

## “We All Used to Meet at the Hall”: Assessing the Significance of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Toronto, 1900–1950

Carla Marano

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### Résumé de l'article

Le présent article s'attarde aux facteurs uniques qui ont mené l'Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) de Toronto à occuper une place centrale dans la communauté noire de la ville et dans l'ensemble du mouvement Garvey. Dès 1919, la section torontoise de cet organisme a servi de lieu neutre où les Noirs de la ville ont pu exprimer leurs préoccupations entourant le racisme, la politique, l'emploi et la communauté. À partir d'entrevues, de journaux et de dossiers officiels de l'UNIA, cet article explique toute l'importance de cet organisme pour la croissance de la communauté noire de Toronto, sa sécurité et son bien-être.

Bien que l'article porte sur l'histoire locale, il s'intéresse aussi aux relations transnationales, et particulièrement à la place de Toronto dans la diaspora africaine. La section de Toronto a tissé des liens avec des membres des quatre coins du monde en participant à différentes activités de l'UNIA qui transcendaient les frontières provinciales et nationales. L'article évalue aussi la portée de la collaboration entre les sections et le rôle de Toronto dans la survie du mouvement Garvey au Canada et à l'étranger. Puisque la plupart des membres de l'UNIA à Toronto étaient des immigrants des Caraïbes, l'article explore la compatibilité entre l'UNIA et les idéaux politiques et culturels antillais. À cet égard, l'étude situe la communauté noire de Toronto fermement au cœur de la diaspora africaine.

# **“We All Used to Meet at the Hall”: Assessing the Significance of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Toronto, 1900–1950**

**CARLA MARANO**

## *Abstract*

*This article discusses the unique factors that led the UNIA in Toronto to become a central fixture in the city’s black community and to the Garvey movement as a whole. Beginning in 1919, the Toronto Division served as a secular outlet for blacks in the city to express their concerns over racism, politics, employment, and the community. Using interviews, newspapers, and official UNIA records, this article explains how meaningful this organization was to the growth, security, and well-being of Toronto’s black community.*

*Although this study delves into local history, it is also concerned with transnational relations – primarily, Toronto’s place within the African diaspora. The Toronto Division forged relationships with members around the world while taking part in various UNIA activities that transcended provincial and national boundaries. This article, then, assesses the significance of cross-division cooperation and Toronto’s role in the survival of the Garvey movement in Canada and abroad. Since most members of the UNIA in Toronto were Caribbean immigrants, this essay explores the UNIA’s compatibility with West Indian political and cultural ideals. In this way, this research sets Toronto’s black communities firmly within the African diaspora.*

## **Résumé**

*Le présent article s’attarde aux facteurs uniques qui ont mené l’Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) de Toronto à occuper une place centrale dans la communauté noire de la ville et dans l’ensemble du mouvement Garvey. Dès 1919, la section torontoise de cet organisme a servi de lieu neutre où les Noirs de la ville ont pu exprimer leurs préoccupations entourant le racisme, la politique, l’emploi et la communauté. À partir d’entrevues, de journaux et de dossiers officiels de l’UNIA, cet*

*article explique toute l'importance de cet organisme pour la croissance de la communauté noire de Toronto, sa sécurité et son bien-être.*

*Bien que l'article porte sur l'histoire locale, il s'intéresse aussi aux relations transnationales, et particulièrement à la place de Toronto dans la diaspora africaine. La section de Toronto a tissé des liens avec des membres des quatre coins du monde en participant à différentes activités de l'UNIA qui transcendaient les frontières provinciales et nationales. L'article évalue aussi la portée de la collaboration entre les sections et le rôle de Toronto dans la survie du mouvement Garvey au Canada et à l'étranger. Puisque la plupart des membres de l'UNIA à Toronto étaient des immigrants des Caraïbes, l'article explore la compatibilité entre l'UNIA et les idéaux politiques et culturels antillais. À cet égard, l'étude situe la communauté noire de Toronto fermement au cœur de la diaspora africaine.*

At the turn of the twentieth century Toronto's black peoples began to organize to improve their disadvantaged position in society. Among the organizations that emerged at this time was the Universal Negro Improvement Association, or UNIA. The UNIA was an international organization founded by Jamaican Marcus Garvey to unite people of African descent from across the globe. Toronto's UNIA Division, which was established by a small group of primarily West Indian immigrants, would quickly become a cornerstone in Toronto's black community.

Scholars of the Garvey movement and the UNIA have long debated their importance to black communities across the United States and the Caribbean, not to mention their legacy and influence on black culture and civil rights activism.<sup>1</sup> Historians do not agree on the impact of the UNIA in Canada, either. Some historians, such as Robin Winks and Keith Henry, conclude that the UNIA was not a well-supported organization and that it was of little consequence to African-Canadian history and culture.<sup>2</sup> Others have argued the opposite, that the UNIA maintained a strong presence in the lives of blacks in Canada, especially in large cities such as Montréal and Toronto. The works of Dionne Brand and Natasha Henry reveal that the Toronto Division played an essential role locally as a conduit of black culture and camarade-

rie. Similarly, Leo Bertley’s unpublished dissertation asserts that the Montréal Division had a strong influence on its membership through “active and constructive participation,” and that it served as a vital link between Garvey and his North American followers after his deportation from the United States.<sup>3</sup> More recently, scholars such as Jared Toney have grappled with Toronto’s role within the African diaspora, with the UNIA serving as a means of connecting black communities around the world. Following Toney’s work, this article affirms that Canada — and particularly Toronto — should be considered a significant part of the global network we call the African diaspora. My own research examines the UNIA at both the local and transnational levels, situating the Toronto Division and its members within the larger black diasporic framework.<sup>4</sup>

This article discusses the unique factors that led the UNIA in Toronto to become a central fixture in the city’s black community and the Garvey movement as a whole. With working-class West Indian immigrants at the helm, the Toronto Division worked hard to raise race pride and celebrate black culture within the community. In addition, the UNIA brought blacks from across Ontario and parts of the United States together at the annual Emancipation Day Picnic held at Lakeside Park near St. Catharines. Finally, as the site of three UNIA conventions in the 1930s, the Toronto Division proved itself to be significant not only to the local black community, but also to the Garvey movement on a global scale.

The periodization in this article reflects the heyday years of Toronto’s UNIA division — from 1919 to 1940. Beginning the study in 1900 provides historical context on Toronto’s black population and the city’s racial climate before the arrival of West Indian immigrants and the UNIA. The study extends to 1950 to offer some insight into the legacy of the Toronto Division of the UNIA which continued to operate (albeit with difficulty) until 1982.

This article is based on approximately 40 interviews with black Torontonians and UNIA members that were conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and housed in the Multicultural

History Society of Ontario's (MHSO) African-Canadian collection. The interviewees reveal much about the Toronto's black communities and leaders, as well as UNIA events and activities. Jared Toney's work considers the narratives of only a handful of interviewees — about four or five.<sup>5</sup> My research offers a better sense of the various opinions and experiences of Toronto's black peoples. The interviews took place up to 60 years after the founding of the UNIA in Toronto, so it is possible that the interviewees' memories of specific instances and groups may not be completely clear or accurate. Nevertheless, in many cases more than one of the interviewees recalled the same events and people in a similar way, which indicates a level of accuracy. Related stories are found in several memoirs by Toronto residents, which provide some excellent information on the UNIA and other black groups in the city. Wherever possible I have referred to written primary documents to corroborate the interviewees' recollections and those found in the memoirs. These include the useful, though limited, minutes of Toronto's UNIA Division held by the MHSO. More records on the Toronto Division are in a remarkable collection of official UNIA documents edited by Robert A. Hill, titled *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*. This study also benefitted from a few historical newspapers, most notably the UNIA's official newspaper, *The Negro World*, *The Canadian Observer* — another black newspaper, published out of Toronto —, and *The St. Catharines Standard*.

