

# BLACK CROSS NURSES



A student Driven Analysis

**Class 2E (SJC) and teacher Mr. Delmer Tzib**

# General Description

**In 2013 St. Johns College adopted a decolonizing and student centered approach to the teaching of history at the high school level. The history department pledged to inform students from the perspective of the oppressed to create critical thinking and an awareness of the country's development and composition. As part of the curricular aims, the program encourages student-centered projects that empower students to rationalize history and critically assess turning points, causes and effects, perspectives, realities and problems.**



This project entailed students that are in second form. It is worth mentioning that the second form curriculum focuses on the discussion of nation formation through analyzing themes such as oppression, resistance, organization, labor movements, nationalism, sovereignty, independence and identity formation. This semester, in particular, the students were informed about the formation of black consciousness and labor movements in the regional context and its impact on national development. Students debated about the origins of Garveyism and were inspired by music, pictures and speeches that transformed their views on racism and oppression in the USA, the Caribbean and Belize. This short introduction led to a close analysis of the role and impact of the United Negro Improvement Association and the Black Cross Nurses in the labor movements and nationalist formation of Belize. The broader discussion is leading to an examination of the political, social, and economic marginalization of blacks due to race and racism in the nineteenth century.

This project entailed four major steps in its conceptualization and implementation. The following is a discussion of each:

1. Students were informed about the topic: The teacher presented a concise introduction to Garveyism and the Black Cross Nurses in British Honduras. The discussion placed a special emphasis on the ideological implication of black nationalism and its impact on the improvement of black lives in British Honduras. Students were provoked by songs, pictures, videos and quotes about the movement. They participated actively in the discussion and related the concepts to their daily lives.
2. Concise notes: For the project on the Black Cross Nurses, the students were only provided with the following notes:

“The UNIA was an organization that fought for the black people to have an upliftment. As part of their aims they created a system of health aid through the Black Cross Nurses. In British Honduras, Nurse Vivian Seay was the leader of the organization from the beginning in the 1920's. They went from house to house in Belize town to offer health assistance. The colonial government at the beginning was not happy with such organization and did not want to pay for any educational/training to be given to the nurses. However, after a period of time the colonial government used the Black Cross Nurses as a welfare tactic. In part this reflected the limitations of the Gerveyite movement itself, which concentrated on culture and race to the exclusion of class division in society, and which sought accommodations with the colonial administration.”

3. Poem Writing: The students were instructed to write a poem based on the information provided on the Black Cross Nurses. They were aware that the teacher would choose the poem (that in his views was the best) for an upcoming project.
4. Poem Analysis and visualization by peers: The best poem was given for the students to analyze and create images to attach to it.

This project entailed an array of provocative discussion that harnessed a student driven analysis of the role of the Black Cross Nurses in British Honduras.

The project directly relates to the African and Maya History Program's overall objectives. The individual, group, class and community interaction fosters an awakening of student's critical thinking and thinking processes. The dialogue between each other, the information, and with the teacher encourages a high level of interaction that humanizes education and focuses on problem solving and actions. This approach aims to synthesize thoughts, interpretations and actions through a liberated and safe learning environment.

# A Summary of Garveyism

Garveyism stems from the social, economic and political thoughts of Marcus Garvey who was an avid promoter of black nationalism in the USA and the region. He is credited for forming the University Negro Improvement Association. The following is a short discussion on his philosophical outlook of people and nationalism, and a glimpse into his organization.

