

Relevant Unit Objectives

Module 2: Resistance and Self-Determination

This lesson addresses the following Essential Questions:

- What constitutes an act of resistance?
- What is freedom?
- Are some acts of resistance more effective than others?
- In what ways do our personal experiences shape our choices and actions?
- Why do some people become bystanders?

Objectives of the Lesson

Aim

What is Black Nationalism and is it still relevant in today's world?

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Evaluate the concept of black nationalism
- Understand the appeal of Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement
- Identify other leading figures in the history of black nationalism
- Assess the validity of black nationalism in the context of today's world

Introduction

The teacher will write the following words on the board:

- Colored
- Negro
- Black
- African-American
- Person of Color

Discuss:

- What does each of these terms refer to?
- In what historical era was each term most commonly used?
- What does each tell us about the time in which it was used?
- Which term is most commonly used today?
- What is implied by the term "African American?"

Instructional Procedures

Step One:

The teacher will lead a brief discussion about why the term “African American” is the most commonly used term to describe this population today.

1. What is the historical link between “black” people in the United States and Africa?
2. How central is (or should be) this historical link to their identity?

Step Two:

The teacher provides background information about Marcus Garvey. This may be done as a summary of the main points listed below, as a worksheet, as a PowerPoint presentation, or another appropriate strategy. (NB: This language is taken directly from the lesson on Langston Hughes.)

Jamaican-born Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jr., was the founder of a political movement known as “Garveyism,” a “black pride” movement that encouraged African-American economic and political independence and the unity of all people of African descent.

After traveling through Latin America and Europe in his youth, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914 and brought the movement to New York two years later. The movement essentially preached Black Nationalism, which aimed to unite all people of African descent and celebrate the contributions of black leaders and heroes. Garvey believed that blacks would never achieve true freedom while under the control of white Americans. He began advocating for a return of blacks to their African homeland, the only place he believed they could attain the economic and political independence that would lead to true emancipation. In 1919 he founded the Black Star Line, a shipping company that he hoped would literally transport thousands, if not millions, of blacks across the Atlantic back to Africa. (The name was a play on the famed White Star Line, the British shipping company that owned the Titanic.)

At its height, in the years between the late teens and early 1920s, Garveyism was a massively popular movement, particularly among the poorest African Americans, who often felt overlooked and neglected by other black leaders of the day. The UNIA claimed to have millions of members, and Garvey himself addressed some 25,000 followers at Madison Square Garden in August 1920 for the opening of the First International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World. Garvey’s weekly newspaper, *The Negro World*, was widely read and featured contributions from such figures as Zora Neale Hurston and Arthur Schomburg.

But Garvey’s movement collapsed almost as quickly as it had risen. In the early 1920s the federal government investigated his business holdings and charged him with mail fraud. He was released from prison after two years, but was deported and died in obscurity. The movement, however, enjoyed a renaissance with the resurgence of Black Nationalism in the 1960 and the popularity of such leaders as Malcolm X and the Black Panthers.

Step Three:

Distribute copies of Handout 1, which contains the text of “Return to Africa,” an editorial written by Garvey in the *Negro World* in 1922. Ask students to answer the questions at the end of the handout.

Step Four:

Each student must imagine that s/he is an African American living in 1922. Each student may decide what his/her particular role in society was and where s/he lived. Then, ask each student to write a “Letter to the Editor” of The Negro World, with one of the following titles:

- Why I Support the “Return to Africa” Movement – OR –
- Why I Do Not Support the “Return to Africa” Movement

In the letter, each student should identify which of Garvey’s arguments offered in the editorial s/he finds most (or least) persuasive. Then, each student must offer an additional three arguments in support of his/her position.

After students have completed the written assignment, the instructor may wish to hold a class discussion in which students compare and contrast their arguments.

Concluding Discussion:

The lesson will conclude with a summative discussion based on the following questions:

1. Why was Garvey such a popular figure in his day? What was the main appeal of his movement?
2. Why did his movement have such broad appeal among poorer African Americans?
3. Why did the movement collapse so quickly when Garvey was removed from the picture? Weren’t the ideas he espoused valid enough to keep the movement going without him?
4. What is meant by the term nationalism? What are some other major nationalist movements of the 20th century?
5. Is the idea of nationalism valid when applied to black people – i.e., African Americans, people of color in the West Indies, and native-born Africans? Why or why not? In other words, does a black person in the United States have more in common with native-born Africans or with white Americans?
6. Why might Garvey’s ideas have become popular again in the 1960s and in more recent times?

