“I AIN’T NO AFRICAN!”

How often has one heard the statement, “I ain’t no African,” coming from the mouth of an African American? This obnoxious but common sentiment is usually expressed as consequence of having experienced firsthand, or perceived through the media, that the conditions of modern Africa are irretrievably desperate. Such perceptions of Africa are so destitute that some of these African Americans, the grandsons and granddaughters of those that were enslaved, now want little to do with that great civilization for which their ancestors lived, sacrificed and within which huge numbers were brutalized. Yet, as the following excerpt from historian Carter G. Woodson explains, this unbalanced perception of Africa is being projected from within an historic vacuum:

From literature the African was excluded altogether. He was not supposed to have expressed any thought worth knowing. The philosophy in the African proverbs and in the rich folklore of that continent was ignored to give preference to that developed on the distant shores of the Mediterranean...

They failed to teach the student of the Mediterranean Melting Pot with the Negroes from Africa bringing their wares, their ideas and their blood therein to influence the history of Greece, Carthage, and Rome. Making desire father to the thought, our teachers either ignored these influences or endeavored to belittle them by working out theories to the contrary...

Be proud of your race today as our fathers were in the days of yore. We have a beautiful history, and we shall create another in the future that will astonish the world.

—Marcus Garvey
No thought was given to the history of Africa except so far as it had been a field of exploitation for the Caucasian. You might study the history as it was offered...and you would never hear Africa mentioned except in the negative. You would never thereby learn that Africans first domesticated the sheep, goat, and cow, developed the idea of trial by jury, produced the first stringed instruments, and gave the world its greatest boon in the discovery of iron. ...The status of the Negro, then, was justly fixed as that of an inferior. 

As the preceding quote from Carter G. Woodson alludes, we Africans have been accredited with bringing organized civilization to this planet. From seeming infinite geographies within the Dark Continent, sprang ancient and long lasting cultures that introduced agriculture, the use of fire and developed metallurgy. From these beginnings African civilizations developed the world’s first great architecture, fine arts, sciences, healing arts and we even produced the first firearms in northwest Africa. The brilliant historian J.A. Rogers articulated these accomplishments throughout his works:

The Negro played his part before the white man came on the stage, and will very likely play it again when he is gone. Apart from old Egypt there have been several successful Negro governments like Timbuctoo, Songhay, and Uganda. The last thrived for more than five centuries and well into our day until annexed by the British. When Speke discovered Uganda he said that the people had developed a high state of civilization, and ‘Chinese” Gordon speaks cordially of the fine government of King Mtesa. Stanley in ‘The Dark Continent’ speaking of King Mtesa’s court says: “The most courtly European could not have excelled the Uganda premier.”

Lastly, not to belabor the point but to firmly establish that there is a vast record of documentation to confirm our claims to great African ancestral accomplishments, we refer to the fundamental text of *THE DESTRUCTION OF BLACK CIVILIZATION* by Chancellor Williams. From his chapter “Egypt: The Rise and Fall” we note the following:

Internal stability was achieved through a process of increased
centralization of power at Memphis and the perfection of the bureaucracy of the vast imperial administration. The state became the chief promoter and inspirer of progress on all fronts: agriculture, industrial development, science, the arts, engineering, massive building programs, mining and shipbuilding. The rapid rise and expansion of numerous crafts, each an organized secret society, stimulated the remarkable industrial and building developments. Internal peace and stability provided the opportunity for the outpouring of much dormant native genius, and religion was the chief motivating source... It was during this same period that stone was first used in building, hieroglyphic writing was first invented, the great pyramids were built, stone quarrying perfected and expanded and Imhotep became the world’s greatest architect and the “Father of Scientific Medicine.” It was seven and a half centuries of the most glorious pages in the history of the black world.

If we, as Africans, are to overcome any distorted images of ourselves, which are held not only by external ethnic groups but by miseducated members of our own race, there must be a systematic reversal of such perceptions. Mapping out a course toward a sustained empowerment of the coming generations is the intention of our body of research as realized in the evolution of the Conscious Rasta Report. In the end our primary goal can only be empowerment; this includes individual power, that of the family and within the world community of African people wherever they may be located.

**RACE FIRST: The Key to Group Identity**

For the majority of our discussion, two books will serve as fundamental texts for our research: *Race First* by Dr. Tony Martin and *The Philosophy & Opinions of Marcus Garvey: Africa for the Africans* by Amy Jacques Garvey, both available from Majority Press. While there is a large body of published information on the Garvey movement within the works of a number of scholars, for myself, these two books are outstanding contributions to the library of Pan African scholars, progressives or social theorists.
We begin our analysis of the life of Marcus Garvey in the post-Reconstruction period of the latter 19th Century and opening years of the 20th Century. This was an era when the majority of blacks within the U.S. who weren’t unemployed, were engaged in menial labor tasks for the newly industrialized nation and, to a large extent in Southern states, migrant labor, sharecropping and subsistence farming. “Jim Crow” laws of segregation and second-class social status were the rule for the majority. At this time a tiny “colored” economic elite is evolving out of businesses that service the segregated black community. Social justice is largely absent and this is the period of frequent lynchings and other racist crimes against the unprotected black community.

