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Building "the machine": The development of slavery and slave society in early colonial Virginia

John C. Coombs
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BUILDING "THE MACHINE":
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLAVERY AND SLAVE SOCIETY
IN EARLY COLONIAL VIRGINIA

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

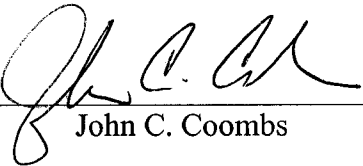
John C. Coombs

2003

APPROVAL SHEET


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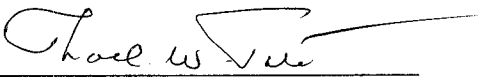


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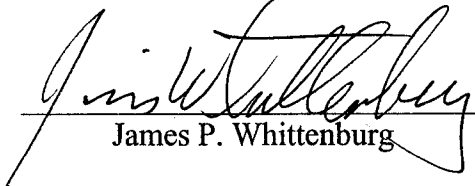
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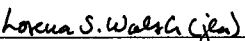
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For Kelly

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Preface

“I have my flocks and my herds, my bondsmen and bondswomen, and every soart of trade amongst my own servants,” William Byrd II wrote an English correspondent in 1726, “so that I live in a kind of independence of everyone, but Providence.” Byrd’s words conjure up images of an idyllic agrarian utopia. But he quickly admitted that “a great deal of trouble” also filled his days. The demands of growing tobacco for an ever-competitive market required a great deal of attention, and he constantly strove “to keep all my people to their duty, to set all the springs in motion, and to make every one draw his equal share to carry the machine forward.”¹

The slave-based plantation “machine” that Byrd referred to in this oft-quoted passage has attracted a great deal of interest over the past thirty years. The literature on slavery in the colonial Chesapeake has expanded accordingly, with scholars compiling abundant information on everything from importation rates and work routines to dietary practices and runaway patterns. However, a surprisingly small amount of this work has addressed developments in early Virginia. Historians have instead devoted their energies either to the better documented eighteenth century or to exploiting the more complete collection of seventeenth-century records available north of the Potomac in Maryland. As a result, apart from a limited number of essays and a few book-length studies on the growth of racism and free blacks on the Eastern Shore, the story of slavery’s initial growth in Virginia has remained a largely untold tale.

This dissertation attempts to help fill that gap by examining the course of events between 1630 and 1730. These were the critical decades when Virginia’s planters converted from using white servants as their primary source of bound labor to relying almost exclusively on African slaves. At the beginning of the period there were no more than a handful of blacks in the entire colony, while at its end in some counties six out of every ten colonists were of African descent. Historians have, of course, long been aware of this pivotal transformation and called attention to its importance. Some have even offered interpretations to explain why it occurred. But remarkably, a detailed analysis of how it happened does not exist, nor by extension have scholars ever fully considered the repercussions of what one might call the “process of conversion.”

In all fairness, the African presence in the colony was insubstantial throughout much of the seventeenth century. By the 1670s blacks still comprised only a small percentage of the total population. However, in Virginia’s case the aggregate figures are somewhat deceiving, for the slave population was heavily concentrated on the estates of a relatively small circle of wealthy planters. Members of the gentry invested in black labor more aggressively than their less financially fortunate competitors, and by the middle decades of the century some had acquired sizable quantities of slaves. Indeed, as early as the 1660s, when the typical Chesapeake planter still only employed servants, on many elite plantations blacks made up nearly half of the workforce, and in

¹ William Byrd to Charles Boyle, Earl of Orrery, 5 July 1726, in Marion Tinning, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia 1684-1776*, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, 1977), 1: 355.

some cases were numerous enough to comprise a considerable majority.

The gentry's early turn to slavery had, I argue, a profound effect on the development of the plantation "machine." From a socio-economic perspective, it was instrumental in facilitating the rise of Virginia's great families. As Bernard Bailyn has observed, the middle decades of the seventeenth century marked the arrival of such influential clans as the Lees, Carters, Byrds, and Fitzhughs. The founding members of these dynasties all landed in the colony with wealth and social status. But it was their remarkable success in building up their holdings in land and slaves that distanced them from their peers and that would prove decisive in securing the lasting predominance of their descendants. Although it certainly remained possible for some immigrants to obtain wealth and influence after 1700, no fewer than two-thirds of the one hundred richest men in post-revolutionary Virginia owed their privileged position to the achievements of a seventeenth-century ancestor.²

If the timing of the elite's move toward slavery played an essential role in fostering the emergence of a native-born plantocracy, the way in which it happened had a lasting effect on the cultural orientation of slave society. Before the turn of the eighteenth century, even the wealthiest planters were unable to undertake a rapid conversion to black labor. Their location on the margins of the transatlantic slave trade forced them to make the switch gradually, with the result that for decades elite-owned labor forces included a mix of white servants and black, mulatto, and in some areas Indian slaves. Usually integrated into existing plantation communities either singly or in groups of two or three, early African immigrants faced enormous pressure to acquire the language and conform to the behavioral norms of their white co-workers. While they did not entirely abandon their native customs in favor of the social mores of the dominant Anglo-American culture, the colony's creole slaves persistently exhibited a more anglicized appearance and manner of speech than their counterparts in other areas of the English plantation world.

It is the gentry's efforts to build enslaved labor forces and the resonant effects of those efforts, then, that is the principal subject of these pages. Chapter one examines the colony's plantation system as experienced by servants. Laborers from England and elsewhere in the British Isles were an integral part of the Chesapeake workforce throughout the seventeenth century, and immigrant slaves were invariably integrated into communities that, at least initially, consisted predominantly of non-black bondsmen. Consequently, although servitude and slavery were very different conditions, this brief overview of the challenges faced by white workers is intended to provide the reader with some understanding of the legal, social, and spatial environment that early blacks entered.

The colony's conversion to slavery, however, did not take place in a vacuum. The interconnectedness of the Atlantic world ensured that such disparate developments as European competition for preeminence on the African coast, the spread of sugar cultivation throughout the West Indies, and the mercantilist trade

² Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," in Stanley N. Katz, John M. Murrin, and Douglas Greenburg, eds., *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*, 4th. ed. (New York, 1993), 25-29; Jackson T. Main, "The One Hundred," *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *WMQ*), 3rd ser. 11 (1954): 354-84.

policies of the English government all had an impact on the ability of Virginians to procure enslaved workers. Chapter two attempts to convey some of this complexity by examining the wider context in which the shift to black labor unfolded and how events outside of the Chesapeake influenced both the timing and character of slavery's initial growth. Particular attention is also given to the structure of commercial exchange with the West Indies—an important source of slaves for Virginians throughout much of the period—and its role in concentrating blacks on the estates of affluent men. Chapter three continues this analysis by comparing the rate at which elites in different sub-regions of the colony moved toward slavery, a process that the wealthiest members of the gentry began in earnest during the 1640s and 1650s.

The next three chapters examine the lives of the slaves themselves. Chapter four discusses how the racially-mixed character of elite labor forces influenced the cultural decisions of immigrant Africans and to what extent slave-ownership patterns facilitated the establishment of stable, creole traditions in nascent slave communities. Chapter five traces the changing legal status of blacks, focusing on how the efforts of the colony's leading planters to hold their slaves in bondage and control them through various police measures produced laws that transformed inchoate racial prejudice against people of color into institutionalized racism. Chapter six addresses the racial isolation of blacks from a different perspective by exploring the evolution of plantation landscape and the spatial marginalization of slaves that resulted from the reorganization of gentry homes and homelots after mid-century.

The last chapter carries these various lines of inquiry into the eighteenth century and seeks to demonstrate how seventeenth-century developments continued to shape the mature plantation machine that emerged during Virginia's "golden age." It covers not only the ways in which second-generation elites reaped the benefits of their predecessors' early acquisition of slaves but also the long-term effects those investments had on the cultural orientation of slave society after direct shipments of Africans began arriving on a regular basis after the turn of the century. A final section addresses how racist policies propagated by the colonial government, which failed to gain broad popular support in the seventeenth century, acquired new life through the spread of slave ownership among ordinary planters and their concomitant fear of widespread servile rebellion.

Although a complete listing of sources is included in the bibliography, a brief explanation of the more specialized citations that appear in the footnotes seems in order. My analysis is based primarily on a systematic survey of court records for all Virginia counties established by 1700. Much of the information thus compiled was quantitative rather than qualitative, and was therefore consolidated into two series of database files, one for the seventeenth century and the other for the eighteenth. In each case, the principal dataset consists of an index of individuals who held the more important local and provincial offices such as Councilor, Burgess, Justice, Sheriff and Court Clerk, which for practical purposes I used to signify membership in the gentry.

These "master" lists were then used to identify officeholders within tithable, headright, and probate records that provide the greatest insight into estate-building activities. If a tax list, inventory, or land certificate or patent is mentioned specifically,

a precise citation is included in the footnotes. When referred to collectively, the citation given is for the appropriate dataset file. At times it was necessary to highlight the differences between the labor forces belonging to elite planters and more general trends, and for this purpose I relied upon probate files for Northampton, York, Northumberland, Lower Norfolk, and Lancaster counties compiled by the Historic St. Mary's City Commission and generously made available to me by Lois Green Carr, Lorena S. Walsh and Jean B. Russo.

My analysis of runaway slave advertisements placed in Virginia newspapers was also completed using primary data collected by others. For the years 1736-1777, I used the collection compiled by a group headed by Thomas Costa of the University of Virginia's College at Wise.³ The ongoing effort under Professor Costa's direction—which is part of the University of Virginia's Virtual Jamestown Project—will eventually make accessible via the internet every eighteenth-century newspaper advertisement mentioning slaves and servants from the Old Dominion. However, at present the collection is incomplete, so for the period 1778-1790 I relied on a less comprehensive collection published by Professor Lathan A. Windley.⁴ I then combined the data gleaned from these two sources into a single file that is cited in the notes as the Runaway Slave Advertisement Database. Again, when an individual advertisement is mentioned in the text it is given a precise footnote citation.

³ Thomas Costa, comp, "Virginia Runaways: Runaway Slave Advertisements from 18th-Century Virginia Newspapers," University of Virginia's College at Wise, <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/explore.html>.

⁴ Lathan A. Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, 4 vols. (Westport, CT, 1983).

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ABSTRACT

The timing and nature of Virginia's move toward black labor had a profound influence on the formation of slave society in the colony. The Chesapeake's marginalization within the transatlantic slave trade following the West Indian sugar revolution, passage of the Navigation Acts, and the establishment of Restoration slave-trading monopolies slowed the rate of slavery's growth in Virginia and concentrated blacks on the estates of wealthy men. As early as the 1660s, when white servants still heavily outnumbered non-white bondsmen in the colony's bound population, on most elite plantations the latter made up nearly half of the workforce, and in some cases were numerous enough to comprise a considerable majority.

The gentry's early turn to black labor was instrumental in facilitating the rise of Old Dominion's great families. The middle decades of the seventeenth century marked the arrival of such influential clans as the Lees, Carters, Ludwells, and Fitzhughs. The founding members of these dynasties all landed in Virginia with wealth and social status. But it was their remarkable success in building up their holdings in land and slaves that distanced them from their peers and that would prove decisive in securing the lasting predominance of their descendants.

Yet because even most affluent tobacco planters were unable to fully convert to slavery before the turn of the eighteenth century, for decades elite-owned labor forces were truly "Atlantic" in character and included a diverse, interracial mix of white servants and black, mulatto, and in some areas Indian slaves. Early African immigrants consequently faced enormous pressure to acquire the language and conform to the behavioral norms of the dominant Anglo-American society. On the compact homelots of the early Chesapeake, they had little choice but to accept the clothing, food, and housing provided by their masters and adapt as best they could to existing work routines. Unless they wished to remain socially isolated, they also had to learn English and endeavor to gain the acceptance or at least the tolerance of their white and native co-workers. These constraints lent an assimilationist bent to the cultural compromises that immigrant slaves ultimately reached with each other, and as the founding generations relinquished community leadership to their native-born children and grandchildren, slave society in Virginia acquired a thoroughly anglicized veneer.

Although this existing creole population was quickly overwhelmed by the massive influx of Africans that poured into Virginia during the early decades of the eighteenth century, runaway slave advertisements suggest that the cultural decisions of the first black immigrants continued to exert a lasting influence over African-American society. Despite the fact that many slaves lived out their lives spatially and socially segregated from whites, the advertisements suggest a steady improvement over time in the quality of English spoken by blacks and show that African practices such as ritual scarification did not take permanent root. Slave communities certainly underwent a period of "Africanization" between 1700 and 1750. But by the time of the American Revolution the anglicized veneer established in the seventeenth century was clearly reemerging.

**BUILDING "THE MACHINE": THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLAVERY AND
SLAVE SOCIETY IN EARLY COLONIAL VIRGINIA**

Chapter One

Servants: The Original Mudsills

By the second quarter of the seventeenth century, Virginians had, if little else, at least managed to overcome the various trials which had threatened to destroy their colony in its infancy. Endemic New World diseases such as malaria took a heavy toll on the earliest settlers and combined with starvation to push them to the brink of abandoning their venture before it could really begin. “There remained not past sixtie men, women, and children,” one survivor wrote of the disastrous winter of 1609/1610, “most miserable and poore creatures; and those were preserved for the most part, by roots, herbes, acornes, walnuts, berries...yea even the very skinnes of our horses.” This already tenuous situation had only been exacerbated by a long series of violent exchanges with the local Indians, culminating in a 1622 surprise attack that claimed the lives of over one-third of the colony’s inhabitants. Despite the migration of roughly six thousand people, a muster compiled in 1625 still included only around a thousand names, bearing grim testimony to exactly how bad times had been.¹

Although mortality rates remained high and conflict with neighboring Indians persistent, Virginia’s prospects slowly began to improve, principally because waves of new immigrants continued to be attracted to the colony by its new-found

¹ John Smith, *The Travels and Works of Captain John Smith, President of Virginia and Admiral of New England, 1580-1631*, ed. Edward Arber and A. G. Bradley, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1910), 2: 498; Carville V. Earle, “Environment, Disease, and Mortality in Early Virginia,” in Thad W. Tate and David Ammerman, eds., *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society* (New York, 1979), 96-120; Irene W. D. Hecht, “The Virginia Muster of 1624/25: A Source for Demographic History,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 30 (1973): 65-92. The figure given for the number of immigrants that arrived in Virginia between 1607 and 1625 is taken from Wesley Frank Craven, *White, Red, and Black: The Seventeenth-Century Virginian* (Charlottesville, VA, 1971), 3. For an account of the 1622 Indian attack, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 98-99.

font of prosperity: tobacco. The sot-weed had been planted by the Indians for centuries and by the Spanish in the Caribbean basin since the mid-sixteenth century. Yet it was only after 1614, when John Rolfe developed a strain that could be both cultivated locally and still appeal to European tastes, that growing tobacco became commercially viable for Virginians. Smoking had by this time already become a popular activity among the wealthier classes of the Old World, and consequently, as planters became more adept at tending and curing the leaf, the 1620s turned into boom years, with the best variety fetching prices as high as three shillings a pound.²

The rows of tobacco planted in the streets of Jamestown that so epitomized this initial scramble for big profits were only a harbinger of the central role the crop would play in Virginia's development. The weed's rapid consumption of soil nutrients compelled the colony's inhabitants to spread themselves across the landscape in a thin line of clustered habitations hugging the shoreline of the Chesapeake Bay and its complement of creeks and rivers. Their plantations—a term that when used to describe a farm denoted its commercial character—were in most cases little more than a motley collection of stump-ridden fields surrounding a ramshackle dwelling built by sinking large posts in the ground and framing the house off the resulting “foundation.” This rough and ready approach to settlement was by no means aesthetically pleasing to look at, but it did allow planters to devote maximum resources to cultivating the staple, which, after all, was the whole point of

² Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, and Thad W. Tate, *Colonial Virginia: A History* (White Plains, NY, 1986), 39–41; Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492–1700*, vol. 3 of *Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion*, ed. Boyd C. Shafer (Minneapolis, MN, 1984), 222; Edmund S. Morgan, “The First American Boom, Virginia 1618 to 1630,” in *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 28 (1971): 169–98.

setting up a plantation to begin with.³

Growing tobacco shaped the lives of virtually all seventeenth-century Virginians. Yet the estates of the colony's elite—those men who served in the more important county-level offices such justice and sheriff or held seats in the House of Burgesses and Council of State—were in some respects entirely different places from the hardscrabble operations of their less financially fortunate neighbors. For one thing, they were much larger, and instead of consisting of tens of acres their size could range into the hundreds or even thousands, though only a fraction of land was under cultivation at any given time. However, it was the number of hands employed in the fields of large plantations rather than their size that truly set them apart. Laborers were hard to come by in land rich but population poor Virginia, and few men could afford more than one or two. According to a Lancaster County list taken in 1653, for example, only nine of eighty-two householders had ten or more tithables (individuals who were legally identified as performing taxable labor). Eighty percent of the remainder had four or less.⁴

Moreover, a small planter's tithables often consisted solely of family members, while the gentry relied primarily on the labor of poor white immigrants who in order to pay for their transportation across the Atlantic became servants for a period of years. These were mostly young, lower-class men and women, the same sort who in England traditionally spent their adolescence and early adulthood either bound as

³ For an analysis of settlement patterns, see James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill, 1994), ch. 4; Kevin P. Kelly, " 'In dispers'd Country Plantations': Settlement Patterns in Seventeenth-Century Surry County, Virginia," in Tate and Ammerman, eds., *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century*, 183-205. The dominance of earthfast construction in the colonial Chesapeake is clearly established in Cary Carson, et al., "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," *Winterthur Portfolio* 16 (1981): 135-96.

⁴ Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1657), 90-94.

apprentices or as farmhands and domestics employed by contract for wages. Yet servitude in Virginia differed considerably from contemporary practice in the mother country. Saddled with the additional cost of having to import their labor, the colony's elite planters developed ways of holding servants in bondage longer and driving them harder than what would have been permissible under existing English law and custom.⁵ In the process, they created a labor system that, by establishing lasting precedents for the institutional debasement and exploitation of workers, would deeply influence the later development of slavery.

Though often lumped together under the catch-all title "indentured servants," bound white laborers actually fell into a number of different categories. Some like George Hancocke actually had an indenture, which was essentially a formal contract that spelled out the details of an individual's term of service. In Hancocke's case, he agreed to serve Lancaster planter Thomas Gayner for four years in any capacity "the sd. Thomas or his assigns shall there employ him." In return Gayner pledged to pay for Hancocke's passage, provide him with food and lodging, and upon completion of his time give him "one ax hoe, one years provisions, double apparell, [and] fifty acres of land." Hancocke effectively consented to do whatever work Gayner required. But other indentured servants, such as Henry Harman who lived on the nearby plantation of Colonel John Carter, insisted they be excused from certain kinds of tasks. Standing before the Lancaster court in 1659, Harman acknowledged that he was to serve five years, "Coll. Carter haveinge exported hym that hee shall not worke in the grounde at

⁵ For a thorough analysis of immigrant backgrounds and the differences between servitude in England and Virginia, see Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 30-48, 256-64, 266-76.

any hard labour with howe or axe or the like.”⁶

Many immigrant servants, however, found themselves in the same situation as Sarah Hill and Elizabeth True, who upon being respectively adjudged twelve and thirteen years old by the Northumberland court in 1663, were ordered to serve their new master Richard Span “from the time of their arrivall accordinge to law in that case made & provided.” The law referred to in this instance established what was commonly known as the “custom of the country,” or the statutory terms of service applicable when a servant lacked a written agreement. For Hill and True this meant a dozen years or so before they would again see freedom, since the Virginia Assembly had earlier decided that “all servants hereafter comeing in without indentures” should be bound for five years if older than sixteen and if younger until they reached the age of twenty four. The type of work performed by laborers serving “according to custom” was left solely to their master’s discretion, but the courts regulated their additional compensation or “freedom dues,” which for John Hatley of Charles City amounted to three barrels of corn and “double clothing from head to foot, one being a new cloth suite.”⁷

A much smaller third group, often called hired servants, was made up of previously free inhabitants such as Francis Millesent of Northampton, who in 1634

⁶ Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 2 (1654-1702), 235-36; Orders, Etc. (1655-1666), 82. For a concise explanation of indentures, see Warren M. Billings, “The Law of Servants and Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter cited as *VMHB*) 99 (1991): 46-47.

⁷ Northumberland County, Orders (1652-1665), 342; William Waller Henning, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia...*, 13 vols. (Richmond, Philadelphia, and New York, 1809-23), 2:113-114; Charles City County, Deeds, Wills, Orders, Etc. (1655-1665), 81. The evolving legal standing of unindentured servants is covered in Billings, “The Law of Servants and Slaves,” 48-49.

agreed to serve Phillip Chapman for “tow yeares his tyme” if Chapman would pay “500 lbs. of tobacco, foure seutes of apparell, and one breeding sow, and to cleare him of all publique charges and also six barrells of corne.” Although the arrangements of hired and indentured servants were similar, the former apparently enjoyed a distinct legal status. The only laws that mentioned them specifically were merely intended to ensure they fulfilled their contracts, and the colony’s courts continued to treat them more or less as free persons, sometimes to the considerable consternation of their masters. When Thomas Reeve demanded that two employees who had beaten him be disciplined, for instance, the justices of Charles City declined to act on the matter until they could determine “whether or not a hired servant shall be equally punishable as an indentured servant if he strikes his master.” In a similar case, the Accomack court refused to correct a “covenant servant” named Lancelot Jacques for slapping his mistress across the face and flinging her “violently against the chest and bedstead,” ruling instead that the law cited against Jacques did not apply to him.⁸

Finally, there were the children of resident colonists, many of them orphans, who were “bound out” for the duration of their minority. While indentured immigrants usually drew up their agreements with an agent before coming to the colony and seldom knew anything about whom they would be serving ahead of time, bound minors often benefited from growing up in the local community and having either a relative or guardian available to negotiate their terms of service in person. Much as Margrit Johnson of Middlesex did for her daughter Annie, who with “the

⁸ Northampton County, Orders, Wills, Deeds no. 1 (1632-1640), 36; Henning, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 2: 115; Charles City County, Orders (1687-1695), 162; Accomack County, Wills, Etc. (1682-1697), 81.

consent and desire of her mother” was apprenticed to Erasmus Wethers until she came of age or married, though with the stipulation that she neither “worke in ye grounde, nor beate at ye mortar.” Having family or friends nearby who were concerned about one’s welfare could also come in handy if a master reneged on his promises or proved cruel. It certainly did for Thomas Powell of Elizabeth City when his master began repeatedly abusing him, including “tying him up and whipping of him most inhumanely.” Undoubtedly to Powell’s relief, his mother brought his plight to the attention of the county court, which subsequently ordered that he remain “at liberty” until he could be apprenticed to a trade with someone else.⁹

Regardless of their specific situations, all bound workers were subject to several restrictions on their freedom. Citing the “great injury” arising from servants being induced to “purloin and imbeazill” their masters’ goods, a 1639 measure prohibited them from engaging in trade, effectively curtailing what little economic independence they might have previously enjoyed. The following year a provision forbidding servants to marry without their master’s permission was also added to the books, while a 1663 act rescinded their freedom of movement by enjoining masters to take “especiall care” that their laborers “not depart from their houses on Sundayes or any other dayes without perticuler lycence from them.” Since a master could also sell his servant to someone else if he so desired, this incremental abrogation of rights had by mid-century extended what was essentially interest in a servant’s labor into de facto ownership of his person. Virginia law continued to recognize servants as English subjects and to view their condition as temporary. But from a practical standpoint they

⁹ Middlesex County, Orders no. 1 (1673-1680), f. 84; Elizabeth City County, Deeds, Wills, Etc. (1689-1699), 36, 50.

were increasingly reduced to a species of “chattels personal,” much as if they were cattle, clothing, or plate.¹⁰

As in any instance where one individual sought to illegally deprive another of his property, servants who willfully disobeyed their masters were subject to prosecution as criminals. In the 1640s and 1650s, runaways had their hair cut “close above their ears” and twice the time they were gone tacked on at the end of their terms. Recalcitrant offenders were also to be “branded in the cheek with the letter ‘R’ and passe under the statute of incorrigible rogues.” Secret marriages, illicit sexual intercourse, and bastardy were also punishable by the addition of time, along with a fine of 1500 lbs. tobacco (or public whipping if the guilty party was unable to make payment) prescribed by law for any inhabitant convicted of fornication. Forceful resistance carried the similarly harsh sentence of two extra years for any “stubborn and incorrigible” servant—hired workers seemingly excepted—that dared “lay violent hands” on their master, mistress, or overseer.¹¹

In contrast to the array of statutes aimed at controlling servant behavior, there was a decided lack of legislative effort to ensure their well-being. Even a 1662 measure that explicitly condemned the “barbarous usage” of laborers was rather vague in addressing how they should be properly treated, stating only that they were entitled to “competent dyett, clothing and lodging,” and that masters should not “exceed the bounds of moderation in correcting them beyond the meritt of their offences.” At no

¹⁰ Henning, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 1:252-3, 274; 2:195; Billings, “Law of Servants and Slaves,” 51.

¹¹ Henning, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 1:252-5, 438-9, 517-18, 538. The colonial assembly revised the laws governing servant misconduct several times during the second half of the century, but the various offenses covered by statute remained fairly constant and most of the changes adopted were alterations in the penalty assigned a particular violation.

point during the seventeenth century did the Virginia assembly move to adopt clear standards of conduct to which masters could be held accountable, instead leaving it to servants to register a complaint with local commissioners if they encountered “harsh or bad usage, or else for want of dyett or convenient necessaries.”¹²

Indentures, contracts, and statutes established a servant’s institutional status and placed them under legal restraint, but the day-to-day experience of servitude was shaped more directly by individual masters, who determined how hard their laborers worked, the material condition in which they were kept, and their manner of discipline. The comments of noted traveler Richard Ligon, though directed toward Barbados, accurately described the contemporary situation in Virginia as well. “As for the usage of the servants,” Ligon observed, “it is much as the master is, merciful or cruel; those that are merciful, treat their servants well, both in their meat, drink, and lodging, and give them such work, as is not unfit for Christians to do. But if the masters be cruel, the servants have very wearisome and miserable lives.”¹³

Miserable or not, the life of a servant was one of constant labor, though some seasons of the year were more consistently busy than others. Males generally followed a seasonal pattern of husbandry organized around the growing cycles for tobacco and corn. When weather permitted during the winter months, they cleared new fields, built fences, cut firewood, and prepared, planted, and tended seedbeds containing the coming year’s tobacco crop. The pace of activity picked up considerably in the spring, the time for making and planting corn hills and moving

¹² *Ibid.*, 1: 255, 440; 2:53, 117-18, 129.

¹³ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados...*, 2d ed. (London, 1673; reprint, 1970), 44.

newly sprouted tobacco seedlings to their permanent beds. Planted fields were then assiduously kept clear of weeds throughout the hot and humid summer, and the tobacco topped, de-suckered, and continuously checked for worms. From mid-October through December, all hands were deeply engaged in the delicate process of cutting, curing, and packing the leaf into hogsheads for shipment, during which time they also put harvested corn into storage and slaughtered livestock.¹⁴

Female work routines varied less from season to season, since most women performed “domestique employments and hous-wifery” rather than agricultural labor. Though less physically demanding than work in the fields, completing the mundane round of chores necessary to keep a household running smoothly was far from easy. Food preparation alone consumed much of every day. With no mills to speak of in the colony, corn kernels were soaked in water and then pounded or ground into meal by hand, with roughly an hour needed to produce one adult’s daily ration. Dairying required that all equipment be first scalded or boiled in water to remove any residue, the cows milked, and the proceeds poured into a tub to cool before being strained and skimmed for drinking. Additional time was needed to turn leftover milk into cheese and butter, which by itself could take several hours of churning in colder weather. Aside from otherwise preparing and cooking meals, servant women were usually also responsible for tending gardens and orchards, washing and mending clothes, sweeping out living quarters, and looking after their master’s children.¹⁵

Just as a servant’s work regimen was more or less the same whether he lived

¹⁴ Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena S. Walsh, *Robert Cole’s World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 55-71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71-5.

on a large plantation or a small one, his master's prosperity did little to improve the material aspects of his day-to-day life. Those who belonged to wealthy members of the elite generally endured the same meager existence in terms of housing, clothing, and diet as those who worked for men of more modest circumstances. Throughout the first sixty years or so of the seventeenth century, Virginia's bondsmen were, as in England, usually accommodated within their master's dwelling. Poor and middling planters had little choice in the matter, for they seldom owned more than a simple post-in-ground house with just one or two rooms. But gentry homes of the period were also modest in size, construction, and plan. Most only measured around twenty-by-forty feet, were framed rather than brick, and consisted mainly of a central core divided into two rooms. The first room, called the hall or kitchen, was a multi-purpose space containing a large fireplace, while the second, the parlor or chamber, was often more private and reserved for the use of the master and his family. Unlike their less affluent neighbors, however, the well-to-do were able to supplement the space available within this central core. Laying a ceiling of boards over ground floor rooms to create a loft or chambers above was one way of accomplishing this end, though most men opted to append extra rooms and sheds to the body of the main structure or to move activities such as cooking and washing into detached outbuildings called dependencies.¹⁶

The simplest elite homes were like that of Lieutenant-Colonel Toby Smith, a Rappahannock County justice who in earlier years had served as a burgess for

¹⁶ Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 259, 331-32; Gloria Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650-1720* (Princeton, 1982), 152-3, 221-23; Fraser Neiman, "Temporal Patterning in House Plans from the 17th-Century Chesapeake," in Theodore R. Reinhart and Denis J. Pogue, eds., *The Archaeology of 17th-Century Virginia* (Richmond, 1993), 251-75.

Warwick and Nansemond counties and as a member of the Lancaster bench. Smith owned five servants and over 3,500 acres of land at his death in 1658. But according to a probate inventory taken of his estate, he lived in a small dwelling that was probably indistinguishable from the surrounding earthfast structures his less prosperous neighbors. His house had just two rooms, both of which were multiple-use areas. The sole fireplace was located in what the appraisers called the kitchen, along with dishes and cooking equipment, four guns, clothing, and the plantation's "working tools." The second room functioned as a hall/chamber, and contained table linen, a sword, several butter pots, a churn, and the only bedding and bedstead listed. His servants apparently either slept on the floor or in whatever space they could find.¹⁷

The York County home of Captain Stephen Gill, who also served as a justice and member of the assembly, was larger, better appointed, and more spatially diversified than Smith's. His 1653 inventory lists a hall, a shed, inner and outer chambers, and a loft that were all clearly part of the house proper, as well as a kitchen and milkhouse that were possibly detached. Both chambers appear to have been used primarily for sleeping by Gill's family and his seven servants, for aside from a desk in the heated outer chamber, bedsteads and hammocks are the only furniture listed in either room. The shed, loft, kitchen, and milkhouse also served distinct purposes, with the first two providing space for the storage of food and dry goods, and the latter two

¹⁷ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; Nell M. Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants*, 3 vols. (Richmond, 1977-92), 1: 239, 273, 304, 348; (Old) Rappahannock County, Records (1656-1664), 66-7. Smith was listed as having seven tithables in 1655, suggesting that the number of laborers listed in his inventory was fairly accurate. See Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1657), 239.

for the preparation of meals. The hall, by contrast, was a general-use area. In addition to containing a bedstead, a hammock, and two couches with flock beds, it also had fireplace equipment, a dining and side table, chairs, stools, cushions, and a livery cupboard “with glasses and earthenware upon it.”¹⁸

The best houses were similar to Major Peter Walker’s, a burgess and justice from Northampton County who died in 1655. According to his inventory, Walker’s family and eight laborers lived in a one-and-a-half story dwelling that had two upstairs chambers, each with its own hearth. A bedstead, two chests, a wainscoted cupboard, and a looking glass were located in the chamber above the hall, and in the chamber over the parlor there were another two bedsteads and a chest, clearly indicating that this second floor was employed chiefly as sleeping quarters. Of the ground-floor rooms, the study was likely reserved by Walker as a private space, as was the parlor which contained a round table, a settle bed (a long seat that converted for sleeping), three Dutch chairs, fireplace tools, and a collection of pewter and plate. The presence of a table, eight chairs, two benches, fireplace tools, a cupboard, and a settle bed in the hall suggest it was used mainly for dining and entertaining, while cooking took place in a kitchen that was probably a dependency.¹⁹

One of the most striking characteristics of Virginia’s elite architecture in this period was its homogeneity. The Warwick County home of Captain Thomas Barnard, for example, consisted of a finished upstairs chamber, three ground floor rooms, and a milkhouse when he died in 1651, whereas a contemporary of his, Lieutenant Colonel

¹⁸ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no.1 (1633-1694), 143-47.

¹⁹ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 5 (1654-56), ff. 109-11.

Cornelius Lloyd of Lower Norfolk, had a single-story, two-room dwelling with a milkhouse and lofted kitchen despite having an estate worth over four times more.²⁰ In an era that demanded substantial investments in land and labor to sustain financial success, even the wealthiest men were invariably conservative, and sometimes downright stingy, when allocating resources for building their homes.

This tendency to privilege utility and cost over comfort and aesthetics had a profound effect on the domestic environment of early large plantations, particularly the spatial separation of masters and servants. For men like Smith and Gill who lived cheek-by-jowl with their laborers, the degree of separation was minimal to nonexistent, while in houses such as Peter Walker's it was somewhat greater. Segregated living arrangements, however, were more likely the exception than the rule. Of the twelve pre-1660 room-by-room inventories that survive for the colony's county and provincial officeholders, none list more than seven total spaces, and the average is slightly under five. Finished upstairs chambers appear in just four of the inventories, and only two contain evidence of servants being quartered outside of the principal dwelling. Most elites probably tolerated conditions similar to what existed in the home of Northampton planter Sampson Robins, where a visitor awoke one morning to find "foure Indyans asleep in the chimney corner" of the hall, men sleeping on beds in two small adjoining chambers, and Robins's wife ensconced in the main "lodgeinge roome."²¹

In a house full of people, even one divided into separate spaces, occupants

²⁰ Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 152; Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century; Warwick County, Order Fragments (1648-1651), 21; Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds C (1651-1656), f. 168-9.

²¹ Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1645-1651), f. 148.

were constantly within sight or sound of one another. John Browne of Accomack watched his mistress give birth to a stillborn baby by looking up through the widely spaced boards of a loft. Northampton servant Susanna Kennett, prompted by noise coming from behind a door, climbed onto a hogshhead and peered over a partition wall to find Mary West, her master's wife, having an adulterous tryst with Richard Jones. Unable to stop herself from laughing aloud and fearing she might be caught, Kennett moved to another room with fellow voyeur John Tully, and after adjusting a loose board the two were able to see West "with her coates upp above her middle and Richard Jones with his breeches downe lying upon her."²²

The limitations on privacy that clearly accompanied cohabitant servants prompted some wealthier men to accommodate their workers elsewhere. As one might expect, most of these men were high-level officeholders such as Argoll Yardley of Northampton and Thomas Swann of Surry, both of whom served as members of the Council of State. A milkhouse listed in Yardley's 1655 inventory contained three bedsteads undoubtedly used by his laborers. In 1656, Swann paid over 2,200 lbs. of tobacco for the construction of several outbuildings on his home plantation, including a quartering house of "twentye five or thirtie ffoote long." But there were also planters of more modest circumstances such as Lower Norfolk vestryman John Yates, whose 1648 inventory included a quartering house and a workhouse even though his estate was appraised at roughly 20,000 lbs. of tobacco, which was less than half the value of Yardley's and just one sixth of Cornelius Lloyd's.²³

²² Accomack County, (Deeds), Orders, Wills (1671-73), 8; Northampton County, Orders, Deeds, Wills, no. 2 (1640-1645), f. 157.

²³ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 5 (1654-56), ff. 117-19; Surry County, Wills, Deeds, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1671), 96; Lower Norfolk County, Wills and

The effect that separate housing arrangements could have on the spatial proximity of masters and servants is perhaps best illustrated by the James City County plantation of Richard Kemp, a member of the Council and Secretary of the Colony. Seven years of excavation on his plantation, called Rich Neck, uncovered a one-acre enclosed domestic complex dating to the 1640s, with a brick dwelling house and kitchen, fence lines, two trash middens, and thousands of artifacts (**Figure 1.1**). Apart

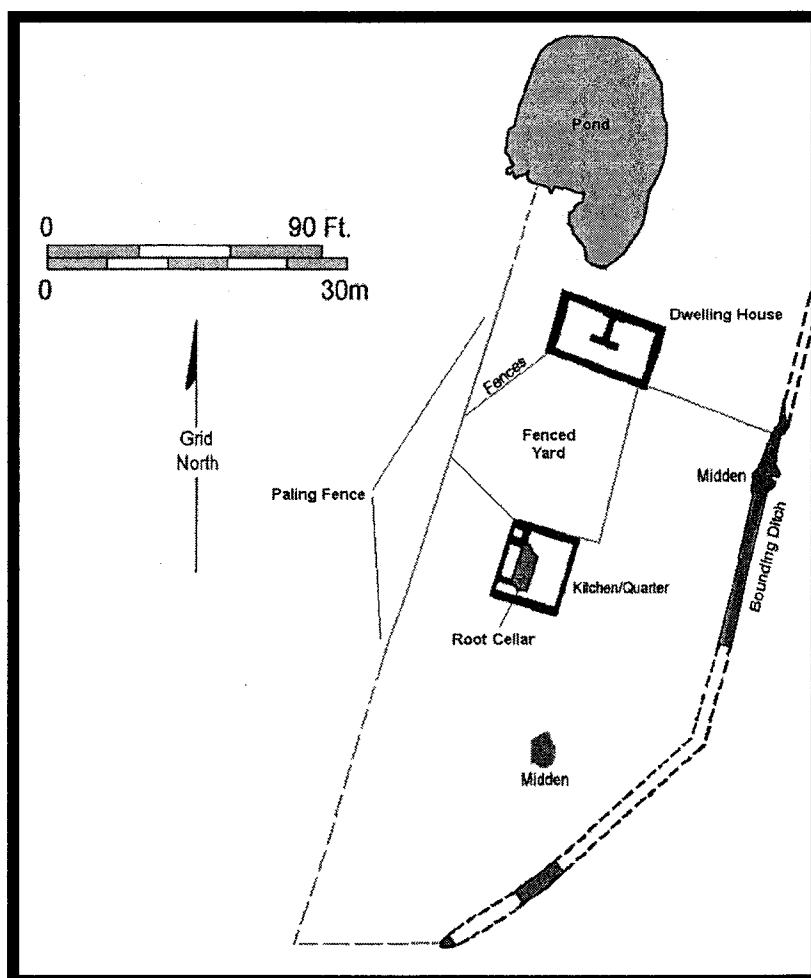


Figure 1.1. Rich Neck Plantation Homelot, ca. 1645

from their masonry construction, which was rare in the first half of the century, the two buildings were quite typical of the period in which they were built. The 35-by-20-

Deeds B (1646-1651), 94-5.

foot dwelling house stood one-and-a-half or two stories high, and had an H-shaped central fireplace that gave it a simple hall-and-parlor plan likely replicated on the second floor. The kitchen, measuring 20 by 24 feet, contained a large fireplace, baking oven, and root cellar for storing food and other items.²⁴

Kemp's estate was not appraised when he died in 1650, but the remains of his homelot provide several clues as to how space was divided on his plantation. First, there is the layout of the main dwelling, which had a lobby entry formed by one side of the fireplace and doors leading into each of the ground floor rooms (**Figure 1.2**). This indirect mode of access suggests that the house did not serve as workspace, since such an arrangement would have rendered the bulk processing of tobacco, corn, and

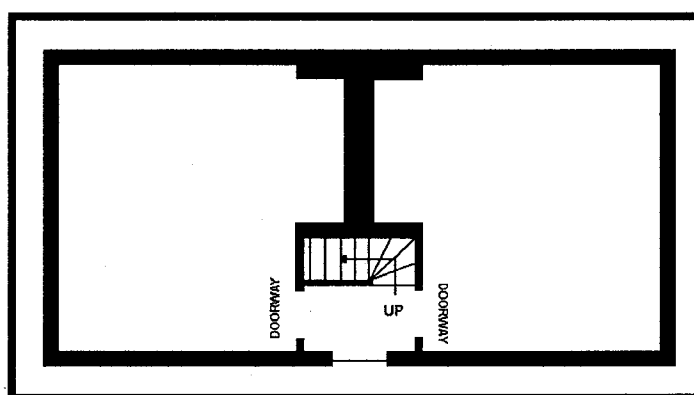


Figure 1.2. Possible Interior Plan of Rich Neck's Dwelling House, ca. 1645.

other products highly impractical. It is also unlikely that servants slept in the dwelling house or took their meals there. The size of the kitchen, which had a massive eighteen-inch-wide foundation typical of two-story buildings, would have allowed it to be used as quartering space as well as a cooking area, giving most laborers little

²⁴ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; David Muraca, Phillip A. Levy, and Leslie McFaden, *The Archaeology of Rich Neck Plantation(44WB2): Description of the Features* (Williamsburg, VA, 2001), 17-33. Artifact assemblages suggest occupation of the site and construction of the buildings began around 1642.

reason to regularly visit the principal dwelling. On the other hand, there is no evidence of any buildings or domestic activity beyond the outer perimeter formed by the paling fence and man-made ditch, ensuring that even though living arrangements at Rich Neck were probably segregated, the spatial worlds of Kemp and his workers remained connected.²⁵

Although class distinctions were perhaps most evident on estates where masters housed their laborers in detached quarters, on plantations where they shared space the colony's social hierarchy was still clearly manifested. According to a maid on the Eastern Shore, "competent dyett" for a servant meant an endless round of boiled hominy, cornbread, and water, with milk, cheese, broth, and vegetables added when they were available. The only break in this culinary monotony occurred when fresh pork and beef were occasionally included in rations after the slaughter of livestock in fall. But at other times of year preserved meats were often reserved solely for the use of the master and his family, and so kept under lock and key along with whatever alcohol was on hand. Archaeological excavations on the plantation of William Drummond, a commissioner and sheriff of James City County, suggest that even when servants were given meat, it was generally of lower quality. A well located next to Drummond's dwelling house produced the faunal remains of pork, mutton, venison, and high-quality cuts of beef, while a well found near an outbuilding inhabited by his laborers contained the remnants of less desirable beef and pork cuts, as well as some smaller wild animals such as opossums.²⁶

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-22, 26-30.

²⁶ Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, Orders (1678-1682), 81; Joseph Douglas Deal III, *Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans on the Eastern Shore in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1993), 107-09; Henry M. Miller, "An Archaeological Perspective on the

The clothing issued to servants was equally utilitarian. Writing in 1649, pamphlet author William Bullock—who claimed he had spent over twelve years as a planter in Virginia—listed the ideal allotment for a male laborer as costing just over £2½ sterling: it consisted of two suits (one made of canvas, the other of slightly better cloth), a woolen waistcoat and drawers, three shirts, two pairs of stockings, two pairs of shoes, a Monmouth cap, and three neckerchiefs. Among the items listed in the 1662 inventory of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Ludlowe of York were “fourteen servants shutes [suits] of course cloth” and three “servants shirts of course lockram” valued at 1000 lbs. of tobacco, which at the time was roughly equal to £12 ½ sterling. Although durable and functional, the workaday appearance of such garb rendered its wearer’s plebian status readily apparent to all he encountered. This point was not lost on one Northampton laborer, who when laying out a theoretical escape plan made it clear that he would attempt to run away only after having obtained the “good clothes” and other accoutrements necessary to pass himself off as a free man.²⁷

On larger estates, a servant’s austere existence sharply contrasted with the leisure and privileges enjoyed by what one traveler later described as the “well dressed ladies” and booted, sword-bearing gentlemen “of quality.” The wealthy could eschew manual labor, impress their neighbors with sartorial finery, and afford regular access to a variety of fresh and preserved meats, wheat bread, and rum or imported wines to quench their thirst. Planters of middling circumstances, however, often toiled beside their workers in the fields, shared their bland diet, and wore relatively plain

Evolution of Diet in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1620-1745,” in Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 189-90.

²⁷ William Bullock, *Virginia Impartially Examined...* (London, 1649), 36; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills 3 (1657-1662), 108; Northampton County, Order Book no. 11 (1678-1683), 52.

clothing. Poorer freeholders invariably endured routine drudgery and material hardship as they struggled to make ends meet and get ahead. Consequently, on small plantations and farms, servants were distinguishable more for their dependency and subordinate status than either the tasks they performed or their standard of living.²⁸

Yet whether they belonged to an affluent planter or one who barely scraped by from year to year, servants were vulnerable to exploitation, neglect, and physical abuse not faced by freemen. Men and women serving by indenture and custom were in a particularly weak position because they lacked the legal standing of hired workers and social connections of bound minors, which afforded those groups at least some measure of additional protection. Having special rights or access to an advocate who would intercede on one's behalf could be important, sometimes vital, advantages, considering the wide latitude given masters to treat their workers as they saw fit.

Hoping to counter Virginia's growing reputation as a "place of intolerable labour, bad usage and hard diet," former resident John Hammond promised prospective immigrants in 1656 that the work "servants are put to is not so hard nor of such continuance as husbandmen nor handicraftmen are kept at in England." But after landing in the colony, new arrivals soon found that their masters could potentially push them to exhaustion, especially those bound to demanding men like John Merryman of Lancaster, who in 1661 was ordered by the county court to refrain from keeping his servants at "any kind of labour after day light shutt in." What

²⁸ Gilbert Chinard, ed., *A Huguenot Exile in Virginia: Or Voyages of a Frenchman exiled for his Religion with a description of Virginia and Maryland* (New York, 1934), 110, 138, 148; Lorena S. Walsh, "Servitude and Opportunity in Charles County, Maryland, 1658-1705," in Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr, and Edward C. Papenfuse, eds., *Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 119-21; Lois Green Carr and Russell R. Mernard, "Immigration and Opportunity," in Tate and Ammerman, eds., *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century*, 228-29.

percentage of planters similarly overworked their laborers is unknown, but the practice was common enough to prompt Charles City clergyman Paul Williams to publicly condemn “tyrannical” masters who treated their servants as “galley-slaves, compelling them unmercifully beyond their strength.”²⁹

While even the poorest planters could at least feed their families and provide them with clothing that offered some protection from the elements, some masters deprived their servants of such necessities. The laborers on Thomas Cock’s plantation in Charles City, for example, complained that their mistress supplied them with food that was “fitter to be given to horses than to Christians.” Several Accomack workers were reportedly fed nothing but hominy, salt water, and rotten meat for months on end, forcing them to seek the “charity of neighbors” or face starvation. Anne Dupper, another Accomack servant, eventually died after she was left “in a naked condition a great while,” and compelled to go about her chores barefoot and barelegged in the snow with only a buckskin wrapped around her waist, “a sorry waistcoat full of holes on her back and an old piece of hat on her head.”³⁰

Servants’ vulnerability was perhaps most poignantly highlighted by their exposure to non-judicial or “casual” punishment by their masters, mistresses, or overseers. Normally, correction of this sort was probably comparable to the three or four blows Major Samuel Goldsmyth of Northampton gave his bondsman “on ye arse with a small rod,” but at times it far exceeded the “bounds of moderation” prescribed

²⁹ John Hammond, “Leah and Rachel, or, the Two Fruitfull Sisters Virginia, and Mary-land: Their Present Condition Impartially Stated and Related... (1656),” in Clayton Colman Hall, ed., *Narratives of Early Maryland, 1633-1684* (New York, 1910; reprint, 1967), 290-1; Lancaster County, Orders, Etc. (1655-1666), 149; T.H. Breen, James H. Lewis, and Keith Schlesinger, “Motive for Murder: A Servant’s Life in Virginia, 1678,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 40 (1983): 120.

³⁰ Charles City County, Deeds, Wills, Orders, Etc. (1655-1665), 357; Accomack County, Orders (1666-1670), 82-3; [Deeds], Orders, Wills (1671-1673), 164.

by law. When John George of Lower Norfolk sarcastically answered his overseer upon being asked why he came in from work before sunset, the latter “tooke an iorne and stroke the said George one stroake over the head,” cutting through his hat and wounding him “so dangerously that his life was to be feared by reason the scull was much crackt.” Unconvinced that George had had enough, the overseer then gave “him another stroake on the arme which cutt him to the bone and 3 or 4 stroakes more on the shoulders,” swearing that if George “held not his peasse he would give him such another.”³¹

Female servants were subject to the same corporal punishments as men. Northampton planter Arthur Upshott beat one of his women with a seven-cord whip, and a maid in the Accomack home of John Wallop claimed that she had been “struck once and threatened often.” After servant Margaret Barker gave birth to a stillborn baby, an inquiry launched by the justices of York County revealed that her infant’s head had been “much bruised” and its skull “broaken in pieces.” When asked how this had happened, Barker claimed that her mistress had “whipped & kicked hir” the week before she gave birth and “that the very day shee was delivered shee being washing hir mistress with a short tobacco stick did greivously strike hir over the loynes.” Several women closely examined Barker in order to verify the truth of her story, later reporting to the court that they “found hir in a sad condition from the knees upwards all hir body full of stripes and black and blew blowes.”³²

The only legal recourse open to abused servants was to bring a complaint

³¹ Northampton County, Order Book (1657-1664), f. 47; Henning, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2:118; Lower Norfolk County, Minute Book (1637-1646), part 1: f. 107.

³² Northampton County, Order Book no. 9 (1664-1674), 193; Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, Orders (1678-1682), 81; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 3 (1657-1662), ff. 28-9.

before the county court, and some obtained relief by exercising this right. William Haly of Lower Norfolk received six months off his term after showing justice Thomas Butt “a piece of a stick or switch for striking” that became lodged in his arm during one especially vicious beating. Margery Woosly eventually gained her freedom by convincing the Northumberland court that her mistress had been “unreasonably and unlawfully severe to her.” But there was no guarantee that justices—who, after all, usually owned a significant number of laborers themselves—would issue a decision in a servant’s favor, and the consequence of failing to prove a charge was often physical punishment of some kind. When Abraham Harman and Samuel Harrison of York were unable to demonstrate that Thomas Beale had wronged them, for instance, the court sentenced both to “20 stripes a peece on their bared backs for slandering & abusing their said master.”³³

A well-documented case involving Accomack planter Henry Smith suggests that the courts could also be slow or ineffectual about protecting servants, even when confronted with clear evidence of their mistreatment. Members of the county bench were already well aware of Smith’s “comon fame” for “ill useing” those under his authority when, in June 1668, a maid named Jeane Powell claimed that he had “without cause most severely whipped her” and kept her in “want of shiffts & lying [sleeping] on ye ground.” Although the corroborating testimony of another witness and the “many stripes” on Powell’s back convinced the justices that she had “sufficient cause to complaine,” no one else had ever leveled similar charges against her master, so they merely admonished him “better to use his servants for ye future

³³ Lower Norfolk County, Deed Book no.5 (1686-1695), 111; Northumberland County, Order Book no.4 (1678-1698), 455; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 3 (1657-1662), f. 43.

and pay cost of suit.”³⁴

This slap on the wrist did little to improve Smith’s behavior, and within a year eight more servants came forward with further accounts of his cruelty. Elizabeth Carter and Anne Cooper each named him as the father of their bastard children. Mary Hughes and Mary Jones related in graphic detail how he had forcibly restrained and raped them. Four others attested to “cruel blows, hard keeping, want of clothes, and unjustly severe whippings.” None, however, suffered as much as an elderly hand named “Old” John Butt. Starved and ill-clothed like the rest of Smith’s servants, Old John seems to have been the favorite target of his master, who subjected him to frequent beatings him with a “bull’s pizzle.” When he attempted to complain to Colonel Edmund Scarborough, Smith shaved the hair from half of his head and had him stripped and tied to a mulberry tree, where he whipped him severely, and afterwards fastened a plow chain to his leg that was so long it “reached over his shoulder to the ground.” Some three weeks later, Old John’s bruised and emaciated body was found at his usual sleeping place in the tobacco barn, he finally having died sometime during the night. The court, shocked at the sheer number and seriousness of these new complaints, asked “why their suffering being great & long tyme applied” none had earlier protested, to which the servants candidly replied that “they did dispair of reliefe nor could they hope for any,” for instead of deriving some benefit from having sought assistance, Jeane Powell “was beaten & ill kept as formerly.”³⁵

³⁴ Accomack County, Orders (1666-1670), f. 60. For two similar examples see the cases of Capt. William Odeon in Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), ff. 343, 350, 358 and Richard Cole in Northumberland County, Order Book (1652-1665), 316, 324, 365-66, 381, 384, 387, 393, 399, 404.

³⁵ Accomack County, Orders (1666-1670), ff. 65, 70, 73, 99-105, 128-137.

The justices were themselves partially to blame for Smith's continued brutality, since throughout much of the case their rulings were geared more toward protecting the interests of labor-owning planters than enforcing the law. They openly admitted to not aggressively intervening on Powell's behalf in hopes of preventing "servants making any rash complaints...against their masters." When Smith's other laborers began coming forward they were still ordered to return home and "be obedient to his just commands." Only after hearing the charges of rape and murder did the justices finally decide to send Smith for trial in James City. But they steadfastly refused to either free his victims or have them sold to someone else, "considering servants are mens estates & yt ye precedent might be of worse consequence than intended." In the end, despite the Accomack court's opinion that Smith had acted "more like a monster than a man," the provincial authorities acquitted him of any wrongdoing, and sentenced Hughes and Jones to double the time they had been away from his service. What compensation, or punishment, his other laborers received is unknown.³⁶

Not surprisingly, some servants lacked the fortitude and patience necessary to pursue grievances through the courts, and instead decided to take matters into their own hands. Running away was the most common form of resistance, though the odds against successfully escaping from the colony were hardly promising and the price of failure often great. There was, of course, always the chance of being recaptured and punished. A group of six Lancaster servants were caught after having made it as far as the Eastern Shore, and accordingly paid for their attempt with an extra year of time

³⁶ Ibid., ff. 73-4, 178; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia*, 2d. ed. (Richmond, 1979), 212, 217.

added to their terms and twenty stripes a piece “on their bare backs.” It was also easy to become disoriented or lost in unfamiliar or confusing terrain, a problem Henry Mountoors of Northampton highlighted when confessing that he would “never a runaway” had he not been aided by a fellow laborer who possessed greater knowledge of the local geography, “for I should never a knowne wich way to I goin” and “thought it unposible and soe hard to escape.” This same difficulty almost certainly led to the “untimely end” of a more impetuous Charles City servant named John Prise, who after receiving a beating from his mistress eventually “starved for want of victualls” in the woods while trying to make his way to freedom.³⁷

A smaller number of servants, usually driven by the heat of the moment, opposed their masters with violence. When Lancaster planter Edward Dale tried to discipline William Page, the latter fought back with a hoe, “swearing (God damme him) if his master stroke him hee would beate his braynes.” Nicholas Paine of Surry took the offensive by hurling “five or six bricks or brick bats” at Colonel Thomas Swann, later cursing the inaccuracy of his aim with the statement “a plague take the damn gate, if it had not been for that I would have hit him.” Whatever immediate satisfaction servants derived from such spontaneous confrontations, they invariably came out on the losing end. Page and Paine both paid for their defiance with time added to their terms. After John Daniel got into a row with Edmond Scarborough, the Northampton court ordered that he be “layed necke & heele” as punishment for striking his master, while Scarburgh was adjudged “not accountable” for any assault

³⁷ Lancaster County, Orders, Etc., no. 1 (1666-1680), 190-191; Northampton County, Order Book no. 11 (1678-1683), 52; Charles City County, Deeds, Wills, Orders, Etc. (1655-1665), 357.

and battery he might have committed in return.³⁸

In what is perhaps the best documented case of individual servant resistance during the seventeenth century, Thomas Hellier inflicted the ultimate revenge on his betters. Hellier was the well-educated son of a respectable family from Dorsetshire, England, who despite an advantageous marriage had squandered his inheritance in the taverns of London and then taken ship for Virginia hoping to amend his fortune. After arriving in the colony in October 1677, he agreed to tutor the children of one Cuthbert Williamson, a man of middling circumstances living on a Charles City plantation called Hard Labour. Although his new master had promised that he would “not be set to any laborious work, unless necessity compelled now and then,” Hellier soon found himself, contrary to these “fair promises,” toiling day after day in the fields.³⁹

Nonetheless, he was not as bad off as many servants. Williamson provided adequate food and clothing, and Hellier gave no indication of being beaten or severely overworked. Aside from the continuous tedium of manual labor, to which he became quickly, if reluctantly, resigned, his sole complaint concerned Williamson’s wife, “who would not only rail, swear and curse me within doors, whenever I came into the house, casting upon me biting taunts and bitter flouts; but like a live ghost would impertinently haunt me, when I was quiet at work in the ground.” After several months of her verbal abuse, and apparently without lodging a complaint that his indenture had been violated, Hellier attempted to run away, eluding his master for three weeks before being captured and returned to service. Again he attempted to

³⁸ Lancaster County, Orders, Etc., no. 1 (1666-1680), 200; Surry County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 2 (1671-1684), 82; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1645-1651), f. 155.

