

Justice for Marcus Garvey

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ST. CROIX — Marcus Garvey was many things, activist, orator, businessman, and a revolutionary leader of international movements focused on the empowerment of black people worldwide.

The appellation of convict, however, is one title that Garvey has unjustly borne for too long according to the sons of Jamaica's first National Hero, who together with community leaders from across the globe are banding together during the month of February to raise 100,000 signatures on a petition that calls for President Joseph Biden to grant Garvey a posthumous pardon.

The effort, spearheaded by the Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC) and led locally by C-PAC Board member Dr. Donna Christensen, is the latest group to call on a sitting president to overturn Garvey's 1923 mail fraud conviction. Beginning in 1987, and continuing until 2017, New York City Congressman Charles Rangel every year proffered a resolution that sought to have Congress call on the president to pardon Garvey.

Garvey came to the United States from Jamaica in 1916 and settled in New York City's Harlem, where he began speaking from soapboxes on street corners, decrying the inhumanities of colonialism and preaching about the strength black people could bring to bear against an oppressive society if they were able to effectively unite. Within a year of coming to the U.S., Garvey was fully enmeshed in America's race politics, delivering a damning, and galvanizing speech in the aftermath of a race riot that saw hundreds of black

Former Congresswoman Christensen pushes for full presidential posthumous pardon for Garvey

American's murdered by white citizens.

World War I had been raging since 1914, spurring an increased demand for labor in manufacturing plants across the nation that only increased after America officially entered the war in 1917. The promise of better wages and the chance to build a more dignified life for themselves drew African Americans away from the rural south and towards industrial hubs like East St. Louis, Illinois, which during the war years had more than 10,000 African Americans move to the city.

Prior to the explosion of the black population in East St. Louis, the city had been almost uniformly white. As black people became ever more entrenched in the city, gaining employment in manufacturing plants and beginning to compete with whites for housing, tensions related to race that were never far from the surface, came to the fore. As thermostats began to climb in July of 1917, mere months after Garvey completed his first U.S. speaking tour, a rumor began to spread in East St. Louis that a black man had killed a white man.

By the next day, blood was flowing in the streets as gangs of white citizens engaged in drive-by shootings of black people, targeted black homes for arson, and beat black people in the streets. After a week of wonton barbarity, hundreds of African Americans would be dead from mob violence, and more than six thousand would flee the city, fearing that if they stayed, it would be their tomb.



File photo
Marcus Garvey, Jamaican Black Nationalist and Separatist, ca. 1920. In August 1920, his 'Universal Negro Improvement Association,' claimed 4 million members and 25,000 attended its Madison Square Garden event.

A week after the deadly rumor spread through East St. Louis, Garvey would deliver one of his most famous speeches, a piece of oratory that launched him fully onto the national stage and cemented his place amongst

black leaders in the country. "Millions of our people in slavery gave their lives that America might live," he said. "From the labors of these people the country grew in power, until her wealth today is computed above

that of any two nations. With all the service that the Negro gave he is still a despised creature in the eyes of white people, for if he were not to them despised, the whites of this country would never allow such outrages as the East St. Louis massacre. . . . This is a massacre that will go down in history as one of the bloodiest outrages against mankind for which any class of people could be held guilty."

Garvey's speech, reprinted into a pamphlet entitled: "The Conspiracy of the East St. Louis Riots," captured the imaginations of black people, and the attentions of a young J. Edgar Hoover. Over the next two years, Garvey would go on to re-launch the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA), start an international steamship company called the Black Star Line, and incorporate the Negro Factories Corporation, which established businesses in black communities. The company at one point employed over 1,000 people in Harlem, New York alone.

UNIA would go on to disseminate a global newspaper that spoke against colonialism and its fruits, and offered black people alternative schools of thought than those that could be found in publications controlled by the mainstream media. The paper would go on to be banned in multiple countries, although UNIA only grew in international influence. The organization hosted its first International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in 1920, one of UNIA's most public-facing achievements that attracted delegates from all over the world.

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As Garvey, buoyed by the support of first Amy Ashwood, his first wife with whom he cofounded UNIA in 1914, and later Amy Jacques, his second wife and organized African Americans into a more cohesive political and social force, clandestine opposition to his work began to grow in the highest chambers of American government.

Hoover became the head of the Bureau of Investigation's new General Intelligence Division, also known as the Radical Division, in 1919 and pushed his agents to begin investigating Garvey. Hoover saw parallels between the black struggle for equality and Communist movements that were trying to gain a foothold in the country, and was equally devoted to rooting out both. The Bureau of Investigation was the predecessor of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), which Hoover is credited with founding.

"Today, the late former director of the FBI is widely discredited as a power-hungry blackmailer of U.S. presidents and a hateful bigot and slanderer of Martin Luther King who shied away from prosecuting organized crime while doing everything in his power to intimidate and undermine leaders of civil rights anti-war movements of the 1960's," Rangel wrote.

