

VIRGINIA DEVELOPMENT

I. Virginia at the time of Sir William Berkeley's arrival (1642)

- A. Although the tobacco boomtime that had caused the company's failure in 1624 ended around 1630 - the colony continued to develop slowly during the first half of the seventeenth century.
- B. By 1642, when Governor Sir William Berkeley arrived, the colony remained a sickly settlement with only 8,000 people living there.
- C. Virginia had earned the reputation "that none but those of the meanest quality and corruptest lives went there."
- D. The quality of life in early Virginia was more like a modern military outpost or lumber camp than a permanent society.
- E. Its leaders were rough, violent, hard-drinking men. Berkeley's predecessor, Governor John Harvey, had knowcked out the teeth of a councilor with a cudgel, before being thrust out himself by the colonists.
- F. The colony was in a state of chronic disorder. Its rulers were unable to govern, its social institutions were ill-defined, its economy was undeveloped, its politics were unstable, and its cultural identity was indistinct. (Above points from Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 210).

II. Berkeley's and his elite

- A. In the thirty five years of Sir William Berkeley's tenure, Virginia was transformed. (1642-76)
 - 1. Its population increased fivefold from 8,000 to 40,000 inhabitants.
 - a. increased immigration
 - b. People were living longer because there were more doctors, better diet (esp. fruit), better conditions on the trip over
 - 2. It developed a coherent social order, a functioning economic system, and a strong sense of its own special folkways.
 - 3. Most important, it also acquired a governing elite which Berkeley described as "men of as good families as any subjects in England" (Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 210).
- B. Of all Sir William Berkeley's many projects as governor, the most important was the reruitment of an Royalist elite for Virginia. He encouraged the cavaliers (mostly younger sons of royalist gentry in England) to come over in large numbers, and when

they arrived, he promoted them to high office, granted them large estates and created the ruling oligarchy that ran the colony for many generations.

C. The cavalier migration continued throughout Berkeley's tenure as governor (1642-1676). Much of it occurred during the decade of the 1650s, when a Puritan oligarchy gained the upper hand in England and tried to impose its beliefs by force upon an unwilling people.

D. Virginia's Royalist immigrants were refugees from oppression, just as many New England Puritans themselves were. Many had fought for Charles I in England's Civil War. Some continued to serve him until his armies were broken by Parliament and the King himself was killed in 1649. Others rallied to the future King Charles II, and in 1651 fought at his side on the field of Worcester, where they were beaten once again.

E. Most of the Royalists émigrés from England took refuge in Europe during the English Commonwealth period (1649-1660). But many were recruited by William Berkeley. Some had been his friends in England, others he met in the New World. They all shared his Royalist politics, his Anglican faith (opposed to Puritanism), and his vision for the future of the colony.

III. Elite Domination

A. Political Domination

1. The Elite gained control of the Royal Council (governor's cabinet, upper house of legislature, colony's supreme court) during the mid-seventeenth century and retained it until the Revolution.
2. As early as 1660, every seat on the Council was filled by members of five related connections.
3. In 1724, there were 12 members on the Royal Council. All, without exception were related to one another by blood or family.
4. As late as 1775, every member of the Royal Council was descended from a councilor who had served in 1660.
5. A seat on the Council was not an empty honor. This small body functioned as the governor's cabinet, the upper house of the legislature and the colony's supreme court.

B. Economic Domination

1. With political control, came economic control.
2. The Royal Council controlled the distribution of land in Virginia (land was owned by the Crown and distributed by the Royal Council through the headright system).

3. The vast majority of land went to twenty-five families who held two-thirds of the seats in the Royal Council from 1680 to 1775.

3. These same 25 families also controlled other offices of power and profit: secretary, treasurer, auditor general, receiver general, surveyor general, collectors and naval officers, and governors of William and Mary College.

4. Along with a larger group of lesser gentry the leading 25 families dominated the economic life of the colony.

- a. controlled the best land in the tidewater
- b. owned much of the urban real estate that there was in the colony
- c. also, owned land on the western frontier

5. An example may show the degree to which economic control was wielded by the Colonial elite, and how this colonial elite also dominated the cultural/social order in the colony.

EX. A big man with labor to grow tobacco on a large scale could command more attention and better prices from the ships, because his large crop made it possible for a ship to load rapidly and get back to England for a more favorable market than later ships. It was often easier for a small man to sell his crop to his larger neighbor than to gamble on the chance of getting it aboard a ship himself. If his land did not abut a river, he might have no choice but to sell to someone who could get it aboard for him. (Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 224.)

C. Cultural Domination

1. The more hierarchical a society becomes, the stronger is the cultural domination of the elite.

2. The psychological cement that held Virginians together – these elites of Berkeley's tenure and their social inferiors – was a cultural of subordination that historians call **deference**.

