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Transnational Nationalism: Revisiting the Garvey Movement

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INTRODUCTION

In late May 2020, George Floyd, an African American man, was murdered by a White police officer in Minneapolis. When video footage of the scene began to circulate, it sparked the nationwide Black Lives Matter movement against police brutality and racial injustice. As the movement spread rapidly and heightened tensions between demonstrators and law-enforcement officers, the Ghanaian minister of tourism announced her nation's invitation to African Americans to "return" to their homeland, asserting that "Ghana is your home. Africa is your home."¹

Ghana launched its Year of Return campaign in 2019, which marked four hundred years since the first documented enslaved Africans arrived on the shores of Virginia in America. The campaign resulted in a 27 percent increase in international visitors to Ghana compared to the previous year and resulted in \$3.3 billion in income.² In 2020, the government started its Beyond the Return initiative to encourage members of the African diaspora not just to visit but to settle and invest in Ghana. It is reported that the government negotiated with local chiefs to obtain five hundred acres of land for about 1,500 returnee families.³

The minister's statement, "come home build a life in Ghana, you do not have to stay where you are not wanted forever,"⁴ echoed a remark reportedly

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made by C. D. B. King, who attended the Paris Peace Conference and later became the president of Liberia, almost one-hundred years ago: "If the American Negroes were so thoroughly dissatisfied with the social and political conditions, why they did not go to Liberia . . . and become citizens there where they would have social and political equality."⁵ In the same year, Marcus Garvey, a Black leader from Jamaica, launched the Back-to-Africa movement, in which skilled Blacks were to be sent to Liberia to help its development. Although his plan eventually failed, his vision survived even after his death. One hundred years later, we see Ghana initiating the same kind of plan as Garvey's.

In this article I reevaluate Garvey's movement, especially its nation-building programs in Africa, according to the international politics at the time. In recent years, international relations scholars have reappraised the Garvey movement, with many positioning Garvey's transnationalism as a pioneering effort of liberal international cooperation. In contrast, I argue that his transnationalism would be more aptly called "transnational nationalism" because Garvey not only presented Blacks as a transnational entity but also sought to establish a powerful nation-state on African soil. In that regard, his worldview was more "realist" than "liberal" in terms of international relations theory.

Garvey's realist worldview was heavily influenced by Japan, the first country of color to defeat a White empire, as it did in the Russo-Japanese War. In becoming one of the post-World War I great powers, Japan gained the admiration of many African Americans.⁶ Garvey saw Japan as a model for a future Black nation, pointing out that Japanese immigrants and Blacks in the United States were treated differently because the former had a powerful nation-state behind them.

Garvey originally started his movement in Jamaica by establishing the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). After he moved its headquarters to Harlem, New York, in 1918, the organization attracted numerous supporters at home and abroad and grew into the first Black-centered mass movement, with more than 830 chapters in the United States and more than 210 abroad. Garvey's movement was based on the idea of Pan-Africanism, in that the advancement of Blacks across borders was necessary to improve the conditions of Blacks in every region. To achieve this, Garvey believed there needed to be a powerful Black nation-state occupying a respectable position in the international community, which could represent Black people as a whole.

During this period, Garvey's harshest critic, W. E. B. Du Bois, also

advocated Pan-Africanism. Du Bois's Pan-African Congress, however, primarily appealed to the international community through meetings of elite Blacks. The Garvey movement operated enterprises, such as the steamship company Black Star Line (BSL), supported by the Black masses purchasing shares of stock, and attempted to actualize the formation of a powerful nation-state in Africa.

After World War I, as the right to self-determination and the establishment of nation-states became the norm for the international community, Garvey saw Blacks outside Africa's shores as members of a quasi-nation and sought to claim their right to self-determination. Initially, he appealed to the international community, including the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, to cede the former German African colonies to members of the African diaspora. When the League of Nations decided to make the former German Africa colonies into mandated territories, Garvey moved the site for his nation-building scheme to Liberia, which—having declared its independence in 1847—was one of only two independent nations in Africa.

