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“A SENSE OF THEIR OWN POWER”

Self-Determination in Recent Writings on Black Virginians

by PHILIP J. SCHWARZ*

BLACK Virginians have attained historical visibility in reverse proportion to their presence in the colony and state. A mere “20. and odd” Africans captured the attention of John Rolfe and Virginia officials in 1619 as well as that of millions of Americans in later years.¹ As the slave population expanded, however, white Virginians denied a history to their human chattel whose unknown past was socially useless to a society based on racial slavery. Planters and officials rarely showed awareness of the historical development these African-Americans experienced. It was the immediate economic and social usefulness of the blacks with which whites were most concerned.² After Appomattox, white leaders attempted to “explain the Negro’s past” in order to control their changed status.³ Perhaps wearying of being explained, some twentieth-century black Virginians attempted to explain themselves by becoming historians of their ancestors.⁴ Historical visibility to the educated public, however, remained elusive until numerous scholars, both black and white, began to search intensively for Virginia’s black history. By that time—the 1960s

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¹ John Rolfe’s own words were “20. and odd”; John Smith popularized the flat figure of twenty (John Rolfe to Sir Edwin Sandys, Jan. 1619/20, Nicholas Ferrar Papers, Magdalene College, Cambridge [Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilm, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond]; Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580–1631)* [3 vols.; Chapel Hill and London, 1986], II, 267; Wesley Frank Craven, “Twenty Negroes to Jamestown in 1619?” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XLVII [1971], 416–20; Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* [rev. ed.; Baltimore, 1984]).

² Felix Okoye, *The American Image of Africa: Myth and Reality* (Buffalo, 1971), pp. 23–70; Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action* (London, 1965), pp. 9–15; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), pp. 3–6, 30–33, 305–8.

³ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York, 1971); August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915–1980* (Urbana, 1986), pp. 2–5; John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865–1918* (Westport, Conn., 1985).

⁴ Meier and Rudwick, *Black History*, pp. 1–159.

and 1970s—blacks made up less than one-fifth of the Old Dominion's population for the first time in two and one-half centuries.⁵

The greatest growth in the historiography of black Virginians occurred in the 1960s. The debate over the relationship between racism and the obscure beginnings of slavery in the British New World spawned several articles and chapters in books.⁶ By 1968 Winthrop Jordan concluded in his prodigiously researched *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* that it was to a great extent in Virginia that various white American attitudes toward “the Negro” began to evolve.⁷ Jordan's influential judgment thus set the stage for the future course of the historiography of blacks in the Old Dominion. Historians would have to chart and explain the development of African-Americans' behavior and institutions, taking diversity, individuality, change, and exceptions into account.

The writing of the history of African-Americans in the colony and state of Virginia has itself been developmental. Conscious of current events as well as new trends in scholarship, historians since 1968 have generated more questions than they have answered. Their subject is immense; the evidentiary base is sometimes small; the complexities inherent in the topics are challenging, if not baffling. This essay will attempt to analyze

⁵ One forecaster has concluded that the Old Dominion's black population will once again exceed 20 percent by 1995 (Woods & Poole Economics, 1987 *Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia State Profile* [Washington, D.C., 1987], p. 106). On recent black history, see Meier and Rudwick, *Black History*, pp. 161–308.

⁶ Alden Vaughan's essay in this issue, “The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” summarizes the literature. Joseph Boskin, *Into Slavery: Racial Decisions in the Virginia Colony* (Philadelphia, 1976); Robert S. Cope, *Carry Me Back: Slavery and Servitude in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Pikeville, Ky., 1973); Craven, “Twenty Negroes to Jamestown in 1619?” pp. 416–20; Wesley Frank Craven, *White, Red, and Black: The Seventeenth-Century Virginian* (Charlottesville, 1971), pp. 73–103; George M. Fredrickson, “Toward a Social Interpretation of the Development of American Racism,” in *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience* (2 vols.; New York, 1971), I, 240–54; Winthrop D. Jordan, “Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery,” *Journal of Southern History*, XXVIII (1962), 18–30; Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 44–98; Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (2d ed.; Urbana, 1973), pp. ix–xvi; Robert McColley, “Slavery in Virginia, 1619–1660: A Reexamination,” in Robert H. Abzug and Stephen E. Maizlish, eds., *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp* (Lexington, Ky., 1986), pp. 11–24; Donald L. Noel, “A Theory of the Origin of Ethnic Stratification,” *Social Problems*, XVI (1968), 157–72; Paul C. Palmer, “Servant into Slave: The Evolution of the Legal Status of the Negro Laborer in Colonial Virginia,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXV (1966), 355–70; Thad W. Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (3d printing; Williamsburg, 1985), pp. 1–12; Alden T. Vaughan, “Blacks in Virginia: A Note on the First Decade,” *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter cited as WMQ), 3d ser., XXIX (1972), 469–78.

⁷ Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 71–82, 91–98. James C. Ballagh also emphasized the developmental aspects of the institution of slavery in his *History of Slavery in Virginia* (Baltimore, 1902). See Philip J. Schwarz, “James C. Ballagh and the Law of Slavery,” paper presented to the Southern Historical Association convention, Norfolk, Va., 12 Nov. 1988.

the efforts of historians who have published major studies since the late 1960s concerning the long history of blacks in Virginia.⁸

Is it possible to discover in these works a theme sufficiently comprehensive and sound to encompass the entire past of black Virginians? The available literature has rarely attempted to cover so extensive a topic as blacks in the Old Dominion from 1619 to the present.⁹ One obvious theme might be black responses to white racism, but that topic is so broad as to be of limited analytical value.¹⁰ It is apparent that the vagaries, self-contradictions, and fallacies of racism shaped emotions, ideas, ideologies, and behavior, and the historian must be constantly aware of white racism as a factor in black history.

I contend, however, that a more meaningful analytical tool is the concept of self-determination, especially in relationship to power. The circumstances of power and the quest for autonomy show more about trends and changes in the history of black Virginians than do racism and the responses to it. Indeed, much of the strength and excitement of recent scholarship on black Americans in the colonies and states derives from the attempts of historians to discover the active role of African-Americans in our national heritage. Studies of family life, resistance, folklore, culture, religion, and related topics have commonly ascribed to blacks a much more dynamic presence in our early history than previous historians were willing to acknowledge, and therefore to discover.¹¹ When analyzed to evaluate their worth as interpretations of the self-determination and power of black Virginians between 1619 and the

⁸ Space permits inclusion only of full-length published works that concentrate on the history of black Virginians. Anthologies of primary sources, theses and doctoral dissertations, and articles have been noted where possible, but this essay is historiographical rather than bibliographical. See John David Smith, *Black Slavery in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Bibliography* (Westport, Conn., 1982), as well as the annual lists in *Slavery and Abolition* for more complete bibliographies.

⁹ James C. Ballagh published a *History of Slavery in Virginia* in 1902; writers in the Works Projects Administration compiled *The Negro in Virginia* (New York, 1940); and a traveling exhibit of photographs concerning black life in the Old Dominion gave rise to Philip D. Morgan, ed., *"Don't Grieve After Me": The Black Experience in Virginia, 1619-1986* (Hampton, Va., 1986). Ballagh's monograph was actually a legal, institutional history and obviously stopped at 1865. *The Negro in Virginia* had the merit of largely black authorship, but it never attempted to find common themes. *"Don't Grieve After Me"* maintains it is an "overview" rather than a comprehensive history; it is a collection of three distinct essays tied together with a brief introduction.

¹⁰ See Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York and London, 1982), pp. 143-77.

¹¹ Three of the best, and in the case of Dew and Wood, the most comprehensive surveys of these studies are David B. Davis, "Slavery and the Post-World War II Historians," *Daedalus* (Spring 1974), 1-16; Charles B. Dew, "The Slavery Experience," in John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge and London, 1987), pp. 120-61; Peter H. Wood, "'I Did the Best I Could for My Day': The Study of Early Black History During the Second Reconstruction, 1960-1976," *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXV (1978), 185-225.

present, works written simultaneously with or later than *White Over Black* present a pattern and suggest future trends in the historiography of Virginians of African descent.

The process by which black status and power in Virginia have been determined is at the heart of the history of Afro-Virginians. Scholars have concentrated on questions of assimilation, labor, economics, political power, and the law in order to trace that process. For the purposes of my discussion, I wish to distinguish four phases of the process—1619 to 1800, 1800 to 1902, 1902 to 1965, and 1965 to the present.¹²

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries make up the first period. Between 1619 and 1700, blacks were a distinct minority, slavery was not well established, and such free blacks as Anthony Johnson, of Northampton County, could temporarily protect themselves and their property. From the 1690s through 1800, Virginia's black community went through dramatic change. Transformed from a minority to a majority of the population in many counties, former Africans became African-Americans, native-born Afro-Virginians began to predominate, and after the 1770s, virtually no new Africans appeared.

