

Reel Talk with Film DC Celebrates DC Emancipation Day

Leslie Green: Welcome to Reel Talk with Film DC. This is your host, Leslie Green, Director of Communications for the DC Office of Motion Pictures and Television Development, also known as the DC Film office. Here we are today with the Secretary of District, Lauren Vaughan, and at large Councilmember, Vincent Orange.

We are so excited to have you here with us, today. We are going to talk about a very special day coming up, Emancipation Day. We are super excited about that, and I want to thank you all for being here, again.

Councilman Vincent Orange: Thank you for having us.

Secretary Lauren Vaughan: Yeah. Thank you very much.

Leslie: Absolutely. For those who may not know, our agency is engaged this year in the planning and coordination of the district celebration of Emancipation Day. We thought we'd bring in two of the coordinators of this event.

Secretary Vaughan and Councilman Orange, I would like for you all to start by talking about, first, what is Emancipation Day? What is the significance of it? Secretary Vaughan, if you could get us kicked off and just share that with our listeners, for those who may not know.

Secretary Vaughan: Thank you. Emancipation Day is very special to those of us, here in the district of Colombia. April 16th of this year marks the 153rd Anniversary of the Emancipation of more than 3,000 slaves, here in DC. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Act in 1862 that freed so many people eight and a half months prior to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Here, in DC, Emancipation Day is celebrated every year, and it is the only place in the country, where Emancipation Day is a holiday.

Councilman Orange: It's very significant in that, in 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln executed the DC Emancipation Compensation Act, that the Federal government actually paid \$1 million to the enslaved owners, to free the 3,100 slaves, the only time this has happened in the world, in the history of this country.

The fact that, the slaves were freed first in the nation's capital, and then, the rest of the nation follows, is very significant. DC Emancipation Day used to be the biggest parade in the United States, from 1866 to 1901. This was a parade that was received by every single President from that time frame, 1866 to 1901.

Leslie: Thank you for that history.

Councilman Orange: In fact, if I might just add one another thing. It was dormant from 1901 to 2001, when we, the district of Colombia brought it back, when former Councilman Carol Schwartz and myself, introduced legislation to create the private legal holiday of DC Emancipation Day.

Basically, this came from interaction with Loretta Carter Haynes, who is considered the keeper of Emancipation, because she used to do this along with her son, and others from the National Park Service used to celebrate it, emancipation. But it came to our attention during that time frame, we introduced legislation to make it a private legal holiday.

In 2005 I introduced a legislature to make it a public legal holiday, and that's where we are at this year, celebrating our 10th anniversary of it being a public legal holiday, a 15th anniversary of it being a private legal holiday, and as Lauren has indicated, the 153rd anniversary of the actual document being executed to free the slaves in the District of Columbia.

This year's event has more, because we are commemorating the 150th anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, who executed the documents.

Leslie: Interesting. Clearly, you have history with Emancipation Day, why is it so close to your heart? How have you celebrated it in previous years?

Councilman Orange: It's close to our heart because it's germane to the nation's capital, it's germane to the citizens of District of Columbia. Frederick Douglass, who became a resident of District of Columbia and became our Recorder of Deeds for District of Columbia, was very involved with everything in this process.

We need to recognize our history, to know that, the slaves were freed here first. As this country is now in the process of building the museum for African Americans right down the street, we want to make sure that the District of Columbia has its proper place in history, and that our residents and our offsprings are very aware of the role that we played in the history of this country.

Leslie: Sure. Did you want to add to that, Secretary?

Secretary Vaughan: No. I think he about covered it.

Leslie: OK.

[laughter]

Secretary Vaughan: I will add this, it's also the sesquicentennial anniversary of the ending of the Civil War. This year is very special for a number of reasons, and we will continue to celebrate Emancipation Day and the end of the civil war all the way into the month of May.

Leslie: OK. Excellent. How has it been celebrated in previous years? What did you do? Senator, you've been involved for some time now.

Councilman Orange: Yes, in previous years, we've had parades down in Pennsylvania Avenue. We've had national debates. We've had concerts. One year we had a big gala and we passed out the Image Awards. In the next we had an opportunity to present one of those awards to the late senator Edward Brooke, and he came and participated. Howard University has played a key role in the past.

In fact, the former president of Howard University, Patrick H. Swygert, he provided us a venue and helped us get people together. It's been a number of various institutions that helped out over the years. It really was big under Mayor Williams, when we actually bought the parade back after 100-year absence, to bring it back.

We've had our ups and downs, but I can say this administration, the fresh start administration under the leadership of Muriel Bowser, and the new secretary, we were all working together.

That's the key, when we did this before, we were close with Mayor Williams, and the secretary at that time, Sheryl Hobbs Newman. It's always good when you have the mayor, and the secretary, and the council all on the same page, bring it together.