³⁹ Breen, Lewis, and Schlesinger, “Motive for Murder,” 107-08, 111-112.

accept his condition, but when his mistress continued to berate him with her “odious and inveterate tongue,” Hellier became convinced that murdering the Williamsons was his only way out. In May 1678, he broke into the couple’s lodging room and killed them with an axe, only to become lost in the county’s “unknown woods” and eventually arrested, tried, and executed for his crime.⁴⁰

Instead of exacting retribution on their masters, other dissatisfied servants simply committed suicide. A Surry county jury found that Robert Story, a presumed runaway, did in fact “ungratiously...and cruelly hang himselfe” on a tree in some nearby woods, “about the time he absented himselfe from his masters service.” Thomas, an Irishman belonging to Colonel John Custis of Northampton, made doubly sure his life came to an end “by cuttinge of his throate with a drawinge knife and afterwards by drowninge himselfe in a well, where he finished his last breath.” Court-ordered inquests usually dismissed such incidents as evidence of a servant’s wickedness rather than investigating what might have driven them to take such drastic action. When Robert Peirsen was found hanging in a tobacco barn, for instance, a York County jury decided that not “having God before his eyes,” he had been “seduced” into killing himself by “the instigation of the devill.”⁴¹

Occasionally groups of servants conspired against their masters. In 1661, a York laborer named Isaac Friend took charge of a meeting held on the plantation of

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 112-114. For other examples of servant murders see the cases of Robert Challicome in Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), ff. 398-99 and Huntington Ayers in York County, Deeds, Wills, Orders, no. 3 (1657-1662), f. 46

⁴¹ Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no.7 (1655-1668), f. 26; Surry County, Wills, Deeds, Etc., Book 1 (1652-1671), 150; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 3 (1657-1662), f. 73. See also Accomack County, Deeds and Wills (1663-1666), f. 67 and York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 3 (1657-1662), ff. 121, 135.

Major James Goodwin, where servants were complaining “of their hard usage & that they had nothing but corne & water & were not kept according to the law of the countrey.” Friend initially argued that they should petition the king for relief. But he soon changed his mind and proposed that they should instead seize arms and demand their release from bondage, declaring “that there would enough come to them & they would goe through the countrey and kill those that make any opposition & they would either be free or dye fir it.” Two years later, eight servants in neighboring Gloucester County hatched a similar plan, though a last-minute betrayal thwarted their design. Because plots of this sort posed a greater threat to the prevailing social order than individual acts of resistance, participants tended to be severely dealt with by colonial authorities if they were not executed outright. Several Lower Norfolk servants belonging to Captain John Sibsey, for example, received the draconian sentence of “100 strippes apeice, severally upon their bare shoulders” for attempting to raise “a mutiny” while their master was away from his plantation on business.⁴²

By the middle decades of the seventeenth century, then, Virginia’s planters had devised a labor system that largely suited their needs. Taking their cue in some instances from existing English precedent and in others from the harsh realities of colonial life, they eventually cobbled together an effective statutory scheme that extended the length of time their less fortunate countrymen had to serve, established punishments for the most egregious forms of misconduct, and placed the power of

⁴² York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 3 (1657-1662), ff. 146-50; “The Servants Plot of 1663,” *VMHB*, 15 (1907-08): 38-43; Henning, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2:191, 204; Lower Norfolk County, Minute Book (1637-1646), f. 7.

colonial legal authority firmly in support of the rights and interests of masters.

Most of these achievements, of course, came at the expense of servants. The original mudsills of Virginia society, servants not only saw many of their customary rights abrogated but also lacked the ability to ensure that the rights they retained were adequately enforced. Still, the majority of white workers likely never had to confront these potential weaknesses and served out the duration of their terms without incident or unusual suffering. Even when combined together, the number of mistreated servants mentioned in surviving records represent only a minuscule fraction of the tens of thousands of English men and women who entered into bondage over the course of the century.⁴³

But as successful as it was, in the eyes of some planters servitude still had its problems. At least in theory, white bondsmen were protected by the courts, and could accordingly complain if they felt they were being mistreated. This placed a limit on how aggressively servants might be exploited, since masters were expected to meet at least minimum standards for working conditions, clothing, food, housing, and discipline. Although planters occasionally engaged in various forms of chicanery to extend terms, the right of white laborers to a finite period of service also remained intact. In one extraordinary case in Northampton County, an impoverished planter named Lambert Groton managed to get himself deeply into debt with Colonel John Stringer, and to extricate himself from this predicament signed an agreement to serve Stringer for life. However, when the contract came to the court's attention, they

⁴³ My use of the term "mudsill" to suggest the degraded status of Virginia's laboring bondsmen was taken from Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York, 1984), 129.

declared it void and freed Groton, apparently because they felt that permanent bondage was an inappropriate condition for even the most destitute of Englishmen.⁴⁴

Blacks, on the other hand, obviously were not English and thus could neither complain to the courts nor claim a right to temporary service. Not surprisingly, some wealthier men clearly saw slavery as an answer to servitude's shortcomings. By the 1650s most members of the Council had invested in slaves and by the 1660s the same was true for a majority of local officeholders. However, although leading planters were fairly quick to buy into slavery, it would take until the last two decades of the century—the final decade in some counties—for blacks to outnumber whites in the bound labor force. This delay was partially owing to the large number of servants that continued to arrive in Virginia and perhaps even to deeply-rooted feelings of racial prejudice. But another, more important, cause was the changing structure of the Atlantic slave trade, and the restrictions it placed on the colony's supply of black laborers.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Northampton County, Order Book no. 10 (1674-1679), 290. For some examples of masters extending their servants' terms, see Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 271-72.

⁴⁵ Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century. For more information on servant immigration to the Chesapeake and its affect on the region's conversion to slavery, see Russell R. Menard, "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," *Southern Studies* 16 (1977): 362-63, 368. For English prejudice against blacks, see Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), ch. 1.

Chapter Two

“Seaven, Eight, Nine, or Ten in a Sloope”

Thirty-four days after leaving the island of Barbados, Captain John Studley’s pink *Friendly Society* arrived off Stingray Point, a low-lying finger of land that marks where Virginia’s Rappahannock River meets the Chesapeake Bay. He steered westward and sailed upriver, eventually dropping anchor near the mouth of Corotoman Creek to have his cargo checked by local customs officer and wealthy tobacco planter Robert “King” Carter. Clearing customs on this occasion, however, was a mere formality for Studley and his crew. As one of the *Friendly Society*’s owners, Carter was undoubtedly relieved to see that his vessel had avoided the perils of an ocean passage and safely arrived at her intended destination, particularly since she carried a valuable shipment of sugar, rum, molasses, and twelve black slaves.¹

There was nothing extraordinary about the *Friendly Society* or her voyage from Barbados to Virginia. Hundreds of similar vessels ventured back and forth between the two colonies during the latter half of the seventeenth century.² But as this scene illustrates, Virginia’s planters acquired enslaved Africans as well as agricultural products through commercial exchange with the island. In fact, shortly after the turn of the eighteenth century, acting Governor Edmund Jennings cited the West Indies as the colony’s most important early source of slaves. “Before the year 1680,” Jennings wrote after consulting with several “ancient inhabitants” and probing his own memory, “what negros were brought to Virginia were imported generally from

¹ C.O. 33/13-14, Virginia Colonial Records Project (hereafter cited as VCRP) microfilm, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, reel no. 271; C.O. 5/1441, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 24.

² C.O. 33/13-14, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 271. Surviving Barbados shipping returns list over 400 separate voyages between the island and Virginia between 1678 and 1700 alone.

Barbados for it was very rare to have a Negro ship come to this country directly from Africa.”³

Even after large deliveries became more frequent in the Chesapeake during the 1680s and 1690s, small shipments of “seven, eight, nine, or ten in a sloop” from Barbados and other “islands and plantations” continued to furnish as much as one-third of the region’s black laborers.⁴ Throughout the century, the structure of the transatlantic slave trade provided much of the impetus for this coastal traffic. Direct shipments of blacks had arrived periodically along the tobacco coast during its earliest years of settlement, but a confluence of New World economic developments and changes in English commercial policy shifted the focus of Atlantic slavers elsewhere during subsequent decades. Consequently, instead of continuing to receive cargoes from Africa, Virginians who desired slaves were forced to find alternative sources of supply, which in turn affected both the timing and character of slavery’s growth in the colony.⁵

Before 1660, the Governor and Company of Adventurers of London trading to Gynney and Bynney was the principal English firm trading with Africa. More commonly known as the Guinea Company, this thirty-seven member joint-stock organization was first established in 1618 under the leadership of court favorite and Virginia plantation owner Robert Rich. King James I openly showed his support by

³ Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to North America*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1930-35), 4:88-89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:21-23.

⁵ For the earliest recorded delivery of blacks to Virginia, see Susan M. Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1906-1935), 3: 243. However, there has been some debate over whether Virginia’s first blacks possibly arrived sometime earlier, see William Thorndale, “The Virginia Census of 1619,” *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*, 33 (1995), 155-77 and Engel Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 54 (1997): 395-98.

granting Rich and his partners a monopoly over England's African trade, but financial weakness prevented them from fully exploiting this advantage and they quickly folded after suffering losses totaling over £5,000. By 1630, the exclusive rights enjoyed by Rich's group had devolved to a syndicate of London merchants headed by Nicholas and Thomas Crispe, who reorganized the company and recruited a larger membership. The revived Guinea Company continued to operate under this more business-savvy leadership for the next thirty years, and though the Crispes and their fellow investors continuously struggled to make a profit, they did manage to establish England's first permanent African trading station at Kormatin around 1631.⁶

A good share of the Guinea Company's problems stemmed from illegal domestic competition. Like other chartered trading monopolies of the period, the company continually suffered from infringements on its rights by independent merchants known as interlopers. These smaller operators generally participated in short-term partnerships of two or more individuals allied for a single voyage, and were attracted to the African trade because the proceeds generated by even one trip could be considerable. In 1656, a year when sugar was commanding a price of roughly £2 per hundredweight on the English market, a group of seven London merchants sent a cargo of slaves from Guinea to Barbados that returned over 230,000

⁶ K.G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (New York, 1957), 38-41; Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade* (New York, 1997), 174-75. Davies stated that "Gynney and Bynney" actually meant Guinea and Benin and probably referred to all of West Africa during the Guinea Company's existence. For more information concerning the Guinea Company and its shifting membership between 1618 and 1660, see Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 1:78-85; Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton, NJ, 1993; reprint, 2003), 162-65; P.E.H. Hair and Robin Law, "The English in Western Africa to 1700," in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Empire to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1998), 249-55.

pounds of the product.⁷ The prospect of striking it rich through privateering also lured non-company captains to Africa's coast to raid the shipping of England's enemies. The primary intent of such attacks was usually to acquire the victim's trade goods. But a 1628 report that an English ship called the *Fortune* had "taken an Angolan man with many negroes, which the captain bartered in Virginia for tobacco" makes it clear that seized cargoes occasionally also included slaves who were sent to the colonies.⁸

Before mid-century, the Guinea Company and any other Englishmen involved in slaving had to compete with the Dutch, who by raiding the shipping and trading outposts of their various foreign competitors—particularly the Portuguese—emerged during the 1620s and 1630s as the preeminent European power on the African coast. By the latter decade, the West India Company alone was sending fifteen hundred slaves a year to Brazil, while also pledging to supply the North American settlement of New Netherlands with "as many blacks as it possibly can." Ever on the lookout for opportunities to trade in lucrative New World staples, the resourceful Dutch also consistently shipped more slaves to the English plantations than the English themselves.⁹

Many of Virginia's leading inhabitants developed close relations with the Netherlands during these years. By 1646, York burgess Richard Lee was serving as attorney for Richard Glover of Amsterdam, whose clientele included Governor Sir William Berkeley, Council members George Ludlow and Ralph Wormeley, and

⁷ Davies, *Royal African Company*, 30-31; RB3/2/495, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives. The £2 per hundredweight price for sugar is taken from Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1714* (New York, 1973), 205.

⁸ Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 4: 49.

⁹ Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 170-71. Quote about supply of slaves to New Netherlands taken from p. 171.

several other prominent planters in York and James City. Lower Norfolk had a number of connections with Rotterdam. Simon Overzee, the son of a major tobacco importer in that city, settled in the county sometime during the late 1640s and eventually became related by marriage to Colonel Francis Yeardley, councilor Thomas Willoughby, and the powerful Thoroughgood family. Justice Mathew Phillips handled shipping arrangements for a number of trading firms based in Rotterdam, and his fellow commissioner William Mosely emigrated from there sometime before 1651. On the Eastern Shore, Amsterdam merchants Arent and Dirck Corsen Stam leased land from councilor Nathaniel Littleton, who allowed them to use his sloop and barge for carrying on their business. Lieutenant-Colonel Obedience Robins, Captain Stephen Charlton, and Justice Thomas Hunt also had Dutch commercial ties, while in recounting his 1649 voyage to the colony, Henry Norwood noted that Colonel Argoll Yeardley had “not long before brought over a wife from Rotterdam.”¹⁰

Virginia’s political elite made a considerable effort to cultivate such partnerships. In 1643, the assembly passed a measure making it “free and lawfull for

¹⁰ John R. Pagan, “Dutch Maritime and Commercial Activity in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *VMHB*, 90 (1982): 488-91; York County, *Deeds, Orders, Wills 2 (1645-1649)*, 93; Northampton County, *Orders, Deeds, Wills, Etc. (1640-1645)*, ff. 160, 174, 231; Henry Norwood, “A Voyage to Virginia by Colonel Norwood,” in Peter Force, ed., *Tracts and Other Papers...*, 4 vols. (Gloucester, MA, 1963), 3: no. 6, 49. Among Richard Glover’s other clients in York County were Lee himself, burgess John Chew, and justices Augustine Warner and Stephen Gill. He also had dealings with Captain Bridges Freeman and justices Samuel Abbott and Robert Holt of James City, and had outstanding debts owed him by Mary Menefie, the widow of councilor George Menefie who had died the previous year. Other prominent Virginians with documented Dutch connections include Governor Sir John Harvey, councilors Richard Kemp and Richard Bennett, Nansemond burgess Edward Major, Charles City justice John Gibbs, and Captain Thomas Burbage of Northampton. See 13 Sept. 1642, VA 18, no. 732/745-745v, Amsterdam Notarial Archives; 14 Aug. 1645, VA 28, no. 1076/27v-28, *ibid.*; 16 Feb. 1646, no. 849/83-83v, *ibid.*; 13 Sept. 1649, VA 45, no. 2042/271v272, *ibid.* and 10 Aug. 1647, V 31, no. 332, Rotterdam Notarial Archives. (Citations are for the transcriptions of these records deposited in the library of the University of Victoria, British Columbia, and detailed in Jan Kupp, “Dutch Notarial Acts,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser. 30 (1973): 653-55.

any...of the Dutch nation to import wares and merchandizes and to trade or traffique for the commoditys of the collony in any shipp or shippes of their owne.” Nine years later, the Northampton court moved to protect a Dutch vessel seized by a patrolling English man-of-war called the *Hopeful Adventure*. Citing their “knowne experience both in ye case of trade from us to Holland & soe back again,” the county commissioners rejected the captain’s claim that his prize was the *Fame of Rotterdam* bound for Brazil, insisting that she legally belonged to James City justice Walter Chiles and should be released.¹¹ Encouraging and protecting Dutch traders was important to Virginia’s leading planters because the Netherlanders provided them with advantageous terms of credit and low shipping charges for their tobacco, and on occasion likely also supplied them with slaves. Of the 305 black headrights claimed in the 1630s and 1640s, 234 (77 percent) were claimed by high level officeholders. These men were, of course, among the wealthiest in the colony and thus the planters who could most afford to purchase laborers of any sort. But it is telling that over a third of the black headrights were claimed by just ten individuals, all of whom had Dutch connections of one kind or another.¹²

However, whether or not they came on English or Dutch ships, slave deliveries to England’s budding plantation empire were irregular throughout the

¹¹ Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 1:258; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 4 (1651-1654), ff. 126-29. In 1653, a Rotterdam merchant named Adriaen Paulusz stated that he had heard nothing regarding the whereabouts of his ship *De Faem* (The Fame) since it sailed for Virginia a year earlier, indicating that the vessel seized off Northampton was indeed Dutch. See 4 Nov. 1653, VA 51, no. 1892/297-298, Amsterdam Notarial Archives.

¹² Virginia headright files, 17th century; Virginia officeholder files, 17th century. Individuals received a “headright” allowing them to claim fifty acres of land for transporting either themselves or someone else to the colony. For a concise explanation of headright records and some of the problems involved in using them, see Edmund S. Morgan, “Headrights and Headcounts: A Review Article,” *VMHB*, 80 (1972): 361-71.

century's early decades, due in large part to light demand. Adequately supplied with servants from the British Isles, most Chesapeake planters and their West Indian counterparts had small need and little desire for blacks. Consequently, the Guinea Company and its private competitors often placed slaving lower on their lists of priorities than obtaining African gold, ivory, and dye-woods for sale in Europe, and even Dutch slave shipments to the English colonies were insignificant compared to the Netherlander's more extensive Brazilian trade.¹³

This state of affairs changed dramatically after the introduction of sugar cultivation transformed the previously struggling English settlement on Barbados. Founded in 1627, this Caribbean island-colony of only 166 square miles produced little of value during its first thirteen years of existence. Its principal export crop was initially tobacco, though according to one London merchant it was "accompted the worst...tobaco that cometh to England."¹⁴ After attempts at growing cotton also failed to produce significant profits, the Barbadians began experimenting with sugar cane in the early 1640s.

It took a few years for planters on Barbados to perfect the sugar-making process. Following in the tradition of anything previously grown commercially on the

¹³ Davies, *Royal African Company*, 40-41. Enslaved blacks did constitute more than half of the population on the English colony of Providence Island at the time it fell to the Spanish in 1641. However, its early conversion to slavery was exceptional. Unlike colonies in the Chesapeake and elsewhere in the West Indies, the company running the Providence Island venture experienced considerable difficulty convincing English settlers—both bound and free—to emigrate to its settlement. The company's difficulties were compounded by the fact that the island's proximity to the Moskito Coast and Dutch slave traders kept the price of black bondsmen so low that they were actually cheaper than white laborers. See Karen O. Kupperman *Providence Island 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (New York, 1993), ch.6.

¹⁴ Quote taken from Vere Langford Oliver, ed., *Caribbeana: Miscellaneous Papers Relating to the History, Genealogy, Topography, and Antiquities of the British West Indies*, 6 vols. (London, 1909-1919), 3:197-98. My analysis of early Barbadian history and the island's transition to sugar production is chiefly based on Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, ch. 2 and Gary A. Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700* (New York, 1984), ch.4.

island, early attempts produced a coarse brown variety which, according to English visitor Richard Ligon, was regarded as “inconsiderable and of little worth.”¹⁵ However, with help from Dutch traders and information gained from visits to sugar plantations in Brazil, the Barbadians eventually began manufacturing a highly marketable product and growing rich from its sale in Europe. News of their success caused a whirlwind of excitement in England, and thousands of immigrants from virtually every stratum of society took ship for the colony hoping make their fortunes by planting sugar.¹⁶

The dreams of many poor and middling newcomers were quickly shattered as they realized that the financial resources required to become a sugar baron were well beyond their reach. Land prices skyrocketed as people poured into Barbados and the value of its new staple increased. Plantations valued at ten shillings an acre during the tobacco years sold for £5 per acre by 1646 and £10 by the 1650s, with the best tracts commanding even higher prices.¹⁷ Even among those who could afford to buy some land, few had enough money left over to establish a sugar works and purchase laborers to grow and process the cane. Writing in the mid-1650s, Ligon estimated that a planter needed £14,000 to begin producing sugar on a profitable basis, a sum that only the colony's larger tobacco growers and a small number of well-heeled new immigrants were capable of raising.¹⁸

The countryside, economy, and society of the island underwent a metamorphosis as sugar production took root. Settlers hacked down what forestland

¹⁵ Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 96.

¹⁶ Puckrein, *Little England*, 57, 59.

¹⁷ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 66.

¹⁸ Ligon, *History of Barbados*, 108; Puckrein, *Little England*, 61.

remained and put it under cultivation, even though doing so rendered them dependent on importing essential wood products such as boards, shingles, and barrel staves. Fields of corn and other food crops disappeared from a colony formerly reputed to be the “granary of all the rest of the charybbies isles,” as the planter-class, eager to find ways of expanding production, increasingly preferred to purchase provisions from Britain, Ireland, and the mainland colonies rather than sacrifice valuable acreage to growing their own food.¹⁹ Land and political power eventually became concentrated in the hands of a small group of wealthy plantation owners, prompting scores of settlers, the losers in the race for riches, to leave in search of better opportunities elsewhere in the West Indies and North America.

The use of slave labor played a central role in this transformation. Barbadian sugar growers would never have achieved the success they did, Governor Sir Thomas Modyford would later insist, “had it not been lawful for [the] Dutch, Hamburgers, our own whole nation, and any other, to bring and sell them blacks.” The island’s rapid conversion to slavery was strikingly apparent to visitor George Downing as early as 1645. Slaves had become “the life of this place,” he informed a New England cousin, “I believe they have bought this yeare no lesse than a thousand Negroes, and the more they buie, the better able they are to buye; for in a year and a halfe they will earne (with God’s blessing) as much as they cost.”²⁰ Following Downing’s prediction, the colony’s rate of importation continued to climb and its black population soared, increasing from around 6000 at the time of his letter to 40,000 by

¹⁹ Quote taken from Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 54.

²⁰ W. Noel Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies* (Hereafter cited as *S.P. Col.*), 40 vols. (London, 1860-; reprint, 1964), 7: 96; Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 1:125.

1668.²¹

The burgeoning demand for slaves in Barbados quickly overshadowed the much smaller Chesapeake market, and the focus of Atlantic slave traders continued to shift even further away from the tobacco coast as the “sugar revolution” spread to other English possessions in the West Indies. Over the remainder of the century, the Leeward Islands of St. Christopher, Antigua, Montserrat, and Nevis all became dependent on growing cane, as did Jamaica after an invasion launched from Barbados took it from the Spanish in 1655. A scarcity of men with adequate capital resources and repeated sackings during wartime initially hampered the rise of sugar production in these colonies. Yet despite such obstacles, their output and wealth continued to increase, and as with Barbados, substantial slave-population growth accompanied development. The number of blacks in the Leewards grew from 4,200 in 1672 to 23,000 in 1706, while Jamaica’s slave labor force jumped from a paltry 1,500 in 1658 to 45,000 by 1703.²²

The expansion of Dutch influence in Virginia and the West Indies did not go unnoticed by officials in England, who had long been wary of foreign participation in colonial commerce. As early as 1621, the Privy Council had asserted that overseas possessions were useful only if “the commodities brought from thence were appropriated unto his Majesties subjectes” and “not communicated to forraine

²¹ Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, WI, 1969), 55-59; Puckrein, *Little England*, 70-72. The Dutch were primarily responsible for this growth, because they held a virtual monopoly over slave trading to Barbados throughout the 1640s and 1650s. However, both the Guinea Company and its interloping rivals also became deeply involved in the trade during these years. For a selection of the Guinea Company’s correspondence concerning the delivery of slaves to Barbados during this period, see Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 1:126-35.

²² Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, chs. 4, 5; Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 59.

countries, but by way of trade and commerce from hence only.”²³ The activities of the Netherlanders were of particular concern, writer Benjamin Worsley warned in his 1651 pamphlet *The Advocate*, because they routinely sent “three, if not four ship of sail” for every English vessel journeying to the colonies. Even if Worsley exaggerated somewhat to make his point, no one could deny that substantial quantities of valuable colonial staples were going to continental entrepôts instead of the mother country. Dutch encroachment also took on added importance because it was not limited solely to the New World. Merchants in the busy ports dotted along the North Sea coast of the United Provinces already dominated many of the important European trades, such as those with the Baltic and Mediterranean, and reaped enormous profits from herring fisheries located in English waters. In an age when a nation’s balance of payments served as the preeminent popular gauge of its economic well-being, such commercial prowess was more than just something to be envied; it represented a grave threat to England’s very survival as a great power.²⁴

Confronted with the problem of besting such a formidable rival, English economic thinkers looked to Dutch commercial practices for ways of improving their own country’s competitive position. This was not an easy task, for the economy of the Netherlands was unlike any other in Northern Europe. Like the acres of land they reclaimed from the sea, Dutch affluence appeared to come from nothing. They lacked traditional sources of wealth such as abundant farmland, mines, and forests, yet in

²³ Quote taken from Thomas C. Barrow, *Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service in Colonial America, 1660-1775* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 4.

²⁴ Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1978), 73-76; Charles H. Wilson, *Mercantilism* (London, 1958), 10-11; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 584-86, 598-600. Worsley quote taken from Lawrence A. Harper, *The English Navigation Laws: A Seventeenth Century Experiment in Social Engineering* (New York, 1939), 244 n.23.

almost alchemical fashion they still enjoyed greater prosperity than much larger and seemingly better endowed nations. In an attempt to explain this apparent contradiction, English writer William Goffe contended that the Netherlands grew rich principally by importing raw materials and exporting finished products. “The Dutch buy their hemp at Riga, and other places where we buy ours,” he observed in 1641, “but they employ their people to manufacture the same into sail-cloth, and they import it on us, and we, to encourage them, use it for our Royal Navy, and all our merchant ships.”²⁵

While many of Goffe’s contemporaries agreed that a productive population and the efficient coordination of industry and trade were essential elements in Dutch success, their continuing strength in overseas commerce highlighted the importance of shipping. Among others, Benjamin Worsley argued that dominance in this vital area enabled the Netherlanders “to give the laws of trade to us, both in the government of exchange, and the markets abroad for foreign commodities.” By the time English economic theorist Sir William Petty asserted in the 1670s that Dutch economic power chiefly sprang from the size of their merchant fleet, he could look to nearly three decades of similar arguments for support. “Those who predominate in shipping,” Petty confirmed, “have more occasions than others to frequent all parts of the world, and to observe what is wanting or redundant every where, and what each people can do, and what they desire, and consequently to be the factors, and carriers for the whole world of trade.” Far from possessing “angelic wits and judgements,” he added for emphasis, merchants in the Netherlands simply followed the well-trodden path of

²⁵ Goffe quote taken from Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology*, 73.

history, where “in all the ancient states, and empires, those who had the shipping had the wealth.”²⁶

Influenced by the economic thinking of the times, the English merchant community increasingly called for more stringent navigation laws during the late 1640s. This pressure on Parliament to place “some restraint” on the “general liberty” of commerce came from a variety of sources. Men involved in the carrying trade complained that they lost a great deal of business to the Dutch because English merchants shipped “their goods in stranger’s bottoms, when English ships could be had.” For altogether different reasons, most of them similarly self-serving, some of England’s powerful chartered trading companies also urged the government to check foreigners. Members of the Eastland Company advocated that the shipment of Baltic commodities be restricted solely to English vessels, while the Levant Company forwarded a petition outlining the “prejudice likely to befall the Commonwealth by the importations of turkey goods from Holland.”²⁷ Perhaps the most important group working to reshape commercial policy in this period, however, was the group of London-based “new merchants” involved in trade with the American colonies such as Maurice Thompson, Samuel Vassall, and William Pennoyer. Though mostly of humble origin, this small, closely-knit group of ambitious and determined men used their close ties to republican political leaders to wield enormous influence over the economic decisions of the Commonwealth government that came to power following

²⁶ Worsley quote taken from *Ibid.*, 78; Sir William Petty, “Political Arithmetick,” in Charles Henry Hull ed., *The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty* (Cambridge, 1899), 258; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 600-601. Petty’s *Political Arithmetick* was not published until 1690, but it existed in manuscript form for many years. While the exact date of its completion is unclear, Hull’s introduction states that internal evidence suggests Petty probably wrote it between 1671 and 1676.

²⁷ All quotes taken from Harper, *English Navigation Laws*, 40-44.

the chaotic years of the English civil war.²⁸

Indeed, it was largely because of the lobbying efforts of the “new merchants” that Parliament, fresh from its victory over King Charles I, launched in 1651 what would eventually become a prolonged campaign against Dutch commercial supremacy by passing *An act for increase of Shipping and Encouragement of the Navigation of this Nation*. As its title suggests, this legislation promoted growth in the English merchant marine by offering it some protection against foreign competition. The act addressed a number of issues, but had two key provisions. The first forbade goods “of the growth, production, or manufacture” of Asia, Africa, and America from being imported into the mother country or its colonies in non-English ships. The second placed a similar prohibition on European commodities, unless the foreign ship employed belonged “to the people of that country or place, of which the said goods are the growth” or where they “can only be, or most usually are shipped for transportation.” To deter potential smugglers, the law stipulated that any vessel and goods found to be in violation of the act were subject to being seized and forfeit.²⁹

Virginians were adamantly opposed to these restrictions. As late as 1647, the assembly had again openly courted the Dutch by granting them “all freedome &

²⁸ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 113-40, 577-602. The English civil war was fought between 1642 and 1646, followed by an uneasy period of negotiation between Parliament and the crown that culminated with the execution of Charles I in 1649. From that year until Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, a period known as the Interregnum, England was a puritan commonwealth. For more information, see Richard S. Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715* (New York, 1979), 164-78.

²⁹ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 613-28; C.H. Firth and R.S. Rait, eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, 3 vols. (London, 1911), 2:559-62. Passage of act led directly to a period of hostility between England and the Netherlands that would last throughout the middle decades of the seventeenth century, during which time the two nations fought declared wars in 1652-54, 1665-67, and 1672-74. Although both sides suffered from these conflicts, they probably did more than the fledgling English navigation system to end Dutch commercial dominance. For more information, see Charles H. Wilson, *Profit and Power: A Study of England and the Dutch Wars* (New York, 1957).

libertie... to trade within the collony,” while at the same time it condemned “avaritious” English merchants who through “wylie & spetious pretences” sought to ban foreigners and “monopolize not onely our labours and fortunes, but even our persons.” Governor Sir William Berkeley was equally critical of efforts to prohibit foreign shipping, denouncing them as a transparent attempt by London importers to seize control of the tobacco trade and reduce planters “to the same poverty, wherein the Dutch found and relieved us.” Such sentiments helped fuel royalist sympathies in the years following the execution of Charles I. It was no coincidence that the burgesses’ declaration of allegiance to Charles’s exiled son also included an assertion of their resolve to continue permitting “trade with Londoners, and all other nations in amity with our sovereigne.” Covert resistance persisted even after the Virginia government’s surrender to parliamentary forces in 1652 necessitated formal submission to the mother country’s commercial policies. For the remainder of the Interregnum, the colony’s leaders were notoriously lax in enforcing the Navigation Act, and they undoubtedly rejoiced when, in 1660, the newly crowned Charles II refused to recognize any laws enacted after the outbreak of the English civil war.³⁰

Abolishing statutes did not mean forgetting them, however, and Restoration statesmen drew heavily on experience gained under the Commonwealth when formulating new policies for regulating commerce. Consequently, the *Act for the*

³⁰ H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1658/59* (Richmond, VA, 1915), 74, 76; Pagan, “Dutch Maritime and Commercial Activity,” 493-97; “Speech of Sir William Berkeley, and Declaration of the Assembly, March, 1651” *VMHB* 1 (1893-1894): 75-81. For the close relationship between colonial economic concerns and royalist sentiment in the years following the English civil war, see Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 584-87. For an analysis of Virginia’s political situation during the period, see Wesley Frank Craven, *The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, 1607-1689*, vol. 1 of *A History of the South*, eds. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge, LA, 1949; reprint 1970), ch.7.

Encouraging and increasing of Shipping and Navigation, passed by Parliament in 1660, closely resembled its predecessor in many respects. But it also extended protection from foreign competition to several additional areas of trade and considerably tightened connections between England and her overseas possessions. The new measure prohibited the colonies from dealing with foreign shippers “whatsoever,” and required them to send certain enumerated staples, including tobacco and sugar, exclusively to England or English dominions. By establishing procedures for registering foreign-built shipping and charging colonial governors and other appointed officials with ensuring compliance under threat of losing their offices, the bill’s framers closed two gaping loopholes in the 1651 act, which had failed to provide a method for validating the nationality of vessels or any real means of enforcement.³¹

For the expressed purpose of keeping the colonies “in a firmer dependance” on England and “rendering them yet more beneficiall and advantagious unto it,” Parliament would pass additional legislation during the 1660s and 1670s to further regulate commerce within the empire, but the 1660 act alone solved the primary problem of legally eliminating Dutch competition.³² Although English merchants were understandably delighted with this suppression of their foreign rivals, the end of free trade was a harsh blow to Virginians desiring black laborers. The House of

³¹ 12 Car. II, c. 18, Great Britain, *The Statutes of the Realm: Printed by Command of his Majesty King George the Third—from original records and authentic manuscripts*, 11 vols. (1810; reprint, London, 1963), 5:246-50. Although the use of foreign-built shipping was allowed under the 1660 act, the law required that they be registered, owned entirely by English subjects, captained by an Englishman, and manned by crews at least three-fourths English. English-built shipping was also required to meet the same standards for ownership, captaincy, and manning.

³² See 13 Car. II, c.14; 14 Car. II, c.11; 15 Car. II, c. 7; 22 & 23 Car. II, c.26, in *Ibid.*, 316-17, 393-300, 449-52, 747-49. These statutes further refined the commercial system established in 1660 and beefed up enforcement measures.

Burgesses, perhaps anticipating that the monarchy's restoration would bring about a change in commercial policy, had just months earlier passed a measure exempting all Dutchmen who "shall import any negro slaves" from a duty exacted on tobacco shipped to foreign destinations.³³ Now completely cut off from foreign slavers by the new navigation act, the colony's planters faced competition with much larger West Indian demand for a share of the fledgling English slave trade, which itself soon became severely restricted.

Shortly after assuming the throne, Charles II sought to revive England's languishing commerce with Africa, until then ostensibly still in the hands of the all-but-defunct Guinea Company, by granting a monopoly to the newly created Company of Royal Adventurers. Headed by the king's own brother James, Duke of York, this group was in the beginning primarily interested in acquiring gold, though it was widely understood they would also supply the English colonies with slaves. Losses from repeated Dutch attacks on the company's outposts along the African coast quickly prompted its leadership to seek a new charter which, when granted in 1663, explicitly mentioned slave trading for the first time. This reorganization also improved the Adventurers' financial position by adding new investors, but they still proved incapable of meeting the combined expense of carrying debts owed by West Indian planters and replacing property destroyed during the Anglo-Dutch wars. By 1667, the company had completely abandoned active trading and was instead farming out its monopoly rights by selling licenses to private merchants.³⁴

³³ Henning, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 1:540.

³⁴ Davies, *Royal African Company*, 41-44; Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 1:85-93; Hair and Law, "The English in Western Africa," 255-57.

“Great losses” from “accidents in the late wars and other casualties” made it obvious by the early 1670s that the Royal Adventurers required yet another, even more drastic, restructuring. Unexpectedly, an entirely new organization called the Royal African Company grew out of this process, which at its inception in 1672 enjoyed more legal control over African trade than either one of its predecessors. King Charles granted the new company a thousand-year monopoly and supplied it with broad judicial powers for combating infringements on its rights. Yet while on the surface the company’s charter appeared to provide ample means for profitably carrying on the trade, in reality it offered little protection against either illegal competition from interlopers or payment-avoiding West Indian planters desiring ever larger numbers of slaves. Straining under the weight of enormous colonial debts, in 1675 the company resorted to borrowing money to finance its voyages and began sliding into insolvency.³⁵

In the end, political discontent in England itself decided the fate of the Royal African Company’s monopoly. Because the prerogative power of the monarchy alone legitimated the company’s extensive authority, its directors had always relied heavily on unwavering royal support. This potential weakness had not been a problem during Charles’s lifetime, but as controversy increasingly swirled around James after he succeeded his brother in 1685, it became apparent that the company’s privileged position stood or fell with the reigning king. When James’s arbitrary manner of decision-making finally became too much for leading members of the English gentry, they invited the Dutch ruler William of Orange to invade England in November 1688.

³⁵ Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 1:178; Davies, *Royal African Company*, 76-79.

Faced with open rebellion, James fled to safety in France a month later. The company's exclusive rights essentially ended with his departure.³⁶

In the years following the Glorious Revolution, the company's monopoly, although unenforceable, was at least technically still intact, and its leadership attempted to salvage their privileges by convincing Parliament that England's African trade was still best handled through a chartered joint-stock. But with the threat of reprisals by the crown now removed, a powerful alliance of manufacturers, interlopers, and colonial planters rose to counter their claims by making a case for free trade. Each side strenuously forwarded its position through lobbying and pamphlet writing, until Parliament finally decided the issue by passing compromise legislation in 1698 that opened up the African trade to any Englishmen paying the company a ten-percent duty on the total value of goods shipped to Africa.³⁷

Ever since the founding of the Royal Adventurers, colonial planters had longed for the days when they had "been plentifully supplied with negroes" and condemned restrictions that they felt "totally obstructed" the slave trade.³⁸ It came as little surprise, then, that once the Royal African Company's privileges came under question in the 1690s, the major criticism leveled against it was that it harmed colonial economies by failing to provide them with satisfactory numbers of black laborers. "Despite the pretensions of the company," the Barbados Assembly asserted in 1693, "the colonies have not been so well or cheaply furnished with slaves" and the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 104; For an interpretation of the issues surrounding the 1688 Glorious Revolution, see Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714* (New York, 1996), ch. 11.

³⁷ Davies, *Royal African Company*, 122-35.

³⁸ L. F. Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates in the British Parliament Respecting North America*, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1924-41), 1:342.

“consequence is injury to the sugar industry.”³⁹ If the Barbadians had been less interested in increasing supplies in order to drive down prices, they would have admitted they possessed little cause for complaint. Their colony, which had fully converted to slavery before 1660 and thus required only replacements, received nearly half of the 56,000 blacks sold by the company at auction in the West Indies between 1672 and 1688. Far from being inadequately serviced, former governor Edwyn Stede testified, Barbados had so many slaves that those imported were often more than “the island then seemed to want” and company agents sometimes struggled for “ten days or more in selling and disposing two hundred and fifty or three hundred negroes, though good and able people.”⁴⁰

The remaining West Indian colonies, however, were far less fortunate. Like Virginia, Jamaica and the Leewards (with the exception of Nevis) had just begun importing black labor when passage of the navigation acts and the institution of monopolistic control significantly altered slave trading to English America. Consequently, Jamaica’s representatives informed Parliament, they were “not sufficiently supplied with negroes; and those that came, were sold partially, and at extravagant rates.”⁴¹ This statement was made during the polemical debates of the 1690s, but it gains some credence from the company’s own records, which show that before 1688 Jamaica and the Leewards received considerably fewer slaves than

³⁹ *S.P. Col.*, 14: nos. 655, 677

⁴⁰ David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America*, (Cambridge, 1986), 13-21; Stede quote taken from Davies, *Royal African Company*, 307 n.1. Stede’s opinion was probably biased because he had also served as the company’s factor in Barbados during his tenure as governor. However, the company’s deliveries seem to have fulfilled the island’s labor requirements as stated by members of its assembly, strengthening his claims.

⁴¹ Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates*, 2:183.

Barbados, despite having much greater needs.⁴²

The inability of the Restoration monopolies to adequately provide slaves to the West Indian colonies does much to explain their poor record in supplying Virginia. The Royal Adventurers do not seem to have sent any shipments to the colony whatsoever, though it is possible that licensed private merchants made some deliveries since in 1671 Sir William Berkeley mentioned that “two or three ships of negroes” had arrived during the previous seven years. The Royal African Company did not do much better. Between 1672 and 1697 it scheduled just eighteen ships capable of carrying roughly 3,300 slaves. It is unclear how many of these actually arrived, but the company likely sent only a percentage on its own initiative. Assuming that all of the vessels reached their intended destination fully loaded, the total value of their cargoes (£18 per slave according to a proclamation made by the company in 1672) would have been about £60,000, yet just £7,248 in bills of exchange from Virginia appear in its account books. Although some remittances are possibly not recorded among the payments received, at least six of the ships discharged their cargoes in accordance with the instructions of independent English merchants, suggesting that most shipments were sent under contract.⁴³

Private merchants arranged for these deliveries by agreeing in advance to

⁴² Davies, *Royal African Company*, 363; Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 137.

⁴³ Henning, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 515; David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, eds., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, 1999); C.O. 1/31 f. 32, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 92; C.O. 1/34 ff. 109, 110, *ibid.*; T.70/1, f. 8, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 802; T. 70/57, f. 38, *ibid.*; T. 70/61 ff. 6, 30, 57, 83, 106, 165-66, 170, *ibid.*; Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 4: 53-55; Davies, *Royal African Company*, 294-95, 359. Davies stated that all slaves the company delivered to Virginia were supplied on contract, but in most cases this is impossible to firmly establish because surviving records mention only the name of the ship, the date of its departure, and the number of slaves it was to carry. For a brief analysis of the company's shipments to Virginia, see Menard, “From Servants to Slaves,” 366-67.

purchase cargoes from the company at a fixed price payable in London. Their own factors in the colony, rather than the company's agents, performed all the tasks associated with selling the slaves, paying the company for those actually delivered via bills drawn on their merchant sponsor. These contracted shipments gave Virginians at least limited access to slaves from Africa, though not enough to satisfy their needs or to prevent them from joining the fight against monopoly in 1696.⁴⁴ Blacks imported by interlopers also might have helped to compensate somewhat for the company's neglect. Yet the only mention of such activity in extant records is the 1687 seizure of the *Society* for illegally attempting to land 120 blacks on the Eastern Shore, indicating that interlopers also failed to pay much attention to Virginia until after 1688.⁴⁵

Consequently, Virginians used their connections with West Indian merchants and planters as an alternative means of acquiring black laborers. Edmund Jennings did not arbitrarily list Barbados as the most important colony in this respect. Of all the English sugar islands, it alone had a surplus of slaves. This happy predicament, according to Edwyn Stede, often forced agents to send newly imported blacks "to a remoater market" or "retaille them to the marchants & others that sold them again or shipped them to forraigne parts."⁴⁶ Most of these re-exported slaves probably went to labor-hungry settlers in the Leewards and Jamaica, but a significant

⁴⁴ Davies, *Royal African Company*, 294; Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 4: 53-5; Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates*, 2:160, 183.

⁴⁵ C.O. 5/1308 ff. 18-45, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 35; T. 70/57 f. 38, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 802. Virginia's county court records contain numerous references to vessels being seized for violating the acts of trade, further suggesting that shipments brought by interlopers such as the *Society* were rare during the heyday of monopoly control. However, the company ceased to actively pursue interlopers after 1688, and during the Nine Years' War (1689-1697) the government granted a few independent traders formal permission to send consignments of slaves to Virginia. See Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 122-24; Jacob M. Price, "Sheffield v. Starke: Institutional Experimentation in the London-Maryland Trade, ca. 1696-1706," *Business History* 28 (1986): 19-39.

⁴⁶ Stede quote taken from Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 307n.1.

number undoubtedly were sent to Virginia as well.

However, slaving was only one part of a broader commercial connection between Virginia and Barbados. Between 1680 and 1700—the only years during the seventeenth century for which reasonably comprehensive data are available—Virginians mainly traded in provisioning goods, sending more foodstuffs than any other type of commodity (see **Chart 2.1**). In their 1697 description of Virginia, the

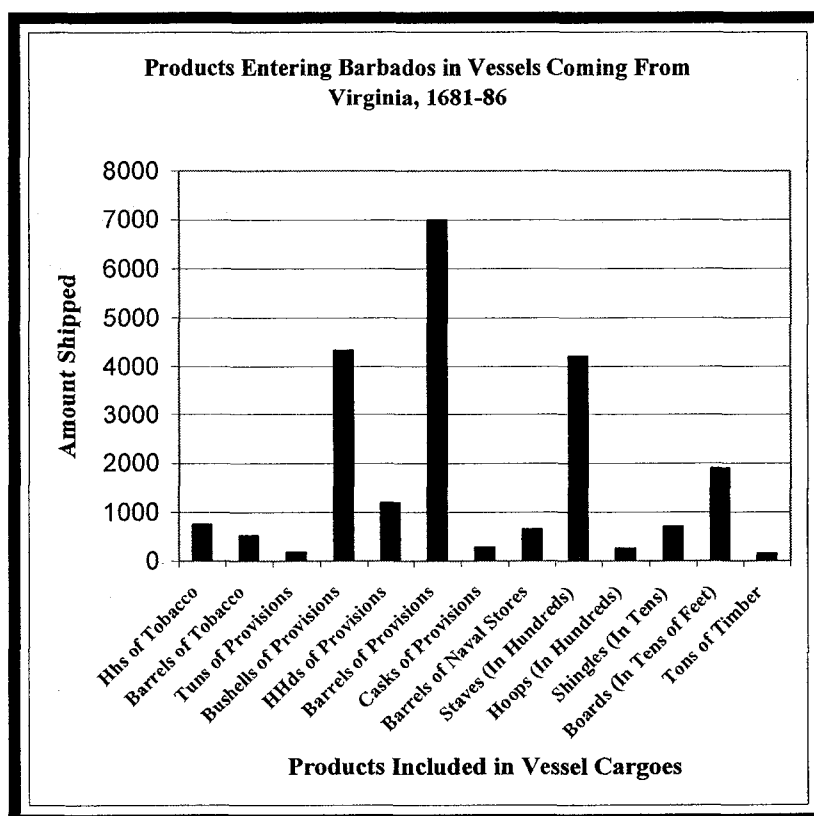


Chart 2.1. Source: C.O. 33/13-14 Barbados Shipping Returns, 1678-1709⁴⁷

Reverend James Blair, Henry Hartwell, and Edward Chilton remarked that the colony's planters grew "wheat, rice, Indian corn, oats, barley, peas, and many other

⁴⁷ These six years are the only consecutive period for which complete listings of incoming vessels survive. There are spotty returns for the 1690s, but not a full record again until 1698. For more information on the Naval Officer Shipping Lists and the problems involved in using them, as well as a listing of surviving returns for Barbados, see Walter E. Minchinton and Peter Waite, comps., *The Naval Officer Shipping Lists for the West Indies, 1678-1825 (Excluding Jamaica), in the Public Record Office, London* (Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1981).

sorts of puse...in great plenty,” which were used for “the supply of Barbadoes, and the other Leward Islands.” In return, their counterparts in the West Indies shipped sugar, rum, molasses, ginger, lime juice, and slaves.⁴⁸

Entries in surviving county court records further illustrate the mix of items exchanged in this coastal trade. In 1660, Thomas Willoughby of Barbados sued Lower Norfolk merchant Owen Hays for 236 pounds of “good sound well condiconed porke” that Hays had failed to pay him. Burgess John Page of York County shipped twenty hogsheads of tobacco to the island on the *Elizabeth* in 1670, and nine years later Thomas Thoresby, a York merchant, sent “eleven barrells of porke & one small barrell of hoggs fatt” on the *Mary* of Salem. In 1684, Lancaster justice Edwin Conway shipped ten hogsheads of “Indian corne” in the *Constant Friendship*. Major Arthur Allen of Surry sued for payment on three hogsheads of tobacco and two barrels of pickled pork he consigned aboard the ketch *Endeavor* in 1686.⁴⁹

Not surprisingly, sugar and sugar-related products made up the bulk of Barbadian cargoes sent to the Chesapeake. Among the items listed in the 1676 inventory of Lancaster merchant John Godsell were 3,454 pounds of muscovado sugar and a parcel of rum “expected to bee consigned in from Barbadoes.” In 1689 merchant James Trapley of Rappahannock received a shipment consisting of “three terces or barrells of rum & six barrells of molasses.” It is uncertain when slaves were

⁴⁸ Henry Hartwell, James Blair, and Edward Chilton, *The Present State of Virginia, and the College*, ed. Hunter Dickinson Farish (Williamsburg, VA, 1940), 6.

⁴⁹ Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), 266; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills 4 (1665-1672), 282; Deeds, Orders, Wills 6 (1677-1684), 431; Lancaster County, Orders, Etc., no. 2 (1680-1686), 148; Surry County, Order Book (1670-1691), 615-16, 623-25. See also the examples from Virginia county court records given in Phillip Alexander Bruce, *Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century: An Inquiry into the Material Condition of the People, Based Upon Original and Contemporaneous Records*, 2 vols. (New York, 1896), 2:324-29.

first included in cargoes, though they were almost certainly a regular component by mid-century. In 1648, for example, Daniell Peirce sold Colonel Francis Yeardley four blacks he had brought from the island. “Three men, and seaven women negroes” were listed on a bill of lading consigned by John Barwick to Lancaster merchant Joseph Smith in 1665.⁵⁰

The letters of Charles City planter William Byrd I afford a rare glimpse into the volume of goods handled by Virginians who were consistently active in this reciprocal coastal trade. Writing to the Barbadian firm of Sadler and Thomas in February 1686, Byrd requested an assortment of island staples and “4 Negro’s, 2 men and 2 women not to exceed 25 years old,” adding that he hoped to send “a few barrells of flower for a sample.” Eight months later, he informed the same correspondents that “you will receive herewith from mee 12 hogsheads of corne 8 barrells of flower & about 2500 pipe staves,” asking that “1200 gallons of rum, 3000 muscavado sugar, 1 barrell of white [sugar], 2 tun of mellasses, 1 caske limejuice and 2 cwt ginger” be sent in return.⁵¹

Surviving naval office returns suggest that Virginians and Barbadians involved in the coastal trade employed an array of shipping to transport their goods, and that maritime activity between the two colonies had a seasonal ebb and flow. Seventy percent of the vessels listed as sailing from Barbados to Virginia were British-owned bottoms averaging eighty tons burden, with smaller New England craft a very distant

⁵⁰ Lancaster County, Wills, Etc., no. 5 (1674-1689), 20-22; Deeds, Etc., no. 4 (1666-1682), 31-32. (Old) Rappahannock County, Order Book (1686-1692), 133; Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds B (1646-1651), f. 116.

⁵¹ William Byrd to Sadler and Thomas, 10 February 1686 and 18 October 1686, in Tinling ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1:50-51, 64-65.

second at fifteen percent. The majority of this outbound traffic departed between September and February, and apparently included few coastal traders, since less than two in ten eventually returned to the island within six months. Considering that many of the larger vessels from London, Bristol, and other British ports came from Europe and arrived in the Caribbean loaded with merchandise, it seems unlikely that they were tightly connected with inter-colonial commercial networks. Some were perhaps part of the annual tobacco fleet headed for the Chesapeake, stopping over briefly at Barbados after plying the traditional southern route across the Atlantic.⁵²

Inbound shipping from Virginia exhibited a distinctly different pattern. Less than thirty percent of the vessels listed were British-owned. The remaining two-thirds were sloops, ketches, pinks, and barks of around forty tons; almost all of which were registered in the colonies and more than half in the Old Dominion itself. The number of vessels arriving from the tobacco coast peaked between April and August rather than later in the year, and most tended to complete a circuit by returning directly to the mainland after acquiring a new cargo on the island. In cases where the recording clerk noted the intended destination of a vessel as well as its port of origin, seventy percent of arrivals from Virginia were headed back to the Chesapeake.⁵³

⁵² C.O. 33/13-14, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 271. Seventy-seven percent of the vessels listed as sailing for Virginia departed on their journey between September and February, sixteen percent left in the spring, and seventeen percent in the summer. Vessels registered in England and Ireland accounted for over 9,000 tons of the total outbound shipping headed for the Chesapeake between 1678 and 1700, compared to 882 tons for New England and 642 tons for Virginia. Fifty tons was the typical burden of vessels throughout the English merchant marine during the later seventeenth century, suggesting that the British vessels sailing between the two colonies were slightly larger than average size. However, many ocean-going ships of the period, such as those sailing to East Indies, were over 300 tons. See Violet Barbour, "Dutch and English Merchant Shipping in the Seventeenth Century," *Economic History Review*, 1st. ser., 2 (1929-30): 279-81.

⁵³ C.O. 33/13-14, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 271. Sixty-eight percent of vessels coming to Barbados from Virginia arrived between April and August, thirteen percent arrived in the fall, and eighteen percent in the winter. At 3,672 tons, British owned vessels still accounted for the bulk of the shipping listed, although Virginia was a close second at 2,761 tons. Incomplete returns make it impossible to

Many of these coastal traders appear repeatedly in the returns, clearly demonstrating that they carried goods between the two colonies on a regular basis. Some were owned by independent merchant-mariners such as James Rainy of Accomack and William Knott of Lower Norfolk, both of whom made several trips to Barbados in the 1680s; Rainy in the ketch *Unity* and Knott in the sloop *Arthur and Jane*. Others, like John Studley's *Friendly Society*, belonged to small groups of more prominent Virginians who in some cases shared ownership with English merchants or with the vessel's captain. Aside from securing reliable transport and lower freight charges for their produce, investing in shipping allowed wealthier planters to avoid taxes levied on certain West Indian goods. "I doe expect there will bee at Barbados about the latter end of July...a small ship called the *Friendship* John Wynne commander," William Byrd informed a Bridgetown merchant in 1689, "& wish that what you send mee, may be by him. I being concerned in the vessell doe thereby save 3d. per gallon duty of the rum here." The *Friendship* occasionally sailed to England with shipments of tobacco or furs. But Wynne seems to have been employed extensively in exchange with Barbados, visiting the island no less than five times in one three year period.⁵⁴

Byrd and his fellow planters had at least three reasons to favor the sailing

precisely establish how many vessels were involved in the coastal trade each year, but somewhere between twenty and thirty would be a good rough estimate.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, Orders (1678-1682), 112, 219-20; Wills, Etc. (1682-1697), ff. 24-25; Lower Norfolk County, Orders (1675-1686), 178-79; Deeds, Etc., no.5 (1686-1695), 52; William Byrd to Sadler and Thomas, 10 February 1686 and 18 October 1686, Byrd to John Thomas & Co., 12 February 1687 and 16 April 1688, Byrd to Perry and Lane, 11 December 1688 and January 1689, Byrd to Jonathan Walke, 29 May 1689, in Tinling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1: 50, 64-65, 70-71, 74-75, 88-89, 95, 104.

schedule usually followed by vessels involved in the coastal trade. First, it allowed them to keep their laborers busy manufacturing planks, shingles, and barrel staves during winter months that would have otherwise been devoted primarily to plantation maintenance. These items, while produced in smaller quantities than the corn, preserved meats, and other foodstuffs that comprised the bulk of cargoes, were often a significant component of shipments sent to Barbados beginning in early spring. April through August arrival times also overlapped with the cane harvest and production season on the island, which lasted from January through June. This enabled Virginians to purchase sugar and sugar-related products when prices were most favorable, increasing their margin of profit when they in turn sold these goods to their surrounding neighbors. Finally, the number of transatlantic slaving vessels arriving in the West Indies peaked in May and June, making it the ideal time of year to procure slaves.⁵⁵

However, during the seventeenth century not all planters possessed enough land and laborers to directly engage in the coastal trade. Even men of middling circumstances often found it difficult to diversify their activities beyond growing tobacco and corn; many barely had enough hands on their farms to prepare and plant fields for these two vital crops in the spring and to tend them during the summer. Producing surplus corn for export or providing feed for extra livestock also required additional acreage and labor time, resources that small operators usually did not have.

⁵⁵ C.O. 33/13-14, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 271; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 190-97; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 168; Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*, 33-37.

Consequently, only in Lower Norfolk and other counties on the south side of the James River—where tobacco production essentially ended by the 1680s—is there evidence of fairly broad participation.⁵⁶

While the laborious nature of Chesapeake husbandry prevented most poorer planters from producing provisioning goods on anything more than a casual basis, there were at least two other reasons that exchange with Barbados remained a relatively exclusive enterprise. Like any other commercial endeavor, engaging in the coastal trade with the islands called for a specialized set of skills. Participants needed to have an understanding of markets and bookkeeping, and possess the ability to coordinate production, make contracts, and arrange for shipping. To effectively perform such work required at least rudimentary training as a merchant, something that not all men had.

Even when a planter had the necessary resources and mercantile expertise, he still needed a connection in Barbados or some means of establishing one. While this last requirement was undoubtedly fraught with its own set of difficulties and challenges, those who engaged in the coastal trade managed to accomplish it in various ways. Robert Pitt and Thomas Jarvis, for instance, traveled to the island in person. Despite being a justice on the Accomack court, Pitt made several voyages to Barbados during the 1660s, shipping pork consigned to him by Colonel Edmund

⁵⁶ Carr, Menard, and Walsh, *Robert Cole's World*, 69-70; Lois Green Carr, "Diversification in the Colonial Chesapeake: Somerset County, Maryland, in Comparative Perspective," in Carr, Morgan, and Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, 344. Economic diversification in the late seventeenth-century Chesapeake is also briefly covered in John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, 1985), 128-29.

Scarborough and other planters as well as his own goods. Jarvis, who served as a justice and burgess for Elizabeth City, visited Barbados often enough to enter a formal partnership with Major Thomas Jolly of St. Michael's Parish in 1671. He remained active as a merchant and vessel captain well into the 1680s, dealing with planters from as far afield as York, Surry, and Lower Norfolk counties.⁵⁷

Other participants were former residents of Barbados who remained in contact with groups of friends or relatives they left behind. Rappahannock merchant Nicholas Ware lived in St. Michael for at least four years before moving to Virginia, and throughout the early 1660s continued to conduct business with his brother-in-law, John Vassall of Bridgetown. Thomas Walke relocated from the island to Lower Norfolk around 1662 and eventually grew affluent enough to be named to the county court. Until his death in 1693, he sought to promote the commercial interests of his brother Jonathan among high-placed acquaintances in the colony, and on occasion handled shipping and financial affairs for him as well.⁵⁸

Barbadian immigrants could also be instrumental in helping some of their new neighbors gain a connection on the island. "I am altogether a stranger to you," William Byrd wrote Jonathan Walke in 1689, "yet by the advice & encouragement of your brother Mr. Thomas Walke, I have given you the trouble of the inclosed bills of

⁵⁷ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; Accomack County, Orders, Wills, Etc. (1671-1673), 136, 170-72, 177; Wills, Etc. (1673-1676), 22; RB3/12/82-84, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives; P.C. 2/64, 166, 168, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 459; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 6 (1677-1684), 367; Surry County, Orders (1671-1691), 438; Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds E (1666-1675), f. 46; Orders (1675-1686), 232, 236.

