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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park Celebrates Freedom Day 2026: Freedom to Learn—Education as Liberation Then, Now, and Next

Former Smithsonian Director Dr. Deborah L. Mack to moderate panel featuring K-12 and Higher Education Leaders; South Carolina State University Concert Choir to perform

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. January 13, 2026 — Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park will host their annual Freedom Day Celebration on Saturday, February 7, 2026, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the park on Hilton Head Island. The annual commemoration will honor Mitchelville's enduring legacy as sacred ground and spotlight the powerful role of education as a cornerstone of liberation, civic leadership, and self-determination.

The theme for 2026, "Freedom to Learn: Education as Liberation Then, Now, and Next," is rooted in Mitchelville's historic commitment to learning. Freedom Day 2026 will explore how the community's early adoption of compulsory education, one of the first in South Carolina, continues to shape conversations about access, equity, and opportunity today.

"Freedom at Mitchelville was never just an idea—it was built, governed, and taught," said Ahmad Ward, Executive Director of Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park. *"Our annual Freedom Day celebration invites our community to reflect on what it means to protect the right to learn, and how education remains one of the most enduring pathways to dignity, power, and self-determination."*

Program Highlights

- **Featured Panel Discussion:** Moderated by Dr. Deborah L. Mack, Past Director, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art
Panelists include:
 - **Dr. Valerie Cave**, Superintendent, Allendale County School District
 - **Dr. Glenda Sheffield**, Superintendent, Hampton County School District
 - **Dr. Paulette R. Dillard**, President & CEO, Shaw University
- **Musical Guest:** South Carolina State University Concert Choir (Orangeburg, S.C.)



“Hosting Dr. Mack at Historic Mitchelville is an extraordinary privilege,” said Joyce Wright, Director of Programs & Interpretation. “Mitchelville is a living classroom, and Dr. Mack’s scholarship and leadership will help illuminate how education has always been central to freedom—then, now, and next.”

Dr. Mack will lead a forward-looking conversation anchored in Mitchelville’s historical grounding, exploring why education was central to freedom for formerly enslaved people, how education functions as liberation and obligation today, persistent barriers to equity, the evolving role of educational institutions, and actionable steps communities can take to support these institutions beyond Freedom Day.

Event Details

What: 2026 Freedom Day Celebration “Freedom to Learn: Education as Liberation Then, Now, and Next”

When:

Saturday, February 7, 2026 | 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. | *Free admission, donations welcome, Rain or Shine*

Where:

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park
40 Harriet Tubman Way
Hilton Head Island, SC 29926

For More Information:

Visit exploremitchelville.org or call 843-255-7301.

Press Materials: Additional press materials and graphics can be found [here](#).

Media Opportunities:

Interviews with featured speakers and performers are available upon request. For media inquiries, please contact Courtney Young at cyoung@thinkfsc.com.