

Excerpt from oral history interview with former member of the UNIA. (October 20, 1938)

So you want me to tell you something about Negro Folklore well, here's a story about a strapping, jet-black Negro that will live as long as folk tales are handed down from generation to generation. To many, he was a clown; a jester who wanted to play at being king but, to hundreds of thousands of Negroes, he was a magnificent leader and martyr to a great cause; complete and unconditional social and economic freedom for Negroes everywhere. And, had it not been for one flaw in his plan of action, there would probably be no more than a handful us Negroes in America today.

His name was Marcus Garvey...

He was standing there, strong and forceful before a crowd of more than 25,000 Negroes who had assembled in Madison Square Garden to consider the problems of the Negro race. It was shortly after the World War, August 1920 I believe.

Well that was a sight to thrill you with pride. Imagine, huge spacious Madison Square Garden, rocking with the yells of 25,000 frenzied Negro patriots demanding a free Africa, from the Strait of Gibraltar to the cape of Good Hope-- A Negro republic run exclusively by and for Negroes. Doesn't sound real, does it? Well, it happened--and it can happen again, but not until another leader with Marcus Garvey's strength, vision and courage comes along...

Following the thirty day organizational convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association at Madison Square Garden, more than three thousand delegates and sympathizers of the group gathered in Harlem at Liberty Hall, 140 West 138 Street, where they gave their final approval of the declaration of rights of the Negro peoples of the world. Delegates were there from Africa as well as the West Indian and Bermuda Islands. It was a memorable occasion.

Decorating the huge hall were banners of the various delegations. Prominently displayed also were the red, black and green flags of the new African [Republic-to be?]. A colorful, forty piece band, a choir of fifty male and female voices and several quartettes entertained the assembly all during the early part of the evening. Afterwards, Marcus Garvey, president general of the association, announced the business of the meeting and read the declaration.

Much applause greeted the reading of the preamble to the declaration which stated: "In order to encourage our race all over the world and to stimulate it to overcome the handicaps and difficulties surrounding it, and to push forward to a higher and grander destiny, we demand and insist upon the following declaration of rights."

SOURCE: Wilbert J. Miller, interview by Vivian Morris, October 20, 1938, transcript, American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.