⁵⁸ RB3/3/44, 51, 87, 287, 289, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives; RB3/5/35, *ibid.*; (Old) Rappahannock County, Records (1656-1664), 212-13. Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; William Byrd to Jonathan Walke, 23 January 1691 and 20 May 1691, in Tinling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1: 143-44, 147. Thomas Walke likely also represented several other Barbadian merchants in Virginia. See, for example, a 1679 reference to his service as an attorney for "one Parrett of in ye Barbadoes" in Lower Norfolk County, Orders (1675-1686), 98.

exchange, which I desire you would receive for mee & please to send mee the effects about 2/3 in rum & 1/3 sugar.” By the early 1690s, Byrd was only one of several wealthy men dealing with Jonathan Walke, who also counted Lewis Burwell of Gloucester, Nathaniel Bacon Sr. of York, and Benjamin Harrison of Surry among his clients.⁵⁹

Gaining access to the coastal trade was easiest for members of the elite, whose social connections with kin, friends, and fellow officeholders—both within and outside of their local community—often led to cooperation in commercial matters. A network of planters involved with Sadler and Thomas developed on the upper James River, and included William Byrd, Benjamin Harrison, William Randolph, Francis Eppes, Peter Perry, and Henry Hartwell, all of whom held various provincial and county offices.⁶⁰ It is impossible to firmly establish whether Thomas Walke’s “advice & encouragement” of Byrd resulted in a similar network associated with Jonathan Walke. However, Byrd and Nathaniel Bacon were contemporaries on the Council, and Harrison served in the House of Burgesses during the same period. Lewis Burwell did not join the assembly until 1698, but he was married to Bacon’s niece and could have easily learned of Walke through him.⁶¹

The degree of intimacy associated with relationships that grew out of the

⁵⁹ William Byrd to Jonathan Walke, 29 May 1689, in Tingling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1:104; T.70/276 f. 57, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 802.

⁶⁰ Charles City County, Orders (1687-1695), 359, 368, 373, 381, 384; Virginia officeholder files, 17th century. Perry lived in Charles City, Hartwell in James City, and Eppes and Randolph in Henrico. For evidence of their cooperation, see William Byrd to Sadler and Thomas, 18 October 1686, Byrd to Perry and Lane, 11 December 1688, in Tingling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1: 64-65, 88-89.

⁶¹ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; For a brief examination of Lewis Burwell’s connection with Nathaniel Bacon Sr., see Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter’s Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community* (Charlottesville, VA, 1997), 26-27.

coastal trade varied widely. Thomas Jarvis and Thomas Jolly probably knew each other only as business associates. The agreement they signed in 1671 was accordingly quite specific in addressing the details of their partnership. After acknowledging what items Jolly had loaded aboard his ship the *Thomas and Mary*, Jarvis pledged to keep “just and true accounts” of what he sold in Virginia, and to forward the proceeds to Jolly or his assignees on his order. Jarvis was further obliged to contribute goods of his own that were equal in value, and to either bring them to Barbados himself or to send them to Jolly by another vessel within ninety days after arriving in the Chesapeake. Both men agreed to evenly split the risks and profits of their dealings and, after affirming that they would not charge each other commission on any merchandise consigned “on the joynt account,” committed themselves to “the true and reall performance” of their agreement “in the penalty of five hundred pounds sterling.”⁶²

Other participants could not negotiate their arrangements in person, and instead relied on friends and long-term associates they knew they could trust. Barbadian merchants Richard Bate and Barnard Schenking, for example, chose their “trusty and welbeloved friend” justice William Travers of Rappahannock as their Virginia representative in 1677. A year later Mary Clutterbuck of Barbados called on “her friend” Thomas Jordan of Surry County to be her attorney when she sought to recover debts owed her late husband. Relations between Virginia merchant Nathaniel Huberd and John Randolph of Barbados were also quite warm. When writing to give Randolph’s wife Ann “the sorrowful news” of her husband’s death in 1688, Huberd

⁶² RB3/12/82-84, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives.

offered her “kind loves” as well as his assistance in settling several business matters. In closing his letter asked that she tender his “most humble regards” to several mutual acquaintances, suggesting that they knew one another well.⁶³

The value of acquiring a reliable contact is aptly demonstrated by the myriad frustrations, problems, and disputes that even men who were well versed in the coastal trade were apt to encounter on occasion. “All the parties concerned seem much dissatisfied with Mr. Thomas and Sadler as I suppose you will hear more at large from others,” William Byrd wrote his English factors Perry and Lane in 1688, “we were all surprized on Wynns arrival from Barbados where we find all our effects sent thither...come to just nothing.” The reputation which Sadler and Thomas enjoyed on the upper James evidently continued to deteriorate over the next few years, so much so that Byrd and five other planters obtained writs of attachment against them from the Charles City court in 1692. Arthur Allen and Robert Caufield of Surry were similarly forced into a legal wrangle when Barbadian merchant Thomas Partridge failed to make returns on a shipment of tobacco and pork they consigned to him for sale, receiving their profits only after Partridge proved unable to produce accounts demonstrating he had properly handled the goods they had sent him.⁶⁴

Even with such headaches, however, the coastal trade had its benefits for Virginians, particularly given the sluggish tobacco market of the late seventeenth century. Falling prices and rising production had characterized the tobacco industry

⁶³ Middlesex County, Order Book no. 1 (1673-1680), f. 107; Surry County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 2 (1671-1684), 184.; RB3/17/381, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives.

⁶⁴ William Byrd to Perry and Lane, 11 December 1688, in Tingling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 88; Charles City County, Orders (1687-1695), 368, 384; Surry County, Order Book (1671-1691), 615-19, 623-25; Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 4 (1687-1694), 35-38.

from the 1620s to the early 1670s. But growth slowed considerably during the latter decade, and around 1680 prices for the leaf entered a period of relative stagnation that lasted for thirty years.⁶⁵ Even before the market began to sour, producing provisions for the coastal trade provided some planters with an alternative to gambling all of their resources on their unstable staple. Yet in the exceptionally difficult economic times after 1680, the extra income generated by selling sugar and other island products to neighbors undoubtedly made the difference between mere sufficiency and prosperity for some men.

Of course, the coastal trade also provided access to slaves. Nicholas Ware used his relationship with John Vassell to acquire four “good negroes” in 1661. Robert Ruffin and George Williams of Surry both purchased slaves who were “brought from Barbadoes” by Captain Thomas Willis in 1685. William Byrd took advantage of his “particular account” with Sadler and Thomas to obtain black laborers on a number of occasions.⁶⁶ Although wealthy men with connections on the island like Byrd enjoyed the advantage of being able to request slaves whenever they required them, Barbadian merchants also included blacks in cargoes they sent to their counterparts in Virginia for casual sale. “Three negroe men and one negroe woman” were among the “goods” Thomas Jolly consigned aboard Thomas Jarvis’s ship in 1671. Nathaniel Huberd apparently performed the same service for John Randolph, for in his letter to Randolph’s widow he noted that he had recently sold two women, a

⁶⁵ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 120-25. See also Russell R. Menard, “The Tobacco Industry in the Chesapeake Colonies, 1617-1730: An Interpretation,” *Research in Economic History* 5 (1980): 109-77.

⁶⁶ (Old) Rappahannock County, Records (1656-1664), 212-13; Surry County, Order Book (1671-1691), 484, 486; William Byrd to Perry and Lane, 2 February 1685, Byrd to Sadler and Thomas, 10 February 1686 and 18 October 1686, in Tingling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 29, 50, 64.

girl, and a boy on behalf of her late husband. Slaves shipped to Virginia for distribution in this manner were available to anyone, which allowed some middling planters to occasionally purchase one or two. But even most consigned blacks probably went to wealthier men, since merchants involved in the trade primarily dealt with planters who regularly produced a surplus of provisioning goods for export.⁶⁷

With direct shipments of Africans reduced to a trickle by the sugar revolution, the navigation acts, and the Restoration monopolies, the exclusion of most ordinary planters from direct participation in the coastal trade virtually assured that slave ownership in Virginia remained limited. As late as the 1680s, only fourteen percent of inventoried estates in York, Lower Norfolk, Lancaster, and Northumberland counties listed a black laborer, and less than five percent had more than four. Obviously, cost also prevented many planters from buying slaves. The average price for a prime male slave hovered around £25 from the mid-1670s to 1700, while white servants only commanded between £10 and £12 over the same period. However, until intermittent direct deliveries began in the last quarter of the century, more than a third of labor-owning decedents worth more than £200 did not have any black workers, suggesting that access was just as important as price in limiting slave holding.⁶⁸

The uneven distribution of blacks is similarly evident in surviving headright records. Between 1660 and 1690, years when monopoly control over the slave trade was at its height, officeholders accounted for more than half of the black headrights

⁶⁷ RB3/12/82-84, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives; RB3/17/381, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ St. Mary's City Commission inventory files; Menard, "From Servants to Slaves," 372. By contrast, ninety-four percent of labor-owning planters with estates valued at more than £200 had at least one servant.

claimed in land patents and comprised roughly forty percent of the patentees. The same trend is even more pronounced in land certificates issued by the various counties, where elites were accredited with nearly three-quarters of the black headrights listed and made up fifty-five percent of the total claimants.⁶⁹

Many of Virginia's seventeenth-century planters did not die owning an estate that was valuable enough to be inventoried, and the number whose lack of resources prevented them from claiming land with black headrights was even greater.⁷⁰ Thus, in order to understand fully the initial development of slavery in the colony, it seems prudent to look beyond the overall rate at which blacks replaced whites within the Chesapeake's bound workforce. Indeed, focusing solely on the behavior of the "average planter" actually obscures how rapidly slavery took root in the colony, since almost all early slaveowners came from the upper ranks of society. Of course, historians have long noted that the region's wealthier men were the first to hold slaves.⁷¹ Yet when this phenomenon is examined in detail, it becomes apparent that, while the timing and extent of conversion differed from one sub-region to another, blacks made up an integral component of elite labor forces long before the turn of the eighteenth century.

⁶⁹ Virginia headright files, 17th century.

⁷⁰ Surviving land patent and land certificate records list just 522 individuals who claimed land with black headrights during the seventeenth century, of which 222 held a county or provincial office or was closely related to someone who did.

⁷¹ Menard, "From Servants to Slaves," 385-87, Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland*, 102-103; Robert McColley, "Slavery in Virginia, 1619-1660: A Reexamination," in R. Abzug and S. Maizlish, eds., *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Stamp* (Lexington, KY, 1986), 20; Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction* (New York, 1986), 102; David W. Galenson, "Economic Aspects of the Growth of Slavery in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake," in Barbara L. Solow, ed., *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge, 1991), 281-86.

Chapter 3

“The Substantial Planters Have of Those Negro Slaves”

Virginia’s conversion from servitude to slavery has long been a subject of scholarly interest. Modern discussion of this crucial transition dates back at least to 1950, when Oscar and Mary Handlin offered the then novel interpretation that the colony’s inhabitants did not begin to enslave blacks until the 1660s and were afterwards hesitant to employ them in large numbers so long as adequate quantities of servants remained available. “Planters did not think Negro labor more desirable” and continued to call for white bondsmen, they asserted, further contending that since “the holders of large estates in the Chesapeake colonies expressed no wish for a Negro labor supply, they could hardly have planned to use black hands as a means of displacing white.”¹ Decades of further research have led most historians away from the Handlins’ position. Yet their idea that the transition to slavery came late in the seventeenth century, and that it was unintended, even reluctant, remains firmly entrenched in the current historiography.

The most convincing proponent of the view that Virginians and Marylanders were pushed rather than plunged into slave ownership has been Russell R. Menard. In an influential essay based on quantitative evidence drawn from headright lists, probate inventories, and county court records, he demonstrated that the number of servants reaching the tobacco coast slowly began to decline relative to the number of

¹ Oscar Handlin and Mary F. Handlin, “Origins of the Southern Labor System,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 7 (1950): 199-222, quotations on pp. 207, 208. I consider the issue of why Virginians converted to black labor as only tangentially related to the more publicized debate over the relationship between slavery and racism. For a thorough analysis of the latter, see Alden T. Vaughan, “The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *VMHB* 97 (1989): 311-54.

householders during the late 1660s and dropped-off precipitously after 1680. If a growing demand for slaves was responsible for this trend, he reasoned, then there should be some indication of substantial black immigration by mid-century. But it was not until roughly 1690 that slaves came to outnumber whites in the Chesapeake's bound labor force, and the early eighteenth century before they were consistently imported in large numbers. Moreover, as white bondsmen became more scarce, their price initially rose, leading Menard to suggest that planters "were reluctant to exchange laborers they were used to for workers who were unfamiliar and, doubtless to some, a bit frightening." In other words, the region's inhabitants "did not abandon indentured servitude because they preferred slaves; rather a decline in the traditional labor supply forced planters to recruit laborers from new sources."²

Not all scholars have concurred. In his landmark book *American Slavery, American Freedom*, Edmund S. Morgan pointed to the greater profitability of black labor as the principal reason for the switch. "With slavery Virginians could exceed all of their previous efforts to maximize productivity," he contended, because "there was no limit to the work or time a master could command from his slaves." For Morgan, rising life expectancy did more to trigger demand for black workers than any decline in the availability of servants. Arguing that high levels of immigrant mortality had made acquiring slaves prohibitively risky throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, he cited the assembly's decision to exempt Dutch slave traders from certain

² Menard, "From Servants to Slaves," 355-90, quotations on pp. 355, 374. For similar interpretations, see Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 97-106; David W. Galenson, "White Servitude and the Growth of Black Slavery in Colonial America," *Journal of Economic History*, 41 (1981): 39-47. Galenson has further suggested that planters may have been hesitant to purchase slaves so long as their precise legal status remained ambiguous and that increasing legal recognition of slavery after 1660 probably also played a role in prompting the shift toward enslaved labor in the last third of the century. See "Economic Aspects of the Growth of Slavery," 270-75.

tobacco duties as evidence that conditions had improved enough by 1660 to make blacks the better buy. Planters likely would have begun to aggressively invest in slaves around this time, Morgan surmised, had it not been for passage of the Navigation Acts and the establishment of monopoly control over the English slave trade, the combined result of which “was to delay Virginia’s conversion to slavery.” Poorer planters had little choice but to continue buying servants during these years since they lacked the necessary means to purchase blacks. Yet despite severe limitations on access, men “who could afford to operate on a large scale, looking to the long run, bought slaves as they became more profitable and as they became available.”³

Although the interpretations put forward by Menard and Morgan seem radically different, they are not wholly incompatible. Menard’s focus was on the large picture—when and why slavery became the predominant form of labor throughout the Chesapeake. Not only did his essay place particular emphasis on the point when blacks began to outnumber whites in the region’s bound workforce, he used aggregate data from probate inventories and tax lists to support his selection of circa 1690 as the date this transition occurred. As a result, while his analysis of the broad course of change is certainly sound, the manner in which he marshaled his evidence served to mask differences between social classes. For instance, before 1670, when according to

³ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 295-315, quotations on pp. 399, 305, 309-10.

Menard the supply of servants was more or less adequate to meet demand, the likelihood that a planter would own slaves went up significantly as his wealth increased (see **Chart 3.1**). Over sixty percent of Virginians worth more than £500

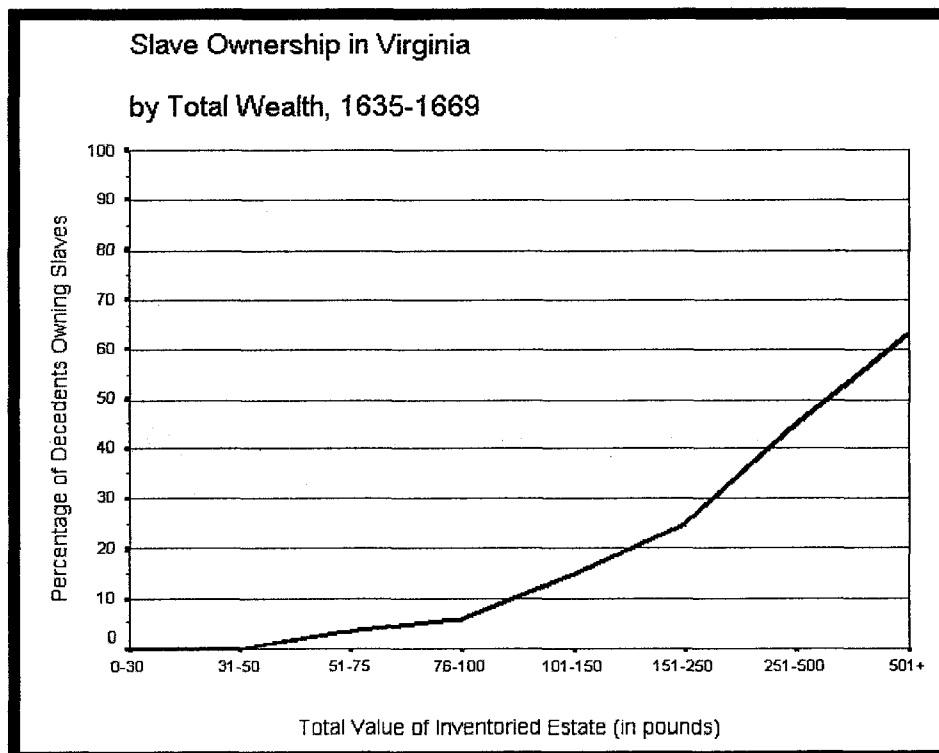


Chart 3.1. Source: St. Mary's City Commission Inventory Files.

employed slaves in this period, and the true proportion was probably even higher.⁴ Of course, this trend largely reflected the higher cost of black laborers. But it also begs a question: if Virginians were truly reluctant to buy into slavery as long as servants were plentiful or at least available, why was slave ownership most widespread among the affluent, who presumably enjoyed the greatest amount of choice?

Menard offered a solution to this apparent paradox himself when he noted that

⁴ Five of the decedents with estates valued at more than £500 pounds did not have any laborers listed in their inventories. When these individuals are excluded, slave-ownership among the wealthiest group rises to eighty-two percent. It should be noted that the chart is based on inventories from York, Northampton, Northumberland, Lower Norfolk, and Lancaster counties. Consequently, while the dataset is representative of all sub-regions in the colony it is not comprehensive.

“small planters largely confined their labor purchases to servants; wealthier planters bought servants and slaves.” He did not discuss how this difference might qualify his argument that planters along the tobacco coast were forced to convert to slavery, only how it shaped the region’s social distribution of labor during the period. However, his acknowledgement that there were perhaps “two distinct yet overlapping labor markets in the Chesapeake colonies” can be viewed as eliminating much of the conflict between his interpretation and Morgan’s, which was concerned almost exclusively with the elite. It is entirely possible that men of middling circumstances—who had more intimate contact with their workers—were hesitant to buy slaves when servants could be had. Yet another potential scenario is that demand for servants remained vibrant because black laborers were simply too expensive and difficult to procure for the majority of Virginians. In addition, since middling householders comprised the most rapidly expanding segment of the labor market and wealthier planters continued to buy white bondsmen even as they converted to slaves, it is understandable that the price of servants surged upward after supplies of them began to decline, leveling off only after blacks became more widely available after the turn of the eighteenth century.⁵

So was Morgan correct in asserting that it was the greater profitability of black labor that spurred the initial growth of slavery? The answer appears to be yes. If any group was in a position to choose between white and black bondsmen, it was the elite, and many of them chose the latter. That wealthier Virginians found investing in slavery attractive is hardly surprising. After all, the procurement of labor was crucial

⁵ Menard, “From Servants to Slaves,” 385-88.

to the success of any ambitious planter. For those who were able to run the risk of incurring some losses from disease and other causes, acquiring “lusty negroes” offered several advantages over relying solely on servants.⁶

It is quite clear that by the second quarter of the century blacks could be held in permanent bondage. In 1640, the colony’s General Court ordered that two servants belonging to Justice Hugh Gwynne of York receive a one-year extension of their terms for running away, but that their accomplice, “being a negro named John Punch,” should serve “his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural life.” Surviving records demonstrate that the court’s ruling was not an isolated occurrence. The 1648 inventory of Northampton vestryman John Major, for instance, included “one Negro man having his whole life to serve.” During that same year the executors of York Burgess William Pryor sold a group of eight blacks to Captain John Chisman, stipulating that they should belong to him and “his heirs etc., forever.”⁷

Enslavement was apparently also quickly recognized—at least on a de facto basis—as a hereditary condition, since planters often asserted ownership over the prospective offspring of black laborers they sold or bought. In 1648, Captain Roger Marshall of Northumberland County sold Luke Billington of Northampton a “Negro woman aged about sixteene yeares knowne by ye name of Jane...& all her increase

⁶ Quotation taken from Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 2 (1654-1702), 367. Investments in labor, at least for wealthier planters, likely constituted the largest single capital expenditure associated with growing tobacco. Three workers listed in the 1645 inventory of Northampton Burgess Phillip Taylor, for example, accounted for roughly forty percent of his estate’s total value. See, Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc, no. 3 (1645-1651), f. 77-78.

⁷ McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court*, 466; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1645-1651), ff. 180-82; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 2 (1645-1649), 338. See also the various sentences meted out in 1640 to Captain William Pierce’s seven runaway laborers, one of whom was “a negro” named Emanuel, in McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court*, 467.

which for further tyme shall be borne of her body.” In 1653 John Custis bought “a Negro girl named Doll” from Colonel Argoll Yardley, “to have and to hold her & her increase for ever.” Although the language used in deeds of this sort indicates that planters were aware that the purchase of slaves could potentially lead to a self-perpetuating labor force, few felt moved to record any explicit comment on the subject. One rare exception was burgess William Fitzhugh of Stafford, who assured an English correspondent that his “Negroes increase being all young, & a considerable parcel of breeders, will keep that stock good for ever.”⁸

A third advantage was the absence of any social prohibition against using black women as agricultural laborers. It was not unknown, of course, for female servants to occasionally work in the crop alongside men, but the practice was generally frowned upon. John Hammond expressly addressed this point in his 1656 defense of the colony, stating that the tasks assigned white women were usually domestic in nature, and only “som wenches that are nasty, beastly and unfit to be so employed are put into the ground.” A 1643 change in the statutes governing tithables not only suggests that Hammond’s claim was accurate, it also illustrates how promptly official blessing was bestowed on the view that black women were “nasty” and “beastly” enough to be used in the fields. The new law did nothing to change the status of white females, who because they were not legally considered to be wealth-producing members of a household were exempted from annual levies. Yet after its passage, planters were obliged to pay parish taxes on “all negro women at the age of

⁸ Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1645-1651), f. 139; Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 4 (1651-1654), 151; William Fitzhugh to Doctor Ralph Smith, 22 April 1686, in Richard Beale Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World, 1676-1701: The Fitzhugh Letters and Other Documents* (Chapel Hill, 1963), 176.

sixteen years,” most likely because it was assumed they would participate regularly in tobacco cultivation.⁹

Finally, because blacks were barred from bringing complaints before the courts, there was nothing to prevent masters from skimping on their provisions, compelling them to work long hours, or depriving them of the half day of free time customarily granted white bondsmen on Saturdays. In short, slaves were less costly to maintain than servants and decidedly easier to exploit, advantages that Governor Thomas Lord Culpepper undoubtedly took into account when he informed the Board of Trade in 1683 that blacks could grow tobacco “cheaper than whites.” Culpepper’s statement had particular import in a period of depressed prices for the staple. But it was equally true during more prosperous times a generation or two before, and from a relatively early date prominent Virginians began purchasing slaves. Indeed, rather making a reluctant, “unthinking decision” to employ black laborers, many affluent planters clearly saw their value, and likely felt the same way as Captain Francis Pott of Northampton, who stressed to his nephew in 1646 that he would “rather parte with any thinge or all I have besids; then with my Negroes.”¹⁰

However, determining how rapidly the colony’s elite converted from white servants to black slaves is somewhat more difficult than ascertaining what might have

⁹ Hammond, “Leah and Rachel,” 291; Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 1:242, 292, 454. In 1662, the assembly further discouraged the use of white women as field laborers by declaring tithable all female servants “whose common employment” was working “in the ground.” Planters’ wives and daughters who engaged in similar tasks, however, remained exempt from taxation. See, *Ibid.*, 2:170. For a thorough discussion of the 1643 law and related statutes that focuses on the role of gender in delineating racial difference, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), 116-20.

¹⁰ Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 4: 58; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Ect, no. 3 (1645-1651), f. 95. The categorization of Virginia’s conversion to slavery as an “unthinking decision” was first espoused by historian Winthrop Jordan in his classic study *White Over Black*, ch. 2.

prompted them to do so, particularly since the various types of records that provide some means of charting the growth of slavery are anything but precise. Edmund Morgan has pointed out the problems involved in using headrights for calculating the annual immigration rates of white and black workers. Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh, along with several other historians, performed a similar service by describing some of the inherent biases in probate inventories. The utility of tax lists—the most reliable source for examining changes in the colony’s labor force over time—is limited because lengthy runs survive only for Lancaster, Surry, and the Eastern Shore counties, with Northampton and Surry alone having years in which tithable workers were individually named.¹¹

Still, these records contain a good deal of information about slave ownership during the seventeenth century. Despite the sizable time gap that could exist between a person’s arrival and the date their name appeared on a land certificate or patent, there is a fair probability that headrights can serve as an indicator of how incoming slaves were geographically and socially distributed. Land certificates in particular seem to supply a reasonably accurate accounting of slaves purchased by individual planters. Sixteen of the twenty-four black headrights claimed on Northampton County certificates between 1663 and 1677 correspond with the names of tithables in contemporary tax lists, and at least one of the remaining eight was probably below

¹¹ Edmund S. Morgan, “Headrights and Headcounts,” 361-71; Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh, “Inventories and the Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary’s County, Maryland, 1658-1777,” *Historical Methods* 13 (1980): 81-104. Morgan’s “review article” was written in response to ideas Wesley Frank Craven posed in his collection of lectures entitled *White, Red, and Black: The Seventeenth-Century Virginian*. For more information on the potential pitfalls of working with probate inventories, see Gloria L. Main, “The Correction of Biases in Colonial American Probate Records,” *Historical Methods Newsletter* 8 (1974): 10-28; Daniel Scott Smith, “Under-registration and Bias in Probate Records: An Analysis of Data from Eighteenth-Century Hingham, Massachusetts,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 32 (1975): 100-110.

tithable age. The percentage is even better for Surry, where thirty-seven of forty-four black headrights claimed between 1680 and 1699 match the names of tithables belonging to the men who claimed them.¹²

Unfortunately, land certificates are available only for those counties with surviving records, and even then, court clerks were far from consistent about recording them. Consequently, any colony-wide analysis of headrights must be based on data culled from patents, which as Morgan demonstrated are almost certainly less accurate because they were issued at the provincial rather than the county level and often included rights that had been accumulated over time or even sold or traded from one planter to another for use in land speculation. However, it is quite easy to establish the county of residence for those claimants who were most likely to have used headrights in the ways Morgan suggested, since most of them held public office. By also making adjustments where a transfer or duplication of rights can be documented, it is possible to gain a rough idea of where incoming slaves ended up.

Throughout the seventeenth century, rivers provided the only practical means of reaching Virginia's interior, a reality that eventually led to the formation of five naval or customs districts: Lower James (which included the Eastern Shore), Upper James, York, Rappahannock, and Potomac. The slave trade undoubtedly followed the same general patterns as other forms of commercial activity, so with the simple modification of separating the Eastern Shore and Lower James into distinct areas,

¹² Morgan, "Headrights and Headcounts," 363-64; Virginia black headright files, 17th century. The figures given for both Northampton and Surry exclude certificates issued to non-resident planters who do not appear on the tax lists and thus could not be cross referenced. In 1662, for example, Hugh Yeo of Accomack was issued a certificate in Northampton for the transportation of nine people, including "Anthony, a Negro."

these districts serve as a convenient guide for segregating headrights by sub-region.¹³ According to land patents, planters along the York imported the largest number of blacks during the century, followed closely by those living on the Upper and Lower James (see **Chart 3.2**). An analysis limited to headrights claimed by officeholders yields only a slightly different result, the main difference being that the total for the Lower James drops slightly below that for Rappahannock.¹⁴

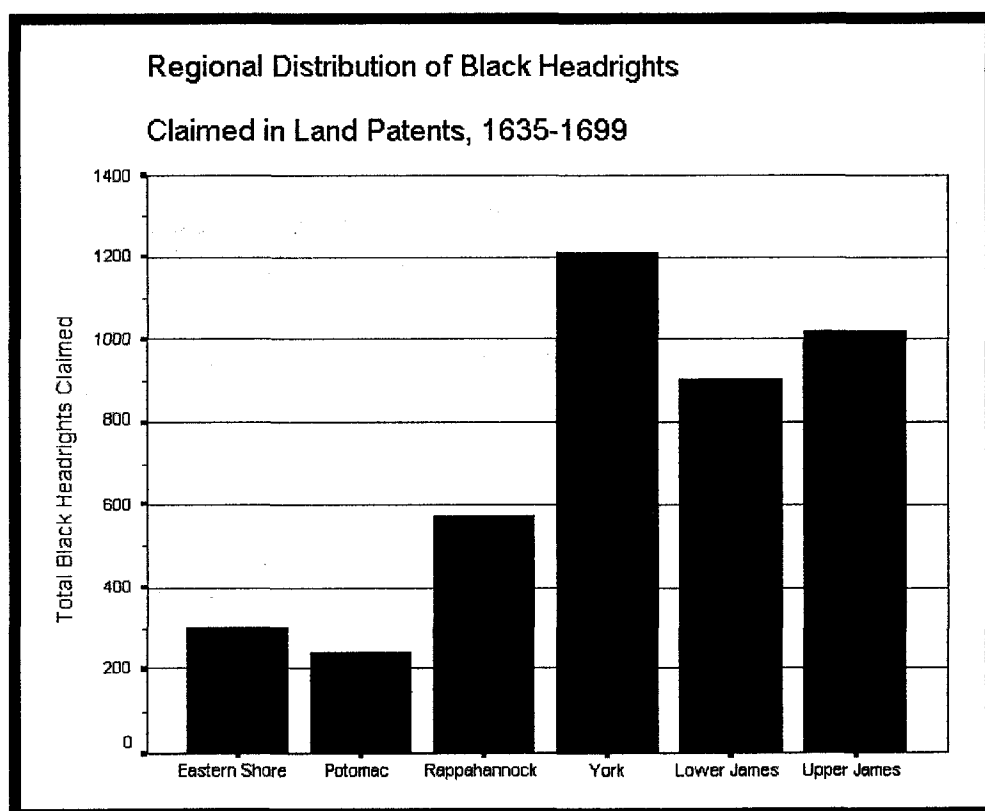


Chart 3.2. Source: Virginia black headright files, 17th century. The totals given are based either on the claimant's known county of residence, or, in cases where that cannot be established, on the county in which the patent was granted.

¹³ The counties included in the respective sub-regions are as follows: Eastern Shore— Northampton and Accomack; Potomac— Northumberland, Westmoreland, and Stafford; Rappahannock— Lancaster, Middlesex, and Old Rappahannock (divided into Richmond and Essex Counties in 1692); York— York, Gloucester, New Kent, and King and Queen; Lower James— Elizabeth City, Warwick, Isle of Wight, Nansemond, Lower Norfolk, and Princess Anne; Upper James— James City, Charles City, Henrico, and Surry.

¹⁴ Virginia black headright files, 17th century. The reason for the significant drop in the total for Lower James when analysis is restricted to officeholders is discussed below on pages 92-93.

To some extent, the concentration of slaves in areas bordering the York and the James reflects the growth of settlement. Seven of the colony's eight original counties were located along one of these two rivers, and throughout the century the bulk of the population continued to live either along their banks or in their hinterlands. In fact, during the 1640s, Dutch ship captains bound for Virginia were sometimes instructed to limit their activities to the area between Jamestown and Point Comfort (located at the tip of the lower peninsula), presumably because that was where they would find the greatest concentration of potential customers.¹⁵ Planters on the Eastern Shore, where the eighth original county was located, were undoubtedly at a disadvantage because of their isolated location, though the presence of Dutch merchants such as the Corsen Stams perhaps helped to assuage this problem until their influence was proscribed by the Navigation Acts. The lower totals for Rappahannock and Potomac are probably due in part to their later date of settlement. Counties were not formed along either watershed until mid-century, and they accordingly took several years to catch up with the population density and overall wealth of more demographically mature areas.¹⁶

However, it was the quality of a sub-region's natural resources that most profoundly influenced the density of its black population. The rich, alluvial soils of

¹⁵ 28 July 1650, VA 50, No. 1345/68v-69, Amsterdam Notarial Archives. In 1647, a skipper sailing from Rotterdam was given instructions to restrict his trading activities to "the James, Yorck and Elizabeth River," see 6 Aug. 1647, V 27, Rotterdam Notarial Archives. Between 1634 and 1699, the percentage of the colony's total population living along the James and the York dropped from roughly ninety-two to sixty-six percent. See Evarts B. Green and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York, 1932), 145-46.

¹⁶ Northumberland, the first county organized in either region, was formed in 1645, followed by Lancaster in 1651, Westmoreland in 1653, and Rappahannock in 1656. The remaining two northern counties of Stafford and Middlesex came into being in 1664 and 1669 respectively. In 1699, the Rappahannock region contained just fifteen percent of the colony's total population and the Potomac only eleven percent.

the lower and middle peninsulas allowed the planters living there to grow milder, sweet-scented tobacco. The higher returns generated by this lucrative variety of the leaf likely produced greater disposable income for investing in slaves. Sweet-scented growers also suffered less during years of depressed prices. Most inhabitants of the Potomac basin, on the other hand, were limited to growing oronoco tobacco, which commanded a significantly lower price than sweet-scented and was more vulnerable to fluctuations and depressions in the market. The Eastern Shore and counties located south of the James River were the poorest sections of the colony. Perpetually handicapped by soils that were largely unsuitable even for oronoco, many planters in these areas began abandoning tobacco altogether during the difficult years after 1680, and instead started producing naval stores or provisioning crops to sell locally or for export abroad.¹⁷

The better tobacco-growing areas also tended to attract the heaviest concentration of great planters. These large operators, many of whom served on the Council, produced the staple on an entirely different scale than other men, a fact best illustrated by comparing the tithables owned by officeholders from Lancaster, Surry, and the Eastern Shore during the second half of the century (**see Chart 3.3**). Although in each case the individuals tabulated were the largest labor owners in their respective counties, after a brief spike in the early 1660s the mean number of Lancaster tithables generally fluctuated between ten and fifteen, while the average for Surry and the Eastern Shore usually varied between four and eight and never broke ten. Most of this difference is attributable to the concentration of a few very wealthy planters in

¹⁷ Lorena S. Walsh, "Summing the Parts: Implications for Estimating Chesapeake Output and Income Subregionally," *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 56 (1999): 53-76.

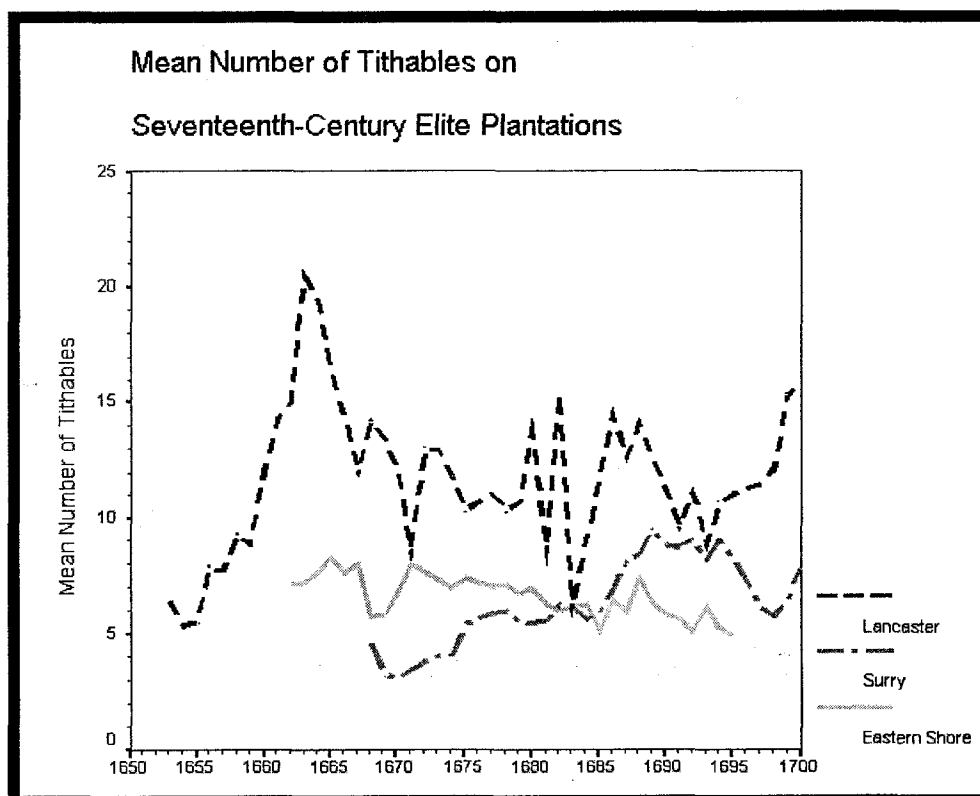


Chart 3.3. Source: Virginia officeholder tithable files, 17th Century. Between 1663 and 1677, the line for the Eastern Shore reflects the combined average for Northampton and Accomack. After 1677, it reflects data drawn from Accomack alone.

Lancaster. In 1665, for example, nearly one quarter the county's taxable workers belonged to just six men, and together its two largest labor owners had more tithables than all of Northampton's elites combined. If planters of this class are excluded, the average number of tithables owned by Lancaster officeholders drops to between six and nine over most of the period, and after the 1660s never rises above ten until turn of the century.¹⁸

The number of laborers controlled by great planters is significant, for land patents indicate that they were also the most aggressive purchasers of slaves.

¹⁸ Virginia officeholder tithable files, 17th century. The six wealthy Lancaster planters were Sir Henry Chicheley, Robert Smith, Anthony Elliot, John Carter I, Henry Corbin, and David Fox, who in 1665 accounted for a combined total of 218 of the county's 965 tithables. See Lancaster County, Orders, Etc. (1655-1666), 359-62.

Councilors claimed on average a little more than fifteen black headrights each over the course of the entire century, compared to around ten for burgesses, seven for county officeholders, and four for non-officeholders. Surviving land certificates exhibit a nearly identical pattern, with councilors again averaging just over fifteen black headrights per claimant, while burgesses averaged seven apiece, county officeholders five, and non-officeholders three. Significantly, well over half of the men who attained membership on the Council before 1700 hailed from counties along either the York or Upper James, the two regions that received the largest share of blacks. Despite its later date of settlement, the prosperous Rappahannock sub-region produced fourteen members, just three less than the Lower James and nine more than the Eastern Shore.¹⁹

Judging from inventories, great planters and other elites also began investing in slaves much earlier than other Virginians. Fifty-three percent of officeholder estate accounts compiled between 1640 and 1669 include one or more black workers, whereas only six percent of other inventories do so. The gap is even wider for the following three decades, with seventy percent of elite inventories including at least some slaves compared to just eleven percent for non-elites. By the 1680s, slaveholding had become pervasive enough among the gentry for one observant traveler to comment that “in most parishes, the substantiall planters have of those negro slaves, which the merchands purchase either immediately from the Affrican Company in Guiney, or at second hand from Barbadoes.” Of course, ownership of

¹⁹ Virginia black headright files, 17th century; Virginia officeholder files, 17th century. For the most complete list of council members, see Cynthia Miller Leonard comp., *The General Assembly of Virginia, a Bicentennial Register of Members* (Richmond, 1978), xix-xxi.

blacks did not necessarily equate to dependency upon them, and the extent to which elite planters invested in slave labor varied widely according to the sub-region in which they lived, their wealth, and over time. Yet there is ample evidence that blacks were commonly present on large plantations in all six sub-regions of the colony from mid-century on.²⁰

As early as the 1640s and 1650s, nearly half of the office-holding planters on the Eastern Shore were slave owners. Most, such as burgesses William Burdett and Major Peter Walker, had just a few. Burdett's inventory, taken in 1643, listed eight white servants, a "very anncient" Negro man named Caine and "a negro girle about eight years old." An account taken of Walker's estate twelve years later included three servants, two enslaved "Turks" called Cursory and Jacke, and three black children named William, Gabriel, and Joane. Other planters were more deeply invested. Eight of the ten laborers in Colonel Argoll Yardley's 1655 inventory were blacks, seven of whom were likely enslaved since no prescribed amount of time to serve is listed next to their names. Councilor Nathaniel Littleton's wife Anne owned no fewer than twenty four slaves when she made out her will in 1656, two years after her husband's death. The region's largest early slave owner was probably Colonel Edmund Scarborough, whose thirty-two tithables in 1665 rivaled the number of workers owned by great planters in more prosperous counties across the Bay. Between 1651 and 1656, Scarborough either claimed or assigned fifty-four black headrights, all but three

²⁰ Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century; St. Mary's City Commission inventory files; Stanley Pargellis, ed., "An Account of the Indians in Virginia (1689)," *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 16 (1959): 242. David W. Galenson has also noted a gradual but significant rise in the Chesapeake slave population before 1680 and cited it as an area in need of further study. See Galenson, "Economic Aspects of the Growth of Slavery," 267-68. The percentages given for slave ownership by non-officeholders were calculated using the same data set described in note 4.

being recorded eight months after Dutch officials in New Netherland permitted him to transport “some purchased Negroes” to Virginia provided he did not put into the Delaware River on his way home.²¹

If Northampton’s tithable lists for 1664 through 1677 are indicative of conditions in Accomack as well, slave-holding patterns on the Eastern Shore changed quite slowly. Although by the mid-1670s nearly ninety percent of officeholders had blacks on their plantations, throughout the years covered by the lists the largest number of tithable adults held by any single individual was just nine and only four other men owned more than five. However, between 1671 and 1677, the overall percentage of blacks within elite workforces increased from twenty-nine to forty-two. At least seven officeholders had years in which they employed more slaves than servants, and three—Captain Francis Pigot, Hancock Lee, and Captain John Robins—had clearly committed themselves to relying almost solely on black laborers.²²

Racially mixed workforces²¹ also appeared in the Potomac sub-region shortly after the initial years of settlement. Extant deeds show that Colonel Giles Brent Sr. and Colonel Thomas Speke of Westmoreland were both slave owners by the 1650s, and Northumberland justices William Thomas, Samuel Smith, and Thomas Hopkins

²¹ Northampton County, Orders, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 2 (1640-1645), f. 223-25; Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 5 (1654-56), ff. 109-11, 117-19; Deeds, Wills, nos. 7, 8 (1655-1668), ff. 22-24; Virginia officeholder tithable files, 17th century; Virginia black headright files, 17th century; Donnan, ed., *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 4:49-50.

²² Virginia officeholder tithables files, 17th century. During the final third of the century, Colonel John Custis of Northampton (who was named to the Council in 1680) and Accomack burgess Daniel Jenifer were likely the only planters on the Eastern Shore who operated on the same scale as Edmund Scarborough and Nathaniel Littleton had earlier. Although the Accomack records only list the total tithables held by individual planters rather than enumerating them by name, it is clear that the large labor force assembled by Scarborough was broken up after his death in 1670 and distributed among his several children. Even with just a single great planter during the period for which detailed tithable lists are available, however, Northampton’s elites still controlled between 55 and 70 percent of the county’s enslaved workers during the period covered by the lists.

were among the several other prominent men who claimed black headrights during the same decade.²³ As on the Eastern Shore, few of these early planters likely owned more than a handful of slaves. Only five of the eleven laborers listed in the 1655 inventory of Colonel John Mottram of Northumberland were blacks. A 1663 account taken of the estate of Mottram's son-in-law, Captain Richard Wright, included just three. On the other hand, Colonel Richard Lee, a member of the Council who relocated from York County to Westmoreland around mid-century, probably had considerable holdings in slaves. In 1660, he was granted a 4,000-acre land patent for having imported eighty blacks, and in 1664 his son John received a certificate for the transportation of "ten Negroes in Green's ship" and "ten Negroes in the *Elizabeth*" whose headrights had been assigned to him by his recently deceased father.²⁴

Surviving probate records suggest that the ratio of slaves to servants had begun to shift on larger Potomac plantations by the 1670s. Five of the seven elite inventories recorded in the region during the decade list blacks. The largest number was held by John Lee, who at his death in 1674 had seventeen slaves and eight whites working on his estate. Nine of the twelve laborers listed in Westmoreland justice John Appleton's 1676 inventory were blacks, and his fellow commissioner Captain John Ashton had nine slaves and six servants when he died a year later. By the mid-1680s, William

²³ Westmoreland County, Deeds, Wills, Patents, Etc. (1653-1659), 112; Deeds and Wills 1 (1653-1671), 103-05; Virginia black headright files, 17th century.

²⁴ Northumberland County, Record Book (1652-1658), 115-121; Record Book (1658-1666), 117; Order Book (1652-1665), 385; Virginia black headright files, 17th century. For Richard Lee's 1660 land patent, see Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 1: 404. Citing a later patent granted to Henry Corbin of Middlesex County, Wesley Frank Craven asserted that the eighty blacks claimed by Lee were lost at sea. But as Edmund Morgan's analysis of headright records demonstrated, it is far from certain that all of the blacks mentioned in the patent were from a single shipment. Indeed, considering the nature of the slave trade during the period and the certificate issued to his son in 1664, it seems more likely that Lee used headrights for slaves imported over a number of years, only a portion of whom perished in transit. For Craven's analysis, see *White, Red, and Black*, 85-86.

Fitzhugh's sizeable workforce was almost entirely enslaved. In describing his Stafford plantation to a Bristol friend in 1686, he proudly remarked that it was well staffed "with a choice crew of Negroes...most of them this country born, the remainder as likely as most in Virginia, there being twenty nine in all."²⁵

Although it is impossible to determine whether other elites plunged as aggressively into slave ownership as Fitzhugh did, his letters offer some insight into how Potomac planters possibly went about procuring black workers. After receiving "a Negro servant James and a Negro girl Sarah" as gifts when he married the daughter of Westmoreland widow Rose Garrard in 1674, Fitzhugh drew on his numerous acquaintances and contacts to gain access to imported slaves. "There are some Negro ships expected into York now every day," he wrote Ralph Wormeley II of Middlesex in 1681, "I request you to do me the favour, if you intend to buy any for yourself, & it be not too much trouble to you, to secure me five or six." Two years later he negotiated a deal with a New England ship captain who proposed "bringing in Negroes next fall," specifying how much he would pay for what men, women, and children his correspondent eventually delivered. Fitzhugh also sought to find slaves for sale within Virginia as well. In 1682 he asked his friend John Withers to comb plantations along the York and buy "what likely Negroes you can." In 1687, he purchased "a Negro named Frank" from Captain John Battaile of Rappahannock for 9,000 pounds of tobacco. By his death in 1701, Fitzhugh's "family" of slaves had grown from twenty-nine to fifty-one, demonstrating that his diversified efforts at

²⁵ Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century; Westmoreland County, Deeds, Patents, Etc. (1665-1677), ff. 170-180, 266-67, 321-25; William Fitzhugh to Doctor Ralph Smith, 22 April 1686, in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 175.

building his labor force continued to prove highly effective.²⁶

Searching for available slaves to the southward was certainly an understandable course of action for any Potomac planter to follow, since many of the colony's largest slave owners lived along the Rappahannock and the York. Four of the most prominent early settlers of Lancaster—burgess David Fox and councilors William Brocas, Ralph Wormeley I, and John Carter—all enthusiastically invested in black workers. Like Richard Lee, Brocas and Wormeley had originally settled in York County, and both probably brought slaves with them when they moved to the banks of the Rappahannock around mid-century. Brocas possibly owned at least some of the eleven blacks mentioned in his 1655 inventory as early as 1646, when he used “2 Negro men servts.” to secure a debt. In 1645, Wormeley placed “fower Negro men, and two women” in trust for Northampton widow Agatha Stubbins, at the time his soon-to-be bride. Four years later he claimed headrights for what were perhaps an additional thirty-five slaves, including one group of eight “transported in Capt. John Williams shipp.” While no account was taken of Wormeley's estate when he died in 1651, the twenty-one blacks which Agatha's third husband, Sir Henry Chicheley, eventually signed over to her son Ralph II in 1677 gives some indication of how many slaves her late husband had owned.²⁷

²⁶ Westmoreland County, Deeds, Patents, Etc. (1665-1677), ff. 200-01; William Fitzhugh to Ralph Wormeley, 19 June 1681, Fitzhugh to John Withers, 5 June 1682, Fitzhugh to John Jackson, 11 February 1683, in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 93, 119, 127-28; Stafford County, Record Book (1686-1694), f. 47; Will Book, Liber Z (1699-1709), 180-83. Fitzhugh's inventory is reproduced in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 382-85.

²⁷ York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. no. 2 (1645-1649), 203-04; Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1657), 202-04; Northampton County, Orders, Deeds, Wills, Etc. no. 2 (1640-1645), f. 230; Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 1: 245; Middlesex County, Order Book no. 1 (1673-1680), ff. 104-07. Wormeley claimed his thirty-five headrights in two 1649 patents, one listing a group of seventeen blacks and the other eighteen. Considering that the second group was assigned to Richard Kemp rather than used by Wormeley himself, and were so near in number to the first group, they might very well be fraudulent. Abuses in the land patenting process such as using the same headrights

David Fox also quickly acquired a relatively large number of slaves. Eighteen were included in his 1669 inventory, but in deeds executed in 1662 and 1664, and later in his will, he listed by name a total of twenty-seven blacks and mulattos whom his executors were to distribute among his various children.²⁸ However, it was Colonel John Carter who likely assembled the biggest enslaved workforce in the region. A one-time burgess for Nansemond, Carter was one of the original justices named to the Lancaster bench when the county was created in 1651. Although he undoubtedly brought some workers with him from his former home, the first slaves he is documented as having owned were the eleven previously held by William Brocas, whose widow he married in 1655. Ten years later, he was issued a land patent that included headrights for another twenty-one blacks, most of whom probably arrived between 1661 and 1663 when his tithables sharply increased from twenty-two to fifty-nine. Carter continued to sink significant resources into obtaining black workers for the remainder of his life. When he died in 1669, forty-three of his seventy-seven laborers were slaves.²⁹

Great planters such as Carter and Wormeley were not the only early Rappahannock elites to embrace slavery. Of the thirty-four officeholders in the region who claimed black headrights before 1670, eighteen served solely at the county level

multiple times were certainly not unknown.

²⁸ Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 2 (1654-1702), 241-42; 283-85; Loose Inventories, Folder 1650-1705. Fox placed six slaves in trust for his daughter Hannah in 1662, and in 1664 put aside another four for her and ten for his son David. In addition to referencing both of these bequests, his inventory includes a section headed "Tenne servts given by will to Will. & Eliz. Fox" which lists an additional seven slaves and three servants. Some slaves were possibly transferred to the children before their father's death, since Fox's tithables dropped from a high of twenty-six in 1665 to twenty in 1669. See Lancaster County, Orders, Etc. (1655-1666), 362; Orders No. 1 (1666-1680), 51, 86, 130.

²⁹ Virginia officeholder files, 17th century; Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 1: 536; Lancaster County, Orders, Etc. (1655-1666), 162, 199, 237; Loose Inventories, Folder 1650-1705.

and another ten held no post higher than a seat in the House of Burgesses.³⁰ Some of these local gentry also acquired significant, albeit smaller, holdings in slaves.

Rowland Burnham—yet another former York commissioner—owned eleven when he made out his will in 1656, the adults among them constituting just over half of his tithable labor force. During the early 1660s, Justice John Curtis of Lancaster and Colonel Samuel Griffin of Rappahannock each used a half dozen slaves as security for debts they owed Thomas Bowler, who likely owned more than a few himself since he had previously sold Curtis and Griffin the same blacks they used as collateral.³¹

Although slave ownership among Rappahannock officeholders became even more common over the final third of the century, the gap between great planters and lesser elites continued to widen. At his death in 1690, John Carter II owned 107 slaves, two-and-a-half times the number his father had owned twenty years before. Ralph Wormeley II had eighty-seven on his home plantation alone in 1701, including two enslaved Indians. By contrast, the wealthiest local elites had at most around twenty or thirty slaves. An account taken of Lancaster burgess John Pinkard's estate in 1690, for example, listed nineteen. The 1701 inventory of Captain Richard Willis of Middlesex included twenty-nine. However, many county commissioners, such as Daniel Harrison of Lancaster and William Fauntleroy of Rappahannock, had less than ten laborers and continued to rely heavily on servants. Harrison owned seven servants

³⁰ Virginia black headright files, 17th century. The six other officeholders who claimed black headrights were eventually named to the Council.

³¹ Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 2 (1654-1702), 46-49, 285-86; Deeds, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1657), 237; (Old) Rappahannock County, Records (1656-1664), 218-19. It is quite possible that John Curtis owned several more slaves than the "six Negro women" he offered as security to Thomas Bowler. He was taxed for twenty tithables in 1664 (the year the agreement was signed) and every seventeenth-century elite inventory listing more than three black females also included at least some men. See Lancaster County, Orders, Etc. (1655-1666), 301. Bowler, who joined the Rappahannock court in 1664, became a member of the Council in 1675.

and a black child when he died in 1677, and Fauntleroy had just three blacks and three whites working on his plantation when his estate was appraised in 1686.³²

There is little detailed information on how rapidly slavery developed in New Kent, Gloucester, and King and Queen counties, since virtually all of their seventeenth-century records have been lost. However, a thorough analysis of demographic data for York—the fourth and oldest county in the York sub-region—led historian Kevin Kelly to conclude that blacks made up approximately fifteen percent of its total inhabitants as early as the mid-1660s, a percentage three times greater than Governor Sir William Berkeley reported for the colony as a whole in 1671. Probably owing to the advent of direct shipments from Africa, the county's slave population expanded at an accelerated rate in the decades after 1670. Blacks likely constituted twenty percent of the total inhabitants by the 1680s and thirty percent by the 1690s. At the turn of the eighteenth century, they outnumbered white servants among inventoried bound laborers by a ratio of twenty-two to one.³³

As in Rappahannock, the growth of slavery along the York was likely dominated by great planters. Its four counties together produced thirty-two councilors before 1700, fifteen of them accounting for almost one-fifth of all black headrights

³² Lancaster County, Wills, Etc., no. 8 (1690-1709), ff., 15-20, 21-28; Wills, Etc., no. 5 (1674-1689), ff., 43-46; Middlesex County, Will Book A (1698-1713), 55-76, 113-32; (Old) Rappahannock County, Records (1677-1687), 107-09. Wormeley's inventory is incomplete since it does not include his properties and chattels in York and Rappahannock counties.

³³ Kevin P. Kelly, "A Demographic Description of Seventeenth-Century York County, Virginia," paper presented at the Omohundro Institute of American and History and Culture Colloquium, Williamsburg, Virginia, Oct. 1983 (typescript, Colonial Williamsburg Department of Historical Research). For Berkeley's 1671 estimate of the colony's black population, see Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 2: 515.

claimed in the region during the seventeenth century.³⁴ Surviving probate inventories suggest a considerable disparity in the number of slaves owned by provincial and local elites as well, with the gap between them widening over time. In the 1650s and 1660s, councilor George Ludlow probably had upwards of twenty blacks, while Major Joseph Croshaw and justice John Hansford respectively owned eleven and four apiece. Three other county-level officeholders staffed their plantations solely with servants. By the early 1690s, Nathaniel Bacon Sr. had forty slaves, twice as many as Ludlow. Yet the largest number recorded for a member of the lesser gentry between 1670 and 1700 was still only seven.³⁵

With the exception of Warwick and Elizabeth City—which had good tobacco-growing soils and likely shared much in common with the counties of York and Rappahannock—slave holding was perhaps more widespread along the Lower James than in any other area of the colony. From the 1630s through the 1660s, the social distribution of black headrights in the region was much the same as elsewhere, with elites claiming seventy-eight percent of the overall total listed in land patents. But after 1670 this trend dramatically reversed, and more than two-thirds of all black headrights were claimed by non-elites. Of course, the near total destruction of seventeenth-century court books for Warwick, Elizabeth City, and Nansemond has

³⁴ There were 118 men appointed to the Council between 1635 and 1700. Five came from the Eastern Shore sub-region, 4 from Potomac, 14 from Rappahannock, and 17 from the Lower and Upper James respectively. The York sub-region's share was therefore 27% or just over a quarter of the total.