The Garvey movement tended to have a reputation for being dreamy and unrealistic. Indeed, Garvey's gigantic "African republic" never materialized, and the BSL finally collapsed. After initial negative reviews and subsequent high praise from Black nationalists, the Garvey movement in the late 1970s began to be studied based on primary sources. Researchers after that time have focused mainly on cities in the American South and elsewhere in the world, where the movement was localized and developed in conjunction with a variety of other factors, within the unique context of each place.⁷ This makes sense since the Garvey movement was multifaceted and diverse. It is still necessary, however, to analyze the core features of the movement, especially from the perspective of international relations, since Garvey himself recognized that the movement's main battleground was international politics.

The "decolonization" trend in the field of international relations has highlighted phenomena that have been overlooked in conventional narratives. This has led to a revisualization of the transnational aspect of the Garvey movement. Randolph Persaud, who specializes in postcolonialism and race in international relations, affirms that Garvey and his organization, the UNIA, "advanced counter-hegemonic discourses, which have been fundamental to the emergence of global democratization," by applying sovereignty to "people."⁸ Through its appeal to the international community, he believes, the UNIA advocated "an international norm of human rights which laid the basis for limiting sovereignty in instances of state-guaranteed

racial oppression.”⁹ Today, those limitations on state sovereignty are standardized under the name of “humanitarian intervention” or “responsibility to protect.”

Another postcolonial IR scholar, Robbie Shilliam treats Garvey’s “extra-territorial sovereign authority” as a predecessor of another modern-day phenomenon: “multi-level governance encapsulated in the emergence of the European Union.”¹⁰ Through the example of the Garvey movement, he shows that the concept of the change in the view of sovereignty from territorial to extraterritorial is multilinear, rather than unilinear, as is the predominant narrative in international relations theory today.

Garvey’s transnationalism was ahead of its time. He represented transnational Blacks as bearers of sovereignty in an “imagined community.” Garvey, however, did not only seek to create a Black transnational community. For him, territory-based nation building was also crucial. From a realist perspective in international relations theory, he believed that a strong, substantive nation-state was essential for transnational Blacks to receive respectful treatment everywhere. Garvey’s imagined community was imperial, in the sense that the home country would protect its people even if they do not reside within the home country. Both of his schemes, transnational and national, were intertwined and to be implemented simultaneously.

Garvey’s transnational nationalism, the building of a powerful nation-state in Africa that would represent and protect transnational Blacks, was the core of his movement. I demonstrate this by examining how his movement tried to accomplish his program in the contemporary international sphere and how other actors reacted.

Garvey’s Realist Worldview

Garvey defined Blacks as a transnational political group and sought to achieve their elevated status within the international community rather than within their respective national societies. He had a worldview based on a realist perspective and believed that the world was based on a struggle between the weak and the strong, and that power was necessary for a group to occupy a dignified position. He was also aware of the international racial order in which Blacks were positioned at the bottom. He believed that the current order could be disrupted by the presence of a powerful Black nation-state.

Japan played an important role in Garvey’s conceptualization of the

movement. As mentioned, as the first nation of color to join the ranks of great powers, Japan made its presence known in the international community at the Paris Peace Conference. He believed that the low status of Blacks in the United States was because Blacks did not have a strong independent nation-state, unlike Japanese Americans who had higher status and a strong nation-state in Japan. He claimed, "It is requisite for 400,000,000 Negroes to have a national home and a national government."¹¹

Garvey did not call for a single large Black nation in which all Blacks in the world could directly belong as a substantial "nation," nor was he specifically aiming at the independence of Black people in each place individually. His goal was to build a powerful nation-state that would represent "Blacks" and be able to compete with Western powers. Such a Black nation was, as Garvey often said, more akin to an "empire."

Garvey said that there would be no peace in the world unless the "white man confines himself politically to Europe, the yellow man to Asia and the black man to Africa."¹² Note that he inserted the word "politically" here. It means that each race is sovereign as a majority in its original region. Garvey did not deny immigration but, rather, believed that the home nation-state should provide protection for immigrants residing in various places. Although the three regions listed above were identified as belonging to their respective races, Garvey cleverly avoided making a clear statement about which race belonged to the United States. On rare occasions, he did speak of the United States as a White man's country, but this only indicates his awareness of the status quo that the government of United States was dominated by White people.¹³

Taking a realist perspective, Garvey also ranked those who belonged to the transnational Black community. Among Blacks, there were those who were "advanced" and those who were "behind"; he believed that the former had to lead the latter. Therefore, by extension, the Japanese expansion into China was an attempt by the "advanced" Japan to lift up the "lagging" China, and there was no problem with it. This worldview was shared by Japanese leaders of the time, especially those who advocated Pan-Asianism.¹⁴ While Garvey's view of the ideal "empire" did not endorse violent aggression against other nations, the above ideas left room for a dominant-subjugated relationship within the empire.

