



DRS Africa Homecoming Network Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is Diversity Restoration Solutions, Inc. (DRS) and what does DRS do?

Diversity Restoration Solutions, Inc. (DRS), a social business tourism entity based in Newport News, VA, conducts Homecoming events and project development activities in America and Africa to reconnect families and communities previously separated by institutions of slavery for mutually beneficial social-economic restoration. DRS is led by President/CEO Eric Sheppard, who has focused on family history and restoring and healing Africa connections since 2003. Eric's inspiration comes from the legacy of his Ancestor named Moses Grandy.

2. Who is Moses Grandy?

Moses Grandy was an enslaved person from Camden County, NC, who purchased his freedom three time before being set free. Moses went on to have his life story written in an [1843 slave narrative](#) published by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. After receiving proceeds from his story, Moses resolved to reunite his family by purchasing their freedom. He eventually ended up in Boston, MA with his wife and some of his children and became one of the earliest African American abolitionists, before Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas. Since 2001 when Eric discovered the slave narrative, he has been following in Moses' footsteps to reunite the African American community to their Ancestors connected to the Dismal Swamp and expanding that reconnection to the Motherland.

3. What is the Dismal Swamp Canal and why is it so important to African American history?

The [Dismal Swamp Canal](#) is part of the Great Dismal Swamp wildlife refuge and stretches 22 miles between northeastern NC and southeastern VA. The canal was hand dug by majority enslaved labor and was completed in 1805. The canal was a major route on the Underground Railroad and received designation as such from the National Parks' Network to Freedom program in 2004. The Dismal Swamp was also home runaway slaves called "Maroons" who set up encampments deep inside the swamp to shelter them from slave catchers. Not all Maroons left the Swamp going North to freedom. There is archeologic evidence that Maroons made permanent housing in the swamp, raising families. Some historians estimate that over 50,000 people traveled through the Dismal Swamp Canal escaping slavery. DRS also has a Network to Freedom certified [Underground Railroad tour](#) for groups to explore key locations in NC and VA mentioned in the Moses Grandy slave narrative and a narrative by Charles Grandy from Hickory, VA.

4. How does the Dismal Swamp Canal tie to Africa?

After researching family history ties to the Dismal Swamp Canal and Underground Railroad, and doing his maternal DNA testing, Eric traveled to The Gambia, West Africa, in 2006, following in the footsteps of the late author, Alex Haley. Eric's DNA tied him to the Fulani people in Mali/Nigeria. Many Africans asked him why more African Americans did not try to connect to Africa and he didn't have a response. From that point, Eric decided God had given him an assignment to help reconnect African Americans back to Africa and heal from the devastating effect of their separation, even if they did not know the country or countries from which their ancestors came. In 2009, he started the Africa Business Conferences and in 2011 began taking small business groups to Ghana and The Gambia in West Africa on business and cultural trade orientation programs 2011. In 2017, Eric discovered a parallel link to an area in Zambia called Western Province, which has a similar terrain and history as does the Great Dismal Swamp.

5. What is the significance of the 1619-2019 400-year milestone?

Although there is research documenting that Africans were already present in the Americas, 1619 is the documented beginning of the world's most tragic holocaust, the African slave trade import to the American colonies. The first documented "20 and odd" Africans from Angola came to Point Comfort, which is now known as Hampton, VA, down the James River and on to Jamestown Settlement in Williamsburg. Although history has these Africans as indentured servants, the slave trade branched off from these indentured servants to their latter generation being enslaved for life, as codified by the [Virginia Slave Codes](#).

6. What event is DRS doing in 2019 to observe the 400th year milestone?

In 2019, DRS is planning a signature event called the Africa Homecoming Pilgrimage to commemorate the documented 400th anniversary of the transatlantic slave trade era that started in 1619. The Pilgrimage will go to Zambia, in southern Africa. Eric has designed a facility called Restoration Center that will be the headquartered in Zambia for African Americans and others in the African diaspora to reconnect to the Continent through business/trade, culture and history. From a Biblical perspective, 400 years is a significant milestone in [Genesis 15:13-14](#), predicting the return of a people to their homeland after 400 years of enslavement. Although African Americans were not physically enslaved for 400 years, we have been in untethered bondage, economically, psychologically and in some cases physically since President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, but we have survived due to strong Ancestors.

7. Why is it important to reconnect with Africa, I do not know anyone there?

Africa for African Americans, is our ancestral homeland. Although we may not know from which country our Ancestors were brought, we do know there is a DNA connection to the Continent. It was never designed for those brought to this country in bondage and their descendants to know their history and origin, but that does not mean we cannot reconnect. Every ethnic group in the United States, other than the majority of African Americans, know their ancestral homeland, and has probably visited or have a desire to visit. We need to make this feeling reverberate throughout the African America community so that we can gain pride in our history, other than being know for slavery. Although our ancestors are rooted in slavery in America, our history did not start in slavery. We should know not only our African American heritage, but the great history of the kings and queens of mighty kingdoms in Africa from where we come. We have a great inheritance in Africa. The Africa Homecoming Center/Restoration Center will be developed in Western Province as a headquarters facility for African Americans to reconnect and learn.

8. Will the Africa Homecoming Pilgrimage be for vacation tourists?

The Pilgrimage will not be a vacation trip or tour. The Pilgrimage specific purpose will be to reconnect to Africa through business/trade, culture and history. There will be side tours to tourist sights that will be part of the Pilgrimage, but tourist attractions will not be the main focus. The Pilgrimage will be a learning experience, like the Jewish birthright programs to Israel. DRS is planning for annual Pilgrimage events starting in 2019, with the addition of more frequent Pilgrimages in later years.

9. How can I learn more and help support DRS and the Africa Homecoming Pilgrimage program?

You can visit the DRS website at www.diversityrestoration.com and subscribe to the Africa Homecoming campaign fund for just \$10.00 per person annually. All contributions will help support the operation of the Africa Homecoming Network and Pilgrimage programs in the U.S. and Africa. You can also reach DRS at (757) 926-5233 for more information on our programs and projects.