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A Colonial Past Makes Way for Better Historic Representation as Bust of King Christian IX is Removed From Emancipation Garden

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Bust of King Christian IX being stored inside Fort Christian By. SENATOR MYRON JACKSON

On Monday, the copper sculpture of King Christian IX was removed from the Emancipation Garden in St. Thomas and will be replaced with the statue of "the Conch Shell Blower". The authorization to remove King Christian IX's sculpture [came through a bill](#) sponsored by former Senator Myron Jackson. The measure, which became law, appropriated \$20,000 from the St. Thomas Capital Improvement Fund for the removal and replacement of the sculpture.

During testimony when the bill was being heard in the 33rd Legislature in November, Felipe Ayala Jr, a member of the Historical Trust Board, told senators that 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. He further stated 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. The creator of an online Change.org petition which called for the removal of the king's bust, Mr. Vante said the sculpture's prominent placement was disrespectful to 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 said 1,297 petition signers, along with himself, believed that removing the bust was not about rewriting history but correcting a historical narrative that centers on a Danish King. He said 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.

Leba Ola-Niyi of the Pan African Support Group 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.

Mr. Jackson 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.