### What is the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)?

In 1914, Marcus Garvey founded and became President-General of the UNIA in Jamaica.<sup>6</sup> The primary goal of the UNIA was to unite blacks from around the world and repatriate them to Africa. In what has become known as the “Back-to-Africa” or “Garvey movement,” the UNIA proclaimed its goal of an “Africa for the Africans.” In other words, Garvey and his followers — known as “Garveyites” — believed that to shed the burdens of racial prejudice they would have to create a black empire in Africa where they could govern themselves.

Garvey was born into the colour-caste society of Jamaica that consigned blacks to the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder, while a minority of white and mixed-race Jamaicans dominated the middle and upper classes. He began to seek answers to how blacks – who constituted the majority in Jamaica – could overcome this oppressive system. He was inspired by the prominent African-American leader Booker T. Washington, who told his followers that the race would progress if they worked hard and pursued educational opportunities. While Garvey essentially supported Washington’s philosophies, he thought that racism was so deeply ingrained in whites that they would never allow blacks the opportunity to succeed in these avenues. Rather, the only way for blacks to rise above it was to establish a nation, government, and economy of their own in Africa.

In 1916 Garvey decided to move the UNIA’s headquarters to Harlem, New York, which was the Mecca of black culture and political thought in the early twentieth century. From here, Garvey was able to reach millions of blacks in the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and Canada who were dissatisfied with their position in society. Divisions of the UNIA quickly sprouted around the world, including 32 in Canada alone. While most members tended to be of Caribbean/West Indian origin, some African-American immigrants in the western provinces and in border cities, notably Windsor and St. Catharines, also joined their local divisions. Only a few Canadian-born blacks joined the UNIA, as Jared Toney explains, “because they were hesitant to embrace an Africinity that might undermine their claims to being Canadian.”<sup>7</sup> Altogether, approximately 5,000 blacks in Canada joined the UNIA, which represented one-quarter of the total black population of Canada in 1921.<sup>8</sup>

Of the 32 divisions in Canada, only a few were very actively engaged in the UNIA. These divisions tended to be in places with a high concentration of West Indian immigrants. The tiny divisions that dotted the western provinces, such as Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg seemed to participate in the UNIA briefly in the early 1920s, catering to a small and dispersed black population of mostly African-American

immigrants. In the east, Nova Scotia boasted twelve divisions, with the liveliest branches found on Cape Breton Island in Sydney, Glace Bay (New Aberdeen), and New Waterford. The province of Québec had one large and very dynamic division in Montréal. Ontario had several divisions — one each in Windsor, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Hamilton — but by far the biggest and most active branch in this province was in Toronto.<sup>9</sup>

The main goals of the UNIA were colonial in nature, a product of the time period during which Garvey was born and raised. In addition to the more benevolent goals of raising race pride, promoting better education for blacks around the world, and helping the needy, Garvey set forth a plan “to establish a central nation for the race” and “to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa.”<sup>10</sup> Garvey began to develop a plan for colonization, with his eyes set directly on Liberia. He initiated discussions with the Liberian government in 1920 to convince them of the importance of forming an all-black empire in Africa. The UNIA also introduced business enterprises to promote the formation of a healthy African economy. The shipping company Black Star Line (BSL) was its primary venture. Garvey encouraged his followers to purchase stocks in the BSL so that the UNIA could acquire large ocean liners for the development of a shipping economy between North America and Africa. Unfortunately, the BSL was already defunct by 1922 and negotiations with the Liberian government fell through in 1924, officially ending the UNIA’s colonization scheme. Nevertheless, Toronto’s members believed in Garvey and did all they could to help raise race consciousness and pride.<sup>11</sup>

The UNIA provided its members with many stimulating roles to take on within their local divisions. Each division elected a board of executive officers, including a President, Lady President, Vice President, Treasurer, Chaplain, and Secretary. Various auxiliary groups within the UNIA included the Black Cross Nurses (BCN), Universal African Legion (UAL), UNIA Choir, and Juvenile Branch. The BCN promoted good health and hygiene practices within the black community, while visiting sick members in the hospital. The UAL was the military branch

of the UNIA, while the Juvenile Branch aimed to teach children about the UNIA and black culture.

The opportunities offered under the umbrella of the UNIA certainly reflected the gender ideals of the period. For example, only women could run the Juvenile Branch because it was understood that they possessed an inherent ability to teach young minds. Similarly, the BCN was only for women because nursing was considered to be a female profession given their (supposed) inborn knowledge of hygiene, healing, and nurturing. In the same vein, the UAL – strictly for men – required its members to dress in military garb and perform marching drills. UNIA followers widely accepted and celebrated these gendered roles, which gave members a sense of pride and purpose. In the early 1900s manhood and womanhood were strictly defined by white, middle-class ideals, with manliness measured by a man’s ability to provide for and protect his family while motherhood and domesticity reflected the model woman. For working-class blacks, the reality was that both men and women had to enter the paid workforce to provide for their families. Socio-economic conditions stymied men’s ability to become sole breadwinners and prohibited black women from staying at home to raise the children. The roles offered by the UNIA, though, allowed black working-class men and women to lay claim to the qualities that defined respectable manhood and womanhood to whites and middle-class people. As Leo Bertley explains, the UNIA’s various roles allowed its members to “build up their self-esteem and morale” while the titles bestowed upon them, such as “Lady President” or “Chaplain,” surely “helped the West Indian immigrants to bolster their self-worth.”<sup>12</sup>

### Racial Climate in Toronto

The UNIA appealed to many blacks in Canada because they were tired of racial discrimination, be it in the workplace, housing, politics, or social services. Many blacks in Toronto were also frustrated with the scarcity of organizations one could join to help alleviate these anxieties. *The Canadian Observer* expressed



this longing for co-operation in March of 1915. An editorial observes, "Cordial co-operation will bring the race to prominence. United efforts along the right lines is certain to bring results, which will benefit every member of such an organization. It is not enough to meet once and awhile in a social way at an occasional banquet or entertainment."<sup>13</sup> The racial climate in Toronto seemed primed for the arrival of the UNIA.

Prior to 1900, Toronto's black population was very small and hardly visible. Moreover, until the World War I, most blacks in Toronto were Canadian-born.<sup>14</sup> These people, some of whom were descendants of Underground Railroad survivors, had lived in Toronto or in other parts of southern Ontario for several generations. They were well accustomed to living as a minority in a city where respectability was gauged by white ideals. This set of circumstances likely affected their political and social outlook. Keith Henry explains that these "Old Line" black Torontonians "generally adhered to a philosophy of assimilationism" and believed that progress would be achieved by "co-operating with the 'best whites'" and "utilizing white philanthropy."<sup>15</sup> Blacks in Toronto, then, remained relatively quiet on race issues.