Black Virginians experienced pronounced diversification and change between 1800 and 1902, the second period. Still about 90 percent enslaved and present in greater numbers than blacks in any other state, those Virginians of African descent who lived between 1800 and emancipation became hirees, industrial slaves, skilled workers, and Christians in significantly greater numbers than their eighteenth-century ancestors. The general emancipation of 1865 provoked radical, but not always beneficial, changes in the lives of both black and white Virginians. Between 1865 and 1902, those African-Americans born free and those made free were enfranchised, enjoyed real economic, social, and political gains, and saw reason for hope—only to lose the vote (gradually before 1902 and quickly thereafter), to experience sharp economic, social, and political reversals, and to be hard put to find reasons for hope.

Many blacks became former Virginians, while those who stayed struggled to survive between 1902 and 1965, the third phase. The relative lack of institutionalized political power characterizes this period. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the civil rights movement mark the

¹² This periodization lends itself well to a study of historiography; it would not be completely satisfactory for a general history of black Virginians. For a more negative view of the period between emancipation and the constitution of 1902 than the one presented below, see Howard N. Rabinowitz, "More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*" and C. Vann Woodward, "*Strange Career* Critics: Long May They Persevere," *Journal of American History*, LXXV (1988–89), 842–68.

beginning of the fourth phase, in which black Virginians have become an increasingly potent voting force in local and state elections, as well as in some national ones, and more and more Virginians of African descent have reached socioeconomic, political, and professional heights heretofore unequaled, even during Reconstruction.

I

The popularly understood genesis of black history in Virginia is only a symbolic beginning. Most people think of 1619 as the advent of black history in English Virginia and, by extension, in the United States. We ascribe historical importance to the landing of 1619 out of all proportion to what we know about that incident. By now our image of this event has assumed the dimensions of a myth of origins of the type held by most Americans.¹³ What distinguishes the arrival of black Americans from that of most other Americans, however, is the relatively fixed nature of their status. Other Americans at least believed they had the power to change their original status; African-Americans faced masters who were determined to prevent any change in the position of blacks so that those property owners could assure the continuity or improvement of their own place in society.

The beginning of black Virginians' history is more than the discrete event of 1619 or the complex set of images we hold about that event. What also marks the beginning of that history is the setting into motion of those forces that most profoundly influenced the future of Afro-Virginians. Enslavement was clearly one of those forces. We know enough about the landing in 1619 to say that only very few white Virginians in the new English settlement had anything to do with those “20. and odd” blacks; we also know that Afro-Virginians constituted only

¹³ Lerone Bennett's choice of the title *Before the Mayflower* for his popular history of black Americans is but one indication of the hold the date 1619 has on the popular consciousness. Howard Pyle's painting "Landing of Negroes at Jamestown from a Dutch Man-of-War, 1619" and Sidney King's painting of that incident reflect the same imaginary perception of the beginning of black Virginians' past. Pyle's painting is at the Brown County Library in Green Bay, Wisconsin, while Colonial Williamsburg has possession of King's, which was originally executed for the Jamestown Festival Park. Pyle prepared a drawing from his painting for Woodrow Wilson's "Colonies and Nation" series in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*. The drawing subsequently appeared in Wilson's *History of the American People*. I am indebted to Rex Ellis, of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, for locating the King painting and to Mary F. Holahan, of the Delaware Art Museum, and Mary Jane Herber, of the Brown County Library, for, respectively, suggesting and confirming the location of the Pyle painting. See Woodrow Wilson, "Colonies and Nation: A Short History of the American People," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, CII (Jan. 1901), 173; Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People* (10 vols.; New York, 1917), I, 61; *Howard Pyle's Book of the American Spirit: The Romance of American History* (New York, 1923). For a black-and-white reproduction of King's painting, see Parke Rouse, Jr., *Planters and Pioneers: Life in Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1968), p. 128.

The landing of "20. and odd" Africans at Jamestown in 1619 has assumed mythic dimensions in Virginia history out of all proportion to what is actually known of the event. *Right:* Howard Pyle's "Landing of Negroes at Jamestown from a Dutch Man-of-War, 1619." *Below:* Sidney King's rendering of the same subject.



*Courtesy of the Brown County Library,
Green Bay, Wisc.*



Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

2 percent of the colony's population by 1650, a figure whose significance is obvious when compared to the rapid increase in the presence of blacks on the English sugar island of Barbados between 1630 and 1650.¹⁴

By 1700, however, lifetime, hereditary, coerced black labor was the norm in the agricultural work force in Virginia. Disagreement among historians centers on the process by which black status became so fixed and by which, therefore, white Virginians determined black Virginians', indeed black Americans', fate for centuries.¹⁵ Assimilation was an especially important part of that process because whites controlled so much of it but also lost control of some of it. Assimilation, therefore, is an excellent barometer of black self-determination in the Old Dominion from 1619 to the present.

T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes explored aspects of the question of the assimilation of seventeenth-century Africans in "*Myne Owne Ground*": *Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676*.¹⁶ What is most striking about this study is its depiction of a group of free blacks who managed to achieve some economic and even social success in Virginia in the mid-seventeenth century. Nevertheless, none of these free people achieved anything more than a patron-client relationship with members of the white elite on the Eastern Shore. To have made greater strides, they would have had to be more successful and more independent than both the economic and social conditions of their time and place allowed them to be. They would also have had to intermarry or at least to form political alliances with members of the white gentry. None of this happened. Had the Johnson, Driggus, and Payne families (the subjects of "*Myne Owne Ground*") started to become even more successful, one suspects that threatened whites would have created artificial barriers to the black families' further advance.¹⁷

What assured the eventual degradation of free blacks on the Eastern Shore and elsewhere was the expansion of slavery to the point that Virginia became a slave society, a society based on forced labor. Once that

¹⁴ Craven, *White, Red, and Black*, pp. 77-82; McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia*, pp. ix-xi; McColley, "Slavery in Virginia, 1619-1660," pp. 11-24; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, 1972), pp. 54-56, 74-76, 87-88.

¹⁵ Craven, *White, Red, and Black*, pp. 73-103, concentrates on the importation and increasing presence of Africans in late seventeenth-century Virginia but has little to say about the blacks themselves.

¹⁶ T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes, "*Myne Owne Ground*": *Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York, 1980).

¹⁷ Joseph Douglas Deal III, "Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans on the Eastern Shore During the Seventeenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1981), pp. 192-471, charts the later history of the families Breen and Innes describe.

happened, free blacks became an anomalous presence. As Gerald W. Mullin's *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* revealed, however, a degree of assimilation could still occur within the confines of the peculiar institution—an assimilation about which whites were somewhat ambivalent.¹⁸ As “new Negroes” and “outlandish” slaves learned English and became accustomed to Anglo-Virginian assumptions, they were able to become increasingly valuable to their owners because they could learn skills, perform services, and achieve geographical mobility essential to the kind of labor that plantation owners required and demanded. The development of such skills and the increasing assimilation of black Virginians, especially after the new state prohibited the importation of any more Africans in 1778, however, threatened masters' control of their human property, because those kinds of personal growth raised the expectations of blacks concerning their status and thereby encouraged resistance, both individual and collective. Under slavery, the position of blacks was supposed to be clear; under bondage in Virginia, and with the passage of time, the status of slaves became confused.¹⁹

Virtually omitted from Mullin's study is the fertile relationship between religion and assimilation.²⁰ Mechal Sobel has provided the best analysis to date of this interconnection in *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*²¹ and *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*.²² While frequent use of the words “probably,” “likely,” “perhaps,” and “maybe” in *The World They Made Together* reveals the speculative nature of her fascinating argument, that book promises to alter previous perceptions of cultural change that occurred in one direction only. In addition to arguing that a symbiotic relationship existed between African-American and Euro-American attitudes toward time and space, their styles of building, and their belief in magic, Sobel avers that the well-known encounter between black and white Christians changed both groups, not just the descendants of Africans. Black Virginians assimilated to whites' culture extensively and relatively quickly. The membership of many slaves in the early Baptist and Methodist churches is ample testimony to the depth and pace of that

¹⁸ Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 83–123.

²⁰ Herbert S. Klein, in *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago, 1967), concentrated on the religion of slaveowners rather than that of blacks.

²¹ Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, Conn., 1979). This study does not focus primarily or exclusively on Virginia.

²² Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, 1987).

process. Temporal and demographic factors, however, strongly influenced the nature of that assimilation; these same factors assured that blacks would influence white culture as well.

