

## Jamaica introduces Garveyism in classrooms

Marcus Garvey, who inspired millions of followers worldwide with messages of Black pride and self-reliance, is being resurrected in a new mandatory civics program in schools across the island.

Students from kindergarten through high school are supposed to learn values such as self-esteem, respect for others and personal responsibility by studying Garvey, whom Martin Luther King Jr. called the "first man on a mass scale and level to give Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny." But the program almost totally avoids mention of the positions that made Garvey deeply controversial: his promotion of a "back to Africa" movement, his use of the title "provisional president of Africa" and a campaign for racial separation, born of the conviction that whites would never allow Blacks justice. American civil rights pioneer W.E.B. Du Bois once called him "the most dangerous enemy of the Negro race." The program is a major rethinking of Garvey's legacy in his Caribbean homeland. He was the first person named a national hero following independence in 1962, and the government put his likeness on coins. But it had declined repeated calls to use his teachings in schools, where history is not a required subject. "The teaching of Garveyism in schools is something that politicians of all stripes have shied away from partly because of their own intellectual ignorance and partly because they don't know what to make of this complex subject," said Robert Hill, a Garvey expert who is professor emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles. But Jamaicans take great pride in the achievements of a native son who created an international movement. "We want all our children to believe they are important to what becomes of this country. Through Marcus Garvey, we see what it means ... to admit to no stumbling block that we cannot overcome," said Amina Blackwood Meeks, the Ministry of Education's culture director who led efforts to draft the Garvey-infused civics program. For many Garvey adherents in Jamaica, where reggae luminary Burning Spear once mournfully sang "no one remembers old Marcus Garvey," the only question is: What took so long? Born nearly 50 years after the abolition of slavery in Jamaica, Garvey founded the United Negro Improvement Association in 1914 on the island, and then built it into a mass movement in New York from 1919 to 1927. He established a network of "Liberty Halls" as venues for political debate, theater and scholarship around Black themes, raising awareness of African achievements and calling for economic empowerment to circumvent racism. From his Harlem base, Garvey urged people find pride in their African history, and assured the descendants of slaves that there were no limitations to what they could accomplish. His Pan-African philosophy urged Blacks to return to the continent of their ancestors and he launched the Black Star Line, a fleet of steamships intended to take them there. During his meteoric rise, he was bitterly opposed by some fellow Black intellectuals, especially Du Bois, who said Garvey was either "a lunatic or a traitor." In turn, Garvey called Du Bois a "rabid mulatto who needed a horse whipping," and he dismissed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, as seeking Black assimilation into White society. Garvey was eventually convicted of mail fraud charges in connection with his steamship line and was deported to Jamaica in 1927. But in the early decades of the 20th century, when segregation was deeply implanted in the United States and when European colonialism still stretched around the world, Garvey's words also inspired civil rights figures in America, political leaders in Africa and the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica. It's the uplifting and ambitious aspects of Garvey's life that educators hope will inspire youngsters in modern-day Jamaica, where times are tough for many. The teachers' handbook for the new program includes lesson plans using famous Garvey quotes such as "Up, you mighty race, accomplish what you will" to instill personal identity, discipline, courtesy, national pride and heritage. It says economics lessons could highlight Garvey's experiences as an entrepreneur, while devotionals will include hymns he wrote. So far there has been no public opposition to the program from Blacks or Whites, who are accustomed to seeing Garvey as a part of the country's history and seem happy to have civics of any sort introduced at schools. Education Minister Ronald Thwaites said he's confident the program will soon be a success, saying that "after many false starts, the campaign of values and attitudes now begin in earnest, rooted and founded" in Garvey. Source: newpittsburghcourier