizabeth Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904,” *Acadiensis* 24, 2 (Spring 1995): 70.

¹⁶ Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton,” 68; Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds*, 106; Ted Boutilier, *New Waterford Three Score and Ten: Seventy Years of Civic History* (New Waterford: The Publication Committee New Waterford

with their families, they did not stay long. The majority resided in Cape Breton only between the years 1901 and 1904, although some did remain and became part of the larger and more permanent black community headed by West Indian immigrants. DOSCO and Dominion Coal Company recruited hundreds of blacks from the Caribbean, mostly from Barbados but also some from Grenada, St. Vincent, and British Guyana.¹⁷ The West Indians traveled by steamship which docked at a number of ports in Atlantic Canada, including Saint John, New Brunswick, Halifax, Port Hawkesbury (on the southwest end of Cape Breton Island), and Sydney. The journey from the Caribbean to Atlantic Canada took about two weeks.¹⁸ DOSCO and Dominion Coal would pay for the recruited workers' passage from the Caribbean but the company would take a small amount off each pay cheque until the total was paid off.¹⁹

An interview with Winston Ruck, whose family emigrated from Barbados around 1900, reveals that the promise of work was the only incentive to come to Cape Breton Island, and that the Canadian climate was a concern for West Indian immigrants who had never experienced the snowy winters of Nova Scotia. Annabelle Kirton, a former resident of Glace Bay and Sydney, says that the West Indians wore a lot of flannel clothing to keep warm in their new surroundings. Quite a few West Indians contracted pneumonia during their first winters, resulting in a number of fatalities. Consequently some West Indians moved on to the United States, South America, or back home to

70th Anniversary, 1983), 65; and John Nicholson, recorded interview on C.B.I. radio, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute.

¹⁷ Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 10-11; and Cape Breton Black/West Indian Scrapbook, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Beaton Institute.

¹⁸ Boutilier, *New Waterford*, 65.

¹⁹ Glace Bay Community Fabric Oral History, Viola King interview, 20 July 1982, Manuscript Holdings, Ethnic Papers, Beaton Institute; and "History of the Black Immigrants in Cape Breton Island, Social Life, etc.," Winston Ruck recorded interview by Betty Lynch, 1972, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute.

the Caribbean, but most actually stayed in Nova Scotia.²⁰ Many, like Mrs. Viola King, actually preferred Canada to their birth place in the Caribbean. King left Barbados with her parents in 1925 and the family settled in Glace Bay. She recalls that their first home on Donkin Street was a company-owned house. While modest, it had heat and electric lighting which was a step up from their house in Barbados.²¹ The majority of West Indian immigrants lived in Sydney, but a few hundred chose to settle in the neighbouring communities of Glace Bay and New Waterford where the coal mines were located.²² While census numbers are likely underestimated, they provide insight into the influx of black immigrants to Cape Breton. For instance, the 1901 census shows only eleven “Negroes” living in Glace Bay, and none living in Sydney and New Waterford. Then in 1911, the numbers jump considerably: Sydney grew to have a population of 172 “Negroes,” and Glace Bay 93.²³

Elizabeth Beaton notes that the hiring of blacks and other “undesirable” immigrants like Slavs and Italians for the blast furnaces coincided with the hierarchy of work within the iron and steel industries. “The blast furnace ... was the first step towards producing basic carbon steel. This part of steel making was considerably more dirty and dangerous than the steel producing open hearth operation, which was the next stage in the process.” The hearth workers tended to be skilled

²⁰ Winston Ruck interview; and “West Indian Blacks,” Annabelle Kirton, recorded interview by Pam Newton, 1986, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute. Ruck claimed that the island of Barbados was a bit overpopulated and had few job opportunities to offer, thus the prospect of decent-paying work in Nova Scotia appealed to many looking to make a better life. Some men in Barbados had been fishermen or sugar cane farmers prior to arriving in Cape Breton.

²¹ Glace Bay Community Fabric Oral History, Viola King interview, Beaton Institute. King’s father had previously worked on the Panama Canal and was drawn to the coal mining industry in Glace Bay where he worked at the No. 11 Colliery.

²² Boutilier contends that the very first blacks to settle in New Waterford were recruits from Barbados. The census corroborates this assumption, showing no blacks living in New Waterford in 1901 and 58 by 1921. See *New Waterford*, 65; and Census of Canada, 1901, 1921.

²³ The number of blacks on Cape Breton Island increased from only 23 in 1901 to 289 in 1911. The census then reports a slight drop in the black population in 1921 with 247. These numbers must surely be incorrect given that it only tabulated 30 blacks living in Sydney in 1921. This is grossly underestimated given that the UNIA in Sydney was in its heyday at this time. See Census of Canada, 1901, 1911, 1921.

craftsmen, and these positions were “reserved for white Anglophone workers.”²⁴ This point is corroborated by George Creese, a member of the New Aberdeen (Glace Bay) Division and the UNIA’s Commissioner of Canada from 1921-2. He voiced his concerns over living conditions in Nova Scotia and Eastern Canada at the UNIA’s first International Convention in 1920. He said “that about 2,500 black people are resident there, and that the conditions are far from satisfactory. The majority work in the iron and steel industries and receive wages from \$4.50 to \$6 per day, in many instances receiving the same pay as whites,” meaning the unskilled workers from Eastern and Central Europe, for example. Moreover, while some black steel workers had learned skilled trades in their homelands, such as masonry, riveting, and engineering, “they cannot get employment in their trades. Hence they have to seek work in the steel plants as laborers, as bricklayers, and as firemen.”²⁵ Willard Jones, a coal miner from New Waterford, recalls, “There were a few Black people came from Barbados had trades but you weren’t going to get none of them around here ... [Dominion Coal] brought them here to work in the coal mines and that’s what they were going to do.” He concedes that blacks tended to get the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs in the mines.²⁶

Beaton explains that the racial hierarchy of work within the steel and coal industries was also reflected in the workers’ living quarters in Sydney. Management and skilled workers lived in the area called Ashby. It was located further away from the steel plant than the neighbourhood of Whitney Pier which housed the unskilled workers, including Ukrainians, Italians, Hungarians, and blacks. Whitney Pier was “the district close by the dirtiest end of the coke and steel making processes” and it “became known as the settlement area of ‘labourers’ from all over the world.” In the age before the dawn of suburbia and the ubiquity of the automobile, workers lived as close to the mines or steel

²⁴ Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton,” 68.

²⁵ In this case, “fireman” is the title given to blast furnace operators. Hill, “Reports from the Convention,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 535.

²⁶ Weeks, “Willard Jones, New Waterford,” in *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 96.

plant as possible so that they could walk to work.²⁷ The residents of Whitney Pier were provided accommodations by DOSCO, but they were not the type of fine housing promised to the employees prior to recruitment. In fact, they were very basic bunk shacks that were really meant for housing single men, not entire families. This contrasted with the more substantial homes and hotels reserved “for skilled and semi-skilled workers of Anglo-Celtic background.” These shacks were not connected to Sydney’s water or sewage system, had poor ventilation, and were generally filthy and inadequate for the throngs of immigrants forced to live there. The conditions were similar in Glace Bay and New Waterford where many coal miners, mostly single men, lived in homes owned by the coal company. As in Sydney, the West Indians lived in these workers’ camps with other immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe.²⁸

The situation was slightly different in Glace Bay and in New Waterford where most men in worked for Dominion Coal. Joan Weeks explains, “Dominion Coal had a policy of keeping ethnic groups together by employing them in the same mine and providing housing nearby. As a result, ethnic neighbourhoods sprang up across industrial Cape Breton.” Black miners in Glace Bay “worked in the No. 2 Colliery in the New Aberdeen area of Glace Bay. As a result, a vibrant Black community developed on nearby Gordon Street and Jessome Street.” The black community in New Waterford developed in the area known as Fourteen Yard near the No. 12 and No. 16 collieries.²⁹

Cape Bretoners generally did not oppose the influx of white immigrants from the United States and Britain. However, they felt quite differently about African Americans, as well as workers

²⁷ Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton,” 70; and Nicholson interview. Beaton offers some population figures to emphasize the rapid growth of Sydney between 1900 and 1920. She contends that the total population in Sydney in 1899 was 2,500, and by 1921 it had increased to 23,000, the majority of whom were from Eastern or Central Europe or the West Indies. They formed “ethnic ghettos near the steel plant in the Whitney Pier area of Sydney where they maintained many of their traditional customs.” See Elizabeth Beaton Planetta, “Case Studies: St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church, Holy Ghost Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, St. Mary’s Polish Church,” (Sydney: Department of Culture, Recreation, and Fitness, Province of Nova Scotia, 1983), 1.

²⁸ Boutilier, *New Waterford*, 65.

²⁹ Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 12-13.

from Central and Eastern Europe. Beaton cites local newspapers to exhibit the racist attitudes toward such “undesirable” immigrants who were allegedly stealing good jobs from local men. One article even described black immigrants as “foul-mouthed ... niggers.”³⁰ In addition to the local press, police reports indicate a biased attitude against the aforementioned immigrant groups. The African-American immigrants, for example, were portrayed as vagrants and drunkards. Beaton claims, “In Sydney, blame for social disorder was most commonly placed on Blacks and Italians.” When writing about life in the workers’ camps, newspaper columnists focused on stories which depicted the immigrants as disorderly, violent, and living in filth. These stories were “juxtaposed against news items about the activities of Sydney's more 'respectable' citizens, descriptions of piano recitals, dramatic productions, or the latest millinery additions to one of the town's fine stores.”³¹ According to George Creese, there was no open discrimination against blacks in Nova Scotia. However, there were no black lawyers on Cape Breton Island³² to support and advise the immigrants from the United States or the West Indies who were targeted by police. This left black residents at a significant disadvantage since there was no one reliable to help defend their rights in the courts. Moreover, Creese claimed that blacks were singled out and forced to pay a poll tax on Cape Breton Island. He told the delegation to the UNIA’s International Convention in 1920 that “[a] system exists there of collecting a poll tax, everyone being required to pay \$10 for police protection, good streets, etc. If the tax is not paid, the police call at the house and take the individual to jail. This

³⁰ Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton,” 70. The quotation is from a letter to the editor in the *Daily Post*, April 14, 1902.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 86-8.

³² There was, in fact, one black lawyer on the island by the name of F.A. Hamilton. A graduate from Dalhousie University’s law program, he lived in Sydney and published a weekly newspaper called the *Nova Scotia Gleaner* of which only one issue remains in existence. See Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 13.

practice applies only to the colored people.”³³ The use of a poll tax against blacks, in addition to the negative portrayal of some immigrant groups in the newspapers and police reports, alienated the labouring class in Cape Breton from the rest of the population.

Aside from the steel and coal workers, Cape Breton had only a few black entrepreneurs to cater to a number of needs on the Island, including retail stores, shoe repair shops, dry cleaning businesses, barbers, clothiers, and jewelers.³⁴ As in others parts of Canada, blacks in Nova Scotia were discriminated against in jobs and in public areas. There were also very few black professionals living on Cape Breton Island; even if those immigrants from the Caribbean and United States had been educated professionals in their homelands, they were hired solely as labourers on the Island.³⁵

The situation for blacks living on Cape Breton Island was somewhat unique compared to those living in other parts of the country. As the other case studies in this dissertation demonstrate, black immigrants tended to settle together in ethnic enclaves based mostly on their shared histories, place of birth, language, and culture. On Cape Breton Island, various immigrant groups from Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean all settled together along *class* lines. An interview with Cape Breton University sociologist, John Nicholson, reveals that on the Island, social class tied the ethnic groups of Whitney Pier together. He explains that out of necessity as newcomers to Canada, the labouring class in the steel and coal industries tended to co-operate for their mutual benefit and support. The neighbourhoods where the workers lived were very ethnically diverse, and so no one dominant group developed that would demand assimilation. Nicholson argues that everyone was

³³ Hill, “Reports from the Convention,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNLA Papers*, 2: 535. Creese also says that housing conditions for blacks were “deplorable” and rents were “excessively high,” thus making it difficult to move into better homes.

³⁴ “The Black Settlement in Sydney, Nova Scotia,” Cape Breton Black/West Indian Community Scrapbook, 1985, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Beaton Institute.

³⁵ “Cape Breton’s early professionals of African ancestry include physician, Dr. Alvinus Calder ... and lawyer, F.A. Hamilton.” See Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 13; and “Black Culture of Whitney Pier,” Whitney Pier Project, 1984-1985, Manuscript Holdings, Ethnic Papers, Beaton Institute.

allowed to be different ethnically because they were so much the same in social class.³⁶ Put plainly, the various ethnic groups living in the workers' housing in Whitney Pier, Glace Bay, and New Waterford got along pretty well. Adding to this was Cape Bretoners' sense of remoteness living at the eastern edge of Canada. Far removed from the other black communities on Nova Scotia's mainland, let alone the rest of Canada, the blacks in Cape Breton's coal and steel towns had to be communal with people outside their racial and ethnic scope in order to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Interviews with former Glace Bay residents, Bob Wadman, Billy Pittman, and Archie MacIntyre, lend insight into race relations among the working class of Cape Breton Island. They note that after living and working in such close quarters, the men began to learn the languages of their colleagues. They note that "after two years of being in Glace Bay, the Jews could speak Gaelic better than we could." They also recall "a big colored fella [sic]" who learned to speak Russian after just a couple of weeks. They claim, for example, that "a Polish man and a Spanish man would go to work together in the mines and they would become very good friends."³⁷ Based on the shared experiences as new immigrants in Canada and as labourers working long hours in dangerous positions, the coal and steel workers developed a sense of comradeship that transcended race and ethnicity.

This is not to say that the black residents of Cape Breton Island did not want a community based on kinship and ethnic ties. In fact, they did. It was just a bit more challenging to do than their friends from Hungary, for example, who shared a common language, religion, place of birth, food preferences, and style of dress. The Hungarians were able to establish their own ethnic church (which doubled as a community centre) because most of them shared a common faith. The same

³⁶ John Nicholson interview.

³⁷ "Introduction to 'Community Fabric,'" Glace Bay Community Fabric Oral History, Beaton Institute.

can be said of the Italians, Poles, and Ukrainians who each established their own churches. In essence, vestiges from the “Old Country” naturally tied the Europeans together along ethnic lines. This contrasted with the West Indians who emigrated from a variety of countries and who might belong to any number of religious sects, including the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, or Baptist churches. There were, then, considerable barriers to overcome in order to form a black community on Cape Breton Island.

For these reasons, most blacks in the Island, especially the West Indians, were very receptive to the idea of opening UNIA divisions in their towns. Furthermore, to overcome religious differences the West Indians in Whitney Pier opened a branch of the African Orthodox Church (AOC) which they named St. Philip’s. It is, to this day, the only branch of the AOC in Canada. For the West Indians, the UNIA and St. Philip’s AOC were institutional expressions and celebrations of a common African heritage and a great way to unite the community along racial lines. Thus, the establishment of these organizations on Cape Breton Island represents the West Indians’ desire to make a community of their own, separate from their European co-workers.

As the immigrant groups within the labouring class became more settled in the first couple of decades of the 1900s, it appears that they started to divide along ethnic and racial lines. Certainly, life in the sub-standard workers’ houses could create a tense environment given their tight living quarters and lack of privacy. Moreover, some ethnic groups like the Hungarians and Poles began to set down firm roots on Cape Breton Island; they started to move out of the workers’ shacks and built their own churches and community centres to provide a place for their compatriots to gather and socialize. As the years rolled on competition for jobs and housing in Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford became fierce, causing resentment between the various ethnic groups.³⁸ The growing divide between immigrant groups based on ethnicity and race is exemplified by the race riot

³⁸ “Black Culture of Whitney Pier,” Whitney Pier Project, Beaton Institute.

that took place in Glace Bay in 1918.³⁹ In early September of that year a riot began when, at a picnic hosted by the black community, an Italian man named L. Linello entered the bike race competition. The *Sydney Post* reports that Linello “was winning everything in sight,” which made a black contestant⁴⁰ in the race so jealous and angry that he knocked the Italian off his bicycle.⁴¹ “The Italian jumped up and struck the colored chap and, as he did so, other colored men and Italians rushed in,” which snowballed into a full-fledged riot. Some of the men were close enough to their homes as to quickly retrieve firearms. Shots were fired in the streets of Glace Bay on both sides, and one black resident named Irvin Yard was killed. The riot raged on despite Mayor O’Neill’s public reading of the Riot Act. Eventually soldiers were able to quell the mob, “but not before scores of negroes had been beaten and kicked by the infuriated whites, some of them into insensibility.” One reporter noted, “For some of the time past, the feeling of white against black has been growing bitter and on several occasions serious fights ensued.”⁴²

This incident demonstrates how life for the immigrants on Cape Breton Island changed between 1900 and 1918. Upon arrival, working-class immigrants from various countries co-habited and co-operated for the sake of overcoming feelings of isolation and alienation. Nearly two decades later, the immigrants were putting down permanent roots in the form of institutions based on a

³⁹ Race rioting and violence took place in other towns in Nova Scotia. Constance Backhouse notes, “An increasingly widespread pattern of white racism exploded with particular virulence across Canada during and immediately following the First World War,” as aggressive white mobs in the towns of New Glasgow and Truro terrorized black residents. See Constance Backhouse, “‘Bitterly Disappointed’ at the Spread of ‘Colour-Bar Tactics’: Viola Desmond’s Challenge to Racial Segregation, Nova Scotia, 1946,” in *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 250–1.

⁴⁰ The accused were two black men by the names of N. Gibson and A. Callender. No arrests were made. “Sydney Negroes Involved in Riot,” *Sydney Daily Post*, 5 September 1918.

⁴¹ Joan Weeks maintains, “Oral accounts of the event differ. Some believe a Black man was winning the race, others say the collision was accidental. What is known is that one Black man was killed, one Black man and two White men were hospitalized and many people suffered serious injuries.” See Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 16.

⁴² Reports do not agree on the given name of the murder victim. He is described as “Irvin,” “Herman,” or “Urban” in various articles. “Murder Done in Wild Riot of Negroes and White at Glace Bay,” *Sydney Record*, 3 September 1918; and “Not a Scrap of Evidence Obtained to Show Who Shot Colored Man at Glace Bay,” *Sydney Record*, 4 September 1918.

common birthplace. The Hungarians, Italians, and Poles, for instance, were dividing along ethnic lines to shape communities based on culture, not class. This left the black residents of Cape Breton, whether West Indian, American, or Canadian, on the periphery and with the task of establishing a community of their own that would have to transcend their ethnic differences. The unifying factor for black Cape Bretoners was race. Just as the divide along ethnic and racial lines was occurring in Cape Breton, the UNIA was rising in popularity across the United States and Canada. The UNIA, with its race-first philosophy and focus on African heritage, provided black Cape Bretoners with an apt channel for pioneering a community and an identity of their own.

The Rise of the UNIA in Nova Scotia

There were twelve UNIA divisions in Nova Scotia, the most of any other province.⁴³ Nine were located on the mainland and another three on Cape Breton Island, which are the subject of this chapter. There was also one more division in eastern Canada located in Saint John, New Brunswick.⁴⁴ Given the scarcity of documents on most of these divisions, it is nearly impossible to know with certainty how many were actively participating in the Garvey Movement. Some of these

⁴³ The divisions of Nova Scotia could be found in: Africville, Amherst, Dartmouth, Halifax, New Aberdeen/Glace Bay, New Glasgow, New Waterford, Preston, Sydney, Tracadie, Truro, and Yarmouth. See Robert A. Hill, Appendix X, "Locations of UNIA Divisions and Chapters," in *The Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 7: 997; and Leo W. Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917–1979" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 1980), 38–9.

⁴⁴ Most blacks living in New Brunswick were the descendants of Black Refugees and slaves who arrived after the War of 1812. During the First World War, there was a small influx of blacks from the United States and the West Indies; by 1921, the total black population of New Brunswick was 1,190, of which 1,133 were born in Canada, 37 in the West Indies, and 20 in the United States. In the early twentieth century, blacks in New Brunswick attended separate churches and schools and were denied service at white-owned establishments. A black lawyer in Saint John named Abraham B. Walker started a journal called *Neith* in 1903. Walker "devoted much of each issue to matters concerning Black people, particularly his scheme to solve the 'Negro Problem' by removing many Black people from the United States and Canada and resettling them in Africa." Walker's scheme, which was proposed over ten years before the launch of the UNIA, was remarkably similar to Garvey's. This may have made Saint John residents receptive to the Garvey Movement when it arrived years later. See W.A. Spray, *The Blacks in New Brunswick* (Fredericton: Brunswick Press, 1972), 62-7.

communities had very small populations, and some like the divisions in Halifax, Preston, Africville, and Dartmouth, were clustered very close together.

The three divisions on Cape Breton Island were more actively engaged in the Garvey Movement than the ones on the mainland. This is because the black population of Cape Breton was, as mentioned earlier, primarily comprised of immigrants from the West Indies and the United States. Prior to their arrival, there was a very small black population on the island and almost no black institutions or organizations. With the influx of new immigrants to Cape Breton there became a greater need to create cultural and religious institutions that would cater to the black population. Coincidentally, the UNIA was rising in popularity around the same time when black Cape Bretoners had begun to lay the foundations for a racially cohesive community. Thus the UNIA became a vital means of community-building on Cape Breton Island as it was able to unite the black population on the basis of race and heritage. This contrasts with blacks on the mainland who had been living in Nova Scotia for hundreds of years before the arrival of the UNIA. In many cities and towns like Halifax, Preston, and Africville, there was already a well-established black community with sophisticated institutions and kinship networks.⁴⁵ The black communities on the mainland did not need to use the UNIA as a community-building device like their counterparts on the Island.

As mentioned above, occupation may have also influenced the level of active participation on Cape Breton Island versus the mainland. On Cape Breton Island, the dominant type of work for men, coal mining and the production of iron and steel goods, did not require men to be away from the home for extended periods of time. Thus, they had more time to contribute to community associations like the UNIA. By contrast, the men on the mainland commonly worked as seamen or

⁴⁵ For example, the African United Baptist Association (AUBA) was launched in 1854 by Richard Preston and included over a dozen black Baptist churches, including Cornwallis Street Baptist Church in Halifax (1832) and Seaview United Baptist Church in Africville (1849). The churches in AUBA became pillars of black unity within their respective communities.

railroad porters. This type of work required the men to be away from home for days or weeks at a time, and this would certainly hinder their ability to take part in an organization like the UNIA which required consistent participation to keep afloat.

This does not even take into account the issue of class and its impact on UNIA participation. As this dissertation has made clear, the UNIA appealed mainly to the working class because they most identified with the UNIA's goal of an all-black nation to guarantee their political and economic prosperity. The black population of Cape Breton Island is no exception to this phenomenon; most of them were working-class labourers who held low-paying jobs and, as new immigrants, held little political influence either locally or beyond. However, the native-born African Nova Scotians on the mainland were a more diverse group of blacks. A few members of this long-established black population eventually rose in social class.⁴⁶ Suzanne Morton explains that in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, class was just one of many subjects that split the black population. She notes, "Divisions existed based on class, rural or urban residency, religion, ethnicity and more abstract criteria such as the value placed on respectability."⁴⁷ These divisions did not exist to the same extent on Cape Breton Island; most blacks on the Island were of the same social class, lived in small urban towns, practiced the same religions (Anglican and African Orthodox), and came from the West Indies, primarily Barbados. Perhaps these factors made it easier for blacks on Cape Breton Island to unite within a common organization than blacks on the mainland. Indeed, many of the aforementioned factors impeded active participation in the Garvey Movement on the mainland, and thus led to a shorter lifespan of their UNIA divisions.

⁴⁶ One example is James R. Johnston who became Nova Scotia's first black lawyer, having graduated from Dalhousie School of Law in 1898. He later became a prominent member of the African United Baptist Association (AUBA). See Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds*, 72-3.

⁴⁷ Suzanne Morton, "Separate Spheres in a Separate World: African-Nova Scotian Women in late-19th-century Halifax County," *Acadiensis*, 22, 2 (Spring 1993): 66.