3. Deference had a reciprocal posture called **condescension**, which was to treat an inferior with kindness, decency, and respect. Taught to children of the elite.

IV. The Social Order in Virginia mid-17th century Virginia

A. As Virginian society matured in the middle of the seventeenth century, tobacco remained at the center of economic life and two interrelated "commodities" became more and more necessary to any planter who hoped to become prosperous - land and labor.

B. Land – under the headright system land was easy to come by early on. Some planters acquired thousands of acres, although in the 17th century they only worked a few hundred of them.

C. Labor – on the other hand was not so easy to come by.

D. It was the economic system and need for labor that set the parameters of the social order in Virginia in the mid-seventeenth century.

1. Outside the structure entirely were the remaining **Indians** of the area.

a. In the **Second Anglo-Powhatan War** (1644-46), the Indians under Opechancanough (Powhatan's brother) had made one last effort to dislodge the Virginians.

b. They were again defeated.

c. The peace treaty of 1646 banished the Chesapeake Indians from their ancestral lands and formally separated Indian from white areas.

d. By 1669 an official census revealed that only about two thousand Indians remained in Virginia, perhaps 10 percent of the population the original English settlers had found in 1607.

2. Inside the structure at the bottom were a number of **slaves**, at most 1,000 in 1660. A small minority in Virginian society.

3. A little above the slaves were a much more numerous body of **indentured servants**, working out the terms assigned them to repay the cost of their transportation.

a. In fact, more 75% of those who came to Virginia in the seventeenth century came as indentured servants, with someone else paying their way.

b. The vast majority 80 - 90% of indentured servants were men

c. 3/4 of the indentured servants were young, between the ages of 15 and 24

d. These young men were mostly agrarian, they were not highly skilled, and they were not literate for the most part

4. At the other end, at the top of the scale were the **elite**, a group of men who had inherited, amassed, or arrived in the colony with estates large enough to assure them a continuing supply of servants and to win them lucrative government offices.

5. A little below the elite, were the other **established householders**, usually with one or more servants.

6. In between the established householders and the indentured servants, was the group that was growing most rapidly – the **freedmen** who had finished their terms of service.

V. The Problems Posed by Freedmen

A. Indentured Servitude had worked during the first 30 years of Virginian history (1607-1640) in part because the death rate was so high.

1. Population in 1625 still on 1,300

2. Between 1625-1640, 15,000 immigrants came to Virginia; only 8,000 survived in 1640

3. It was too expensive to buy slaves

4. Freedmen, after they served their period of indenture, could find a place to live and farm and – if they survived – be successful

B. After 1640, circumstances changed for the freedmen

1. When the diseases responsible for the high death rate began to decline, the population of Virginia rose – passed 25,000 by 1662

2. There were more and more freedmen who had served their terms but who were now unable to afford land of their own except on the frontiers. The elite of the colony had founded up the best areas in the tidewater already.

3. By 1676, it was estimated that one fourth of Virginia's freemen were without land of their own.

a. some resigned themselves to working for wages

b. others preferred a meager living on dangerous frontier land

c. others lived hand to mouth, roaming for county to county, renting a bit of land here, squatting on some there, dodging the tax collector, drinking, quarreling, stealing hogs, and enticing servants to run away with them.

C. The presence of this growing class of poverty-stricken Virginians was frightening to the planters who had made it to the top.

D. They planters were caught in a dilemma.

1. They wanted the immigrants who kept pouring in every year. Indeed they needed them and prized them the more as they lived longer.

2. But as more and more turned free each year, Virginia seemed to be becoming a more dangerous place to live.

E. The men who worried the uppercrust looked very dangerous.

1. They were, to begin with, young, impatient, and rebellious.

2. They were also predominantly single men. Because the planters did not think women, or at least English women, fit for work in the fields, men outnumbered women among immigrants by three or four to one throughout the century.

3. Consequently most of the freedmen had no wife or family to tame their wilder impulses.

4. Finally, what made these wild young men particularly dangerous was that they were armed and had to be armed.

a. Life in Virginia required guns.

b. The plantations were exposed to attack from Indians by land and from privateers and petty-thieving pirates by sea.

c. Whenever England was at war with the French or the Dutch, the settlers had to be ready to defend themselves. In 1667 the Dutch in a single raid captured twenty merchant ships in the James River, together with the English warship that was supposed to be defending them.

d. On these occasions Governor William Berkeley gathered the planters in arms and at least prevented the enemy from making a landing.

e. But while he stood off the Dutch he worried about the ragged crew at his back. The freedmen were in debt, they were rebellious, and they might seek to plunder the property of the wealthy.