Although Sobel refrains from casting her argument in a political mold, it has profound political implications. Whites who encountered black expressions of faith were frequently shocked. A dishonored and defiled people were by definition incapable of true religious sensibility. Proof of the existence of such depth of feeling among blacks turned white observers' perceptions and paradigms upside down. Whites were often moved to accept bondpeople as equals, which meant they must oppose slavery as unjust. In a familiar series of struggles, most white Baptists and Methodists in the South eventually found a way out of the dilemma of how to acknowledge the spirituality of African-Americans and still hold them in bondage. (Those whites who could not left their churches or their communities.)²³ The way out might be called the doctrine of sanctification through slavery. Although white Christians would never themselves try to achieve salvation by enduring the privations and accepting the burdens of bondage, they readily accepted that course for their black brothers and sisters. They believed that to do otherwise would risk destruction of the Garden of Eden that they persistently hoped would blossom forth in the New World. Once again assimilation was limited by slavery at the same time that the incorporation of blacks into white Virginia society was on the verge of significantly advancing.²⁴

The labor of black Virginians produced both money and trouble for white owners. Slaves' labor has received a great deal of attention from historians, because from the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries it was the reason why Africans were brought to Virginia, kept there, or taken away, while from Reconstruction on it was black Americans' hope or despair.²⁵

²³ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1978), pp. 128–50; Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 414–26; John B. Boles, *Black Southerners, 1619–1869* (Lexington, Ky., 1984), pp. 153–68; Duncan MacLeod, *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 143–46; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1975), pp. 196–212.

²⁴ In his 1937 doctoral dissertation, James Hugo Johnston surveyed the question of assimilation in Virginia before 1865. Published with an introduction by Winthrop Jordan in 1970, Johnston's *Race Relations and Miscegenation in Virginia and the South* (Amherst, Mass., 1970) is the only study that attempts to deal with the question of assimilation through much of Virginia's early history. Written before the advent of extensive microfilming of local records, this pioneering effort must be used with care.

²⁵ Breen and Innes demonstrate in "*Myne Owne Ground*" that the hope of Anthony Johnson and his fellow free black Virginians was to participate in the colonial economy by having their own land to till. What helped to make that possible in the mid-seventeenth century was the nature of the staple-crop economy.

Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman show in *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750* some of the immediate consequences for white people of the shift to slave labor. “Toward the end of the seventeenth century,” the Rutmans write, “Middlesex (and the Chesapeake as a whole) took ‘the negro road,’” meaning the increasing reliance on slave labor.²⁶ The Rutmans are well aware that once blacks dominated the laboring population, they exerted a marked influence on the white citizens of Middlesex. One effect they had on whites was to make them suspicious, distrustful, and fearful, which led to more harsh and sometimes violent repression of those in bondage than had previously been imposed on white servants. Owners tried to structure their “families” to include, or control, blacks. Should any slaves “misbehave,” the “family” authority could normally discipline them. Only when “a black was discerned as threatening in some way the security of the larger society” would public action be taken. The Afro-Virginians also “structured” the world of Middlesex farmers, making it different from that of their parents and grandparents. With the Africans came a more virulent form of malaria than that known by the Euro-Virginians, which produced a higher death rate among their captors; they required a long-term investment, rather than the short-term one involved with servants; and their presence changed the tactics whites employed to prosper or even to survive.²⁷

In *Flight and Rebellion*, Mullin concentrated exclusively on the eighteenth-century interaction of black and white Virginians. He achieved a breakthrough in the study of Africans and African-Americans in early Virginia by changing the focus of study from slaveholders and the institution of slavery to the point of view and experience of the enslaved people themselves. Their encounter with the New World and with Virginians of European descent was developmental and usually assimilationist, up to the point at which whites resisted the blacks’ further incorporation into white society, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Just as black Virginians had to learn how to live in a mostly white world, white Virginians had to comprehend the increasingly black society in which they lived and worked. Indeed, for Mullin the primary factor in blacks’ assimilation and in their choice of modes of resistance was the kind of tasks to which whites assigned them.

²⁶ Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750* (New York, 1984), p. 164.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 164–88.

In *Tobacco and Slaves*, whose title reinforces the obvious interrelationship between Virginia's "golden leaf" and the use of forced labor, Allan Kulikoff clarifies the socioeconomic processes by which African labor became the dominant force in the Old Dominion's development in the eighteenth century.²⁸ Demographic factors were important: only 15 percent of Virginia's population in 1690, Virginia blacks, who had mostly come from the West Indies, assimilated quickly. By 1740 the heavy influx of Africans, especially of men, made blacks a permanent and dominant part of the labor force.²⁹ Because the proportional number of female slaves expanded during these years, slaves increased their own numbers. As Philip Morgan observes, Virginia imported no more than 87,000 Africans, "less than 1 percent of all the Africans brought to the New World."³⁰ Virginia was probably the first slave society in the Western Hemisphere "to possess a black population growing primarily from self-reproduction, not immigration." This profound demographic factor, explained so well by Kulikoff, guaranteed that the colony and state of Virginia would have an ample supply of labor as long as slavery was politically and legally viable. As Kulikoff shows, it also assured the creation and continuation of the African-American family and slave community, both of which were crucial for blacks' self-determination.³¹

The central theme of black history in early Virginia is the tension between functional black labor and the social assumptions and behavior of black people. As more and more African-Americans achieved a high level of economic productivity and skill, they also became more and more inclined toward autonomy. The problem of interpretation, then, is how to characterize the levels of autonomy attained by different bondspople at various times. Could enslaved blacks in fact achieve any kind of autonomy? In *American Slavery, American Freedom*, a study of seventeenth-century white political and social development in the Old Domin-

²⁸ Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill and London, 1986).

²⁹ Immigration declined after 1740, however, making African origin less influential. Most immigrants went to the Piedmont after 1755. By 1810 blacks were 52 percent of the Piedmont population and half of the Tidewater (*ibid.*, pp. 317-51, 430).

³⁰ Philip D. Morgan, "The Eighteenth Century," in Morgan, ed., "*Don't Grieve After Me*," p. 17; Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton, N.J., 1978); Walter Minchinton, Celia King, and Peter Waite, eds., *Virginia Slave Trade Statistics, 1698-1773* (Richmond, 1984); Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Wisc., 1969); Susan Alice Westbury, "Colonial Virginia and the Atlantic Slave Trade" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1981); Susan Westbury, "Slaves of Virginia: Where They Came From," *WMQ*, 3d ser., XLII (1985), 228-37; Susan Westbury, "Analysing a Regional Slave Trade: The West Indies and Virginia, 1698-1775," *Slavery and Abolition*, VII (1986), 241-56.

³¹ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, pp. 317-80.

ion, Edmund S. Morgan surveys white efforts to subordinate blacks securely in order to free whites permanently—economically, socially, and politically. He perceives a thoroughly suppressed Afro-American population when he concludes that in Virginia “slaves proved, in fact, less dangerous than free or semi-free laborers. They had none of the rising expectations that have so often prompted rebellion in human history. They were not armed and did not have to be armed. They were without hope and did not have to be given hope.”³²

Writers on eighteenth-century Virginia must paint a more complex picture. Kulikoff declares that in spite of white desires, blacks achieved a significant degree of cultural autonomy. The Old Dominion’s hierarchically controlled social order was sufficiently broad to allow Afro-Americans semiautonomous cultural development. Philip Morgan notes the extent to which Afro-Virginians “adopted Anglo-American mores more readily and more completely than slaves in most other New World slave societies.” He argues, however, that their distinctive culture fused African and Anglo-American elements in language, family life, religion, music, dance, and other forms of expression and behavior. Sobel detects mutual cultural influence between Americans of African and of European descent.³³

The difficulty of determining the degree of autonomy achieved by blacks in pre-emancipation Virginia may be apparent in these diverse models of cultural interaction. In fact, it may be futile to attempt to fix or measure a specific degree of autonomy that would hold true for a significant length of time or a sizable number of people. Because human behavior so frequently proceeds from mixed motives, there is limited utility in trying to gauge resistance in the complex slave society of the Old Dominion. Successful acts of resistance were constants only within the overall black community in Virginia, but not necessarily within a particular plantation, county, town, or period. Lacking the ability to measure the motivation of past behavior in any precise way, we must remain content with analysis of what was constantly possible. Autonomy

³² Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), pp. 295–337 (quotation on page 309).

³³ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, pp. 345–51; Morgan, “The Eighteenth Century,” p. 19. Although Alex Haley’s “faction” has sometimes turned out to be fictional where it was supposed to be factual, *Roots* (Garden City, N.Y., 1976), much of which took place in colonial Virginia, did strengthen the public image of black cultural and family development in the late eighteenth century. See Gary B. Mills and Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Roots and the New ‘Faction’: A Legitimate Tool for Clio?” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter cited as *VMHB*), LXXXIX (1981), 3–26, the best critique because it is well supported by primary sources.

or self-determination was possible for bondspeople in Virginia. It was possible because of the resources on which African-Americans could draw—religion, community, family, self, diverse forms of cultural expression, intelligence, and the sheer will to survive. Repression by whites was always possible as well because of their ample resources.