The particular set of circumstances on Cape Breton Island contributed to the longevity and success of the UNIA as a community-building tool in that part of the province. The divisions in Glace Bay, Sydney, and New Waterford worked to unify the black populations in each town based on a shared African heritage. In the spirit of racial confraternity, the three UNIA divisions worked together to connect the various black communities on the island, thereby establishing firm cultural roots on the island and surmounting immigrants' feelings of social isolation and inequity. What follows is an examination of each of the three Cape Breton divisions followed by an analysis of their cooperation and collaboration for the sake of growing and strengthening the island's black communities.

New Aberdeen/Glace Bay Division

The New Aberdeen Division was the first branch of the UNIA in eastern Canada. Some accounts claim that Albert Francis organized the UNIA in Glace Bay as early as 1918, and was officially chartered division number thirty-five on March 11, 1920. Born in Barbados, Francis immigrated to Nova Scotia in 1916 to work in the coal mines. He was not only the founder but also the division's first president, and later served as treasurer. He hosted UNIA meetings in a small building in his backyard until they were able to acquire a property on Maple Street (now Jessome Street) in 1923. The UNIA Hall was located on Maple Street in the heart of Glace Bay's black neighbourhood, which was in an area known as New Aberdeen, hence the choice to name the division after the neighbourhood rather than the town itself. Indeed, most black families lived on or near Maple Street, and the UNIA Hall even boarded men from the Caribbean who had come to Nova Scotia for work.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Annabelle Kirton interview. Theresa Brewster says that the UNIA also owned property on either side of the Hall thanks to donations from its members. This included twenty apartment units on Maple Street which the UNIA rented out to black families since they sometimes experienced discrimination in housing in other parts of town. It is unknown

The black community in Glace Bay was very enthusiastic about the arrival of UNIA. In a report about his visit to Glace Bay and Sydney in 1921, Vernal Williams, an executive from the Parent Body, claims, “In Glace Bay every Negro is a member of the U.N.I.A.”⁴⁹ According to Theresa Brewster, the vast majority of UNIA members in Glace Bay were specifically from Barbados. In its early years, members used the UNIA as a sort of Barbadian cultural centre and sometimes shunned the small native-born black population in town. This was quite exclusive to the region, and indeed compared to other divisions across Canada which had a more varied membership in terms of country of origin. The Barbadians felt superior to the native-born black population, mainly because they were proud of the higher level of education they had received in their homeland. They also prided themselves on their food. Traditional West Indian dishes like black pudding and fish cakes were served at UNIA events in Glace Bay, and they were often prepared by Albert Francis and his wife, or by the Black Cross Nurses (BCN).⁵⁰

The New Aberdeen Division hosted regular Sunday Mass Meetings (SMMs) and other social events like concerts, dances, and dinners for the enjoyment of its members. Theresa Brewster alleges that the New Aberdeen Division was considered Cape Breton’s “main” division, and its UNIA Hall was the centre of the area’s black community. She reveals that “everything” used to happen at the UNIA Hall, from SMMs to concerts to a tutoring school and a children’s Sunday School for parishioners at St. Mary’s Anglican Church. The Hall also had a co-operative store in its

exactly when the New Aberdeen Division purchased these properties. Theresa Brewster, interview by Carla Marano, October 2014, UNIA Cultural Museum, Glace Bay.

⁴⁹ “Canadian Divisions Making Preparations for U.N.I.A. August Convention, *The Negro World*, 25 June 1921.

⁵⁰ Winston Ruck interview; Theresa Brewster interview; and Weeks, “Elmena Vaughn, Glace Bay,” in *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 55.

basement that sold necessities and confections to the local community, and it allowed the miners to buy on credit.⁵¹

Members in Glace Bay remained committed to paying off the mortgage of their UNIA Hall. In 1929 the *Nova Scotia Gleaner* reports that the New Aberdeen Division held a concert on August 18 for the purpose of raising funds to pay off the mortgage, and another on August 25 with a social to follow at the home of UNIA member, Mrs. Philips. Representatives of the division also said that they were grateful for the launch of the *Nova Scotia Gleaner* because they felt it would help to establish a better relationship with various people in the province.⁵² This is a sign of their desire to connect and strengthen black communities around the province.

Many of the UNIA's events were planned by the Black Cross Nurses auxiliary, which was launched on February 16, 1921. For male members the division initiated a branch of the Universal African Legion (UAL).⁵³ As in all other divisions, these auxiliary groups delivered UNIA members with a sense of purpose and, accordingly, a boost to their self-worth. Moreover, their active participation in planning and executing a variety of events for its members, with a focus on cultural cohesion, New Aberdeen members were playing a vital part in shaping a sense of community among the Barbadian immigrants.

Members in Glace Bay were extremely active and passionate about the Garvey Movement as demonstrated in their reports to *The Negro World*. For example, they wrote the following to the newspaper about their Easter event in 1922:

⁵¹ Theresa Brewster interview. The store, which was run by Vernon Braithwaite and Joe Hinsen, was also remembered as a hangout for neighbourhood kids. See also Annabelle Kirton interview; and Weeks, "Elmena Vaughn, Glace Bay," in *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 58.

⁵² "Glace Bay Notes: New Aberdeen Division Charter No. 35," *Nova Scotia Gleaner*, 3 October 1929.

⁵³ "New Aberdeen Division Organizes Black Cross Nurses," *The Negro World*, 2 April 1921; and "New Aberdeen Div. Stages Concert," *The Negro World*, 22 July 1922.

Our program was a bit lengthy, owing to the fact that our members have got in the movement, and also in their indomitable and unsurpassable leader, the Hon. Marcus Garvey, whom they intend to follow until the colors of the Red, the Black and the Green are planted on every summit in our motherland, Africa.⁵⁴

Indeed, more than the other divisions in Nova Scotia, the New Aberdeen Division sought longevity as a community mainstay. They did so by investing in property in both Glace Bay and Sydney as a means of generating revenue for the division. The New Aberdeen Division had various committees to suit different purposes, with fundraising being a main priority. Moneys earned through events and fundraisers were put into savings bonds and deposited in a safety deposit box. Over the years members were able to raise the funds to purchase plots of land along Grand Lake Road which connects Sydney and Glace Bay, and some property near Cape Breton University in Sydney. Houses and apartments on some of the land were rented it out to tenants who provided a good source of income for the division.⁵⁵

Sydney Division

According to Weeks, the Sydney Division dates back to 1919 and boasted a membership of 250.⁵⁶ Indeed, the Sydney Division was quite active in the 1920s, so much so that it attracted a visit from Vernal Williams, an executive from the Parent Body, who delivered a speech in Sydney during a Sunday Mass Meeting. In a report of the event, Williams wrote that “down in Sydney more than half the Negro population” is a member of the UNIA.⁵⁷ And, unlike Glace Bay with a majority of

⁵⁴ “Easter Lavishly Celebrated by New Aberdeen, N.S., Div.,” *The Negro World*, 27 May 1922.

⁵⁵ Interviews with former members do not reveal the exact date(s) of purchase for the property. However, it was still owned by the division at the time the interviews were recorded in the 1970s. See Neville Gibson, recorded interview by Elizabeth Beaton, 1984, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute; and Theresa Brewster interview.

⁵⁶ Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 37.

⁵⁷ Members from Glace Bay were also in attendance for Williams’ speech. See “Sydney N.S. Division of the U.N.I.A. Stages Big Mass Meeting,” *The Negro World*, 5 March 1921; and “Canadian Divisions U.N.I.A. Making Preparations for August Convention,” *The Negro World*, 25 June 1921.

Barbadian members, the membership in Sydney included blacks from several cultural backgrounds. West Indians, African Americans, and even native-born black Canadians joined the UNIA in Sydney.⁵⁸

The UNIA was very popular among both men and women in Sydney. By 1921 the Sydney Division had launched a variety of auxiliary groups to cater to both genders, including a Ladies Division, the Black Cross Nurses, and the Universal African Legion.⁵⁹ One member, Annabelle Kirton, remembers the women wearing special dresses (likely the BCN) and the men in Panama hats (likely the UAL) they had ordered directly from the West Indies.⁶⁰ Beryl Braithwaite claims that the Black Cross Nurses in Sydney actually served as midwives, “and they would go and they would help women look after their children and clean their homes.”⁶¹ The Sydney Division also had two locally-famous bands: the UNIA Band and the West Indian Brass Band. The bands played at all types of events, from dances to concerts to SMMs to funerals.⁶² Interviews with former members show a profound fondness for the bands. For example, Winston Ruck recalled that he looked forward to hearing the bands play at every type of occasion. He said that they usually played on the ships that took members on picnic excursions during the summer months. Ruck also said that the UNIA band played at his father’s funeral in 1936, which he alleged was the last time the UNIA Band played together.⁶³ Both the UNIA Band and West Indian Brass Band ended their runs in the 1930s.

⁵⁸ Annabelle Kirton interview.

⁵⁹ “Sydney N.S. Division of the U.N.I.A. Stages Big Mass Meeting,” *The Negro World*, 5 March 1921; “The U.N.I.A. in Sydney, Canada, Installs Officers,” *The Negro World*, 19 March 1921; and “Commissioner [C]reese Puts Sydney Division on its Feet,” *The Negro World*, 1 April 1922.

⁶⁰ Annabelle Kirton interview.

⁶¹ Weeks, “Beryl Braithwaite, Whitney Pier,” in *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 71.

⁶² Cape Breton Black/West Indian Community Scrapbook, Beaton Institute.

⁶³ Winston Ruck interview; Annabelle Kirton interview; and Vernal Tull, recorded interview with Elizabeth Beaton, 1983, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute. Vernal Tull claimed that despite the overwhelming

Although the reason for this is uncertain, one speculates that the financial difficulties of the Great Depression led to their decline.

The UNIA Hall in Sydney was located on Lingan Road near Tupper Street.⁶⁴ The Hall quickly became the black population's central meeting place for secular events. Interviews with former members reveal that community events were always held at the UNIA Hall in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁶⁵ Sometime in the 1920s members of the Sydney Division, including Neville Gibson, Bill Harris, A. Brewster, and John Armstrong, purchased the land next door to the Hall and built a tennis court there to provide an additional source of recreation for black youths, although everyone in the community was allowed to use it.⁶⁶ In its heyday, the Sydney Division met once a week on Sundays where a full program of speeches, choral performances, poems, and religious features like prayers and hymns could be expected.⁶⁷ As in Montreal and Toronto, the programs at Sunday Mass Meetings were meant to both educate and entertain the audience. Speeches on African brotherhood and history were meant to inform and inspire, while poems and songs by black artists encouraged pride in members' shared African roots.

In later years, the division met less frequently – about once a month. However, they hosted various summer activities, especially picnics, as a means of staying connected to the black communities of Cape Breton Island. The picnics, particularly a large one held in August to celebrate Marcus Garvey's birthday, drew participants from Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford. The Garvey Day picnic, which was similar to the Big Picnics hosted by the Toronto Division, was a full

West Indian population, the bands did not play calypso music. West Indians played calypso music and sang traditional songs in their homes.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Annabelle Kirton interview.

⁶⁶ Neville Gibson interview.

⁶⁷ "Sydney N.S. Division of the U.N.I.A. Stages Big Mass Meeting," *The Negro World*, 5 March 1921.

day of festivities, beginning with a parade led by the UNIA Band, followed by a picnic at a local park. Guests would take a boat over to the picnic grounds in the morning and return home before dusk so that everyone could head over to the UNIA Hall for a dance that evening.⁶⁸

As in Montreal and Toronto, the UNIA Halls on Cape Breton Island were crucial meeting places not just for UNIA members, but for other community organizations, too. The Sydney Division welcomed any and all clubs to use the Hall for functions and special events. For example, *The Free Lance* reported that in 1935, “The West Indian Cricket Club gave a dance at the U.N.I.A. hall Easter Monday”, and then on May 13 the Coloured Maroons Juvenile Soft Ball Club hosted a large concert and dance for the town’s black youths. The event was called “[o]ne of the most spectacular events in the history of dramatics among the Negroes in Sydney.”⁶⁹

Despite its early popularity, the Sydney Division was already showing signs of struggle by the late 1920s. The *Nova Scotia Gleaner* reports in 1929 that the Sydney Division had not been keeping up to the position it had formerly held in the community. As a result, the division was reorganized on September 15 and members, numbering only twenty-three by this time, elected a new slate of officers.⁷⁰

New Waterford Division

Although an exact launch date is not known, we know that chartered division number twenty-four in New Waterford was up and running by May of 1921. However, it had far fewer members than the divisions in Sydney and Glace Bay, with one report in *The Negro World* admitting

⁶⁸ Neville Gibson, Annabelle Kirton, and Winston Ruck interviews.

⁶⁹ “Sydney, N.S.” *The Free Lance*, 8 June 1935

⁷⁰ “U.N.I.A. Reorganized,” *The Nova Scotia Gleaner*, 5 October 1929. Eight more members paid up at this reorganizing meeting.

that there was only a “small amount of members in our locality.”⁷¹ As mentioned above, New Waterford had a much smaller black population than either Glace Bay or Sydney, therefore it is natural to assume that their division would have fewer members. When they first opened, members “gathered in a little shack.” They were later able to rent a building for UNIA meetings, but “had to go to the Italian Hall when they wanted recreation.”⁷² This division may not have existed without help from members from the New Aberdeen Division who held a membership drive in New Waterford in May of 1921, garnering five new members at that time.⁷³

There are no records to indicate how many auxiliary branches the New Waterford Division had; their small size would suggest they had few. However, the New Waterford Division was renowned for their “splendid” UNIA Choir. A report in *The Negro World* shows that they contributed greatly to the Sydney Division’s Garvey Day celebration on August 7, 1927, performing a number of tunes for the crowd that day.⁷⁴ In addition to local events, members in New Waterford contributed financially to the broader Garvey Movement; several names appear on donation lists for the Marcus Garvey Defense Fund, for example.⁷⁵

After years of struggling to purchase a property for community events, the black community finally acquired a two-story building on September 1, 1929, which they called New Waterford Hall. It was the official meeting place for the New Waterford Division of the UNIA, but it also took in boarders and hosted the church services of All Saints Anglican Church congregation. Albert Francis

⁷¹ “The U.N.I.A. in New Waterford, Can., Elects Officers Nov. 20, 1922,” *The Negro World*, 2 December 1922.

⁷² “New Waterford Notes: New Hall Opened,” *The Nova Scotia Gleaner*, 5 October 1929.

⁷³ The New Aberdeen/Glace Bay members who held the membership drive were: H. Rayside, W. Griffith, A. Marshall, A. Francis, and W.T. Hunte. The Black Cross Nurses of Glace Bay threw a masquerade ball the next day as another method of attracting new members to the UNIA in New Waterford. See “New Aberdeen Division on Membership Drive,” *The Negro World*, 18 June 1921.

⁷⁴ “Sydney, Nova Scotia,” *The Negro World*, 10 September 1927.

⁷⁵ “Marcus Garvey Defense Fund,” *The Negro World*, 18 November 1922.

from the New Aberdeen Division spoke at an event to inaugurate the new building, revealing that by this time “there are only about 36 [black] men and women in New Waterford.”⁷⁶ Because the population was so small, it made sense for the black community to pool their resources and purchase one multipurpose building to suit a variety of needs.

Community-Building at Home and Abroad

The UNIA in Cape Breton linked the island’s black population and served as an instrument by which to expand both the organization and their sense of community. Given the close proximity of Cape Breton’s three divisions, members from each met frequently for mass meetings and special events. Glace Bay and New Waterford are nearly equidistant from Sydney, roughly twenty kilometres; New Waterford and Glace Bay are even closer at just sixteen kilometres apart.

The appeal among Cape Breton’s Garveyites to get together reflected not only the UNIA’s philosophy of racial unity, but also the black communities’ desire to broaden their social circles with like-minded people. The physical geography of the island made it convenient for Cape Breton’s black population to meet. At the same time, the UNIA provided the ideal outlet for them to extend and strengthen their Afrocentric community.

Albert Francis, the founder and president of the New Aberdeen Division, strongly believed that the UNIA’s practice of unifying people of African descent empowered and “improved life for the Negro race.” His conviction in this philosophy was such that he personally “took an active part in organizing a number of UNIA Divisions in eastern Nova Scotia, including the one in New Glasgow.” One report in *The Negro World* claims that Francis visited the New Glasgow Division,

⁷⁶ “New Waterford Notes: New Hall Opened,” *The Nova Scotia Gleaner*, 5 October 1929.

chartered number 419, in the summer of 1921. The people there were shown gratitude for his visit and were “overwhelmed with joy to have the U.N.I.A. there.”⁷⁷

Reports in *The Negro World* show that the three divisions on Cape Breton Island were collaborating as early as 1922. For example, the New Aberdeen Division hosted a special Easter event that year, with members from New Waterford in attendance. The New Waterford Choir entertained the crowd with a number of songs, while members from both divisions presented speeches, recitations, and musical performances. The audience agreed “that with the advent of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the unification of Negroes everywhere, the redemption of Africa will be a reality.” Another event hosted by the Sydney Division on August 31, 1925 attracted visitors from the New Aberdeen and New Waterford Divisions, with all enjoying both a parade and mass meeting.⁷⁸ In 1927 the divisions celebrated Garvey Day all together on August 7 in Sydney. The event drew such a large crowd that day that it “forced the officers to procure seats from the neighboring homes.”⁷⁹ In Glace Bay, the UNIA held a picnic on May 24, 1935 in honour of Empire Day which included an afternoon luncheon and a dance in the evening. Members from all three divisions were present at this event, with some remarking that “[i]t looked to us from the progress made that there is much united effort and co-operation among the members of the race at this end.”⁸⁰ Perhaps more demonstrative of their close relationship is an article regarding “a local convention” held on May 7, 1933 in Glace Bay that was attended by members from all three divisions. The convention’s purpose was to secure “closer unity with the organization

⁷⁷ Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 38; and “Albert Francis, Local Organizer of New Aberdeen Division of U.N.I.A. and A.C.L., C.B. Canada,” *The Negro World*, 13 August 1921.

⁷⁸ “Easter Lavishly Celebrated by New Aberdeen, N.S., Div.,” *The Negro World*, 27 May 1922; and “Sydney, Nova Scotia,” *The Negro World*, 3 October 1925.

⁷⁹ “Sydney, Nova Scotia,” *The Negro World*, 10 September 1927.

⁸⁰ “Glace Bay Notes,” *The Free Lance*, 29 June 1935.

and to show the world a united front, for the cause of ‘Africa for the Africans, at home and abroad.’”⁸¹ Collaborations like this were possible because the three divisions pooled their resources and hired a bus to pick up members from the various divisions and bring them to the agreed-upon location of a particular UNIA meeting or event.⁸²

The meals served at UNIA events was also meant to be a unifying feature for the majority Caribbean population. The food, which was usually prepared by the Women’s Auxiliary or Black Cross Nurses, was traditional West Indian fare such as fish, chicken and rice, ox tail, pork hocks, and black pudding. A favourite West Indian dish served at community events was cou-cou, a cornmeal porridge, similar to grits or polenta, which is cooked with fish, okra, and salted meat.⁸³ Serving traditional West Indian foods at UNIA functions was an expression and celebration of a shared cultural identity among Caribbean immigrants, as well as a vehicle through which to welcome and unite members from the various UNIA divisions who were either African American or native-born black Canadians.

The spirit of unity among Cape Breton’s black communities went far beyond the local. In fact, it manifested itself at both the national and international levels. Their interest in the international affairs of the UNIA began very early on as George D. Creese and Richard E. Riley, both active members from the New Aberdeen Division, represented the eastern Canadian divisions at the 1920 UNIA Convention in Harlem. Not only did Creese speak to the delegation on the issues facing blacks in this part of the world, but the two men also appear as signatories on the original

⁸¹ “New Aberdeen Cape Breton, Can.,” *The Negro World*, 3 June 1933. Beryl Braithwaite recalls that members from the various divisions met often for special meetings and events. See Weeks, “Beryl Braithwaite, Whitney Pier,” in *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 70.

⁸² Theresa Brewster interview.

⁸³ Winston Ruck, Vernal Tull and Theresa Brewster interviews; and “Black Culture of Whitney Pier,” Whitney Pier Project, Beaton Institute.

UNIA Declaration of Rights.⁸⁴ The two men attended the convention again the following year, and on this occasion Garvey appointed Creese to the position of High Commissioner of Canada. It was Creese's duty in this role to help spread the movement across Canada, which he did by working to open at least one division in each province by 1922. Creese traveled from coast to coast, helping local black communities to set up UNIA divisions in their hometowns, and also visiting existing divisions to offer support and encourage membership growth. He began his trip in western Canada and made his way back east, opening divisions in Halifax, Africville, and Preston before ending in Saint John, New Brunswick on 21 April 1922.⁸⁵ The opening of this division completed Creese's goal of having a least one in each province, except for Prince Edward Island which did not have a large enough black population to sustain a branch of the organization, and for Newfoundland which did not become a Canadian province until 1949.⁸⁶

Like Albert Francis mentioned above, Creese's participation in the UNIA reflected his profound belief in racial unity across borders. This is clearly demonstrated in his role as High Commissioner of Canada where he was successful in bonding black communities in Canada through collective membership to the UNIA. He cared deeply about providing opportunities for local Cape Bretoners to get together. A prime example of this is the organization of a night school for adults in June of 1921 which operated out of the Sydney Division's UNIA Hall. Creese created a program

⁸⁴ Hill, "Reports of the Convention," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 535, 538 note 5; and "Declaration of Rights," 2: 578-9, note 8. Riley was a member of the Universal African Legion in Glace Bay.

⁸⁵ Creese launched the three divisions between April 6 and 7, 1922. The ones in Africville and Preston were very small in size and had few members. The Halifax Division held some distinguished citizens on their executive council, including Beresford A. Husbands, a Barbadian-born businessman and later founder of the Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League, and Rev. Cecil A. Stewart, the Jamaican-born pastor of Zion African Episcopal Church in Halifax and founder of the Afro-Community Church in Toronto. See *The Negro World*, 29 April 1922.

⁸⁶ "St. John, New Brunswick, Falls in Line For African Redemption," *The Negro World*, 26 May 1922. It was on this tour of Canada when Creese helped to establish a division in Halifax, Preston, and Africville. See *The Negro World*, 29 April 1922. For more on his visits around Canada, see "High Commissioner Geo. D. Creese, Establishes a Division of U.N.I.A. in the Frozen Northwest Territories of Canada," *NW*, 10 December 1921; "Hon. Capt. E.A. Gaines and Hon. Geo. D. Creese Visit Vancouver, B.C.," *NW*, 21 January 1922; "Commissioner [C]reese Puts Sydney Division on its Feet," *NW*, 1 April 1922; and "Com. Creese Visits Windsor, Ontario," *NW*, 27 May 1922.

that was aimed at “advancing them a great deal forward through life’s commercial and industrial pathway.” The school welcomed adult students from Sydney and the neighbouring towns, who, as mentioned, were primarily labourers in the steel plants and coal mines, to advance their education in arithmetic, public speaking, grammar, and shorthand. Creese hoped to rekindle in them a penchant for learning and curiosity about the world, “and so recall to memory the youthful days spent at school when we were boys and girls.”⁸⁷ More than anything the school served as a meeting place for local black residents, this time under the pretext of self-improvement, and which was a central tenet of the UNIA.

Creese’s desire for cooperation was also seen at the 1922 UNIA Convention in Harlem where he addressed the delegation on, what was to him, “a very important matter.” He felt that the delegation “should devote some time to finding ways and means to secure better relationship between the parent body and the divisions. He thought it very necessary that there should be a better understanding” of operations at both the local and international levels.⁸⁸ Although it is not clear if any efforts were made by the delegation to address this concern, it remains evident that Creese played an active role at these conventions, thereby giving Nova Scotia an international presence within the organization.

Although it does not appear that any of the Nova Scotia divisions played a direct role in acquiring ships for the Black Star Line, it bears mentioning that the enterprise’s first ship was purchased in Nova Scotia. In March of 1920, the BSL acquired the *S.S. Yarmouth* from the North American Shipping Corporation, located in Halifax. Garvey and the BSL executives from the Parent Body actually had to incorporate a branch of the original enterprise called the Black Star Line of

⁸⁷ “Sydney Division Opens Night School,” *The Negro World*, 25 June 1921. The teachers were Creese, P.A. Barrow (secretary for the Sydney Division), J. Sergeant, A.S. Trotman, I. Phillips, and A. Cambridge.

