

# Black Resistance . Integration or Separation ?

## The Black Renaissance

However, poverty and discrimination were not the whole story. Black culture and black pride flourished in the cities. Harlem in New York became the centre of an artistic 'RENAISSANCE'. Talented black artists and writers collected there, led by the poet and writer Weldon Johnson. Their work expressed the social and economic grievances of blacks and made whites aware of the 'black experience' of rootlessness and alienation.

Black theatre attracted big audiences and black performing artists – comedians, singers and dancers like Josephine Baker – were successful in musical shows, clubs and black REVUES. Black American music, whether jazz, blues or soul, became one of the most influential art forms of the twentieth century.

Paul Robeson, 1898–1976

Paul Robeson was a trained lawyer who was unable to find work because he was black. Instead, he turned to acting and became well known for his role in the hit musical *Showboat*. He became one of the most popular concert singers of his time with songs such as his trademark 'Ol' Man River'. His *Othello* was the longest-running Shakespeare play in Broadway history. More than any other performer of his time, Robeson believed that famous people have a responsibility to fight for justice and peace.

### SOURCE 4 Langston Hughes

*“ Because my mouth is wide with laughter  
And my throat is deep with song  
You do not think I suffer  
After I have held my pain so long*

*Because my mouth is wide with laughter  
You do not hear my inner cry  
Because my feet are gay with dancing  
You do not know I die? ”*

4. Explain what the 'Black Renaissance' was.
5. What do Sources 4 and 5 tell us about the 'black experience' in American society?

### SOURCE 5 Richard Wright, from his autobiography, *Black Boy*. Wright grew up in the 1920s

*“ Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow when I played, but now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at my bedside. The hunger I had known before this . . . had been a normal hunger that had made me beg constantly for bread, and when I ate a crust or two I was satisfied. But this new hunger baffled me, scared me. Whenever I begged for food now my mother would pour me a cup of tea which would still the clamour in my stomach for a moment or two; but a little later I would feel hunger nudging my ribs, twisting my guts until they ached. ”*

## Political movements

There were major black political movements in the 1920s, the most important of which were the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association (UNIA).

### NAACP

Led by W.E.B. DuBois, the NAACP was dedicated to 'equal rights and opportunities for all'. It grew rapidly in strength and support, with nearly 90,000 members in some 300 branches in 1919. It was determined to challenge

WHITE SUPREMACY, end the segregation laws and make blacks aware of their civil rights, including the right to vote. DuBois was also the father of the PAN-AFRICAN movement in America, recognising the cultural links between black people in Africa and the USA.

One of the NAACP's major campaigns was against the practice of lynching in the South. It carried out investigations which revealed the extent of lynching and proved that it was unjustified and sadistic. It failed to get a law against lynching passed (it was blocked by southern Democrats) but caused public outcry and the number of lynchings fell dramatically.



### UNIA

Founded by Marcus Garvey, UNIA was the forerunner of black organisations advocating black power. It reached its peak in 1921 with over a million members.

Garvey said that blacks should have pride in their colour, their culture and their history. He blamed their problems on white racism and he offered disillusioned blacks hope of a better future.

Garvey wanted to establish close contacts with Africa and called on American blacks to use their skills, education and knowledge to make Africa strong and powerful in the world. Garvey pioneered a REPATRIATION 'back to Africa' movement where he encouraged blacks to return to their original homeland to help develop it and escape white racism. UNIA set up the Black Star steamship line to carry migrants and pressed the League of Nations to hand over former colonies to a new African republic, of which Garvey would be president.



#### Marcus Garvey, 1887-1940

Marcus Garvey thought that black people should not try to be part of white society. He insisted that they should celebrate their blackness and their African past. In 1914 Garvey set up the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). By 1920 the UNIA had 2000 members. Garvey wanted to establish close contacts with Africa and asked black Americans to use their skills, education and knowledge to make Africa strong and powerful in the world. However, in 1923 Garvey was put in prison for 'postal fraud', and on his release, he was deported. The UNIA fell apart. Nevertheless, Garvey passed on the idea taken up by the Black Power movement of the 1960s that 'black is beautiful'.

