

1619: A Particularly Important Year in American History

Unit 5, Lesson 6

Essential Question

Why is 1619 such an important year in American history?

Let's Think

What are some dates that are considered important in American history?

Why are they considered important?



In a small group...

Write your list of important dates in American history

Be ready to share your list...
and explain why



Why is this date so important?

161

Today, we are going to find are at least 3 reasons.

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Why is 1619 Considered to be Such a Significant Year in History

As you read Why is 1619 Considered to be Such a Significant Year in History, look for the 3 reasons why that date is so important.

Resource 1: Why is 1619 Considered to be Such a Significant Year in History

The year 1619 is a very important one in American History. It is important for both good and bad reasons.

Reason 1: Why 1619 is Significant

The year 1619 is viewed by many as an extremely important year in American history. That was the year when the first Africans were brought to Virginia, which is now part of the United States.

The first 20 people from Africa were bought and sold in Jamestown by the captain of a Dutch ship. The image to the right illustrates the arrival of the first African to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 (source [here](#)). Historians believe that they were taken (by pirates!) from a Portuguese ship in the ocean. Pirates frequently attacked and robbed ships at sea at this time in history. They even attacked Lewes, Delaware.



Historians have also concluded that the first Africans who came to Virginia were treated as indentured servants and given the same benefits as white indentured servants when their contracts were up. Why do historians believe this? Because they have not found laws in Virginia about slavery at the time. Additionally, documents show that some of the Africans who came to Jamestown were free years later.

The story of "Antonio" offers evidence. He arrived in Jamestown on a Dutch ship in 1621. His name on the ship records was "Antonio." It appears that he came from the country of Angola in Africa. Antonio started out working for a White farmer and adopted an English name - Anthony Johnson. Anthony later became free and became not only a landowner, he also enslaved others. In 1655, he took a White neighbor to court to demand the return of one of his enslaved persons who had run away. Anthony won his case. During his lifetime, Anthony Johnson acquired hundreds of acres of land in Virginia which he called "Angola." (Franklin and Higginbotham, p. 51)

Over time, colonies started passing laws that made it legal to enslave Black people. Massachusetts made enslavement legal in 1641. Virginia made it legal in 1661. These laws took away freedoms that Africans might have had. Sadly, all 13 of the original English colonies eventually passed laws that made enslavement legal.

As the need for workers grew in the colonies, so did the cost of indentured servants. Free people who needed workers did not want to have to pay these costs. Many also did not want to keep giving up land to indentured servants once they completed their work. So the rich landowners turned to Africans and enslaved them permanently. The shift from indentured servants to enslavement based on race had begun. (Source [here](#))

Slavery remained legal in the United States until 1865. By then, at least 12 million human beings from Africa had been forcibly enslaved and brought to our country (source [here](#)). What makes 1619 so significant is that the "suffering and forced labor" of those 12 million

"African Americans is what made the United States powerful and rich." As historian Edward Baptist has argued in his book *The Half Has Never Been Told*, "Enslaved African both obvious and hidden." (Baptist, pp. xxx-xxiii)

Sources:

Franklin, John Hope and Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks (2011). *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*. Ninth Edition. McGraw Hill.
Baptist, Edward E. (2014). *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. Basic Books.

Reason 2: Why 1619 is Significant

Another important event that took place in 1619 involved Virginia's government. At this time in history, it was common for one person to make laws for everyone. People had little or no say in what rules or laws that they would have to obey.

It is almost impossible in a big country to have everyone vote on every law. So, the people in colonial Virginia adopted the idea of "representative government." The people of the colony created a "House of Burgess." Burgess is an old English word for representative. So, the House of Burgess was really a House of Representatives who were chosen by the people of Virginia to make laws.

In building the House of Burgess, the people of Virginia were laying the foundation for the kind of government that we now have in the United States - a government "by the people" in which the people (not just a king or queen) elect representatives who make the laws that we are asked to obey. What a great idea - we decide who makes our laws for us!