Largely missing from many of these studies is a complete model of the politics of black self-determination under slavery. Only Mullin sees this problem in all of its political dimensions.³⁴ *Flight and Rebellion* concentrates on slave resistance, extensively discussing runaway slaves and culminating in an interpretation of Gabriel's Plot of 1800. Thus Mullin plumbs the significance of individual and collective resistance. Only a small percentage of the Old Dominion's bondspeople appeared in runaway advertisements. Hundreds, perhaps several thousand, became runaways during the Revolution; even more were probably initially involved in Gabriel's Plot of 1800. Only a small portion of these people succeeded, leaving the vast majority of Afro-Virginians to figure out how to achieve some degree of autonomy in a world in which white owners purchased more and more blacks, placed them in particular locations, assigned them certain tasks, limited their participation in institutional Christianity, allowed or encouraged family formation, and sold slaves away from family and kin.

The best indication of how blacks could achieve self-determination at all while under the undeniable power of slaveholders is resistance. Although other historians have shown how effective malingering and various forms of sabotage could be as a means of resistance to owners' work demands, resistance defied ready understanding until such scholars as Mullin transformed the study of slavery in Virginia into analysis of the lives, thinking, and behavior of the people held in slavery.³⁵ Yet the power of slaveowners continues to loom large in any study of slaves' resistance; aggressive bondspeople chose resistance precisely because of

³⁴ The politics of slavery usually refers to political controversies and decisions about slavery. Robert McColley's *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* treats this aspect of slavery with only passing references to any slaves, especially individuals. His design was to trace the "influences of slavery on the life, the thought, and the politics of Jeffersonian Virginians" (p. 1).

³⁵ The influence of Mullin's work is apparent in Thad Tate's bibliographical addition to a 1972 reprinting of *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*, first published in 1965. Tate referred his readers to Mullin's *Flight and Rebellion* "for an account that casts the Negro in a somewhat less passive role than I may have implied" (p. 128). In the 1985 printing, Tate acknowledged "the increasing attention accorded the development of an Afro-American culture distinct from that of the dominant white population" (p. viii). Since publication of Mullin's book, much of the evidence he used concerning runaways has appeared in Lathan A. Windley, ed., *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, Volume I: *Virginia and North Carolina* (Westport, Conn., 1983).

the power held by owners. For example, in their short treatment of slavery in *A Place in Time*, the Rutmans bring out the distinct potential for violent repression in the Chesapeake slave society, and Mullin is keenly aware of the importance of task assignment in relation to resistance.³⁶

Despite repression, resistance was the choice of many blacks in bondage. They chose it spontaneously or designedly, and they chose it in a large variety of forms.³⁷ In doing so, they profoundly influenced the nature of the peculiar institution in Virginia. What Mullin reveals, then, is the *other* paradox of eighteenth-century Virginia history. For Edmund S. Morgan the great paradox is that white leaders depended on slavery to guarantee their own freedom. That reliance would seem to militate against black self-determination. Mullin's great paradox, however, is that white dependence on, and even cultivation of, skilled blacks to guarantee white independence also encouraged many blacks to seek their own autonomy.³⁸

The interpretive problem of resistance looms large in any study of the relationship of bondspeople with the laws and courts of the Old Dominion. Court records concerning blacks convicted of everything from stealing a spoon to organizing an insurrection deal with only a fraction of the black population of the colony and state. Yet such records yield as much rich detail concerning the rebellious behavior of individual slaves as do the runaway advertisements studied by Mullin. My own study of these trial records focused on the meaning of the interaction between enslaved and free people before, during, and after prosecution and punishment. The relative absence of recorded black or white testimony from eighteenth-century cases, however, frustrates extensive use of criminal trials of slaves as direct evidence of blacks' *mentalité*, or ways of ordering their

³⁶ Rutman and Rutman, *Place in Time*, pp. 173–74; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, pp. 25–28, 34–35, 37, 38, 69, 121. On the difficult question of how to make slaves the central focus of history when owners had so much control over them, see Nathan I. Huggins, "Integrating Black History into American History," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future* (Baton Rouge, 1986), pp. 164–65.

³⁷ William Kelso's archaeological investigation of Kingsmill Plantations, near Williamsburg, has established that black workers used literally underground means to protect their possessions. Kelso found "root cellars" in many of the slave dwellings. In them were a variety of gifts or goods that may have been taken from owners (William Kelso, *Kingsmill Plantations, 1619–1800: Archaeology of Country Life in Colonial Virginia* [Orlando, 1984], pp. 104–8, 114, 116–17, 120–27, 201–4).

³⁸ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, pp. 295–387, 420–23, 431; Rutman and Rutman, *Place in Time*, pp. 174–77. See also Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, pp. 381–96. Breen and Innes's "Myme Owme Ground" and Douglas Deal's thorough investigation of the long-term circumstances of blacks on the Eastern Shore of Virginia treat the interaction of blacks and whites with an equal eye for black efforts toward self-determination and independence (Deal, "Race and Class in Colonial Virginia," pp. 192–471).

perceptions of the immediate world, although the trials do make it possible to suggest avenues of investigation.³⁹ Yet to learn how laborers attempted to fix their own status and consequently influenced white perceptions of their "property's" position, historians must look for evidence of black laborers' *mentalité*, however elusive the source materials might be.

Relative inattention to the assumptions and motives of blacks has weakened the legal history of slavery in Virginia. Changing slave behavior was one of the most significant causes of white legislators' fluctuating perceptions of the interrelationship between statutes and society. Diverse authors are acutely conscious of the importance of laws as a mirror of intentions and assumptions.⁴⁰ All such authors are equally aware, however, that, as William W. Wiecek put it, "statutes are not evidence of actual social conditions."⁴¹ These authors attempt to take social conditions into account, but their analysis is inadequately supported by research in court and other primary records. Only when thorough study concerning the influence of slaves themselves on lawmaking in the Old Dominion establishes the context and delimits the constraints of legislative action will we have a satisfactory legal history of the peculiar institution in Virginia.⁴² The focus of that research must be on the interrelationship of the black presence and black behavior with white leaders' responses thereto, not just on whites' thinking. Otherwise we shall continue to see only part of the slave society.⁴³

³⁹ Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia* (Baton Rouge and London, 1988), pp. 6–191. See also James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXV (1978), 3–32, and the comment by James T. Lemon, with Henretta's reply, in *ibid.*, XXXVII (1980), 688–700. Charles L. Perdue, ed., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville, 1976) is a collection of most of the interviews of former Virginia slaves that we have. Overlooked as a source, however, is the testimony of enslaved witnesses in criminal trials of fellow bondspersons.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Ballagh, *History of Slavery in Virginia*; Cope, *Carry Me Back*; A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York, 1978), pp. 19–60; Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 587–88; Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*, pp. 1–12, 91–113; William W. Wiecek, "The Statutory Law of Slavery and Race in the Thirteen Mainland Colonies of British North America," *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXIV (1977), 258–80. See, however, A. Gregg Roeber's correction (with Wiecek's reply) of one aspect of Wiecek's description of Virginia's law of slavery in *ibid.*, XXXV (1978), 600–601.

⁴¹ Wiecek, "Statutory Law of Slavery and Race," p. 279.

⁴² The most successful attempt to consider the influence of slaves is Peter Hoffer's introduction to Peter Charles Hoffer and William B. Scott, eds., *Criminal Proceedings in Colonial Virginia: [Records of] Fines, Examination of Criminals, Trials of Slaves, etc. . . .*, American Historical Association, American Legal Records, X (Athens, Ga., 1984), pp. xlii–lii. See also Peter C. Hoffer, "Disorder and Deference: The Paradoxes of Criminal Justice in the Colonial Tidewater," in David J. Bodenhamer and James W. Ely, Jr., eds., *Ambivalent Legacy: A Legal History of the South* (Jackson, Miss., 1984), pp. 187–201.

⁴³ Schwarz, "Ballagh and the Law of Slavery."

II

The death of Gabriel and the birth of Nat Turner in 1800 make that year an important point of transition. Born in 1775 or 1776, Gabriel was the first of the well-known black revolutionaries in the new republic. Nat Turner, on the other hand, led his uprising as abolitionism entered into its zenith of activity. Gabriel was a skilled and literate man who lived near an important capital city; although literate and a leader among fellow Afro-Americans, Turner was probably less skilled than Gabriel, and his Southampton County was decidedly rural. Both men reflected the increasing diversity and complexity of the state and nation in which they lived, and both mirrored the controversy that would rage over the presence of blacks in Virginia. It was that presence, so undeniable but so problematic to whites, that became an important determinant of black status and power between 1800 and 1902.⁴⁴

Nineteenth-century whites ordinarily came to terms with the presence of black Virginians by continuing to ensure their subordination. Todd A. Savitt's *Medicine and Slavery* reminds us that black Virginians found a variety of ways to contest that subordination.⁴⁵ Owners who wished to protect their capital, to prevent epidemics that could attack them or their loved ones, and sometimes to alleviate the suffering of human beings provided medical care to slaves at a level commensurate with their knowledge, will, and means. One crucial aspect of this medical care was the intention of owners to maintain control over it. This regulation could be done by providing preferential treatment and facilities. Even medical education and experimentation reflected the subordinate status of black Virginians, who "served most of the needs of Virginia's medical community for autopsy and dissection cadavers." Whites did not always succeed in medically subordinating blacks, however. African-Americans either secretly or openly provided their own remedies. "The result," Savitt concludes, "was a dual system of health care, the two parts of which constantly conflicted with each other."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Richard S. Dunn's "Black Society in the Chesapeake, 1776-1810" and Allan Kulikoff's "Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790-1820," both in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, 1983), pp. 49-82, 143-71, are excellent overviews of demographic and economic conditions that strongly affected the lives of black Virginians after the American Revolution.

