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“Forging Ahead” in Banes, Cuba *Garveyism in a United Fruit Company Town*

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Abstract

In the early 1920s, British West Indians in Banes, Cuba, built one of the world’s most successful branches of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the heart of the world-famous United Fruit Company’s sugar-export enclave in Cuba. This article explores the day-to-day function of the UNIA in Banes in order to investigate closely the relationship between British West Indian migration and Garveysim and, in particular, between Garvey’s movement and powerful employers of mobile West Indian labor. It finds that the movement achieved great success in Banes (and in other company towns) by meeting the very specific needs of its members as black workers laboring in sites of U.S. hegemony. Crucially, the UNIA survived, and even thrived, in a company town by taking a pragmatic approach to its dealings with the company.

Keywords

African diaspora – Cuba – Garveyism – British West Indian migration – United Fruit Company

In March 1921, Marcus Garvey, president general of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), visited the town of Banes on the northern coast of Cuba’s Oriente Province. Upon hearing the news of his imminent arrival, officers of the local UNIA branch, Division #52, hastily made arrangement to ensure a smooth trip for their organization’s leader. Four UNIA officers and three leaders of the women’s auxiliary group, the Black Cross Nurses, met Garvey in the nearby town of Dumois, escorting him and his personal secretary to Banes in a special railcar secured for the occasion. As the group made their way toward town, a large crowd gathered outside of the town’s largest hall,

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El Teatro Heredia, chosen for Garvey's speech because Liberty Hall, the usual UNIA meeting place, would not have accommodated the hundreds planning to attend the evening's festivities. That afternoon, the Black Cross Nurses stood to attention in their crisp, white uniforms while Garvey greeted and shook hands with admirers and well-wishers. When the time came for the mass meeting, the Black Cross Nurses led a formal procession into the theater, followed by the Division #52 officer corps and, finally, Marcus Garvey himself. The Cuban national anthem and an opening address by division president Egbert Newton were followed by no fewer than a dozen presentations by enthusiastic UNIA members before the president general finally addressed the audience on the state of "the population of Negroes everywhere" and the goals of his association.¹

Months later, Garvey remembered the visit as a tremendous success. In July, he told a New York audience that he sold thousands of dollars' worth of stock in the UNIA's shipping company, the Black Star Line (BSL), during his brief stay in town and that "hundreds and thousands" of people had paid the dollar entry fee to see him speak (Hill 1984:533). In fact, Garvey wasn't the first international UNIA representative to stop over in Banes; only a month earlier the UNIA chaplain-general, Reverend George Alexander McGuire, had "electrified" packed audiences in the Banes Liberty Hall for five straight nights and raised four thousand dollars in BSL stock.² That such high-profile dignitaries from the Harlem headquarters of the world's largest black organization visited Banes attests to the tremendous popularity and success of the UNIA in town and to the town's leading role in the black internationalism crystallizing in the Caribbean during the interwar years. Indeed, Banes was home to one of the Caribbean's strongest and most active chapters of Garvey's transnational black-uplift association.

Founded in early 1920, the Banes division of the UNIA, like most branches of the organization in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America, took root among British West Indians who had traveled to participate in U.S.-led economic growth. In Banes, this vibrant *antillano* population largely labored for the United Fruit Company or one of its subsidiary divisions, as the world-famous multinational corporation headquartered its Cuban operations in town. United Fruit had transformed Banes from a sleepy harbor town into a

¹ Robert S.F. Blake, A Message from Banes, Oriente, Cuba, *Negro World*, April 16, 1921; Banes Division Welcomes Hon. Marcus Garvey, *Negro World*, April 30, 1921.

² Blake, Banes Division, UNIA & ACL, *Negro World*, March 26, 1921; Blake, A Message from Banes, *Negro World*, April 16, 1921.

hub of capital, migration, and sugar production for export in the first decades of the twentieth century. By the time Garvey visited in early 1921, the region surrounding the Banes and Nipe bays on the northern coast of Cuba's Oriente Province was one of the most productive sugar enclaves in the world and one of the most concentrated zones of U.S. economic imperialism in the Americas.

As a proliferation of scholarship on what Emory Tolbert has called "outpost Garveysim" has recently demonstrated, the UNIA was especially popular among those British West Indians who were well-traveled.³ In fact, the organization experienced greater local participation in destinations of *antillano* immigration than in the British West Indies themselves. Cuba was second only to the United States in its number of chapters, while the Hispanic-American countries of Panama and Costa Rica each had more chapters than any British-ruled island except Trinidad, which was in fact a receiving island for many migrants.⁴ In this rapidly transitioning world of rising U.S. hegemony and vast labor migration, the UNIA also flourished in the United Fruit Company's Central American banana export enclaves, including Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, and Bocas del Toro, Panama, as well as the canal terminals of Colón and Panama City. Along with the UNIA branches in these sites, the Banes division of the UNIA thrived through the 1920s and into the 1930s, outlasting many of its North American counterparts.⁵ This article takes a microhistorical approach to the question of why the Garvey movement was so successful in company towns by

3 Tolbert 1975. Until recently, only a handful of scholars had specifically investigated Garveyism in the greater Caribbean. Those early works include Burnett 2005, Fernández Robaina 1998, Giovannetti 2001, Lewis 1988, and McLeod 2000, as well as a special edition of *Caribbean Studies* 31, no. 1, 2003). In the last few years, however, scholarship on grassroots Garveyism has taken off. See, among others, Dalrymple 2008, Ewing 2011, Leeds 2010, and Vinson 2012. For an excellent overview of the sometimes unique, sometimes shared characteristics of Garveyism in the greater Caribbean, see the country profiles in the latest volume of Robert Hill's *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*. All of the authors describe, in greater or lesser detail, the movement's strong appeal to those West Indians sojourning away from home (Hill et al. 2011).

4 In the mid-1920s, there were 725 UNIA chapters in the United States and 271 chapters outside of the United States, with Cuba hosting the most (at least 52 chapters), followed by Panama (47), Trinidad (30), Costa Rica (23), Canada (15), and Jamaica (11). See Divisions of the UNIA, 1925–1927, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture New York NY; UNIA Central Division Records, Reel 1, Box 2, A16.

5 For histories of the movement in each of these UNIA hubs, see the country Costa Rica and Panama profiles in Hill et al. 2011 as well as Burnett 2005, Harpelle 2003, and Zumoff 2013.

exploring the day-to-day functioning of the UNIA in Banes. Investigating Division #52 sheds light on this international panorama of grassroots Garveyism during the height of the movement's international dynamism in the 1920s and reveals that the organization's remarkable success was due, in part, to its flexibility and adaptability to local circumstances. Members built an organizational infrastructure well suited to meet the distinct needs of mobile black workers laboring in sites of U.S. hegemony. In company towns like Banes, their ability to do so was based in part on a pragmatic relationship with large employers of West Indian labor such as the United Fruit Company, a mutual understanding that allowed the organization to survive, and even thrive, despite repressive labor conditions and overwhelming power discrepancies.

Economic Expansion, Labor Migration, and Garveyism in the U.S.-Caribbean World⁶

Outward expansion was nothing new for the United States after a century spent conquering native lands, annexing Mexican territory, and filibustering in Central America. Yet, U.S. military, political, and economic intervention in the Americas reached new heights at the turn of the twentieth century. The 1898 Spanish-American-Cuban War, followed by the U.S. annexation of Puerto Rico and occupation of Cuba, launched the United States' ascendancy in the greater Caribbean, marked (only in part) by the creation of the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone in 1903; military invasions of Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras; and occupations of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua. Concomitant with military action and political influence was, of course, economic expansion, exemplified by the large agricultural export corporations that set up shop across the region, especially the United Fruit Company. Founded in an 1899 merger of two tropical trading companies, United Fruit quickly went on to acquire vast tracts of land and build extensive rail networks in the Caribbean, Central America, and along the Caribbean coast of South America. The company became known as *el pulpo*, or the octopus, for its tentacles stretching across the Americas.⁷

⁶ Frank Gurdy (2010:7–9) uses the term “US-Caribbean World” to describe a transnational space rooted in the circum-Caribbean, marked by U.S. hegemony, and united by interconnected and crisscrossing networks of trade, cultural exchange, and migration.

