

**1619-2019**   
**COMMEMORATION**  
**FIRST AFRICAN LANDING**  
AT FORT MONROE    **AUGUST 23-25**    HAMPTON, VA

**First African Landing Commemorative Ceremony**

*Fort Monroe*  
*August 24, 2019*

**Welcome**

**The Honorable Donnie R. Tuck, Mayor of Hampton, VA**

**The Honorable James P. Moran, Jr., Chairman, Fort Monroe Authority Board of Trustees,  
United States Representative from Virginia (1991-2015)**

**The Honorable M. Kirkland Cox, Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates**

The Honorable Donnie R. Tuck:

Good morning and welcome to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First African Landing Commemorative Ceremony. It is my honor to welcome Governor Ralph Northam and First Lady Pam Northam; Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax; Attorney General Mark Herring; Senator Mark Warner and Senator Tim Kaine; U.S. House of Representatives Robert C. Scott and Elaine Luria of Virginia; Congresswoman Karen Bass of California and Congressman William Clay of Missouri; Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, Kirk Cox;

Former Virginia Governors Gerald Baliles and Bob McDonnell; as well as former Missouri Governor Eric Greitens; former Congressman James Moran; Chief Judge Roger Gregory of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals; members of the Governor's Cabinet; Aurelia Skipwith, Deputy Assistant Secretary of U. S. Fish and Wildlife and Parks; David Vela, Acting Deputy Director for Operations of the National Park Service; members of the Virginia General Assembly; Norfolk Mayor Kenneth Alexander; Portsmouth Mayor John Rowe; Hampton Vice-Mayor Jimmy Gray; Councilwoman Eleanor Brown; Councilman Steve Brown; Councilwoman Linda Curtis; Councilwoman Chris Snead; members of the 400 Years of African American History Federal Commission; and special guests:

On behalf of the members of the Hampton City Council, our City government and the residents of this great City, it is my honor and privilege to welcome you to Point Comfort; Old Point Comfort; Freedom's Fortress; Ft. Monroe; and now, Ft. Monroe National Monument in Hampton, VA. Today's Hampton is a historic city that is 409-years-old. When I greet visitors to our city, I often tell them that we don't look that old because we have been burned to the ground

at least twice! From almost its beginning, Hampton has been a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural city, a model for the rest of the nation and world to emulate.

At its founding in July 1610, there were two ethnicities and two cultures here in Hampton – that of the English colonists and that of the Kecoughtan Indians. Just over nine years later, a third ethnicity and culture – that of Africa – was introduced. In late August 1619, an English privateer ship, the *White Lion*, arrived at Point Comfort with human cargo it had captured in an attack on the Spanish slave ship, the *San Juan Bautista*. John Rolfe, the Virginia Colony Secretary, stated that “20 and odd Negroes” were traded for food and supplies.

Among those first documented Africans to be brought to North America in 1619 were two individuals, simply called Anthony and Isabella. They married, and in 1624, it is believed that they gave birth to the first African child born in English America. They named him William Tucker in honor of a Virginia planter. Descendants of Anthony and Isabella, the Tucker Family, are with us this morning.

This weekend’s 400-Year Anniversary Commemoration events began with yesterday’s ceremony at the Tucker Family Cemetery, about eight miles northwest of here. Another African American family that is here today – the Charity Family – can trace its roots in Charles City County to the mid-1600s.

I want to acknowledge the organizations and agencies that have collaborated the past 4-5 years to plan and execute not just this weekend’s commemoration events, but speakers, symposiums, panel discussions, cultural exhibits, concerts, and educational seminars over the last three years.

These are the Hampton 2019 Commemoration Commission; Project 1619, Inc.; the Commonwealth of Virginia’s American Evolution; the Fort Monroe Authority; the Fort Monroe National Monument of the National Park Service; and the 400 Years of African American History Federal Commission. I would like to especially recognize Calvin Pearson and Project 1619, who began telling the story of the first Africans’ arrival at Point Comfort in Hampton, not Jamestown, with African Landing events annually since August 2008.

In closing, researchers and historians tell us that more than 12 million individuals were taken from the African continent during the transatlantic slave trade; of these millions, just over 380,000 were brought to the shores of America. This weekend, we honor, salute, and commemorate those “20 and odd,” along with those other individuals – yay, our ancestors – who, because of their strength, determination, endurance and 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.”

To borrow from Hebrews, Chapter 11: All these people died having faith. They didn’t receive the things that God had promised them, but they saw these things coming in the distant future and rejoiced. They acknowledged that they were living as strangers with no permanent home on earth.

Today, I can imagine that as our ancestors are looking over the “battlements of glory” and beholding on this podium two Congressional representatives, a lieutenant governor, a state senator and a mayor who are all African Americans, their hearts must be overflowing with joy!

The Honorable James P. Moran, Jr.:

As Chairman of the Fort Monroe Authority over the last three years, there are several people that deserve to be recognized. I want to recognize Governor Ralph Northam. I would like to thank him for all the efforts and achievements that he has made in pursuit of racial justice and reconciliation. Just as an example that some of you may not be aware of, a number of us on the Authority have had a major problem with an arch that exists down the street called the Jefferson Davis Arch. It was designated as historic, although anything that is more recent than I am is really not historic. It was put up in the 1950’s. A deliberate act of defiance by the Daughters of the Confederacy. We wanted it down before we had this commemoration today. The Governor used his power to come down one morning and took every one of those letters off of that arch, and if any of you want to see those letters, they are in the museum someplace, and help yourself to read them, but it did not belong here.

I also want to call out some friends, former Governors and Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine as they have done such a terrific job, and a couple of other friends in Congress, Bobby Scott who represents this area as does Elaine Luria. Bobby is chair of the Education and Labor Committee.

Karen Bass, it is so good of you to come to this event. She is the Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus at the national level. She is also chair of the Africa Sub-Committee of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Let me mention some of the members of the board of the Fort Monroe Authority. They have been wonderful. State Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball; State Secretary of Natural Resources, Matt Strickler; State Senator Mamie Locke and Mary Bunting, Hampton City Manager; Dr. Rex Ellis, who had a major role in the establishment of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Every single one of you should go through that museum if you have not done so and every single day, we are making a closer connection with that museum.

Dr. Ed Ayers- I don’t know if you have watched the public broadcasting series on Reconstruction, but he is continually interviewed and he does such a terrific job. I have listened to him two or three times, and I have thought I know that guy...he has done a great job- thank you. Dr. Maureen Elgeron Lee is a professor at Hampton University; J. Joseph is currently serving as Vice Chair of the Authority; Colin Campbell is the Vice Chair, but is recovering from health issues. Jay is the brother of Molly Ward who was the Secretary of Natural Resources and was instrumental in much of the direction we have taken. I want to thank Clark Mercer, Chief of Staff to the Governor. He has done such a great job and has been directly involved.

I’m going to come across a number of people- I see Attorney General Mark Herring; of course our Lieutenant Governor is here.

The Fort Monroe Foundation has raised money for the new Visitor and Education Center. Every one of you should go through that center as phenomenal accomplishments have been made in such a short period of time. Thank you to Jack Ezzell; Allan Diamonstein; Bill Armbruster; and Michael Westfall. Let me also recognize Glenn Oder, Fort Monroe Executive Director. I cannot imagine the number of people he and his wife Mary have entertained on a weekly, if not, daily basis. There are so many people that deserve recognition. I'm going to make a few comments so we do not get too far off schedule.

This is an historic place. Four hundred years ago some of the most important decisions that shaped our nation's future began to be made here. First, we pay respects to the native peoples who lived full lives for many generations well before the first English settlers arrived. We also pay respects to those first English settlers, many of whom did not survive. Those English settlers carried with them a strong desire for freedom and a better life than the one they knew in their first homeland in Europe.

Today, we address the paradox that a land settled right here in the name of freedom was also sullied at the expense of freedom.

We are here to recognize the first enslaved Africans who were brought ashore to the English colonies. Human beings brought here in bondage to Old Point Comfort where they were traded for provisions. English settlers, including the first Governor Governor Yeardley, who made a trade for indentured servants who ultimately became slaves.