#### W E B Du Bois, 1868-1963

William Du Bois set up the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910. He wanted America to accept all people and offer equal opportunities to all people. By 1919 the NAACP had 90,000 members in 300 branches. Du Bois used the NAACP to challenge white supremacy, especially the segregation laws. He made black Americans much more aware of their civil rights, especially the right to vote. The NAACP also campaigned against the practice of lynching in the South. It investigated and publicised the number of lynchings. Although the NAACP failed to get a law passed banning lynchings, the publicity gained led to a great reduction in the number of lynchings being carried out.

# Integration or separation?

## Learning objectives

In this chapter you will learn about:

- principles of integration: e.g. W. E. B. Du Bois
- principles of separation: e.g. Marcus Garvey.

Black Americans reacted differently to racism. Some decided to work for greater **integration**. As American citizens, they should have the same rights and opportunities as white Americans. They didn't. So they campaigned for these rights. In 1905, the Niagara Movement was set up, to speak up for the rights of black people. It was followed, in 1909, by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other, more local, groups. **Separatist** black Americans thought integration was impossible. It was better for black people to live in separate communities.

## W. E. B. Du Bois 1868–1963

W. E. B. Du Bois helped to set up the Niagara Movement and the NAACP. He also set up and edited a monthly magazine for the NAACP – *Crisis*. He was born in the North and took degrees at Nashville and Harvard before settling to teach at Atlanta University. In 1909 he left the university to work for the NAACP as Director of Publicity and Research. He worked for integration and the rights of black Americans. He travelled widely, speaking on integration and studying the way other countries ran their societies. In 1961 he became a communist and moved to Ghana, Africa, where he spent the last years of his life.

We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil and social; and until we get these rights we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America. The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone but for all true Americans. It is a fight for ideals, lest this, our common fatherland, false to its founding, become in truth the land of the thief and the home of the slave.

**Source B:** *The aims of the Niagara Movement, set up in 1905.*

## Did you know?

In 1923, Du Bois went to Liberia as a US 'special ambassador' for the inauguration of Liberia's president. After this, he tried to persuade companies and the US government to give Liberia aid and develop its industry. In the early 1920s Marcus Garvey became interested in Liberia. He said he hoped to move the UNIA there to make it a base to defend black interests worldwide. Many Liberians thought he wanted to build a black empire in Africa, from Liberia, with himself as emperor.

**Source A:** *A photograph of Du Bois (standing at the back) photographed in the Crisis office, in about 1910.*



## Marcus Garvey 1887–1940

Marcus Garvey was born in Jamaica, studied in England, then returned to Jamaica in 1914 to set up the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). He moved to the USA in 1916. The UNIA wanted an end to racism, just like the NAACP. But Garvey was a **separatist**. He said whites ran all aspects of life in the USA and other countries and black people would always feel second-rate trying to live in an integrated way. He said he believed in Europe for the Europeans, Asia for the Asians and Africa for the Africans – all Africans who had been scattered by slavery. He set up an African Orthodox Church (a Christian Church with black images of God and the holy family). Some people laughed at his ideas, but he had a huge following, especially among ordinary people. He used donations to help black people set up their own businesses in black areas of US cities.

Garvey began a Back to Africa campaign, with Liberia (a country set up in 1817 as a new country for black colonists from the USA) as the country to settle in. In 1919 he set up the Black Star Line to take black people to Liberia. He funded it with \$10,000 collected from his followers. The ships did make several trips to Liberia and back. However, they were in bad condition and the company shut down in 1922. In 1923 Garvey was arrested for fraud and he was deported to Jamaica in 1927.

## Garvey and Du Bois

At first, Du Bois was supportive of Garvey's ideas. He said that, while he believed in integration, he also believed that people should be allowed to choose separation. In 1921, he wrote in *Crisis* that Garvey was an inspiring leader, with some good ideas, but that he should be careful how he put them into practice. When Garvey was accused of fraud, he withdrew his support.



**Source C:** Marcus Garvey, photographed in Harlem, New York, in August 1922 when he was at the height of his popularity.

## Activities

- 1 Write, in your own words, definitions of 'integration' and 'separation'.
- 2 Use Source B to write two slogans for the Niagara campaign: one to show their aims and another to show why they see their fight as a fight for all Americans.
- 3 **a** Does Source C support the fear of some Liberians mentioned in the Did you know box? Explain your answer.  
**b** Does this mean that Garvey really was empire-building?