⁷ For histories of the United Fruit Company, see Adams 1914, Colby 2011, Dosal 1993, May & Plaza Lasso 1958, Striffler 2002, and United Fruit Company 1944.

As it did elsewhere, U.S. military might supported the company's expansion in Cuba. Rather than rehabilitate Cuban production, U.S. occupying powers encouraged foreign investment, particularly in Cuba's eastern provinces of Camagüey and Oriente, which had been wiped out during Cuba's thirty-year independence struggle. In 1899, United Fruit purchased a banana plantation near Banes, converted to sugar production, and set about building a "self-contained enterprise"—a highly efficient, closed society, celebrated for its "magnitude of operations" and modern production standards.⁸ By the mid-1920s, United Fruit had constructed two massive mills, Boston and Preston, and owned over 280,000 U.S. acres of land, five hundred miles of railroad lines comprising the entirety of the vicinity's rail network, two hospitals, two shipping ports, several electrical plants, water treatment facilities, firehouses, warehouses, commissaries, dairies, bakeries, churches, schools, and housing facilities.⁹ United Fruit even owned the land upon which local police stations and courthouses stood, as the company's Banes-Nipe territory came to epitomize foreign-dominated agro-export enclaves in Latin America.¹⁰

To meet its significant need for field and factory labor, a demand that could not be filled by displaced Cuban peasants alone, United Fruit's managers in Cuba imported workers principally from Haiti and Jamaica (Casey 2011; Pérez Nakao 2007). By 1920, the company imported approximately 3,000 Jamaican and Haitian field laborers annually through its private port at Nipe as well as through Antilla, over which it exerted significant control (Giovannetti 2001:52–53; Pérez Nakao 2007:70). Some 600,000 *antillano* workers arrived on the island during the first third of the twentieth century (McLeod 1998:599).¹¹ Between the push of British imperial decline and the pull of American ascendancy in the region, this pattern was replicated across the Caribbean, as Afro-Caribbean migrants dug the Panama Canal, harvested Central American bananas, cut

8 See also Adams 1914:297; A. James 1976:107; Santamaría García & Malamud 2001:246; Reynolds 1924:15, 18; Zanetti & García 1976:53–56, 62, 78–79.

9 "Boston" and "Preston," *Manual azucarero de Cuba/Gilmore's Cuba sugar manual 1927–8* 1928; United Fruit Company 1944; Secretaria de Agricultura, *Zafra de 1934, memoria anual*, 1934, pp. 70–71.

10 A classic Cuban account of the United Fruit Company in Cuba is Zanetti & García 1976.

11 Many workers included in this figure returned home after the sugar harvest. Until relatively recently only a handful of scholars carefully examined Caribbean immigration to Cuba. For older examples, see Pérez de la Riva 1979 and Álvarez Estévez 1988. More recently, however, several authors have addressed the subject of *antillano* immigration to Cuba (Chomsky 2000; Giovannetti 2001; McLeod 1998).

cane in Cuba, and labored in Venezuelan oil fields.¹² American employers found these “third-country laborers,” from neither the host nation nor the United States, to be ideal workers. Unprotected by local governments, lacking in nearby kinship networks, and dependent on the company for even their most basic needs, imported workers were thought to be isolated and less inclined to participate in labor disturbances (Conniff 1985: 176–78; Langley & Schoonover 1995:24). Indeed, private employers deliberately segmented distinct racial and ethnic groups of laborers in order to discourage worker solidarity (Bourgeois 1989; Colby 2011). Yet, the history of the Garvey movement demonstrates that British West Indian immigrants were far from isolated as they built the largest black organization in world history.

It was in these U.S. imperial enclaves, or what historian Winston James (2011:450) has called “black contact zones,” that the UNIA thrived. As preeminent scholar of Garveyism Robert Hill (2011:lxvi) and others have pointed out, British West Indians on the move “served as the key vector in spreading the message of Garveyism.” Across the greater Caribbean, the growth of the UNIA was synonymous with West Indian immigration, as Antillean migrants built and spread an organization distinctly suited to meet their needs as mobile black workers laboring in sites of racial subjugation and U.S. hegemony. The organization facilitated a strong sense of unity among heterogeneous West Indians across differences in insular origins, class, and even skin shades.¹³ Additionally, it offered a consistent set of rituals and experiences—from singing the Ethiopian national anthem to pageants and parades—that could be easily replicated across the region. Through their regular contributions to the “News and Views of UNIA Divisions” section of the organizational mouthpiece, the *Negro World*, West Indian migrants assured one another that, should they have to pick up and leave in search of work, they were likely to find a welcoming and familiar community in their next destination. Ultimately, the UNIA was “both a product and a catalyst” of increasing black diasporic interaction and communication in the 1920s (Guridy 2010:63).

12 Lara Putnam has written extensively and beautifully on the international circuits of British West Indian migrants. For just a few examples, see Putnam 2011a, 2011b, and 2013.

13 Garvey often spoke of the importance of black unity. See, for example, Hon. Marcus Garvey Electrifies Audience at Panama Prospective Chapter of the UNIA, *Negro World*, June 4, 1921, pp. 1, 5; Hill 1984:384; Hill et al. 2011:66–75. Scholars have often suggested that much of the UNIA’s success is attributable to its unifying capacity; see, for example, Lewis 1988:63, 79.

Universal Negro Improvement Association Division #52

In early 1920, British West Indians laboring in Banes founded Universal Negro Improvement Association Division #52. The group received a boost thanks to widespread enthusiasm for the Black Star Line, which stopped over in Cuba in late 1919 and early 1920.¹⁴ Although visits from UNIA high officials, including Chaplain General McGuire and President General Garvey, in early 1921 also helped spread local membership, these international leaders found during their stays in Banes an already formed and operating branch of the UNIA. During his visit, McGuire dubbed Division #52 “the Model Division of Cuba” and Garvey referred to the town as “the great stronghold of the UNIA” after his own trip to the town.¹⁵ Indeed, Division #52 was one of the most prominent UNIA chapters in the greater Caribbean in terms of its membership numbers, its role as a regional leader of the organization, and its extensive interaction with the Harlem headquarters.

In Banes, as elsewhere in Cuba, the UNIA largely functioned as a mutual-aid society whose members paid dues toward sickness and death benefits, organized first-aid services, and provided relief in emergencies like floods and hurricanes. It was also a social organization with strong race-pride and uplift components, as Garveyites commemorated key moments in black history and established educational institutions. Division #52 held regular Sunday-night meetings and organized parades, dances, and pageants. Worldwide, but especially in Banes, UNIA organizers adeptly incorporated various members of local society into their organization through distinct auxiliary groups. Subgroups of Division #52 included the Black Cross Nurses; the African Legion, consisting of uniformed men who “maintained order within the society,” practiced militaristic drills, and marched in parades; the Motor Corps, who provided instruction in the maintenance of automotive vehicles; a band and a choir; and boy scouts.¹⁶

14 Reverend McGuire claimed immigrants in Cuba were some of the most enthusiastic investors in the BSL and, in Banes, both McGuire and Garvey raised significant funds for the line; see Hill 1984:532–45, and Hon. Rev. McGuire Speaks in Guantánamo, *Negro World*, March 19, 1921. Additionally, a representative from Banes reiterated his town's enthusiasm for the line at the UNIA international convention (Convention Report, New York, August 1922 in Hill 1985:876–77).

