

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH DOUGLAS WILDER, MAYOR OF RICHMOND, VIRGINIA AND FORMER GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA, ACCOMPANIED BY BEN VEREEN, ACTOR

SUBJECT: "CONFRONTING THE ISSUE OF SLAVERY: THE UNEXPLORED CHAPTER IN AMERICAN HISTORY"

MODERATOR: JONATHAN SALANT, PRESIDENT, NPC AND REPORTER, BLOOMBERG NEWS

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 1:00 P.M. EST

DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2006

(C) COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

MR. SALANT: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jonathan Salant, a reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the National Press Club.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN. Please hold your applause during the speech so we have time for as many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it is from the members of the general public and the guests who attend our luncheons, not from the working press.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the National Press Club's website at www.press.org. Press Club members may also get free transcripts of the luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may buy transcripts, audio tapes and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at area code 202-662-7511.

As part of our celebration of Black History Month, several artifacts, including a letter from the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. -- who's widow's passing we mourn today -- is on display at the club, part of a collaboration with the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African-American History.

Before introducing our head table, I would like to remind our members of future speakers: on February 14th, Marc Morial, the president of the National Urban League; on February 16th, actor Richard Dreyfuss, who will talk about Hollywood's view of today's media; and on -- and on February 17th, General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits.

We're honored to have with us today actor Ben Vereen, who most of first met in his leading role in the Broadway show "Pippin." Mr. Vereen won a Tony Award for his performance in that play, and went on to star in several other Broadway plays. He is currently starring as the wizard in "Wicked."

He was a television star as well. A special, "Ben Vereen...His Roots," received seven Emmys, and he appeared in the miniseries "Roots," as the lead in "Tenspeed" and "Brown Shoe," and as Geordi La Forge's father in "Star Trek: The Next Generation." He has won numerous awards for his humanitarian activities. And, Mr. Vereen, welcome to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

Let me now introduce the rest of the head table. I'll ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all the head table guests are introduced.

From your right, Alan Elsner, he national correspondent for Reuters; Dorothy McManus, an analyst and editor with the Environmental Protection Agency; Peter Hardin, the Washington correspondent for the Richmond Times-Dispatch; Vonita Foster, executive director of the U.S. National Slavery Museum; Jane Podesta, Washington correspondent with People Magazine; Ben Vereen, who I talked about earlier; Rick Dunham, White House correspondent for Business Week and the immediate past president of the National Press Club; Angela Greiling Keane, associate editor of Traffic World Magazine and vice chair of the Press Club Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Marilou Donahue, producer and editor for Artistically Speaking and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon. Thank you very much, Marilou. (Applause.) Chien Chung Pei from Pei Partnership Architects and a guest of our speaker; Eleanor Clift, a contributing editor with Newsweek; Chuck McCutcheon, a reporter for Newhouse News Service; Alison Bethol, the Washington bureau chief of the Detroit News and a

member of the Press Club's Board of Governors; and Douglas Turner, the Washington bureau chief for the Buffalo News. (Applause.)

As we focus this month on the achievements of African-Americans, it is fitting that today's speaker has himself made history. Doug Wilder is the first black to be elected governor in the United States. In 1989, he won his race for chief executive of the Commonwealth of Virginia, occupying a position once held by Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. Today he is mayor of Richmond, Virginia, once the capital of the Confederacy.

The grandson of slaves, Mayor Wilder had a thriving law practice in Richmond before entering politics. He ran for the state Senate in 1969 and became the first black elected to that body since Reconstruction. Once in office, he tried to do away with the official state song -- "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" -- with its references to slavery. Today the song has been retired to emeritus status.

In 1985, he was elected as the first black lieutenant governor of the commonwealth, and four years later won the race for governor. Once in office, he won points for dealing with an inherited \$2.2 billion deficit. He also engaged in feuds with some of his fellow Democrats, most notably Senator Charles Robb, one of his predecessors as governor. And he ran, albeit briefly, for the 1992 Democratic presidential nomination.

Ten years after his gubernatorial term expired, Doug Wilder returned to public office, being elected mayor of Richmond. He took over a city that was on the FBI's list as one of the most dangerous, and a municipality that saw three city council members go to prison within a decade.

In office, Mayor Wilder has attempted to shake up the city and improve its finances. His efforts have brought him into conflict with the city council, the school board and the business community. As he said last August, "I guess they thought I was just going to sit around and cut ribbons." (Laughter, applause.)

His other job is supervising the new National Slavery Museum that is being built in Fredericksburg, about halfway between Washington and Richmond. The museum is scheduled to be opened next year as part of a retail resort in the city. The museum's website says its mission is to educate some and reeducate others about slavery in America. We're anxious to hear about this project and more.

