

Remembering Marcus Garvey's impact

By Thomas C. Fleming
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Marcus Garvey, the leader of the "Back to Africa" movement, arrived in Harlem in 1916, the same year I did. He was 38, an immigrant from Jamaica, and in a short time he became one of the most famous black men in America.

I was eight years old and living on 133rd Street in Harlem, right in the middle of where the Garvey movement started.

In my neighborhood, there were probably more West Indian than American-born blacks. They wanted to succeed in America, and were very industrious, always trying to start small businesses. They were looking ahead, with the goal of attaining naturalization so they could vote.

There was some antagonism between American-born blacks and the West Indian immigrants. The latter used to say they were subjects of the king, and would tell you that back there they could get jobs that blacks weren't getting here. Well, the first thing we asked them was: "If you could do all those things, why did you leave?" I never heard of any American-born blacks wanting to go there.

Garvey never became an American citizen, although he lived in New York for nine years. He started the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which at one time might have had over a million mem-

bers. But in New York, I think the only ones who considered him to be a leader were West Indians.

I heard a lot about him, and then I started seeing him. His organization used to have parades along 7th Avenue frequently. Garvey would always be standing up in a big open-top car with his immediate aides riding with him. He dressed like an admiral. He wore one of those cockade hats that admirals wear, and a uniform. There were marchers in front and behind him, carrying banners. The women were in white dresses, and the men wore suits. They probably started at about 125th Street, and marched up to 135th and 7th Avenue.

I didn't understand why they marched. But I think it was all part of trying to attract more members. The dues weren't very much.

The first thing Garvey did was take all those dollars and form a steamship company, the Black Star Line. The first ship was leaky and unseaworthy, and barely made it out of New York harbor. He sold people on the idea that the ship was going to take them back to Africa and carry on commerce between Africa and here. He later added two more ships, but not one of them ever landed in Africa.

His idea was to set up a colony of American blacks in Liberia. The Liberians first went along with this, but then changed their minds and wouldn't let him in, because they were afraid he would take over political power.

The U.S. government wanted to break up the movement because it saw any movement of black people as a threat. The U.S. Department of Justice thought he was trying to start a rebellion, so they accused him of bilking poor working people, and arrested him on several fraud charges for collecting the money to buy the steamers and to start other commercial businesses. He was tried in federal court and jailed in Atlanta, then later deported to Jamaica.

Two of Garvey's biggest enemies were W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of the NAACP's magazine *The Crisis*, and Philip Randolph, editor of *The Messenger*, a socialist weekly paper, and founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. They thought the "Back to Africa" movement was a harebrained idea — just as I did.

Garvey had a dream, but I don't think going back to Africa was ever possible. How would he have gotten enough money to move all blacks back to Africa? And nobody wanted to go over to Africa anyway.

But Garvey still has a lot of supporters today. There are Garvey societies throughout the United States and in other countries, and the biggest park in Harlem has been renamed Marcus Garvey Park.

THOMAS C. FLEMING, 89, recently retired as executive editor of the *Reporter Publishing Company in California*. Born in 1907, Fleming writes for the *Sun-Reporter*, *San Francisco's African-American weekly*, which he co-founded in 1944.

More than barbecue at Mallard Creek



DG
Martin

It is Mecklenburg County's fall folk gathering — where modern life can stop for just a moment and people can go back in time and live for a few minutes as if it were 50 or 75 years ago.

For many years, the members of the Mallard Creek Presbyterian Church have cooked barbecue on the night before the fourth Thursday in October and then sold plates to friends and neighbors the next day to raise funds for church projects.

Lots of other churches and volunteer fire departments and schools and other good community organizations have fundraising barbecue sales — and they are almost always good.

But the Mallard Creek Barbecue packs them in like no other. How it became such a popular event is another story. But it must have something to do with the talents of Mr. "June" Oehler, who has directed the cooking of the pigs as long as anybody can remember.

The weather helps too. Late October is almost always mild and pleasant — just right to enjoy the outdoor eating at the long tables set up by the church members.

It helps that word got around the downtown Charlotte business community that the Mallard Creek Barbecue was the place "you had to be."

Wherever crowds gather during the times just before election day, you'll find candidates. Mallard Creek welcomes them. "It adds to the color of the event," someone told me. "They use us. We use them — for decoration."

The folks from downtown eat quickly, visit among themselves, and go back to work.

Others linger. Returning former church members and friends. Some come back each year just to see those folks "that we only see at Mallard Creek."