⁴⁵ Todd A. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana, 1978).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-84, 171, 290. See also Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, chap. IV.

After 1800 two groups of African-Americans were most threatening to the subordination desired by whites. One was free blacks, and the other insurrectionaries. In *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784–1860*, Suzanne Lebsock explains why free people of color unnerved white authorities.⁴⁷ The case of Petersburg is particularly instructive in this regard: the more than 1,000 free blacks of that town made up 31.2 percent of free residents by 1810. This was the largest percentage of free people of color in any jurisdiction in the state; it was also a sharp change from just twenty years before. Predictably, Petersburg’s common council successfully petitioned the state legislature to cut off the growth of this anomalous population. In 1806 Virginia law declared that anyone emancipated must leave the state within a year. Although qualified in 1815, this law eliminated manumissions of Petersburg slaves for five years after its passage and sharply reduced private emancipation through 1860.⁴⁸

It seems puzzling that whites feared a group of apparently powerless people. A significant sector of Petersburg’s free blacks seemed to be particularly weak. They were women, of whom there were one hundred for every seventy free black men. The most obvious economic consequence of this imbalance was that free black women frequently had to support themselves, and they had to do so in the face of very limited opportunity for women regardless of race. “Free black women assumed enormous burdens with pitifully slim resources,” according to Lebsock. They were the poorest people in Petersburg. Very few benefited from organized private charity or public welfare. These limited economic means created grave disadvantages for free black children as well, because over half of them lived in households headed by women. The future of free blacks could hardly be hopeful. Even those black men and women who held property—the “stake in society” on which the ubiquitous nineteenth-century advocates of property rights placed so high a premium—were relatively impotent. Although 207 black Petersburg residents owned property in 1860, whereas only 23 had in 1810, their ability to protect that property had simultaneously decreased. In other words, they may have made some gain in status because of their

⁴⁷ Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784–1860* (New York, 1984).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–92.

ownership of property, but their loss of power to protect that land cancelled much of their gain.⁴⁹

Although whites made sure free black Virginians remained "half slave, half free" or "slaves without masters," those free people could still menace whites. An argument the Petersburg common council made in favor of limiting the presence of free blacks shows why: they might start or join a black revolt. It had recently happened among the free blacks of Saint-Domingue (Haiti), so it could happen in Petersburg.⁵⁰ Indeed, authorities in Richmond had already uncovered a plot of large, although undetermined, proportions. In 1800 Gabriel and his allies had planned to take over the capital city and move into the countryside. Over two dozen executions of slaves tried for participation in this plot did not cool white fears or subdue black courage. Sporadic scares and incidents of incendiary speeches, plotting, and sometimes action occurred in 1801 and 1802, indicating that Gabriel's fate had emboldened rather than intimidated some slaves.⁵¹

The attack feared by some whites did occur in 1831. Nat Turner's famous revolt resembles the 1619 landing of "20. and odd" blacks because of its symbolic importance in the history of black Americans. We know less about it than we should, but we know more than we used to. The controversy over novelist William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner* produced heated polemical writings,⁵² yet it also inspired Henry Irving Tragle to issue *The Southampton Slave Revolt*, an anthology of primary source materials,⁵³ and influenced Stephen B. Oates's decision to write *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion*, the best available history of the event.⁵⁴

Oates tells the story of Nat Turner well, sketching in the milieu of the early nineteenth-century United States and vividly describing the people and conditions in Southampton County. Oates does not comprehensively analyze the tensions in Southampton society, however. He recognizes the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100, 103–8. Ira Berlin's *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974) makes frequent use of materials concerning free black Virginians.

⁵⁰ Lebscock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, p. 91.

⁵¹ Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, remains the best analysis of this episode. See also Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. 255–79. Douglas R. Egerton, of LeMoyne College, and James Sidbury, of the Johns Hopkins University, are currently preparing studies of Gabriel's Plot.

⁵² William Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (New York, 1967); John Henrik Clarke, ed., *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond* (Boston, 1968).

⁵³ Henry Irving Tragle, comp., *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst, Mass., 1971).

⁵⁴ Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion* (New York, Evanston, and San Francisco, 1975).

presence of an unusually large number of free blacks there⁵⁵ and frequently acknowledges the role of religion in the revolt but attempts only a brief explanation of the special role free blacks and Christianity played in the momentous events of 1831. Mechal Sobel's anthropological approach to the subject in *Trabelin' On* is somewhat more complete than Oates's explanation.⁵⁶ While one may doubt that we shall ever know all we should in order to understand the revolt, we still need a social history of all sectors of the county. Thomas Parramore's section on the revolt in *Southampton County* is only a beginning because, even though his book deals with Southampton over a considerably longer time, his discussion of county society is not significantly more revealing than that found in *Fires of Jubilee*.⁵⁷

Oates does establish, however, that the revolt changed the consciousness of black Virginians at the same time that it scared white Virginians into tightening up the slave code and slave surveillance. After 1831, according to Oates, “Virginia's blacks were more shackled to the rack of slavery than they had ever been.”⁵⁸ Indeed, the number of capital convictions of slaves for conspiracy or insurrection plummeted after 1831. The records of criminal trials show that until the Civil War, slaves relied on other forms of resistance, especially arson. The suspicious fires that erupted near Harpers Ferry while John Brown awaited trial for treason and conspiracy to raise a slave rebellion were only the tip of an iceberg whose dimensions may never be measured but whose existence is now difficult to doubt.⁵⁹

Yet because scholars are preoccupied with blacks in the rapidly expanding and economically vibrant Deep South, there is much work to be done concerning black Virginians during this period. Historians acknowledge that escaping to the North or to Canada assumed much greater importance during the last decades of slavery than it had attained before the 1830s. They are also aware of the aggregate estimates of the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Sobel, *Trabelin' On*, pp. 159–68. See also Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, pp. 163–64. Oates also makes silly errors; for example, he declares that “only seven [Southampton] slaves had ever been convicted of crimes,” other than those condemned for insurrection in 1799. The actual figure is closer to sixty (Oates, *Fires of Jubilee*, p. 59; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. 234–36; Southampton County Court Minute Books, 1786–90, 1793–99, 1799–1803, 1804–7, 1811–16, 1824–30, 1830–35, Order Books, 1803–5, 1814–16, 1816–19, 1819–21, 1822–24, 1824, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond [microfilm]).

⁵⁷ Thomas C. Parramore, *Southampton County, Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1978).

⁵⁸ Oates, *Fires of Jubilee*, p. 161.

⁵⁹ Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. 306–11.

number of black Virginians who were moved into the Lower South.⁶⁰ We have no major history of either phenomenon in the Old Dominion, however.

Scholars have also begun to study the changing work roles of antebellum Virginia slaves, but their task is far from complete. Ronald L. Lewis's *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715–1865* demonstrates that slave labor proved to be useful to specialized sectors of the economy beginning in the early eighteenth century. Peter J. Rachleff's *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865–1890* introduces and illuminates the political importance of black workers in late nineteenth-century urban Virginia.⁶¹ Rachleff's interpretation of that experience properly begins with the special circumstances of industrial labor in Richmond before 1865. Enslaved workers at the Tredegar Iron Works and the tobacco, flour, and other establishments had developed a sense of organization even before emancipation, Rachleff argues.⁶² Lewis makes clear that slaves in these manufacturing contexts used every means of bargaining, evading, resisting, and even attack to try to determine their place in the industrial form of slavery.⁶³

The urban context was essential to some kinds of black self-determination.⁶⁴ "No one Southern city furnished a larger number of brave, wide-awake, and likely-looking Underground Railroad passengers than the city of Richmond," wrote William Still, a nineteenth-century chronicler of the Underground Railroad.⁶⁵ This high percentage was the natural correlative of the degree of autonomy enjoyed by urban industrial

⁶⁰ Figures for Virginia are scarce in the secondary literature. In *Slave-Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore, 1931), Fredric Bancroft estimated that 281,142 enslaved people were moved or sold from Virginia between 1830 and 1860. Later estimates for out-migration and sales from the Upper South imply a somewhat lower total for the Old Dominion. See William L. Calderhead, "Slave Trade, Domestic," in David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1979), pp. 1117–18, or his "Slave Trade, Domestic," in Randall M. Miller and John David Smith, eds., *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery* (New York, 1988), pp. 684–89, for convenient summaries concerning the topic. See also William J. Ernst, "Changes in the Slave Population of the Virginia Tidewater and Piedmont, 1830–1860: A Stable Population Analysis," in University of Virginia, Corcoran Department of History (History Club), *Essays in History*, XIX (1975), 75–83, and the extensive bibliography in Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans From the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom to the Eve of the Compromise of 1850* (Westport, Conn., 1983), pp. 563–64.

