

Commemoration of the 133rd Anniversary of the Birth of the Rt. Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey

“Up you mighty race, accomplish what you will.”- Garvey

Jamaica’s first National Hero, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, was born on August 17, 1887 to parents Marcus Garvey Snr and Sarah Jane Richards in the parish of St. Ann. Garvey would later be regarded as the father of the “Pan-Africanist Movement”. His teachings came to symbolize the hopes and aspirations of black people, who since emancipation, remained disenfranchised.

Marcus, (whose given name was “Malcus”) was the youngest of 11 children. He developed a keen interest in books from an early age due to the extensive family library that was created by his father (a mason) that Garvey made use of. Garvey attended the Church of England school in St. Ann until the age of 14 (1906). He then worked at a printery in St. Ann’s Bay and later at P. A. Benjamin in Kingston. Shortly after he joined the work force, Garvey became involved in trade unionism and two years later, led a strike with the purpose of earning higher wages from the printing press company for all. This perhaps gave birth to Garvey’s political career and activist life that he would later develop and become.



32 Marcus Garvey Way in St. Ann’s bay is the site of Garvey’s early childhood home, and his purported birthplace.

Garvey’s interest in humanity (specifically blacks) and their rights became forefront, so much so that in 1912, he travelled to London, England where he became interested and studied black history and culture. It was at this point that he created the “*Back to Africa*” movement. After completing his tenure in England, Garvey returned to Jamaica in 1914. With his exposure to Negroes being degraded and mistreated, Garvey soon realised that he had a greater role to play in the motivation and liberation of blacks across the world. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was created in the same year of his return to Jamaica.

The UNIA, of which Marcus Garvey was president and travelling commissioner, represents the largest mass movement in the African American history. Its aim was to establish a universal confraternity among the race, to promote the spirit of race, pride, and love, among a few other aims. This arm of the black movement existed in several areas in Jamaica and each division was required to have a Liberty Hall. Prior to the relocation of the Kingston division of Liberty

Hall, Garvey occupied the halls at 76 King Street (which still exists today) which was bought by the Kingston Division of the UNIA and opened its doors in 1923. This area was used as his headquarters for a short while, following his deportation to Jamaica from the United States in 1927.



Liberty Hall, 76 King Street, Kingston

Later in 1928, Garvey, through the 76 King Street Liberty Hall, Kingston Division, acquired a larger space which was more suitable for his headquarters and operations and in December of that same year, a ceremony was held to commemorate the opening of this new venue. This new headquarters, which was located at Edelweiss Park, 67 Slipe Road, St. Andrew became the International Headquarters for the UNIA movement in 1929 until Marcus migrated to England in 1935.

The headquarters and its operations was the central point for the UNIA general meetings such as the Sixth and Seventh International Convention of Negro Peoples of the World in 1929 and 1934 respectively; it served as meeting halls for the Black Cross Nurses, the African Legion as well as the Juveniles. Edelweiss Park was also the cultural centre of the UNIA activities and was popularly known for its own bands, choir and drama group which hosted many cultural and intellectual functions. Though the UNIA movement had its roots in politics and activism mixed with religion, Marcus knew that one way to empower blacks was to give them a medium through which they could feel a part of society. As such, the UNIA movement catered to the social wellbeing of its members.

Due to Garvey's extensive travel to other countries and meeting negroes who were experiencing the same degradation, the UNIA movement began to spread. In 1919, Garvey purchased an auditorium in Harlem and named it Liberty Hall. In this space, he held nightly meetings, sometimes to an audience of six thousand. The UNIA grew immensely in the United States beyond anything that Garvey had ever expected. As a result of the mass, the organization was an "international force of black resistance and affirmation". The first convention held by the UNIA in August 1920, was at Madison Square Gardens. It was the convention that

produced the ‘*Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World*’. This declaration was a stipulation that blacks had the right of choice in all matters, whether it be political, religious, or otherwise.

Marcus Garvey’s life, his movements and his words of encouragement gave hope to many blacks across the world. Though he faced many hurdles, imprisoned on several accounts, and even lost much, his fight for black humanity did not waver. In 1935, Garvey left Jamaica for the final time for London, England, where the UNIA international headquarters was relocated. Garvey died in London on June 10, 1940 at the age of 52. He was laid to rest at the St. Mary’s Roman Catholic cemetery in Kensal Green, London. His remains, however, was later exhumed on the November 13, 1964 and was reinterred beneath the Marcus Garvey Monument in the National Heroes Park, Kingston, Jamaica.



Monument to the Rt. Excellent Marcus Garvey at the National Heroes Park

Garvey was officially conferred with the Order of the National Hero in 1969. His legacy, name and sacrifices live on, as Jamaica and the world still celebrate him as the man who propelled the liberation of negroes.

Sources:

Biography. (2020) Marcus Garvey [https://www.biography.com/activist/marcus-garvey#:~:text=Founding%20the%20United%20Negro%20Improvement%20Association%20\(U.N.I.A.\),-Garvey's%20Philosophy%20%26%20Beliefs&text=Garvey%20returned%20to%20Jamaica%20in,After%20corresponding%20with%20Booker%20T.](https://www.biography.com/activist/marcus-garvey#:~:text=Founding%20the%20United%20Negro%20Improvement%20Association%20(U.N.I.A.),-Garvey's%20Philosophy%20%26%20Beliefs&text=Garvey%20returned%20to%20Jamaica%20in,After%20corresponding%20with%20Booker%20T.) [Accessed 07 August 2020]

History (2019) *Marcus Garvey* <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/marcus-garvey>
[Accessed 10 August 2020]

Lewis, Rupert (2012) “Garvey Reconsidered at Jamaica’s 50th” *Celebrating 50 Years of Independence*

Jamaica Information Service. *Marcus Mosiah Garvey-Jamaican National Hero*

<https://jis.gov.jm/information/heroes/marcus-mosiah-garvey/> [Accessed 07 August 2020]

Leeuwen, David (2000) *Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/garvey.htm> [Accessed 10 August 2020]

Shoshana Dyer

Research Officer

shoshanadyer@jnht.com