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American Series Sample Documents

Volume VI: September 1924--December 1927

UNIA Delegation to President Calvin Coolidge

UNIVERSAL BUILDING,
56 WEST 135TH STREET,
NEW YORK, September 2, 1924

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:---

We, the delegation elected by the Delegates and Deputies attending the Fourth International Convention of Negroes, desire to present to you this petition, embodying the sentiment of four million black citizens of the United States of America, and endorsed by the Representatives of the four hundred million Negroes of the world, asking that you be good enough to consider our request and give us the attention necessary. We are mindful of the fact that you are burdened at this time with tremendous business of state, but the Negro problem is such an important one that we feel sure that you will spare us a few minutes of such valuable time, to listen to our complaints, our needs, and desires. We further hope for the success of your administration, and pray that when history writes of your regime, glory and honor as you do merit, will be recorded therein. Yours respectfully,

THE DELEGATION

- WM. L. SHERRILL
- HENRIETTA VINTON DAVIS



- G. EMONE, CARTER (<https://global.ucla.edu/home>) • UCLA International Institute (<https://www.international.ucla.edu/institute>)
- JOSEPH H. STEWART

[Handwritten endorsement 1:] [striked out: Enclosed 7 packages of names]

[Handwritten endorsement 2:] 7 Volumes of Petitions destroyed June 11, 1935

under authorization of Congress (See 116/231, 243, 256).

DNA, RG 59, file 882.5511/10. TLS, recipient's copy. On UNIA and ACL letterhead.

1. D. H. Kyle was a schoolteacher in Clarksburg, W. Va. He played a significant role in the 1924 UNIA convention and the following year became the organization's state commissioner for West Virginia (NW, 28 March 1925).

Enclosure:

UNIA Petition

[New York, September 2, 1924]

Petition of Four Million Negroes of the United States of America to His Excellency the President of the United States Praying

for a Friendly and Sympathetic Consideration of the Plan of Founding a Nation in Africa for the Negro People, and to Encourage Them in Assisting to Develop Already Independent Negro Nations as a Means of Helping to Solve the Conflicting Problems of Race

GREETING:---

We your Petitioners, representing four million members of the Negro Race, citizens of the United States, being mindful of the ever present race problem that exists in these United States of America which has acted as a deterr[e]nt to the higher aims and aspirations of the Negro, beg to lay before you the following statement of facts, and hereby ask your help and co-operation to the end that our race be assisted in establishing a nation of its own on the continent of Africa, where our members may be given the fullest opportunity to develop themselves, and that such encouragements be given by you as to enable the race to assist in the development of already existing Negro nations, of which we may become a part.

Statement of Facts

1. The Negro was brought to this country much against his will from Africa, and held as a slave.
2. The averred purpose was to exploit his labor and incidentally to civilize and Christianize him.
3. He worked as a slave for over two hundred and fifty years.
4. He was emancipated fifty-nine years ago by President Abraham Lincoln of grateful and imperishable memory.
5. Since his emancipation, he has developed, and has become a part of American civilization, and a part of the Christian systems of our age, to the extent, however, that a new racial problem has been



8. This has to a great extent bridled the higher ambitions of millions of the race, as far as aspirations to higher office and position are concerned.
9. The race's ambition, however, cannot be permanently bridled[;] therefore, it is felt that if sufficient outlet is not given to the rising ambition of the Negro, there are likely to be continued scenes of unpleasantness, harmful to both races in their rivalry and contact with each other, for the higher places of usefulness in the nation.
10. A large percentage of the Negro race now feels with your Petitioners that with the civilization imbibed, they are able to use it in helping to develop the land of Africa from whence they were taken more than three hundred years ago.

Your Petitioners, therefore, request that you give a sympathetic consideration to the program of the Universal Negro Improvement Association of which we are members, which is that of creating for the Negro People, a nation of their own in Africa, and assisting in the developing of already existing independent Negro nations of which your Petitioners could form a part.

Your Petitioners are mindful of the fact that great inconvenience may be caused in the immediate arrangements of the plans for the successful prosecution of the object herein outlined, but the end to be served will more than justify such inconveniences and arrangements.

We are petitioning that Your Excellency use your good influence on the State and other Departments of your Government, to facilitate in every way the efforts of those of the race who are desirous of repatriation to Africa to assist in the development of such independent Negro nations as are now existing, and that you further, personally, use your good office to help us in establishing a nation separately and distinctly in Africa, where we may enjoy freedom among ourselves.

Your Petitioners beg to draw to your Excellency's attention, that our sole desire in this direction is to permanently improve and help the Negro Race, and to lessen the terrible friction and evil that may eventually threaten American civilization, without a friendly[,] sympathetic, and considerate settlement.