It is this contradiction – the first immoral decision that determined who we Virginians became. Slaveholders for two and one-half centuries. The fact that a Virginian, who became the Governor and then our third President, wrote our nation's Bill of Rights declaring all people to be equal with an inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is a contradiction that undergirds and compromises the America most of us still want us to be – a Commonwealth of the people who believe in the promise of freedom, justice and equality for all.

In 1861, at the start of the Civil War, three brave enslaved Black men sought refuge here. The Federal Commander, Major General Benjamin Butler, protected these men by declaring them contraband of war, releasing them from the ownership of their masters. The General decided not to return those men as fugitive slaves, but to protect them by declaring them contraband of war. Releasing them from the ownership of their masters who tried to have them returned. He explained that you seceded from the Union and are using these men to build fortifications for the Confederacy.

As the word of freedom went viral by word of mouth to other slave states, the brave act of these three men triggered a migration of many more enslaved people to seek refuge here. Their passion for freedom combined with Commander Butler's shrewd, yet honorable, respect for justice, created a movement that would dismantle slavery and preserve the United States of America. A singular nation willing to fight a bloody, brutal, civil war to enable emancipation of all of its people. It all happened here at what is now celebrated as Freedom's Fortress.

In 2011, this place, where the first enslaved Africans to English North America arrived and the first contrabands found refuge, was designated a National Monument by the first elected Black president of the United States of America – President Barack Obama. He served his country honorably and competently.

We have come a long way. We still have a long way to go to achieve true equality of opportunity, to overcome the residual effects of slavery and Jim Crow and systemic racial discrimination. The American middle class was formed from the immigrant working class who successfully defeated the forces of Nazism, Fascism, and right-wing nationalists who had taken control of Europe in the 1940's. For those working class Americans who fought and won that war, except for the Black soldiers who had fought at least as valiantly, but were excluded from those benefits.

Today, more than a third of African American children are living in poverty. The net worth of White families is ten times that of Black families. Much of it is due to the comparative difficulty Black families have securing a home mortgage. Prison sentences for the same crime are on average 20% longer for Black men. A job applicant in the United States with a white sounding name is 50% more likely to get a call back from a prospective employer. I could go on and on with these examples of modern-day discrimination. I am not going to do that.

I mention some of these facts because this should be more than a day to commemorate. It also must be a day to recommit to being one nation, true to our values, our ideals and aspirations. We are a great nation, a diverse nation made of the survivors of a genocide against its first inhabitants, made of immigrants who came to this country, mostly from Europe, prepared to endure discrimination and, the discrimination of the Africans and African Americans.

Descendants of people who were brought in bondage, held as property, treated as sub-human, but who persevered, will triumph and are proving their value and humanity every day. They will lead our country out of our ignorance and bigotry and selfishness to a future based on truth and justice and unity. Ladies and Gentlemen, the courage to accept the truth gives us the strength to pursue justice because we believe what our founding fathers understood—e pluribus unum. That phrase is on our currency and monuments and even in our national constitution. It is etched into our national soul. That out of many, there will emerge one nation and that nation is destined to be as good as it is great. Thank you all very much.

The Honorable M. Kirkland Cox:

Good morning. As Co-Chairman of the 2019 “American Evolution” Commemoration, it is my honor to welcome you to this important ceremony today.

Let me begin by thanking the Co-Chairs of our First African American to English North America Committee, Cassandra Newby-Alexander and Jackie Stone, and the entire committee for their leadership and guidance in advising the programs and activities of this 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution event.

A few weeks ago, we commemorated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the new world's first representative assembly. It was a moment worthy of remembrance not only for what began then, but for how far we have come in the 400 years since then. Certainly, the same is true of this anniversary, for we commemorate four centuries of African-American contributions that have enriched our commonwealth and country and shaped the America we know today.

And, yet, we also know the unspeakable tragedy and awful injustice that marked that beginning. As I said at Jamestown last month, the year 1619 saw the beginning of not only the “highs” of America, but also the “lows” of America. And we are here today to acknowledge the lowest of our lows – the forced arrival of Africans to English North America right here on these very shores, which tragically was the genesis of the shameful evil that became systemic enslavement based on race. This occasion will challenge us to seek a deeper understanding of not only our history, but also our future. The history is all too real.

From these shores, to the slave auction blocks of Richmond, to the tobacco fields of Southside, the original sin of slavery left a permanent stain on our Commonwealth. From the 20 and odd enslaved people who came ashore at Point Comfort, Virginia's enslaved population of Virginia would reach 500,000 by 1860 – the highest of any state in the union. From these shores, to slave auction blocks in port cities up and down our coast, to the plantations of the south, the original sin of slavery left an indelible scar on our nation. From the 20 and odd enslaved people who came ashore here, the enslaved population of the United States would reach 3,953,761 by 1860. But, as strong as the chains of slavery were, they were no match for the justice of our God ... no match for the perseverance, fortitude, and faith of the enslaved community ... no match for the righteous resolve of those who struggled and sacrificed to abolish this evil institution.

As strong as the chains of slavery were, they were no match for the human spirit ... no match for the founding ideals of freedom and equality ... no match for the conscience that cried out demanding that the promise of a “more perfect union” apply to all Americans, not just some. Over these four centuries, African Americans have overcome the legacy of those chains to leave an equally permanent, indelible, and positive mark on our commonwealth and our nation. And so today we celebrate those contributions, especially the achievements of so many outstanding Virginians who shaped the America we know today—men and women of achievement in industries as diverse as our nation ... role models for all Americans like: Booker T. Washington and Maggie Walker, Dred Scott and Mary Elizabeth Bowser, Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson, Doug Wilder and Henry Marsh, Henrietta Lacks and Mary Jackson, Barbara Johns, Arthur Ashe, and so many more whose stories we will recall this weekend.

Each of these people has a story of great achievement, of overcoming adversity, of blazing trails and opening doors for others. And their individual stories are part of this epic story that brings us here today—a story that began in tragedy on this shore at Point Comfort, and that saw a nation and a people through civil war and reconstruction, through Jim Crow and the civil rights movement, to where we are today and what we hope to become tomorrow.

As we gather here now, the future is in our hands. What will we do to shape and mold the future of Virginia?

Today, we will hear perspectives, viewpoints, histories, and more that are part of a much-needed dialogue, one American Evolution has worked diligently to help foster throughout this year-long commemoration.

Hopefully, that dialogue will allow us to go from contradiction to reconciliation. From sinful past, to a brighter future and a more perfect Commonwealth as part of a more perfect Union. We know that our history does not live up to our ideals, but we also know that our future can – and with God’s help and our work together, it will.

Thank you.

### **Invocation**

#### **Dr. Joseph Green, Jr., Chairman of the 400 Years of African American History Federal Commission**

Dr. Joseph Green, Jr.:

Joshua 4 Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, “Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So, these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.”

Heavenly father, we come here today to honor a sort of memorial stone. We come here to acknowledge our passage here to this land. Although the conditions were not good and the trek was treacherous you sustained us, you kept us. The journey has been rocky and there have been very dark days, but you were with us.

We thank you today father that we do not come here to celebrate this dark past but to commemorate your faithfulness. We come here to honor your strong right hand that watched over us. Through our tears and through our fears we knew that we would survive. And so, we celebrate the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers. We celebrate our fathers that believed for what they could not see.

We look back at the past as a means of hope for the future. As you were with Moses and Joshua, we know that you are with us. We come here to honor the resiliency, the strength and the unwavering will of our fathers who bent but did not break.

We know that the strength, the will, and the fortitude flows through our veins. And so, as we move forward, we seek your peace, your comfort and your unity that the future is bright, the possibilities endless. The hope deferred yet not destroyed.

Help us father, to grow together, to love, and to dream together. Let us walk in forgiveness, love, and unity.

