

## [Almost Made King]

Beliefs and Customs - Negro Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK [??] Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 W. 130th St. New York

DATE Oct. 20, 1938

SUBJECT THE MAN WHO WAS ALMOST MADE KING.

1. Date and time of interview Oct. 4th, 5th, 10th, 12th, 19th
2. Place of interview Informants home, 224 W. 140th St.
3. Name and address of informant Wilbert J. Miller, 224 W. 140th St. Apt 9
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Five room apartment, comfortably furnished, Neighborhood entirely Negro.

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 W. 130th St. New York

DATE Oct. 20th, 1938

SUBJECT THE MAN WHO WAS ALMOST MADE KING

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth Jamaica, B. W. I. - April 2nd 1870
3. Family Wife and one daughter
4. Places lived in, with dates Jamaica England and South Africa
5. Education, with dates Elementary
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates Interior Decorator
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities Member of Seventh Day Adventist Church Universal Negro Improvement Association

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9. Description of informant About 5 ft 11 in, tall, Negro, mixed gray hair weight about 185 lbs.

10. Other Points gained in interview

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 W. 130th St. New York

DATE Oct. 20th, 1938

SUBJECT THE MAN WHO WAS ALMOST MADE KING.

So you want me to tell you something about Negro Folklore well, here's a story about a strapping, jet-black Negro that will live as long as folk tales are handed down from generation to generation. To many, he was a clown; a jester who wanted to play at being king but, to hundreds of thousands of Negroes, he was a magnificent leader and martyr to a great cause; complete and unconditional social and economic freedom for Negroes everywhere. And, had it not been for one flaw in his plan of action, there would probably be no more than a handful us Negroes in America today.

His name was Marcus Garvey. He was born, so the records say, on the island of Jamaica in the British West Indies about 1887, but few people ever heard of him until he came

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to New York. He was a born orator and his power to attract and hold an audience was destined to make him famous.

I remember his first important speech.

“Wherever I go, whether it be France, Germany, England-or Spain, I am told that there is no room for a Negro. The other races have countries of their own and it is time for the 400,000,000 Negroes of the world to claim Africa for themselves. Therefore, we shall demand and expect of 2 the world a Free Africa. The black man has been serf, a tool, a slave and peon long enough.

That day has ceased.

We have reached the time when every minute, every second must count for something done, something achieved in the cause for Africa. We need the freedom of Africa now. At this moment methinks, I see Ethiopia stretching forth her hands unto God, and methinks I see the Angel of God taking up the standard of the Red, the Black, and the Green, and sayings; Men of the Negro race, Men of Ethiopia, follow me:

“It falls to our lot to tear off the shackles that bind Mother Africa. Can you do it? You did it in the Revolutionary War. You did it in the Civil War. You did it in the battles of Maine and Verdum. You did it in the Mesopotamia. You can do it marching up the battle heights of Africa. Climb ye the heights of liberty and cease not in well-doing until you have planted the banner of the Red, the Black, and the Green upon the hilltops of Africa . ”

These, my child, were the very words of the man Marcus Garvey, whom many called the black Napoleon. I Remember them well as you, perhaps, remember Lincoln's Gettysburg address. He was standing there, strong and forceful before a crowd of more than 25,000 Negroes who had assembled in Madison Square Garden to consider the problems of the Negro race. It was shortly after the World War, August 1920 I believe.

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Well that was a sight to thrill you with pride. Imagine, huge spacious Madison Square Garden, rocking with the yells of 25,000 frenzied Negro patriots demanding a free Africa, from the Strait of Gibraltar to the cape of Good Hope— A Negro republic run exclusively by and for Negroes. Doesn't sound real, does it? Well, it happened—and it can happen again, but not until another leader with Marcus Garvey's strength, vision and courage comes along. Some people say that Father Divine is 3 the answer to this need. Personally I doubt it. He is a good organizer but his Divinites are not to be compared with the powerful and vigorous following once commanded by the Universal Negro Improvement Association that Garvey founded and built single-handed. Why, He had such a magnetic personality that people flocked to see him wherever he went, and when he appeared on any platform to speak he'd have to wait sometimes five or ten minutes before the loud ovations and sounds of applause subsided. Then he would stride magestically forward in his cap and gown of purple, green and gold, and the hall, arena, square, or whatever it was, would become magically silent.

