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# Virgin Islanders Admonished to Follow in Legacy of D. Hamilton Jackson During Liberty Day Celebrations

Culture / **Published On November 02, 2022 05:39 AM /**

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**From l2r: Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett, Gov. Albert Bryan, Lt. Gov. Tregenza Roach (center right), and Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory during D. Hamilton Jackson Day on Nov. 1, 2022 in Grove Place, STX. By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS**

A concerted and solemn challenge to help improve the quality of life in the U.S. Virgin Islands was echoed by all speakers who took the podium at Tuesday's D. Hamilton Jackson Day ceremony in Grove Place, St. Croix.

The connotations of "Black Moses" and "a true renaissance man," was used to heap praises on David Hamilton Jackson who is in modern times considered as one of the founding fathers of the territory.

Known also as Bull and Bread Day and Liberty Day, the activity recognizes the contributions of Mr. Jackson who challenged the autocratic ways of colonial Danish leaders ruling over the territory at the time, and managed to successfully galvanize the first labor trade union (The St Croix Labor Union) that allowed black working-class people to enjoy organized rights like health benefits, increased wages and shorter work hours by enacting labor laws that were beneficial to poor workers.

At the age of 31, Mr. Jackson fought to end media censorship dictated by the government of the day and became the first editor of The Herald, which was first published on November 1, 1915.

“His passionate advocacy for the advancement of our home set the stage socio-economically, politically, socially for where we are now. We also acknowledge that today commemorates the publication of the first free press newspaper in the Danish West Indies – The Herald,” said Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett.

The newspaper was critical of the government and painted what she described as “the harsh realities” that poor people faced during that time, Ms. Plaskett said, adding that The Herald also represented the right of everyone to be informed.

Still, she said there is work to be done, mentioning the U.S. territories' fight with the mainland's court to achieve equity of life and treatment among all Americans.

She said the battle with the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the Insular Cases [continues to deny](#) Virgin Islanders “certain constitutional rights” that impede its economic development.

The congresswoman put forward to those listening that “These cases, people say that we Virgin Islanders, people who live in Puerto Rico and Guam are savages. That is the words in this Supreme Court Opinion – that we are savage, alien races who cannot understand Anglo-Saxon principles of law. That's what the Supreme Court recently upheld.”

“We must fight against that. We know that it is a Virgin islander, Alexander Hamilton who wrote the Constitution that all laws are based upon. How dare they say that we cannot understand their principles of law when we are the ones who gave them their laws,” she insisted.

Outside of being a journalist and labor leader, Mr. Jackson was an educator, judge and legislator who worked hard to change the circumstances of a once enslaved people.

Although he died 76 years ago, his legacy was so profound that a public holiday was named in his honor and every year on November 1, Virgin Islanders gather at Grove Place to pay tribute to the man and his contributions.

Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory called Mr. Jackson “a fighter for his people”, beaconing the crowd to imagine his life of service in those many capacities.

“These days we feel that there isn't enough time or enough hours in the day to get all we have to get done but as I reflect on his life's work, I cannot help to think about where we are as Virgin islanders today and how important it is for us to have leadership qualities like Jackson,” she said.

“We need to ensure that we have more individuals in our communities who are passionate and who are willing to fight and become involved in the betterment of this United States Virgin Islands,” she petitioned.

D. Hamilton Jackson Day has been traditionally used to host political events that encourage all party supporters to back their candidates, a tradition that Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach spoke fondly of when he said, "I personally want to commend you for taking part in political activity, because that is the way we move forward."

Mr Roach, who believes that voting gives each citizen a voice, reminded those present that citizenship was not handed to their ancestors when Danish rule ended, but instead it was a freedom that had to be fought for.

"...because people forget that when the United States bought these islands, it did not confer citizenship upon the people. It did not. It took until 1932 for that citizenship to be finalized. And all of that time, Virgin Islanders lived under a military occupation. That's what it was."

Today, he said there are people in the community who won't even come out and vote, saying, "In our primary [election], 20 percent of the Democrats came out to vote and maybe 60 percent of the people eligible to vote will come out in the general election."

"When you think back about how awesome a people we all are, it has to give you chills," remarked Governor Albert Bryan Jr.

"We didn't ask for our freedom. Lincoln didn't free us. Nobody freed us. We freed ourselves," he declared, as he rallied the crowd to celebrate Mr. Jackson who fought more than a decade ago for the rights and freedoms that Virgin Islanders now enjoy.

He said, "Today we celebrate that man. I want you to put your hands together for our black Moses, Hamilton Jackson. I want you to remember that as Virgin Islanders, we didn't come here and grow old by ourselves. We stand on the backs of so many people that work to make us the proud people we are today."

In his keynote address, author Geron A.W Richards also encouraged residents to band together to solve pressing issues within society.

"In society today, we tend to isolate ourselves from each other, focusing more on differences when there are larger issues at stake. This can be seen in the realm of education where we limit our children's potential by denying them access to adequate educational resources. It can also be seen in the economic affairs of our community, where it is apparent that the struggle for better wages and living conditions still exist," he said

"I think David would smile for the freedom we now have, but I also think he would urge us to work for greater changes, great advancements, whether it be technologically, economically, socially or politically, as David would say," Mr. Richards added.