⁸⁸ Hill, “Convention Report,” *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985), 4: 935.

Canada, Ltd., in order to “facilitate the purchase of the *Yarmouth*. However, the Canadian Department of Marine refused to register the bill of sale to the *Yarmouth* when the BSL of Canada could not satisfy the department as to its financial condition.” As a result, the BSL operated the *Yarmouth*, which they renamed the *S.S. Frederick Douglass*, “under a charter agreement with the North American Shipping Line.”⁸⁹ Once the old ship had been reconditioned, it operated for a few years as a freight carrier between the United States and the Caribbean, captained by former Royal Naval officer, Joshua Cockburn.

Nova Scotian Garveyites were enthusiastic about the BSL and readily purchased shares in the enterprise.⁹⁰ Cape Bretoners also donated generously to the Marcus Garvey Defense Fund when Garvey was imprisoned on counts of mail fraud in relation to the BSL. Long lists of donors from Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford can be seen alongside the names of Garveyites from across Canada and around the world who all wished to contribute financial aid to cover Garvey’s legal fees.⁹¹ The BSL and the financial contributions are just a few ways in which the Cape Breton Divisions made themselves visible on an international scale. Their financial investment in the BSL and their donations to the Defense Fund, in addition to their written reports in *The Negro World* on the events of local divisions, show a desire on the part of Cape Bretoners to be part of an international community working toward a common goal.

Nova Scotia maintained an international presence within the UNIA into the late 1930s. Garvey visited the province on what would be his last speaking tour of Canada in 1937 after teaching the first School of African Philosophy in Toronto. He spoke first at Menelik Hall in

⁸⁹ Hill, “Article in the *New York News*,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 2: 268-9; “Report by Special Agent Mortimer J. Davis,” 4: 394 and 429; and “Closing Address to the Jury by Marcus Garvey,” (Berkeley: UC Press, 1987), 5: 338.

⁹⁰ Neville Gibson interpreted the BSL as an enterprise to be used to go to Africa to help liberate the African population. Neville Gibson interview.

⁹¹ “Marcus Garvey’s Defense Fund,” *The Negro World*, 18 November 1922 and 25 November 1922.

Sydney on October 1, 1937, and then again on October 7 in Halifax at the Bethel Church. It was his first (and only) visit to Nova Scotia. In Sydney, Garvey told the crowd he was impressed by “the hearty reception you gave me this morning,” and “flattered with the genuine and spontaneous hospitality extended to me, evidenced by your large and truly representative gathering.” The speech centred on the continued need for an Africa for the Africans. He said, “Minorities wherever they happen to find themselves should unite because they are in the midst of a majority. The temper of the majority cannot always be guaranteed even with the best Government,” citing the recent rise of Nazi Germany as an example. Thus, it was important for black people to find their place in the world, which to Garvey meant Africa. In this speech, Garvey uttered the sentence which would later be made famous in the lyrics of “Redemption Song” by Bob Marley. He promised, “We are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind.”⁹² The speeches and a report on his travels in eastern Canada appeared in the *Black Man*, the UNIA’s official publication after *The Negro World* ceased in 1933. He boasted, “I had the most splendid receptions in the Maritime Provinces and was overwhelmingly received at Sydney and Glace Bay.”⁹³ The speeches and his report, which portrayed the Nova Scotian divisions in a positive light, would have been read by Garvey’s followers around the world. In his speech in Halifax, of which the subject was “The Making of Self,” Garvey noted that there were no UNIA divisions or any representatives of the organization in that city or in Saint John, New Brunswick.⁹⁴ In doing so, Garvey confirmed that the divisions in these two cities had already closed

⁹² Garvey also visited Glace Bay and New Waterford before venturing to Halifax. Hill, “Speech by Marcus Garvey,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 788-93. The song lyrics read, “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds.” See Bob Marley, “Redemption Song,” *Uprising*, Island Records, 1980.

⁹³ Hill, “Editorial by Marcus Garvey in the Black Man,” *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1991), 7: 816. Garvey also noted that from Halifax he boarded the *S.S. Lady Nelson* for a trip to the British West Indies and South America.

⁹⁴ In the speech Garvey actually says “St. Johns,” and Hill speculates that Garvey meant the capital of Newfoundland. However, I believe Garvey simply misspoke and meant to say “Saint John” in reference to the city in New Brunswick

by this time. Since the tiny communities of Preston and Africville were so close to the city of Halifax, I conclude that their UNIA divisions had also folded. Nevertheless, Garvey's speaking tour in Nova Scotia reveals that the divisions on Cape Breton Island were active into the 1930s, and trying to remain resilient during the Depression years.

When Secular Meets Spiritual: The UNIA in Sydney and St. Philip's African Orthodox Church

Randall Burkett argues that "there has been an integral relationship throughout American history between Black religion and Black radicalism."⁹⁵ This relationship manifested itself in the UNIA and in an offshoot Christian sect called the African Orthodox Church. The UNIA incorporated elements of Christian tradition into its doctrine and its purpose. Among the UNIA's main objectives was "to promote a conscientious Spiritual worship among the native tribes of Africa," while boasting an official motto of "One God! One Aim! One Destiny!"⁹⁶ The UNIA's Christian ethos was put into practice weekly at Sunday Mass Meetings in the form of group prayers and hymns. Such religious practices were under the jurisdiction of each local division's Chaplain. Burkett explains, "Each chapter or division was required by the UNIA constitution to select a chaplain, whose duty it was to attend to the spiritual concerns of the members. All chaplains were under the direction of the Chaplain-General, who was a member of the High Executive Council, the UNIA's ruling body." The UNIA's first Chaplain-General, elected to the position at the UNIA

since it had once boasted a UNIA division, and because he mentions visiting "Nova Scotia and New Brunswick" in a report on his travels. Newfoundland was not yet a Canadian province at this time and thus would not have been on the itinerary for Garvey's speaking tour. See Hill "Speech by Marcus Garvey," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 795 and "Editorial by Marcus Garvey in the *Black Man*," 7: 816.

⁹⁵ Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978), 5.

⁹⁶ Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., "Aims and Objects of Movement for Solution to Negro Problem," in *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, or Africa for the Africans*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1967), 38.

International Convention in 1920, was George Alexander McGuire. Born in Antigua in 1866, McGuire was baptized in the Anglican Church but would later become an ordained pastor within the American Episcopal Church in 1897.⁹⁷ Within the Episcopal Church McGuire came to realize that there was a great deal of racial prejudice against blacks within the congregation. Kimberly Harding notes that “most black clergy were not welcome into the administration.” This discrimination, which prevented black clergy from taking on administrative or managerial roles, led McGuire to conclude that blacks and whites should worship separately. That way, black clergy would have equal access to higher ranking positions within the church.⁹⁸

Naturally, McGuire was drawn to the UNIA’s message of racial separatism. He joined the UNIA in 1919, and one year later he was elected to the post of Chaplain-General, or as Garvey would have it, the Archbishop of Ethiopia.⁹⁹ In this role he wrote the UNIA’s *Universal Negro Ritual*, which was modelled on the Book of Common Prayer, and also the *Universal Negro Catechism*. All Chaplains at the local level were obligated to study the UNIA’s *Ritual* book, “which prescribed the standard order of service to be followed in UNIA meetings.” Aside from the Order for Sunday Mass Meetings, the *Ritual* included both a baptismal and burial service for UNIA members. On occasion, marriages would also take place under the direction of the UNIA’s chaplain. “McGuire regarded the *Universal Negro Catechism* as an important instrument by which the history, purpose, and theology of the Universal Negro Improvement Association could be disseminated” to its members. It contained four sections “devoted to religious knowledge, historical knowledge, Constitution and Laws of the UNIA, and the Declaration of Independence of the UNIA.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 29, 72; and Kimberly L. Harding, “St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church: A Case Study of a Unique Religious Institution,” (MA Thesis, Acadia University, 1998), 47.

⁹⁸ Harding, “St. Philip’s,” 49-50.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁰ Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 29, 77, and 82-3.

In his role of influence, McGuire began to fathom “an official Black church tied to the organization.” So in 1920 he launched a new church meant to serve the needs of black worshippers called the Independent Episcopal Church in New York City.¹⁰¹ The church would be renamed the African Orthodox Church (AOC) the following year, likely in an attempt to show a stronger connection to the UNIA and its focus on Africa as a common motherland.

To be sure, the AOC was *not* directly linked to the UNIA, meaning it was not considered the “official” church of the association. Evidence of this can be determined by what is absent from St. Philip’s AOC Minute Book. I examined all entries between 1931 and 1943 and found nothing written on the UNIA. This indicates that their programs did not overlap. However, it was McGuire’s intention to make his church the official spiritual outlet of the UNIA. He credited Garvey and the UNIA for inspiring his new Afrocentric church, and the UNIA’s promotion of the philosophies of race pride and self-reliance had greatly impacted McGuire in a personal way.¹⁰² For McGuire, hitching his new church to the UNIA would be an ideal way to see the AOC grow quickly. As Harding contends, “Within the UNIA, McGuire had a forum for his beliefs, an audience sympathetic to those beliefs and the resources to make such a venture viable.”¹⁰³

McGuire’s main obstacle was Garvey himself. Garvey did not support the idea of a singular church to represent the UNIA and its members. While McGuire and Garvey both agreed “that the image of a Black God was liberating for the Black community,” Garvey did not want to risk alienating members who came from a variety of religious denominations, nor dictate their religious beliefs.¹⁰⁴ Almost immediately the UNIA made efforts to disassociate itself from the AOC. Garvey

¹⁰¹ Harding, “St. Philip’s,” 52.

¹⁰² Ibid., 54; and Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 90.

¹⁰³ Harding, “St. Philip’s,” 54.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 56.

publically announced that the UNIA had no affiliation with the AOC,¹⁰⁵ and he forced McGuire to resign from the post of Chaplain-General to prove the point. However, once the distinction between the two associations had been made clear, Garvey re-instated McGuire as the UNIA's Honorary Chaplain-General in 1924 for his foundational work in the organization.¹⁰⁶

While the AOC was never the official church or an auxiliary of the UNIA, the two organizations are linked together in time, doctrine, and even membership, especially in Sydney, Nova Scotia. The UNIA and AOC developed at roughly the same time, with the UNIA pre-dating the church by only six years. And, as mentioned, the UNIA served to educate and empower McGuire on the topics of race pride and black self-reliance. Thus the AOC likely would not exist without the UNIA, which had motivated McGuire to open an independent Afrocentric church. This church appealed to McGuire's fellow Garveyites who espoused the same beliefs in a black God, a staunch Christian tradition, and an African motherland. Harding rightfully contends, "The members of the UNIA had strong racial consciousness so it would only seem fitting for them to join a church wherein the same appreciation for ethnicity was to be found."¹⁰⁷ In Sydney, memberships to both the UNIA and AOC overlapped, and "each organization supported the other."¹⁰⁸

The congregation at St. Philip's AOC in Sydney dates to 1921. It is unclear whether the arrival of the AOC in Sydney was the result of proselytizing by McGuire and other church elders, or if the black community in Sydney initiated communications with AOC headquarters. Jennifer Reid,

¹⁰⁵ Even as late as 1938 Garvey was asserting the differences between the UNIA and AOC. At the UNIA Convention in Toronto Garvey said, "Let the Church[es] alone, let them rise or die by themselves. Your duty is to preach the U.N.I.A." See Hill, "Official Minutes of the Eighth International UNIA Convention," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 7: 845.

¹⁰⁶ Harding, "St. Philip's," 56; and Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 95 and 98.

¹⁰⁷ Harding, "St. Philip's," 57.

¹⁰⁸ Jennifer I.M. Reid, "Points of Contact: A Wachian reappraisal of the African Orthodox Church and the early steel industry in Sydney, Nova Scotia," *Studies in Religion/ Sciences Religieuses* 30, 3-4 (2001): 325 and 330.

for example, contends that “a group of steel workers” sent a request to McGuire, whom they knew as the Chaplain-General of the UNIA, to establish a branch of the AOC in Sydney. An entry in the Journal of the AOC corroborates Reid’s claim. It notes, “Several persons desirous of having a clergyman of their own race petitioned the Archbishop George Alexander McGuire, then Chaplain-General of the U.N.I.A.”¹⁰⁹ Other scholars contend that, at the behest of McGuire, the Rev. Father William Ernest Roberson was sent to Sydney in June of 1921 “to start the work of THE AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH in Canada.”¹¹⁰ Former Garveyite and St. Philip’s member, Vernal Tull, also claimed that the West Indians did *not* ask for an AOC directly. Rather, McGuire had been acquainted with some people living in Sydney, and was therefore aware of the town’s its existence as well as its black community which lacked a unified black church. Thus, Sydney seemed a logical place for McGuire to launch his church.¹¹¹

Based on oral histories, Elizabeth Beaton determined that racism within the existing churches in Sydney led the West Indian community to seek an alternative place to worship. She asserts that while black worshippers were technically welcome to attend services at St. Alban’s Anglican Church, there was no seating available to them because all the pews were already rented out to white congregants. Even more blatant was the priest’s refusal to perform funeral services for black parishioners.¹¹² This racial bigotry, according to Beaton, served as a catalyst for some blacks in Sydney to ask McGuire to organize a branch of the AOC.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Reid, “Points of Contact,” 330; Harding, “St. Philip’s,” 79; and Journal of the African Orthodox Church, 1926-31, Manuscript Holdings, Religious Papers, Beaton Institute. The Journal states that the congregation was formed on Sunday, August 14, 1921.

¹¹⁰ Rev. A.C. Terry-Thompson, *The History of the African Orthodox Church* (New York: Beacon Press, 1956), 100.

¹¹¹ Neville Gibson interview.

¹¹² Harding, “St. Philip’s,” 53; and Reid, “Points of Contact,” 330. Reid also gives an example of Roman Catholics who refused to sit next to West Indian immigrants at Sunday mass in 1931.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Beaton Planetta, “Case Studies: St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church, Holy Ghost Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, St. Mary’s Polish Church,” for the Heritage Division of the Department of Culture, Recreation, and

Harding also notes that the black community in Sydney lacked a cohesive church when compared to the Italians, Polish, Hungarians, Greeks, and Ukrainians. Each of these immigrant groups were typically of the same religion (most Italians were Roman Catholic, for example), thus they would transplant their church traditions from Europe to Cape Breton. “The parish was clearly a way in which to maintain continuity with the old country and a place to experience a sense of community with people from the same ethnic group.” This was not the case for West Indians and African Americans in Sydney who were from various countries of origin and practiced a variety of different religions. Thus, a “neutral” church for blacks in Sydney that united people on the basis of race could help transcend religious and cultural barriers.¹¹⁴

It is no coincidence that the UNIA and AOC were developing at the same time in Sydney. Established just one year apart, both organizations reflect the black population’s desire to fashion a community based on a shared racial heritage by 1920. By creating both a secular and religious platform upon which to unite the black residents of Sydney, organizers of the Sydney Division and St. Philip’s AOC were maximizing their chances of forming a strong community bond based on race. The two organizations shared a common hierarchical figure in McGuire, as well as a belief in race pride and the philosophy of black self-sufficiency, that is the right to establish organizations for blacks, by blacks. Like the UNIA, the AOC was founded to empower and meet “the needs of the Black citizen.”¹¹⁵

Although the congregation began in 1921, they did not have a church building of their own for several years. In the meantime, the congregation used St. Cyprian’s Mission Church as a place of

Fitness, Province of Nova Scotia, 1983, 12, Manuscript Holdings, Personal Papers, Elizabeth Beaton-Planetta Collection, Beaton Institute.

¹¹⁴ Harding, “St. Philip’s,” 81.

¹¹⁵ Joyce M. Ruck, “History of the African Orthodox Church: St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church, Sydney, Nova Scotia,” in *Three Nova Scotia Black Churches: A Collection of Historical Essays* (Dartmouth: Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 1990), 2-3.

worship. They also sometimes used “a building on the corner of Lingan Road and Tupper Street,” which, according to insurance maps, was the UNIA Hall.¹¹⁶ This is confirmed in a speech by Garvey in December of 1921 where he claims to have received a telegram from George Creese which stated, “they had changed the Liberty Hall in Sydney, N.S., into some orthodox church.”¹¹⁷ The congregation met in these locations until December of 1925 when they “agreed to buy land on Hankard Street from Mr. William Fitzgerald.”¹¹⁸ The vacant land was bought thanks to donations from the parish and community, as well as through fundraising initiatives.¹¹⁹ The building that would become St. Philip’s was actually a former storage facility built by DISCO between 1900 and 1915. A member of the black community named Dr. Alvinus Calder approached DISCO and brokered a deal for the building by which the congregation would pay the company a ceremonial fee of one dollar. The building was moved on rollers to the property on Hankard Street in 1926 where it still stands to this day. Over the next two years parishioners volunteered their time and skills to renovate the building in order to make it suitable for church services. St. Philip’s was incorporated by the Province of Nova Scotia in February 1928 as an official religious organization, and officially opened their doors to the public on July 15 of that year.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Beaton Planetta, “Case Studies,” 12; Whitney Pier Insurance Maps, Whitney Pier Project, Manuscript Holdings, Ethnic Papers, Beaton Institute; Neville Gibson and Annabelle Kirton interviews; and Letter to D.G. Padmore from Elizabeth Beaton, Beaton Institute.

¹¹⁷ Hill, “Speech by Marcus Garvey,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 4: 292. The telegram from Creese also claimed that St. Philip’s AOC had “taken away the lease of the building of the U.N.I.A., and that there was great confusion and the people wanted to know whether we [w]ere first for the orthodox church or for the Universal Negro Improvement Association,” to which Garvey emphatically replied the UNIA “had nothing to do with McGuire’s church.” Sources show that there was some resistance against the church at first, but this was likely due to confusion over the UNIA’s stance on the AOC. Once Garvey clarified that it was not to be considered the official church of the UNIA and that membership to it was voluntary, tensions eased and St. Philip’s congregation grew steadily. See Vernal Tull interview, Beaton Institute, and Reid, “Points of Contact,” 330.

¹¹⁸ Terry-Thompson, *The History of the AOC*, 100; Interview T-2104 Beaton Institute.

¹¹⁹ Vernal Tull interview.

¹²⁰ Beaton Planetta, “Case Studies,” 2-4; Terry-Thompson, *The History of the AOC*, 100; Reid, “Points of Contact,” 333; and Ruck, “St. Philip’s AOC,” 8.

No records exist to indicate the exact membership of St. Philip's AOC. Harding estimates about 150 members in its early years based on the physical capacity of the church and on reports referring to the church being full on Sundays.¹²¹ Like the UNIA, the church attracted mainly West Indian immigrants and some African Americans. One estimate suggests that eighty percent of the congregation were from the Caribbean.¹²² Vernal Tull, a member of the Sydney Division and St. Philip's, recounted that the West Indian population embraced the name "African Orthodox Church" because they were comfortable with and conscious of their ethnic background.¹²³ This sense of pride in their African roots coincided with the teachings of Marcus Garvey who taught blacks to think for themselves. Garvey promoted to UNIA members that their God was black and that because of this, "Negroes are the chosen people; Africa is the promised land." McGuire latched onto these tenets and incorporated them into his independent church.¹²⁴

The UNIA in Sydney also influenced St. Philip's church services. For example, the Ethiopian National Anthem, which was always performed at Sunday Mass Meetings at the UNIA Hall, was also sung at St. Philip's Easter Mass in 1924. In addition, the UNIA band "gave a concert" at St. Philip's on October 3, 1926 and "[a]ddressed the audience on the Educational, Social, and Spiritual value of music." The UNIA band and/or the West Indian band would often perform and march in funerals for deceased parishioners.¹²⁵ Even leaders at St. Philip's AOC brought the

¹²¹ Harding, "St. Philip's," 9.

¹²² "Informal Religion," speech by Rev. Waterman, Beaton Institute.

¹²³ Vernal Tull interview; and Harding, "St. Philip's," 86.

¹²⁴ Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 7-8.

¹²⁵ The UNIA Band performed at the funeral of the Sydney Division's ex-president, James Hoyte, who died tragically in a car accident on August 17, 1927. The funeral itinerary consisted of a procession from Hoyte's home to the UNIA Hall "where services were conducted by Mr. Samuel Knight, chaplain of the division." The body was then moved to St. Cyprian's Church where a religious service was performed. The procession from the church to the cemetery "was headed by the U.N.I.A. band, playing 'The Dead March,' followed by the Black Cross Nurses, West Indian band, and Ancient Order of Foresters, of which [the] deceased was a member." Several of the pallbearers were UNIA members. See "Sydney, N.S.," *The Negro World*, 10 September 1927.

beliefs of the UNIA into the church. For example, St. Philip's third rector, the Venerable Archdeacon Dixon Egbert Philips (1925 - 35) was himself an immigrant from Tobago and also a devoted Garveyite who "carried within him a sense of pride in regards to his ethnic heritage as well as a tenacity, which he was able to instil within those under his spiritual care."¹²⁶

Even though St. Philip's was the predominant black church on Cape Breton Island, it did not prohibit whites from attending. This was quite unlike the UNIA which required all members to be of African heritage. Nevertheless, "[w]hile the constitution of the African Orthodox Church opens its membership to all races, it ... could be controlled or administered only by negroes" until 1981.¹²⁷

Harding's analysis on St. Philip's concludes that it was the sense of community offered by the church, and not necessarily its theology¹²⁸, that appealed to the black residents in Sydney. She writes, "People who were Methodist in Barbados, for example, might find it easier to justify going to a new AOC church versus an Anglican church."¹²⁹ This was certainly true for Neville Gibson and his wife. Gibson, a Methodist born in St. Vincent, and his wife, a Baptist from Tracadie, Nova Scotia, each refused to convert to the other's religion prior to their wedding. The solution was for both to join the AOC, and the couple was married at St. Philip's in 1935.¹³⁰ That blacks in Sydney were so willing to adopt a new church is indication of their profound desire for community. St. Philip's served as an ideal tool to help shape the cohesive black community Sydney residents wanted. That St. Philip's was influenced by the community's primary secular organization, the UNIA, simply

¹²⁶ Harding, "St. Philip's," 86; Journal of the AOC, Beaton Institute, 3 October 1926; "Informal Religion," speech by Rev. Waterman, Beaton Institute; and Ruck, "St. Philip's AOC," 7.

¹²⁷ Beaton-Planetta, "Case Studies," 14; Harding, "St. Philip's," 88.

¹²⁸ The AOC's theology is "a blend of Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions." Since most blacks in North America were either Protestant or Catholic at the time, the AOC's program was sure to appeal to many black Christians. See Harding, "St. Philip's," 84.

¹²⁹ Harding, "St. Philip's," 81, 92.

¹³⁰ Neville Gibson interview.

made it more attractive to black residents in Sydney as it provided continuity between their secular and religious institutions.

Decline of the UNIA in Cape Breton

Not unlike other divisions in Canada, by the late 1920s the Cape Breton divisions had experienced a lull in active participation. A report about Sydney's Garvey Day celebration on August 7, 1927 is telling of this point. It reads, "The crowded hall reminded us of the many splendid public gatherings that have gathered to the call of the Red, Black and Green in the not distant past. The old spirit is being revived from day to day and the good work that has been started will never be allowed to fall to the ground."¹³¹ The imprisonment of Marcus Garvey in 1923 had clearly stripped some of vitality out of the movement in Cape Breton, just as it had around the world. Nevertheless, the report indicates an enduring commitment to the UNIA and a promise to restore their divisions to the verve it once had.

In Sydney, the arrival of a new black community centre inadvertently led to the demise of their UNIA division. Menelik Hall was built between 1935 and 1936 to serve as a new community centre for the black community of Sydney. It was the brainchild of Dr. Alvinus Calder and several others, including Arthur Coward, Mr. Parris, and A. Marsh. The project was funded by selling shares in the building to prospective buyers for fifteen dollars a share, thus allowing the community to own their own centre. Those who owned shares in the building formed a social alliance known as the Ethiopian Community Club. Located on the corner of Tupper and Laurier Streets, it provided a neighbourhood hangout for children after school hours.¹³² The Hall was also used for various community events, including banquets, dances, boxing and volleyball matches, floor hockey, plays,

¹³¹ "Sydney, Nova Scotia," *The Negro World*, 10 September 1927.