⁶¹ Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715–1865* (Westport, Conn., 1979), pp. 11–27, 35, 88–89, 121–22, 131–32, 182–86, 228–30; Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865–1890*, Class and Culture series (Philadelphia, 1984).

⁶² Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South*, pp. 5–11.

⁶³ Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves*, pp. 111–45.

⁶⁴ Michael L. Nicholls, of Utah State University, is currently working on a project for Colonial Williamsburg concerning late eighteenth-century urban black life in the United States that should significantly extend the findings of Thad Tate in *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*.

⁶⁵ William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (1872; New York, 1968), p. 377, quoted in Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South*, p. 8.

slaves, especially the tobacco factory and iron mill bondsmen. The former, according to Rachleff, "exercised considerable freedom"; the latter lived under a "paternalistic system" that "had greater space within it than did the rural world." One cause of this relative autonomy was the realization by employers that incentives were superior to punishments as motivators.⁶⁶

The urban context also is an excellent historical laboratory for investigation of changes in black self-determination that resulted from emancipation. During Reconstruction in Richmond, for example, it was "working-class activists" who emerged as the leaders of that city's black community.⁶⁷ Occupational choice became as important as task assignment had been under bondage. Some blacks had enjoyed privileges before emancipation and rose quickly to the top; others learned from the intense activity of Richmond blacks between 1865 and 1870 and worked their way up. The next step in black workers' quest for self-determination was organizing. Experimentation with the Colored National Labor Union and later with the Knights of Labor was disappointing, however. Although winning some strikes and gaining more political power, black workers still could not successfully combine their numbers with those of white workers. There was an increase in biracial consciousness but not in interaction. Other problems, especially the general lack of black political power, led to a fatal weakening of union activity. Later efforts by Populists and Socialists to strengthen black labor were even less successful. Rachleff's somber conclusion is that by 1900 "the color line remained where it had been when Richmond was established, where it remains today."⁶⁸

Such historians as Michael Chesson⁶⁹ and Howard N. Rabinowitz⁷⁰ see the same results in the late nineteenth-century quest of urban blacks for autonomy. Although discussions of the black role in post-Civil War Richmond are but one part of Chesson's study and are scattered throughout Rabinowitz's, these historians, too, paint a picture of ulti-

⁶⁶ Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South*, pp. 8–9. As an indication of changes in emphasis since the 1960s, James H. Brewer concludes in *The Confederate Negro: Virginia's Craftsmen and Military Laborers, 1861–1865* (Durham, 1969), pp. 164–65, that slave labor had a "compelling effect on the course of the war" and was a "key piece in the mechanism of Southern defenses." Yet Brewer, without relying on Stanley Elkins, takes an Elkins-like view of "the Confederate Negro," whom he characterizes as "denigrated, corroded by degradation, and psychologically disabled by oppression."

⁶⁷ Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South*, p. 34.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁶⁹ Michael B. Chesson, *Richmond After the War, 1865–1890* (Richmond, 1981).

⁷⁰ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York, 1978).

mate failure in the face of white racism, political divisions, and economic reversals. Disfranchisement by the new state constitution in 1902 damaged an already weakened black community in Richmond, so that *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902–1965*, as seen by Andrew Buni,⁷¹ was able to effect very little change in the status of black citizens.

Comparison of Richmond, admittedly a distinctive case, with other urban centers in Virginia is somewhat difficult. We do have Robert F. Eng's *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia, 1861–1890*, a study of a smaller town.⁷² Eng demonstrates that after two decades of economic progress, black workers and business people slipped backward because of a loss of political power. For several possible reasons, the percentage of black Hamptonians in skilled crafts declined between 1880 and 1896.⁷³ What happened thereafter is beyond the scope of Eng's study. Whether there was any attempt to organize Hampton's black workers he does not say.

Crandall A. Shifflett's *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860–1900* paints an even bleaker picture of the blocks to opportunity for postemancipation rural blacks.⁷⁴ Part of the story is similar to that of antebellum Petersburg. In 1870 there were only 22 black landholders in Louisa; thirty years later there were 1,314, a seemingly phenomenal increase of 5,873 percent.⁷⁵ The average size and value of blacks' landholdings, however, differed markedly from those of whites' tracts. In addition, lack of control over market forces and a dearth of means to increase agricultural yields placed black owners in a position subordinate to whites that Shifflett characterizes as a "patron-client" relationship. Given these socioeconomic circumstances, it is no surprise that white supremacist politicians were able to redraw precinct lines and pad registration of white voters to assure white control of the county.⁷⁶ Black Louisans found various ways to resist this subordination, to be sure, but their position resembled that of Anthony Johnson in seventeenth-century Northampton County.

The thread running through any account of black labor after slavery is political power. Perhaps the best illustration of the importance of political

⁷¹ Andrew Buni, *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902–1965* (Charlottesville, 1967).

⁷² Robert F. Eng, *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia, 1861–1890* (Philadelphia, 1979).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁷⁴ Crandall A. Shifflett, *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860–1900* (Knoxville, 1982).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20, 53–54.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–83.

power to Afro-Virginians is the experience of black Hamptonians. Engs tells a story of temporary success that made Hampton "a model for black progress very different from the accommodationism being advocated by [Samuel Chapman] Armstrong [head of Hampton Institute] and his foremost pupil—Booker T. Washington."⁷⁷ Yet the victory was only temporary, and 1890 marked the end of black political power in Hampton and the surrounding county. What secured temporary success in Hampton was not just white intervention and Reconstruction policy. "Northern involvement in Hampton made black success possible," Engs tells us, "but it was the blacks' own efforts that made success a reality." The key to these efforts was the fact that "as the freedmen grew more accustomed to their freedom, they showed a growing tendency to define their own priorities and to structure their lives as they wished."⁷⁸

Education was bound to play a role in black self-determination after slavery. "The condition of the col'd people here [in Virginia] will not be much improved except we have got them well embued with the spirit of liberty and educated so as not to be worth much to slavery," an anonymous correspondent informed the American Missionary Association in 1862, but blacks' expression of that very "spirit of liberty" in the area of education made white abolitionists and teachers uneasy.⁷⁹ Samuel L. Horst's *Education for Manhood* finds the same ambivalence among white Virginians about black control of education as about labor. For former slaveholders, the education of blacks was threatening for obvious reasons. Accustomed to trying to get black slaves to labor up to their demands, white employers now wished to force black employees not to labor beyond white expectations. Education would enable the freedmen to do so. What disturbed abolitionists and missionary teachers about blacks' educational goals, however, was that the freedmen's objectives were not grounded in the same moral and social assumptions as theirs. With white employers fearful of "too much" black education and white abolitionists and missionaries attempting to control blacks' thinking, once again the possibility that blacks could determine their future was limited.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, p. 202.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 201.

⁷⁹ Anonymous correspondent to American Missionary Association, 28 Dec. 1862, quoted in Samuel L. Horst, *Education for Manhood: The Education of Blacks in Virginia During the Civil War* (Lanham, Md., 1987), p. 106. See also Joseph P. Reidy, "'Coming From the Shadow of the Past': The Transition from Slavery to Freedom at Freedmen's Village, 1863–1900," *VMHB*, XCV (1987), 403–28.

⁸⁰ Although only part of a larger study, William A. Link's analysis of the ability of blacks to exercise some autonomy in education in rural Virginia is quite illuminating (William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely*

III

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the historiography of twentieth-century black Virginians is its brevity. Black residents of the state figure as the passive subjects of various monographs, such as those about massive resistance or studies of political change.⁸¹ Blacks appear much less frequently as the main actors. "Primary sources have been difficult to obtain," Andrew Buni declared in the preface to his 1967 study of *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902-1965*, "since few Negroes have kept extensive collections of personal papers."⁸² Over twenty years later, that statement looks suspect. Still, the use of interviews has been fruitful. Buni relied on personal interviews as well as manuscripts and publications, as did Raymond Gavins in his biography of Gordon Blaine Hancock, Raymond Wolters in the Virginia section of *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation*, John V. Moeser and Rutledge M. Dennis in *The Politics of Annexation: Oligarchic Power in a Southern City*, Christopher Silver in his history of planning, politics, and race in twentieth-century Richmond, Daryl Cumber Dance in *Long Gone*, Scott C. Davis in *The World of Patience Gromes*, and Henry Lewis Suggs in *P. B. Young, Newspaperman*.⁸³

It is no wonder that these eight studies benefit from interviews; they are to a great extent current history. Dance's book is more about folklore than history and is therefore inherently dependent upon the spoken as well as the written word. As current history, these works show diverse kinds of black self-determination in twentieth-century Virginia.⁸⁴ In

Place: *Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920* [Chapel Hill and London, 1986], pp. 39-43, 58, 61, 173-94). See also Lester F. Russell, *Black Baptist Secondary Schools in Virginia, 1887-1957* (Metuchen, N.J., 1981), pp. 20-40.