Never let us forget, never let us waiver. We speak your peace, your joy. We pray with expectation and with the belief that our latter is much brighter than our former. Like the message of redemption, we are here because we have the chance to write a new history. A history of hope, love, and unity. We put on the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Never let us forget father so that we don't repeat our mistakes. We forgive because we are forgiven, and we thank you for the great future that lies ahead of us.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen!

### **Special Remarks**

**The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine, United States Senator from Virginia**

**The Honorable Mark R. Warner, United States Senator from Virginia**

**The Honorable Karen R. Bass, United States Representative from California and  
Chairwoman, Congressional Black Caucus**

**The Honorable Robert C. Scott, United States Representative from Virginia**

**The Honorable Elaine G. Luria, United States Representative from Virginia**

The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine:

It is an honor to stand before you on such an important day. I want to thank all assembled and particularly thank the federal 400 years of African American History Commission. I played a role with Congressman Scott and Senator Warner in passing the federal legislation to recognize this momentous occasion and am deeply moved by today's gathering.

What does this day mean?

In searching for a way to describe its significance, I was drawn to the words of Oliver White Hill, the pioneering Virginia civil rights lawyer who I came to know when I was a young civil rights lawyer beginning my career in Richmond.

Mr. Hill was born in 1907, as Virginia commemorated the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of English settlers at Jamestown. He entered an ironclad segregated Virginia that had just passed a Constitution to guarantee discrimination against all people of color. From this start, he set his sights on the emancipation of African-Americans, indeed all Americans, from the bonds of prejudice. In the military, in the courts, as an elected official, as a civil rabble-rouser. He helped win the historic Brown v. Board of Education case and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1999.

Mr. Hill lived a century and saw a very different Virginia commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jamestown settlement in 2007. As Governor, I made sure he got to meet Queen Elizabeth as she and Prince Philip visited the Capitol in the week after he celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. And when he passed on, later that year, we honored him by having his body lay in state in the Governor's Mansion. The Commonwealth that was set like stone against him at his birth accorded him its highest honors at his death.

Mr. Hill grappled with the significance of 1619. In fact, he organized a panel symposium in Jamestown 50 years ago—September 1969—to discuss what we are grappling with today—the monstrous tragedy of slavery and its deep and lasting consequences.

Mr. Hill wrote an autobiography in 2000 and chose an unusual title. “The Big Bang.” The book’s theme was the evolution of mankind and the need for a continuing American Evolution. And I can think of no better way to describe the significance of the arrival of the “20 and odd” African slaves at Point Comfort in August 1619. It was the Big Bang.

In physics, the Big Bang is posited as the violent event that began the universe. Its consequences linger. It was a starting point but the process commenced with the Big Bang is not yet complete.

The birth of slavery in our nation was equally violent, both at its start and then for another 246 years. And its debilitating consequences linger in our collective soul.

It occurred precisely at the same time as the birth of legislative democracy in our nation. And beginning in 1619, Virginia legislators and courts helped built the legal architecture enshrining slavery on this shore, just as a Virginian proudly proclaimed a society based on the truth that all were created equal. This dualism, high minded principle and indescribable cruelty, has defined us. And the war between our cardinal equality principle and the prejudices we still cling to continues to define us.

We cannot tell the story of our nation without speaking about its indigenous peoples. And we cannot tell the story of our nation without speaking about its immigrant character, as drawn from experiences of the Spanish settlers of 1565, the English settlers of 1607, the French settlers of 1608 and the waves of others who freely arrived in their appointed time from all corners of the world.

But neither of these stories are the full story of America today. When the first Africans arrived in 1619, our nation now contained the powerful combination of indigenous, immigrant and enslaved. And that mixture became the Big Bang creating America as we know it.

I want to close with a feeling that I have a hard time putting into words. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was one of the most cruel atrocities ever perpetrated by mankind. And yet, how fortunate we are as a country that the descendants of those 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.

America would be so much the 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?

And so we gather here 400 years later—in a nation of resilient indigenous people who face mighty struggles, in a country of immigrants who too often face shouts to go back where they came from, in a land where the historical burden of slavery, racism, and legally mandated discrimination still act as a shackle burdening African-Americans.

And we are faced with the conflict between our high-minded principles and the realities we sinful humans often accept or even perpetrate. How might we move forward?

As Mr. Hill concluded The Big Bang: “Many of our problems stem from several inadequacies. One is a lack of understanding of evolution and the inevitability of change. Instead of opposing change, we should try to direct the change in a constructive direction. The second is the lack of a model of the type of environment needed for a truly civilized society. We need to work assiduously to correct this defect. One way to do that is to promote in the twenty-first century a renaissance in human relationships. That’s where I am now.”

It’s on each of us to understand our nation’s history and “direct the change” toward a better future. And we can’t do this silently from the sidelines. 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.

The Honorable Mark R. Warner:

Thank you. It is an honor to be here today to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first African landing.

This Commemoration challenges us to reject simplistic versions of our history and confront the complicated truth. The truth is, our Commonwealth is the birthplace of representative democracy...and of American slavery. Our nation’s constitution enshrines both the ideals of liberty and justice...as well as America’s original sin.

Frederick Douglass spoke about this contradiction a few weeks after the Dred Scott decision. He said that American slavery endured “not because of any paper Constitution...but in the moral blindness of the American people.” In remembering the first landing of enslaved Africans, we come face to face with that moral blindness, as it existed in 1619...in 1776...and even today.

The truth is, our founders’ idea of representative democracy did not include many of the people gathered here today. Little did they know that the descendants of the people America had enslaved would one day be free...and that they would challenge this nation to finally live up to our founding ideals.

We honor the heroes of that struggle today...as well as the men and women whose stories are lost to history. We recognize that 1619 also marks the first chapter in the 400-year story of African-American history...and that African-American history is central to Virginia’s history and America’s history.

Frankly it's a recognition that's long overdue. I remember one day years ago, when I was Governor...our youngest daughter asked why there were no statues of Rosa Parks in Capitol Square. The easy answer would have been "she wasn't from Virginia." But Lisa and I knew the truth was not that simple. Those conversations motivated us to help bring about the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial. And when we broke ground in 2008, it was a historic occasion, but it was bittersweet.

The truth is, it shouldn't have taken more than 50 years to honor Barbara Johns in Capitol Square. And Barbara Johns should never have had to walk out of class to get an equal shot at an education in the first place. It's a reminder that no monument...no legislation or court case can simply erase the stain of slavery. It will never be that easy.

The truth is, an America Democracy where all men and women are entitled to equal citizenship is a very recent creation. Many of the people here today were born in an America where "separate but equal" was still the law of the land.

Many of us remember the years of Massive Resistance that followed... enabled by the widespread complacency of White America. And we ought to recognize that the project of righting those wrongs continues to this day.

We have made progress as a nation. But that progress is recent. It is incomplete. And it is only as durable as our commitment to advancing and defending it. 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.

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.

That is why this Commemoration — and the national conversation it has fostered — are so important. If we are going to be a country that truly lives up to our founding principles...then we need to tell the truth about our history ...the good, the bad, and the ugly.

So as we mark the 400-year commemoration of the first African landing...it is my hope that this will be a moment to both comfort the afflicted...and afflict the comfortable.

And I thank you for letting me be a part of this important work today.

The Honorable Karen R. Bass:

Good morning everyone. I want to thank the great people of the state of Virginia for organizing a series of events commemorating the 400 year anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans.

I want to thank all of the community and elected leaders here for your invitation to participate on behalf of the 55 member strong Congressional Black Caucus. This is the largest number of African Americans ever elected to Congress, and in Congress, CBC members hold major positions of leadership and have accomplished significant change through legislative victories.

One of the most significant legislative victories of the year was accomplished by your own representative, Representative Bobby Scott, who by the way, I know you are aware, is the chair of one of the most important committees in Congress, the committee governing the nation's education system. He led and is leading the effort to raise the nation's national minimum wage.

Let me acknowledge another member of the Congressional Black Caucus who is in the audience with us today, Representative Lacey Clay, from the great state of Missouri.