And they talk. Ninety-nine year-old Elizabeth Millwee assures us she will be back next year when she is a hundred. She tells us about growing up on North College Street in Charlotte (now in the middle of the city) and that her maiden name was Overcash.

"But it is not right to say it the way most people say it. It should be said like 'Over-car-sh.' It was a German name. But nobody but me says 'Over-car-sh' anymore."

Mrs. Millwee gets me thinking about the Oehler family and how that family with its German name have been such leaders in the Mallard Creek Presbyterian Church.

One day, a few years ago, June Oehler's son, Donnie, took me aside and showed me some of the family history papers. His German ancestor came up from Charleston or Wilmington sometime in the last century — walking, speaking little English, and looking for a kinsman who had settled in nearby Cabarrus County.

Not much time later, he fell in love and married a daughter of one of the original Scotch-Irish settlers. The children took up the language and the Presbyterian faith of their mother. Of course, they kept the father's German name. But they turned it into a brand name for Scotch-Irish, American, Southern, Presbyterian, Mallard Creek barbecue.

There is something different about the barbecue this year for me. The quiet visiting at the long tables continues on in to the afternoon. The big crowds are gone, but the cars keep coming. Cars are everywhere, but they are not parking.

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Internal Revenue in need of an overhaul

By Lauch Faircloth
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Listening to story after story of how the Internal Revenue Service took advantage of innocent American taxpayers, I became increasingly irate. The IRS has consistently targeted vulnerable taxpayers and used unethical tactics to collect money from them that often was not even owed. Unfortunately, the recent oversight hearings by the Senate Finance Committee revealed what most of us already knew: the current practices and procedures of the IRS need to be changed. Congress needs to "clean house" and make the IRS an agency that can be trusted, and not feared.

One story that I heard involves Katherine Hicks. This innocent woman's life was completely violated by the IRS. Because of a billing problem, at the fault of the IRS, Mrs. Hicks was told that she owed nothing on an out-of-court settlement she made with the IRS. Believing that an error must have occurred, she made repeated attempts to rectify the obvious mistake and take responsibility for the money she owed. However, without independent records or access to IRS files, she was forced to

rely on the professional integrity of the IRS and believe what they told her.

After a prolonged silence, the IRS filed a tax lien against her. Mrs. Hicks had tried desperately to settle her debt with the IRS, but she told repeatedly that she owed nothing and so she paid nothing. Because of this mistake by the IRS, which they refused to admit, and their inability to track her account, she has been subjected to tax liens against her house and levies against her husband's wages. Trying to escape the ire of the IRS, she even filed for bankruptcy and divorce. Mrs. Hicks clearly attempted to deal with her problems in good faith, but the IRS made little effort to resolve this easily avoidable problem, thereby inflicting financial and emotional damage on yet another innocent victim.

Small business owner Tom Savage also endured undeserved hardships put upon him by the IRS. His problems began not with an administrative error, though, but with deliberate targeting of his company for taxes owed by an unrelated company. Mr. Savage now faced the decision of whether to fight for his rights or save his business. Fearing a drawn-out and costly legal battle and the con-

tempt of the IRS, Mr. Savage chose to settle the case and move on with his life. This decision permitted the IRS to keep \$50,000 in taxes that he did not owe. But Mr. Savage knew that the protracted legal battle necessary to challenge the IRS would have required tremendous personal resources that he, along with most taxpayers, do not have.

The oversight hearings also brought out testimony of former and current IRS employees who told the Senate committee of the increasing decay of professional ethics within the IRS. One employee's account of abuse includes occasions when a taxpayer simply failed or forgot to submit one or two items on a long list requested by the revenue officer and then the officer responded by issuing a paycheck or bank levy on the taxpayer.

Furthermore, while the Internal Revenue Manual says that reasonable living expenses must be allowed, one employee witnessed several occasions in

which the IRS punished a taxpayer by not allowing reasonable living expenses because the revenue officer did not believe the taxpayer followed his orders sufficiently. He even witnessed Collection Division Branch Chiefs, Assistant Division Chiefs, Division Chiefs, Problem Resolution employees, and an Assistant District Director, violate or ignore Internal Revenue Manual procedures and Treasury regulations in order to personally punish a taxpayer. As an American citizen and a taxpayer, I am embarrassed by this branch of our government.

While these cases bring to the forefront the many problems related to the IRS, I realize that they only touch the tip of the iceberg. Numerous North Carolinians have told me their own personal horror stories of IRS intimidation and abuse. American citizens are being treated as guilty until proven innocent by the IRS. This arrogant and indifferent attitude of many IRS employees leads to threats, assaults, and a general lack of cooperation. Immediate action is needed.