³⁵ Virginia black headright files, 17th century; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 3 (1657-1662), f. 108-09; Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 4 (1665-1672), 190-91, 194; Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 9 (1691-1694), 134-35; Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 10 (1694-1697), 274-77. My estimate for the number of slaves owned by George Ludlow is based on the eighteen blacks listed in the January 1661 inventory of his nephew, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Ludlow, who likely acquired most if not all of them when he inherited his uncle's entire estate in 1656. A copy of George Ludlow's will is located in Britain's Principal Probate Registry, Will Register Books, 256 Berkeley, ff. 7-8. An extract of the will can be found in the Virginia Colonial Records Project, survey report no. 03131, p.2, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

rendered it impossible to identify all of the region's officeholders. Yet an analysis of Lower Norfolk and Princess Anne patents suggests that the shift was real and not simply an illusion created by the loss of local records. Of the 370 black headrights granted in these two well-documented counties between 1670 and 1699, nearly eighty percent were claimed by non-elites.³⁶

Expansion in the number of slave-owning, ordinary planters was probably linked to commercial exchange with the West Indies. After tobacco prices began to stagnate during the late 1670s, men of poor-to-middling circumstances living in counties on the south side of the James increasingly looked to the provisioning trade as an alternative to growing the smoky staple, and the region accordingly developed a close relationship with island sugar producers. This connection seems to have brought with it ready access to black laborers. During the last third of the seventeenth century, over sixty percent of labor-owning, non-elite decedents in Lower Norfolk County had at least one slave, and between 1698 and 1718 nearly half (forty-four percent) of all blacks imported into Virginia as part of coastal trade with the Caribbean arrived in the Lower James naval district, both high percentages considering the area's lack of great planters and relative poverty.³⁷

³⁶ Virginia black headright files, 17th Century. Despite the destruction of most seventeenth-century court books in the region's three "burned" counties, many of their early elite planters can be found in the lists of burgesses and councilors compiled by Cynthia Leonard Miller in her *The General Assembly of Virginia, a Bicentennial Register of Members*. Using references in the records of other counties I was able to identify another seventeen pre-1700 local officeholders for Warwick County, thirty-two for Elizabeth City, and twenty-three for Nansemond.

³⁷ Walsh, "Summing the Parts," 59; St. Mary's City Commission inventory files for Lower Norfolk County; Walter E. Minchinton, Celia King, and Peter Waite, eds., *Virginia Slave-Trade Statistics, 1698-1775* (Richmond, VA, 1984), 3-45. Cargoes of more than thirty slaves were excluded from my analysis of blacks transported to Virginia as part of the Caribbean provisioning trade. However, all vessels, regardless of their place of registry, were considered to be involved in coastal trading if their shipment size met the prescribed criteria. The lack of great planters in the Lower James region is suggested by the fact that it produced just six councilors between 1650 and 1700, of whom only two, Joseph Bridger of Isle of Wight and John Lear of Nansemond, came from Southside counties.

Slave ownership was even more common among the region's leading planters. Only four of the twenty-seven surviving inventories of seventeenth-century officeholders do not list blacks. But elite labor forces in the Southside counties were generally small by contemporary standards. Few, if any, men acquired as many slaves as did large tobacco growers like Nathaniel Bacon Sr. or Ralph Wormeley II. The thirteen blacks owned by Colonel Joseph Bridger of Isle of Wight when he died in 1686 were the most recorded in an inventory taken before 1700. The average number owned by members of the local gentry was just over four. On the other hand, prominent families on the northern side of the James River likely had larger holdings in slaves. As early as the 1640s, for instance, a traveler who visited the Warwick County plantation of councilor Samuel Mathews noted that his host had "forty Negroe servants." All twelve laborers listed in a 1689 account taken of the estate of Major Thomas Cary of Warwick were blacks, and three elite inventories recorded in Elizabeth City during the 1690s listed an average of almost nine slaves apiece.³⁸

Although the Upper James sub-region also straddled the river, the social distribution of its slave population was probably more in line with that of wealthier areas. Officeholders claimed seventy-seven percent of the black headrights granted in patents between 1635 and 1669, and seventy percent of those awarded between 1670 and 1699. Unfortunately, it is impossible to estimate the number of slaves acquired by individual elites during the earlier period, since the only inventories that survive date

³⁸ Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century; Isle of Wight County, Wills, Deeds, Etc., no. 1 (1662-1715), 255-63; Anonymous, "A Perfect Description of Virginia...(1649)," in Force, ed., *Tracts and Other Papers*, 2: no. 4, 15. For the inventory of Thomas Cary, see New York Historical Society, *Miscellaneous Manuscripts—Virginia* (miscellaneous microfilm reel no. 43). The three inventories from Elizabeth City were for burgesses Thomas Allonby and William Marshall, and justice Edmund Swaney.

to the last third of the century. However, over half of the 190 black headrights granted in the region before 1670 were claimed by just nine men—all of them members of the Council—suggesting that some individual holdings were perhaps quite large.³⁹

The surviving tithable lists for Surry indicate that affluent planters on the Upper James became deeply invested in slavery during the 1670s. Slave owners comprised a majority of the county's officeholders every year from 1677 to the end of the century, and after 1686 justice Thomas Drew was the only man named to the commission who did have at least one black laborer. Slaves also outnumbered white servants among elite-owned workers throughout the period covered by the lists, with the county's leading inhabitants the most thoroughly committed. Ten of the twelve laborers future councilor Benjamin Harrison paid taxes for in 1686 were slaves. Major Arthur Allen Jr.—who served a term as speaker of the House of Burgesses—had twelve working-age blacks and three servants on his plantation eight years later. Investment by other members of the elite was less extensive. The average local officeholder had only some six slaves and two servants by the mid-1690s. Yet from a high of eighty-five percent in 1678, Surry's leading planters still controlled over half of the county's enslaved tithables at the turn of the eighteenth century.⁴⁰

The same steady progression toward a reliance on black labor was undoubtedly evident in the region's three remaining counties, and was likely even more pronounced considering their greater overall wealth. William Byrd, for example,

³⁹ Virginia black headright files, 17th century; Virginia officeholder files, 17th century.

⁴⁰ Virginia officeholder tithable files, 17th century. The percentage of enslaved tithables controlled by Surry officeholders (who numbered around a dozen at any given point in time) is based in part on data contained in Kevin P. Kelly, "The Structure of Household Labor in Late Seventeenth-Century Virginia: Surry County, a Case Study," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Dallas, Texas, Nov. 1983 (typescript, Colonial Williamsburg Department of Historical Research).

had acquired so many slaves by 1685 that he thought it necessary to send his daughter to England, informing his father-in-law Warham Horsmanden that “shee could learne nothing good here, in a great family of Negro’s.”⁴¹ Moreover, Charles City and Henrico had the colony’s largest concentration of Native American servants and slaves. Of course, planters in other areas of Virginia occasionally also used native laborers. In 1661, an Indian called Thomas Rogers agreed to serve Edward Hall of Lower Norfolk for four years “in such service & imployment as...Hall shall thinke good.” In 1667, the Accomack court ordered that four youths brought in by “a great man of Kikotank” be bound as servants till the age of twenty-four, and that same year Colonel John Dodman and Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Meese of Stafford were both granted leave to “imploy an Indian.” The Lancaster court issued similar licenses to justices Edward Dale, Robert Beckingham, William Ball Jr., and Bryann Stott in 1671, while one year later the commissioners of York issued a ruling regarding Jacke, “an Indian boy servant to John Page.”⁴²

Yet the use of Indians was far more prevalent in Charles City and Henrico than in other counties. Twelve of the twenty-nine men who held office in Charles City

⁴¹ William Byrd to Warham Horsmanden, March 1685, in Tinling ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1: 32. There are no extant inventories for elites in Charles City and James City Counties, which together produced thirteen councilors during the last thirty years of the century and were home to many of the wealthiest families in the colony, including the Ludwells, Brays, Hills, and Byrds. Phillip Ludwell of James City—who by the late 1670s had acquired both Rich Neck plantation after the death of his brother Thomas and Greenspring by marrying the widow of Sir William Berkeley—maintained between eight to sixteen tithable-age blacks on a single quarter in Surry throughout the late 1680s and early 1690s, which at the time made him the fourth largest slave owner in the county. Five inventories do survive for local officeholders in Henrico, three of which list blacks.

⁴² Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), 299-300; Accomack County, Orders (1666-1670), f. 33; Stafford County, Court Records (1664-1668), 84; Lancaster County, Orders no. 1 (1666-1680), 210; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 5 (1672-1694), 27. References to Indians serving on plantations are scattered throughout the records of virtually every county. Between 1667 and 1670, for instance, seventeen Indians from nearby native towns were bound as servants by the Accomack court, though none were apparently enslaved.

between 1655 and 1665 employed Indians in some capacity, a higher percentage than can be documented for any other county during the same period.⁴³ Estimating the relative presence of native workers in different areas of the colony is somewhat easier for the last third of the century, when it became obligatory for masters to have the ages of any Indian children they owned adjudged for purposes of taxation. Between 1670 and 1699, a combined total of forty-nine such children were recorded as being presented to the county courts of Accomack, Northampton, Northumberland, Lancaster, Middlesex, York, Lower Norfolk, and Surry for this reason. By contrast, at least thirty-nine were brought before the court of Charles City alone, and no fewer than seventy-seven came before the justices of Henrico between 1678 and 1699.⁴⁴

The frequent mention of Indians in the records of both counties, particularly after 1680, undoubtedly reflected their strategic location at the terminus of the well-traveled Occaneechee trail, an ancient trading path that led southward from Virginia into the interior of what would become the Carolinas and Georgia. All four of the initial English expeditions into the southern piedmont employed this route, three of them sponsored by councilor Abraham Wood and launched from his trading post at Fort Henry near the falls of the Appomattox River (site of the present-day city of Petersburg). Though these early exploratory forays into Indian territory first led to a

⁴³ York, with three officeholders mentioned as having Indians between 1648 and 1668, was second behind Charles City. Throughout this earlier period, natives were most often employed as hunters. The court of Northumberland, for example, reported in 1652 that “the inhabitants of this county doe employ Indians with guns, powder, and shott very frequently.” See Northumberland County, Order Book (1652-1665), f. 15.

⁴⁴ The numbers given are based on an analysis of order books for the counties named, which were selected because all of them have relatively intact runs of surviving court records. It is quite possible, of course, that the clerks of Charles City and Henrico were simply more diligent in recording when Indians were brought before their courts, but the wide disparity with the rest of the colony suggests a real rather than a documentary difference. It should be noted that the total for Charles City is undoubtedly low because only fragments of its order books survive for the period in question.

lucrative trade in deerskins, they eventually produced a steady commerce in native slaves. While describing his business for Lord Baltimore in 1682, for instance, Colonel Cadwallader Jones of Rappahannock noted that he received a quantity of “indyan children prisoners” along with skins and furs through the trade with southwestern tribes, a trade in which Jones was far outstripped by competitors along the Upper James such as Wood, William Byrd, and Charles City burgess Robert Bolling.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, on the Upper James, as elsewhere, enslaved Indians were heavily outnumbered by their African counterparts. Indeed, though precise timing differed from one area of the colony to another, inventories suggest that, as early as the mid 1670s, the typical large plantation had more blacks than whites working in its fields (**see Chart 3.4**). However, any quantitatively determined “point of conversion” to slavery among the gentry is less important than the simple fact that throughout the second half of the seventeenth century most elite labor forces in Virginia were racially mixed.

As blacks were slowly integrated into the existing plantation system, interaction with white and native bondsmen was crucial in helping them to overcome the trauma of enslavement. Just as the law of servitude would, in some respects, provide a model for the institutional framework of slavery, so the day-to-day experiences and struggles of the servant became those of the slave. Through

⁴⁵ Alan Vance Briceland, *Westward from Virginia: The Exploration of the Virginia-Carolina Frontier, 1650-1710* (Charlottesville, VA, 1987); James Axtell, *The Indians' New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1997), 41-43; James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors From European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 36-37; Cadwallader Jones to Lord Baltimore, 6 February 1682, C.O. 1/48, f. 115, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 96.

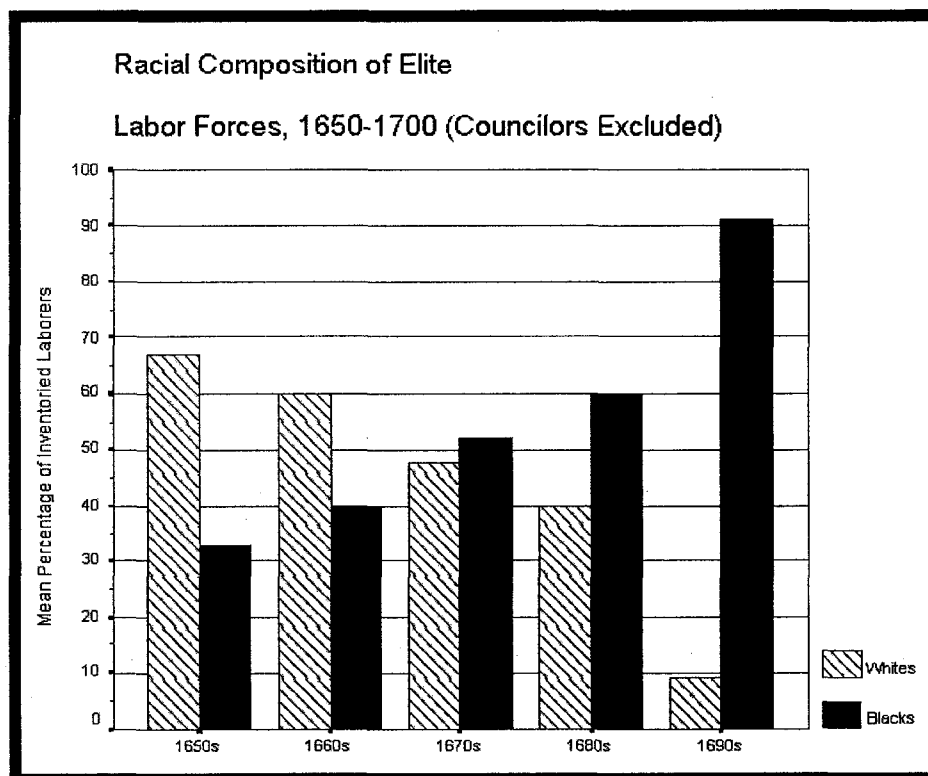


Chart 3.4. Source: Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century. Councilors were excluded from the data set on which this chart is based because median averages clearly showed that the larger size of their labor forces and heavier investment in slaves had a distorting effect.

interaction with their fellow laborers, African immigrants learned how to cultivate tobacco and corn, speak English, prepare the various foods the country afforded, and hone their skills at circumventing and resisting their master's authority. Other challenges slaves faced and met on their own by drawing on an ethnically diverse milieu of beliefs and practices and adapting them to fit the harsh realities of their condition. Through this process of cultural borrowing and refashioning, Virginia's early blacks would not only manage to carve out a new identity for themselves within slavery, but to shape the character of African-American society in the Chesapeake as well.

Chapter 4

The Anglicization of Afro-Virginia

“When all our people were gone out to their work as usual,” Olaudah Equiano recalled of his last day in the Igbo village where he was born, “and only I and my sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both; and without giving us time to cry out, or to make any resistance, they stopped our mouths and ran off with us into the wood.” With this brief yet poignant passage, Equiano recounted the event that precipitated his journey into slavery. His captivity began in the middle of the eighteenth century when he was still a youth, but his story doubtlessly would have resembled those of many of his seventeenth-century predecessors, both children and adults, had they been similarly able to write them down.¹

Torn from his parent’s home when he was just eleven years old, Equiano served as a slave in the households of several African masters before eventually being carried to the Atlantic coast, where for the first time he encountered a European ship “which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo.” Filled with trepidation, he was carried on board and “immediately handled and tossed up to see if I was sound.” He found the “horrible looks, red faces, and long hair” of his English captors terrifying, and quickly became convinced that he “had got into a world of bad spirits,

¹ Olaudah Equiano, “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa,” in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York, 1987), 25. Some literary scholars have suggested that Equiano never visited Africa and that his account of his capture and the middle passage was drawn from oral history and reading rather than personal experience. However, the majority of historians remain convinced that his story is authentic. For the various arguments forwarded by revisionists, see Vincent Carretta, “Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity,” *Slavery and Abolition* 20 (1999): 96-105; S. E. Oguide, “Facts into Fiction: Equiano’s Narrative Reconsidered,” *Research in African Literatures* 13 (1982): 31-43.

and that they were going to kill me.” His treatment at the hands of the crew, who often “severely flogged” him when he refused to eat, did nothing to allay his fears.²

After lingering for some time to complete its cargo, the ship began its long sojourn across the Atlantic, and the heavily outnumbered crew kept the slaves mostly below decks in order to prevent them from observing how the vessel was sailed. Over the following weeks, Equiano, like so many others before and after him, suffered the horrors of the “middle passage”:

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 ship’s cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, being so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This deplorable situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now became insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered it a scene of horror almost unconceivable. Happily, perhaps, for myself, I was soon reduced so low here that it was thought necessary to keep me almost continually on deck; and from my extreme youth, I was not put in fetters. In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death.³

This sustained misery ended only when the ship reached Barbados, where on the very evening of its arrival “many merchants and planters” came aboard to examine the cargo. The invasive inspection that followed caused considerable alarm among the already frightened Africans, who when they were once again ordered below let out such a rancorous stream of “bitter cries” that the captain finally “got some old slaves from the land” to pacify them and explain the situation. The next morning, they were disembarked and herded into a Bridgetown market yard “like sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age.” Most were soon purchased by island residents. Yet the young

² Equiano, “The Interesting Narrative,” 26, 29-30, 32-34.

³ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

Olaudah and “some few more slaves” remained a while longer in the custody of a merchant until they were “shipped off in a sloop for North America.” Conditions during this final leg of the journey were a marked improvement over the Atlantic crossing. The slaves were treated well and received “plenty of rice and fat pork.” After a brief trip up the coast, they were landed “a good way from the sea” along a river in Virginia, and over the next several weeks all of Equiano’s companions were sold to various planters, until he alone was left.⁴

Many of the experiences Equiano described—the cruelty of the sailors, the disease-ridden environment aboard ship, the humiliating poking and prodding of prospective buyers—were also documented by observant Europeans familiar with the slave trade. But his account provides a rare first-hand glimpse into the emotional toll the process of enslavement exacted on individual victims. Suddenly snatched from the society in which he was raised, and not fully able to comprehend many of his fellow Africans (let alone the English), Equiano often fell into deep despair. He occasionally hoped that death might relieve his plight and more than once contemplated suicide. Although in the end he decided against taking his own life, he continued to suffer from severe bouts of loneliness until he eventually found ways of adapting to his new situation.⁵

Virginia’s early slaves faced similar trials and challenges. Taken into bondage from towns and small villages throughout west and west-central Africa, at one time or another they too endured the traumatic voyage across the Atlantic and were cast into

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37-39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35, 39. For a partial list of period accounts by Europeans, see Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 834-35.

the midst of an alien society unlike any they had ever known. Of course, some lived in the West Indies before coming to the colony and so possessed a working understanding of English language and customs when they arrived. A “Negro man” employed as a cooper on the Northampton plantation of Captain Isaac Foxcroft, for example, was reputed to have “formerly worked at the trade in the Barbadoes.” Of the sixteen blacks who accompanied Barbadian merchant William Bird when he emigrated to Lancaster in 1687, as many as eleven had perhaps been acquired a decade before.⁶

Yet such slaves were likely far more exceptional than historians have tended to assume.⁷ Nowhere in contemporary records is it suggested that blacks obtained from the sugar colonies were usually creoles who possessed more experience than slaves imported directly from Africa. On the contrary, surviving documents contain only a handful of references to individuals who had clearly served a stint in the West Indies, suggesting that they were quite rare. Moreover, while numerous seventeenth-century Barbadian deeds concern internal slave sales between resident planters, only two mention shipments sent to Virginia, neither of which give any indication of how long the blacks involved had lived on the island. Considering the utter lack of evidence for a sustained traffic in seasoned hands, it is highly probable that a large majority of

⁶ Northampton County, Order Book no. 10 (1674-1679), 258; Lancaster County, Order Book no. 3 (1686-1696), 73; RB3/12/10, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives, St. Michael, Barbados.

⁷ The idea that most seventeenth-century slaves shipped from the West Indies to Virginia and Maryland were “seasoned” hands who had lived in the islands for some time has been consistently repeated within Chesapeake historiography. See, for example, John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* 4th ed. (New York, 1974), ch. 5; Alan Kulikoff, “A ‘Prolifick’ People: Black Population Growth in the Chesapeake Colonies, 1700-1790,” *Southern Studies* 16 (1977): 392; Timothy H. Breen and Stephen Innes, *“Myne Owne Ground”: Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York, 1980), 70; Deal, *Race and Class*, 177; Phillip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Low Country* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 2-3; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 29, 39.

“Caribbean” slaves sent to the Chesapeake were actually new arrivals, who, like Equiano, had been quickly transshipped after recuperating from the rigors of the middle passage.⁸

Still, as long as the provisioning trade with the West Indies served as Virginia’s primary source of slaves, the diversity of its immigrant black population likely resembled that of Barbados, where according to Richard Ligon there were slaves “fetch’d from severall parts of Africa” who spoke “severall languages, and by that means, one of them understands not another.” Data compiled from European records of the transatlantic slave trade confirm Ligon’s observation that the island’s blacks were drawn from a wide array of regions. Over the course of the seventeenth century, English merchants delivered roughly 93,000 blacks to Barbados. No specific point of embarkation is known for roughly a third of those sent. Of the remainder, around forty percent came from the Bight of Benin, twenty percent from along the Gold Coast, seventeen percent from the Bight of Biafra, ten percent from the Angola Coast, and the remaining thirteen percent from Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and southeast Africa.⁹

⁸ The two Barbadian deeds that mention slave shipments to Virginia were found during a complete search of deed books covering the period between 1650 and 1700. They are RB3/17/381 and RB3/12/82-84, Recopied Deed Books, Barbados Archives, St. Michael, Barbados. While there is no direct evidence of island merchants purchasing newly-arrived Africans for re-shipment to the Chesapeake, in the late 1680s Jonathan Walke of Barbados—who had commercial connections with William Byrd I, Nathaniel Bacon, and several other prominent planters—did buy slaves from the Royal African Company using bills of exchange from Virginia. See T.70/276 f. 57, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 802. I am not alone in questioning the assumption that it was primarily creolized slaves who were exported to Virginia from the West Indies. See Susan Westbury, “Slaves of Colonial Virginia: Where They Came From,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser. 42 (1985): 228-37; Lorena S. Walsh, “The Chesapeake Slave Trade: Regional Patterns, African Origins, and Some Implications,” *Ibid.* 57 (2001): 144; idem, “The Differential Cultural Impact of Free and Coerced Migration to Colonial America,” in David Eltis, ed. *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives* (Stanford, CA, 2002), 127-28.

⁹ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 46; Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson, and Klein, eds., *Slave Trade Database*. The backgrounds of African slaves sent to England’s other Caribbean colonies were

The mix of different ethnic groups sent to the sugar islands—and by extension to Virginia as well—would, at first glance, seem to have made the formation of self-sustaining slave societies quite difficult. However, the cultural and linguistic barriers separating enslaved blacks were perhaps less formidable than Ligon believed. In a pioneering study based on the writings of early European travelers and missionaries, historian John Thornton persuasively argued that, despite the complex political geography of Africa's Atlantic littoral, virtually all seventeenth-century slaves sent to the Americas came from as few as three major cultural regions: Upper Guinea, Lower Guinea, and the Angola Coast.¹⁰

The northernmost region, Upper Guinea, extended south from the Senegal River to just above Cape Mount. Most slaves the English exported from this area came from the vicinity of the Gambia River and were generally Mande-speaking peoples from the interior, who were either sold directly to resident factors on the coast by native merchants or were purchased further upriver as part of a trade conducted with shallow-draft sloops. Although a host of different languages were spoken in the small coastal states of Sierra Leone that served as a secondary source for slaves, many

similarly diverse. The point of embarkation is known for two-thirds of the 90,000 or so blacks delivered to Jamaica and the Leeward Islands during the seventeenth century. Of these, thirty percent were loaded in the Bight of Benin, twenty-four percent in the Bight of Biafra, twenty-two percent along the Angola Coast, thirteen percent along the Gold Coast, and eleven percent in Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and Southeast Africa. However, David Eltis has argued that shipments to the islands were more patterned temporally and geographically than scholars have previously believed and that consequently there was less random mixing of African groups than Ligon suggested. See Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*. (New York, 2000), 242-57.

¹⁰ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 7. See also Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*. For a different view of diversity within pre-colonial Africa and its implications for the formation of slave societies in the Americas, see Sidney W. Minz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992); Philip D. Morgan, "The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations, and New World Developments," *Slavery & Abolition* 18 (1997): 122-145.

were mutually intelligible and multilingualism was widespread. Even in areas where linguistic differences were most pronounced, military conquest and trade along the region's extensive system of rivers and coastal waterways had over time led to a significant degree of cultural integration, as evidenced by the widespread use of Mandinga (a language that was part of the Mande family) as a political and commercial lingua franca.¹¹

The native inhabitants of Lower Guinea—which stretched roughly from Cape Mount to the Bight of Biafra and included the Windward, Gold, and Slave coasts as well as Calabar—spoke either the Akan or Aja varieties of the Kwa language, and though local dialects were quite distinct, some had such closely related vocabulary and grammar that multilingualism was often easily acquired. Like Upper Guinea, the region was also economically linked through a complex transportation network of rivers and coastal lagoons. The continuous flow of commercial traffic along these arteries provided countless opportunities for the exchange of goods and ideas between different groups, and by the 1630s had led to the emergence of Yoruba and several other tongues as lingua francas.¹²

The Angola coast, which ran southward from the Gabon River to Angola and inland as far as the Kwango River, was the most homogeneous of the three regions. Nearly all of its inhabitants spoke either Kikongo or Kimbundu, which were both part of the Western Bantu language group and were described by one late-sixteenth-century commentator as being as similar as Spanish and Portuguese. Interaction between Kongo and Ndongo, the two principle kingdoms in the region, was extensive,

¹¹ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 187-89; Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 214-22.

¹² Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 189-90.

and they in turn exerted significant cultural influence over the smaller states that lay along their borders. From a European perspective, the Angola Coast was primarily a Portuguese preserve, though vessels sent by both the Royal African Company and its interloping competitors occasionally traded there as well.¹³

While it is possible that Thornton's reliance on European sources might have led him to understate the diversity of pre-colonial Africa, his analysis amply demonstrated that, by the era of the slave trade, many of its peoples were well practiced in the art of overcoming linguistic and cultural differences. Ultimately, it was these skills, rather than any preexistent cultural homogeneity, which proved crucial in enabling enslaved Africans to fashion viable societies in the New World. After all, in places where sizeable groups from all three regions intermingled, slaves still successfully managed to establish integrated communities. On one well-documented sugar plantation in French Guiana, for instance, slaves from vastly different backgrounds even intermarried, with Kongos selecting spouses from various areas in Upper and Lower Guinea as well as more culturally similar Angola Coast nations.¹⁴

Yet unlike their counterparts in the plantation colonies of the Caribbean and coastal South America, Virginia's slaves throughout the seventeenth century had to reach a large degree of cultural accommodation with whites and Indians as well as among themselves. Indeed, until the 1670s there were usually more servants than blacks on elite plantations, and even the wealthiest planters continued to employ white

¹³ *Ibid.*, 190-91; Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 231-32.

¹⁴ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 197-98, 200-201. For examples of similar behavior in the English Caribbean colonies, see Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Chicago, 1992), 37-38.

laborers for a prolonged period thereafter. As a result, early Chesapeake slaves almost invariably lived in a multi-racial environment and received considerable exposure to the dominant Anglo-American society.

The socialization of newly-imported blacks frequently began with their masters giving them a new name. Common English nicknames were the most popular, probably because within the context of white society addressing an individual in the familiar form highlighted his or her inferior or dependent status. Captain Mathew Kemp of Middlesex, for example, chose Tom, Sue, and Betty instead of Thomas, Susan, and Elizabeth for three slaves he imported in 1695. Other planters with a more twisted sense of humor preferred names drawn from classical mythology and history, such as Jupiter, Hector, Pompey, or Hannibal, while Captain John Appleton of Westmoreland sarcastically dubbed two of his blacks “My Lord and My Lady.” Although the heavy use of English appellations suggests that most slave owners renamed their blacks with an eye toward forwarding the process of assimilation, some slaves were allowed to retain African names or received monikers that reflected the place or ethnic group from which they came, such as “Congo” and “Iboe.”¹⁵

Clothing issued by masters also served as an anglicizing influence on slaves by

¹⁵ Rutman and Rutman, *A Place in Time*, 172-73; Middlesex County, Order Book (1694-1705), 11; Henrico County, Order Book (1678-1693), 315; Westmoreland County, Deeds, Patents, Etc. (1665-1677), ff. 258-59; Northampton County, Orders, Deeds, Wills, no. 2 (1640-1645), f. 21; Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, Orders (1678-1682), 117. Of the 1,270 slave names listed in land certificates, 83% were English or derived from English, 10% were African, 4 % were Iberian, and 3% were of ambiguous origin. The importance that planters could place on renaming is suggested by Robert “King” Carter’s desire that his overseer “take care that the negros both men & women I sent yo[u] up always go by the names we gave them.” Carter to Robert Jones, 10 October 1727, Robert Carter Letter Book 1727-1728, Robert Carter Papers (acc. no. 3807), Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA (Hereafter cited as Carter Letterbook, UVA).

giving them a more “civilized” appearance. The justices of Elizabeth City considered it indecent that a “Negro woman” working at Eaton’s free school was “almost naked,” and so ordered that she receive “one new cotton waistcoat and petticoat, 3 yards of good new canvas for a shift, [and] one pair of new shoes and stockings.” Males were supplied with European-style clothing as well. In 1686, a James City planter seeking to recover a slave who had run away described him as being dressed in a “redd cotton waistcoate, canvis drawers, [and a] broad brimed black hatt.” Such garments were undoubtedly comparable in quality to the rough-wearing attire worn by servants. Surry County’s justices expressly prohibited masters from providing their slaves with “shirts & shifts, caps, or neckcloths” made from anything better than inexpensive “course lockerham or canvas.” The overseers of Northampton burgess Stephen Charleton’s estate apparently shared a similar attitude. An account of their expenditures for 1654 included fifty pounds of tobacco spent on “one pr. of canvas breeches” and “one pr. of shoose for ye Negro,” a paltry sum at a time when merchantable leaf was fetching between two and three pence per pound.¹⁶

Masters also fed their servants and slaves the same monotonous and nutritionally-deficient diet of cornbread and boiled hominy, which a Frenchman journeying through Gloucester in the mid-1680s described as “an excellent but somewhat indigestible soup.” On a 1680 visit, the Dutch missionaries Jaspar Dankers

¹⁶ Elizabeth City County, Deeds, Wills, Etc. (1684-1699), Pt. 2, 8; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 7 (1684-1687), 230; Surry County, Orders (1671-1691), 12. Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, no. 7, 8 (1654-1668), pt. 1, f.5; Russell R. Menard, “A Note on Chesapeake Tobacco Prices, 1618-1660,” *VMHB* 74 (1976): 401-10. In issuing their order concerning clothing for the slave woman at Eaton’s free school, the Elizabeth City justices were highly critical of the school’s late master, Eben Tayler, indicating that the woman’s “almost naked” appearance was the result of neglect rather than her personal preference. For other examples of slave clothing, see Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 186-87; Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), 50-51.

and Peter Sluyter recorded that “for their usual food” both had “nothing but maize bread to eat, and water to drink, which is sometimes not very good and scarcely enough for life.” The watchful Dutchmen also observed that food preparation was a shared task on plantations with integrated labor forces. “The servants and negroes,” they noted with evident sympathy, “after they have worn themselves down the whole day, and gone home to rest, have yet to grind and pound the grain, which is generally maize, for their masters and all their families as well as themselves.” Provisioning practices on large estates remained more or less unchanged at the turn of the eighteenth century, when as far as a Swiss visitor could tell “the food prepared for the negroes” consisted mainly of “pounded Turkish maize, cooked in water, called hominy.”¹⁷

On smaller plantations, masters played a role in their slaves’ lives that went well beyond the dishing out of names, clothing, and food. Because families of middling circumstances lived and worked closely with their laborers, those few who owned blacks had daily contact with them and got to know them well. Some became so attached to their slaves that they gave them gifts or made bequests for them in their wills. Elizabeth Smith of Accomack gave a mare colt and cow calf to a slave named Dollar for his help in “breaking her horses and other willing offices on several occasions.” In her 1697 will, Judith Patrick of Northampton left a white friend and her two blacks Doll and Sarah “eleven yards & one quarter of browne course linen to bee equally divided amongst them.” William Thornbury of Essex apparently became

¹⁷ Chinard, ed., *A Huguenot Exile in Virginia*, 116-17; Jaspas Dankers and Peter Sluyter, *Journal of a Voyage to New York*, ed. and trans. Henry C. Murphy (Brooklyn, 1867; reprint, 1966), 191-92, 216-17; “Report of the Journey of Francis Louis Michel from Berne, Switzerland, to Virginia, October 2, 1701-December, 1702,” *VMHB* 24 (1916): 114.

extremely intimate with his slaves, since he appointed his “Christian Negro” Elizabeth as executor of his estate and left three-fifths of all his property to her and her two children.¹⁸

Despite their greater social distance, wealthy planters could occasionally also develop close relationships with individual blacks. Captain Francis Pott of Northampton, for example, gave his “Negro man” Bashaw Fernando a cow calf “for use freely by him to be disposed of eyther in his lifetime or att his death.” Other elites grew so fond of longtime slaves that they took the extraordinary step of providing for their eventual manumission. As a reward for the “true and faithfull service” of his slave Virginia Will, Major Daniel Parke II of York ordered that after his death “the sd. Negroe” was to be given his freedom, and receive clothing, tools, and an annual allotment of provisions for the remainder of his life. Colonel John Carter II of Lancaster was even more generous toward two married slaves named Black Dick and Chris. In addition to releasing both from bondage “after the finishing of the crop that is now in the grounde,” he gave instructions that they were to get enough land to support them and their posterity along with “houses convenient...and timber for casque.” He also made arrangements to free their three daughters, each of whom he gave a yearling heifer “with their encrease untill they come to halfe a dozen.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Accomack County, Wills, Etc. (1682-1697), f. 159-60; Northampton County, Order Book (1678-1698), 433-36; Essex County, Deed Book no. 9 (1695-1699), 158-60. Thornbury’s generosity toward Elizabeth and her children might have been the product of a romantic attachment (Elizabeth’s son William was listed as his godson). However, he gave the remainder of his estate to two white servant girls and named his brother-in-law as an executor in trust, so it is equally plausible that his bequest to Elizabeth reflected a genuine platonic regard.

¹⁹ Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1645-1651), f. 83; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 8 (1687-1691), 239; Lancaster County, Wills, Etc., no. 8 (1690-1709), f. 5.

On the larger estates where some two-thirds of Virginia's seventeenth-century slaves lived, however, it was servants, not masters, who were the most influential agents of socialization. Exchanges between black and white bondsmen (and in some areas Indians as well) took place under a variety of circumstances. They worked side by side in the fields, shared meals and often lodgings, and sometimes collaborated in circumventing the authority of their "betters." Perhaps more than anything else, it was the mundane yet myriad encounters newly-arrived Africans had with non-black laborers that shaped the cultural choices made by early slave communities, choices that ultimately caused African-American society to assume a different character in the colonial Chesapeake than it did elsewhere in the English plantation world.²⁰

If William Fitzhugh was at all typical of his fellow planters, Virginians not only expected their slaves to dress and eat like English servants but to speak their language as well. In a 1681 letter, Fitzhugh minced no words in venting his dissatisfaction with a slave woman he had acquired from Gloucester burgess John Buckner. "Had she been a new Negro I must have blamed my fate not you," the Stafford grandee wrote testily, "but one that you had two years, I must conclude you knew her qualitys, which is bad at work and worse at talking." Whether his feelings on the matter were reasonable or not, Fitzhugh's complaint suggests that in his experience imported Africans often attained fluency in English within a short period after their arrival, or at least gained enough facility that they could readily converse

²⁰ While historians studying the seventeenth-century Chesapeake have long noted interaction and cooperation between servants and slaves, the effect such contact had on the development of black society has remained virtually unexplored. See Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 327-28; Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 138-39; Alan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986), 319; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 285-87; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 8-11; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 44-45.

with their masters and white co-workers. There is reason to believe that immigrant slaves also spoke English among themselves and taught it to their children. After spending several years in the colony in the early eighteenth century, Anglican minister Hugh Jones reported that while “the languages of the new Negroes are various harsh jargons,” native-born blacks could generally “talk good English without idiom or tone.”²¹

The exigencies of daily interaction with servants was likely the primary reason that Virginia’s early slaves strove to learn standard English rather than develop an elaborate creole tongue such as Gullah or Geechee. Racially integrated workforces were a common enough sight in the Chesapeake by the late 1670s to attract the attention of Dankers and Sluyter, who noted that servants and slaves were “one with another” routinely “employed in the culture of tobacco.” Robert Beverly II, who grew up on the Gloucester plantation of his father and eventually acquired large holdings in King and Queen County, stressed the same point two decades later, informing readers of his *History* that “male-servants, and slaves of both sexes, are employed together in tilling and manuring the ground, in sowing and planting tobacco, corn, etc.” Both observations corroborate the remembrances of James Revel, a felon who had been transported to Virginia to toil for fourteen years as a servant. In a poem about his experiences, the “poor unhappy” convict waxed lyrical about how he “and the

²¹ William Fitzhugh to John Buckner, 3 December 1681, in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 105; Hugh Jones, *The Present State of Virginia, from Whence Is Inferred a Short View of Maryland and North Carolina*, ed. Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill, 1956), 75, 80. Phillip Morgan and Gerald and Michael Mullin have also found evidence that newly-arrived blacks were capable of rapidly learning English, though their analyses are based primarily on eighteenth-century sources. See Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 565-66; G. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 46-47; M. Mullin, *Africa in America*, 30.

Negroes both alike did fare, of work and food we had an equal share.”²²

While neither black nor white bondsmen were in a position to choose their companions in drudgery, leisurely encounters between the two groups were not unknown. The best documented instance occurred on Captain Thomas Cock’s Henrico County plantation during the summer of 1681, when some of his servants, who had been busy “cutting downe weeds” in an orchard, invited a couple of local freemen “to drink syder” with them. Within a few hours several of Cock’s slaves summarily ended their workday as well, and throughout the remainder of the afternoon joined in the general revelry by trading drinks “cupp for cupp” with the whites. Of course, blacks were not always welcome at such informal gatherings. When Frank, a slave belonging to Mrs. Elizabeth Vaulx of York, approached a group of laborers to inquire about his mistress’s business, two men named John Macartey and Edward Thomas rebuffed him by saying they “were not company for Negroes.” This slight led directly to a violent confrontation the following day, with Frank and a servant friend successfully enticing Macartey into a brawl when he came round to drink rum with a few acquaintances who lived on Vaulx’s plantation.²³

On the whole, however, servants and slaves were clearly capable of setting aside racial differences and finding common ground. They often cooperated with one

²² Dankers and Sluyter, *Journal*, 216; Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill, 1947), 271; James Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon’s Sorrowful Account of his Fourteen Years Transportation at Virginia in America [ca.1680],” ed. John M. Jennings, *VMHB* 56 (1948), 191. Using internal evidence in Revel’s poem and other sources, Jennings argued that Revel must have come to the colony sometime between 1656 and 1671. Revel himself indicated the size of the plantation on which he lived in an earlier stanza, where he stated that his “fellow slaves were just five transports more, with eighteen Negroes, which is twenty four.” For information on the growth of pidgin and creole languages in other plantation colonies, see Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 211-18; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), ch. 6; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 566-70.

²³ Henrico County, Records (1677-1692), 192-195; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 6 (1677-1684), 362-64. For another interracial gathering, see Deal, *Race and Class*, 331-32.

another in pilfering the goods of their masters and other nearby planters. Henry Hases, a Rappahannock County servant, had a year added to his term for “hog stealing” with Ralph Wormeley’s mulatto slave Mingo. In 1693, the justices of Charles City heard the case of Henry Fells and William Carter, “who with Lewis, a Negro... did carry away and eat a hog” belonging to their master Colonel Edward Hill. While servants were usually the primary instigators in such capers, blacks were also capable of taking a leading role. On a spring evening in 1686, a slave named William Rodriggus convinced John Cammel to help him break into the cellar of Colonel John Custis, where the great planter was reputed to “hath alwayes good drinke.” After Cammel expressed his puzzlement at how they were going to accomplish their design, Rodriggus confidently replied that “hee know well enough how to gett in for it was not ye first time,” and then proceeded to crack open the cellar by “lifting up the frame from the bricks.”²⁴

Such interracial partnerships should not be dismissed as mere temporary alliances formed on the spur of the moment. “Bridgett [a] Negro woman” and four servants belonging to Colonel John Stringer of Northampton were accused of having “imbezealed the said Coll. Stringers goods by confederacy amoungst them sevarall times.” Six months after suffering “thirty lashes well layed upon his bare back” for his hog heist with Henry Hases, Ralph Wormeley’s Mingo appeared before the Rappahannock justices yet again, this time for allegedly “committing diverse felonyes...in company wth: a Negro named Lawrence and one Englishman named Richard Wilkinson.” Collusion was apparently rampant among Colonel John West’s

²⁴ Rappahannock County, Orders (1686-1692), 158 ; Charles City County, Orders (1687-1695), 468; Northampton County, Order Book no. 12 (1683-1689), 203.

laborers. In a 1684 deposition delivered to the Accomack court, West's bondsman Roger Crotosse confessed to having purloined no less than four turkeys, a hen, four pigs, and three sheep over the course of a single year, sometimes acting in conjunction with other servants and sometimes with slaves. As if to prove that there was no honor among thieves, he even admitted to appropriating a "bag of potatoes" which "Jonny Negro" had previously stolen and stashed in the plantation's hen house.²⁵

It was also not uncommon for black and white laborers to run away in mixed groups. John Houghton, a servant belonging to Northumberland justice Thomas Mathew, ran away with four of Mathew's slaves in 1666. Thirteen years later Captain Daniel Jennifer of Accomack received a certificate for apprehending William Siller, Mary Axton, Mary West, and "Thomas George Negro," all of whom had escaped together from the Nansemond County plantation of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Milner. Some groups of runaways included laborers who belonged to different masters. One band "taken up" in Lancaster consisted of two servants employed by Colonel William Ball, one by Joseph Ball, and "Tom, a Negro belonging to Coll. Edward Carter." In 1666, Northampton justice John Michael's servant attempted to steal away with two slaves, one owned by Lieutenant-Colonel William Waters and the other by burgess John Robins.²⁶

The most direct indicator of affinity between black and white laborers was their willingness to become sexually involved with each other. One of the earliest

²⁵ Northampton County, Order Book no. 11 (1678-1683), 236; Rappahannock County, Orders (1686-1692), 158, 240; Accomack County, Wills and Deeds (1676-1690), ff. 389-90.

²⁶ Northumberland County, Order Book (1652-1665), 439; Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, Orders (1678-1682), 95; Lancaster County, Order Book no. 1 (1666-1680), 487; Northampton County, Order Book no. 9 (1664-1674), f. 31. See also Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, and Orders (1678-1682), 283.

recorded interracial liaisons in Virginia occurred in Lower Norfolk during 1649, when William Watts and Mary, “a negar woman” belonging to Lieutenant-Colonel Cornelius Lloyd, were ordered to stand before the congregation of Elizabeth River in white sheets “with a white rodd in their hands,” a humiliating ritual usually reserved for those convicted of “the foul crime of fornication.” Over time the colony’s leaders prescribed more severe penalties for whites who were convicted of “defiling” themselves “by lying with a Negro.” When Major James Goodwin presented his servant Elizabeth Banks for committing “bastardy with a Negroe slave” in 1683, for instance, the York justices ordered that she have extra time added to her term and receive “39 lashes on the bare back.” But even the threat of physical punishment proved ineffective in deterring interracial sexual pairing, for three-quarters of all known seventeenth-century fornication cases involving servants and slaves occurred after 1680.²⁷

On some plantations, blacks encountered Indians as well as whites.

Throughout most of the century, native laborers generally came from tributary nations within the colony and had the legal standing of servants. In 1654, “an Indian boy belonging to the people or nation of Seacoeks” signed an indenture to serve Samuel Hubye of Surry for a term of four years. A group of three Indians brought before the Accomack court in 1669 were ordered to serve Colonel Edmund Scarborough till the age of twenty-four, at which time they were to “receive corn and clothes according to

²⁷ Lower Norfolk County, Minute Book (1637-1641), ff. 112-13; Wills and Deeds B (1646-1651), f. 113; Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 1:146 York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 6 (1677-1684), 498. By my count there are sixty-nine total instances of interracial fornication mentioned in surviving county court records surviving county court records. Seventeen occurred between 1635 and 1679, twenty-two during the 1680s, and thirty-one during the 1690s.

the custom of the country.” After the mid-1670s, however, native workers were increasingly drawn from tribes in the southern piedmont and held in permanent bondage. Between 1670 and 1700, not one of the 116 Indian children who had their ages adjudged by the justices of Henrico and Charles City were mentioned as being indentured or ordered to serve a stipulated length of time, strongly suggesting that enslavement had become the norm.²⁸

Regardless of their institutional status, Indians who came to live on plantations were renamed and clothed in the same way as newly-arrived Africans. Wickepeason, Oquiock, Chotohoin, and Anuck, four “Kickotank” youths assigned to Mrs. Anne Toft, were arbitrarily renamed by the justices of Accomack as Humphrey, Edward, George, and Richard. In 1663, Captain Rice Hoe of Charles City was ordered to supply one of his native servants with “two good new canvas shirts, and one paire of new canvas drawers.” Although Indians employed as field hands were integrated into labor forces and occasionally stole, ran away, or otherwise resisted their masters, they were apparently reluctant to collaborate with their white and black co-workers in such illicit activities. Of the thirty-four references to fugitive native bondsmen recorded in surviving seventeenth-century court books, only three mention them as having run away with accomplices of a different race.²⁹

²⁸ Surry County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1672), 74; Accomack County, Orders (1666-1670), 181. The status of Indian children in Henrico and Charles City is based on the same analysis of records described in chap. 3, note 44. See also Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 330. In 1676, the Virginia Assembly passed a law stipulating that “all Indians taken in warr to be held and accounted slaves dureing life.” This was affirmed and broadened in a 1682 “act to repeale a former law making Indians and others free.” Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 346, 490-92. However, neither law applied to tributary Indians who continued to serve by indenture.

²⁹ Accomack County, Orders (1666-1670), f. 33; Charles City County, Deeds, Wills, Orders, Etc. (1655-1665), 398. It is worth noting that twenty-four of the thirty-three references to runaway Indians contained in surviving records come from the order and deed books of Charles City and Henrico, and that more than half occurred in the 1690s when most native workers were enslaved.

Because Virginia planters switched to slavery so slowly—usually taking several decades to fully convert—slaves often interacted with non-blacks over an extended period. Not surprisingly, sustained contact was quite common during the middle decades of the century, when many elite workforces were racially mixed. John Michael of Northampton, for example, employed roughly equal numbers of servants and slaves throughout the 1660s and 1670s. Despite some degree of turnover resulting from slaves dying or being sold and servants completing their terms, three of the seven blacks he owned in 1677 had worked alongside whites for at least thirteen years, one for ten years, and another for seven. But as late as the turn of the eighteenth century, even labor forces that were entirely enslaved still included substantial numbers of blacks who had lived in a multi-racial setting throughout most of their time in the colony.³⁰

In 1677, Major Arthur Allen paid taxes in Surry on three servants and six slaves, four of whom he had imported no later than 1673. From 1685 to 1694, he consistently added between one and three adult slaves every year. While in some instances the new blacks replaced others who had died, by 1694 his labor force included a total of thirteen slaves of tithable age. Until that year, Allen had also usually employed at least a couple of servants at any given time, though from 1694 to 1699 no whites are listed among his tithables. At the end of the century, then, Allen's workforce had consisted entirely of slaves for five years. But when land certificates and age certifications listed in court records are considered alongside the tax lists, it becomes clear that four of his blacks had worked on his plantation for more than

³⁰ Virginia officeholder tithable files, 17th century.

twenty years and another six for at least ten. Only three slaves were relative newcomers who had spent the majority of their time solely in the company of other blacks.³¹

Benjamin Harrison developed his labor force in a similar manner. According to the tax lists, he remained wholly reliant on servants until 1680, when he imported five slaves named Dick, Kate, Tony, Mary, and George. Like Allen, Harrison incrementally built his holdings in slaves over the next two decades, usually adding one or two a year. He continued to procure servants as well, keeping between four and five throughout most of the 1680s and employing three as late as 1696. In 1683, he also acquired Frank, a young “Indian gurl” who was probably enslaved. In addition to Frank and one white laborer who likely served as an overseer, in 1699 Harrison’s workforce included all five of his original slaves, three blacks he had owned for fifteen years, and another three who had worked on his estate for at least ten. His remaining tithable blacks had not previously appeared on the tax roles, though one, “Little Tony,” was possibly a son of the older slave who shared the same name.³²

The nascent slave communities that developed on the plantations of elites such as Michael, Allen, and Harrison were what historian Timothy Breen has described as “charter groups.” By virtue of their precedence, these first black immigrants enjoyed a wider scope for cultural maneuver than those who followed. It was they who made the initial choices about which beliefs and customs to retain or discard, and what

³¹ Ibid.; Surry County, Order Book (1671-1691), 47, 558, 567.

³² Virginia officeholder tithable files, 17th century; Surry County, Order Book (1671-1691), 293, 419, 533. In addition to the slaves listed on the tax roles, in 1692 Harrison possibly owned at least two other blacks who were not yet of tithable age. See Order Book (1691-1713), 24. The procurement practices of both Allen and Harrison are similar to those Lorena Walsh has described for Councilor Nathaniel Bacon, Sr. of York. See Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter’s Grove*, 27-29.

would or would not be accepted as normative behavior. The consensus that emerged from their negotiations in essence served as a “charter” for local African-American societies, since the founding generation of slaves assumed the role of cultural arbiters by instilling their native-born children with the values of the community and by laying down rules for the assimilation of newcomers. Slaves who arrived later did not have the same freedom to create a new culture. They could introduce new ideas and effect some adjustments, but “the hand of the past restricted the choices available to them.”³³

According to Ira Berlin, Virginia’s charter generations of slaves consisted mainly of “Atlantic Creoles.” These highly adaptive blacks, he maintained, arrived in the colony already possessing considerable familiarity with the commercial practices and languages of the Atlantic world, skills that enabled them to quickly master the complexities of the colony’s social politics. By cultivating advantageous patron-client relationships with powerful members of the planter elite, many secured their manumission and ascended the social order. Anthony Johnson, a free black planter on the Eastern Shore, epitomized the confidence, perseverance, and cultural dexterity of these early immigrants. Possibly brought to Virginia as one of the “twenty and odd Negroes” landed at Jamestown in 1619, by the 1640s Johnson had managed to obtain both his freedom and a respectable estate in land and laborers. Atlantic Creoles continued to carve a niche for themselves until the “tobacco revolution” of the late seventeenth century, Berlin concluded, when a hardening of racial lines and the influx

³³ Timothy H. Breen, “Creative Adaptations: Peoples and Cultures,” in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1984), 204-206. Breen analysis of “charter groups” was based on an idea originally developed by the Canadian sociologist John Porter in *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto, 1965).

of less cosmopolitan slaves from the African interior transformed the social environment in which they had thrived.³⁴

While the achievements of Anthony Johnson and other Atlantic Creoles certainly demonstrate the fluidity of race relations in mid-century Virginia, Berlin's contention that their success was common among charter-generation blacks is not persuasive. Of course, historians have long noted that a significant percentage of Eastern Shore slaves eventually gained their freedom, and it is not surprising that Berlin drew much of his evidence from the court books of Accomack and Northampton. But free black communities of comparable size did not develop in other counties (at least none that can be detected in extant records), suggesting that mainland planters were less willing to manumit slaves than their contemporaries on the Shore. Blacks with names such as Domingo Mathews, Phillip Mongon, and Anthony Longo, names which Berlin suggested were indicative of the broad experience and independent spirit that characterized Atlantic Creoles, were also rare in wealthier areas of the colony. Even in the early decades of slavery's growth, travelers venturing along the James, York, and Rappahannock Rivers were apt to come across far more Nans, Jacks, Toms, and Molls toiling away in the fields of large plantations than slaves with names that suggested they previously had spent time in a foreign colony or whose master recognized their use of a surname.³⁵

³⁴ Ira Berlin, "From African to Creole: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African American Society in Mainland North America," *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 53 (1996): 251-88; idem, "Time Space and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 85 (1980): 67-71; idem, *Many Thousands Gone*, esp. chs. 1 and 5; Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, 3: 243 (quotation). For a detailed analysis of Anthony Johnson's career, see Deal, *Race and Class*, 217-35.

³⁵ Of the eighty-eight slaves named in officeholder inventories compiled in mainland counties before 1670, seventy had names that were English or English in character and sixteen had names that were possibly of African origin. Only two of the slaves were named Mingo, which some scholars have

The principal interpretive shortcoming of Berlin's argument, however, is its reliance on the dubious premise that most blacks sent from the West Indies were creolized slaves rather than transshipped Africans. This is not to say that he was wrong in asserting that charter-generation immigrants differed from their eighteenth-century successors in many respects. The former appear to have been somewhat more inclined to at least outwardly adopt the language, behavioral customs, and even the religion, of whites.³⁶ Yet his focus on Atlantic Creoles led Berlin to assume that this propensity reflected the experiences that early slaves had undergone before their arrival. He consequently made little attempt to explore the socialization of immigrants who were new to plantation life, particularly those imported in the decades surrounding the "tobacco revolution." If a large majority of seventeenth-century blacks received their initial introduction to colonial society after coming to the Chesapeake—a scenario suggested by the lack of evidence for a large-scale traffic in seasoned slaves from the Caribbean—then an analysis limited solely to the experiences of Atlantic Creoles cannot satisfactorily explain the cultural orientation of Virginia's first slave communities.

Breen's more general interpretation of African-American social development, on the other hand, does point the way toward such an explanation. He posited that the formation of slave society was initially a local process rooted in the exchanges that occurred between the first inhabitants of a single plantation or neighborhood as they struggled to transplant familiar customs to the New World. The problems associated

suggested is a derivative of the Iberian name *Domingo*. None was listed with a surname.

³⁶ Berlin, "Time Space and the Evolution of Afro-American Society," 68; idem, "From African to Creole," 276; idem, *Many Thousands Gone*, 29.

with this undertaking were daunting. In addition to coping with the trauma and harsh conditions that accompanied their enslavement, community members of differing ethnic backgrounds had to find ways of bridging the linguistic and cosmological gulf that often separated them. In areas where large shipments were common ethnic rivalries served to further complicate matters. Yet despite many difficulties, through skillful compromise and “creative adaptation,” immigrant blacks eventually managed to cobble together functional social systems. Time transformed these provisional arrangements into established traditions as parents and elders passed them down to children born in America. Within a relatively short period—perhaps no more than one or two decades—socially and linguistically stable creolized communities began to emerge.³⁷

Apart from masters, estate managers, or overseers, most Caribbean and Low Country slaves rarely had ongoing relations with whites, so it is understandable that Breen only cursorily addressed how interracial exchange might have influenced the creolization process.³⁸ Along the seventeenth-century tobacco coast where white bondsmen abounded, however, such interaction had a profound effect on African-American society. Whether they were imported during the 1640s or the 1680s, the first Africans to arrive on a plantation possessed a limited array of cultural options. Indeed, on the compact and racially-integrated homelots of the early Chesapeake, they had little choice but to accept the clothing, food, and housing provided by their masters and adapt as best they could to existing work routines. Unless they wished to

³⁷ Breen, “Creative Adaptations,” 217-19. See also Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, ch.4.

³⁸ Breen, “Creative Adaptations,” 218-19.

remain isolated, they also had to learn English and endeavor to gain the acceptance or at least the tolerance of their white and native co-workers. These constraints lent an assimilationist bent to the cultural compromises that immigrant slaves ultimately reached with each other. As the founding generations relinquished community leadership to their native-born children and grandchildren, creole society in Virginia acquired a thoroughly anglicized veneer.

