



GLEANNING MARCUS GARVEY'S LESSONS IN STRUGGLE: QUESTIONING, ORGANIZING AND LIBERATING OURSELVES

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THE HONORABLE MARCUS GARVEY (AUGUST 17, 1887—June 10, 1940) stands as a model and a monument of African liberational thought and practice and the human possibilities inherent in it. And thus, his life and work offer abundant lessons for us. He emerges in a time of triumphant European imperialism—Europe's political, economic and cultural hegemony throughout the world. He travels the world and sees Black people everywhere in various forms of domination, certainly less achieved than they could be and less assertive on the world stage than their ancient and glorious history demanded of them. He then decides he must act to politically educate, organize and mobilize them to bring out in them the best of their potential and powers. To do this, he conceives a broad and sweeping pan-African project of liberation and steps forward to achieve it.

Garvey's philosophy and practical project begins with a series of questions rising out of the condition in which he sees Black people around the world. It is a condition of relative powerlessness and oppression. And he concludes that it has to do with both the power and immorality of the oppressor and the lack of adequate self-knowledge and organization of African peoples. He thus taught that "a race without power and authority is a race without respect." Moreover, he says, "point to me a weak nation and I will show you a people oppressed, abused and taken advantage of by others." But he concludes, "show me a well-organized nation and I will show you a people and nation respected by the world." The challenge for him, then, is to ask how can we as a people stand up and go forth in the world as an organized, strong and respected people?

Garvey teaches that there are several things necessary for this. The first is to reaffirm our Africanness and derive both our purpose and direction from this identity. Thus, he concludes, that "Man's first duty is to discover himself." To do this, Garvey says one must ask two initial

questions, "Who am I here?" and "what is expected of me?" by my God and my people? To ask "who am I?" is to reaffirm one's Africanness in general. But to ask "Who am I here" is to ask the question of what have I done and what am I doing to honor my historical identity and the burden of history this places on me *in this time and place*? This is clear from Garvey's second question, what is expected of me by my God and my people?

Garvey says that the first need is for men and women who are committed to and ready for the demands of history and struggle. He asks, then, "Where can we find in this race of ours real men? Men of character, men of purpose, men of confidence, men of faith, men who really know themselves?" To organize Africans and redeem the world African community, he says we need "the man who will never say die; the man who will never give up, the man who will never depend on others to do for him what he ought to do for himself, the man who will not blame God, who will not blame Nature, who will not blame Fate for his condition, but the man who will go out and make conditions to suit himself." And, of course, all this applies to women also.

Thirdly, Garvey says we need men and women to join actively in the pan-African project of redeeming Africa and building the *world African community* through political, economic and cultural self-determination. Therefore, he says his "appeal is here made to every son and daughter of Africa, the scattered Africans and the Africans at home" on the continent. It is a project of *struggle for liberation and remoulding ourselves in the process*. The question here is "how many of us are living up to the dignity of human beings;" thinking deeply about our lives and future; and organizing and building the world that affirms and expands our humanity? Thus, he says it is *in and for* this pan-African project that we must, as Africans and self-determining human beings, "remould yourselves, remake yourselves, mentally and spiritually (and) place responsibility

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in your own two hands." For "You are responsible for what you are. You are responsible for what you want to be."

Garvey then asks where should we begin our work and what is it? He answers saying, "It is the duty of every man to find his place, to know his work, and I take it for granted that every man and woman of the (Black) race who know himself or herself, can, if they make up their minds, find their racial place." Garvey says that our place is among our people, thinking critically, working hard, acting with strength, dignity and determination, and being creative. He says to us, "You must realize that your function is to create, and if you think about it in the proper way you will find work to do." Nature, he tells us, is still to be studied, discovered and developed and "the problems of the world are still unsettled."

Also, Garvey teaches that our task is to prepare ourselves to serve and then begin to do so. Service for Garvey is always for the masses and the greater good. He cautions us against the immorality and destructiveness of selfishness and teaches the promise of working for the collective good. He says, "the ends you serve that are selfish will take you no further than yourself, but the ends that are for all, in common, will take you even into eternity." Garvey, then, wants us to find our place, serve the people and build for eternity.

Here Garvey talks about the function of education as the fundamental way by which a people builds its own unique culture and civilization and ensures its progress in human history. Thus, he says, "Education is the medium by which a people are prepared for the creation of their own particular civilization, and the advancement and glory of their own race." And Garvey here argues that education must reach and raise up the masses for they are the core and essence of the nation and people, defining both the external perception and the internal reality of the level of a race or society. As he states, "the masses make the nation and the race. If the masses are illiterate that is the judgment passed

on the race by those who are critical of its existence."

But Garvey also argues that it is not simply a concern for what others think, but even more important, what we think of ourselves, our sense of human possibility and what we know is necessary to free the masses of our people, to wake the people up to their duty, mission and inherent potential and promise.

IN CONCLUSION, GARVEY'S PROGRAM IS ONE of collective and personal liberation, self-determination and ongoing development through: (1) self-knowledge, i.e., identity, purpose and direction; (2) self-conscious organization to develop our potential and powers for good purposes; (3) an education for service; (4) economic and political self-determination; (5) moral grounding expressed in character and commitment to doing good in the world; (6) righteous and relentless struggle for liberation and upliftment; and (7) being constantly creative and answering each day the questions, "who am I here" and am I doing what the Creator, history and my people expect and demand of me?

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