

GARVEY, MARCUS MOZIAH, JR., 1887-1940 . FIRST SPEECH AFTER RELEASE FROM TOMBS PRISON DELIVERED AT LLIBERTY HALL, NEW YORK

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First Speech after Release from Tombs Prison Delivered at Lliberty Hall, New York City

"Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is needless for me to say that the pleasure of meeting you in Liberty Hall, the shrine of Negro inspiration, after an enforced absence of three months, is beyond my ability to express.

The news of the trial of the celebrated case of fraud, and my so-called conviction, have made the circuit of the world, and black humanity everywhere, even to the remotest parts of our homeland, Africa, have formed their opinion of Western twentieth century civilization and justice, as controlled and administered by the white man.

My absence from you did not leave me despondent, nor desolate, for in the daily silence of the passing hours in my cell I thought of you, the warriors of true liberty, who were working for the consummation of our ideal – a free and redeemed Africa, and my meditations led me into greater flights of hope that shall strengthen me for the nobler work of self-sacrifice for the cause that we represent.

The amusing part of my trial is that I was indicted along with others for conspiracy to use the United States mails to defraud in the promotion of the Black Star Line Steamship Company, yet my conviction was void of conspiracy, in that I alone was convicted, and, if I understand my conviction clearly, I was convicted for selling stock in the Black Star Line after I knew it to be insolvent. The difference between us and the trial court is that they wanted a conviction, caring not how it came about, and they had it to suit themselves, to the extent that all the others, who had more to do with the actual selling of stock than I, went free, because they were not wanted, while I received the fullest penalty that the law could impose – five years in the penitentiary, the maximum fine of one thousand dollars as provided by law, and the entire cost of the case, a condition not generally imposed but, maybe, once in twenty-five years.

Our point of view is that we cannot defraud ourselves in the sense of promoting the Black Star Line, for the idea of a line of steamships operated by Negroes for the promotion of their industrial, commercial, fraternal and material well-being can never be insolvent or bankrupt; for, as long as the race—232—lasts, and as long as humanity indulges in the pursuit of progress and achievements, the new Negro will be found doing his part to hold a place in the affairs of the world. It is true that we have been defrauded, but it was done, not by those of us who love our work and our race, but by disloyal and dishonest ones, whom we thought had the same feelings as we do, and by crooked white men, who were not even ashamed of hiding their crookedness. One white man said in court that he sold us a ship when he knew it was not worth the money paid for it. Another took \$25,000 and an additional \$11,000 to buy the Phyllis Wheatley to go to Africa, which never materialized, and which money was never returned, the reason of which supplied the legal cause for my indictment. And yet it is said in the law of those who tried me that there was fraud and I should pay the penalty.

The Black Star Line, as we all know, was but a small attempt, or experiment, of the race to fit and prepare ourselves for the bigger effort in the direction of racial self-reliance and self-determination. To say that we have failed, because a few black and white unscrupulous persons deceived and robbed us, is to admit that the colonization scheme of America failed because a few Pilgrim Fathers died at Plymouth, and that the fight of the Allies to save the world for a new civilization failed, because the Crown Prince met with early success at Verdun. The Black Star Line was only part of an honest effort

on the part of real Negroes to re-establish themselves as a worthy people among the other races and nations of the earth, and but a small contribution in the plan of a free and redeemed African nation for the Negro peoples of the world. The idea of a Black Steamship Line, therefore, can only fail when the Negro race has completely passed away, and that means eternity.

I was convicted, not because any one was defrauded in the temporary failure of the Black Star Line brought about by others, but because I represented, even as I do now, a movement for the real emancipation of my race. I was convicted because I talked about Africa and about its redemption for Negroes. I was convicted because an atmosphere of hostility was created around me. I was convicted because wicked enemies, malicious and jealous members of my own race, misrepresented me to those in authority for the purpose of discrediting and destroying me.

I would not blame the few white persons who contributed to my conviction, neither would I blame the Government and--233--the illiberal of the white race who had prejudices against me. They knew no better than the information they received from treacherous, malicious and jealous Negroes who, for the sake of position and privilege, will sell their own mothers.

I feel, however, that these white persons and the Government have now the opportunity of learning the truth, not only about my case and my conviction, but about the differences in the Negro race, that set one against the other.

Appealing the Case.

