

## Review of Adam Ewing's *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*

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Adam Ewing's book, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (2016), illustrates the climate that gave rise to twentieth-century Pan-Africanism, and specifically, Garveyism. Notably, Ewing does not delve into either the life of Marcus Garvey or his philosophy at the onset of his book. This is intentional so that he can contextualize the core themes of the book and introduce twentieth-century questions of race. His core themes include Pan-Africanism, black self-determination, and discourse around black leadership, and Garvey's efforts are examples of these themes as much as they are results of them. It is important to explore the impact of these themes both globally and within the United States, as well as how they may have changed the way blacks assert their understanding of race. *The Age of Garvey* (2016) provides valuable insight into the birth and spread of the Pan-Africanist movement, as well as grapples with problems faced within the movement, such as leadership, strategy, and how to unite blacks.

Pan-Africanism, or the idea that everyone of African descent should unite to uplift the black race, is one of the most prominent themes Ewing covers in the book. It is the foundation on which most of Garvey's rhetoric lies. Marcus Mosiah Garvey, born in 1887 in Jamaica, was a twentieth-century civil rights leader most known for his tailored vision of Pan-Africanism, which was an amalgamation of global ideas of race. Though he was born in Jamaica, Garvey was educated in London and carried out most of his work in the United States, specifically in Harlem (Ewing 2016, 14). Notably, Garvey's Pan-Africanism included the eventual return to a politically and economically separatist Liberian colony, of which he would be named the leader (Ewing 2016, 137).

The majority of the first half of this book is *not* about Garvey. Instead, Ewing uses this part of his study to contextualize Garvey's life and ascent to civil rights leader. He begins with the political and racial climate of Garvey's home country of Jamaica, focusing initially on the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865. Despite slavery having been abolished on the island decades earlier, there were colonialists who refused to enfranchise blacks. The rebellion is Ewing's first introduction of blacks' attempts at nation-making and attempting to seize their rights (Ewing, 2016, 29). Garveyism is initially introduced here, and Ewing helpfully situates it as neither radical nor conservative, but as an amalgamation of ideas, discourse, and events happening to Africans and African descendants (31).

Ewing also uses European countries' racially-based perceptions of their colonial subjects to contextualize Pan-Africanism. For example, England envisioned a plan for citizenship and independence for colonies such as Australia and Canada, yet saw their African and Caribbean subjects as perpetual children who could never be independent. This racist paternalism compelled blacks in colonies and newly-liberated countries to seek institutions to remedy the oppression they faced. The resulting conflict manifested in rebellion across African colonies and the Caribbean, inspiring the rallying cry of "Africa for Africans!" (Ewing 2016, 89). Discourse

varied on who should lead these movements – from Garvey in Jamaica, Washington or DuBois in the United States, or Harry Thuku in Kenya (Ewing 2016, 119).

The latter half of the book focuses more on Garvey and what Garveyism looked like in action. Garveyism's central focus was to uplift the black race through means such as education and economic empowerment. One such method included bringing blacks across the colonized world and closer to what Garvey viewed as modernity – minus the air of paternalism that accompanied white imperialism. These desires prompted Garvey's ambitious efforts, such as establishing the "Back to Africa" Movement in the 1920s, creating the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and opening of his own shipping line, the Black Star Line. His movement gained global political and financial support from blacks in the first quarter of the twentieth century, with many believing that he might hold the key to the post-emancipation future of the black race (Ewing 2016, 151). The UNIA, founded on the principles of Garveyism, advocated territorial separatism as the solution to black subjugation, and counseled its followers to work and suffer as a collective to achieve liberation as an entire race (Ewing 2016, 151).

