

“To accept one’s past— one’s history is not the same thing as drowning in it;

it is learning how to use it.”

—James Baldwin

Understanding that different perspectives come from our wide-ranging experiences helps us to develop an appreciation of one another. The myths surrounding Harborfest also encourage us to delve more closely into our shared history that includes America’s long and painful involvement in slavery and the slave trade.

Let us never forget.



This project is the result of the work of the Film and Humanities Institute at Norfolk State University, Norfolk Public Library, City of Norfolk, and Norfolk Festevents.

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Images Courtesy of
Norfolk Festevents
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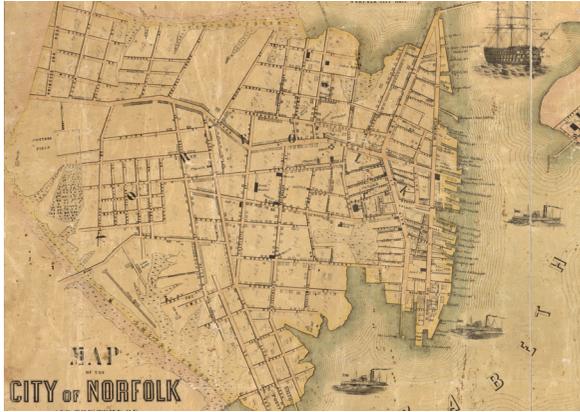
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**Norfolk Harborfest®
Dispelling the Myth of
Harborfest and the
Connection with the
Slave Trade**

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**The Slavery Myth Surrounding
Norfolk Harborfest®**



Why Do So Many People Believe the Myth?

Many ports and harbors have sordid histories related to America's slave trade. Norfolk Harborfest® occurs at the same downtown waterfront as did Norfolk's domestic slave trade, where thousands of people were separated.

The harbor was the center of Norfolk's domestic slave trade

Over 15,000 enslaved people and kidnapped free blacks were transported primarily to the New Orleans slave market for resale as part of the domestic slave trade

Norfolk's slave jails and auction blocks were located within a few blocks of the waterfront



Conclusions

The horrific institution of slavery was never celebrated at Norfolk Harborfest®. The event originated in 1976 as a result of America's Bicentennial Celebration to recognize international goodwill through the visit of the world's sail training tall ships to U.S. ports.

Norfolk Harborfest® has maintained its tradition as a three-day public event filled with tall ships, navy and maritime goodwill, diverse entertainment, and performances. It also provides one of the largest fireworks displays on the East Coast.

The inclusion of tall ships at Norfolk Harborfest®, and the history of Norfolk's harbor, highlights the complexity of the city's nautical history and provides an inclusive commemoration of maritime history.

The Slavery Myth Surrounding Norfolk Harborfest®

Located at Norfolk's historic waterfront, Norfolk Harborfest® is the nation's largest, longest-running, free maritime event. Norfolk Harborfest® brings residents and visitors from around the world to Norfolk's harbor.

The location of Norfolk Harborfest® at the downtown harbor has contributed to the myth that wrongly associates Norfolk Harborfest® as a celebration of the slave trade.

The tall ships of Norfolk Harborfest® remind some local citizens of slavers, a ship for transporting the enslaved.

The myth has kept many from attending.

Going forward, Norfolk State University's Joseph Jenkins Roberts Center and its Film and Humanities Institute have joined with the City of Norfolk and Norfolk Festevents to ensure that rumors, myths, and mistaken information are corrected with the real truth of Norfolk's complicated and varied history.

