“20. AND ODD NEGROES”: VIRGINIA AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF SLAVERY, 1619-1660

BY

CARMEN PECOLA THOMPSON

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor David R. Roediger, Chair
Professor Jean Allman
Associate Professor Adrian Burgos, Jr.
Assistant Professor Jessica Millward
ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relationship between Virginia’s early development and the transatlantic slave trade. This study locates Virginia as a colonizer and an enslaver in the context of the developing international system of slavery and the major upheavals that transformed both West Central Africa and the New World in the early seventeenth century. European peoples in the early sixteenth century promoted the expansion of plantation economies in the Americas using European immigrant and West African laborers. This expansion created the conditions for England’s settlement of Virginia and its transition from observer to participant in the transatlantic slave trade. This dissertation explores how the technologies of oppression that made-up the international system of slavery shaped the early development of Virginia and the extent to which they fueled the racial character of Virginia. This project also explores how Black peoples attempted to survive and build community using indigenous West African knowledge systems and cultural forms.

Using a variety of county court records (deeds, orders, and wills), estate inventories, statutes, and letters from various counties between 1619 and 1660, this study examines the influence of the international system of slavery on Virginia’s social, legal, religious, and governmental institutions from its settlement through the legislative enactments of the 1660s that made it increasingly difficult for African peoples to remain free. In the early decades of the seventeenth century Virginia leaders looked to England, and England looked to other European nations that participated in the transatlantic slave trade for guidance in how to structure its society. By the 1620s and 1630s these models were fundamental to establishing the colony’s hierarchical social structure that produced unequal relations between European immigrants and
African and Native groups. I argue that Virginia had integrated into the international system of slavery earlier than most historians have argued, influencing not only the racial character of Virginia but also its early development. I further argue that African peoples united as a group in response to this reality, recreating indigenous knowledge systems and culture forms such as agrarian culture, oral traditions, and lineage systems that were held in common across ethnic divides in West Africa to resist subjugation and build community in Virginia. Viewing the early decades of Virginia through the lens of the transatlantic slave trade reframes our fundamental assumptions about first half of the seventeenth century, about the ways in which Africa and Africans shaped the development of Virginia, and about what it meant to be African and European in the early decades of the seventeenth century.
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Introduction
Rethinking Virginia and its Place in the International System of Slavery

When John Rolfe reported in a letter to Sir Edwin Sandys that “20 and odd Negroes” had been off-loaded from a English vessel at Point Comfort, Virginia in late August 1619, his statement was more than just a casual comment about the cargo contained on this vessel. It told of Virginia’s entrance into a developing international system of slavery that included Africa, the Americas, Western Europe and the Islamic world.¹ The decision made by Virginia leaders to participate in the piracy of the “20 and odd Negroes” and to join their European neighbors in a program that exploited the labor of millions of African peoples from West Central Africa--leading to the transformation of the regions indigenous forms of slavery--was not unexpected or fortuitous, nor was it uncalculated. Rather, it was planned and premeditated, and it was precipitated by their previous experience with enslaved Africans.

There is convincing evidence that shows that the “twenty Negroes” that Rolfe was referencing were not the first enslaved persons imported to Virginia from West Central Africa. The muster (census) of 1619 shows “32 Negroes” (seventeen women and fifteen men) “in the service of seu[er]all planters, in the begininge of March 1619.”² This fact suggests that Virginia’s leaders were not as detached from the Atlantic slave trade during the early seventeenth

