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Statement in Support of Posthumous Presidential Pardon of Marcus Mosiah Garvey

In recognition of his lifelong and substantial contributions to society, his efforts to uplift peoples of African descent the world over, and his work to promote economic independence as a means of social progress, Lorna Shelton Beck stands in support of the descendants of Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who now seek a posthumous presidential pardon on Garvey's behalf.

Marcus Garvey lives in history as one of the first leaders of the American civil rights movement. In the early twentieth century, he was an advocate for the social, political, and economic independence of those of African descent across the world, and Garvey staked his name and his movement on the development of economic opportunity as a source of black empowerment. To unite his followers toward a common goal of social progress, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), which at its height boasted nearly 6 million members in 40 countries. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "He was the first man on a mass scale and level to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny. And make the Negro feel that he was somebody."

Marcus Garvey is a beacon of hope for the Black community. As the National Hero of Jamaica he is a shining example of, "learn to do for yourself" encouraging Blacks to be self-sufficient and not depend on the state. We respect his contribution and would like our National Hero free of this shackle that has damage his name, work and reputation.

Because of these achievements, Garvey was viewed as a threat to the established order by the U.S. government. Decades before Dr. King would become targeted for his activism, J. Edgar Hoover led the Bureau of Investigation in its surveillance of Garvey and actively sought methods to disrupt and destroy Garvey's civil rights movement. In 1923, based on intelligence gathered from undercover agents posing as Garvey supporters and aided by judicial proceedings that have largely been condemned as factually unsound and politically and racially motivated, Garvey was convicted of mail fraud and sentenced to five years in federal prison. In partial recognition of the unsettling facts underlying the prosecution of the case, President Calvin Coolidge commuted the sentence in November 1927, but deported Garvey from the country.

The posthumous pardon petition now filed on Garvey's behalf seeks to exonerate him from the stigma of this conviction. Following the commutation of his sentence, efforts to fully clear Garvey's name have been ongoing and concerted on the part of the U.S. Congress, civil society organizations, cities, states, and international groups. More than 90 years after the imposition of this injustice, it is time to exonerate Marcus Mosiah Garvey and let history reflect the true nature of his legacy.

Lorna Shelton Beck