We also pray that Your Excellency will be good enough to submit to Congress at its next sitting, a message embodying the sentiment of this petition, and the desire of these your humble Petitioners.

We also beg to inform Your Excellency that among the four millions of us who send you this petition, are numbered two million five hundred thousand voters. The rest of us are rendered voteless because of our domicile in States where we are not permitted to vote.^1

We also beg to draw to Your Excellency's attention, that each epoch has its leaders, who have advanced the solution of vexing problems. We know and believe that no race problem is solved unless its solution brings lasting benefit to both groups, the majority and minority alike.

We have contemplated the future of the Negro in the western world and we have studied history and reached a logical and sensible conclusion, that no two races can reside side by side unless the stronger rules the weaker.

We also know and believe that the majority race in America has done all that is possible to assist us as a minority, and that there is very little more that it can do to assist us further, and that the responsibility of any further progress rests upon our own shoulders.



founded through the efforts of liberal white Americans, who banded themselves together in the organization known as the American Colonization Society, which was founded more than one hundred years ago.

Believing that the economic struggles between races will become keener in the United States of America, and that there is every promise and belief that the native white population will increase preponderantly, we feel that there can be no other solution of this vexing problem of race than that advanced by your Petitioners, through the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

We also beg to draw to Your Excellency's attention that the leader of this movement, Honorable Marcus Garvey its President-General[,] has been wickedly persecuted by Agencies under the control of your Government, used as they have been by jealous rivals of our own race, and that any effort on your part in preventing any agencies of the Government under your control being further used to unfairly handicap us in this endeavor of ours to solve the race problem, will be highly appreciated.

We further beg to draw to Your Excellency's attention, the unfriendly attitude of two of Your Excellency's recent representatives in Liberia, Solomon Porter Hood and W. E. B. Du Bois, in working against the interest of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in that country, being members of a rival organization and who used their official positions to create prejudice against our cause because of jealousy and rivalry.

Believing that Your Excellency will take into full consideration that your humble petitioners are from diversified sections of these United States of America, and that it is our wish and desire that the things referred to in this petition be done, we your Petitioners, therefore, representing millions of others whose names it is not convenient to herewith submit, do pray and evoke, and request of you His Excellency, Calvin Coolidge, President of the United States of America, in the name of God the Creator of all mankind, in the principles of Christianity, the advancement of civilization, and the enhancing of the Brotherhood of Man in universal love, that you do take cognizance of this our petition, and that you further send a message to Congress embodying our sentiment, and using every power vested in you to assist us in building up in Africa a national home for our race, and for this and other considerations that you may give, we do humbly pray, and to you offer thanks. Respectfully submitted, [f]or four million Negro American citizens[,] members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

- WM. L. SHERRILL, CHAIRMAN
- HENRIETTA VINTON DAVIS
- D. H. KYLE
- J. D. BARBER
- FREEMAN L. MARTIN
- JOSEPH H. STEWART
- G. EMONEI CARTER, SECRETARY

DNA, RG 59, file 882.5511/10. TDS, recipient's copy.

1. Between 1890 and 1910 many southern states disfranchised their black populations, using restrictions which were still in effect in the 1920s. These included the white primary, which prevented



prospective voters intelligently interpret the Constitution and also be of "good character" (NYB, p. 241) (<https://global.ucla.edu/home>) • [UCLA International Institute \(https://www.international.ucla.edu/institute\)](https://www.international.ucla.edu/institute)

Though these practices came under legal attack by the 1920s, they still effectively limited blacks from casting more than a few thousand votes in southern elections. In view of this widespread disfranchisement, the Garveyites' depiction of the number of votes the UNIA could command seems unrealistically high. According to the 1920 census, only 1,487,000 blacks lived in the North and West, as compared to 8,894,000 in the South. Thus the vast majority of the African Americans still resided in areas where their suffrage rights were effectively denied them (Gunnor Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* [1944 reprint ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1962]; V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* [New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949]).

Editorial by Marcus Garvey in the *Negro World*

[New York City, September 2, 1924]

Fellow Men of the Negro Race, Greeting:

Our Fourth International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World has risen and the delegates and deputies are now on their way back to their respective homes and habitats, to further promulgate and carry on the work of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the cause for which they were assembled. Great has been the result of this [A]ugust convention. We, as a people, ought to feel glad that there is in existence such a movement like the Universal Negro Improvement Association, to afford us the opportunity of legislating for our own common good rather than allowing us to depend upon the good will of others to do for us. There is no doubt about it, that the convention was a splendid success. As usual, we stirred the curiosity and attention of the whole world, and now that we have risen, the convention has left its program to be discussed by the entire civilized world. Among the many things that we did during the month of August, was to lay a foundation for the new education of our race, educating them to the policy of self appreciation and it is hoped that the four hundred million members of our race the world over will follow the advice given.