VI. Bacon's Rebellion

A. Berkeley's fears of the freedmen were justified.

B. In 1676, sparked not by a Dutch invasion but by an Indian attack, rebellion swept Virginia.

C. It began almost as Berkeley had predicted, when a group of volunteer Indian fighters turned from a fruitless expedition against the Indians to attack their rulers.

D. Bacon's Rebellion was the largest popular rising in the colonies before the American Revolution. Sooner or later nearly everyone in Virginia got in on it, but it began in the frontier counties of Henrico and New Kent, among men whom the governor and his friends consistently characterized as rabble.

E. As it spread eastward, it turned out that there were rabble everywhere, and Berkeley understandably raised his estimate of their numbers.

F. Virginia's poor had reason to be envious and angry against the men who owned the land and imported the servants and ran the government.

G. But the rebellion produced no real program of reform, no ideology, not even any revolutionary slogans. It was a search for plunder, not for principles.

H. When the rebels had redistributed whatever wealth they could lay their hands on, the rebellion subsided almost as quickly as it had begun.

I. It had been a shattering experience, however, for Virginia's first families.

1. They had seen each other fall in with the rebels in order to save their skins or their possessions or even to share in the plunder.

2. When it was over, they eyed one another distrustfully, on the lookout for any new Bacons in their midst, who might be tempted to lead the still restive rabble on more plundering expeditions.

VII. Dealing with the Freedmen

A. As Virginia acquired the social problem of the freedmen, the colony's leaders dealt with it by restricting the liberties of those who did not have the proper badge of freedom, namely the property that government was supposed to protect.

1. One way was to extend the terms of service for servants entering the colony without indentures. Formerly they had served until twenty-one; now the age was advanced to twenty-four.

2. There had always been laws requiring them to serve extra time for running away; now the laws added corporal punishment and, in order to make habitual offenders more readily recognizable, specified that their hair be cropped.

3. New laws restricted the movement of servants on the highways and also increased the amount of extra time to be served for running away.

4. In addition to serving two days for every day's absence, the captured runaway was now frequently required to compensate by labor for the loss to the crop that he had failed to tend and for the cost of his apprehension, including rewards paid for his capture.

5. If a servant struck his master, he was to serve another year.

6. For killing a hog he had to serve the owner a year and the informer another year.

B. The effect of these measures was to keep servants for as long as possible from gaining their freedom.

C. At the same time the engrossment of land (by the elite) was driving many back to servitude after a brief taste of freedom. Freedmen who engaged to work for wages by so doing became servants again, subject to most of the same restrictions as other servants.

D. Nevertheless, in spite of all the legal and economic pressures to keep men in service, the ranks of the freedmen grew, and so did poverty and discontent.

E. To prevent the wild bachelors from gaining an influence in the government, the assembly in 1670 limited voting to landholders and householders. But to disfranchise the growing mass of single freemen was not to deprive them of the weapons they had wielded so effectively under Nathaniel Bacon.

F. It is questionable how far Virginia could safely have continued along this course, meeting discontent with repression and manning her plantations with annual importations of servants who would later add to the unruly ranks of the free.

VIII. Move to Slavery

A. However, this is a question we don't have to answer.

B. There was a solution to the freedmen problem, one which:

1. Allowed Virginia's magnates to keep their lands

2. Yet at the same time arrested the discontent and the repression of other Englishmen

3. This was also a solution which strengthened the rights of Englishmen and nourished that attachment to liberty which came to fruition in the Revolutionary generation of Virginia statesmen.

4. But the solution put an end to the process of turning Africans into Englishmen.

5. The rights of Englishmen were preserved by destroying the rights of Africans.

C. Virginians did not deliberately turn to African Negro slavery as a means of preserving and extending the rights of Englishmen.

D. Winthrop Jordan has suggested that slavery came to Virginia as an unthinking decision. We might go further and say that it came without a decision.

E. It came automatically as Virginians bought the cheapest labor they could get.

1. Once Virginia's heavy mortality ceased, an investment in slave labor was much more profitable than an investment in free labor; and the planters bought slaves as rapidly as traders made them available.
2. In the last years of the seventeenth century they bought them in such numbers that slaves probably already constituted a majority of the labor force by 1700.
3. But the social benefits of an enslaved labor force, even if not consciously sought at the time by the men who bought the slaves, were larger than the economic benefits.
4. The increase in the importation of slaves was matched by a decrease in the importation of indentured servants
5. And so a decrease in the dangerous number of new freedmen who annually emerged seeking a place in society that they would be unable to achieve.

F. You see, there was a limit beyond which the abridgment of English liberties would have resulted not merely in rebellion but in protests from England and in the cutting off of the supply of further servants.

