



HISTORIC
MITCHELVILLE
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MEDIA ALERT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park Announces 2025 Film Series: *The Labor of Culture Keeping*

Dates: Wednesday, October 22 & Thursday, October 23, 2025

Location: USCB Hilton Head Island Campus | 1 Sand Shark Drive, Hilton Head Island, SC 29928

Time: Reception begins at 5:00 PM | Films to follow

Tickets: \$30 One Night | \$50 Two-Night Pass | [Ticket Link](#)

About the Event

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park announces the return of its annual two-night Film Series, taking place October 22 and 23 at the University of South Carolina Beaufort's Hilton Head Island campus. This year's theme, "*The Labor of Culture Keeping*," honors the intergenerational work of artists, chefs, farmers, and historians who sustain African American traditions with creativity, resilience, and purpose.

Each evening will feature acclaimed documentary films paired with conversations that highlight the extraordinary efforts of Black culture bearers who have committed their lives to preserving memory, land, flavor, and identity. The event will be guided and moderated by historian and Ph.D. candidate André L. Taylor, whose work on African American foodways, oral history, and cultural heritage provides critical context and connective threads throughout the series.

"This series is more than an evening at the movies—it's a platform for cultural transmission," said Joyce Wright, Director of Programming and Interpretation at Historic



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Mitchelville Freedom Park. *“Whether through fire, fabric, or farming, our featured guests remind us that culture doesn’t survive by chance. It endures because people labor to carry it forward, and this event is a space to honor that labor.”*

Wednesday, October 22

Traditions in Thread: Culture, Costume, and Community

The series opens with an evening devoted to the Black Masking tradition of New Orleans—a powerful cultural practice passed down through centuries of resistance, artistry, and identity. Featured film *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Big Chief Demond of the Young Seminole Hunters* provides an intimate look into the life and work of Big Chief Demond Melancon, a master beader, costume maker, and contemporary artist whose creations speak to both ancestral memory and present-day transformation.

Melancon, who leads the Young Seminole Hunters in New Orleans’ Lower Ninth Ward, has redefined the boundaries of traditional masking, with his glass-beaded suits exhibited in major museums around the world. Through these films, audiences will glimpse the spiritual, emotional, and physical labor involved in constructing a single suit—an act that combines history, protest, and art in every stitch.

Following the screening, André L. Taylor will lead a conversation with Big Chief Melancon that explores the Black Masking tradition as both a living ritual and a contemporary cultural force. The discussion will offer insight into how costume, performance, and storytelling operate as tools of survival and affirmation within Black communities.

Thursday, October 23rd

Feeding the Culture: Farmers, Fire, and Flavor

The second evening shifts focus to foodways, exploring how farming, cooking, and culinary innovation serve as vessels of cultural memory and resistance. The night’s featured film, *When Rice Was King*, recounts the rise and fall of the rice economy in South Carolina and the deep expertise enslaved Africans brought to the Lowcountry’s iconic Carolina Gold rice. Though often overlooked, that knowledge laid the foundation for what was once the richest agricultural region in colonial America.



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Joining the conversation is Marion “Rollen” Chalmers, a heritage rice farmer from Hardeeville who has played a vital role in reviving traditional rice cultivation in the region. Chalmers made history by replanting Carolina Gold on Daufuskie Island after more than a century and continues to share his knowledge through educational work and his family-run farm store, Rollen’s RAW Grain.

The evening will also feature celebrated Gullah Geechee chef BJ Dennis, whose work has brought national attention to the food traditions of the Lowcountry and the broader African diaspora. Chef Dennis’s cooking draws on centuries-old methods and ingredients to tell stories of migration, memory, and resistance. Rounding out the evening are Ed and Ryan Mitchell, a father-son team from North Carolina whose mastery of whole hog barbecue has made them legends in the culinary world. While Ed Mitchell brings generations of pitmaster knowledge to the table, Ryan Mitchell bridges tradition with innovation—advancing their brand while keeping their heritage intact.

The post-screening conversation, moderated by André L. Taylor, will explore the ways land, labor, and lineage intersect in the kitchen and on the farm. From seed to smokehouse, the panel will reflect on how Black foodways endure not only through preservation but through reinvention.

About the Emcee

André L. Taylor is a public historian, lecturer, and Ph.D. candidate in American Studies at William & Mary. His research focuses on African American foodways, oral history, and memory, with particular attention to Gullah/Geechee heritage. Formerly the Oral Historian for William & Mary and Historian of African American History and Culture for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Taylor brings a deeply informed and engaging voice to each night’s program. His ongoing digital humanities project, *Black Folk and Our Food*, captures the unwritten recipes and personal histories that preserve Black culinary traditions across generations.

About Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization and a cherished cultural landmark dedicated to preserving and celebrating the history of Mitchelville, a significant community founded by formerly enslaved individuals in 1862. The park aims to promote human understanding and foster just communities through the exploration of arts, culture, and history. To learn more about the park’s initiatives and projects, visit exploremitchelville.org.



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HISTORIC 2025 MITCHELVILLE FREEDOM PARK film series

OCT 22-23 2025

The Labor of **CULTURE KEEPING**

5:00 PM Reception, films to follow

**USCB Hilton Head Island Campus
1 Sand Shark Drive, Hilton Head Island, SC 29928**

Day 1

EVENT SCHEDULE:
October 22, 2025
Traditions in Thread: Culture, Costume, and Community
Film: All on a Mardi Gras Day: Big Chief Demond of the Young Seminole Hunters
Speaker: Big Chief Demond Melancon

Day 2

October 23, 2025
Feeding the Culture: Farmers, Fire, and Flavor
Film: When Rice Was King
Speakers: Marion "Rollen" Chalmers, BJ Dennis, and Ed and Ryan Mitchell

Event Emcee: André L. Taylor

For more information visit exploremitcheville.org or call 843-255-7301.

TICKETS:

\$30
one night

\$50
two nights

**GET TICKETS
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