

Juneteenth 2023

A Freedom Celebration

Media Release

Date: May 24, 2023
Contact: Janine Y. Bell
jaybee@efsinc.org
804.644.3900

Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration To Be Presented in Richmond, Virginia

Elegba Folklore Society, *Richmond's Cultural Ambassador*, presents **Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration** in Richmond, Virginia on Saturday and Sunday, June 10-11. Saturday's program presents The ***Torch Lit Night Walk Along the Trail of Enslaved Africans***. It begins at the Manchester Dock, 1308 Brander St, at 7p. The Torch Lit Walk is free to attend; donations appreciated. Sunday's program features ***Dancing With the Ancestors*** at the African Burial Ground, 1540 East Broad Street, beginning at 4p. General Admission is \$5 and children under 12 may attend for free.

The intension of **Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration** is to express ancestral homage — gratitude, remembrance and optimism — through the intersectionality of past with present, in a healing environment that centers cultural enrichment and knowledge for attendees.

Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration is Elegba Folklore Society's 27th Annual Juneteenth observance.

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The ***Torch Lit Night Walk Along the Trail of Enslaved Africans*** immerses attendees in narratives, the historical record and music. It is a sacred and poignant pilgrimage of short walks to interpretive sites from the Manchester Dock, a point of entry of Africans into America to be sold into lifelong bondage, through Shockoe Bottom, a geographical and economic center of the trade of enslaved Africans in Virginia, to the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground, reclaimed as a site of memory.

The ***Walk*** starts at the Manchester Dock. There are places to sit along the way including at the African Burial Ground. Buses will return attendees to their cars at the program's conclusion. Water will be available.

The grounds open for ***Dancing With The Ancestors*** on Sunday at 4p. This commemoration will be sacred and joyful. Attendees are asked to wear white, and they may bring ancestral offerings such as flowers, fruit, sweets, libations or other gifts of personal significance.

The program begins with the *Get Woke Youth Summit*. Youth of all ages are invited to participate in this cultural education exchange aimed at affirmation and personal growth.

Dancing With The Ancestors continues fully at 5p, and the program concludes at 9p.

Elegba Folklore Society will welcome scholar and activist, **Dr. Shawn Utsey**, appearing as the president of the *Virginia Chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists* along with chapter members who will discuss the legacy of generations of enslavement and mental health. This presentation will chart the relationship between certain African traditions and global African futures as a tool for healing and holism.

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Kólá Abímbólá, a Babaláwo of Ifá, the spiritual path of the Yoruba people indigenous to parts of Nigeria, Bénin and Togo in West Africa, will facilitate attendees' engagement in spiritual ceremony for Ancestral reverence. He was ordained as Ifá Priest by the Ògeese conclave of diviners of His Imperial Majesty, the Aláàfin of Òyó.

He studied the Ifa Literary Corpus as an apprentice under Wande Abimbola and Babalola Adeboye Ifatoogun. He undertook his PhD studies in Philosophy of Science under John Worrall at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a second PhD in the Law of Evidence and Criminal Justice under C. John Miller at the University of Birmingham. Kola is the Editor of Journal of Forensic Research and Criminology. He was President of the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies from 2006 to 2010, and he is the Ajagunnà Àgbáyé of the Yoruba people, filling a position vacant since 1910. He is a full professor of philosophy at Howard University.

Singer and songwriter, **Kenneka Cook** will open the stage at **Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration's *Dancing With The Ancestors***, with her own brand of neo-soul, jazz and cosmopolitan pop. Honing her talent since childhood, Kenneka Cook will showcase her solo performance with her loop and beatbox layering of multiple vocal, instrumental and percussive tracks. Her sound is its own healing cypher.

Elegba Folklore Society's African Dancers, Drummers and Singers contribute to the performing arts element of **Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration**. The company's interactive performance will be rooted in the music, dance and lifestyle traditions of West Africa's the Manding and the Yoruba while paying homage to Ancestral calls for social justice and liberation and acknowledging the same calls 158 years after the inception of Juneteenth in 1865.

