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**"Be the change that you want to see": The awakening of cultural nationalism  
—Gandhi, Garvey and the AAPA****John Maynard**

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1. Over the past few years I have spent a great deal of time exploring for connections between the early Aboriginal activists and African Americans/West Indians —particularly Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association. I must confess I have not explored or uncovered similar evidence of connections with Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. However, my work and findings have revealed some indirect connections between these groups —and this paper will explore the comparatives of experience entwined in the political and post-colonialist rhetoric of Gandhi, Garvey and the rise of organized Aboriginal political activism with the launch of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) in 1924 Sydney led by my grandfather Fred Maynard. I contend that the Aboriginal leaders during the 1920s would have been well aware of Gandhi (1) through the local press and (2) through their consumption of international black political newsletters and literature.

2. Auntie Veronica Brodie in her recent book *My Side of the Bridge* acknowledged that Gandhi had been an inspiration to her. She said: 'I'd read Gandhi's books and followed his journeys, and I was very interested in this little man who had done so much for his people'. She recounted her own trip to India in 1988 and was amazed that when she had told Indians about the Aboriginal situation in Australia. They replied 'why don't you kick the English out of your country'. (Brodie, 2002: 123) Of course it wasn't that simple for us.

3. I look back on my schooldays during the 1960s when there were no Aboriginal heroes and heroines in the school history texts—but Gandhi's story was one that certainly grabbed my interest. His presence in those books stood in total contrast to the likes of Clive of India, Wolfe of Quebec, Florence Nightingale, Nelson, Wellington, Churchill and a host of other British and white historical figures. Significantly I too looked to Gandhi for inspiration as opposed to my own grandfather whose political fight for Aboriginal Australia was sadly not only unknown in Australian history texts at the time but was also largely forgotten by the wider white and Aboriginal community and also by many of his own family.

4. The end of the First World War was the catalyst that marked a surge in nationalistic and organized opposition to imperialism and its domination over many oppressed peoples. The Russian Revolution, an outbreak of nationalistic fervor in both Egypt and Ireland, the rise of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and Gandhi's prominence with the fight for Indian self-determination marked the period just prior to and coinciding with the rise in Australia of the AAPA. The British Empire had suffered severe embarrassments during 1922 in Ireland and the Middle East—at the zenith of its power and triumph, the Empire simultaneously developed cracks in its foundations which would signify its eventual decline and collapse. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May 1922)

5. The parallels of political platform reflected with Gandhi, Marcus Garvey and Fred Maynard in Australia focus on self-determination, cultural revival and a strong sense of Black Nationalism. Dawson has theorized that:

Black nationalist movements are often reactive in nature, a political and ideological response to what is seen as an oppressive racial order. (Dawson, 2001: 86)

6. The rise of organized and united Aboriginal political opposition in Australia in 1924 was in direct response to enforced oppression. The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Boards action through large scale revocation of Aboriginal reserve lands from 1910 inflamed the Aboriginal population—13,000 acres of prime coastal land was stripped from the Aboriginal occupants in fourteen years. (Goodall, 1996: 96) This assault upon land combined with the inflammatory Board policy which legalized and accelerated the practice of separating Aboriginal children from their families were the galvanizing issues that ignited Aboriginal political revolt. The (AAPA) burst into Australian public awareness in 1925 with front-page media coverage of their first conference staged in Sydney which announced the formation of the Association under the headline 'On Aborigines Aspirations-First Australians to Help Themselves-Self Determination'. (*The Daily Guardian* 24 April 1925) Another article stated 'Aborigines in Congress-Self Determination Is Their Aim-To Help A People'. (*The Daily Guardian*, 7 May 1925) My grandfather in his inaugural address stated :

We aim at the spiritual, political, industrial and social. We want to work out our own destiny. Our people have not had the courage to stand together in the past, but now we are united, and are determined to work for the preservation for all of those interests which are near and dear to us'. (*The Daily Guardian* 7 May 1925)

7. The message was clear and blunt: the new Aboriginal political movement was 'fighting for the preservation of rights for [A]borigines for self determination'. (*The Daily Guardian* 7 May 1925) During the course of the next four years they fought a bitter campaign against the Protection Board. They denounced the Board as incompetent to manage the affairs of Aboriginal people and demanded that it should be scrapped and replaced with an all Aboriginal Board of management under a chairman to be appointed by the Government.