In Liberia, the destination of the Back-to-Africa movement, a small elite class of Americo-Liberians, who had colonized the country from the United States, ruled over many Africans. A strict application of the right to self-determination would have allowed for the self-determination of most

Africans and, more precisely, of the various ethnic groups within them. Garvey, however, disregarded this colonial domination found within the same race and took the position that priority should be given to the betterment of Blacks led by “progressive” people.

Observing that the post–World War I years were a time when the world was “reorganizing itself,” Garvey asserted that Blacks were now demanding their “portion of democracy,” which they had been fighting for throughout the war, and he prepared the UNIA’s nine-point peace aims to appeal to the international community when the Paris Peace Conference took place in 1919.¹⁵ As Persaud rightly points out, the aims show “the dual character of sovereignty—namely, the sovereignty of the state and the sovereignty of the people.” While emphasizing the UNIA’s “position that the African *nation* cannot be delimited by state/territorial borders,” and explaining that “whenever territorial delimitations were fixed to political claims, they referred to the whole African continent,” Persaud omits from his full citation of the aims the ninth point, which is the focal point of the UNIA’s scheme.¹⁶ The ninth and final point demands that “the captured German colonies in Africa be turned over to the Natives with educated Western and Eastern Negroes as their leaders.”¹⁷

At the time, to be recognized as an actor in the international community, it was necessary to meet the so-called standard of civilization. With the help of the Westernized African diaspora, Garvey attempted to create a Black nation on African soil that could be comparable to those in the West. There was a power vacuum in the former German colonies in Africa after Germany’s defeat, and Garvey considered them the perfect place to achieve his plan. The call for independence for these colonies under the leadership of Western-educated Blacks clearly differed from the proposals made by other organizations, such as the Pan-African Congress, which did not demand immediate independence of those areas. For Garvey, gaining national sovereignty over a particular territory in Africa was essential for materializing the sovereignty of Black people.

The UNIA sent Eliézer Cadet, a Haitian, to Paris, in an attempt to publicize the UNIA’s aims. He met the Japanese delegate to the Peace Conference, Nobuaki Makino, and others but failed to make an impact on the conference. In the end, it was decided that the former German colonies in Africa would be governed by the mandate system as defined in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Criticizing this mandate provision as signifying a new African colonization by European countries, the UNIA rejected the League of Nations itself as “null and void,” due to its

powerlessness in the international arena, which was controlled by the great powers.¹⁸ The UNIA distanced itself from the international organization and began its own business of nation building in Liberia.

Liberia in World Politics

Liberia was a new nation that had declared its independence in 1847, led by Black emigrants from the United States under the auspices of the American Colonization Society. These Blacks, who made up about 1 percent of Liberia's population, were known as Americo-Liberians and formed the dominant class. Although the nation had achieved independence through US leverage, the fury of imperialism on the African continent threatened their borders: British Sierra Leone in the northwest and French West Africa from the north to the northeast were still claiming territory in Liberia even after the border was settled.

A militia was organized by emigrants to Liberia in the 1820s, and the Liberia Frontier Force (LFF) was formally established in 1908, in response to a request from the British. The mission of the LFF was to defend the borders from French aggression and prevent resistance movements by indigenous Africans, and it was to be under the control of the Americo-Liberian commissioner in charge of each district. The British commander of the LFF, however, refused to deploy its forces under the authority of Americo-Liberians, which resulted in a riot in 1909. This led to a breakdown in cooperation with Britain, and, subsequently, Liberia sought military and economic assistance from the United States. Beginning in 1912, the LFF was commanded by Charles Young, a Black American who had served as a resident military officer in Haiti and later became the first Black colonel.¹⁹

The growing influence of the United States, however, did not eliminate pressures from the British and French governments. In the early 1920s, alarmed by the Garvey movement that was spreading across Africa, both governments repeatedly questioned the Liberian government about its relationship with the movement.²⁰

Liberia was forced to rely on Western countries for its finances. In 1871, Liberia entered into a loan agreement with Britain for £100,000, but this loan did not benefit Liberia, and, combined with the depression caused by the fall in the price of coffee, it led to further economic difficulties. During the negotiation of a new £100,000 loan in 1906, several British officers were placed in the Liberian customs administration. In 1912, the United States,

Britain, France, and Germany made a joint loan of \$1.7 million, and four trustees were appointed by their governments to oversee the customs department. When World War I broke out, Liberia declared war on Germany under pressure from the United States, despite Germany having been an important trading partner.²¹ This led to a sharp deterioration in Liberia's finances.

