

**Egypt and Egyptology in the pan-African discourse of  
Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey**

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**Abstract:** Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey argued for the Africanity of ancient Nile Valley cultures, in direct opposition to some academics. In early 20<sup>th</sup>-century United States, incorrect narratives alleged that Africa had no history. The Garveys, and other Black intellectuals, looked to the Nile Valley to show the absurdity of that claim. The pan-Africanism of Garveyism instilled pride in African descended communities and united them against colonial structures. Pan-Africanism factored strongly in President Gamal Abdel Nasser's conception of the modern nation-state of Egypt. Egyptian scholars from a variety of fields, including Nile Valley studies, continue to understand ancient Egypt as part of a network of African cultures.

**Keywords:** Amy Jacques Garvey, Marcus Garvey, Gamal Abdel Nasser, pan-Africanism, Egyptology, Egypt

**Abstract:** Amy Jacques Garvey et Marcus Garvey ont plaidé pour l'africanité des anciennes cultures de la vallée du Nil, en opposition directe avec certains universitaires. Au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle aux États-Unis, des récits incorrects alléguaient que l'Afrique n'avait pas d'histoire. Les Garveys et d'autres intellectuels noirs se sont tournés vers la vallée du Nil pour montrer l'absurdité de cette affirmation. Le panafricanisme du Garveyisme a inspiré la fierté des communautés d'ascendance africaine et les a unies contre les structures coloniales. Le panafricanisme a joué un rôle important dans la conception du président Gamal Abdel Nasser de l'État-nation moderne de l'Égypte. Les érudits égyptiens de divers domaines, y compris les études sur la vallée du Nil, continuent de comprendre l'Égypte ancienne comme faisant partie d'un réseau de cultures africaines.

**Keywords:** Amy Jacques Garvey, Marcus Garvey, Gamal Abdel Nasser, panafricanisme, égyptologie, Égypte

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In July 1926, when Amy Jacques Garvey wanted to talk about African history, she turned to a newly discovered piece of evidence: the gold mask of Tutankhamun that had been unearthed only nine months earlier (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Howard Carter's team had first discovered Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings in November 1922. The story of the young king and the trove of artifacts that the excavation turned up caused an international sensation. Because of the amount of artifacts contained in the tomb and the laborious process of carefully removing and recording them, the king's coffin was not opened until three years after archaeologists first entered the tomb. Carter's journal entry for Wednesday, October 28, 1925 describes the moment that he opened the final of four nested coffins, revealing, "a very neatly wrapped mummy of the young king, with golden mask of sad but tranquil expression, symbolizing Osiris. The similitude of the youthful Tut.Ankh.Amen, until now known only by name, amid that sepulchral silence, made us realize the past" (Carter, 1925–1926). Carter's words read like a fantasy, with the silence of the tomb, the previously unknown king, and a contemporary present that only at that moment comes into contact with the king's past. Amy Jacques Garvey tapped into something much more vibrant and alive in her contemporary present: a realization of the past that directly affected people in the present. She saw in scholarly discussions of Tutankhamun evidence of Egyptology's Western, Eurocentric, and colonialist underpinnings, and she instead located there a basis for pride in African history.



Fig. 1 Amy Jacques Garvey opened her essay on the Africinity of Egypt with a discussion of this photograph of Tutankhamun's mask, published in *The New York Times* on July 25, 1926

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Egypt's multifaceted role on the world stage has resulted in it frequently balancing competing interests. This liminality has been described as a result of Western powers having "disembod[ied] Egypt's geography. . . . as Europeans made it an artificial extension of Europe, a material passage to Arab and African frontiers. Consequently, Egypt, not only Cairo, became a colonized/Europeanized geography, disembedded from its Africanness" (Kosba, 2021, p. 8). The dislodging of Egypt and its people, both ancient and modern, from Africanness lies at the core of the issues addressed in this paper. The discipline of Egyptology participated in and contributed to that dislocation. This paper addresses the ways in which Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey recognized Egyptology's role in this process and wrote critiques of it, as well as counterarguments that resituated ancient Nile Valley cultures in their African contexts.

### **Amy Jacques Garvey**

Amy Jacques Garvey was the second wife of the social activist and businessman Marcus Garvey. Amy Jacques and Marcus Garvey were born in Jamaica and came separately to the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, Amy for health-related reasons and Marcus for economic opportunity (Taylor, 2002, pp. 16–17). In Jamaica, Garvey had founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, whose membership spanned the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, and Africa, and whose goal was to instill a sense of pride in Black people linked to their identity and to help Black communities thrive. He was a vocal advocate of the idea that African people, on the continent and in the diaspora, should ban together for mutual benefit (for a recent discussion of a particular example of cultural complexity in Africa, see Malki, 2017). While living in the United States, Marcus Garvey started a newspaper, two international shipping lines, and an association of factories.

Initially, Amy Jacques Garvey was one of Garvey's private secretaries. After their marriage, she regularly wrote for the newspaper, gave public lectures, and took a leadership role in the organization, especially during the three years when her husband was incarcerated in a federal penitentiary on charges of mail fraud (on the circumstances surrounding his incarceration, see Pierce, 2016). During that time, Amy Jacques Garvey collected and edited some of Marcus Garvey's writing and published them in two volumes, in 1923 and 1925. Her role transitioned from her early days as his secretary, where she was "perpetuating her husband's ideas" to later

being the person responsible for “shaping and disseminating the philosophy of Garveyism” (Taylor, 2002, p. 3, pp. 46–47). She clearly delineates her role as keeper of Garveyism in the titles of the volumes she compiled: *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. Her point in publishing his speeches and newspaper articles was to enable readers to learn about Garveyism directly from the source, as opposed to hearing secondhand, usually disparaging, reports (M. Garvey, 1923/1967, pp. viii, xi; M. Garvey 1923/1978, preface p. 1). Due to the ephemeral nature of newspapers, much of Marcus Garvey’s philosophy would have been unavailable to later audiences without her efforts. Only in recent years have issues of *The Negro World* been accessible online in digitized format, thanks to the efforts of Harlem’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

### **The mask of Tutankhamun**

A large part of Garveyism was encouraging a pride in people of African descent that had been long denied by racist societies. One way this was achieved was to educate people about African history and culture, which at that time was virtually unknown in the United States. Rather, for decades in the United States, an incorrect and dehumanizing strain of thought perpetrated the idea that Africa had no history and that as a result people of African descent did not share in the human experience of history. Because the history of ancient Egypt was widely and popularly known, it offered a simple corrective to that misinformed view. In July 1926, Amy Jacques Garvey seized on that corrective.