- a. **Garvey's View of People:** Garvey had a strong religious background and believed in the supremacy of god. He argued that god created all people equally and that no specific group of people should accept inferiority. Garvey encouraged blacks to develop and accept a better self-image and approach life in all its dimensions with an equal ethos, as other races. His conceptualizations externalized that blacks had the power, through their own will, to curb the status quo and develop a society that promoted a continued equality. In addition, his teachings are also linked to the ideas of a separate black nation because he fervently believed that only when blacks achieve power, in areas like, "education, science, industry, politics and higher government that other nations will see them... or feel them."
- b. **Garvey's View of Nationalism:** Marcus Garvey is popularly known for his back to Africa movement in the 1900s. He believed that individuals of various races could only fully realize themselves in their own separate nations. He argued in favor of racial nationalism and pinpointed that the UNIA was fighting for an independent black nation and government. His notions were informed by three main propositions. Firstly, he argued that if blacks were part of any country as a minority, they would never realize their higher ambitions and potentials. Secondly, he stated that only in a black nation would blacks set priorities based on their needs and aspirations. Lastly, Garvey proposed that the return to Africa of African-Americans will enable the birth of a true black aristocracy based on merit.
- c. **Garvey's organization:** Garvey's potent speeches and ideology prompted a movement that included a multilayered approach to improve black lives. He created liberty halls in cities where the UNIA had support. These halls became important social settings for political, religious, and social events. The centers also served as basis to share the political message. Garvey also established a newspaper called the "Negro-World" to share his views and empower blacks to unite for their betterment. In addition, the UNIA encouraged the formation of economic independence by forming the Royal African Motos, Negro Factories Corporations, and the Black Starline shipping line. On the hand, the organization also formed the Black Cross Nurses which encouraged black access to quality health services.



Garvey's ideological perspective had a great impact on the black population in the USA as early as the early 1900s. His views fueled a movement for black empowerment that threatened the supremacy of colonial governments in the region. His influence garnered much support and in British Honduras, the colonial government even banned the importation of his newspaper "the Negro-world."

# ***Black Cross Nurse***

by Chris Garbutt

I will tell you of a story not shown on television,  
About the UNIA an association with a vision,  
Uplifting black people that was their dream,  
They were tired of the white people being so mean,

One of their programs tackled our health system,  
Because blacks worry about blacks,  
Whites only care of their wealth,  
The colonial government was not happy at all,  
They rather white rise and see blacks fall,

They were against this brilliant organization,  
Nurses had to find their own training and education,  
After a period of time the government came through,  
They used the nurses and the black cross to help all of you

In a way it came out of the Garveyite movement itself,  
Not moving the many but helping their health,  
At first it was just an idea, what more can it be?  
Oh look at them now, just like Vivian Seay

The UNIA looked out for each other,  
Because white or blacks we should care for one another,  
The United Negroes always face problems at the door,  
Because of people like them we should struggle no more!!!

# **A SUMMARY OF THE BLACK CROSS NURSES**

As a branch of the UNIA, the Black Cross Nurses had a dual objective of promoting healthy practices and uplifting blacks in British Honduras. On one hand, they promoted a clean environment, taught about basic rules and procedures in personal care, and stimulated a change in living habits to prevent diseases and ensure a better health for the future. On the other hand, the nurses worked towards a social hygiene strategy to disprove racist denials of social worth and promote a racial uplift of primarily the poor blacks in Belize Town. Led by Vivian Seay, the nurses were respectable, hard working women that were able to devote many unpaid hours to improve the lives of blacks in British Honduras. Anne Mcpherson (2007) states: “they were sympathetic to the hardships caused by poverty, but Seay and her nurses never accepted it as an excuse for disrespect or disorder. This attitude exemplified the Garveyite and wider Creole middle-class commitment to native self-discipline and self-improvement” (pp 89-91). The nurse’s loyalty to their social aims earned them great respect among the community, Garveyites, and the government itself; creating a group and tradition of outspoken women. The women did not only provide services but also challenged the established patriarchal system they idealized the domestic role of women. Despite their role in racial uplift, when the colonial authorities and Garveyite authorities united in 1923, Seay assigned her 24 nurses to specific areas in Belize Town. Gradually the nurses evolved from being perceived as a threat, by the colonial government, to being used as an agent to improve the lives of blacks in the settlement by the colonial government. However, it is worth celebrating the invaluable contribution of the Black Cross Nurses in the uplift of both the health care system and blacks in British Honduras.

