

# The Washington Post

## Emancipation Celebration

*After 101 Years, Parade Again Marks Liberation of D.C. Slaves*

By Sylvia Moreno, *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2002

Neither a blazing sun nor an arthritic knee stopped Sharon Goings yesterday. The third-generation Washingtonian donned a bright red straw hat, snapped on her knee brace and hobbled on her cane to Pennsylvania Avenue NW to celebrate a piece of her history: District of Columbia Emancipation Day.

"I thought if I can wobble, I can" be here, said Goings, 48, a Ward 5 resident who said her great-grandfather opened one of the first black-owned businesses in old Foggy Bottom, now known as Georgetown. "I'll probably be in bed the rest of the day, but I just wanted to be a part of history. It was important for somebody in my family to be a part of this."

"This" was a parade commemorating April 16, 1862, the day President Abraham Lincoln signed an order freeing the District's 3,000 slaves, 8 1/2 months before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation for slaves in the rebel states. A parade marking Emancipation or Jubilee Day, as it was called in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, started in 1866. It soon became a major Washington event, drawing the president and most of the city's black residents, many dressed in their Sunday best.

But in 1901, the Emancipation Day parade was discontinued, mostly because of infighting among organizers who split into factions of those whose ancestors had been slaves and those whose families had been free.

Yesterday, after 101 years, the parade resumed, and it was an unusually hot day that drew only a sparse crowd -- most dressed in their summer lightest.

No one argued about whose family was enslaved or free, but the subject of what 21st-century emancipation means for the District -- full voting rights in Congress -- was on most participants' lips.

"It's been a great day, a day that we can build on," said D.C. Council member Vincent B. Orange Sr. (D-Ward 5), sponsor of legislation to recognize D.C. Emancipation Day and to ensure that District workers may use leave to observe it.

"Our ultimate goal is to have taxation with full representation and to have two senators and one representative voting in Congress," he added. "This journey [is] an ongoing journey."

That theme was sounded by Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D), Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) and several other council members who spoke at midafternoon at Freedom Plaza. Former D.C. mayors Marion Barry and Sharon Pratt, along with Williams, rode in the parade.

Barry, wearing a navy cap with the words "FREE D.C." stitched in white across the front, said, "We pay taxes. . . . We go to wars. We do everything. But yet we don't have anyone to vote for us."

The historical significance of the date was the most important thing to Joseph Taylor of Alexandria and his wife, Renee. "It's too important of an issue to act as if it's just another day," said Joseph Taylor, a government contractor.

He said that it was important to honor the concept of freedom and, referring to slave ancestors, that "something we must not take for granted is the people who suffered before us."

The resuscitation of the tradition was the culmination of a decade of work by local historian Loretta Carter Hanes, who has organized small commemorative Emancipation Day events in the District since 1992.

Hanes, now 75 and in failing health, was unable to attend the festivities, which ended with a concert and fireworks at Freedom Plaza last night.

Orange recognized her efforts yesterday. "This is a tribute to Loretta Hanes. She really kept this alive," he said.

The parade featured a sprinkling of Maryland high school and college marching bands, some local politicians and small contingents of police forces.

D.C. public school students could not participate because they were taking standardized tests yesterday. Next year, the school calendar should not prevent them from participating and, Orange said, building attendance for the parade.

"When you bring back an event after 101 years, you have to crawl before you can walk," he said. "I think the fact we had a parade and a nice crowd down here is great. The word was getting out today, and we just have to build on that."

At top, 18-month-old Christian Carranza views the Emancipation Day parade from the shoulders of his great-uncle Bernard Williams. Above, former D.C. mayors Sharon Pratt and Marion Barry share the viewing stand along Pennsylvania Avenue. The event commemorated the day 140 years ago yesterday that President Abraham Lincoln signed an order freeing the District's 3,000 slaves. from Crossland High School in Temple Hills march down Pennsylvania Avenue during the revived festivities.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2002/04/17/emancipation-celebration/56247bdb-7e01-4610-80c2-aeb4724163f5/>