In an article she wrote for *The Negro World*, Amy Jacques Garvey referenced the mask of Tutankhamun as a relic of African history. The gold mask featuring the head of the king wearing a striped royal headdress has become such a famous image that it may be difficult for us to put ourselves in the shoes of people in her day. Tutankhamun’s mask had been discovered just nine months prior to the publication of her article. The artifacts that were slowly extracted from the tomb since its discovery in 1922 provided the public with a royal procession of sorts. *The Negro World* regularly reported on recently removed objects, as well as the opinions of all sorts of scholars on topics related to the artifacts themselves and the culture in general (e.g., Bust of Pharaoh’s Wife, 1923). The images of the mask published in *The New York Times* were perhaps the first glimpse that many members of the public had of this now ubiquitous object. In *The Negro World*, Amy Jacques Garvey described the mask according to its phenotype, or observable

physical characteristics. Phenotype was, and some would say still is, the major determinant of one's race, which in turn defines nearly every other aspect of a person's life in the United States.

### **Racial categorization in the United States**

In the United States, skin color was and is a primary determinant of assigning race to people. Other physical factors, such as hair color and texture and width of the nose, contributed to that decision. Some people of African descent who had lighter skin color or who possessed other attributes determined to be "white" might "pass" as white in order to have access to the economic and social benefits that were awarded to white people and were denied of people deemed not white. For example, some of Amy Jacques Garvey's relatives through her mother were passing in the United States. So when she moved to New York in 1917, she could not rely on them for social or economic support lest her presence in their lives force them to admit that they were not completely white and were instead, by the legal and cultural norms of the day, "Negro" (Taylor, 2002, pp. 17–19). Egyptians might similarly "pass." An Egyptian person who attended Florida State University in the late 1950s described her experience with being granted the ability to pass: "While affiliation with a 'white' university endowed Egyptian students with this honorary racial status, it did not always shield us from the racism of the surrounding community" (Morsy, 1996, p. 184).

The racial identity of the ancient Egyptians within the carefully delineated colorized classifications of the United States was frequently addressed on the pages of *The Negro World*. A February 1923 article concludes that because of the brownish-yellow color of statues removed from Tutankhamun's tomb "there was a decided strain of Negro blood in the ancient Egyptians, who were a mixed race, some with one-fourth Negro, others one-half Negro, others three-fourths Negro, others seven-eighths Negro. According to the modern view of one drop of Negro blood claiming everything it touches, the Egyptians were Negroes" (Were the Egyptians, 1923). The specificity of language here that quantifies a so-called "measurement" of African ancestry was prevalent in US society at that time (for more, see Kendi, 2016; Williams, 2018).

For decades, the categories that classified people's race on the United States census designated a person's African ancestry in terms of amounts, as if heritage could be counted by means of fractions of ancestors' physical features. The terms that the US census used changed over time and reflected the prevalent conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in society in the

United States. For example, in 1890, certain terms were used to classify people that are no longer used and are considered offensive. By 1920, many of those terms had fallen out of official census use. At the next census, in 1930, the racial categories were informed by a new arbitrary way of categorizing people: the “one-drop rule” (hypodescent). According to that “rule,” a person having multiple ethnic or racial identities was automatically assigned to the group perceived to have the lower status. The 1930 US census classified Black people according to the one-drop rule, as seen in the instructions for census-takers: “A person of mixed white and Negro blood should be returned [classified] as a Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood. Both black and mulatto persons are to be returned as Negroes, without distinction. A person of mixed Indian [Native American] and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro, unless the Indian blood predominates and the status of an Indian is generally accepted in the community” (Nobles, 2000, p. 72, also pp. 44, 58). From these instructions, we see that the government assigned official racial status according to regulations that were both rigid (“no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood”) and nonsensical (For starters, why should a person “of mixed . . . blood” be classified one way versus the other?). Census workers were given the authority to determine a person’s race regardless of one’s self-identification.

### **The importance of history**

Other news outlets also considered the racial identity of the ancient Egyptians. In March 1923, *The Negro World* reported on a story in *The Boston Globe* that posed the question of the ancient Egyptians’ racial heritage to three scholars: anthropologist Alexander Francis Chamberlain, historian George Rawlinson, and biologist Thomas Henry Huxley (Was King Tut, 1923). Answers ranged from “in some respects,” to “true Egyptian . . . with perhaps an admixture of more Southern blood,” to “an unknown quantity . . . neither a white nor a black race.” The following week’s issue ran a follow-up from *The Boston Globe* that noted the opinion of Flinders Petrie, whose racist and eugenicist views about both the ancient people of the Nile Valley and the modern people of Egypt are now well known in Egyptology (Challis, 2013). Amy Jacques Garvey directly countered the claims of these academics in her analysis of the gold mask. In her estimation, given the obviousness of the racializing characteristics visible on the mask, “the exponents of white superiority cannot claim him as their own, [so] they make no comment as to his racial stock” (A. J. Garvey, 1926).

Amy Jacques Garvey lingers not only on the racialized identity of the Egyptian king, but she also points to the artifacts found in tombs like his, the tombs of “rulers of Egyptian Africa,” as evidence of the “culture and progress” of Egypt and of the advancement of that African culture at a time when European societies were not as advanced. With that evidence, she constructs for readers a message of hope, describing a cyclical rotation of world cultures, where those that were once great fall and others rise up to become great. She predicts that Africa will again become “the center of civilization” (A. J. Garvey, 1926).