So, Mayor Wilder, welcome to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MAYOR WILDER: Thank you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Thank you, Jonathan Salant, for that very informative introduction. His wife is from Richmond, and so he knows a lot about Richmond. His father in law was a practicing psychiatrist in Richmond.

And my good friend Bill Cosby says I'm in retrogression in terms of the offices that I seek. (Laughter.) My daughter and her husband are here, Loren and Ed James. And my oldest

grandson said, Dad, Mom, didn't you say that granddaddy has been a senator and lieutenant governor and then governor? And now you say he's mayor? Isn't he going backwards? (Laughter, chuckles.)

I really want to thank the National Press Club for the opportunity to be here, the Speakers Committee and the persons who have been involved. And I know how difficult it is for you to fit so many things into your schedule. But I think the National Press Club is a most important public platform, and I always enjoy the opportunity to speak here. I said to someone earlier that I'd lost my mug. When you speak, they said, you'll get another one. (Laughter.) And so I won't lose this one, and I promise you.

There are so many important public things and issues, and I think that there's nothing more important than what I would call the burning need to tell a more complete and accurate story about our nation's history; that even some 400 years later, there's still a blot on our national conscience. And I'm here today to discuss the importance of the new United States National Slavery Museum that, when built in Fredericksburg, Virginia, will be the only museum in the nation dedicated solely to the proposition and exclusively speaking on the topic of slavery.

This venue, with its rich history of contributions to American society and dedication to many of our freedoms, is indeed an appropriate place for me to introduce an institution that matters so much to humanity, to our nation, to its citizens, and obviously to me personally. I'll tell you why I think the museum should matter to all Americans.

As previously noted, this museum is the first and only museum that's aimed exclusively at telling the story of slavery in Virginia. Eric Foner, in describing the centrality of slavery to the history of the United States, said, "History has always been and always will be regularly rewritten in response to new questions, new information, new methodologies, and new political, social and cultural imperatives."

Now the beginning of this new millennium is a most appropriate time to ask these questions, and to provide new information about one of the most important, yet misunderstood and misrepresented, chapters in American history.

For some, the idea of a slavery museum may be difficult to understand, and yet, for others, it's long overdue. The responses we have received regarding our ongoing work with educational, civic and community organizations resounds loudly the timeliness and propriety of this historic initiative.

Our approach to slavery in this country has marked a defining moment in our history. And while it brings to mind a painful period in terms of abhorrence -- we had once openly permitted to exist slavery -- it also provides us valuable lesson, and even a point of sober reflection, in that we as a nation can begin to view slavery as an important element in our economic and political evolution.

This museum will be built to enable this generation and generations to come to better understand the pivotal role of slavery in the history of this great nation. Have you ever considered, for

example, that slavery was our economic engine of growth leading to the Industrial Revolution? Slavery provided a rich cultural heritage and legacy in various forms of human experience. It created this yearning to be free that we hear resonating all over the country and all over the world today.

I am the grandson of slaves. And someone said earlier, "You mean great-grandson?" No. Grandson -- (chuckles) -- of slaves. And I think this national slavery museum that we can remember and can embrace our common heritage and learn from is my hope the powerful lessons that this period in our history may offer to tell us.

I'll tell you a little bit about our museum, but I'll tell you a little bit about my father's parents, who were slaves. He would not talk about it. And as much as my mother would encourage him and said, "Robert, tell him, please!" And he would bite down on his pipe, clench it and almost snap it in two. And he would tell a little and a little, and I would ask for more, and he says, "Well, I got to go now." And he was the youngest in his family, really trying to just get past it.

But I always remembered that his father, a slave, built a house; and his son, the son of a slave, built a house. That was the only house we ever knew. We didn't have to go any other place. And so they believed in family, they believed in resonance, and they believed in going up together.

That knowledge was always a driving force to me and it really drove me to public service as state senator, lieutenant governor, governor, and now mayor. And I think about our upcoming 400-year anniversary of our country, the centennial celebration in 2007 and then reflect on the integral role of the black indentured servants and slaves the museum had to be -- that forced me to say this museum had to be located in Virginia.

When I first conceived of the museum, I was on a trip to Senegal in West Africa. And there, as many of you know who have been there, have seen the depicting of the slave auction block on Goree Island -- and so the mayor was there and the griot who was telling the story of slavery. We got to this door of no return. That's the door wherein the slaves look out into the ocean and see absolutely nothing. This is where they are finally to get on the ship and to leave that homeland forever. And I said to myself, "Here I am leading a group of American businessmen located in Virginia to Africa, and our forbearers were shipped away from here never believing they should ever come back and could come back. And yet, here I'm coming back in spirit, representing them to the extent that I'm governor of the state that many of them were shipped to as slaves.

