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# Sculpture of King Christian IX to be Removed From Emancipation Garden and Replaced With Statue of the Conch Shell Blower, if Bill Approved in Rules Committee Becomes Law

Culture / **Published On November 13, 2020 05:15 AM /**

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**Sculpture of King Christian IX at Emancipation Garden in St. Thomas. By. ROGER WOLLSTADT**

A bill that seeks to authorize the removal of the copper sculpture of King Christian IX from the Emancipation Garden in St. Thomas and replace it with the statue of "the Conch Shell Blower", was supported by all members of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary present for a Thursday hearing.

"This is the right time for African people and Virgin Islanders to stop worshiping and adoring the heroes of other peoples," said Leba Ola-Niyi of the Pan African Support Group during the hearing.

Bill No. 33-0369 was sponsored by Senator Myron Jackson. The measure also appropriates \$20,000 from the St. Thomas Capital Improvement Fund for the removal and replacement of the sculpture.

Yet while the measure advanced to the Committee of the Whole, Felipe Ayala Jr, a member of the Historical Trust Board, explained to the senators that he believes the sculpture, also called a bust as it portrays only King Christian IX's head and shoulders, has been "incorrectly promulgated as an insult to the people of this territory." Mr. Ayala stated that King Christian IX did not descend from the Danish kings of that slavery era, nor was he a participant of the island slave trade era. Mr. Ayala expounded that King Christian IX was a king who worked to better the lives of all the people of the territory, including descendants of slaves. "He was not responsible for the colonization of these islands, and this statue does not celebrate colonialism or slavery," said Mr. Ayala.

Michael Vante, a community activist and St. Thomas resident, had a different view of the bust than Mr. Ayala. Mr. Vante, the creator of an online Change.org petition which called for the removal of the king's bust, said during his testimony that the sculpture is disrespectful of the memory of slaves.

"The bust of King Christian IX in Emancipation Garden is simply disrespectful to the memory of our enslaved ancestors who were sold on that land, and who built and toiled for the fruits we enjoy today," Mr. Vante said. "Removing the bust of King Christian IX is not about rejecting our relationship or our history with Denmark, it is about accepting the fullness of that relationship in all of its complexities. It is about honoring space for our ancestors and the untold story within that physical space dedicated to honoring them on those sacred grounds."

Mr. Vante further stated that 1,297 petition signers, along with himself, believe that removing the bust is not about rewriting history but correcting a historical narrative that centers on a Danish King. He believes it should instead be refocused on celebrating a narrative of the roles Virgin Islanders played in the liberation and expansion of the territory's story. Mr. Vante suggested that the bust be removed from the grounds and be properly contextualized inside Fort Christian.

In Mr. Ola-Niyi's testimony, the member of the Pan African Support Group, he requested that three busts of the following outstanding Virgin Islanders and persons of African origin should be put up in the Emancipation Garden: Gen. Budhoe, Queen Coziah, and Edward Blyden.

Sen. Jackson, the measure's primary sponsor and a historian, explained that the King's bust has been in the park since 1909. However, it was not placed in the park to grace it but to grace the King's Wharf landing. The Emancipation Park was named in commemoration of the July 3rd, 1848 emancipation of slaves in the Danish West Indies. Mr. Jackson said the bust should not be the overwhelming image in a square named to celebrate a historic occasion. He said emancipation is absent outside of the Conch Shell Blower statue, which was placed there in 1998. The Conch Shell Blower is located on the west side of the park and also symbolizes the emancipation of slaves. Mr. Jackson highlighted that the Conch Shell Blower is truly the framework to which the park is named, however, the history is virtually absent.

Nine other measures were approved with Bill No. 33-0369, along with two board nominees: Marise James, Esq. who was nominated to serve on the board of VI Government Hospitals and Health Facilities Corporation on the island of St. Croix; and Dina Perry-Malone, who was selected

to serve on the VI Housing Authority Board of Commissioners on St. Thomas.

The other measures are:

- Bill No. 33-0433- An Act amending Title 19 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 34, section 777 (b), relating to the composition of the Cannabis Advisory Board
- Bill No. 33-0367- An Act amending Title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 1, section 27f, to change the composition of the Commission on Aging and its duties and for other related purposes
- Bill 33-0282- An Act amending Title 3, chapter 18, subchapter II, section 312(a) of the Virgin Islands Code by adding the Athletic Director of the University of the Virgin Islands and the Little League Administrator, or a representative, to the membership of the Virgin Islands Sports Commission
- Bill No 33-0364- An Act amending Title 1, Virgin Islands Code, chapter 7, by inserting section 111 relating to the recognition of indigenous tribes as official tribes of the Virgin Islands, and Title 3, Virgin Islands Code, chapter 14 by inserting section 234 creating the Virgin Islands Indigenous Indian Tribe Identification Card as amended
- Bill No 33-0369- An Act authorizing the removal of the copper bust of King Christian IX from the Emancipation Garden and replacing it with the statue of “The Conch Shell Blower” statue and appropriating \$20,000 from the St. Thomas Capital Improvement Fund for the removal and replacement of the bust
- Bill No. 33-0233- A Resolution honoring and commending Mr. Randolph “Junior” Donovan and Mr. Kashief “DJ General Kuntry” Hamilton for their heroism in saving the life of a cruise passenger at the West Indian Company Dock
- Bill No. 33-0285- An Act honoring and commending Noel “Breeze” Boynes, Sr. for his service to his community of St. John and naming the car ferry dock in St. Thomas “The Noel “Breeze” Boynes, Sr. Car Ferry Dock” in his honor
- Bill No 33-0150- An Act posthumously honoring and commending Manassah Francis for his significant entrepreneurship and service to the people of the Virgin Islands
- Bill No. 33-0247- A Resolution honoring and commending Wallace D. Williams for his years of extensive work and service as a librarian and his accomplishments as an Olympic athlete representing the U.S. Virgin Islands in multiple competitions