

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 - Late Morning Arrival

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 then a tour of the **Virginia Living Museum**. It's here that you will come in contact with more habitats, wildlife, and plant species than you would encounter in a lifetime of outdoor adventures in Virginia. Enjoy a **planetarium show "Follow the Drinking Gourd,"** that will take you back to the days when freedom was nothing more than a dream for those held in slavery. Some looked for hope to a certain constellation with its bright shining star. The story is a poignant and inspiring tale of one African-American family's desperate flight to freedom and how they used constellations to guide the way. The program is based on a children's book, "Follow the Drinking Gourd," written and illustrated by Jeanette Winter. This production incorporates historical images from the local region.

This evening tour **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*

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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. After your tour, enjoy **dinner and a presentation with Frederick Douglass**. Mr. Douglass was born a slave in 1818, taught himself to read, write and became one of the greatest African Americans in history. He published two autobiographies as well as a weekly newspaper, *The North Star*, which was devoted to the abolition of slavery. He also became an advisor to presidents such as Abraham Lincoln and James Garfield

DAY 2 – Continue Exploring Newport News Culture Before Departing For Home

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 you'll tour **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 Bailey Library (born in 1918 in Newport News) we'll stop at the **Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center** that features the Ella Fitzgerald Theater (also born in Newport News in 1917). Explore the permanent exhibit, Anderson Johnson Gallery, before enjoying lunch. After lunch participate in a **rhythm-engaging drum circle**. Arthur Lopez creates a safe, supportive environment where participants can freely explore and tap into their own individual creativity and experience a connection to the group through drums. "Creating unity in the community with drum circles" is Arthur's motto.

Depart for home.