"I have no fear of the ultimate outcome of my case. I shall take it to the highest courts in the land, and from there to the bar of international public opinion, and even though I go to jail because of prejudice, I will have left behind for our generations a record of injustice that will be our guide in the future rise of Ethiopia's glory. Nevertheless, I believe that the higher courts of this country will not mingle prejudice with justice and condemn a man simply because he is black and attempts to do good for his race and his fellow men.

Whatsoever happens, the world may know that the jail or penitentiary has no terrors for me. Guilty men are afraid of jail, but I am as much at home in jail for the cause of human rights as I am in my drawing room, the only difference being that I have not my good wife's company even as I know how glad she would have been to share my lot, but hers must be a life of sacrifice also, painful though it be. When my life is fully given for the cause, and she is left behind, I trust that you will give her the consideration that is due a faithful and devoted wife, who gave up her husband for the cause of human service. During my trial cowards tried to blemish her character, but it is an accepted truth that character is not blemished from without; it is from within, and the noblest souls that ever peopled this world were those maligned and outraged by the vile and wicked.

Service to my race is an undying passion with me, so the greater the persecution, the greater my determination to serve.

As leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, of which the Black Star Line was an auxiliary, I must state that the millions of our members in this country and abroad look to America as a national friend, and, citizens and residents as we are, we are jealous of her fair name among the other nations of the world and zealous in the effort to be to her loyal and true.--234--

The Universal Negro Improvement Association seeks to do for Africa similarly what the Pilgrims and, later George Washington sought to do for America. We Negroes want a government of our own in Africa, so that we can be nationally, if not industrially and commercially, removed from competition in race, a condition that will make both races better friends, with malice toward none, but respect and appreciation for each.

Our greatest trouble, however, is with our own people. There are some in the race who are not in sympathy with an independent Negro nation. To them 'they have lost nothing in Africa.' They believe in the amalgamation of races for the production of new racial and national types; hence their doctrine

of social equality and the creating of a new American race. Feeling as they do, divides us into two separate and distinct schools of thought, and, apparently, we are now at war with each other, and they have gained the first victory in having me (through their misrepresentation) indicted and convicted for the purpose of rendering me *hors de combat*.

We who believe in race purity are going to fight the issue out for the salvation of both races, and this can only be satisfactorily done when we have established for the Negro a nation of his own. We believe that the white race should protect itself against racial contamination, and the Negro should do the same. Nature intended us morally (and may I not say socially?) apart, otherwise there never would have been this difference. Our sins will not make the world better.; hence, to us of the Universal Negro Improvement Association the time has come to rebuild our ancient and proud race.

My personal suffering for the program of the Universal Negro Improvement Association is but a drop in the bucket of sacrifice. To correct the evils surrounding our racial existence is to undertake a task as pretentious and difficult as dividing the sea or uprooting the Rock of Gibraltar; but, with the grace of God, all things are possible, for in truth there is prophecy that 'Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand, and Princes shall come out of Egypt.'

We are expecting the co-operation and support of liberal White America in the promulgation of the ideal of race purity, and the founding of a nation for Negroes in Africa, so that those who, after proper industrial and other adjustments, desire to return to their original native homeland can do so in peace and security.

Now that the world is readjusting itself and political changes and distributions are being made of the earth's surface, there--235--is absolutely no reason why certain parts of Africa should not be set aside absolutely for the Negro race as our claim and heritage. If this is not done, then we may as well look forward to eternal confusion among the races.

Superstate for Negroes.

"Negro men will never always feel satisfied with being ruled, governed and dictated to by other races. As in my case, I would never feel absolutely satisfied with being tried and judged by a white judge, district attorney and jury, for it is impossible for them to correctly interpret the real feelings of my race and appreciate my effort in their behalf; hence, the prejudice from which I suffer. A white man before a black district attorney, judge and jury would feel the same way, and thus we have the great problem that can only be solved by giving the Negro a government of his own. The Black Star Line was an effort in this direction and bore a relationship to the Universal Negro Improvement Association as the Shipping Board does to the Government. My effort was not correctly understood, and that is why some people have become prejudiced toward me. Yet in the final presentation of truth the fair-minded is bound to come to the conclusion that the program of the Universal Negro Improvement Association is reasonable and proper for the solution of the vexed question of races.