¹³² "Black Culture of Whitney Pier," Whitney Pier Project, Beaton Institute.

and meetings of other local clubs like the Ancient Order of Foresters and the Ethiopian Community Men's Club.¹³³

Menelik Hall was named after the former Emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik II. Under his reign, Ethiopia famously defeated the Italian army during the First Italo-Ethiopian War in 1896. To the founders of Menelik Hall, the emperor was heroic and steadfast in the fight against European colonialism and thus represented the epitome of African independence. Not by coincidence, the construction of Menelik Hall was conceived during the period of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, and was thus inspired by the Ethiopian Emperor at that time, Haile Selassie.¹³⁴ One cannot help but notice the link between Garvey's message for a redeemed and sovereign Africa and the choice to name a new black community centre after an African king. As mentioned in previous chapters on the Toronto and Montreal Divisions, UNIA members strongly sided with the Ethiopians and even sent them supplies to aid in their war effort. The connection exposes Garvey's influence on the black communities of Cape Breton in terms of their belief in an Africa for the Africans.

The opening of Menelik Hall was met with great enthusiasm by the black community. However, it unwittingly contributed to the downfall of the Sydney Division. Neville Gibson's interview is telling in this regard. He remarked that at first, members enjoyed events at both the UNIA Hall and Menelik Hall. Indeed, when Garvey visited Sydney in 1937 to give a speech he was received at the newly-constructed Menelik Hall. Yet after a few years, many UNIA members stopped paying their membership dues.¹³⁵ Perhaps these people felt that they could have all the benefits of their UNIA membership, that is, a sense of community, a place for recreational events, and an outlet to share their African heritage, without the financial burden of UNIA membership

¹³³ Vernal Tull interview; and Cape Breton Black/West Indian Community Scrapbook, Beaton Institute.

¹³⁴ Neville Gibson interview.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

dues. According to Theresa Brewster the Sydney Division lasted until 1946. She claims that there had been a fire at the UNIA Hall in Sydney, and this likely sounded the death knell for the division.¹³⁶ With Menelik Hall still operating and serving the black community of Sydney, there was little need to re-build the UNIA Hall.

To be sure, the UNIA divisions on Cape Breton Island had been struggling to keep membership numbers up for many years. As early as 1929 the Sydney Division was reporting difficulties in getting members to pay their dues, citing only twenty-three that were paid up by September of that year.¹³⁷ The Depression Years were very hard on the black communities of Cape Breton, as they were in all parts of the country. Yet through co-operation, all three of the island's divisions managed to stay afloat during these trying times.

Membership declines were not linked to a decline in work in the iron and steel industries. On the contrary, DOSCO and Dominion Coal experienced a boom period during the Second World War as the war effort required as much steel as possible to produce weapons, submarines, and other equipment. However, the children of early West Indian and African-American immigrants began to seek other types of work outside the iron and steel industries. By the 1960s, many West Indians and their descendants had left Whitney Pier in search of work in larger cities. Younger generations who had been born and raised in Canada had received a good education, and the ones who left the island were considered the "cream of the crop" because they were smart and ambitious. Many youths from the island sought not only better-paying jobs, but also a greater diversity of culture and a sense of adventure in big cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Boston.¹³⁸ The decline in the black population

¹³⁶ Theresa Brewster interview.

¹³⁷ "U.N.I.A. Reorganized," *The Nova Scotia Gleaner*, 5 October 1929. At a meeting held on September 15th, eight more people decided to become financial members of the Sydney Division.

¹³⁸ Isabelle Waterman, recorded interview by Pam Newton, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute.

of the island obviously led to a sharp decline in membership to black clubs and churches, including the UNIA and St. Philip's AOC.

The New Waterford Division had closed a few years prior to the Sydney Division in the early 1940s. As mentioned above, the New Waterford Division had purchased a building for use by the UNIA and other community organizations in 1929. However, the versatility of New Waterford Hall actually created some strife between members of the black community. It was not long before some people began to feel "that the money going to the head office [of the UNIA] in the United States should remain in New Waterford." Non-UNIA members were concerned that valuable funds in the form of membership dues were being sent to the Parent Body of the UNIA instead of financing the new building and local community events. Ted Boutilier recounts, "Ownership of the hall then became a question, which was only settled after going to the law courts. The decision reached was that all black men and their families were to have and hold the hall as one."¹³⁹ It is unclear how this debate over the use and ownership of the building affected the New Waterford Division. However, after the court ruling the name of the building changed to the Negro Social Club, which may indicate that the UNIA in New Waterford either dissolved or was absorbed by the newly-formed Club by the 1940s.¹⁴⁰

The New Aberdeen Division lasted much longer, about forty years, than either the Sydney or New Waterford Divisions. As mentioned above, the members of the New Aberdeen Division had purchased properties in the general vicinity which provided a good source of income outside the regular membership dues and fundraising events. This added source of revenue is likely what helped the New Aberdeen Division to weather the various highs and lows experienced by other divisions in

¹³⁹ Boutilier, *New Waterford*, 66; and Weeks, *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 38.

¹⁴⁰ Willard Jones believes that the UNIA became part of the Negro Social Club sometime during the 1940s. See Weeks, "Willard Jones, New Waterford," in *One God One Aim One Destiny*, 98-9.

the province and elsewhere. With extra money in its coffers, the New Aberdeen Division was safeguarded against financial pitfalls like the Great Depression, periods of low membership dues, and scarce fundraising revenue.

Nevertheless, the New Aberdeen Division needed more than money to stay afloat. While the financial status of the organization was adequate, human interest in the UNIA waned significantly after World War II. Elder members began dying off and those that remained did not welcome youths into the organization. Moreover, founding members only wanted dark-skinned blacks to join, preferably Barbadians, in order to carry on the traditions of the division. This was nearly impossible to do given that more and more young people were being born on Cape Breton Island and were sometimes of mixed race.¹⁴¹ Joan Weeks asserts, “For a time, beginning in the late 1960s, the Glace Bay UNIA was at a standstill until it was revived in 1973 by president Victor Jones.” At this time the New Aberdeen Division enjoyed a brief period of revival as a community centre, but by the 1980s, “the Glace Bay Hall once again fell into disrepair.” Like the division in Toronto, the New Aberdeen Division closed in the early 1980s. The UNIA Hall would remain closed for nearly thirty years until 2003 when Theresa Brewster launched a campaign to restore the Hall and serve as a museum and community centre dedicated to the history of blacks in Cape Breton. With the help of Victor Jones, Brewster was able to re-open the building in 2006 as the UNIA Cultural Museum.

Conclusions

Although the province of Nova Scotia had the most UNIA divisions of any other in Canada, it was the three divisions of Cape Breton Island that proved the most enthusiastic about the Garvey

¹⁴¹ Theresa Brewster, for example, is an example of a mixed-race child born in Glace Bay after the war. See Theresa Brewster interview; and Annabelle Kirton interview.

Movement. This was because the burgeoning immigrant population of the island, primarily of West Indian origin, was able to use the UNIA as an organizational tool to develop a sense of community in their new home. Native-born African Nova Scotians on the mainland, whose ancestry in the province dates back generations, had long-established churches and institutions and a pre-existing sense of community and identity before the arrival of the UNIA. Thus, mainlanders had little need for the UNIA as a community-building tool. By contrast, before the influx of immigrants to Cape Breton in the early twentieth century there was no sizable black community on the Island. The UNIA was rising in popularity at the precise moment when blacks on Cape Breton Island were looking to set down permanent roots and establish a cohesive community based on race and culture. The UNIA delivered the ideal tool through which Cape Breton's black population could begin the process of community-building in Canada.

Due to their close proximity and their dedication to the UNIA's tenet of racial confraternity, the three divisions on Cape Breton Island met and collaborated regularly throughout their existence which helped to enlarge and bolster the island's black community. But their participation in the Garvey Movement went far beyond the local level. In fact, Cape Breton Garveyites, especially Albert Francis and George Creese, took an active role in broadening the reach of the UNIA at both the provincial and national levels. Moreover, members of the three Cape Breton Divisions maintained an international presence in the UNIA. They regularly contributed news on their local events to *The Negro World* newspaper and participated in the International Conventions in Harlem, while also backing the financial endeavours of the UNIA, including the Black Star Line, the African Redemption Fund, and the Marcus Garvey Defense Fund.

In conjunction with the UNIA, the West Indian population in Sydney opened the only Canadian branch of the African Orthodox Church as a means of further strengthening the black community. The African Orthodox Church was closely tied to the UNIA and shared the sense of

pride in a common African heritage. The parish of St. Philip's in Sydney offered a religious channel through which to bond the black community, while still appealing to the beliefs and principles that had attracted its congregants to the UNIA.

The UNIA flourished in Cape Breton throughout the 1920s and was successful in shaping a strong black community, perhaps for the first time ever, in the Island's history. While the divisions in Sydney and New Waterford would not last beyond the 1940s, the New Aberdeen Division remained a vital piece of the local fabric until the 1980s. Its recent rebirth as a cultural museum demonstrates the UNIA's profound impact on the black population of Cape Breton Island, and its purpose as community-building tool for newcomers to Canada.

Chapter 4

From Oklahoma to Edmonton: The UNIA on the Great Plains

Introduction

The UNIA's influence extended into the western provinces, even into the tiny, isolated black communities that dotted the prairies. In total, thirteen UNIA divisions sprang up across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba in the early 1920s in cities, like Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg, and in small rural hamlets like Junkins, Alberta and Milleton, Saskatchewan.¹ The UNIA in the west, as elsewhere in Canada, inspired black Canadians and took on great meaning in their lives for many reasons. This is certainly true for the members of the Edmonton Division who regarded the UNIA as the black community's most important organization in the 1920s and 1930s.² The UNIA in Edmonton helped to bring isolated black communities together and served as a springboard for other, more specific, black groups to develop and serve the unique needs of blacks in Alberta.

Of all the UNIA divisions that emerged in the west, one of the most active was the Edmonton Division. Edmonton had the largest urban black population of the prairie provinces, about three times as much as Calgary's between the 1920s and 1940s. It was also at the epicentre of several vibrant rural black communities located within a 100 mile radius of the city.³ Perhaps consequently, Edmonton's is the division for which the most primary sources exist. It is for these

¹ The following divisions opened in the western provinces during the early 1920s: Winnipeg, MB; Saskatoon, North Battleford, and Milleton, SK; Edmonton, Calgary, Keystone, Donatville, and Junkins, AB; and Vancouver, Victoria, Prince George, and Burnaby, BC. See Leo W. Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917–1979" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 1980), 38–9; and Robert A. Hill, Appendix X, "Locations of UNIA Divisions and Chapters," in *The Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 7: 997.

² Velma Carter, *The Window of Our Memories* Volume II, *The New Generation*, (St. Alberta: Black Cultural Research Society of Alberta), 281-3.

³ Howard and Tamara Palmer, "The Black Experience in Alberta," in *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity*, edited by Howard and Tamara Palmer (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 381.

reasons that this chapter will focus on the Edmonton Division and serve as an example for the kind of appeal the UNIA had to blacks in the west. That being said, it should be noted that although the Edmonton Division has the most available historical resources of any other western division, it is still rather limited compared to that of Toronto, Cape Breton Island, and Montreal.

Archival records, including a few interviews and written materials from the Provincial Archives of Alberta and the City of Edmonton Archives, provide insight into the lives of early black homesteaders in Alberta. In this way, these sources establish the historical context that helps to understand the appeal of the UNIA in western Canada. Regrettably, these documents offer no specific information on the UNIA divisions within the province of Alberta. It was necessary, then, to consult the news reported in *The Negro World* newspaper and also the various volumes of *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*. While helpful, these sources provided only a small glimpse into the daily activities, membership, and leadership of Alberta's UNIA divisions. Most evidence on the Edmonton Division comes from a regular newspaper column published in both the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Edmonton Bulletin* between 1921 and 1924 called "Our Negro Citizens." Written by Reverend George Slater, pastor of Edmonton's Emmanuel A.M.E. Church, it reported on the important issues, events, and institutions in the lives of blacks in Edmonton and its neighbouring communities including Pine Creek, Junkins, and Keystone. Today, it functions as a portal into this busy moment in time when blacks in Alberta organized numerous institutions like the UNIA in order to support the African-American homesteaders, families, and workers dotting the province. Jennifer Kelly and Dan Cui correctly point out that "the ONC newspaper column might allow us to understand early attempts at community formation and consequent identity formations as Christians and Canadians."⁴ What they perhaps fail to realize is that the column is actually the single most

⁴ Dan Cui and Jennifer R. Kelly, "Our Negro Citizens': An Example of Everyday Citizenship Practices," in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, edited by Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna (Edmonton: AU Press, 2010), 253-4.

important historical resource on the UNIA in Alberta, and perhaps in the entire western part of Canada. It is precisely because this column exists that a detailed interpretation of the Edmonton Division can be written as compared to the various other UNIA divisions in western Canada for which almost no documentation exists outside of what is contained within *The Negro World* and the *Marcus Garvey Papers*.

Evidence on the Edmonton Division is strongest for the period between 1920 and 1924, which coincides with the run years of the ONC column and the data present in the available historical resources mentioned earlier. The general lack of material on the UNIA in the west is likely due to several factors. For one, the black population of the western provinces was significantly smaller than those found in the east and especially in cities like Montreal and Toronto. Therefore, the existence and/or survival of any written documentation on the western UNIA divisions might be less likely than a more densely-populated area like Toronto. The sparsely populated black settlers, especially in rural areas, were certainly busy dealing with the challenges of homesteading which may have made it difficult to participate regularly in secular organizations, let alone keep a detailed record of their daily activities. The lack of sources on the western divisions of the UNIA signifies that the association may not have been as well-received or long-term in Alberta as it was in other parts of Canada. Lastly, it may simply be that UNIA members did not see the pertinence in keeping and preserving written records on their divisions, much to the detriment and disappointment of future historians.⁵ Whatever the reason, it has left a void in the historiography of the UNIA in Canada. However, thanks to the work of Rev. Slater in the ONC column, the gap begins to close.

⁵ Leo Bertley notes that he was unable to locate any meeting minutes from the Montreal Division between the years of 1919 and 1926. This was perhaps the largest and most active division in Canada, and these were the division's peak years. And yet it seems that Montreal's members were unconcerned with keeping records of their regular meetings. The files on the Toronto Division from the MHSO contain only a few meeting minutes from its earliest days. Therefore, it seems that the Canadian divisions were generally indifferent about record-keeping for posterity, much to the chagrin of future historians. See Bertley, "The UNIA of Montreal," 226.

Origins and Edmonton's Racial Climate

To understand the UNIA in Edmonton, it is imperative to first identify the black population of the west and the racial climate of Alberta in the early twentieth century. The population of black peoples in the western provinces, that is, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, was quite different from the ones of eastern Canada. The eastern provinces, as mentioned, saw an influx of black immigrants from the Caribbean at the turn of the twentieth century. These West Indian immigrants would become the basis of UNIA membership in the largest divisions in the east. However, on the Great Plains it was African Americans who comprised the vast majority of black residents. Between 1908 and 1911, approximately 1,500 African Americans emigrated from the United States, primarily from the state of Oklahoma, and settled in western Canada. Of these, about 1,000 landed in Alberta. Most of these settlers were farmers seeking refuge from the extreme forms of racism plaguing the American south. For many, the appeal of owning a large farm in Canada, known by many African Americans as a racial safe haven, was a great motivation to leave Oklahoma in search of a more peaceful life.

The history of the black settlers from Oklahoma is a tumultuous one. Beginning after the American Civil War, African Americans began migrating west from southern states like Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas into land that was formerly occupied by indigenous peoples, known as "Indian Territory." Racial atrocities were rampant across the South as the former slave states refused to accept the newly-freed African Americans as social equals. Not only did the southern states promote the segregationist practice of Jim Crowism, which effectively denied African Americans their political rights and public services, they also suffered the unmitigated racial terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan. Needless to say that when word about western expansion reached their ears, the prospect of living freely on a large plot of farmland attracted a number of southern blacks. Many migrated under the false rumour that the American government would give each settler "forty acres

and a mule” to inhabit this land and facilitate American expansion westward. Others were moving with “their fellow white citizens in looking for opportunities on the frontier,” including better wages and farm land. Some African Americans settled first in Kansas, and then later moved on to Oklahoma which officially became a state in 1907.⁶ Unfortunately, the African Americans found neither better opportunities nor increased wages in Indian Territory. Instead, what they received was continued and sometimes violent racial discrimination from the white settlers who “brought a noticeable southern flavour to what would become Oklahoma.”⁷

The white settlers used various means to intimidate the African Americans and discourage them from relocating to Oklahoma. R. Bruce Shepard notes that “during the 1890s, there was racially motivated mob violence in both the Territories. White communities would often band together to drive their African-American neighbours out of town.” Lynching became a regular occurrence. Black children had to attend segregated schools, while adults were denied access to public places on account of their race. While other groups of African Americans protested their unfair treatment to the government (to no avail), many other blacks felt that isolation was perhaps the best and only means of attaining a safe and peaceful life. A few all-black communities formed as a means of protection against this onslaught of racial hatred.⁸

While the implications of racial segregation certainly distressed African Americans, it was perhaps their official disenfranchisement that ultimately inspired many to look northward to Canada for a solution. When Oklahoma entered the union in 1907, the state amended the constitution to

⁶ R. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century Only to Find Racism in their New Home*, (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997), 13-4, 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-33 and Charles C. Irby, “Northeast Alberta: A Marginal Agricultural Situation” (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 1979), 145. For more on the all-black communities of Oklahoma see Mozell C. Hill, “The All-Black Negro Communities of Oklahoma: The Natural History of a Social Movement: Part I,” *The Journal of Negro History* 31, 3 (July 1946): 254-268.

include the Grandfather Clause. The Grandfather Clause “required eligible voters to be able to read and write, but exempted them if they or one of their ancestors had voted before 1861.” This clause was designed to directly target African Americans because they did not qualify for the exemption; prior to 1865 African Americans in the south had been enslaved and therefore would have been ineligible to vote in any elections. Moreover, literacy rates among blacks were low, and even if an African American in Oklahoma professed to be literate the Election Board, whose directors were white, could easily deny their claim.⁹ Certainly, then, segregation and disenfranchisement served as powerful push factors to the black people of Oklahoma. But the prairies of Canada also seemed to pull them northward with the promise of farmland, economic prosperity, and racial harmony.

As in the United States, the turn of the twentieth century saw the westward expansion of Canada. The Canadian federal government had been advertising in the United States, Britain, and parts of Europe for years, hoping to draw skilled farmers to Canada’s “Last Best West.” Advertisements appeared in newspapers in both Kansas and Oklahoma and promised potential American emigrants 160 acres of free and fertile land, so long as they cleared it, built a homestead on the property, and began to farm it. The advertisements also portrayed Canada as a safe and law-abiding country. What they did not stipulate was that the Canadian government favoured only white immigrants. Although recruitment posters only ever depicted white farmers and emigrants, the written text in advertisements, pamphlets, and newspapers never specified a preference for whites. Interviews with African-American settlers reveal that black families heard about homesteading in the western provinces through pamphlets circulating in Oklahoma, which claimed that one could own land for the price of ten dollars. The interviewees state that the draw of cheap land and the hope of

⁹ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited*, 53; Irby, “Northeast Alberta,” 151; Judith S. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers: A Study of Canadian Immigration Policy and Practice,” (MA thesis, University of Alberta, 1981), iv; and Gwen Hooks, *The Keystone Legacy: Recollections of a Black Settler* (Edmonton: Brightest Pebble Publishing Company Ltd., 1997), 9. See also Ellis Hooks, interview by Reevan Dolgoy, Edmonton, 27 August 1978; Mark Hooks, interview by Reevan Dolgoy, Breton, 7 July 1978; and Mrs. Charles King, interview by Reevan Dolgoy, 3 July 1978, Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA).

racial equality in Canada enticed black Oklahomans to emigrate to Alberta. They confirm, as Shepard explains, that “none of the advertisements gave any indication that African Americans would be unwelcome.”¹⁰

Judith Hill’s research on the migration of African Americans to Alberta sheds light on the Canadian government’s anxiety over the influx of black settlement in the west. Prior to the Oklahoman migration, there were very few black people living in the west. Perhaps the most famous was former-slave, John Ware, who became a rancher in Alberta in the 1880s and 1890s. There were also a few black employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company who worked as fur traders and ran materials to the various outposts in the west. A few black men also worked as independent whiskey traders and interpreters before the Oklahomans arrived.¹¹ Despite having only a few black residents in Alberta, mostly bachelors, the Canadian government did not wish to see their numbers increase any further and by 1899 the Immigration Branch was already discouraging African-American immigration to Canada. They did this by deliberately excluding blacks from public recruitment campaigns, by refusing to publish homesteading advertisements in the black press, and by failing to distribute any special pamphlets to African Americans. Immigration agents who had been sent to various parts of the United States to recruit potential settlers told African Americans that they would be unsuited to the harsh Canadian climate, especially in wintertime, as a way to dissuade emigration.¹²

These tactics proved insufficient in keeping African Americans away from western Canada, and in April of 1908 “the first recorded group of black immigrants from Oklahoma stepped off the

¹⁰ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited*, 48, 64; Ellis Hooks, Mark Hooks, and Mrs. Charles King interviews. The 160 acres allotted to settlers was outlined in the Dominion Lands Act, which specifically required that settlers clear the land, plant crops, and live on the property for at least three years. See J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 4.

¹¹ J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70-2, 77; Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited*, 69-70; and Hooks, *The Keystone Legacy*, 23.

train in Edmonton.” It was a group of seven families who eventually settled in the rural community of Junkins (now Wildwood), about 120 kilometres west of Edmonton.¹³ Interest in homesteading among African Americans in Oklahoma continued and by 1910 an estimated 634 blacks had arrived on the Great Plains. They settled primarily in Alberta, but some chose to make a home in Saskatchewan instead; it seems few went to Manitoba and British Columbia. Black emigration from Oklahoma continued until 1912, and by then about 1,500 African Americans had arrived in western Canada, of which approximately 1,000 chose Alberta. The 1911 Canadian Census counts 979 blacks in Alberta, 336 in Saskatchewan, 209 in Manitoba, and 473 in British Columbia. These numbers are not completely accurate because the Immigration Branch made no distinction between American citizens based on race.¹⁴

The Oklahoman emigrants came via rail and usually traveled as extended family units. These emigrants were not destitute; many were prosperous farmers who could afford the costly journey of moving an entire family and their belongings, including livestock, to Canada. For example, the family of Mrs. Charles King was relatively well-to-do, having worked a large 300 to 400 acre farm in Oklahoma and made a profitable business out of baling hay and selling it to nearby farmers. However, the Kings rented the farm in Oklahoma, whereas in Canada they could own one. Aside from being skilled farmers, Mrs. King notes that the black Oklahomans were also accomplished carpenters and knew how to build houses, abilities that would serve them well as they established their homesteads in Alberta. Based on his interviews with Pine Creek settlers, Irby concludes that black Oklahomans emigrated primarily for social rather than economic reasons, “seeking a place of

¹³ J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 76.

¹⁴ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited*, 64-5; J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 82, 111-2; H. & T. Palmer, “The Black Experience in Alberta,” 365; and Census of Canada (1911).

refuge where they could lead their lives unhampered by racist restriction on their existences.”¹⁵ To reach Alberta, the African Americans rode in “a special train carrying only blacks.” The trains, comprised of eight to ten cars, assigned the women and children to the cramped, yet reasonably comfortable, coaches while “the men rode in special boxes with the machinery and livestock they were bringing to Canada.”¹⁶

Most African Americans that arrived in Alberta disembarked at Edmonton and usually lived there for a few years while they acquired land in the countryside and built their homesteads. The settlers who wished to homestead headed out in covered wagons to small hamlets like Keystone (now Breton), Junkins (Wildwood), Campsie (Barrhead), and Pine Creek (Amber Valley).¹⁷ Others chose an urban life and either stayed in Edmonton or moved south to Calgary. Hill reports that about 60 percent of blacks decided to homestead in rural areas while the remaining 40 percent chose to live in cities. By 1911 the census records 298 blacks in Edmonton and only 72 in Calgary. The remaining 581 black homesteaders lived in the small rural areas outside Edmonton.¹⁸ Pine Creek had the largest black population of the rural communities with about 500 by 1920. Keystone had between 60 and 100 African Americans living there by 1912 and may have had up to 250 at its peak. Junkins had a fair number as well, with an estimated 175 taking up residence there by 1910.