It is impossible to analyze Garvey and his efforts outside of the context of Pan-Africanism. Though Garvey did not invent Pan-Africanism, he subscribed heavily to it, putting the needs of the black race before all others (Ewing 2016, 29). Pan-Africanism, however, in and of itself is not a solution to racism nor a way to escape it. On this front, Garvey was tasked with determining how he wanted his vision of Pan-Africanism to materialize and what exactly he expected to achieve. Garvey's ideal version of Pan-Africanism included creating institutions for blacks, encouraging brotherhood, and instructing his followers to not let fear deter them from uplifting the black race (Ewing 2016, 157). His principles rested largely on a foundation of self-determination. Because of this, Garvey appealed not only to African Americans, but also to those Africans living in colonies, who were considered second-class citizens in their homeland. His work inspired extra-governmental welfare programs and self-help economic practices from the United States to the African continent, especially in places such as Nyasaland (part of present-day Malawi) (Ewing 2016, 216). Uniting was a way to solidify and draw upon the strengths of black cultures to dismantle white supremacy, rather than beg for acceptance in a Westernized world.

Within black communities, there oftentimes existed the idea that there had to be *one* leader to advance the race. Garvey's time was no different, and Ewing references this throughout his book. He especially does so through his mention of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, black American leaders who also had the goal of racial uplift, but who had contrasting ideas on how to achieve such a feat. Ewing creates a stark contrast between Garvey and DuBois by pointing out similarities between Washington and Garvey, such as their beliefs in vocational competency and desire for separatism (Ewing 2016, 47). DuBois, adamant about being accepted into white society, opposed these sentiments, asserting that select groups of blacks should seek respect through academic betterment. DuBois also suggested that blacks fight for their countries in World War I (including colonized Africans), and then use their loyalty as grounds to request better treatment after the war was won (Ewing 2016, 71). This approach, of course, differed greatly from Washington and Garvey's beliefs on the war. Garvey and Washington believed blacks had no place in the war and should not risk their lives to defend countries that did not treat them as citizens.

Ewing also relates how the desire to unify the black race combined with wartime nationalism inspired a Moses complex among some black leaders. This sentiment was evident once Garvey was arrested in the United States, and after his Black Star Line and the UNIA failed. It was at

this point that DuBois proudly stated that blacks had not fallen prey to Garveyism or Washingtonianism (Ewing 2016, 121). Despite his efforts and intentions, Garvey could never achieve his goal of uniting the black community, simply because of the diversity of opinions regarding how best to do this. This begs the question of what is more important: is it who is credited with leading a movement, or what goals are actually achieved? Such a question extends to Garvey, whom Ewing characterizes as more interested in being the authoritarian face of his movement than letting what he intended to achieve take precedence over his leadership (Ewing 2016, 121).

In terms of content, Ewing made a smart choice in not telling the story solely from Garvey's point of view or making the book strictly a biography. Such an approach would have failed to serve his purpose of both analyzing Garvey as the individual, and the climate that shaped his ideas. This also fits the theme of Pan-Africanism, as Garvey's ideas did not come from one country or school of thought, but from a combination of racial discourses throughout the diaspora. Ewing expounds heavily on global resistance, such as in Kenya, Zambia, Jamaica, and the United States. In addition, he introduces other prominent twentieth-century black figures and develops them as people, which allows for a better comparison of Garvey. Mentioning the black leaders tangentially would limit the reader's ability to make informed opinions about them.

*The Age of Garvey* (2016) illustrates that Pan-Africanism, attempts at black self-determination, and the desire for centralized leadership existed throughout the African diaspora and on the continent, rather than mainly in the United States, as is often taught. Not only does the book provide a more in-depth look into Marcus Garvey's ideology and efforts, but this particular author has made the decision to humanize him, rather than dismissing him as radical or short-sighted and destined for failure. This approach differs from this reviewer's previous encounters with versions of the Garvey story, which often depict the leader as overly ambitious and as a cautionary tale of one wanting too much for one's people too quickly. Despite Garvey's efforts having failed, there is much to be learned from a man who inspired a movement to make an entire race as independent as the people who once owned and continued to exploit them.

## Reference

Ewing, Adam. 2016. *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.