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Bryan, Roach Reflect on Legacy of Freedom in Emancipation Day Messages

Emphasizing the ongoing relevance of July 3, both Gov. Bryan and Lt. Gov. Roach urged Virgin Islanders to honor the legacy of emancipation by confronting present-day injustices and building a more equitable future rooted in freedom and resilience.

Community Center / **Published On July 03, 2025 04:41 AM /**

Staff Consortium **July 03, 2025**

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A statue of General Buddhoe at Emancipation Park in Frederiksted. By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach marked the 177th anniversary of the Emancipation of enslaved Africans in the U.S. Virgin Islands with heartfelt messages honoring the legacy of resistance, unity, and determination that brought freedom to the

territory.

In his statement, Governor Bryan noted the importance of Emancipation Day as a time to reflect on the courage and strength of Virgin Islands ancestors, calling it “a sacred reminder that freedom, justice, and dignity are not freely given — they are claimed.” He described July 3, 1848, as a day when “our ancestors rose up, not as victims, but as victors, refusing to wait for permission to live as free men and women.” He urged residents to reflect not only on history but on the present moment, noting that “the fight for justice and equality is far from over.”

Governor Bryan drew a powerful link between the past and the present, urging Virgin Islanders to protect and expand the freedoms won on that historic day. “Let us be moved to act — to honor their legacy by defending the rights of all people, confronting injustice wherever it exists, and building a future rooted in freedom, equity, and opportunity,” he said.

Lieutenant Governor Roach echoed these sentiments in his own Emancipation Day message, calling the occasion “one of the most significant holidays in the Virgin Islands.” He praised the resolve of the enslaved people who rejected the Danish government's plan to abolish slavery gradually over a twelve-year period — a plan viewed as “an insult” to those living under “unjust and inhumane conditions.”

Roach honored the leadership of General Buddhoe, whose role in the July 3, 1848, uprising at Fort Frederik helped force the immediate emancipation of the enslaved. He called on Virgin Islanders to keep the memory and courage of their ancestors “deeply rooted in our consciousness” and expressed hope that the torch passed on from that generation would continue to guide the territory forward.

Both leaders connected the commemoration of Emancipation Day to a broader narrative of pride, resilience, and shared responsibility. Governor Bryan encouraged Virgin Islanders to take inspiration from history and stand against present-day inequalities, while Lieutenant Governor Roach looked forward to the Emancipation Day and Independence Day celebrations as opportunities to remember the past and celebrate the “birth of this great nation of which we are a part.”