

PROJECT TITLE: What is the story of the first Africans that arrived in Virginia? How did they find themselves in Jamestown and why did the descendants of these “20 and odd Africans” end up enslaved?	
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SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

Primary Investigative Question(s)

What is the story of the first Africans that arrived in Virginia? How did they find themselves in Jamestown and why did the descendants of these “20 and odd Africans” end up enslaved? In fourth grade Virginia students are given their first “in depth” look at United States history by looking at slavery in the United States. By becoming historians and using primary and secondary resource documents, students will explore how Africans came over from Africa against their will, were traded for food, and their descendants gradually became slaves in less than 100 years. By the end of these lessons students will have studied the arrival of the Africans in 1619, learned that some became permanent servants, or slaves by examining census documents and a will, see that some Africans became freedman, examine laws that changed between 1619 and the early 1700’s which permanently enslaved the descendants of the original Africans and others who were brought over.

Contextual Essay

Slavery did not begin in the 13 colonies. Evidence that slavery existed dates back to Biblical times, and in the western hemisphere, was prevalent during early Greek and Roman history, two centuries prior to the Christian era. At one point, 35-40 percent of the Roman population was enslaved. Legal precedent for slavery in America was set by the Romans, such as total domination of master over slave, a slave’s lack of personal freedoms, a slave’s inability to own personal property, and a slave’s limited mobility. According to Herbert Klein’s book, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, one condition for having a slave society was to be an agricultural society {Klein, 2-4}, which also matched Virginia’s eventual agrarian slave society. Until 1865 and the end of the Civil War, slavery was a large component of Virginia’s economy, and while tobacco plantations drove Virginia’s global market in the 1600’s and early 1700’s, it was the African slave trade that caused Virginia’s global economy to grow in both Europe and Africa during the eighteenth century. What is the story of the first Africans that arrived in Virginia? How did they find themselves in Jamestown and why did the descendants of these “20 and odd Africans” end up enslaved?

Indentured servants or slaves? Historians have differing opinions on the status of the Africans who landed in Jamestown in late summer of 1619, but what is agreed upon is that within approximately 100 years almost all of their descendants were enslaved. The need for labor existed early in Virginia history. High death rates plagued the colony and laborers, free or paid, had to be replenished often. Most of the first Englishmen who settled Virginia were considered “gentlemen” and John Smith’s forced work program in 1608, followed by Thomas Dale’s in 1611, helped save the early colony by forcing the colonists to provide labor so that food and shelter was assured. A need for labor was especially imperative after tobacco became the cash crop. Growing tobacco became more important than growing corn because you could trade tobacco for goods from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Tobacco also changed the labor market because a landowner could not work his fields without extensive help. Virginians began shipping tobacco to England in 1617, and inadvertently, the need for a slave labor force emerged.

English colonists were eager to find gold and silver, but the only gold that was discovered was green-the green gold of tobacco, an agricultural product requiring an extensive labor force. The gentlemen that continued to sail to Jamestown were not conducive to heavy labor, so they unsuccessfully tried to enslave the native population. The Indian women did most of the farming, and the Algonquian Indians they encountered did not understand the necessity of the men tilling vegetable gardens, typical female jobs in the Indian populace. Ralph Hamor, an English colonist in 1615, thought the Indians would make successful laborers based on “they are easily taught...[could] be bought...[whose labor] may exceede our English.” Further evidence of attempts to enslave Indians was preserved with the first patent in Virginia being issued to William Claiborne, an early Virginia settler who enslaved an Indian with his “better experience and tryall of his invention,” which proved unsuccessful in containing Indians {Morgan, E. 600-601}. Indian attacks happened often, making it difficult for the colonists to garden, with or without Indian labor. Enslavement of Indians was made more difficult because they blended in with the environment when they escaped, which was often.