8. I have previously revealed that it was Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association which played a significant part in influencing the emerging Aboriginal political ideology (Maynard, 2005).

9. Garvey had intelligently employed black seamen around the globe as agents to spread the word of his movement. This influence was instigated in Australia through African/ American and West Indian seamen coming into contact with Aboriginal wharf laborers. It was through these contacts that Aboriginal people had access to international black literature and political newspapers. Most notably Garvey's *The Negro World* which had a weekly international circulation of in excess of 200,000 copies. Garvey's paper highlighted the struggles of many oppressed groups around the globe, he admired Third World leaders with a similar political outlook to his own, particularly those involved in nationalistic struggles. Significantly one of those championed on a regular basis was Gandhi; *The Negro World* had articles showing support for the Indian struggle and through these editorials the AAPA would have been aware of Gandhi's stance from a supportive black perspective. Gandhi himself was aware of the importance of influence and inspiration to other oppressed peoples. Stating:

If India won her freedom through truth and non-violence, India would not only point the way to all exploited Asiatic nations, she would become a torch-bearer for the Negro races. (Rooney, 2002: 37)

10. The nationalistic platform of Gandhi and Garvey was imitated by the AAPA in Australia who modeled their own rhetoric and direction from Garvey's manifesto. A number of the Aboriginal political leaders had prior to the formation of the AAPA been members of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association when a chapter had been formed in Sydney in 1920. AAPA treasurer Tom Lacey in a letter published in Garvey's *The Negro World* reveals that the 1920s Aboriginal political stance evidenced a Black Nationalistic agenda. Lacey's letter pledged the support of 10,000 Aboriginal people in NSW and 60,000 Aboriginal people nationally to Garvey and his movement. He stressed to Garvey, 'we have a great deal of work in front of us to do. What I mean by that is the native [A] boriginals of this state, New South Wales'. Despite the obstacles Lacey revealed: 'We have not had the time to organize the other four states yet, but I think there are about fifty or sixty thousand; that is as far as we can reach at the present time'. (*The Negro World*, 2 August 1924) His letter revealed that the Aboriginal political fight was hampered by the tight control exerted over many Aboriginal people confined on reserves by both missionaries and government Protection Boards:

We have a bit of trouble to see some of our people, as the missionaries have got the most of them, and we have great difficulty in reaching them. The authorities won't allow us to see them unless we can give them (the Aboriginal Board) a clear explanation of what we want them for. (*The Negro World*, 2 August 1924)

11. Garvey recognized the importance of this growing international black mobilisation:

Everywhere the black man is beginning to do his own thinking, to demand more participation in his own government, more economic justice, and better living conditions. The Universal Negro Improvement Association during the past five years has blazed the trail for him, and he is following the trail. We do not think he will turn back. He has nothing to lose and everything to gain by pushing forward, whatever the obstacles he may encounter. (*The Negro World*, 20 September 1924)

12. Imperialist governments and media commentators of the day targeted Gandhi and Garvey as dangerous agitators. Gandhi was described as a:

queer mixture of ascetic and fanatic, saint and mischief maker. He also deprecated, or affected to deprecate violence in any form, and advocated passive resistance to authority. He could not, or would not, realise that when illiterate peasants and artisans are exhorted to deliberately disobey the law they are not likely to be satisfied for long with a passive role. Violence is the inevitable result of such advice. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May 1922)

13. Attention was given to the fact that when:

addresses were given Gandhi declared that the masses must conquer by soul-force and not by resistance to the Government. But on the same platform his two (Muslim) followers always declared that the time was ripe for battle. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 July 1922)

14. In the contemporary setting and understanding a greater pacifist than Gandhi has probably not walked the earth yet the Australian press at the time fueled with racist sentiment held him as a violent revolutionary:

Gandhi, a native propagandist, who is leading the non-co-operation movement made a violent speech at Lucknow yesterday. Referring to the murder of Commissioner Willoughby, he said: "when we shall use swords again we shall warn European women and children. (*Courier Mail*, 18 October 1922)

15. Provocative and misleading articles were also penned to describe Marcus Garvey. He was noted as looking:

to the time when the yellow and white races will be locked in a great race war, the [N]egroes will march over their weakened and prostrate bodies and enter into their own. The bloodiest of all wars is yet to come when Europe will match its strength against Asia and that will be the [N]egroes' opportunity to draw the sword for Africa. (*The Adelaide Advertiser* 18 April 1925)

16. This process was a deliberate attempt to undermine and create fear within the wider community of the motives behind people like Gandhi and Garvey. Fred Maynard was a target for similar inflammatory ignorance. Government correspondence described him as a man of illogical views who will do more harm than help the Aborigines and that his character and that of the other Aboriginal leaders was questioned by the Board. He was also denied access to Aboriginal reserves on the pretence he was inciting revolt.

