

Introduction

The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities' League is an international self-help organization founded in Jamaica, British West Indies, by Marcus Garvey in 1914. Its objectives are to establish a Universal Confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of pride and love; to reclaim the fallen; to administer to and assist the needy; to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; to assist in the development of Independent Negro Nations and Communities; to establish Commissionaries or Agencies in the principal countries and cities of the world for the representation and protection of all Negroes irrespective of nationality; to promote a conscientious Spiritual worship among the native tribes of Africa; to establish Universities, Colleges, Academies and Schools for the racial education and culture of the people; to conduct a worldwide Commercial and Industrial Intercourse for the good of the People; to work for better conditions in all Negro communities.

In 1916, Marcus Garvey moved to New York and began organizing divisions of the Association in various parts of the United States. By 1920 he was able to claim four million followers, and by 1923 some six million. Besides the divisions, which were the basic units of the organization, Garvey established auxiliaries to carry out special aspects of his general program. These included the Universal African Legion, a paramilitary group, the Universal Black Cross Nurses, the Universal African Motor Corps, the Black Eagle Flying Corps, and the Black Star Steamship Line.

The annual conventions of the U.N.I.A. ("International Conventions of the Negro Peoples of the World") attracted many thousands of people who participated in the month-long series of programs, planning sessions, parades, and discussion groups. Resolutions were discussed and passed stating the official positions of the "400,000,000 Negroes of the world" on the pressing matters of the day. Often these conventions are more remembered by observers for the pomp and ceremony that accompanied them than for the tremendous amount of discussion and analysis of the condition of the black man which took place during the annual thirty-one days of meetings.

The Central Division, whose records constitute this record group, came into being in 1936 and was a development arising out of the fractionalization of the U.N.I.A. movement following Garvey's imprisonment in 1926 and his subsequent deportation. In 1926 the leadership of New York Division #340 was evicted from the U.N.I.A. Liberty Hall building in New York by the incipient Garvey Club. The group, headed by Capt. A. L. King, formed the Pioneer Negroes of the World. Later, in August 1929, a temporary reconciliation occurred when Garvey reincorporated the U.N.I.A. in Jamaica under the name Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities' League of the World.

Also, in August, Captain King attended the Sixth International Convention of Negro Peoples of the World in Kingston as one of the American delegates. He served as president of the reinstated New York Division until another split occurred in 1936. This time he left the division and established an independent unit—the Central Division—which appealed to Garvey for the recognition that it was subsequently granted.