⁸¹ James W. Ely, Jr., *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance* (Knoxville, 1976).

⁸² Buni, *Negro in Virginia Politics*, p. viii.

⁸³ Raymond Gavins, *The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership: Gordon Blaine Hancock, 1884-1970* (Durham, 1977); Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville, 1984); John V. Moeser and Rutledge M. Dennis, *The Politics of Annexation: Oligarchic Power in a Southern City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Christopher Silver, *Twentieth-Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race* (Knoxville, 1984); Daryl Cumber Dance, *Long Gone: The Mecklenburg Six and the Theme of Escape in Black Folklore* (Knoxville, 1987); Scott C. Davis, *The World of Patience Gromes: Making and Unmaking a Black Community* (Lexington, Ky., 1988); Henry Lewis Suggs, *P. B. Young, Newspaperman: Race, Politics, and Journalism in the New South, 1910-62* (Charlottesville, 1988). Suggs makes extensive use of private papers. I am indebted to the University Press of Virginia for making a copy of the page proofs of Suggs's book available to me. The forthcoming *At Work and at Home: Blacks in Norfolk, Virginia, 1910-1945*, by Earl Lewis, of the Afro-American Studies Department of the University of California at Berkeley, will complement the other books discussed here.

⁸⁴ Virginia hardly figures at all in Herbert Shapiro's *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst, 1988). Whether this is because the level and intensity of violence were lower in the Old Dominion than elsewhere is not clear.

fact, the more they show about that subject, the more they rely on interviews. Where historians of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Afro-Virginians have to extract evidence from largely impersonal sources such as tax records or from documents such as runaway advertisements or trial records that raise as many questions as they answer, historians of twentieth-century black Virginians have had the advantage of sources with whom they can engage in dialogue.

Was political self-determination a realistic possibility between 1902 and 1965? *The Negro in Virginia Politics* gives conflicting answers. Although it may surprise those who believe that no blacks could vote after 1902 and that blacks avoided or were excluded from all organized politics until the 1960s, a recurring theme of Buni's study is voter apathy among blacks.⁸⁵ Buni describes how, during the six decades in which legal barriers remained in place against a substantial black vote, such leaders as historian Luther Porter Jackson, of Virginia State College, continued to organize black voters to exert what pressure they could. Buni recognizes that only when the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution prohibited the poll tax, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided protection against discriminatory registration, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 further guaranteed voting by blacks could they organize and vote in a truly effective manner. He even mentions without comment some blacks' offhand rejection of politics as "the white man's business." At the same time, however, he documents an increase in black voting whenever there appeared to be a good chance of its making a real difference.⁸⁶

At the same time, black lawyers and activists were able to maintain steady pressure in the courts against the legal foundation of segregation in education.⁸⁷ Even though they won their battle, Raymond Wolters concluded in *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation*, they lost their main war objective of true racial integration in the schools. *The Burden of Brown* is preoccupied with what Wolters calls "the sorry record that disingenuous judges and naive educational reformers have made in the Brown school districts," one of which is that of Prince Edward County, Virginia.⁸⁸ What merits analysis here is Wolters's understanding of black activism and goals in the Prince Edward case. Unlike the writers of two popular monographs concerning the *Brown v.*

⁸⁵ Buni, *Negro in Virginia Politics*, p. 18; see also pp. vi, 22, 24, 121–22, 131, 141.

⁸⁶ The core of another explanation appears in Sarah Shaver Hughes, "The Twentieth Century," in Morgan, ed., "Don't Grieve After Me," p. 86.

⁸⁷ Buni, *Negro in Virginia Politics*, pp. 184–206.

⁸⁸ Wolters, *Burden of Brown*, p. 289.

Board of Education decision,⁸⁹ Wolters keeps the actors in the Prince Edward drama in the background.⁹⁰ He still gives brief notice to the relative economic independence of Prince Edward's black farmers. Statistics in Buni's study, however, bring out a crucial factor worth more investigation. In 1900 Prince Edward's black voters outnumbered the white 1,876 to 1,280. By 1902, of course, that ratio was dramatically reversed to 868 white voters and 173 blacks. In 1960 it stood at 2,775 to 1,100 in favor of white voters. The 1900 and 1960 figures are connected to each other as well as to the campaign black Prince Edwardians carried out in favor of improved schools. As Wolters notes, 57 percent of the public school students in 1950 were black in a majority-white county. By the time the schools closed, Prince Edward already had a recorded history of black political power and the subsequent loss of that power.

Just as any attempt to explain the role of Prince Edward blacks in that county's history would focus on the careers of the activists, so did Raymond Gavins seek to use the career of one leader, Gordon Blaine Hancock, to explain the nature of black activism in Richmond in the years before the advent of the civil rights movement. According to Gavins, "black leadership is one window through which historians can view black responses to oppression." The Reverend Mr. Hancock was a multifaceted and sometimes self-contradictory window. "A cultural pluralist who chauvinistically celebrated black culture, an interracialist who sometimes doubted the feasibility of integration, a self-help advocate who dismissed schemes promoting black economic independence as segregationist, and a critic of American democracy who patriotically defended it against Communism, Hancock remained a marginal man," Gavins declares.⁹¹ Hancock's main problem was that his only weapon against segregation was "moral suasion" when "the prerequisite for change was political power—an essential denied black Southerners" during Hancock's lifetime (1884–1970).⁹²

⁸⁹ Bob Smith, *They Closed Their Schools: Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1951–1964* (Chapel Hill, 1965); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York, 1976), pp. 451–507.

⁹⁰ He therefore misunderstands one aspect of Prince Edward, stating quite erroneously that the county "boasted the largest population of free blacks in Virginia" in the mid-nineteenth century (Wolters, *Burden of Brown*, p. 66). In 1850 thirty-three counties had more than the 488 free blacks counted in Prince Edward. The free Afro-Americans of the county were never more than 5 percent of the total population before 1865, nor was the total black population—both free and enslaved—distinctively large (U.S. Census Office, 9th Census [1870], *The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, Volume I: *Population and Social Statistics* [Washington, D.C., 1870], pp. 68–70).

⁹¹ Gavins, *Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership*, p. 178.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Henry Lewis Suggs treats a similar transitional figure in *P. B. Young, Newspaperman*. Like Hancock in Richmond, Young communicated with both black and white readers through an urban newspaper, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, and worked within the confines of segregation to try to improve the lot of fellow blacks. Suggs explains the tightrope Young found it increasingly difficult to walk as the politics of civil rights changed steadily between the pre-World War I United States and 1962, the year he died. An effective role model and patron of his community because of his successful ownership of the *Journal and Guide*, ambassador to the white political elite of Norfolk and also of Virginia, he nevertheless was unable to adapt to the increasing black militancy of the 1950s. Suggs's conclusion about Young is that his success as an individual conflicted with his objectives as a black citizen: "He was so consumed with his own philosophy of success that he neglected to find a way to solidify the economic and political objectives for which he had worked."⁹³

Hancock and Young both had a deep faith in "moral suasion" of a public kind. Scott C. Davis's *World of Patience Gromes* concentrates on private, or individual, moral suasion. More a "tract for the times" than a history, Davis's book still illuminates a painful aspect of recent urban black history: the threat to blacks' values represented by the downfall of Fulton, a lower-class and mostly black district of Richmond that not only fell to the bulldozers of urban renewal but was in danger of succumbing as well to truly evil forces within the community. Davis may be accused of blaming the victim, but that accusation is valid only if one sees black neighborhoods as monoliths. Davis perceives division within such communities. On one side in Fulton were the courageous "people living in a hostile world with no hope of government assistance," at least before World War II, who nevertheless learned the lesson of slavery that "an understanding of good and evil was the way to advancement." These people consequently had "a sense of their own power." Breaking down the neighborhood from within were those men and women who had not "assumed control over their own minds" but who had instead "preyed upon human failing" by "destroy[ing] an individual's character in order to control him." Such soul-destroying people resembled, but were not identical to, the worst slaveholders.⁹⁴

Black Richmonders were not powerless before the 1960s. They did, however, certainly have less political clout than they needed to advance

⁹³ Suggs, *P. B. Young*, pp. 190, 168, 172-73.