The peasant population in England contributed a ready supply of labor in the form of indentured servants. Indentured servants became the preferred labor supply, and it benefited all parties because Virginia plantations needed a ready supply of labor, and poor Englishmen recognized these jobs as a possible road to land ownership. In Virginia the death rates continued to be high. When the “20 and odd” Africans arrived at Jamestown in 1619, John Rolfe penned a note to the Virginia Company of London to note their arrival. “Twenty and odd negroes” had arrived at Jamestown and were exchanged for food {Kingsbury, website}. At face value it appeared innocent enough. There were no slaves in Virginia, so an exchange of goods implied they could have been indentured servants. The letter does not give the name of the ship, nor how the Africans happened to be on the ship. Research by Tim Hapshaw outlines Rolfe’s relationship with Richard Bryd, friend of the recently hanged Sir Walter Raleigh and owner of the ship, the *White Lion*. The *White Lion* coincidentally had a ship’s captain with the same name, Captain Jope, that was mentioned in John Rolfe’s letter, who captured a Spanish ship, the *San Jean Baptista*, and confiscated her cargo, which consisted of Angolan slaves in the months preceding her arrival at Jamestown {Hapshaw, 67}. The *White Lion* did not have King James I’s permission to trade in slaves in the Caribbean, and owner Richard Byrd would have faced hanging if he had been caught, so it is alleged that Rolfe could not have been completely honest in his letter to the Virginia Company. Because Virginia had no laws regarding slavery, and the Africans were slaves on their way to Mexico, Rolfe evidently felt he must write to tell the Africans had arrived. There was no known response, and thus, the mystery begins of whether the first Africans arrived as indentured servants or as slaves.

Governor George Yeardley and his friend, Abraham Piersey, took possession of the original Africans who arrived in 1619, placing them on their tobacco plantations, Flourdieu Hundred and Piersey's Hundred respectfully. At their death, the two men had the two most successful plantations in Jamestown, often attributed to the fine farming skills the Africans had acquired in the fields of Angola. Nine years later, Yeardley's will left the African men and women in his possession to his wife, "to be sold and turned into money." She in turn, left two of the original African arrivals to her son, Argoll Yeardley, who sold two of the children in 1653. This appears to offer proof that all of the servants could not have arrived as indentured servants. In addition, Piersey's will left his property, including Africans, to his wife {Hapshaw, 105-108}.

In 1624 the Virginia Company of London collapsed, and Virginia became a royal colony. King James I asked for a total count of all people. The Virginia Muster was collected, often using data from a census collected the previous year. By 1624, though, the Africans were still only a small portion of the servant population of Virginia, as shown on the following chart:

List of Servants in 1624/25

	Males	Females	Unknown	TOTAL
Negroes	13	9	1	23
Indians	1			3
Hired Servants	3			1
White Servants	437	43		480
Total	454	52	1	507

From the Virginia Muster 1624/25 As a Source for Demographic History, pg. 77

The Virginia Muster also showed some of the same irregularities between European servants and Africans that the Census of 1623/24 had found. Free Europeans were listed with first and last names, white servants were listed with at least their first names, and Africans were listed with no last name, and only rarely a first name. Africans in the early 1620's were not considered important enough to include their names.

Not all Africans who arrived in Jamestown remained slaves, nonetheless. Antonio arrived in Jamestown in 1621 and his soon-to-be wife, Maria, arrived in 1622. They were both placed on Edward Bennett's tobacco plantation, and, in opposition to English law, which did not allow servants to marry; they married and changed their name to the more Anglican Anthony and Mary. Traded like slaves, the Johnsons, who had four children by this time, were loaned to John Upton, and then traded to Edward Scarborough, who gave them to his daughter as a wedding present in the late 1630's. History becomes obscure, but by 1647 the Johnsons had purchased 4 head of cattle. By the 1650's they are documented as free Africans with 250 acres of good farmland, five indentured servants, and two Africans, John Casor, and Mary Gersheene. Mary freed John Casor before she died {Hapshaw, 212-213}. Fifty acres of prime farmland was given to their son, Richard Johnson, just before Anthony died. The land did not remain in the Johnson family. A 1670 court order agreed with a Virginia colonist, stating that Richard Johnson could not own the land because it was given to him by his father, who was an African. It went back into English hands to be given to someone else because Anthony Johnson was black, another example of rights of Africans gradually being taken away.