15 Blake, Banes Division, UNIA & ACL, *Negro World*, March 26, 1921; Hill 1984:533.

16 Reglamento de La Asociación Universal Para el Adelanto de la Raza Negro División No 52 de Banes and Asoc. Univ. para el Adelanto de la raza negra to Provincial Governor, July

Sizable numbers of rank-and-file members were seasonal mill or factory laborers, as reports from Banes to the *Negro World* often mentioned that members had left town in search of work.¹⁷ In the early 1920s, the organization's officer corps, however, was composed exclusively of skilled, semiskilled, and professional West Indians residing in the La Güira neighborhood of Banes (often referred to as Overtown, Jamaicatown, or Baneston, reflecting its predominance of English speakers). Although sugar companies and the Cuban state sought to keep immigrant workers strictly in sugar fields and mills in order to ensure a consistent labor supply and to avoid migrants becoming "public wards," British West Indians often moved beyond their designated roles and spaces.¹⁸ An internally diverse group with mixed migratory paths, *ingleses* arrived in Cuba with relatively high levels of literacy and education (94.5 percent of Jamaican migrants in the mid-1920s were literate, for instance) as well as previous work experience in skilled or semiskilled occupations. Perhaps most importantly, they were native speakers of English. All of this afforded them a degree of upward mobility in Cuba's American-dominated eastern sugar zone.¹⁹ UNIA leaders were teachers and shopkeepers, tradesmen and artisans working independently of United Fruit (such as tailors, watchmakers, and cobblers), and skilled workers laboring directly for the company or one of its subsidiaries (in positions such as coal stoker, train conductor, driver, mechanic, and bricklayer). Women officers, serving in positions like lady president and lady vice president were, with few exceptions, domestic

28, 1924, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santiago de Cuba, Fondo: Gobierno Provincial (hereafter AHPSC Fondo-GP), Legajo (hereafter Leg.) 2452, Expediente (hereafter Exp.) 2; "All's Well in Banes, Cuba," *Negro World*, May 26, 1923. See also, Blake A Ringing Message From Banes, Oriente, Cuba, *Negro World*, April 14, 1923.

17 Blake, All's Well in Banes, Oriente, Cuba, *Negro World*, May 26, 1923; Blake, A Ringing Message from Banes, *Negro World*, April 14, 1923.

18 Documents relating to the solicitation of authorization by the administration of the *centrales* "Chapara" and "Delicias" in order to bring to this Republic through Puerto Padre 2000 immigrants from the British islands for the 1923–4 zafra, Archivo Nacional de Cuba (hereafter ANC), Havana Fondo Secretaria de Agricultura, Comercio, y Trabajo; Leg. 4, Exp. 45. In contrast to British subjects, Haitian immigrants, who were Creole speaking and largely uneducated, remained largely in rural employment. McLeod and Pérez de la Riva have analyzed the ways in which Haitian and British West Indian experiences in Cuba varied (Knight 1985; McLeod 1998; Pérez de la Riva 1979:11–13, 17–21, 27–29). For new research on Haitian immigration, see Casey 2011.

19 Giovannetti highlights the internal diversity of those often lumped together as "*ingleses*" or even "Jamaicans" (Giovannetti 2001:4–5).

servants working as cooks or housekeepers.²⁰ Sometimes president and sometimes chaplain, Robert S.F. Blake, a carpenter by trade, wrote to the *Negro World* in 1923, “In this division you will find men in all walks of life, men of the medical profession, engineers, tradesmen, mechanics, and others, all united, standing firm, with one watch-word ‘a new and redeemed Africa.’”²¹

The chapter maintained high membership numbers throughout the 1920s, reaching 300 members by April 1921 with “the 400 [mark] in view.”²² In early 1921, under the leadership of acting president Egbert Newtown, the Banes Liberty Hall was expanded from a seating capacity of 300 to 500.²³ In contrast, most Cuban chapters suffered from a shortage of funds and functioned without a freestanding meeting place.²⁴ Official numbers in Banes remained in the hundreds by mid-decade, falling only with Cuba’s economic decline beginning in 1925.²⁵ These figures, listed with the Cuban registry of associations, however, reflect only full-dues-paying members; for all practical purposes the UNIA reached many more, as its public events were designed specifically to involve the wider community.

Division #52 served as a regional leader within eastern Cuba and regularly sent its members across the region to assist other chapters and to act as representatives at special events hosted elsewhere.²⁶ In 1923 Banes Garveyites organized a regional meeting and invited delegates from across Oriente (including the cities of Santiago and Guantánamo, and the sugar mill towns of Miranda, Cueto, Cayo Mambí, Antilla, and San Geronimo) to a conference designed to “devise plans for closer relationships among divisions.”²⁷ Additionally, Division #52 officers regularly played key roles within the UNIA’s international leadership structure. Arnold S. Cummings, a prominent Garveyite in town, had been such a successful fundraiser that he was invited to attend the UNIA’s 1920

20 See, Sociedad de instrucción y cultura Asociación Universal para el Adelanto de la Raza Negra División No 52 de Banes, AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2 for several documents listing the officers, their names, and their professions in Banes.

21 Blake, A Ringing Message from Banes, *Negro World*, April 14, 1923.

22 Blake, A Ringing Message from Banes, *Negro World*, April 14, 1923.

23 UNIA in Banes, Cuba Forging Ahead, *Negro World*, February 26, 1921.

24 Dr. Alexander Given Ovation on Return, *Negro World*, March 19, 1921.

25 See AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2. Unfortunately, membership numbers registered with the Cuban state are unavailable for the first half of the decade, making it impossible to crosscheck state and *Negro World* records.

26 See, for just two examples, Camagüey, Cuba, Elia No. 754, *Negro World*, October 10, 1925 and The Camagüey Division Holds Inspiring Meeting, *Negro World*, August 25, 1923.

27 Blake, All’s Well in Banes, May 26, 1923.

International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in New York, and he signed the organization's pioneering "Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World."²⁸ Cummings went on to serve as the personal secretary to Chaplain General McGuire during his tour of Cuba.²⁹ In 1921, he again attended the UNIA convention. Two of the four representatives from Cuba at that meeting were from Banes, indicating Division #52's significant leading role within the UNIA's Cuban arm.³⁰

Particularly enthusiastic supporters of the cause, Banes Garveyites fiercely defended the organization against criticism and often boasted of success in spreading the UNIA message, even when other chapters complained of slow or no organizing progress, a point exemplified in contrasting contributions to the *Negro World* in March of 1923.³¹ That month, the executive secretary of the Santiago de Cuba division reported on the status of his branch, lamenting the opposition the UNIA faced in Cuba's second largest city. He explained that there are those who are "working towards [the chapter's] destruction" and claimed, "the worst enemies are those from within." He summarized his complaints by stating, "Comparatively speaking, we are not progressing as steadily as many other divisions of the Oriente of Cuba."³² In contrast, later that same month, the Banes Ladies' Division general secretary submitted a report on the progress of Division #52, claiming that local membership was steadily growing and that members were increasingly "understanding more of their race and what is meant by the UNIA." Moreover, she wrote, every member was "anxious to do something to push the cause along," and concluded, "Marcus Garvey can at all times depend upon the Banes division because we have loyal and true men who are ready to undergo any hardship."³³ In contrast to that

28 His Grace, the Right. Hon. Chaplain General, the Rev. Dr. George Alexander M'Guire, Given Great Ovation on his Return from Cuba, *Negro World*, March 19, 1921; AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2, p. 49. Arnold S. Cummings's name is spelled differently in local UNIA documents, Hill's volume ("Cunning") and in the *Negro World's* article on McGuire's speech ("Cummings"), though we have every reason that they are one and the same; Hill 1983:578–79, fn. 7.

