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2018 ended much like it began, with immigration at the forefront of the national political conversation. What’s to be done with the mantra of “crisis” flaring up to perpetuate US tradition of expulsion and exclusion? What does it all mean for us doing immigration work?

A white nationalist fixation on the US government produced the largest US government shutdown in history, in pursuit of politically dividing the US from our southern neighbors. According to TRAC (Transnational Records Access Clearinghouse), the federal government shutdown earlier this year impacted more than 40,000 individual immigration cases. With 3,320 of those cases, New York had the second highest number of individuals impacted by court cancellations. For some of our members fighting cases on the outside who have been waiting to appear in court, they meant they'd have to wait up to a year or more as their cases were postponed and rescheduled. Yet, even with EOIR limited in operations, cases of detained people are still proceeding as usual.
In 1914, Marcus Garvey, alongside Amy Ashwood, founded the first division of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Kingston, Jamaica. The goal of the UNIA was to “establish Universal Confraternity among the race,” to better the material conditions of Black people of all nationalities, to work toward the independence of African states, and to “establish a central nation for the race.” In just a few short years, the vision of the UNIA expanded throughout the Black diaspora and chapters could be found throughout Africa, Latin America, North America, and the Caribbean. The importance that Garvey’s ideals placed on universal brotherhood cannot be understated and played a crucial role in the growing movement of Black liberation that sought to build beyond very limiting and divisive colonial borders. As people fighting for the freedom of movement and the rights of immigrants everywhere, we must understand how this is inextricably connected to the global fight for the liberation of all Black people. The work of Garvey was among the most formative tools and ideological frames of reference for members of the Black diaspora who sought to build extensive networks and bridges for solidarity and material support across national borders.

The UNIA built structures for political education, local organizing, and economic exchange. Among these were publications such as Negro World, which allowed members of the UNIA in to read about the activities of other divisions in Cuba, Panama, Haiti, etc. and the Black Star Line, which allowed those in the diaspora to develop multinational commercial relationships. These institutions were so widely embraced by Black communities that it did not take long for the United States government to intervene. The government went so far as to hire the first Black FBI agents to infiltrate the UNIA and sabotage its programs. Garvey and other UNIA leaders were subsequently charged and imprisoned for mail fraud associated with the Black Star Line and he was then deported to Jamaica upon his release. Divisions of the UNIA can still be found in a few cities across the North America, Africa, and the Caribbean.

It is important to acknowledge that there are many valid criticisms to be made of Garvey’s work; many have argued that adopting capitalist frameworks of economic growth, replicating western projects of nation building, and modeling white American and patriarchal politics of respectability are not productive to the project of Black liberation.

But there are many invaluable lessons to be drawn from a movement that sparked pride among Afro-descended people and galvanized so many to work across national boundaries for the mutual benefit of all Black people. Garvey understood very well that a movement for our liberation that was not global in scope would not yield as much progress as one that united the diaspora. As we move forward with our own movements in the present day, we must draw from the lessons of those that came before us. It is crucial that we approach our struggles from an international focus because our liberation at home will not come without that of our family and comrades abroad.

Earlier this year, we received a powerful poem by someone currently fighting his detention at an ICE facility. Read below:

**Freedom, Liberty, Justice**
_A poem by Joel Ray_

We come to live on an land where they can’t trust us.
Who is us?
Us is we.
Most foreigners migrating to escape poverty
Seeking, searching to live norma and free...dom
Most of our homeland are extremely beautiful, from this why should we run?
Liberty is hard to come by.
Many risk their lives for plenty will die,
To have a chance at a better life,
No justice in their homeland so they won’t think twice,
A desperate attempt to save the lives of their family,
Panic, trauma and tragedy [sic]
Find a safe haven in calculated strategy, [sic]
What would you do if you was placed in this position,
Not knowing if you dare cross that border you will end up in prison

What’s the other decision
Stay in your homeland and end up a victim,
Nah, I will take my chances at a better living.
Even if its blood, sweat, and tears from the beginning, I’ll risk it all, my life for my children.
If we can just get across this bored we’ll be winning
Just a few more steps to our freedom,
As we make it we learn immediately liberty here is only for some
And not all, where does that line of justice of justice fall

Did we run from one mess into a land of cultural stress.
A place away [sic] pronounced to be the best,
But we even grant us asylum,
Like we have no emotions and feelings their hearts must be numb,
Many of us restrained by even the nasty words of their tongues,
Electronic shackles is a form of their justice, for just us.
But I will forever “Freedom it is a must and the chains and shackles must bust”

“Deuces” to ICE who are ready to bargain our liberty for a price.
Free from detentions are detainees and inmates true intentions
Oppressed are the people, caught in an unjust immigration system
Not knowing when we came here one day we would be a victim,
By enforcement of laws and policies never built to benefit immigrant families

_Take away our freedom and many of us was never found guilty
Sit us in their jails for weeks, months, years dreaming of liberty
No justice for us their ways to corrupt and filthy [sic]
We have to get up, stand up and fight in unity
Strengthen our numbers in every oppressed community_