So today we commemorate the anniversary of the arrival here of Africans, but earlier this month, a delegation of members of the Congressional Black Caucus, led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, traveled to Ghana, West Africa, to pay homage to our ancestors and to visit where they were held captive before they began that horror-filled journey. Before they were captured, they lived in villages with sophisticated levels of organization. Many were skilled craftsmen, farmers, healers, and leaders. They were first taken from villages and forced to walk hundreds of miles to dungeons. Our delegation visited these dungeons that looked like the old European forts common in many parts of the world.

The two dungeons we visited are called Elmina and Cape Coast. Ironically, they are in a beautiful part of the country, right on the beach. It was a solemn and emotional experience to enter the dungeon. To close our eyes and imagine what our ancestors experienced.

An added challenge we all faced was the mystery of knowing that our ancestors were held captive there, but that we have no knowledge of who they were. Captured Africans were stripped of their languages, ethnic identities, tribal and family ties. We saw the areas of the dungeons that were large enough to hold about 50 to 100 people, but where hundreds were held. Rooms without sunlight, forced to lay in their own excrement, no access to water to bath. Only given enough food and water to keep them alive, but deliberately kept in a weakened state so that they could not organize or resist. Those that did attempt to resist were mutilated and left in separate rooms and slowly starved to death. Females were routinely made to stand in line while their captors would choose one of them. She was then washed and led up a staircase to a bedroom, where she was raped and then returned back. The men, women, and children were held in the dungeons for months, awaiting the time they would be forced onto boats to begin a journey that lasted for months. We have all seen the drawings of hundreds of people stuffed onto ships and heard the stories of what happened during their journey. When individuals became too sick or died, or women gave birth, they were then thrown overboard the ship to the sharks who followed along. The ones that survived here, only to live out their lives as property, in captivity.

It is difficult to believe that this level of brutality lasted for hundreds of years and affected millions of Africans. But when we stood in the dungeons, filled with sadness, our heads lowered, reliving or trying to imagine what they went through, at the very same time, we lifted our heads

and our chests were filled with pride and amazement at the strength and resilience of our ancestors.

And here we are today, on what can be described as hallowed ground in our nation's history. But I would guess that most of the nation doesn't even know the story of the hallowed ground we stand on today. That we would arrive here first, and generations later would escape enslavement and seek protection right here. That the nation's first African American president would make Fort Monroe his first designation for a national monument.

From enslaved ancestors to Mayor Tuck and Vice Mayor Grey, that in spite of 250 years of enslavement, there would be 57 African Americans in Congress, representing all of America. I only wish the entire nation could witness what you are doing here today, the history of Fort Monroe, how you have honestly acknowledged *all* of our nation's history, not just the parts that make us feel good, but the difficult parts as well. And I can't tell you what it feels like for me, to sit here – this is my first time here – but the emotion that I feel in listening to the speakers tell the truth, tell the truth. The sad thing about our nation, and why we continue to have the issues we do, is because we have denied part of our history.

And I believe that if the entire nation could experience, could learn and understand our true and full history, we might not be witnessing a resurrection of hate. Thank you so much for the honor of speaking to you today.

The Honorable Robert C. Scott:

Good morning. I am honored to join all of you here at Freedom's Fortress on this historic and solemn day. I want to thank everyone who made this commemoration possible and who traveled to be with us today, especially my friend and colleague, Congresswoman Karen Bass, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Slavery first arrived on our shores, right here, 400 years ago. The forced labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants built this great nation, a part of our complicated history with which we continue to wrestle. Over the past 400 years, descendants and others who have followed the first "20 and odd Africans" have made significant contributions to science, medicine, business, politics, law, and the arts.

As we continue the work of addressing equity in education, mass incarceration, income inequality, police brutality, and attacks on voting rights, we also pause to celebrate their incredible resiliency. It is in that spirit that I've been asked to discuss one individual whose fight for justice has much to teach us today.

When I am introduced at public gatherings, it is often mentioned that I am the first African American to represent Virginia in the House of Representatives since Reconstruction and only the second in the history of the Commonwealth. The first was John Mercer Langston, who, after successfully contesting the election of 1888, was seated as a representative in 1890, 103 years before I began my first term in Congress. My service in Congress, and that of so many others, would not be possible if not for those who fought to pave the way – the first black Senators and

Representatives elected after the Civil War during Reconstruction, like Langston, as well as the many who put their lives on the line to advance civil rights and defend voting rights for African Americans. After federal troops were withdrawn from the South, ushering in the era of Jim Crow, there were no black representatives in Congress for almost 30 years.

But even before becoming Virginia's first black congressman, John Mercer Langston had already left a mark on our Commonwealth and nation – as a student, abolitionist, patriot, lawyer, educator, diplomat, and public official. In 1829, Langston was born a free man in Louisa County, Virginia and later, following the death of his parents, moved to Ohio. Langston's brother ensured he received a good education but could not protect him from the realities of restrictive “Black Laws” in place there at the time. Despite this, Langston graduated from Oberlin College and became one of our nation's first black attorneys

As an abolitionist, Langston risked his life to assist those escaping slavery along the Underground Railroad. As a patriot, he joined Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists in recruiting Black men to fight for the Union and turn the tide of the Civil War. As an educator, Langston helped establish Howard University's law school – the nation's first Black law school and alma mater of two of America's greatest civil rights attorneys, Thurgood Marshall and fellow Virginian, Oliver Hill, Sr. as well as Virginia's first African American Governor, L. Douglas Wilder. Langston also served as the first president of what is today Virginia State University in Petersburg.

Langston was encouraged by both whites and blacks to run for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1888. It initially appeared that he lost but Langston contested the results due to obvious voter intimidation and fraud. The House of Representatives eventually declared him the winner and he took his seat on September 23, 1890 – and was only able to serve the few remaining months of the two-year term. Though he lost his re-election bid, Langston had already left an indelible mark on the cause of freedom.

A portrait of Congressman Langston hangs in my office, a visible reminder of one of many visionary Black Virginians and Americans whose dogged pursuit of equality helped to shape a more perfect union.

We may never know all the names and stories of the men and women who were brought to Point Comfort in 1619. But as we remember, mourn, and honor them, let us also remember the individuals, trailblazers like John Mercer Langston, who followed them, believing in and fighting for our nation to live up to its creed.

I hope that reflecting on our nation's complicated history reminds us of our responsibility to one another and inspires each of us, like John Mercer Langston, to work to achieve liberty and justice, for all. Thank you.

The Honorable Elaine G. Luria:

Good morning. I'm Elaine Luria and I have the honor of representing Virginia's Second Congressional District.

Four hundred years ago, our Commonwealth was the site of some pivotal historical "firsts." For example, we recently celebrated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first legislative session in Jamestown. This event led to representative democracy in America and continues to influence our society for the better.

But American history isn't all uplifting and convenient. In fact, it's messy and it's complicated. Our past contains difficult truths that we must learn from so that we can be empowered and equipped to correct today's injustices.

One of those difficult truths is that our Commonwealth, specifically Fort Monroe – the land we're standing on – is the site where the first enslaved Africans in British North America arrived 400 years ago.

Today, we remember this history that continues to shape our nation. We also honor the bravery of those who escaped slavery here – Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory, and James Townsend, all of whom paved the way for thousands more.

As one of several representatives of Hampton Roads, I'm proud that Fort Monroe serves as a symbol of the courage and heroism that emerged from America's original sin of slavery.

And from a military community perspective, we know the fight for freedom is one that has been waged at great cost, including many thousands of African Americans from Virginia who have contributed to the safety, security, and freedom of this nation. Many came from or fought in our Hampton Roads community.

We are reminded of men like William Harvey Carney. Born into slavery in Norfolk, Mr. Carney joined the Union Army during the Civil War and made his mark during the 1863 assault on Fort Wagner in Charleston, South Carolina.

As the soldier holding the Union flag was killed, Mr. Carney ran to catch the falling flag, raised it high, and kept marching despite his own multiple wounds. He made his way back to the Union side, never once dropping the flag. His actions were an inspiration to his fellow soldiers.