Like other Black intellectuals in the United States who brought the history of Africa to public attention, Amy Jacques Garvey drew on historical sources to make her arguments. Black intellectuals were largely excluded from the predominantly white academic system of higher education in the United States. Two results of this exclusion are pertinent to this discussion. One is that white writers of history omitted Black people from and misrepresented their roles in historical events. Carter Woodson’s book *The Mis-education of the Negro* (1933/2005) corrected shortcomings in the way that African-descended people’s history and culture was taught in the United States. Many of the essays in his book he had earlier published on the pages of *The Negro World* (Martin, 1983/1985, pp. 104–105). The second result is that white academics were unaware of most intellectual work occurring in African-descended communities in the United States. But those Black intellectuals were knowledgeable about the writings and opinions of white intellectuals, and they drew on their published writings to construct their own arguments. For example, African American editor, novelist, singer, and playwright, Pauline Hopkins, brought the history of Africa to public attention in a novel she published in 1902. Her novel, *Of One Blood*, borrows directly from history books, travelogues, and novels and uses those sources to teach readers about the historicity of African cultures in the Nile Valley (Davies, 2021).

Similarly, Amy Jacques Garvey engaged with the academics of her time and constructed arguments against the incorrect theories that Africa had no history. In November 1927, she quotes William Johnson Sollas, a British academic and author of a book on early hominids (A. J. Garvey, 1927, November; for another example of her research, see A. J. Garvey, 1927, May). Sollas saw human history as comprised of waves of migration and conquest where “more advanced” population groups replaced “less advanced” population groups, either annihilating them or driving them to the margins of the environment (Sommer, 2005). Amy Jacques Garvey criticized Sollas’s view, which was rooted in the white Western imperialistic world in which he

operated. Her critique, which called attention to this type of racist discourse that circulated in some scientific circles at that time, still resonates today. In two recent works, anthropologist Jonathan Marks denounced the exact same sentiments of Sollas (Marks, 2017a, p. 38; 2017b, p. 260).

Because many of Amy Jacques Garvey's writings for *The Negro World* were geared specifically toward women, she wrote about women's educational needs, and the ancient Nile Valley cultures were a part of that education. She engaged with academic arguments, calling out the racism and inaccurate arguments that she saw in white scholars. She also showed the power and relevance of history to Black people in the United States who at that time were threatened both with physical violence and with fewer social and economic advantages than other people. She sought to bring unity to the wide diversity of African-descended people in the United States who were classified in constantly varying and denigrating ways (Taylor, 2002, pp. 69–70). In this, she echoed the message of Garveyism.

### **Marcus Garvey**

Marcus Garvey arrived in the United States in 1916 after having lived and worked in a variety of countries. He had founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) a few years prior in Jamaica. After traveling through the United States, he settled in New York, established a branch of the UNIA there, and in 1918 founded *The Negro World*, a weekly publication that ran for fifteen years.

With the masthead of *The Negro World*, Marcus Garvey definitively linked his readership with ancient Nile Valley cultures. Front and center was the head of a man wearing the *nemes* headdress of an Egyptian king (fig. 2). *The Negro World* declared itself “A Newspaper Devoted Solely to the Interests of the Negro Race.” With this masthead, Garvey applied the term “Negro” to the ancient Nile cultures, aligning them within the world of segregation based on skin color that pervaded the United States at that time. No doubt in Garvey's day, the vast majority of people from the Nile Valley, whether ancient or modern, would have similarly been assigned to that category unless they were able to and chose to “pass” as white. For example, the Egyptian person mentioned above who lived in the southern United States in the 1950s and '60s was often judged to be Black or “Negro” based on the types of injustices she experienced, including being told to sit at the back of a bus and being refused service in white-only restaurants (Morsy, 1996,

pp. 184–185). *The Negro World*'s reading audience were people with a range of darker skin tones and also a range of language fluency. Sections of every issue were written in Spanish for “the advancement of the Negro [Black] race” (*el adelanto de la raza negra*). The masthead united all members of this diverse, multicultural group of “Negro” people with a message of solidarity printed on a banner that visually ties together the figures: “One God, One Aim, One Destiny.”



Fig. 2 Masthead of *The Negro World*

Using imagery in the masthead to identify the ancient Nile Valley cultures with a Black readership was not a unique move. In November 1911, after W. E. B. Du Bois had become editor of *The Crisis*, he had its masthead incorporate similar iconography (Davies, in press, Figure 2). *The Crisis* depicted the head of a man wearing the *nemes* headdress and with closely drawn lines on his face and neck indicating that his skin is of a dark color. The slogan underneath “The Record of the Darker Races” stated, as *The Negro World* did, that the people of that ancient culture would be—in the colorizing system of the United States—one and the same as the readers. *The Crisis* used that masthead frequently in 1911 and 1912 and then only sporadically through 1914. By the time Garvey started *The Negro World* in 1918, *The Crisis* had ceased using imagery in its masthead.

The masthead was not the only way that Marcus Garvey engaged with ancient Nile Valley cultures. As mentioned above, *The Negro World* frequently ran articles addressing those cultures, especially after the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb in November 1922.<sup>3</sup> Some of the articles addressed the race of the ancient Egyptians in general or Tutankhamun specifically. These discussions were happening alongside broader questions of race and Africa that also occurred on the pages of *The Negro World*. The discussions often centered on the so-called one-drop rule, described above, that was—and is still largely—the way that people in the United

<sup>3</sup> Given the Jamaican heritage of Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey, it is especially relevant to mention the recent work by Adodo (2021) on Afrocentric translation, which analyzes Egyptian and Jamaican languages.

States conceived of racializing identifications.

