

Marcus Garvey (17 August 1887 - 10 June 1940)

Garvey was a Jamaican-born black nationalist who created a 'Back to Africa' movement in the United States. He became an inspirational figure for later civil rights activists.

Marcus Garvey was born in St Ann's Bay, Jamaica on 17 August 1887, the youngest of 11 children. He inherited a keen interest in books from his father, a mason and made full use of the extensive family library. At the age of 14 he left school and became a printer's apprentice where he led a strike for higher wages. From 1910 to 1912, Garvey travelled in South and Central America and also visited London.

He returned to Jamaica in 1914 and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). In 1916, Garvey moved to Harlem in New York where UNIA thrived. By now a formidable public speaker, Garvey spoke across America. He urged African-Americans to be proud of their race and return to Africa, their ancestral homeland and attracted thousands of supporters.

To facilitate the return to Africa that he advocated, in 1919 Garvey founded the Black Star Line, to provide transportation to Africa, and the Negro Factories Corporation to encourage black economic independence. Garvey also unsuccessfully tried to persuade the government of Liberia in west Africa to grant land on which black people from America could settle.

In 1922, Garvey was arrested for mail fraud in connection with the sale of stock in the Black Star Line, which had now failed. Although there were irregularities connected to the business, the prosecution was probably politically motivated, as Garvey's activities had attracted considerable government attention. Garvey was sent to prison and later deported to Jamaica. In 1935, he moved permanently to London where he died on 10 June 1940. In 1964, his body was returned to Jamaica where he was declared the country's first national hero.