

Jamestown Settlement Family Gallery Guide

From Africa to Virginia



Not long after the English settled Jamestown in 1607, the first Africans were brought to Virginia. They arrived in 1619 from the Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa.

As you explore the Jamestown Settlement Galleries, learn more about their cultural origins, their interactions with the English in Virginia and the 17th-century Virginia culture they helped to create.



Find the “How We Know What We Know” section in the first area of the gallery.

What are some ways historians and scientists discover information about the past? What types of things can be learned from what they find?

Historians knew very little about the first Africans who arrived in Virginia in the 17th century until the early 1990s when new information discovered in Spanish archives uncovered clues about where they were from and how they came to Virginia in 1619.

Parent Cultures

West Central Africa in the 17th century was a place rich in culture and resources. The people of the Kongo/Angola areas of West Central Africa lived in a society of rural villages, towns and cities. They were ruled by kings and queens and prospered from extensive trade networks.



In the 17th century, West Central Africans primarily spoke Kikongo and Kimbundu, two languages from the Bantu family. It is likely that many of the Africans brought to Virginia in 1619 spoke one of these two traditional African languages. Some may also have known how to speak, read and write Portuguese.

Find a “language phone” in the African section of the Parent Cultures gallery. Listen to a portion of the traditional African language, Kimbundu. Can you understand what is being said? When the first Africans arrived in Virginia, do you think the English and Africans could understand each other? How would this make their interaction with one another difficult? What other ways could they have communicated with one another?

Imagine that you are living in West Central Africa in the 17th century. Use the large diorama and the objects and statues of people inside, to answer the questions below about daily life in West Central Africa in the 1600s.

What jobs were done by men and what jobs were done by women? What were their clothes made of? What were their houses made of and why? What crops did they grow? What tools did they use and what were they made of?



As you read the label copy on the artifacts in this exhibit, you will notice that many of them were made in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Because these objects have changed little in their look and function, traditional African objects made in the 19th and 20th centuries resemble 17th-century objects very closely.



The baobab tree was an important part of the 17th-century Angolan landscape. Baobab trees grow extremely large and store lots of water, which helps them to live for a very long time. The West Central Africans used this tree for many things, including a type of cloth made from the bark. **In the African immersive area, find a life-size replica of a baobab tree.**

What features make this tree interesting to look at?

Did you know that eastern Kongo traded more than 100,000 meters of cloth a year to other countries? African kuba cloth, a type of cloth made from raffia palm leaves, was highly valued by European traders who considered it to be very desirable. Take a minute to touch a sample of kuba cloth.

Age of Discovery

In the 1400s, more than one hundred years before the first Africans were brought to Virginia, the Portuguese began to explore Africa and its resources. By the late 1400s, the Portuguese had established trade relationships with the western and central parts of Africa.

Find a case that contains a ceremonial brass and iron knife.

The hand was and is an important symbol to the people of the Benin kingdom and symbolized vigor, strength and the ability to accomplish things in the world. If you were a craftsman making your own ceremonial knife, what symbol of strength would you use?



Interacting Cultures

The colonists tried many ways to make money in Virginia before they were finally successful with growing tobacco. Tobacco required a huge amount of labor to grow and process. The colonists first relied on indentured servants from England, who agreed to work for a master for four to seven years. But by the 1650s, fewer people from England were willing to become indentured servants, so the English in Virginia turned to slave labor to supply their needs.

Find an area inside the gallery that looks like a storehouse. What plant is hanging from the ceiling? Why do you think a poor person in England would be willing to work as an indentured servant in Virginia?



Contact between Africans and Europeans increased as Europe became more heavily involved in the African slave trade. As a result, Africans and Europeans were exposed to one another's culture. The objects they produced, either for trade or for everyday use, reflect this contact. **Please watch the 10-minute film, "From Africa to Virginia," in the African object theater. After the film is over, explore the items in the exhibit to answer the questions below.**



Most West Central Africans practiced traditional African religions until contact with Europeans began in the 1500s. Europeans began to spread Christian ideas to the African people. Many West Central Africans added these beliefs to their religious practices. The Portuguese also believed it was their duty to baptize those Africans they captured as slaves, who were often given Christian names before being brought to America.

Find a case that contains an African crucifix. Compare the African crucifix with the European crucifix in the next case. If you didn't know where either one was made, how could you tell that one was made in Africa and the other was made in Europe? Which features show European influence? Which features show African artistic traditions?



Find a case with brass weights and decorative boxes. These were used by Africans to measure and store gold dust, which was very valuable and used as money in many parts of Africa. Western African cultures, such as the Akan, also were famous for their ability as craftsmen to make gold jewelry. African gold was very desirable among European traders.



In the next case, find a gold coin with a tiny elephant on it.

Read the label to help you answer the questions below. Where was this gold coin made? In the late 17th century, the English began trading in Africa for gold jewelry. Why do you think the English wanted this jewelry? What does the tiny elephant represent?