# STUDENT VISUALIZATION

Victor Chan, Gil Gilharry, Jayden Perrera

Black Cross Nurses  
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The student visualization consists of several hand-drawn elements: a television set with '3rd generation' and 'BLACK' on the screen; a person labeled 'White' holding a child labeled 'Black'; a large black cross with 'UNIA' and 'CROSS' written around it; a person labeled 'Black People' holding a sign with 'UNIA' and 'Black Cross'; a person labeled 'Black Cross' standing by a door labeled 'Problems'; and a magnifying glass with 'UNIA' and 'EDUCATION' written on it.



# Alexander Smith, Marson Mejia, Adib Cruz

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Black  
Cross  
Nurses

UN  
IA



“Blacks worry about Blacks”

# Ajani Neal, Erick Leslie, Cristian Robinson

Black Cross Nurses

By Chris Garbutt

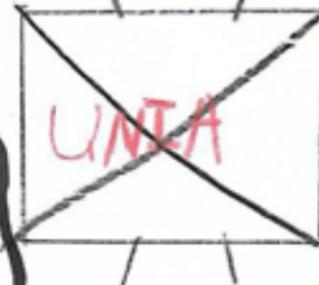
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DREAM



worried



has



HEALTH

UNIA

BLACK  
CROSS



# Liquon Zhao

Liquon Zhao

ZE  
9/5/18

Black Cross Nurses

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Uplifting black people that was their dream,  
They were tired of the white people being so mean,

They were saying that  
this unia association  
was something common  
that was the dream  
of lifting black people

One of their programs tackled our health system,  
Because blacks worry about blacks,  
Whites only care of their wealth,  
The colonial government was not happy at all,  
They rather white rise and see blacks fall,

Colours were only  
Caring about their  
Own kind & was  
worrying, what could happen  
to other race & they rather  
see other fall.

They were against this brilliant organization,  
Nurses had to find their own training and education,  
After a period of time the government came through,  
They used the nurses and the black cross to help all of you

Pressure was there for  
people & after a period  
the government got tired  
and help them. So they  
used nurses & Black cross  
to help them.

In a way it came out of the Garveyite movement itself,  
Not moving the many but helping their health,  
At first it was just an idea, what more can it be?  
Oh look at them now, just like Vivian Seay

Their race of helping other  
was show, but they were doing  
what they can in the process.  
At first this was all an idea  
that came together.

The UNIA looked out for each other,  
Because white or blacks we should care for one another,  
The United Negroes always face problems at the door,  
Because of people like them we should struggle no more!!!

The unia looked out for  
everyone, because we  
should all help other  
races & not bring down  
others, because of people  
like Vivian Seay, we  
don't struggle no more

