GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

Tel: (284)468-2730
Official Government Website:
https://gov.vg

Self-Manumission: The Long Look Free People and 250 Years of Legacy

Release Date: 4 June, 2026



The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development in collaboration with the Long Look 250th Commemorative Committee is launching a poetry and critical essay writing competition as part of activities to observe the Commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of Freedom at Nottingham Estate, Long Look.

As a part of these activities in observance of this momentous milestone, the competition is being launched under the theme “Self-manumission: The Long Look Free People and 250 years of legacy.” This competition invites the community to reflect on heritage, resistance, freedom and legacy through the creativity of poetry and the analysis and interpretation of the critical essay.

Premier and Minister of Finance Honourable Dr. Natalio Wheatley who is also Representative for the Seventh District stated, “I am pleased at the integration of a poetry and critical essay writing competition into the activities celebrating and commemorating 250 years of freedom for the Long Look Free People, as they were known.”

The Premier added, “The fact that the 30th of June has been declared a national holiday indicates the national significance of this commemoration. In addition to our celebratory activities, the later launch of a publication regarding the history of Long Look will ensure that this unique and defining heritage will be available for educational purposes. This poetry and critical essay writing competition will also highlight the participation of our young people in these commemorative activities.”

In 1776, 25 enslaved persons, later to be known as the Long Look Free People, paid Samuel and Mary Nottingham £5 to reclaim their freedom. The Free People were later gifted the Long Look estate in 1782 by the Nottinghams in order to build a community and to sustain themselves.

The Free People earned the money to purchase their freedom from the sales of livestock, produce from their provision-grounds and crafts products, and hiring themselves out when Long Look, a cotton estate was in its offseason. When they were gifted the estate, they operated it as a cotton estate until the 1820s, after which they switched fully to farming of ground provisions and livestock rearing. Other economic activities were huckstering, boatbuilding, and fishing.

Up to the end of apprenticeship period in 1838, Long Look existed as a free black village in the midst of enslaved plantations. The planter community did not favour Long Look as they viewed it as "injurious to their interests". However, the Free People transitioned the Long Look estate to the Long Look village, making collective decisions for the mutual benefits of all. They built a community which attracted other free and enslaved persons and became a center for families, landowners, artisans, and entrepreneurs.

Long Look whether as an estate or a village has been in existence for over 300 years (since 1713) and in its various stages, Long Look and the Long Look Free People (since 1776) have contributed significantly to the heritage of the Virgin Islands. Long Look served and continues to serve as a beacon of hope.

Coordinator of the Long Look 250th Commemorative Committee, Mrs. Bernadine Louis, stated, “It is very important for everyone, and especially young people, to engage in serious reflection on matters related to heritage. This poetry and critical essay writing competition asks for creative and analytical reflection on the legacy that the Long Look Free People created for future generations across the Virgin Islands. We are looking forward to reading every entry.”

About

The Long Look story is not just about a moment in 1776, but also about what remains to guide future generations. Entrants are asked to reflect on the legacy of skills and self-determination and on the legacy of heritage, resistance, and freedom – on what continues to ripple across generations.

The poetry competition is open to the age categories of 9 – 12, 13 – 17, and 18 and older. Poems that are submitted by the age categories of 9-12 and 13-17 should have a 10 line minimum while poems submitted by ages 18 and older should have a 20 line minimum.

The critical essay component is open to the age category of 18 and older. Essays must be 5 pages in length, double spaced using Times New Roman. The 5 page minimum length does not include the bibliography. Resources are available at the Virgin Islands Studies Institute at the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College. Entrants

may also conduct oral history interviews.

Prizes will be awarded to first, second and third place winners in each category. Only one entry per person per category is allowed.

The deadline date for submission is Thursday, the 25th of June 2026. All entries must be submitted to the following email: viculture@gov.vg