He was always an engima to the white people who flocked, in great numbers, to hear him, They couldn't decide whether to consider him a political menace or a harmless buffoon. But to his several hundred thousand Negro followers he was a great leader with a wonderful idea, an unequalled program of emancipation. He did not claim to be a great intellectual, a Frederick Douglas or Booker T. Washington, but he was certainly endowed with color and originality; so much so that he caught the fancy and commanded the solid support of the Negro masses, as no other man has done before or since. He had the unusual happy faculty for stirring their race consciousness.

I can see him even now as he stood and exhorted his followers at that first organizational meeting.

He read a telegram of greeting To Eamon De Valera, President of the Irish Republic, Wait a minute, I'll look among my papers and find a copy of it for you.

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Here it is. It says; "25,000 Negro delegates assembled in Madison Square Garden in Mass Meeting, representing 4000,000,000 Negroes of the world, send you greetings as President of the Irish Republic Please accept sympathy of the Negroes of the world for your cause We 4 believe Ireland should be free even as Africa shall be free for the Negroes of the world. Keep up the fight for a free Ireland."

After that, he spoke at length and if I remember correctly, his speech went something like this;

"We are descendants of a suffering people. We are descendants of a people determined to suffer no longer. Our forefathers suffered many years of abuse from an alien race.

It was claimed that the black man came from a backward people, not knowing and not awake to the bigger callings of civilization. That might have been true years ago, but it is not true today.

Fifty-five years ago the black man was set free from slavery on this continent. Now he declares that what is good for the white man of this age is also good for the Negro. They as a race, claim freedom, and claim the right to establish a democracy. We shall now organize the 400,000,000 Negroes of the World into a vast organization to plant the banner of freedom on the great continent of Africa. We have no apologies to make, and will make none. We do not desire what has belonged to others, though others have always sought to deprive us of that which belonged to us.

We new Negroes will dispute every inch of the way until we win.

We will begin by framing a bill of rights of the Negro race with a constitution to guide the life and destiny of the 400,000,000. The Constitution of the United States means that every white American would shed his blood to defend that Constitution. The constitution, of the Negro race will mean that every Negro will shed his blood to defend his Constitution.

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If Europe is for the Europeans, then Africa shall be for the black peoples of the world, We say it. We mean it.”

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Following the thirty day organizational convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association at Madison Square Garden, more than three thousand delegates and sympathizers of the group gathered in Harlem at Liberty Hall, 140 West 138 Street, where they gave their final approval of the declaration of rights of the Negro peoples of the world. Delegates were there from Africa as well as the West Indian and Bermuda Islands. It was a memorable occasion.

Decorating the huge hall were banners of the various delegations. Prominently displayed also were the red, black and green flags of the new African [Republic-to1/2be?]. A colorful, forty piece band, a choir of fifty male and female voices and several quartettes entertained the assembly all during the early part of the evening. Afterwards, Marcus Garvey, president general of the association, announced the business of the meeting and read the declaration.

Much applause greeted the reading of the preamble to the declaration which stated: “In order to encourage our race all over the world and to stimulate it to overcome the handicaps and difficulties surrounding it, and to push forward to a higher and grander destiny, we demand and insist upon the following declaration of rights.”

Then followed the fifty four statements of rights that the association demanded for Negroes everywhere. The first was similar in form to the American Declaration of Independence. It read: “Whereas all men are created equal and entitled to the rights of life, liberty and the pursuits of happiness, and because of this, we, dully elected 6 representatives of the Negro people of the world, invoking the aid of the just and almighty God, do declare all

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men, women and children of our block throughout the world free denizens, and do claim them as free citizens of Africa, the motherland of all Negroes.”