The racial atmosphere would gradually change with the influx of Caribbean immigrants. At the turn of the twentieth century, the sugar economy in the islands collapsed. At the same time, the Boston (United) Fruit Company monopolized the banana trade, inflating the cost of land and making it difficult for the lower classes to purchase homes. Economic difficulties, coupled with consistent natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and droughts proved to be important push factors for the West Indian emigrants who landed in Canada and the United States.<sup>16</sup> But job opportunities also pulled the West Indians to Canada. Indeed, even more West Indians might have immigrated to Canada had immigration policies been more accepting of racial minorities. The Immigration Act of 1906 denied entry to "any specified class of immigrants" whom officials judged to be poor, diseased, criminal, or "feeble-minded." Then in 1910 the government passed the Canadian Immigration Act which, through an order-in-council, permitted immigration officials to reject

individuals “belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada.”<sup>17</sup> Government officials claimed that given their origins from a warm climate, Afro-Caribbeans were unsuited to the cold weather in Canada and therefore for entry — unless, of course, big companies demanded otherwise. At the turn of the twentieth century, Canada’s small population could not keep up with labour demands as industry grew steadily. Some companies, such as the Dominion Iron and Steel Company in Nova Scotia, convinced government officials that recruiting workers from the United States and Caribbean was necessary. It was commonly believed that blacks were an ideal choice because they could likely handle the heat from blast furnaces much better than immigrants coming from colder climates.<sup>18</sup>

Many West Indian immigrants in Toronto came by way of Nova Scotia where they had been recruited to work for the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, the coal mines of Sydney, and sometimes even for railways. Others came after a brief stay in New York City.<sup>19</sup> By 1921, an estimated 1,200 West Indians were living in Toronto.<sup>20</sup> They mainly settled in and around Dundas Street and Spadina Avenue in what is currently known as Toronto’s Chinatown. At the time blacks tended to settle in this neighbourhood because members of the sizable Jewish population living there were among the few Torontonians who would rent to African Canadians. One interviewee explained that relations between Jews and blacks were always cordial because Jews saw themselves as allies facing similar racial oppression.<sup>21</sup>

Because railroad tracks and a station were close to the neighbourhood, many West Indian men sought work there. For women the most familiar work was domestic service. Together, the West Indian immigrants established themselves as respectable working-class residents in Toronto’s west side.<sup>22</sup> Few other employment options were available to the West Indian immigrants — a couple of shop owners sold West Indian groceries, and a few were doctors and lawyers.<sup>23</sup> However, interviews with West Indian immigrants indicate that these businesses and professionals were not well supported by Toronto’s Canadian-born black population and that the West Indians and native-born

black Canadians lived in separate parts of the neighbourhood. Partly because of their outspokenness and partly because of their cultural differences, the local population viewed the West Indians as foreigners, who, in turn, felt as if they did not belong.<sup>24</sup>

As early as 1914, *The Canadian Observer* reported on the lack of black co-operation in Toronto. Beginning on 31 July 1915, the editor published "An Open Letter to the Colored Race in Canada," asking them ten poignant questions about the status of blacks in the country. In answering question one, "Why are we not making progress like we should?," a reader replied, "because we are not united on anything." Another reader responded similarly: "I regret to say as a race we are not united; thereby we become our greatest enemy, making no progress." One reader believed that there was an absence of "racial self-respect, the lack of which tends, above all other things, to weaken us as a people and prevent our advancement as a race."<sup>25</sup> Even the editorials evoked the necessity of unity, proclaiming "[t]he time has arrived when we, as a Race of people, should be getting together and reviewing matters pertaining to our welfare as a race."<sup>26</sup>

Divisions based on one's place of origin seemed to contribute to the lack of unity among blacks in Toronto.<sup>27</sup> Scholars have identified four ethnic groups of blacks in Toronto at this time: native-born black Canadians, West Indian immigrants, African Americans, and Nova Scotians. Of these groups, the African Americans, and to a lesser extent the Nova Scotians, tended to be transients, meaning they were less likely to set up permanent residence in Toronto. Rather, they migrated according to job opportunities. As a result, they did not create their own organizations and they rarely joined existing ones. The West Indians and native-born blacks considered the Nova Scotians to be apolitical, choosing not to get involved in black organizations.<sup>28</sup>

Given the lack of interest from the African Americans and Nova Scotians, the native-born black Canadians and West Indian immigrants are credited with forming the two dominant black organizations of the period: the Home Comfort Club and the UNIA. Yet, these associations were polarized along the lines of ethnic alliance, political outlook, class, and age. The first black

organization to form was the Home Comfort Club. Native-born black Canadians in Toronto launched this association to assist black-Canadian servicemen. A life-long resident of Toronto confirms that black women in the community established the Home Comfort Club during the First World War. They simply wanted to send “home comforts” such as homemade socks and sweaters to black servicemen. After the war, members changed the organization’s name to the Home Service Association (HSA) and operated as a *de facto* community centre and social club for blacks in Toronto. It also provided scholarships for black youths and ran programs to help the needy.<sup>29</sup>

Many blacks in Toronto, especially those from the West Indian community, recall that the HSA favoured light-skinned and middle-class blacks. A former HSA member, Nellie Rosina Wells, claimed that most families involved were the product of “a great deal of intermarriage.” Most members were of a light complexion and had roots in Canada dating back several generations. Additionally, the HSA was not exclusively a “black” organization: it received financial assistance from white philanthropists and allowed its subsidizers to choose its executive officers.<sup>30</sup> As Keith Henry writes, this type of co-operation with whites demonstrates the Old Line/native-born Torontonians’ commitment to assimilationism and “the belief in élite white patronage.”<sup>31</sup> In the view of Old Liners and those who joined the HSA, working with whites was the route to improving one’s status within the community.<sup>32</sup>

According to the West Indians, the Old Liners and the HSA would not address racism directly and were therefore inward-looking and lacked a wider sense of pan-African identity. In contrast, the West Indians were no strangers to the global plight of persons of African descent. Before immigrating to Canada and the United States, West Indians had traveled the globe for economic opportunities. Winston James confirms that some of them had “worked on the Panama Canal, some on banana plantations elsewhere in Central America, and still others on sugar plantations in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic.” Many had worked and lived in urban areas such as New York City, Boston, and Detroit where they had become famil-

iar with the universalism of racial prejudice. They developed a strong sense of pan-Africanism which they felt was deeper than that of native-born black Canadians.<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that the native-born population lacked a pan-African identity altogether. Native-born blacks had proudly served in the First World War in construction battalions. Many also worked as railway porters and frequently interacted with other blacks across Canada and the United States. Some had work experience in the United States or had family members living in northern cities such as Boston, New York, and Detroit. Yet the UNIA's message of African separatism did not appeal to native-born blacks who felt a closer tie to Canada than to Africa. Toney argues that black Canadians were more inclined to boast of their Canadian heritage than their African roots. Their service in World War I may have strengthened this sentiment.<sup>34</sup>

Along with ethnicity, generational differences and social class widened the gap between HSA and UNIA members. The leaders within the native-born black community were much older than even the oldest West Indians immigrants. To the older and more conservative Old Liners, the new arrivals from the islands seemed to be outspoken and radical trouble-makers. West Indians felt that the black Canadians acted superior to those from the Caribbean, ignoring their shared British connection to the Empire. In addition, class divided the two communities. Most West Indians were respectable working-class people and, as Keith Henry notes, even highly educated West Indians found it difficult to be accepted "in the circles to which the more established local blacks had some access."<sup>35</sup> Class also affected the UNIA's relations with and reactions to other black organizations of the period. In the United States, educated middle-class African Americans joined the ranks of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) along with well-to-do whites. Unlike the UNIA, the NAACP stressed a program of racial integration rather than separatism. Its most prominent leaders, including W.E.B. DuBois, were skeptical of Garvey's goals and intentions and did not have cordial relations with the UNIA's membership.

Relations were slightly better with the Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (CLACP), a London-based organization modeled on the principles of the NAACP. Like the NAACP, the CLACP appealed to blacks and whites of the middle class and maintained the goal of full racial integration in Canada. *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, its official newspaper, sometimes editorialized about Garvey and the UNIA. For example, its editors believed that Garvey’s notion of a God was “foolish, grotesque and idolatrous.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, there seems to have been a mutual respect between the organizations. In 1926, the UNIA and the CLACP even joined “under one flag” to protest injustices against black waiters of the Canadian National Railway who had been unjustly fired and replaced with white men.<sup>37</sup>

Feeling a sense of alienation in their new country and overwhelming frustration with racial discrimination, the West Indian immigrants decided it was time to organize. The UNIA appealed to West Indian immigrants in Canada for many reasons. Firstly, they felt a strong sense of ethnic alienation. Toney argues that initially there was even competition and divisiveness among islanders; Barbadians did not get along with Jamaicans, and so on. However, the UNIA encouraged these divisions to dissipate. Once in Canada, the immigrants became identified as West Indian, allowing their island affiliations to unite rather than divide them.<sup>38</sup> Since class differences excluded them from other clubs, it was working-class blacks who joined the ranks of the UNIA because they felt that Garvey was the only black leader of the time to stand up for the poor and underprivileged.