29 His Grace, the Right. Hon. Chaplain General, *Negro World*, March 19, 1921.

30 Appendix IV, Delegates to the 1921 UNIA Convention (Hill 1984:789).

31 See an exchange of letters in which one Mr. Moodie from Santiago fiercely critiques the organization but is quickly reprimanded for his criticism by Robert Blake from Banes. Additionally, Blake was eager to clear the name of another Mr. Moodie residing in Banes from all association with the critical letter writer from Santiago. Oriente, Cuba Goes Wild Over UNIA, *Negro World*, April 28, 1923; All's Well in Banes, *Negro World*, May 26, 1923.

32 Division 194 of Santiago de Cuba, *Negro World*, March 17, 1923.

33 The Future Lies Before Us, Says the Banes Div. No. 52 of Cuba, *Negro World*, March 31, 1923.

of Santiago, the Banes report is upbeat and proud. Bearing in mind that many *Negro World* contributors likely downplayed internal conflicts within their local chapters, the striking contrast in tone may be a matter of distinct writing styles and public relations skills. It is also likely, however, that the UNIA did in fact experience unique success in Banes and other company towns largely thanks to the organization's pragmatic approach to working with major employers of West Indian labor.

Garvey's Movement and the United Fruit Company

By the time the Universal Negro Improvement Association took off in Banes in late 1920 and early 1921, the organization's leadership had already transitioned away from its early, militant period toward reaching a mutual understanding with the United Fruit Company and state powers in the region. When the *Negro World* first began circulating in the Caribbean in 1918, the paper's fiery rhetoric placed Garvey's association in a contentious relationship with British officials and with major employers of West Indian labor. Under the editorial direction of socialist W.A. Domingo, until July 1919, the paper routinely supported black labor solidarity and ran stories predicting race war, such as an article maintaining that the world's "400 million Negroes," suffering "from the injustice of the white man," must "prepare themselves for the next war."³⁴ British colonial authorities claimed the paper had a pernicious influence on British subjects and proposed prohibiting the publication due to its "distinctly inflammatory nature."³⁵ British Honduras, British Guiana, Trinidad, the Windward Islands, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Kitts-Nevis, Antigua, and St. Lucia all moved to suppress the paper, usually by passing ordinances against "seditious" publications. Similarly, a lawyer for the United Fruit Company maintained that the *Negro World* contained "articles tending to stir up trouble in Latin American countries and in the United States by promoting race feeling against the whites." Alluding to deep-seated white fears of black revolt that harked back to the Haitian Revolution, he added, "There is a possibility of [Garvey] attempting to repeat the French experience in Haiti."³⁶

34 Reginald Popham Lobb, Administrator, St. Vincent, to George Basil Haddon-Smith, Governor, Windward Islands, September 2, 1919, in Hill et al. 2011.

35 Viscount Milner, Secretary of State, Colonial Office, to HEW Grant, Officer Administering the Government, Bahamas, September 10, 1919, in Hill et al. 2011:296–97.

36 William Phillips, Assistant Secretary of State, to Abert S. Burlson, US Postmaster General, October 27, 1919, in Hill et al. 2011:405–8.

Though such claims serve more to reveal colonial authority and managerial anxieties than to explain Garvey's actual intentions, a series of riots and labor rebellions did erupt during this postwar period, and many were openly connected with the UNIA. Historian Adam Ewing (2011:123–128) has demonstrated that the language used in strikes and riots in Belize, Trinidad, and the Windward Islands, among other places, closely resembled UNIA literature, and that many uprising leaders exchanged ideas and newspaper articles with the organization's Harlem headquarters. This pattern was not limited to the British Caribbean, as Garveyites reported participating in a successful strike against United Fruit in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. Moreover, as Carla Burnett (2005) has detailed, a massive 1920 strike in the Panama Canal Zone was led, in part, by local UNIA leaders. Garvey himself sent US\$500 to support the striking workers. In short, in its first iteration, Garvey's organization in the Caribbean was often openly hostile to powerful employers of West Indian labor and his popularity had the potential to pose a significant threat to the imperial, capitalist status quo in many places.

Yet, by 1921, the leadership's approach had shifted significantly. This changed relationship was made apparent early on when United Fruit management discovered that UNIA representatives Henrietta Vinton Davis and Cyril Henry intended to tour the Central American isthmus in late 1919 and early 1920. Upon gathering that the trip was strictly a fund-raising venture principally orchestrated to sell stock in the Black Star Line, company officials concluded that Davis and Henry would rather allow the "goose to lay the golden eggs" than advocate a strike, which would "decrease the purchasing power of the Jamaicans." In the end, United Fruit offered workers cheap rail transportation and gave them the day off so that they could attend UNIA rallies (Harpelle 2003:55–56).³⁷ The company found little conflict between its own business interests and UNIA fundraising efforts.

Garvey's own "retreat from radicalism," to use Hill's words, began in 1921 when economic pressures, including the imminent bankruptcy of the BSL, sent the UNIA president general abroad on a fundraising tour of the Caribbean and Central America. The organization's acute need for financial resuscitation and pressure from the U.S. State Department, which persistently denied Garvey re-entry visas, effectively served to moderate Garvey's tone. Throughout the trip, he repeatedly assured state and company authorities of his noninterfer-

37 The "golden egg" quote, cited in Harpelle 2003, is from GP Chittenden, UFC Manager of the Limón Division, to V.M. Cutter, Vice President of United Fruit, December 21, 1919, and is reproduced in Bourgois 2003:120–21; Hill et al. 2011:476–77.

ence policy, claiming in Cuba, “I do not come here to interfere with the labor question or the political question where governments are concerned,” (Hill 1983a:lxix). During his visit to Limón, Costa Rica, Garvey arranged to postpone his speaking engagement by three days so that two shiploads could be loaded for export. While waiting, he was given access to a special train, typically reserved for white passengers, with which to travel to San José and meet privately with the president of Costa Rica, Julio Acosta (Harpelle 2003). The United Fruit’s manager in Limón later concluded that the UNIA leader’s speeches were “favorable to our business,” because Garvey had told his followers that their work for the company was “their bread and butter” and that “they should not fight the United Fruit Company.”³⁸ The movement’s relationship with the company was such that Garvey himself later traveled on the United Fruit’s Great White Fleet when the BSL failed. On at least one occasion, Eduardo Morales, UNIA high commissioner to Cuba, argued that UNIA had aims and scope similar to those of the United Fruit Company (Guridy 2010:68, 77).

Harpelle (2011:clxxxv) has claimed that this evolving relationship with employers of West Indian labor represents the UNIA’s history of “both radicalism and accommodation,” but pressures appear to have worked the other way as well. United Fruit and powerful employers were often forced to contend with the overwhelming popularity of Garvey and his movement, and were left with no choice but to accommodate the UNIA. For instance, in 1919, Panama Canal authorities went to considerable effort finding a place to dock the Black Star Line’s S.S. *Frederick Douglass*, so that a request for “permission for several thousand of these West Indians to inspect the vessel” could be granted.³⁹ Similarly, United Fruit officials in Panama conceded of Davis and Henry’s visit, “it is useless for us to oppose them,” implicitly acknowledging the widespread popularity the BSL enjoyed in Central America.⁴⁰

In short, by 1921 much of the UNIA leadership’s early labor militancy and fiery rhetoric had tempered, as Garvey and the United Fruit Company reached an understanding of their, at times, mutually beneficial aims. As the wealth of scholarship on Garveyism in various Caribbean port towns and cities demonstrates, changes at the top did not necessarily trickle down to individual chap-

38 G.P. Chittenden to V.M. Cutter, April 22, 1921, reproduced in Bourgois 2003. Harpelle (2003:58–60) even suggests that United Fruit paid Garvey \$2,000 a month during this period.