¹ I define the international system of slavery as the technologies of oppression and enslavement used by Europeans in the transatlantic slave trade. Among them were six key elements that overlap in various ways with other systems of domination such as colonialism and imperialism. The six key elements discussed in this dissertation as they relate to Virginia’s growth and development includes: religious intolerance and persecution, territorial expansion, colonial settlement, arrogant imposition on colonial and indigenous peoples, theological justification for enslavement, racial exclusion. Aspects of this analysis was informed by the work of Robin Blackburn, The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800 (New York: Verso, 1997), 10-18, 33.; Paul E. Lovejoy, Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa, Second Edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).; and Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982).
²The March 1619 census is contained in Ferrar Papers, MS 1597A, document 159 on microfilm reel 1. It is also reprinted in William Thorndale, ”The Virginia Census of 1619,” Magazine of Virginia Genealogy 33 (1995): 168-70.
century as many scholars have claimed. Instead of the colony’s involvement with the international system of slavery having occurred slowly, in the latter decades of the seventeenth century, and in isolation from England and other European colonies, the subsequent decision to purchase a second group of enslaved Africans (the “20 and odd Negroes”) in August 1619, reveals that Virginia’s leaders were, indeed, early and active participants in the slave trade, importing more than fifty Africans into Virginia in 1619.

Two letters, one by John Pory, secretary of state of the colony, written on September 30, 1619 from Jamestown to Sir Dudley Carleton, English envoy to The Hague, and the other by the aforementioned Rolfe to Sandys, dated January 20, 1620, disclose Virginia’s purposeful intent to import African slaves. Together, the two documents explain the events that led to the acquisition of the “20 and odd Negroes.” Pory’s letter reads as follows:

Having mett with so fit a messenger as this man of warre of Flushing, I could not but imparte with your lordship … these poore fruites of our labours here… The occasion of the ship’s coming hither was an accidental consortship in the West Indies with the Tresurer, an English man of warre also, licensed by a Commission from the Duke of Savoye to take Spaniards as lawfull prize. This ship, the Treasurer, wente out of England in April was twelve moneth, about a moneth, I thinke, before any peace was concluded between the king of Spaine and that prince. Hither she came to Captaine Argall, then governour of this Colony, being parte-owner of her. Hee more for the love of gaine, the root of all evill, then for any true love he bore to his Plantation, victualled and manned her anewe, and sent her with the same Commission to raunge the Indies.4

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3 Many scholars have claimed that Virginia leaders were slow to participate in the transatlantic slave trade in the first half of the seventeenth century because the colony possessed a relatively dependable supply of European immigrant labor to sustain tobacco plantations, notable among these are: Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 296-300; T. H. Breen, and Stephen Innes, “Myne Owne Ground:” Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640-1676 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4-5.; Winthrop D. Jordan, White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 56, 72-3. My research shows that we should not take the small number of enslaved African imports as evidence of a lack of influence of the transatlantic slave trade or its technologies of oppression on Virginia society or its settlers.

The letter by Pory to the English envoy reads more like a debriefing of a planned mission than a personal letter. Nonetheless, it outlines in significant detail Virginia’s seizure of a Spanish vessel that we now know contained the “20 and odd Negroes.” The tone of Pory’s letter hints at an orchestrated attack (consortship) against the *San Juan Bautista* by the English ship the *Treasurer* and a Dutch vessel that hailed from England’s seaport in Flushing. What Pory called an “accidental consortship” describes the raid that led to the “20 and odd Negroes” being brought to Virginia.

The best evidence in Pory’s letter in support of the depth of Virginia’s immersion in the international system of slavery was the fact that the letter was written to the English ambassador, Sir Dudley Carleton. Addressing the letter to Carleton indicates that high ranking officials in England and Virginia cooperated to bring enslaved Africans to Virginia. As mentioned, Carleton was the English envoy to The Hague, which was the seat of the Dutch parliament, government, and Royal Court, located in the Netherlands. Diplomatic relations between the English and the Dutch had been forged over several decades. For more than thirty years, between 1585 and 1616, the English and the Dutch were trading partners. So much was this so that in the sixteenth century England maintained its primary seaport in Flushing, also located in the Netherlands.

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5 There is convincing evidence to suggest that the Spanish vessel was the *San Juan Bautista*, which had three hundred-fifty enslaved “Loanda” Africans aboard, of which approximately two hundred were pirated by the English. The “20 and odd Negroes” are believed to be part of this cargo. Scholars that hold this belief include: Engel Sluiter, "New Light on the ’20. And Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 Third Series, no. 2 (April 1997): 395-8, and Tim Hashaw, *The Birth of Black America the First African Americans and the Pursuit of Freedom at Jamestown* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007), xvi. These scholars cite evidence from “Indiferente General 2795, Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Sevilla, in support of their claim.