Virginia laws were passed that differentiated the treatment of Africans and Englishmen, and the transition from free Africans to a life of enslavement. One of the first laws documented is recorded in a 1640 court case. Three servants ran away- an African, and two English servants.

When they were captured, all three servants received whippings. In addition, the English servants received four extra years of indentured servitude. The African, however, received a life of enslavement with his current master {Catterall, Vol. 1, p 77}. This led to a March 1660 law punishing servants who ran away with Africans. The 1660's saw an increase in laws against Africans. In 1662 the status of a slave became determined by the condition of the mother and not the father, as was stated in English law. In September 1667 servants needed a license to travel from their homes. Also in September 1667 a new Virginia law stated that Christianity was not a reason to free a servant from servitude. This was needed because most Africans arriving from Africa were baptized Christians, and any Indians in Virginia were not baptized Christians. 1668 saw a law passed that placed a tax on all African women, free or black. This was to clarify a law passed in 1662 which made all female servants who worked in the fields taxable. By 1669 masters were not punished for killing an African servant. By 1670 a law was passed that did not allow Indians or Africans to purchase servants {Shifflett, Virtual Jamestown}. All of these laws were gradually removing rights from Africans, while asserting their differences from English and Indian servants.

Laws in Virginia were setting the stage for all Africans to become enslaved at a time life spans in Virginia were increasing and the number of English indentured servants coming to the colonies was decreasing. There was also a change in agricultural practices in the 1640's as the Caribbean, including the West Indies and Barbados, were switching from growing tobacco, to cotton, and ultimately to sugar production, which was more demanding. These islands were forced to purchase slaves because indentured servants would not go there because death rates were so high. The Dutch had taken over the Portuguese empire and were encouraging the switch from tobacco to sugar so that it would increase the numbers of slaves being bought and sold. A diminishing number of servants and increased life span by 1660 may have forced the need to purchase slaves in Virginia. In addition, taxes were exempt on the Dutch sale of slaves in Virginia. {Morgan, E., 298-299}. Slaves were also becoming a better "deal" than indentured servants as their life spans increased and trade with the Dutch was expanding.

In 1660 England passed Navigation Acts that limited the amount of trade with the rest of the world, including the Dutch, which slowed the growth of slavery in Virginia. Barbados, settled twenty years later than Virginia, had an African population of 4,500 by 1640 and 20,000 by 1660. Virginia had barely a tenth of that at either date {Morgan, E., 298}. Laws were written defining mulattos, or anyone with a portion of African bloodline and the manner by which slaves could be moved out of the colony. These laws would continue to get tougher until after the American Civil War.

Between 1700 and 1750 Virginia imported approximately 45,000, but the slave population increased from approximately 10,000 to over 100,000. In contrast, Barbados imported approximately 150,000 slaves but its black slave population increased by only 28,000 {Morgan, E., 301}. Slaves in Virginia were healthier and were multiplying, while in Barbados the strain of working the sugar fields took their toll. Slaves became a good long term investment, and the need for transatlantic slaves lessened. Between 1700 and 1750 Virginia imported approximately 45,000, but the slave population increased from approximately 10,000 to over 100,000.

The eighteenth century continued the pattern of passing laws to limit the movement of Africans. In October, 1705 laws reiterated that Christianity was not a reason to release Africans, setting the stage for all future Africans entering the colony to enter a life of slavery. October also saw laws that set penalties for helping slaves escape, and even determined how long a slave could

stay on someone else's property {Shifflett, Virtual Jamestown}. All Africans, with very few exceptions, were slaves by the early eighteenth century.

What is the story of the Africans who arrived in Jamestown in 1619 and how did the descendants of these 20 and odd Africans end up enslaved? It is the story of African men and women who were dropped off in an unfamiliar country. It is the story of people who gained rights and saw them gradually taken away. Whether the original 20 Africans were indentured servants or slaves is almost irrelevant, because their descendants all faced the same future, a life of enslavement; a life of enslavement that could possibly last until the end of the American Civil War.