¹⁵ Mrs. Charles King interview; and Irby, “Northeast Alberta,” 153-4. See also Breton and District Historical Society, *The Ladder of Time: A History of Breton and District* (Edmonton: Co-op Press, 1980), 29; J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 127; and Hooks, *The Keystone Legacy*, 39. Gwen Hooks revealed in an interview that she had heard one black family from Oklahoma arrived in Alberta with some \$50,000 in money and assets. See Gwen Hooks, interview by Jennifer Kelly, Leduc, May 2001, Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI).

¹⁶ Hooks, *The Keystone Legacy*, 7, 39. See also Mark Hooks, Ellis Hooks, and Gwen Hooks interviews; H. & T. Palmer, “The Black Experience in Alberta,” 365, 372, 381; *The Ladder of Time*, 13, 17, 26; and *Trails Northwest: A History of the District of Barrhead, Alberta, 1867-1967* (Edmonton: Barrhead and District Historical Society, 1967), 121.

¹⁷ Pine Creek was the largest black rural settlement in Alberta. For more on this community, see Stewart Grow, “The Blacks of Amber Valley – Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* Vol. 6 (1974): 17-38.

¹⁸ The Palmers note that Edmonton always had a larger black population than Calgary because it was much closer in proximity to the rural black settlements mentioned above. See Howard and Tamara Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” *Alberta History* 29 (Summer 1981): 9; Census of Canada (1911); J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 120; and H. & T. Palmer, “The Black Experience in Alberta,” 372.

Campsie seems to have been less populated with about 30 black residents by 1910.¹⁹ The rural communities usually had more black residents than white, which was by design given that the African Americans were searching for an autonomous life without racism. Long-time resident of Pine Creek, F. B. Jamerson, claimed that the area was nearly 100 percent black with families coming from all over the American south, including Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, South Carolina, and, of course, Oklahoma.²⁰

Life in the first few years was difficult for the African-American settlers. Ellis Hooks recalls that her family had to live in a tent as squatters in Edmonton before building their homestead in Keystone. Mrs. Charles King admits that she cried for days when they first came to Edmonton and wanted to head back to Oklahoma instead. However, they toughed it out because they had put so much effort and money into their trip to Alberta. The settlers who could cope with the poor living conditions and homesickness had to then endure the backbreaking labour of clearing and cropping land and building homesteads. Sometimes the land upon which these settlers chose to homestead proved arduous to cultivate. For example, the Pine Creek area north of Edmonton was a very challenging tract of land to farm because the rocky soil was not very fertile.²¹ Despite the magnitude of these hardships, they paled in comparison to the racial conflict blacks in Alberta would face as Canada struggled to keep the plains white.

To the surprise of the black Oklahomans, Canada was not the racial safe haven they had imagined. Whites in Alberta vehemently resisted and protested black settlement in the province from the very beginning. Hill points out, “Although many western Canadians may have had little

¹⁹ J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 82, 126, 147; Grow, “The Blacks of Amber Valley,” 35; and Ellis Hooks and Mrs. Charles King interviews.

²⁰ F.B. Jamerson to City of Edmonton Archives, n.d. Box 1021, Folder 2, Frank Bernard Jamerson fonds, The City of Edmonton Archives.

²¹ Ellis Hooks, Mark Hooks, and Mrs. Charles King interviews; and Irby, “Northeast Alberta,” 188.

first-hand experience with blacks, they were all too familiar with the popular racial stereotypes. Consequently, they were not enthralled with the prospect of having black neighbours.” To be sure, white Albertans also disliked many of the other ethnic groups that homesteaded in small pockets outside Edmonton, including Ukrainians, Austrians, Germans, Scandinavians, and French Canadians who held fiercely onto their distinct cultures and languages.²² A long tradition of white Anglo-conservatism and a strong sense of nativism characterized the province of Alberta at this time. Most people who moved west in search of economic opportunity were white English-speaking settlers from Ontario, Britain, and the United States. Shepard points out that these three groups had a lot in common, including “a language, a deep love of democracy, and a profound racist bias against dark-skinned peoples.”²³ When the African Americans from Oklahoma began to arrive in 1908 white Albertans felt threatened, believing there would be a massive influx of black immigration to the province which could undermine the fabric of Canadian society.²⁴ Complaints to the provincial and federal governments came in fast and furious, mainly from labour groups who had a great deal of clout in Alberta since the province needed a strong workforce during this time of rapid industrial and agricultural development.

The Edmonton Board of Trade, in particular, was determined to thwart black immigration to the province. They sent out a barrage of petitions to the federal government demanding that they prohibit any further black immigrants from Alberta, and recruited other labour organizations to do

²² J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 9, 77. The Ku Klux Klan did not target black immigrants in Alberta at this time. The Klan was more concerned with Catholics and European immigrants alleged to be Catholic or refusing to assimilate. The KKK believed they were trying to make Catholicism the dominant religion of North America. See William Peter Baergen, *The Ku Klux Klan in Central Alberta* (Red Deer: Central Alberta Historical Society, 2000), 36.

²³ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 67.

²⁴ Even though only about 1,000 African Americans arrived in Alberta by 1912, white Canadians perceived the influx to be much more significant. For example, in 1916 recruiters for the Canadian Expeditionary Force had received intelligence reporting that at least 10,000 blacks were living in the Edmonton area and hoped to draw from this population to form an all-black battalion of about 1,000 men. See James W. St.G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70, 1 (1989): 6.

the same. In a letter to the Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver, the Athabasca Landing Board of Trade wrote that “Canada is the last country open to the white race. Are we going to preserve it for the white race, or are we going to permit blacks free use of large portions of it?” Newspapers relayed stories falsely alleging that the black immigrants were poor, destitute, lacking in farming skills, and dangerous.²⁵ As Kelly and Cui point out, the concern over black immigration “became the catalyst for discussions as to who was an ideal Canadian and what the results of ‘race mixing’ might mean for the future workforce and society.” Eventually these complaints convinced Oliver to take action against black immigration to the prairies, so he signed an order-in-council in 1910 “requiring immigrants to have in their possession a ticket to their destination in Canada and cash amounting to \$25 during the months from March to October and \$50 if they arrived between November and February.”²⁶ The Immigration Branch also began to conduct vigorous medical exams at the U.S.A. – Canada border where “a medical cause could be found to bar the entry into Canada of virtually any immigrant.” Providing a health reason for rejecting an immigrant meant immigration officials did not have to explicitly admit their racial biases. The government also sent immigration agents to Oklahoma in 1911 to convince African Americans not to come to Canada,

²⁵ For example, the *Edmonton Journal* published a story about a young lady who accused a black man had attacked and robbed her. The girl’s testimony was a lie, as she later admitted to fabricating the story in order to avoid punishment for losing a diamond ring. Judith Hill argues that white Albertans were more vocal about black settlement than their counterparts in Saskatchewan and Manitoba because 21 percent of Alberta’s population in 1911 was American-born and may have “brought anti-black prejudices with them” into Canada. While this may be a contributing reason for Alberta’s outcry against black immigration, it should be noted that Canada already had a long history of racism based on the notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority and white supremacy. See “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 78, 92, 100; and Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 80-1, 83.

²⁶ Order-in-Council PC 924, 9 May 1910. Kelly and Cui also contend that “the Canadian parliamentary discussions concerning immigration to the western provinces made it clear that immigrants from China and the Indian subcontinent were as unwelcome as African immigrants.” Chinese immigration had been restricted since the passage of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1885, while the 1908 Gentlemen’s Agreement between Canada and Japan limited the number of Japanese immigrants to 400 per year. Several orders-in-council targeted South Asian immigration. For example, PC 920 required immigrants to arrive in Canada by “continuous journey,” which was impossible for residents of India whose voyage had a stopover in Japan or Hawaii, while PC 926 dictated that immigrants from Asian countries not already covered by other legislation (i.e., the Chinese and Japanese) must have a minimum of \$200 in landing money to be granted passage into Canada. See Jennifer Kelly and Dan Cui, “Racialization and Work,” in *Working People in Alberta: A History*, edited by Alvin Finkel (Edmonton: AU Press, 2012), 270 and J. Hill, “Alberta’s Black Settlers,” 79-80; and Orders-in-Council PC 920 PC 926, 9 May 1910 (later revised as PC 1914-23 and PC 1914-24).

citing the great racial unrest taking place in the west on top of Alberta's poor soil, harsh climate, and invasive medical exams at the border. These methods were meant to deter potential African-American immigrants without having to enact official policy against persons of African descent which, the Canadian government feared, might offend the United States and other countries with whom they had good trade relationships.²⁷ This would change, however, on August 12, 1911 when the federal government finally heeded to public opinion and signed an order-in-council which explicitly prohibited "Negro" immigration to Canada because the race was "deemed unsuited to the climate and requirements of Canada."²⁸ This, in conjunction with the government's less overtly racist tactics, finally seemed to work as African-American interest in immigration to Canada virtually ceased by 1912.

This torrent of racial antagonism by white Albertans left an indelible mark on the African-American immigrants from Oklahoma. Many of them chose to settle in remote rural pockets with other African Americans, just as they had done in Oklahoma before statehood. Howard and Tamara Palmer noted that "the black pioneers apparently deliberately picked isolated areas because they wanted to be independent of white racism, and wanted to have large enough tracts of land to establish predominantly black settlements." This is proven by the fact that they sometimes chose areas with poorer quality soil, like Pine Creek, just to distance themselves from white Canadians.²⁹ In fact, the African Americans from Oklahoma seemed to have a long history of cultural isolation.

²⁷ J. Hill, "Alberta's Black Settlers," 86; Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited*, 87-9, 92; and H. & T. Palmer, "The Black Experience in Alberta," 365, 371-2.

²⁸ Order-in-Council PC 1911-1324, 12 August 1911. This order-in-council banned "Negro" immigration for a "period of one year." The Immigration Act of 1910 had facilitated the passage of this order-in-council as it stated in section 38c: "The Governor in Council may, by proclamation or order whenever he deems it necessary or expedient, prohibit for a stated period, or permanently, the landing in Canada... of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada." See Statutes of Canada (SC) 1910 c. 27, s. 38; Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited*, 100; J. Hill, "Alberta's Black Settlers," 105; and H & T. Palmer, "The Black Experience in Alberta," 372.

²⁹ H. & T. Palmer, "The Black Experience in Alberta," 373; and Irby, "Northeast Alberta," 188.

As mentioned above, blacks in Kansas and Oklahoma formed all-black towns as a means of maintaining a safe and peaceful lifestyle amidst the racial conflict that was common in both territories. As Irby points out, “it was because of their desire for self-determination that blacks held tenaciously to the vision of authority over their own towns.” The yearning for black self-determination in Oklahoma dates back to the 1880s when “Edwin P. McCabe, following a black nationalist ideology, proposed to make Oklahoma a black state within the Union.”³⁰ McCabe was an African-American attorney and politician in Oklahoma, and he had a similar philosophy to Garvey’s in that having an all-black state would free its citizens of the white antagonism that plagued their everyday lives. McCabe’s plan, of course, never came to fruition but his viewpoint certainly impacted black life in Oklahoma as African Americans saw the benefits of living in majority-black towns.

This was a practice that the Oklahomans would take with them when they migrated north to Canada. For example, Mrs. Charles King, a settler of Keystone, claims that the town was predominantly black with only a few whites. As a result, many blacks, including her husband, father, and brother, were elected to town council and some served on the local school board. Most teachers, in fact, were black. When Gwen Hooks’ parents migrated from Kansas and Oklahoma, they chose Keystone as their new home because they wanted to “move where there was freedom. They moved way out in the bush so they could have their own government.”³¹ The desire for self-determination sheds light into why many black Oklahomans became Garveyites and opened UNIA branches in their communities. The black nationalist agenda of the Garvey movement encouraged black self-governance which would be achieved through the separation of the races. This would

³⁰ Irby, “Northeast Alberta,” 145-6, 149. See also Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited*, 22-3, 27; and M. Hill, “The All-Black Negro Communities of Oklahoma,” 254-268.

³¹ Mrs. Charles King and Gwen Hooks interviews.

grant people of African descent the political and economic autonomy they desired, as well as the social equality that they deserved. In Hill's words, "The existence of the Marcus Garvey Club is indicative of a spirit of black nationalism in Amber Valley," and in communities across Alberta.³²

Aside from their geographic seclusion in Alberta, blacks became keenly aware of their cultural distinctions having quickly become a tiny minority within the predominantly white province. With very few whites around, black homesteaders bonded with each other based on their shared history of migration and racial marginalization in addition to new challenges like crop failures, loneliness, and the unforgiving Albertan weather. These experiences "inevitably affected their attitudes toward the outside world as well as the type of community they ultimately developed." The black Oklahomans' shared bond also helps to explain the appeal of establishing and joining UNIA divisions, which afforded a means of overcoming feelings of alienation and hardship, as well as inspiration for creating a better life.³³

The longing to (re)connect with their compatriots and freely express a common culture almost certainly contributed to the opening of UNIA branches in Alberta. But there was also a more practical reason. UNIA divisions served as an organizing body to contest racial discrimination in politics, education, and the workplace. Judith Hill has suggested that "a conciliatory attitude and avoidance of retaliation was characteristic of the community" at Pine Creek.³⁴ However, this view ignores the perspective of the black settlers. Perhaps because the tactics of the African Americans were peaceful, scholars have overlooked the fact that their choice to isolate themselves in small, tightly-knit communities in Alberta was in itself a form of retaliation against racial discrimination. In fact, it also indicates a strong predisposition among the African-American migrants toward

³² J. Hill, "Alberta's Black Settlers," 138.

³³ *Ibid.*, 120-1, 129.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

Garveyism and the doctrine of racial separatism. This particular group of immigrants *chose* to leave Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri in search of greater freedom in Oklahoma. They then *chose* to leave Oklahoma because they refused to endure the extreme acts of racism committed against them on a daily basis. They *chose* to settle in all-black or nearly homogenous communities in both Oklahoma and Alberta as a means of controlling their own lives without the fear of racial oppression. And black Albertans also *chose* to form clubs, organizations, churches, and schools to grant a voice to their underrepresented and marginalized group. It would seem, then, that the blacks in Alberta were anything but conciliatory; rather, they used the power of community to cast off racial injustices.

While some African-American immigrants report mostly cordial relations with whites, there were many instances when racism affected the lives of these settlers. While the schools in Keystone were mixed, for example, there was “quite a lot of name-calling” from the white students who had never before had contact with black children. In Campsie there was no school at all for black children as whites refused to admit them into their existing schools. Some white landlords refused to rent apartments to the African Americans living in Edmonton and Calgary. In 1920 white residents in Calgary submitted a petition to city council when four black families had moved into the Victoria Park district. These black families were the first to purchase homes in the area, and the petition put forth by the white residents asked “city council to relocate the black families and to restrain any further purchases.” The white residents believed that there must be an existing by-law to warrant the removal of black residents from their neighbourhood, but in fact none existed in Canada in 1920. In the words of James Walker, “Nevertheless it is surely significant that Calgarians assumed examples must exist, and were ready to implement legal segregation in their city.”³⁵

³⁵ James W. St.G. Walker, “Christie v. York Corporation,” in *“Race,” Rights, and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Waterloo: WLU Press, 1997), 130.

On top of the segregation in education and housing, white business owners were known to turn away black patrons in public places like restaurants, hotels, and dance halls. In 1924 even the city of Edmonton banned blacks from their public swimming pools because they felt the races should not bathe in the same water. In addition to social exclusion, white employers often refused to hire blacks or relegated them to the hardest and lowest-paying jobs available.³⁶ To contest these acts of bigotry, blacks in Alberta formed UNIA divisions and several specific offshoot organizations like the Negro Political Association (NPA), Negro Welfare Association (NWA), and Alberta Negro Colonization and Settlement Society (ANCSS) to give them a stronger and more united voice against their unfair treatment in politics, economics, and society. While blacks established UNIA divisions in Calgary, Junkins, Keystone, and Donatville, the Edmonton Division was the first and largest branch in Alberta, as well as the most active. As a result, it functioned as a kind of unifying body for the smaller neighbouring divisions. The UNIA in Edmonton provided a place for friends and relatives scattered around Alberta to reconnect, socialize, and plan for a better future.

The UNIA in Edmonton

It is difficult to say with certainty when blacks in Edmonton opened a branch of the UNIA. This is because if they kept any written records of their regular activities, they have yet to be found. However, it was reported in the *Edmonton Bulletin* on August 27, 1921 that the city's "Universal Negro Improvement Association will give their first annual celebration next Wednesday at Borden Park, when a fine program will be rendered all day and evening."³⁷ This report can be interpreted as

³⁶ Mark Hooks, Ellis Hooks, and Mrs. Charles King interviews. E. Hooks and King charge that the two races were well-integrated, for the most part, with only isolated incidents of racial discrimination. See also "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 4 February 1922 and 18 February 1922; "Negro Citizens Appeal Order Barring them from City Pool," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 12 July 1924; "Negroes Bathe in City Pools," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 15 July 1924; J. Hill, "Alberta's Black Settlers," 140-1, 145; H. & T. Palmer, "Urban Blacks in Alberta," 11-12; and Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* 2nd Edition (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 325.

³⁷ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 27 August 1921.

the Division's one-year anniversary celebration. The earliest report I have located on the Edmonton Division dates to November 6, 1920. It is an article explaining the purpose of the UNIA as revealed by the Division's first president, Mr. Ted H. Golden. Golden attended the first ever UNIA International Convention in New York City in August 1920 as a representative of western Canada and where he became one of the official signatories of the UNIA's Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World. According to the UNIA's constitution, it was the responsibility of division members to pay the travel/conference expenses for their official representatives at the conventions. Given that members of the Edmonton Division would have required some time to build up the funds for Golden's trip to New York, I presume that they became chartered division number eighty-nine either during the latter half of 1919, or perhaps in the first half of 1920.³⁸

The immigrants from Oklahoma, who comprised the majority of black residents in the western provinces, established the UNIA divisions in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and perhaps even British Columbia. In the early 1900s some of the Oklahomans living in Alberta and Saskatchewan moved further west to British Columbia where a well-established black population from California had been living since the mid-1800s.³⁹ The African-American settlers were mostly working-class people. Those in the countryside were mostly farmers while those in the city had jobs on the railroad or were employed by local businesses like the Swifts Package Company, Dray Shoe Shine, and the Crown Paving Company. Some men performed odd jobs like picking chicken or

³⁸ "Negro People Determined on Racial Equality," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 November 1920 and "The Black Cross Nurses of Edmonton, Alta.," *The Negro World*, 7 May 1921. See also Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 2: 571-80.

³⁹ During the Fraser Gold Rush of 1858, about 600 blacks from northern California migrated to Victoria for job opportunities and to escape violent forms of racism in the United States. They were a mixed crew of both African Americans and West Indians. This group of black settlers was civic-minded and established an all-black militia unit called the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Company. As the gold rush died down, some of these pioneer settlers moved to Vancouver and elsewhere at which point they were joined by some black Oklahomans who had given up on homesteading. Historical writing on black in British Columbia is extraordinarily limited, and there is a great need for more research in this area. For more on the black pioneers see Crawford Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing: The Black Pioneers of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1978), 15, 34, 47-8, 75-6, 156-8.

digging ditches, and the women worked as domestic caretakers. There were a few black-owned businesses in Edmonton at this time; Mrs. Bell operated a dressmaking shop and Mrs. Proctor a fancywork store in downtown Edmonton. The Palmers note that Edmonton also had “at least two pool hall owners, two barbers, four families who ran cafes, one man who had a horse-drawn delivery service, one man in real estate, a hotel owner, four who ran boarding houses,” in addition to a few grocers, a doctor, and eight teachers.⁴⁰ As in other parts of Canada, this group of working-class black immigrants occupied a disadvantaged position within the social fabric of the province. Therefore the goals and philosophies of the UNIA, which focused on elevating blacks to higher ranks in politics, occupation, and society, would have appealed to the African-American immigrants in the west. Both men and women joined the UNIA and took up active roles within the Edmonton Division while encouraging youth participation much like the rest of Canada’s UNIA branches.

The Edmonton Division had an active Black Cross Nurses (BCN) auxiliary group. In May of 1921 they reported to the *The Negro World* that they had made 250 “calls,” perhaps house calls to sick members of the community, “and served six maternity cases successfully.” This was in addition to holding several fundraising concerts, teas, and bazaars for the benefit of the Edmonton Division.⁴¹ The BCN may to have been the only auxiliary group in the Edmonton Division as there is no evidence of any others. However, division members did seem to promote youth involvement at UNIA events. For example, at the first annual Edmonton Division celebration, there was a youth concert, a juvenile program, and a sports program for young girls and boys.⁴²

⁴⁰ F. B. Jamerson to City of Edmonton Archives, 8 November 1988, Box 1081, Folder 2, Frank Bernard Jamerson Fonds, The City of Edmonton Archives; “The U.N.I.A. in Edmonton, Canada,” *The Negro World*, 16 April 1921; and H. & T. Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” 9. See also Kelly and Cui, “Racialization and Work,” 272.

⁴¹ “The Black Cross Nurses of Edmonton, Alta.,” *The Negro World*, 7 May 1921; “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 5 December 1921 and 12 December 1921.

⁴² “News in the Interest of Colored Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 September 1921.

Although not officially auxiliary groups under the UNIA's banner, members of the Edmonton Division launched two associations or sub-organizations to meet specific needs within the community. These were the Negro Welfare Association (NWA) and the Negro (Independent) Political Association (NPA). Members established the NWA to remedy the widespread problem of unemployment in the city of Edmonton, while the NPA focused on educating members on the political process, candidates, and issues concerning black citizens.

The two associations formed within the same month, the NPA launching about two weeks before the NWA. On September 5, 1921, "those persons interested in a political study club completed their organization to be known as the Negro Political Association of Edmonton district." A report in the *ONC* column explains the purpose of the association: "To study principles and tenets of political parties, legislative measures proposed by the legislative bodies, and all political propositions as they effect [sic.] the welfare of the race." They pledged not to endorse any one particular party or candidate, but rather to supply accurate information on political issues to the public and to encourage "the people to become voting citizens." This group held meetings at Shiloh Baptist Church and the Emmanuel AME Church, which were also common meeting places for UNIA meetings and other community events. The NPA had several branches, including one in Donatville and Junkins, which were likely also supported by their local UNIA divisions.⁴³ The formation of such a group may be a reaction to the disenfranchisement of blacks in Oklahoma where, as mentioned earlier, the Grandfather Clause had barred them from voting.

The NPA got off to a rocky start, noting that some (unspecified) changes to the group were "met with such disappointment from so many that they cannot consistently endorse it." Therefore they called another meeting during which they selected a new president, Rev. H. Brooks, and vice-

⁴³ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 September 1921 and "The Independent Negro Political Ass'n Held Meet," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 5 November 1921.

president, T.H. Golden. Rev. Brooks was the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church and Chaplain of the Edmonton Division and Golden was the President of the Edmonton Division.⁴⁴ The NPA selected several more officers to complete the association at a meeting held on Monday, October 3rd, 1921, which included Mrs. T.H. Golden as vice secretary, Dr. E.A. Cobbs as treasurer, Fred Dickens as general organizer, and H.P. Stewart as assistant organizer. This crew visited the black communities in and around Edmonton to provide materials on the various political parties and to encourage them to vote in “the interest and welfare of their people at large.”⁴⁵

It is significant that Edmonton Division president, T. H. Golden, became an officer and organizer of the NPA. In November of 1920 Golden explained to an *Edmonton Bulletin* reporter that the UNIA furnished black people with the ability “to recognize their own strength, and the manner in which they co-operate with one another,” citing that in the United States “colored men possess a united vote which if cast into the balance will have the power of controlling the elections.”⁴⁶ One of the NPA’s main goals was to persuade blacks to vote as a block, thereby influencing political elections at both the provincial and federal level and electing the candidate/party that would best represent the needs of the black population of Alberta. This desire among black Albertans to engage with politics is indicative of some of the larger goals of the UNIA, that is, increased political power and equality with whites. While the wider Garvey movement sought black nationhood and political power in Africa, members of local divisions like Edmonton worked on ameliorating their social situation at the grassroots level by practicing their right to vote at home.