In September 1918, a \$5 million loan from the United States was approved, but it imposed strict conditions that deprived Liberia of power over its own financial and internal affairs. Liberia at first accepted the conditions but finally rejected them. The issue of loans to Liberia was discussed during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, but C. D. B. King, a member of the Liberian delegation and future president of the country, expressed his dissatisfaction that he had not been invited to the informal meeting of the United States, Britain, and France: "We object to this discussion going on at which Liberia is not represented. Liberia's fate is being determined and she has no voice in the matter."²²

The UNIA's Back-to-Africa movement took shape in February 1919 during the Paris Peace Conference, when Cadet handed King a copy of *Negro World*, the UNIA's weekly newspaper and asked for cooperation with the UNIA. As noted, King welcomed the migration of members of the African diaspora to Liberia. This contact gave shape to Garvey's plan to create a powerful nation in Africa with the help of skilled and educated Blacks.

Liberia and the Back-to-Africa Movement

In June 1920, a UNIA representative was sent to Liberia to begin negotiating with the government. He requested a grant of "lands for business, agriculture and industrial purposes" in return for the UNIA's "financial and moral assistance" to enhance the international prestige of Liberia. In response, Liberia's secretary of state, Edwin Barclay, stated on behalf of President King, that the government of Liberia "has no hesitancy in assuring" the UNIA that it affords "every facility legally possible."²³ In August 1920, Garvey declared that the UNIA had "decided to concentrate on the building of the great Republic of Liberia, and to make Liberia one of the great powers of the world."²⁴

In October 1920, the campaign for the Liberian construction loan was launched with the goal of collecting \$2 million. The loan was advertised as essential to making Liberia a powerful nation by building railroads, schools,

churches, factories, port facilities, farms, and the like. Garvey appealed to the practice of Pan-Africanism based on self-help to urge Blacks to contribute to the advancement of their status by purchasing these loans and creating a nation backed by themselves. When the campaign did not succeed as expected, however, the Pan-Africanist cause morphed into a rhetoric that emphasized mass migration of ordinary Blacks with their individual economic interests.²⁵

A federal special agent who monitored the Garvey movement reported that the Back-to-Africa movement was making “quite an unrest among the Negroes, causing them to sell their belongings and quit their jobs.”²⁶ For Black Americans at the time, the image of Liberia as a promised land was not necessarily unrealistic. Through the American Colonization Society’s own Back-to-Africa movement, which continued until the end of the nineteenth century, emigration to Liberia was recognized as helping Blacks gain their independence and restore their humanity that had been lost to slavery.²⁷

It was widely reported that the Liberian government refused to accept terms that would violate the sovereignty of the nation and continued to negotiate with the US government regarding the process of signing loan agreements.²⁸ In March 1921, when a Liberian delegation headed by President King arrived in the United States, King expressed caution about the US government intervening in Liberia in the same way it did in Haiti.

The great publicity given American intervention in Haiti made it desirable that the aims and desires of the American Government be clearly defined. . . . The constitutional Government of Liberia must be maintained, even if in form only. . . . An empire within an empire was not desired; a financial administration coordinating with the Liberian Government was desired. No foreign official might have the power to veto Liberian legislative acts.²⁹

In the same period, a six-member UNIA delegation visited Liberia as an advance team. When the UNIA representatives asked for land for the project at a meeting with Liberian officials, Secretary of State Barclay again allowed UNIA to use some of their already settled areas.³⁰ The delegation had to suspend its activities at the end of April, however, because of financial difficulties, which reflected the deteriorating relationships among the UNIA representatives. It was reported that the two African representatives claimed that they were free to change matters decided at

UNIA in New York to suit local circumstances, quoting “we Africans will run things over here. We hold the trump cards; we can make or break them; they have got to come by us.”³¹ Eventually, an American delegate, who was the resident secretary of the delegation, resigned.