This story has to be told. (Applause.) Somebody has to tell this story. (Applause.) And I was subsequently asked the following year by the late Dr. Leon Sullivan, head of the CIC movement in America, finding jobs for young people. And he was in charge of what he referred to as African-American summit. It was there that I can see the idea that we have to have a slavery museum in Gabon, and I made the announcement. Took a long time, a long time before we could move past getting it done. We wanted it in Jamestown. Couldn't get it there. I tried to get it in Richmond, my hometown. And for reasons already cited, we couldn't get it there. (Laughter.) There were other things they were busy doing. (Laughter.)

And I got a call from my good friend Larry Silver (sp) in Fredericksburg, and he said, "You need to come up and look to see what we may have." And I came up, half-hearted, and once I saw the majestic 38.5 acres on the banks of the Rappahannock River -- pristine land, never anything built on it, never anything developed on it -- I said this is it. I have got to go back and see if the persons who are on our board are going to suggest we move here. And they did.

Here's what we want to do: Our museum will be within view and easily reached of Interstate 95, right across. As you're traveling south on 95 and just as you get ready to cross the bridge going to Fredericksburg, you'll see a sign over to the right saying Shoney's on a big billboard sign. (Laughter.) That's it. (Laughter.)

Can you imagine something rising 120 feet from the ground level with a slave ship inside, illuminated for anyone to see from everywhere to say what's there? We will have 10 permanent galleries; a 450-seat amphitheater, plus three other theaters; two libraries, multiple classrooms and a lecture hall. We'll also include special wings for both children and senior citizens, and we'll regularly feature education, as well as thought-provoking, temporary exhibits. Our outdoor gardens will be comprised of sculptures, commemorative walkways and walls, tobacco and cotton crops, and will host diverse educational, cultural and civic activities.

Our architect, Chien Chung Pei of New York City, has designed a most unique 290,000 square-foot space featuring a full-scale replica of a slave ship -- that Portuguese slave trader, Dos Amigos. And the people who are working on it, the designers from Henley Lexington, are making great progress on the stunning interior exhibits. They're working with our architects, the Clark and Prestige construction companies, and our engineers, and the completion of schematic drawings to begin fabrication later this year.

Yes, in case you were wondering, it's the same Pei family of architects who gave us the east wing of the National Gallery of Art right here, the pyramid at the Louvre in Paris, the Jacob Javits Convention Center in New York, Hancock Place in Boston, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, the building that houses the S.I. Newhouse School of Communications at Syracuse University, and any numbers of places all over the world. This is the architect that I refer to, and I want to tell you that we couldn't have picked better. (Applause.)

Of course, all of this, as you know, requires a substantial financial support and we are fortunate to have a number of investors and supporters who have already demonstrated their commitment to our mission. These include American companies such as Wal-Mart, McDonald's, U.S. Airways, Hyatt Hotels, United Vanlines, and many, many more.

Our early financial supporters also include Bill and Camille Cosby, Larry Silver, that I mentioned; Ben Vereen, Princes Ermias Sahle-Selassie, Chien Chung and Beatrice Pei, and Ambassador Pamela Bridgewater, Wynton Marsalis, John Hope Franklin, the -- (name inaudible) -- Foundation, and Ultimate Pontiac, Best Western, Ron Rosner Toyota Mitsubishi, and many, many others.

Now, when we think of other industries touched or impacted by slavery, we think of textiles and cotton, we think of energy firms, farming equipment, machinery companies. Of course there are

leading national banks, like Wachovia, JP Morgan, and others that now have a corporate policy of acknowledging past involvement in the slavery trading. All of these companies should seek participation in our campaign as enlightened self-interest. And I'm calling for them now to get involved, not as a sense of reparation -- and I want to be as clear as I can be about that -- but as a sense of acknowledgment of doing what is right, doing the right thing. (Applause.)

Museum staff are already working with the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Virginia Tourism Corporation and our new governor, Tim Kaine, on the economic development directly affecting the museum, because we'll be creating hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in revenue for the state of Virginia. And the Virginia Tourism Corporation has already said they'll make the United States National Slavery Museum a true centerpiece of the 2007 programs, including the Jamestown Settlement Commemoration.

