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**NATIONAL AND WORLD LEADERS CONVENE IN VIRGINIA TO COMMEMORATE
THE 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST AFRICAN LANDING IN ENGLISH NORTH AMERICA**

*Declaring “African American History is America’s History,” Virginia Governor Ralph S. Northam
Announces New Commission on African American History Education*

Hampton, VA (August 27, 2019) – This weekend the 2019 Commemoration of the First African Landing was hosted by [Virginia’s 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution](#), in partnership with [Fort Monroe Authority](#), [Fort Monroe National Monument](#), and the [City of Hampton](#). Thousands of people from around the world gathered at a commemorative ceremony at Point Comfort in Hampton, Virginia, which is the site where “20 and odd” enslaved African men and women were forcibly landed in English North America 400 years ago in August 1619.

In his remarks at the 2019 Commemoration of the First African Landing ceremony on Aug. 24, **Ralph S. Northam, Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia**, announced that he had signed an executive directive to assign a commission on African American history education in the Commonwealth. The new commission will review education standards, instructional practices, content and resources currently used to teach African American history in Virginia schools.

“When we look back at events of 1619, or 1861, or 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was signed, we often look at them as history frozen in time, or locked in a book, relics in the past frozen in time,” said Gov. Northam. “We often fail to draw the connecting lines from those past events to our present day. But to move forward, that is what we must do. We want to make sure all students develop a full and comprehensive understanding of the African American voices that contribute to our story.”

As recorded by English colonist John Rolfe, “20 and odd” enslaved African men and women were stolen by English privateers from a Spanish slave ship and brought to Point Comfort on a ship called the White Lion. Natives of west central Africa, these enslaved individuals are believed to have been traded for food and supplies. They were the first Africans to be brought to English North America. Point Comfort, the site of the ship’s arrival, is the present site of Fort Monroe National Monument in Hampton.

The commemorative ceremony included a performance by Portsmouth, Virginia’s I.C. Norcom High School choir and a panel of distinguished speakers. **Donnie Tuck, Mayor of Hampton**, spoke at the event and said, “This weekend, we honor, salute and commemorate those ‘20 and odd,’ along with those other individuals, yea, even my own ancestors. For because of their strength, determination endurance, perseverance and resilience, survived the capture and months-long transport through the middle passage,

and endured the indignities, dehumanization, brutality and atrocities of that peculiar institution,” he said. “Today, I can imagine that as our ancestors are looking over the battlements of glory, and beholding on this platform, two Congressional representatives, a lieutenant governor, a state senator, and a mayor who are all African Americans, their hearts must be overflowing with joy.”

Mark R. Warner, the U.S. Senator from Virginia, said, “Two years ago this month, we saw the violent forces of hate and backlash on display in Charlottesville. That tragedy had a lot of folks asking ‘Is this who we are?’ The history we confront today reminds us that the answer is complicated.” He added, “But it is not who we should be. And I believe every American – especially our leaders – has a moral responsibility to speak up and demand America deliver on its promise of liberty and justice for all.”

As a part of the 1619 commemorative year, Virginia’s 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution has convened 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 a course towards the ideals of democracy, diversity and opportunity.

“How fortunate we are as a country that the descendants of African slaves and all who followed are still here and part of this nation. It is impossible to imagine an America without the courage spirit and accomplishment of the African diaspora,” said **U.S. Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia**. He added, “America would be so much poorer without our African roots. What does it mean to say that monstrous tragedy, in the passage of time, may sow the seeds of great beauty? It’s on each of us to understand our nation’s history and direct the change toward a better future. Let’s honor our African roots by finally living up to the American ideal that we are all created equal and deserve to live free.”

One of the highlights of the Commemorative Ceremony was the recitation of an original poem by the **renowned American poet and activist, Yolande Cornelia "Nikki" Giovanni Jr.** The poem, titled *1619 Jamestown (but not only) An Answer to the New York Times*, was read by Jacquelyn E. Stone, Co-chair of the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution’s First Africans to English North America Committee.

The 2019 Commemoration of the First African Landing Ceremony also featured remarks by special guest speaker **Van Jones, author and CNN political commentator**, who said, “African American people and our close allies have been the driving force for progress and democracy on these shores, over these 400 years.” Jones added, “We have to take charge in our time as seriously as the people before us did so that someday, when we put our hands on our hearts, we will have a democratic republic, with liberty and justice for all.”

The full list of speakers at the 2019 Commemoration of the First African Landing Ceremony includes:

- Donnie Tuck, Mayor of Hampton, VA
- James P. Moran, Former US Representative (D-VA, 1991-2006) and Chair of the Board of Trustees, Fort Monroe Authority
- Kirk Cox, Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates
- Joseph Green, Chair of the 400 Years of African-American History Commission
- U.S. Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia

- U.S. Senator Mark Warner of Virginia
- Karen Bass, Chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus
- Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott of Virginia's Third District
- Rep. Elaine Luria of Virginia's Second District
- Governor Ralph S. Norton of the Commonwealth of Virginia
- Jacquelyn E. Stone, Co-Chair of the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution's First Africans to English North America Committee
- Dan Smith, Deputy Director of the National Parks Service
- Brycen Dildy, 11-year-old student of Larkspur Middle School in Virginia Beach, VA
- Virginia State Senator Mamie E. Locke
- Van Jones, author and CNN political commentator
- Justin Fairfax, Lieutenant Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia

Following Saturday's Commemorative Ceremony, invited guests and the general public had an opportunity to participate in several events organized by Project 1619, the City of Hampton, and exhibitions from Virginia institutions and museums, including the National Park Service, American Evolution, Hampton History Museum, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, Casemate Museum, and more. In the evening, the 2019 Commemoration of the First African Landing Concert at the Hampton Coliseum featured a performance by GRAMMY-award winning rapper and actor, Common, with Sounds of Blackness.

The Commemoration weekend concluded Sunday, Aug. 25th with the Day of Healing and Gospel Music Festival at Continental Park. The event included gospel choir performances and a keynote speech by Reverend Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, academic, author, media personality. The National Parks Service, including Fort Monroe National Monument, hosted on-site programs and a nationwide bell ringing that brought people together in solidarity as they rang bells simultaneously for four minutes.

For more information on 2019 Commemoration of the First African Landing visit <http://hamptonva2019.com/firstafricanlanding/>

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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.