The disruption of the UNIA delegation in Liberia was followed by the repudiation of the Garvey movement by the Liberian government. In June 1921, the NAACP newspaper *Crisis*, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, published a statement signed by President King that Liberia “has never considered the surrender of its sovereignty to any nation or organization. . . . Under no circumstances will she allow her territory to be made a center of aggression or conspiracy against other sovereign states.”³² Next month, the *Baltimore Afro-American* carried an interview with President King in which he declared that he did not approve of the “political propaganda” of the Garvey movement and explained that he had told the UNIA delegation to “discard their political propaganda and impossible talk about driving the white race out of Africa.”³³

King was not denying all the activities of UNIA. In his statement in *Crisis*, while rejecting mass migration, he said he would welcome migration and investment by those with skills. He said that “Liberia has always regarded itself as the natural refuge and center for persons of Negro descent the world over.”³⁴ Additionally, in the interview with the *Baltimore Afro-American*, King said that if UNIA representatives wanted to help Liberia, they should “enlist the aid of the American people in sending emigrants there, building up the country agriculturally, commercially and financially.”³⁵

Garvey judged this cautious attitude of the Liberian government to arise from a need to receive loans from the United States government and that it did not reflect its true attitude.³⁶ He continued to offer to provide resources and tried to relax Liberia’s concerns by demonstrating that the UNIA’s objectives were “solely and purely industrial and commercial” rather than political.³⁷ Nevertheless, President King reiterated his caution against the propaganda aspect of the Garvey movement, saying that Liberia, “as a sovereign state with corresponding international responsibilities, could not permit its territories to be used as a center of hostile attacks upon other sovereign states.”³⁸

In 1924, Garvey announced a new migration plan, which called for “members . . . who desire to go to Liberia . . . to settle and help in the industrial, commercial and cultural development,” and reiterated the movement’s Pan-Africanist objectives.³⁹ The plan envisioned the

construction of four colonies within Liberia, by building facilities for government, entertainment, education, and public utilities in each colony. It stated that “all government buildings, however, [shall be] under the direction of the Liberian Government,” which shows Garvey’s intention to remove Liberia’s anxiety.⁴⁰

When the new delegation of five engineers arrived in Monrovia in August, however, they were placed under the surveillance of the Liberian police and forced to leave the country on the next ship that arrived in port.⁴¹ At the end of the month, it was announced, with Barclay’s signature underneath, that the Liberian government was “irrevocably opposed both in principle and in fact to the incendiary policy” of the UNIA.⁴² In the face of this series of rejections from the Liberian government, the UNIA delegation and Garvey himself pleaded for support from the president of the United States and the Liberian parliament, but the situation did not change.⁴³

Ultimately, Liberia signed a \$5 million loan agreement with the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, which was backed by the US government with Du Bois as a special ambassador. Even after the agreement with Firestone, however, the Liberian government sought to amend the contract on the grounds that it threatened the sovereignty of Liberia.⁴⁴ A compromise was finally reached the following year, and it has been suggested by Raymond Leslie Buell, the first American political scientist who conducted fieldwork in Africa,⁴⁵ that the reason for this would be Liberia’s desire to avoid being dominated by European powers through strengthening its relations with the United States. Buell quotes Barclay’s comment in his private letter to the US secretary of state: “What it has been hoped . . . is a counterpois[e] to other menacingly aggressive interests already established in this country, a balancing of foreign influences here and a new economic impulse.”⁴⁶

In his annual message to the legislature in December 1924, President King discussed UNIA’s project at relatively long length and made it clear that he had vetoed it.

The loud and continued boasts of members of that association in America . . . that the Republic of Liberia would be used as the *point d’appui* whence the grandiose schemes of their leader . . . would be launched made it necessary for the Executive Government of Liberia to take such concrete and effective steps as would show to our friendly territorial neighbors, and the world at large, that Liberia was not in any way associated or in sympathy with any movement . . . which tends to intensify racial feelings of hatred and ill will.⁴⁷

Although King was sympathetic to the plight of Black people all over the world and continued to welcome their emigration to Liberia, he stressed that “Liberia’s immediate object is towards nationalism, not racialism; the making of a nation and not a race.”⁴⁸ In conclusion, he repeated his concern for the neighboring powers by stating that the Government of Liberia “could not give countenance to any association whose avowed objects and widely advertised plans are launching a race war against friendly states in Africa.”⁴⁹

Liberia was one of the weakest states in the Eurocentric international community, and its political and economic sovereignty was constantly threatened by Western powers. When the Garvey movement was cautiously being investigated by the US, British, and French governments, it was acceptable insofar as it strengthened the sovereignty of Liberia. When Secretary of State Barclay met with the UNIA delegation, he said it was not wise to always make the Liberian government’s intentions clear to the British and French governments: “We don’t tell them what we think; we only tell them what we like them to hear—what, in fact, they like to hear.”⁵⁰ A similar attitude was also taken toward the UNIA.

