Colonial Slavery

VIRGINIA AND MARYLAND

The twenty Africans who were put ashore at Jamestown in 1619 by the captain of a Dutch frigate were not slaves in a legal sense. And at the time the Virginians seemed not to appreciate the far-reaching significance of the introduction of Africans into the fledgling colony. These newcomers, who happened to be black, were merely indentured servants. They were listed as servants in the census counts of 1627, and as late as 1631 some Negroes whose period of service had expired were being assigned in much the same way that it was being assigned to whites who had completed their indenture. During the first half-century of existence Virginia had many Negro indentured servants; and the records reveal an increasing number of free Negroes.

But as time went on, Virginia steadily fell behind in satisfying the labor needs of the colony with Indians and indentured servants. It was the colonists began to give serious thought to the "perpetual servitude" of Negroes. Virginians began to see what neighboring islands in the Caribbean had already recognized: that Negroes could not easily escape without being identified; that they could be disciplined, even punished, with impunity since they were not Chris- tians; and that the supply was apparently inexhaustible. Black labor was precisely what Virginia needed in order to speed up the clearing of the forests and the cultivation of larger and better tobacco crops. All that was required was the legislative approval of a practice in which many Virginians were already engaged. Indeed, by 1660, some Africans in Virginia had become bondmen for life. The distinction between black and white servants was becoming well established. In that year, when three runaway servants, two white and one black, were recaptured, the court ordered the white servants to serve their master one additional year. Meanwhile, the Negro was ordered "to serve his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural life here or elsewhere." Thus, within the first generation of Virginia's existence, African slavery was well on its way to becoming African slavery.

The initial statutory recognition of slavery in Virginia came in 1641. The status of blacks already there was not affected if they had completed their indenture and were free. As a matter of fact, the recognition was almost casual and was first indicated in a law that was directed at white servants: "That in case any English servant shall run away in company with any negroes who are incapable of making satisfaction by the addition of time...that the Englishman running away...shall serve for the time of the said negroes' absence as they are to for their own." In the following year, 1662, Virginia took another step toward slavery by indicating in her laws that children born in the colony would be held bond or free according to the condition of the mother.

Some mitigation of slavery was intended by a law of 1667 that provided that slaves could be baptized as Christians. In order to protect the institution of slavery, however, this law provided that "the comforting of hypocrisy doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom." Thus, "diverse manners, freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavour the propagation of Christianity."

At first the Negro population of Virginia grew quite slowly. In 1635 there were only 23 in the colony; and as late as the middle of the century scarcely 300 could be counted. With the chartering of the Royal African Company in 1672, the shipment of slaves into the colony was accelerated. By the end of the century they were being brought in at the rate of more than 1,000 per year. It was in the eighteenth century that the Negro population grew at what some Virginians began to view as an alarming rate. In 1708 there were 12,000 blacks and 18,000 whites. By 1756 there were 120,156 blacks and 173,316 whites, with blacks outnumbering whites in many communities.

Although Virginians greatly appreciated the importance of slave labor in the development of the colony, they soon became apprehensive about such large numbers of negroes living among the whites. Already whites and blacks were mixing, and a mulatto population was emerging. There were, moreover, the persistent rumors of conspiracies of rebellion, and many whites feared for their lives. Those who were apprehensive took the lead in attempting to control the importation of slaves, but the commercial interests fought off these attempts with all the resources at their command. For the time being they were successful.

But the fears of insurrection were not groundless. Within two years after the first statutory recognition of slavery, the Negroes of Virginia were showing signs of dissatisfaction and began to plot rebellion against their masters. In 1687, while a funeral was taking
place, a group of slaves in the northern neck planned an uprising, but the plot was discovered before it could be carried out. Runners continued, and plots of varying sizes were uncovered. Where there were no plots of slaves, there was general docility and lawfulness. By 1694 the Virginia government complained that there was insufficient enforcement of the code, which, by that time, had become elaborate enough to cover most of the activities of slaves.

The Virginia slave code, borrowing heavily from practices in the Caribbean and serving as a model for other mainland codes, was comprehensive; if it was anything at all. Slaves were not permitted to leave the plantations without the written permission of their masters. Slaves to their masters. Slaves found guilty of murder or rape were to be executed. For major offenses, such as robbing a house or a store, slaves were to be whipped. For petty offenses, such as insubordination and associating maimed. The severity of the laws, about which many masters complained, was considered a necessary measure to maintain discipline in the colony. With the sheriff, the courts, and even the slaves whites on their side, the masters should have experienced no difficulty in maintaining peace among their slaves.

