

NEWS

FROM THE JAMESTOWN-YORKTOWN FOUNDATION
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JAMESTOWN-YORKTOWN FOUNDATION APPOINTS CHRISTY COLEMAN AS NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WILLIAMSBURG, Va., Dec. 17, 2019 – As the newly appointed Executive Director of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation (JYF), Christy Coleman will lead the state agency and its iconic U.S. historical sites in developing the next generation of living history and educational programs, nationally accredited museum operations, and top-quality visitor experiences.

Under Coleman’s leadership, the Foundation will build on significant recent successes, including the opening of the new American Revolution Museum at Yorktown, the refresh of the exhibit galleries at Jamestown Settlement and the 2019 Commemoration, “American Evolution” that brought national and international attention to Jamestown’s major legacies. With the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution just a few years away, JYF’s Yorktown museum and Revolution-related programming will soon be in the national limelight as well.

A new voice

With a record of successful leadership roles at the American Civil War Museum, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Coleman brings a broad perspective and highly relevant experience to the leadership of JYF. At a time of challenge for heritage tourism and historical education, she is a nationally respected commentator and recognized authority on the cultural and educational importance of museums and historical places for a diverse national and international audience.

“Christy Coleman’s professional accomplishments and perspective will be invaluable in writing the next chapter of JYF’s long and storied history, and we’re all looking forward to having her experience and creativity guiding the next generation of programming,” said Speaker M. Kirkland (Kirk) Cox, chairman of the JYF Board of Trustees. “As a dynamic, proven leader in the museum field, she will help ensure that our programs and exhibits align with the educational needs of today’s young people and are relevant and appealing to the visiting public.”

H. Benson Dendy III, chairman of the search committee, observed, “Christy Coleman brings a remarkable record of success and diverse experiences to the executive director role. She has a national and international profile that will help bring even greater attention to Jamestown and Yorktown and make JYF an influential contributor to the timely conversation about how to make our history accurate, engaging and useful for our times.”

Senator Janet Howell, vice chairman of the JYF Board of Trustees, noted the history-making significance of Coleman’s appointment. “She is the first woman and the first person of color to hold this role, and we’re really looking forward to how she will use her unique experience to tell inclusive narratives on a global stage,” Howell said.

An ambitious mission

As the new executive director, Coleman will succeed Philip G. Emerson who has retired after leading the foundation for 28 years. Coleman is proud to succeed Emerson and to build on the major advances achieved during his tenure. In 2018 alone, there were 533,730 combined paid admissions to both Jamestown Settlement and the American Revolution

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Museum at Yorktown, representing roughly \$94 million in spending in the Historic Triangle, which includes Jamestown, Yorktown and Williamsburg.

“The leadership of this place has been committed to doing things the right way and it has received many well-deserved accolades. My goal is to work in partnership with JYF’s board, staff, donors, volunteers and diverse stakeholders to build on this strong foundation and to continue to tell powerfully relevant history that is inclusive and compelling,” Coleman said.

Coleman said she was drawn to JYF’s commitment to engaging, inclusive programming and continued improvement. She cited the recently completed Jamestown Settlement gallery revamp that incorporates new research on the first recorded Africans and Powhatan Indian capital at Werowocomoco, the “TENACITY” special exhibition there that highlights the unique contributions of women in Jamestown, and the “Forgotten Soldier” special exhibition at Yorktown that tells stories of African Americans who fought in the Revolution and contributed to American independence.

“Telling the many stories of early Virginia in a way that is not only innovative and engaging, but accurate and complete, will be a high priority for Christy Coleman,” predicted Chief Stephen R. Adkins, Sr., of the Chickahominy Indian Tribe, a member of the search committee. “She has shown the ability to unite people of diverse perspectives around a common purpose,” said search committee member and former Virginia Delegate Daun Hester, “and in doing so she has helped many more people see the relevance of our history in enabling us to make good choices for the future.”

A professional profile

Coleman, a native of Williamsburg, Va., holds a master’s degree in museum studies from Hampton University and has been a member of numerous organizations, including the African American Association of Museums, the American Alliance of Museums and the Association for State and Local History where she was also a Council member. She has been featured prominently in the press recently, including in Forbes and Smithsonian magazines and on NBC. TIME last year named her one of the 31 people changing the South.

As the new director of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, Coleman intends to continue the process of telling a more comprehensive story of our nation’s 17th- and 18th-century beginnings. The recently completed “American Evolution” commemoration focused nationwide attention on the intersection of English, African and Native cultures in early Virginia and their impact on modern America. Coleman plans to capitalize and expand on these successes with the aim of bringing Jamestown, Yorktown and their rich stories and legacies to much broader national and international notice and influence.

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