Education officials in Virginia, and beyond, are also working together to ensure the long-term educational value of the museum, that we talked about earlier today, Ben, because we want to be grateful for all of our supporters, but I want to take a moment to recognize and to applaud the enthusiasm of some, and that's Doctors Camille and Bill Cosby. The enthusiasm they have for our museum, it never (stops ?). I talked with them just yesterday with new ideas that they have. Bill Cosby is best known for his entertainment prowess and his legacy of laughter that spans several decades. But Dr. Bill Cosby is also an educator -- as well as Camille -- and he's also a civic-minded humanitarian. He has not only provided us with financial support, but also educational direction and moral inspiration that we are so tremendously grateful for in terms of his years of visionary involvement. He serves on our museum board of directors.

Another valuable, or invaluable, board member is Dr. John Hope Franklin. His son is here today. He is the dean of American historians. And I recall once as he was in Richmond and he was in an airplane and we were riding over, at the time, Jamestown.

And he says, "You've got to have that ship. You've got to have that ship." That's why we have insisted that we have that ship. Not just because it's a ship, but it'll be a place to see the size of the seats that the people had, the hole that they had to go into, the deck that they had to come to for the short period of time, unless, to the extent that you could then empathize with the suffering, you could then understand how people could endure two to three months of this at a time. And I think it's so important that we have those kinds of people serving.

We also acknowledge the service on that board of doctors Pat Seiger (sp), that I thought he would be here. I know the vice president is here, the general counsel is here. Howard University, my alma mater, has been so strongly supportive of what we've done. The first conference we had was held at Howard. And people from any number of the places came, and we had scholars from all over the country to come and to contribute.

Now, I think it would take far too much time to describe the accomplishments of our other major supporters. And I would hope that Dr. Foster (sp) will provide that information to you, as I know she will be getting in touch with you for other things. She has been a most excellent executive director, and education and training specialist with a love of learning that she will translate into the new museums and our program.

Now, I want to spend just a moment on another important luminary, and that is a man who has already been introduced to you, and that is Ben Vereen. You knew him in "Roots" -- I know him today. And he is here to tell you today a little bit about why he's here with us with the Slavery Museum.

Ben, please. (Applause.)

MR. VEREEN: Thank you, Governor Wilder -- Mayor Wilder. (Laughs.) You going backwards? (Laughs.) No, we're going forward.

To the press and to you this afternoon, thank you very much for being here. How I got involved is my daughter Kbara (sp) Vereen, who's out with us today, was having dinner with Prince Selassie. And he mentioned the Slavery Museum to her, and she said, "Well, you know, you can't do this project without having Chicken George involved." (Laughter, applause.) So, Kbara (sp), thank you very much. And my passion is about the education of what this project is bringing to America and to the table.

You know, when I was growing up, we were speaking earlier, the only information that I had about African American -- actually, as I like to say it, African American Colored Negro people -- (laughter) -- was one paragraph in the textbooks was we were slaves, and all praise to Lincoln, we were freed.

Now anybody knows that that's not true when you get into it, but the fact that that was -- that was the reason why when Alex Haley came along and wrote this magnificent book called "Roots," I had to be a part of it. I had to be a part of "Roots." I don't care if I was a pole carrier. I had to be a part of this history that was being made to tell our story.

Now as you can tell by the impact that "Roots" had throughout the world, that people were hungry and are hungry for the truth. We have the opportunity today, ladies and gentlemen, to do just that -- unveil the truth here in America. (Applause.) And it's not -- it's going to take all of us. It's going to take -- we're doing a benefit on the 19th -- turn off your phone, please -- on the -- or I'll answer it -- (laughter) -- on the 19th on February at the Jazz Lincoln Center in New York City, I'm putting on a show where I'm paying tribute to a friend -- it's our gala kickoff. I'm paying tribute to my friend who also paved the way, Mr. Sammy Davis, Jr. And -- (applause) -- and that evening, we're looking for you to come out and for everyone to be involved in our premier hour, our kickoff. This is our launching pad, people, and we've got let the world know that we are stepping up to the plate, that we are taking responsibility for this thing happening in our country, that we're going to have a museum.

You know, when I was growing up -- give all the credit to my Jewish brothers and sisters -- but every day -- every Sunday at 9:00 on Channel 9, there was reminders of World War II. There was films, there were films of what went on, the Holocaust. They didn't want you to forget. And what they were saying was, "We don't want you to forget so it will never happen again. We will not allow this to happen again." Well, ladies and gentlemen, it is time for the African-American Museum of Slavery is brought to the forefront, so we let the world know that slavery will never

happen in this country or anywhere else in the world again by showing -- (applause) -- by showing what has happened to us! This is our Holocaust Museum, hello!

AUDIENCE: Hello.

MR. VEREEN: This is our Holocaust Museum. So I'm asking the churches -- (laughter) -- to come forward. I'm asking corporate America -- ooh! We need you now. Now we've bought your cars, we've smoked your cigarettes, we've built your industries. Now it's time to tally up! (Applause.)