The first statement was greeted with loud and prolonged applause, as were many others that followed it, but there was so much enthusiasm, shouting, stamping of feet and other exhibitions of approval at the conclusion of the following statement that the chairman was forced to appeal, again and again for order. It read: “We declare that no Negro shall engage himself in battle for an alien race without first obtaining consent of the leader of the Negro peoples of the world, except in a matter of national self-defense.”

Another statement which met with popular fancy was: “We assert that the Negro is entitled to even-handed justice before all courts of law and equity, in whatever country he may be found, and when this is denied him on account of his race or color, such denial is an insult to the race as a whole, and should be resented by the entire body of Negroes.

“We deprecate the use of the term 'nigger' as applied to Negroes and demand that the word 'negro' be written with a Capital 'N'.

“We demand a free and unfettered commercial [intercourse?] with all the Negro peoples of the world. We demand that the governments of the world recognize our leader and his representatives chosen by the race to look after the welfare of our people under such governments. We call upon the various governments to represent the general welfare of the Negro peoples of the world.

“We demand that our duly accredited representatives be given proper recognition in all leagues, conferences, conventions or courts of international arbitration whenever human rights are discussed.

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“We proclaim the first day of August of each year to be an international holiday to be observed by all Negroes.”

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The thing that makes this ambitious adventure all the more remarkable, my child, is the fact that all these strong resolutions and gigantic plans were conceived entirely by this one man, Marcus Garvey, who, in the beginning, was just another underprivileged West Indian boy; a printer's apprentice. Fired with the idea of welding the divided black masses of the world together, however, he became an entirely different and revolutionary personality.

Garvey worked his way to London and studied, at night, at the University. His education was supplemented by travel and observations in the different European countries. He did not get to Africa but listened attentively to many fellow ships' - passengers who told of the cruelty inflicted on the natives in many districts. Later, Garvey worked on freighters that touched several of the West Indian, Central and South American ports. He had many opportunities to observe the exploitation of the black workers of quite a few different countries who create vast fortunes for their white bosses while they lived in abject poverty. Once he is quoted as having said: "Poverty is a hellish state to be in. It is no virtue, it is a crime."

And so, it was this [initiate?] knowledge of unfavorable working conditions for black men everywhere that fired the wandering, giant Negro with his idea of a separate country and homeland for these oppressed peoples; a country with a civilization second to none. Africa, he felt, was the logical country. Thus was born the "Back to Africa" movement.

Nineteen seventeen saw the actual beginning of the Garvey movement but not until the Spring of nineteen eighteen did Marcus succeed in officially organizing the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Later, in the Fall, he established his own newspaper, "The Negro World" and began a systematic appeal for contributions to the movement. It was also his medium for preaching his doctrines to the out of town public. Week by week the paper's editorial pages aired his opinions.

Soon, money began pouring into the coffers of the Association, and it was not long before Garvey organized a steamship company, known as the Black Star Line, and scheduled to

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operate between the West Indies, Africa and the United States. During the winter of 1919 alone, more than half a million dollars worth of stock was sold to Negroes. One Negro college in the state of Louisiana was reputed to have raised seven thousand dollars for promotion of the scheme. Three ships, Garvey said, had been bought from the entire proceeds of the national fund: The Yarmouth, the Maceo and line Shadysiah. Another, the Phyllis Wheatley, was advertised weekly in the Negro World. It was claimed that she would ply between Cuba, St. Kitts, Barbadoes, Trinidad, Demerara, Dakar and Monrovia. The only hitch was, the date of sailing never came. In fact, the mass inspection of the Phyllis Wheatley that Garvey kept promising his followers, never came. Certain doubters in the organization then began to wonder whether there was any ship at all they went even further than that. They sent a delegation to His Highness, the President, with a demand to see the boat. Garvey, always at ease in the face of any difficult situation, that them that he would attend to it the next day. When the next day came, he put them off again. And so it went from day to day.