At the end of the seventeenth century, this transition from a charter to a creole society was just beginning on the plantations of Arthur Allen and Benjamin Harrison. But on the estates of more established slave-owning families such as the Carters of Lancaster, the process was more advanced. John Carter I had begun investing in slaves during the 1650s, and eventually built what at the time was one of the largest enslaved workforces in the colony. His 1669 inventory lists thirty-four servants and forty-three slaves: seventeen men, thirteen women, and thirteen children. Three of the men and two of the women were acquired by Carter when he married the widow of Colonel William Brocas in 1655, since their names can be found in the account taken of her deceased husband's estate. One of the women, Old Gumbie, was the mother of two other slaves and the grandmother of a third, while all of the children appear to have belonged to resident mothers. Thus at the time of Carter's death, at least eighteen of his blacks had either been in the colony for more than fourteen years or were native born, and at least one was a second-generation Virginian.³⁹

John Carter II's workforce was much larger than his father's and included a greater number of new immigrants, but by the standards of the seventeenth century it

³⁹ Lancaster County, Loose Inventories, Folder 1650-1705.

was also quite mature. By his death in 1690, he owned forty-eight black men, thirty-one women, and twenty-eight native-born children. The slave community on his plantation appears to have been remarkably settled, for seventy of his 107 blacks belonged to family units. Nineteen were likely recent arrivals since they were identified as “new” or “new hands.” Yet twelve others can be matched with names listed in the elder Carter’s inventory, suggesting that a balance existed between longtime residents and newcomers. Moreover, although only two white laborers were living on the plantation in 1690, no fewer than thirty-nine servants worked for Carter at various times during the 1670s and nineteen during the 1680s. Consequently, even many of his immigrant slaves had undoubtedly experienced sustained contact with bound whites.⁴⁰

Children obviously were essential for the perpetuation of creole society, and while Virginia’s enslaved blacks as a whole never achieved natural growth during the seventeenth century, their prospects for finding a spouse and starting a family were not as dismal as they have been generally portrayed. Over the past twenty-five years, the most influential analysis of slave demography in the early Chesapeake has been Russell R. Menard’s landmark article on the black population of Maryland’s lower Western Shore. His study, based on data culled from hundreds of inventories in four different counties, painted a bleak picture of slave domestic life between 1658 and 1710. He found nothing to suggest that the region’s planters were interested in fostering reproduction among their slaves. Instead, unbalanced sex ratios (on average

⁴⁰ Lancaster County, Wills, Etc., no. 8 (1690-1709), ff., 21-28. For court record entries concerning white servants employed by the younger Carter, see Lancaster County, Orders no. 1 (1666-1680), 230, 258, 277, 280, 286-87, 321, 326, 333, 352, 355, 368, 387, 407, 427, 431-32, 503; Orders no. 2 (1680-1686), 33, 60, 196, 243, 254; Orders no. 3 (1686-1696), 41; Deeds, Etc., no. 6 (1682-1687), 60-61.

working-age adult men outnumbered women by roughly one-and-a-half to one) and a dispersed pattern of ownership severely stunted family formation. Although the number of children per woman did grow slightly over time, Mernard convincingly argued that the preponderance of boys over girls indicated that most were immigrants, and therefore any increase was largely a product of importation.⁴¹

Despite the fact that Maryland was smaller, less wealthy, and founded thirty years after Virginia, lack of further research has left Menard's analysis to stand as representative of the entire region. However, inventories from York, Northampton, Lower Norfolk, Northumberland, and Lancaster counties suggest that the two colonies' seventeenth-century slave populations were actually quite dissimilar (see **Table 4.1**). One difference that is immediately apparent is the fluctuating sex ratio among adults aged sixteen and fifty. From 1635 to 1660 and 1681 to 1700, the sex ratio for this group was skewed in much the same manner as in Maryland. But during the intervening twenty years, when the provisioning trade with the West Indies served as Virginians' principal means of obtaining slaves, a few more women were listed than men.⁴²

Two later developments suggest that this temporary shift had significant long-term consequences. First, by the early eighteenth century, when the grandchildren of

⁴¹ Russell R. Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population, 1658-1730: A Demographic Profile of Blacks in Four Counties," *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 32 (1975): 33-42.

⁴² The discussion in this section is based on inventory data compiled by the St. Mary's City Commission. Because my analysis closely adheres to the methodological approach Menard employed for his article, it shares the same degree of imprecision. Consequently, the conclusions offered are similarly speculative and should be used with caution. Lorena S. Walsh and Phillip D. Morgan have also observed that inventories from Virginia do not display the same degree of sexual imbalance Menard found in Maryland. See Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove*, 29; Philip D. Morgan, "The Development of Slave Culture in Eighteenth-Century Plantation America," (Ph.D. dissertation, University College of London, 1977), 288-91.

Table 4.1
Demographic Profile of Slaves
in Virginia Inventories, 1635-1720

	<u>1635-1660</u>	<u>1661-1680</u>	<u>1681-1700</u>	<u>1701-1720</u>	<u>1635-1720</u>
Males 0-15	7	23	49	153	232
Females 0-15	7	20	47	172	246
Sex Ratio*	1.0	1.15	1.043	0.890	0.943
Sex Unknown 0-12	4	38	20	30	92
Total 0-15	18	81	116	355	570
Males 16-50	17	62	131	245	455
Females 16-50	10	65	95	207	377
Sex Ratio*	1.70	0.954	1.379	1.184	1.207
Total 16-50	27	127	226	452	832
Old Males	4	10	19	28	61
Old Females	3	14	21	30	68
Sex Ratio*	1.333	0.727	0.950	0.930	0.897
Old Sex Unknown	0	2	0	0	2
Total Old	7	26	40	58	131
Slaves, age, sex, Unknown	<u>14</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>126</u>	<u>197</u>
Total Slaves	66	244	429	991	1730
Ratio 0-15/16-50	0.667	0.638	0.513	0.785	0.685
Ratio 0-15/Females 16-50	1.80	1.246	1.221	1.715	1.512

* number of males per females

blacks imported during the 1660s and 1670s would have reached maturity, the sex ratio among younger adults became more balanced, even though direct importation was at its highest peak of the period, indicating that a substantial percentage of the colony's enslaved workers were creoles. Second, if Menard was correct in surmising that the roughly equal numbers of boys and girls listed in the inventories is indicative of a large proportion of native-born offspring, then the dramatic increase in children after 1700—in terms of both total numbers and the number of children per woman—was due primarily to natural growth rather than immigration.⁴³

⁴³ Around 18,000 slaves are recorded as being delivered to Virginia between 1700 and 1720, a number perhaps as much as one-and a half times the colony's existing black population at the turn of the eighteenth century. See Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson, and Klein, eds., *Slave Trade Database*;

Table 4.2
Sex Ratio Among Slaves Aged 16-50 in
Virginia Inventories, 1635-1720

No. of Laborers Per Estate	Sex Ratio (Number of Men per Women)		
	1635-1700 (N = 177)	1701-1720 (N = 127)	1635-1720 (N = 304)
2-4	1.40	1.10	1.20
5-9	1.075	0.914	0.980
10-19	0.750	1.375	1.118
20+	1.436	1.283	1.369

When the inventory data are further broken down into categories according to the total number of laborers listed, it becomes apparent why the aggregate profile of Virginia's black population contrasts with Menard's findings for Maryland. Variation in ownership patterns among planters of differing economic strata was clearly the cause (see Table 4.2). For the most part, seventeenth-century decedents with between five and nineteen workers kept equal numbers of younger adult male and female slaves on their estates, while middling planters and the largest slaveowners exhibited a pronounced preference for men. This situation changed somewhat after 1700. Planters who had fewer than five laborers began to maintain a sexual balance among their slaves. The holdings of wealthier men with ten to nineteen workers, however, began to exhibit a sexual imbalance in favor of males, even more so than the top-tier elites.

Minchinton, King, and Waite, eds., *Virginia Slave-Trade Statistics, 1698-1775*. For a tabulation of imports that combines the information in these two sources, see Walsh "The Chesapeake Slave Trade," 168-69. Estimates of Virginia's black population in 1700 range from the 13,000 proposed by Phillip Morgan to Walsh's rough estimate of "as many as 20,000." The Bureau of the Census came up with the intermediate figure of just over 16,000, but I believe Morgan's more conservative number to be closest to the mark. See Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 61; Walsh, "The Chesapeake Slave Trade," 144, n. 15; U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Time to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 1168. Menard's assertion that balanced sex ratios among boys and girls listed in inventories is suggestive of a large percentage of native born offspring is supported by age assessment data in surviving court records. Of the 232 imported black children who came before county justices to have their ages adjudged between 1683 and 1699, boys outnumbered girls by 1.8 to 1.

The ownership patterns suggested by the inventories make sense when one considers the nature of Virginia's seventeenth-century slave trade. Until the Royal African Company's monopoly ended in 1698, the colony's supply of black laborers was anything but certain. Even most affluent planters were forced to rely primarily on their own ingenuity and contacts to gain access to slaves. In such an environment, marginal slaveowners who could only afford to buy a single black had to take what they could get, and it was likely for this reason that their inventories included the highest percentage of older slaves. Men who were wealthy enough to procure at least a few prime-age blacks were in a slightly better position to cope with the prevailing scarcity. By maintaining equal numbers of men and women, they could maximize the possibility of expanding their holdings through natural means. Low birth rates among immigrant Africans and high levels of infant mortality undoubtedly slowed growth in many cases, but on the whole this strategy seems to have proven effective. Planters with between two and nineteen slaves had proportionately larger numbers of children in their workforces, and they owned nearly seventy percent of the overall total listed in the inventories (see **Chart 4.1**).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Maintaining balanced sex ratios seems to have led to slightly higher reproductive rates among younger adult black women. In inventories compiled during the seventeenth century, the ratio of children to women aged 16-50 belonging to decedents with between two and nineteen blacks was 1.402, while the same ratio for those owned by great planters was just 1.036. Of course, the lower aggregate level of fertility among female slaves on the largest plantations may also reflect the presence of a greater number of immigrants. The wealthiest elites enjoyed the greatest access to slaves during the period, and since African women generally began giving birth at a later age than native-born mothers, they usually had fewer children. Some combination of both factors was probably responsible for the difference in reproductive performance. However, if a larger percentage of the women owned by moderately affluent planters were in fact creoles, it would tend to support the contention that they primarily expanded their enslaved workforces through natural means rather than purchase. It would also not change the fact that by keeping equal numbers of men and women on their estates they maximized the possibilities of increase. For information on the higher rates of fertility among creole women, see Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population," 40-47; Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," 398-403; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 79-101.

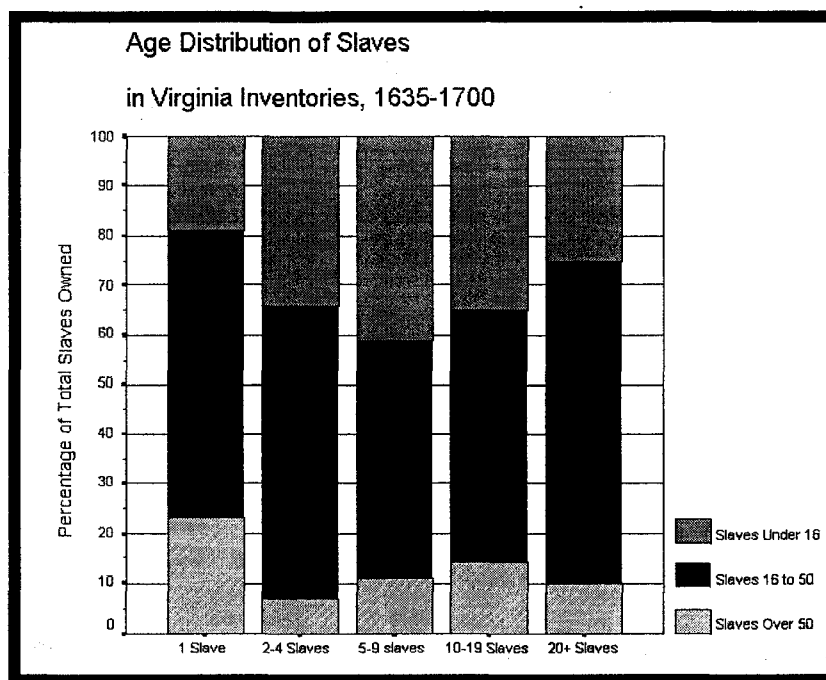


Chart 4.1. Source: St. Mary's City Commission Inventory Files.

Yet if most slave owning Virginians were quick to seize upon the advantages of a self-perpetuating labor force, why do the colony's great planters, whose deep pockets and connections gave them the greatest array of options, appear to have been so indifferent? Ironically, the sexual imbalance among working-age adults on the plantations of the largest slaveowners probably stemmed from the relatively secure access to blacks that they enjoyed after contract shipments began to arrive in the mid-1670s. During earlier decades, the leading members of the gentry faced the same difficulties in obtaining slaves as other planters, and they accordingly sought to expand their holdings through natural means. In inventories with twenty or more laborers recorded before 1674, when intermittent direct deliveries began, the mean sex ratio for the key cohort of blacks aged sixteen to fifty was just 1.023 and thirty-six percent of the total slaves listed were children. In contrast, those probated between 1674 and 1698 had an average sex ratio of 1.851 and younger blacks under sixteen years old comprised only twenty-one percent of the slaves listed.

This change in strategy was perhaps aimed at mitigating the costs associated with owning slaves. As Darrett and Anita Rutman have pointed out, not all blacks contributed to their master's income. By the cold calculations of the balance sheet, children were a sort of long-term capital investment that would literally "mature" over time, though until they reached adolescence they were "just so many useless hands" who had to be clothed and fed. Old blacks also generally consumed more than they produced and were of little value unless they could be employed in a domestic capacity or had happened to acquire some skill. In order to grow enough tobacco to remain fiscally solvent, then, it was imperative that a slaveowner offset the less productive members of his workforce with a sufficient number of able-bodied hands who could perform the arduous tasks of planting, tending, and harvesting his crop.⁴⁵

Given the limited availability and higher cost of slaves, it is not surprising that ordinary planters with fewer than five laborers remained heavily reliant on servants throughout seventeenth century (see **Charts 4.2 and 4.3**). Maintaining a balance between productive and unproductive workers was a more pressing concern for the intermediate group of wealthier men who could invest more heavily in slaves but were forced to build their enslaved workforces slowly and primarily through natural means. Although their access to black workers seems to have improved after direct shipments began to arrive, most continued to employ significant numbers of white bondsmen until the end of the Company's monopoly. Consequently, while they generally maintained a balanced sex ratio among their adult blacks and owned greater numbers of children, their use of servants still skewed the overall demographic profile of their

⁴⁵ Rutman and Rutman, *A Place in Time*, 180-81; Hartwell, Blair, and Chilton, *The Present State of Virginia and the College*, 5-6 (quotation).

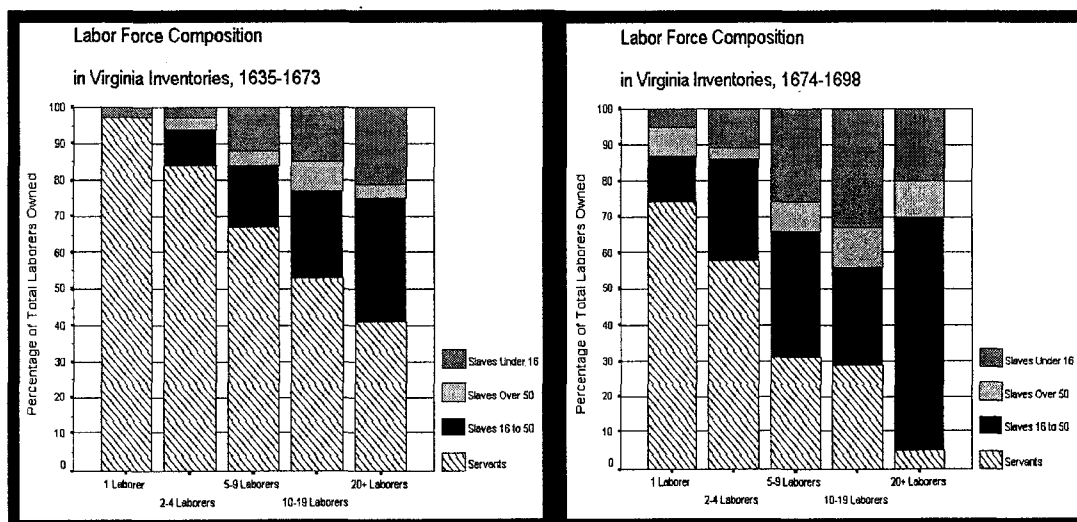


Chart 4.2.

Chart 4.3.

labor forces in favor of males. Before the last years of the century, only large operators such as the Carters and Wormeleys were successful in fully converting to slavery. When this crucial difference is taken into account, the sexual imbalance among their younger adult slaves appears more as an attempt to maintain acceptable levels of tobacco output than as indifference toward the benefits of natural increase. More so than other planters, the wealthiest elites could rely on sheer weight of numbers to help keep, as William Fitzhugh callously put it, their “stock good for ever.”⁴⁶

Although great planters seem to have been the chief beneficiaries of contract deliveries, no seventeenth-century Virginian was capable of purchasing more than a couple of dozen slaves at one time, so cargoes sent by the Royal African Company were routinely broken up into smaller groups called “lots.” The 120 Lower Guinea slaves who survived the middle passage on the *Katherine*, a vessel sent to the York River by leading English tobacco importer John Jeffreys in 1678, were sold to planters

⁴⁶ William Fitzhugh to Doctor Ralph Smith, 22 April 1686, in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 176.

from Middlesex, Gloucester, York, and perhaps several adjoining counties. Two other shipments that Jeffreys arranged to have discharged along the York in the 1680s were handled by agents from as far afield as Northumberland, Middlesex, and Warwick. A letter written by William Byrd concerning the *Two Friends*, which under the sponsorship of London merchants Micajah Perry and Thomas Lane delivered roughly a hundred Senegambians to the upper James in 1686, provides a more detailed picture of how contract shipments were distributed. No fewer than four prominent planters received a portion of the vessel's cargo: Byrd (who lived in Henrico at the time), Benjamin Harrison of Surry, Henry Hartwell of James City, and Peter Perry of Charles City. Byrd's share was seventeen slaves, of whom "one dyed on board, & another in the boat" during the trip to his plantation. Harrison and Perry later claimed headrights for twenty and sixteen respectively.⁴⁷

Because English slavers usually made only one stop on the African coast, most of these contract deliveries were comprised of culturally similar peoples from the same geographical area. Thus most of the 177 slaves William Booth transported to Virginia in the *Arrabella* in 1679 would have spoken or at least understood some variety of the Mande language that predominated in the interior of Upper Guinea. The more than 250 slaves Captain John Soane of the *Jeffrey* collected from Calabar in 1694 were likely all Aja speaking inhabitants from the vicinity of the Niger River delta. Only along the Windward, Gold, and Slave coasts did captains commonly load

⁴⁷ Donnan, ed., *Slave Trade Documents*, 4:53-54; T. 70/61, ff. 30, 57, VCRP microfilm reel no. 92; William Byrd to Perry and Lane, 10 November 1686, in Tinning, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1: 65-66; Surry County, Order Book (1671-1691), 561; Charles City County, Orders (1687-1695), 254. It is unclear what happened to the twenty blacks Harrison purportedly obtained off the *Two Friends*, since between 1686 and 1687 his number of tithable slaves only increased by six. He might have located a portion of them on a quarter located outside of Surry or sold them to neighboring planters, though some might have been children beneath tithable age.

slaves from more than one port. In 1679, for example, Captain William Smith of the *Blossom* probably followed his instructions and took aboard a number of Akan speakers from the Gold Coast. But his last stop was at the port town of Ardra, where he presumably gathered his quota with slaves from the Aja subgroup. Still, cargoes acquired through this strategy of “coasting” consisted entirely of slaves from Lower Guinea and were often drawn from only one of its two language zones. At no time were slaves from multiple regions transported on the same vessel.⁴⁸

However, it is doubtful that the advent of direct shipments caused significant changes in the cultural orientation of slave society. Not only were large cargoes often dispersed over a wide area, but by the time they began to arrive the colony’s blacks were no longer as scattered and isolated as they once had been. As more and more planters began the process of converting to slavery, blacks were eventually able to develop social networks that extended beyond their home plantations into the surrounding neighborhood. A slave belonging to Captain William Robinson of Lower Norfolk named Jack, for instance, evidently formed an emotional attachment to Justice John Porter’s “Negro woman Pegg,” for when Porter forbid him to see her, Jack became so incensed that he assaulted him with a stick. By 1687 there was sufficient contact among the assorted slave communities of the Northern Neck to allow for the formulation of a widespread “Negro plott,” though the planned uprising was betrayed to white authorities before it could be put into action. Seven years later,

⁴⁸ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 192-94; Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson, and Klein, eds., *Slave Trade Database*; Donnan, *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 1: 250; Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 227. The point of embarkation is known for three-quarters of the 4,300 slaves purportedly delivered to Virginia between 1672 and 1697. Of these, thirty-nine percent were loaded in the Bight of Biafra, thirty-four percent in Senegambia, sixteen percent along the Gold Coast, and eleven percent in the Bight of Benin. Just over seventy-six percent of the slaves were shipped under the auspices of the Royal African Company.

a proclamation issued by Governor Edmund Andros complained of “meetings and gatherings” held by “diverse Negroes and slaves in sundry parts and countys in this colony.”⁴⁹

Inter-plantation relationships between blacks —whether of a romantic, conspiratorial, or any other nature—were undoubtedly most common in localities that had concentrations of gentry, whose labor forces by the last quarter of the century were becoming increasingly enslaved. Enclaves of wealthier planters could be found in virtually every area of the colony. Historian James Horn has identified one centered around the Wormeleys’ Rosegill estate along the Rappahannock and another near Willoughby Bay in Lower Norfolk. In his study of the Eastern Shore, Douglas Deal noted that a significant proportion of Northampton County blacks lived on or near one of the elite plantations clustered below Old Plantation Creek. A fourth enclave sprung up at Middle Plantation (the site of present-day Williamsburg), where during the late 1670s and 1680s four councilors and two members of the House of Burgesses all lived within two or three miles of one another. If these six men were similar to their peers, together they probably owned somewhere between 200 and 300 slaves. When combined with the blacks owned by other surrounding planters, this would have given the area a sufficient population density to easily absorb even a sizable infusion of ethnically homogeneous Africans.⁵⁰

But at the same time the anglicized veneer of creole society was becoming

⁴⁹ Lower Norfolk County, Deed Book no. 5 (1686-1695), pt. 2, 191; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 6 vols. (Richmond, 1925-1966), 1: 86; Essex County, Orders, Etc. (1692-1695), 270-71.

⁵⁰ James Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 167-68, 179-80; Deal, *Race and Class*, 319. The four councilors who owned estates at Middle Plantation during these years were Thomas Ludwell, Thomas Ballard, John Page, and James Bray. The two burgesses were Captain Otho Thorpe and Francis Page.

firmly established, the institution of slavery was undergoing a wholesale transformation. Unlike the regulations governing servants and servitude, which appeared on the statute books quite early, throughout the first half of the century Virginia law remained virtually silent on the status of blacks. During the 1660s, this began to change as the colony's leaders passed several acts that more clearly defined slaves' legal standing and significantly bolstered the authority of masters. In the years following Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion in 1676, they also adopted a separate set of policing measures for slaves, who along with white bondsmen and impoverished planters had flocked to the standard of the defeated rebel army. While each of the acts passed in this legislative effort addressed a specific issue or problem, together they would form the core of Virginia's slave laws for the remainder of the colonial period. When coupled with radical changes in the racial composition of plantation labor forces after the turn of the eighteenth century, they would also play an important role bringing to an end the era of servant-slave cooperation.

Chapter 5

“The Negroes to Serve For Ever”

For more than half a century after Virginia’s founding, the existence of slavery was not formally acknowledged by a single law, let alone a codified set of statutes. By the time of the Stuart Restoration in 1660, the colony’s assembly had passed just four measures that even suggested blacks were subject to differential treatment. The first, adopted in 1640, required that masters “use their best endeavours for the firmishing of themselves and all those of their families wch shall be capable of arms (excepting negros) wth arms both offensive and defensive.” The remaining three, enacted respectively in 1643, 1645, and 1658, were limited to issues of taxation, and merely established that “all negroes imported whether male or female” should “be listed and pay leavies.”¹

By contrast, other English colonies addressed the legality of slavery directly. The Governor and Council of Barbados declared in 1636 “that Negroes and Indians, that came here to be sold, should serve for life, unless a contract was before made to the contrary.” In 1638, the London-based officials of the Providence Island Company informed authorities in its colony that blacks could be “kept as perpetuall servants.” Even when prohibiting slavery in 1652, the Rhode Island Assembly took note of the “common course practised amongst English men to buy negars, to the end that they may have them for service or slaves forever.”²

It is perhaps some measure of slavery’s ambiguous standing in early Virginia

¹ “Acts of General Assembly, Jan. 6, 1639-40,” *WMQ*, 2d. ser., 4 (1924): 147; Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 1:226, 242, 292, 454.

² Quotes taken from Jordan, *White Over Black*, 64, 70.

that scholars have never fully agreed about the precise legal status of blacks in the decades before mid-century.³ However, few active historians still support the position, first forwarded by James C. Ballagh and later by Oscar and Mary Handlin, that “slavery had no meaning in law” until the 1660s, and that before then blacks “were accepted, bought and held” in much the same manner as white bondsmen. Research in surviving primary sources has simply uncovered too much evidence to the contrary. For instance, the Handlins were quite correct in asserting that the terms “slave” and “slaves” appear in early extant records with far less frequency than the more purely descriptive “Negar,” “Negroe,” or “Negroe servants.” But provisions in wills and deeds—such as a clause in the will of Rowland Burnham specifying that two “Negroes” bequeathed to his children were to serve “for ever, both of them & their heirs”—clearly show that by no later than the 1640s the colony’s courts accepted, or at least did not dispute, the practice of holding of black laborers in permanent, hereditary bondage.⁴

Of course, just because county justices recognized perpetual servitude as a legal condition for people of African descent, it does not necessarily follow that they had the requisite authority to do so. In the Virginia Company’s original charter of 1606, King James I had vouchsafed that all “parsons being our subjects” who ventured to

³ The most recent detailed discussion of scholarly literature addressing the legal status of Virginia’s early slaves and its relationship to the growth of racism is Vaughan, “The Origins Debate.” See also Boskin, *Into Slavery*; Donald L. Noel, ed., *The Origins of American Slavery and Racism* (Columbus, OH, 1972).

⁴ James Curtis Ballagh, *A History of Slavery in Virginia* (Baltimore, 1902); Handlin and Handlin, “Origins of the Southern Labor System,” 199-222 at 203, 204. Rowland Burnham’s will is in Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 2 (1654-1702), 46-49 (some similar selections from documents dating to the 1640s are quoted in chapter 3, pp. 74-75) For examples of interpretations that run counter to the Handlins’, see Alden T. Vaughan, “Blacks in Virginia; A Note on the First Decade,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 24 (1972): 469-78; McColley, “Slavery in Virginia.”

the New World “shall have and enjoy all liberties, franchises and immunities...to all intents and purposes as if they had been abiding and borne within this our realme of Englande.” The crown offered similar assurances after the company’s dissolution in 1624 brought Virginia under direct royal control. The instructions issued to Governor Sir William Berkeley and the Council of State by James’s successor, King Charles I, ordered “that justice be equally administered to all his majesties subjects there residing, as neere as may be after the forme of his realm of England.”⁵

While such documents certainly demonstrate that the settlers were expected to follow legal practices that closely resembled those of the mother country, guarantees and guidance were not tantamount to a formal imposition of the common law. According to a doctrine that dated back to medieval times, conquered lands and other newly acquired territories were under the king alone rather than under the realm headed by the king-in-Parliament. Using its prerogative power, the crown could thus exercise any number of juridical options in its overseas dominions. It could introduce the common law or some of its elements selectively, or even permit the pre-conquest legal system to remain in place. In Virginia’s case, the crown never made any specific declarations regarding such matters, and so through “tacit delegation” gave the colony’s inhabitants sufficient leeway to adopt whatever customs and laws they

⁵ “‘Letters patent to Sir Thomas Gates and others,’ 10 April 1606,” in P.L. Barbour, ed., *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter, 1606-1609*, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, 2d ser. (Cambridge, 1969), 1: 31; “Instructions to Sir William Berkeley, August 1641,” in Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606-1689* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1975), 51. Similar guarantees of rights were included in the Virginia Company Charters of 1609 and 1618 as well, see S.M. Bemiss, ed., *The Three Charters of the Virginia Company of London, with Seven Related Documents, 1606-1621*, Jamestown 350th Anniversary Historical Booklet 4 (Williamsburg, VA, 1957). For an interpretation proposing that the enslavement of blacks in early Virginia had no legal basis, see William J. Wood, “The Illegal Beginning of American Negro Slavery,” *American Bar Association Journal* 56 (1970): 45-49.

desired, though royal ministers retained the right to reject any measures they found objectionable. Consequently, as long as Westminster did not disapprove, colonial magistrates could be quite confident in recognizing lifetime service for blacks as legitimate. Under the logic of what historian Jonathan Bush has called “prerogative constitutionalism,” any conflict between slavery and existing English law was irrelevant.⁶

This is not to say that the royal prerogative exempted slaveowners from every form of legal challenge. Slaves periodically sued for their freedom throughout the seventeenth century. However, it is unlikely that such petitions were ever a source of real concern for the colony’s leaders. When considered as a group, their most striking characteristic is how few of them were brought. Only twenty-three cases can be found in the surviving order and deed books of the county courts, the level of jurisdiction where most claims were initially contested. More doubtlessly were lost along with local and provincial records later destroyed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But even if the extant number of cases is doubled or tripled, the resulting figure could still hardly be construed as an overwhelming amount of litigation, particularly given the narrow grounds on which most suits were pled.⁷

⁶ Jonathan A. Bush, “The British Constitution and the Creation of American Slavery,” in Paul Finkelman, ed., *Slavery and the Law* (Madison, WI, 1997), 379-418, especially 396-405. See also idem, “Free to Enslave: The Foundations of Colonial American Slave Law,” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 5 (1993): 417-70; Alan Watson, *Slave Law in the Americas* (Athens, GA, 1989), 62-64; Wilcomb E. Washburne, “Law and Authority in Colonial Virginia,” in George Athan Billias, ed., *Law and Authority in Colonial America* (New York, 1965), 116-35; Warren M. Billings, “The Transfer of English Law to Virginia,” in K.R. Andrews and N. P. Canny, eds., *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480-1650* (Detroit, 1979), 215-44; David Thomas Konig, “‘Dale’s Laws’ and the Non-Common Law Origins of Criminal Justice in Virginia,” *American Journal of Legal History* 26 (1982): 354-75.

⁷ Seven additional seventeenth-century cases can be found in the surviving records of the General Court. See McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court*, 316, 354, 372-73, 411, 413, 437, 513.

In addition, scant and incomplete though it is, surviving local case law strongly suggests that the legal boundary between slavery and freedom was never very porous in Virginia. Few slaves could even begin to hope of escaping their condition through the courts. Not only did justices generally require that black and mulatto plaintiffs provide some positive proof of their claims, they seem to have also operated under the assumption that, all things being equal, a person of African descent should be considered enslaved. Mounting a challenge certainly grew harder over time as slavery became more firmly established in statute law. Yet from a fairly early date, only slaves who could produce creditable evidence that they either should not have been held in lifetime bondage to begin with or had somehow been released from service by their owner stood a realistic chance of successfully contesting their status.

A good idea of the loopholes available around mid-century is provided by a 1656 suit that pitted a young mulatto named Elizabeth Key against the overseers of the estate of Colonel John Mottrom, a member of the Northumberland commission who had died the previous year. The relevant facts of the case do not appear to have been in dispute. Elizabeth claimed and was widely acknowledged to be the daughter of Thomas Key, a one-time member of the House of Burgesses, and “his negro woman.” In 1636, when Elizabeth was around six years old, Key had bound her to Councilor Humphrey Higginson for nine years, though their agreement included certain restrictions. Higginson was not to sell her to any other man “but to keepe her himself.” In the event he returned to England permanently, he was required to “carry the sd. girle with him & pay for her passage.” If he died before the stated term of

service expired, she was to be set free.⁸

It is unclear at what point and under what conditions Higginson transferred Elizabeth to Mottrom. But when the latter's inventory was taken in July 1655, she and her child were included among his laborers. The entry gave no indication that either was the mulatto descendent of a white man, listing them only as "Elizabeth ye Negro woman & her sonne." This oversight is intriguing. As was customary, Mottrom's inventory was compiled by four men he appointed to oversee his estate: Colonel Thomas Speke, William Presley, George Colclough, and Ralph Horsley. Of these, Speke at least must have been aware of Elizabeth's parentage. His own wife had previously scolded John Key (Thomas's legitimate white son) for calling her "Black Bess," instructing him to instead "call her sister for shee is your sister."⁹

If the overseers assumed that Elizabeth's background did not matter, they were sorely mistaken. In January 1656, she brought suit and a Northumberland jury found that she "ought to be free." Although the General Court reversed this decision two months later, Elizabeth's attorney William Grinstead made a final appeal to the assembly, which until the 1680s served as the colony's court of last resort. Because no one appeared before them to oppose Elizabeth's petition, the burgesses thought it best to remand the case back to the county. But they also concurred with the findings of a

⁸ Northumberland County, Record Book (1652-1658), f. 66. According to a Nicholas Jurnew, Thomas Key had denied that Elizabeth was his daughter, insisting instead that "a Turk of Capt. Mathewes was the father of the girle." However, he had been found guilty in court and fined for "giting his Negro woman with childe," which both the Northumberland jury and the House of Burgesses apparently felt was adequate proof of his paternity.

⁹ Ibid., 67, 115-21. According to one of the deponents interviewed in the case, Elizabeth had actually given birth to two children, though only one seems to have survived. She claimed that both were fathered by her attorney and future husband William Grinstead. Of the three overseers, Speke, Presley, and Colclough all served on the Northumberland commission, Speke and Presley at the time the case was being tried. Colclough was married to Mottrom's widow, Ursula, by January 1657.

committee whose report recommended she be given her freedom for three separate reasons. The first was that “by the common law the child of a woman slave begott by a free man ought to be free.” The second was “she hath long since been christened” and “is able to give a very good account of her fayth.” Lastly, the report cited the restrictions governing Thomas Key’s original sale of her to Higginson. George Colclough’s success in persuading Governor Edward Digges to grant a second hearing before the General Court apparently came to nothing, since at their July meeting the Northumberland justices ordered Elizabeth freed. The following day, the banns publicizing her impending marriage to Grinstead were entered in the county record book, and in 1659 the overseers renounced any further claim to her service.¹⁰

Assuming there was nothing extraordinary about Elizabeth’s case, then, as late as the mid-1650s slaves could potentially escape lifetime bondage on the basis of white parentage, Christian baptism, or contractual limitations on their term of service. Yet the members of the Council, acting with the governor in their judicial capacity as the General Court, evidently did not agree that freedom should be granted on such grounds. This was more than a mere coincidence. While no record of the councilors’ deliberations concerning Elizabeth’s case has survived, by granting a favorable ruling to the overseers they were in effect also helping themselves. At the time the suit was tried, some great planters had already more or less fully converted to slavery, and as a

¹⁰ Northumberland County, Order Book (1652-1665), ff. 40, 49; Record Book (1652-1658), f. 85; Record Book (1658-1666), f. 28; McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court*, 504. As Warren Billings has pointed out, the burgess’s reference to Elizabeth’s mother as a “woman slave” suggests that some blacks were held in permanent servitude by the end of the 1620s. See his article “The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 30 (1973): 468, n. 5. For an explanation of the judicial role played by the General Assembly, see Philip Alexander Bruce, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century: An Inquiry into the Religious, Moral, Educational, Legal, Military, and Political Condition of the People*, 2 vols. (New York, 1910), 1: 690-96.

group they had by far the largest holdings in black laborers.

It was not long before the rest of the elite adopted a similarly hard line. Within a little more than a decade of lending its support to Elizabeth's cause, the General Assembly passed legislation that closed off two of the loopholes she had utilized to gain her freedom. Historian Warren Billings has attributed this change of heart to a rise in the frequency of costly lawsuits as the slave population expanded in the 1660s. However, any increase in litigation was probably of less importance than the spread of slave ownership among the gentry. According to one contemporary estimate, as late as 1671 the colony still only had around two thousand blacks, probably no more than a small fraction of whom would have been able to bring suit on one of the three grounds mentioned in Elizabeth's petition. The percentage of officeholders who owned at least some slaves, on the other hand, grew from less than half in the 1650s to more than two-thirds by the late 1670s. Billings was undoubtedly correct in asserting that the assembly had the interests of masters in mind when it began to eliminate slavery's legal ambiguities. But its motivation for taking action most likely stemmed from the fact that throughout the 1660s, when the first laws defining the status of blacks appeared on the colony's statute books, the number of burgesses with personal interests potentially at stake was growing every year.¹¹

Ironically, it was a question raised by a member of the 1656 House, Bartholomew Hoskins, which seems to have prompted the assembly to reconsider its position on the question of mulattos. At a meeting of the Lower Norfolk court in

¹¹ Billings, "The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key," 471-72; idem, "The Law of Servants and Slaves," 56-57; Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 515; Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century.

August 1662, Hoskins asked for some guidance “concerninge his Negro servant beinge gotten wth child.” The justices did not respond to his request. Instead, Governor Sir William Berkeley, who happened to be present, ordered that the issue “be referred to the next assembly then & there to be determined.” In accordance with these instructions, when the assembly convened the following December, it moved to definitively answer the question of “whether children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or free.” Yet rather than adhering to the common law doctrine they had cited in the case of Elizabeth Key, the burgesses essentially reversed traditional English practice by mandating that “all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.” The statute also stipulated that “if any christian shall committ fornication with a negro man or woman, hee or shee so offending shall pay double the fine imposed by the former act.”¹²

The two provisions in the 1662 statute each addressed a different problem. The first made certain that miscegenation no longer infringed on the property rights of slave-owning planters. This was not a concern when the mother of a mulatto child was white. The “losse and trouble” a master sustained from a female servant’s inability to work during her pregnancy and lying-in could be recouped through the addition of time to her term. By the early 1660s, a servant woman convicted of bastardy was required to serve “two yeares after her time of indenture is expired or pay two

¹² Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), f. 350; Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 170. Historians disagree about what body of law the burgesses drew upon in formulating the rule that a child’s status would be determined through the mother. See Billings, “Law of Servants and Slaves,” 57-58; Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 42-45.

thousand pounds of tobacco to her master,” in addition to the half-year of service or public whipping prescribed for bondsmen found guilty of fornication. However, more than a temporary loss of labor was at issue in cases where the mother was enslaved, since a master owned not only her person but “all her increase” as well. As this often-used phrase suggests, in the mind of slaveholders the offspring of enslaved women rightfully belonged to their owners, regardless of whether the father was black or white. By mandating that status would be inheritable through the mother, the assembly effectively adopted the same position and made it the law of the colony, ensuring that the reproductive capacity of female slaves would henceforth be directed solely to their masters’ benefit.¹³

Whatever increased security the new law afforded planters, its passage was disastrous for slave women. Before 1662, whites who might seek to rape, seduce, or otherwise sexually exploit female slaves risked being named responsible for their pregnancy in court. In 1657, testimony by a “Negro woman” belonging to Captain Daniel Parke had convinced the York County justices that Parke’s servant Thomas Twine was “the father of a child of the said Negros,” and they accordingly ordered that he “doe open pennance” for his misconduct “att the next publique meeting at Marston Church.” But with the paternity of children born to enslaved mothers rendered legally irrelevant, the courts lost all interest in prosecuting such cases, leaving female slaves utterly defenseless against potential sexual aggressors. The most overt demonstration of this judicial apathy occurred in 1666, when a Northampton grand jury presented William Scrivin, John Dorman, and Henry Larton for the offense

¹³ Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 114-15; Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1645-1651), f. 139; Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 128-35.

of fathering mulatto bastards. Although all three defendants were formally identified by the slave women involved, the commissioners dismissed the charges on the grounds that there was insufficient “positive proffe” for conviction.¹⁴

However, justices did not have the same option of simply ignoring sexual interaction between black men and white women. Relations resulting in pregnancy and offspring made confronting it unavoidable. When Major Samuel Swan’s servant Susanna Shelton “brought forth” a mulatto child, for instance, the Surry court had no choice but to acknowledge her confession that Swan’s “Negroe Will was the father thereof” and make arrangements for her punishment and the raising of her infant. Of course, interracial fornication of this sort did not encroach on the proprietary interests of masters. Existing statutes already provided for their compensation. Yet it still threatened to destabilize the social order by undermining notions of racial difference that colonial authorities were beginning to employ as an ideological rationale for slavery.¹⁵

The assembly attempted to solve this dilemma with the second provision of the 1662 statute, which doubled the penalty for “christians” who engaged in illicit sexual activity with “a negro man or woman.” The intent of this additional punishment was clearly to discourage whites from entering sexual unions with people of African descent in the first place. But setting apart such unions for special treatment solely

¹⁴ York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1657-1662), f. 2; Northampton County, Order Book no. 9 (1664-1674), ff. 30, 32, 35; Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 133-34, 196. A servant belonging to Westmoreland justice Robert Williams was convicted of having “begotten a Negro servant of Mr. Williams with childe” in 1664, but it is unclear what role, if any, the testimony of the woman played in establishing his guilt. See Westmoreland County, Orders (1662-1664), f. 19.

¹⁵ Surry County, Order Book (1671-1691), 508; Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 195-96.

because of their interracial character also allowed the prosecution of offenders to serve as a means of reifying the legitimacy of the emerging racial hierarchy. The public process of indictment, trial, and sentencing ritually characterized sexual intimacy with blacks and mulattos as deviant behavior worthy of censure, naturalizing perceptions of them as a “barbarous” people who justifiably deserved legal debasement and exclusion from membership in the community. While theoretically the provision applied to whites of both sexes, its manner of enforcement demonstrates that it was chiefly aimed at women. Of the nearly six dozen known cases of interracial fornication and bastardy tried before Virginia’s county courts between 1663 and 1700, only four involved male defendants.¹⁶

In September 1667, the burgesses closed the second loophole mentioned in Elizabeth Key’s petition by passing a statute declaring that “the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedome.” Exactly what prompted this action is unclear. Warren Billings has suggested that the catalyst was a suit brought against a Captain Warner in Lower Norfolk the previous August. The plaintiff, “a Negro” named Ferdinando, argued that Warner unjustly held him as a slave since “he was Christian and had been severall years in England.” To support his claim, he presented “severall papers in Portugal or some other language wch. the court could not understand wch he alledged were papers from several gouvnrns. where he had lived a free man and where he was borne.” Unimpressed by this testimony and evidence, the commissioners denied Ferdinando’s request that his

¹⁶ Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 170; Jones, *The Present State of Virginia*, 75. A complete survey of extant seventeenth-century court records yielded a total of sixty-nine cases that dealt with sexual interaction between men and women of different races.

service should be limited and instead judged “him a slave for his lifetime.” He in turn appealed their decision to the next meeting of the General Court.¹⁷

The timing of Ferdinando’s suit and the fact that he mentioned his baptism as one of the reasons he should be set free would at first glance seem to indicate that Billings was right in drawing a connection between his case and the 1667 legislation. But the statute itself points to a different conclusion. The assembly’s stated purpose was to quell any doubts about “whether children that are slaves by birth, and by the charity and piety of their owners made partakers of the blessed sacrament of baptisme, should by vertue of their baptisme be made free.” Judging from the wording of its preamble, the primary purpose of the statute was to clarify the status of slaves who might potentially embrace Christianity, not those who had already converted before their arrival. Indeed, if the burgesses were responding to anything, its was most likely pressure exerted by Anglican ministers intent on instructing the growing black population in the tenets of the true faith.¹⁸

One clergyman who almost certainly berated the colony’s leaders on the subject of proselytizing slaves was the Reverend Morgan Godwyn. An aggressive promoter of blacks’ spiritual welfare, Godwyn served in Virginia from 1665 to 1667 before relocating to Barbados. His pamphlet entitled *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, published in 1680, was specifically intended to refute colonial claims that

¹⁷ Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 260; Lower Norfolk County, Order Book (1666-1675), f. 17; Billings, “The Law of Servants and Slaves,” 58. The identity of the Captain Warner mentioned in Ferdinando’s suit is unclear since no contemporary member of the Lower Norfolk commission had that last name. He may have been a resident of neighboring Nansemond County, for which virtually no records survive, or possibly even a seaman. Throughout the seventeenth century vessel captains were occasionally referred to by their honorific title, even if they did not hold a naval commission or rank in the local militia.

¹⁸ Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 260.

masters would suffer considerable harm “from their Negro-slaves becoming Christians.” Among the assorted objections he sought to discredit was the idea that conversion would necessitate manumission. Dismissing this contention as groundless, he cited biblical passages and English historical precedent to support his conclusion that no requirement “for such a release” arose “from any principles of Christianity, nor of religion in general.” Whether Godwyn voiced this specific argument to Virginia lawmakers is uncertain. Yet there is reason to believe that his lobbying efforts or those of other evangelically-minded clerics had some influence on the statute. The assembly included a provision declaring that, with the threat of losing their property removed, masters should “more carefully endeavour the propagation of christianity by permitting children, though slaves, or those of greater growth if capable” to be baptized.¹⁹

While the 1667 act indisputably eliminated the baptism loophole for native-born slaves and those who converted after arriving in Virginia, two later cases suggest it did not preclude christianized immigrants like Ferdinando from gaining their release from bondage. The first, tried in Lower Norfolk in 1688, involved a mulatto named John Smith. Born to a French father and free-black mother, Smith complained that his master, Thomas Scott, took advantage of his lack of an indenture to unduly detain him as a slave. By way of proof he supplied the court with “two letters written in French & a testimonial that he was borne of such parentage in ye Island of St. Christophers and was baptized.” As with Ferdinando, the justices were skeptical that there was

¹⁹ Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro's & Indians Advocate, Suing for their Admission into the Church: Or a Persuasive into the Instructing and Baptizing of the Negros's and Indians on our Plantations* (London, 1680), 123, 140; Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 260; Michael Anesko, “So Discreet a Zeal: Slavery and the Anglican Church in Virginia, 1680-1730,” *VMHB* 93 (1985): 252-54.

sufficient cause to warrant a grant of freedom. Before issuing a judgement, however, they referred the matter to the governor and Council, who subsequently ordered that if Smith had served seven years he should be set “free from ye sd Scott and that ye sd Scott pay him corne & clothes according to ye custome of ye country.”²⁰

A different set of issues were disputed in the case of Francisco Condolarium, “a Negro man” belonging to Northumberland justice Thomas Brereton. Initiating his bid for freedom in May 1691, Condolarium claimed he had come to the colony as a hired “seafaring man” on the small coastal trading vessel the *Sparrow*, and that in order to avoid paying him off, the captain, Charles Ball, had fraudulently sold him into slavery. Ball denied this accusation in open court, swearing under oath that “he did not ship ye sd. Negro for wages, but yt, he honorably purchased him in Jamaica for a slave.” Faced with conflicting testimony—apparently none of which was supported by documentary proof—the justices opted to believe Ball and ruled that Francisco was “a slave and yt he return forthwith to his sd master.”²¹

The commissioners’ decision likely would have stood had it not been for a complaint lodged by Andrew Maccoy, a white servant whom Charles Ball had also sold to Thomas Brereton. Unlike his former shipmate, Maccoy was able to produce “sufficient testimony to prove yt. he was shipt a seaman on board” the *Sparrow*, and in July 1691 the court voided his sale and awarded him a judgment against Ball for back pay and damages amounting to more than £20. The depositions taken in the

²⁰ Lower Norfolk County, Deed Book no. 5, pt. 2 (1687-1695), 115.

²¹ Northumberland County, Order Book no. 4 (1678-1698), 450, 533. None of the entries concerning Condolarium’s suit explicitly mentions that he was a Christian. But his use of a surname and the fact that he was probably Spanish or Portuguese speaking—his hearing had to be postponed a month because of his “not being capable to speak English”—strongly suggest that he had been baptized.

course of his hearing evidently also led to a reconsideration of Francisco's claim. The following September the Northumberland justices were making arrangements to examine what evidence the county's sheriff "should summon on behalf of a Negro man agt. Mr. Charles Ball by him sould a slave." Unfortunately, whether or not these deliberations led them to reverse their initial decision is unknown.²²

Both of these cases obviously involved extenuating circumstances that had nothing to do with religion. Yet religious concerns could very well have played an important role in their outcome. Virginia authorities consistently exhibited an unwillingness to enslave Christians, even if they were of African descent. A 1670 law stated that "all servants not being christians imported into this colony by shipping shalbe slaves for their lives," implying that regardless of race, baptized immigrants were to serve only for a limited term. Noting that this measure required the release of christianized slaves who accompanied their masters to Virginia, the assembly adopted a new act in 1682 that allowed the continued enslavement of any "Negroes, Moors, Molattoes, or Indians" who had not already converted "at the time of their first purchase...by some christian." But considering that Ferdinando, Smith, and Condolarium had all probably been baptized and lived as free men in European colonies, they clearly qualified for exemption even under the more stringent standard.²³

Still, the increased definition given to the institution of slavery by the acts of

²² *Ibid.*, 559-60, 566.

²³ Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 283, 490-92. In a revised version of the laws enacted in 1705 the assembly reinstated a somewhat more relaxed standard that exempted from enslavement all Christians and those who could "make due proof of their being free in England, or any other christian country, before they were shipped, in order to transportation hither." See *Ibid.*, 3: 447-48.

1662 and 1667 left the vast majority of blacks and mulattos with only one way of challenging enslavement: proving some contractual limitation on their term of service. This had not been an easy task even in earlier decades. John Baptist, “a turke or moor” belonging to Major Thomas Lambert of Lower Norfolk, had been fortunate enough to have an eyewitness who could corroborate his claim. His case began sometime in 1652, when Lambert took him aboard a vessel belonging to the Dutch merchant Simon Overzee. When it came time to leave, “Baptist refused to goe a shoare againe wth his sd master sayenge yt he would goe upp to ye Governor for he would serve but fower yeres.” Upon hearing this Overzee quickly reassured Lambert, telling him “he had sould ye sd Baptist unto him for his life tyme, & he should serve his life tyme.”²⁴

Exactly when the case came to trial is unclear. But Baptist had won a favorable verdict by January 1654, since that month Lambert was ordered to provide security for his attendance at the General Court’s hearing of his appeal the following March. The county court’s decision most likely hinged on information provided by one Darby Kelly, who had been present at the time Overzee had asked Baptist “how longe he would serve.” When Baptist answered “he would serve five yeres,” Kelly testified, Overzee had agreed “it was enough.” Whatever Lambert said at his appeal evidently failed to persuade the General Court that a reversal was in order. In 1660, the last time Baptist is mentioned in the records, he lodged a complaint against a local merchant for assault and battery, clearly demonstrating that he was a free man.²⁵

²⁴ Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds C (1651-1656), f. 8. Baptist is referred to as “a turke or moor” in a later case tried in 1660. See Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), 244. Thomas Lambert held the offices of commissioner, sheriff, and vestryman in Lower Norfolk during the 1640s and 1650s, during which time he also occasionally represented the county in the House of Burgesses.

²⁵ Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds C (1651-1656), ff. 68, 71, 75; Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), 244. Baptist evidently later moved to Maryland since he appears several times in the court

Because blacks could be bound for much longer periods than their white counterparts, there was always the possibility that the death of their master might leave the terms of their service unclear and open to challenge. This seems to have been precisely what happened in the case of Edward Mozingo, “a Negro man” who had been apprenticed by indenture to Colonel John Walker for twenty-eight years. When his time finally came to an end in 1672, Mozingo sought his freedom. But Walker had died four years earlier and his widow had subsequently married Colonel John Stone of Rappahannock, who claimed him as a slave. The case eventually came before the General Court, which after a full hearing of the matter decided on the basis of testimony given by “divers witnesses” that Mozingo should “be and remayne free to all intents and purposes.”²⁶

A change of ownership could also leave black bondsmen susceptible to enslavement. Benjamin Lewis faced this very danger in 1691. As a free black living in England, Lewis had signed an indenture to serve in Virginia for four years “accordinge to ye custom of ye country.” Originally consigned to Colonel Christopher Robinson of Middlesex, he had been transferred first to Edmund Pagett of Rappahannock and then later sold to William Harris, a Stafford County planter. When his term expired, Lewis requested “his freedom according to law and pursuant to his indenture.” Harris, however, denied his claim, maintaining that the agreement Lewis had brought out of England was a forgery and that he “ought by law to be his slave.” After a jury empanelled to determine the validity of the disputed document found it to

records of Charles County. See W. H. Browne and B.C. Steiner, eds. *Archives of Maryland*, 72 vols. (Baltimore, 1883-1972), 53: 74-77, 111-115, 119-120, 352.

²⁶ McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court*, 316. Some blacks did serve standard-length terms. See the case of Andrew Moore in *Ibid.*, 354.

be “legal and authentick,” the Stafford justices awarded Lewis his freedom, though Harris appealed their decision to the General Court.²⁷

Historian Alden Vaughan has suggested that as slavery became more entrenched, authorities increasingly came to view limitations on the service of blacks as invalid, because by definition slaves had no contractual rights. But this view fails to take into account that—cases like Benjamin Lewis’s excepted—the parties to such agreements were often both white, and there was no legal impediment that prevented a merchant from selling a black or mulatto for a finite term. In 1678, for example, Boston merchant John Indicott sold Richard Medlecott of Middlesex County “a Spanish mulatto boy by name Antonio.” Indicott declared in the deed that he had “full power” to sell Antonio “for his life time.” Yet he decided to instead limit his service to ten years, at the expiration of which “ye sd mulatto” was “to be a free man and to goe whereever he pleaseth.”²⁸

Of course, while the color of their skin left indentured blacks vulnerable to being pressed into lifetime bondage, from a strictly legal standpoint they were servants. For blacks and mulattos who were enslaved, securing a consensual release from service was by the late 1660s the sole remaining means by which they might

²⁷ Stafford County, Record Book (1686-1694), 197; Court Records (1689-1693), 145-46, 170. In September 1690, Harris had convinced Lewis to sign a deed acknowledging that he was purchased “as a slave.” The deed further stipulated that Harris would manumit Lewis after fourteen years if he was a “diligent” servant and did not runaway or otherwise resist his master’s authority, while if he failed to behave satisfactorily he was to serve “dureing his naturall life.” However, as part of its verdict the Stafford court ruled that the agreement had been executed through “fraud and deceit” and was therefore “not good effectual nor valid in law.” See Record Book (1686-1694), 166.

²⁸ Vaughan, “The Origins Debate,” 330; Middlesex County, Order Book no. 1 (1673-1680), f. 126. Some contracts provided for freeing blacks only under certain conditions. In 1656, for instance, a Cornelius Powell sold Lancaster planter Minor Doodes a “Negro Servant” named Degoe for a life term, though Doodes agreed that if he left Virginia or sold Degoe to someone else he would serve for no more than ten years. Consequently, when Degoe sued Doodes for his freedom in 1666, the court ruled that he should remain a slave. See Lancaster County, Orders, Etc. (1655-1666), 369; Deeds, Etc., no. 2 (1654-1702), 337.

escape their condition. Even then, freedom was not always assured, since manumissions were sometimes subject to dispute. In 1665, the heirs of Charles City justice Rice Hoe contested the release of his slave John, asserting that the deed granting his freedom had been “conditional for the said Negroes performance of true and faithful service.” Maintaining that “he had not only been refractory and disobedient but also committed several acts to impeach the force and covenant of the said note,” Hoe’s heirs refused to free him. John petitioned Governor Sir William Berkley and the Council to intervene, and they eventually returned a memorandum to the county justices stating that if “the sd Negro” had dutifully served eleven years than he should “be sett free.” Although the assorted depositions taken in the case presented dramatically disparate profiles of John’s behavior, a jury decided that he did not commit any “notorious acts as was alleged” and the court granted him his freedom.²⁹

Occasionally it was the county courts, not disgruntled heirs, who moved to block manumissions. Citing that his slave Doll “beinge now fifty years of age and havinge served me thirty five years,” Northampton planter William Gascoigne had a deed entered in the county record book in 1689 granting her freedom upon his death. Some time later he executed a second deed freeing Doll’s husband Robin, though he evidently never moved to have it formally entered. When Gascoigne died in 1692, Doll presented both documents to the county commissioners for verification. The court accepted as legitimate the deed releasing her from service and ordered that she be set “free accordinge to the contents thereof.” But they reached a different conclusion in her husband’s case, noting that while his manumission was “under the

²⁹ Charles City County, Deeds, Wills, Orders, Etc. (1655-1665), 604-05, 617-18.

hand & seale of her said late master” and had been “proved to be his act & deed by the oath of John Cole,” it had not been “acknowledged in court nor recorded.” In addition, Gascoigne’s will stipulated that after his decease his entire estate should be delivered to his son Henry, without making “any excepcon of his said Negro man Robin to bee free then as well as his wife.” Consequently, the court ruled that the deed freeing Robin was invalid and that “hee continues still in the same quality as formerly.”³⁰

The unwillingness of the Northampton justices to give Robin the benefit of the doubt likely stemmed from a desire to limit the number of free blacks in their midst. According to tax lists, as late as 1668 nearly one-quarter of the county’s blacks were free, and the overall percentage was perhaps even higher since the lists do not include younger children who were below tithable age. Almost all of these men and women were ex-slaves or the sons and daughters of ex-slaves. Indeed, as historian Douglas Deal has shown, most free black families on the Eastern Shore were connected in one way or another with a handful of manumissions by wealthy planters during the 1640s and 1650s.³¹ Mainland counties undoubtedly had a much lower percentage of free blacks. In Surry, for example, only one such household was included on the tithable list for 1670 and just one in 1688. However, despite their relatively small numbers, during the last third of the century Virginia’s leaders increasingly came to view “the setting of negroes and mulattos free” as a threat to social order. Not only did their

³⁰ Northampton County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 11 (1680-1692), 232; Orders and Wills, no. 13 (1689-1698), 182-83.