6 Flushing was an English seaport in the Netherlands. Since the sixteenth century it was one of the chief ports for English traffic in the Netherlands.

7 A Consortship is a temporary agreement to cooperate. In this case it was a temporary agreement to cooperate in pirating the Spanish vessel and sharing the loot. It is believed that this vessel that was in consortship with the *Treasurer* was a ship called the *White Lion*. For information on the *White Lion* see Hashaw, *The Birth of Black America the First African Americans and the Pursuit of Freedom at Jamestown*. 
During this time, the Dutch were challenging Portugal’s monopoly of the slave trading routes in West Central Africa, including the important Kongo-Angola region, which supplied the majority of enslaved Africans to Virginia and the Americas through the first half of the seventeenth century. As a result, the Dutch would often invade Portuguese networks in an effort to procure African peoples for sale across the Atlantic. For example, in 1622 the Dutch ship the *Margarett and John* brought “Mary a Negro Woman” to Virginia. The longstanding relationship between the Dutch and the English, made it likely that Virginia officials in 1619 enlisted the services of its English diplomat (Carleton) to prevail upon the Dutch to facilitate the acquisition of slaves.

Rolfe’s letter, when read in conjunction with the Pory’s, suggests that the events described by Pory were an attack of the Spanish vessel for its slaves. Rolfe’s description of the raid provides fuller details:

About the later end of August, a Dutch man of Warr of the burden of a 160 tunnes arriued at Point-Comfort, the Commandors name Capt Jope, his Pilott for the West Indies one Mr. Marmaduke an Englishman. They mett with the *Trier* in the West Indyes, and determyned to hold consort shipp hetherward, but in their passage lost one the other. He brought not any thing but 20. and odd Negroes, which the Govenor and Cape Marchant bought for victualle (whereof he was in greate need as he pretended) at the best and easyest rate they could. He hadd a lardge and ample Commyssion from his Excellency to range and to take purchase in the West Indyes. Three or 4. daies after the *Trier* arriued.

Unlike Pory’s letter, Rolfe’s was not written to a prominent English official, but to Edwin Sandys, architect of one of Virginia’s most noted labor programs that imported three thousand five hundred English immigrants to Virginia between 1618 and 1622. Rolfe was an early settler

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8 In 1641 the Dutch won temporary control of Portuguese trading routes.
of Virginia, famously known for his marriage to Pocahontas. He and Sandys were both powerful men in Virginia, whereas the relationship between Pory and Sir Carleton was more hierarchical--Carleton was ambassador to England-Virginia’s mother country, and Pory was the colony’s secretary. As such, Rolfe’s letter could be more informal and candid on the matter of the raid than Pory’s.

Both letters suggest that Virginia worked with other English colonies and European countries (West Indies, England, Spain, and Netherlands) and was supported by those in the highest ranks of Virginia’s government in the acquisition of African slaves. Pory tells us in his letter that “his Excellency” provided ample funds to hire a Captain and first mate to raid the Spanish vessel that led to the eventual purchase of “20 and odd Negroes” by Virginia’s governor.11 The governor Pory referenced was Samuel Argall, 1617-1619, who was part owner of the Treasurer, the vessel involved in the pirated attack. Likewise, Rolfe’s letter explained that the governor and the colony’s merchant purchased the “20 and odd Negroes” obtained from the raid after the ship had stopped in the West Indies.12 The governor that Rolfe was referring to, however, was not Argall, but George Yeardley who was the governor of Virginia from 1619 to 1621 while Argall was temporarily in England.13 Yeardley and his friend Abraham Peirsey purchased the twenty Africans. In all, the letters show that two of Virginia’s governors (Argall and Yeardley) and a high ranking English official were in on the decision to bring slaves to the colony. The first purchase of “32 Negroes” in March 1619 and the subsequent pirated acquisition of the “20 and odd Negroes” in late August 1619, suggests that Virginia’s entrance

11 According to the Oxford Dictionary (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), the term “his Excellency” is a mid-sixteenth century title given to certain high officials of state.
12 The merchant that Rolfe was referencing was Abraham Peirsey.
13 Yeardley was also governor from 1616-1617.
into the expanding transatlantic slave trade was not an “unthinking decision” but a thought out and organized program by men at most every level of power.

