

Juneteenth 2016

A Freedom Celebration

Media Release

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Juneteenth 2016, A Freedom Celebration to be Presented

Elegba Folklore Society presents **Juneteenth 2016, A Freedom Celebration** in Richmond, Virginia, June 17 - 18. The theme, ***Here I Stand***, invites a consideration of the legacy of history in the present and its influence on shaping the future.

This two-part event features **The Symposium** on **Friday, June 17** in Rhythm Hall at Dominion Arts Center (formerly Richmond CenterStage), 600 E. Grace Street. Doors open at 6:30p. Tickets are \$15 for one and \$25 for two, general admission. Tickets for students, 12 -18, are \$10 and children under 12 are admitted free of charge.

On **Saturday, June 18, In Reflection** happens beginning at 5:00p at the Manchester Dock and along the Trail of Enslaved Africans. Admission is free.

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Dick Gregory, legendary comedian, civil rights activist and natural health enthusiast whose social satire influences America's thinking, will keynote **The Symposium**. **Elegba Folklore Society's performers** will also appear. There will be art making, and the Freedom Market will be open all night.

Mr. Gregory will appear in Richmond just a few weeks after the Off-Broadway opening of the biographical, *Turn Me Loose*. This new comedic drama is about the 60's comic genius Dick Gregory, the first Black stand-up to make white audiences laugh at the absurdity of bigotry. Gretchen Law wrote and John Legend with Mike Jackson produce, in association with Get Lifted Film Company. According to Gregory's website, the play reveals how the overwhelming power of activism enticed Gregory from one of the most successful show business careers of the postwar era into a life of sacrifice and danger alongside Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers and other Civil Rights leaders. Wielding razor-sharp wit Gregory hacked away at myths about race, poverty, war and politics. In a recent interview President Obama called Dick Gregory one of his two favorite comics ever. The other was Richard Pryor who himself said, "Dick Gregory was the greatest and he was the first." Gregory is still championing the same messages today, at age 83. He is a last living champion from a remarkable period of struggle for dignity and freedom. Joe Morton, Emmy winning *Scandal* star, portrays Mr. Gregory.

A theatre-goer reflected, "We *need* Dick Gregory more than *ever!*"

Elegba Folklore Society invites all those who appreciate Dick Gregory's commentary along with a new generation who will discover, says the site, "one of the most prophetic, committed, authentic, confrontational — and hysterically funny — public figures of our time."

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After a stint in the military, in the mid '50s, he became part of a new generation of black comedians that included Nipsey Russell, Bill Cosby and Godfrey Cambridge. These comedians broke with the minstrel tradition, which presented stereotypical black characters.

Gregory drew on current events, especially the racial issues, for much of his material: "Segregation is not all bad. Have you ever heard of a collision where the people in the back of the bus got hurt?"

Inspired by the work of leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Gregory took part in the Civil Rights Movement and used his celebrity status to draw attention to such issues as segregation and disfranchisement.

When local Mississippi governments stopped distributing Federal food surpluses to poor blacks in areas where SNCC was encouraging voter registration, Gregory chartered a plane to bring in several tons of food. After the assassinations of King, President John F. Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy, Gregory became increasingly convinced of the existence of political conspiracies.

Gregory fasted in protest more than 60 times. In 1984 he founded Health Enterprises, Inc., a company that distributed weight loss products. In 1987 Gregory introduced the Slim-Safe Bahamian Diet, a popular, powdered diet mix.

In 2001, after being diagnosed with cancer, Mr. Gregory put together a regimen of a variety of diet, vitamins, exercise, and modern devices not even known to the public, which ultimately resulted in his reversing the trend of the cancer to the point where today he is 100% cancer free.

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Mr. Gregory has been honored by his peer celebrities on several nationally recognized occasions. He has authored his pivotal autobiography, *Nigger*, in 1963, *Code Name Zorro: The Murder of Martin Luther King Jr.* with Mark Lane in 1971 which was recently released under another title, *Murder In Memphis*, and his most recent book, *Callus On My Soul*, a best-seller within weeks of publication, is an autobiography that updates his earlier work.