We're asking the young people in the streets of hip-hop community. Because of these people whose -- the mother who was being beaten, seeing her child taken away from her, the king -- the father whose family was torn asunder, those grandparents of ours, great- great -- because of them, you are able to wear your pants down between your knees and sing hip-hop today, come aboard. (Laughter.)

Come aboard. (Applause.)

This is our time to come to the forefront. We're asking everybody, the hip-hop community -- I'm drafting all of the entertainers, not just the black entertainers but also my white entertainers, not just my white entertainers, my Indian entertainers, not just my Indian entertainers, my Chicano entertainers. I'm asking America, entertainers of America to come to the forefront. We need you now. We need you now to heal our country. (Applause.) Heal our country.

We're looking at right now that Katrina has hit us so hard, we need to save those artifacts for our children. It's time for us to heal our country, people. It's time for us to step up and say this will not happen again and we are going to preserve our ground for our children so that they will be well educated, so that they will no longer turn to the history books and see one paragraph saying we were slaves and Lincoln freed us. (Applause.) It's over. It's truly over.

So on the 19th, that is our beginning. That is our kick-off. We're asking you please, I mean -- (pause) --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.) (Laughter.)

MR. VEREEN: Hey. Build -- to have a ship. I'm diverting, but excuse me a minute. To have a ship -- whoo -- inside this building. Hmm. When I was doing "Roots," I remember that was the year of the longships in the Harbor of New York. I remember sitting in my living room in Hollywood while filming "Roots" after doing my research, after talking to the elders, talking to the elders and hearing -- because I as a child did not dream in my deepest dreams how much pain and suffering my people went through. I don't know what it's like to be under the whip. Under the strap -- (laughs/laughter) -- because Mama was a disciplinarian, she didn't take nothing, but to be under the whip, I don't know about that. I don't know what it's like to stand there and have my family torn from me. I didn't know about that.

And I sat then to listen to their stories, and then I'm sitting there watching the longships come into the Harbor in New York City. Oooh, what a pretty sight it was. But tears were in my eyes. Tears were in my eyes. And I said, "You know, that was first class. To be steered on a ship from Europe would have been first class." My people didn't come that way; we came as cattle.

And the story has to be told. Alex Haley did a wonderful thing in scratching the surface, but now that he's opened up that wound, let us go deep inside and revisit so that we never again have any peoples go through such a thing, by educating ourselves and our children to make this world a better place.

This is not just about African Americans. This is about America. This is about America. So America, we need now to come forward. I'm looking right at you, C-SPAN. (Laughter.) We need your donations. We need you to step forward. We need you not just to talk about it, not just to wear dashikis anymore, not just to say Black History Month, like we're black for a month. (Laughter.) This is a lifetime thing.

We need you to come forward. This is our day in the sun. WOOO! Don't it look bright! Don't it look beautiful! (Applause.) Oh, you can sit there on your hands if you want to, but it's time to celebrate! It's time to stand up and make a joyful noise, because truly, as Martin Luther King said, "We have climbed to the top of the mountain, and we are going down the other side!" Are you with me! (Applause.) Are you with us! (Continued applause.)

Then on the 19th -- once again, on February 19th at the Jazz Center at Lincoln -- at Lincoln Center, Jazz Center at -- Jazz -- be there! (Laughs, laughter.) It's going to be a great show. It's going to be a great show, so please come out. That's the beginning of our campaign, and there will be many more campaigns along the way.

So thank you for your time. Thank you. (Applause.)

MAYOR WILDER: Thank you very much.

What I'd like to do now is to answer some questions that you might be asking, and the question that I think would be -- the first one is, why do we need a slavery museum? And I think it's very simple, as has been indicated. It's a very simple (piece ?), because of the thousand of museums in the U.S. today, we don't have any one. And slavery is less than a glorifying period of our history, but understanding slavery can help us a great deal.

Why a slavery museum in Virginia? People ask me, "How could you have gotten to be elected governor in Virginia?" (Light laughter.) And I say to them, well, where would you have had me go? (Laughter, laughs.) Everything happened in Virginia. I've addressed that. Through the 18th and 19th centuries, Virginia had more slaves than any other American state or colony. Of the first five American presidents, four of them had slaves. They were slave owners. And yet Virginia was also the birthplace of the American Revolution, and much of what we as a nation have conceived has been conceived right there. I might also mention that Virginia's given us so many other great people, and we can thank Virginia for giving us a number of great national and international luminaries.

