

# African-American History

## A Timeless Legacy



*Since before the founding of our nation, African Americans have played a vital role in creating what is now the United States. In fact, Africans first came to Virginia in the early 1500s, almost a century before the first permanent English settlement in America at Jamestown in 1607, as explorers and as members of Spanish and French Jesuit missions. While Newport News is but a small part of Virginia, it is filled with stories of timeless legacy in our African-American heritage.*

### Day 1

Visit the only large antebellum plantation house remaining on the lower Peninsula, **Lee Hall Mansion**. Lee Hall's first owner, Richard D. Lee, successfully applied the principles of scientific farming, which were increasingly being used in the mid-Atlantic region during the 1850s and 1860s. There were 38 enslaved African Americans who labored at Lee Hall prior to the Civil War. Their descendants, as well as other African Americans, Native Americans and European cultures on Virginia's Lower Peninsula, produced a distinctive and vibrant cultural tapestry. Confederate generals Joseph E. Johnston and John B. Magruder used Lee Hall as their headquarters during the initial phase of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign.

Next, lunch and then a tour of **Endview Plantation**. Here, slave quarters were scattered around the vicinity of the house, and there are anecdotal references to a slave graveyard near the spring. On the eve of the Civil War, records indicate 12 slaves living at Endview. In early 1864, the federal government confiscated the plantation and relocated seven African-American families to farm the site. At the end of the year, the property was returned to the original owners, and the former slaves living there were forced to leave.

Top off your day visiting **The Mariners' Museum and Park / USS Monitor Center**. This museum connects people to the world's waters because that is how we are connected to one another! Designated by Congress as America's National Maritime Museum, you'll explore one of the largest and most comprehensive maritime history museums in the world. Among the many stories in the USS Monitor Center is that of Siah Carter, a courageous runaway slave turned permanent USS Monitor crew member, who remained in the Union Navy even after the sinking of his ship.

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### Day 2

Begin this morning with a tour of the **James A. Fields House**. James A. Fields (1844-1903) was born a slave in Hanover County, Virginia. In 1862, he and his brother escaped slavery and found refuge at Fort Monroe in Hampton. His restored home is historically significant for its long association with the development of the social and civic life of the African-American community in Newport News. The house was used by Mr. Fields as his law office and primary residence from 1897 to 1903, and it was just one of 15 properties he owned in Newport News. Mr. Fields was also a teacher and member of the Virginia House of Delegates.

Down the street, visit **The Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center**, the restored 1899 residence of J. Thomas Newsome and his wife, Mary Winfield Newsome. Mr. Newsome (1862-1942) was born to Joseph and Martha Ann Newsome, former slaves on Princeton Plantation, near Sussex Courthouse. After schooling, which included Howard University's Law School in Washington, DC, Mr. Newsome became a respected attorney, journalist, churchman and civic leader who prospered as part of the post-Civil War South's new urban African-American middle class. His elegant Queen Anne residence was the hub of the local black community in Newport News and was twice visited by Booker T. Washington.

Drive by **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Plaza**. This highly visible site honors the legacy of Dr. King, who visited Newport News in 1958 and 1962 and spoke at the historic First Church of Newport News (Baptist).

Next to the Pearl Baily Library, born in Newport News in 1918, take a tour of the **Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center**. The former Walter Reed School from 1917 has been transformed into a 52,000 square-foot masterpiece dedicated to offering constructive opportunities for youth and community to express their artist abilities. The building houses the Ella Fitzgerald Theater, born in Newport News in 1917, Anderson Johnson Gallery, Newport News Community Gallery, Thaddeus Hayes Dance Studio, L. Marian Poe community meeting space, art and music rooms and a banquet room.