



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 929

Resolution calling upon the 110th Congress to unanimously support H. Con. Res. 24, Congressman Charles B. Rangel's resolution to fully exonerate the late black leader Marcus Garvey of all charges brought against him by the United States government and to recognize Garvey internationally as an outstanding twentieth century leader and thinker in the struggle for human rights.

By The Speaker (Council Member Quinn) and Council Members Dickens, Jackson, Brewer, Foster, Gerson, Gonzalez, James, Mark-Viverito, Mealy, Rivera, Sanders Jr. and Seabrook

Whereas, Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940), by virtue of oratorical legacy, literary influence, political acumen, and great accomplishment established himself as a towering figure of Black history; and

Whereas, Born in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, Garvey would become a figure of international distinction, founding the Black Star Line steamship company and a host of advocacy organizations including the African Communities League and the influential Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an organization that, at its height, claimed a membership of over one million; and

Whereas, UNIA, in its "Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World," would presciently challenge inequality and racism worldwide, crying out against the injustices of educational, social, and wage inequality, condemning use of the "N" word, calling unequivocally for "the self-determination of all peoples," and tearing apart ignorant but persistent conceptions of Black mental inferiority; and

Whereas, In stark contrast to such pernicious myths, the intellectual triumphs of Marcus Garvey were manifold, revealing themselves in sweeping new social theories and dazzling rhetoric including, for example, his 1925 "First Message to the Negroes of the world from Atlanta Prison," in which he proclaimed, "Look for me in the whirlwind or the storm, look for me all around you, for, with God's grace, I shall come and bring with me countless millions of black slaves who have died in America and the West Indies and the millions in Africa

to aid you in the fight for Liberty, Freedom and Life;” and

Whereas, At the first convention of the UNIA, held here in New York City itself, Garvey, speaking before a crowd of 25,000, laid out ideas of African nationalism and the human rights-based arguments for the eviction of Europe’s colonial powers from the continent of Africa after which African peoples, harnessing the great literal and figurative riches of their homeland, might give rise to a new, free, and self-determined epoch of Black history; and

Whereas, Garvey’s rise to prominence attracted not only followers but also detractors, not least among whom was the United States Federal Bureau of Investigations director J. Edgar Hoover, who, according to the *New York Times*, “saw the blacks and the Reds as a larger conspiracy. The new Negro movement, which Garvey symbolized, Hoover saw as a terrible threat to the American way;” and

Whereas, While the passage of time has led many to view Hoover as a paranoid, delusional egomaniac blinded to the needs of his country by his own lust for power, Hoover’s power in his own era resulted in an investigation into Garvey’s and the Black Star Line’s affairs, an investigation that would result in Garvey’s incarceration for mail fraud after a trial now decried by many historians as a politically motivated travesty of American justice and riddled with both procedural and factual inconsistencies; and

Whereas, After serving over two years in prison, President Calvin Coolidge commuted Garvey’s sentence and deported the activist due to Garvey’s then-status as a felon and non-citizen; and

Whereas, Following deportation, Garvey would live in Jamaica and England and would continue to advocate principles of self-government and reform, and while Africa would not begin to break free from the shackles of colonialism in Garvey’s lifetime, following his death the post-World War II Pan-African movement would in its pursuit of an independent Africa be palpably informed and dogmatically fortified by Garvey’s powerful philosophy; and

Whereas, In his pursuit of self-determination, staunch defiance of and aggressive attacks upon popular ignorance regarding African and African American people, and unprecedented channeling of Black social and

financial resources, Garvey announced to the world that Black communities were one community, linked by common bonds of universal oppression and therefore possessed of not only a need but a duty to rise up in solidarity to take well-considered action in claiming a rightful place on the global stage; and

Whereas, Congressman Charles B. Rangel has many times introduced Congressional resolutions seeking to exonerate Garvey and forever sever from Garvey's federal record his ignominious designation as ex-convict number 19359; and

Whereas, In recognition of his many achievements, the Council of the City of New York seeks to join a growing chorus of academics, politicians, advocates, and fair-minded people of all races in calling for the deserved emancipation of the good name of Marcus Garvey from historical chains of racially and politically motivated falsehood and distortion; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the 110th Congress to unanimously support H. Con. Res. 24, Congressman Charles B. Rangel's resolution to fully exonerate the late black leader Marcus Garvey of all charges brought against him by the United States government and to recognize Garvey internationally as an outstanding twentieth century leader and thinker in the struggle for human rights.

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