While slavery in Maryland was not recognized by law until 1657, it came into existence shortly after the first settlements were made in the late 1630s. At that time, Maryland had witnessed an intense rivalry between the Catholics, favored by the ruling Calvert family, and the Protestants, who were heartened by the Protestant ascendancy in England. In 1669, 1670, and 1671, the Maryland government passed a series of laws designed to control and maintain law and order against the government of Maryland. Indians were suspected of collusion with the Catholics, and the Negroes of some of the southern colonies were also watched with suspicion. This led to the law of 1679 which prevented frequent meetings of Negroes in the colony. The laws were intended to prevent slaves from assembling and plotting against the government of Maryland. The laws were intended to prevent slaves from assembling and plotting against the government of Maryland. The laws were intended to prevent slaves from assembling and plotting against the government of Maryland.
THE CAROLINAS AND GEORGIA

It was a foregone conclusion that slaves would be introduced into the Carolinas as soon as it was feasible. After all, four of the proprietors of the colony were members of the Royal African Company and fully appreciated the profits that could come from the slave trade. By 1680, moreover, the examples of Virginia and Maryland could lead them to believe of the important foundations of the colony's economic life. Perhaps in fundamental complexity, he wrote, "Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion, against any possible destruction that might have come through the conversion of slaves to Christianity.

Negroes were in the Carolina colony virtually from the beginning. This was undoubtedly the result of the deliberate encouragement of the importation of slaves by the proprietors. In 1663 they offered to the for every Negro woman slave brought into the colony in the first year. In subsequent years. Twenty years after the original settlement, the black population in the Carolinas was equal to that of the whites. By 1715 blacks led the whites, 18,950 to 6,230. In 1724 there were three times as many blacks as whites, and the growth of the black population was to continue for decades to come.

As in the other colonies, the growth of the Negro population led to new legislation aimed at controlling the activities of the Negroes. As early as 1686 the Carolina colony forbade blacks to engage in any trade without written authorization. In 1722 while justices were authorized to search Negroes for guns, swords, and "other offensive weapons" and to take them unless the suspect could produce a permit. Patroons were given authority to search Negroes and to whip those deemed to be dangerous to peace and good order. Punishments for offenses by slaves were summary and severe.

The Carolinians had not established their control too soon, for as early as 1711 there were rumors that the Negroes were getting out of hand. In 1720 several slaves were burned alive and others were hanged because they were implicated in a revolt near Charleston. In 1739 the well-known Stono Rebellion, a series of events west of Charleston, threw the countryside into a state of wild excitement. After slaves killed two guards in a warehouse and escaped, they went on a full-scale drive to destroy slavery in that area. The uprising was put down, but not for several days, and not before thirty whites and forty-four blacks had lost their lives. Later in the century there were other uprisings, and the general state of affairs led to a full-scale revision of the slave code.

Before the Revolution, South Carolina, now divided from North Carolina, had enacted one of the most stringent of laws governing slaves to be found anywhere in the New World. The selling of liquor to slaves was prohibited. Owners were warned against undue cruelty to slaves which might incite them to revolt. Owners were prohibited from working slaves more than fifteen hours per day between March 25 and September 25 and for more than fourteen hours per day between September 25 and March 25. These last few provisions were a tacit admission that slaves could be driven to revolt. What the Carolinians realized all too late was that slaves were not as tractable as they believed, and that the danger of having so large a slave population in their midst was more real than fancied.

If conditions were at all remediated among the Carolina slaves, it was the result of the efforts of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. The SPC missionaries sought to raise the level of living both among the whites and the blacks. In some instances they met with considerable success. They suggested that slaves should be given time to study the Scriptures and to learn to read and write. In many cases they taught slaves themselves, and in one notable instance they fostered the establishment of a school for Negroes in Charleston in which the teachers were Negro slaves owned by the SPC. While these were significant accomplishments, they were also evidences of acceptance of the basic idea of enslavement, and the religious sanctions of the SPC gave to slavery, the planters felt more secure than ever in their belief in the righteousness of the institution.

