



3.1 THE SOUTHERN COLONIES: VIRGINIA AND THE ORIGINS OF SLAVERY

<p>SETTLEMENT OF VIRGINIA Virginia Co.</p>	<p>In 1606, King James I of England granted a charter to the VIRGINIA COMPANY, a joint stock company of adventurers, and authorized them to occupy over six million acres of land in North America. Of the 144 Englishmen who sailed for Virginia in December 1606, only 105 survived the journey. When they came ashore, in May 1607, they hastily built a fort to protect themselves from Indians and named the new settlement JAMESTOWN. By January 1608, because of disease and famine, only 38 of the original settlers were alive to welcome the Virginia Company’s supply ships and new colonists.</p>
<p>Jamestown</p>	
<p>Profit Motive</p>	<p>Since the company was INTENT ON MAKING A PROFIT, it had directed the settlers to blow glass, raise silk, make wine, and dig for gold rather than deal with the necessities of life. Although the colony received food from the Indians, Jamestown failed to thrive because the majority of settlers were GENTLEMEN and their servants who considered CULTIVATING THE LAND BENEATH THEM. Nevertheless, the colony survived and slowly expanded. This caused tensions with nearby Algonquian Indians who attacked in 1622 and killed 347 settlers – nearly one-third of the English population.</p>
<p>High Mortality + Mismanagement = Royal Colony</p>	<p>In 1624, the shocking MORTALITY RATE and evidence of MISMANAGEMENT (the company had lost a total of 160,000 pounds) led the king to dissolve the Virginia Company and convert Virginia into a ROYAL COLONY governed directly by the crown. The king appointed the governor but allowed most aspects of local government, including the House of Burgesses, to continue.</p>
<p>STABILIZING EFFECTS OF TOBACCO</p>	<p>The cultivation of TOBACCO proved to be the turning point for Virginia. The first shipment of Virginia-grown tobacco arrived in England in 1617 and sold for a handsome price. This stimulated the same Virginia colonists who had refused to grow food for themselves to harvest as much tobacco as possible. The crop changed the aimless settlers into a community of dedicated planters.</p>
<p>SOLUTIONS TO LABOR PROBLEM</p>	<p>But tobacco was a LABOR INTENSIVE crop requiring close year-round attention. Primitive tools and methods made the work even more difficult. As hired laborers, settlers were only willing to do the work because they could earn two or three times more in Virginia than in England. Furthermore, because land was so plentiful in Virginia, even laborers could hope to obtain it. Finally, new settlers who paid their own passage received fifty acres of free land known as a HEADRIGHT.</p>
<p>Headright</p>	
<p>Indentured Servants</p>	<p>Although relatively high wages, cheap and abundant land, and headrights attracted many poor people to the New World, others could not afford to pay their passage. Consequently, they became INDENTURED SERVANTS – men and women who sold their labor for a period of four to seven years in exchange for passage to Virginia and the chance to acquire land and wealth. As many as 40 percent of the indentured servants died before their servitude ended, but those who survived were likely to acquire their own farms. More than two-thirds of the servants were young, unskilled males between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. Only about one servant in four was a woman because employers preferred men for field work. Servant life was very harsh. Servants had no control over who purchased their labor and could be sold from owner to owner. In addition, laws often extended the period of indenture for servants who ran away or got pregnant. For an account of the experiences of an indentured servant, see http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/jamestown-browse?id=J1012.</p>
<p>Slavery</p>	<p>Africans were initially treated much like indentured servants. It was possible for them to gain their freedom and to purchase and own land. However, in the 1660s, being BLACK</p>