The letters of Rolfe and Pory also challenge the notion of Virginia exceptionalism—that slavery in Virginia developed independently from the international world without influence from England or English colonies, and that slavery and racism were rare or nonexistent before the legislation of the 1660s and 1670s. The letters confirm that the route to Virginia that these early Africans traveled was made up of a growing international network of countries and colonies that had traded in slaves in West Central Africa since the fifteenth century. Thus, Virginia had integrated into the international network of slavery in the early decades of the seventeenth century rather than the later decades, and in higher numbers than what was initially believed. This meant that Virginia’s demand for slaves contributed in some small measure to the population declines that ultimately weakened African countries than had been recognized by many historians of Africa and the Americas.

My dissertation explores the relationship between Virginia’s early development and the expanding transatlantic slave trade. I situate the early history of Virginia, as a colonizer and an enslaver, in the context of the international system of slavery and the major upheavals that

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transformed both West Central Africa and the New World in the seventeenth century. I trace this link to the slave trade to before the 1705 slave codes, including the period before Virginia was founded-in the late sixteenth century-when England was trading in slaves on the West African coast.16 This link can also be made after the settlement of Virginia in 1607, as colonists subdued and eliminated the indigenous populations, to the arrival of the first groups of Africans in 1619, and the extant institutions built and the legislation that was enacted for purposes of advancement.

Closing the time gap in the relationship between the Virginia’s early development and the transatlantic slave trade requires a new perspective from which to analyze many aspects of Virginia society including African slavery and resistance, the formation of race, both whiteness and blackness, the importance of the courts and churches as spaces of social control, and the power of the plantation, all of which were institutions for “civilizing” that can be traced back to and viewed within the context of a rising international system of slavery. Locating Virginia in the international system of slavery requires careful focus on the geography and layout of local communities and how they reflected this international system. What were the “places” and “spaces” in Virginia that augmented the transatlantic system of slavery?17 How did African and European persons navigate, experience, and perceive their surroundings?

Approaching the early history of Virginia from the perspective of the international system of slavery permits a view of a transatlantic Virginia rather than one that was detached from the

16 The Virginia Slave Codes of 1705 were a series of laws enacted by the Colony of Virginia’s House of Burgesses regulating activities relating to interactions between enslaved persons and European settlers. The enactment of the slave codes is considered to be the consolidation of slavery in Virginia, and served as the foundation of Virginia’s slave legislation. For a reading of the codes see Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, II: 481.
17 I draw my understanding of space from geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6, who defines “place” as a space that is perceived and experienced. Barbara Heath defines “space” as an area that has physical dimensions. See Barbara Heath and Amber Bennett, “Little Spots Allow’d Them: The Archaeological Study of African-American Yards,” in Historical Archaeology 34, 2 (2000), 38-55.
Atlantic World. Considering Virginia historically in a transatlantic rather than a narrow “American exceptionalist” context, one that takes into account its imperial heritage, allows us to situate early Virginia alongside other European and English countries, colonies, and territories who exploited the labor of millions of Africans and eliminated or subdued indigenous populations for purposes of advancement. This dissertation attempts to bring together what are all too often three separate literatures. The first includes the social history of Virginia, which implies or asserts that the colony’s involvement with the international system of slavery occurred slowly, in the latter decades of the seventeenth century, and in isolation from England and other European colonies. The second is the history of pre-colonial West Central Africa and the influence of its social and political systems on the purposefulness and resolve of African peoples in the early decades of seventeenth century Virginia. The third, and more recent literature, is the history of landscape and architecture that focuses on the relationship between the built environment in Virginia and New World slavery, and African people’s resistance to it.

