

Telling the Story:

Enslavement of African People in the United States

1619 – Four Hundred Years Ago



Four hundred years ago, the first enslaved Africans were brought to the English colonies in North America. In May of 1619, 350 Africans, who had been abducted from the Ndongo region of Angola, were loaded onto the Spanish ship *San Juan Bautista* and sent to toil in the silver mines in Mexico. Many Africans died of disease and starvation or chose to end their own lives rather than remain enslaved. When the *San Juan Bautista* entered the Gulf of Mexico, it was attacked by two ships, the *Treasurer* and the *White Lion*, looking to pirate gold and silver.



What they found was a cargo of people greatly diminished from the torturous Middle Passage. Looking to make some profit from the attack, the *Treasurer* and *White Lion* captured and split up approximately 60 of the healthiest Africans. The *Treasurer* eventually made its way to Bermuda and the *White Lion* up the coast to the English colonies.



In August of 1619, the *White Lion* landed in Point Comfort, now Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia. John Rolfe, Secretary to the Virginia Company of England and widower of Pocahontas, wrote in his diary that the ship “brought not anything but 20 and odd negars [sic].” Two of the Africans, Isabella and Antoney, were sold into the household of William Tucker, the Commander of Port Comfort. As Slavery was not yet legal, it is believed they were freed after a term of seven to ten years of forced “indentured service.” Isabella and Antoney had a son, William, who is the first documented child of African descent born in America. William is buried in Hampton and his descendants live on.

Elizabeth Cittie.

CAPT. WILLIAM TUCKER, his MUSTER.

CAPT. WILLIAM TUCKER, aged 36, in the *Mary and James*, 1610.
 MRS. MARY TUCKER, aged 26, in the *George*, 1623.
 ELIZABETH TUCKER, born in Virginia in August.
 GEORGE TOMSON, aged 17 }
 PAULE TOMSON, aged 14 } in the *George*, 1623.
 WILLIAM TOMSON, — II }
 PASCOE CHAMPION, aged 23 } in the *Ellenor*, 1621.
 STRENGHT SHEERE, aged 23 }
 THOMAS EVANS, aged 23 } in the *George*, 1623.
 STEPHEN COLLOWE, aged 23 }
 ROBERT MUNDAY, aged 18 }
 MAHEWE ROBINSON, aged 24, in the *great hopewell*, 1623.
 RICHARD APPLETON, aged 19, in the *James*, 1622.
 JOHN MORRIS, aged 24, in the *Bona Nova*, 1619.
 MARY MORRIS, aged 22, in the *George*, 1623.
 WILLIAM HUTCHINSON, aged 21, in the *Diana*, 1618.
 PEETER PORTER, aged 20, in the *Tyger*, 1621.
 WILLIAM CRAWFORD, an Indian, baptised.
 ANTHONY, negro ; ISABELL, a negro, and WILLIAM her child, baptised.

JOHN DOWNEMAN, his MUSTER.

JOHN DOWNEMAN, aged 33, in the *John and Francis*, 1611.
 ELZABETH DOWNEMAN, aged 22, in the *Warwick*, 1621.
 MOYSES STONES, aged 16, in the *Bone Bes*, 1623.

JOHN LAYDON, his MUSTER.

JOHN LAYDON, aged 44, in the *Susan*, 1606.
 ANNE LAYDON, aged 30, in the *Mary Margett*, 1608.

The other Africans were sold and dispersed throughout the colonies. The Africans were skilled farmers, blacksmiths and artisans, bringing valuable skills needed to grow the colonies. Some were released from their bondage after seven to ten years, but because there was never a written contract, other Africans were held 15 to 20 years. Larger plantations fully exploited the free labor, never releasing the captured Africans from bondage. Slavery became legal in 1661 and remained the great stain of our nation for over 200 years.

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