Establishing a UNIA in Toronto was also a way to shelter oneself from racism. Toney notes that although racism in Canada was seldom violent, it was a regular presence in the lives of black Torontonians. Whites in Toronto hotels and restaurants often denied service to blacks. Finding suitable housing was a challenge given that few blacks in Toronto could afford to purchase a house, and most landlords (except for Jewish Canadians) discriminated on the basis of race. Blacks in Toronto also experienced discrimination in employment, often forced to take low-paying jobs in the service industry despite having higher educational or

occupational credentials.<sup>39</sup> Garvey's tenets of self-government, higher education, and an "Africa for the Africans" appealed very strongly to a group of people who felt alienated in a white-dominated society. The UNIA — with its various leadership and membership roles — allowed its followers to feel connected to something bigger than themselves, to a global movement aimed at improving the lives of black people everywhere.

### The Purpose and Uses of the UNIA in Toronto

The UNIA had its humble beginnings in the back room of Occidental Cleaners and Dyers store at 318 Spadina Avenue, where a handful of West Indian men established a short-lived club called the Coloured Literary Association (CLA) on 20 April 1919. This was not a book club as the name might suggest. Rather, the term "literary" referred to educating oneself in the fields of law, politics, and economics so as to help black communities progress in these areas. The minutes of the CLA indicate that its few members — about 15 — organized "for the general uplift of their race in Toronto." The CLA had a President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, and Treasurer. In its first meeting, founding member Dr. Dotten Yearwood said that this group "showed the need of unity among us," highlighting the point that "other peoples who were united prospered while we suffered much by being separated."<sup>40</sup> The rhetoric of the CLA mimicked that of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. For example, one member, Mr. Marshall, said "that we should not be abusing any race but should strive to be wholly self dependent."<sup>41</sup> As with the UNIA, members of the CLA paid dues — one dollar for entrance, plus 25 cents per month thereafter. They discussed topics such as the effects of World War I on blacks in Canada, the economic status of African Canadians, blacks in the farming industry, and the importance of books and education to individuals and the greater community.<sup>42</sup>

The minutes of the CLA end abruptly on 1 June 1919. The memoir of Donald Moore, an original member of the CLA, indicates that perhaps this group evolved into another club, or that they may have changed their name before becoming the

UNIA. Moore mentions that the Occidental Cleaners store “had become a handy place for the increasing number of young West Indian railway porters to stop to exchange greetings on their way to Union Station, their headquarters.” Men would meet in the “Boiler Room” on Sunday afternoons to chat, and after a few meetings formed the West Indian Progressive Association which would, according to Moore, become the UNIA.

Among the many topics discussed by the men in the Boiler Room were the UNIA and the philosophies of Marcus Garvey. Moore claims that:

[i]n Toronto, Garvey’s philosophy and teaching were like the ‘balm of Gilead’ to the heart and soul of the boys in the ‘Boiler Room.’ Contact was made with the UNIA’s headquarters in New York and arrangements were made to establish a branch in Toronto. Our first open meeting was held in the office of A. Benjamin Thomas, a Jamaican, who was elected the first president of the Toronto branch. William Otis, an American, was treasurer, and I became secretary.<sup>43</sup>

On 1 December 1919, 11 men and two women officially established the Toronto Division of the UNIA. They obtained an official charter from the UNIA headquarters in Harlem, New York, and like all other UNIA divisions Toronto’s branch believed in Garvey’s philosophy of self-determination, economic improvement, and a deep sense of pride in one’s African heritage.<sup>44</sup>

It is impossible to know exactly how many people joined the Toronto Division because precise membership records do not exist.<sup>45</sup> However, the Division had an estimated 200 to 300 active members at its peak.<sup>46</sup> It held regular Sunday afternoon meetings and offered plenty of opportunity to get involved through its executive positions and auxiliary groups. As was practice, the Toronto Division regularly elected a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Chaplain, and Lady President. The most popular auxiliary group was the Black Cross Nurses (BCN). Garvey instructed that the BCN should fall “entirely under the supervision of their own head nurse, who is to seek for them



first aid training from some medical institution or individual.”<sup>47</sup> The women who joined the BCN were not professional nurses. Rather, their role was to educate the community on matters of health, hygiene, and sanitation. In Toronto, BCN members were required to take the St. John’s Ambulance course in first aid. They also sent flowers to and visited sick UNIA members in the hospital. In the mid-1930s, during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War, the BCN filled a big trunk of medical supplies to ship to Ethiopia. Esther Hayes recalls that the nurses wore their iconic uniforms — a pristine white gown with matching cap, adorned with a black cross — when Garvey visited the city.<sup>48</sup> In addition, a UNIA Choir performed at the regular Sunday meetings, and the Juvenile Branch welcomed the Toronto Division’s young people.<sup>49</sup>

The leadership roles and titles offered within the Toronto Division and its auxiliaries helped its members to develop feelings of pride and self-worth. It was rewarding to belong to such an organization and to reach out to the black communities of Toronto. In other words, the UNIA ignited in its leaders and participants a sense of purpose — a responsibility to one another, and to the wider Garvey movement.<sup>50</sup>

Early on, Toronto’s UNIA members showed great dedication to the Garvey movement. The division did not have a central meeting place, and so members would take turns offering up their homes for weekly meetings. Before long, the Toronto Division’s primary objective was to earn enough money to purchase its own UNIA Hall. The division held many fundraising events for the express purpose of acquiring a building: bazaars, social events, bake sales, games, raffles, concerts, and dances.<sup>51</sup> Long-time member Violet Blackman reveals that a large impetus for wanting to purchase a UNIA Hall was Garvey’s first visit to the city in 1920. At the time, the Toronto Division was renting a space at 339 Queen Street West. On 5 January 1920, 52 members and visitors piled into the small venue to hear Garvey’s “very interesting address on the aims and objects of the association.” By November of that year, fundraising efforts to secure a down payment on a building were well underway.<sup>52</sup>

All funds for the UNIA Hall were raised by Toronto Garveyites who by 1925 had pledged enough to purchase a building at 355 College Street West. Almost immediately, it became a hub for blacks in Toronto. It was likely the first black-owned secular building for public use in the city. With the acquisition of the UNIA Hall, blacks would no longer be subject to rejection or discrimination by racist white landlords. Members frequently rented the hall to other black groups in the city, such as the Eureka Lodge, the Order of the Oddfellows, the congregation of the Afro-Community Church, and the Negro Citizenship Association.<sup>53</sup> The UNIA Hall was instrumental, then, in breaking down some of the ethnic and class barriers that divided the black population.

Of course, the members themselves used the hall often. One former member claimed, “Every day of the week there was something going on up in the UNIA.”<sup>54</sup> According to Marjorie Lewsey, whose parents were devoted Garveyites, “We all used to meet at the Hall.” Every week there were speakers, programs, and dances, “and it was a lot of fun.” Gwen Johnston remembers that the UNIA sponsored many community activities and cultural events, including dances, Sunday afternoon concerts, recitals, oratorical contests, and more. Many of these cultural events were meant to provide entertainment to Toronto’s black population and to celebrate its African roots. These events, as Gwen Johnston remembers, were also supposed to help the “young people develop themselves.”<sup>55</sup>

Raising the next generation of Garveyites was a major focus of the UNIA in Toronto. Female members took turns running the youth program each Sunday for a month.<sup>56</sup> Esther and Eleanor Hayes, the daughters of Garveyites, recalled that in the UNIA’s youth program they learned about black history, performed in plays, and recited poems and literary works by important black writers of the day, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson.<sup>57</sup> Esther even wrote and recited a poem called “Our President General” about Garvey that was later published in the UNIA’s magazine, *The Black Man*. Toney explains that poems and artistic expressions such as these proved “instrumental in

articulating a racial diaspora between local populations.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, Esther’s poem affirmed her belonging to a diaspora, a race, and a movement.