The lack of analysis of the transatlantic slave from 1619 to 1660 represents a telling lacuna in the historiography of early Virginia. Although historians have generally been interested in the social history of early Africans or the development of Virginia as separate phenomena, they have not done enough to show how the two worked in tandem with the development of the international system of slavery during the first half of the seventeenth century. At best, this interaction has been merely referenced or fleetingly described but not adequately explored during the early decades of the century. To the extent that attempts to connect Virginia to the international world through the system of slavery were made, it was assigned to the late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth centuries, periods that undervalue the steady expansion of
transatlantic profiteering that was taking place in the global world and that had an impact on the
development of Virginia in the seventeenth century. Much of the seventeenth century
historiography of Virginia embodies the assumption that an expanding international system of
slavery had little impact on the early development of Virginia. Allan Kulikoff typifies the
analysis of many scholars whose research on the early history of the Chesapeake region did not
incorporate the international system of slavery into his study. Kulikoff explains the making of a
slave society in Virginia not in the context of the rising transatlantic slave trade, but from the
unique economic and demographic changes that occurred after 1680 in England that led to fewer
Whites willing to immigrate to Virginia. Kulikoff does not explore the fact that in the early
decades of the seventeenth century, many Virginia colonists lived and worked with an awareness
of the transatlantic system of slavery from their interactions with other English colonies and
European countries that were increasingly committing resources to the growing slave trade. In
fact, profiteering in the Caribbean by the English led to the colonization of the island of Bermuda
in 1609 by many of the same men who brought the first slaves to both Bermuda and Virginia in
1616 and 1619, respectively. 18

In contrast to Kulikoff, Breen and Innes argued that the Atlantic slave trade linked the four
continents, but the authors failed to connect this relationship to the development of Virginia
society. 19 More recently, Ira Berlin examined the development of North America within a global
context that included Black peoples whom he called “Atlantic Creoles.” Berlin locates the
personhood of Atlantic Creoles not in Africa or the Americas or even Europe but in the

18 Michael Joseph Jarvis, “In the Eye of All Trade: Maritime Revolution and the Transformation of Bermudian
Society, 1618-1800” (The College of William and Mary, 1998), 16. The vessel Sea Venture was bound for Virginia
with supplies when it sank in Bermuda, an event that led to the islands settlement and colonization.
“netherworld” between Africa and America—the Atlantic littoral. Yet, as important as Berlin’s research was in situating Virginia in a global context through the personhood of Black peoples, his treatment of the colony’s evolution of slavery was quite local, bounded by the politics and economics of Virginia rather than by the demand for slaves that was occurring in the wider world and the practices accompanying that demand.

This dissertation expands the social history of early Virginia to include its connection to this wider world through the medium of the transatlantic slave trade. I show what the formation of a colonial state influenced by a growing international system of slavery looked like and how it affected Virginia’s early development. I show this formation from the “ground-up”—in the built environment, such as plantations, courthouses, taverns, churches and churchyards, as well as other public spaces that were appliances of an advancing international system of slavery. I also show it from the “inside-out,” as Virginia officials looked outward to other colonies and countries to guide its early development, and from the “top-down,” as Virginia’s leaders enacted policies that were reflective of an unfolding international system of slavery. Within this framework, I explore how Africans and Europeans perceived, experienced, adapted, and resisted the state and its geographic controls. Throughout this study, I try to provide insight into the lives of early Africans by illustrating how Black peoples navigated the social structures of Virginia, which were extensions of imperial and colonial systems of domination.

21 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. 136, 149. I ground my notion of colonialism and imperialism as defined by Rodney, who defines *Colonialism* as repatriating profits from the exploitation of labor and resources back to the “mother country,” and *Imperialism* as looking abroad in less developed countries for opportunities to control and extract raw material supplies, to find markets, and to find profitable fields of investment using the materials and labor gotten at a cut rate to resell on the world market at market rates which because of cheapness of labor and resources makes for increased profits and market position.
No accounts by seventeenth century enslaved Africans, and few by other people, give us a direct statement of their perceptions of their surroundings. Nevertheless it is possible to form a few impressions from local court and county records and to augment these with evidence regarding the physical spaces that early Africans navigated. One of the early Africans who provide unique insights into the outlook of Black peoples while also illuminating the consequences of the international system of slavery in Virginia daily life was a woman named Elizabeth Key.