The presence of Quakers in North Carolina had a salutory effect on the conditions of slaves in the colony. They urged the establishment of regular meetings for slaves, and Quaker slaveholders were urged by their coreligionists to use their Negroes well. Before the end of the colonial period there was some sentiment among the Quakers to discourage members from purchasing slaves, and finally, in 1770, the organization denounced the slave trade as "an iniquitous practice" and sought its prohibition. Members of the SPC also sought to improve conditions among Negroes as well. In 1746 and, as they had done in South Carolina, they encouraged masters to permit their slaves to attend religious services.

It is interesting to note that there was no real slave insurrection in North Carolina during the colonial period. The fact that the slave population was relatively small and that there was little impatience on the North Carolina plantation was doubtless responsible for this
peaceful situation. In comparison with neighboring colonies, North Carolina presented a picture of remarkable calm in the period before the War for Independence. Georgia was the only important New World colony to be established by England in the eighteenth century. It differed in several significant ways from the earlier English colonies; it was to grant no free slavery. From the time of its establishment in 1733, however, each of these possessions was subjected to enormous pressure from the settlers, and one by one the restrictions collapsed. It was in 1817 that the third petition of the colonists brought about the repeal of the harsh prohibition against slaves. From that point on the Negro population grew and slavery flourished. By 1760 there were six thousand whites and three thousand blacks. In 1775, when the last estimate was made before the War for Independence, the white population had increased to eighteen thousand, while the black population numbered some fifteen thousand.

Much of Georgia's slave code, adopted in 1755, was taken from the South Carolina code, and it reflected South Carolina's experience rather than Georgia's. For example, the interdiction against more than seven Negroes being out together without a white chaperone indicated South Carolina's general fear of Negro uprisings. Between Saturday evening and Monday morning, not even those slaves who were authorized to possess firearms were permitted to carry them on their persons. Under no conditions were Negroes to be taught to read and write.

If the slaves of colonial Georgia did not actually engage in rebellion, they nevertheless resisted their enslavement by running away into Florida and by committing acts of sabotage. Strongly enough, Georgia displayed a relative indifference to insurrection by subjecting her slaves to service in the militia. Perhaps the service that Spanish Florida rendered as a place of escape for the more discontented Negroes made possible the parasitical practice of using Negroes as Georgia militia in the return of fugitive slaves to Georgia.

THE MIDDLE COLONIES

Although the Dutch were primarily interested in the slave trade and made great profits from transporting slaves to various colonies, they did not neglect their own New World settlements. There were large plantations in New Netherland, particularly in the valley of the Hudson River, and by 1638 many of them were cultivated largely with slave labor. The institution of slavery, as practiced by the Dutch in the New World,

was relatively mild, with slaves receiving fairly humane treatment and many considerations as to their personal rights. The Dutch slave code was not salutary, and insurrection was not an uncommon reward for long or meritorious service. Although the demand for slaves always exceeded the supply, the number imported by the Dutch never reached such proportions as to cause serious apprehension or difficulty during the period of their domination.

The character of the institution of slavery changed when the English took over New Netherland in 1664. In 1665 the colonial assembly recognized the existence of slavery where persons had willingly sold themselves into bondage; and in the statute of 1684 slavery was recognized as a legitimate institution in the province of New York. In subsequent years the Negro population of New York grew substantially. In 1698 there were only 2,170 Negroes in a total population of 18,007, while in 1723 the census listed 6,171 slaves. By 1771 the Negro population had increased to 19,885 in a total population of 163,007.

The slave code of New York became refined early in the eighteenth century. In 1706 the colony enacted a law stating that baptism of a slave did not provide grounds for a claim to freedom. A further and certainly significant provision was that a slave was at no time a competent witness in a case involving a freeman. In 1715 the legislature enacted a law providing that slaves caught traveling forty miles above Albany, presumably bound for Canada, were to be executed upon the oath of two credible witnesses. Meanwhile, New York City was enacting ordinances for the better control of slaves. In 1710 the city forbade Negroes from appearing "in the streets after nightfall without a lantern with a lighted candle in it."

The concentration of an increasing number of slaves in the city of New York brought with it increased dangers to the white population. Negroes defied authority and disobeyed the laws. In 1721 the ungodly temper of New York Negroes flared up into a fully organized insurrection in which twenty-three slaves armed with guns and knives met in an orchard and set fire to a slaveholder's house. During the melee that followed nine whites were killed and six were injured. In the ensuing trial of the accused Negroes twenty-one were found guilty and executed.