This difficult situation arose during the famous “first convention” that was held in August 1920 and lasted for thirty days. There was a grand and imposing parade through the streets of Harlem 9 and the colorful, regal mass meetings at Madison Square Garden and Liberty Hall. Garvey said he was busy. There was nothing for the delegates to do but wait. The publicity that the movement received during this gigantic display of marching legions and blaring trumpets, skyrocketed the circulation of the “Negro World” to the amazing figure of 75,000 unprecedented in the field of weekly Negro journalism. It was one of the instruments that made Garvey the most powerful black man in America at that time. Harlem and black America were literally at his feet.

Garvey then bought a chain of grocery stores, restaurants, beauty and barber shops, laundries, womens' wear shops, and a score or more of other small businesses. He instituted a one-man campaign to completely monopolize the small industries in Harlem and drive the white store-keepers out. His one big mistake came, however, when he printed and issued circulars asking for additional purchasers of Black Star Line stock and

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assuring prospective buyers of the financial soundness of the company. This was too much for the delegates who had been asking for a detailed accounting of the Associations' funds throughout the entire convention only to get the run around. They immediately petitioned the U. S. Post Office Department of Inspection to investigate the company's books. When the true state of affairs was brought to light, Garvey was immediately indicted for using the mails to defraud. The investigation also brought to light the fact that Garvey had collected thousands of dollars for his so called "defense fund".

Well, to make a long story short, by June 1924, instead of perching majestically on his golden throne in some far away jungle clearing, being waited and danced attendance upon by titled nobles, the erstwhile Black Napoleon and Provisional President of Africa, 10 found himself sitting, disconsolate and alone, in a bare cell of the Tombs prison. It was the culmination of a 27 day trial in the United States District Court. The jury, after listening to testimony and arguments for practically the entire duration of that time, brought in a verdict of 'guilty'. Marcus, the great, had been duly and officially convicted of using the mails to defraud.

Loyal officers of the movement had a bail bondsman on hand, ready to secure the release of their idol by the Assistant U. S. District Attorney foiled this move by asking that Garvey be remained to prison without bail. His [request?] was granted when the Court was told that Garvey's African Legion was well supplied with guns and ammunition and would probably help their chief to escape.

And so, in the midst of heavily armed U. S. Marshalls and a detachment of New York City policemen, the "Leader of the Negro Peoples of the World", was marched off to the, anything but comfortable and homelike, atmosphere, of the Tombs. Later he was transferred to Atlanta. With him went his dreams of a great Black Empire, his visions of a final welding of all Negroes into one strong, powerful nation, with himself as dictator; his favorite supporters, elegant lords, princes, dukes and other personages of high-sounding title: like "High Commissioner", "His Highness and Royal Potentate", "Minister of the African

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Legion”, “The Right Honorable High Chancellor”, “His Excellency, Prince of Uganda”, “Lord of the Nile” and so on.

Yes, there's no doubt about it, Garvey had grandiloquent ideas. Conceiving and attempting to put over big things was his specialty. But like most dreamers, he dreamed just a little too much. He was too little the realist. Otherwise, his story might have been different. As it was, few of his dreams ever came true; not, mind you, of their lack of soundness. I still feel that he was a great man, honest and sincere. But he was not practical. Conducting a business enterprise according to established rules meant very little to him. That was his undoing. But there was no denying the fact that he was a colorful personality. The way he thought up such grand titles for his subjects was only one manifestation of it. In defense of conferring these titles, by the way, Garvey said:

“It is human nature that when you make a man know that you are going to reward him and recognize and appreciate him for services rendered, and place him above others, he is going to do the best that is in him.”

Garvey also called attention to the fact that the conferring of degrees by colleges and universities adopted from European customs, is only parallel to the conferring of titles by the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The only difference being that one is scholastic, the other political. And, perhaps he was right.

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