# Steven Alvarado, Marlon Smith, Christopher Castenda

Steven Alvarado, Marlon Smith, Christopher Castenda  
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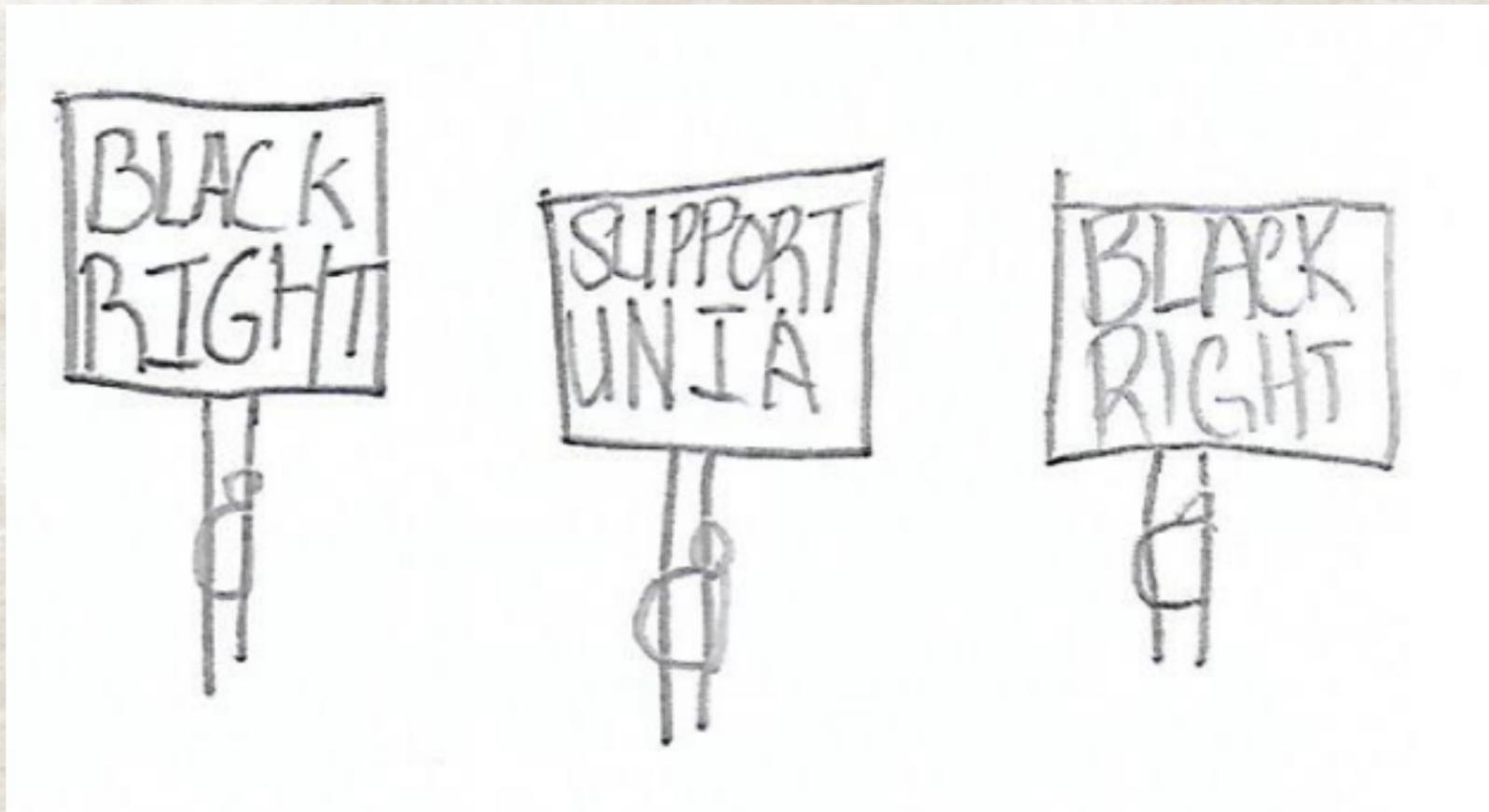
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# Student Analysis of the Poem

## Alexander Smith, Adib Cruz, Marson Mejia

Chris Garbutt the writer/poet of this poem was trying to say that back in that era the white government was trying to oppress the black people. Through his poem he is showing that the nurses uplifted blacks from the struggle they were experiencing at the time. In a way he talks about how the nurses tried to influence the blacks in the colony to break out from the mental slavery that downgraded them. The Black Cross Nurses were going from door to door helping out the sick and those in need. This, Chris shows, was interpreted as something bad by the government. The whites did not want uplift but later on the government also found a way to use the nurses to their advantage.