39 S.W. Heald, Superintendent, Panama Railroad Company, to R.B. Walker, Receiving and Forwarding Agent, Panama Railroad Company, November 14, 1919, in Hill et al. 2011:438.

40 H.S. Blair, Division Manager, United Fruit Company, to George P. Chittenden, December 19, 1919, in Hill, et al. 2011:477–78.

ters. Rather, the organization proved remarkably adaptive to distinctive local circumstances (Burnett 2005; Ewing 2011; Macpherson 2003). Yet, by 1921, when Banes Division #52 was taking off, the realm of ideological approaches to UNIA-led black uplift and community building in the Caribbean had come to include Garvey's policy of noninterference with local labor and political matters. Despite—or perhaps because of—this flexibility, the UNIA thrived throughout the Caribbean in the early 1920s, even as the organization began to disintegrate in the United States. As Ewing (2011:118) argues persuasively, this transition as well as Garveyism's continued success in the Caribbean “reflected the capacity of the movement to effectively speak to the needs and the aspirations of the moment within the realm of political possibility”. In Banes in the early 1920s, the needs of the moment were clear: to build a racial-uplift organization capable of supporting a community whose members continually suffered the profound ramifications of economic turbulence, all the while projecting black respectability in an often hostile society.

Uplift in a Company Town

Garvey and his biographers have argued frequently that his Central American and European peregrinations illuminated the pervasive suffering of his race and pushed Garvey to found the UNIA.⁴¹ What was true of the organization's founder, however, was also true of its rank-and-file membership, as British West Indians dispersed across the Americas were similarly exposed to ubiquitous racial discrimination (Hill 2011:lxv–lxvii; James 1998:50–90; Putnam 2013:16–17). In Central America, the Panama Canal Zone was notorious for the racial segregation of its workforce into “gold” and “silver” employees (Conniff 1985; Greene 2009; Newton 1984). Similarly, the United Fruit Company racially and ethnically segmented its workforces, maintaining distinct health, housing, and recreational facilities at its banana plantations in Central America.⁴² Immigration records for eastern Cuba in the 1920s reveal that a sizable portion of *antillanos* migrated not directly from their home islands, but from other labor destinations, especially Central America.⁴³ By the time West Indians arrived in

41 A. Garvey 1974:34; M. Garvey 1974:73–74; Martin 1976:5–6; Stephens 2005:85–89, 110.

42 Bourgois 1989; Chomsky 1996; Colby 2011; Fowler 1981.

43 Immigration and the Movement of Passengers, ANC, Fondo Donaciones y Remisiones, Leg. 403, Exp. 11. See also Giovannetti 2001:47–50 and Garnes 2009:139. Putnam (2010:282) points out that Jamaican immigration records indicate that the number of Jamaicans arriving home from Cuba exceeded those who departed for Cuba by 6,000, clearly illus-

Banes—also a racially segregated United Fruit town—many had years of first-hand experience with Jim Crow-style segregation.⁴⁴

In this context, Garveyites in Banes, like elsewhere in eastern Cuba, developed an organizational program specifically oriented around black identity. Regulations stated that “[an]y person of the black race or descendent thereof” had the right to be a member of the association, regardless of his or her nationality.⁴⁵ This explicit racial qualification, in and of itself, was a bold policy, given the fact that Cuban law and custom restricted the rights of race-based political and social organizations (de la Fuente 2001:70–71).⁴⁶ The chapter aimed to work toward “fraternity among the [black] race,” and establish black-run primary and secondary schools, hospitals, and commercial establishments.⁴⁷ In fact, other mill towns in eastern Cuba, including Florida and Macareno, were home to UNIA-run schools.⁴⁸

Associational life built in and around race pride and racial uplift was particularly important in the face of not only company-mandated segregation but also openly racist hostility from Cuban society. In the 1920s, Cubans from across the political spectrum increasingly agreed in their opposition to Caribbean immigration. Nationalist intellectuals led by Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez and Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring blamed American “neocolonialism” for “undesirable” black immigration and maintained that the key to ending Cuba’s exploita-

trating Cuba’s status as a subsequent destination for migrants who had set out for Central America as well as their children.

44 For information on racial-segregation in sugar company towns in eastern Cuba, see Casey 2011:8–9; Giovannetti 2001:146, 93; A. James 1976:114–16; McGillivray 2009:104–7, 19–21; Pérez de la Riva 1979:37; Pérez Nakao 2008:36–38.

45 Reglamento de La Asociación Universal Para el Adelanto de la Raza Negra Division No 52 de Banes. AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2.

46 Giovannetti correctly points out that, in light of legislation against race-based associations, the UNIA omitted the words “Negro” and “African” in its early registration with the Cuban state and reiterated its nonthreatening stance toward the Cuban government. As time went on, however, overt references to black racial uplift crept back into the UNIA rules and regulations of various chapters (Giovannetti 2001:160–61, 2006:9–12). I have seen these documents and they appear to be little more than a nod to local law. For example, in some instances standard UNIA letterhead was used with the words “Negro” and “African” simply crossed out from the formal title of “Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League.”

47 Reglamento de la Asociación Universal para el Adelanto de la Raza Negra, AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2, p. 12.

48 Selvin E. Reed, Central Macareno Division, Camagüey Cuba, Aug 16, 1933, *Negro World*, October 17, 1933; Con Adj Howlitt, Florida, Cam. Cuba, *Negro World*, September 11, 1926.

tion by foreign power was to prohibit Caribbean immigration while encouraging a “heartier” (white) Spanish immigration (Guerra y Sánchez 1964).⁴⁹ In the 1920s, a common narrative suggested that profits from Cuban sugar benefited only Wall Street and the West Indies, illustrated in newspaper headlines such as “Ten Million Pesos Drawn From Cuba by Jamaicans in Two Years of Work.”⁵⁰ More openly racist rhetoric depicted black immigrants as diseased and illiterate practitioners of witchcraft, as sensationalist headlines such as “Savage Haitian Murders a Boy and Eats His Body” appeared with increasing frequency.⁵¹ Campaigns to prevent the spread of disease supposedly introduced by “unsanitary” immigrants, to quarantine new arrivals to the island, and to raid immigrant housing were common manifestations of the national opposition to black immigration (Giovannetti 2001:39; McLeod 1998:601–2; Pérez de la Riva 1979:46–47, 56–57, 63–65). Spanish-American hostility toward black immigrants laboring for monopolistic foreign companies increased throughout the 1920s and only increased the importance of a vibrant associational life for Afro-Antilleans (Carr 1998:85a; Colby 2011:122; Giovannetti 2006:143).⁵²

In the face of such opposition to black immigration and racist stereotypes about *antillano* immigrants, the UNIA offered a clear avenue to project a strong image of black respectability particularly in Banes’ local British West Indian community. The formal pageantry of parades, dances, and holiday celebrations, as well as of subgroups such as the Black Cross Nurses, was a means through which Garveyites displayed their Christianity and erudition despite negative stereotypes about black immigrants. No one more proudly showcased respectability than the members of Banes Division #52. UNIA rules and regulations in Banes reveal a strong concern with maintaining an organization of the most respected members of “polite society.” For instance, seven or more people could form a division in a place where one did not yet exist, but “these people have to be sufficiently educated and respected in order to command the attention of the other respected and educated members of their community.”⁵³ Robert Blake, in particular, consistently expressed strong concern with

49 For analyses of the implications of these narratives, see Chomsky 2000:38 and de la Fuente 2001:100–4.

50 *El Cubano Libre*, July 9, 1921.