<p>TRANSITION TO SLAVERY</p> <p>Coincided with Rising Social Tensions</p> <p>Landowners v. Landless Settlers</p> <p>BACON'S REBELLION ↓ More Equitable Distribution of Power + Substitution of Slavery for Servitude</p> <p>THE TRAGEDY OF HUMAN BONDAGE</p>	<p>increasingly became a mark of INFERIOR LEGAL STATUS and slavery became a lifetime condition. A Virginia law of 1669 stated: “...if a slave resist his master... and by... coercion ... chance to die, ...his death shall not be accounted felony, ... since it cannot be presumed that ...malice...should induce any man to destroy his own estate.”</p> <p>Beginning in the 1670s, tobacco planters began a TRANSITION FROM SERVANT TO SLAVE LABOR that would lead to slavery’s full adoption and institutionalization in the South.</p> <p>The transition to slavery coincided with RISING SOCIAL TENSIONS within the colony. The tobacco growers’ varying degrees of success had created a hierarchical society in which wealth and status were unequal. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION led to POLITICAL POLARIZATION. After 1650, three developments accelerated that process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ TOBACCO PRICES DECLINED as production increased, making it more difficult for freed servants to save enough to become landowners. ■ As the mortality rate of freed servants decreased, the NUMBER OF FREEDMEN SEEKING LAND INCREASED. ■ The drop in mortality also contributed to A RISING PLANTER ELITE CLASS whose members were living longer, acquiring more land, and making more money. <p>By the 1670s, Virginia society had become divided between LANDOWNERS (the planter elite and small farmers) and LANDLESS SETTLERS (mostly freed servants).</p> <p>The tensions climaxed in 1676 with BACON’S REBELLION. The issue involved the seizure of Indian lands by the land-hungry poor in inland frontier regions. Under the leadership of Nathaniel Bacon, who was a member of the elite but outside the inner circle of planters, the western settlers waged war against Indian groups and then against the royal government. The rebellion persuaded planters and merchants to DISTRIBUTE POLITICAL POWER MORE EQUITABLY and TO SUBSTITUTE SLAVERY FOR INDENTURED SERVITUDE with its attendant social problems. By 1700, Virginia was changing from a system of predominantly white indentured servants to a system of African slave labor.</p> <p>This minimized the differences between common people and rich planters and magnified the differences between whites and blacks. Although there were still large economic differences among whites, the rights enjoyed by poorer white farmers made them feel that they too had a stake in the existence of slavery even if they could not afford to own slaves themselves.</p> <p>Virginia’s economic and political stability came at the expense of countless numbers of African slaves – those who were delivered alive to the shores of America and those who perished either in Africa during long slave journeys or on colonial slave ships. We can only begin to understand the tragedy of human bondage when we read Olaudah Equiano’s account of life on board a colonial slave ship. He was only eleven years old when he was captured in Benin, Africa, and taken by slave ship to Virginia. He writes:</p> <p><i>When I was carried on board I was immediately handled...to see if I were sound, by some of the crew.... I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life, so that with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything....but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables, and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across, I think, the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely....</i></p> <p><i>I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner.... One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, the he died in consequence of it;</i></p>
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<p>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</p>	<p><i>and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute. This made me fear these people the more; and I expected nothing less than to be treated in the same manner....</i></p> <p><i>The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place and the best of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us.... The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable....</i></p> <p><i>One day, when we had a smooth sea, and a moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen, who were chained together, preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the netting and jumped into the sea, immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example.... And there was such a noise and confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before, to stop her, and get the boat to go after the slaves. However, two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and afterwards flogged him unmercifully, for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery.</i></p> <p>URL: http://www.brycchancarey.com/equiano/index.htm</p> <p>Historians have observed that the English colonists who came to America experienced soaring expectations, frustration, disaster or near disaster, and then slow adjustment to the grinding realities of life on the wilderness edge of the North American continent. Trace this pattern as it occurred in the settlement of Virginia. How did the Virginia colonists compromise their values to insure their economic and political survival?</p> <p>Southerners before and after the Civil War often defended slavery (and later, segregation) as the basis of a "way of life" that they had led since the founding of the colonies. Is this true?</p> <p>There are several theories about why slavery become the South's dominant labor system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ One theory states that racism (European prejudice against darker-skinned peoples) was the main cause. ■ Another theory argues that the switch from white indentured servants to black slaves was primarily an economic move. ■ A third theory holds that the southern switch to slavery had political causes: white servants were becoming harder to attract and control while former servants were beginning to form a rebellious element in southern society. <p>Which theory makes the most sense to you? Why?</p>
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