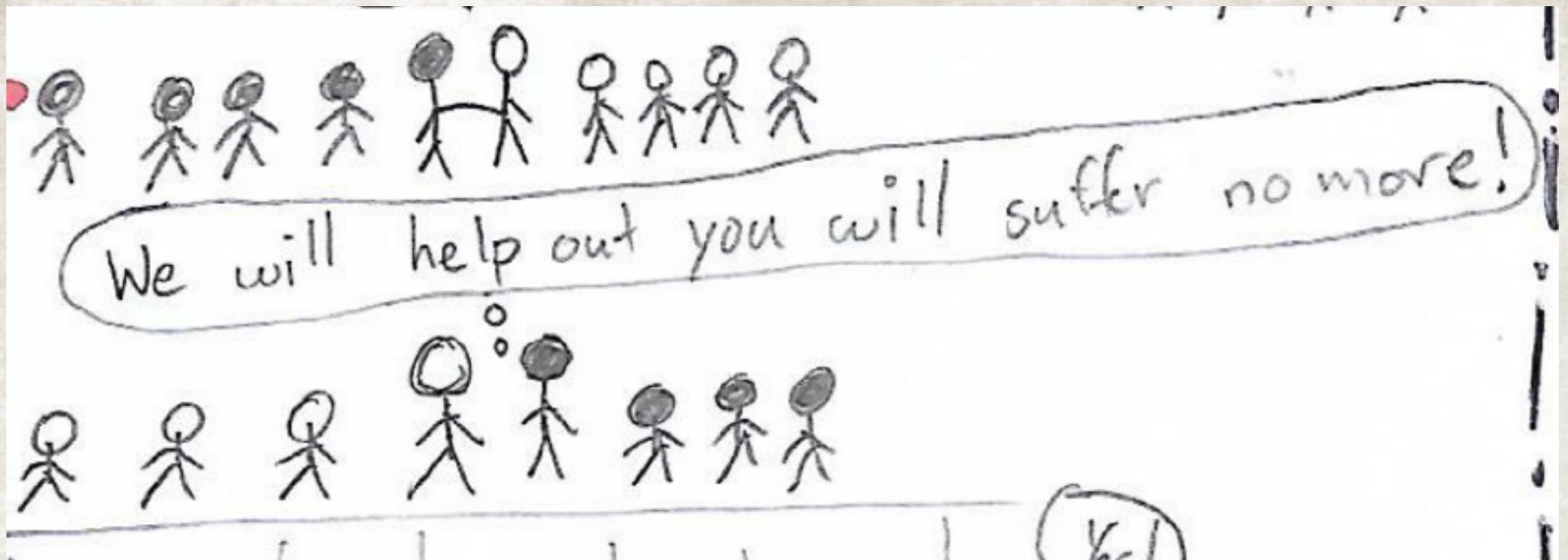


## Erick Leslie, Christian Robinson, Ajani Neal

The poem tells us about a story that was not properly recorded. It tells about how the black people were not celebrated or not encouraged to be successful. It was almost, as if, the nurses were working against the colonial government because the government only cared for the wealth. They only wanted the blacks to perform their tasks. The government were against the black cross but later on, helped them to help everyone in the colony. The whole movement came out of the Garveyite movement for blacks. They were helping everyone with the leadership of nurse Seay. They wanted for everyone to be treated equally.

## Jhalen Mariano, Abdias Lozano, Shakir Tillet

The poem talks that this is no ordinary event in history. It is not something we hear or talk about every day. It took a lot of drive and motivation for the UNIA to make change. The purpose of the nurses was key; it was to promote that blacks look out for each other. In comparison, all the whites were worried about money and profits. In the beginning, the government did not help the nurses but eventually the government came to its senses and helped them. The leadership of Vivian Seay was also inspired by the Garveyite movement. They struggled for many reasons but they were strong because of a system of brotherhood.