Unfortunately, Mr. Carney had to wait until 1900 – 37 years – to get recognition for his efforts. By then, other African Americans had received Medals of Honor, but because his actions had occurred the earliest, Mr. Carney is considered to be the first African American Medal of Honor recipient.

African Americans who fought for American freedom must be remembered, in part, because they were not free, nor did they benefit from the liberties given to other Americans. Clearly their sacrifice went above and beyond.

As President Obama once said, Fort Monroe “played an important role in some of the darkest and some of the most heroic moments in American history.” We have the power to transform symbols of injustice into bastions of hope and knowledge. That’s why the Fort Monroe Visitor & Education Center is so important.

As we listen to today’s speakers and reflect on the complex history of our community, let’s remember the past so that we can pave the way to a brighter future. Above all, let’s recommit, together, toward a better America.

Thank you.

### **Featured Remarks**

#### **The Honorable Ralph S. Northam, Governor of Virginia**

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam:  
Good morning.

What a beautiful setting this is. I thank you for the privilege of speaking to you at Fort Monroe today. As a former member and vice-chairman of the Fort Monroe Authority, it’s always a pleasure to be here at this site.

Thank you all for being here today to commemorate 400 years of American history. For those of you from out of state, welcome to Virginia.

It’s great to be here today with former governors, now Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, and former governors McDonnell and Baliles. I also want to recognize Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax, Attorney General Mark Herring, Congressman Bobby Scott, Congresswoman Elaine Luria, House of Delegates Speaker Kirk Cox, members of our legislative black caucus, and other elected officials.

I would like to thank everyone who has worked hard to make this commemoration a reality— Fort Monroe Authority director Glenn Oder, Fort Monroe Authority Board of Trustees Chairman Jim Moran, members of the Fort Monroe Authority board, Fort Monroe National Monument Superintendent Terry Brown, the National Park Service, Kathy Spangler, Nancy Rodrigues, and the team from American Evolution. I’d also like to thank the Hampton 2019 Commemorative Commission for all the hard work they have done around these events in their home city.

We are here today for a commemoration, and a reckoning.

Today is a time to reckon with the fact that four hundred years ago, enslaved Africans arrived for the first time on Virginia shores. Like you and me, they had lives and families— lives and families they would never see again.

Just up the river in Jamestown, a few weeks earlier, white landowning men had come together to establish a system of representative government. But that system did not represent *all* of the people who arrived here at Old Point Comfort, people whose skin looked different than mine. That government did not represent them during 246 years of slavery. It did not represent them through nearly 100 years of Reconstruction and Jim Crow terror and discrimination. And in many ways, it struggles to represent them today.

That is the truth, and that is what we must reckon with as we move forward. How do we tell the full and true story of our past 400 years?

How do we do so with honor and dignity for people whose honor and dignity were taken away from them? Who should tell that story? And how do we learn from those lessons as we move forward?

Ida B. Wells wrote that “The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.”

If we are going to begin to truly right the wrongs of our four centuries of history, if we are going to turn the light of truth upon them, we have to start with ourselves.

Over the past several months, as I have met with people around the state and listened to their views on the disparities and inequities that still exist today, I have had to confront some painful truths. Among those truths was my own incomplete understanding regarding race and equity. I have learned a great deal from those discussions, and I have more to learn. But I also learned that the more I know, the more I can do.

For too long, the burden has been on individuals and communities of color to lead these discussions. But if more of us have these hard conversations, and truly listen and learn from them, we’ll be better able to shine that light of truth. Because the eyes can’t see what the mind doesn’t know.

We can start those conversations at places like this, Fort Monroe, the ground where the first enslaved Africans landed. This is also the same ground where the end of slavery began. It was here where enslaved people sought refuge, and were granted it, a decision that eventually led to emancipation. General Butler’s contraband decision has been hailed by Ed Ayers—a nationally known historian of the American South, and a member of the Fort Monroe Authority—as “the greatest moment in American history.”

Virginia is the place where enslaved Africans first landed and where American representative democracy was born. Virginia is the place where emancipation began and the Confederate capitol was located. Virginia is the place where schools were closed under Massive Resistance, rather than desegregate and allow black children to attend, and it is the state that elected the nation’s first African American governor. Virginia is a place of contradictions and complexity. We take a step forward and, often, a step back.

And we have to acknowledge that. We have to teach that complexity to our children, and often to our adults. We are a state that for too long has told a false story of ourselves.

The story we tell is insufficient and inadequate, especially when it comes to black history. We must remember that black history *IS* American history. That's why earlier today, I signed an executive directive to establish a Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth. This Commission will review our educational standards, instructional practices, content, and resources currently used to teach African American history in the Commonwealth. We want to make sure all students develop a full and comprehensive understanding of the African-American voices that contribute to our story.

But that is not the only thing we can do. 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 of the past. We memorize dates, but not connections. We don't teach the themes that appear in our history over and over again. 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 know that racism and discrimination aren't locked in the past. They weren't solved with the Civil Rights Act. They didn't disappear—they evolved. They're still with us, in the disparities we see in educational attainment and school suspension rates, in maternal and neonatal mortality for black and white mothers, in our courts and prisons, and in our business practices.

Through 400 years of American history, starting with the enslavement of Africans, through Jim Crow, Massive Resistance, and now mass incarceration, black oppression has always existed in this country, just in different forms.

The legacy of racism continues not just in isolated incidents, but as part of a system that touches every person and every aspect of our lives, whether we know it or not. And if we're serious about righting the wrong that began here at this place, we need to do more than talk. We need to take action.

The Commission I mentioned earlier is just one action. My administration is taking bold steps to right historical inequities in education, in our health system, and in access to business opportunities. We established a commission to examine racial inequities in Virginia law. We have set a goal to eliminate racial disparities in maternal and neonatal mortality by 2025.

I signed an executive order to advance equity for our small women-, minority- and veteran-owned businesses, including a statewide disparity study, and we are working to reduce evictions.

A few weeks ago, I was here at Fort Monroe to announce the removal of letters from the arch that once celebrated the president of the Confederacy. Jefferson Davis was charged with treason and was imprisoned here at Fort Monroe, a traitor to his country. And I believe it is no

coincidence that in the same year that Virginia enacted Massive Resistance as official state policy, that arch went up in his honor.

To have a monument glorifying a person who worked to maintain slavery, on the same site on which enslaved Africans both first arrived here and were later freed, is not just inappropriate, it is offensive, and it is wrong. Removing that monument is one way we can act to better tell the true story here in Virginia.

And I am pleased and proud to announce today another important step in how we represent the full and true story of our Commonwealth. Last year, I requested and the General Assembly agreed to allocate \$500,000 toward the first African Landing Memorial Art Project here at Fort Monroe.

Since that time, the Fort Monroe Authority and the Virginia Commission for the Arts, in partnership with the National Park Service, the Fort Monroe Foundation, and Project 1619, led a national search for an artist who could create this memorial art project at Old Point Comfort.

The art project will be dedicated to the first landing of African people here on these shores. Importantly, the artist will engage with the public to ensure that the community has the chance to express their opinion on what this memorial project means to them, and what experiences should be included in the design. I'm delighted that the artist for the Fort Monroe African Landing Memorial Art Project is here with us today. Mr. Brian Owens, would you please stand? I look forward to seeing Mr. Owens' project and how it will contribute to this site and the telling of this important American story.

On this very day last year, I was at the Tucker family cemetery, a cemetery named after the first documented child of African descent born in English-speaking North America.

William Tucker's parents, Anthony and Isabell, were among those who were brought here to Old Point Comfort in 1619. Like too many African-American cemeteries, the Tucker family cemetery had fallen victim to neglect. But it is also a testament to revival and restoration. Family members and interested groups are working to restore that cemetery, and I want to recognize Delegate Delores McQuinn for her work on this issue. In that restoration work, and in the events here this weekend, I see steps forward. I see us working to acknowledge the wrongs and the evils done in the past – and in the present. Because, while we cannot change the past, we can use it and learn from it. When we know more, we can do more. I know more, and as your governor, I will do more.