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The performance will communicate a philosophy of Afrocentricity articulated by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante who says, “Africans were not simply removed from Africa to the Americas, but Africans were separated from philosophies, languages, religions, folklore and cultures. Finding a way to...reorient our thinking is essential to the presentation of an African cultural reality.” Dr. Asante’s intention is that African Americans can bring more to the table of humanity than just the adaptive experiences of Europeans.

Elegba Folklore Society’s performing company has appeared in several states, in Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. It was recognized in 2019 for *Best African Choreography* by the RVA Dance Awards.

This 27th year of **Juneteenth, A Freedom Celebration** offers the opportunity to ponder concepts of freedom from both an external or societal view and an internal or personal and spiritual view. Accordingly, attendees are invited to activate their spirits in **Healing Cyphers** on the grounds while ***Dancing With The Ancestors*** at **Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration** and to shop in the **Freedom Market**. Food will also be available.

Youth can also make a **Heritage Craft** as a keepsake.

The Marvin Taylor Experience will close **Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration**. With several jazzy releases in circulation, Taylor has cultivated a passion to inspire joy, ***Dancing With The Ancestors*** fully and soulfully, through the power of music.

Juneteenth 2023, 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 our arrival in 1619 and 1865, the year government sanctioned enslavement ended — and now the 404 years from 1619 to 2023.

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A constructive way to pay homage to enslaved Africans upon whose backbone Virginia was sustained, from the twelfth year following English settlement, **Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration** re-examines the legacy of their contribution and their forfeiture. It provides a cultural framework for building bridges of understanding.

Juneteenth 2023, A Freedom Celebration

Schedule:

4:00p	Get Woke Youth Summit
4:45p	Sound Bowl Symphony
5:00p	· Kenneka Cook · The Freedom Market Opens · Healing Cyphers for Adults & Children Begin & Continue until 8:00p
6:00p	<u>E</u> legba Folklore Society
6:15p	Awaken Your Spirit with Kólá Abímbólá
7:15p	Association of Black Psychologists
8:00p	The Marvin Taylor Experience
9:00p	Close

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 while producing America’s foundational structure 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 captors can reclaim and understand hidden history. An enhanced level of understanding can bring needed clarity to our lives today.”

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Juneteenth, A Freedom Celebration is a signature event of the United Nations' International Decade for People of African Descent. An excerpt of the declaration says, "The International Decade aims to celebrate the important contributions of people of African descent worldwide, advance social justice and inclusion policies, eradicate racism and intolerance, promote human rights, and assist in creating better, more prosperous communities, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals spearheaded by the United Nations."

The City of Richmond, Dominion Energy, Virginia Museum of History and Culture, Wells Fargo, Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities, ABC 8 News and City Parking Inc. are partners with Elegba Folklore Society in presenting **Juneteenth 2022, A Freedom Celebration**. The Arts & Cultural Funding Consortium provides partial support.

The ***Torch Lit Night Walk Along the Trail of Enslaved Africans*** is free, though donations are appreciated. Tickets for ***Dancing With The Ancestors*** are \$5, general admission. Children under 12 come free. 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.

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The History of Juneteenth

Juneteenth is a freedom celebration that became a tradition when, on June 19, 1865, General Gordon Granger sailed into Galveston harbor and issued a proclamation that gave freedom to a quarter of a million blacks in Texas who were still in bondage 2 1/2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation that President Abraham Lincoln issued was enacted on January 1, 1863. The tradition is so firmly rooted in Texas that it was made a state holiday in 1980, and ***Juneteenth*** has come to be regarded as the earliest African American holiday.

The freedom message reached different parts of America on various dates between 1863 and 1865, but migrated black Texans continued the ***Juneteenth*** celebration as they moved to cities in the North and across the country. Today, this holiday is observed from California to New York. Some in Virginia have observed Emancipation Proclamation Day annually on January 1. Virginia has now proclaimed ***Juneteenth*** an official state holiday. It was first observed on June 19, 2020.

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