

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Legislature Marks African Liberation Day with Call for Justice, Reparations, Unity, and Cultural Renewal

With music, dance, and reflections on history, lawmakers and cultural leaders honored the Virgin Islands' place in the Pan African movement, urging renewed commitment to reparative justice, self-determination, and the preservation of African heritage.

Culture / **Published On May 17, 2025 07:22 AM /**

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African Liberation Day performance at the V.I. Legislature in St. Thomas. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

On Friday, lawmakers convened at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall to commemorate African Liberation Day, a practice kept by the Legislature since 1990, the year after Act

5473 designated the third week in May as Virgin Islands African Heritage Week.

The legislation declares that “time should be set aside to remember our proud African heritage.” This year's ceremony featured a mix of dance, song, drumming and storytelling that highlighted the continued preservation of the ties between the U.S. Virgin Islands and the continent of Africa. Speakers, meanwhile, contemplated the theme: “We Call Attention to Justice and Reparations for Africa and People of African Descent.”

The theme, said Senate President Milton Potter, “reminds us that the struggle for liberation did not end with the lowering of colonial flags. It continues today in the fight for economic justice, for control over our own resources, for the right to chart our own destinies and for the unity of African people across every border.”

“Our own journey as Virgin Islanders, striving for self-determination, justice and equality, is a continuation of the great Pan African struggle. We are heirs to a legacy of resistance and a duty to carry it forward,” he continued. “Let us build bridges across the African world, from the Virgin Islands to every shore where African descendants reside,” he pleaded.

Friday's keynote speaker Sele Adeyemi provided listeners with a timeline of the Virgin Islands' involvement in the Pan Africanist movement. African Liberation Day began to commemorate the founding of the Organization of African Unity on May 25, 1963. Twelve years later, a contingent from the USVI traveled to Antigua to celebrate African Liberation Day in 1975. In 1981, the Virgin Islands held its own African Liberation Day rally for the first time. In 1989, the Legislature moved to formally recognize the observance.

“They take Africans out of Africa, but they didn't take the memory of Africa out the Africans,” declared Leba Ola-Niyi, a member of the Pan African Support Group. “We are African people, regardless of where we are.” Mr. Ola-Niyi issued a word of advice: “We must teach our youngsters African, Caribbean, and Virgin Islands history, all three...If you don't know yourself, how would you love yourself and love others?”

Mr. Ola-Niyi and Glenn Davis, another Pan Africanist, community activist, and storyteller, were both awarded for their “exceptional contributions, dedication and commitment towards keeping Virgin Islands culture alive” during Friday's ceremony. The two men were described as “people who have given of themselves for decades with no ulterior motive at all, but the advancement of our people,” by Senator Potter.

The Pan African flag now flies outside the Legislature's building in St. Thomas as local Pan Africanists appeal for reparative justice.