And as we reckon with the painful legacy of Virginia's racist past, and acknowledge that it continues to shape our present, we can and must continue to act to improve the future. We must work to tell our full and true story.

It is our job—all of us that make up this diverse society—to ensure that when the next generation looks back—a generation that is hopefully more inclusive than we have been—they see a more accurate narrative, one that tells the truth, and includes everyone.

Thank you.

**Original Poem by Nikki Giovanni (read by Jacquelyn E. Stone)**  
**Nikki Giovanni, poet, writer, activist and Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech**  
**Jacquelyn E. Stone, Member of the 2019 Commemoration Steering Committee**

1619 Jamestown (but not only)  
An Answer to the New York Times

There may be a time line but there is no time limit to change that does not, will not, cannot change.

No matter what the color the people or language they speak, no matter which God is served, no matter which food is eaten or forbidden, which clothes are worn or not, no matter the hair covered or shaved, no matter how we look at it...there have been slaves.

Every civilization or rather most, reach a point where slavery is recognized as wrong or in some cases simply a bad idea. Or perhaps more accurately those who used to sell slaves now no longer have the currency or strength to control the lives of human beings so they create a lie on a supreme court for the same purpose.

I have often wondered when I think of the murder of Jesus what He and Simon the Cyprian talked about as Simon gave Jesus some relief with getting the Cross to Calvary. We have a bit of an idea what Socrates was thinking as he drank hemlock. In our time we know Martin Luther King wanted to hear music at dinner "Play it beautifully for me" before the shots took his life. And there would be many others who were hanged, beaten to death, fought in wars for the right or wrong side.

But I have wondered, as a person living in Virginia how the peanut got here. We know Europeans didn't go into communities to find West Africans. Africans did. We know when communities recognized defeat they were lined up and brought to shore to be sold.

But don't we also see a grandmother trying to defend her grandson and failing reaching to put in his hand a peanut. "Don't forget me," she says.

And he holds tightly to what will be called America where he is sold.

He plants that charge for a promise to keep.

And he stays to watch it grow.

Others would escape and think him cowardly.

But he had promises to keep.

Others did not understand the strength it takes to wipe spit from your hanging brother, to cradle your daughter after a rape, to lovingly put your wife into the ground.

But he had promises to keep.

And he kept them.

Virginia is not the Peanut State.

Virginia is the State of Promises.

The only question is will we keep them.

### **Special Remarks**

**P. Daniel Smith, Deputy Director, exercising the authority of Director for the National Park Service**

**Brycen Dildy, student, Larkspur Middle School, Virginia Beach**

P. Daniel Smith:

Good morning. When you're the 11th speaker, especially following these distinguished individuals, and then a poet laureate, and then to be followed by a young man who will steal all of our hearts, it is a pretty rough assignment, but as the Deputy Director of the National Park Service, I take that responsibility but I will try to be brief.

Welcome to all of you today who are distinguished guests. We are grateful for so many for helping to make Fort Monroe one of the 419 national park units of the National Park System. We recognize the important responsibility we have as stewards of Fort Monroe National Monument, and its role in so many facets of our history.

Since the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, 103 years ago tomorrow, our duty has been to care for America's extraordinary places and the stories they harbor. Certainly, many of our parks are beautiful landscapes. But they are also places where challenging events took place. National parks provide spaces for discussion, for reflection, and our shared American narrative, as we are doing here at Fort Monroe today, tomorrow, and into the future.

The 400th anniversary is a year-long commemoration and conservation conversation, to recognize the highlight of 400 years of African-American history and accomplishments. The work of the 400 Years of the African-American History Commission, established by Congress and signed into law by President Trump last year, is administered by the National Park Service. It will extend through July of 2020. Civic, historical, educational, artistic, religious and other organizations are invited to coordinate and participate in activities designed to expand the collective understanding and appreciation of African-American contributions to the American experience.

Tomorrow, national parks across the country will join with us here at Fort Monroe as we ring bells to remember the Africans who were brought here in bondage 400 years ago and the generations of African-Americans who struggled, overcame, and continue to strive for civil and social justice today. Just imagine tomorrow at the Statue of Liberty, at Independence Hall, at Acadia National Park in Maine, the Everglades in Florida, Denali in Alaska, at the USS Arizona Memorial in Hawaii, at Martin Luther King's national historic site in Atlanta, at Brown v. Board of Education, at Tuskegee National Historic Site, at Selma to Birmingham, at Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, all of us will be in spirit and in strength as we go forward.

We're grateful to our many partners who have made this weekend possible, including the Commonwealth of Virginia, American Evolution 2019, the city of Hampton, the grassroots

organization Project 1619 and the Hampton Roads community, the Fort Monroe Authority, and the United States Armed Forces who are supporting this event.

I would like all representatives of the National Park Service who are here to please stand briefly. I would like the Superintendent [Terry Brown] to remain standing. Terry, this is a hallmark day for the National Park Service. This is what our mission is about. You, as the Superintendent of Fort Monroe National Monument, have brought us to this day, and I commend you for your efforts and leadership to bring us to where we are today. I salute you, Superintendent Brown. He represents the best of the National Park Service, and Governor, I would like to say that the National Park Service accepts your challenge to tell the stories as we move toward the 250th anniversary of our declaration in 2026, and that we tell the stories as you say we need to with truth and the knowledge of our past.

Thank you all very much.

Brycen Dildy:

Good morning everyone. My name is Brycen Dildy and today, I am honored and delighted to be a youthful voice to help celebrate this occasion. When the first Africans landed here at Fort Monroe 400 years ago, they may not have known how their sacrifices and contributions would help shape our community and nation. As the years and generations past, there are also local African-Americans who continue to give contributions to society. Such as Katherine Johnson, a resident of Hampton, a mathematician who is known for calculating trajectories for many of NASA's crew missions. We should also recognize Mary Jackson, who in 1958 became NASA's first black female engineer and who was born and educated right here in Hampton, Virginia.

I am sure the first Africans would be proud of their accomplishments, however, there is another way that we can all give back to our community. We can simply start with how we treat one another. Are you kind to others daily? I'm not just talking about being kind to friends and family. How about being kind to people you barely know? Or do not know at all.

I want to share a personal story. Earlier this year, my teacher was battling cancer, so I wanted to do something to let her know she wasn't on this journey alone. With the help of others, I collected 551 cards to encourage her and brighten her most difficult days ahead.

We can all find ways to show kindness to one another. For example, hold the door open for someone walking behind you. Or, walk around with a smile on your face. Your smile may brighten up someone else's day. Be helpful to the elderly and disabled. Pray for our country and others during times of tragedy. Create ways to volunteer and help others.

Why do all of this you may ask? Well, in my 11 years of being on this earth, I realized that Maya Angelou's quote is true. She said people may not remember what you say or do, but they never forget how you made them feel. Imagine the problems that would be solved if all people were kind and felt cared for. It doesn't matter what your race or religion may be; we all deserve kindness. And we all should show kindness.

And as we commemorate 400 years of the first Africans landing here at Fort Monroe, let's make them proud. This is more than just a speech. I challenge you to let the day also be a celebration of your commitment to become a more caring and kind individual to all.

Thank you and God bless you all.

## **Introduction**

### **The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, Virginia State Senator**

The Honorable Mamie E. Locke:

Education and the news media are two critically important institutions that have been involved in the Freedom Movement here in America.

It is with great pride that I stand here today first as an educator, which is my role in addition to being a legislator.

As a professor, I have long believed that knowledge is power.

Power can be productive, but also destructive.

When we educate ourselves with the truth and commit to living out that truth, we can change our communities for the better.

As a student and product of the Southern Freedom Movement, I know intimately that the truth shall indeed set us free.

As a legislator, I believe that establishing laws that are rooted in truth is crucial to guaranteeing freedom and justice for all.

The responsibility of the General Assembly is to confront this important principle during each session.

And the news media is equally responsible.

The press has often been a guiding light toward helping the legislative branch of government achieve this important goal.

