



MARCUS GARVEY AND AFRICAN LIBERATION: A NEW LIGHT DAWNING

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It was for Marcus Garvey at an early age an uplifting vision of African liberation imagined, mapped out and foreseen as the dawning of a new light and life on earth and the initiation of a new history of humankind and the world. He said, “I saw before me then, as I do now, a new world of Black people, a nation of sturdy people, making their impress on civilization and causing a new light to dawn upon the human race”. And from the beginning, Garvey realized that his vision could not come to fruition and fulfillment as just a dream, but had to draw from and be built on and in the work, strength and struggles of our people.

Garvey wanted us to free Africa, as a continent and world community, to free ourselves and be ourselves; to map out and pave the roads we want and need to walk on; to build the good lives we want and deserve to live; and to struggle always with our shared vision and sense of inevitable victory in our hearts and minds. He knew too that in spite of the many identities and roles we might acquire and assume, our primary sense of self must be African and that African must always mean excellence in all we do in self-defining, self-developing and self-fulfilling ways. He knew also, and reminded us over and over, that we cannot simply focus on our smaller individual self, but must also and always understand ourselves and engage the world in collective and world-encompassing ways without losing our anchor in the space and smaller circles of the lives we live.

Garvey also tells and teaches us that the Creator “made us in the fullness of ourselves”. This does not mean that we are made as finished products, but rather that we have the capacity, right and responsibility to

know ourselves, develop ourselves and construct ourselves in expansive ways that lead to liberation and our lifting up the light for the dawning of a new day. He stressed several values that are key to our freeing ourselves, being ourselves and building the just, good and sustainable world we all want and deserve to live in. But I want to focus on five of these values which include and require others in the process and practice of African liberation. They are: active unity; deep faith; hard work; uncrackable courage; and relentless struggle.

Unity is key to any project and is expressed in a sense of togetherness and a resultant commitment to each other and to shared vision and goals. This is clearly a teaching against vulgar forms of individualism and a stress on feeling a anchoring oneness with our family, friends, and people and a profound commitment to working for what Garvey called the common good of all. He tells us “the time has come for those of us who have the vision of the future to inspire our people to a closer kinship, to a closer love of self, because it is through this appreciation of self will we be able to rise to that higher life”, a life of freedom, justice, peace, good, and flourishing we long for and deserve. Indeed, it’s only through coming together, uniting “into one mighty bond that we can successfully pilot our way through the avenues of opposition and the oceans of difficulties that seem to confront us”.

This noble ancestor also wanted us to have faith in ourselves and our people, and tells us if we don’t have confidence and faith in ourselves, we are already defeated. And he asks us to be courageous, audacious and steadfast in faith no matter what. Thus, he

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says, “lose not courage; lose not faith; go forward”. But in all our going, we must get organized, “Get organized”, he says, “and you will compel the world to respect you”.

Again stressing the importance of active solidarity, he says “Show me a well-organized nation and I will show you a people and a nation respected by the world”. If we are to free ourselves and build the good society and world we want and deserve, then “We must work together”. And “if we will survive, then it must be done through our own efforts, through our own energy”, our own agency, will and work to live well and leave a legacy defined by a shared and ever-uplifting good on every level for all Africans everywhere.

Garvey stressed our continuing need to be committed to the hard, constant and caring work we must do to free Africa and ourselves and light the way to the dawning of a new day. We, Garvey teaches, must “be up and doing”, up early, upstanding, upright and uprising doing the work of good in and for the world African community and the world as a whole. Therefore, he calls for initiative, originality, and creativity and self-determination in all things. He says, “the race needs workers at this time, not plagiarists, copyists and mere imitators; but men and women who are able to create, to originate and improve, and to make an independent racial contribution to the world and civilization”.

Indeed, Garvey says, “the reliance of our race upon the progress and achievement of others, (or) for a consideration in sympathy, justice and rights is like a dependence upon a broken stick, resting upon which will eventually consign you to the ground”. Thus, self-determination and self-reliance must be practiced “not only in one essential, but in all those things that constitute human happiness and well-being”.

And finally, Garvey reminds us of how fragile and vulnerable our gains are unless we build and sustain a true base of power in the world. He says, “You talk about progress we have made in America and elsewhere, but what progress is it. A progress that can be snatched away from you in forty-eight hours because it has been built on sand”, i.e., the funds, favors and the fragile kindness of others. Therefore, Garvey says, especially to the dreamers and self-deluders, but also to the pessimists, nay-sayers and nihilists, “stop flattering yourselves (people) and let us go to work. Do you hear me? Go to work! Go to work in the morn of a new creation and (stop) not because of the noon day sun, but plod on and on, until you have succeeded in climbing the hills of opposition and reached the height of self-progress, and from that pinnacle bestow upon the world a civilization of your own, and hand down to your children and posterity of your own a worthy contribution to the age”.

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