Third question, why is it important to address the relationship among African slavery -- among African-American slavery, the concept of race, and the unfortunate enduring legacy of racism? "Leave it alone," people will say. "We've gone through that. Why are you talking about slavery? We didn't own slaves. Our people didn't own slaves." Even African Americans remind me of my daddy biting on that pipe, and they'll tell you they know about slavery until you ask them, what do you know about slavery other than the fact that somebody in your family may have been a slave? The lack of knowledge is so pathetic -- (scattered applause) -- that there are few things in this nation's history that compare to it.

And so I think it's a tough question. Many persons would accurately say that slavery ended in America some 140 years ago, and then understandably ask: "Why shouldn't we just leave it there?"

The legacy of slavery is as much a part of our present and, if left alone, will tragically remain a part of our future. And so I think until we resolve our age-old struggle with the issue of race by understanding its artificiality, it will never fully be appreciated.

Fourth question: What will the museum deliver in terms of educational value? I've tried to address that. But the answer is plenty, because in the absence of education, all else fails. And when should we start that? At the earliest practicable time. But we are talking with schools, colleges, universities, and we are developing on that our resources for use in discussing the topic. We launched a traveling exhibit some two years ago that has crossed the entire country, and it is already fully booked this year.

We participated with the Department of Education, a role -- and they'll continue to be involved in working with us. Our university is the University of Mary Washington, right in Frederickburg. The University of Richmond, Hampton University, Brown University, Howard University, Chicago State University and Virginia Commonwealth University are all universities that will be working with us.

Fifth question: When will the museum open? Well, we're scheduled to end -- open at the end of 2007. WE have a very aggressive fundraising campaign. We're already halfway to reaching a part of it, but we need a lot of money. We are talking about \$100 million first stage, \$100 million second stage. And as you have surmised by now, it's something that lives very close to a lot of people's hearts.

But we've been privileged and I've been privileged to serve this nation as a citizen. As both governor of a great state and now the mayor of the capital city of the South, the museum means so much more. As Dr. King did in fact say, darkness can't drive out darkness; only light can do that. And I don't know anything other than education that could provide the kind of light we are talking about.

Slavery as indeed a very cruel period of American history, but that darkness began yielding to light even as the Civil War established that America would in fact stand against slavery.

Now we need to remember slavery for both the fact that we once accepted it and the fact that we ultimately rejected it. And this duality is so pivotal to understanding who we are as a nation, and the museum to help amplify the light that has been shining since the mid- 19th century will be the U.S. National Slavery Museum.

In closing, I'd like to say that my good friend John Hope Franklin pointed out and said to me that no American president grew more in office than Abraham Lincoln. We all know that the Emancipation Proclamation didn't free the slaves. It did not even free all of the slaves in one state. I didn't know up till late that in Virginia the Emancipation Proclamation didn't free all slaves in Virginia. Just past three paragraphs of flowery language is written that Virginia is included except -- except -- for the 48 counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Accomack, Northampton, Elizabeth City -- now Hampton, York, Princess Anne -- now Virginia Beach, and Norfolk. If you happen to have lived in those places when the Emancipation Proclamation was passed, you still weren't free.

Now, for those of you who knew who had raised your hands, thank you so much. (Laughter.) Thank you so much -- all 500 of you. (Laughter.)

Lincoln also rebuked those Union officers who rejected the Fugitive Slave Act requiring return of slaves to their owners for fear of losing the Union. Now, those officers had -- those officers had to resort to calling the slaves "contraband" because if they came to seek their freedom from them, if they weren't covered, the only way they could be freed was they said, "Well, look, these are your property? Right. Well, we're seizing your property. And your property is contraband." So the freed slaves during that period of time were known as contraband.

But Lincoln said this: "In giving freedom to the slaves" -- and he said this in an 1862 message to Congress: "In giving freedom to the slaves, we assure freedom to free honorable men alike in what we give and in what we preserve." The U.S. National Slavery Museum is about giving the nation an objective chronicle of slavery, and in so doing, helping to ensure the freedom that we all strive to preserve.

Lincoln continued in the same measure with these inspiring words: "The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just, a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud." I applaud those of you here at the National Press Club for your contributions to American freedom. And thank you for the opportunity to be here, and for your interest in the National Slavery Museum. I'll answer the questions. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Jim Campbell, who heads Brown University's study into Brown's own past in slavery, says before the revolution 10 percent of Rhode Island's population was slaves, New York City's was 20 percent. What emphasis will your center play on -- place on slavery in the north?

MAYOR WILDER: A very good question. Emphasis on slavery being everywhere. The north was not sacrosanct in terms of being against slavery. Slaves were not only in those places that you spoke of, but other places in the north: Michigan, parts of Massachusetts. We will be showing that African Americans owned slaves -- in Virginia, and in other places. So our

emphasis will be on giving the total picture of slavery. And it underscores what we said before: it had more to do with economics and power than it had to do with race.

