

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Students Reenact 1878 Fireburn In Frederiksted

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ST. CROIX -- A group of junior and high school students dressed in white and carrying torches handcrafted from vibrant paper, resolutely marched down King Street in Frederiksted on September 30 shouting, "We want more money. We want a better contract."

The event was a small but significant staging of the October 1, 1878 Labor Riot, commonly known as the Fireburn, which occurred in the western town of St. Croix as former enslaved workers demanded fair pay for work and better working conditions. Among the demonstrators were four women leaders, revered today as the Queens of the Fireburn, namely Mary Thomas or Queen Mary, Queen Agnes, Queen Mathilda and

Susanna Abramson, remembered today as Bottom Belly.

During the insurrection against the governing Danes, several buildings in the town were burned down, and sugar plantations and mills were destroyed. The rebellion was quelled, but not before lives were lost among the former enslaved and the Danes. The Queens of the Fireburn were later imprisoned in Denmark.

Students volunteering for the re-enactment from the Arthur A. Richards Jr. High School were seventh graders, T'nira Charles, Xanyce Cupid and Antonio Vega. Music teacher Erick Willie accompanied the students. St. Croix Educational Complex Virgin Islands History teacher, Desiree Miranda, solicited the services of her ninth grade students, Jianna Hughes, Deanna Lawson, Sh'Neah John-Lewis, Jadah Jarvis and Nathan Thomas to stage the Fireburn re-enactment.

The 1878 Labor Riot reenactment was organized by Valrica M. Bryson, director of the Division of V. I. Cultural Education, to ensure the historic event remains an important lesson for students of today and tomorrow.