Almost thirty years later, in 1741, there was a rumor of an even larger insurrection. After a series of fires, the rumors spread that blacks and gone whites were conspiring to destroy law and order in the city and to seize control. After the city offered generous rewards for the apprehension of the conspirators, almost two hundred whites and blacks were arrested and prosecuted. At least one hundred Negroes were convicted, eight of whom were hanged, thirteen burned alive, and seventy banished. Four whites, including two women, were hanged.
There were no more serious outbreaks during the colonial period, and by the time of the Revolution, New York had begun to recognize the moral and economic unsuitability of holding men in bondage.

South of New York, the colonies of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware each in its own way subscribed to the institution of slavery. After the English came to dominate New Jersey, they encouraged slavery in every way. Soon, the Negro population there was growing steadily: 2,581 in 1726, 3,961 in 1738, and 4,606 in 1745 out of a population of 60,000. In Pennsylvania the growth was not so rapid, due largely to the opposition to slavery by the Quakers. In 1688 the Germantown Quakers issued their celebrated protest, and in 1691 George Keith demonstrated with Pennsylvanians for holding men in perpetual bondage. But in 1685 no less a person than William Penn himself expressed the view that African slaves were more satisfactory workers than white servants; and this had the effect of greatly encouraging slavery in some quarters. In 1721 the Negro population of Pennsylvania was estimated at between 2,500 and 5,000. Thirty years later there were about 11,000 in the colony. In 1790 there were 10,974 Negroes, of whom 7,372 were slaves and 6,537 were free.

In Pennsylvania there was some respect for blacks as human beings, and this attitude led to an early movement for manumission. Even those to whom the institution was acceptable shrank from the wholesale and indiscriminate enslavement of black people simply because it was possible to do so. Pennsylvania was not only relatively free from violence and interracial strife, but the blacks there made strides toward genuine accommodation to their new environment. The line of communication between blacks and whites was not altogether closed, and the former made many contacts. Schools and churches were a part of the lives of Negroes; the institution of marriage was generally respected, and the Negro family achieved a stability unlike that reached by blacks in most English colonies.

Meanwhile, as early as 1636 slavery existed on the site of the Delaware. Since Delaware was a part of Pennsylvania until 1785, the laws of the latter colony applied to Delaware. After that date Delaware was on its own, and the slave population increased at a somewhat more rapid rate than it did in Pennsylvania. As this occurred, Delaware drifted away from the mother colony and became more closely identified with the interests of the neighboring colonies to the south.

Slavery was never really successful in the Middle colonies. Their predominantly commercial economy, supplemented by subsistence agriculture, did not encourage the large-scale employment of slave labor; and many of the slaves that came through the New York and Pennsylvania ports were later sent into the Southern colonies. Even where there were extensive agricultural enterprises there was no desire for

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**NEGLIGENCE OF NEW ENGLAND**

Although New England's primary interest in slavery was in the slave trade, some were early introduced into Massachusetts and Connecticut. In 1636 a Salem ship unloaded several Africans in Boston, and in the following year there were Negroes in Hartford. Before a decade had passed, blacks were used in the construction of houses and forts in Connecticut. By the middle of the century the refugees who founded Rhode Island were using Negroes to help establish that colony. While the status of these early New England blacks was rather uncertain, it gradually became clear in all New England colonies that slavery was a legitimate institution.

Whether slaves landing in New England were to be settled there or shipped to other colonies, they became important to the commercial life of the New England colonies. New England slave traders competed in the trade, although they were at a serious disadvantage with the powerful European trading companies. After England secured a monopoly of slave trade to the New World in 1713, she welcomed New England merchants since there was more than enough for her own traders. In the first half of the eighteenth century the New England traders thrived. Boston, Salem, Providence, and New London busied with activity as outgoing ships were laden with rum, fish, and dairy products, and as Africans, molasses, and sugar were unloaded from the incoming ships. Down to the War for Independence the slave trade was vital to the economic life of New England.

