

Source 1: Court Ruling on Anthony Johnson & His Servant (1655)

Anthony Johnson came to the British colonies in the 1621 as a servant named "Antonio the Negro," according to the 1625 Virginia Census. By the 1640s, however, Johnson had gained his freedom and become a landowner with slaves of his own. On March 8, 1655, Johnson accused a neighbor of stealing one of his slaves. As the trial transcript below illustrates, the court found in Johnson's favor and ordered his slave returned.

The deposition of Captain Samuel Goldsmith taken (in open court) 8th of March Sayth, That beinge at the howse of Anthony Johnson Negro (about the beginnige of November last to receive a hogshead of tobacco) a Negro called John Casar came to this Deponent, and told him that hee came into Virginia for seaven or Eight yeares (per Indenture) And that hee had demanded his freedome of his master Anthony Johnson; And further said that Johnson had kept him his servant seaven yeares longer than hee ought, And desired that this deponent would see that hee might have noe wronge, whereupon your Deponent demanded of Anthony Johnson his Indenture, hee answered, hee never sawe any; The said Negro (John Casor) replied, hee came for a certayne tyme and had an Indenture Anthony Johnson said hee never did see any But that hee had him for his life; Further this deponent saith That mr. Robert Parker and George Parker they knew that the said Negro had an Indenture (in on Mr. Carye hundred on the other side of the Baye) And the said Anthony Johnson did not tell the negro goe free The said John Casor would recover most of his Cowes of him; Then Anthony Johnson (as this deponent did suppose) was in a feare. Upon this his Sonne in lawe, his wife and his 2 sonnes perswaded the said Anthony Johnson to sett the said John Casor free. more saith not Samuel Goldsmith

This daye Anthony Johnson Negro made his complaint to the Court against mr. Robert Parker and declared that hee deteyneth his servant John Casor negro (under pretence that the said Negro is a free man.) The Court seriously consideringe and maturely weighinge the premisses, doe fynde that the said Mr. Robert Parker most unjustly keepeth the said Negro from Anthony Johnson his master as appeareth by the deposition of Captain Samuel Goldsmith and many probably circumstances. It is therefore the Judgment of the Court and ordered That the said John Casor Negro forthwith returne unto the service of his said master Anthony Johnson, And that mr. Robert Parker make payment of all charge in the suit. also Execution.

Source: Northampton County Order Book 1655–1668, fol. 10; via Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606–1689* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), P. 180–181

Downloaded from:

http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Court_Ruling_on_Anthony_Johnson_and_His_Servant_1655