51 See, for example, Several Haitians Caught in the Act of Grotesque Witchcraft Practices, *Diario de Cuba*, May 5, 1927; Savage Haitian Murders a Boy and Eats His Body, *El Cubano Libre*, October 20, 1921.

52 For an excellent summary of the exclusionary laws enacted across the region, see Putnam 2013:95–110.

53 Reglamento No 52 de Banes, AHPSF Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2.

the reception of UNIA activities and what he called the “estimation of the public.”⁵⁴ In 1923, he described the division’s monthly parade and drew upon a thick vocabulary of respectability. After noting that “any stranger coming to Banes ... would see something to be remembered,” indicating a clear concern with the *reception* of UNIA performance, he detailed each of the “uniformed units, looking clean and orderly,” and congratulated several other chapters for the “prominent men who are identifying themselves with the cause.”⁵⁵

A Banes UNIA Mother’s Day celebration held in 1923 epitomized Garveyite pronouncement of respectability. Attended by “the most influential elements” of Banes’s society, the event entailed hymns, a scripture lesson, and forty-seven separate performances delivered by mothers and children. The dedicated—and apparently inexhaustible—UNIA members gathered again later that evening at Liberty Hall for their regular Sunday-night mass meeting, where officers, dressed “in full regalia,” processed to the stage and addressed the audience on the subjects of “the love of mothers” and their “duties toward their little ones.” In particular, one R.G. Murray advised mothers to “educate your boys and girls and fit them for their future career so that they may be able when we are gone to marshal the cause to a glorious end.”⁵⁶ By honoring the responsibility UNIA women had as mothers, Garveyites in Cuba continued a long tradition of gendered racial uplift that viewed women’s roles as principally domestic: raising children and acting as helpmate to their husbands.⁵⁷

In practice, however, women in Cuba did much more than educate their children in the UNIA cause. While the Harlem leadership structure only gave those women positioned as Garvey’s personal representatives prominent roles in the association, Garveyite women in the Caribbean were integrated into the main division leadership, often functioning as reporter or executive secretary, and not simply “ladies’ secretary.” Women served as chairpersons at mass

54 Blake, Banes Division, UNIA & ACL, *Negro World*, March 26, 1921, p. 9.

55 Blake, A Ringing Message from Banes, *Negro World*, April 14, 1923.

56 U.N.I.A. in Cuba Celebrates Mother’s Day, *Negro World*, April 14, 1923; R.G. Murray, Big Day at Banes, Oriente, Cuba, *Negro World*, March 24, 1923.

57 In an excellent analysis of gender in the Garvey movement, Barbara Bair notes that Victorian gender roles of the black racial-uplift movement appealed to black men and women reacting against a long history of racist gender ascription, giving typically “feminine qualities” (such as subordination and passivity) to black men and “masculine qualities” (such as physicality and strength) to black women. She contends that the concept of separate spheres for black women and men “was a reversal of the double standard applied by whites in which white women belonged in the home, black women in the workforce” (Bair 1990:156).

meetings, as sports-program organizers, and as reporters to the *Negro World*. In the early 1920s, Banes Division #52's reporter and secretary were women.⁵⁸ Women were particularly important to the UNIA in mill towns, as men left the area for long periods of time after the sugar harvests. In other words, public projections of women as helpmates reveal more about the particular goals of the association—to cultivate an image of respectability—than about the actual roles of female UNIA members and organizers in the Caribbean.

In addition to drawing upon the UNIA's race-pride philosophy in order to project black respectability, *antillanos* in Banes built in the organization a means of maintaining West Indian community stability, despite a tremendous amount of economic turbulence. The lives of sugar workers and those dependent on the sugar economy in Cuba were marked with the persistent economic instability that accompanies single-crop economies. Even in good times, when the price of sugar was high and markets steady, agricultural workers experienced seasonal unemployment after each sugar harvest. Further, periodic economic crises had devastating effects on local sugar towns, with immigrant workers suffering the most. The 1920 postwar collapse in sugar prices and Cuba's subsequent banking crash caused an abrupt halt in production, sent many immigrant workers home, and left others stranded and in dire circumstances.⁵⁹ In this difficult time the UNIA provided material assistance by

58 For the North American leadership structure, see Bair 1990:155. For examples of an integrated leadership structure, see Ingenia, Rio Canto, *Negro World*, September 5, 1925; Santiago, Cuba, *Negro World*, May 19, 1925; R.H. Bachelor, Garvey Relieve Cantata is Staged by Division #164, at Guantánamo, *Negro World*, September 8, 1923; Dora Stennett, Elia, Cam. Cuba, *Negro World*, August 21, 1926; Mrs. E. Chandler, Children's Evening Celebrated at Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, *Negro World*, March 31, 1923.

59 United States National Archives, College Park MD. Microfilm RG 165: War Department. General and Special Staffs; M1507 Correspondences & Record Cards of the M1 Div. Relating to General Political, Economic, Military Conditions in Cuba and the West Indies, 1918–1941, Reel 5, Economic Reports docs. 2655-Q-27, Q-28, Q-30, and Q-47; Report of Conditions Existing in the Cuban Republic, *Negro World*, August 27, 1921.

distributing food to distressed immigrants in Santiago de Cuba awaiting passage home.⁶⁰ After the UNIA stepped in to assist those in need, several new chapters opened in eastern Cuba, suggesting that such assistance boosted the organization's reputation.⁶¹ During the second half of the decade, diminished employment possibilities for immigrant workers in Cuba made the UNIA's resources as a mutual-aid society all the more valuable, which may explain how chapters in Cuba often outlasted the movement's decline in North America.

Garveyites frequently asserted with pride the strength of the community they built through the UNIA. Parades continued, mass meetings were held, and members struggled against the odds to "put the program over." In 1923, Division #52 president Blake boasted that he and his fellow UNIA members maintained a position of "no surrender" in the face of hardship and that Division #52 held an elaborate parade every month, even though "many of our male members have left this locality in search of employment."⁶² In an often-repeated narrative of persevering despite difficulties, Garveyites praised the association for surmounting the many obstacles of life in Cuba, of overcoming "bitter struggle" with "dogged determination."⁶³ In other words, through the Universal Negro Improvement Association, British West Indians strived to assert a degree of community stability despite the ongoing movement—including seasonal migration, longer-term immigration, and returns home—that marked immigrant life in Cuba's company towns.

This organizational infrastructure and community stability proved useful not only to West Indians, but also to their employers. Although power discrepancies between migrant laborers and employers, especially United Fruit, were tremendous and although workers routinely faced a grueling harvest followed by unemployment and destitution, sugar factory and field workers did exert a degree of agency over the particulars of their migratory experience. Historians Barry Carr and Matthew Casey have both demonstrated that workers regularly voted with their feet, protesting poor working conditions by simply leaving

60 Report, British Consulate, Santiago de Cuba, November 17th, 1921, submitted to the Colonial Secretary, Kingston, ANC, Fondo Secretaria de Estado, Leg. 532, Exp. 12473; McLeod 1996:140–41.