Perhaps the most popular events for Toronto’s black youth were the UNIA dances. In interviews former members frequently reminisce about the dances, which usually took place on Thursday and Saturday nights. The young women who worked as domestics would refuse to work those evenings because they did not want to miss the dances. Those who attended had to pay an admission fee (usually about 50 cents) to cover costs and raise a little money for the UNIA treasury.<sup>59</sup> The UNIA dances provided a safe and fun atmosphere for teenagers and young adults to mingle (and sometimes find a suitable husband/wife) under the watchful eye of their chaperones.<sup>60</sup>

Even more than the dances, blacks in Toronto looked forward to the annual Big Picnic in Port Dalhousie, a small town on Lake Ontario near St. Catharines. Starting in 1924, the picnic took place at Lakeside Park on the first Thursday of every August in celebration of Emancipation Day. This event was the idea of Toronto Division president at the time, B.J. Spencer Pitt, about whom Natasha Henry notes is “credited with operating the famous, well-organized event for over 27 years.”<sup>61</sup> Henry explains that the UNIA “used the August First observances in St. Catharines to raise the racial consciousness and pride of its celebrants.” The picnic provided a variety of activities and opportunities to socialize. It always included church services held at the local BME Church and the Salem Chapel. Other picnic activities included amusement rides, baseball games, races, dancing, vendors, restaurants, and, of course, swimming at the beach. Interviewees indicate that for blacks in Toronto, the Big Picnic was the event of the year. One person even said that the picnic was better than Christmas.<sup>62</sup> Blacks in the community would not miss the event, even if it meant having to take the day off work. The purpose of the picnic was to get black families together and teach them about the UNIA. The hope was to inspire those in attendance to return home and join black organizations and to help one another. Pitt would always deliver a rousing speech

about the UNIA and black unity, and a collection was taken up to help raise funds for the organization.<sup>63</sup>

Over time, the Big Picnic attracted even more Torontonians and attendees from outside Toronto. Natasha Henry explains, “As its popularity grew, more and more Toronto residents of African ancestry took the one-hour steamer ride across Lake Ontario to attend, joining in with busloads of visitors from Rochester, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls, New York.”<sup>64</sup> At its peak, the Big Picnic attracted upwards of 8,000 visitors.<sup>65</sup> The picnic brought together black clubs and church congregations, overcoming the ethnic and generational boundaries that so frequently divided blacks in Toronto. Large groups from the BME, AME, and Baptist churches would attend the picnic every year, as would clubs such as the Home Service Association, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Oddfellows, the Eureka Lodge, and many more.<sup>66</sup> Even some whites came to share in the festivities. One year Marcus Garvey himself served as the guest speaker, warning spectators that the black race was falling behind other races because “the Negro has not a foot of ground in the world to call his own country.”<sup>67</sup> The Big Picnic, then, provided an opportunity to make blacks and black culture in Ontario more visible. Thanks to the Toronto Division of the UNIA, the Big Picnic became “the premier African-Canadian social event in Ontario and a prime example of the cultural life of the Black Community.”<sup>68</sup>

The Big Picnic illustrates the Toronto Division’s importance to the local and provincial black population. But from the beginning, Toronto Garveyites engaged with the movement on a global scale, firmly asserting themselves as members of a growing African diaspora. The Toronto Division regularly contributed news on their events and activities to *The Negro World* which had a worldwide circulation of over 200,000.<sup>69</sup> The division’s news appeared in the paper alongside news from other divisions and the editorials of Marcus Garvey himself. Around the world, Garveyites could learn about the lives of blacks in Toronto. Conversely, *The Negro World* was read aloud at UNIA meetings in Toronto so that members could be informed on the latest news of the association. *The Negro World* exhibited the far-reaching exchange

of ideas between Toronto's black peoples and UNIA members around the world. Jared Toney and Sarah-Jane Mathieu argue that railway porters were also "instrumental in the spread of black culture and news across North American borders." With so many black men in Toronto working as porters and serving as members of the UNIA, they doubtlessly contributed to the development of a diasporic identity within the city.<sup>70</sup>

Toronto also connected with the global movement by financially supporting various UNIA enterprises. Toronto members bought shares in the BSL and donated to the African Redemption Fund for the UNIA's recolonization scheme in Liberia. They also contributed to the UNIA Conventions Fund and to the Garvey Defense Fund, a charity set up to pay for the President-General's legal fees prior to his imprisonment. Garveyites across Canada and the world made financial contributions to all of these projects, expressing their dedication to the main goals and principles of the UNIA and to their fellow members within the diaspora.<sup>71</sup>

The Toronto Division's international influence extended well into the 1930s. Between 1936 and 1938, Toronto was chosen as the site of two UNIA Regional Conferences and an International Convention.<sup>72</sup> This great honour illustrates that the Toronto Division was vital to the UNIA's survival in the late 1930s after a turbulent period in the mid-1920s. A regular target of J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Garvey had been arrested on 11 counts of mail fraud in 1922 in relation to the Black Star Line. Garvey served a jail sentence at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, and upon his release in 1927 was deported to Jamaica. While in prison, Garvey had tried to consolidate power within the organization, resulting in internal strife and animosity between West Indians and African Americans. The conflict was too much to overcome, and in 1929 Garvey split from his Harlem faction, forming the "UNIA, August 1929, of the World" with its new headquarters in Jamaica, and later London, England. Toronto Garveyites felt that Garvey had been wronged and was innocent of the charges against him, and most Canadians remained loyal to Garvey's faction.<sup>73</sup>

The annual UNIA Conventions were normally held at the headquarters in Harlem, but after Garvey’s deportation, Canada provided the best outlet to reach his loyal American followers. Toronto, as the largest and closest UNIA division to the American border, offered the perfect meeting place for North American Garveyites, and the events drew significant international attendance. In fact, the three conventions drew significantly more attendees than those conferences held in Kingston, Jamaica in 1929 and 1934.<sup>74</sup>

Out of the 1937 conference emerged the School of African Philosophy, a course aimed to educate the next generation of UNIA leaders. In Garvey’s words, the course would “make everyone a Marcus Garvey personified.” The curriculum was actually developed over a period of three years, having been first proposed at the 1934 conference in Kingston. Garvey himself acted as principal/instructor in the school’s first year and taught at Toronto’s UNIA Hall in September 1937. Tony Martin explains that “Garvey’s overriding concern was to develop within his organizers a fierce Afro-centric view of the world.”<sup>75</sup> The course had a program of 22 lessons (covering 42 subjects) that adhered to the tenets of the UNIA, including Leadership, Diplomacy, The Purpose of Institutions, Propaganda, Commercial and Industrial Transactions, and The History of the UNIA, among others. Charles L. James, a graduate of the school’s first class who would later become President-General of the UNIA, summarizes the students’ experiences: “The class became one family. We ate together, roomed together, studied together ... For thirty days and nights, with two sessions per day, mass meetings at 8 o’clock p.m., studying until the early morning hours, we had no time for anything else but study, study, study.”<sup>76</sup> Among the ten pupils in this first class were two Canadians: Arthur Clement Moore and Abraham R. Roberts, both of Toronto. After graduating from the course, they immediately became commissioners of Ontario on behalf of the UNIA with the purpose of spreading awareness of the Association.<sup>77</sup>

After this initial year in Toronto, Garvey extended the course to members around the world. Some of the graduates

from the first class later taught the School of African Philosophy in various American cities. Beginning in 1938, Garvey offered it as a correspondence course based in London, England. In 1939, seven graduates were listed in *The Black Man*: four Americans and three Africans originating from Uganda, South Africa, and Nigeria.<sup>78</sup> Toronto proved itself to be a springboard for the diffusion of Garvey's ideas across the diaspora.