### **“Who, and What is a Negro?”**

Garvey’s editorial in January 1923 posed the question “Who, and what is a Negro?” in response to a statement by the French government claiming that the Moroccans and Algerians who were serving in the French military should not be considered “Negroes” (M. Garvey, 1925/1967, pp. 2:18–21). He argued that the term was not universally used to refer to people with darker skin tones, as the official ideology in the United States, seen in the census, might pretend (Jackson Lears, 1985; also Drake, 1987/1991, pp. 17–18). Instead, the dominant white society might choose to remove from that category particular population groups with darker skin tones. Marcus Garvey determined that the people removed from the category were those who had done things that the white culture in power viewed as worthwhile. “A Negro is a person of dark complexion or race, who has not accomplished anything and to whom others are not obligated for any useful service” (M. Garvey, 1923, January 20). In the context of the statement about Moroccan and Algerian soldiers serving under the French, Garvey addressed the question of why the French would claim that those soldiers were “not Negro.” Why? Because those soldiers had done something that white society saw as useful.

Marcus Garvey called out those who bent the racializing rules, effectively breaking the code of the one-drop rule to bring certain population groups deemed “desirable” into the realm of “whiteness.” Academics were among the people criticized on the pages of *The Negro World*:

It is interesting to note . . . that American anthropologists like Franz Boas and Dr. Clark Wissler are trying to say that the Moroccans are not really Negroes, but “Negroid,” being but “a blend of Arab, Jew and Berber.” . . . Surely people—dark-skinned people—who are 50 per cent Negroid are, if not Negroes, what, then, are they? We are not begging the question. It is the white race that legislates that one drop of black blood makes a man a Negro. It is this same white race that is contradicting itself when it says that “50 per cent Negroid” does not make “Negro.” This decision, come to think of it, might result in a complete revolution of the statutes of the South. It might put a half-million “blacks” on the other side of the fence. Let us hope so! (Maynard Keynes was right, 1923)

Articles like this one noted the divisiveness of racializing terms, that the term “Negro” was not invoked by white voices in a positive way. The term was meant to denigrate a group, which is

why when white voices wanted to remove or elevate certain subsets of that population, the populations became “Negroid,” essentially “Negro-like,” but no longer “Negro.”

A major theme of Garveyism was reclaiming the word “Negro” as a label of pride. The practice of removing a racializing label from a group of people and making them “white” in the United States has been documented with regard to many populations (e.g., Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1999; Roediger, 2005; also Drake, 1987/1991, p. xx). Marcus Garvey refused to allow groups that had been included under the umbrella of “Negro” to be removed from its purview by white interests.

Let us not be flattered by anthropologists and statesmen who from time to time because of our successes here, there or anywhere try to make out that we are no longer members of the Negro race. If we were Negroes when we were down under the heel of oppression then we will be Negroes when we are up and liberated from such thralldom. . . . We are tired of being shunted and shifted here, there and everywhere to please the fancy and change of mind of anthropologists and statesmen. When it is to their interest they make us Negroes or something else, but if we were Negroes yesterday surely we are satisfied to be Negroes today. (M. Garvey, 1923, January 20)

Marcus Garvey realized that white voices completely controlled the application of racializing terms to different population groups. He encouraged readers to resist the whims of white-dominated culture that was appropriating groups of people whom that culture had formerly excluded.

### **The compilation of the essay**

When Amy Jacques Garvey compiled the second volume of *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, she included an essay entitled “Who and What is a Negro?” The essay was sourced from multiple editorials. The bulk of the material appeared in Marcus Garvey’s editorial of January 20, 1923, discussed above.<sup>4</sup> The essay’s two paragraphs that contain Garvey’s thoughts on scholars’ discussions of ancient Nile Valley cultures appeared in print later that

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<sup>4</sup> The first edition of the book (1925) dates the essay to January 16, 1923, and most of the material in the essay appeared in Marcus Garvey’s editorial of January 20, 1923. Subsequent editions of the book push ahead the date of the essay by a few months, to April 16, 1923, perhaps because two of the paragraphs included in the essay in *Philosophy and Opinions* appeared in print in the spring of 1923, each paragraph in a separate issue. In M. Garvey (2004), the piece is dated April 23, 1923.

spring.

The first of the two paragraphs was printed in May under the heading “The Things in History.” That piece appeared just days after the second of two free lectures offered in Harlem by Egyptologist Lorenzo Dow Covington (M. Garvey, 1923, May 5). Covington’s lectures were advertised in *The Negro World* in this way: “Was Tut-an-akh-Amen a Negro? Learn the truth about the ancient Egyptians” (King Tut, 1923). The first lecture disappointed journalist John E. Bruce who reported on it the following week. Covington’s inability to correctly name people and places left knowledgeable audience members in doubt about his Egyptological credentials. Furthermore, whenever he was asked about “to what ethnic stock the Egyptians belonged,” he “cleverly and skillfully avoided and evaded a direct answer” (Bruce, 1923). Bruce wrote this about Egyptologists: “The fruitful imagination of the modern Egyptologist, who can see nothing great in the black man, but finds unlimited wisdom in the white man, delights to robe all ancient Egypt in white” (Bruce, 1923).

The second paragraph contains Garvey’s criticism of US professor of Egyptology, George Reisner. Parts of that paragraph were sourced from an article originally reported through the Pacific News Bureau and republished in *The Negro World* in April (Ethiopians, 1923). Other parts of the paragraph perhaps derive from speeches of Garvey’s. His writing style often contained rhetorical flourishes reminiscent of his style of public speaking. The second paragraph contains such a sentence, beginning “Imagine a dark colored man,” which will be discussed below (M. Garvey, 2004, pp. 119–122).

### **Marcus Garvey on George Reisner**

The Egyptological subject of Marcus Garvey’s writing in the spring of 1923 was Harvard University professor George Reisner (for more on Reisner, see Manuelian, in press). Reisner received his undergraduate degree at Harvard and subsequently earned a Ph.D. there in 1893, a few years after W. E. B. Du Bois received his undergraduate degree there. In 1896, Reisner was hired as an instructor at Harvard, something that would not have been possible for Du Bois, being a Black man, and Reisner spent the later part of his career employed there. When Marcus Garvey criticized Reisner’s views, in early 1923, Harvard had frequently been in the news because of a racist decision made by the administration. Caving to the white supremacist attitudes of Harvard-related individuals, college president A. Lawrence Lowell barred Black

students from living in the first-year dormitories with white students (e.g., Bowser, 1923). Because of this injustice, the connection between George Reisner and Harvard was especially significant for Garvey (Ethiopians, 1923).