President Thomas Jefferson was correct to champion the role of the press as a pillar of democracy.

As an African American, the news media, particularly the Black Press, has been vital to the process of educating- and inspiring Americans to persevere toward freedom.

From its very beginning, the Black Press advocated passionately for freedom, education and self-empowerment.

In 1827, Freedom's Journal, America's first Black newspaper, launched with these powerful words: "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly..."

These words defined the desire and willingness of Black people to fight for their freedom; to determine their own fate. And regarding the importance of education, Freedom's Journal looked toward future generations of African Americans.

The editorial continued: "Education being an object of the highest importance to the welfare of society, we shall endeavor to present just and adequate views of it... It is surely time that we should awake from this lethargy of years and make a concentrated effort for the education of our youth."

Deliberate mis-education was why the institution of slavery stood for so many generations.

This wrong, yet very real, belief that Black people were less than human, prevailed among many well-educated white men and women.

It was not only perpetuated in schools, but through writings and images published in the White press.

But the Black Press, from Freedom's Journal on through to other Black publications such as Norfolk's Journal & Guide here locally, presented to America the truth that was being deliberately omitted.

Real facts told by Black journalists pushed all media to be more balanced. More accurate. To become better at telling the truth.

Now in 2019, as news is consumed in new ways, we face the challenge of inaccurate information spread across the Internet and the airwaves. Lies have threatened our knowledge of each other as Americans.

We are more educated, yet we seem to have less understanding of the truth.

Today more than ever we need voices of truth in the media, such as our speaker today.

Media personalities who are dedicated to advocacy that educates and moves Americans to positive action.

It is an honor to introduce Van Jones- A graduate of the University of Tennessee and Yale Law School, he has worked for economic justice, both as a civil rights attorney and environmental activist and is known for his bestselling book *The Green Collar Economy*.

He served as Special Advisor for Green Jobs for President Obama and now is a Host and Commentator on CNN.

Please join me in welcoming Van Jones.

### **Special Address**

**Anthony “Van” K. Jones, TV host, author, and change-maker**

Anthony “Van” K. Jones:

I am relieved, because nobody is going to remember anything that happened except for Brycen. Give that young man a hand. My goodness. Everybody was wiping away tears listening to that young man.

I will save time by just echoing and amen-ing all of the great words of appreciation and all the honors to all the people who are here and just say a few words.

I’m a ninth generation American. I’m a ninth generation American, and I’m the first person in my family who was born with all my rights recognized by this government. I am a ninth generation American, and I am the first person in my family.

So when people say, “Why do you guys keep talking about these issues?” I am not talking about my great-great-great-great-grandparents, though I could and should. My mother and my father were born under segregation. My father, Willie Anthony Jones, was born in poverty and segregation in Memphis, Tennessee. He joined the military; when everybody was running out of the military, my father ran in, so he could put himself through college. He went to a little black college in Jackson, Tennessee, called Lane College, and he married the college president’s daughter because my father had it like that. My dad had it like that. He knew what he was doing. After he got out, he and my mother put my Uncle Milton through college, his little brother. And their cousin through college. And my entire family got out of poverty on this bridge called my father's back. When my father died, the picture they put of my father on the funeral program was my father standing in front of Yale Law School the day I graduated, with his hands in the air saying, “We did it!” We did it! We showed them. In one generation we showed them. You just take the foot off our neck a little bit, we can go anywhere and compete with anybody.

My one great pain is that my father lost his battle with cancer before being able to see Barack Obama enter the White House. Yet in some ways, maybe it's good. Because my father was not the kind of man who would have taken it easy on me or easy on us. As we look to the future, my father would have asked me, “Son, how can you be happy to have one black man in the White House and almost a million black men in the jailhouse and not doing enough about it?”

He would not be easy on me. He would not be easy on us. How can you be happy to celebrate a few black billionaires when the average wealth of the black family is going down and down and down to almost zero? He would be tough on us. He would not accept the answer that there are racists in the country, that there are opponents in the country. You know, when I would come

home from school and talk about racism at Yale, my father would say, “Well, did they put any dogs on you, son? Well, go on and get yo’ lesson.”

So, yes, he would say we have to deal with those issues, but my father would also say something which I want to share with you. That when you have the right strategy, it is hard to hurt you. When you have the wrong strategy, it is hard to help you. When your enemy downgrades, you’ve got to upgrade your approach.

As we now look to the next 400 years, we often have Black History Month. I love Black History Month. And we need more black history - it shouldn’t just be a month. But I would sometimes feel tempted to trade at least one Black History Month for a Black Future Weekend. Can we talk about the black future? Can we talk about where we are going? And can we talk about what is necessary to get there, as we look at the next 400 years?

We learned a tough lesson in the Obama White House. We believed that we had gotten to the mountaintop that Dr. King talked about. But when we got to that mountaintop, we realized that our sisters and brothers in Haiti, who had been dropped off by other boats, were correct when they say behind the mountain is another mountain. That achievement in 2008 was not the end, it was the beginning of a new journey. Behind the mountain of Washington, D.C., there are other mountains of power.

There are four centers of power in our country, and we did not know that until we got to Washington, D.C. We spent most of the last century trying to get to Washington, D.C. Frederick Douglass went to D.C. to talk to Lincoln. Dr. King, a young preacher, marched on Washington, D.C., hoping a president would do better. Barack and Michelle Obama went to the White House. Our entire strategy primarily focused on Washington, D.C. When we got to that corner of power, it turned out there were three others that we didn’t know anything about.

If we're going to be honest, there is work left to be done in Washington, D.C. I am proud to be under the leadership and the tutelage of Bobby Scott doing that work to deal with mass incarceration, to deal with the prison industrial complex. I am proud that in Washington, D.C., Bobby Scott is bringing conservatives and liberals together to do something about incarceration. Conservatives believe in liberty, liberals believe in justice, and our incarceration industry denies liberty and justice to too many people. And that is why Bobby Scott is such a champion for liberty and justice for all. I love this brother, and he is my leader.

But D.C. is only one corner of a four corner power system. If you leave Washington, D.C. and get on the train and go north just a few hours, you are in New York City. Wall Street. Finance. Big capital. Very few African-Americans there. I want to make sure that the next generation sitting in our classrooms will study Robert Smith, the African-American who is beginning to dominate Wall Street as much as we study anybody else. Big money, big power, Wall Street. If you leave Wall Street, take an Uber or a Lyft or a taxi, and you go to the airport, JFK, you can fly across the country, and within five hours you are in the Bay Area of northern California. Silicon Valley, where you have Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon; the people who are building the future. We used to write the future in laws in Washington, D.C. Now the future is being

written in computer code in Silicon Valley. They are changing your phone right now, and they don't ask your permission. The power to write and to dictate the future is in Silicon Valley. Very few African-Americans in Silicon Valley. Our children are happy to be given the opportunity to download apps and are not being taught how to write their own and upload apps. We need a generation of uploaders, not just downloaders, for the next generation, if we're going to get anywhere. It's another corner of power.

Lastly, you could take a leisurely drive from northern California to southern California. You will very quickly be in a place called Hollywood. You can see stars, not just in the sky but on the sidewalks. Another place of power where, too often, we are the stars, but we do not own the studios. Media ownership in an information age, another mountain to climb.

I say this to you because the way we got *here* was because African-Americans and our allies were willing to look coldly, clearly, and honestly at the challenges that they faced. And with less than we have - with less technology, with less money, with less support, with less understanding - they met every single challenge up to this day. They understood that sometimes you have to have an evolution in the revolution. Sometimes you have to have an evolution in the revolution. When your enemy downgrades, sometimes you have to upgrade, and we are now at that moment. I am confident that we can meet this moment and meet this challenge and climb the mountain of policy in D.C., finance in Wall Street, technology in Silicon Valley, media ownership in Hollywood, and any other mountain revealed to us because African-American people and our close allies have been the driving force for progress and democracy on these shores through these 400 years.

And do not forget the original fake news. We were sold in 1776, when they said and maybe even believed, that we had created, that we had founded, a democratic republic on these shores on one day in 1776. Fake news. We hadn't yet founded a democratic republic. We had begun the process.

But Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman standing up to end slavery were founders too of a democratic republic. They too were founders. The suffragettes, demanding that women have the right to vote, that they be included, were a part of founding a democratic republic; they were founders too. Ella Jo Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Dr. Martin Luther King, Bayard Rustin - challenging segregation, demanding that we live up to these principles - they were founders too. The folks who stood up at Stonewall and said stop mistreating us because of who we love, they were founders too.

The process of founding a truly multiracial, multiclass democratic republic is the toughest job taken on by any people in the world. To have one country with every kind of human being ever born living within it - one country with every race, every faith, every gender presentation, every sexuality, every kind of human being ever born in one place living as a democracy, as a democratic republic - is the toughest challenge taken on ever by any people on earth. That challenge is a challenge that was taken on centuries ago, and we will be working to develop it centuries from now.

But what that challenge means for us today is that you are a founder. You are a founder. The people on this stage are founding the republic that the Brycens of the world will live in, and we have to take our charge in our time as seriously as the people before us did, so that someday, someday, when we put our hands on our hearts, we will have a democratic republic with liberty and justice for all. Thank you very much.

## **Closing Remarks**

### **The Honorable Justin E. Fairfax, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia**

The Honorable Justin E. Fairfax:

Good morning, everyone. I am deeply honored to be here with you all today with this distinguished array of wonderful public servants. I thank you all for your leadership, for your inspiration, for all that you do on behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia and on behalf of this nation. I recognize all of those who previously have been recognized here in the audience. Thank you all for your service. I also wanted to especially recognize a couple of dear friends who have been instrumental in this Commemoration Weekend and have given their heart and soul to making this so successful. To the Co-Chairmen of the Hampton Commemoration Commission, Lieutenant Colonel Claude Vann III and Dr. Colita Nichols Fairfax. I want to recognize them if they would stand and please take a bow. Thank you for your tremendous leadership, for all that you have done. I also am very grateful for being joined here by my wonderful family. My brilliant wife, Dr. Cerina Fairfax, our two young children, Cameron and Carys, my mother-in-law, Conchita Wanzer-Clark, thank you all. The Ashton branch of the Fairfax family - we are grateful that you made the trip to be with us here.

But there is also a group here at Fort Monroe that I wanted to recognize who has not yet been I believe properly recognized. If you anywhere on this fort are the descendent of anyone who has been enslaved, whether you know their name or not, I would be honored if you are able to please stand and be recognized by all of us. We are grateful you are the legacy that we are here to commemorate and celebrate. Let us please recognize all of those who represent the best of who we are in Virginia and in this nation, the foundational part of why we are here today.

We have heard a lot this morning, rightfully so, about truth. There is power in the truth. There is power in knowing our history. There is power in knowing from whence we came.

During the week of our inauguration in January of 2018, I learned how my family got the last name Fairfax. It was discovered that week in the old Fairfax County courthouse a manumission document that had freed my great great great grandfather, Simon Fairfax, from slavery in Fairfax County, Virginia on June the 5<sup>th</sup>, 1798. He was freed by a man named Thomas Fairfax, who was the ninth Lord Fairfax. My father got a copy of that document two days before our inauguration. He gave a copy of it to me, and I saw it for the very first time in my life 20 minutes before I walked up the steps of the Capitol on Inauguration Day to take the oath of office of the 41<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. I had that document in my breast pocket. And so 220 years later, Simon Fairfax's great great great grandson was being sworn in as

the number two in command of the very same state where he had been enslaved. God is good, and the arc of the moral universe is long, but it ultimately bends towards justice.

And today, we mark this Commemoration to ensure that the world will always remember how the United States of America got its start. And the enslaved Africans whose labor and lives are foundational to the beginning and the success of our nation. We stand today on sacred and hallowed ground from which sprang the foundation of America. We also stand at the awe-inspiring intersection of four hundred years of a very complex history. A history filled with the dual strands of darkness and light that have run through the veins of the Commonwealth of Virginia and through our nation for centuries. A history of tragedy and triumph, of pain and promise, of slavery and salvation, of opposition and opportunity. A history of heartbreak and hope.

At this intersection, we must decide what the next 400 years will look like in this land that we love. We must decide whether we finally abandon the racism, sexism, dehumanization, unequal treatment under the law, and racial and economic subjugation that met the 20 some odd Africans as they were forced to land on this very spot 400 years ago. We must decide whether in the next 400 years we will rise to the better angels of our nature.

There is power in the truth. For generations, Americans have been taught that the first enslaved Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619. Today however, we raise up the truth that they in fact were forced to land right here 40 miles southeast in Point Comfort, modern-day Hampton, Virginia.

The truth is that among that small band of brave, surviving souls on the White Lion were Anthony and Isabella, who would later find love even in the midst of enslavement to produce William Tucker, the first named African child born in English North America. Yesterday, eight miles up the road, we commemorated the 400 year milestone of the Tucker family cemetery with the beautiful descendants of the great legacy. As I stood there on those hallowed grounds in a cemetery that represented life more than death, I thought about the famous quote, “they tried to bury us but they didn’t know we were seeds.”

The Tucker family story is the African-American story, but is also the American story. We as a people have triumphed over obstacles no others have, and we will do it again and again. We built this country. Do not tell us to go back where we came from. We have found victory over systematic subjugation and seen our way through. We have prevailed over lies and succeeded against all odds. No one can stop us. We have made a way out of no way. We should be proud of it all.

We stand on the shoulders of the strongest ancestors in world history. Ancestors whose faith, resilience, perseverance, and love have allowed us to rise in spite of all the many obstacles created to stop our progress.

In the famous and immortal words of Maya Angelo, “Out of the huts of history’s shame I rise. Up from a past that’s rooted in pain, I rise. I’m a black ocean leaping and wide, welling and

swelling, I bear in the tide. Leaving behind nights of terror and fear I rise, into a daybreak that is wondrously clear. I rise. Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise, I rise, I rise.”

It is said that Anthony, Isabella, and the 20 some odd Africans came here with nothing. But that’s not quite true either. Having nothing would not have allowed them to survive the brutal month-long journey from Angola to where we stand today in the bowels of wooden ships. Having nothing would not have permitted their spirits to believe in the capacity of love even as hate and degradation was their daily reality. Having nothing would not have allowed them to continue to burn the flame of hope in the seemingly unending midnight of slavery. What they had was spiritual wealth. The faith, the values, the compassion, the love of others and the belief that tomorrow could be brighter than today.

See the truth is, for centuries, we have sailed masterfully in rough seas. Over alternating waves of progress and high tides of adversity, powered by the unflagging wins of faith and hope and ever steered in the direction of liberation and uplift. We have carried each successive generation to lands of opportunity hoped and prayed for by prior ones. The pace of our progress is sometimes painfully slow and at other times breathtakingly rapid. But in the broad sweep of our collective journey, because our moral compass remains true, we always make progress. We always rise together. That is the nature of our story in America. It is the hallmark of who we are.

And now, it is our time to write another chapter in the great story of America. I believe it will be a chapter where we continue to see the best of who we are, because I have an unwavering belief in the fundamental decency, goodwill, and humanity of the people of Virginia and America. Comforted by the God of our weary years and the God of our silent tears, and with our eyes focused firmly on the promised land, we will rise to the clarion call of history and to the better angels of our nature together. God bless you all, God bless Anthony, Isabella, the 20 odd enslaved Africans, William Tucker, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the United States of America. We will rise together. God bless you all.

### **Benediction**

**Reverend Monsignor Walter Barrett, Jr., pastor of the Peninsula Cluster Parishes**

Reverend Monsignor Walter Barrett, Jr.:

Let us pray and ask for God’s blessing;

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,

Thou who has brought us thus far on the way,

Thou who has by Thy might, led us into the Light,

Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places our God, where we met Thee.

Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.

Shadowed beneath Thy Hand,

May we forever stand

True to our God,

True to our Native Land.  
Amen, Amen, Amen