Garvey was the leader of the UNIA from its creation in 1914 until his sudden death on 10 June 1940, owing to a massive stroke. African-American James R. Stewart, one of the school's first class graduates, became the first President-General of the UNIA after Garvey's passing. Two other graduates, Charles L. James and Thomas W. Harvey, also became heads of the association in later years.<sup>79</sup> Since Garvey had trained a group of potential leaders in Toronto, choosing his successors proved to be fairly straightforward. Somewhat by chance, the Toronto Division and its School of African Philosophy played a critical role in allowing the UNIA to continue after Garvey's death, while serving as a gateway for the spread of Garvey's teachings.

### After 1940

While the UNIA in Toronto remained active and engaged in the community throughout the 1930s, the situation would quickly change in the 1940s. When Garvey passed away unexpectedly in 1940, his followers in Toronto immediately felt the loss. Esther Hayes believed that no one would be as capable and driven as Garvey to carry on the work of the association. Without its fearless leader at the helm, the Toronto Division seemed to lose motivation. Hayes mentions that people still attended UNIA meetings and the Big Picnic, but no one ever *did* anything anymore. While members frequently talked about problems and issues, they did little to find solutions.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to Garvey's death, the 1940s had ushered in World War II. Priorities had changed and the focus shifted overseas where many black Canadian men aided in the defeat of Hitler and the Nazi regime. After the war conditions began to

improve at home for blacks in Toronto. The events of the Holocaust forced the world to start looking more critically at racism and its effects, and small movements against racial prejudice could be seen progressively in the late 1940s. Rella Braithwaite, a former UNIA member, notes that her husband had experienced some racial prejudice in the military early in the war but felt that conditions improved over time, and even more so after the war. More work was available for black men and women in Toronto. As their financial situation improved, some black families began to move out of the core of Toronto and into the suburbs.<sup>81</sup>

The decline of the UNIA in Toronto was further exacerbated by the arrival of a younger generation of West Indian immigrants in the 1950s. Donald Moore recalls that at this time, “the unequal treatment of black West Indians seeking entry to Canada became public knowledge. Close relatives and visitors of Canadian citizens were refused entrance and the few who managed to get in were detained ... or deported to their native lands.”<sup>82</sup> Moore, along with other UNIA members, formed the Negro Citizenship Association and began petitioning the government to change restrictive immigration policy. The NCA sent a delegation to Ottawa to protest racist immigration laws in 1954, and in 1955 the Canadian government consented to their demands to grant permanent residency after a period of one year to West Indian women who worked as domestics.<sup>83</sup> Over time, more and more young men and women from the Caribbean made their way to Canada. This new crowd seemed generally uninterested in joining the UNIA, seeing it as a social club for old folks. Keith Henry notes that the feeling was mutual, as the older members of the Toronto Division “overwhelmingly rejected any additions to its paltry membership of eleven.”<sup>84</sup> As UNIA membership waned in the 1950s, so did interest in the Big Picnic. Pitt retired from his career as a lawyer in 1954 and also gave up his post as President of the Toronto Division and the event coordinator of the Big Picnic. In addition, the two steamships that carried guests over Lake Ontario to Port Dalhousie, the *S.S. Dalhousie City* and the *Northumberland*, were both lost to fires in the 1950s.<sup>85</sup>



The story of the Toronto Division's later years falls outside the scope of this article. Its members would face many ups and downs between 1950 and 1982 as the division evolved to suit a changing black population in the city. Yet the legacy of the UNIA in Toronto would live on as new black organizations emerged, offering fresh approaches to the ongoing problem of racism in Canada.

## Conclusion

For black people in Toronto, the UNIA served as a unifying force as well as an outlet to celebrate and strengthen their connection to the African diaspora. The charter members of the Toronto Division founded this branch to unite blacks in the community. The division doubtlessly succeeded in achieving this goal by providing plenty of activities and cultural events for African Canadians. The UNIA Hall itself served the wider black community of Toronto. Local black clubs and church congregations frequently rented the Hall, which provided them a safe and welcoming place to meet. A former UNIA member, Violet Blackman, sums up its importance: "that was one building where I felt within myself that, even if I'm gone from here my young children ... could open that door, and no one could tell them that they can't come in."<sup>86</sup> More importantly, the UNIA in Toronto encouraged its followers and their children to take an interest in black history and culture. The Toronto Division took the message of black pride outside the confines of the city to the Big Picnic in Port Dalhousie. The Big Picnic connected blacks from Canada and the United States and is remembered fondly by UNIA members and non-members alike for its focus on fun and community. Perhaps most significantly, the Toronto Division proved vital to the survival of the UNIA and the Garvey movement after 1940. The Toronto conferences in the 1930s brought Garveyites from around the world together to discuss plans on how to advance the race, and even trained the next generation of UNIA leaders at the School of African Philosophy. The Toronto Division, then, remained an indispensable commu-

nity-builder not only to the local black population, but also to Garveyites across the African diaspora.

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**CARLA MARANO** is a PhD Candidate in History at the University of Waterloo. Her research focuses on race relations in Canada, with a specialization in African-Canadian History and the African diaspora.

**CARLA MORANO** est doctorante en histoire à l'Université de Waterloo. Elle s'intéresse aux relations raciales au Canada et se spécialise dans l'histoire afro-canadienne et la diaspora africaine.

### Endnotes:

- 1 Two more recent studies on Garveyism examine how the rhetoric and unifying principles of the movement had an impact on global black politics. Robert Trent Vinson argues that the language of the Garvey movement was instrumental in helping segregated blacks of South Africa to unify and fight against apartheid. Adam Ewing demonstrates how the UNIA connected blacks across the African diaspora while giving them the tools and opportunity to engage with black politics, both locally and internationally. See Vinson, *“The Americans Are Coming!” Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, OH: University of Ohio Press, 2012) and Ewing, *The Age of Garveyism: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). For a more thorough debate on the importance of the Garvey movement, see Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (Berkeley: Ramparts, 1971); Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport: Greenwood, 1976); Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey, Anti-Colonial Champion* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), to name but a few.
- 2 Robin Winks argues that the period during which the UNIA emerged was also the time when “the Negro sank to his nadir in Canada.” He also contends that “Garvey’s brand of racially proud activism made little impact on black Canadians.” Keith Henry denies that the UNIA was important to Toronto Garveyites when he claims that the Garvey move-