Marcus Garvey's Egyptological critique revolved around a question at the forefront of the minds of both scholars and interested members of the public. Formulated according to the language of the day, the question centered on whether the ancient Egyptians in general, or Tutankhamun specifically, were "Negroes." As Garvey recognized in his writings quoted above, scholars and thinkers fluctuated on who comprised the group of humans they were calling "Negro." Reisner was no different. For example, in 1910, Reisner felt that the predynastic burials in Egypt contained the same population group as a particular cemetery in Nubia because of similar artifacts found in both sets of burials. "In other words, at the earliest period in which human remains have been recovered, Egypt and Lower Nubia appear to have formed culturally and racially one land" (Reisner, 1910, p. 319). His subsequent writing does not evidence such unity. For example, an Egyptian statue head is referred to as "Negro," but then Nubians are referred to as "not negro." A newspaper reports Reisner saying that a particular piece of Dynasty 4 statuary found at Giza depicted "the wife of the prince [who] is, curiously enough, of a distinctly negroid type. The head is, I believe, the earliest known portrait of a Negro" (*The Crisis*, 1915, p. 229).<sup>5</sup> In a 1923 publication of his excavations in Kush, Reisner writes, "The Nubian race was negroid, but not negro" (Reisner, 1923, p. 8; also Crowfoot, 1924, p. 113). Reisner incorrectly, though not surprisingly, interpreted the results of his excavation work through the racializing lens of the early twentieth century United States. Included in his mistaken views were contemporary African-descended people, as evidenced by his comment to his African American student, Egyptologist William Leo Hansberry: "I do not believe that Negroes founded these great civilizations. You are a brilliant student Hansberry, but you are a product of our civilization" (Keita, 2000, p. 100). Marcus Garvey's clear understanding of how the hegemonic culture used the term "Negro" is repeated here when Hansberry, "a brilliant student" who is useful to his white professor in the context of a college classroom, is contrasted with "Negroes" whom Reisner, because of his bigotry, cannot accept as originators of ancient Nile Valley cultures (for more, see Kingstone, 2019; Hefny, 2018).

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Der Manuelian kindly informed me that the statuary mentioned here is a reserve head from Giza (MFA 14.719), and he recognized that the quote is taken from Reisner (1915, p. 32).

In his discussion of the ancient history of the Nile Valley, Garvey shows how the concept of race is used to divide groups. He described Nile Valley history as being the history of people with darker skin tones whose history has been taken from them and appropriated by white people as their own history. The two-paragraph section “Negroes Robbed of Their History” begins, “The white world has always tried to rob and discredit us of our history. They tell us that Tut-Ankh-Amen . . . was not a Negro, that the ancient civilization of Egypt and the Pharaohs was not of our race, but that does not make the truth unreal” (M. Garvey, 1925/1967, p. 2:19). Garvey goes on, discussing the history of ancient Egypt and ancient Greece and Rome. He then calls out George Reisner, although a typographical error renders his name as Kersnor, for his opinions on the “Ethiopians.” At that time, Ethiopia referred to the southern part of modern Egypt and northern Sudan, following the Greek historian Herodotus who used that term to refer to that area.

Garvey wrote that Reisner “after discussing the genius of the Ethiopians [i.e., the ancient people of modern Sudan] and their high culture . . . declared the Ethiopians were not African Negroes. He described them as dark colored races . . . showing a mixture of black blood” (M. Garvey, 1925/1967, p. 2:19). Then Garvey interjects a thought that cuts to the heart of the racializing labels common in the United States: “Imagine a dark colored man in middle Africa being anything else but a Negro” (M. Garvey, 1925/1967, 2:19). His comment again calls attention to use of the term “Negro” by the dominant white culture, here represented by Egyptologist George Reisner.

Reisner could not say that the ancient people of Sudan had not accomplished something. His excavations continually produced proof of their accomplishments from their tombs, temples, and settlement sites and in the beautiful artifacts admired by collectors and museum-going crowds. They were “useful” to him in his work as an archaeologist. But Reisner also could not admit that those ancient people were of the same race as the Black people whom Reisner knew and saw in the United States. So he had to “remove” those ancient people from the category of “Negro” and assign them a different identity. This is where Reisner and others applied the idea of a “mixture” of Black and white that is communicated through the label “negroid.” Like other Egyptologists had done before him, Reisner willfully separated the ancient people of the Nile Valley from Africa and denied that their history was related to people of African descent in the United States.

Marcus Garvey pointed out the discrepancy in the formula of assigning different

racializing terms to groups of people. When a person designated by the society of his day as “Negro” did something deemed worthwhile to the dominant white culture—such as fight on behalf of a Western power, as Moroccan and Algerian soldiers did, or produce great works of art and architecture, as did the people of ancient Sudan—then they were no longer considered “Negro.” They would then be edged closer to “whiteness” so that a white Western culture could lay claim to and make use of their accomplishments. Garvey challenged these views propagated by scholars, and he restored the historical past of the Nile Valley to African descended people.

### **Maud Cuney Hare**

Marcus Garvey’s challenge to the narrative that Nile Valley cultures were part of African history was not the first or the only such challenge. Since the nineteenth century, African American intellectuals had been challenging the incorrect view that Africa had no history (e.g., Beatty & Davies, in press). For example, in 1912, African American historian Leila Amos Pendleton wrote, “Some historians tell us very plainly that the Egyptians were not Africans at all and so Negroes need not be proud of what they did” (Pendleton, 1912, p. 15). She and other Black thought leaders continually challenged that sentiment in their efforts to overturn incorrect and racist ideas.

