

Video Transcript: Early African Remains in Maryland – Shouldering the Load

Narrator:	00:01	October 2004, a Smithsonian excavation team makes a rare discovery at a colonial burial site in Maryland.
Speaker 2:	00:09	Anything to see by looking at it?
Doug Owsley:	00:11	I think it's African.
Speaker 2:	00:12	Really?
Narrator:	00:13	The finding of African remains offers the team a chance to learn more about the African experience in the colonies.
Lonnie Bunch:	00:20	There is still so little that we really understand about being an African in colonial America.
Narrator:	00:29	What we do know is this, the first Africans came to the Chesapeake in 1619 as servants and slaves. Some gained their freedom, but that didn't last.
Lonnie Bunch:	00:40	The growing need for more labor, the fact that people of darker skin were considered inferior by many Europeans, all of that congeals into a system of slavery by 1700.
Narrator:	00:54	Among the African remains discovered at the Maryland site are the bones of a young woman, a teenager.
Doug Owsley:	01:00	She's going to date somewhere between roughly 1720 and 1750.
Narrator:	01:06	At the Smithsonian lab, the anthropologists carefully examine the young woman's skeleton.
Doug Owsley:	01:11	We can begin to track who she is as an individual and where she came from.
KariBruwelheide:	01:15	The clavicles on her, the collar bones right here, show deep cortical excavations and that is an indicator of heavy labor.
Doug Owsley:	01:26	We can tell that she's working out in the land. She's working very hard. For the time period that she represents, she's probably slave.

Narrator:	01:35	But forensics can go even further. Anthropologist Kate Spradley traces African origins by looking at skull measurements.
Kate Spradley:	01:43	This is a digitizer. It collects three-dimensional data on this cranium. And when I lift up the stylus, I can place this on many points all over the skull. And what I'm going to get at the end is an image of roughly a 3D reconstruction of this in the computer. And then I'll compare it against other 3D images of different African groups and American groups. She very closely associates with these African groups. She is most similar to the Ashanti and the Gold Coast region of Africa, and that is modern day Ghana.
Narrator:	02:22	As a final step, the Smithsonian team plans a facial reconstruction for this young woman. Using a cast of her skull, forensic sculptor Joanna Hughes molds the basic shape of her face.
Joanna Hughes:	02:35	The marker tells me how much clay to build up from the skull to represent the tissue and the skin. Then, once you have all that filled in, you can start to blend everything. And that's when the face really starts to come out.
Narrator:	02:51	The reconstruction is then sent to Studio EIS in Brooklyn, where artist Rebecca Spivack humanizes the sculpture for visitors to the exhibition.
Rebecca Spivack:	03:00	I want the figure to rivet them in a certain way, and to draw their attention, and to give them some idea about what she might have been, so that they can actually bring some of their imagination to it as well.
Narrator:	03:14	Once the finishing touches are applied, the young woman from Maryland returns to the Smithsonian.
Lonnie Bunch:	03:20	That face makes this story accessible. That face doesn't allow you to turn away from a past that you might find difficult. It really brings the bones back to life.
Lonnie Bunch:	03:32	(silence)