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Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation Receives 2024 Commonwealth History Fund Grant

JAMESTOWN, VA. (February 22, 2024) –

Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation (JRF) is one of fourteen organizations selected to receive a grant from the Virginia Museum of History & Culture's (VMHC) Commonwealth History Fund. **JRF has been generously awarded \$35,000 for *Law and Race at Jamestown***, an expansion of the groundbreaking research and historic interpretation conducted for the commemorations of the year 1619.

The VMHC, in partnership with Virginia's Department of Historic Resources (DHR), awards grants to history organizations and projects throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia through its Commonwealth History Fund. There are several key selection criteria to be considered for the grants, including the significance of the project or resource, its impact on its community and the Commonwealth, the focus on historically underrepresented topics and communities, and the need for funding and urgency of the project.

One of the largest initiatives of its kind, the Commonwealth History Fund is expected to award up to \$2,000,000 over its first five years. In 2023, the VMHC awarded \$401,206 to fellow history organizations. Funds can be used for a variety of purposes including preservation, publications, artifact acquisition, research, conservation of artifacts and educational programming. Eligible recipients include Virginia non-profits, educational institutions, and state recognized Virginia Indian tribes. The Fund was made possible through the generosity of Dominion Energy and others.

"The Commonwealth History Fund continues to exceed our expectations in supporting a wide range of historic preservation projects and initiatives across the state," said VMHC President and CEO Jamie Bosket. "We remain committed to reaching more Virginians with this wonderful opportunity to invest in Virginia history."

With the support of the Commonwealth History Fund, JRF plans to develop new programs that will address Jamestown's pivotal role in establishing the rule of law and legalized chattel slavery in U.S. society. *Law and Race at Jamestown* will focus on two central themes: 1) the origins of rule of law in America and its evolution throughout the 17th century and into the 18th century; and 2) the intersection of race and law through the gradual, systemic development of codified slavery in America. These two themes represent the legal legacies of the year 1619, when, at Jamestown, the Virginia General Assembly convened for the first time to establish representative government in the colony. In that same year, Virginia saw the first forced landing of some 20 enslaved Africans, marking the beginnings of America's great paradox: the birth of slavery amidst the foundations of liberty.

This project will include both onsite, educational programming as well as a virtual field trip package. The onsite lectures will explore three 17th- and 18th-century court cases, which played pivotal roles in laying the foundations of legalized slavery and racism in Virginia, and later, the early United States. The virtual field trip package will give educators who are unable to travel to Jamestown access to central locations that were crucial to the legislative efforts of Virginia's General Assembly, such as the foundations of the c. 1665 statehouse and the Memorial Church. Themes from *Law and Race* will also be incorporated into the Bob and Marion Wilson Teacher Institute of Colonial Williamsburg's summer workshops held at Jamestown. JRF has partnered with the Legal History Society of William & Mary, under the leadership of faculty advisor Professor Thomas J. McSweeney of the William & Mary Law School, for archival research assistance.

"The story of America's beginnings is fraught and much of the conflict we learn about and experience today can be traced back to 1619, when both representative government and the beginnings of chattel slavery were established in Virginia," Mark Summers, Director of Public and Youth Programs at Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation, said. "We're incredibly grateful for the support of the Commonwealth History Fund, which will help us expand these vital programs that build understanding and community."

Through onsite and virtual programs, this project aims to unpack this story in accessible ways so that learners of all ages come away with a sharper understanding of Jamestown's contributions to these foundational quandaries. *Law and Race at Jamestown* programming will begin in 2025.

More information on The Commonwealth History Fund can be found at VirginiaHistory.org/HistoryFund.

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Available photos can be found [here](#). All images courtesy of Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation.

About Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation

The Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation (JRF) preserves and shares the original site of James Fort and Jamestown, established in 1607. JRF is dedicated to uncovering, preserving, and sharing Jamestown's diverse history, and highlighting its major contribution to the foundations of modern American society. Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation is a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit. JRF jointly administers Historic Jamestowne alongside the National Park Service. For more information about visiting Jamestown, please visit www.historicjamestowne.org or call (757) 856-1250.