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## Students and Teachers Honored for Excellence at 5th Annual David Hamilton Jackson & All Ah We Exhibit

**The Division of VI Cultural Education celebrated young writers, artists, and performers at Cane Roots Art Gallery, honoring student achievement, teacher innovation, and the legacies of Virgin Islands heroes David Hamilton Jackson and Rothschild Francis.**

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The Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education, under the Virgin Islands Department of Education, hosted the 5th Annual David Hamilton Jackson & All Ah We Student Exhibit on Saturday at Cane Roots Art Gallery, celebrating youth creativity, civic pride, and historical awareness. The program honored students and teachers from across the territory whose artistic, literary, and academic works reflected the enduring legacies of Virgin Islands freedom fighters David Hamilton Jackson and Rothschild Francis.

The exhibit, stewarded by Stephanie Chalana Brown, Director of the Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education, featured student essays, visual art, musical performances, and research projects inspired by the early 20th-century activists who used the power of the press to challenge injustice and colonial rule.

“It’s not only about honoring Jackson’s voice,” said Brown. “It’s about teaching our students that freedom of expression and civic participation are living traditions. This year we expanded the project to include Rothschild Francis, bridging their stories as part of an ongoing series exploring unsung Virgin Islands heroes.”

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## **Literary Arts Winners**

The David Hamilton Jackson & Rothschild Francis Literary Arts Awards recognized students for original poems and essays reflecting freedom, courage, and social consciousness.

- 1st Place (\$300): From Educator to Bookkeeper — D’Lejah Charles, St. Croix Educational Complex High School (Teacher: Ms. Cleone Lynch)
- 2nd Place (\$125): Jenearah Rogers, St. Croix Educational Complex High School (Teacher: Ms. Chinenye Jacob)
- 3rd Place (\$112): Denisiah Ragguette, St. Croix Educational Complex High School (Teacher: Ms. Chinenye Jacob)
- Honorable Mention: The Legacy — Orvan Vidal, Ivanna Eudora Kean High School (Teacher: Mr. Shem Matthew)

Elementary participants from Jane E. Tuitt School were also recognized for creative reflections on Jackson and Francis, demonstrating early literary promise and historical understanding.

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## **Performing Arts Winners**

The Performing Arts Awards celebrated exceptional musical and creative performances.

- 1st Place (\$300): Quelbe Arrangement of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata (3rd Movement) — Howard Peters, Pearl B. Larsen K–8 School
  - 2nd Place (\$175): Original Song — Julia Phillip, Eulalie R. Rivera K–8 School (Teacher: Ms. Luz Rivera-Baires)
  - 3rd Place (\$112): Shay’Nyra Miller & Laurianna Bryan, Eulalie R. Rivera K–8 School (Teacher: Ms. Luz Rivera-Baires)
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## **Academic Project Winners**

Students showcased their research and multimedia presentations connecting themes of inclusion, freedom, and justice to Virgin Islands history.

- 1st Place (\$300): All Ah We Have One Voice, One Purpose: Inclusion, Freedom, and Fairness — Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School (Teacher: Ms. SharraMae Estigo)
- 2nd Place (\$175): Research Paper and Multimedia Lecture Presentation — Isaiah Benjamin, St. Croix Educational Complex High School (Teacher: Ms. Cleone Lynch)
- 3rd Place (\$112): Research Paper and Multimedia Lecture Presentation — Ajai Allen, St. Croix Educational Complex High School (Teacher: Ms. Cleone Lynch)
- Honorable Mention: Research Paper and Multimedia Presentation — Lucianick Alexander, St. Croix Educational Complex High School (Teacher: Ms. Cleone Lynch)

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## **Special Recognition Awards**

Teachers were honored for their dedication and creative integration of this year's theme into their classrooms.

- Early Learner Guiding Hand Award (1st Place): Ms. Jenna Fuentes — \$75 Gift Card
- Early Learner Guiding Hand Award (2nd Place): Ms. Jessica Patterson — \$50 Gift Card
- Class Participation Recognition: Ms. Cleone Lynch — \$25 Gift Card

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## **Celebrating Educators and Legacy**

Teachers across both districts were commended for innovative approaches to cultural education. Ms. Luz Rivera Betis, a foreign language teacher at Eulalie R. Rivera Elementary School, described how she incorporated Jackson's story into her Spanish lessons.

"I teach Spanish, but I wanted my students to understand why they are entitled to the rights they have today," she said. "One of my students wrote a song for David Hamilton Jackson; another wrote a poem. It became a lesson in identity, history, and pride. I now commit to introducing David Hamilton Jackson in every Spanish class I teach."



Mr. Shem Matthew of Ivanna Eudora Kean High School led students in creating mixed-media works inspired by *The Emancipator*, while Ms. Fuentes of Lew Muckle Elementary School engaged over 400 students in classroom projects focused on Jackson and Francis.

“From pre-K to high school, from St. Thomas to St. Croix,” Brown said, “our students and teachers showed that culture lives in every subject—from language, science, art, and civic studies. That’s what it means to teach the whole child.”