The Negro population in New England grew slowly. In 1700, when the total population of the entire region was approximately 90,000, these were only 1,000 Negroes. In the eighteenth century the growth was more rapid. Massachusetts led with 2,000 Negroes in 1715 and 5,249 by 1776. Connecticut was second with 1,500 Negroes in 1715 and 3,587 by 1776. The largest percentage of Negroes was to be found in Rhode Island, where, in 1774, there were 3,701 blacks to 54,335 whites. The number in New Hampshire remained negligible all during the colonial period.

New England slavery needed little legal recognition for its growth and development. When the codes emerged late in the seventeenth century, slavery had already become well established. In 1670 Massachusetts enacted a law providing that the children of slaves could be
sold into bondage, and ten years later it began to enact measures restricting the movement of Negroes. In 1660 Connecticut barred Negroes from military service, and thirty years later it restrained them from going beyond the limits of the town without a pass. The restrictions against the education of slaves were not as great as in other regions, and frequently Negroes learned to read and write. Since the number of slaves in New England remained relatively small throughout the colonial period, there was little fear of insurrections. Nevertheless, many slaves indicated their dislike of the institution by running away. Others attacked their masters and even murdered them. Still others plotted to rebel. In 1658, some Negroes and Indians in Hartford decided to make a bid for their freedom by destroying several houses of their masters. In the eighteenth century there were a number of conspiracies to rebel in Boston and other towns in Massachusetts. The situation became so serious in Boston in 1723 that the selectmen found it necessary to take precautionary measures by forbidding slaves to be on the streets at night and to be "idling or lurking together."

Despite some restrictions, Negroes in New England seemed to have been free to associate with each other and with peaceful Indians. The houses of some free blacks became the rendezvous for them to dance, play games, and tell stories. Slaves like Lancy Terry of Deerfield, Massachusetts, and Senagambia of Narragansett, Rhode Island, had a seemingly limitless store of tales about Africa and other faraway places that filled many an hour with excitement and pleasure. There was, moreover, ample opportunity for blacks to associate with whites, for hardly a house or church raising, an apple paring, or a corn husking took place without the presence of at least a portion of the slave population. On Guy Fawkes Day, Lorenzo Greene says, "Negroes joined in the boisterous crowds that surged through the streets of Boston, much to the annoyance of pedestrians."

Negroes in New England were in a unique position in colonial America. They were not subjected to the harsh codes or the severe treatment that their fellows received in the colonies of the South. Nevertheless, it is possible to exaggerate the humanitarian aspect of their treatment. Masters in New England held a firm hand on the institution and gave little consideration to the small minority that argued for the freedom of the slaves. Although the New Englander took his religion seriously, he did not permit it to interfere with his appreciation of the profits of slavery and the slave trade. At the same time, he did not glut his home market with slaves and raise the number to the point where he would be fearful for the safety of himself and his family. There seemed to be the characteristic Yankee shrewdness in the New Englander's assessment of the importance of slavery to his economic and social life.

VI

Latin America's Bondmen

SPANISH SLAVERY ON THE MAINLAND

In 1501 the government in Madrid authorized the introduction of Africans to make up for the deficiency in Indian labor which the Spaniards had been using in the New World. The condition that only such Africans should be taken as had been born under the power of Christian manners was shortly overlooked as the demand for workers increased. They were being brought into Cuba in such large numbers by 1566 that the Spanish government, fearing of an uprising among the slaves, was moved to prohibit their further importation. For a decade the importation of Negroes slowed to a trickle, and the extensive use of Indians was resumed. In 1576 Charles II issued licenses to several Flemish traders to take Negroes into the Spanish colonies. In the following year the ban against the use of Negroes was removed, with the stipulation that one-third of those imported should be women. By the time Cortés launched his conquest of Mexico, Negroes were in all the Spanish island colonies and were being rapidly introduced into the mainland.

In the early years of the Spanish colonies the slave trade was viewed as un-Christian and illegal. To overcome this dual disfavor, it was necessary for traders to secure special permission—the encomienda—to bring slaves into the Spanish colonies. This made it relatively easy for the crown to subject the traffic in slaves to rigid control. Since the contracts, or permits, were monopolistic, the holders were required to pay a tax to the crown on each slave brought in. The crown reserved the right to revoke the encomienda if the trader did not make accurate reports on the numbers of slaves imported or if they were either unhealthy or in some other way undesirable as workers. Whether the encomienda was held by private persons or companies, by Spaniards or foreigners, the crown could use its granting power as an effective diplomatic and economic weapon to enhance its influence in both hemispheres.