³¹ Northampton County, Order Book no. 9 (1664-1674), ff. 54-55; Deal, *Race and Class*, pt. 2. Deal’s brief biographical portraits of free blacks on the Eastern Shore reveal that most had previously belonged to less than a dozen planters. See also Breen and Innes, “*Myne Own Ground*,” ch. 4.

liminal status within the colony's emerging racial caste system pose a thorny legal and ideological problem, they also burdened local authorities by "entertaining negro slaves from their masters service, or receiving stolen goods, or being grown old bringing a charge upon the country."³²

To eliminate these "great inconveniences," in 1691 the assembly mandated that "no negroe or mulatto to be...set free by any person or persons whatsoever," unless they made arrangements "for the transportation of such negro or mulatto out of the countrey within six months." As a result, slaves who would have previously been released from service remained in bondage. Mingo, "a Negro man" formerly belonging to Charles City planter James Blamore, complained in 1692 that contrary to his late master's will he was unjustly detained as a slave. The administrator of the estate countered his claim with the language of the will itself, in which Blamore stated that "four years after my decease my Negro man and my Indian boy will be free if the law will admit, otherwise the Negro to my executors." The county court, "takeing note of the law barring Negroes their freedom," ruled that Mingo was still rightfully the property of the Blamore's estate and should return to his owners.³³

The 1692 will of Essex County planter John Jones contained no such clause restricting the manumission of his slave Okree. He was to remain the property of Jones's wife Millicent "for noe longer than she doth remain a widow," after which he would "be free and cleare from her and all other persons whatsoever." The will apparently passed legal muster, for when Millicent's new husband James Blaise

³² Surry County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1672), 372-74; Deeds and Wills, Etc., no. 4 (1687-1694), ff. 65-71; Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 3:87-88.

³³ *Ibid.*; Charles City County, Orders (1687-1695), 410.

refused to comply with its manumission clause after marrying her two years later, Okree complained to the county court and the justices “adjudged ye sd Negro to be free.” Nevertheless, because of the 1691 act he would still have had to leave Virginia within six months. This he was unwilling to do since he had “severall children” who remained enslaved. Compelled to decide between his family and his freedom, Okree chose the former. In order to conform with the law, he signed an agreement to serve Captain Edward Thomas “in the same quality I was in before I was set free, dureing the time of my naturall life.”³⁴

The terrible choice forced upon Okree exemplifies the greater harshness and rigidity of the institution of slavery in Virginia during the last third of the century. Beginning in 1668, the General Assembly had begun passing measures that increasingly isolated slaves as a distinct group and subjected them to unprecedented legal debasement and social degradation. This effort was a clear departure from previous legislation. Racial prejudice had, of course, shaped the treatment of blacks in the colony from the time they first arrived. It obviously took a significant degree of contempt to keep Africans and their descendents in lifetime, hereditary bondage. The absence of complaints brought before the county courts strongly suggests that even in the earliest decades enslaved men and women were denied legal means of seeking redress for any abuse they suffered. But whereas until the end of the 1660s the Virginia government’s racial policy—at least as it was expressed through statutes—was aimed chiefly at protecting the property rights of masters by preventing slaves from escaping their condition, subsequent acts were altogether different in character.

³⁴ Essex County, Orders, Etc. no.1 (1692-1695), 186-87, 205; Deeds, Wills, Etc. (1692-1695), 155-60; 315-16.

While each addressed a different issue, together they formed a comprehensive program for repressing people of color, marking a pivotal transition from state-sanctioned racial prejudice and discrimination to state-sponsored racism.

As historian Winthrop Jordan has suggested, this program's racial agenda did not necessarily reflect the beliefs of the entire white population. Because of the nature of Virginia's government, it can only be directly connected with the class of men who sat on the Council and in the House of Burgesses. Councilors were nominated by the governor and appointed by the Crown, and though Burgesses served as members of a representative body, their accountability to the public was nothing like that of a modern legislature. Servants and women had always been excluded from participating in elections. After 1670 the franchise was further limited to "freeholders and householders," disqualifying the masses of poor white males who did not have land of their own. Statutes passed by the assembly thus represented the views of a very narrow stratum of society—propertied men in general and the gentry in particular. Furthermore, when one considers that office-holding planters owned some two-thirds of the slaves in Virginia during this period, it not only becomes clear whose interests the new laws were intended to serve but also why they were passed when the colony's black population was still relatively small.³⁵

In no instance was the connection between interest and legislation more evident than in the sole seventeenth-century statute to address domestic relations between masters and slaves. Despite the substantial authority that the law granted

³⁵ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 588; Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2:280. For a similar argument concerning the usefulness of statutes for examining the changing nature of race relations, see Breen and Innes, "Myne Owne Ground," 22-24.

masters over servants, at least in theory their authority was limited, particularly with respect to discipline. Those who punished their servants “beyond the meritt of their offences” were subject to prosecution. Although local authorities rarely did more than publicly admonish masters who exceeded the “bounds of moderation,” on occasion they employed more aggressive forms of censure. In 1678, for example, the justices of Lancaster County ordered John Chyn to pay them 10,000 lbs. of tobacco as security that he would not abuse “any of his servants by unlawfull correcon nor shall give them any correcons but that is shalbee upon just occasion and that then before some one of his neighbours or his overseer.” Beatings that resulted in death could potentially land an overzealous planter before the General Court under charge of murder. Such was the case for Captain William Odion of Lower Norfolk, who just six months after being convicted of “hard & cruell” treatment of his laborers was compelled to stand trial in James City “for the death of a man servant of his.”³⁶

The 1669 *act about the casual killing of slaves*, however, effectively eliminated restraints on the disciplining of black bondsmen. Citing that “the only law in force for the punishment of refractory servants resisting their master, mistris, or overseer cannot be inflicted upon negroes, nor the obstinacy of many of them by other than violent meanes supprest,” the act provided that “if any slave resist his master (or other by his masters order correcting him) and by the extremity of the correction should chance to die, that his death shall not be accompted felony.” Perhaps feeling that such an extraordinary grant of immunity required explanation, the assembly included a justification for its action. While clearly human beings, they reasoned,

³⁶ Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2:117-18; Lancaster County, Order Book no. 1 (1666-1680), 411; Lower Norfolk County, Wills and Deeds D (1656-1666), 343, 358.

slaves were also a valuable form of property. Consequently, although beating one to death was clearly homicide, there was no basis to establish criminal intent, for in the eyes of the law it could not be presumed “that premeditated malice (which alone makes murder felony) should induce any man to destroy his own estate”³⁷

The 1669 act was intended to ensure that masters enjoyed the freedom they needed to maintain order within their household. Owning slaves often necessitated the use of more severe methods of coercion than what was required for servants. In the latter case, the finite length of their term, which allowed for the possibility of its extension, provided a means of punishing misconduct without resorting to the lash. But no such option was available for men and women held in perpetual bondage. The prospect of freedom was utterly denied them. If slaves could not be induced to behave “for fear of losing their liberty,” as Edmund Morgan succinctly put it, “they had to be made to fear for their lives.” This is not to say that slaveowners completely abandoned the carrot in favor of the stick. Many used perquisites such as better living arrangements or more fulfilling job assignments as a way to both motivate and punish. Yet even in the most congenial relationships between masters and slaves, the threat that “violent means” might be used to compel obedience was always present.³⁸

An incident involving the Reverend Samuel Gray, minister of Christ Church Parish in Middlesex County, vividly demonstrates what could happen when this threat became a reality. According to Thomas Williamson, Gray had been sitting with “two

³⁷ Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 270.

³⁸ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 311-12. For an eighteenth century example of work assignments being used to punish slaves, see Charles Yate’s advertisement for his slave Robin in Lathan A. Windley, comp. *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730’s to 1790* 5 vols. (Westport, CT, 1983), 1: 221.

gentlemen” when he brought in his young mulatto slave Jack, who had recently been taken up after running away. When Jack asked if he might fetch a few items that he had absconded with when he ran off, Gray angrily replied “what you rogue, you want to run away again?” Sensing the depth of his master’s rage, Jack immediately fell on his knees and begged for pardon, promising never to attempt escape again. Gray was completely unmoved by this act of submission, and rising from his chair gave him “three or four blows about the head till the blood come.” Not yet satisfied, he repeatedly ordered first Williamson and then another one of his slaves named Peter to whip the boy, eventually coming out himself and giving him “two or three knocks with the branding iron” that caused some blood to “run downe one of his lips.” He then took a seat while Peter “fell on again,” bidding him to “lay on thicker and closer.” When Gray finally consented to have Jack cut down and washed, Williamson noticed that his eyes had “sett in his head.” He was quickly taken into the house, where Peter attempted to revive him by waving some burnt feathers under his nose. Williamson briefly “perceived some breath in him,” but within a few minutes he was gone.³⁹

Gray clearly lamented Jack’s death, describing it as “an unfortunate chance which I would not should have happened in my family for three times his price.” But whatever regret he felt does not seem to have been rooted in either remorse for his actions or fear of their potential consequences. In a note about the incident that he sent to Justice John Grymes the following morning, he casually remarked that “such accidents will happen now and then,” and even asked Grymes to remind his wife and

³⁹ Middlesex County, Order Book no. 3 (1694-1705), 237-240.

several other acquaintances of “their promise to visett tomorrow.” This evident lack of concern was most likely owing to an awareness of the protection he enjoyed under the law. Although a jury of inquest later ruled that Jack “came by his death by the stripes and blowes he reced. upon his body and head,” his status as a slave made certain that the most serious charge Gray faced was manslaughter.⁴⁰

If the 1669 statute eliminated any uncertainty surrounding the domestic management of slaves by allowing masters a free hand with the whip (or worse), it said nothing about those instances where misconduct could not be treated as a “family” matter. The absence of such guidance was a source of confusion for local authorities. When the Charles City justices authorized Theodorick Bland “to raise men to capture two runaway negroes” in 1662, for instance, they felt it necessary to have the assembly decide whether the expense should “be publique or private.” As the dilemma confronting the commissioners indicates, determining who should shoulder the burden of controlling the growing slave population was a pressing concern. After all, slave resistance often affected planters other than their own master. George, “a Negro belonging to Mr. Thomas Willoughby,” was convicted by the Lower Norfolk court of “breaking open of ye house of Mr. Richard Church and stealing and carrying away severall pcells. of linen.” Captain William Fox of Lancaster “committed three Negroes to the county gaol for feloniously breaking upon ye stores of Capt. Thomas Warner & Mr. James Carradine.”⁴¹

Other slaves chose to flee rather than fleece their oppressors, making them a

⁴⁰ Ibid., 236, 242.

⁴¹ Charles City County, Deeds, Wills, Order, Etc. (1655-1665), 331; Lower Norfolk County, Deed Book no. 5 (1686-1695), pt. 2, 163; Lancaster County, Order Book no. 4 (1696-1702), f. 40.

potential threat to the whole community. Three Accomack blacks belonging respectively to Samuel Fisher, John Sorrill, and William Overton ran away together in 1683. Ralph Wormeley's slave Lawrence remained at large for several weeks in 1691, and was eventually charged with stealing a gun and committing "severall roberrys dureing his outlyeing." The problems caused by runaway slaves could also spread across jurisdictional boundaries, since some managed to make it into a neighboring county or even to more distant parts of the colony. In 1672, three slaves belonging to Charles City justice Rowland Place were taken up in Surry. William Cocke apprehended a "runaway Negroe" in Henrico who had escaped from a plantation near the falls of the Rappahannock River, an area some sixty miles away.⁴²

Determined to more vigorously suppress slave resistance, in 1672 the assembly took the first step toward erecting a publicly funded system of police with an *Act for the apprehension and suppression of runaways, negroes, and slaves*. The new law stopped short of establishing separate procedures for tracking down fugitives. Local authorities were to continue using warrants and the traditional "hue and cry" for that purpose. However, it did grant pursuers license to employ all necessary means to effect a capture, including lethal force. "If any negroe, molatto, Indian slave, or servant for life runaway," the statute read, "it shall and may be lawfull for any person who shall endeavour to take them...to kill or wound him or them soe resisting." The law further stipulated that the person who killed or injured a fugitive slave would "not be questioned" about what happened, and that owners would "receive satisfaction

⁴² Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, and Orders (1678-1682), f. 283; Middlesex County, Order Book no. 2 (1680-1694), 535; Surry County, Order Book (1671-1691), 4; Henrico County, Order Book (1678-1693), 440.

from the publique” for any damages they might suffer, including a payment of 4500 lbs. tobacco for each slave of theirs who was killed.⁴³

On its face the 1672 law was a logical corollary to the *act about the casual killing of slaves* passed three years before, a mere extension to the public realm of the already sanctioned private use of “violent means.” But reining in runaways does not seem to have been the only reason for authorizing such draconian measures.

According to the statute’s preamble, the recovery or destruction of outlying slaves was imperative because of the “mischeifes of very dangerous consequence” that might arise if “other negroes, Indians or servants should happen to fly forth and joyne with them.” This allusion to cooperative resistance suggests that the colony’s leaders were not so much worried about isolated acts of slave misconduct as the possibility of their escalating into a general servile insurrection involving laborers of different races.⁴⁴

The mutual empathy of blacks and poor whites routinely exhibited before the county courts had been a source of concern for at least a decade, during which time the assembly passed four pieces of legislation designed to drive them apart. The first two dealt with the types of interaction that local magistrates most frequently encountered. An act of 1661 increased the penalty for “English” servants who ran

⁴³ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2:299-300. Indians killed in the process of being retaken were to be reimbursed at the lower rate of 3,000 lbs. tobacco. It is worth noting that a runaway’s captors were also rewarded out of the public treasury. In 1669, the assembly had passed a law granting 1000 lbs. of tobacco to anyone who apprehended a servant who left their master’s plantation without a written pass. This amount quickly proved “too burthensome,” so the next year it was reduced to 200 lbs.. See *Ibid.*, 2: 273-74, 277-79, 283-84. “Hue and cry” was a phrase employed in English common law to describe the practice of pursuing a criminal with horn and voice. It was the duty of any person injured by or discovering a felony to raise the alarm among his neighbors, who were then bound to drop what they were doing and turn out and assist in the discovery of the offender. In the case of a hue and cry, all those joining in the pursuit were justified in arresting the suspected person.

⁴⁴ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2:299-300. The most detailed analysis of how elites feared cooperation among poor freemen, servants, and slaves is T.H. Breen, “A Changing Labor Force and Race Relations in Virginia, 1660-1710,” *Journal of Social History* 7 (1973), 3-25.

away “in company with any negroes who are incapable of making satisfaction by addition of time,” while the 1662 law doubled the fine imposed on whites convicted of interracial fornication. The other two statutes focused on free people of color and were intended to foster notions of racial difference. In 1668, the assembly decided that free “negro women... ought not in all respects to be admitted to a full fruition of the exemptions and impunities of the English,” and were therefore “still lyable to payment of taxes” as if they were enslaved. Two years later, “Indians or negroes manumitted, or otherwise free” were forbidden, even if baptized, from “purchasing christian [i.e. white] servants.” Less there be any doubt that issues of race, not religion, lay behind this action, neither group was prohibited “from buying any of their owne nation.”⁴⁵

However, despite all their efforts, the widespread uprising long feared by elite Virginians erupted in 1676, though not in the way they had anticipated. Instead, the government’s half-hearted response to an outbreak of sporadic violence along the frontier stirred up the long-simmering resentment of lower-class whites towards the colony’s “great men.” For reasons that are not entirely clear, a wealthy Henrico planter named Nathaniel Bacon thrust himself into the role of spokesman for these discontented settlers and began lobbying Governor Sir William Berkeley for a commission to lead them against the Indians. Berkeley was fond of Bacon and had

⁴⁵ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2: 26, 170, 267, 281. The act of 1661, generally held by scholars to be the earliest statutory recognition of slavery in Virginia, stipulated that servants who ran away with slaves were to “serve for the time of the said negroes absence.” Perhaps because this penalty proved to be unworkable, the assembly passed a new law the following year. Under the revised version, each convicted servant was to serve “the masters of the said negroes for their absence soe long as they should have done by this act if they had not beene slaves,” which was twice the length of time they had been gone. If a slave died or could otherwise not be recovered, white accomplices were to pay “fower thousand five hundred pounds of tobacco and caske or fower yeares service for every negroe so lost or dead.” See *Ibid.*, 2: 116-117.

recently even appointed him to a seat on the Council. But he doubted that “a rabble of the basest sort of people,” as acting secretary Phillip Ludwell described them, would be able (or willing) to distinguish between native groups who were friendly and those who were not. Nor was he entirely certain of his one-time protégé’s motives and loyalty. He refused to authorize the proposed expedition, and when Bacon declared his intention to move forward anyway, the governor denounced him and removed him from office. Events continued to spin out of control until by mid-summer Bacon and his followers were in open rebellion. The country had descended into civil war.⁴⁶

At first, freemen alone filled the ranks of the two opposing armies. It was not until Berkeley offered liberty to the servants of men supporting Bacon, and the latter responded with a similar offer to the bondsmen of loyalists, that Virginia’s most oppressed classes entered the fray. The overwhelming majority threw in their lot with the rebels. Indeed, even after Bacon died from the “bloody flux” in late October, roughly four hundred “English and Negroes” refused to abandon a rebel bastion at Colonel John West’s plantation in New Kent County. Captain Thomas Grantham, who had lately arrived in the Chesapeake with his thirty-gun vessel, *The Concord*, accepted the task of gaining their surrender. By liberally plying the garrison of “freemen, searvants and slaves” with brandy and proclaiming “that they were all pardoned and freed from their slavery,” he was able to persuade most into giving up.

⁴⁶ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 250-65; Philip Ludwell to Secretary Joseph Williamson, June 28, 1676, *VMHB* 1 (1894): 183. For two differing book-length treatments of Bacon’s Rebellion, see Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Torchbearer of the Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1940); Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1957).

Yet “eighty negroes and twenty English,” distrusting his overtures, “would not deliver their armes.” Only after Grantham lured these remaining holdouts onto a small boat with the promise of allowing them safe passage across the York River, and then threatened to blow them out of the water if they did not immediately yield, did they finally capitulate. All were later “sent hom to there masters.”⁴⁷

Although servants and slaves had clearly been among the most determined members of the “giddy multitude”—the House of Burgesses’ derisive term for Bacon’s supporters—it was the status of the Indians that underwent the greatest transformation in the rebellion’s aftermath. Throughout the 1650s and 1660s, the Virginia government had consistently protected natives from enslavement. Condemning the activities of dishonest traders who “to the greate scandall of Christianitie and of the English nation” encouraged Indians to steal children from rival tribes so that they could be sold into bondage, a 1658 act made it illegal for colonists to purchase native workers from white sellers. Three years later, another statute held that Indians were not to be bound “for any longer time than English of the like ages.” This standard appears to have remained in force until 1670, when yet another law established that native children were to serve until age thirty and adults “for twelve yeares and no longer.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Captain Thomas Grantham, “Account of My Transactions,” in Henry Coventry Papers at Longleat, estate of the Marquis of Bath (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation), LXXVII, f. 301; “The History of Bacon’s and Ingram’s Rebellion” [1676] in Charles M. Andrews, ed., *Narratives of the Insurrections, 1675-1690* (New York, 1915; reprint, 1967), 94-95; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 265-69; Breen, “A Changing Labor Force,” 10-11.

⁴⁸ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 1: 481-82; 2:143, 283. For further evidence of the assembly’s determination to prevent Indians being surreptitiously forced into servitude, see the cases of William Johnson and Mettappin, “a Powhattan Indian” sold as a slave to Elizabeth Short by the King of Weyanoke in *Ibid.*, 2: 155. T.H. Breen was the first to employ the term “giddy multitude” to collectively describe Virginia’s unruly lower classes in the era surrounding Bacon’s Rebellion, see “A Changing Labor Force,” 3.

While the reference to “Indian slaves” in the 1672 act against runaways indicates that restrictions on the employment of native laborers had perhaps already begun to loosen in the years immediately preceding the rebellion, they were all but swept away by the Baconian-dominated assembly of June 1676, which bluntly asserted that “Indians taken in warr to be held and accounted slaves dureing life.” Against the stated desire of royal commissioners sent over from England to restore order in the colony, the reconstituted assembly of 1677 confirmed that Indian prisoners captured during the late hostilities would continue in permanent servitude. Any remaining prohibitions on native enslavement were removed by a 1682 act stating that “Indians which shall hereafter be sold by our neighbouring Indians, or any other trafiqueing with us as for slaves are hereby adjudged, deemed and taken to be slaves to all intents and purposes, any law, usage or custome to the contrary notwithstanding.”⁴⁹

The legalization of Indian slavery was very much owing to political realities created by the rebellion. Any attempt to deprive frontier settlers of the native prisoners they had taken might very well have re-ignited unrest, which had initially fed off fear and hatred of the Indians. By permitting the settlers to keep those captives they had acquired under Bacon’s command and allowing them to obtain others through trade or future punitive expeditions, the assembly eliminated the most immediate cause of what Governor Thomas Lord Culpeper described as “our time of anarchy.” The

⁴⁹ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2: 346, 404, 440, 490-92. The mention of Indian slaves in the 1672 act could possibly refer to natives serving for a finite term, since throughout the middle decades of the century “servant” and “slave” were often used interchangeably. However, it might also pertain to Indians brought from other areas of the continent. As Edmund Morgan has shown, in 1666 Governor Berkeley considered waging war against the “Northern Indians” and selling their women and children to defray the costs, though Morgan also linked the advent of Indian slavery to Bacon’s Rebellion. See *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 232-33, 328-30.

various laws concerning slaves and free blacks enacted during the last two decades of the century, on the other hand, were a continuation of racial policies initiated well before the events of 1676. To be sure, colonial leaders like councilor Nicholas Spencer remained acutely aware of the lingering dissatisfaction that the rebellion “left itching behind it.” The emergence in 1677 of a renegade community of fugitive slaves and impoverished freemen near North Carolina’s Albemarle Sound made it impossible to ignore. But the legislative drive to isolate blacks as a pariah class, to separate them from whites with what Edmund Morgan called “a screen of racial contempt,” dated back to at least the 1660s. Recent memories of the “giddy multitude” only added impetus to the effort.⁵⁰

The assembly returned to the issue of policing slaves three times in the fifteen years immediately following the rebellion, increasing the level of public participation and commitment with each revision. Building upon the 1672 statute, a 1680 law made it illegal for slaves to carry a “club, staffe, gunn, sword or any other weapon of defence or offence” and forbid them to leave their master’s plantation without a written certificate. Those caught violating these provisions were to be remanded to the nearest constable, who was required to administer twenty lashes before sending them home. Any “negroe or other slave” who presumed “to lift up his hand in opposition against any christian” was to receive thirty lashes, while determined resistance was to be met with lethal force. When the colony’s inhabitants proved less than diligent in

⁵⁰ Governor Thomas Lord Culpeper to (?), 20 March 1683, C.O. 1/51, ff. 171-72, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 96; Nicholas Spencer to Sir Lyonel Jenkins, 12 August 1682, C.O. 1/49, ff. 106-107, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 96; William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 10 vols. (Raleigh, 1886) 1: 260-261; Breen, “A Changing Labor Force,” 11-13; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 328. Culpeper had succeeded Berkeley as governor when the latter was recalled to England in 1678.

reporting transgressions, in 1682 the assembly authorized a fine of 200 lbs. tobacco for masters or overseers who knowingly allowed slaves “not properly belonging to him or them, to remaine or be upon his or their plantation above the space of four houres at any one time,” unless the slave in question had their owner’s expressed permission to be there.⁵¹

The twenty-year statutory drift toward a publicly funded-system of police culminated with the 1691 *act for suppressing outlying slaves*, which created an early version of the slave patrols of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No longer were local justices to rely on the hue and cry for pursuing runaways. They were now “impowered and commanded” to issue their warrants to the county sheriff, who at the public’s expense would “raise such and soe many forces from time to time as he shall think convenient and necessary for the effectual apprehending [of] such negroes, mulattoes and other slaves.” As with the three previous statutes concerned with the recovery of fugitives, sheriffs and their assistants were authorized to do all that was required to accomplish the task allotted them, up to and including killing any slaves who attempted to escape or otherwise refused to surrender.⁵²

Armed with the extensive powers afforded them by the 1691 statute, local authorities began aggressively hunting down any slaves believed to be participating in organized resistance. The very year that the statute was passed, the justices of Middlesex issued a warrant for “ye raiseing of men to suppress & take severall outlyeing Negroes” who were roving about the county. In 1694, The Accomack court

⁵¹ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2: 481-82; 492-93. In order to ensure the proper degree of vigilance, the 1682 law encouraged neighboring planters to inform on one another by awarding the fine to those who reported violators.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3: 86-88.

took similar steps to apprehend “severall out lying slaves” who had banded together and were making “mischief.” The grim determination with which leaders pursued such groups is captured in a 1697 order issued by the court of Princess Anne, which authorized the sheriff to “raise as many men as he shall think needfull” to pursue and apprehend some fugitives who were “committing severall injuries to the inhabitants by breaking open houses and killing & destroying sheep calves.” In order to ensure that the sheriff had no doubt about the extent of his authority, the justices further instructed him that if “the said runaway Negroes doe resist and refuse to be taken then to kill them as the law directs.”⁵³

Given the willingness of the assembly and county commissions to countenance the violent suppression of runaways, it is hardly surprising that slaves convicted of criminal behavior suffered severe punishment. For his having “endeavoured to promote a Negro insurrection,” in 1688 the General Court sentenced a slave named Sam to receive two whippings, one “att a cart’s taylor” around the streets of James City and the other during the next court meeting in his home county of Westmoreland. Sam was then to have a “strong iron collar affixed about his neck and four spriggs, which collar he is never to take or get off.” If he tried to remove it or left his master’s plantation again “during all the time he shall live,” the sheriff was empowered to hang him. Correction meted out to slaves who committed lesser transgressions was also brutal. When Richard Robinson’s slave Tom was found guilty of having “stolen severall things” from the home of John Parsons, for example, the Middlesex justices ordered the sheriff “to take into his custodie ye body of the sd. Negro & have him to

⁵³ Middlesex County, Order Book no. 2 (1680-1694), 527; Accomack County, Orders (1690-1697), f. 133; Princess Anne County, Order Book no. 1 (1691-1709), 135.

the publick whipping poste of the county,” where he was to receive “nine & thirty lashes or stripes upon ye bare back well laid on.”⁵⁴

Throughout the 1670s and 1680s, slaves were still allowed the same rights as whites when they stood trial for serious offenses. However, this procedural equality ended with passage of *An act for the more speedy prosecution of slaves committing capitall crimes*. Adopted in 1692, the act authorized the governor to commission special county-level courts of oyer and terminer to hear cases involving slaves that might result in “the death of the offender or loss of member”—a power previously held only by the General Court. The justices so appointed were to see to the arraignment and indictment of the accused, and could try the case “without the sollemnitie of jury” by taking evidence from just two witnesses, or even one if the circumstances were “pregnant.” Their decisions were not subject to appeal.⁵⁵

Tom Cary, a slave belonging to Northampton planter John Simon, found himself before one of these special courts in 1693. He stood accused of forcibly breaking into the home of local planter Thomas Richards, stealing various “goods, clothes, merchandize, & other thinges,” and afterwards “putting fire to the said house,” which completely destroyed both it and another dwelling nearby. After having read their commission from the governor and the charges contained in the indictment,

⁵⁴ Westmoreland County, Orders (1675-1689), 644-45; Middlesex County, Order Book no. 2 (1680-1694), 469.

⁵⁵ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 3: 102-03. Perhaps to eliminate any possibility of slaves claiming ownership of livestock they might be accused of stealing, the law also stipulated that any horses, cattle, and hogs they possessed “be converted by the owner of such slave to the use and marke of the said owner.” In 1699, the assembly revised the statute when it proved “inconvenient by making the first offence of hog stealing felony.” Under the amended provisions, first time offenders received thirty-nine lashes on the bare back. Any slave convicted a second time was to “stand two hours in the pillory and have both his eares nailed thereto and at the expiration of the said two hours have his eares cut off close by the nailes.” See *Ibid.*, 3: 179.

to which Cary plead “not guilty,” the justices called the witnesses against him. Neither this testimony nor “the prisoners owne confession” (perhaps given earlier) is recorded, only that after a “full hearinge” of the evidence the justices unanimously found him guilty on all counts. Their sentence was predictably grim. Advising Cary to “flatter not your self with the hopes of life for you will assuredly dye as now you live,” the head of the court directed the sheriff to erect a gibbet within sight of the charred remains of the two buildings, where shortly before noon the following Saturday Cary was to “hang by the neck till you are dead.” The whole trial probably lasted no longer than a couple of hours.⁵⁶

Through a sustained legislative effort, then, the assembly successfully stripped black and Indian bondsmen of the few rights they once possessed and committed the colonial government to the support of slavery. By the early 1690s, “Negroes and other slaves” could be beaten with impunity by their masters, killed if they attempted to escape, and placed on trial for their lives without the procedural protections afforded even the lowliest English subject. The increasingly racist social climate that accompanied these changes also affected free people of color, who suffered from the harassment and persecution of local officials. Just four months after winning his suit against William Harris, for instance, Benjamin Lewis was picked up in Charles City and summarily sent back to Stafford on suspicion of being a runaway slave. In 1693, the York commission moved against Mary Walters, a free black woman reputed to be of “wicked & dangerous life & conversation.” Convinced that her “ungoverned life”

⁵⁶ Northampton County, Orders and Wills no. 13 (1689-1698), p. 236-39.

would endanger the community if something was not done to check her, the justices decided that if she could not “prove her assertions & pretence of being a free Negroe” she should be sold into slavery. When Walters failed to produce the required evidence of her status, they ordered the sheriff to “take her into safe custody & secure her in close prisson until an opportunity presents to expose her to saile to such person as will give bond for her exportation out of Virginia.”⁵⁷

Colonial authorities also clamped down more severely on interracial coupling and miscegenation. Describing mixed-race children as “that abominable mixture and spurious issue,” the 1691 *act for suppressing outlying slaves* required that whites who intermarried “with a negroe, mulatto, or Indian...be banished and removed from this dominion forever.” The penalty for having a mulatto bastard increased as well. Free women now faced a fine of £15 sterling, a third of which was to go to the support of the government, a third to the parish, and a third to the person who reported their offense. Servants and others who could not pay were to be sold into service for five years, with the proceeds divided in the same manner. The children themselves were to be “bound out” until the age of thirty. No punishment was prescribed for white fathers.⁵⁸

The gentry’s racist policies initially did not garner the support of all whites. Servants and slaves continued to run away together and cooperate in pilfering the goods of their masters. Incidents of interracial fornication rose throughout the 1680s and 1690s, and in 1699 the House of Burgesses received a petition requesting the

⁵⁷ Charles City County, Orders (1687-1695), 360; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 9 (1691-1694), 270, 297.

⁵⁸ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 3: 86-88.

“repeale of the act of assembly, against English people marrying with Negroes Indians or mulattoes.” Some ordinary whites were even willing to openly assist outlying slaves, as Henrico constable Edward Tanner found out in 1696. Tanner had been conveying home Bett, “a Negro woman who was taken up as a runaway,” when she managed to get away under cover of darkness. In an attempt to recover her, he went to the nearby plantation of Henry Turner, where she was first apprehended. Although he did not find Bett there, he did discover a mulatto man known to be her accomplice. He requested Turner and another planter named Edward Ward to help him secure this second fugitive, but while Ward complied Turner resisted. As Tanner and Ward were tying up the hands of their prisoner, Turner “caught hold of ye rope and pluckt it from them and threw it out of doors.” Vowing that he would defend the mulatto, he then wrested a pistol away from Tanner, and pointing it at him declared he “would lay him in the face” if the constable did not immediately depart. Of course, Turner paid dearly for this interference. At a court meeting the following April, the Henrico justices ordered that he pay a fine of 500 lbs. tobacco and “provide security for his good behavior during the pleasure of this court.”⁵⁹

Clearly not all whites were willing to comply with the laws passed by the assembly, especially when they had a personal relationship with the one of the “Negroes and other slaves” those laws were intended to suppress. Nevertheless, if plebian Virginians were often able to overcome their general prejudice toward people of color and even empathize with them, time was on the side of the elite’s racist

⁵⁹ H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Legislative Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 2d. ed. (Richmond, 1979), 262; Henrico County, Order Book (1694-1701), 100-101.

ideology.⁶⁰ The commonality of interest that had given rise to the multiracial “giddy multitude” was the fragile product of everyday interaction, of shared misery and toil. As the century wore on and slaves gradually replaced whites laborers in the bound workforce, fewer and fewer servants—and thus eventually fewer and fewer freemen—experienced sustained contact with blacks. Indeed, throughout the same decades in which the gentry were endeavoring to socially isolate slaves, changes in plantation living arrangements increasingly segregated them spatially, creating a landscape that closely mirrored the colony’s growing racial divide.

⁶⁰ Jordan, *White Over Black*, ch. 1.

Chapter 6

From Dwelling House to Great House

Little had changed at Rich Neck during the years following Richard Kemp's death in 1650. Rather than obeying the late Secretary's wish that she "with all conveniency sell" the plantation and "departe this cuntrey," Kemp's widow Elizabeth instead married Sir Thomas Lunsford, a recently arrived Royalist officer who had fled to Virginia following Parliament's victory in the English civil war. The new couple retained control over the property but seem to have spent considerable time in Lancaster County, where Lunsford patented over three thousand acres near the holdings of his friend and new uncle-in-law Ralph Wormeley. Elizabeth probably stayed in Lancaster for good even though Sir Thomas also passed away in 1653, since she continued to pay taxes in the county and married local notable Robert Smith six years later. With little need for an aging plantation near the James, in the spring of 1665 the Smiths repaid a £1000 debt they owed Thomas Ludwell by signing over to him all rights to the "land and appurtuances" of Rich Neck, ending the estate's dozen years of relative absentee ownership.¹

Although Ludwell found his new home attractive enough to warrant forgoing a sizeable sum of money, he seems to have been less than satisfied with its twenty-year-old buildings. Over the next decade the plantation underwent an extensive series of changes. Ludwell renovated and expanded the main dwelling by

¹"Two Wills of the Seventeenth Century," *VMHB* 2 (1894): 4; Lee Family Papers, 1638-1867, Mss 1 L51f 215, Section 100, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. For Lunsford's land patent, see Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 1:200. Information on Elizabeth's life in Lancaster (Middlesex) County and her marriages to Lunsford and Smith can be found in Rutman and Rutman, *A Place in Time*, 49-50, 54-56. For her inclusion on early Lancaster tax roles, see Lancaster County, *Deeds, Etc.*, no. 1 (1652-1657), 175, 236, 307; *Orders, Etc.* (1655-1666), 41, 61.

replacing its H-shaped central hearth with two gable-end fireplaces and adding as many as five new rooms and a cellar off its eastern side (**Figure 6.1**). He also

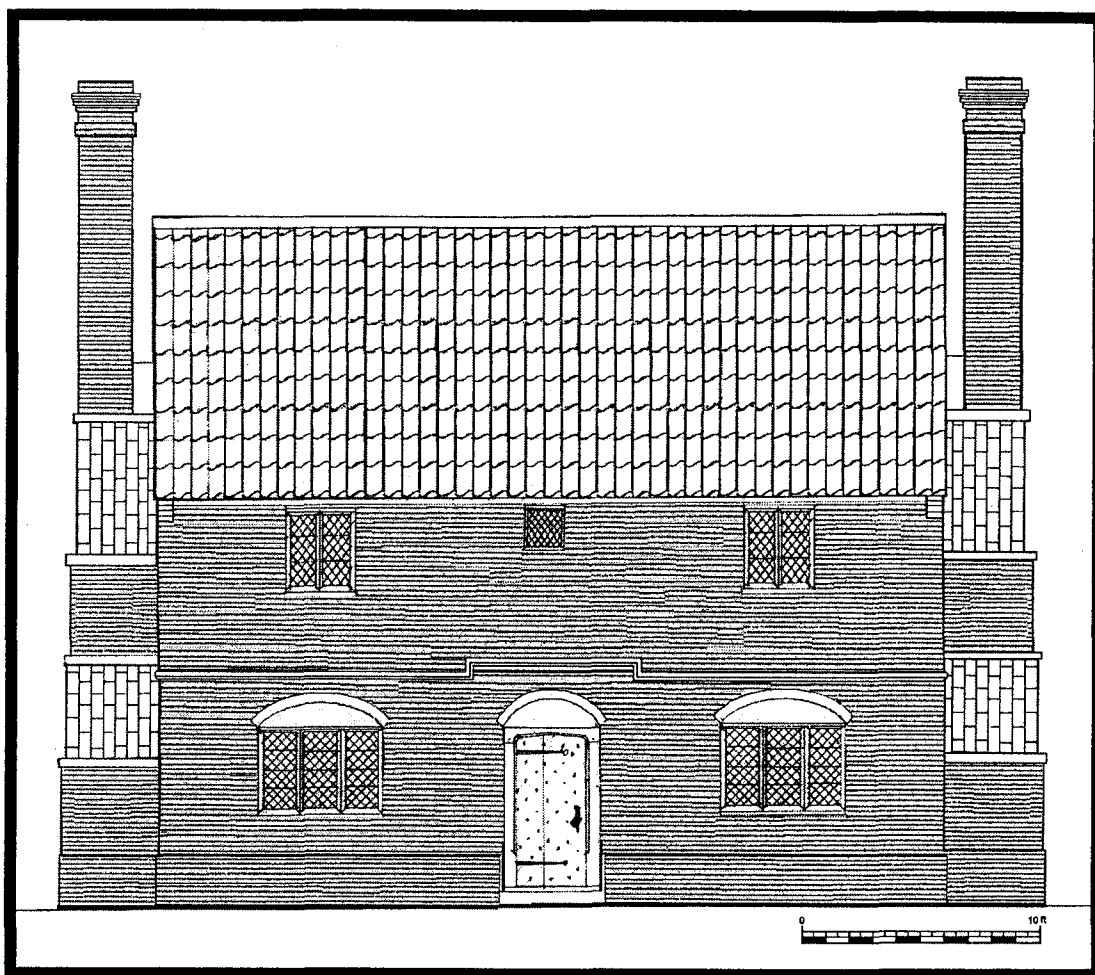


Figure 6.1. Rich Neck Dwelling House, ca. 1670. Drawing by Cary Carson courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

enlarged the kitchen with the addition of two matching wings, each of which included an English basement that sported flooring of glazed ceramic tile. Finally, to give the homelot a more orderly and finished appearance, he reworked its system of fences and imported Dutch pan-tiles to cover the roofs of both main structures.²

It would be wrong to suggest that Ludwell's newly-refurbished dwelling was

² Muraca, Levy, and McFaden, *The Archaeology of Rich Neck Plantation*, 48-66.

comparable to the great eighteenth-century Georgian mansions such as Westover, Rosewell, and Sabine Hall for which the Tidewater is renowned. Even after renovation, it was still less than half their size. Yet Rich Neck and other contemporary elite estates do mark a departure from earlier trends. They represent a transitional phase in plantation development, an interim period connecting the socially-integrated use of space that predominated throughout the first half of the seventeenth century with the more formal and explicitly hierarchical settings created by later generations of the Virginia gentry. This initial movement toward a new conception of the domestic environment, which occurred during the half-century following the 1660 Stuart Restoration, was part of a broader transformation that would in time completely alter the layout of houses and homelots throughout the English speaking world. But whereas in Britain and the northern colonies the principal outcome of this evolutionary process was a widened spatial divide between social classes, Virginia's increasing reliance on enslaved labor would give the same changes a different resonance.

Few historians would agree that the latter decades of the seventeenth century were a key turning point in the domestic arrangements of Virginia's elite planters and their laborers. Affluent families are generally thought to have endured the same "rude simplicity" that defined the material lives of their poorer neighbors. "The rich had more," two careful observers of Chesapeake society have asserted, "but more meant more comfort rather than distinction." Although this characterization is most often used in reference to consumer goods, it is frequently extended to housing as well. Elite homes are acknowledged to have been larger than average, but are still seen as

small by English standards, and lacking in both architectural sophistication and differentiated use of space. One scholar has even estimated that some eighty percent of Virginia's wealthiest inhabitants lived in modest two-room, one or one-and-a-half-story dwellings as late as the 1720s.³

However, the prevailing view of the period has been shaped by two biases. The first is interpretive. In documenting the development of a distinct mode of living among the wealthy, historians have devoted far more energy in charting when various goods appeared in households of differing economic strata than in exploring changes in plantation layout. Admittedly, this skewed perspective partly reflects the nature of available records. While probate inventories can provide a good idea of the types of items the deceased owned and—if compiled on a room-by room basis—the size and design of their house, they offer little or no information about homelot organization. Still, even in those cases where house size is considered, it is primarily interpreted as an indicator of status. Little attempt is made to examine what values might have driven decisions about the number of rooms a dwelling contained and how they were used, let alone what the social repercussions of such choices might have been.⁴

In other words, space and spatial relationships are at best presented as a function of economic prowess: the richer one was, the larger one's house and the

³ Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, VA, 1994), 62-66; Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (New York, 1990), 166. The phrase "rude simplicity" is taken from Aubrey C. Land, "The Planters of Colonial Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 67 (1972):122. For a similar view of living standards among the seventeenth-century gentry, see Kevin M. Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," in Carson, Hoffman, and Albert eds., *Of Consuming Interests*, 3-4.

⁴ For analyses that consider house size in this way, see Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 157-66; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 302-07; Rutman and Rutman, *A Place in Time*, 235-36.

greater number of rooms it contained. More often than not, however, spatial considerations are not even addressed, implying that the cultural landscape (buildings, fences, middens, etc.) was neutral and inert, neither a product of conscious effort nor capable of influencing perception and action. This tendency to treat space, in the words of geographer Edward Soja, “as fixed, dead, [and] undialectical,” has led scholars to overly homogenize seventeenth-century domestic life. It may very well be that the Virginia’s leading planters simply possessed greater quantities of the same goods owned by their social inferiors. But the principle of “more was just more” cannot be applied to built surroundings. Construction of houses with multiple chambers or the relocation of service activities into separate outbuildings suggest an altogether different conception of what constituted an acceptable living environment, and doubtlessly affected social relations.⁵

Of course, “rude simplicity” might still accurately describe the living standards of the colony’s elite had they continued to build dwellings that were either of poor quality or had only one or two rooms. Yet the idea that even the most affluent members of the gentry often lived in such structures reflects a second, evidentiary bias: only a handful of houses dating to before 1700 have survived. It is no coincidence that the emergence of a distinct style of architecture among the wealthy is generally held to have occurred in the second quarter of the eighteenth century—the same timeframe when many of the Tidewater’s extant colonial mansions were built.⁶

⁵ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989), 11. My thinking regarding space and landscape has been deeply influenced by the writings of Soja, Christopher Tilley, Anthony Giddens, and others. A good introduction to the spatial turn in critical theory is Michael Crang and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Thinking Space* (New York, 2000). For an archaeological perspective, see Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (London, 1994).

⁶ Sweeney, “High-Style Vernacular,” 11-18; Edward A. Chappell, “Housing a Nation: The

Common sense would seem to dictate that if impressive houses from the 1730s and 1740s have withstood the ravages of time, the same would be true of those constructed earlier. Since the handful of seventeenth-century dwellings that remain standing are fairly large and made of brick, scholars have assumed, quite logically, that they must have been exceptional.

An empirical basis for this assumption was supplied by a 1981 article written by historian Cary Carson and several archaeologists entitled “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies.” The main point raised by the article, which was based on data collected from over twenty-five sites and more than 150 excavated structures, was that “earthfast building was overwhelmingly the predominant architectural tradition” in the early Chesapeake. Citing the remarks of contemporary observers, the authors allowed that a few affluent planters had possibly begun erecting more permanent, brick homes by the 1680s and 1690s. But they qualified this statement by contending that the number still existing was too small to gauge their frequency, and archaeological evidence indicated that “equally wealthy, well-connected men were content to go on building and repairing earthfast farmsteads for decades.” In short, the overall thrust of their argument was that the scarcity of standing seventeenth-century houses was most likely owing to the fact that virtually all settlers in the region, including most elite planters, had lived in temporary, post-in-ground houses well into 1700s.⁷

Transformation of Living Standards in Early America,” in Carson, Hoffman, and Albert eds., *Of Consuming Interests*, 177-80; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 307. See also, Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992), 113-14.

⁷ Carson et al., “Impermanent Architecture,” quotations on pp. 136, 161. See also William M. Kelso, *Kingsmill Plantations 1619-1800: Archaeology of Country Life in Colonial Virginia* (Orlando, FL, 1984); Fraser D. Neiman, Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building,” *Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Magazine* 28 (1978): 3096-4128.

It would be hard to exaggerate how profoundly the thesis forwarded by Carson and his collaborators has influenced the way scholars have envisioned and written about the region's elite architecture. In 1982, historian Gloria Main incorporated their article's findings into her detailed study of life in early Maryland, arguing that "the principle differences between rich and poor lay not in size and quality of housing but in the number of structures." James Horn painted a very similar picture a decade later, depicting the larger elite dwellings described in probate inventories as "rambling, two-story wooden structures, possibly lofted over, with rooms added on or standing separately as outhouses." Architectural historian Edward Chappell agreed. "Multistory brick houses were always rare" he asserted in a 1994 essay, "rich seventeenth-century Virginians and Marylanders might have indulged in costly clothing and tablewares, but their houses were generally frame structures without masonry foundations."⁸

There is no longer any doubt that ordinary planters and their families lived in relatively primitive surroundings. Twenty additional years of excavation have confirmed the now familiar image of makeshift wooden shacks dribbled willy-nilly across the Chesapeake countryside. But archaeology has also revealed that historians have overstated the scarcity of better-quality dwellings in early Virginia. Indeed, it is becoming more and more apparent that the second half of the seventeenth century marked the first stages of a "great rebuilding" that would eventually transform the character of the colony's elite housing, as the gentry increasingly sought to merge vernacular building traditions with more metropolitan, academic designs. Although

⁸ Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 148; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 306-07; Chappell, "Housing a Nation," 171-74.

men like Thomas Ludwell who inherited established plantations occasionally improved their accommodations by renovating existing homes, the period also saw a spate of new building that considerably expanded the number of elegant, masonry-constructed houses throughout the Tidewater.⁹

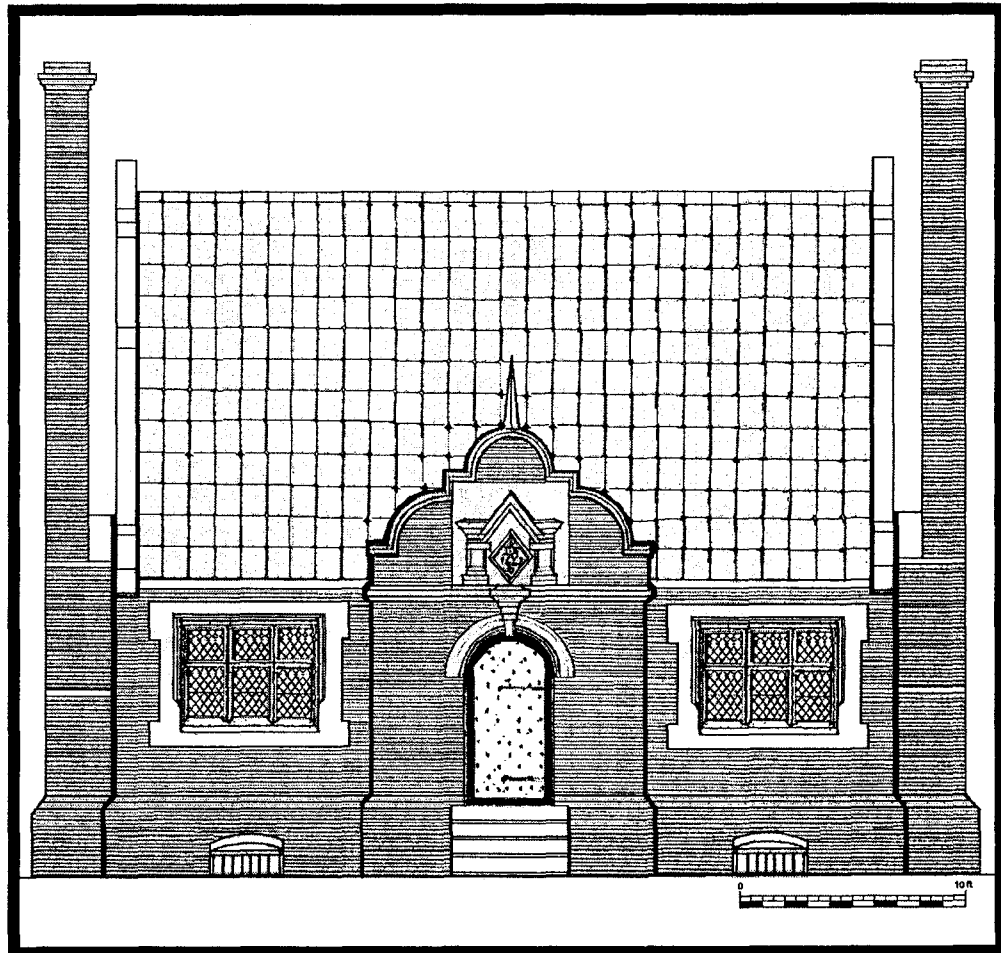


Figure 6.2. John Page House, 1662. Drawing by Cary Carson courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

York County justice and future councilor John Page built a fine brick home less than two miles from Rich Neck in 1662 (**Figure 6.2**). Standing one-and-a-half or

⁹ It was folklorist Henry Glassie who first used the colorful adjective “dribbled” to describe the scattering of houses across the Virginia landscape. See his engaging, though problematic, study of early architecture, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville, 1975). The idea of a “great rebuilding” is taken from W.G. Hoskins, “The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640,” *Past and Present* 4 (1953): 44-59.

two-stories high, this impressive structure had a full basement and porch and stair towers, giving it a cross-plan shape similar to many of the country seats built in England during the same period. The house's ample interior space, which contained as many as seven or eight rooms, was matched by an ornate exterior adorned with a tile roof, casement windows, and decorative brickwork, including a small diamond-shaped cartouche bearing the initials P, J, and A (representing John and his wife Alice) over the year of the house's construction and a heart-shaped symbol.¹⁰

Among those elsewhere, Colonel Miles Cary of Warwick built a cross-plan dwelling similar in design to Page's and Colonel Edward Digges constructed a spacious, double-pile mansion with four interior chimneys on his York County estate. Colonel Thomas Swann and justice Arthur Allen Sr. of Surry were also both living in commodious new houses by the early 1670s, while Robert "King" Carter built what was probably a seven-room home in Lancaster sometime during the following decade. Colonel John Custis of Northampton outdid all of his peers. The renaissance-inspired house he erected at Arlington plantation around 1676 was perhaps the largest private residence in Virginia outside of Governor Sir William Berkeley's sprawling seat at Green Spring in James City County.¹¹

¹⁰ John Metz, Jennifer Jones, Dwayne Pickett, and David Muraca, *Upon the Palisado" and Other Stories of Place from Bruton Heights* (Williamsburg, 1998), 53-59. For examples of similar English houses see Daniel D. Reiff, *Small Georgian Houses in England and Virginia, Origins and Development Through the 1750s* (Delaware, 1986), 197-200.

¹¹ Charles E. Hatch Jr., *The Bellfield Estate: General Study* (Washington D.C., 1970); Carter L. Hudgins, "Excavations at the Miles Cary Rich Neck Plantation Site, the 1974 Field Season," (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA, 1975, photocopy); Edward A. Chappell, "Swann's Point Plantation Site Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places Inventory," (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA, 1975, photocopy); Stephenson B. Andrews ed., *Bacon's Castle* (Richmond, 1984); Carter L. Hudgins, "Archaeology in the King's Realm: A Summary Report of 1977 Survey at Corotoman with a Proposal for the 1979 Field Season," (Virginia Research Center for Archaeology, Williamsburg, VA, 1979, photocopy); Nicholas M. Lucchetti, *Archaeology at Arlington: Excavations at the Ancestral Custis Plantation, Northampton County, Virginia* (Williamsburg, 1999). Over the past thirty years, archaeologists have discovered brick

Court records further suggest that the use of brick was more widespread among the wealthy than is generally believed. In some cases, brick buildings are referred to directly. The 1657 will of Captain Henry Jackson of Warwick County, for example, bequeathed to his oldest son John Wills “the bricke house and land at Mulberry Island” where Wills was then living. In 1679, the Surry court ordered that the county prison be temporarily moved to “the little brick roome next the yard at the east side of the brick house now in the possession of Mr. John Moring,” who at the time was serving as guardian to the daughter of deceased county commissioner William Marriot. Six years later the bounds of the prison’s “liberty” were described as touching a peach tree standing near justice Samuel Thompson’s “brick house.”¹²

Other entries mention disputes over brick sales. Acting on behalf of James Ewell, in 1664 attorney Charles Holden acknowledged before the Accomack court that his client owed Captain John West, among other things, five thousand “good well burnt bricks.” In 1683, Captain John Robins pursued a similar complaint against William Cripps and John Mills in Northampton, claiming they owed him 7,319 bricks from a larger batch they had “made & burnt.” Because there is no way of uncovering

homes dating to the second half of the seventeenth century with increasing frequency in Virginia. With the exception of Arthur Allen’s home in Surry County (commonly known as Bacon’s Castle) all of the houses listed were located through archaeological excavation. They were also all entirely constructed of brick, with the possible exception of Thomas Swann’s house, which might have been a frame dwelling sitting atop a brick foundation. Other brick domestic buildings dating to this period include: The Nassau Street Site at Middle Plantation (1670-1679), the Adam Thoroughgood House in Lower Norfolk (1680-1700), Lewis Burwell’s Fairfield in Gloucester (1692), Foster’s Castle and Criss Cross in New Kent (1690s), and Malvern Hill in Henrico (ca. 1700). For the plans of these houses and still others scattered throughout archaeological reports filed with various institutions across Virginia, the most comprehensive source is David A. Brown, “Domestic Masonry Architecture in 17th-Century Virginia,” *Northeast Historical Archaeology* 27 (1998): 85-120.

¹² Warwick County, Miscellaneous Court Papers, Box 2 (1659-1837), 54; Surry County, Orders (1671-1691), 270, 471. See also the deposition of Thomas Pittman that mentions a “fifty foot brick house” built in 1651 by Surry justice Thomas Warren (Warring). The deposition is reproduced in *WMQ*, 1st ser., 8 (1900):151-52.

the broader context that surrounded lawsuits of this sort, it is impossible to discern the precise purpose for which the bricks mentioned were intended. The quantities involved suggest small projects such as the repair or construction of a house foundation or chimney, though there is also the possibility that they represent a second or third delivery for a larger undertaking.¹³

However, there is no mistaking the purpose of large-scale purchases. According to a list of accounts compiled by the governing board of the College of William and Mary, construction of the 42,000 square-foot Wren Building, completed in 1698, required around 840,500 bricks. It would therefore follow that a two-story, single-pile dwelling of the commonplace dimensions of 20 x 40 feet would take approximately 32,000 bricks, perhaps a few thousand more once the number needed for chimneys are added. In August 1678, James Ewell was once again in Accomack court, this time regarding “40,000 bricks to be made according to an obligation” for John Cole. Five years later, the Northampton justices ordered Captain Isaac Foxcroft to pay Thomas Tyler 450 lbs. of tobacco “due to him as ye remaindr of thirty five thousand bricks made and burned for him besides severll bricks as occasioned.”¹⁴

Loads of this size must have been intended for full brick buildings. The same was likely also true of the ten thousand bricks and fifty thousand tiles William

¹³ Accomack County, Wills, Etc. (1673-1676), 29; Northampton County, Order Book no. 12 (1683-1689), 2; Phillip A. Levy, David Muraca, and John C. Coombs, “Rebuilding Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake Architecture—Brick by Brick” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Quebec, Canada, January, 2000), 4.

¹⁴ Earl Gregg Swem, ed., “Some Notes on the Four Forms of the Oldest Building of William and Mary College,” *WMQ*, 2d. ser., 8 (1928): 221-26; Marcus Whiffen, *The Public Buildings of Williamsburg, Colonial Capital of Virginia: An Architectural History* (Williamsburg, VA, 1958), 21, 24; Accomack County, Wills, Deeds, and Orders (1678-1682), 7-8; Northampton County, Order Book no. 11 (1678-1683), 282. Since the size of the Wren Building required somewhat different construction techniques—its walls are roughly three feet thick—my calculations might exaggerate the number of bricks required for a more modestly sized building.