One person shouldn't have to handle this, and all the great activities that we are going to be talking about momentarily, about what she's been able to put together, and I've been able to put together. Just the entire atmosphere of this taking place around Lincoln's assassination, what Lauren said, this is...

Secretary Vaughan: Sesquicentennial.

Councilman Orange: Sesquicentennial.

[laughter]

Leslie: That's a mouthful.

Councilman Orange: Yeah, that activity under the leadership of former councilmember, Frank Smith, right?

Secretary Vaughan: That's right.

Councilman Orange: It's a lot of synergy, and I think we're at the right place at the right time.

Leslie: That's great. As you tell us, what types of activities we can look forward to this year? Tell us what you're most looking forward to? Secretary Vaughan?

Secretary Vaughan: For me, in coming into this process as the new secretary, it has been most interesting to me, all of the things that I have learned about our history, history of the District of Columbia, history of our country. I had the opportunity to represent Mayor Bowser at the wreath laying ceremony for President Abraham Lincoln on his birthday, February 12th.

For me, it has been wonderful in all that I have learned and been able to experience, since coming into this role. I so much enjoy the parade and the fireworks. I am really looking forward to the concert, but I am also looking forward to the citywide days of reflection and education. We've planned a lecture series, and a number of events throughout the city, throughout the month of April, beginning tomorrow as a matter of fact.

There's a whole lot of stuff going on for people to get engaged, and to learn a lot, and to celebrate the rich history that we have here, in DC.

Leslie: Awesome. Councilmember Orange?

Councilman Orange: It's exciting for us. We have a great program for the Emancipation Day, Thursday, April 16th. We'll start that morning with a prayer breakfast, at the Willard hotel. Reverend Al Sharpton will be our keynote speaker. It's good to be at the Willard hotel, because history shows us that Dr. Martin Luther King finished his "I have a dream" speech at the Willard hotel. It's been good for us to start off and kick off Emancipation Day at the Willard hotel.

We'll have the parade down at Pennsylvania Avenue, from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. It's great to be able to announce that all branches of the United States Armed Forces would be present, that's the army, the navy, the air force, and marines. I must also include the coast guard, as well as our own national guard, will all be participating.

We'll have a grand historic balloons and that will serve everyone well to have these balloons of iconic figures, coming down Pennsylvania Avenue. The Mayor along with our Congresswoman, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and all the councilmembers, and we've invited the AMCs, the democratic state committee, the republican state committee, just everyone to join in.

This is not just a District of Columbia holiday, this is an American holiday. We'll have a great parade, and then, we are really excited about the lunch program that will take place at the Hamilton. We will have the West Virginia State University ensemble orchestra that will come and perform for an hour. That will be followed by a panel discussion on race, justice, and policing.

The panel participants would be actor Jeffrey Wright, actor Malik Yoba, our own Dr. Julianne Malveaux, Mali Music, and the moderator will be Jeff Johnson. We are looking forward to that great discussion. I think is very timely. We will end that program with Howard University's choir. That would be a great treat. Then, approximately at 4:30, we'll kick off the concert, and we'll have the opening act with Brian Lenair, who is a local saxophonist who would be here playing.

From 5: 30 to 8:30 is the BET show. We'll have MC Doug E Fresh and company. They'll serve as the leader of the concert, but we'll feature Eric Benet, Mali Music, Black Alley Band, Masa, as well as, Raheem DeVaughn. We're really looking forward to a great concert.

Then, we'll end it with our fireworks display, so, we are looking great. I'll turn this over to Lauren. She has activities that she might want to go through, that starts tomorrow, April 2nd, that leads up to April 16th.

Secretary Vaughan: Yes. Beginning tomorrow we have a program CR Gibbs, a presentation called, "The Death of Freedom. The End of the Civil War, and the Coming of Reconstruction." That's tomorrow, April 2nd. It's going to be at the Department of Health, at 899, North Capital Street, Northeast, and that's from 1:00 to 2:00.

On April 8th, we have some programming at DCRA, with Christina Savoy, "The Irony of Selma. The Unique Linkage between Slavery and the Civil Rights Movement." That's going to be at 1100, 4th Street, Southwest, from 12:00 to 1:00.

On April 10th, at Cardozo High School, we have an assembly program, Emancipation Day programming, and we are also going to talk about taxation without representation to the students

there. It's going to be planned and presented by social studies teachers, at Cardozo High School, and that's at 10:00 AM.

On April 11th...

Councilman Orange: Which happens to be my birthday.

[laughter]

Leslie: Happy early birthday.

Secretary Vaughan: Yes. On April 11th, Loretta Carter Haynes and Peter Haynes wreath laying ceremony, at the African American Civil War Memorial Museum. That's on Vermont Avenue, on U Street, at 11:00 AM. On April 13th, at the 15th Street, Presbyterian Church, we have a program with Reverend Rodney Teal Esquire. That's from 6:30 to 8:30, at 1701, 15th Street, Northwest.