17. White opposition and hostility was not the only obstacle. It has been said that:

black political history can be seen as being fundamentally shaped by the conflict between nationalism and ...its "integrationist" rivals. (Dawson, 2001:86)

This is significantly true of the Nationalist movements of Gandhi and Garvey. They both had to contend with internal attack from those with a differing ideological perspective. Garvey was most notably embroiled in highly public argument with other black intellectuals including W.E.B. DuBois, who criticized his actions relentlessly in their own black publications. Gandhi and the Indian Congress likewise had to contend with resentment and the continual undermining or misunderstanding of their actions. One such opponent was Indian intellectual Srinivasa Sastri who visited Australia in 1922. Sastri had quit the Indian Congress after it had supported Gandhi's push for non-cooperation and formed the Liberal

Party. Incredibly Sastri had come to Australia at the invitation of Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes. A greater defender of the white Australia policy could hardly have been found. The Prime Ministers statements over the years regarding Asians and people of African descent clearly identified his racist viewpoint. Sastri's visit was given widespread media coverage. He was described as an 'enthusiastic Imperialist and a confirmed believer in British rule for India'. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 June 1922) The Australian press was glowing and supportive of Sastri, reporting:

He is pleading for the future of India within the "British Commonwealth". He is not one of those who preach (in appropriate quarters) that the future "freedom" of India can come only by class war and mob oratory against the "oppression" of the British flag. ( *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June 1922)

18. Some years later Sastri would provide the British Viceroy with a damning estimation of Gandhi's character. Describing him in Judasesque style as:

a "philosophical anarch" who could not be swayed by rational arguments, a man who must be wooed like a capricious woman, and whose dominant characteristic was an unconscious but real vanity. Such a man could not be tempted by any known stratagems; he could only be silenced'. (Payne, 1969: 390)

19. There is no evidence to suggest that Fred Maynard and the AAPA had to contend with a differing Aboriginal ideological viewpoint. However, there was a move instigated by the white power base to encourage division from within the ranks of the fledgling Aboriginal political movement. This attempt at divide and rule has been uncovered in archival and oral sources.

20. In their four years in the public spotlight the AAPA made continued demands through the media encouraging Aboriginal self-respect through spiritual, political, industrial and social ideals. The influence of Garveyism was unmistakable. Similarly interpretations of Gandhi's teaching, have directed that 'if generally followed, would have been to realize not merely social, but economic equality'. (Ackerman, 2000: 115)

21. He stressed the importance of non-violent moral reform and spiritual regeneration stating:

We may petition the government, we may agitate... for our rights; but for a real awakening of the people, the more important thing is activities directed inwards. (Young, 2001:72)

22. Gandhi, Garvey and Maynard whilst expressing and demanding recognition of difference in their political platforms nevertheless saw the future as combining the best of both worlds, Gandhi saw the positives of this fusion 'and made no secret of his intellectual debt to John Ruskin and Tolstoi'. (Hobsbawm, 1987: 78)

23. Gandhi of course was the only one to succeed with Indian self-determination and through that process historical immortality. Despite the fact that Garvey is credited with leading the biggest black political movement ever assembled in the United States by the late 1930s it was all but forgotten. This was also true of Fred Maynard and the AAPA in Australia; by the late 1930s their memory had either been erased or forgotten. Arguably both Garvey and Maynard were hampered and confined as minorities within their spheres of influence and suffered as a result.

24. The 1920s Aboriginal political movement *were the change they wanted to see* but sadly for Aboriginal Australia and the country as a whole—government and wider society of the day were totally blind and Aboriginal people were to remain subjected to another five decades of oppression and tight control—the results of which continues to see Aboriginal people buried deep within a pit of inequality and disadvantage. For us the struggle for justice, equality and self-determination goes on.

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### **Author's note**

This paper acknowledges the great man Mohondas Gandhi whose memory continues to inspire oppressed peoples around the globe.

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