

## Women and African American History: 1492-1699

- [Lucy Terry](#) (c. 1730–1821) is the author of the oldest known work of literature by an African American.
- [Phillis Wheatley](#) (May 8, 1753 – December 5, 1784) was the first African-American poet and first African-American woman to publish a book.
- [Margaret Garner](#) (called Peggy) was an enslaved African American woman in pre-Civil War America who was notorious - or celebrated - for killing her own daughter rather than allowing the child to be returned to slavery.
- [Sojourner Truth](#) (c. 1797 – November 26, 1883) was the self-given name, from 1843 onward, of Isabella Baumfree, an African American abolitionist and women's rights activist. Truth was born into slavery in Swartekill, Ulster County, New York, but escaped with her infant daughter to freedom in 1826. After going to court to recover her son, she became the first black woman to win such a case against a white man. Her best-known extemporaneous speech on gender inequalities, "Ain't I a Woman?", was delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. During the Civil War, Truth helped recruit black troops for the Union Army; after the war, she tried unsuccessfully to secure land grants from the federal government for former slaves.
- [Harriet Tubman](#) (born Araminta Harriet Ross; 1820 – March 10, 1913) was an African-American abolitionist, humanitarian, and Union spy during the American Civil War. Born into slavery, Tubman escaped and subsequently made more than thirteen missions to rescue more than 70 slaves using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. She later helped John Brown recruit men for his raid on Harpers Ferry, and in the post-war era struggled for women's suffrage.
- [Ellen Craft](#) (1826–1897) was a slave from Macon, Georgia who posed as a white male planter to escape from slavery. She escaped to the North on December 1848 by traveling openly by train and steamboat, arriving in Philadelphia on Christmas Day.

## African American History and Women

*What's included? See note below timeline.*

## Women and African American History: 1492-1699

### 1492

- Columbus discovered America, from the perspective of Europeans. [Queen Isabella of Spain](#) declared all indigenous peoples her subjects, in the lands claimed by Columbus for Spain, preventing the Spanish conquerors from enslaving the Native Americans. The Spanish thus looked elsewhere for the labor they needed to take advantage of the New World's economic opportunities.

## **1501**

- Spain permitted African slaves to be sent to the Americas

## **1511**

- first African slaves arrived in Hispaniola

## **1598**

- Isabel de Olvero, part of the Juan Guerra de Pesa Expedition, helped to colonize what has since become New Mexico

## **1619**

- (August 20) 20 men and women from Africa arrived on a slave ship and were sold in the first North American slave auction -- by British and international custom, Africans could be held in servitude for life, though white Christian indentured servants could only be held for a limited term

## **1622**

- Anthony Johnson, son of an African mother, arrived in Virginia. He lived with his wife, Mary Johnson, in Accomack on Virginia's Eastern Shore, the first free Negroes in Virginia (Anthony taking his last name from his original master). Anthony and Mary Johnson eventually founded the first free black community in North America, and themselves held servants "for life."

## **1624**

- Virginia census lists 23 "Negroes" including some women; ten have no names listed and the rest only first names, likely indicating lifetime servitude -- none of the women are listed as married

## **1625**

- Virginia census lists twelve black men and eleven black women; most have no names and do not have the dates of arrival that most white servants in the census have listed -- only one of the blacks has a full listing

## **1641**

- Massachusetts legalized slavery, specifying that a child inherited its status from the mother, rather than the father, reversing English common law

## **about 1648**

- [Tituba](#) born ([Salem witch trials](#) figure; probably of Carib not African heritage)

### 1656

- Elizabeth Key, whose mother was a slave and father was a white planter, sued for her freedom, claiming her father's free status and her baptism as grounds -- and the courts upheld her claim

### 1667

- Virginia passed a law stating that baptism could not free "slaves by birth"

### 1662

- Virginia House of Burgesses passed a law that a child's status followed the mother's, if the mother was not white, contrary to English common law in which the father's status determined the child's

### 1663

- Maryland passed a law under which free white women would lose their freedom if they married a black slave, and under which the children of white women and black men became slaves

### 1664

- Maryland became the first of the future states to pass a law making it illegal for free English women to marry "Negro slaves"

### 1668

- Virginia legislature declared that free black women were to be taxed, but not white women servants or other white women; that "negro women, though permitted to enjoy their freedom" could not have the rights of "the English."

### 1670

- Virginia passed a law that "Negroes" or Indians, even those free and baptized, could not purchase any Christians, but could purchase "any of their owne nation [=race]" (i.e. free Africans could buy Africans and Indians could buy Indians)

### 1688

- [Aphra Behn](#) (1640-1689, England) published the anti-slavery *Oroonoka, or the History of the Royal Slave*, first novel in English by a woman

### 1692

- [Tituba](#) disappeared from history ([Salem witch trials](#) figure; probably of Carib not African heritage)

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[\[2000-\]](#)  
[\[Biographies of Notable African American Women\]](#)

[Events in this timeline include:](#)

- *events featuring African American women*
- *birth and death dates for many notable African American women*
- *general African American events which had significant impact on African American women and families as well as men*
- *events involving key women whose work influenced African American history, for instance the involvement of many European American women in anti-slavery work*
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- *birth and death dates for key women whose work was important in African American history, for instance in anti-slavery or civil rights work*