The Liberian government was negotiating with Western powers, exercising the utmost initiative to ensure its survival as a nation. Preserving, and even consolidating, the sovereignty and independence that it had already won was far more important than being a pioneer in the realization of Pan-Africanism. The UNIA’s transnational movement was hampered by this strong Liberian nationalism.

UNIA’s Appeal to the International Community

While facing difficulties in the Back-to-Africa movement in Liberia, Garvey continued appealing to the international community at important conferences where leaders from all the great powers gathered. When the decision was made to hold the Washington Conference on Disarmament at the end of 1921, Garvey attempted to promote the demands of the Blacks at this event. Again, the Japanese presence was used as rhetoric to justify his realist program of racial uplifting: “They were prejudiced against the Japanese 70 years ago. . . . Since the Japanese have achieved what has happened? Our proud and haughty President has is[su]ed an invitation from the White House to nations of equal standing to come and meet in Washington to discuss the question of disarmament. Who are they inviting? We have white France, Anglo-Saxon Britain, white Italy, and among them yellow Japan.”⁵¹

He sent a telegram to the secretary of the conference “on behalf of the four hundred million Negroes in the world not represented” to ensure that the conference would not become a repeat of the Paris Peace Conference, which “made the awful mistake of legislating for the disposition of other people’s lands (especially in Africa) without taking them into consideration, believing that a world peace could have been established after such a conference.” In the telegram, Garvey somewhat modestly stated that Black people desired “a national independence all our own on the Continent of Africa” and asked the members “to realise and appreciate the fact that the Negro is a man, and that there can be no settlement of world affairs, without proper consideration being given to him with his right.”⁵²

In mid-1921, the UNIA changed its policy of seeking the annulment of the League of Nations and began seeking the cession of the former German colonies in Africa. In May 1922, Garvey sent a letter to Secretary-General Eric Drummond requesting permission for the UNIA representative to attend the General Assembly to present the demands of Blacks. Garvey reminded Drummond that “the Negro race is no longer disposed to be treated as children, but [shall be heard as] men” and also “as a people.”⁵³

Drummond wrote back in his original draft that he would “endeavour to find time to see them” himself “and would, in any case, put them in touch with officials of the Secretariat.”⁵⁴ An official at the Secretariat, however, cautioned Drummond about this promise, calling it “rather dangerous [because it might] arouse hope of results which will not, in fact, be achieved.” The official also pointed out, “As the presence of a Negro delegation will be a novelty, it will be referred to by the press—especially the American press—and it might antagonise many of our friends in America, who might think that the League was meddling in the Negro question in the States, where this question is a very burning one.”⁵⁵

The actual reply sent to Garvey was “noncommittal,” as suggested by Huntington Gilchrist, an American member of the Secretariat. It merely informed him that the meetings were held in public and that seats could be reserved by application; however, only official representatives of the member states could submit agendas at the Assembly.⁵⁶ After receiving Garvey’s request to reserve seats, another American member at the Secretariat, Arthur Sweetser, stated that the UNIA had “a real case which we cannot totally ignore and should not greatly encourage. Seats for the Assembly would seem to be the least, and the most, we can do.”⁵⁷

In 1922, the UNIA sent a delegation to the League of Nations to present the UNIA’s petition, in which it declared that their “race is now seeking

racial political liberty” and argued that Blacks who fought in World War I should be taken into consideration because of their contribution. It reminded the member states that independence was considered for Ireland, Egypt, and India as well as for the Jewish people in Palestine and equated Black people, a transnational racial group, with a “nation” and a “people,” stating that they, “as a people,” should have a government in their homeland of Africa. While it represented Black people as a subject of sovereignty, it clearly demanded a homeland for them, asking the League of Nations to “pass over to our control as a race the development of these two late German colonies:” German East Africa and German Southwest Africa.⁵⁸

