The African Presence has been a central factor in the creation and evolution of Virginia. From 1619 until the end of the Civil War, most Black Virginians came from West and Central Africa. Together, they struggled to throw off the yoke of slavery. Even after “freedom came,” some African Americans reacted to continuing discrimination by resettling in the African country of Liberia, while the majority remained to fight for their rights in Virginia towns and hamlets like Petersburg, Leesburg, and Emporia. Throughout the twentieth century, the African American population grew, as Africans from Somalia, Kenya, and Sudan found their way to Virginia.

Despite the formidable challenges of slavery and segregation, Virginians of African descent have survived and achieved because of the strength that flowed from the strong communities that nurtured and sustained them even in the worst of times. They not only survived, but they also contributed their creativity, traditions, labor, and expertise to shape the Virginia of today.

By building community, fighting for civil rights for all, and embracing a rich past, African Americans will continue to inform the culture and future of Virginia.