61 In 1922, the UNIA established branches in Guantánamo and the eastern sugar towns of Jobabo, Antilla, and Central Manatí. See AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2, Exp. 3, Exp. 4, and Exp. 7; and Leg. 2497, Exp. 7.

62 Blake, A Ringing Message from Banes, *Negro World*, April 14, 1923.

63 Jones, The UNIA in Camagüey, Cuba, Surmounts Difficulties, *Negro World*, May 26, 1923. See also Sydney F. Hugh Miller, Memorial Day for Banner Division, 323, *Negro World*, April 28, 1923.

the worst sugar estates (Carr 1998b; Casey 2011). Indeed, records suggest that sugar companies competed intensely for laborers during the harvest season, as workers routinely chose labor destinations based on word of mouth.⁶⁴ As Lara Putnam (2002:11) has pointed out to her fellow historians, social ties shape migration. These “social ties” could include, of course, institutional networks created through the UNIA. In this sense, community stability built through the UNIA dovetailed with companies’ needs for workers, as some West Indians found in the UNIA a useful proxy for direct familiar or friendship ties to a new location. For instance, in 1921, Irene Richards told a Garveyite audience in the sugar town of Marcane, Cuba, that when she first arrived on the island she had inquired as to where the nearest UNIA chapter was located because she would not live in a town without an active division.⁶⁵ As an organization that offered a degree of social capital to new migrants and sped the process by which arrivals were settled into their new homes, the UNIA performed a key role in stabilizing the labor force for companies that, like United Fruit, desperately needed workers during the harvest but were unwilling to provide laborers with housing, let alone employment, during the off-season.

Just as it had learned in Central America that Black Star Line fundraising efforts posed no threat to company interests (indeed, workers’ need for cash with which to buy shares seemed to *reduce* the likelihood of a strike), United Fruit and other sugar employers in Cuba found that the UNIA performed an important role in sustaining their workforces. During the era of what Gillian McGillivray (2009:90–141) has called the “patrons’ compact,” in the late 1910s and 1920s, sugar companies systematically underpaid employees, requiring workers to rely on private acts of charity (or seemingly magnanimous patronage from mill owners and managers) to help them through times of individual or collective economic distress. In this context, tolerance of (if not outright support for) the Universal Negro Improvement Association helped sugar companies minimize their own role in reproducing the labor force.⁶⁶ As a mutual-aid

64 For examples of the intense competition between sugar companies for laborers, see Cuban American Sugar Company (CASC) reports that complained that United Fruit was encroaching on its “special reserve” of labor recruiting (CASC General Manager Wood to Walter S. Bartlett, November 15, 1928, Archivo Histórico Provincial Las Tunas, CASC: Signatura 0444/43, p. 201). See also a series of complaints in which labor recruiters poached workers from one another by loitering at competitor train depots and decrying local working conditions (Alma Sugar Company to Hon Sr. Guillermo F. Mascaro, Gobernador de Oriente, March 5, 1919, AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 307, Exp. 21).

65 UNIA Marcane, Oriente, Cuba on the Upward March, *Negro World*, March 19, 1921.

66 For a brief but excellent take on the tendency of multinational corporations operating in

society, Division #52 and other UNIA chapters offered illness-and-death benefits, supported the unemployed, and distributed food and clothing during economic downturns and natural disasters, all crucial elements of a safety net that the company declined to provide.

Indeed, the Garveyite uplift project in Banes was decidedly nonthreatening to business interests, as racial uplift was largely understood in entrepreneurial terms. The group had plans to establish a Juvenile Dime Savings Bank, for instance, which was intended to “encourage the spirit of saving among our children.”⁶⁷ Some of its most prominent members, such as bookseller Arnold Cummings, who attended the UNIA conventions in New York, were businessmen in their own right, and in the early 1920s no Division #52 officers were seasonal laborers. As domestic servants, many leading female Garveyites likely found mechanisms by which to make the patronage system work for their own entrepreneurial ends by establishing small side businesses.⁶⁸ Elsewhere in eastern Cuba, UNIA leaders thanked local business leaders and company officials for supporting the association.⁶⁹ Given this entrepreneurial spirit and nonconfrontational approach to major employers, it is unsurprising that local UNIA officers were able to secure from United Fruit a special railcar to transport Garvey from the train depot at Dumois to Banes during his brief visit to town.

This seems to support Marc McLeod’s contention that the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Cuba largely functioned as an “immigrant protec-

Latin America to continually reduce their own rule in reproducing their workforces, see Chomsky 2011.

67 Asoc. Univ. para el Adelanto de la raza negra to Provincial Governor, July 28, 1924, AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2; All’s Well in Banes, Cuba, *Negro World*, May 26, 1923; Reglamento de La Asociacion Universal Para el Adelanto de la Raza Negro, AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2.

68 AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2, p. 49. Although his memoir of a North American’s childhood in Banes must be treated with a degree of skepticism, Jack Skelly (2006) mentions that employer paternalism occasionally supplied domestic workers with an old vehicle, a supply of food, or cash, all of which could in turn be used to start small businesses, support a family, or save toward returning home.

69 For instance, during their extensive campaign organizing new UNIA chapters in the mill towns of eastern Cuba, Samuel P. Radway and Dave Davidson frequently implored local businessmen to support the organization. In Jobabo, they secured the use of a local Cuban-owned hotel for their meeting, borrowed an organ from another local institution, and made a point of thanking the “honorable gentleman, Mr. J.R. Bullard, General Manager of the Jobabo Sugar Company, who is a friend of the Negro,” (E.H. Hope Williams, *The UNIA Almost Encircles Island of Cuba*, *Negro World*, March 26, 1921, p. 8).

tion association” (McLeod 1996:157–58). McLeod and others later revised this position, taking into consideration overwhelming evidence that Afro-Cubans did in fact participate in the organization, especially in larger Cuban cities (Guridy 2003; McLeod 2003). Nevertheless, the “immigrant protection” and mutual-aid program of the UNIA seems to have been the order of the day in company towns. Indeed, in contrast to the *oriental* capital of Santiago de Cuba, which had a Spanish-speaking UNIA branch by the late 1920s, Banes has left no record of significant Afro-Cuban UNIA membership.⁷⁰ Moreover, the entrepreneurial spirit of uplift in Banes differed significantly from the UNIA program in the central Cuban town of Sagua la Grande, where Frank Guridy (2010:96–97) found widespread Cuban participation in the movement. There, UNIA members criticized employers, such as the local railroad company and police force, for not hiring black people in important positions.⁷¹ Similarly, in Camagüey, Garveyites subtly protested the informal segregation of a local park by holding a massive rally in the section of the park typically used by whites.

The unique trajectories of various Garveyite branches are most clearly revealed in the late 1920s, when Cuban president Gerardo Machado, alarmed by the threat increasing Afro-Cuban UNIA participation posed to his reputation as a black-friendly leader who had fostered racial harmony in Cuba, began suppressing the organization. His administration closed several chapters, including the Sagua la Grande division, and outlawed the *Negro World* (Guridy 2003:124–31). Yet, during this crackdown, Banes Division #52 stayed open, unmolested by the Cuban state, as did several others mill town chapters. In fact, the Banes branch of the UNIA lasted for decades, only closing in 1960, a year after the Cuban Revolution. In a town where most land was owned by the company and where even state officials often served at the behest of the company, it is unlikely that the UNIA could have stayed open without a degree of support and, perhaps, protection from the United Fruit Company.

Although Division #52 remained active for decades, by the end of the 1920s the association’s leadership and composition shifted. A sizable portion of the UNIA officer corps transferred their energies to the Jamaica Club, founded in 1927, and a number of leaders went on to serve long tenures as officers in

70 UARN Capítulo Cubano 71, División del Habla Española, Santiago de Cuba, March 17, 1927, AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 9, p. 3.

