



Institute of Caribbean Studies

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August 16, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC

By EMAIL

RE: Posthumous Presidential Pardon of Marcus Mosiah Garvey

Dear Mr. President:

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, the Institute of Caribbean Studies stands in support of the descendants of Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who now seek a posthumous presidential pardon on Garvey's behalf.

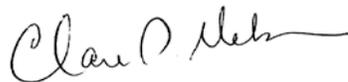
The Rt. Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the first National Hero of Jamaica, lives in history as one of the first leaders of the American civil rights movement. In the early twentieth century, he was an advocate for the social, political, and economic independence of those of African descent across the 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."

The Institute of Caribbean Studies has served as a voice for the engagement of Caribbean Americans in US policy since our founding in 1993, and has tried to build on the visionary leadership, exemplified by Marcus Garvey. His commitment to economic empowerment which led to the founding of the Black Star Line, is seen by many as a precursor to the various Caribbean American Chambers of Commerce which dot the US landscape. Garvey's vision of collective economic success paved the way for the work of publishers like Earl Graves of the Black Enterprise, who is of Caribbean heritage, by demonstrating that it was possible for people of African descent to thrive as thought leaders in the economic space. As for me, personally, the example of Marcus Garvey fuelled my commitment to work to achieve economic justice for the people of African descent across the Americas, and thus informed my contributions to the articulation of portions of the Durban Plan of Action of the UN World Conference Against Racism, which is one of the reasons for my being honored with the White House Champion of Change in 2012. Indeed, the work and legacy of Marcus Garvey has served as both foundation and fuel for many people of Caribbean heritage in these United States, who have constructed businesses that drive their own, as well as America's success. Garvey's achievements in awakening "Negroes" around the world to their power and genius in an era before the first transatlantic telephone call are unparalleled.

As a result 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 the Rt. Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jamaica's first National hero and global Pan-African icon, and let history reflect the true nature of his legacy to America. On behalf of the millions of Americans of Caribbean heritage I urge you to make it so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Claire A. Nelson".

Claire A. Nelson Ph.D., White House Champion of Change 2012
Founder & President