

service and leadership since arriving in 2014.

“Mitchell has worked successfully to help Colonial Williamsburg navigate unprecedented cultural and technological shifts, building a record of solid accomplishment under his tenure,” Moore said. “Among other things, he led us through a difficult but necessary organizational restructuring, improved our guest experience, invested in a diverse and inclusive workforce and completed fundraising to expand and renovate the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg.”

The trustees have enlisted Spencer Stuart, a global executive search firm, to recruit Colonial Williamsburg’s next president and CEO. Specifications for the position were posted Aug. 1 on the Foundation’s “Making History” blog (<https://colonialwilliamsburg.com/blog>).

“The board is confident the position will be filled with a world-class leader who will shepherd the rich legacy of Colonial Williamsburg forward,” Moore said.

He added, “By looking to our nation’s founding principles, which were developed here more than two centuries ago, Colonial Williamsburg can be a beacon in these rapidly changing times. Although it is going to require more hard work and creative thinking, everyone at Colonial Williamsburg is excited about the future. Our next president and CEO is going to have a tremendous opportunity to build on the important work that Mitchell and his team have accomplished. We’re confident that we will find a world-class leader to help us do so.”



Conference on African Diaspora Coming to Williamsburg

William & Mary to host ASWAD, with Foundation as a partner

An international association devoted to the study of the African diaspora comes to Williamsburg this fall, in observance of the 400th year since the arrival of the first Africans in British North America and the origins of American slavery.

Renowned scholar Ta-Nehisi Coates and veteran filmmaker Tim Reid are among those headlining the 10th biennial conference of the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora, or ASWAD, from Nov. 5-9. Hosted by William & Mary at the Williamsburg Lodge, the event is expected to draw 1,000 scholars and others for a program that will alternate discussion sessions with art, music and culinary programs, as well as tours of key historical sites in Williamsburg,

Richmond and Hampton Roads.

“The tradition of ASWAD is always to connect academic scholars with local communities,” said Robert Trent Vinson, professor of History and Africana Studies at William & Mary and one of the organizers of the conference. “ASWAD has been all over the world — Ghana, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, New York . . . What makes it distinctive is those local connections it makes. We’re not just talking to each other.”

Colonial Williamsburg interpreters will be among those participating in programs and discussions throughout the conference, which will also enable attendees to explore the Historic Area. Sharon Dorsey, executive director of human resources, and interpreter Stephen

Seals, who portrays Nation Builder James Armistead Lafayette, are developing the Foundation’s role in the event.

“It is an honor and a privilege for Colonial Williamsburg to partner with William & Mary as it hosts the ASWAD conference,” Dorsey said. “Collaborating with the college provides a unique opportunity for two educational institutions to share the connection between the enslaved and free black men, women and children in 18th-century Williamsburg to the rest of the world.”

Seals said performances by Nation Builders were planned, as well as portions of portrayals that take place on the stage at the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg. “We want them to get a wide array of the way we tell the African American story,” he said.

The theme of the conference

— “Remembrance, Renaissance, Revolution: The Meaning of Freedom in the African World Over Time and Space” — reflects the complex, 400-year milestone that 2019 represents in American history and that of African Americans in particular.

In August 1619, English privateers brought “20 and odd Negroes,” as described by Jamestown colonist John Rolfe, to Virginia’s Point Comfort after seizing them from a Portuguese slave ship. Wealthy English planters bought most of the captive Africans upon their arrival in the colony, initiating a system of enslavement in America that would persist through the end of the Civil War.

“Those first enslaved Africans who came here were really the beginning of African Americans in this country, as a people,” Vinson said. “And also, obviously, the beginning of 246 years of racial slavery and, after that, 100

years of Jim Crow and the racial legacy we’re still living with today.”

With scholars from 30 countries arriving for the ASWAD conference, including many from Africa, “it is a different kind of migration, if you will — coming to Williamsburg to bring scholarship on the black world and to speak of our history. And of course our history is much more than slavery; it’s much more ancient and far more robust than just slavery. But it is a time to remember, to commemorate and to honor those ancestors who came those 400 years ago.”

Vinson, who has been part of the organization since its founding 20 years ago, traces the association’s origins to the unveiling of an expansive slave trade database during a 1998 gathering of scholars held in Williamsburg. Groundbreaking as the database was — tracking tens of thousands of slave trade voyages — its quantitative focus created some dissatisfaction, he said, especially among scholars of African descent.

“It really focused on the numbers: how many enslaved people were here, how much were they sold for,” Vinson said. “It didn’t say much about the humanity involved, and all the suffering. The people at the heart of the story were left out. . . . There was a feeling among some scholars that we needed to start our own organization that looked at our history — that centered black people as people — and recover our humanity so that we were not just numbers. And out of that, ASWAD was born a year later. So in a way, ASWAD celebrating its 20th year [in Williamsburg] is coming full circle.”



Stephen Seals, who portrays James Armistead Lafayette, is helping to plan Colonial Williamsburg’s interpreters’ role at the ASWAD conference.

DARNELL VENNIE