71 Carlos del Castillo to Coronol Emiliano Amiel Ginori, M.M, August 15, 1929, AHPVC, Asoc., Leg. 77, Exp. 563, pp. 70–71. Special thanks to Frank Guridy for pointing me to this rich source of material on the UNIA.

the new club.⁷² Division #52 executive secretary James Lake, for instance, and UNIA trustee Josia Frances participated in both groups.⁷³ While some in Banes shifted their energies toward new clubs, others returned to the British West Indies by the end of the decade, but did not abandon their affiliation with the UNIA. After moving to Jamaica, Arnold S. Cummings served as UNIA division president in Harmony and, later, St. Andrew (Post 1978:417). The professional composition of Division #52's leadership changed as well. By 1930, day laborers served as trustees and by 1933, field laborers (whose occupation is listed simply as "*campo*" or "field") held leading positions, such as secretary, in an officer corps no longer dominated by the skilled and semiskilled.⁷⁴ The UNIA division also saw its numbers significantly reduced. This seems to have been a pattern across the island by the end of the decade and is most likely the result of the repatriation of many immigrant laborers after the economic collapse of 1929.

There are several possible explanations as to why skilled and semiskilled UNIA officers moved to the Jamaica Club and why field laborers moved up into prominent positions within the UNIA. One possibility is that those in more specialized professions had resources to leave the island and return home during the late-1920s economic crisis, and this may have been the case for some, although many UNIA officers from the early and mid-1920s remained in town and became active in the Jamaica Club. Another possibility is that personal differences divided the branch, not an uncommon phenomenon in the 1920s. Elsewhere in the Caribbean, scholars have used local newspapers to demonstrate that disputes and rivalries often caused significant tensions within various UNIA branches, internal divisions that are likely masked in reports to the *Negro World*.⁷⁵ That skilled workers gravitated to the Jamaica Club while factory

72 Isaac S. Hall to Provincial Governor of Oriente, April 7, 1927, AHPSC Fondo-GP, Leg. 2697, Exp. 4 p. 2; UNIA in Banes, Cuba Forging Ahead, *Negro World*, February 26, 1921, p. 10.

73 Others probably made similar transitions. For instance, two young women with the surname Hall performed at the ceremonies held in honor of Marcus Garvey's visit. It is possible that these young women were the daughters of Isaac S. Hall, founding secretary of the Jamaica Club. See Isaac S. Hall to Provincial Governor of Oriente, April 7, 1927, AHPSC, GP, Leg. 2697, Exp. 4; Banes Division Welcomes Hon. Marcus Garvey, *Negro World*, April 30, 1921.

74 Lista de la Directiva, Asoc. Univ. Para el Adelanto de la Raza Negra, November 1930, AHPSC, GP, Leg. 2452, Exp. 2 p. 67.

75 This is also true of other Cuban branches: by the late 1920s, for instance, the Havana UNIA chapter was rife with internal divisions over matters such as leadership positions. See Exchange of letters, beginning with Nestmore Chance to the Gobernador de la Prov. de la Habana, June 25, 1928, ANC, Asoc., Leg. 306, Exp. 8892.

and field workers moved into UNIA leadership, however, suggests a growing rift specifically along class lines. This latter possibility resonates with trends found elsewhere in the greater Caribbean. Putnam points out that, in 1930, British West Indian elites in Limón lamented that the local UNIA chapter had transitioned from the “classes” to the “masses of the Negro race” (Putnam 2013:249). While we must be careful not to anachronistically apply distinctions between class and race politics to a people for whom class exploitation and racial discrimination were tightly woven, it is clear that by the end of the 1920s UNIA Division #52 was no longer led by the relative elites within local British West Indian society who had avoided confrontations with the company by focusing their energies on community stability and projections of respectability.

Conclusions

Throughout the Caribbean during its boom years in the early 1920s, the UNIA proved remarkably adaptable, catering to local circumstances and political realities while continually advancing the larger goals of black pride and uplift. Jacob Zumoff (2013:433–44) has demonstrated that the Garvey movement in Panama initially overlapped considerably with labor radicalism, but in the aftermath of the failed 1920 strike, the UNIA distanced itself from organized labor. Whereas the defeated West Indians would wait over a decade before again joining a labor union, they joined and grew the UNIA, which flourished in the zone throughout the 1920s. After the strike in Panama, many West Indians moved on to Cuba, where lessons learned on the isthmus could easily be applied to sugar company towns: better to struggle for racial uplift, to showcase black respectability, and to maintain a degree of community stability than to fight the company and be forced to abandon the beloved association altogether.

Banes #52 “forged ahead” throughout the 1920s precisely because it met the immediate needs of its members living and laboring in a world of U.S. hegemony, rising hostility toward black immigrants, and tremendous economic turbulence. The UNIA offered material support to migrants in need and for whom the company offered no relief, posed racial solutions to the problem of pervasive racial discrimination, and fostered community unity and stability, all without antagonizing company and state authorities. In a sense, the UNIA and the United Fruit Company were each aware that they had mutually beneficial goals. It is in this context that Garveyites in Banes managed to build one of the most successful branches of the association worldwide, all the while appealing to, and forging, a strong sense of race pride. The everyday work that British

West Indians put into building, growing, and sustaining the UNIA helped cohere black solidarity, and their efforts remind us that, in addition to the more familiar roles played by leading activists and intellectuals, nonelite women and men were often the ones who put diaspora into action during the interwar years—a high point in the history of global pan-Africanism.⁷⁶

In 1929, Afro-Cuban labor leader Sandalio Junco argued at an international congress of labor leaders that communist parties across Latin America had a special obligation to appeal to race consciousness in their attempts to recruit black workers, particularly those *antillanos* laboring for foreign-owned companies like *el pulpo*. Garveyism, he claimed, had “diverted” black workers from the path of anti-imperialism and anticapitalism. Couched in Junco’s criticism was an implicit acknowledgment that the Garvey movement had in fact enjoyed tremendous popularity in Latin America, and that the global left had something to learn from Garvey’s race-based appeal (Junco 1929:165). Cuba’s left would take several years to heed Junco’s advice and organize immigrant workers, beginning only in 1932, when economic pressures began to combine with Cuban nationalism to the point of revolution. During Cuba’s revolution of 1933, a united block of some 6,000 Jamaican, Haitian, Chinese, and Cuban workers from the United Fruit Company’s territory near the Banes and Nipe bays participated in a nationwide sugar insurgency, taking over the company’s mill and infrastructural facilities, and paralyzing production for over six days.⁷⁷ By then, the realm of possibilities Garveyites had so astutely assessed in the 1920s had changed; the patrons’ compact was over and labor militancy posed new possibilities. Junco’s message took root, as black liberation and world communism increasingly became intertwined projects in the 1930s.⁷⁸ This work however, rested on the foundation West Indian Garveyites laid in the previous decade and a half.

76 This is also a crucial point made by Putnam 2013.

77 Granda, Delegado del Buró Nacional Del Sindicato Nacional de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera, Conferencia Provincial de Oriente de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera, September 18, 1933, Instituto de Historia de Cuba, Fondo 1: Signatura 1/8:87/15.1/1–10; CNOC, SNOIA La zafra actual y las tareas de los obreros azucareros, January 1934, IHC Fondo 1: Signatura 1/8:87/1.1/2–11. For an excellent history of the sugar insurgency, see Carr 1996.

78 For just a few examples of excellent scholarship which cover black radicalism in the 1930s, see Adi 2009 and Makalani 2011.

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