Another person who objected to Reisner’s description of the ancient people of Egypt and Nubia was Bostonian Maud Cuney Hare. Maud Cuney Hare was a musician and writer and the former fiancée of the Black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois (Du Bois, 2001, p. 10). In April 1925, she attended a lecture of George Reisner’s where he repeated the claim that Garvey had rejected. She recounted the event in a letter to Du Bois, expressing her anger over Reisner’s statements in clear terms. She said that Reisner claimed that the Ethiopians “were not at all Negro Africans, and then he proceeded to show a statue on the screen of a Negro Prince and Princess. Evidently, the Negro royalty had no children!” (Cuney-Hare, 1925)

Maud Cuney Hare’s letter points out the racism in Reisner’s interpretation of the ancient people of the southern Nile Valley (“Ethiopian”). Her surprise and outrage, which echoes Garvey’s exclamation about “a dark colored man in middle Africa,” shows how ludicrous she views Reisner’s attempt to claim that those people were not—in modern terminology—Black people. Egyptological opinions like Reisner’s were not based on facts but rather were falsehoods based on nothing except an ideology of white supremacy. Because intellectuals like Maud Cuney Hare and Marcus Garvey were Black, their opinions alone were not enough. Unlike their white

counterparts, they could not just have baseless opinions. Instead, Black scholars communicated their responses in the scientific language of the dominant white culture.

Reisner was seemingly unaware that his claims about the identity of the ancient people were at odds with his evidence. Reisner was among the first archaeologists working in the Nile Valley, along with Flinders Petrie, to use scientific method in the field. But as scientifically minded as Reisner's archaeological methods were, he was so embedded in a white Western culture that when he stated that the ancient people of these complex societies that produced such great works of art and architecture were not—as Maud Cuney Hare wrote—“Negro Africans,” he did not realize that the images of the ancient people that he showed to his audiences appeared to belie his very own argument.

Maud Cuney Hare recounted the incident to Du Bois because she knew of Du Bois's interest in educating people in the United States about the history of Africa. Amy Jacques and Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Leila Amos Pendleton, and Pauline Hopkins wrote about the ancient histories of Africa. Except for Du Bois, those authors did not write for a white Western academic audience. Nonetheless, they all directly addressed the scholarly theories of their day, which largely derived from white Western academics. They found sources to bolster their arguments and called out those who, like George Reisner, made arguments that were factually incorrect and mired in modern racist terminology. In doing so, they educated their readers about the nonsensical statements being made about race in academic circles and addressed the statements' absurdities with reasoning and evidence-based arguments.

### **Marcus Garvey's pan-Africanism**

Following in the tradition of the historian Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey would turn to the longevity of cultures in Africa to argue for the humanity of African descended people and to argue for the independence of colonized people in Africa. “Yes, honest students of history can recall the day when Egypt, Ethiopia and Timbuctoo towered in their civilizations, towered above Europe, towered above Asia” (M. Garvey, 1923/1967, p. 1:57) Like many other African descended scholars, he turned to the Bible to show that Africans, too, were included in the vision of a Christian God who would bring divinely ordained leaders from Africa (M. Garvey, 1923/1967, pp. 1:61, 73). He predicted that change rooted in Africa would alter the colonialist landscape and would reinstate a glorious present for Africans similar to their impressive past (M.

Garvey, 1923/1967, pp. 1:39–40; 1925/1967, 2:60–61, 107, 119, 324–326). Garveyism took the very aspect that white Western societies denigrated—Africanity—and made it a point of pride. As Brazilian intellectual Abdias do Nascimento put it, even in the face of domination and oppression, the “rejection of Africa . . . [helps] to maintain the Black nation as a community above and beyond difficulties in time and space” (Nascimento, 1980, p. 142).

Garvey’s focus was not limited to Africa’s history. He also wrote about the struggle for independence in modern Egypt, no doubt learned firsthand from his mentor, the Egyptian Dusé Mohamed Ali. In London, Ali promoted pan-Africanism through the *African Times and Orient Review*, his influential journal that grew out of the Universal Races Congress, where, incidentally, Egyptologist Flinders Petrie and W. E. B. Du Bois met one another (Ewing, 2014, p. 39). When Marcus Garvey lived in London, many Egyptians were championing independence from the United Kingdom. Through his association with Ali and by living and working among a diverse African descended community in London, Garvey developed an anti-colonialist stance (M. Garvey, 1923/1967, p. xiii). Along with Edward Blyden and Booker T. Washington, Ali was a key influence on Garvey’s ideas of pan-Africanism and his efforts to determine ways to govern that would benefit Black people (Ewing, 2014, pp. 38–41).

Marcus Garvey’s championing of the rights of contemporary Africans to have self-rule was an unwelcome stance in the eyes of white Western colonial powers and their allies. Western powers’ refusal to recognize such claims can be seen in US President Theodore Roosevelt’s expression of disdain for the “uncivilized Egyptians” who wanted independence (Grant, 2008, p. 39). Garvey took up the Egyptians’ cause. “The war of 1914–18 has created a new sentiment throughout the world. Once upon a time weaker peoples were afraid of expressing themselves, of giving vent to their feelings, but today no oppressed race or nation is afraid of speaking out in the cause of liberty. Egypt has spoken . . . Egypt is free” (M. Garvey, 1923/1967, p. 1:32). Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey focused on both historical and modern populations because they knew that Western colonial powers applied the modern conception of race to both ancient and modern contexts to divide population groups for the benefit of the Western system.

Racializing identification was one way that white Western powers separated Egypt from Africa. Mahmood Mamdani, a Ugandan anthropologist, discusses colonialism’s “political legacy,” that is, the political identities that took shape under and as a result of colonialism and continue today to wield power in areas that have thrown off colonial powers (Mamdani, 2001, p.

20). Certain physical markers, as outlined above, are commonly attributed to different “races,” but on a biological level, those differences are not substantive enough to warrant the separation that the word “race” connotes in a scientific context. All humans belong to the same subspecies, and “modern human genetic variation is not structured into phylogenetic subspecies (‘races’)” (Keita et al., 2004, S18). On a socio-cultural level, however, race has been “animated” and has come to acquire meaning because “the law breathed political life” into it (Mamdani, 2001, pp. 20–22).<sup>6</sup> As a socially constructed reality, race may change depending on the social environment that a person inhabits.

