



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Sandra Gioia Treadway
Librarian of Virginia

Their Words, Shared Stories, Our Future.

***New Virginians: 1619–2019 & Beyond*, an exhibition at the Library of Virginia, explores the immigration experience and the state's increasing diversity.**

RUNS DECEMBER 10, 2018–DECEMBER 7, 2019

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Richmond, Virginia – **New Virginians: 1619–2019 & Beyond**, a free exhibition at the Library of Virginia running December 10, 2018–December 7, 2019, explores the immigration and refugee experience and Virginia's increasing diversity through video interviews with first-generation newcomers and personal items that represent their stories.

Recent estimates place the number of foreign-born Virginians at just under one million, or about one in every eight Virginians. What will this mean, and what does it already mean, for public education, electoral politics, local economies, and a social fabric that has long been held together by a sense of shared history? The composite portrait of Virginia is becoming more complex, challenging an older, simpler understanding of what it means to be a Virginian. This change presents opportunity to reconsider what kind of place Virginia is and what kind of place it should be—or can be. Whether our roots in the state go back ten thousand years, ten generations, or ten weeks, we must create the future of the commonwealth together.

New Virginians examines the historical and continuous journey toward the ideals of America and seeks to foster an honest discussion about diversity and the challenges of blended cultures. Produced jointly by the Library of Virginia and Virginia Humanities—with support from the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution—the exhibition highlights the changing demographics of the commonwealth on the eve of the 2020 federal census through a series of interviews with first-generation immigrants and refugees who arrived in Virginia after 1976.

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The exhibition uses excerpts from personal conversations, conducted by David Bearinger and filmed by Pat Jarrett, both with Virginia Humanities, to explore the complexity of the immigrant and refugee experience. Topics include the circumstances that led these men and women (and children or families) to leave their homes; their arrival in Virginia; the challenges and obstacles that they faced or overcame; questions about identity, assimilation, language, and culture; and what it means to be a Virginian (and an American). The people interviewed represent a wide range of personal backgrounds, experience, age, and countries of origin—Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Bearinger, director of grants and community programs at Virginia Humanities, noted that if he “had to choose just one word to describe the essence of these conversations, the place where all of them converge, that word would be 'gratitude': for the opportunities, freedom, and protections—the relative safety—this country offers.”

To complement the videos, objects that have special meaning for the interviewees will be displayed. The artifacts on loan include:

- a graduation stole given to Isabel Castillo by her grandmother to celebrate Castillo’s receipt of an honorary doctorate from the University of San Francisco
- a copy of *Wedding Song*, a memoir by Farideh Goldin about her journey from Iran to the United States
- a mask crafted by Ganna Natsag for a *tsam* (masked dance) ceremony practiced in his native Mongolia
- a stringed instrument called a *charango* from Bolivia
- a Qur’an from Aliaa Khidr that represents the free practice of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Look for information about exhibition-related events and programs on the Library’s website calendar (www.lva.virginia.gov/news) and Facebook page in the coming weeks. The complete interviews will be available early in 2019 through the Library’s YouTube channel and website as well as on Virginia Humanities' website (www.virginiahumanities.org).

New Virginians is a Legacy Project of the American Evolution, 2019 Commemoration.

Images of some of the "New Virginians" interviewed for the project are available here (along with caption/credit information): www.flickr.com/photos/vfh/sets/72157671427829607/

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November 9, 2018