- ment was “little more than long-term nationalist education and local political action.” He goes on to state that “there was little in Toronto to match the black energy evident in Montreal,” which had a larger membership base. Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd edition (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 292 and 414; Keith Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto since World War I* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981), 19 and 28.
- 3 Leo Bertley, “The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979” (Ph.D. diss., Concordia University, 1980), 8; Dionne Brand, *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario, 1920s–1950s* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1991); and Natasha Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010).
  - 4 Jared G. Toney, “Locating Diaspora: Afro-Caribbean Narratives of Migration and Settlement in Toronto, 1914–1929,” *Urban History* 38, 2 (Spring 2010): 76. My previous work on the UNIA deals more specifically with the reasons why West Indian immigrants comprised the vast majority of UNIA members in Canada. It examines the distinct traits, especially high literacy rates, experience in trade unions, and a strong pan-African consciousness that led West Indians to join the UNIA, and how their service in the UNIA granted these immigrants the chance to forge and express a distinct Caribbean identity in Canada. See Carla Marano, “‘Rising Strongly and Rapidly’: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919–1940,” *Canadian Historical Review* 91, 2 (June 2010): 234–59.
  - 5 Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 76.
  - 6 The original name of the organization was actually the Universal Negro Improvement Association — African Communities League (UNIA-ACL). The UNIA represented the benevolent fraternal aspect of the organization, while the ACL oversaw the business enterprises and recolonization scheme of the Association. When these efforts failed by 1924, the ACL portion of the UNIA’s name fell out of popular use while the Association became more focused on the organization’s fraternal tenets. Tony Martin, ed., *Message to the People: The Course of African Philosophy* (Dover, Mass.: The Majority Press, 1986), 166.
  - 7 Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 83.
  - 8 Marano, “‘Rising Strongly and Rapidly,’” 233–48. Membership numbers for Canadian divisions are not accurate given the two-tier membership system of the UNIA. Active members were those who paid dues to the Association, and were more likely to have their names recorded as a result. Regular members, by contrast, were those who came to UNIA events and volunteered their time, but never paid membership dues. Because their names were never recorded, precise membership figures elude scholars.

- 9 For a complete list of Canadian divisions, see Marano, “Rising Strongly and Rapidly,” 259.
- 10 Marcus Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey, “Aims and Objects of Movement for Solution of Negro Problem” in *The Philosophies and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Vol. 2, ed. Amy Jacques Garvey (London: Frank Cass & Company Ltd., 1967), 38.
- 11 Esther Hayes recalls that her godmother used to go to the UNIA Hall regularly because she thought one day they would go to Africa and she did not want to miss out. Harry Gairey admits that he did not agree with everything Garvey preached, but felt that the UNIA’s main goal — to organize blacks — was a worthy cause. He was also inspired by Garvey’s belief in a black God. Others believed that Garvey’s dream of going back to Africa was not meant to be literal. Leonard Johnson thought that Garvey simply wanted the liberation of Africa from colonial forces and for African countries to become independent nations. This was, in any case, a message worth supporting. See Esther Hayes, Harry Gairey, Leonard Johnson, interviews, MHSO. See also Marano, “Rising Strongly and Rapidly,” 241–2.
- 12 Bertley, ‘The UNIA of Montreal,’ 269 and Marano, “Rising Strongly and Rapidly,” 245. For more on gender in the UNIA, see Barbara Bair, “True Women, Real Men: Gender, Ideology, and Social Roles in the Garvey Movement” in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women’s History*, ed. Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 155-6; Beryl Satter, “Marcus Garvey, Father Divine and the Gender Politics of Race Difference and Race Neutrality,” *American Quarterly* 48, 1 (March 1996): 43-76; and Carla Marano, “The Splendid Work Our Women Have Done”: African-Canadian Women in the UNIA,” Conference Paper, Promised Land Project Symposium, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, June 2011.
- 13 “Organizations Needed,” *The Canadian Observer* (6 March 1915).
- 14 Keith Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 2.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 6–9.
- 16 Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1999), 32-8 and Marano, “Rising Strongly and Rapidly,” 244, note 39.
- 17 Statutes of Canada (SC) 1906 c. 19, s. 26-30 and SC 1910 c. 27, s. 38 , and Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 78.
- 18 Elizabeth Beaton, “An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904” *Acadiensis* 24, 2 (Spring 1995): 70.
- 19 K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 3. Donald Moore and Violet Blackman are two examples of immigrants who went from the islands to New York City and finally to Toronto. Violet Blackman, recorded interview by Huguette Casimir, January 1979, African-Canadian Collection,

- Multicultural History Society of Ontario (hereafter MHSO), and Donald Moore, *Don Moore: An Autobiography* (Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1985), 19–20.
- 20 James W. St.G. Walker, *West Indians in Canada*, no. 6 of *Canada's Ethnic Groups* (Saint John: Keystone, 1984), 8.
  - 21 Dudley Marshall, recorded interview, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Geraldine Williams, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, December 1981, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; and Leonard Braithwaite, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, August 1982, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.
  - 22 K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 7, and Stanley Grizzle, *My Name's Not George: The Story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada, Personal Reminiscences of Stanley G. Grizzle* (Toronto: Umbrella, 1998), 31–2.
  - 23 MHSO, interview with Gwen Johnston. Some businesses mentioned in the interviews with black Torontonians included Mr. George's grocery store on Bathurst Street, as well as "Coffee" Williams' West Indian grocery store. There was also Mr. Smith's shoe repair shop, Mr. Jim Belfon's barber shop, and beauty salons for women. Leonard Johnston and Ralph Budd believe that black businesses did not flourish because there simply were not enough African-Canadians living in Toronto at the time. See Leonard Johnston, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Ralph Budd, recorded interview by A. Holder, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; and Marjorie Lewsey, recorded interview by Huguette Casimir, March 1979, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.
  - 24 Harry Gairey, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, August 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.
  - 25 "What Is the Matter with the Race in Canada?" *The Canadian Observer* (7 August 1915); "Get Busy on This Once More: 'What Is the Matter with the Race in Canada?'" *The Canadian Observer* (28 August 1915); and "We Want a Revolution of Thought by Our People," *The Canadian Observer* (2 October 1915). Violet Blackman is very critical of the black population of Toronto. She says that historically its members have failed to support one another. Norman Grizzle notes that there was always a lack of black leadership in Toronto, that there was never one who "speaks for the whole community." See Blackman, interview and Norman Grizzle, recorded interview by Donna Bailey, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.
  - 26 "Solve This Problem," *The Canadian Observer* (5 February 1916) and "Getting Together," *The Canadian Observer* (11 August 1917).
  - 27 Toney, "Locating Diaspora," 79.
  - 28 K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 4–5. Some Nova Scotians did become more active in the Afro-Community Church in 1936–7 when Reverend

- Cecil Stewart encouraged blacks to migrate to Toronto from Nova Scotia due to poor housing conditions and overwhelming unemployment.
- 29 Joseph E. Clarke, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, September 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; and Nellie Rosina Wells, recorded interview by Lorraine Hubbard, September and October 1980, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO. The Canadian Red Cross only provided comforts to servicemen who had been sick or injured. Since black recruits did not see combat (they served in construction battalions), the Red Cross did not provide them with any home comforts, which is why the HSA began sending black Canadian servicemen such items. See Sarah Carlene Glassford, “Marching As to War: The Canadian Red Cross Society, 1885–1939” (Ph.D. diss., York University, June 2007).
- 30 It was not until the second wave of West Indian immigration in the 1960s and 1970s that people from the islands joined the HSA. See Gairey, interview; Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 34; K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 16 and 21, and Yaa Amoaba Gooden, “‘Betta Must Come’: African Caribbean Migrants in Canada: Migration, Community Building and Cultural Legacies” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2005), 124.
- 31 K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 7.
- 32 The HSA even operated a co-operative grocery store until World War II when the rationing of certain products led to its closure. After the war, the HSA “broadened its base, opened a community house in Toronto, and engaged in social work, providing counseling, recreational opportunities, and educational outlets for those who remained home as well as for returning servicemen.” The women took First Aid and nutrition courses at the HSA in case returning veterans needed assistance. See Daniel Braithwaite, recorded interview by Arleigh Holder, August 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO; Wells, interview; and Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 421.
- 33 James, *Caribbean Radicalism*, 70–1. See also Marano, “‘Rising Strongly and Rapidly,’” 246.
- 34 Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 83, and James W. St. G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70 (1989): 1–26.
- 35 Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 80 and K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 4, 6–7.
- 36 “Garvey’s Black God,” *Dawn of Tomorrow* (20 September 1924).
- 37 “Act in Concert for Our Own Defense,” *Dawn of Tomorrow* (7 August 1926).
- 38 Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 79 and Marano, “‘Rising Strongly and Rapidly,’ 247–8.