Reason 3: Why 1619 is Significant

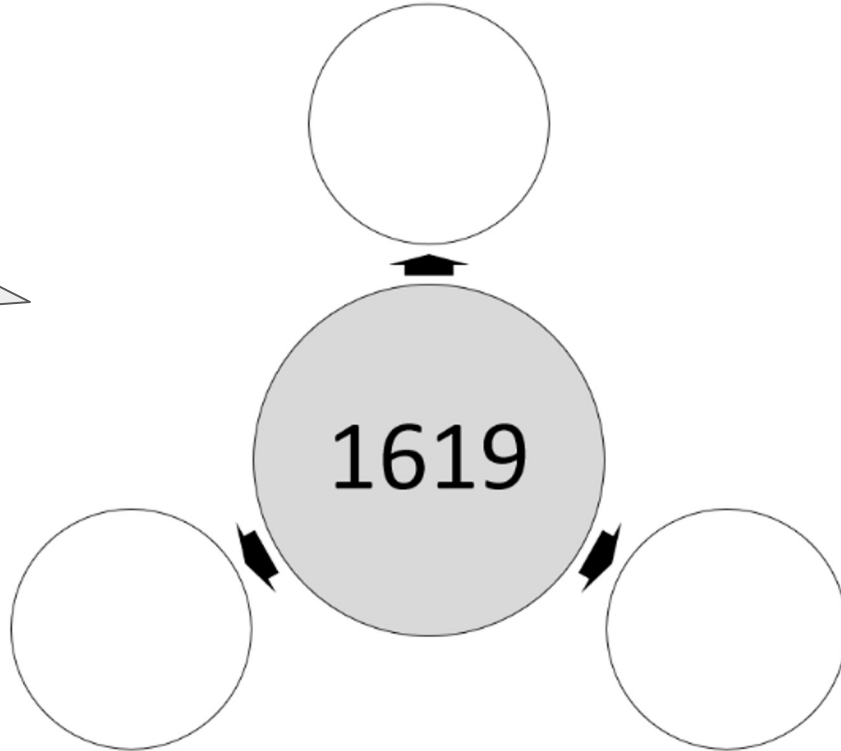
The third reason that 1619 is significant involves women. You see, most of the people who settled in Virginia between 1607 and 1619 were young men. At that time, many people believed that men were better at doing the hard work needed to survive in the wilderness. And, as you have learned from the history of Roanoke, life in America could be dangerous. This is why America was more appealing for younger men who looked for adventure and maybe even riches.

But most of those young men also hoped to meet someone special, get married, and have children. If there were too many men and very few women in Virginia, the men might leave and the colony would not survive.

So, in 1619, people in England arranged for a ship full of women to go to Virginia and the chances that the Virginia colony would survive increased significantly.

Resource 2: 1619 Graphic Organizer

On your 1619 Graphic Organizer, write the 3 reasons why that date is so important.



Debrief

What are the three (3) reasons why is 1619 such an important year in American history?

Check for Understanding

To ensure that you understand the importance of the year 1619, you'll answer the four questions on Resource 3.

Resource 3: Checks for Understanding

Name _____

1. Which of the following shows the correct order (from top to bottom) in which the events described in the reading occurred?
- Column A
 - Column B
 - Column C

Column A	Column B	Column C
First Africans brought to America	Massachusetts made slavery legal	Virginia made slavery legal
Massachusetts made slavery legal	First Africans brought to America	First Africans brought to America
Virginia made slavery legal	Slavery became illegal in the United States	Massachusetts made slavery legal
Slavery became illegal in the United States	Virginia made slavery legal	Slavery became illegal in the United States

2. Why is 1619 considered such an important year in Black history?
- the first Africans were elected to the House of Burgess
 - a ship from England brought African women to Virginia
 - slavery became legal in the area that became the United States
 - the first Africans were brought to an area that became part of the United States
3. What effect did the arrival of women in Jamestown have on the colony?
- it led the colony to legalize slavery
 - it led to the creation of the House of Burgess
 - it improved relations with the Native Americans
 - it made it more likely that the colony would survive
4. Which of the following is considered the first step in the decision to have representatives who we elect make the laws for our country?
- the book Utopia
 - the House of Burgess
 - the trial of John Punch
 - the indentured servant system