



THE FIRST ENSLAVED AFRICAN LANDING

ISABELLA

Isabella was captured from the village of Ndongo in Angola during a Portuguese raid between 1618 and 1619. She was held in captivity until a ship arrived in the bay of 1619. Between 1617 and 1619 over 50,000 Africans were captured from the villages of Ndongo, Kabasa and the Congo. Angelo, another African woman, was also one of the many men, women and children captured.

The Spanish ship San Juan Bautista began loading 350 Africans in the middle of May 1619. The ship departed Luanda, the port Capital of Angola, at the end of May. The destination of the ship was Vera Cruz, present day Mexico. Thirty days out to sea 100 Africans had already died. The ship stopped at Jamaica and traded 24 African boys for medicine. They unload the ship so the remaining Africans can get healthy. The ship then resumes its voyage through the Middle Passage to Vera Cruz.

As they enter the Gulf of Campeche, off the coast of Mexico, they are attacked by two pirate ships. The first ship, the White Lion, was an English privateer, commanded by an Englishman, Captain John Colyn Jope, from England. However, he was sailing a Dutch flag and had been given a letter of marque issued by the Protestant Dutch Prince Maurice. The marquee legally allowed Capt Jope to attack any Spanish or Portuguese ship since the Dutch did not have a treaty with either Spain or Portugal. The second ship was the Treasurer, an English ship owned by the Earl of Warwick and commanded by Daniel Elfrith, sailing out of Jamestown, Virginia, with a letter of marque from the Duke of Savoy, England. But the Duke soon changed his mind and entered into a treaty making the letter of marque void. The Virginia Governor, Samuel Argall, knowingly had participated in piracy and had authorized the Treasurer to attack Spanish and Portuguese ships, knowing that England now had a treaty with Spain and Portugal.

The two English ships attacked the Spanish ship San Juan Bautista. After the surrender of the San Juan Bautista, the pirates boarded the ship looking for gold and silver. They found a load of captured Africans. Neither ship was equipped to take all of the Africans so they took 60 of the healthiest Africans. Isabella was put on the White Lion and Angelo was put on the Treasurer. Both ships raced back to Virginia, the closest English port to Mexico. On August 25, 1619 the White Lion entered from the Chesapeake Bay and arrived at Point Comfort, an English settlement located at the mouth of the harbor, 30 nautical miles downstream from Jamestown. Isabella is aboard the White Lion.

In 1619 Point Comfort was one of many settlements composing the Virginia Colony along with Jamestown. According to the journal log of John Rolfe, the widower of Pocahontas, 20 and Odd Negars arrived at Point Comfort and they were purchased for much needed food. John Rolfe, who was the commander at Point Comfort, obtained Isabella and Antoney, a male African, to become his servants. Isabella becomes the first enslaved African woman in the Virginia Colony. The White Lion never sailed to Jamestown to trade Africans. All of the Africans were purchased and departed from Point Comfort to other plantations.

Three or four days later the Treasurer arrives carrying Angelo and 28 other Africans. The Settlers at Point Comfort knew that an arrest warrant had been issued for Captain Elfrith and the crew of the Treasurer for piracy. The Settlers refused to purchase any of the Africans. Elfrith learns that new Virginia Governor George Yeardley has sent a convoy from Jamestown to arrest him. No Africans were secretly sold as the rumors have it. Elfrith immediately set sail for Bermuda where he would sell all 29 Africans to Vice Governor Miles Kendall who supported piracy. Then Governor Samuel Butler seized Angelo and her 28 companions and took them to St. Georges, a jail. Some of the Africans were sold and others went to work for the Bermudian Colony. One of the Treasurers' owners arrived in Bermuda and filed a lawsuit stating he was part owner of the Africans and they could not be sold without compensating him. He wins the case and was given Angelo and about a dozen other Africans. In February 1620 Angela and the other Africans boarded the Treasurer and headed back to Jamestown. After unloading the Africans, the Treasurer sinks in the James River. Angelo is purchased by Captain William Pierce of James City County. They change her name from Angelo to Angela.

So what do we know about Isabella?

She arrived on August 25, 1619. She and Antoney are purchased by Captain William Tucker and become servants on his plantation. Isabella and Antoney are his only African servants and would remain together until they are eventually freed. Sometime in 1623 they give birth to William who took Captain William Tucker's last name. William was baptized in the Church of England in Jamestown on January 4, 1624. Once they gain their freedom they move to Kent County, Virginia and start their own homestead. William grows to be an adult and marries a mixed woman and Isabella becomes a grandmother.

What do we know about Angela?

She arrived at Jamestown in March 1620 and becomes a servant in the household of William Pierce.

Many institutions and associated historians have misled and distorted the African narrative to make us believe Angela was the first documented enslaved African woman in the Virginia Colony.

The goal of Project 1619 is to insure we commemorate the true narrative of our ancestors.