The delegation met with a Haitian minister to Paris, Dantès Bellegarde, who introduced them to William Rappard, the director of the Permanent Mandates Commission. Bellegarde presided at the second Pan-African Congress in 1921 and later presented the Congress’s resolution to the assembly of the League of Nations. Being more sympathetic to Du Bois, he concurred with other attendees’ criticisms of Garvey, stating at the Pan-African Congress “none of us want to follow Marcus Garvey to Africa.”⁵⁹ Bellegarde was acting, in Du Bois’s description, as “an international spokesman of the Negroes of the world,” of which he was proud.⁶⁰

Although the delegation’s meeting with Rappard did not yield any fruitful results, the UNIA’s petition was distributed to the delegations attending the General Assembly, with the help of Prince Mirza Riza Khan, the representative of Persia, the only Islamic state among the member states. The UNIA delegates were assured of Khan’s “sympathy with the aspiration of the less favoured races of the world.”⁶¹ Not failing to meet their expectation, Khan stated, in the letter addressed to Drummond, that “the Persian delegation believes . . . that it is in the interest of the League of Nations not to deny a right of petition to numerous organizations that have put a sincere hope in our Society,” while reserving his own opinion on the contents.⁶²

Although Drummond hesitated to distribute the document from someone other than the official representative, Rappard determined that it was a specific request from the Persian delegation and directed the distribution of the petition and the publication of the title in the official journal of the League of Nations.⁶³

Garvey had sent a letter to some of the member states, asking for their support for the petition. On receiving this request, the Belgian foreign minister squarely refuted Garvey’s claim of the need for nation building for Black people: “Where have we ever seen a ‘race’ claim, as a race, the

judicial status of a *State*? It is within States that the fate of races is settled, and the claims of the black race can only be expressed within this limitation."⁶⁴

The UNIA petition was not mentioned in the *League of Nations Official Journal* of 1922, but it was acknowledged in the journal of 1928, the year Garvey himself visited Geneva.⁶⁵ The League of Nations never specifically considered the petition and continued the mandate system thereafter. The cooperative attitude of Bellegarde and Khan suggests, however, that there were other international relations in which actors, who had been pushed to the periphery of the Eurocentric international community, sympathized with one another. Their activities were overshadowed by the front stage of international politics, where only the major powers played the leading roles, but to underestimate those peripheral activities is to miss the whole picture of international politics and the racial structure of the international community that exists even today.

Throughout its appeal to the international community, the UNIA represented transnational Blacks as international political actors and, simultaneously, demanded that former German colonies in Africa be given to them. It clearly shows the dual sovereignty the Garvey movement sought to achieve—both transnational and national.

CONCLUSION

Garvey believed that each group of people who sought to uplift their status as a group, regardless of race or ethnicity, should have its own independent state in what is considered its homeland, and only by being protected by this status can individuals be sure of a dignified position in rest of the world. Furthermore, he was convinced that only powerful states could be treated as full-fledged national actors in world politics. This realist worldview was influenced and supported by the status of Japan as a major power recognized in prestigious international conferences.

The UNIA sought in two ways to build a powerful Black nation in Africa: first, by appealing to the international community to grant the former German territories in Africa to the African diaspora and, second, by negotiating with the Liberian government in its Back-to-Africa movement. Eventually, the UNIA's appeal with regard to the former German colonies was denied by the great power-led international community, and its Pan-Africanist project was rejected because of Liberian nationalism, which was threatened by the political and economic influence of Western countries

including the United States.

The Garvey movement, which represented a transnational racial group as a political actor, was rarely taken seriously in international politics, where only nation-states were considered to be legitimate actors. As the Belgian minister rightly analyzed, race functions primarily as a domestic factor, along with others, such as gender and class, by being incorporated into the formation of the modern state to define a legitimate “nation.” Garvey positioned Blacks, who were excluded from the “nation” of every country, as a pseudo-subject of a new nation, an imagined community with the appearance of an empire. He envisioned that eventually the whole of Africa would be ruled by Blacks.

