

Federal Writers Project

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assignment : An account of the African Blood Brotherhood  
research : Interview with Cyril Briggs  
Crusader magazine of January and November 1921  
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The African Blood Brotherhood, a militant organization which referred to itself as a "revolutionary secret order" was formed in the Fall of 1917 and thrived on the World War and post-World War spirit of aggressiveness for six years, passing out under pressure of the economic crisis of 1923.

A contemporary of the Garvey movement, the African Blood Brotherhood also adopted a mantle of awe-inspiring names for high offices. Cyril V. Briggs, founder of the organization, was officially known as The Paramount Chief and the executive committee was known as the Supreme Council.

"Immediate Protection and Ultimate Liberation" of the Negro in the United States and throughout the world was the main platform of the organization. The main and fundamental difference between this organization and Garvey's, and one that led to bitter antagonisms, was that the African Blood Brotherhood placed its emphasis on fighting for Negro rights in America as an essential pre-requisite to aiding in the struggle for his rights in other parts of the world.

The platform of the African Blood Brothers was:

- (1) Armed resistance against lynchings.
- (2) Self-determination for the Negro <sup>in states</sup> where ~~he~~ he constituted a majority.

- (3) Right of Franchise for the Negro in the South
  - (4) Struggle for equal rights and against all forms of Jim-Crowism.
  - (5) Organization of the Negro into established trade unions; against discriminations practiced by unions; Organization of Negro unions in industries where they were barred by established white unions.
  - (6) Against Imperialism in Africa and the West Indies; world-struggle for a free Africa.
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The organization, claiming to have <sup>had</sup> a membership of 2,500, was mainly ~~propagandist~~ propagandist in its character. Divided into fifty posts throughout the nation and having a few posts in South America ~~in~~ and the West Indies, it issued <sup>twice a month</sup> ~~monthly~~ directives from its headquarters at 2299 Seventh Avenue, New York, which was calculated to further ~~develop~~ develop the Negro's "manhood" in rebellious protest against injustices foisted upon him. The official organ of the African Blood Brotherhood was a ~~magazine~~ <sup>monthly</sup> 33-page magazine, named the Crusader and edited by the Paramount Chief, Cyril V. Briggs. ~~Mr. Briggs was~~ Prior to the organization of the A.B.B., Mr. Briggs was editor of the Amsterdam News, a weekly newspaper published in Harlem. According to Mr. Briggs, he resigned from the Amsterdam News when the United States Intelligence Department brought pressure on the ~~newspaper~~ <sup>newspaper</sup> in an attempt to censor his editorials which hotly condemned Jim Crow in the army and the use of the Negro Regiment as stevedores.

The African Blood Brotherhood was strongly opposed to Negroes enlisting in the World War, said Mr. Briggs, and vehemently opposed Dr. Du Bois' appeal to the Negro to "Close Ranks" in an editorial published in the Crisis. The A.B.B. argued that the Negro had no interest in fighting a "white-man-war" "for things he was not enjoying ~~in~~ in America." The Negro's first and foremost duty,

the organization argued, was to fight the war at home, expressed in the form of lynchings. In the January 1921 issue of the Crusader, Mr. Cyril Briggs, wrote:

"The nation-wide mobilization under the Christian Cross and the Stars and Stripes of cracker America into the Ku Klux Klan is as plainly an act of war as was the German mobilization of 1914...

"It is war, and war of the cracker element of the white race against the entire Negro race. Whether the Negro race meets the issue courageously, demonstrating its essential humanity, or in cowardly surrender to the enemy, it will be war just the same---war against the Negro race.

"... We confess we do not know how the race will meet this peril. However, we do know how it will be met by Real Men.

"... With the murderer clutching at our throats we cannot afford to choose our weapons, but must defend ourselves with what lies nearest, whether that be poison, fire or what..."

~~Summary~~

Because of its ~~militant program~~ program of militant defense the A.B.B. was forced to work underground in the South. It was extremely dangerous to be identified in the South as a member of "nigger Briggs outfit," as the plantation owners ~~referred~~ referred to the organization. Mr. Briggs received a number of letters from the South threatening his life. Nevertheless, the A. B. B. continued its work and by 1919 the South constituted the stronghold of the organization, the West Virginia Post, comprised of Negro miners, being the strongest of all.

Opposition to the African Blood Brotherhood reached a high point in 1919 when attempts were made to place responsibility for the race riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on the organization. An associated Press broadcast ~~reported~~ reported that the A.B.B. "fomented and directed the Tulsa riot," which, according to Mr. Briggs, had all been started by a rumor initiated by a white preacher in Tulsa. The A.B.B. had a very strong post in Tulsa at the time, made up of ex-servicemen chiefly, but denied all charges that it was in any way responsible for the riot in which a few of its members lost their lives.

(see n.y.times for story on A.B.B. and riot)

The Garvey-movement, and particularly Marcus Garvey, was consistently ~~criticized~~ criticized by the African Blood Brotherhood and in turn Garvey ~~was~~ just as consistently threatened leaders of the A.B.B. According to Mr. Briggs, Mr. Garvey speaking from the rostrum of Liberty Hall once said:

"If these brilliant young men don't keep to themselves blood will flow in Harlem."

Many scraps between members of the Blood Brotherhood and Garveyites took place on the streets of Harlem. But, ~~never~~ there ~~was~~ never was any generous flowing of blood.

~~Other~~ High-ranking members of the African Blood Brotherhood were: Richard B. Moore; Theodore Durrell; Benjamin Durrell; Otto Hall; ~~and~~ Harry Haywood; and Arthur Reid. ~~Arthur Reid, the~~ ~~obsessive~~ ~~leader~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~A.B.B.~~ ~~has~~ ~~since~~ ~~joined~~ ~~the~~ ~~Communist~~ ~~Party~~ Many of the leaders of the Blood Brotherhood have since become ~~members~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~Communist~~ ~~Party~~ Communists. Mr. Arthur Reid, however, is avowedly a non-sympathiser of ~~the~~ Communism and is at present an ultra-militant labor leader.