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Bloomfield Natives Featured In Juneteenth Celebrations: Unveiling Of MLK39 Equity Mural Tour

Mark Milward

The MLK39 Racial Equity Mural Tour kicked off its unveiling

ceremonies on Juneteenth in several locations in the Connecticut region. *CT Murals* and *RiseUp for the Arts* hosted the event. inspired the life

and legacy of Martin Luther King. According to Joy Meike, (CT Murals), the goal of the initiative is aimed at raising conversations on

important social issues through the power of public art and ignite discussions in communities about what we need to do to create a more just

and liberated society. The murals depict images of national and interna-

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RiseUp for the Arts and CT Mural in Bloomfield, CT



Juneteenth Celebration in Hartford, CT at the Soldiers Memorial Arch in Downtown Hartford, also the location of the Black Lives Matter street painting

Mural Tour

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tional notables who have made significant impact in their communities and the world through their service and accomplishments.

Murals were unveiled in New Haven, Bloomfield, Manchester, Torrington, and West Hartford. The goal is to create 39 murals throughout the state, representing each year of MLK’s life and include successful community contributors who have achieved significant accomplishments in life and returned to their communities to give back.

Bloomfield Connecticut natives Anika Noni Rose, award-winning actress and NFL Superbowl Champion Dwight Freeney have their images depicted on the



Hugh Freeney sharing thoughts on son Dwight, his contribution and aa role model for aspiring youth

Bloomfield mural. Anika is best known for her voicing Tiana, Disney’s first African-American princess as seen in the Princess and the Frog (2009). She is a graduate of Bloomfield High and Florida A&M University. Among her film credits include her role in *Dreamgirls* with co-stars Beyonce’ and Jennifer Hudson.

Dwight Freeney, a Bloomfield High and Syracuse graduate was a defensive end in the NFL for the Indianapolis Colts for 16 seasons and won Super Bowl XLI with the Colts. He also made seven Pro Bowls and later played for the San Diego Chargers, Arizona Cardinals, Atlanta Falcons, Seattle Seahawks, and Detroit Lions, before retiring in 2018.

The aim of the *RiseUp for the Arts* and *CT Murals* sponsors is also to recognize accomplished individuals from the black and brown communities who, in spite of their successes, returned to their communities on multiple occasions to give back and inspire young people from their hometowns to excel. Both of these Bloomfield natives have not forgotten their roots and often return for such occasions.

Dwight, who is the son of Jamaican immigrants has contributed mightily to the Jamaican and Caribbean community through financial donations and appearances. Dwight, not present at the Bloomfield unveiling ceremony was represented by parents Hugh and Joy Freeney who shared their thoughts and reflected on Dwight’s growth in the community and his willingness to be role model for aspiring youth in the greater Hartford and Bloomfield areas.

Ms. Rose was present at the Bloomfield mural unveiling, and delivered a powerful message about art and artists. She carried forward the theme of the sponsors as she spoke about the importance of the artistic and creative community in shaping lives and bringing people together through art as this project initiative does.

The MLK39 Racial Equity Mural Tour aims to expand mural projects in 39 locations throughout Connecticut and working with local townships to reach that goal.

Other Juneteenth celebrations included a celebration in Hartford at the Soldiers Memorial Arch in downtown Hartford, which is also the location of the Black Lives Matter street painting artwork adjacent to the State Capitol. Juneteenth: June 19, 1965 was when the last remaining enslaved men, women and children living in Galveston, Texas received notification that they were freed from slavery when Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation January 1, 1963. President Joe Biden signed into law a declaration establishing Juneteenth as a national holiday.

In reflecting upon the power of art as a vehicle for bringing people together from all walks of live to enjoy art, culture, music, and history, the area Connecticut venues achieved that objective.

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Reparation: Evangelicals Should Sign On

By Jim Daniels

On April 14, 2021, the Judiciary Committee of the US House of Representatives approved legislation to create a commission to make recommendations on paying reparation to the descendants of enslaved people, the furthest the bill has advanced since it was first introduced more than 30 years ago.

