

African Americans in Long Beach and Southern California: A History

READ AN EXCERPT

In the early 1920s many in the local African American community believed the Klan was doing them no harm. They listened when Jamaican born Marcus Garvey preached his Back-to-Africa doctrine envisioning an end to European colonial rule across Africa and the political unification of the continent. They believed the circulars advising them that Garvey and the Ku Klux Klan were their two best friends and that they should beware the Church of Rome and the radical groups within the race. These propaganda circulars were attempting to make African Americans fall in line with the Garvey program and instill a deep desire to do so, according to the California Eagle.

Leaflets mailed to whites said the KKK planned to see that all people of African descent were chased out of the United States. To do this the Klan sent agents among the black community telling them of the delightful climate, and the rich soil in Africa. Their African homeland was a place where cotton and all kinds of fruit grew wild, where there were no white men to rape their women and lynch their men, where they could have officers and make their own laws and where freedom would be as unlimited as the sunshine which was above their heads. To achieve this they needed to get there, which is why Long Beach's Reverend James Lewis, mentioned earlier, was successful for so long in trying to secure subscriptions to his Liberian Transportation and the Living God shipping line.

One approach to pacify blacks was to guarantee them a place in American society once Catholics, Jews and foreigners were dealt with. In 1922, Baptist minister John H. Moore explained the aims and purposes of the Klan at a well-attended meeting at the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium. The Arkansas preacher also discussed the attitude of the organization toward Catholicism, blacks, Jews, labor unions, people born in foreign countries and immigration.

Using text from the Bible, Moore attempted to prove a philosophy that reasoned that God had held back the development of America for several centuries as part of a divine plan intended to make the United States the stronghold of Protestantism and prevent the settlement of Catholics in this country. As part of this plan, as seen by Moore, it was the divine desire to have the Anglo-Saxon element dominate. In discussing white supremacy, he declared the Klan proposed that African Americans take second place.

Moore claimed no organization ever set up in America was as good a friend to blacks as the Ku Klux Klan. The group attempted to protect African Americans from labor unions and against efforts to make them Catholic. The Klan, simply stated, would guarantee African Americans a "second place" in American society, with no fear of competition from Jews, Catholics, or immigrants. This was the country the Klan was going to create, and the role blacks would have if they chose to remain in America.

Shortly after Moore's speech in Long Beach, the California Eagle published an editorial condemning black preachers who seemed to think it was God's plan for the KKK to wage war on the Catholic Church, and the Jews, and that through this medium African Americans would be able to take their place as citizens in this country.

We realize that mob violence is as much in evidence now as it was before we went to France to fight for Democracy, hence we cannot agree with our preacher brothers that the reorganization of the KKK is destined to give the Negro absolute freedom. Too well do we remember why this organization was born and too well do we realize that so long as there is a Klan there will be mob violence and if we abhor unlawful punishment for ourselves, then we do not advocate it for Jews and Catholics. There should be one law for all—black and white, Jew and Catholic.

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