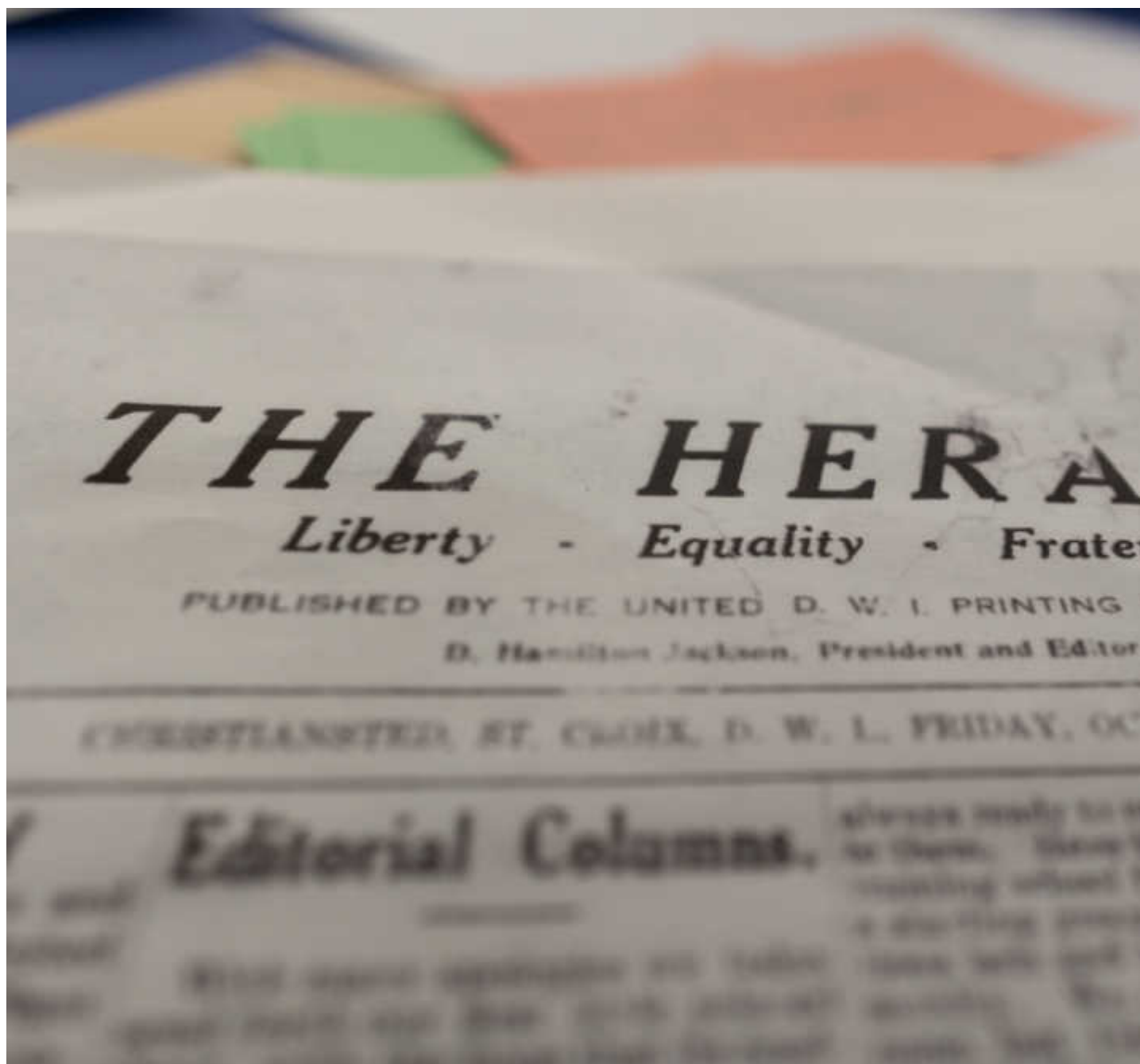
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### Keynote Highlights

The keynote presentation was delivered by Kula Francis, historian and faculty member at the University of the Virgin Islands, who explored the life of Rothschild Francis, the St. Thomian journalist and civil rights activist who founded *The Emancipator* newspaper in the 1920s.

“Rothschild Francis was born the grandson of enslaved people and had only a junior high education,” Francis said. “But through brilliance and determination, he became one of the Virgin Islands’ most fearless advocates. When the U.S. Navy ruled these islands and silenced local voices, Francis demanded fair wages, exposed corruption, and called for the end of military rule.”

Francis read from a 1923 letter written by Rothschild Francis to W.E.B. Du Bois, in which he wrote, “Politically, we are serfs... it is impossible for us to have our day in court when the police judge and the government attorney are one and the same person.” She added, “Those words, written 102 years ago, remind us that freedom of the press is never guaranteed, it is earned through courage.”



Francis also revealed she had recently obtained original letters from Francis to both Du Bois and Madam C.J. Walker, providing rare insight into his international activism and connection to the broader global Black freedom movement.

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## **Community Collaboration and Cultural Impact**

The event was hosted by Cane Roots Art Gallery, directed by Sonia Deane, who made her gallery space available for two weeks to display student works.

“This is about collaborative work,” said Deane. “Teachers and volunteers gave their time to mount every piece. We hope that when students walk in, they feel the magic of seeing their work displayed in a real gallery. It’s about sparking that creative fire.”

Dr. Renée Charleswell, Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction, praised the program’s growth, saying, “Each student here used creativity to reflect their understanding of community and identity. Their art reminds us that the story of All Ah We, all of us, is still being written, and they are the authors.”

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## **Educational Partnerships and Activities**

The exhibit introduced a new environmental education component through collaboration with the Division of Sustainability, directed by Ms. Meadows, which distributed local seed packets to promote home gardening and agricultural literacy.

Workshops were led by Maria Aurora Stiles, the Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition, and the Act Out Ensemble led by Sayeeda Carter. The event concluded with a historic walking tour through downtown Christiansted guided by historian Elizabeth Rezende, visiting Company Street, where Jackson once lived, and King Street, where The Herald was printed.

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## **Exhibit Details**

The David Hamilton Jackson & All Ah We Student Exhibit will remain on display at Cane Roots Art Gallery through November 15, 2025. The gallery is open Tuesday–Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and is welcoming school field trips and community visits.

The Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education extended its appreciation to Ernice Gilbert, founder and publisher of The Virgin Islands Consortium, for his continued support and partnership in making this year’s student and teacher awards possible.