The NPA also had plans to contact local politicians and ask them to speak to the black communities in and around the city. This would allow the politicians to meet the black voters and

⁴⁴ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Journal*, 17 September 1921; and “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 September 1921.

⁴⁵ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Journal*, 8 October 1921.

⁴⁶ “Negro People Determined on Racial Equality,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 November 1920.

hear about their concerns, while giving black voters a chance to learn about the political platforms of the representative's political party. A few political figures did come to speak to the black community in Edmonton, including Member of the Legislative Assembly, Nellie McClung, Secretary of the Alberta Social Services Council, H.H. Hull, and Alderman Bury from the City Council.⁴⁷ However, it is unclear if the NPA had a hand in arranging these visits as sources do not divulge how these speakers were procured. There are also no reports on how successful this association was in their goal to educate, encourage, and register voters. The NPA is not mentioned in the *ONC* column beyond the end of 1921. The NPA had likely been focused on the federal election which took place on December 6, 1921. In fact, the year 1921 was a busy one for elections in Alberta in general. There had been a provincial election on July 18 to elect members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Next, Albertans voted in a federal election which led to the appointment of a new Liberal Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King. Lastly, on December 12 Edmonton held their municipal election which saw the re-election of Mayor David Duggan. The NPA seems to have dissolved at this point, perhaps because there would be no new elections for at least one year (municipal).⁴⁸

Unemployment was a serious concern to the black settlers of Alberta. As early as November 1920, President Golden of the Edmonton Division argued that "the Labor movement" would "ultimately bring about better conditions for the colored people."⁴⁹ In a report to *The Negro World* in the Spring of 1921, Golden wrote to the newspaper's editor, William Ferris, asking him to decrease the number of copies sent to Edmonton from 100 to 75. He writes that "times were hard and the

⁴⁷ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 December 1921 and 17 April 1922; and "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 7 January 1922.

⁴⁸ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 December 1921.

⁴⁹ "Negro People Determined on Racial Equality," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 November 1920.

Negro men were losing their jobs and the people didn't buy the paper very readily.⁵⁰ Men commonly worked as railway porters, construction workers, meat packers, and farmers, while women held jobs as laundresses, maids, and nannies. Homesteaders who farmed the rough terrain of northern Alberta often held other jobs to supplement the family income. Some sold timber cut from their property and others went to the city during the winter months looking for odd jobs. On occasion, some male homesteaders around Athabasca would haul freight northward to HBC trading posts. For African-American immigrants, jobs were hard to come by and earning a living was a daily challenge. As mentioned above, relations with white Albertans were often tense. The Edmonton Board of Trade was so adamantly opposed to black immigration in the first place that it should come as no surprise that whites sometimes refused to hire the African-American settlers, or at least gave them the lowest-paying jobs available.⁵¹

To remedy this problem of unemployment, "a goodly number of citizens met and organized the Negro Welfare Association of Alberta" on September 19, 1921, led by President Ira J. Day. This organization, like the NPA, was a more targeted association formed with the support of UNIA members in Edmonton. Linked to this was a free employment bureau set up by Edmonton Division President Golden at his own place of business on 102nd Avenue.⁵² Just a few days prior to the creation of the association, "a committee composed of Rev. Geo. W. Slater, pastor of the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church, Ira J. Day, and D. W. Anderson" had contacted Mayor Duggan and the provincial government "in the interest of the unemployed colored people." They were seeking information on potential job opportunities for black Albertans, as well as help acquiring them. The committee received correspondence back which confirmed that "their efforts are meeting with very

⁵⁰ "The U.N.I.A. in Edmonton, Canada," *The Negro World*, 16 April 1921.

⁵¹ J. Hill, "Alberta's Black Settlers," 132, 140-1; and H. & T. Palmer, "Urban Blacks in Alberta," 11.

⁵² "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 24 September 1921; and "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 September 1921.

gratifying success,” noting that the mines and meat packing plants had a few positions available, and that as harvest time approached there would be a greater demand for farm hands. In a letter addressed to Rev. Slater, Mayor Duggan confirmed,

I have been in communication with Mr. Jamieson [of the Canada National Railway in Edmonton] with the result that he is prepared to employ all the colored people requiring work. I would like you to call to see him as early as possible so that arrangements can be made to take care of all the unemployed colored people.⁵³

The formation of the NWA and employment bureau just days after this report and letter were published likely means that the committee felt it necessary to organize a more formal group to help Edmonton’s black people to find employment in the aforementioned industries. In other words, the NWA may have been a type of placement agency for unemployed black workers and a medium through which people could obtain information on upcoming job opportunities. Perhaps as a means of gaining membership or boosting morale among the unemployed, the NWA also held entertainment events including a Halloween social, guest speakers, and musical performances.⁵⁴

It is unclear how long the NWA operated as there is very little evidence on this organization. The ONC column does not report any news of the association by name after November 26, 1921. However, on April 17, 1922, ONC reports that a debate on the issue of unemployment would be held between a committee comprised of members of the various churches and “the unemployment association.”⁵⁵ Perhaps this was the colloquial term for the NWA, or it could be possible that the article is referring to a different group entirely. Nevertheless, it is evident that the question of unemployment remained an important one to the black community of Edmonton. Efforts continued to help the African-American immigrants find gainful employment. In the Spring of 1922, ONC was still encouraging “every able bodied colored man and woman” to “get a good

⁵³ “News in the Interest of Colored Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 19 September 1921.

⁵⁴ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Journal*, 22 October 1921 and 26 November 1921.

⁵⁵ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 April 1922.

homestead and stay with it until he or she has made a good home out of it.”⁵⁶ This plea in favour of homesteading suggests two things. First, it implies that women could apply for a homestead independently, which means that black women in Alberta were not confined to the occupation of domestic servitude. Second, the article suggests that there was a level of economic hardship and failure among the black farmers in Alberta who had arrived in the province a decade ago. Also during that Spring, the Emmanuel AME Church held a business program “at which time there will be papers and speeches on the necessity of colored people developing business enterprises.” Rev. Slater from the AME church also helped young black women to find work around the city, namely in domestic roles for white families.⁵⁷

The NWA may have declined in significance as black railway porters gained strength within the labour movement and began to unionize. In March of 1922, Rev. Slater wrote that he was well-acquainted with union members and “found them very largely intelligent, progressive, home owning and morally dependable.” He goes on to state their great value to the larger black community as leaders and as “the real backbone of all our progress.” Throughout the Spring and Summer of 1922 it was reported that “employment for the men seems to be increasing,” while UNIA member Fred Dickens and twenty other black men were hired on as extras for Canadian National Railway (CNR).⁵⁸

The UNIA and the Railway

Scholars agree that black railway porters became pillars of leadership within Canada’s black communities because of their profound awareness of race relations across North America. Sleeping

⁵⁶ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 April 1922.

⁵⁷ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 8 May 1922, 15 May 1922, and 22 July 1922. Unfortunately the business program at the AME church was not well attended.

⁵⁸ “Our Negro Citizens” *Edmonton Journal*, 18 March 1922; and “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 19 June 1922.

car porters served as conduits of information across national and international borders. Nelson George explains that Pullman porters “made up a black underground communications network, traveling across the country bringing news from one black community to the next, by word of mouth, and by selling black newspapers. Sarah-Jane Mathieu adds that porters who had cross-border routes between Canada and the United States forged “transnational social and political alliances” and developed a diasporic consciousness as they became more informed about the issues affecting blacks across North America.⁵⁹ Porters also demonstrated a strong political presence in their persistent struggle to establish a labour union. In 1919 under the leadership of J.A. Robinson in Winnipeg, several black railway workers for the Canadian National Railway (CNR) founded the Order of Sleeping Car Porters (OSCP), the first association for black labourers in North America. However, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) refused to recognize the OSCP as an official labour union unless they were affiliated with a larger, more established railway union. After applying significant pressure to the Canadian Brotherhood of Railroad Employees (CBRE), the OSCP were finally accepted into the Brotherhood which formally acknowledged black porters as unionized employees. Unfortunately, this was only a small victory for the black sleeping car porters; the union had accepted the OSCP but had also introduced “two separate groups of employees under the CBRE’s collective bargaining agreement. In one group: white dining and sleeping car employees. In the other: Black porters.”⁶⁰ The two tiers, which also had separate seniority lists, communicated very little and made it near impossible for black porters to advance to higher ranking and better paying jobs.

⁵⁹ Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (London: Penguin Press, 2004), 11; and Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 5, 18.

⁶⁰ Stanley G. Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George: The Story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1998), 18.

Black employees of Canada's other major railway, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), also hoped to unionize, but under the auspices of American-led union called the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP). A. Philip Randolph established the BSCP in 1925 and received an official charter from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1929.⁶¹ African-Canadian porters invited Randolph to Canada to help them unionize. Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, Randolph made secret visits to Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver "to meet privately with groups of porters" and develop plans to union the Canadian porters. Finally in July of 1942, the BSCP established divisions of the union in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg, and then later in Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver. Then "on March 28, 1945 the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was certified [in Canada], and the first collective agreement was signed on May 18, 1945."⁶²

To African Canadians, the BSCP in Canada embodied leadership, progress, and fairness. Unionization had helped the porters to develop a political stance which could be applied to other issues besides fair employment practices.⁶³ Perhaps consequently, union members and their wives made up a significant membership in a growing civil rights organization in Alberta which "worked for fair employment legislation and civil rights protections for African Canadians."⁶⁴ The Alberta Association for the Advancement of Colored People (AAACP) was headquartered in Calgary but represented blacks across the province. It had a racially mixed membership and invited all ages to

⁶¹ Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, 19-20. The BSCP became a chartered affiliate of the AFL on October 7, 1929, at the AFL's annual convention held in Toronto.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21-2. Edmonton's branch started in September of 1945. See also Kelly and Cui, "Racialization and Work," 277.

⁶³ For more on the history of Canadian railway workers, see Agnes Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada: An Ethnically Submerged Split Labour Market," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 19, 1, (1987): 1-20; "Blacks on Canadian Railways," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 20, 2 (1988): 36-52; and "The Struggle for Employment Equity by Blacks on American and Canadian Railroads," *Journal of Black Studies* 25 (January 1995): 307-14.

⁶⁴ Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, 88; Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 204-5; and Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 173.

get involved. The AAACP dealt with cases of discrimination in housing, employment, and public areas like swimming pools and dance halls. They also established scholarship funds for young black students and worked “to change the public’s stereotyped image of blacks.”⁶⁵ There is a debate in the scholarship over the AAACP’s possible affiliation with the BSCP and another organization called the Canadian League for the Advancement of Colored People (CLACP). Melinda Chateauvert, Sarah-Jane Mathieu, and Stanley Grizzle believe that the CLACP, which is a completely different organization from the one mentioned in the Toronto Division chapter, was launched with the help of A. Philip Randolph in the 1940s as a civil rights wing of the BSCP. They claim that the CLACP was an umbrella organization and had branches in Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. On the other side of the debate are Howard and Tamara Palmer, who contend that the AAACP was “autonomous from other black organizations in Canada and in the United States,” just like the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NSAACCP) was in eastern Canada. Interviews with former members of the AAACP do not elucidate whether or not the BSCP was formally linked to the AAACP, but suggest only that railway porters were heavily involved in both organizations.⁶⁶

Perhaps scholars have assumed a connection between the BSCP and the CLACP because they tended to have similar memberships (i.e, porters and their families), and the supposed “branches” of the CLACP sprouted up in the same cities where divisions of the BSCP existed. The debate over these complementary organizations highlights the apparent need for more research on this topic. What I can confirm at this point is that railway employees were the dominant members

⁶⁵ Hazel Proctor, interview by Jennifer Kelly and Donna Coombs-Montrose, Calgary, 27 October 2001, ALHI; and Mojo Williams, interview by Jennifer Kelly and Donna Coombs-Montrose, Calgary, October 2001, ALHI; Kelly and Cui, “Racialization and Work,” 278; and H. & T. Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” 15.

⁶⁶ Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, 173; Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 205; Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 88; H. & T. Palmer, “The Black Experience in Alberta,” 389; Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” 15; and Hazel Proctor and Mojo Williams interviews.

of the AAACP, which served the black communities of Alberta throughout the 1940s and 1950s. It also seems that the AAACP declined in the 1960s after “it had achieved its major goal of outlawing discrimination in jobs and public accommodation.”⁶⁷ The stories of the BSCP and the AAACP serve as a reminder that the question of employment equity in Alberta took decades to answer. It also underlines that its roots lie firmly within the UNIA in Edmonton and its subsidiary group, the NWA, to which many railway employees claimed membership and began their fight for racial equality in the workplace.

Offshoots of the UNIA

The NPA and NWA may have declined or ended operations in the early 1920s because another organization emerged in 1923 that would occupy the time of its organizers, who also happened to be members of the UNIA. In January 1923, three members of the UNIA, Rev. H. Brooks, T. H. Golden, and Fred D. Dickens, created the Alberta Negro Colonization and Settlement Society (ANCSS) “to encourage further [black] immigration into this province.”⁶⁸ Sarah-Jane Mathieu argues that this organization was established as early as 1911,⁶⁹ yet it seems clear according to reports found in the *Edmonton Bulletin* that this society formed in 1923 as a reaction to years of restrictive immigration policy which had stymied African-American immigration for a decade. The ANCSS had “plans as a starter to bring in 500 well-to-do colored farmers” from the southern United States. Some white Albertans believed that the railways were sponsoring settlement

⁶⁷ H. & T. Palmer, “The Black Experience in Alberta,” 389. The Alberta Human Rights Act was passed in April of 1966 and it prohibited the discrimination of persons in employment and housing based on race, religion, colour, or place of origin. *Alberta Human Rights Act*, S.A. 1966, c.39.

⁶⁸ “Society to Encourage Negro Immigration Formed in Edmonton,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 January 1923; and Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, Vol II, 280.

⁶⁹ Mathieu cites an article in the *Edmonton Evening Journal* as evidence of the ANCSS’s foundation in 1911. See *North of the Color Line*, 223, note 75.

organizations like the ANCSS, although there is no solid evidence to validate this claim. White Albertans also remained skeptical about immigration as a means to provide adequate numbers of labourers for the province's various industries, arguing that the market did not demand or require an influx of workers at this time. Moreover, rampant xenophobia persisted in the province, with many whites asking the question: "Can we afford to exchange our coming generation of Canadian-born boys and girls for any class of immigrants?"⁷⁰

Again, it is not known for how long the ANCSS lasted, or how successful it was in its goal of attracting black farmers to Alberta. Based on the data collected by Charles Irby, very few people claimed new homesteads after 1913 so it seems the ANCSS fell short of its objective.⁷¹ However, what the aforementioned organizations in this chapter highlight is the tremendous amount of community involvement among Edmonton's black peoples. During the 1920s and 1930s blacks in Edmonton and the surrounding area created a wide variety of benevolent organizations designed to bring people together and help them to engage with politics, art, religion, and culture. Although the population of Edmonton was small in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, they were very keen on organizing. Aside from the churches, Shiloh Baptist and Emmanuel AME, the black residents of Edmonton established groups for women, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Women's Liberal Club, The Lotus Art Club, and the Deborah Chapter of the Masonic Order. For men there were the Masons and the Fraternal Lodge No. 9. Aside from the UNIA, NPA, NWA, and ANCSS, both sexes could belong to the Golden Rule Pioneer's Club which was a social club for elderly citizens. A few other clubs operated during the Great Depression, like the Liberty Protective Society formed in the 1930s to raise money and send provisions to destitute people in the

⁷⁰ "Bulletin's Mail Bag," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 30 January 1923; and "Mat. Esdale President of Board Trade," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 27 October 1923.

⁷¹ Irby, "Northeast Alberta," 156-187.

community and the Colored Canadian Industrial Association which “met to discuss matters pertaining to the general welfare of Black people in Alberta, as well as to plan methods of putting Black concerns before governing authorities.”⁷²

While the number of groups available to Edmonton’s black residents is impressive, what is even more remarkable is that black citizens often claimed membership in multiple organizations and clubs at the same time. For example, T.H. Golden served as president of the UNIA division in Edmonton, and as a member of the NWA, NPA, and ANCSS. Rev. Brooks also served as pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Chaplain of the Edmonton Division of the UNIA, and president of the ANCSS. For Estelle Proctor, “her participation in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the Marcus Garvey ‘Back to Africa Movement,’ and the Shiloh Baptist Church developed her ability as a public speaker.”⁷³ The presence and assortment of so many different groups for Edmonton’s black community indicates a profound urge to connect with their compatriots and with like-minded people. Kelly and Cui argue that the multitude of black clubs in Edmonton illustrates black Albertans’ desire to validate and express a sense of citizenship in Canada. They label this as “citizenship as participation.”⁷⁴

Kelly and Cui explain that in the early twentieth century, “citizenship was not an automatic aspect of residence; the racialized structure of Canadian society was often prohibitive in enabling African Canadians to undertake traditional forms of citizenship within the public sphere.” Formal Canadian citizenship was closely tied to the Immigration Act, which basically outlined the definition of a Canadian citizen. A Canadian citizen was someone born in Canada, or a British subject with a

⁷² Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, Vol. II, 281-3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁷⁴ Jennifer Kelly and Dan Cui, “A Historical Exploration of Citizenship Practices of African Canadian Immigrants in 1920s Alberta,” (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, Vancouver, 2008), <http://casae-aceea.ca/~casae/sites/casae/archives/cnf2008/OnlineProceedings-2008/CAS2008-Kelly.pdf>, 204.

permanent residence in Canada, or a person who applied for and met the criteria of citizenship as outlined in the laws of Canada. One of these laws was the Naturalization Act of 1914. The Naturalization Act, and therefore citizenship, required applicants to provide proof of residence in Canada for at least five years, have a knowledge of either French or English, and possess a “good character.” However, applicants were at the whim of authorized government agents who could deny any applicant a certificate of naturalization without “assigning any reason.” Given that white residents and immigration officials alike held negative opinions of the African-American immigrants in Alberta, it seems plausible that the black settlers would have had a difficult time achieving formal Canadian citizenship in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, Kelly and Cui persuasively argue that while citizenship can be formal, it can also be expressed informally through participation, “the central themes of which focus on community, belonging, and political participation.” In this way, Alberta’s black residents demonstrated their citizenship through participation in organizations that worked toward the betterment of their country and community. The UNIA and other organizations represent the political voice of African Canadian communities in pursuit of equality and democracy, “with members serving as political mediators between the state and the local community.”⁷⁵

The UNIA proved very significant to locals in the Edmonton Division for many reasons. The UNIA was a social place where friends and relatives in and around the city could connect. Based on interviews with former members, Velma Carter concludes that [d]uring the 1920s and 1930s, it was felt that the most important Black organization in the community was the Universal Negro Improvement Association.” As we know, the black population of Edmonton was small, perhaps around 400 by the 1930s.⁷⁶ Moreover, the rural communities like Pine Creek, Junkins, and Keystone were even smaller and more isolated. To beat their sense of disconnection with one

⁷⁵ Kelly and Cui, “A Historical Exploration,” 202-6.

⁷⁶ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, Vol II, 280-1.

another, black Albertans joined the UNIA which, as the evidence shows, worked as a vehicle through which dispersed members of these black communities could meet and socialize.

The Black Cross Nurses hosted social events like tea parties, which were specifically for the female members of the UNIA. The ladies of the BCN also convened to knit and sew items for display and sale at UNIA bazaars. For example, at the Edmonton Division bazaar in February of 1922, the BCN exhibited samples of their fine needlework and also organized a program of entertainment for its members.⁷⁷ The annual UNIA picnics in Alberta's black communities were great opportunities for members of the various divisions in Alberta to get together. Reports indicate that people from all around Alberta, even as far away as Calgary, attended the Edmonton Division's picnic in August of 1921. Edmonton residents often made a day trip to Junkins in the summertime to attend their UNIA picnics. In 1922, Rev. George Slater from Edmonton attended the UNIA picnic in Pine Creek. These events included lectures and sermons on issues of race, and also a range of activities and games which provided ample opportunity for socializing.⁷⁸

In fact, visits between UNIA divisions seemed to be fairly common. Members in Edmonton, Junkins, and Keystone met with each other quite regularly, likely because of their relative close proximity to one another. Yet, UNIA members from further away, like Pine Creek and Calgary, sometimes traveled to Edmonton to experience their Sunday mass meetings. In September of 1921, the Edmonton Division even hosted a guest speaker all the way from the Winnipeg Division: its vice president, Nelson Driver.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 5 December 1921 and 12 December 1921; "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 21 January 1922.

⁷⁸ "Celebration is Held by Negro Improvement As." *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 September 1921; "News of Interest to Colored Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 September 1921; "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 9 August 1922; and "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 September 1921.

⁷⁹ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 24 September 1921, 15 October 1921, 24 October 1922, and 12 November 1921; "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 December 1921, 14 January 1922, 18 February 1922.

Reports in ONC indicate that the Edmonton Division held regular Sunday meetings where members delivered lectures, news, and poems on race and black culture. For example, at one mass meeting a Miss Carter recited a piece she wrote called “The Ku Klux Klan” in which she claims, “While they are organizing a million strong for destruction, we [the UNIA] are organizing four hundred million strong for construction.” At the same meeting the division secretary, Charles Barnes, “gave a stirring address and caused the audience to give three cheers.”⁸⁰ In this way, the UNIA in Edmonton provided a safe and congenial place where members of the black community could discuss their concerns over racism with like-minded people. In addition, the UNIA in Edmonton served as an outlet for its members to display their talents and achievements. On numerous occasions, members of the black community recited poetry and performed in musical concerts at the UNIA’s mass meetings. In November of 1921, “Mr. Nurse gave one of his original poems,” and “Mrs. Bozzie, Edmonton’s nightingale, gave one of her famous solos.” At the Edmonton Division’s annual picnic in 1922, the program consisted of several vocalists, musicians, and dancers who performed for the enjoyment of the black community.⁸¹

By reporting on local events, the ONC column reflected the values as well as the racial and ethnic background of Alberta’s black residents. In one issue, the columnist implores writers in Canada to use a capital “N” when spelling the word “Negro” to comply with what “scholars of our own race” consider to be the correct way to address this “distinct class or race of people.”⁸² The column also reports that on several occasions members of Edmonton’s black community served classic southern cooking at receptions and events. Shiloh Baptist Church, which had many Edmonton Division members in their congregation, hosted a chitterlings (chitlins) dinner in

⁸⁰ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Journal*, 22 October 1921.

⁸¹ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 26 November 1921 and 12 August 1922.

⁸² “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 13 February 1922.

September of 1921 and a fundraising “feast of Kentucky oysters” in 1922. The BCN in Junkins served a meal of Maryland fried chicken at a reception in honour of the UNIA’s High Commissioner of Canada, George Creese, who was visiting the community in the Fall of 1921.⁸³ The choice of foods served at these events reflects the distinct cultural heritage of the black settlers of Alberta, whose origins go back to the American south.

It should be noted that the UNIA in Edmonton was also closely tied to the black churches in the community. Members of the Edmonton Division attended either the Emmanuel AME Church or Shiloh Baptist Church, the latter being the more popular of the two. In fact, Howard and Tamara Palmer contend that Shiloh Baptist Church “was the centre of the Edmonton black community” between the 1920s and 1950s. In Alberta, as in other parts of the country, one’s Sunday routine usually consisted of church services in the morning and regular UNIA mass meetings in the afternoon. This schedule was particularly easy to keep for UNIA members in Edmonton given that regular division meetings took place at Shiloh Baptist, with church services commencing at noon and UNIA meetings following at three o’clock. Furthermore, long-serving Chaplain of the Edmonton Division, Rev. H. Brooks, was also the pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church. In these ways, Shiloh Baptist Church is inextricably linked to the history of the UNIA in Edmonton.⁸⁴ To be sure, the relationship between the UNIA and the black churches of Edmonton was reciprocal. For example, the pastor of Emmanuel AME Church and ONC columnist, Rev. George Slater, was also a devoted member of the Edmonton Division. In addition, UNIA members

⁸³ “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Journal*, 24 September 1921 and 12 November 1921; “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 28 January 1922.