MR. SALANT: What kind of exhibit will be featured to tell young people, and some not so young, the inspirational story of black triumph over slavery?

MAYOR WILDER: We intend to show -- and we do have the traveling exhibit as Dr. Foster points out -- that even though these things occurred, that families were reunited with each other and found, and that people were able to rise above what some said they could not do. And even as slaves acquired wealth later to show opportunities for others -- we'll speak more of the people like Sojourner Truth and people who helped. We'll tell the story of the abolitionists. But we'll more importantly talk about how we have risen as a nation past slavery, past dealing with what was, more importantly, dealing with what is.

MR. SALANT: How would you feel about bringing black history to our public schools? There are so many children, both black and white, who do not know of the achievements of black people. They should be taught not only in their homes but in our schools.

MAYOR WILDER: You sound like Morgan Freeman. (Laughter.) I was with him a couple of weeks ago in Memphis, and he may very well become a member of our board. He's very much interested in what we're doing, and what rankles him is how the history as important as this is relegated to some people in America during some time in America. And I think that it's absolutely important for American history to be taught in American schools to the extent that American public schools teach anybody's history, if they don't teach this history, they're not teaching a full history. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: I know you and Mr. Vereen both mentioned the upcoming fundraiser in New York City. How else can someone get involved in the museum?

MAYOR WILDER: Well, I'd like to get that website -- usnationalslaverymuseum.org. Have I pronounced it right?

MS. : Usnationalslaverymuseum.org.

MAYOR WILDER: Usnationalslaverymuseum.org. Please send checks. (Laughter.) Send money. Call Dr. Foster. Call me. Call any member of the board. And nothing is too small. We intend to eventually have a membership campaign wherein we would have people having their children being able to come to the museum on a regular basis by virtue of being members of our slavery museum club.

MR. SALANT: That website is www.usnsm.org. It's usnsm.org.

MAYOR WILDER: If you dial the other number by mistake, they'll get it. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: This questioner writes, "Sadly, slavery is woven deeply into our Constitution, guaranteeing the existence of slavery through 1808. Will there be classes and course materials to

show people how many constitutional amendments were needed to eradicate all of slavery's legal support in America?"

MAYOR WILDER: We'll have education on it. You're absolutely right. The 13th Amendment didn't quite do it. Obviously, the Emancipation Proclamation didn't at all do it. And even though the 13th Amendment came about, we saw that we still needed due process in the 14th.

We still needed the Civil Rights Act. We still needed the Voting Rights Act. And every time you turn around there's some need for something.

But the more important thing is in spite of all of those things that we still need, look what the descendents of slaves did with less, with little or nothing. (Applause.) And they came from absolutely nothing and were able to compete at every level. We'll give the educational tools, but we will provide no crutches for anyone to say this is an excuse for you not to excel, to be competitive, to do the best you can.

I went to those kinds of deprived schools. My principals were white. I didn't have a cafeteria. I didn't have an auditorium. I didn't have any of those finer things in life. But I had parents and teachers who told me -- (applause) -- that I could be competitive, and if we wait for a law, if we wait for a congressional act, if we wait for a Supreme Court decision, if we wait for a presidential executive order, it will never happen. We will do this ourselves. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: How will the collection differ from the collection at the Reggie Lewis Museum and the African-American Museum planned for the Mall? Are you competing for the same dollars?

MAYOR WILDER: No, to the contrary. And I've discussed this with several persons who were there. Dr. Lonnie Bunch is here today, who is the director of the national museum that's going to be put on the Mall here, likewise is one our -- attended two of our meetings with the National Slavery Museum, and his organization.

We're not competing against each other. You have any numbers of museums all over the world. You have fine arts museums in New York, as in New York you should, and Washington and Chicago, everywhere. You can't have too many. And there is enough money to go around; just give us ours. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. SALANT: What kind of an outreach campaign do you have to attract support from corporate America? Have you found companies reluctant at all to be involved with what they might consider a controversial subject?

MAYOR WILDER: I've found companies that wanted to know just where their money was going, and that's a legitimate concern. I found companies that have asked some of the questions that I asked of myself when I answered you early on: the need, is it justifiable? Are we duplicating efforts? And I can tell you we're not.

I think it's important, though, for these companies to understand that, as Ben Vereen put it in a more direct way -- (chuckles) -- we are a part of America. We are a part of what built this country. We're a part of what gave the infrastructure for you to be successful. Don't you feel it's the right thing to do? If you don't, fine. We are going to have a museum; it would be far better if we could have your help.