As reported in the Washington Post, advocates of reparation pushed the bill to the forefront last year as racial justice protests were held across the country following more police killings of Black Americans, including George Floyd in Minneapolis.

The significance of this step was noted by Representative Shirley Jackson Lee, a Democrat who represents the 18th Congressional District of Texas and whose parents are Jamaicans, "Here we are today, marking up for the first time in the history of the United States of America any legislation that deals directly with the years and centuries of slavery of African American people who are now the descendants of those



Jim Z. Daniels

Africans." She has introduced the legislation in every Congress since its original sponsor in 1989, Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.). He retired in 2017. Lee's comments were framed in the context that the bill would serve as a necessary first step on a "path to restorative justice."

The legislation proposes a 7-member commission to study the issue of slavery. The intent is to "acknowledge the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery in the United States, and the

13 colonies between 1619 and 1865, and to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies and for other purposes."

Reparation advocates pushed it to the forefront last year as racial justice protests were held across the country following more police killings of Black Americans, including George Floyd in Minneapolis.

The legislation's supporters hailed the vote as a historic step forward. But opposition to any such endeavor was evident in the comments of Republican Congressman Henry Hyde of Illinois, who at that time in 1989 was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, "I never owned a slave. I never oppressed anybody. I don't know that I should have to pay for someone who did own slaves generations before I was born," Hyde said.

His failure as well as others to understand or acknowledge that he was a beneficiary of the slaves' free labor that heaped incalculable privileges upon him is central to the issue of remedy for slavery.

What is perplexing regard-

ing the discussion on slavery is this: Why hasn't there been firm vocal support for an examination of slavery's impact on the descendants of slaves and why it has, in whatever form is deemed reasonable, not garnered support from the evangelical community? Are there not biblical principles enunciated regarding reparations specifically, as well as injunctions concerning fair compensation for labor and obtaining benefits from free labor, which were never earned?

The Bible provides an account in the life of the Hebrew people (Israel) how after a prophetic announcement regarding 400 years of slavery made centuries before its actual occurrence. God through Moses instructed these people as they escaped from slavery, to plunder the Egyptian homes of their jewelry, fine clothing, their gold and silver, and other valuables and to carry these items out of Egypt as they fled the terror of the Egyptian army.

It is about as explicit an endorsement that God acted

out of the principle of reparation or remedy where the Hebrews were enslaved for 400 years, but were allowed to retrieve that which their free labor purchased in the Egyptian homes. The value of their contribution to the economy, power and life-style of the Egyptians are incalculable. The celebration of the Jewish Passover and its symbolism are inescapable.

There is another example of recompense found in the New Testament: Jesus visits the home of the tax collector Zacchaeus who is overcome by Jesus' words and confesses that if he had collected tax dues unfairly, (he probably did), he says he will return what was unfairly taken at a level four times higher than was collected.

Given the new political clout of the evangelical community they certainly could prod more open discussions on the topic of reparation and, if nothing else, raise awareness and understanding of the consequences of slavery.

Perhaps God through Moses prodded the Hebrews to go and get their stuff will prod the evangelicals to join the conversation and endorse it as a national agenda item for action.

AEC Graduates 25 Students



AEC Graduation: At platform facing the graduates are Winston Johnson, keynote speaker and other invited guests.

HARTFORD, CT: Spring graduation at Adult Education Center (AEC) took place Thursday, June 3, 2021 with 25 students receiving their high school diploma. The students met requirements for either the General Education Development (GED) or the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) between June 2020 and May 2021 and were thus eligible to participate in the ceremony.

The joyful graduation celebration began Wednesday, June 2, 2021 with rehearsal and graduates picking up their caps and gowns; and dinner followed outdoors with Mazzco Gourmet Pizza providing the food.

Graduation day with all

its Pomp and Circumstances came alive on Thursday: Dr. Zandralyn Gordon, director of AEC, led the procession, followed by invited guests, including Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, superintendent, Hartford Public Schools, and graduates marching proudly down the aisle and applauded by families, teachers, and guests.