Kitchen of Lancaster sued Lieutenant-Colonel Cuthbert Potter for payment on in 1667. Although the number of bricks mentioned was less than a third of those needed to build a dwelling of realistic proportions, the stated figure of fifty thousand tiles indicates that they were of the roofing rather than flooring variety, and frame buildings, even those with masonry foundations, were incapable of supporting a roof of such weight. Moreover, in a dispute concerning “a parcel of bricks” decided one year later, the court awarded Kitchen a judgement against Potter in the amount of £20 sterling, a sum that suggests the clerk’s use of the term “parcel” was a decided understatement.¹⁵

Clearly, more than a few of Virginia’s leading planters were constructing their houses in brick by the 1660s and 1670s. The only question that remains is how many of them did so. Most of the homes discovered through archaeology belonged to members of the Council of State—the richest of the rich—while almost all of the elite brick builders and purchasers mentioned in documentary records were local office holders, some of whom did not even rise as far as the House of Burgesses. Reaching a definitive answer on frequency will require further research and excavation. But there is certainly reason to believe that Robert Beverly had more than the wealthiest members of the gentry in mind when he confidently reported at the turn of the eighteenth century that “private buildings are of late very much improved; several gentlemen there, having built themselves large brick houses of many rooms on a floor,

¹⁵ Lancaster County, Orders no. 1 (1666-1680), 32, 60. Gloria Main cited a reference from 1701 which listed bricks at nine for a penny sterling. If the same rate was operative in the 1660s, then the 1668 dispute alone concerned 43,200 bricks, enough for a relatively large building. See Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 149.

and several stories high.”¹⁶

If Beverly had been so inclined, he could have extended his praise beyond the colony’s growing stock of masonry buildings. Many wealthy planters opted to construct substantial frame houses that were no less distinctive in an architectural landscape filled with the one or two-room, post-in-ground dwellings of smaller operators. In a letter to an English correspondent, William Fitzhugh proudly described his Stafford County home as having “all accomodations for a comfortable & gentile living,” with “13 rooms in it, four of the best of them hung [and] nine of them plentifully furnished with all things necessary & convenient.” Despite the wide availability of timber in Virginia, few could afford a frame house of this size, since a shortage of skilled laborers made building one prohibitively expensive. Fitzhugh himself complained to a friend that even after having “agreed as cheap” as possible with workmen, “my house stood me in more money” than one “of the same dimensions would cost in London, by a third at least.”¹⁷

Wood or brick, the homes of elites such as Ludwell, Page, and Fitzhugh were generally larger and more spatially complex than those of their predecessors, a change which in part reflected the growing maturity of Virginia’s ruling class. In the decades before the Restoration, many leading planters had come from the ranks of English yeomen or laborers and began their lives in the colony on the lower rungs of its social ladder. John Utie and George Menefie first appear in the records as small freeholders.

¹⁶ Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, 289.

¹⁷ William Fitzhugh to Doctor Ralph Smith, 22 April 1686 and Fitzhugh to Nicholas Hayward, 30 January 1687 in Davis, ed., *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 175, 202-203. The size and cost of Fitzhugh’s dwelling indicate that it had a masonry foundation like George Powell’s “good and sufficient framed” house in Surry, which was reportedly “groundselled & under pinned wth bricces.” See Surry County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1672), ff. 176-77.

Abraham Wood and Richard Townsend arrived as servants. Of course, some leaders such as William Claiborne and Thomas Willoughby had more privileged pedigrees. Yet even they often found maintaining their positions difficult in a society that tended to reward greed and aggressiveness more than gentility. In an era of fluid class lines and fierce economic competition, these men and their contemporaries were perhaps less concerned with improving their quality of life than consolidating their hard-won ascendancy by acquiring land, laborers, and offices.¹⁸

In contrast, most planters who obtained prominence after 1660 already had means and connections. Thomas Ludwell was the cousin and former Somerset neighbor of Sir William Berkeley. William Byrd, Lewis Burwell, and Edward Digges all came from distinguished London trading families that had interests in Virginia dating back to the earliest years of settlement. Bristol natives Malachy Thruston and Miles Cary also descended from prosperous men in the English mercantile community, as did William Fitzhugh. Other immigrants such as William Randolph, Nicholas Spencer, Nathaniel Bacon, and John Page were the sons of English country gentry, while even native-born Virginians like Ralph Wormeley II and Robert Carter had fathers who had done well enough to provide them with considerable estates.¹⁹

¹⁸ Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure," 22-23; Lyon Gardiner Tyler, ed., *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography* (New York, 1915), 106, 109. All of these men obtained seats on the Council. See Miller, comp., *The General Assembly of Virginia*, xix-xxi.

¹⁹ Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure," 25-27; Martin H. Quitt, "The Immigrant Origins of the Virginia Gentry: A Study of Cultural Transmission and Innovation," *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 45 (1988): 632-33, 641; Davies, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 9; Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (San Marino, 1940), 41, 248-9, 287; Tyler, ed., *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography*, 54, 143; Richard Channing Moore Page, *Genealogy of the Page Family in Virginia* (New York, 1898), 32-40. See also Carole Shammas, "English Born and Creole Elites in Turn-of-the-Century Virginia," in Tate and Ammerman eds., *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century*, 274-96; Warren M. Billings, "The Growth of Political Institutions in Virginia, 1634-1676," in *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 31 (1974): 225-42.

Less encumbered with the burdens of frontier settlement and internecine struggles for political authority than earlier leaders, affluent planters in this later period had both the resources and freedom necessary to pursue greater comfort in their style of living.

However, generational differences in social background and economic standing do not entirely account for the changes that occurred in the colony's elite architecture, since not all houses constructed before mid-century were built with only expediency in mind. Governor Sir John Harvey considered a brick residence Richard Kemp erected in James City around 1635 "the fairest that ever was knowen in this cuntrye for substance and uniformitye." In 1649, a foreign visitor described a similar hall-and-parlor-style dwelling built by Council member Samuel Mathews as "a fine house."²⁰ Such homes were undoubtedly considered luxurious in their time, but, significantly, few if any survived intact for very long. They were instead either abandoned or substantially altered within a few decades after being built, indicating that the improvements adopted by wealthy planters in the second half of the century signified something more than just a new-found concern with refinement.

Contemporary architectural trends in England suggest that the transformation of the colony's elite housing also reflected shifting ideas about the spatial organization of domestic life. In terms of overall square footage, house size in the mother country stayed relatively constant between 1630 and 1700. But around mid-century,

²⁰ "Virginia Under Governor Harvey," *VMHB* 3 (1895-1896): 29; *A Perfect Description of Virginia...* (London, 1649), in Force, ed., *Tracts and Other Papers*, 2., no. 2, 15. Samuel Mathews's Warwick County home was excavated by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation between 1965 and 1966. See Ivor Noël Hume, "Mathews Manor: Preview of a Major Archaeological Discovery in Virginia," *Antiques* 90 (1966): 832-836; idem, *Historical Archaeology* (New York, 1969), 228-29.

prosperous urban dwellers and lesser members of the landed gentry began altering the interior layout of their homes by adding upper-floor chambers and creating separate service areas for everyday tasks such as cooking and washing. Consequently, their probate inventories show a marked decline in multi-purpose living areas and greater specialization in room use. Halls, where they continued to exist at all, were often turned into dining rooms or highly ornamented entrance foyers, while the removal of bedsteads to new upstairs rooms allowed parlors to be used exclusively for eating and sitting.²¹

Local economic and environmental circumstances played a significant role in determining the specific timing and form of these improvements. But the general movement toward more segregated living arrangements primarily stemmed from an emerging set of cultural values. In the decades surrounding the Restoration, the same social groups that were readily adopting architectural innovations were also coming to very different conceptions of both the individual and the family. This shift in attitudes, which the historian Lawrence Stone grouped under the rubric of “affective individualism,” resulted in at least three cultural changes that shaped the use of interior space.

The first was a remarkable growth in personal awareness. Building on a soul-searching ethos inherited from the religious enthusiasm of the civil-war era, members of the English propertied classes began paying attention to their innermost

²¹ R. Machin, “The Great Rebuilding: A Reassessment,” *Past and Present*, 77 (1977): 33-56; N.W. Alcock, “The Great Rebuilding and Its Later Stages,” *Vernacular Architecture* 14 (1983): 45-48; M.W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (London, 1961), 183-240; Alan Dyer, “Urban Housing: A Documentary Study of Four Midland Towns, 1530-1700,” *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 15 (1981): 207-18; Ursula Priestly and P. J. Canfield, “Rooms and Room Use in Norwich Housing, 1580-1730,” *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 16 (1982): 93-123.

thoughts and sentiments with unprecedented intensity. Originally spiritual in orientation, this burgeoning interest in the self acquired a decidedly secular bent in the freer environment after 1660. Diaries—which were widely kept for the first time in this period due to improving literacy—became more focused on recording the events of this life than charting progress toward achieving the blessings of the next.

Autobiographies also grew increasingly self-reflective and less religious in character. Indeed, the very spread of private reading and writing, pursuits that required people to separate themselves mentally from the world around them, served to foster greater introspection and a stronger sense of individual uniqueness.²²

Though for centuries everything from cooking to lovemaking had taken place in close proximity to others, the growth in self-consciousness created new demands for personal space. This need was partially met through the establishment of individual bedchambers, which appear in probate inventories of the time as “my lady’s chamber” or “the squire’s room.” Yet perhaps even more important was the space dedicated to housing books and papers. Usually called “the study” but often referred to as a “closet,” this room was generally reserved as a quiet refuge for the master or mistress of the house, where, removed from the commotion of everyday activity, they could immerse themselves in reading, correspondence, and reflection.²³

²² Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, 1977), 225-29; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), 161-62; Roger Chartier, “The Practical Impact of Writing,” in Roger Chartier, ed. and Arthur Goldhammer, trans, *Passions of the Renaissance*, vol. 3 of Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, eds., *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1989), 111-59. For examples of secular introspection in this period see, J. G. Nichols ed., *The Memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett and Ann, Lady Fanshawe* (New York, 1979); Israel Gollanz ed., *The Love Letters of Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple* (London, 1903); Robert Latham and William Mathews et al., eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 11 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970-1983).

²³ Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 253; Orest Ranum, “the Refuges of Intimacy,” in Chartier, ed. and Goldhammer, trans, *Passions of the Renaissance*, 225-29. In the seventeenth century, the term “closet” often referred to a full-sized room rather than a small area for storage. For other differences

A second, closely related, development was a desire for greater privacy. This was not only signified by the adoption of social mores that limited contact with the bodily functions of others—such as the introduction of individual place settings for dining and new conventions against spitting, nose blowing, or otherwise excreting when in the presence of company—but also by a newly expressed fear of having the intimate details of one’s life made public. “All our affairs of my family are made known of and discussed there,” the bureaucrat Samuel Pepys anxiously informed his diary after a maid in his London home took a position elsewhere in 1663, “and theirs by my people.” Concern over such unwanted exposure became especially acute among members of the upper middle class like Pepys, who lacked the cavernous houses of the aristocracy and were thus constantly surrounded by the inquisitive eyes and ears of loose-lipped servants prone to gossip about whatever information they happened to obtain.²⁴

Homeowners devised a number of strategies to combat this problem, one of which, according to architect Roger North, was to increase the spatial distance between themselves and those they employed. “It is but late that servants have left their eating in the hall,” he wrote in 1698. “This in my time was done in my father’s house. But since then it hath been usual, to find a room elsewhere for them.” Inserting partitions to create smaller more intimate rooms was another practical way of limiting one’s exposure to observation and eavesdropping by others, particularly if

with modern usage see M.W. Barley, “A Glossary of Names for Rooms in Houses of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in I.L. Foster and L. Alcock, eds., *Culture and Environment* (London, 1963), 479-501.

²⁴ Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage*, 253-57; Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley, 1989), 224-26; Latham and Mathews et al., eds., *Pepys Diary*, 3: 7.

the room in question had a ceiling that prevented the overly voyeuristic from climbing onto the rafters to peer down on the unsuspecting below. The growing importance of privacy was certainly clear to amateur architect Sir Roger Pratt, who advised potential builders in 1660 that any “apartment for strangers” should be “divided so from that of the ordinary family that they may not at all be disquieted by any noises from it, nor come to the hearing of anything which should be concealed from them.”²⁵

The last development was the growth of more affectionate ties within affluent families. Older patterns of behavior remained vibrant, but many men and women began choosing their marriage partners because of romantic attachment and the potential for life-long companionship and happiness rather than dynastic considerations. Changes in property arrangements that gave wives a greater degree of financial independence further aided this process, as did attacks on the legitimacy of rigid domestic patriarchy by social theorists such as James Harrington and John Locke. Perhaps heeding Harrington’s mid-century admonishment that “whereas it is a mischief beyond any that we can do to our enemies, we persist to make nothing of breaking the affection of our children,” parents increasingly came to see their offspring as requiring warmth and kindness as well as discipline, even if the overall objective remained control.²⁶

The spatial expression of these developments was a general withdrawal of

²⁵ Howard Colvin and John Newman, eds., *Of Building: Roger North's Writings on Architecture* (Oxford, 1981), 68; R.T. Gunther, ed., *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt* (London, 1928), 64. For two examples of peering over partition walls to observe others, see Northampton County, Orders, Deeds, Wills, no. 2 (1640-1645), f. 157; David H. Flaherty, *Privacy in Colonial New England* (Charlottesville, 1967), 43.

²⁶ Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 221-22, 239-53; James Harrington, *Oceana*, ed. H. Morley (London, 1887), 115. See also John Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, edited by John W. and Jean S. Yolton (New York, 1989).

the family from public scrutiny and interference. Servants no longer dined with or slept near their owners. They were instead provided with living quarters in a designated service wing. Parents allocated space specifically for the use of their children, where they could play and receive early instruction at home rather than at a boarding school. Overall, middle- and upper-class houses became subdivided into four distinct parts: public rooms used for entertaining visitors, rooms reserved for family members, servants quarters, and a nursery area for the children.²⁷

After mid-century, these same cultural attitudes prompted affluent Virginians to adopt similar architectural changes in their homes, which despite being dispersed “without any rule or order in country plantations” increasingly came to resemble the new fashionable residences of urban England.²⁸ The inventories of county and provincial officeholders show steady growth in two-floored houses and in the number of upstairs rooms (**see Chart 6.1**). The most common type was a one-and-a-half story dwelling with its garret space partitioned into separate chambers. The York County home of Nathaniel Bacon, for example, had four such chambers. Justice David Fox’s house in Lancaster had three. These rooms usually served as sleeping quarters, though some also contained suitable furniture for entertaining visitors. Bacon’s home was typical in this respect. Every upstairs chamber listed in his 1694 inventory contained bedding items. But he used only two exclusively as bedrooms, the others having enough chairs and tables to accommodate a small party of guests.

²⁷ Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage*, 253, 432-33.

²⁸ Hartwell, Blair, and Chilton, *The Present State of Virginia and the College*, 11 (quotation). A similar development was taking place in England, where by the last decades of the seventeenth century many country houses strongly resembled urban dwellings in both plan and exterior appearance. See Eric Mercer, *English Vernacular Houses: A Study of Traditional Farmhouses and Cottages* (London, 1975), 73-75.

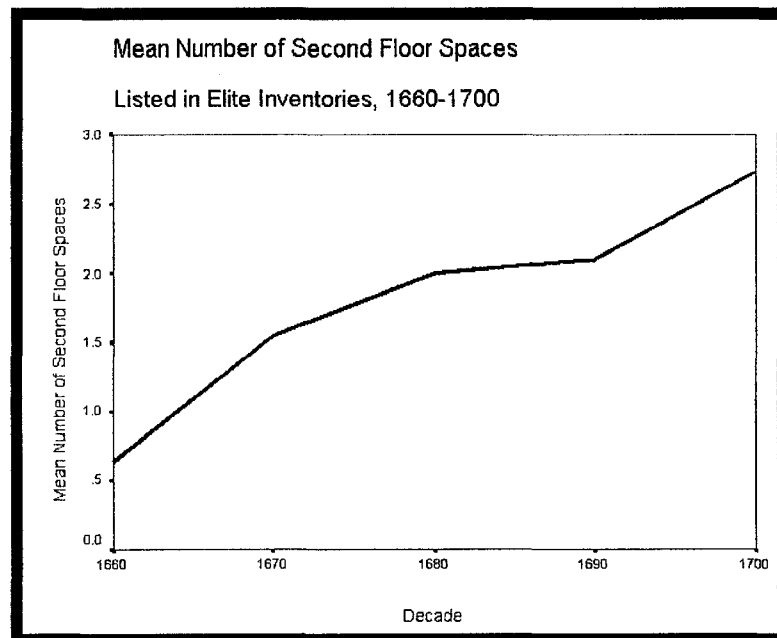


Chart 6.1. Source: Officeholder Inventory Files.

Nevertheless, Bacon's house and others like it show a clear, if imperfect, division of interior space, with ground floor rooms (with the exception of bedchambers) providing an appropriate setting for public display, while upstairs rooms were invariably reserved for members of the family and their more intimate acquaintances.²⁹

Instead of contenting themselves with a few rooms in what essentially amounted to a finished attic, some planters were more architecturally ambitious. The homes constructed by Arthur Allen, Sr. and Edward Digges were both full two-and-a-half-story structures and were undoubtedly among the most impressive in the colony. John Custis's Arlington reputedly stood "three storys high besides garrets" (**Figure 6.3**).³⁰ However, if an inventory taken after the death of Arthur Allen II is at all

²⁹ York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., 10 (1694-1697), 274-77; Lancaster County Loose Papers, Folder 1670-1674. For other examples of gentry homes that had layouts similar to those of Bacon and Fox see Accomack County, Wills and Deeds (1676-1690), 293-97; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills 6 (1677-1684), 599-600; Deeds, Orders, Wills 12 (1702-1706), 277-86; Middlesex County, Will Book A (1698-1713), 55-76; Rappahannock County, Record Book (1677-1687), 107-12.

³⁰ Hatch, *The Bellfield Estate*, 97, 142; Daniel Park Estate Settlement, 1709, document no. 6077,

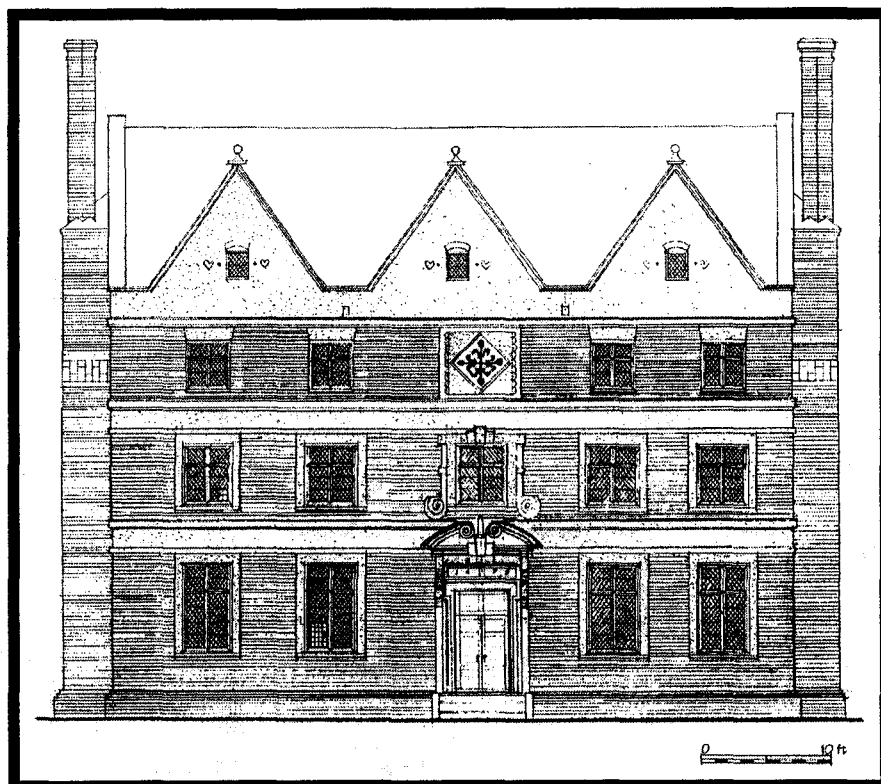


Figure 6.3. Arlington Plantation, ca. 1676. Drawing by Cary Carson courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

suggestive, these larger houses still had a division between public and private space similar to homes like Bacon's and Fox's. At the time the younger Allen's estate was appraised in 1711, the three garrets in his house were all being used primarily for sleeping, while its two second-floor chambers doubled as bedrooms and small sitting areas. The hall was furnished with an assortment of chairs, two tables, a desk, and a couch. No bedding or bedstead were listed.³¹

Unlike the English, who tended to keep service areas within a segregated part of the main dwelling, wealthier Virginians increasingly located them in outbuildings.

Emmett Collection, New York Public Library (microfilm Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). The size of Digges's home is suggested by its massive twenty-eight-inch-wide brick foundation and double-pile plan.

³¹ Surry County, Deeds, Wills, Etc., no. 6 (1709-1715), 84-88. Though his inventory was taken in the early eighteenth century, Allen lived in the same house his father had built in 1662. Consequently, the living arrangements in his home probably reflected the social values of the previous century.

William Fitzhugh, for instance, put his kitchen in a fenced yard along with other “conveniencys” such as his dairy, barn, and dovecote.³² Moving the “drudgeries of cookery, washing [and] dairies” into detached “offices,” according to Robert Beverly, kept a house “more cool and sweet” in the warm Tidewater climate. But the practice also contributed to the demise of multi-functional halls, which after mid-century acquired the character of a drawing or dining room in most elite homes. The hall in Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Ludlowe’s York County home contained a long table, a green cloth table carpet, a green couch, nine chairs (two of them leather), and fireplace tools when his inventory was taken in 1662. Westmoreland burgess Captain John Lee had ten high leather chairs, two wooden tables, a settle bed, and fireplace tools in his hall when he died twelve years later.³³

The influence of the new cultural ideals is perhaps most clearly evident in the houses of Council members Ralph Wormeley and Joseph Bridger. Rosegill, Wormeley’s impressive seat along the Rappahannock in Middlesex, was surrounded by so many dependencies that French traveler Durand of Dauphine felt he was “entering a rather large village” when he visited in 1685.³⁴ The crowded character of Wormeley’s homelot is further suggested by his 1701 inventory, which listed several structures housing business operations and service activities, including a store, barn, smith’s shop, dairy, kitchen, and accommodations for resident laborers. While neither the number nor function of these buildings was exceptional for a man of Wormeley’s

³² Mercer, *English Vernacular Houses*, 74; William Fitzhugh to Dr. Ralph Smith, 22 April 1686, in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and his Chesapeake World*, 175; Beverly, *The Present State of Virginia*, 290. For an environmental interpretation of this development, see Donald W. Linebaugh, “All the Annoyances and Inconveniences of the Country,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 29 (1994): 1-18.

³³ York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills 3 (1657-1662), 108-09; Westmoreland County, Deeds, Patents, Etc. (1665-1677), f. 170-80.

³⁴ Chinard, ed., *A Huguenot Exile in Virginia*, 142.

wealth, they demonstrate that he actively sought to segregate work and living space frequented by laborers from that used by his own family.³⁵

Room names within the main residence at Rosegill show a remarkably different use of interior space than what had been common among elite families a generation earlier. The presence of a “nursery” and “old nursery” indicate that the Wormeleys had for some time allocated an area within the house for their children’s use. The assortment of chairs and tables in the nursery would have allowed it to be employed for a variety of purposes, while the old nursery served primarily as a sleeping area, and thus had only a few chairs and two bedsteads. The master and mistress of the house also reserved private rooms for themselves. Each had a “closet” listed under their name containing a large number of books, a desk, and a few chairs. Mrs. Wormeley had an additional heated chamber of her own where she kept a large chest of drawers and several chairs for entertaining visitors. The remaining rooms listed were also specialized areas. The parlor was used for dining and sitting, and the chambers on both the first and second floors for sleeping.³⁶

The 1686 inventory of Joseph Bridger’s estate, recorded in Isle of Wight County, also suggests a large home of between nine and fifteen rooms, depending on whether an “old brick” dwelling was somehow attached to his “new house.” However, in contrast to the array of outbuildings that filled Wormeley’s homelot, Bridger’s inventory listed only two. One was a store containing a wide assortment of merchandise. The other was a kitchen, which included an outer chamber and upstairs room that provided sleeping accommodations for workers, as well as a cellar that was

³⁵ Middlesex County, Will Book A (1698-1713), 113-32.

³⁶ Ibid.

used for storing spirits. This arrangement, while different from that on most large plantations of the period, still allowed Bridger to house his laborers separately from his immediate family and to keep service activities out of primary living areas.³⁷

The size of the Bridger's house enabled him to also employ a specialized use of interior space. The old and new structures together included no fewer than ten chambers, all of them serving primarily as sleeping areas. That one of these was called "the children's chamber" indicates that Bridger, like Wormeley, thought it proper to allocate a room specifically for their use. The purpose of "the gallery" is unclear. In the parlance of the time, a gallery was a long hall, balcony, or similar space that was usually public. But the only items mentioned in Bridger's were fireplace tools, a parcel of Virginia-made cloth, and a bedstead, suggesting it simply served as another bedchamber. On the other hand, the dining room, hall, and parlor on the ground floor were all richly furnished to impress visitors, particularly the parlor, which among other things contained a large chest of drawers, three tables, a leather couch and chairs, and a "greate lookinge glase."³⁸

The great rebuilding of the colony's elite housing—and the changes in the spatial organization of everyday life that accompanied it—had nothing to do with the growth of slavery *per se*.³⁹ But it significantly altered the proximity of social classes just as blacks were beginning to outnumber whites in the workforces of large plantations. No longer was it common for wealthy planters to quarter or feed laborers within their principal dwelling as they had previously. They were instead relegated to

³⁷ Isle of Wight County, Wills, Deeds, Etc. no. 1 (1662-1715), 255-63.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ For an interpretation that ties late seventeenth-century changes in house plan directly to the growth of slavery, see Neiman, "Temporal Patterning in House Plans," 251-83.

less costly (and less comfortable) housing, undermining their traditional status as members of the planter's "family." At the same time, masters retreated behind a more complex hierarchy of interior spaces, many of which were off limits to all but the handful of retainers required for routine household maintenance.

Although the increasing number of interior domestic spaces and dependencies listed in elite inventories suggests this widening spatial divide between affluent planters and their laborers, it is even more visible in the changing landscape of Rich Neck.⁴⁰ During Richard Kemp's tenure, the plantation's homelot had a four-room main dwelling and a detached, two-story kitchen, a relatively common arrangement for wealthy planters in the first half of the century. But after assuming ownership in the mid-1660s, Thomas Ludwell did not stop at simply renovating and expanding these two primary buildings. He also ordered the construction of four post-in-ground structures, three of which served as quarters for laborers. When completed, his ambitious building program increased the number of rooms within Rich Neck's dwelling house from four to ten, and the total spaces within dependencies from two to ten. In addition, adjustments to existing fence lines produced a homelot partitioned into three separate spheres: one centering on the main house, a second on the kitchen, and a third on the newly-created earthfast quarters (**Figure 6.4**).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Virginia officeholder inventory files, 17th century. Average house size (defined as the total number of rooms identified as being contained within the principal dwelling) doubled from 3.5 rooms in the 1650s to 7.09 at the turn of the eighteenth century. The mean number of spaces in dependencies similarly increased over the same period, growing from 1.33 to 2.64. The dependency figures do not include buildings located on outlying quarters, which were separately tabulated.

⁴¹ Muraca, Levy, and McFaden, "The Archaeology of Rich Neck Plantation, 66-75. The number and close proximity of the earthfast structures at Rich Neck suggest that inventories possibly understate the growth of homelot quarters. In most cases, cooking implements were the only property of value found in buildings that housed laborers. If workers at a home plantation took their meals in the main kitchen (as the absence of substantial artifact deposition around the earthfast quarters indicates was the case at Rich Neck) then they likely would not have needed such items, and consequently there would have been no reason for appraisers to list the building in which they lived.

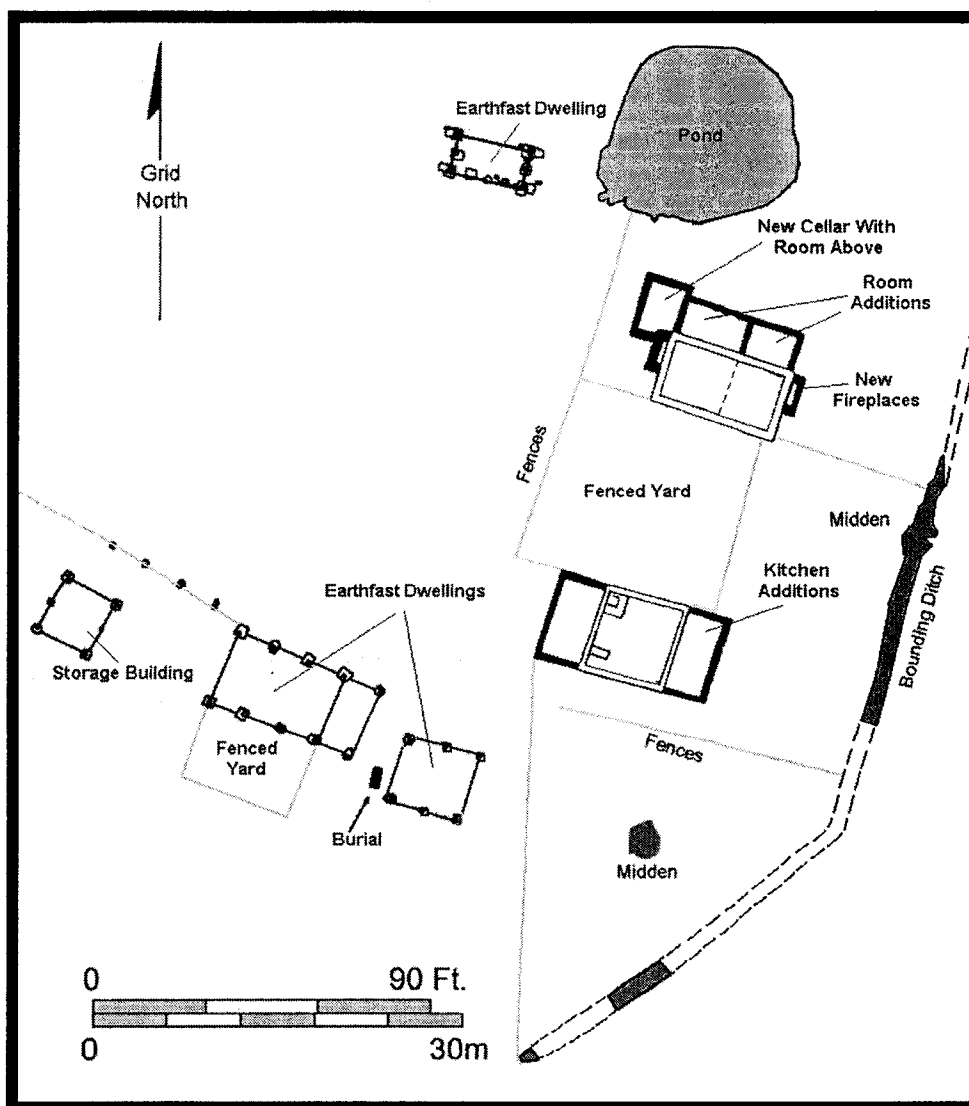


Figure 6.4. Rich Neck Plantation Homelot, ca. 1675.

Excavation of the Rich Neck site provided clear archaeological evidence that these three areas were quite different in status. Despite its central location, the fenced yard adjoining the dwelling house—which contained several circular planting holes typically found in ornamental gardens—yielded an unusually low number of artifacts, suggesting that access to interior space was relatively exclusive. The yards around the kitchen revealed precisely the opposite pattern. They exhibited signs of regular use and traffic in the form of heavy concentrations of ceramic sherds, clay pipe stems, bottle glass, and small objects such as eating utensils, work tools, and horse furniture.

The area to the north of the fence stretching from the kitchen to the bounding ditch, however, produced a much lighter scattering of artifacts and far fewer small objects, indicating that the inhabitants of the quarters were materially worse off than those living in the kitchen. In addition, bone analysis performed on a burial located between the two quarters on the western edge of the homelot suggested that the deceased was a young woman of African origin. If this was indeed the case, living arrangements for the plantation's workforce possibly reflected the same racial segregation noticed by Dauphine on his travels across Virginia's Middle Peninsula, where he observed that planters built one "house for the Christian slaves" or servants, and "one for the negro slaves."⁴²

While most affluent planters removed laborers from their main dwelling house during the latter half of the century, a smaller number of men relocated at least some of their workers onto outlying plantations. By 1675, for example, Ludwell had established a "Negroes Quarter" on the periphery of the Rich Neck tract. Generally speaking, this practice was simply a matter of economic efficiency. The rapid soil depletion that accompanied tobacco monoculture made it necessary to constantly clear new fields; since this ongoing process shifted the focus of activity farther away from the homelot, it became more expedient to quarter servants and slaves at a site closer to where they worked. Hogs and cattle were often moved to the new location as well,

⁴² *Ibid.*, 75-85, 99; Phillip A. Levy, David Muraca, and John C. Coombs, "Masters, Servants, Slaves, and Space: Exploring the Social Structure of Early Colonial Virginia" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Mobile, AL, January, 2002), 4; Chinard, ed., *A Huguenot Exile in Virginia*, 119-20. It was not uncommon for slaves on Barbados to bury their dead close to, and sometimes even underneath, their living quarters. See Jerome S. Handler and Frederick W. Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 174. Moreover, the same practice had a much longer history in West Africa. See A. Ikechukwu Okpoko, "Traditional Methods of Disposal of the Dead in Parts of Nigeria," *West African Journal of Archaeology* 23 (1993): 104-121.

which also cut down on costs because they could then feed off the land rather than being penned up and supplied with corn.⁴³

Yet if the quarter system made financial sense for planters, it did little to improve the lot of laborers. Living conditions for the inhabitants of an outlying quarter were undoubtedly worse than for those who remained at the home plantation. Housing was of the same quality as the earthfast structures at Rich Neck: crude post-in-ground buildings covered with clapboards and roofed with wooden shingles that offered little protection from the elements, especially in winter. Such dwellings were often so “wretchedly constructed,” the Dutchmen Jasper Dankars and Peter Sluyter complained in 1680, “that if you are not so close to the fire as almost to burn yourself, you cannot keep warm, for the wind blows through them everywhere.” Planters usually also supplied only minimal equipment for daily subsistence. The six laborers living at John Lee’s “new plantation,” for example, were apparently expected to make do with just two iron pots and pot hooks, a frying pan, and a pestle. Material circumstances were not much better twenty-five years later at Ralph Wormeley’s “Hogghouse Quarter,” where seven adults and two children shared a couple of iron pots and pot hooks, a pestle, and a grindstone.”⁴⁴

The racial distribution of laborers between the home plantation and outlying quarters varied according to the individual in question. Lee kept five of his six servants at the dwelling house along with eight slaves, while two black women were listed at the “English quarter” and five slaves and one white servant (presumably an

⁴³ “The Building of Williamsburg,” *WMQ*, 1st ser. 10 (1901): 91-92; Main, *Tobacco Colony*, 128.

⁴⁴ Dankars and Sluyter, *Journal of a Voyage to New York*, 173; Westmoreland County, Deeds, Patents, Etc. (1665-1677), 180; Middlesex County, Will Book A (1698-1713), 125.

overseer) at the “new plantation.” Joseph Ring of York kept both of his servants at his home plantation with nine slaves, but staffed his Beaver Dams and Mattapan quarters entirely with blacks. Wormeley adopted a similar practice. Every one of his nine outlying quarters were manned by slaves. His eight servants were listed as belonging to the “home house,” along with an Indian boy named Jack, two black women, and three black men. The 1686 inventory of Major James Ashton of Stafford, on the other hand, suggests that his workforce was completely segregated by race. Only servants were listed at his home plantation and only slaves at the quarter.⁴⁵

The clear trend that emerges from an analysis of probate inventories is that blacks were far more likely than whites to be shunted off to an outlying quarter. Of course, this was not without its benefits for slaves. Those living away from the homelot and out from under the direct surveillance of their master undoubtedly enjoyed more freedom and privacy than those who remained nearby. When work gangs were sexually mixed, as they usually were, adult men and women enjoyed opportunities for some semblance of a settled home life that would have been impossible under the barrack-style quartering practices that were common earlier in the century, which explains the presence of young children and infants at many quarters.

However, from a broader perspective, the growing separation of black slaves from their masters and white servants—whether it was into segregated living quarters on the homelot or into more distant, outlying quarters—had at least one critical,

⁴⁵ Westmoreland County, Deeds, Patents, Etc. (1665-1677), 178-80; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 12 (1702-1706), 277-86; Middlesex County, Will Book A (1698-1713), 125-32; Stafford County, Deeds and Wills (1686-1689), f. 79.

perhaps unintended result. As the law of slavery became more firmly imbedded in statutes after 1660 and blacks became institutionally defined as a distinct group within society, their increasing spatial isolation served to reinforce and naturalize the colony's emerging racial hierarchy. The gulf separating bound and free, which had been communicated through differences in privilege and material comfort when planters and laborers shared space within the same dwelling house in the 1640s and 1650s, became increasingly manifested in the last third of the century by the physical distance between the "great house" and its surrounding quarters. The compact homelot, which had reflected the shared cultural heritage of master and laborer during the era of servitude, consequently became splintered into two separate worlds: one an impressive symbol of refinement and authority, the other of poverty, debasement, and marginalization.

Chapter 7

“Confirmed by the Name of New Guinea”

The early eighteenth century was perhaps the most decisive period in Virginia’s long conversion to slavery. The legislative moves of the 1660s and the tumultuous upheaval of Bacon’s Rebellion were undeniably important. But their effects were in many ways quite limited since neither did much to alter the multiracial character of the colony’s bound workforce. The turning point that did alter it came with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the effective end of the Royal African Company’s privileged status, or even more directly with Parliament’s vote to abolish the company’s monopoly a decade later. As the transatlantic trade gradually opened up, the number of Africans shipped to the Chesapeake grew first from a trickle to a stream and then to a flood, prompting William Byrd II to speculate that the colony would “some time or other be confirmed by the name of New Guinea.”¹

However, while the dramatic surge in direct importation that followed the demise of monopoly greatly accelerated the growth of Virginia’s slave-based plantation “machine”—to use Byrd II’s term—expansion did not result in wholesale transformation. The social, cultural, and institutional adjustments of the preceding century exerted a pervasive influence over the course of development. The aggressive, estate-building efforts of earlier members of the gentry gave wealthy heirs like Byrd formidable advantages over other planters. The colony’s first slave codes were for the most part compilations of legislation adopted by previous assemblies. Even slave society itself continued to reflect the initial compromises and decisions of the charter

¹ William Byrd to John Perceval, Earl of Egmont, 12 July 1736, in Tinling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 487-89.

generations despite the fact that the existing creole population was quickly swamped by an influx of outlandish “Guineybirds,” one of several derisive names that both whites and native-born blacks used to describe the newly-arrived Africans disgorged from the slave ships.²

The size of this immigrant influx was unprecedented, far outstripping the contract deliveries of the late seventeenth century. Whereas some 4,200 slaves are known to have been sent to Virginia by Atlantic traders during the twenty-five years that the company’s monopoly was technically in force, almost 27,000 arrived in the first three decades after its downfall, an increase of more 600 percent. Growth was slow at first, with just 1,800 slaves being delivered in the five years immediately following Parliament’s 1698 decision. But from 1704 to 1718 over 10,000 were unloaded, and another 14,600 disembarked between 1719 and 1730. Most were brought by private merchants, who after the end of monopoly assumed the official title of “separate traders.” Indeed, Royal African Company vessels carried less than six percent of the slaves delivered during the period, clearly demonstrating that the advent of free trade was primarily responsible for the escalating rate of importation.³

Small shipments continued to arrive through coastal exchange as well, though obviously this branch of the trade was far less important than it had been earlier. All told, another 1,700 slaves were brought to Virginia in coastal vessels, the majority from Barbados, Jamaica, and the other Caribbean sugar islands. Deliveries from colonies in mainland North America were uneven; 220 arrived from 1698 to 1718 but

² Breen, “Creative Adaptations,” 206.

³ Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson, and Klein, eds., *Slave Trade Database*; Walsh, “The Chesapeake Slave Trade,” 170; Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 122-35.

just 13 between 1719 and 1730, while the West Indian trade generally held steady at around 500 or so a decade. How long these slaves had lived in the New World is uncertain. They doubtlessly included some creoles and “seasoned” immigrants who were deported for causing trouble or some other reason. However, like their seventeenth-century predecessors, the majority were probably transshipped Africans who had only recently survived the ordeal of the middle passage.⁴

Virginia’s different sub-regions did not benefit equally from the new availability of slaves. As in earlier decades, some garnered a greater share than others. No specific area of disembarkation is known for 6,700 slaves shipped to the colony, but the York River basin was by far the leading destination, receiving no fewer than 17,000 or 60 percent of the overall total. The Rappahannock was second with 13 percent. The three remaining naval districts of Potomac, Upper James, and Lower James (which included the Eastern Shore) each attracted only a few hundred slaves. Of course, importation figures do not precisely measure the spatial dispersion of imported Africans. Where slaves landed and where they ultimately lived could be two different things. A significant percentage of those brought into the York doubtlessly went to owners in James City, Warwick, and Elizabeth City, which were only a short distance from the busy port of Yorktown. The buyers of slaves from the *Leopard Galley* recorded in the account book of Richmond County merchants Lyonel and Stephen Loyde included three planters from distant Henrico. At least four others were

⁴ Walsh, “The Chesapeake Slave Trade,” 144-45, 170; Westbury, “Slaves of Colonial Virginia,” 231-33; idem, “Analyzing a Regional Slave Trade: The West Indies and Virginia, 1698-1775,” *Slavery and Abolition* 7 (1986): 253-55.

from counties located in the York sub-region and another seven lived along the Potomac, including the single largest purchaser Colonel William Fitzhugh II of Stafford.⁵

Still, the few detailed sources that are extant suggest that the majority of Africans at least initially stayed within the same region where they were sold. Despite the significant number of buyers from other areas, some three-quarters of the *Leopard Galley's* slaves remained in the Rappahannock watershed. Historian Alan Kulikoff has estimated that most of the slaves delivered by the *Charfield*, sold at the Rappahannock port of Urbanna in 1717, went to planters living an average distance of less than thirty miles away, a figure that seems reasonable considering that most of the cargo's larger purchasers came from Middlesex, Lancaster, and Richmond. After analyzing bills of exchange from Virginia included among the documents of the Royal African Company, Charles W. Killinger concluded that 258 of the 304 slaves for whom the company received payment between 1689 and 1713 were bought by planters living along either the York or Rappahannock, the ports of entry for almost all of its vessels sent to the colony.⁶

The geographic disparity in the distribution of slaves was largely a product of

⁵ "Account of Sales of a Cargo of Slaves Imported in ye *Leopard Galley* Mr. John Owen ma. From Guinea. Virginia July 4th 1710," in Lyonel and Stephen Loyde Account Book 1708-1710," Tayloe Family Papers, Acc. #38-62, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. For a Rappahannock broker recruiting buyers along the Potomac, see Robert Carter to George Eskridge, 21 September 1727, Robert Carter Letter Book 1727-1728, Carter Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA (Hereafter cited as Carter Letter Book, VHS).

⁶ *Leopard Galley* Sales, Loyde Account Book, UVA; "Sales of the *Charfields* Slaves begun July 23 1717 belonging to Saml. Jacobs & Comp. Bristol," Stephen Loyde-John Tayloe Account Book 1708-1711, Tayloe Papers, Acc.# MssI T2118b1, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA; Alan Kulikoff, "The Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, 1700-1790," *WMQ*, 3d. ser., 35 (1978): 234, n.22; Charles L. Killinger, "The Royal African Company Slave Trade to Virginia, 1689-1713" (M.A. Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1969), 63-70, 137; Minchinton, King, and Waite, eds., *Virginia Slave-Trade Statistics*, 3-20; Walsh, "The Chesapeake Slave Trade," 146-150, 170.

sub-regional differences in wealth. The relatively higher price and buoyant demand enjoyed by sweet-scented growers throughout the second half of the seventeenth century had given rise to a large contingent of great planters along both the York and Rappahannock. Together the two regions produced sixteen councilors between 1700 and 1730, more than half of the men appointed to that exclusive body. A few, such as William Churchill of Middlesex and Edmund Jennings of York, were immigrants. But most were second-or-third-generation scions of affluent families, like William Bassett of New Kent, Peter Beverly and Mann Page of Gloucester, and Robert “King” Carter of Lancaster.⁷

The concentration of affluent planters in both areas made them highly attractive to Atlantic suppliers seeking buyers with a need for labor and the ability to pay for it. The York in particular developed a reputation as a place where vessel captains could obtain cash rather than tobacco in exchange for their human cargo. In 1687, officials responsible for disposing of slaves seized from the interloper *Society* had thought it best to market them to the planters living along its banks, “they being the ablest men to purchase for money.” Richmond burgess John Tayloe voiced a similar opinion in a 1723 letter to merchant Isaac Hobhouse of Bristol, explaining his decision to send the slave vessel *Grayhound* to the York “as being most for ye owners interest, there being most money sterling in that river.”⁸

Several prominent planters in the two regions were also among the most important “middle men” in the transatlantic trade, brokering the sale of cargoes after

⁷ Walsh, “Summing the Parts,” 60, 87-93; Virginia officeholder files, eighteenth century.

⁸ C.O. 5/1308, ff. 36-37, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 35; Walter E. Minchinton, ed., “The Virginia Letters of Isaac Hobhouse, Merchant of Bristol,” *VMHB* 66 (1958): 297; Walsh, “The Chesapeake Slave Trade,” 150, 154.

they arrived in Virginia. Tayloe and Colonel Augustine Moore of King William performed this function for Hobhouse and a number of other Bristol traders. William Churchill and Colonel Miles Cary of Warwick took at least one consignment from John Denew of London, and “King” Carter had an long-term arrangement with Liverpool merchant John Pemberton. Colonel John Baylor, who Carter remembered as “the great Negro seller & in all respects the greatest merchant we had among us,” handled shipments for several British firms from his seat on the Mattaponi River in King and Queen County. Not surprisingly, the Royal African Company’s two most active resident factors also lived on the Middle Peninsula, Gawain Corbin in Middlesex and Henry Fielding in King and Queen.⁹

In return for a commission, these men and their counterparts in other areas performed a number of services for their British correspondents. They secured buyers for a cargo, oversaw all aspects of its sale, and gathered up tobacco for the vessel to carry home on its return voyage. Even more important, they were responsible for making the crucial decisions about who would be able to buy slaves and on what terms. In the early years of the century factors acting on behalf of transatlantic shippers do not seem to have been very concerned about the solvency of purchasers. While this had the advantage of widening their customer base—Governor Francis Nicholson reported in 1700 that one large shipment had attracted “as many buyers as negros”—many planters proved incapable of meeting their obligations. By 1708,

⁹ Minchinton, ed., “Virginia Letters of Isaac Hobhouse,” 282; Robert Carter to John Pemberton, 26 July 1727 (added to letter of 28 June), 18 December 1727, Carter Letter Book 1727-1728, VHS; Carter to Pemberton, 15 September 1727, Carter Letter Book 1727-1728, UVA; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, no. 15 (1716-1720), 78; Carter to Messrs. Perry, 27 September 1720, in Louis B. Wright, ed., *Letters of Robert Carter, 1720-1727: The Commercial Interests of A Virginia Gentleman* (San Marino, CA, 1940), 54; Killinger, “The Royal African Company Slave Trade to Virginia,” 12-18, 102-124.

Edmund Jennings was lamenting the “prevailing humour of our inhabitants for some years past of buying Negroes even beyond their abilities,” a propensity that in his opinion had “ruined the credit of the country.” Governor Alexander Spotswood registered the same concern in 1711, informing the Board of Trade that “the country is already ruined by the great number of negroes imported of late years; that it will be impossible for them to discharge the debts already contracted for the purchase of those negroes.”¹⁰

Faced with the prospect of pursuing endless collection actions in hostile colonial courts, British slave traders dealing with the Chesapeake restructured some of the financial aspects of their business. The practice may have begun earlier, but by the early 1720s agents in Virginia and Maryland were often required to personally guarantee payment for all sales made from shipments they accepted on consignment. Robert Carter assumed this burden for a cargo of Madagascar slaves, which he and Lower Norfolk justice Robert Tucker brokered on behalf of merchants Francis Chamberlain and Francis Sitwell in 1720. “Some time since I advised you of my being concerned in the sale of a ship of Negroes, the *Mercury*,” he wrote his principal London factor Micajah Perry. “She now brings sundry bills of exchange with my indorsement to the owners Messrs. Chamberlain and Sitwell, amounting to £2487:13:7. A list of these bills is herein sent. What of them will not be paid after they are protested are to be brought to you, and thirty days after your receipt of such protests you are to pay them on my account. This is my agreement, which I request you will see performed, returning me the protests with the first conveyance.”¹¹

¹⁰ Donnan *Documents of the Slave Trade*, 4: 173, 89, 93.

¹¹ Jacob M. Price, “Credit in the Slave Trade and Plantation Economies,” in Solow, ed., *Slavery and the*

Having in essence committed themselves to standing surety for their customers, slave brokers became more cautious and intent on limiting their financial exposure. The obvious way of doing this was to find buyers whose financial position was known to be sound. Carter seems to have followed this course in disposing of the *Mercury's* slaves. In the same letter to Perry concerning their sale, he expressed confidence that the bills he enclosed were “generally good,” basing his assessment on the knowledge that the drawers were all “men of circumstances here.” Well-heeled planters were particularly valued as customers because they also had the ongoing relationships and favorable account balances with metropolitan tobacco factors that enabled them to make immediate payment via bills of exchange. Carter himself bought “near four score slaves” in this manner from Colonel George Braxton of King and Queen in 1727, picking “the choice of the ship three men to one woman at twenty pound per head.” In order to cover their cost, he drew on no less than five different merchant houses with whom he regularly consigned tobacco for the total sum of £1,490.¹²

However, the strategy of pursuing an elite clientele of cash buyers had its

Rise of the Atlantic System, 303-05; Minchinton, King, and Waite, eds., *Virginia Slave-Trade Statistics*, 49; Robert Carter to Messrs. Perry, 27 July 1720, in Wright, ed., *Letters of Robert Carter*, 40. For merchant concerns over uncollected debts, see Robert Baylor to Messrs. Isaac Hobhouse and Company, 21 June 1723, in Minchinton, ed., “Virginia Letters of Isaac Hobhouse,” 298-99; Price, “Sheffield v. Starke,” 19-39.

¹² Robert Carter to Messrs. Perry, 27 September 1720, in Wright, ed., *Letters of Robert Carter*, 54; Carter to Edward Tucker, 11 May 1727, Carter to John Stark, 19 May 1727, Carter to John Pemberton, 3 June 1727, Carter Letter Book, 1727-28, UVA; Carter to William Dawkins 13 May 1727, Carter to Micajah Perry, 2 June 1727, Carter Letter Book, 1727-1728, VHS; Robert Carter Diary, 1722-1727, 2 June 1727, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. The slaves purchased by the wealthiest planters were often also the healthiest and most desirable. Colonial slave sellers often gave wealthier planters, particularly their friends and relatives, the first pick from shipments by allowing them on board arriving ships before making the cargoes available for public sale. See Lorena S. Walsh, “Mercantile Strategies, Credit Networks, and Labor Supply in the Colonial Chesapeake in Trans-Atlantic Perspective.” In David Eltis, Frank L. Lewis, and Kenneth Sokoloff, eds., *Slavery and the Development of the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

limitations. Only a handful of great planters commanded the kind of resources necessary to purchase large portions of a cargo on their own. Finding a sufficient number of affluent customers with the coin, notes, or bills of exchange on hand to pay for slaves could prove a difficult task. Moreover, a broker had more than his own interest to look after. Although cash sales offered the benefit of increased security, they could also have a detrimental effect on a shipment's margin of profit, since those able to purchase for ready money expected to pay less than premium prices. Moreover, British merchants expected the sale of a cargo to be completed quickly in order to speed the turnaround on their investment and reduce costs.¹³

Vessel owners probably recognized that the uncertainties of transatlantic trading could sometimes result in circumstances that were less than ideal. A cargo might arrive late in the year when demand was low or conversely the market for slaves in a given locality might be glutted. But they also expected to turn a profit, and if a broker routinely failed to meet expectations he might find himself losing consignments. The slave-selling business was, after all, competitive. Merchant firms involved in the trade usually dealt with multiple agents, even within the same colony. Thomas Nelson of Yorktown and Colonel Thomas Lee of Westmoreland, for example, also seem to have handled shipments for Pemberton and his associates from time to time. When Carter refused to manage the sale of slaves from the *Leopard* because of what he considered to be unreasonable "peremptory termes," the vessel's captain followed Pemberton's instructions and immediately headed upriver to see John Tayloe.¹⁴

¹³ Price, "Credit in the Slave Trade," 322; Walsh, "Mercantile Strategies."

¹⁴ Carter to Pemberton, 15 September 1727 and 16 September 1727, Carter Letter Book, 1727-1728,

Whether it was to recruit a larger pool of buyers, maintain an acceptable average price, or dispose of a cargo in a timely fashion, it was almost always necessary for an agent to sell at least some slaves on credit. Yet as historian Jacob Price has noted, in the early modern plantation world, access to credit was far from equal. The same desire to avoid losses that led brokers to favor cash buyers also influenced their decisions about how many slaves they allowed their various customers to purchase on account. Wealthier men with collateral in land, labor, and equipment could command the most favorable terms, and thus instead of buying a few slaves for cash might obtain a good deal more through deferred remittance. In 1706, London merchant John Starke had sizable outstanding debts owed him by Colonel William Leigh of King and Queen and several other members of the gentry for assorted goods, including slaves, sold to them on credit by Starke's chief Virginia factor Henry Fox. Middling planters of solid reputation who owned some property were also able to procure slaves in this way, though seldom more than one or two. Carter's 1727 sale of "a Negro man" to James Murphy for "11-10s ster [and] 600l tobb. next crop" was probably typical. The poorest planters were by and large denied sufficient credit to buy slaves.¹⁵

Despite the number of African captives who poured into Virginia after the turn of the eighteenth century, then, marketing arrangements that heavily favored the affluent ensured that the social as well as geographic distribution of the black

UVA. Tayloe apparently agreed to manage the sale of the *Leopard's* slaves, since Carter remarked that "the ship is gon up the Bay to Petuckson [River] and Tayloe meets her there."

