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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY DELIVER REMARKS  
REGARDING CITY LANDMARKS**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Everybody, here we are, the beginning of Black History Month. And this is a time when we are not just thinking about Black history in the sense of studying the past abstractly, we're thinking about Black history in the sense of what it tells us we need to do today, what we need to do tomorrow, how we need to change this city and this country. Black History Month is an acknowledgement of a truth so often untold. And right here in this city there is a painful history and then another very beautiful history. The painful history is the role that New York City played, the very cynical roll that New York City played for decades and decades in the slave trade. The beautiful history is the fact that this is one of the places where the abolitionist movement thrived.

There was a fight for decency and justice and humanity. And it was not easy. Talk about going against the grain, the abolitionist movement. Black and white abolitionists together, female and male abolitionists together went against the grain of an enormous society in the most extraordinary manner, and they were considered outcasts and militants until more and more people heard their message and understood their truth. And ultimately the abolitionist movement prevailed. But in that history is such a clear message to us about the truths we still have to uncover about today and the things we have to fix now.

So, that's what brings us here today because when we talk about 227 Duffield Street we're not just talking about a building, we're talking about a deeper history, and something we cannot afford to lose because it's part of our heart and soul. And it's a story that needs to be told much more deeply. It was the home of the noted abolitionist Harriet and Thomas Truesdell. It was a refuge for those fleeing slavery. And remember that for so long in this country, fleeing slavery was not treated as a heroic act, but was treated as an act of illegality. So, the Underground Railroad, even here in New York City, was needed to protect people from unjust laws across our nation. That past was in so many ways swept aside, covered up, ignored. But some fought to preserve it and the larger meaning. And one of those was Mama Joy, who understood –

[Applause]

Mama Joy understood there was a power and truth on Duffield Street that could not be lost, and that all the modern forces of “development, “progress” should not be allowed to wipe away the history. And because she fought, we're here today. If she had not fought, this would have simply been lost. So, God bless her. We say rest in peace, we saw rest in power, but I also say

remember, her actions live today in what we are doing right now. So, this was a battle for justice led by members of the community in Brooklyn. And I'm happy to say the community prevailed.

And I will tell you from the first time that this issue was raised to Chirlane and I, Chirlane felt it was a matter of absolute importance. And she said to everyone in City Hall, we have to get this right, we cannot let this go, we cannot just go with the conventional wisdom, we have to do what's right, we have to realize there's something bigger at stake. And she made very clear to everyone in the City government that this had to be handled differently. And that is the person she's been throughout her life, always fighting for justice, for social justice even when it wasn't convenient, and it's one of the reasons I love her. Our First Lady, Chirlane McCray –

[Applause]

**First Lady Chirlane McCray:** Thank you, Bill. And good morning, everyone. I am thrilled to celebrate 227 Duffield, New York City's newest designated landmark.

[Applause]

And it is fitting that as we begin Black History Month, we are honoring those who fought to save the physical evidence of our history. There are many people to thank. Shawne Lee, Imani Henry, Aleah Vaughn, the members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, every activist who played a role in this struggle, and especially Joy Chatel, also known as Mama Joy, whose story you'll hear more about in just a bit from her daughter, Shawne.

Mama Joy gave all of us a powerful gift and a lesson. She saw the beauty and importance of this house. She took it upon herself not to sell it but to protect it, to let people know what took place there. She taught children about the bravery of our ancestors and celebrated those who were fighting for freedom right here in this city. It's hard to research and identify Underground Railroad sites for obvious reasons but the Landmarks Preservation Commission has designated 17 sites in New York City, every confirmed site that we know of.

Now, I want to note that over the past year, I've been retracing my own family history and I've been learning about the amazing life of my great grandmother in Harlem, the progressive St. Michael's Church she attended, how active she was in the Garvey movement. And I asked myself, why didn't I know all this before? And the reality is for most of us that holding onto records and property and even stories has been difficult. And America has never given Black achievements in history the value it deserves.

And so, we haven't always valued it ourselves. We throw away old letters and memorabilia or they are lost. The family secrets, no longer needed for our protection, stay secret. Our gathering places are sold and renamed. Think of how much Black history our buildings and our public spaces hold. The forgotten Seneca Village in Central Park, the house where Langston Hughes wrote 'Montage of a Dream Deferred,' the office in Crown Heights where Shirley Chisholm ran for president.

When I wrote the Commission last year, I wrote about the African adage, “Until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify its hunter.” That is my message for everyone who is listening today. It’s on us. We have to own our history. We have to go back and understand it. It’s on us to give it value. If Mama Joy hadn’t done that, none of us would be celebrating here today. So, I urge everyone, interview your parents and grandparents, save your family photos, your heirlooms, write down your family’s stories, recognize that we too are making history that will one day be remembered. And let us all applaud this fine family holding onto Mama Joy’s dream, making it their own dream, and seeing it through. That is really something we should all celebrate.

[Applause]

**Mayor:** And with that note, honoring her mother with her own activism and keeping the dream alive so it could come to fruition, my honor to introduce Shawne Lee.

[Applause]

[...]

Thank you so much, Aleah. And to everyone – I want to give everyone thanks and everyone credit. An amazing struggle, congratulations.

[Applause]

And more ahead to bring out the fullness of this site and what it means for all of us. And I am especially happy that a new generation of activists is starting out. And this is what gives us all hope. We’ve all walked in these steps but when you see the next generation coming forward, it reminds you there’s so much better ahead. Thank you, everybody.

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