Egyptian anthropologist Soheir Morsy described how racializing differences factored into the Egyptian struggle against Turkish colonial powers. When Turkish heritage was valued socially over Egyptian heritage, physical standards of beauty aligned with so-called Turkish attributes, such as lighter skin tone. Despite Egyptian opposition to the devaluing of their heritage, nonetheless “many Egyptians themselves came to aspire and acquiesce to the culture of the hegemonic groups, sometimes referring to indigenous products and customs by contemptuous terms such as *baladi*, which literally means ‘my country’” (Morsy, 1996, p. 180). In denigrating Egyptian goods and identity, the disempowered segment of the population, in this case Egyptians, reinforced their own lack of empowerment even while simultaneously trying to defy it.

In the case of ancient Nile cultures, some scholars invoked the concept of race to separate the ancient culture from its African context. In Garvey’s day, ancient Egyptian culture was the only African culture known and valued by white Eurocentric cultures. To use his conceptual framework, the culture and the people affiliated with ancient Egypt were useful to a white Eurocentric narrative because Egyptian culture could be folded into that narrative as proof of a grand and powerful past. Some scholars then used race as a way to separate the ancient culture from Africa so that the culture could be fully subsumed into a white, Western construct of history (e.g., Davies, 2018, p. 8). The discourses of Amy Jacques Garvey, Marcus Garvey, and many others critiqued that practice and pointed out inconsistencies in how people applied racial

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<sup>6</sup> As Mamdani (2001, p. 27) put it, race is a consequence of state formation, is inscribed in and enforced by law, and then is used as the basis for assigning a host of social and cultural benefits. Colonizers in Africa “tried to *naturalize* political differences” between colonizer and colonized and between indigenous colonized and non-indigenous colonized. “Ethnicity was said to mark an *internal* difference among those constructed by colonial law as indigenous to the land. Race marked an *external* difference, a difference with others, those legally constructed as nonindigenous.”

classifications.

Egyptology was one thread that bound together the gold mask of Tutankhamun and the burgeoning movement to establish indigenous rule in Africa. According to colonial powers, Africans were not able to rule themselves. In formulations like George Reisner's and other Egyptologists, darker-skinned Africans never could rule over themselves. For that reason, those Egyptologists conceptualized kings like Tutankhamun as "white" rulers of the northern Nile Valley. When Amy Jacques Garvey wrote about the mask of Tutankhamun as an artifact of an African culture, her argument addressed the historical past with full awareness of the implications her understanding of the past had on present populations. In a broad sense, she gave sovereignty to an African population, specifically to an Egyptian population that would have been considered—in the racializing formulation of US society in the 1920s—part of the "darker races." On a global scale, members of those so-called darker races had so often been made to suffer under the yoke of colonialism. Like other proponents of pan-Africanism, Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey called for unity among those groups, for pride in their histories and heritages, and for a global movement centered around those people. Strains of Garvey's pan-Africanism are also found in Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's conception of Egypt.

### **Nasser and pan-Africanism**

Pan-Africanism was not conceived of by Marcus Garvey nor did the global push for pan-Africanism dissipate when he was incarcerated or after he died in 1940. Pan-Africanism played a key role, alongside pan-Arabism, in the vision for Egypt that Nasser laid out in *The Philosophy of the Revolution*. His conception of identity might today be referred to as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2022). Nasser described the three circles in which he felt Egyptians "must revolve and attempt to move as much as we possibly can" (Abdel Nasser, 1954, p. 69). Those circles are Arab, African, and Muslim. (Notably excluded from this formulation are Christian and Jewish Egyptians.) He contended that Egypt cannot turn away from Africa because "we are in Africa" and because "the Nile is the artery of life of our country. It draws its supply of water from the heart of the continent" (Abdel Nasser, 1954, p. 69).

Nasser's description of the Nile, Egypt's "artery of life" that is sourced from "the heart of the continent," signals his understanding of Egypt's reliance on other parts of Africa and also Egypt's precarity. He valued dialogue between Egypt and other parts of Africa, as shown in

Radio Cairo that created a clear and easy network of communications among African populations, and provided the means to attempt to influence popular opinion in Sudan to support unification with Egypt (Pendegraft, 2017; Ismael, 1971, p. 177). His sometimes patronizing language toward parts of Africa has been described as “a later-day version of the ‘white man’s burden’” (Akinsanya, 1976, p. 512). But Nasser’s choice of words can be viewed through the lens of precarity: as the language of a ruling official affected (perhaps unconsciously) both by the colonial outlook present in Egypt for so long and by his unstable position contending with the competing interests of various world powers. Nasser wrote about “the most violent struggle between white colonisers and black natives for the possession of [Africa’s] inexhaustible resources” (Abdel Nasser, 1954, p. 54). As much as he encouraged independence among nearby states, he was also aware of the need to preserve and protect his own state from Western powers aligned against independence efforts.

As Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey did, Nasser strengthened Egypt’s association with Africa by highlighting cultural, geographic, and political ties between Egypt and other African populations. A basis for policy planning in Egypt in 1956 was the phrase “Africa for the Africans,” which is closely associated with Garveyism (Ismael, 1971, p. 238; Ewing, 2014). Officials in Nasser’s government looked to the ancient cultures of the Nile Valley in discussing a shared African heritage. They invoked movements of ancient populations through the Nile Valley to explain genetic admixture among geographically diverse population groups, and they drew attention to the false separation of the continent around the Sahara (Ismael, 1971, pp. 103–105). Egyptian policy recognized that imperialist forces benefitted by imposing dichotomies among people and thus inhibiting unity. Such an approach set up “Arab” in opposition to “African” (as if those who lived in the northern part of the continent were somehow not “of” the continent), and it set up “North” Africa in opposition to “Black” Africa and “Sub-Saharan” Africa (the qualifier “Sub-” now increasingly recognized as pejorative). Nasser’s philosophy subverted those divisions. One public statement that reflected the Egyptian government’s African-centered policy was an exclamation made at an international conference by Egyptian Foreign Minister Hussein Zulficar Sabri, “The Egyptian region of the United Arab Republic was freely intermixed with peoples all along the River Nile, up to the innermost heart of Africa, in the Great Lake Region. We have mixed blood in our veins. I shout it to the world, and I am proud of it” (Ismael, 1971, p. 104).