Find a statue of an African queen. What is her name? What features of this statue tell you that this person is important? As Queen of Ndongo, a region within Angola, how do you think Njinga felt about Europeans capturing her people and selling them as slaves in the New World? What did she do to keep this from happening?



The Portuguese were among the first Europeans to become involved in the African slave trade. By the 1500s, civil wars were raging in Africa, and Africans were capturing and selling their African enemies into slavery. The Portuguese took advantage of this situation and began to capture and buy Africans for slavery as well. Other Europeans, such as England, soon followed.

In 1619, a group of Africans captured by the Portuguese departed from the Angolan port city of Luanda aboard a slave ship bound for the Spanish colony at Vera Cruz, Mexico. Just before they arrived in Mexico, the ship was attacked by English privateers, who then took these Africans to Virginia and traded them for supplies. It is not known whether these Africans were indentured servants or slaves at first, but after slave laws were established in the colony, Africans brought to Virginia most likely worked as slaves in English tobacco fields.



Find a map with names that connect Africa to Virginia.

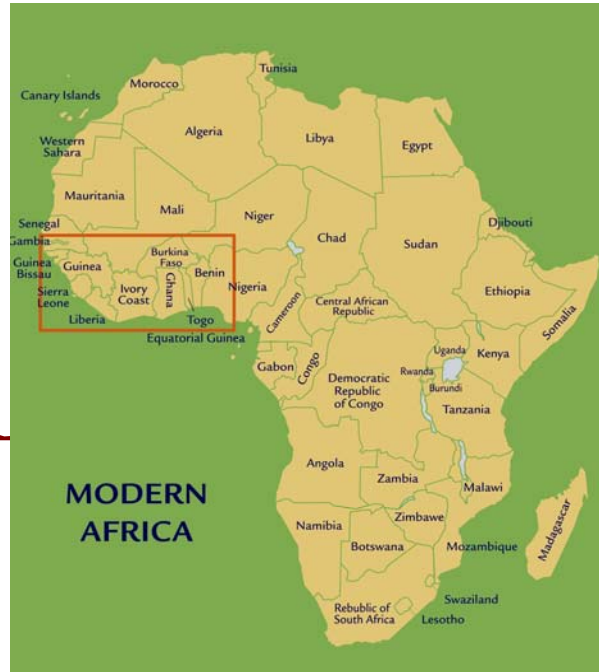
What do you think these names represent? What are some of the ways these Africans' lives were changed when they were brought from Angola to Virginia?

Find a map that traces the route from Africa to Virginia.

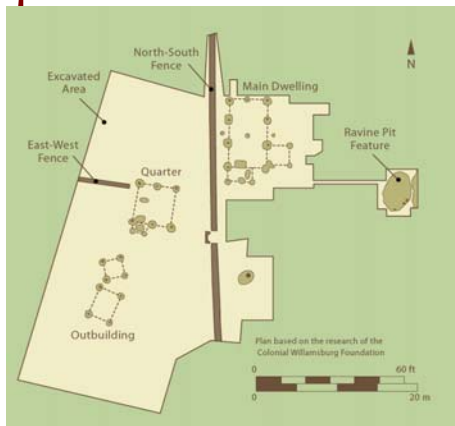
Why were the Portuguese taking Africans to Mexico? How do you think the Africans felt when this Portuguese ship was attacked and they were captured by privateers? Use the timeline to discover when slavery was first established in Virginia.

A New Virginia

It wasn't until the end of the 17th century that Africans began to be brought to Virginia in large numbers. By 1700, slaves were coming to Virginia from different regions of Africa. They brought different cultures and often different languages with them. Those cultures, combined with the culture created by Virginia slaves born to African parents, created a new African-American culture in Virginia.



Find a re-created slave cabin. What types of personal belongings can you find in the house? Where do you think the slaves got them? Why do you think the slaves hid these items in pits in the ground?



Archaeological footprint of the Thomas Atkinson excavation site in James City County. (Plan based on the research of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

In some excavations of slave sites, archaeologists have uncovered fossilized sharks teeth in storage pits in the ground. Where do you think the sharks teeth came from? How might they have been used? What do you think they symbolized to the slaves who put them there?

Jamestown Settlement, a museum of 17th-century Virginia, evokes the world of America's first permanent English settlement through documentary film, indoor gallery exhibits and outdoor living history. A dramatic documentary film, *1607: A Nation Takes Root*, and comprehensive gallery exhibits trace Jamestown's beginnings in England and the first century of the Virginia colony, while Jamestown served as its capital, and provide insight into the cultures of the Powhatans, Europeans and Africans who converged in 1600s Virginia. Outdoors, costumed historical interpreters describe and demonstrate daily life in the early 17th century. Visitors can board a replica of the ships that sailed from England to Virginia in 1607, explore life-size re-creations of the colonists' fort and a Powhatan village, and tour a riverfront discovery area, open seasonally, to learn about the important role of waterways in 17th-century travel and commerce. To contact us, please call toll free 888-593-4682!



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