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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**2019 COMMEMORATION, AMERICAN EVOLUTION SPONSORS TWO NEW EXHIBITIONS,  
*COSMOLOGIES FROM THE TREE OF LIFE: ART FROM THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SOUTH*, AND  
*DETERMINED: THE 400-YEAR STRUGGLE FOR BLACK EQUALITY*,  
THAT EXPLORE THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE SINCE 1619**

**Richmond, VA** (June 4, 2019) – Two 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution exhibitions, *Cosmologies from the Tree of Life: Art from the African American South* and *Determined: The 400-year Struggle for Black Equality*, are opening in June. Timed to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first Africans in Virginia in 1619, these exhibitions combined explore the African American experience over the last 400 years.

In partnership with the [Virginia Museum of Fine Arts \(VMFA\)](#), *Cosmologies from the Tree of Life: Art from the African American South*, will debut on Saturday, June 8. This special exhibition features recent acquisitions from the [Souls Grown Deep Foundation](#) to strengthen the representation of artists from the African American South. *Cosmologies*, on view in the Evans Court Exhibition Galleries from June 8 to November 17, includes sculptures, paintings, works on paper, and quilts, among other media, addressing some of the most profound and persistent issues in American society.

The aesthetic and cultural origins of the works in the *Cosmologies* exhibition can be traced back to the era of enslavement of Africans in America through the Jim Crow period. Given the restrictions on both physical freedom and artistic expression, these works of art serve to celebrate not only the persistence, but also the resilience of these African American artists. This exhibition will reflect the nation's historical diversity and complexity. These themes are key issues addressed by Virginia's 2019 Commemoration.

In partnership with the [Virginia Museum of History & Culture](#), *Determined: The 400-year Struggle for Black Equality*, will debut on Saturday, June 22. The *Determined* exhibition explores the experience of black Americans from the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in English North America in 1619 to present day. *Determined* traces the ways in which black people have profoundly shaped the course of American history and the nature of American democracy through their fight for freedom, equality, and justice.

Visitors will encounter dozens of personal stories, like those of Virginians James Lafayette, Mary S. Peake, Arthur Ashe, and Missy Elliot, and nearly 100 artifacts, including rare signed copies of the Emancipation Proclamation and 13th Amendment. In conjunction with the exhibition, the museum will offer a virtual reality experience, *Ashe '68*, from June 22 through September 2, that will take viewers into the moments before Arthur Ashe's historic win at the 1968 US Open.

"These ground-breaking exhibitions are instrumental in shedding light on the significant stories that make up the history of the African-American experience since 1619," said Kathy Spangler, Executive

Director of the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution. “As legacy projects of the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution, it is our hope that these exhibitions will contribute to a more inclusive and authentic history of Virginia and America and highlight the enduring impact of 1619 Virginia events on our nation today.”

In 2019, American Evolution is convening more than 20 events, programs, educational initiatives performances and exhibitions that showcase key events from 400 years ago in 1619 Virginia, which set our nation on the course towards the ideals of democracy, diversity and opportunity. In addition to the arrival of the first Africans to English North America, these pivotal 1619 Virginia events include the first representative legislative assembly in the New World, 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.

### **About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. The museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. VMFA’s permanent holdings encompass nearly 40,000 artworks spanning more than 6,000 years. VMFA is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission.

### **About the Virginia Museum of History & Culture**

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society — a private, non-profit organization established in 1831. The historical society is the oldest cultural organization in Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. For use in its state history museum and its renowned research library, the historical society cares for a collection of nearly nine million items representing the ever-evolving story of Virginia.

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