The Enemies at Work

During the whole of the convention and a little prior thereto, the enemies of our cause tried to provoke and confuse our deliberation by the many unpleasant things they systematically published against the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Our enemies in America, especially the Negro Republican politicians of New York, used the general time fuse to explode on our tranquility and thereby destroy the purpose for which we were met, but as is customary, the Universal Negro Improvement Association is always ready for the enemy. They had arranged among themselves to get certain individuals of the Liberian government along with Ernest Lyons, the Liberian Consul-General, in Baltimore, himself a reactionary Negro politician of the old school, to circulate through the Negro press and other agencies such unpleasant news purported to be from Liberia as to create consternation in our ranks and bring about the demoralization that they hoped and calculated for, but as usual, the idiots counted without their hosts. The Universal Negro Improvement Association cannot be destroyed that way. in that it is not



As everybody knows, we were preparing to carry out our Liberian colonization program during this and succeeding months. Every arrangement was practically made toward this end. Men were shipped to Liberia as well as materials to the cost of over \$50,000.00. Two consignments of materials were shipped from New York, one on the 25th of June, 1924, and the next on the S.S. West Irmo, on the 25th of July, 1924, consigned to the Association, in care of Chief Justice J. J. Dossen,¹ of Cape Palmas, Liberia, in keeping with the understanding and arrangements entered into with the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the representatives of the Liberian government, and a local committee of Liberians, appointed in said government by the direction of President Charles King, all of which culminated in a higher industrial and commercial development of Liberia as a permanent home for the black race, in keeping with the constitution of that great little black republic. Unfortunately, after all arrangements had been made in this direction, our steamship secured to carry the colonists and all plans laid, these enemies of progress worked in every way to block the carrying out of the plan. For the purpose of deceiving the public and carrying out their obstruction, they tried to make out by the protest that was filed by Ernest Lyons of Baltimore, with the government at Washington, that our Association was of an incendiary character and that it was the intention of the organization to disturb the good relationship that existed between Liberia and other friendly powers. A greater nonsense could not have been advanced by any idiot. What could an organization like the Universal Negro Improvement Association do to destroy the peace of countries that are already established and recognized? It is supposed that England and France are the countries referred to when, in fact, the authors of that statement know that England and France are only waiting an opportunity to seize more land in Liberia and to keep Liberia in a state of stagnation, so as to justify their argument that the blacks are not competent of self-government in Africa as well as elsewhere. If Edwin Barclay had any sense, he would know that the Universal Negro Improvement Association is more friendly to Liberia, because it is made up of Negroes, than England and France could be in a thousand years. Lyons' protest was camouflage.

Negroes Double-Crossing

Everybody knows that the hitch in the colonization plan of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Liberia came about because of doublecrossing. The Firestone Rubber and Tire Company, of Ohio, has been spending large sums of money among certain people. The offer, no doubt, was so attractive as to cause certain persons to found the argument to destroy the Universal Negro Improvement Association, so as to favor the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company who, subsequently, got one million acres of Liberian land for actually nothing, to be exploited for rubber and minerals, and in the face of the fact that Liberia is one of the richest rubber countries in the world, an asset that should have been retained for the Liberian people and members of the black race, but now wantonly given over to a white company to be exploited in the interest of white capital, and to create another international complication, as evidenced in the subsequent subjugation of Haiti and the Haitians, after the New York City Bank established itself in Haiti in a similar way as the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company will establish itself in Liberia. Why, every Negro who is doing a little thinking, knows that after the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company gets into Liberia to exploit the one million acres of land, it is only a question of time when the government will be taken out of the hands of the Negroes who rule it,



but we do hope that the people of Liberia, who control the government of Liberia, will be speedily informed so that they, through the Senate and House of Representatives, will repudiate the concessions granted to the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company, so as to save their country from eternal spoilation. If the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company should get the concessions in Liberia of one million acres of land, which should have been granted to the Universal Negro Improvement Association for development by Negroes for the good of Negroes, it simply means that in another short while thousands of white men will be sent away from America by the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company to exploit their concessions. These white men going out to colonize, as they generally regard tropical countries, will carry with them the spirit of all other white colonists, superiority over and subjugation of native peoples; hence it will only be a question of time when these gentlemen will change the black population of Liberia into a mongrel race, as they have done in America, [the] West Indies and other tropical countries, and there create another race problem such as is confusing us now in these United States of America. These white gentlemen are not going to allow black men to rule and govern them, so, like China and other places, there will be such complications as to ultimately lead to the abrogation of all native control and government and the setting up of new authority in a country that once belonged to the natives.