AEC Assistant Director, Jacqueline Mann, led the singing of the National Anthem; Father Darryl C. Burke of Trinity Episcopal Church, Wethersfield, offered the invocation; followed by the singing of the School Song, *It's Never Too Late to Learn* led by Jacqueline Mann.

Keynote speaker, Winston Johnson, former director of Prevention Intervention Services,

underscored the event's theme, 'Never Give Up.' In his presentation, he acknowledged the tough times graduates overcame, but with determination "they are here today," he said.

Other speakers including Hartford's Mayor Luke Bronin, Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Graig T. Stallings, board member, Hartford Board of Education, linked the *Never Give Up* theme and the School's Song, *It's Never Too Late to Learn*. The twin-themes are emblematic of what it takes to be successful.

The passionate speeches of two graduates—Suseth Reid-Davis, GED graduate and Rosemarie Hall, NEDP graduate—gave hints of their real-life experiences while pursuing their educa-

tion, and this resonated with the audience as a whole. Graduates spoke of their never-give-up approach amidst life's challenges, disruptions, and facing extremely tough times. The speakers expressed thanks to their teachers and all members of the staff at AEC. GED student, Daud Omar was the recipient of the "Hartford Principals & Supervisor's Scholarship." Then Dr. Torres-Rodriguez gave the "Declaration to Graduates."

The Awarding of Diplomas followed with Kimberly D. Oliver, Craig T. Stallings, Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Oliver Barton, Dr. Zandralyn Gordon, and Jacqueline E. Mann officiating.

Indeed, the influence of the *Never Give Up* theme was powerful. It made a connection.

Hopefully, the mantra is a takeaway from the Commencement ceremony, and a source of inspiration that will continue to serve as a guide in the graduates' going-forward endeavors, overcoming challenges, and making intentional choices.

The Commencement ceremony was held directly in person at the school's location, 85 Edwards Street, Hartford. In a scaled-down physically distanced audience, everyone practiced the COVID-19 protocol.

[Dorett Jarrett-Irving and Carol Johnson contributed to this story. Videos of the Commencement ceremony, celebratory scenes can be found on the Adult Education Center YouTube channel].

Caribbean American Restauranters Celebrate National Caribbean American Heritage Month

Mark Milward

Local, State and Federal government officials turned out in venues across the city to recognize National Caribbean American Heritage Month, and saluted Hartford area Caribbean American restaurant owners who have endured the pandemic and served through many challenges.

The Caribbean American restaurant owners were not only recognized for their delicious

Caribbean cuisine, but also for their efforts to contribute and fortify service needs in the community, promoting the Caribbean culture.

Caribbean American Restaurant Week ran June 6-12, 2021 and featured celebrations at several locations in Hartford that included Dunns River, Sweet Delight, Coconut Café, and Fire & Spice.

Violette Haldane, president of the West Indian Foundation

and one of the sponsors of Restaurant Week along with the Upper Albany Merchants Association, stated, “the restaurant owners provide significant economic support to the business community as well as providing employment for area residents.” Haldane said that often these restaurant owners donate food to nonprofit organizations for their various gatherings and for those in need.

Mrs. Pauline Scott along

with her husband George Scott opened Scotts Bakery over 45 years ago and the bakery now has spread out to a few Hartford area locations. Scotts Bakery has been the primary trailblazer for Caribbean American restaurants, setting the example for its economic contributions towards community development and area employment opportunities for residents.

Among the officials who came out in support of restaurant

week: Mayor Luke Bronin, Senator Douglas McCorty, Hartford City Councilwoman, Shirley Surgeon, Bloomfield Mayor, Suzette Debeatham-Brown, and US Senator Richard Blumenthal.

All of these leaders commended the restauranters for their hard work, dedication and sacrifices, each noting the difficulty and challenges faced during the pandemic.

Together In Celebration: Restauranters, Community Leaders, Politicians