G. But to keep as slaves black men who arrived in that condition was possible and apparently regarded as plain common sense.

H. And so, as a labor force arrived in Virginia that was economically advantageous, and at the same time posed less of a social threat than freedmen, the Virginia elite started buying slaves.

IX. Setting Slaves Apart in Virginian Society

A. As African slaves entered Virginia, it seemed convenient and reasonable to have different laws for those arriving as black slaves from Africa and those arriving as white servants or freemen from England.

B. As the number of slaves increased, the assembly passed laws that carried forward with much greater severity the trend already under way in the colony's labor laws.

C. But the new severity was reserved for people without white skin.

1. Slaves were deprived of opportunities for association
2. They were kept unarmed

3. They were subjected to savage punishments by their owners without fear of legal reprisals.

4. And since their color disclosed their probable status, the rest of society could keep close watch on them.

5. The laws specifically exonerated the master who accidentally beat his slave to death, but they placed new limitations on his punishment of "Christian white servants."

D. The danger from slaves proved to be less than that which the armed freedmen posed.

1. Slaves had none of the rising expectations that so often produce human discontent.

2. No one had told them that they had rights.

3. They never knew freedom in Virginia

4. Moreover, slaves were less troubled by the sexual imbalance that helped to make Virginia's free laborers so restless. From the beginning, traders imported women in a much higher ratio to men than was the case among English servants, and the level of discontent was correspondingly reduced.

X. Freedmen and the Elite Come Together

A. When the annual increment of freedmen fell off, the number that remained could more easily find an independent place in society

B. The way was thus made easier for the remaining freedmen to acquire property, maybe acquire a slave or two of their own, and join with their superiors in the enjoyment of those English liberties that differentiated them from their black laborers.

C. A free society divided between large landholders and small was much less riven by antagonisms than one divided between landholders and landless, masterless men.

D. With the freedman's expectations, sobriety, and status restored, he was no longer a man to be feared.

E. That fact, together with the presence of a growing mass of alien slaves, tended to draw the white settlers closer together and to reduce the importance of the class difference between yeoman farmer and large plantation owner.

XI. Political development of the colony, 1680-1720

A. During the seventeenth century the royally appointed governor's council, composed of the largest property owners in the colony, had been the most powerful governing body.

B. But as the tide of slavery rose between 1680 and 1720 Virginia moved toward a government in which the yeoman farmer had a larger share.

C. In spite of the rise of Virginia's great families on the black tide, the power of the council declined; and the elective House of Burgesses became the dominant organ of government.

D. The House of Burgesses members nurtured a closer relationship with their yeoman constituency than had earlier been the case.

E. And in its chambers Virginians developed the ideas they so fervently asserted in the Revolution: ideas about taxation, representation, and the rights of Englishmen, and ideas about the prerogatives and powers and sacred calling of the independent, property-holding yeoman farmer-commonwealth ideas.

F. In the eighteenth century, because they were no longer threatened by a dangerous free laboring class, Virginians could afford these ideas, whereas in Berkeley's time they could not.

G. Berkeley himself was obsessed with the experience of the English civil wars and the danger of rebellion. He despised and feared the New Englanders for their association with the Puritans who had made England, however briefly, a commonwealth. He was proud that Virginia, unlike New England, had no free schools and no printing press, because books and schools bred heresy and sedition. He must have taken satisfaction in the fact that when his people did rebel against him under Bacon, they generated no republican ideas, no philosophy of rebellion or of human rights.

H. Yet a century later, without benefit of rebellions, Virginians had learned republican lessons, had introduced schools and printing presses, and were as read as New Englanders to recite the aphorisms of the commonwealthmen.

I. It was slavery more than any other single factor, that had made the difference,

1. Slavery that enabled Virginia to nourish representative government in a plantation society

2. Slavery transformed the Virginia of Governor Berkeley to the Virginia of Jefferson

3. Slavery made the Virginians dare to speak a political language that magnified the rights of freemen

4. And, slavery, therefore, that brought Virginians into the same commonwealth political tradition with New Englanders.

5. The very institution that was to divide North and South after the Revolution may have made possible their union in a republican government.

J. Thus began the American paradox of slavery and freedom, intertwined and interdependent, the rights of Englishmen supported on the wrongs of Africans.

K. The American Revolution only made the contradictions more glaring, as the slaveholding colonists proclaimed to a candid world the rights not simply of Englishmen but of all men.

L. To explain the origin of the contradictions does not eliminate them or make them less ugly.

M. But it may enable us to understand a little better the strength of the ties that bound freedom to slavery, even in so noble a mind as Jefferson's.

N. And it may perhaps make us wonder about the ties that bind more devious tyrannies to our own freedoms and give us still today our own American paradox.