The Rape of Liberia

It is the duty of every Negro in the world to protest against this rape of Liberia encouraged by those who are responsible for giving the concessions to the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company. Why, nearly one-half of the country has been given away and, when it is considered that out of the twelve million square miles of Africa, only Liberia is left as a free and independent black country, it becomes a shame and disgrace to see that men should be capable of giving away all this amount of land to the same people who have possession of over nine-tenths of the country's [continent's] area.

Bright Future for Race

We beg to advise, however, the members and friends of the Universal Negro Improvement Association all over the world, that what has happened has not obstructed much the program of the Universal Negro Improvement Association as far as our colonization plans are concerned. All that we want is that everybody get behind the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company² and send us the necessary amount of money to pay for our first ship and secure other ships so as to carry out our trade contract with the Negroes of Africa, West Indies, South and Central America and these United States. The Association is devoting its time and energy now to building up an international commerce and trade so as to stabilize Negro industry. There is much for us to do. In taking the raw materials from our people in Africa to America, as well as materials [from] the West Indies, South and Central America to the United States[,] and taking back to them our finished and manufactured products in exchange, we have a whole world of industrial conquest to make and it can be done splendidly if each Negro will give us the support that is necessary. We want money to put the program over and that you must give now. We want not only one, two or three ships, but we want dozens of ships, so that every week our ships can be going out of the ports of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, New Orleans, Savannah or Mobile for Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Lagos, Abyssinia, Brazil, Argentina, Costa Rica, Guatemala



we call upon you everywhere to get behind the industrial program of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. If we can control the field of industry we can control the sentiment of the world and that is what the Universal Negro Improvement Association seeks for the four hundred millions of our race.

Move the Little Barriers

So, the little barriers that have been placed in the way by the envious and wicked of our own race can easily be removed if we will get together and work together. Now that the convention has risen, let us redouble our energy everywhere to put the program over. Let us work with our hearts, soul and minds to see that everything is accomplished for the good of the race. We must have our ship in action by next month. At least, we are calculating to have our ship sail out of New York by the 29th of October, laden with the first cargo for the tropics, and to bring back to us tropical fruits and produce, and from thence to sail for Africa, the land of our fathers. Help us make this possible.

Support the Black Cross Navigation Co.

All those who are desirous of going to Africa will communicate with us at headquarters for instructions, but let everybody help us to pay for the ship now. Seventy thousand dollars more is wanted and we must have it immediately. You can help us by loaning to the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company whatsoever you can afford for five or ten years, \$25, \$50, \$100, \$200, \$300, \$400, \$500, \$600, \$700, \$800, \$900 or \$1,000, and do it now; and, if this is done, we are sure to defeat the enemy and carry the cause to victory. Send in your loan to the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, 56 West 135th Street, New York, U.S.A. With very best wishes for your success, I have the honor to be,
Your obedient servant,

MARCUS GARVEY
President-General
Universal Negro Improvement Association

Printed in *NW*, 6 September 1924.

1. Two weeks later Garvey wrote a front-page eulogy for J. J. Dossen, who died 17 August 1924 at his home in Cape Palmas, Liberia. Garvey claimed in the editorial that Dossen died "not because he was suffering from natural ailments, but because of the sudden shock on learning of what those who were in control of the government of this country had done against the Universal Negro Improvement Association in carrying out the program for the country and to which there was a standing agreement to which he himself was a party" (*NW*, 20 September 1924).

2. The Black Cross Navigation and Trading Co. was founded in March 1924. Before turning to the Panama Rail Road Co., the new UNIA shipping company attempted to purchase a steamship from the U.S. Shipping Board, which declined its offer. It then began negotiations for the S.S. *General G. W. Goethals*. Originally named the *Grunewald*, the ship was built in 1911 at Vegesack, Germany. Garvey announced the pending acquisition of the ship, to be unofficially renamed the S.S. *Booker T. Washington*, at the August 1924 UNIA convention in New York. After repeated delays, the Panama Rail Road Co. received final payment for the ship on 10 January 1925. The bill of sale was transferred without "warranty as to seaworthiness" (bill of sale of registered vessel, 10 January 1925, DNA, RG 41, file 142641-N). The ship left New York on its sole voyage under UNIA management on 19 January 1925.



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African Studies Center • 10244 Bunche Hall • 405 Hilgard Avenue • P.O. Box 951310 • Los Angeles, CA 90095-
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1310

• Tel: (310) 825-3686 • Email: africa@international.ucla.edu (<mailto:africa@international.ucla.edu>) • Campus
Mail Code: 131003

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