¹⁵ Price, "Credit in the Slave Trade," 294; idem, "Sheffield v. Starke," 20-21; Carter Diary, 31 July 1727. Agents also had an incentive to sell on credit because customers who were unable to purchase for ready money were usually willing to pay ten percent more for slaves than cash buyers. This not only raised the average price for a cargo but also increased the agent's commission. See Walsh, "Mercantile Strategies."

population remained uneven. According to inventories taken in Lancaster, York, and Lower Norfolk counties between 1698 and 1730, planters with fewer than five workers still owned just 17 percent of all slaves, even though they comprised more than half of the labor-owning decedents. On the other hand, the inventories suggest that the top 3 percent of planters (those with more than twenty workers) owned almost a third of the slaves living in the colony. The wealthiest of these men had very substantial holdings. Edmund Jennings owned 104 blacks in 1713, and his fellow immigrant William Churchill had 61 when an inventory of his estate was taken the following year. Second-generation great planters did just as well or better. By 1709 Daniel Parke II of York had a built a workforce of 111 slaves. In 1718, William Byrd II sought to win the hand of a rich English heiress by informing her father that he had “43,000 acres of land and 220 Negroes at work upon it,” a significant portion of whom he had inherited from Parke’s estate by right of his first wife Lucy Parke. Even Byrd’s success paled in comparison to that of Carter, who at his death in 1733 owned no fewer than 736 slaves on forty-nine quarters in nine different counties.¹⁶

It was these men and their contemporaries whose careers marked the culmination of the gentry’s transition from an ambitious and grasping group of transplanted Englishmen on the make into the established, closely-knit, native-born

¹⁶ St. Mary’s City Commission inventory files; “Inventories of the Negroes on the Estate of Edmund Jennings, 1712-1713”, Francis Porteus Corbin Papers, Duke University, Durham, NC, microfilm Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (hereafter cited as Jennings Inventories, Corbin Papers); Middlesex County, Will Book B (1713-1734), 204-206; An Account of all the Negroes and other Slaves of Daniel Parke, Esq., Deceased, in Virginia at the time of his Death”, Emmett Collection, New York Public Library, microfilm CWF (hereafter cited as Parke inventory, Emmett Collection); William Byrd to “Vigilante” [John Smith], 18 February 1718, in Tinling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 1: 311-313; “An Inventory of all the [Servants] and Personal Property of the Hon’ble Robert Carter of the County of Lancaster, Esq., Deceased, Taken as Directed in his Last Will”, Carter Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA (hereafter cited as Carter Inventory, VHS).

plantocracy that would dominate the life of the colony down to the American Revolution. Yet the few remaining immigrants among them aside, the Virginia oligarchs of the early eighteenth century were not self-made. All added to their families' fortunes, some of them substantially. But they also invariably inherited wealth and position. The origins of Carter's massive estate stretched back nearly a hundred years, through his half-brother and father, to the material achievements of William Brocas and Christopher Wormeley, both of whom held seats on the Council by 1637. The prosperity of William Byrd II can likewise be traced to the profitable enterprises of his maternal grandfather Thomas Stegg, lauded by Governor Sir John Harvey as one of the "ablest merchants in Virginia" in 1636 and a member of the Council by 1642. To one extent or another, the other great families owed a similar debt to seventeenth-century predecessors, as did a host of second-tier elites such as the Presleys of Northumberland, Bollings of Charles City, Thackers of Middlesex, Curles of Elizabeth City, and Kendalls of Northampton, who exercised as much influence in county matters as the more celebrated grandees did over provincial affairs.¹⁷

In a plantation colony where economic well-being and the social and political influence that went along with it depended largely on growing tobacco, the extensive land holdings passed down to the eighteenth-century gentry were an essential part of their inheritance. Much of this patrimony was assembled in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, when Virginia's leading planters had used a vast reservoir of

¹⁷ Virginia officeholder files, eighteenth century; Lancaster County, Deeds, Etc., no. 1 (1652-1657), 255; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 2 (1645-1649), 154 (153 ½); Tyler, ed., *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography*, 106-7, 114, 129, 138-39; Pierre Marambaud, "William Byrd I: A Young Virginia Planter in the 1670s," *VMHB* 81 (1973): 131-50; Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure," 25-34. For other examples, see Ludwell Lee Montague, "Richard Lee, the Emigrant 1613(?) - 1664," *VMHB* 62 (1954): 3-49; Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove*, ch.1.

unused headrights left over from the 1630s and 1640s to buy up most of the tidewater's best acreage. By 1658 more than 100,000 choice acres along the Potomac, from Smith's Point to the site of present-day Alexandria, were in the hands of just thirty people. Affluent speculators snapped up plots along the York and Rappahannock as well, reaching the "freshes" of both rivers by the mid-1650s. In 1664 alone, thirteen inhabitants of Accomack used 675 headrights to patent a combined total of almost 34,000 acres. The results of this "great land grab" are clearly evident in the quitrent roles of 1704-1705. With the exception of Lancaster, Richmond, and the Potomac River counties, which were not included because their rents were paid to the Northern Neck proprietary rather than the Crown, the ten biggest landowners in each county controlled on average over 25 percent of the patented land.¹⁸

However much real estate a man might own, it could only be made productive with workers, and after 1700 workers meant slaves. The early investments in black laborers made by seventeenth-century elites were therefore just as crucial in ensuring the economic predominance of their successors. After all, while slavery offered certain efficiencies such as longer workdays and lower maintenance costs to anyone with the means to convert, the main advantage of using slaves was their capacity to reproduce, which eliminated the ongoing capital expenditures on labor that servitude had required. For those just beginning to buy into slavery in the early eighteenth century, realizing this benefit often proved disastrously elusive, for as many as a third

¹⁸ Morgan, "Headrights and Headcounts," 361-71. My analysis of the quitrent roles is drawn from the consolidated list printed as an appendix in Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The Planters of Colonial Virginia* (Princeton, NJ, 1922), 183-247. The phrase "great land grab" is taken from Morgan's article.

of all Africans imported during the period died within three years of their arrival.¹⁹

The detailed case studies undertaken by Darrett and Anita Rutman for Middlesex County demonstrate the catastrophic consequences that could befall those who gambled their futures on slavery and came up short. John Guttery was one such loser. In 1717 he acquired a young slave named Harry who died soon after he was purchased. Guttery was unable to replace the boy and never recovered from the financial blow. When his estate was appraised following his death in 1733, it was valued at just fourteen pounds, forcing his wife to live on the charity of neighbors until she, too, died in poverty eleven years later. Given the odds, Guttery's chances of success were perhaps never very good. But bad luck could similarly effect wealthier men. In 1734 John Curtis owned six blacks, placing him squarely in the middle ranks of slaveowners. However, in 1735 he lost two of his prime-age hands, a man and a woman, and two young children also died by 1740. At the time of his death in 1741, the only slaves left were an older male who was over sixty and another aged thirty-eight. With any hope of natural increase gone, Curtis's survivors faced the difficult choice of either buying more slaves to revive their prospects or seeing their inheritance inevitably decline in value.²⁰

By the eighteenth century, elites generally owned enough laborers that they were unlikely to suffer the kind of demographic catastrophe that ruined men like Guttery and Curtis. Yet considering the early date that members of the gentry began converting to slavery, a larger proportion of their slaves should also have been native-

¹⁹ Richard S. Dunn, "Epidemeology and the Slave Trade," *Political Science Quarterly* 83 (1968): 190-216; Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," 396-98.

²⁰ Rutman and Rutman, *A Place in Time*, 184-87.

born, making them more resistant to the local disease environment and better able to reproduce. Because the first half of the eighteenth century was an era of heavy importation and the presence of Africans usually resulted in an unbalanced adult sex ratio, the best way of determining whether this was in fact the case is by looking at the number of children relative to women of child-bearing age. Most African women arrived in their early-to-mid-twenties and often did not have their first child until several years later, so a lower number of children indicates a workforce comprised largely of recent immigrants. By contrast, slave women born in Virginia began conceiving in their late teens, and thus a larger number of children would suggest a more creolized community.²¹

The inventory of Daniel Parke II provides a good benchmark for gauging the relative presence of immigrants and creoles among the enslaved workers of his contemporaries, since it gives the ages of every black living on his plantation when he died in 1709. Although Colonel Daniel Parke I owned at least one slave as early as 1657 and claimed headrights for another eleven between 1662 and 1674, his son's labor force exhibits a surprising degree of demographic maturity for the period. The inventory lists thirteen slaves over the age of fifty, forty-seven between sixteen and fifty, and fifty-one who were fifteen years old or under. While men outnumbered women eight to five among the older slaves, there was near sexual parity among the younger adults (24 males and 23 females). The ratio of 2.22 children for every working-age woman strongly suggests that a large percentage of Parke's slaves were native-born. Indeed, with more than enough youngsters to replace the preceding

²¹ Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," 398-403; Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population," 40-47; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 79-101.

generation, they were almost certainly increasing naturally, something that the Chesapeake slave population as a whole did not begin to achieve until about 1730.²²

William Fitzhugh's slaves were equally prolific. In a 1686 letter written to his future brother-in-law, Dr. Ralph Smith, he stated that he then had twenty-nine blacks on his Stafford County plantation, most of whom were already "country born" and the younger women among them "a considerable parcel of breeders." Though at the time Fitzhugh had hopes of returning to the mother country by exchanging his Virginia holdings for an estate in Britain, there is nothing to indicate that he purchased slaves after 1687, which lends credence to his description. His 1703 inventory provides further evidence that his claims were not exaggerated. Thirteen men, thirteen women, and twenty-five children are named, for a child to woman ratio of 1.92. This would have been a birthrate that many planters of his day would have envied, but it is only when Fitzhugh's will is examined alongside his inventory that the true sincerity of his comments to Smith becomes fully apparent. The section in the will detailing the various bequests made to his widow and sons reveals that four individuals who in the inventory appear to be adults were actually the children of other slaves. Beck, given to Fitzhugh's widow Sarah, was the daughter of Hannah; Susan and Ned, left to his son William II, were the grandchildren of Giles and Lucy; and Esop, who ended up in the hands of John Fitzhugh, was the son of Mulatto Sarah. Thus the true child-to-woman-ratio of his slaves was 2.64, a rate of increase even greater than what existed on many

²² Parke inventory, Emmett Collection; York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., no. 3 (1657-1662), f. 2; Virginia black headright files, 17th century; Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," 401.

late eighteenth-century plantations.²³

While the slaves that Parke and Fitzhugh owned were predominantly creoles, most of those at the King William quarters of Edmund Jennings were not. In December 1712 Jennings had a total of twenty-seven men and twenty-four women in the county, but none of his seven farms had a sexual balance among adults, and a detailed accounting of his slaves lists only fourteen children, a child-to-woman-ratio of just 0.68. Moreover, ten of the children belonged to three couples: Phil and Venus at Morker Quarter and Frank and Judy at Thorpe Quarter both had three, and Tom and Pegg at Ripon Quarter had four. Three other women each had only one child and eighteen had none, though it is unclear to whom, if anyone, a young boy named Isaac belonged. Things changed somewhat by the spring of 1713. Two of Jennings's prime male laborers had died. George of Beaverdam Quarter seems to have been murdered by some of his "country men" who a few months earlier he had accused of having "poysened him for his wife." Roger of Silsoon Quarter hanged himself in a tobacco barn, allegedly because he had been "hindered from keeping other negroes men wives besides his own." The new year also brought the birth of five children. Judy's fourth child and a girl born to Bell and the frustrated polygamist Roger both died by the end of April. Ribson and Tabby of Malbrough Quarter had their first baby, a boy named

²³ William Fitzhugh to Doctor Ralph Smith, 22 April 1686, in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 175; Will Book, Liber Z (1699-1709), 92-102, 180-83; Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," 401-402; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 80-83. Fitzhugh's will and inventory are both reproduced in Davis, *William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World*, 373-85. That some of the family relationships expressed in Fitzhugh's will were not mentioned in his inventory might explain the apparently low birthrate among the slaves of his friend Ralph Wormeley II, who also died in 1701. Wormeley's father had invested in slaves by the mid 1640s and the son inherited at least 21 blacks (eight men, nine women, and four children) in 1677, but the account taken of his estate has a child to woman ratio of only 1.00. The data for Fitzhugh, however, suggests the possibility that a significant number of Wormeley's adult slaves were actually native born, and that in examining his inventory one is seeing perhaps three or even four generations rather than just two. For Wormeley's inventory, see Middlesex County, Will Book A (1698-1713), 113-32.

Jack, while Venus and Pegg had their fourth and fifth children respectively.²⁴

Although the evidence of violent disputes over access to marriage partners and the low overall birthrate among female slaves clearly suggests that Jennings's workforce in King William was comprised mostly of Africans, at his home seat of Ripon Hall in York County the situation was quite different. Men outnumbered women fourteen to seven on the three farms that made up the plantation. However, as in the seventeenth century, this sexual imbalance most likely reflected an effort to compensate for numerous "useless hands." A total of sixteen children are listed as belonging to the estate, yielding a child-to-woman-ratio of 2.29, which was even higher than that for Parke's blacks. No indication of familial ties is included as with the King William quarters. But Jennings did not bring any young slaves into court to have their ages adjudged, and those included in the York inventory are listed under the heading of "Negroe children not workers," indicating that they were all below tithable age. If most members of the Ripon Hall community and the three large families in King William were native-born, then something more than a third and perhaps nearly half of Jennings's slaves were creoles.²⁵

The labor force of Councilor Edmund Berkeley of Middlesex was similar.

Like so many other elites of his generation. Berkeley had deep roots in the colony,

²⁴ Jennings Inventories, Corbin Papers. In his analysis of these materials, Allan Kulikoff incorrectly stated that Jennings was dead by 1712, when in fact he did not die until 1727, see Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," 398.

²⁵ Jennings Inventories, Corbin Papers. The phrase "useless hands" is taken from Hartwell, Blair, and Chilton, *The Present State of Virginia*, 5-6. Jennings was issued certificates in 1691 and 1695 for transporting a total of eighteen "Negroes," fifteen of whom were given names either approximating or matching those of seventeen blacks named in the 1712 and 1713 inventories. Of these, seven men and three women lived at Ripon Hall, and it is therefore possible that the higher birthrate among the York slaves was due to longer residence rather than their being native born. Of the four King William females who might be among the women listed in the certificates, Pegg was the only one who had children. For the two certificates, see York County, Deeds, Orders, Wills no. 9 (1691-1694), 42; Deeds Orders Wills no. 10 (1694-1697), 188-89.

the first members of his family having arrived during the time of the Virginia Company. He doubtlessly received some slaves from his mother Mary, who distributed several blacks among relatives and the children of her second husband John Mann but left the bulk of her estate “to my loveing son Edmund,” who also served as her executor. The exact size of this inheritance is unknown, though it was probably substantial. Berkeley’s 1719 inventory lists 83 slaves: 29 men, 19 women, and 35 children. Although the overall child to woman ratio of 1.84 indicates a mixed population of Africans and creoles, as with Jennings there were distinct differences between his various farms. Boot Swamp and King and Queen Quarters had a combined total of 10 women and 13 children, for a ratio of just 1.30. On the other hand, at Burton Quarter and Berkeley’s home plantation of Barn Elms there were 9 women and 22 children, which calculates to a much higher ratio of 2.44.²⁶

Elite slaveowners in the first decades of the eighteenth century can thus be divided into two groups. Some, like Parke and Fitzhugh, owned primarily native-born slaves, a portion of whom were second-, third-, or in a few cases possibly even fourth-generation Virginians. Others such as Jennings and Berkeley are more difficult to pin down. They clearly were in the process of augmenting their enslaved workforces through the purchase of newly-arrived Africans, though probably to a lesser extent than aggregate fertility rates suggest. It is nearly certain, however, that the labor forces of the gentry included a significant number of creoles and were on the whole

²⁶ Francis L. Berkeley, ed., “Berkeley Manuscripts,” *WMQ*, 1st ser., 6 (1898): 135-40; Middlesex County, Will Book B (1713-1734), 138-48. Berkeley possibly obtained several more slaves when he purchased the Barn Elms property from John and Jeffrey Jeffreys in 1702 and through his marriage to Lucy, the daughter of Lewis Burwell II, in 1703. The inventory might be incomplete since it is unclear whether or not it includes the personal property for Berkeley’s holdings in Gloucester and King William counties that he mentioned in his will. See Berkeley, ed., “Berkeley Manuscripts,” *WMQ*, 1st ser., 7 (1898): 83-89.

increasing through natural means at a higher than average pace, since according to inventories recorded from 1698 to 1730 the overall child-to-woman-ratio of the colony's blacks was just 1.74. Nor was it only the relatively small circle of great planters who seem to have reaped the benefits of early conversion. Decedents with ten or more laborers had an average of 2.62 children for every young adult female, while among those with between two and nine workers the mean ratio was only 1.21.²⁷

If it seems clear that the eighteenth-century gentry's success in consolidating its position was largely made possible by the aggressive slave-buying of their seventeenth-century forbears, Douglas B. Chambers has raised serious questions about whether the anglicized, creole society fashioned by charter-generation blacks survived the "Africanization" of slave communities after 1698. Chambers did not address either the notion of charter groups or even the subject of Africanization directly. But in a thought-provoking essay he forwarded the novel position that slave society continued to retain a pronounced African orientation well after creoles obtained numerical dominance within the colony's black population, an assertion that runs directly counter to the assimilationist model of Afro-Virginian cultural evolution long posited by other historians of the early Chesapeake.²⁸

²⁷ St. Mary's City Commission inventory files. In 21 elite inventories recorded in other counties during the same period, the mean ratio of children to women of child-bearing age was 2.44, lower than the average for York, Lancaster, and Lower Norfolk officeholders but still well above that of the larger black population.

²⁸ Douglas B. Chambers, "'He is an African But Speaks Plain': Historical Creolization in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Joseph E. Harris and Stephen E. Maizlish, and Alusine Jalloh, eds., *The African Diaspora* (College Station, TX, 1996), 100-133. See also idem, "'He Gwine Sing He Country': Africans, Afro-Virginians, and the Development of Slave Culture in Virginia, 1690-1810" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996) for a more extensive development of the ideas put forward in this essay. For the conventional scholarly view of slave society in this period, see G. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, chs. 2, 3, and 5; Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, NJ, 1987); Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove*, ch. 5; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, ch. 10. The term "Africanization" was used by Ira Berlin to describe the changes in slave society that followed the advent of massive direct deliveries. See Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, ch. 5.

Chambers pointed to the recent explosion in quantitative studies of the transatlantic slave trade and the reappraisal of African contributions to the development of slave society such studies have made possible. Epitomized by the pioneering works of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Michael A. Gomez, and John K. Thornton, this revisionist scholarship has strongly challenged the “anthropological perspective” of African-American culture prevalent throughout the 1970s and 1980s. As an interpretive point of departure, proponents of the anthropological view assumed that the transatlantic trade had such a randomizing effect on migration flows that slaves arrived in the New World not as cohesive groups but as ethnically diverse “crowds” or “aggregates,” who were incapable of replicating in captivity the languages and cultures of their respective homelands.²⁹ Thornton in particular has argued that actually the reverse was true. Transatlantic trading patterns tended to “concentrate, rather than disperse” Africans from the same geographic area, and consequently immigrants were often able to find enough slaves of similar cultural background and language to reconstitute communities that “could transmit, develop, or maintain the African culture they brought with them.”³⁰

To demonstrate that a cultural transfer of this sort occurred in eighteenth-century Virginia, Chambers pointed to three different developments. First, he contended that far from being a hopelessly heterogeneous lot whose “babel of languages” and other differences necessitated the creation of syncretic cultural forms,

²⁹ Chambers, “‘He is an African But Speaks Plain’,” 104-05; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1992); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*; Minz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, ch.1. It is the “anthropological perspective” that Minz and Price laid out in their book that has until recently served as dominant interpretive framework for understanding the cultural development of slave communities.

³⁰ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, chs. 7 and 8, quotations on pp. 204, 205.

slaves shipped to the colony were drawn only from a few regions of Africa.

Throughout the first half of the century, he observed, nearly fifty percent of the Africans arriving in the colony came from the predominantly Igbo areas of the Bight of Biafra, and between 1704 and 1730 the proportion of Igbo in the import-trade reached upwards of sixty percent. As a result, whether slaves ended up on their master's home plantation or on a distant, "back-country" quarter in one of the newly formed counties of the piedmont region, they "would have found enough linguistically similar others to constitute a speech-community."³¹

The second development Chambers cited was the stability of what he called "the linguistic creolization continuum" even after the percentage of Africans within the overall black population began to decline around mid-century. Using runaway slave advertisements placed in colonial newspapers such as the *Virginia Gazette*, he described this continuum in terms of proficiency in English, using the parlance of the day to separate runaways into those who spoke "broken" or "bad" English, those who spoke good or "plain," and those who spoke fluently. Between the 1730s and 1790, he maintained, this continuum remained virtually unchanged. Throughout the period, slaves who appeared in the advertisements were divided more or less equally among the three categories along the spectrum, indicating that "the steady decline in the proportion of African-born people in the slave population did not translate into a unilinear shift from broken to fluent English among Afro-Virginians."³²

³¹ Chambers, "He is an African But Speaks Plain," 106-107. The reference to a "babel of languages" is taken from a 1712 speech of Governor Alexander Spotswood to the House of Burgesses in H.R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1702-1712*, (Richmond, 1912), 240-41.

³² Chambers, "He is an African But Speaks Plain," 111-113, quotation on page 112. For a detailed analysis of the changing percentage of immigrants within the colony's black population, see Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 58-62.

Finally, he contended that “physical creolization” also did not lead to the assimilation of other elements of the dominant Anglo-American culture. Instead, “many Virginia-born slaves” continued to exhibit an African appearance and “personal style,” such as a Charlotte County runaway who was described by her master in 1784 as “outlandish” and having “country marks on one of her cheeks.” For Chambers, the persistence of non-European behavior was in large part due to transatlantic trading patterns that allowed slaves “to find and reconstitute ethnic speech” and thus retain and transmit much of their native culture. But it also reflected the character of their interactions with whites. As with linguistic creolization, he asserted, runaway slave ads reveal a continuum of comportment ranging from impudent to downcast to congenial that remained stable throughout the century, suggesting that most slaves maintained “clear psychological boundaries” between themselves and whites, with whom they interacted “largely on their own terms.”³³

Lorena Walsh’s extensive work with records of the Chesapeake’s eighteenth century slave trade has largely confirmed Chambers’s assertion that shipments to Virginia were more patterned than scholars have previously supposed. Of the colony’s five naval districts, only Lower James likely received a strikingly diverse mix of immigrants, mainly because most of its imported slaves arrived through coastal trading with the West Indies and other North American colonies rather than as direct deliveries from Africa. In those areas with well-developed transatlantic connections, however, the situation was quite different. Between 1698 and 1745, more than half of the 28,000 slaves sent to the York were drawn from the Bight of Biafra, while the

³³ Chambers, “‘He is an African But Speaks Plain,’” 101, 113-16, quotations on page 101, 113, and 115; Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 374.

bulk of the rest came either from other parts of Lower Guinea or the Angola Coast. The African geographic provenance of shipments to the Rappahannock were also far from random. From 1704 to 1718, three quarters of the slaves imported into the region had left from Senegambia and the remaining twenty-five percent were Biafrans. The backgrounds of those who arrived between 1719 and 1745 are less certain because an African area of origin is known for fewer than half of the slaves delivered. But among those for whom a port of departure was given, over 60 percent were loaded in Senegambia and another quarter in the Bight of Biafra.³⁴

With so many slaves arriving in large shipments from the same regions of Africa, Chambers's claim that some groups would have attained the critical mass necessary to form speech-communities is highly plausible. However, his contention that the speech and appearance of slaves consequently remained "heavily African-influenced" long after the emergence of a native-born majority is problematic. The most significant flaw in his interpretation is the classificatory scheme he applied to the runaway advertisements to establish the stability of the "linguistic creolization continuum." As exemplified by a 1745 advertisement for a runaway named Aaron who had "not been above 8 months in the country" and "can't speak English," newly-arrived immigrants usually did not possess any facility with the language of their captors. Yet Chambers does not appear to have taken this point into account. The

³⁴ Walsh, "The Chesapeake Slave Trade," 146-50, 166-67. Almost no information is available on the geographic provenance of slaves imported to the upper James before 1735, though presumably Biafrans were quite numerous since most had likely arrived through the York naval district. The almost 2,000 slaves who arrived in the region between 1731 and 1745 were almost equally split between Senegambia and Biafra, though the majority of them were sent to newly opened areas in the piedmont and southside. The African origins of the Potomac's immigrant population probably resembled that of Rappahannock and Maryland, the two primary areas of procurement for its planters, and thus would have included a significant proportion of slaves from Senegambia.

tables presented in his article include only a single category of “broken” and therefore either obfuscate or completely ignore this important first step in the transformation of “Guineybirds” into more seasoned “new Negroes.” If the objective of analyzing the advertisements is to gain insight into the persistence of African speech-communities, then blacks who spoke broken or bad English and those who did not speak it at all should be differentiated.³⁵

The distinction he drew between “plain” and fluent speakers is also questionable. According to Chambers, the English of slaves who were mentioned as speaking “plain” was in fact a “plantation creole” that had a strong “substrate” or African flavor, and it is probably for this reason that he distinguished them from those whose speech was described in such a way as to clearly indicate fluency. Yet keeping in mind that descriptive words could easily have meant different things to different people, many advertisements strongly suggest that use of the term “plain” was not intended to denote a separate type or even dialectical form of English but rather to indicate how well one spoke it. Surry County planter William Heath, for example, observed in 1768 that his slave Frederick “stammers much when affrighted” and “at other times speaks plain and fast.” John Billups informed readers in 1789 that his slave Essex was “country born and talks very plain.” Immigrant blacks were also judged according to how closely their speech came to the standard English of whites. Thomas Poindexter remarked in 1766 that his runaway slave Jack “speaks plain for an African.” In 1772, George Bird noted a difference between Nat, who was “not a Virginia born fellow, though he speaks very plain,” and another runaway of his named

³⁵ Chambers, “‘He is an African But Speaks Plain’,” 102, 113; Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 1: 12-13.

Table 7.1
Quality of English Spoken by Runaway Slaves
Advertised in Virginia Newspapers, 1736-1790³⁶

Period	Percentage (Number)				Total No.
	none/little/ very little	broken/bad very bad	plain/fair/ tolerable	fluent/good/ very good	
1736-1760	27% (15)	16% (9)	22% (12)	35% (19)	55
1761-1774	21% (37)	31% (54)	10% (18)	38% (67)	176
1775-1790	0% (0)	31% (24)	10% (8)	59% (45)	77
1736-1790	17% (52)	28% (87)	12% (38)	43% (131)	308

Source: Runaway Slave Advertisement Database.

Cato, who was “not Virginia born either, but speaks tolerably plain”³⁷

Still, even if Chambers’s parsing of plain and fluent speakers is accepted, the quality of English spoken by slaves mentioned in newspaper advertisements clearly improved over the course of the eighteenth century (see **Table 7.1**). Predictably, those who spoke little or no English disappeared in the years surrounding the American Revolution. After reaching a peak between 1719 and 1745, when over 38,000 slaves arrived in Virginia, imports began to tail off. From 1746 to 1760, some 15,000 were unloaded, and the number dropped again to around 11,000 between 1761 and 1774, after which there is no record of further deliveries. The percentage of slaves described

³⁶ In addition to what is listed in the table, the “fluent” category includes slaves described in terms such as “smooth tongued,” “fair spoken,” and those reported as speaking “very sensible” and “very smooth” or with other phrases that clearly imply fluency. I also made the assumption that any slave who was said to be literate (either reading or writing) was also a fluent speaker. The “plain” category includes slaves whose English was characterized as “tolerable good,” “pretty good,” and “fair.” As Michael Gomez pointed out in his analysis of these materials, many of the terms that appear in the advertisements are imprecise and are not always used consistently. Phrases such as “very little” and “very bad,” for example, may very well have been functional equivalents, so the first two columns should be viewed as having some overlap. However, of the 24 runaways in the last period (1775-1790) who I classified as speaking poor English, only two—one described as talking “very badly” and the other as “remarkably bad”—might possibly be shifted into the none/little/very little category.

³⁷ Chambers, “He is an African But Speaks Plain,” 107-10; Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 1: 63-64, 124, 244, 282-83. In my opinion, Michael Gomez’s grouping of plain and fluent speakers into one category while separating those who spoke “broken” and those who did not speak any English is more accurate. See *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 178-79.

as speaking “bad” or “broken” English admittedly remained consistent and greater than one might expect given the dwindling African presence within the black population, which Philip Morgan has estimated dropped below ten percent by the 1770s. However, the general trend indicated by the advertisements is unmistakable. By 1790, the proportion of Virginia’s slaves speaking a form of English that even whites recognized as good-to-very-good had increased substantially from what had been the case at the beginning of the period. More importantly, every one of the 49 native-born slaves whose level of proficiency was remarked upon was reported as speaking either plain or fluent, indicating that while many immigrants lacked fluency in the language of their oppressors, their sons and daughters did not.³⁸

The runaway advertisements not only substantiate Hugh Jones’s 1724 comment that the colony’s creole slaves could “talk good English,” they also confirm his observation that Afro-Virginians adopted anglicized “habits and customs,” at least in appearance. For the most part, slaves had little control over their everyday dress and equipage. Travelers venturing through the Virginia countryside at any time during the century would have encountered a numbing visual monotony of “the usual clothing of labouring Negroes.” One aspect of their personal appearance that slaves could make choices about was their hairstyle. Yet Chesapeake blacks did not braid their hair in the African manner as Lowcountry slaves occasionally did, though some men adopted the white practice of clubbing their hair or wearing it in a queue. Toney,

³⁸ Walsh, “The Chesapeake Slave Trade,” 168-69; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 60-62. Of the 24 slaves described as speaking broken English in the period 1774-1790, four were from the West Indies, one was from the “island of Saint Jago” and spoke Portuguese, one was raised “in Illinois,” and eleven were Africans. If the remaining seven for whom no information on provenance was given also arrived via the transatlantic trade, then Africans would have comprised nearly a quarter of the sample or nearly twice their percentage in the total population as estimated by Morgan.

a mulatto who ran away in 1774, for instance, was said to keep “his strait black hair tied behind.” The total absence of references to filed teeth and ritual scarification or “country marks” among native-born slaves also indicates that common African practices did not take permanent root. Even the scarified runaway that Chambers singled out to support his argument that creoles were often as “African in appearance and personal style as ‘new Negroes’” was likely not a Virginian. His identification of her as a creole was based solely on the fact that she was a mulatto, a highly dubious assumption given her master’s characterization of her as “outlandish.”³⁹

Of course, Chambers may still very well be right in maintaining that blacks often psychologically distanced themselves from whites. Runaway advertisements are replete with hints of the complex emotions that often underlay interracial exchanges. Some slaves like Ned, whose master claimed “stammers much when surprised,” reacted to such encounters with physical manifestations of fear. Other slaves exhibited unspoken signs of simmering resentment or contempt. David had “a surly down look” in the opinion of his master Archibald Cary. Thomas Poindexter noted that Jack “avoids looking into the face of them he is speaking to.” Whatever the breadth and depth of this mental divide might have been, it is clear that, by the early eighteenth century, changes in plantation layout and organization had resulted in the spatial

³⁹ Jones, *The Present State of Virginia*, 75; Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 1: 48-49; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 598-607, esp. 603; Gilchrist and Taylor, *Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer* (Duncan), 13 October 1774 (Toney); Chambers, “He is an African But Speaks Plain,” 101. Of the almost 550 mulattos and Virginia born slaves listed in the advertisements I examined, the Charlotte County woman identified by Chambers was the only one reported to have “country marks” or some other evidence of ritual scarification. Although she was a mulatto, her master’s choice of the term “outlandish” (which was invariably applied to Africans) to describe her strongly suggests that she was an immigrant who had lived for some time in Africa before her transportation.

isolation of many slaves.⁴⁰

Edmund Jennings's plantation of Ripon Hall was typical of larger estates. More elaborate than Thomas Ludwell's relatively compact (though already racially divided) Rich Neck of a generation earlier, the social landscape of Ripon Hall extended outward in a series of concentric rings. In the center ring stood the great house itself, a doubtlessly imposing edifice "of brick" and the symbol of Jennings's wealth and prestige. The second ring included the outbuildings standing nearby that housed plantation operations, support activities, and living accommodations for the laborers who worked at the homelot. They included a kitchen, wash house, dairy, quarter, and two stores which were "all of brick," as well as two new tobacco barns, two pressing houses, a stable, coach house, and hen house. An untold number of other "necessary houses," if a reference to the dwellings of slaves, made up a possible third ring. The outer ring consisted of two outlying farms called Ripon Hall Quarter and Indian Field Quarter.⁴¹

Interracial contact was obviously most intense at the core of this matrix of socially differentiated spaces. Slaves employed doing cooking, cleaning, and other domestic chores in the mansion would have spent much of their day around Jennings's family and any visitors who happened to call on the Councilor and former acting-governor. Robin and Phil, who were trained as carpenters, and Andrew, a cooper, probably experienced a high frequency of interaction as well, if not with their master then with the four "Scotch servants" who also worked at the homelot. However, although household and skilled slaves had considerable and often intimate

⁴⁰ Ibid., 113-16; Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 1: 24, 101, 282-83.

⁴¹ Jennings Inventories, Corbin Papers.

contact with whites, the runaway slave advertisements suggest they were also the most likely to be already assimilated. Over eighty percent of the hundred or so domestics and craftsmen with a designated birth provenance were native-born Virginians, and only five of the fifty whose proficiency in English was indicated did not speak plain or fluently, one of whom was from Jamaica and another from South Carolina.⁴²

White faces became increasingly scarce beyond the immediate vicinity of the great house. The rest of the blacks who lived at Ripon Hall were probably employed growing tobacco and corn. If the undefined “necessary houses” were in fact slave residences, then visits by Jennings or perhaps one of the servants would have been more intermittent and supervisory in nature. At Ripon and Indian Field quarters, likely only a short walk or ride from the mansion, the only consistent white presence was a single resident overseer, John Hilliard. Responsible for looking after both farms, Hilliard was probably something of a distant figure for the twenty-two slaves who tended their fields, the men who served as foremen or drivers having the most extensive dealings with him. Because he was forced to split his time between the two quarters, at night the slaves at one of them would have been left completely alone. Even on the quarter where Hilliard resided, he lived apart from the blacks in a separate “dwelling house.”⁴³

Though not part of Ripon Hall, Jennings’s holdings in King William might be

⁴² Runaway Slave Advertisement Database. For the employment of slaves as domestics and skilled laborers, see G. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, ch.3. For the frequent contacts between masters and their house slaves, see Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712* (Richmond, VA, 1941).

⁴³ Jennings Inventories, Corbin Papers. For the relationships between overseers and slaves, see Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 326-34.

considered an additional ring where black isolation was nearly total. As with the outlying farms on his home plantation, Jennings expected the overseers he employed at his remote quarters to handle the slaves at two different locations. In January 1713, John Higginson was responsible for the 13 slaves at Beaverdam and Skipton, John Hawkins managed 24 at Silsoon and Morker, and Daniel Richea kept an eye on 25 at Ripon and Thorpe. The seventh quarter, Malbrough, was “under the care” of a slave named Jupiter. No whites were resident there. With their master a considerable distance away and the overseers assigned to watch them stretched thin, Jennings’s blacks in King William, a large number of whom were immigrant Africans, led a semi-autonomous existence virtually free of white influence, particularly the seven who lived at Malbrough Quarter under Jupiter.⁴⁴

To the west of King William in the piedmont, the separation of black and white worlds was more pronounced than in the tidewater. Blacks comprised a substantial portion of the piedmont’s population from the very beginning. In the early stages of county formation anywhere from one quarter to nearly half of slaves lived on plantations run by overseers (some of them black) rather than resident masters. These frontier conditions inevitably changed as settlement progressed and more and more small planters acquired slaves. But as the number of whites migrating westward increased, so did the size of plantations. During the 1730s, more than fifty percent of the blacks in Spotsylvania County resided on farms with more than 11 slaves and one in three lived in groups of larger than 20. Fifty years later, the same predominance of larger units could be found throughout the region.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Jennings Inventories, Corbin Papers.

⁴⁵ Philip D. Morgan and Michael L. Nichols, “Slaves in Piedmont Virginia, 1720-1790,” *WMQ*, 3d.

Considering that many blacks lived their lives spatially—and perhaps psychologically—distanced from whites, why did slave society fail to develop a persistent African orientation during the eighteenth century? Perhaps the most important impediment was the piecemeal fashion in which immigrants were added to plantation labor forces. Despite arriving in large and possibly ethnically homogeneous shipments, the overwhelming majority of blacks were sold in small “lots” of just two or three individuals. Of the 147 unloaded from the *Leopard Galley* in 1710, the average number purchased was just 2.3 and the median was only 1.5. The division of the *Charfield’s* cargo in 1717 was nearly identical, with a mean purchase size of 2.3 and a slightly lower median of 1. The distribution patterns of these individual shipments appear to be representative of the trade as a whole. Customers buying from the Royal African Company between 1703 and 1711 purchased an average of two slaves, while from 1718 to 1721 the bulk of John Baylor’s customers bought just one.⁴⁶

The small size of purchases blunted the impact of ethnically homogeneous shipments by inhibiting new arrivals from reconstituting in ethnolinguistic groups while at the same time allowing existing slave communities to more easily absorb them. Indeed, in many respects the socialization of eighteenth-century immigrants closely resembled that of the charter generations. The experience of those bought by small and middling planters was the most similar, since they invariably had consistent

ser., 46 (1989): 238-47; Philip D. Morgan, “Slave Life in Piedmont Virginia,” in Carr, Morgan, Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, 464-65.

⁴⁶ “Account of Sales of ye *Leopard Galley*,” Tayloe Family Papers, UVA; “*Charfield Sales*,” Tayloe Papers, VHS; Killinger, “The Royal African Company Slave Trade to Virginia,” 138-46; Baylor Family Papers, Acc. no. 2257, Ser. 6: Baylor Ledgers [1718-1721] (2 vols.), Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. The median size of Royal African Company purchases was 2.30. In the Baylor account books the average was 1.23 and the median was one.

and intense contact with whites. Planters with fewer than six laborers owned on average only two adult slaves—usually a man and a woman—and approximately one in five also had a servant, ensuring that blacks and whites working side-by-side in the fields and retiring to shared living quarters remained a common sight throughout Virginia. The situation on slightly larger plantations only varied in degree. Servants were rarer and slaves might be housed separately from their owner's family. But men with 6 to 10 laborers typically had just 4 or 5 adult blacks of working age, so a significant amount of interaction between master and slave undoubtedly still occurred on a daily basis.⁴⁷

For the some 60 percent of blacks who ended up on the estates of wealthier men, circumstances were obviously quite different. But even on sprawling plantations and remote quarters where contact with whites was most limited, the assimilation process occurred much as it had in the previous century. The only difference was that native-born slaves had replaced servants as the primary agents of socialization. Robert Carter made a point of mixing “new Negroes” with creoles, most likely because he hoped that doing so would shorten the new comers' period of adjustment to their new life. “I now send you with Jack Ashley ten or eleven people all old hands which you must disperse in my gangs,” he wrote one of his overseers in 1728. “I cannot direct you how it will be best to disperse of them. A couple of them are boys above twelve years old.” The diligence with which Carter's stewards carried out this policy is evident in his 1733 inventory. Creoles could be found at every one of his forty-nine quarters, and in some cases even comprised a majority of residents.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ St. Mary's City Commission inventory files.

⁴⁸ Robert Carter to Robert Jones, 13 April 1728, Carter Letter Book 1727-1728, UVA; Carter

The assimilation of Africans into existing slave communities did not occur without friction. Noting the “great many” new immigrants he had recently distributed among his various plantations, Carter reminded his overseers to “take care that the old hands” did not “crow over them.” Nor was it only creoles who occupied positions of authority. Calibar, who judging from his name was an African, headed the list of workers at Jennings’s Skipton Quarter and possibly acted as foreman for the slaves living there. Carter appointed at least three immigrants to lead his gangs: two men named Ebo George, one at Totusky Quarter in Richmond County and the other at Head of the River Quarter in Westmoreland, and another George at Forrest Quarter in Westmoreland who had two wives. But, generally speaking, the relationship between creoles and Africans resembled the tutor/student bond that linked a couple of Surry County slaves who ran away from their plantation in 1774. On the one hand there was Bob, a mulatto ferryman considered to possess an “immoderate stock of assurance” and described as “artful, designing, and exceedingly smooth tongued.” On the other was his accomplice, an “outlandish fellow” named Bristol, whose master firmly believed would “entirely submit to, and confide in, his companion's counsels.”⁴⁹

The runaway advertisements leave no doubt that the slave population underwent a prolonged period of “Africanization” after the onset of massive, direct

Inventory, VHS. Carter’s reference to the two teenage boys as “old hands” suggests his use of the term possibly referred specifically to creoles rather than more generally to native-born slaves and long-resident immigrants. While there is no fool-proof way of ascertaining how many of Carter’s slaves were creoles, the manner in which they were grouped is suggestive. I identified those slaves listed in households comprised of two parents with more than three children and single mothers with similar numbers of offspring as being native born. Households containing less than three children, only adult slaves, or adult slaves with African names were considered immigrants.

⁴⁹ Robert Carter to [?], [fall] 1728, Carter Letter Book 1728-1730, VHS; Jennings Inventories, Corbin Papers; Carter Inventory, VHS; Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter’s Grove*, 86; Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 1: 146-147.

importation. For many decades, the “country marks,” filed teeth, and “harsh jargons” of Africa prompted condescending comments from whites throughout the tidewater and piedmont. However, slowly but surely, through thousands of cultural conversations between slaves like Bob and Bristol, life in the slave quarters reacquired the anglicized veneer of the seventeenth century. By the end of the American Revolution, the language and appearance of Virginia’s blacks was once again far more European in character than anywhere else in the plantation world. Admittedly, the assimilation process was not yet complete. Immigrants who conversed in “bad” or “broken” English could still be found in some areas. But in the “smooth tongued” speech and queued hair of native-born slaves, the lasting influence of the charter generations was increasingly evident.

There was, of course, one other aspect of the plantation “machine” that was firmly rooted in the seventeenth century: racism. Even a casual glance at the statute books reveals a remarkable degree of legislative overlap between the ad hoc program of discrimination adopted in the early years of slavery’s growth and the repressive institution that served as the cornerstone of white hegemony in Virginia’s “golden age.” This continuity did not occur by accident. Of the original nine-man committee whose work on revising the laws ultimately produced the colony’s first slave code in 1705, five had sat in the assemblies of the 1680s and 1690s that had passed some of the most important early statutes concerning race.⁵⁰

Given such authorship, it is hardly surprising that the 1705 code was largely a

⁵⁰ Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 3: 181. The five members were Edward Hill II, Mathew Page, Benjamin Harrison, Miles Cary II and Henry Duke. Hill died in 1700 but the other men were active in government through 1705.

compilation of earlier legislation, incorporating with little or no amendment every measure from the 1662 act establishing that a child's status would be determined according to the condition of the mother to the 1692 law that outlined abbreviated procedures for trying slaves accused of capital crimes. However, it did include three new provisions that further widened the already yawning racial divide. For the "reclaiming" of recalcitrant runaway slaves and "terrifying others from the like practice," owners could henceforth seek the permission of their local court to apply more brutal methods of correction, including dismemberment. White laborers, on the other hand, were granted protections and rights that they previously had not possessed. Under penalty of a forty-shilling fine, masters were no longer permitted to whip their white bondsmen naked without an explicit order from a justice of the peace, and any "christian servant" belonging to a master or mistress who entered an interracial marriage was to be immediately set free.⁵¹

Though a less comprehensive piece of legislation, the 1723 act "for the better government of Negros, Mulattos, and Indians" significantly augmented the penalties exacted on slaves who resisted authority and those who aided them. Groups of five or more slaves who gathered to conspire against their masters or the government became subject to felony charges, whether they had acted on their designs or not. If convicted they were to be sentenced to death without benefit of clergy and their owner reimbursed by the public. The fine prescribed for those who illegally harbored a slave was raised to fifteen shillings or 150 lbs. of tobacco, with those unable to pay receiving twenty lashes on their bare backs. Free blacks also suffered increased

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3: 269-70, 447-62.

discrimination. A provision in the 1723 law deprived them of the right to vote “at the election of burgesses or any other election whatsoever.” In 1732 the assembly took the additional step of prohibiting people of color from giving evidence in court “except upon the trial of a slave for a capital offense,” declaring them to be “of such base and corrupt natures that the credit of their testimony cannot be certainly depended upon.”⁵²

By the early 1730s, then, the legal infrastructure of state-sponsored racism was fully constructed. The assembly made no other major changes to the slave code before the end of the colonial era. But in a period when enforcement of the law largely depended upon the cooperation of ordinary inhabitants, the articulation of ideology through legislation was less crucial in determining the functional effectiveness of an institution, particularly an institution like slavery, than the amount of popular acceptance and support it received. After all, in the seventeenth century, the existence of numerous discriminatory measures on the statute books did little to curb the rising tide of illicit sexual pairing between whites and blacks, just as it did not stop servants and slaves from engaging in cooperative resistance against their masters or throwing in their lot with one another during Bacon’s Rebellion.

Yet the social conditions that had fostered cohesion among the “giddy multitude” did not survive the advent of direct importation. One critical change was the rapidly dwindling number of bound white laborers, who by the early eighteenth century comprised just 6 percent of all plantation workers listed in inventories. Moreover, a significant portion of servants lived on the estates of wealthier planters

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4: 126-34, 327.

Table 7.2
Percentages of Planters Owning Slaves in
Virginia Inventories, 1651-1730

Size of Inventoried Labor Force	Percentage Owning (No. of Cases)		
	1651-1680 (N = 138)	1681-1700 (N = 94)	1701-1730 (N = 230)
1 Laborer	3% (39)	41% (29)	86% (49)
2-4 Laborers	29% (49)	59% (41)	92% (79)
5-9 Laborers	61% (36)	100% (14)	100% (62)
10-19 Laborers	100% (10)	100% (4)	100% (28)
20+ Laborers	100% (4)	100% (6)	100% (12)

Source: St. Mary's City Commission inventory files.

where they were often used in skilled positions rather than in the fields. Of the eight white bondsmen listed in Ralph Wormeley's 1701 inventory, one was a shoemaker, another was a tailor, and a third served as a miller. The use of whites in specialized occupations only increased as the century progressed. In 1733, 13 of Robert Carter's 17 servants performed some kind of trade. Three were carpenters, 3 were tailors, 2 were bricklayers, and 5 others provided the specialized services of glazier, gardener, blacksmith, sailor, and cook.⁵³

An equally important development was the growth of slaveholding among small planters (see **Table 7.2**). Throughout much of the seventeenth century, colonial authorities had constantly struggled to convince ordinary Virginians that controlling

⁵³ St. Mary's City Commission inventory files; Middlesex County, Will Book A (1698-1713), 113-32; Carter Inventory, VHS. Most early eighteenth-century elite inventories do not include information on the occupation of servants. However, their small numbers, concentration at the home plantation, and lack of slaves listed as performing a trade, suggests that most worked as artisans or in a supervisory position rather than as field hands. For an overview of this transition, see David W. Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (New York, 1981), 151-68. Historian Timothy Breen pointed to demographic changes in the makeup of the bound labor force as contributing to the demise of the "giddy multitude." But I disagree with his contention that the African origins of incoming slaves was a major reason for the declining cooperation between blacks and poor whites. See "A Changing Labor Force," 16-18.

the colony's slave population was a burden that all whites should share. As late as 1682, the assembly openly complained that its efforts to thwart "Negro plots" had "not had its intended effect for want of due notice thereof being taken," and was reduced to levying fines to compel greater vigilance. By the early 1700s, however, the wider availability of blacks made possible by burgeoning direct deliveries and natural increase made investing in slavery a viable option even for those who could afford only one worker. Consequently, if a growing number of Virginians could share the patriarchal dreams of a great planter like William Byrd II, they also became party to his nightmare that there might emerge a slave "of desperate fortune," who inciting his fellow bondsmen to rebellion "might be dreadfully mischeivous before any opposition could be formed against him, and tinge our rivers as wide as they are with blood."⁵⁴

In the transformed social environment where servants were scarce and most planters with laborers owned blacks, the very mention of a servile revolt assumed an ominous prospect. No white was ever killed in a slave uprising during the colonial period. But a series of conspiracies uncovered in the 1710s and 1720s was sufficient to kindle in the hearts and minds of an overwhelming majority of Virginians the same feelings of anxiety and distrust that had long motivated the repressive actions of the gentry. Fear was certainly one reason for this change. No doubt many a planter was unsettled upon hearing of slaves "congregating, communicating, contriving, and conspiring to kill, murder & destroy very many " whites. But participation in

⁵⁴ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2: 492-93; St. Mary's City Commission inventory files; William Byrd to John Perceval, Earl of Egmont, 12 July 1736, in Tinning, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, 487-89. For the classic analysis of relations between the gentry and ordinary Virginians during the second half of the seventeenth century, see Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, chs. 10-14.

government-directed efforts to prevent “such pernicious designs” probably also played a role.⁵⁵

In 1727, the assembly authorized local leaders to raise the militia in times of crisis and have them “patrol in such places as shall be directed...for dispersing all unusual concourse of Negroes and other slaves.” When three years later authorities learned of “many meetings and consultations of the Negroes in several parts of the country,” the call to arms came from Governor Sir William Gooch himself, who to stifle a colony-wide uprising instructed the militia to “patrol twice or thrice in a week to prevent all night meetings” of slaves. For the remainder of the eighteenth century and as long as slavery remained a legal institution, ordinary white Virginians would find themselves answering the same call time and time again. Once committed to the private tyranny of slaveholding, they had little choice but to support the public tyranny of racism.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ General Court, 26 April 1723, Mss3 V8 b, 142-144, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA; “Proclamation [against] the illegal, unusual, and unwarranted Concourses, Meetings, and Assembling together of Negro, Mulatto, & Indian Slaves,” 29 March 1709, C.O. 5/1316, ff. 166-69, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 40. For a detailed analysis of the various slave conspiracies of the early eighteenth century, see Anthony S. Parent, “‘Either a Fool or a Fury’: The Emergence of Paternalism in Colonial Virginia Slave Society” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1982), ch. 5.

⁵⁶ Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 4: 197-204; “A Proclamation for preventing the unlawful Meetings and Combinations of Negroes and other Slaves,” 28 October 1730, C.O. 5/1322, ff. 212-13, VCRP microfilm, reel no. 42; Lt. Governor William Gooch to the Board of Trade, 14 September 1730 and 10 July 1731, Gooch Correspondence, typescript, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA.

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 Record Book, 1710-1713.
 Record Book, 1718-1726.
 Record Book, 1726-1729.

Princess Anne (formed 1691)Orders

Order Book No. 1, 1691-1709.
 Minute Book No. 2, [Orders] 1709-1717.
 Minute Book No. 3, [Orders] 1717-1728.
 Minute Book No. 4, [Orders] 1728-1737.

Deeds

Deed Book No. 1, 1691-1708.
 Deed Book No. 2, 1708-1714.
 Deeds and Wills No. 3, 1714-1724.
 Deeds and Wills No. 4, 1724-1735, Pt. 1.

[Old] Rappahannock (formed 1656; divided into Essex and Richmond 1692)Orders

Orders [no. 1] 1683-1686.
 Orders, 1686-1692.

Deeds

Records, 1656-1664.
 Deeds and Etc., No. 3, 1663-[166]8.
 Records, 1668-1672 [Deeds, Wills, Invs., Etc., No. 4].
 Records, 1671-1676 [Deeds, Wills, Invs., Etc., No. 5].
 Records, 1677-1687 [Deeds, Wills, Invs., Etc., No. 6].
 Deeds, Etc., No. 7, 1682-[16]88.
 Deed Book No. 8, [1688-1692].

Wills, Ect.

Wills, Deeds, Etc., No. 1, 1665-1677.
 Wills, No. 2, 1677-1682.

Richmond (formed 1692)Orders

Order Book 1, 1692-1694.
 Order Book No. 2, 1694-1699.
 Order Book 3, 1699-1704.
 Order Book 4, 1704-1708.
 Order Book 5, 1708-1711.
 Order Book 6, 1711-1716.
 Order Book 7, 1716-1717.
 Order Book 8, 1718-1721.
 Order Book 9, 1721-1732.

Deeds

Deed Book No. 1, 1692-1693.
 Deed Book No. 2, 1693-1697.
 Deed Book No. 3, 1697-1704.
 Deed Book No. 4, 1705-1708.
 Deed Book No. 5, 1708-1711.
 Deed Book No. 6, 1711-1714.
 Deed Book No. 7, 1714-1720.
 Deed Book No. 8, 1720-1733.

Wills and Inventories

Wills and Inventories, 1699-1709.
 Wills and Inventories, 1709-1717.
 Will Book No. 4, 1717-1725.
 Will Book No. 5, 1725-1753.

Stafford (formed 1664)Orders

Court Records [Orders] 1664-1668.
 Court Records [Deeds, Invs., Etc.], 1680.
 Record Book, 1686-1693/4.
 Court Records [Orders] 1689-1693.

Deeds

Deed Book, 1722-1728.

Wills

Will Book, Liber Z, 1699-1709.
 Will Book [Liber M] 1729-1748.

Surry (formed 1652)Orders

Orders, 1671-1691.
 Orders, 1691-1713.
 Orders, 1713-1718.

Deeds

Deeds, Wills, Etc, 1, 1652-1672.
 Deeds, Wills, Etc. 2, 1671-1684.
 Deeds, Wills, Etc. 3, 1684-1687.
 Deeds, Wills, Etc. 4, 1687-1694.
 Deeds, Wills, Etc. 5, 1694-1709.
 Deeds, Wills, Etc. 6, 1709-1715.
 Deeds, Wills, Etc., 1715-1730.

Warwick (formed 1634)Orders

Order Book, 1713 - 1714.

Boxed Miscellaneous Court Records

Westmoreland (Formed 1653)Orders

Orders, 1662-1664.

Orders, 1675-1689.

Order Book, 1690-1698.

Order Book, 1698-1705.

Orders, 1705-1721.

Orders, 1721-1731.

Deeds

Deeds, Wills, Patents, 1653-1659.

Deeds, Wills, Etc., 1661-1662.

Deeds, Patents, Etc., 1665-1677.

Deeds and Wills No. 1, 1653-1671.

Deeds and Wills No. 2, 1691-1699.

Deeds and Wills No. 3, 1701-1707.

Deeds and Wills No. 4, 1707-1709.

Deeds and Wills No. 5, 1712-1716.

Deeds and Wills No. 6, 1716-1720.

Deeds and Wills No. 7, 1720-1722.

Deeds and Wills No. 8, 1723-1738, Pt. 1.

Inventories

Records, Inventories, No. 1, 1723-1746.

York (formed 1634)*Orders

Orders, Wills, Etc. 14, 1709-1716.

Deeds

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 1, 1633-1694.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 2, 1645-1649.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 3, 1657-1662.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 4, 1665-1672.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 5, 1672-1694.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 6, 1677-1684.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 7, 1684-1687.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 8, 1687-1691.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 9, 1691-1694.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 10, 1694-1697.

Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 11, 1698-1702.
 Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 12, 1702-1706.
 Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 13, 1706-1710.
 Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 15, 1716-1720.
 Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 16, 1720-1729.
 Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. 17, 1729-1732.
 Deeds and Bonds 1, 1694-1701.
 Deeds and Bonds 2, 1701-1713.
 Deeds and Bonds 3, 1713-1729.
 Deeds 4, 1729-1740.

* My research in the records of York County was largely completed using the transcriptions of extant court books compiled by the Colonial Williamsburg Department of Historical Research.

Virginia Colonial Records Project, Library of Virginia

C.O. 1/31, Letters and Papers Concerning American Plantations and West Africa, January 1673/74-21 November 1674.
 C.O. 1/34, Papers and Documents Concerning American Plantations, 28 March 1675-June 1676.
 C.O. 1/48, Letters and Papers Concerning American Plantations, 17 January 1681/82-16 June 1682.
 C.O. 1/49, Letters and Papers Concerning American Plantations, 29 July 1682-6 October 1682.
 C.O. 1/51, Letters and Papers Concerning American Plantations, 18 January 1682/83 - 29 May 1683
 C.O. 5/1308, Miscellaneous Correspondence from Lieutenant Governor Francis Nicholson and Governor (Sir Edmund Andros) to Committee for Trade and Plantations: Copy of Journal of House of Burgesses and Proceedings of Council: Petitions: Correspondence of Committee for Trade and Plantations with Treasury, Customs, and Ordinance, 1691-1695.
 C.O. 5/1316, Correspondence from the President of the Council (Edmund Jennings) and later from the Lieutenant-Governor (Alexander Spotswood) of Virginia to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations with enclosures (Acts of the Assembly, Proclamations, Revenue Returns); also correspondence from the Privy Council, Treasury, Customs and Admiralty, 1708-1714.
 C.O. 5/1322, Correspondence from the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia (Major William Gooch) to the Commissioners for Trade & Plantations with enclosures relating to revenue returns, proclamations etc: copies of Orders in Council, Petitions and Memorials relating to Virginia, 1729-1732.
 C.O. 5/1441, Naval Officer Shipping Returns, Virginia, 1699-1706.
 C.O. 33/13-14, Naval Officer Shipping Returns, Barbados, 1679-1709.
 P.C. 2/64, Privy Council Register, 1673-1675.

- T.70/1, Africa Company. Abstracts of Letters Received. Africa and the West Indies. 1678/79.
- T. 70/57, African Companies. Letter Books. Letters Sent. Plantations. April 1687-1701.
- T. 70/61, African Companies. Letter Books. Letters Sent. Instructions to Captains. 1685-1700 (1685-1693).
- T.70/276, African Companies. Accounts. Bills of Exchange Received by the Company. 1691-1693.

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- RB3/1 1640-1645.
- RB3/2 1640-1642, 1647, 1654, 1659, 1663, 1667-1670, 1690.
- RB3/3 1648-1671, 1701.
- RB3/4 1685, 1688-1690, 1703-1704.
- RB3/5 1656, 1659-1662.
- RB3/6 1668-1670.
- RB3/7 1654-1656, 1667-1668, 1674-1675.
- RB3/8 1670-1673.
- RB3/9 1675-1679.
- RB3/10 1670-1671, 1674, 1678-1681, 1683.
- RB3/11 1679-1680, 1682.
- RB3/12 1673-1674, 1682-1684.
- RB3/13 1682-1684.
- RB3/14 1681, 1686.
- RB3/15 1684, 1688-1690.
- RB3/16 1686-1688, 1691-1692.
- RB3/17 1688-1689, 1691-1694.
- RB3/18 1684-1685, 1692-1693.
- RB3/19 1693-1695.
- RB3/20 1693-1696, 1700.
- RB3/21 1695-1697.
- RB3/22 1697-1699, 1701, 1703.
- RB3/23 1700-1705, 1710-1711.
- RB3/25 1671-1672, 1687, 1710-1711, 1713.

Other Manuscript Sources

Alderman Library, University of Virginia

- Baylor Family Papers.
- Tayloe Family Papers.
- Robert Carter Papers.

New York Historical Society

Miscellaneous Manuscripts—Virginia (miscellaneous microfilm reel no. 43).

Rockefeller Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Emmett Collection, New York Public Library (microfilm).

Francis Porteus Corbin Papers, Duke University, Durham, NC (microfilm).

William Gooch Correspondence, (typescript).

Henry Coventry Papers at Longleat, estate of the Marquis of Bath (microfilm).

University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Amsterdam Notarial Archive Records (transcript).

Rotterdam Notarial Archive Records (transcript).

Virginia Historical Society

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Vita

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John C. Coombs was born in Bellevue, Washington on July 16, 1966. Moving to Arizona following his father's retirement from the U.S. Army, he attended Tempe's Corona del Sol High School, graduating in 1985. After spending two years at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, John completed his undergraduate education at Arizona State University and received his B.A. in 1989 with a degree in Political Science.

In August 1993, John entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate student in the Department of History, pursuing his coursework and dissertation research under the direction of Professor James Axtell. He also completed the Archives and Manuscripts and Historical Archaeology apprenticeship programs during his tenure at the college. He worked extensively on the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's excavation of Rich Neck plantation and participated in the excavation of James Fort conducted by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. During the academic year 1994-1995, he was the department's Jamestown/Yorktown Foundation Fellow. He defended his dissertation in 2003. He and his wife Kelly currently live in Miami, where John is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Florida International University.