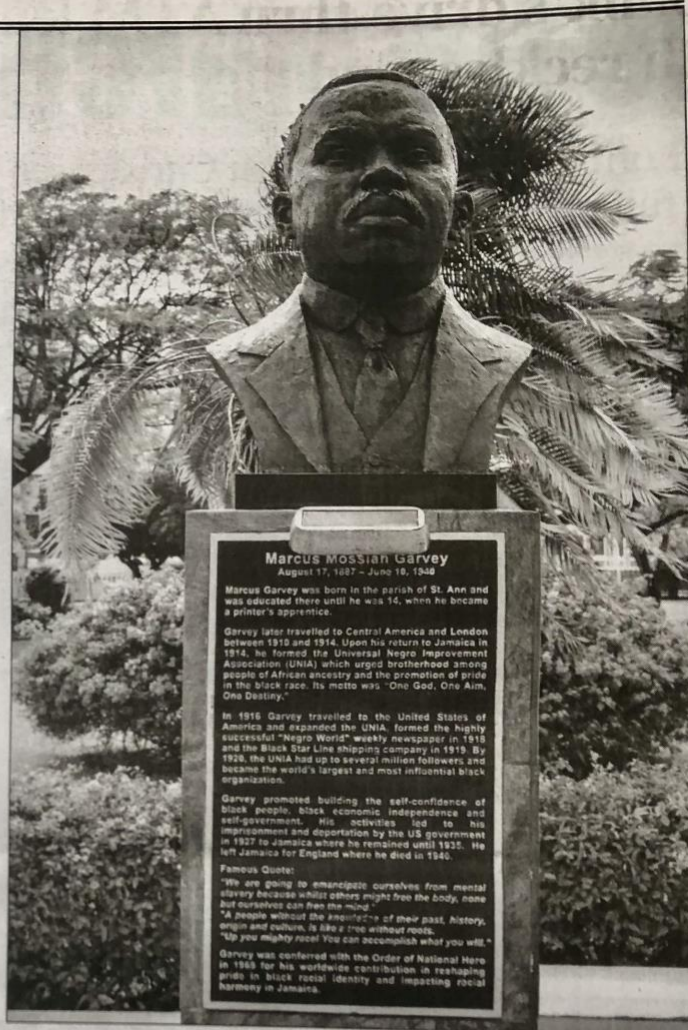
A month after Hoover assumed the lead role at the Bureau of Investigation, the bureau instructed its agents in New York to gather "sufficient evidence against Garvey to warrant the institution of deportation proceedings," according to agency files.

After years of intense investigation by several agencies of the federal government, Garvey was put on trial May, 18th, 1923.

"The government's efforts culminated on June 18, 1923, when Mr. Garvey was wrongfully convicted of mail fraud in an unjust prosecution in which the only evidence against him was an empty envelope, presented by a perjured witness who was unable to remember its contents," Anthony Pierce wrote in the letter to the president asking for Garvey's posthumous pardon.

Before the end of the month, Garvey had been sentenced to five years in prison for mail fraud. His wife, Jacques, worked tirelessly to organize a grassroots movement that called on the government to overturn Garvey's conviction, a movement that bore fruit when President Calvin Coolidge commuted his sentence in 1927, although he did so only under the condition that Garvey be immediately deported from the country.

In order to add your signature to the petition, C-PAC advises that you visit the White House's official website and leave the president a message stating "Exonerate Marcus Garvey." You can reach the specific webpage by typing in the following link: <https://bit.ly/exonerategarvey>.



Marcus Mosiah Garvey

August 17, 1887 - June 16, 1940

Marcus Garvey was born in the parish of St. Ann and was educated there until he was 14, when he became a printer's apprentice.

Garvey later travelled to Central America and London between 1910 and 1914. Upon his return to Jamaica in 1914, he formed the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which urged brotherhood among people of African ancestry and the promotion of pride in the black race. Its motto was "One God, One Aim, One Destiny."

In 1916 Garvey travelled to the United States of America and expanded the UNIA, formed the highly successful "Negro World" weekly newspaper in 1915 and the Black Star Line shipping company in 1919. By 1920, the UNIA had up to several million followers, and became the world's largest and most influential black organization.

Garvey promoted building the self-confidence of black people, black economic independence and self-government. His activities led to his imprisonment and deportation by the US government in 1927 to Jamaica where he remained until 1935. He left Jamaica for England where he died in 1940.

Famous Quote:

"We are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind."

"A people without the knowledge of their past, history, origin and culture, is like a tree without roots."

"Up you mighty race! You can accomplish what you will."

Garvey was conferred with the Order of National Hero in 1963 for his worldwide contribution in reshaping pride in black racial identity and impacting racial harmony in Jamaica.

Saint Andrew, Jamaica - February 05 2019: Statue/Sculpture of Jamaican Political Leader and National Hero Marcus Garvey at the Emancipation Park in New Kingston, St Andrew, Jamaica. File photo