Summative Question:

Does the popularity of the term “African American” today validate Garvey’s basic ideas? Why or why not?

Additional Activity:

Assign students to research other important figures in the history of Black Nationalism, including Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, Franz Fanon, and the Uhuru movement. For each, students should highlight similarities and differences with Garveyism.

Materials

- “Return to Africa,” by Marcus Garvey, The Negro World, 1922
(Source: http://afroamhistory.about.com/library/blmarcus_garvey_africa.htm)

Handout: Return to Africa

Return to Africa, By Marcus Garvey
The Negro World, New York, Saturday, April 22, 1922

Fellow men of the Negro Race, Greeting:

For four and a half years the Universal Negro Improvement Association has been advocating the cause of Africa for the Africans -- that is, that the Negro peoples of the world should concentrate upon the object of building up for themselves a great nation in Africa.

When we started our propaganda toward this end several of the so-called intellectual Negroes who have been bamboozling the race for over half a century said that we were crazy, that the Negro peoples of the western world were not interested in Africa and could not live in Africa. One editor and leader went so far as to say at his Pan-African Congress that American Negroes could not live in Africa, because the climate was too hot. All kinds of arguments have been adduced by these Negro intellectuals against the colonization of Africa by the black race. Some said that the black man would ultimately work out his existence alongside of the white man in countries founded and established by the latter. Therefore, it was not necessary for Negroes to seek an independent nationality of their own. The old time stories of "Africa fever," "African bad climate," "African mosquitoes," "African savages," have been repeated by these "brainless intellectuals" of ours as a scare against our people in America and the West Indies taking a kindly interest in the new program of building a racial empire of our own in our Motherland.

A "Program" at Last?

I trust that the Negro peoples of the world are now convinced that the work of the Universal Negro Improvement Association is not a visionary one, but very practical, and that it is not so far fetched, but can be realized in a short while if the entire race will only co-operate and work toward the desired end. Now that the work of our organization has started to bear fruit, we find that some of these 'doubting Thomas's' of the three and four years ago are endeavoring to mix themselves up with the popular idea of rehabilitating Africa in the interest of the Negro. They are now advancing spurious "programs" and in a short while will endeavor to force themselves upon the public as advocates and leaders of the African idea.

It is felt that those who have followed the career of the Universal Negro Improvement Association will not allow themselves to be deceived by these Negro opportunists who have always sought to live off the ideas of other people.

The Dream of a Negro Empire

It is only a question of a few more years when Africa will be completely colonized by Negroes, as Europe is by the white race. It is for us to welcome the proffered help of such men as Senators McCullum and France. Though their methods are a little different to that of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, yet it is felt that the same object will be achieved. What we want is an independent African nationality, and if America is to help the Negro peoples of the world establish such a nationality, then we welcome the assistance.

It is hoped that when the time comes for American and West Indian Negroes to settle in Africa, they will realize their responsibility and their duty. It will not be to go to the natives, but it shall be the purpose of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to have established in Africa the brotherly co-operation which will make the interest of the African native and the American and West Indies Negro one and the same, that is to say, we shall enter into a common partnership to build up Africa in the interest of our race.

Your obedient servant,
 Marcus Garvey, President General
 Universal Negro Improvement Association
 New York, April 18, 1922

(Source: http://afroamhistory.about.com/library/blmarcus_garvey_africa.htm)

Questions about “Return to Africa”

1. What does Garvey mean by “Africa for the Africans” (1st paragraph)?

2. In the second paragraph, Garvey writes of “the so-called intellectual Negroes who have been bamboozling the race for over half a century.”
 - a. Can you identify which leaders he might be referring to?

 - b. Why does he hold these leaders in such contempt?

 - c. What does this language tell you about which groups of African Americans Garvey is trying to appeal to?

3. In the third paragraph, Garvey writes that the work of the UNIA “can be realized in a short while if the entire race will only co-operate and work toward the desired end.” What factors might have made it difficult for all African-Americans to work together in Garvey’s day? Today?

4. In the fifth paragraph, Garvey writes that “it is only a question of a few more years when Africa will be completely colonized by Negroes.” Who controlled Africa at the time he was writing? Was his prediction correct?

5. Why does Garvey believe it is the “responsibility and duty” of both American and West Indian Negroes to settle in Africa? Do you agree or disagree with this assertion?

6. In the last paragraph, Garvey asserts that “the interest of the African native and the American and West Indian Negro” should be “one and the same.” What assumptions is this assertion based on? Are they valid assumptions?