Nowadays, utilizing diaspora for national development is a realistic strategy as we see in Ghana and other African countries. In 2003, the African Union, in seeking to strengthen African unity, including the African diaspora, inserted the following paragraphs in its objectives in its Constitutive Act: We “invite and encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our Continent, in the building of the African Union.”⁶⁶ The African Union Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum has an initiative to directly link the resources of the African diaspora to African development, by stating: “Our forefathers, including Marcus Garvey, envisioned this blending of our resources many years ago, but we now have the opportunity to make those dreams real.”⁶⁷

The Garvey movement has been rediscovered as a pioneer of liberal international cooperation, but in the original Garvey movement, both the transnational community and the nation-state, with its territorial roots, were inextricably linked. Building a powerful nation-state that stood behind Blacks was vital to the Garvey movement. It was not merely a transnational movement but one of transnational nationalism in which nation building played a crucial part.

NOTES

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¹ “Come to Ghana If You’re Unwanted—Tourism Minister to African Americans,” GhanaWeb, June 5, 2020, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Come-to-Ghana-if-you-re-unwanted-Tourism-Minister-to-African-Americans-971839>.

² “Ghana Earned US\$3.3 billion from ‘Year of Return,’” GhanaWeb, May 28, 2020, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Ghana-earned-US-3-3-billion-from-Year->

of-Return-964768.

³ “Come to Ghana,” GhanaWeb, June 5, 2020; “Ghana to Black Americans: Come Home. We’ll Help You Build a Life Here,” *Washington Post*, July 4, 2020. Endorsing the government’s project, the chief of Achiase, in the Ashanti region, promised to give two hundred acres of land to returnees if they would construct any type of factory. “Year of Return: Achiase Chief Allots 200-Acre Land to Returnees,” GhanaWeb, January 2, 2020, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Year-of-Return-Achiase-chief-allots-200-acre-land-to-returnees-827950>.

⁴ “Come to Ghana,” GhanaWeb, June 5, 2020.

⁵ Harry F. Worley to William A. Phillips, May 2, 1919, RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1910–29, file number (hereafter CDF) 763.72119/5119, US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

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⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁰ Robbie Shilliam, “What about Marcus Garvey? Race and the Transformation of Sovereign Debate,” *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 3 (2006): 379.

¹¹ “Address Denouncing W. E. B. Du Bois,” April 5, 1919, in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983–2006), 1: 397.

¹² “Editorials by Marcus Garvey in the *Negro World*,” November 30, 1918, *ibid.*, 303.

¹³ “Report by Special Agent S-A-I-I,” November 9, 1920, in Hill, *Papers*, 3: 85; “Report by Bureau Agent H. J. Lenon,” January 18, 1921, in Hill, *Papers*, 3: 134.

¹⁴ Keiko Araki, “Africa for Africans and Asia for Asians: Japanese Pan-Asianism and Its Impact in the Post–World War I Era,” in *Anywhere But Here: Black Intellectuals in the Atlantic World and Beyond*, ed. Kendahl Radcliffe, Jennifer Scott, and Anja Werner (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015).

¹⁵ “UNIA Meeting at Carnegie Hall,” August 25, 1919, in Hill, *Papers*, 1: 501.

¹⁶ Persaud, “Re-envisioning Sovereignty,” 122–23.

¹⁷ “Bureau of Investigation Reports,” November 12, 1918, in Hill, *Papers*, 1: 288.

¹⁸ “UNIA Declaration of Rights,” August 13, 1920, in Hill, *Papers*, 2: 577.

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²⁰ “Memorandum by the Division of Western European Affairs, Department of State,” April

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²⁹ United States Department of State, *Liberia*, 204–5.

³⁰ Interview with the Acting President of Liberia, his Excellency Hon. E. J. Barclay, and his Cabinet, by the Commissioners of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Tuesday March 22, 1921, RG59, CDF 882.00/705, NARA.

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³⁴ *Crisis* 22, no. 2 (June 1921), 53.

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³⁶ “Report by Special Agent P-138,” February 23, 1921, in Hill, *Papers*, 3: 234–35.

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⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 665.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 666.

⁵⁰ Interview with the Acting President of Liberia, his Excellency Hon. E. J. Barclay, and his Cabinet, by the Commissioners of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Tuesday March 22, 1921, RG59, CDF 882.00/705, NARA; Memorandum by William R. Castle, September 6, 1924, in RG59, CDF 882.5511/10, NARA.

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⁶³ Eric Drummond to William Rappard, October 3, 1922; and William Rappard to the Registry, September 30, 1922, League of Nations Archives.

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