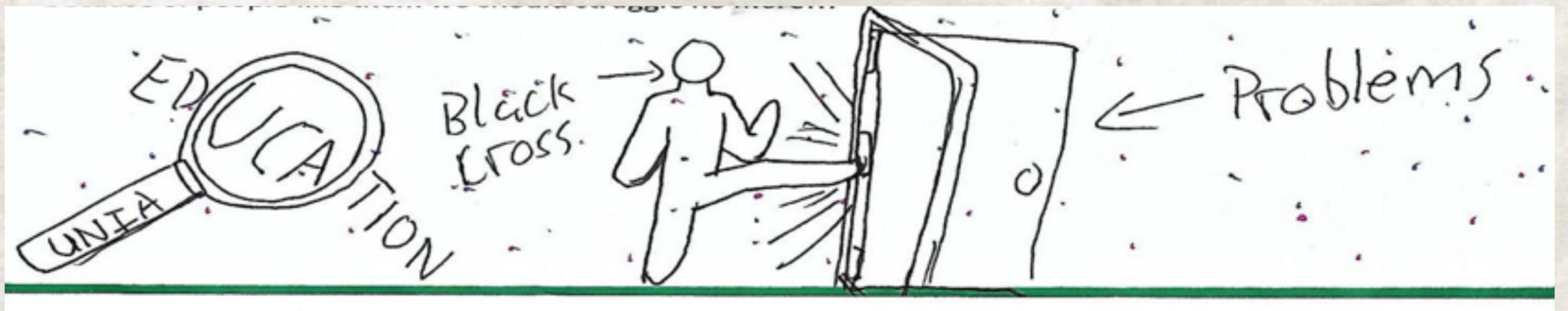


## Jayden Sutherland, Jalen Arnold

In the first stanza, he was speaking of an important organization we know little about. Something that is not spoken about in our schools, radio, or television. The second stanza is mesmerizing in a way. It speaks about the black cross wanting to help the black people badly because they were tired of falling and not looking out for each other. In the third stanza, he wanted to say that he could not believe that the own government did not want the nurses to provide the services. The fourth stanza compared the situations, looking at Garveyism and the Black Cross Nurses. Both organization were tired of how they were being treated. In the last stanza, he concluded in stating that blacks and whites should care for each other and that is what the organization is there for.

## Teajaun Mcfadzean, Tayshaun Pasqual

This poem speaks of a story that is not shown to the world. It talks about how the blacks were treated and about how a club was formed to help blacks rise from poverty and stop the whites from being so racist. When the nurses came forward, the government was not happy because they saw it as a threat. This program was not with being against the government. They did not even get paid to study or help the community. Although the nurses did not get help they imagined a better future and they made it work.



## Victor Chan, Gil Gilharry, Jayden Perrera

In stanza one, Garbutt speaks about how the media and television show many things like cartoons and movies but leave out our history. He states that they hide some real things and information that we can use. In the second stanza, he shows that the blacks were tired of white people being so mean and tired that the whites were on top and thinking that they were the best. Some examples that the whites did was enslaving the blacks. The third stanza states that the white people were against the nurses because they still thought that the blacks were nothing and lesser than them. The fourth stanza talks about how even though the government gave the nurses a hard time the nurses worked hard to help the blacks. In the last stanza, he talks about how the black's devotion helped to improve the lives of the poor in Belize. They have and continue to struggle to live like any white person.

# The Black Cross Nurses Work

By Tayshaun Pasqual (TP)

To uplift black people that is our aim  
We do it to help, we do not do it for the fame,  
All our fallen brothers and sisters whose health got ignored  
Worry no more, the black cross is at your door.

To lend a helping hand, to help blacks take a stand  
Let them help themselves, we don't need the white man!  
But are they really saviors? Can they really walk the walk?  
Well the government didn't like it and left them to talk and walk!

Mrs. Vivian Seay the pain you must have felt,  
To see your own government denying the help  
Well that didn't stop you, nor did it create a frown  
Your nurses offered assistance from house to house in Belize Town

Wake to get their own education,  
Ignored by a government neglecting its nation  
Wait, Stop! Look the government came through!  
But once because they saw this as a way to make some blues!



(BACK) Jaheim Cadle, Michael Rivero, Carlos Bardales, Trayvon Lovell, Lascelle Jeffords,  
Liqoun Zhao, Alexander Smith, Adib Cruz, William Rodriguez, Gavin Taylor

(MIDDLE) Christopher Castaneda, Shakir Tillet, Jayden Sutherland, Jhalen Mariano, Marson Mejia,  
Abdias Lozano, Taejaun Mcfadzean, Marlon Smith, Steven Alvarado

(FRONT) Jalen Arnold, Mr. Sean Rudon, Chris Garbutt, Erick Leslie, Gil Gilharry, Ajani Neal  
(Not in picture: Teajaun Pasqual, Jaheim Anthony and Triston Hulse)

### References

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