⁸⁴ H. & T. Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” 12; “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Journal*, 15 October 1921; and “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 22 July 1922.

regularly attended church events, such as the AME church's first anniversary celebration on May 31, 1922.⁸⁵

The connection between the churches and the Edmonton Division may be part of a larger religious tradition rooted in African-American (slave) culture. Since the era of slavery, "black churches constituted the central institutional sector in black communities."⁸⁶ Henry Mitchell contends that beginning in the Reconstruction period (1865-1877) and for the next thirty-five years, the Black Church entered its "Golden Era" during which time membership in black churches increased dramatically and inaugurated numerous institutions, such as schools, insurance companies, and banks, for the benefit of the black community.⁸⁷ The Reconstruction period that followed the American Civil War was a time when newly-freed slaves had to forge a new life for themselves, which for many was a very daunting venture. Tasked with finding housing, employment, and schools for their children, African Americans turned to the church for guidance. Mitchell notes that African Americans "had to be stabilized and supported" during this time of immense change. The Black Church, which had always provided emotional and spiritual counseling to its members, now began to take a more active role in the social and civic lives of the congregation. The church represented and educated black communities in political matters. The church was also instrumental in starting schools at every level as a means of eradicating illiteracy and preparing young black men and women for the job market. It also guided them toward potential job opportunities, or even created jobs for African Americans by establishing businesses like banks and insurance companies. On top of this, these institutions presented African Americans with the means to achieve financial

⁸⁵ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 27 May 1922. Note that several other black community groups attended this event, including representatives from Shiloh Baptist Church, the Masons, the WCTU, and the Deborah Star Club.

⁸⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 7.

⁸⁷ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 140.

stability; white-run banks and insurance companies commonly rejected black clients on account of their race. Black-owned banks and insurance companies, in contrast, acted as a safety net for the black community during times of need. In this way, “the church became, for all intents and purposes, a reincarnation of the African extended-family community.” Church members could rely on others within the congregation to support them, like a family. Indeed, Black Church leaders experienced a new sense of pride in “their capacity to care for the aged, widowed, crippled, homeless, and destitute.”⁸⁸

During the Reconstruction period, the Black Church achieved such a central position within black communities in America because the black sects, including Methodists and Baptists, “cast loose from white supervision.” In other words, black congregations which had been controlled by white factions before the Civil War began to separate themselves and establish churches led by black pastors. In time, the black churches became officially “recognized by associations and conventions” as distinct from white churches. The Black Church, then, became more visible, independent, and organized during this period.⁸⁹

The “Golden Era” of the Black Church was the period during which the generation of black Oklahomans discussed in this chapter came of age. Thus, the formidable presence of the Black Church in America at this time had a powerful influence on this group of people. This generation of African Americans also saw the rise of strong secular organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as the NAACP. These secular groups “were often founded with the help and support of Black Church leaders; their memberships often overlapped with Black Church membership.” As Lincoln and Mamiya note, there was great cooperation between non-religious institutions and black churches because “some of the more astute and visionary church leaders saw

⁸⁸ Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings*, 162-73.

⁸⁹Ibid., 162-3.

the need to develop secular vehicles in order to cope with more complex and pluralistic urban environments.”⁹⁰ Considering the history of the Black Church in America and its connection to non-religious institutions, it should come as no surprise that the African-American immigrants in Edmonton would have chosen to link their churches, Shiloh Baptist and Emmanuel AME, to their primary secular organization, the UNIA.

As mentioned above, Kelly and Cui contend that participation in the various groups available to Edmonton’s black residents represents a tangible demonstration of citizenship. A closer look at the UNIA in Edmonton helps to illustrate the point. The Edmonton Division certainly seems to be a group that formed as a means to challenge racist practices in the province by staking a claim to important political issues like education and employment on behalf of black residents. The Edmonton Division was, in many ways, an outlet through which its members could express a united front against racism. The first Edmonton Division president, T. H. Golden, made this point abundantly clear in 1920 when he told an *Edmonton Bulletin* reporter that

The Negro people emphatically claim that as law abiding citizens under the protection of the flag, who enjoy the right to vote, and pay their taxes, that they are entitled to a consideration of their claims, and that the day is past when they will allow themselves to be reckoned as an inferior race and be subject to the persecution such as is meted out to them in the southern states of the union.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 9. Judith Weisenfeld’s work on African-American women and the black YWCA of New York City presents an example of how secular organizations were inextricably linked to Christian ideals. Weisenfeld claims that while the YWCA may seem to have had a secular agenda, “the organization nevertheless originated from the Christian commitments of its founders.” She argues, “Faith was vital to the women involved in the institution, and in keeping with the YWCA’s mission of ‘bringing about the kingdom of God among young women,’ they held a place for Protestantism in their work.” More recently, Albert Raboteau explores how the religious backgrounds seven American activists, including Fannie Lou Hamer and Martin Luther King, Jr., influenced their political leanings. He argues that these activists were “moved to action by a deep compassion for those suffering injustice or oppression” while their religious rhetoric and ethics “mobilized some of their fellow citizens to commit themselves to movements for social change.” See Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York’s Black YWCA, 1905- 1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3-4; and Albert J. Raboteau, *American Prophets: Seven Religious Radicals and their Struggle for Social and Political Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), xiv.

⁹¹ “Negro People Determined on Race Equality,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 November 1920.

The Edmonton Division and its sub-groups like the NPA and NWA, as we know, took an active role in ameliorating the unemployment problem among black residents and also greatly encouraged black citizens to make their vote count at the polls in 1921. UNIA members also showed concern over the question of segregated schools in the nearby community of Campsie. Black children in Campsie had “been shut out of school for about seven years” with whites in the area calling for separate schools for the races. A committee “of several prominent preachers” in Edmonton lobbied the Minister of Education on this matter, as was relayed at a UNIA meeting in 1922, while a petition “signed by quite two-thirds of the rate payers and citizens of their district” called for the ending of segregated schools so that the black children of Campsie could attend the one and only schoolhouse in the community.⁹²

Although not directly named in the sources, it is reasonable to infer that UNIA members in Edmonton were part of the delegations that lobbied city council about the delayed sale of land to Emmanuel AME Church in February of 1922. The AME church, interested in purchasing the property at the corner of Fraser and 106th Avenue, was met with resistance by “six owners of adjoining property” who did not wish to have black neighbours. Considering the small black population of Edmonton at this time, in conjunction with the knowledge that some UNIA members attended the AME church, it is probable, if not likely, that members of the Edmonton Division were part of the delegations that asked council to carry out the sale of the property lawfully. The sale of the property was eventually approved by City Council and was completed later that year.⁹³

UNIA members stood behind the committee that protested in city council against “an edict forbidding the use of public swimming pools” by black residents. It is known that at least two of

⁹² “Our Negro Citizens,” *Edmonton Journal*, 17 December 1921, 4 February 1922, 18 February 1922, and 15 April 1922.

⁹³ “Sale of Land for Negro Church by City Causes Protests from Owners of Adjoining Property,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 28 February 1922. Rev. George Slater notes that at the time the church claimed 70 members in Edmonton which “included the best colored citizens in western Canada.”

the four committee members, Mrs. P.S. Poston and Rev. George Slater, were UNIA members in Edmonton. Mrs. Poston accused the order to ban black swimmers from the East End Swimming Pool (also known as Borden Park Pool) a “form of hateful Ku Kluxism that discounts worthy people simply because of race.” The committee’s appeal found sympathetic ears as council voted almost unanimously to rescind the order on July 14, 1924.⁹⁴

While Kelly and Cui’s assessment of Alberta’s black organizations holds merit, the concept of citizenship as participation is not in itself sufficient in describing why members joined the UNIA in Canada. UNIA membership demonstrates black Albertans’ desire to connect to something global. For a group that evidently felt marginalized and underrepresented in their own country, the UNIA granted them a united voice for a greater, international cause. Claiming membership in the UNIA meant you were an active participant in both the organization *and* a social movement intended to eradicate inequality between the races.

From its inception, the Edmonton Division engaged wholeheartedly in the Garvey movement in a variety of ways. For one, its first president explained that the UNIA’s goal of inhabiting Africa was “a very real issue with the colored peoples” of Edmonton and that it was “more than a poetical myth; it is the goal towards which this powerful society is aiming.”⁹⁵ The Edmonton Division also welcomed international guest speakers to address its members and inform them of the broader work of the UNIA, including V.J. Williams of the Harlem Division/UNIA

⁹⁴ The other two committee members were Ernie Walker and Richard Cross. They may have been UNIA members, but no evidence has been found to validate this. “Negro Citizens Appeal Order Barring them from City Pools,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 12 July 1924 and “Negroes Bathe in City Pools,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 15 July 1924. Only City Commissioner Christopher Yorath opposed the repeal of the ban against black swimmers; he resigned following the vote to overturn it. This matter of blacks using public swimming pools remained a prevalent one that summer. The issue was brought to City Council again after 535 white citizens signed a petition which protested council’s decision to rescind the order. “A large delegation of the black community led by Rev. George Slater” fought back against this petition while another delegation from the Colored Citizens’ Community League, led by its president H.P. Stewart (an organizer of the NPA), “declared that his people as a whole were not protesting what was happening at the swimming pools; the objections were being lodged by a small minority.” The issue finally fizzled out by the end of the summer. See “Racism Colours the Opening of Two New City Swimming Pools,” *Edmonton Journal*, 28 August 2014.

⁹⁵ “Negro People Determined on Race Equality,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 6 November 1920.

Headquarters.⁹⁶ In addition UNIA members in Edmonton showed interest in the broader Garvey movement by subscribing to *The Negro World*, which allowed them to keep up on world events and the most current thoughts of their President-General. Members of the Edmonton Division also occasionally reported their own division news in the newspaper, which would be read by the millions of Garvey followers around the world.⁹⁷ These examples demonstrate how the Edmonton Division sought to do their part as members of an international movement; by educating themselves on the movement and by engaging with a global audience, Edmonton members became active participants in this Pan-African movement.⁹⁸

Not only did Edmonton members seek to educate themselves, but they also took part in spreading the Garvey movement to others parts of the province. In the summer of 1921, two members of the Edmonton Division, Rev. H. Brooks and Mr. Gustave, traveled to Calgary to help establish and organize a UNIA division in their community.⁹⁹ Later that year, the Edmonton Division facilitated the opening of several other UNIA divisions in Alberta with the help of the UNIA's High Commissioner of Canada, George D. Creese. Part of Creese's duties as High Commissioner of Canada was to travel across the country and encourage black communities to become followers of Garvey. Creese was scheduled to arrive in Edmonton from his home in New

⁹⁶ "A Negro Flag for Africa; Black Continent for Blacks Demand Colored Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 11 July 1921. Williams spoke about "The Garvey Movement in the realm of international politics."

⁹⁷ "The U.N.I.A. in Edmonton, Canada," *The Negro World*, 16 April 1921 and "The Black Cross Nurses of Edmonton, Alta," *The Negro World*, 7 May 1921.

⁹⁸ It is unknown whether or not members of the Edmonton Division bought shares in the Black Star Line or contributed to other UNIA fundraising efforts like the Marcus Garvey Defense Fund or the African Redemption Fund. However, there is evidence to show that members in Saskatchewan made monetary donations to the Marcus Garvey Defense Fund in 1922, so it is possible that members in Edmonton would have done the same. See "Marcus Garvey's Defense Fund," *The Negro World*, 18 November 1922.

⁹⁹ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 27 August 1921.

Aberdeen, Nova Scotia on October 25, 1921 to help spread the work of the UNIA in Alberta.¹⁰⁰

After a grand welcoming reception thrown by the BCN in Creese's honour, President Golden accompanied Creese as his secretary on a trip around the province, including visits to Junkins (November 6), Donatville (November 13), Keystone (November 20), and Calgary (November 30).

The first visit to Junkins was reported in *ONC* as "a successful trip." However, the column reveals that "the division, in spite of opposition and lack of constitutional interpretation, are doing fine. Owing to the low price of grain and poor market for their products, as well as high rate of taxes, their finances are somewhat limited. In spite of such circumstances they contributed well for the upkeep of their association."¹⁰¹ Given that the other UNIA divisions in rural areas would have experienced similar economic challenges, it is likely that they all struggled like Junkins to maintain the association in their communities. They doubtlessly relied on the strength of the Edmonton Division which was, according to Rev. Slater, "a large organization ranking with the best in the general association." Creese left in mid-December, claiming "that his work in this section of the dominion had been both pleasant and profitable."¹⁰² Edmonton's contributions to Creese's visit and to the establishment and upkeep of UNIA divisions in Alberta demonstrates its members' desire to connect these isolated black communities in the province and to recruit more followers for the broader Garvey movement.

As should be clear by now, much of this early work for the association was under the trusted leadership of T. H. Golden. Velma Carter claims that Golden, originally from a small town outside

¹⁰⁰ "Our Negro Citizens, *Edmonton Journal*, 22 October 1921 and 29 October 1921; "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 5 November 1921; and "High Commissioner Geo. D. Creese Establishes a Division of U.N.I.A. in the Frozen Northwest Territories of Canada," *The Negro World*, 10 December 1921.

¹⁰¹ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 12 November 1921.

¹⁰² "Our Negro Citizens, *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 December 1921. President Golden gave his resignation after Creese's visit. It was also reported in *ONC* that Creese suffered a nervous breakdown early in 1922, perhaps a result of the stress associated with his extensive travels throughout Canada. See "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 11 February 1922.

Chicago, was one of the first five African-American settlers in Edmonton in 1905. Aside from being the founding president of the Edmonton Division, he was also Worshipful Master of the Masonic Lodge and a supporter of the Community Mission which served the city's unemployed.¹⁰³ Golden attended the annual UNIA convention in Harlem, New York, in 1920 and 1921 as a representative for the Edmonton Division which had raised money for his travel expenses.¹⁰⁴ His attendance at the UNIA's international convention, backed by the support of the division members, confirms black Albertans' goal of connecting to a global black community and social movement. It was, in conjunction with the division's commitment to *The Negro World*, the procurement of national and international guest speakers, the spread of Garveyism within the province, and a belief in an Africa for the Africans, one of many ways in which blacks in Alberta declared their presence within the African diaspora.

The Decline

According to Velma Carter, the UNIA in Edmonton existed throughout the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰⁵ However, there seems to be no solid evidence to confirm when blacks in Edmonton decided to close their doors. Unfortunately, the UNIA may have been doomed from the start. According to the Palmers, a number of factors contributed to the brevity of secular black clubs like the UNIA, including a "lack of a national black organization to provide help, the absence of a sizable middle class to give leadership to the groups," not to mention "the small number of blacks in

¹⁰³ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, Vol. II, 280-1.

¹⁰⁴ "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 September 1921 and 1 October 1921; and "Our Negro Citizens," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 September 1921. See also Robert A. Hill, "Appendix II," in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983): 2: 682-3; and "Appendix IV," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (1984), 3: 786-7.

¹⁰⁵ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, Vol. II, 281-3. She also claims that the UNIA division in Pine Creek lasted into the 1930s.

Alberta and the high rate of mobility and transiency of the porters.”¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, it seems fair to assume that the UNIA declined in Alberta in the 1930s as the Great Depression struck the country. Life for the homesteaders was extremely difficult. While they had livestock to feed their own families, their meat and eggs were worth very little in the marketplace which made it hard for farmers to earn a living. Many had to work in the cities of Edmonton or Calgary during the winter months to make ends meet, while others began moving out of their homesteads completely and setting up residence in the city or back in the United States. Ellis Hooks recalls that by 1939 only ten families remained in Keystone because many had moved out in search of job opportunities. This trend continued even after the Second World War which saw the rapid decline of the rural communities. The opportunities to serve in the war effort both at home and abroad inspired many in these isolated communities to leave their tiny hamlets for good. This, of course, “sounded the death knell for the rural black communities” of Alberta; with so few residents remaining, there was no need to maintain black fraternal organizations like the UNIA.¹⁰⁷

As the evidence in this chapter shows, the UNIA’s popularity in Alberta rose quickly but did not last long as several other, more specific, black organizations emerged to meet the needs of the black population. Groups like the Greater Edmonton and Civic Community Organization, the High Tension Club, the Canadian Colored Industrial Association, and the AAACP served singular purposes, yet were rooted in the common objective of improving the lives of black citizens in Alberta.¹⁰⁸ In this way, each one is a representation of the UNIA’s influence in the province as one of the first secular organizations to encourage its black residents to celebrate their African roots and demand equality.

¹⁰⁶ H. & T. Palmer, “The Black Experience in Alberta,” 388; and Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” 13-4.

¹⁰⁷ Ellis Hooks and Mrs. Charles King interviews; and H. & T. Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” 14.

¹⁰⁸ H. & T. Palmer, “Urban Blacks in Alberta,” 14.

Conclusions

Although the UNIA may have lasted only a short time in Alberta, this chapter demonstrates the organization's ability to meet the specific needs of the African-American immigrants who arrived in a province that was still largely unsettled frontier at the turn of the twentieth century. This group of African Americans, who had continually sought refuge and freedom in isolated communities across the American south and in Canada, was predisposed to the separatist philosophies of the Garvey movement. The UNIA provided an outlet for the black community of Edmonton to express pride in their African and African-American heritage. Moreover, the UNIA was a source of strength and fellowship for blacks on the plains during hard times. It allowed black communities that felt alienated in their new home to unite on matters of politics and employment, and to participate to a global anti-racism movement. In cooperation with black churches like Shiloh Baptist, the UNIA divisions in Edmonton and its surrounding rural hamlets also served as social hubs where porters, laundresses, and homesteaders alike could convey a sense of purpose to one another and cultivate a voice to speak out against bigotry.

The Edmonton Division in particular was influential in spreading the Garvey movement across Alberta. As the province's first division, its members saw the benefits of having the association within their community and quickly acted to help other towns like Calgary and Junkins to open a UNIA division of their own. Members from these communities frequently attended UNIA events at each of the various divisions across Alberta, proving that the UNIA was a driving force in breaking the sense of isolation that characterized life on the Great Plains.

In spite of its fleeting appearance in the province, the UNIA had a notable impact on the black communities of Alberta. Blacks settlers in Alberta like E.A. Cobb considered Marcus Garvey to be a hero, even comparing him to the Métis martyr, Louis Riel, and to the great civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for their shared ability to unite marginalized peoples in the face of

adversity.¹⁰⁹ The UNIA was a springboard and a training ground for other, more specialized, black organizations that developed to improve race relations in Alberta. In this way, the UNIA played an integral part in the development of Alberta's early black settlements and served as the voice for the black Oklahomans who sought a better, more egalitarian life in Canada's western provinces.

¹⁰⁹ Carter, *The Windows of Our Memories*, Vol. II, 66.

Epilogue

The story of the UNIA in Canada does not end in 1950. In fact, in some places the organization lived on and adapted to the needs and wants of a changing black population. The purpose of this epilogue is to offer a window into the changes the UNIA faced in the four Canadian regions examined in this dissertation.

Montreal

Beginning in the 1940s, black residents gradually began moving out of the St. Antoine District, which had become known as the West End by that time, in search of better housing in other parts of Montreal. Dorothy Williams explains, “By the end of the decade many blacks had taken advantage of veteran’s benefits and either bought land or a home, or moved into rental property designated for veterans and their families.” The Depression years had been very difficult financially on Montreal’s black population. During this time the West End had deteriorated significantly. Homelessness was common, and the rental properties that were available tended to be in poor condition and carried high rents. But the Second World War had renewed their hope for a better future; war industries boomed and jobs became available for both men and women. Higher wages meant they could afford housing in better parts of town, and many black Montrealers capitalized on this opportunity. Some moved into the area known as Nôtre-Dame-de-Grace (NDG) in the 1940s and 1950s, and into the neighbourhood called Côte-des-Neiges in the 1960s.¹ The exodus of blacks from the West End coincided with the period directly following Marcus Garvey’s death. Members in Montreal were already mourning his loss and struggling to keep the UNIA afloat during this difficult period. Although it continued to operate, the movement of black families out of the neighbourhood exacerbated the decline of the UNIA into the 1950s.

¹ Dorothy Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 95-7; 114.

Liberty Hall remained open throughout the 1950s and 1960s and served mostly as a social club for the few elderly black residents still living in the neighbourhood. During this period, members offered support to foreign black students who wished to come to Canada to study, and offered remedial help classes in 1965 for high school students as a means of improving their grades and their sense of self-worth. The Montreal Division also worked with other black organizations in the city to offer scholarships to students, showing continual support for the education of black youths. Bertley notes that many of the students who won scholarships were African immigrants because members hoped they would return to Africa and spread Garvey's message of African independence.²

An incident at Sir George Williams University in the late 1960s briefly revived the organization as it became an important meeting place for young black students who protested discriminatory treatment at their school. The incident arose after six black students accused their biology professor, Perry Anderson, of discriminatory treatment in 1968. All six of them had received failing grades despite having completed the coursework to a satisfactory level. They filed an official complaint to the Dean of Students, but were unhappy with how the university administration handled their concerns. In response, the six of them led a sit-in protest of some 200 students in February of 1969. They occupied the ninth floor of the computer building on campus for days until the police were called in to quash the demonstration. The students considered the move deliberately aggressive and peaceful negotiations abruptly ended. A riot ensued, causing two million dollars in

² Leo Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979" (PhD. diss., Concordia University, 1980), 238; 243-4; 250. Bertley says that the Montreal Division was instrumental in helping a student from Trinidad, Owen Hodges, apply to study in Canada in 1967. The UNIA in Montreal provided Hodges with a letter to give to the immigration authorities "to demonstrate that the organization supported him in his application to study in Canada."

damage to the building and resulted in ninety-seven arrests. Professor Anderson was reinstated and cleared of all charges of racism.³

Williams notes, “The leadership of the Universal Negro Improvement Association believed that the obvious failure of the integrationist approach by blacks which was revealed during the Sir George Williams Affair was nothing less than the vindication of Garveyism.” They decided to offer up Liberty Hall as a meeting place for the February Eleventh Defence Committee, which was a group of students who were trying “to raise funds for the defense of the 97 students who were eventually charged.” Thursday nights at Liberty Hall were “standing room only” in the months directly following the riot in February. The fundraising events included spirited lectures against the racist treatment of blacks in Montreal. However, by the end of 1969 the student protesters had begun investing their time and energy into other groups and initiatives like the Congress of Black Women and the Quebec Black Board of Educators.⁴ Although it lasted only a few months, the UNIA in Montreal had experienced a period of intensity it had not seen since the 1920s.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s there were almost no active members left in Montreal, although the UNIA still owned their Liberty Hall at Georges Vanier Boulevard. The dozen members who remained were still paying dues to the Parent Body of the UNIA, and were “administering the property which the division purchased” over thirty years ago.⁵ In 1983, the Montreal Division set up The Garvey Institute in Montreal. A primary focus for the UNIA in Montreal has always been educating the next generation. The Garvey Institute was specifically

³ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 119-121.

⁴ Ibid., 126-7. For more on the Sir George Williams Affair, see Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 104-12; Dennis Forsythe, ed., *Let the Niggers Burn!: The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montreal: Black Rose Books-Our Generation Press, 1971), David Austin, “All Roads Led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, 4 (Autumn 2007): 529-35.

⁵ Bertley, “The UNIA of Montreal,” 112-4.

designed to do this, but in a more targeted way. The members, who included Leo and June Bertley, had the ultimate goal of setting up a black private school in Little Burgundy and providing the students with an Afrocentric and bilingual education. “In 1991 a permit was granted to Quebec’s first black private school, where black history, civilization, and culture were celebrated.”⁶ The Garvey Institute also offered scholarships to black students around the city as a means of helping them to continue their education beyond high school. Today the Montreal Division (number 334) is the only operating branch of the UNIA in Canada, and it is currently located at 2741 Notre-Dame Street West in the neighbourhood of Little Burgundy.