- 39 Toney, "Locating Diaspora," 78–9.
- 40 Minutes of the Colored Literary Association (hereafter CLA), 20 April 1919, Universal African Improvement Association (hereafter UAIA) of Toronto records, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.
- 41 Minutes of the CLA, 27 April 1919, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.
- 42 Minutes of the CLA, 4, 18, and 25 May 1919, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO.
- 43 Moore, *An Autobiography*, 32–4. The original owner of the dry cleaning business was Dudley Jefferson, also a founding member of the CLA. Donald Moore later bought the business from him in 1921. Moore writes that with the founding of the UNIA in Toronto, the West Indians also established the West Indian Trading Company, with a store located at 1002 College Street. Its purpose was to import West Indian produce and food into Canada, and to provide housing in the two apartments above the store.
- 44 Minutes of the Universal Negro Improvement Association Toronto Branch, 1 December 1919, UAIA of Toronto records, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO. Dr. A. Benjamin Thomas, an optometrist, was one of a few black doctors in Toronto at this time. His office was located at 339 Queen Street West.
- 45 See endnote number 8.
- 46 K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 19. Henry believes that the UNIA achieved its highest membership ("an unspectacular two hundred") in the 1940s. From my own research, this seems unlikely given that the UNIA in Toronto was gradually declining by the start of World War II. I would estimate that the peak membership of the UNIA in Toronto occurred sometime between 1922 and 1938.
- 47 Martin, *The Course of African Philosophy*, 187.
- 48 Marjorie Lewsey and Esther Hayes, interviews.
- 49 A couple of interviewees refer to this auxiliary as the Negro Youth Club, and claim that it operated mostly in the 1930s and 1940s. See Esther Hayes and Daniel Braithwaite, interviews.
- 50 Marano, "Rising Strongly and Rapidly," 245 and 253.
- 51 Blackman, interview. A designated social committee carefully planned and executed these occasions and each committee member was responsible for an aspect of the event. For example, if one were to be put in charge of making food for an event, one would be expected to donate it in order to maximize the UNIA's profits.
- 52 Blackman, interview; Minutes of the UNIA Toronto Branch, UAIA of Toronto records, MHSO; and Hill, "British Military Intelligence Report," in *The Marcus Garvey Papers* (1983), 2: 205. Although the UNIA minutes indicate that the meeting was held on 29 January, it is more likely that the meeting was held on 5 January given that Garvey

- and his first wife, Amy Ashwood, honeymooned in Toronto and Montreal between 26 December 1919 and 8 January 1920.
- 53 Marshall, Blackman, and D. Braithwaite, interviews. Marshall believes the cost of the Hall was \$15,500 at the time. See also Moore, *An Autobiography*, 54.
- 54 Dionne Brand, “Violet Blackman” in *No Burden to Carry*, 41.
- 55 Gwendolyn Johnston, recorded interview by Ruth Lewis, February 1979, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO, and Lewsey, interview.
- 56 Blackman, interview.
- 57 Brand, “Esther Hayes and Eleanor Hayes” in *No Burden to Carry*, 214. Stanley Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 34.
- 58 Brand, “Esther Hayes and Eleanor Hayes” in *No Burden to Carry*, 214 and “Our President General,” *The Black Man* (July 1938), 20, and Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 83.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Rella Braithwaite, recorded interview by Diana Braithwaite, September 1978, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO, and Williams, interview. Leonard Johnston met his future wife Gwen at a UNIA dance. The two were married at age 18. L. Johnston, interview.
- 61 N. Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 149.
- 62 Lewsey, interview. The purpose of the picnic was to get black families together and inspire them to return home and join black organizations and to help one another. See also Clarke, interview.
- 63 Clarke, interview. For example, in 1942 Pitt spoke about the need for black Canadians to join the war effort “so that they would be prepared for the post-war problems” and have a better understanding of how to solve them. “Colored Folk at Picnic,” *St. Catharines Standard* (7 August 1942).
- 64 N. Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 149–50.
- 65 “Picnic Sets Record,” *St. Catharines Standard* (1 August 1936).
- 66 Verda Cook, recorded interview by Lorraine Hubbard, August 1980, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.
- 67 “Thousands at Picnic,” *St. Catharines Standard* (5 August 1938).
- 68 N. Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 136–7, 150, and 214. Henry argues that “Emancipation Day served as a political tool as well, a role that changed in each successive generation. It shifted from opposing segregation in public spaces and obtaining suffrage to equal employment access.”
- 69 Bernie Morris Evans, *Garvey and DuBois – A Race to Nowhere: A Feud to Change All Time* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2014), 18. The newspaper had such a wide readership because it was published in three languages: English, French, and Spanish.
- 70 Toney, “Locating Diaspora,” 81–2, Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, 36, and Sarah-Jane Mathieu, “North of the Colour Line: Sleeping Car Por-



- ters and the Battle against Jim Crow on Canadian Rails, 1880–1920,” *Labour/Le Travail* 47 (Spring 2001): 9–41. Several other Canadian divisions also reported their news to *The Negro World*, including Montréal, Sydney, Vancouver, and New Aberdeen/Glace Bay.
- 71 Brand, “Marjorie Lewsey” in *No Burden to Carry*, 239, and “Marcus Garvey Defense Fund,” *The Negro World* (25 November 1922).
- 72 Toronto was supposed to be the site of the 1929 International Convention. However, UNIA officials changed their minds in late 1928 after the appalling treatment of the President-General at Montréal. In October of 1928, Canadian immigration authorities detained Garvey and forced him to leave the country within seven days because he had served jail time and was considered an undesirable visitor. See Robert A. Hill, “Article in the Montreal Gazette” in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 7: 288 and 313, note 14.
- 73 Marano, “‘Rising Strongly and Rapidly,’” 241–2. See also Blackman interview and Gairey interview, MHSO.
- 74 Records show that 87 delegates attended the 1929 Convention, while only 22 attended in 1934. However, the attendance in 1936, 1937, and 1937 was 144, 148, and 116, respectively. See Hill, “UNIA Convention Delegates by Gender” in *The Marcus Garvey Papers*, 7: 971.
- 75 Hill, “Speech by Marcus Garvey” in *The Marcus Garvey Papers*, 7: 782 and Martin, *The Course of African Philosophy*, xvi–xxi.
- 76 Martin, *The Course of African Philosophy*, xi.
- 77 Hill, “Official Minutes of the Second Regional Conference of the UNIA,” in *The Marcus Garvey Papers*, 7: 755 and 770-1, note 2. The minutes explain that graduates of the program would be “the first authorized trained representatives of the Organization in the United States and Canada.”
- 78 C.L. James taught the course in Gary, St. Louis, and New Orleans, and James Stewart offered it in Cleveland. See Tony Martin, *The Course of African Philosophy*, xix–xx.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Esther P. Hayes, recorded interview by Roy Thompson, January 1983, African-Canadian Collection, MHSO.
- 81 R. Braithwaite, interview.
- 82 Moore, *An Autobiography*, 87.
- 83 Ibid., 110.
- 84 K. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto*, 31. Henry’s membership estimates are from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. I have found no evidence to corroborate the accuracy of this number. Leonard Johnston also testified that the youths in the community were not welcome to join the UNIA during this period. L. Johnston, interview.

“WE ALL USED TO MEET AT THE HALL”: ASSESSING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE  
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- 85 N. Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 150. One interviewee even claims that the picnic became an occasion for vice in the late 1940s: “There was an awful lot of drinking and fighting.” See Verda Cook, interview.
- 86 Brand, “Violet Blackman” in *No Burden to Carry*, 45–6.