Universal Negro Improvement Association

and African Communities' League · how the organization was governed

Constitution and Book of Laws
In effect July 1918
Text as amended August 1920, 1921 and 1922

EACH DIVISION SENDS DEPUTIES TO CONVENTION · ONE VOTE EACH · NO PROXIES · III §1–2

The Convention

Elects the top officers, confirms the rest, amends the Constitution by two-thirds. II §3 · IV §2

may impeach and remove by two-thirds · V §4

Potentate and Supreme Commissioner

"The invested ruler." Permanent. Must seek the Executive Council's advice.

SUPREME DEPUTY
Permanent. Acts for the Potentate in his absence.
IV §8 · VI §13

THE CONSORT
Heads "the female division of all organizations, societies and orders."
V §1

responsible to · IV §8 · V §1–2

President-General and Administrator

"The working head." Veto on money matters. Appoints every Division president.

PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT OF AFRICA
Elected, four years. No duties defined in this text.
IV §2

ASSISTANT PRESIDENTS-GENERAL

- **1st** · acts if the office falls vacant
- **2nd** · titular Leader of American Negroes
- **3rd** · titular Leader, West Indies, South and Central America
- **4th** · no separate duties listed

appoints · Convention confirms · IV §2a · VI §14

High Executive Council

Chaired by the Potentate · settles disputes between Divisions between Conventions IV §1 · XI §1

SECRETARY-GENERAL
All correspondence. Spokesman in Convention.
→ every Divisional Secretary
→ Bureau of Passports
VI §16 · XIV §1

HIGH CHANCELLOR
Holds and banks the funds. Gives the Financial Speech.
Auditor-General checks the books twice a year
VI §19, §22

COUNSEL-GENERAL
Head legal officer. Prosecutes an impeached Potentate.
Assistant Counsel-General
V §5 · VI §20

HIGH COMMISSIONER-GENERAL
Heads the foreign service.
→ a High Commissioner in every country, ambassador rank
IV §4–6 · VI §23

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZER
Organizes "all the Negro communities of the world."
→ local organizers, reporting monthly
VI §25

MINISTER OF LEGIONS
A Legion division in every city or district.
→ Universal African Legions
VI §28

MINISTER OF LABOUR AND INDUSTRIES
Jobs, labour conditions, immigration.
→ representatives in each Division
VI §27

CHAPLAIN · SURGEON · EDUCATION
Chaplain-General, Surgeon-General, Minister of Education.
Surgeon examines the Legions
IV §1 · VI §24, §26

charters · I §4–6 · IV §7

THE DIVISION
Charter for **seven or more**. President **appointed** from the top; other officers **elected** by the members.
I §4 · IV §7

CHAPTERS
Every further Division in the same city. Supervised by the Executive Secretary, a civil servant.
I §5

BRANCHES
Divisions under one Dominion, Provincial or Colonial charter.
I §6

JUSTICE COMMITTEE
The President plus two members, under the Bureau of Justice.
XV §3

one-fifth of dues and profits go up to the High Chancellor · IX §3

The Membership

"All persons of Negro blood and African descent are regarded as ordinary members." Active members pay dues of up to 25¢ a month. X §1 · IX §1

COMPANIES AND BUREAUS

Black Star Line Navigation and Trading Co.
Owned wholly by the UNIA. No individual may hold stock.
VI §11

Black Star Line Redemption Corporation
Buys back the old Line's stock and notes over five years.
VI §12

Civil Service
Every employee hired and promoted by examination.
XIII §1–8

Bureau of Justice
Headed by an attorney, "for the protection of all Negroes."
XV §1–2

African Redemption Fund
Voluntary, $5 or more, "for the building up of Africa."
IX

> *"The Potentate's power of action in all matters shall be derived from the advice received from his Executive Council... which advice shall be expressive of the will and sentiment of the people."*
> Art. V §2

Source: "Constitution of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (1918)," BlackPast.org, from A. C. Hill and M. Kilson, eds., *Apropos of Africa* (1969). BlackPast dates it 1918; the text carries the 1920–22 amendments. Article and section as printed there; BlackPast's "Article XL" read as XI, Civil Service articles shown as XIII.

Officeholders are not named in the document.
Legacy Lectures · Session 3