MR. SALANT: Monday night, the Press Club screened a Lifetime movie for one night about segregation in 2003, present day. Are you going to address racism and the bigotry as part of your mandate?

MAYOR WILDER: I'm going to address it as a part of what we do. But let me say to your statistic in Richmond you gave to me, we were having people voting in Richmond at such levels that if you use the standard that would have been applied to whether you were being discriminated against, the Voting Rights Act would kick in.

Now, this was in Richmond, Virginia, in the 2000s, which means there was no discrimination in terms of race, and there was a lack of inspiration. And to the extent that we provide that inspiration to be a part, to be involved, yes, we'll do that. We will address the things that still divide us, as we pointed out here talking to you earlier. Racism is still here. Our job is to rise above it and not let it hold us back, and we'll do just that. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Changing the subject for a moment, do you find running the City of Richmond more or less of a challenge than running the state?

MAYOR WILDER: Well, I'll say this; that local government is more flexible, and -- I use "bureaucracy" in a benign sense -- there's more bureaucracy associated at national level than at state levels. A governor will change, he'll put his patina and his hand on the way that government is run, but he doesn't have to run that government totally. Trust me; when I got this new job, it was something I had not envisioned. It's an every-day job. I have not taken a day off since I've been there, and I don't really consider this a day off, because I'm going back tonight. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: As a former Virginia governor, what do you think about the state's transportation plan, which would greatly expand the use of toll roads? (Laughter.)

MAYOR WILDER: Transportation is going to be a problem for every Virginia governor. Realistically, we're not going to resolve it in four years. Realistically, you're not going to resolve it in eight years. When I was lieutenant governor, there was a plan that was advanced by my predecessor which said that we would have Virginia's transportation problems resolved until to the year 2010. That was 20 years ago. Shortly after I became governor, we still had transportation problems.

You will always have transportation problems. The real problem is are we going to have more accent on public transportation, mass transportation light rail, getting people to be able to get back and forth to work, living in our cities rather than believing that the only place they'll find safety is in the suburbs or in the rural areas. All of those things have to be considered.

MR. SALANT: The Republican Party says it's going to go after black voters. Some blacks have accused the Democratic Party of taking the black vote for granted. Where do you stand on that?

MAYOR WILDER: I say this; that the Democrats who say that our vote is taken for granted and the Republicans don't really want it, every time I turn around, I hear that. I have a question. My question is, what are you going to do about it? If somebody takes my vote for granted, I'm going to do something about it. As you pointed out in your introduction of me, I have had some squabbles with people in my own party, and many of them related to don't take me for granted. And to the extent that I can show that, and I think that people in America should exercise their right to vote and not to be told how to vote by anybody. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Before we ask our last question, I want to offer you a replacement National Press Club coffee mug. (Laughter.)

MAYOR WILDER: Thanks, Jonathan. (Laughs.) Very good.

MR. SALANT: And Mr. Vereen, we have one for you as well.

MR. VEREEN: That's for my tea. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: And Governor Wilder, a significant of appreciation for coming to the club.

MAYOR WILDER: Oh, thank you again. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: You don't get away yet. Last question.

Next year is the 400th anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown. How can this anniversary become a way to honor Americans of all colors and backgrounds, and what will it take to get it right?

MAYOR WILDER: Well, you ask the toughest question at the end.

When we talk about Jamestown, are we really going to be talking about the founding of the country? Are we really going to be talking about who was here and who was not?

Some 12 years after Jamestown was a red letter year in Virginia, 1619. Are we going to talk about where we've come and how far we've got to go? It's one thing to make a tourist attraction. It's quite another thing to see a seminal involvement in terms of change taking place.

Great changes have taken place in Virginia. Great changes have taken place in America. The question is, has it changed significantly enough in the period of time allocated for it, or is there more stress laid and laid to show to need for more change, and to not wait for change to happen?

Things don't happen by themselves. People make change happen -- things happen. As Emerson said, "Events are in the saddle. They ride mankind." And to the extent that we take advantage of whatever events there are -- whether it's the Jamestown celebration, whether it's this month's

observation, whether is a National History -- Slavery Museum, whether it's anything at all -- we must remember that we're all involved in one thing. Jamestown was dedicated to the proposition, notwithstanding not being adhering to the words, that all of us were created equal, and that we were endowed by the creator with certain inalienable rights, and it is our infeasible obligation to pursue them. And that is what Jamestown would mean to me. Have we reached the point where we can afford to rest? The answer is no, we've got to keep moving. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank everyone for coming today.

I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the National Press Club library for its research.

We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

#####

END