Annotated Bibliography

Johnson, Anthony. (1670). Court document. Image courtesy of Library of Congress. Retrieved October 8, 2010 from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1h314.html>

This court document of 1670 shows how 250 acres of land that had been purchased by Anthony Johnson, who gave 50 acres to his son, Richard, was taken away from Richard by a juried trial simply because he received it from an African. This is used to show the progression of rights being removed from Africans because of their color.

Lindsay, Lisa A. (2008). Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade. New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall.

The author tells the tragic story of buying and trading human beings on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, while humanizing the story of those that were exploited. Laws that were passed, ships that crossed the ocean with their human cargo, and the pain and suffering of the enslaved are shared as countries both banned and continued to benefit from the slave trade profits. This book deals with both the enslaved and the people/countries buying and selling.

Mintz, S. (2007). Virginia Slave Laws. Digital History. Retrieved October 8, 2010 from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/documents/documents_p2.cfm?doc=217

This website has in chronological order a listing of Virginia slave laws, sometimes in abbreviated form. It is easy to maneuver and includes easy to read explanations of the slave laws.

Morgan, Edmund S. (1975). American Slavery, American Freedom. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

Mr. Morgan uses the "marriage of slavery and freedom" to show how slavery and freedom were interspersed throughout early American history; i.e. that while white Americans had their freedom in the new world, Africans were enslaved and supporting their ability to stay free. Interesting to read, it follows colonial history of both the enslaved and the free.

Morgan, Edmund S. (June 1971) The Labor Problem at Jamestown 1607-18, The University of Chicago on behalf of the American Historical Association, Vol. 76, No. 3. p. 595-611. Retrieved December 6, 2010 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1851619>.

As soon as tobacco was introduced as a crop that could readily be exchanged in the global market, labor became an issue. Morgan traces the labor problem before Africans were introduced to Jamestown. From English laws and the inappropriate choices for people sent to the new world to the use of Indian labor that was difficult to monitor, Mr. Morgan clearly shows the problems of the working class, or lack of a working class, in Jamestown, while ending on a positive note of the increase in the number of plantations, falling prices, and the ever ending number of colonists willing to risk everything to come to Virginia.

Morgan, Phillip. (2008). *Origins of American Slavery. America on the World Stage*. University of Illinois Press, pp. 36-49

This essay states a very clear definition of slavery and follows slavery from its origins in Greek and Roman history until the abolition movements of the late 1700's and 1800's. The enslavement of Indians in South America, the different types of slavery in the North American colonies are written clearly and concisely.

Shifflett, Crandall. (2010) Laws on Slavery. Virtual Jamestown. Retrieved from December 1, 2010 <http://www.virtualjamestown.org/laws1.html#15>

This site is a wealth of information for children. It has interactive learning sites on Indians, indentured servants, slave laws, the fort, the Chesapeake Bay area, recent research on Jamestown, and everything a student, teacher, parent, or casual observer could want to know about Jamestown. An excellent resource for a teacher!

Vaughn, Alden T. (Jul. 1972). *Blacks in Virginia: A Note on the First Decade*. The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series. Vol. 29., No 3., pp. 469-478. Retrieved November 29, 2010 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1923875>

Using data from the Virginia Census of 1623/24 and the Virginia Muster, the first ten years of African history emerges. It clearly shows that Africans were mostly listed with no names, in contrast to Indians, with first names, or English servants, who usually had first and last names. It reads easily and details what is found in lengthy charts in the actual census document.

The Virginia Census, (Apr. 1990). *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 364-367. Virginia Historical Society. Retrieved November 30, 2010 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/424281>

This is a condensed version of the Virginia Census of 1623/24 but clearly lists the total African population as 23. It also lists each settlement and the numbers of males, females, houses, and lists of supplies such as animals, houses, weapons, etc. Some of the old English words would be difficult for young students to understand.

Virginia Center for Digital History. (2005). *The Geography of Slavery*. Retrieved November 22, 2010 from http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_ads.php?year=1736&month=10&page=0

This website is a wealth of information on slavery from the 1600's through the 1800's and very easy to navigate. It can be navigated by name, date, place, etc. It is easy to use and includes many facts that are easy to find.