I believe that there are a few changes that the IRS should make to benefit the taxpayer.

First of all, the IRS should create a much less complicated tax code so that taxpayers can clearly know what they owe. There shouldn't have to be any guess-work on the part of the taxpayer. Second, we should have a national debate about newly suggested ideas such as a national sales tax or flat tax. Also, some have suggested a citizen board to oversee the IRS.

The bottom line is that honest, law-abiding taxpayers deserve better. The current system is 100 percent indefensible. I believe that it is extremely important that this agency operate with efficiency and fairness. However, the policies and procedures of the IRS will not change on their own. Their actions must be scrutinized to ensure that the rights of American citizens are not violated. Reform should not be prolonged by further government studies. Action must be taken, and the time is now. IRS reform should be a high priority in Congress, and I will not rest until we see genuine change. Please write to me and share your ideas and comments about this important issue.

LAUCH FAIRCLOTH is the junior U.S. Senator from North Carolina.

Eric Smith: New Houdini of public education?

By Gyasi A. Foluke
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Last week (Oct. 15), I had the opportunity, along with other members of the NAACP, to meet with Dr. Eric Smith, to discuss the recent removal of Kenneth Simmons as principal of West Charlotte High School. It was an experience by no means surprising or unprecedented, since I have been involved in the black liberation struggle for over 45 years and have witnessed multiple forms of political or bureaucratic "games," including pseudo-sophisticated rationalizations, as a "cover" for racist behavior.

The above factors notwithstanding, this recent meeting with Smith has reaffirmed, from my perspective, that the present struggle against racism, most notably in public education, has reached such a high level of "sophistication" that it is best described as somewhat magical — "now you see it, now you don't." For this phrase best depicts the "art" of the practitioner, perhaps somewhat similar to he renowned magician, the great Houdini.

During our recent meeting with Smith, we could witness Houdini-type behavior on the first question posed to him by our NAACP leader — to wit: Was there an official investigation conducted at West Charlotte to ascertain relevant facts before Ken Simmons was removed from his job? Unfortunately, apart from

Simmons' support goes up in smoke

meaningless rhetoric or skillful circumlocution (Houdini-type behavior), this question was not answered for over 30 minutes or until I had asked a series of follow-up questions, with the superintendent finally conceding that no such investigation was ever conducted. Indeed, in view of this major concession, additional follow-up questions are now in order — to wit:

If Smith did not have all relevant facts before removing Ken Simmons, what was the basis for his removal? Did Eric Smith fail to support Mr. Simmons because of racist politics, as usual, including Smith's failure to confront that alleged small racist "gang" of anonymous white dissident teachers at West Charlotte, with the related probable support or political pressure from Mr. John Tate, a school board member?

Did Smith violate a fundamental principle of good management — "authority should be commensurate with responsibility" — in failing to support Ken Simmons with appropriate authority against this alleged racist "gang" of anonymous dissidents at West Charlotte? Since Ken Simmons was seeking to provide equity for black students at West Charlotte, does his removal suggest that Smith could "care less" about

the genuine education of black students, especially in contrast to maintaining his personal-professional position and/or the racist status quo "tradition" in the CMS system? If John Tate and others — including some negro "leaders" — did pressure Smith to remove Ken Simmons, why is it that "our" black school board members did not fight for Ken Simmons and those black students that he was attempting to rescue from a racist education system? Did "our" black school board members vote to extend Smith's contract and provide him with a financial bonus — and for what reasons? Since Smith has not solved all of the problems in the CMS system, why was Ken Simmons removed in the context of remaining problems at West Charlotte High School? Were "our" black school board members guilty of racial "treason" as alleged by an articulate female member of the NAACP? Why should blacks vote "yes" for school bonds, when black students are not receiving a genuine education under the CMS system?

In the context of these questions — and many others with serious adverse implications for blacks — it is distinctly clear that the time has come to make major changes in the educational system in Charlotte. And I have proposed a "Modified Neighborhood School Model" and/or Supplemental Educational Centers as alternative measures, in part, for the existing system. Please note the words "in part," for there can be no genuine solution for "race relations," including black miseducation, apart from addressing black socioeconomic conditions in the larger society, most notably through reparations. For the present system of miseducation has not only failed to provide justice for Kenneth Simmons, it has failed to provide genuine education for virtually all black students. And Eric Smith's proposals to upgrade test scores for black students, while commendable, is clearly superficial — mostly "smoke and mirrors" — and "too little and too late" to address this serious problem of black miseducation in the CMS



Faircloth



Simmons



Smith