To add an almost miraculous coincidence, migrating to America from the British-colonized Caribbean island of Jamaica, comes this remarkable visionary. In an initial period of three years of phenomenal organizing, Garvey brought a dehumanized colored people to the brink of world influence. Garvey’s tremendous appeal was his ability to passionately articulate his grand vision of African destiny and the greatness of the legacy of the black race:

But when we come to consider the history of man, was not the Negro a power, was he not great once? Yes, honest students of history can recall the day when Egypt, Ethiopia and Timbuctoo towered in their civilizations, towered above Europe, towered above Asia. When Europe was inhabited by a race of cannibals, a race of savages, naked men, heathens and pagans, Africa was peopled with a race of cultured black men, who were masters in art, science and literature; men who were cultured and refined; men, who, it was said, were like the gods. Even the great poets of old sang in beautiful sonnets of the delight it afforded the gods to be in companionship with the Ethiopians. Why, then, should we lose hope? Black men, you were once great; you shall be great again. Lose not courage, lose not faith, go forward. The thing to do is to get organized; keep separated and you will be exploited, you will be robbed, you will be killed. Get organized, and you will compel the world to respect you. If the world fails to give you consideration, because you are black men, because you are Negroes, four hundred millions of you shall, through organization, shake the pillars of the universe and bring down creation...
Yet this period in which Garvey was organizing was a time when our enemies were engaging in extensive political subterfuge against Blacks as well as the frequent outburst of outright warfare. As Garvey himself had investigated, all over the world the status of blacks within any nation was generally that of the lowest caste. From his observation, the philosophy of “race first” was the only viable means of overcoming disunity within this debased condition—from Garvey’s political enemies in the U.S. government, this “race first” ideology was viewed as sedition. Eventually his enemies hired virtually every black intellectual of the time as collaborator toward the end of destroying the Garvey movement and redirecting The Vision.

Between 1918 and 1921, Garvey and his fellow organizers built the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) to be the largest black-progress organization in history. By 1924 the organization had grown to the point of purchasing ocean liners, the then-equivalent of today’s jet aircraft—an amazing accomplishment. “Race First,” for Garvey was the key:

> In a world of wolves one should go armed, and one of the most powerful defensive weapons within the reach of Negroes is the practice of race first in all parts of the world.

Through the vehicle of the UNIA, Garvey intended to accomplish black unification:

> The Universal Negro Improvement Association advocates the unity and blending of all Negroes into one strong, healthy race. It is against miscegenation and race suicide. It believes that the Negro race is as good as any other, and therefore should be as proud of itself as others are. It believes in the purity of the Negro race and the purity of the white race. It is against rich blacks marrying poor whites. It is against rich or poor whites taking advantage of Negro women. It believes in the spiritual Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

Garvey was such an incredibly convincing orator that he could, within a very brief time, motivate his audience to make the necessary self-sacrifices toward the end of the unity and progress of the race. We must take into account that Garvey was operating without the benefit of
television, radio, telephones or other modern forms of electronic mass communication. Nonetheless, Garvey was able to transmit to the masses through oratory and his printing craft a vision for African destiny which was as legitimate as those of intelligentsia representing the interests of Japanese, Chinese, Islamic and European cultures.

Garvey saw his movement as necessary toward protecting the safety and self-interests of Blacks in all corners of the globe. As he had observed firsthand, all around the world Africans suffered a similar destiny, that of injury at the hands of more organized races:

“When we, as members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, talk about a government of our own in Africa, a flag of our own and a national anthem of our own, some Negroes laugh at us, but we only have pity for them, as they know not what they do. When Uncle Sam lynchers her black boys with her uniform on their back, and John Bull calls her ex-soldiers aliens who helped her in the Ashanti and Zulu wars to take big slices of Africa, then it is high time for some dull, apathetic Negroes to think in terms of nationhood.

...we are determined to solve our own problem, by redeeming our Motherland Africa from the hands of alien exploiters and found there a Government, a nation of our own, strong enough to lend protection to the members of our race scattered all over the world, and compel the respect of the nations and races of the earth.”
ii  FROM “SUPERMAN” TO MAN by J.A. Rogers, Helga M. Rogers Publisher, reprinted 1990, pgs. 38-39
iii THE DESTRUCTION OF BLACK CIVILIZATION by Chancellor Williams, Third World Press, 1987, pg. 100
v  RACE FIRST by Dr. Tony Martin, The Majority Press, 1976, pg. 22
vi  Ibid. pg. 22
vii  Ibid. pg. 41