⁹⁴ Davis, *World of Patience Gromes*, pp. 41-42, 187-90.

their collective interests. Black Richmonders could not prevent the death of Fulton, but they did survive it. At times, as Christopher Silver's *Twentieth-Century Richmond* reveals, concerted action on the part of black property owners could influence public policy. More than once public meetings, petitions, testimony, newspaper articles, and even alliances with white conservatives opposed to governmental planning enabled blacks to protect themselves from the adverse effects of some housing and road projects.⁹⁵ Although John Moeser and Rutledge Dennis's *Politics of Annexation* follows the efforts of white civic and business leaders to prevent a black majority from controlling Richmond, the authors correctly evaluate the importance of one black activist's campaign to use the courts to fight dilution of the black vote. What makes Curtis Holt so distinctive is that he was not a professional like Hancock but was a member of the lower class. In alliance with a young white lawyer, he managed to secure the intervention of the federal government in behalf of black voters. His campaign was one reason why the black majority took political control of the government of Richmond slightly more than a decade after the Voting Rights Act of 1965.⁹⁶

Historians can also view one aspect of black responses to oppression and one method of trying to achieve self-determination by looking at independent educational movements. In *Black Baptist Secondary Schools in Virginia, 1887–1957*, Lester F. Russell describes the growth of black Baptist education but only occasionally takes the opportunity to discuss the issue of self-determination. In his histories of some individual schools, he points out that black leaders founded Baptist secondary schools because they "were determined to wait no longer for the white residents of the county to act in their behalf,"⁹⁷ yet he consistently states that several counties either took over or replaced the independent schools without explaining why this happened or what effect it had on black independence.⁹⁸ In his conclusion, he indicates that because of *Brown v. Board of Education*, "most of the Black Baptist secondary schools closed at

⁹⁵ For a summary of Silver's argument concerning black self-protection, see *Twentieth-Century Richmond*, pp. 324–25.

⁹⁶ Moeser and Dennis, *Politics of Annexation*, pp. 9–11, 143–45.

⁹⁷ Russell, *Black Baptist Secondary Schools*, p. 66, in reference to the creation of Ruffin Academy in King and Queen County.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 69–70, 74–75, 77–78, 81, 84, 87, 88, 90, 95, 101. In his treatment of the origins of Virginia Union University, Russell states that the Richmond Institute, a precursor of Virginia Union, had nine trustees, only a minority (three) of whom were black. When he does bring up the "Race-men," who fought for racial autonomy from white philanthropists, he does not adequately explain their rationale.

the end of the academic year 1954–55."⁹⁹ Given both local resistance and massive resistance to that Supreme Court decision, why did the black Baptist schools close? We still need an adequate answer to that question.

In "*Don't Grieve After Me*," the catalog for a traveling exhibition of photographs about black Virginians, Sarah Shaver Hughes shows how "education became the main bulwark of Jim Crow" in twentieth-century Virginia. She points out that the work of philanthropic agencies, the building of public high schools in the Depression, and whites' "frantic effort to upgrade separate schools" to avoid integration in the 1950s gradually improved conditions for black Virginians in public schools. She also recognizes the manner in which black leaders and cooperative programs provided valuable self-help.¹⁰⁰ This role of blacks in education is an insufficiently studied subject. Rather than continuing to focus mostly on the idiosyncratic Prince Edward County system, historians need to investigate black education throughout Virginia in order to assess conditions in segregated schools and also to relate the history of black education to the issue of black self-determination. Russell, Hughes, and William A. Link have provided some evidence for such study, but Russell's monograph contains insufficient analysis, limitations of space prevented Hughes from fully exploring her subject, and Link looked at black education only in the context of all rural education.

The most surprising gap in the historiography of twentieth-century black Virginians is any substantial treatment of their role in the economy. Hughes does pay some attention to this subject,¹⁰¹ and there are passing references to the occupations of blacks in some other studies. Gavins's analysis of the Richmond city directory in the late 1920s shows, for example, that "very few Negroes . . . were in the professions" and few were in the skilled trades. Economic energies centered in "the traditional black businesses." "Ultimately dependent upon white capital, lacking a foothold in manufacturing or industry, excluded from craft unions, blacks were also plagued with an 18.3 per cent illiteracy rate for those twenty-one years old and over," Gavins has noted. Three-fourths of all blacks occupied rental housing. Under these conditions, political power seemed all the more unattainable.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁰⁰ Hughes, "The Twentieth Century," pp. 66–72.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–79.

¹⁰² Gavins, *Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership*, pp. 45–46.

When a group's political power is minimal, educational opportunity is limited, social segregation prevails, and economic progress is frustrated, there is bound to be crime. Under these same conditions, crime is sometimes bound up with rebellion, or at least resistance. Although Virginia did not experience the large-scale urban riots of the 1960s, the rate of crime in the black community was sufficiently high to merit historical as well as criminological and sociological analysis. Yet we have almost no historical investigation of the relationship between black Virginians and the twentieth-century criminal justice system.

Daryl Cumber Dance's *Long Gone*, however, shows why the issue of crime can reflect continued racial distrust and separation in the state. Dance argues that "Black people in this country have found that their best chance for freedom was through running—literally and figuratively."¹⁰³ Although she tells the tale of a particularly dramatic prison escape by several black men (and one white man) who had been convicted of murder, her subject is escape "from present entrapment" of any kind as experienced by black Americans. The notorious Briley brothers led the escape. The crimes of which they had been convicted were particularly violent and sadistic. Yet they were perceived by many blacks as the traditional hero, the black "Badman." The "Badman" is as dangerous to blacks as he is to whites; he is not to be confused with a revolutionary who devotes, even loses, his life in the cause of his people. "He is not fighting his white opponents to change conditions in society, but to achieve some selfish personal end," Dance explains. His appeal to "the folk" lies in his style, to be sure, but the core of that appeal is his "rejection of the authority, laws, and values of a system that does not value Blacks and his assertion of his own power and authority, something that many who cheer him can only vicariously enjoy." Dance goes to the tragic heart of this response to white authority. "As unfortunate and terrifying as it may be," she writes, that response "is not merely understandable; it is inevitable."¹⁰⁴ If many black Virginians continue to admire the "Badman," then their struggle for self-determination will remain outside the mainstream.

IV

Blacks are clearly more in Virginia's mainstream in 1989 than they were even twenty years ago, but how much so? Whether a fourth phase

¹⁰³ Dance, *Long Gone*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–45.

of increased opportunity and black self-determination began in the 1960s remains to be seen. It is a fertile period but still fraught with perils. Most important to the development of the historiography of black Virginians, an expanding number of black historians have turned to the study of black Virginians' past.¹⁰⁵ While they have published few monographs of the scope or quality of the work of Luther Porter Jackson in the 1940s, their articles and dissertations promise productivity in the future. Numerous scholarly articles on the history of black Virginians have appeared in recent years; theses and dissertations have also been appearing steadily.¹⁰⁶ Since the 1960s, centers of learning such as the Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies at the University of Virginia have been founded, while colleges and universities across the state have offered a variety of black history courses, and many secondary as well as primary schools have tried to incorporate the history of black Virginians into their curricula.

At the same time, various historical institutions and agencies have reached a wider audience with the results of recent scholarship. Colonial Williamsburg has developed exhibits, tours, and programs on black life, while other historical sites have begun to incorporate the history of Afro-Virginians into their presentations. The Valentine Museum of Richmond is but one example of a cultural institution that has turned a great deal of attention toward black history. Archaeologists are also unearthing evidence of slave and free black life.¹⁰⁷ This emphasis has happened at a time when the black population of the Old Dominion is much smaller relative to the entire population than it has been for many

¹⁰⁵ Besides Raymond Gavins, author of *The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership*, selected examples of black historians and their work are Tommy L. Bogger, "The Slave and Free Black Community in Norfolk, 1775-1865" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1977) and Anthony S. Parent, Jr., "Either a Fool or a Fury: The Emergence of Paternalism in Colonial Virginia Slave Society" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1982).

¹⁰⁶ Smith, ed., *Black Slavery in the Americas*; Richard R. Duncan, *Theses and Dissertations on Virginia History: A Bibliography* (Richmond, 1986); annual bibliographies in *Slavery and Abolition*.

¹⁰⁷ On Colonial Williamsburg, see "AT&T Grant Expands Study of Black History at Colonial Williamsburg," *OAH Newsletter*, XIV (Aug. 1986), 24-25. Rex Ellis, of the Black Programs Department at Colonial Williamsburg, is writing a doctoral dissertation on the early interpretation of black life at Colonial Williamsburg. On the Valentine Museum, see Marie Tyler-McGraw and Gregg D. Kimball, *In Bondage and Freedom: Antebellum Black Life in Richmond, Virginia* (Richmond, 1988), an exhibition catalog. The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Richmond is in the planning and fund-raising stages at this time, and the National Park Service has opened the Maggie Walker house in the Jackson Ward district of Richmond. On archaeology, see Kelso, *Kingsmill Plantations*. Kelso, director of archaeology at Monticello, has made several discoveries concerning black life on Jefferson's plantation (William Kelso, "Mulberry Row: Slave Life at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello," *Archaeology*, XXXIX [Sept.-Oct. 1986], 28-35). The ongoing historical research of Jean B. Lee concerning slave life at Mount Vernon promises to give us yet another picture of black self-determination on an elite and nationally prominent planter's lands.

years. Yet the hundreds of thousands of descendants of Africans who have lived in this state, trying with success at times and failure at other times to determine their lives, are, as they continue to seek "a sense of their own power," now attaining much greater historical visibility than ever before.