Nasser's formulation of the three circles of Arab, African, and Muslim allowed for some movement. That movement, the ability to dance between different identities, provided Nasser with flexibility in balancing competing concerns on a global stage. Security for Egypt was also provided in solidarity alliances with other African nations, such as the Non-Aligned Movement that Nasser and Kwame Nkrumah founded for nations that wished to maintain their sovereignty in the face of the new colonial powers of the Cold War (Pendegraft, 2017; Akinsanya, 1976; for CIA involvement in the overthrow of democratically elected leaders in post-colonial Africa, see Williams, 2021). Embracing the multifaceted nature of modern Egyptian society—at least parts of it, since, again, the Christian and Jewish populations are not referenced—kept Nasser's government in power for nearly two decades. In terms of Egyptology, however, a shifting identity (e.g., the views of Reisner described above, Petrie [Challis, 2013], and Frankfort [1965, p. 24]) has allowed continued circulation of incorrect colonialist-inspired conceptions of ancient Egypt as a non-African entity.

### **Contemporary Egyptian intellectuals and pan-Africanism**

With regard to the modern nation-state of Egypt, a pan-Africanism similar to the Garveys' was a part of national self-conception under Nasser, and the history of the Nile Valley factored strongly into pan-African narratives. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egypt's expert on the Organization of African Unity, called attention to the longevity of connections between the northern Nile Valley and elsewhere in Africa in defiance of attempts to, as he put it, "isolate Egypt from its ancient and precious African context" (Boutros-Ghali, 1997, pp. 103–104). Current diplomatic, military, trade, and educational relationships attest to Egypt's strong ties with other African countries, where "Egypt's affiliation with its African surroundings goes beyond the traditional geographical and historical dimensions, as this affiliation has been a major component of Egyptian identity throughout the ages" (Sharaf Eldin, 2022). Egyptian scholar May Kosba also sees an African identity in the permanence of a population in the northern Nile Valley despite cultural ruptures, for example, when ruled from power bases external to the area. "The cutoff between antiquity, and medieval and modern history, does not disqualify Egyptians from their Africanness because they were not physically diasporized" (Kosba, 2021, p. 10). A recognition of shared pasts, presents, and futures breaks down divisions imposed by hegemonic powers, exposes the myth of cultural distinctiveness, and reintegrates communities.

Pan-Africanism has been expressed in specifically Egyptological contexts by Egyptians such as Gamal Mokhtar and Fekri Hassan. Gamal Mokhtar, former head of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, chaired the critically important UNESCO symposium of 1974 on the history of the Nile Valley. In the resulting publication, he explained that the idea of race is a product of Enlightenment era-thinking and debunked the idea of a “single, pure race” populating the area by pointing to gradual settlements by a variety of nomadic people over thousands of years (Mokhtar, 1981, p. 14). Egyptologist Fekri Hassan explained in some detail the settling of the Nile Valley and made a plea for Africans to recognize both the connectedness of their histories and the traumas experienced by people of African descent in the diaspora.

Peoples of Africa, including Egyptians, have to recognize the course of historical events and how they contributed to the recent current cultural and political differentiation of African peoples who share a common background going back to the prehistoric past. Egyptians and fellow Africans have also to develop a deeper understanding of the situations Americans of African descent face with the painful memories of the forced abduction from their African homelands, cruel mistreatment in plantations, and decades of struggle to reclaim their rights as equal and free citizens in a hostile society still ridden with its fantasies of white supremacy. (Hassan, 2021)

In the face of such fantasies, African descended people all over the world look to the ancient past of Africa to disprove the incorrect claims that Africa had no history and that by extension African descended people were not fully human.

## **Conclusion**

Ancient Nile Valley cultures, with their impressive art, artifacts, and monuments, provided effective counterarguments to the incorrect idea that Africa had no history because those cultures translated into “civilized” society in a white Eurocentric framework. As the U.S.-American scholar and cultural critic Gerald Early put it:

European intervention denied the Africans the ability to determine for themselves the worth of their memory. That this reconstruction could be done only through running African history and African civilization through Egypt, the only African civilization that impressed and that was widely known by European intellectuals, is interesting. . . . In order to get respect for their humanity by having a distinct set of memories, the Africans

had to couch their setting of remembrance in terms that Europeans could understand, could, in fact, be in awe of. (Early, 1998, p. 708)

The colonialist response to African cultures could not dismiss ancient Nile Valley cultures as “uncivilized.” The result, as Amy Jacques and Marcus Garvey noted, was to simply remove those ancient populations from their African contexts.

Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey were only two of many voices who called for unity and understanding among people of darker skin tones who have in so many places and so many ways suffered under colonialist and racist structures. They were not the first or the only African descended intellectuals in the United States to engage with Egyptology. Their message was a particularly potent one though. As a woman, Amy Jacques Garvey was less threatening than her husband to the hegemonic culture in the United States. What made Marcus Garvey so dangerous—what made the FBI infiltrate his organization and what led the US government to incarcerate him on the flimsy evidence of an empty envelope—is that he had widespread popular support among African descended people in the United States and elsewhere in the world (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002). Those institutional powers were correct in their assessment of the threat of the Garveys’ message to their very existence. The vision and influence of Amy Jacques and Marcus Garvey spread to many groups in Africa and the African diaspora, and the positive effects of their work are seen today (e.g., Ewing, 2014, pp. 238–241). Amy Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey were knowledgeable about the intellectual debates of their day, and they constructed arguments to dismantle the nonsensical and racist claims of white scholars about Africa.

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