



**CONTACT**  
Robin Crawford  
2019 Commemoration  
[Robin.crawford@finnpartners.com](mailto:Robin.crawford@finnpartners.com)  
P: (202) 974-5025  
C: (703) 966-7616

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***FAITH JOURNEYS IN THE BLACK EXPERIENCE: 1619-2019***  
**SCHOLARLY CONFERENCE AT VIRGINIA UNION UNIVERSITY**  
**EXPLORED EVOLUTION OF A RELIGIOUS AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE**  
**UNITED STATES**

*Renowned Theological Scholars and Historians from Across the United States Came Together at Conference Convened by Virginia's 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution™; The Virginia Council of Churches; and The Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University*

**Richmond, VA** (March 27, 2019) – Last week, Virginia's 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution partnered with the Virginia Council of Churches and the Samuel DeWitt Protector School of Theology at Virginia Union University (VUU) to present the scholarly conference, [\*Faith Journeys in the Black Experience: 1619-2019\*](#). The conference gathered theological scholars and historians from across the country to examine the religious context of Virginia in 1619, its impact on African Americans, and the evolution of a religious and culturally diverse United States in the 21st century.

The conference explored the faith journey of Africans and African Americans over 400 years, beginning in 1619 when the first Africans were enslaved and forcibly migrated to the Virginia colony. During the conference, scholars presented papers that will be edited and published in 2020.

*"Faith Journeys in the Black Experience* provided us with a timely opportunity to convene experts from across the country to examine the lost religious traditions of Native Americans and the first Africans who were forcibly migrated to the Virginia colony in 1619," said Dr. Luranett Lee, Summit Moderator and Visiting Lecturer, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond. "The United States has a painful history of racism, so it's important to continue having these conversations about religious and cultural traditions in an increasingly diverse society."

On Wednesday, March 20 the conference featured a public education program and concert, *Reflections of the Past: Songs from the African American Journey*. Historical interpreter Wisteria Perry presented the historical context of spirituals as part of the African American journey, which were performed by the Youth Choir from Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church. Thursday's panel discussion, *"What would reconciliation, civility look like?"* featured Chief Stephen R. Adkins, Sr., Chickahominy Tribe; Senator Jennifer McClellan, General Assembly of Virginia; Glenn Oder, Executive Director, Fort Monroe Authority; Secretary Kelly Thomasson, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia; the Reverend Ben Campbell, Pastoral Associate,

St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Dr. Lenneal J. Henderson, Adjunct Professor of Government at William & Mary.

“Before we talk about where we go from here, it is important to note how we got here. The power structure of this country was created with a hierarchy,” said Virginia Senator Jennifer L. McClellan during Thursday’s panel discussion. “It is on each of us to make sure that we are sharing our history with our children. It is on each of us to tell our stories. We have got to have uncomfortable conversations.”

Also, during the panel discussion, Stephen R. Adkins, Sr. Chief of the Chickahominy Tribe, said “Let's go back and get the story right. Let's lead the way for America because America's story began here.” Kelly Thomasson, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia, said to participants, “Sharing stories of today is important and can move this community forward. When you make it personal for someone it clicks, more than just reading about history.”

[\*Faith Journeys in the Black Experience: 1619-2019\*](#) is one of more than 20 events, programs and educational initiatives American Evolution is hosting with notable Virginia institution partners in 2019 to showcase key occurrences from 1619 Virginia. These events set our nation on a course towards the ideals of democracy, diversity and opportunity, and include the first representative legislative assembly in the New World, the arrival of the first recorded Africans to English North America, the recruitment of English women in significant numbers, the first official English Thanksgiving in North America, and the development of the Virginia colony’s entrepreneurial and innovative spirit. A full schedule of American Evolution programming can be found [here](#).

#### **About the 2019 Commemoration**

The 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution™, highlights events that occurred in Virginia in 1619 that continue to influence America today. Featured programs, events and legacy projects will position Virginia as a leader in education, tourism and economic development. American Evolution™ commemorates the ongoing journey toward the key ideals of democracy, diversity and opportunity. Dominion Energy is an American Evolution Founding Partner and Altria Group and TowneBank are Virginia Colony Partners.

###