Toronto

As mentioned in the Toronto case study, the UNIA Hall became a sort of jazz hall as a means of attracting younger members and of fostering young black musical talent. By the 1950s, it was no longer taboo for black musicians to perform for white audiences. Because black musicians no longer needed to perform at the UNIA Hall, the association quickly dropped in popularity. This coincided with significant changes in the city’s black population. After the Second World War, some black families began moving to the suburbs while at the same time, Toronto experienced an influx of new immigrants from the Caribbean in the 1950s. These new immigrants were not welcomed into the social circles of the elderly members of the UNIA. Keith Henry reckons that this was partly out of fear that the UNIA would lose “its hard-won building to a greedy or feckless clique of newcomers or outsiders.”⁷ These new immigrants started organizations of their own. At the same time, some of the children and grandchildren of original UNIA members no longer saw the

⁶ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 142.

⁷ Keith Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto since World War I*, (Toronto: MHSO, 1981), 31. See also “What is Happening to the U.N.I.A.?” *The Canadian Negro*, December 1956, Universal African Improvement Association (hereafter UAIA) of Toronto records, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

need for a race-first organization. They preferred an integrationist approach to fighting racism in their community rather than the separatist ideals of the UNIA. Young blacks in Toronto largely viewed the UNIA as an outdated vestige of the past, and a place where their elders socialized. Nevertheless, and as in the past, other black organizations in the city like the Eureka Lodge and Toronto United Negro Association (TUNA) rented the UNIA Hall throughout the 1950s and 1960s, thus remaining an important locale for the black community in Toronto.⁸

Unfortunately, the rent moneys were not enough to keep the UNIA Hall from falling into arrears. Financial reports show that the Toronto Division had been spending more money than they were taking in since the late 1930s.⁹ By 1957 the Toronto Division had only eleven dues-paying members.¹⁰ The tiny membership meant that fundraising efforts also waned given the lack of available volunteers to coordinate them. Perhaps sensing that the Toronto Division was in dire need of new members and financial support, older UNIA members finally began to allow young people to join the organization in the 1960s. The result was a brief resurgence in UNIA membership in the late 1960s, perhaps coinciding with the growth of the civil rights movement in the United States. In 1967 the Toronto Division's records show that dues-paying members were up to thirty-seven.¹¹

Newer members tried to build on this momentum into the 1970s. The charge was led by a dynamic West Indian immigrant named Dudley Laws. Laws was born in Jamaica in 1934 and had learned of the UNIA as a teenager. He arrived in Toronto in 1965 and became active in several community organizations, including the UNIA. He was elected president of the Toronto Division

⁸ Letter from Toronto United Negro Association to UNIA, 1956; and Letter from Eureka Lodge to UNIA, 1956, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

⁹ Financial Statement, 30 January 1940; Financial Statement, December 1962; and Treasurer's Report, 1970, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

¹⁰ Names of Active members of UNIA, 1 February 1957, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

¹¹ Miscellaneous Applications for Membership, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.

in the early 1970s and used the platform of the UNIA to launch new programs to remedy specific problems in Toronto's black neighbourhoods, namely police brutality against black youths and a lack of education. Indeed, the UNIA had a change of mission in the 1970s: to advise and counsel people of African descent living in Toronto who were in dire straits. Laws claims that before he became president of the Toronto Division, the UNIA was almost completely inactive because many of the members were quite elderly and they were reluctant to let younger people take over and implement new programs. Laws began his tenure as president by changing the name of the organization to the Universal African Improvement Association (UAIA) in the hopes of appealing to a more diverse group of people. By the early 1970s the term "negro" was falling out of favour by members of the black community, so the switch to "African" was meant to be more inclusive.¹² Laws initiated two major programs through the UNIA: the Black Youth Community Action Project (BYCAP) and Black Inmates and Friends Assembly (BIFA). BYCAP was launched to educate black youths in the community, while BIFA's purpose was to counsel black inmates and prevent further run-ins with the law.¹³

Despite the efforts of the Toronto Division, the UNIA Hall deteriorated throughout the decade as the tiny membership struggled to pay the bills and update the building as needed. The Toronto Division fell into significant debt in the late 1970s, carrying several mortgages on the Hall in addition to years of back taxes owed to the city of Toronto.¹⁴ Unable to make up the debt, the board of directors received consent from the general membership to sell the UNIA Hall at 355

¹² Dudley Ezekiel Laws, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, December 1981; Violet Blackman, recorded interview by Huguette Casimir, January 1979; Gwendolyn Johnston, recorded interview by Ruth Lewis, February 1979; and Leonard Johnston, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, November 1981, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

¹³ Marjorie Lewsey, recorded interview by Huguette Casimir, March 1979, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.

¹⁴ President's Report, 1972, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO; and Dudley Laws interview.

College Street. The decision was not unanimous and some members were shaken by the loss of the Hall.¹⁵ After this, an attempt to reorganize the UAIA failed, and the association dissolved in 1982.

Cape Breton

As the case study on Cape Breton explains, interest in the UNIA waned in the towns of Sydney and New Waterford by the mid-1940s. By the 1930s, a few new clubs like the Negro Social Club, the West Indian Cricket Club¹⁶, and Menelik Hall seemed to replace the UNIA whose founding members had either passed away, or failed to pass the torch on to the next generation. After the Second World War, young women who had been employed in war industries experienced problems securing employment. Some of these young women, usually fresh out of high school, went on to larger cities like Halifax, Toronto, Montreal, or even cities in the United States to work as housekeepers and dry cleaners. In addition, more black youths in general were becoming better educated after the war and left Cape Breton to find work elsewhere. At the same time, the older generation of blacks living on the island was beginning to pass on. This led to a rapid decrease in the black population of Cape Breton Island by the 1960s. In fact, by 1983 there were allegedly only thirty-eight black residents remaining in New Waterford. The black Cape Bretoners who remained tended to spread out as they could now afford to purchase better homes outside the old neighbourhoods formed by DOSCO and Dominion Coal.¹⁷

¹⁵ Dudley Laws interview; and Dionne Brand, "Violet Blackman," in *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario, 1920s-1950s* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991), 45-6. Blackman says the Hall was sold for \$250,000. She was devastated by the loss of the UNIA Hall, claiming that she "took sick" after it was sold.

¹⁶ The West Indian Cricket Club grew popular among West Indian families in the 1930s and 1940s. Teams from Cape Breton traveled by bus to play other teams on the island and on the mainland, including New Glasgow, Truro, and Halifax. See "West Indian Blacks," Annabelle Kirton, recorded interview by Pam Newton, 1986, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute.

¹⁷ "The Black Settlement in Sydney, Nova Scotia," Cape Breton Black/West Indian Community Scrapbook, 1985, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Beaton Institute; and Ted Boutillier, *New Waterford: Three Score and Ten: Seventy Years of Civic History* (Sydney: Aim Print and Design Ltd., 1983), 67.

The New Aberdeen Division lasted much longer than the divisions in New Waterford and Sydney. It did not officially close until the 1980s, at which point it ceased to be an official UNIA division. However, members of the local black community in Glace Bay led a campaign to revive the old UNIA Hall in 2003 to serve as a cultural museum and community centre. Theresa Brewster, a lifetime resident of Glace Bay, initiated the effort to revive the UNIA Hall. Brewster, whose family members had been members of the New Aberdeen Division, was saddened to see that this former “focal point in the community” had been left to decay. Wishing to revive the Hall so that it could once again be a place of celebration and commemoration for the people of Glace Bay, Brewster set out to gain support for the initiative from the community. She explains, “I went to community members and we had meetings in the beginning where we had me and maybe two more people. But that went on for close to four years.” She and a small committee began applying to various institutions for funding, while at the same time selling raffle tickets within the community to raise money to renovate the derelict Hall. Eventually, Brewster received a grant of \$10,000 from the Cape Breton Regional Municipality to fix the leaking roof. After their first successful application, “they applied to the other places and the money just kept coming in.”¹⁸ Recently, the UNIA Cultural Museum received a grant of \$20,000 from the provincial government which would go toward the various programs offered at the old UNIA Hall, including an annual Marcus Garvey Day celebration in August, a fishing derby in June, as well as summer camps for children and an Afrocentric Learning Program.¹⁹ The UNIA Cultural Museum may no longer be an official branch of the association, yet it reflects the profound effect of the New Aberdeen Division on the formation of Glace Bay’s black community.

¹⁸ Joan Weeks, “Theresa Brewster, Glace Bay,” in *One God One Aim One Destiny: African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton* (Sydney: Centre for Cape Breton Studies, 2007), 101-4. Victor Jones was one community member who helped with the fundraising. His applications for funding were successful which helped to fix the front steps and put a small addition onto the building. See Weeks, “Victor Jones, Glace Bay,” 91.

¹⁹ Sharon Montgomery-Dupe, “UNIA Receives \$20,000 in Funding for its Work,” *Cape Breton Post*, 7 February 2016.

Although it had grown in unison with the UNIA, St. Philip's African Orthodox Church remained open even after the UNIA division in Sydney closed in 1946. To be sure, the exodus of young black people to larger cities after the Second World War led to a significant decrease in membership.²⁰ Nevertheless, the church, which is still located on Hankard Street, remained open to serve the permanent black community of Whitney Pier. In October of 2015, the long-serving pastor at St. Philip's, Rev. Vincent Waterman, was elected the head of the worldwide African Orthodox Church, which has approximately 5,000 spread throughout the United States, Caribbean, Africa, and Canada. He served in the position of head patriarch for about one year, retiring in September of 2016 at the age of ninety-one.²¹

Edmonton

For Edmonton and the small divisions of Alberta, the UNIA fizzled out long before the 1950. However, the influence of Marcus Garvey popped up once again in the 1960s when a new group of Caribbean immigrants settled in the province. With the Canadian government's introduction of the points system, immigration became more standardized and egalitarian as assets like education, literacy, and work experience rather than race or religion determined one's eligibility. This, combined with the oil boom in Alberta in the early 1970s, attracted more immigrants from the Caribbean, namely Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago, who were looking for better work opportunities and who had been virtually shut out of Canada since the 1910s. David

²⁰ "Informal Religion," recorded speech by Rev. Vincent Waterman, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute; and Isabel Waterman, recorded interview by Pam Newton, Black Nova Scotian Holdings, Audiovisual, Beaton Institute.

²¹ Waterman had been pastor at St. Philip's AOC since 1983. See George Mortimer, "Vincent Waterman, Sydney Pastor, Named Head of African Orthodox Church," 12 October 2015, CBC News Website, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/vincent-waterman-african-orthodox-church-1.3267707> (accessed 9 March 2017); and "Archbishop, 91, Reflects on Life at Retirement from Sydney Church," 22 September 2016, CBC News Website, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/priest-archbishop-african-orthodox-church-retirement-1.3772763> (accessed 9 March 2017).

Este and Wek Mamer Kuol argue that “the influx of people from the Caribbean fostered the development of many different organizations supporting the culture, in dancing, music, arts, foods and games in the province, most notably Cariwest and Carifest celebrations which occur on an annual basis in Edmonton and Calgary respectively.” Immigrants from the Caribbean later established the Marcus Garvey Centre for Unity in Edmonton which is a community centre and also the meeting place for the Jamaican Association of Northern Alberta (JANA).²² While not at all affiliated with the UNIA, the Marcus Garvey Centre is a reflection of the global influence of the organization on generations of Caribbean immigrants.

A detailed study of the legacy and influence of the UNIA after 1950 falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. What this brief epilogue suggests is that there is much work to be done in uncovering the lasting effects of the UNIA on the development of Canada’s black communities. While the UNIA lived on in some Canadian cities beyond the 1950s, in other places it met an early end as populations shifted and interests changed. The longevity of the UNIA across Canada is linked to a division’s ability to adapt to changes within the black community. In this way, the UNIA in Canada has always been about the ways in which the organization could be used to suit the specific needs of a particular community.

²² David Este and Wek Memer Kuol, “African Canadians in Alberta: Connecting the Past with the Present,” in *Multiple Lenses: Voices from the Diaspora located in Canada*, edited by David Divine (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 37-9. The authors note that immigration to Alberta from Africa did not occur in significant numbers until the late 1990s.

Conclusion

This dissertation demonstrates the ways in which the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Garvey movement were integral to the development of black communities across Canada in the early twentieth century. In cities and towns where few blacks lived before the turn of the century, like Edmonton, New Waterford, Glace Bay, and Sydney, the UNIA provided a significant tool through which new immigrants from the American south and the islands of the British West Indies could forge a cohesive community in a new homeland. Even in cities with well-established black communities like Montreal and Toronto, West Indian and African-American newcomers along with a few native-born black Canadians found common interests in the UNIA, helping to strengthen the bonds of community in these areas.

Central to the success of the UNIA as a community-building tool was its ability to adapt and change to suit the needs of its members at the local level. To be sure, the UNIA had a firm set of documented goals, philosophies, rules, and regulations as laid out in documents like the UNIA Constitution, Declaration of Rights, and Catechism.¹ Nevertheless, the first and primary goal of the UNIA was “to establish a Universal Confraternity among the race.”² As such, members at the local level used the four walls of their UNIA Halls as a foundation upon which this racial confraternity could be built. Bonded by the common goals and beliefs of the UNIA, blacks in the four regions discussed in this dissertation could then use their local divisions in various ways to meet their individual needs and tastes. In Edmonton, for example, the UNIA was used to help bring isolated black communities in northern Alberta together. The African-American immigrants from

¹ Robert A. Hill, ed. “Constitution and Book of Laws,” in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983), 1: 256-80; “UNIA Declaration of Rights,” *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (1983), 2: 571-8; “Universal Negro Catechism,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (1984), 3: 302-19.

² “Constitution and Book of Laws,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, 1: 266.

Oklahoma, who comprised the majority of the UNIA's membership in Alberta and across the Great Plains, were predisposed to the UNIA's separatist goal of an all-black nation. This group had been seeking refuge from racial oppression since the Reconstruction Era following the American Civil War, migrating from the southern states to Oklahoma and finally into the prairie provinces. United by a common history of racial oppression, migration, and American and African ancestry, the black Oklahomans in Edmonton and across the western provinces found a place of respite in the UNIA, as well as a means through which friends and kin living in disparate communities could connect. UNIA events in Edmonton and around Alberta served traditional southern American fare while members rallied around common concerns in their daily lives such as unemployment and lack of political voice in their new home.

The same is true of the small towns on Cape Breton Island that saw an influx of immigrants from the Caribbean and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Much like Alberta, there was no sizable black presence in Cape Breton before the arrival of West Indians and African Americans. Bonded by a shared history and common beliefs, the new immigrants in Cape Breton used the UNIA as a conduit through which to establish a race-based community on the island. The UNIA appealed to these immigrant labourers who often worked the lowest-paid and most dangerous jobs in the coal mines and steel mills because it gave them a greater sense of purpose to one another, and allowed the mostly West Indian population to express their cultural traditions. Like the African Americans in Edmonton, the West Indians in New Waterford, Glace Bay, and Sydney served traditional West Indian dishes at special events and discussed common goals as a means of celebrating their shared heritage. With a strong commitment to community-building, in addition to the convenience of existing within close proximity to one another, the three UNIA divisions on Cape Breton Island met together frequently, helping to strengthen the island's black community and overcome the sense of isolation associated with island living.

The UNIA was also foundational for blacks in Toronto and Montreal despite already having well-established black communities dating back generations. The views and beliefs of newcomers from the West Indies in both cities often did not align with those of the “Old Line” blacks living in Montreal, and especially Toronto. Moreover, the cultural divides between native-born black Canadians, African-American immigrants, and West Indians often kept newcomers out of well-established organizations in these cities. As a result, West Indian, and a few African-American immigrants, in Toronto and Montreal used the UNIA as a means of creating a new community centre based on their shared cultural beliefs and history. In Montreal, the UNIA launched a unique auxiliary group aimed at educating teenagers and young adults called the Literary Club. It became the Montreal Division’s most popular auxiliary group, reflecting its members’ committed passion toward educating the black population, both formally and informally.

In Toronto, the UNIA launched an annual Big Picnic in August in honour of Marcus Garvey’s birthday. Although other UNIA divisions around the country also held similar picnics, none reached the scale and reach of Toronto’s. The Big Picnic served to connect blacks from around the province, and even some neighbouring states, in the quest of educating the public on the philosophies and goals of Garvey and the UNIA through entertainment and celebration.

A distinctive aspect of the UNIA in Canada was its close ties to local black churches. Certainly, black churches have served as community-builders for generations, and so perhaps it was logical for UNIA members to link their secular and religious organizations in the interest of creating a stronger community. In Montreal, for instance, the UNIA became closely tied to Union United Church whose pastor, Rev. Charles Este, also served as the Montreal Division’s Chaplain. The Montreal Division and the UUC shared a common membership and a common belief in helping to educate youths and to provide charitable relief to the local black population. Shiloh Baptist Church and the Edmonton Division also shared a common membership and also a common meeting place.

Since the Edmonton Division did not have its own UNIA Hall, it often held its meetings and social events at Shiloh Baptist Church. Moreover, like in Montreal the Edmonton Division's Chaplain was Shiloh's pastor, Rev. H. Brooks.

The link between the UNIA and the Black Church in Canada is most evident in Sydney, Nova Scotia, where UNIA members were instrumental in launching the only branch of the African Orthodox Church in the country, St. Philip's. The AOC was created by the UNIA's first Chaplain-General, George Alexander McGuire, and like the UNIA it was also grounded in the belief of Africa as the congregation's motherland, thereby catering distinctly to a black membership. Although it was never an official auxiliary of the UNIA, the AOC was doubtlessly inspired by its philosophies and goals, and thus naturally drew from the same audience. The UNIA along with St. Philip's Church served as beacons of unity for Sydney's black population in the 1920s and onward.

The only UNIA division discussed in this dissertation that was not closely linked to a church was Toronto's. The Toronto Division remained neutral in terms of religious affiliation, with members belonging to a number of churches in the city. Nevertheless, the Toronto Division did play a role in helping the fledgling Afro Community Church to make roots in Toronto. Although the topic needs more research, it is known that Toronto's UNIA Hall sometimes served as the venue for Afro Community Church services before they had a building of their own, and that Toronto Division members thought highly of the church's pastor, Rev. Cecil A. Stewart, as a community leader.³

The case studies herein also explain the ways in which local UNIA divisions evolved to suit the needs of each black community. In Edmonton, where the UNIA was short-lived, the organization essentially evolved into other, more specific groups like the Negro Welfare Association

³ Violet Blackman, recorded interview by Huguette Casimir, January 1979; Joseph E. Clarke, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, September 1978; Daniel Braithwaite, recorded interview by Arleigh Holder, August 1978, African-Canadian Collection, Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO).

(NWA) and the Negro Political Association (NPA). These two offshoots of the Edmonton Division were initiated in order to meet two particular concerns within the community: unemployment and political education and voter registration. In Toronto, the UNIA evolved into a pseudo jazz club in the 1930s and 1940s before black musicians could perform for white audiences. This not only kept some youths interested in the UNIA, but also helped to stimulate and develop black musical talent in the city. As mentioned in the epilogue, the Toronto Division evolved once again in the 1970s, changing its name to the Universal African Improvement Association (UAIA) to appeal to a wider audience, and also implemented new programs like BYCAP and BIFA which reflected the association's new mission to counsel and provide for blacks in need.

In Cape Breton, the New Waterford Division merged with the Negro Social Club in the 1940s as a means of keeping dues money within the community. Similarly, the Sydney Division membership moved over to Menelik Hall, constructed in the late 1930s, allowing black residents to continue to host cultural events and preserve the black community without having to pay UNIA membership dues. In Glace Bay the UNIA Hall became a type of community centre in the 1970s, and after a long period of dormancy, was revived in 2006 to become a cultural museum dedicated to the legacy of the UNIA in Cape Breton and the accomplishments of its members.

The Montreal Division evolved in the mid-1930s as its Liberty Hall served as hub of organization and information in Canada on the Second Italo-Abyssinian War. The UNIA joined with several other black organizations and institutions in Montreal to protest the war and educate the public on the atrocities against the Ethiopian people. Liberty Hall once again became a rallying place for students and protesters in Montreal during the Sir George Williams University incident in 1968-9, taking a stand against racial discrimination in the education system.

While it is evident that the UNIA played a number of important roles at the local level, the case studies reveal that blacks in Canada wanted to make their voices heard at the international level

and to connect to members across the African diaspora. Canadian Garveyites across the country did this through active participation in the UNIA's international programs and activities. Leaders from each of the communities studied in this dissertation attended and participated in the annual UNIA conventions in Harlem, and later Kingston and Toronto, which attracted members from across the globe. Canadian Garveyites also regularly delivered news on their local divisions to *The Negro World* so that members around the world could be assured of their work toward solidarity and self-sufficiency. *The Negro World* also reported lists of financial contributors, which always included a significant number from Canadian divisions, to the UNIA's various funds, including the Black Star Line, the African Redemption Fund, and the Marcus Garvey Defense Fund. UNIA members in Canada also conducted protests and sent supplies to the Ethiopians during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War in the 1930s, and helped found the UNIA Rehabilitation Committee in the 1940s to oust the corrupt leadership chosen to succeed Garvey after his death. These examples of African-Canadian participation in the UNIA's international affairs show the desire to connect with others beyond the local and to be part of something wider. It was, in essence, an expression of their newly-formed pan-African consciousness and a declaration of their position within the African diaspora.

In doing so, Canadian Garveyites proved their importance to the development and survival of the UNIA in Canada and abroad. Each case study provides multiple examples of Canadian contributions to the advancement and longevity of the Garvey movement. For example, members from Montreal, Toronto, Cape Breton, and Edmonton all signed the UNIA's Declaration of Rights, a foundational document for the organization, at the 1920 UNIA Convention in Harlem. Leaders from Montreal played a key role in the early days of the UNIA. For example, Alfred Potter was instrumental in the expansion of the BSL in Canada as its stock representative, while Dr. D.D. Lewis served on the UNIA's executive council as the Surgeon-General, providing a Canadian authority on a board consisting of members from around the world. George Creese of Glace Bay was appointed

the UNIA's Commissioner of Canada in the early 1920s and is responsible for the spread of Garveyism across Canada, helping black communities from coast to coast to open local divisions. Long-serving division president in Toronto, B.J. Spencer Pitt, was instrumental to the survival of the UNIA during the Depression years. Not only did he and his fellow Toronto Garveyites organize three UNIA conferences in the late 1930s, but they also hosted the first ever School of African Philosophy in September of 1937 which trained the next generation of UNIA leaders who would succeed Garvey after 1940. In addition, Pitt and members from Montreal, including their division president at the time, E.J. Tucker, helped to organize the UNIA Rehabilitation Committee in 1942 which kept the spirit of the Garvey movement alive during trying times and successfully ousted the corrupt President-General who took over Garvey's post. In these ways, Canadian Garveyites demonstrated their value as members of the UNIA, while at the same time putting their skills and voices toward the goal of racial equality at home and abroad.

Relationships by their very nature are reciprocal; an enriching relationship is one in which both parties give and take of their best qualities and gifts. Canadian Garveyites' connection with the UNIA is an example of such a relationship. The UNIA provided an ideal tool with which black immigrants could mould in a new sense of community in Canada. The UNIA's philosophies of race pride, self-sufficiency, education, and brotherhood bestowed Canadian Garveyites with a vision of community based on the uplift of all people of African descent. The UNIA's auxiliary groups, programs, events, and lectures all helped to bolster its membership's self-esteem while granting them with skills in public speaking, leadership, the arts, organization, and education. Belonging to a global movement and to an organization working toward a better life for African descendants everywhere not only gave Canadian members of the UNIA a sense of purpose, but also helped to develop their sense of pan-African consciousness. In turn, they used their acquired skills and social awareness to

give back to the UNIA in service to their communities at the local, national, and even international levels.

The UNIA serves as an integral part of the study of the African diaspora in the twentieth century, and a vital element in the story of black Canada. The period between 1900 and 1950 should be viewed as a very significant time in the growth and maturity of black communities in Canada, with the UNIA acting as an indispensable vehicle through which the goal of community-building could be achieved. The UNIA and the teachings of Marcus Garvey went a long way in lifting the chains of “mental slavery”⁴ that burdened his followers, inspiring them to take action toward a more equal world and leaving a lasting effect on the history of human rights activism in Canada.

⁴ Hill, “Speech by Marcus Garvey,” in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1991), 7: 788-93.

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