On April 14th, we have a program at the Office of Tax and Revenue also with Christina Savoy. It's part two of, "Irony of Selma." Again, that's at 1101, 4th Street, Southwest, from 1:00 to 2:00.

Also on April 14th, we have a University forum, at the School Without Walls, George Washington University, and the topic is, "153 years late. Where are we after Emancipation Compensation?" It's going to be a lecture and panel discussion, from 3:30 to 5:30. The lecture is by Dr. Maurice Jackson, who is a professor of history at Georgetown University. There will be a panel discussion, and the moderator is Dr. Bernard Demczuk, who is a teacher at School Without Walls.

On April 15th, there are a couple of events. One is at the Vermont Avenue Baptist Church. It's a program with Professor Herbert Smith, from NOVA. It will be a jazz and gospel music, and the struggle for freedom, justice and equality, that's 1630 Vermont Avenue, Northwest, from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM.

Also on April 15th, at the George Washington University, the Africana Studies program presents "Frederick Douglas' Tales of Abraham Lincoln," featuring Robert S. Levine, who was a professor of English at the University of Maryland. That will be held in the City View room at 1957 East Street, Northwest from 6:00 to 7:30 PM.

We also have two additional events on Emancipation Day, April 16th. One of them is at the Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture. The National Archives and the DC Office of Public Records presents a program about the black life in the district in the 19th century. The moderator will be Maurice Jackson, with Professor Elizabeth Clark from Howard University, and George Musgrove, from George Mason University.

Last, but certainly not the least, we will have a candlelight vigil at the African American Civil War Memorial Museum and a reading of the names, of the 3,100 enslaved persons that were freed by the Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862. There will also be a film screening by Marvin Jones, and that will be in Vermont Avenue and U Street at 6:00 PM.

There is a lot going on. All of these activities are posted on the Office of the Secretary's website, as well as, the official Emancipation Day website, which Councilmember Orange can tell you what that is.

Councilman Orange: It's emancipationdc.com While all these activities are going on, at Ford's theater, commencing on April 14th, there will be 36 hours of non-stop programming from the time Abraham Lincoln was shot, 150 years ago, on April 14th. Then, you will have people dressed in the costumes of that time.

There will be someone running out from the Peterson house, "It's now 11 o'clock PM, and the President's blood pressure and heart rate is this," and it will go on all night until the next morning, on April 15th, at 7:22 AM, where he is pronounced dead.

There is a tremendous amount of activity that's taking place, and we think that it's going to be a great experience. We'll just happen to be a part.

Leslie: Sounds like you have all done a wonderful job, at putting all of these events together. We are so excited to just be in partnership with you on that. Of course, as the Film Office, we want to know about the celebrities that are going to be there, as well. Did I see on the website about Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins? Are they involved this year? Was that part of last year's?

Councilman Orange: That was part of the planning, but we've now narrowed down as I've indicated before, the panel of the actors, will be Jeffrey Wright. He has been an American film, television and stage actor. He played in the "Hunger Games," and "Cadillac Records," and "Quantum of Solace." We have Malik Yoba, who played Vernon Turner in the "Empire," which was recently filmed.

Leslie: Yeah, he got killed off. Unfortunately.

Councilman Orange: We have Mali Music and Dr. Malveaux, who's the former President of Bennett College. Then, we have BET's Jeff Johnson, who will be the moderator. Those are the celebrities that we have for the panel discussion.

Of course, you haven't heard the name, Doug E Fresh, who's performing on Freedom Plaza. That will be great. It's always good to have the Reverend Al Sharpton in the house, kicking it off that morning. He's going to fire everybody up.

Leslie: Absolutely, he is a celebrity in his own right, as well.

Councilman Orange: It's certainly, would be a great day to put everybody together, to review history.

Leslie: Awesome. Again, for those listeners who want to make sure that you attend those Emancipation Day activities, you can go to emancipationdc.com. That's where the full lineup is. Did you all have anything else that you wanted to share before we complete?

Councilman Orange: We just want people to come out. We need folks to really come out and participate in what we believe would be a great day of historic review. We labored hard, and now

we'd like to see the fruits of our labor on display with a huge number of participants to bear witness.

Secretary Vaughan: Indeed, absolutely. The mayor and the councilmembers and the Office of the Secretary have done a lot to pull all these things together. We just really want everybody to come out and support.

Leslie: Sure. Yes, please come out, make sure that you are tweeting, and Facebooking, and Instagramming about it, as well. I know that you all have sites setup for that, and you can find the links for that on your emancipationdc.com.

I want to thank you all again for joining us at Reel Talk with Film DC. Thank you all for listening to Reel Talk with Film DC. Again, this is your host, Leslie Green, signing off. We'd like you to check us out online at film.dc.gov, like us on Facebook, at facebook.com/FilmDC, and follow us on Twitter [@dcfilmoffice](https://twitter.com/dcfilmoffice).

Catch you next time.