An admirer was quoted as saying, "I am lost for words but I realized you were created in gods image to enlighten us on better understanding. I honor you."

The next day, **Juneteenth 2016, A Freedom Celebration** moves to the Manchester Dock for **In Reflection**. This commemorative program opens with a youth summit, **Knowledge is Power Rap Session**, to explore cultural perspectives in the transition from high school to college. **Elegba Folklore Society's performers** provide important cultural context for examining slavery in America and the event culminates with the **Annual Torch Lit Night Walk on the Trail of Enslaved Africans**.

Juneteenth 2016, A Freedom Celebration is a family event. It commemorates the Juneteenth holiday known as *Juneteenth National Freedom Day* by remembering the impact of the trade of enslaved Africans in Virginia, during the 246 years between 1619 and 1865 and its legacy. A constructive way to pay homage to enslaved Africans upon whose backbone Virginia was sustained, from the twelfth year following the English settlement, **Juneteenth 2016, A Freedom Celebration** re-examines the legacy of their contribution and their forfeiture. It provides a cultural framework for building bridges of understanding.

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Janine Bell, President and Artistic Director of the Elegba Folklore Society, appreciates the cultural enrichment **Juneteenth, A Freedom Celebration** gives. She says, “This event is about acknowledgment. Africans who were brought to Richmond to live out their lives in bondage here and in other states have not been properly acknowledged. In one example, the multi-billion dollar, multi-national tobacco industry was built on their backs neither to their own benefit or the benefit of their descendants. Now Africa’s children with the children of European owners of the enslaved can reclaim and understand hidden history. An enhanced level of understanding can bring needed clarity to our lives today.” Attendees may come as they are, and African attire is encouraged. Comfortable shoes and a bottle of water for the Walk are suggested. Free parking is available at the Manchester Dock. Shuttle buses will be available for attendees after the Walk and so that elders and those with disabilities can participate fully in the entire experience.

For tickets or more information visit www.efsinc.org, visit Elegba Folklore Society’s Cultural Center, 101 E. Broad Street in the downtown RVA Arts District or contact the Elegba Folklore Society at 804/644-3900 or at story1@efsinc.org. Background about the holiday and directions follow.

Juneteenth, A Freedom Celebration was one of the international signature events of the United Nations’ International Year for People of African Descent. An excerpt of the declaration says, “The international community has affirmed that the transatlantic slave trade was an appalling tragedy not only because of its barbarism but also because of its magnitude, organized nature and negation of the essential humanity of the victims.... Even today, Africans and people of African descent continue to suffer the consequences of these acts and should be fully integrated into social, economic and political life and at all levels of decision-making.” More at: www.un.org.

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The City of Richmond and Dominion along with Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities, James River Park System sponsor **Juneteenth 2016, A Freedom Celebration** along with media partner, WRIR 97.3. The Arts & Cultural Funding Consortium provides partial support.

Images are available.

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DIRECTIONS TO MANCHESTER DOCK

From I-95 South: Exit at #73, Maury Street. At the bottom of the ramp turn right. This is an industrial area. Continue just a few blocks up and over the big railroad tracks. Drive through the opening in the floodwall. When you come to the fork in the road, bear left. The road will curve and be intersected by a smaller railroad crossing. As you enter the parking area, bear left and park.

From I-95 North: Exit at #73, Maury Street. Follow the directions above.

From I-64 West: Exit at #190, I-95 South and 5th Street. Follow I-95 South. Exit at #73, Maury Street. Follow the directions above.

From I-64 East: I-64 merges with I-95 South. Follow it and exit at #73, Maury Street. Follow the directions above.

Local: Access Southside via the Manchester Bridge; turn left on Maury Street. From the 14th Street (Mayo) Bridge, turn left on E. 3rd Street, cross several blocks and turn left again on Maury Street. Follow the directions above.

Manchester Dock (aka Ancarrow's Boat Landing)
1308 Brander Street
Richmond, VA 23224