Elizabeth Key was an African-Anglo woman, born in 1630 in Virginia to an enslaved African woman and a free English man. In 1655, Key sued for her freedom and that of her son in a Northumberland County, Virginia court. After lengthy legal proceedings, on July 21, 1659 she prevailed. Key’s freedom strategy rested on a claim of Englishness and Christianity, revealing a crucial and largely unexplored links between these identities and the expanding British empire by way of the transatlantic slave trade.

Early Americanists interested in slavery have generally focused on whether slavery or racism came first, and what specific economic and social factors in Virginia and England accounted for the transition from indentured servitude to chattel slavery. Neither question fully examines the connections between early Virginia slaveholders and slaveholders elsewhere and the influence of religion and race on Virginia’s decision to enslave. Oscar and Mary Handlin posited in 1950 that Africans in English colonies were not initially slaves for life and were probably treated more like indentured servants.22 The Handlins hint at the link between Englishness and Christianity and its impact on racial slavery by confirming that laws after 1660

prevented the manumission of baptized Africans. For the Handlins and many historians after them, the real story of slavery was Virginia’s independence from transatlantic connections, including other English colonies. They claim that Virginia’s move toward African slavery and racism occurred organically, in the latter decades of the seventeenth century.

More recent historians of the Chesapeake attributed Virginia’s delayed embrace of slavery and racism first to economics and then to English ideals about gender. In 1975, Edmund Morgan acknowledged the longstanding congruence in Virginia between “Christianity, whiteness, and freedom and heathenism, non-whiteness, and slavery.” However, Morgan did not examine the influence of other slaveholding societies to explain how this worldview came about. Although Kathleen Brown acknowledged the importance of countries like Spain, the Netherlands, France, and Portugal in shaping England’s ambitions for Virginia, her study of Virginia does not fully develop the colony’s connection to these nations via West Central Africa and the international system of slavery. Instead, this transatlantic connection was subsumed in her argument about the centrality of English gender norms to the colony’s articulation of race, slavery, and patriarchy. Although Morgan’s and Brown’s work are important contributions to our understanding of the role of race, religion, and gender to the enslavement of early Africans and attempts to conquer Native groups, both undervalue the importance of the international system of slavery in shaping the worldview of colonial leaders.

Elizabeth Key’s legal suit entered the historical record at a critical moment in the history of the burgeoning transatlantic slave trade. By 1659, when her suit was settled, Virginia’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade, as it was for nearly all the colonies in the Americas,

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23 Ibid., 211-212.
24 Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 331.
was on the verge of exploding. Prior to her suit, just over three hundred fifty enslaved Africans were imported to Virginia. After her suit, from 1661 to the turn of the century, nearly six thousand enslaved Africans disembarked in Virginia. Although we have no way of knowing the exact birthplaces of these persons, we know that in the first half of the seventeenth century the port in Luanda located in the Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa exported the largest number of slaves to the Americas, while in the second half of the century it was the Bight of Benin on the western coast of Africa. From 1601 to 1650, the port in Luanda sent a little more than one hundred seven thousand enslaved persons from the region to the Americas, and just over nine thousand embarked from various ports in the Bight of Benin. In contrast, during the period from 1651 to 1700, the Bight of Benin supplanted Luanda as the largest exporter of enslaved Africans to the Americas, sending just over one hundred twenty thousand slaves to the area compared with the thirty thousand Luanda sent. The expansion in the procurement of slaves outside of Luanda in the latter part of the seventeenth century was a response to the phenomenal growth in plantation slavery in the Americas. Thus, the increase in the importation of enslaved Africans to North America, including Virginia, resulted in a concomitant increase in slave exports out of West Africa. In other words, while African countries were being severely depopulated as a result of the demand for slaves in the Americas, Virginia was increasing the number of enslaved persons it was taking in; clearly situating Virginia within the growing

26 David Eltis, “A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,” Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Data Base, http://www.slavevoyages.org/last/assessment/essay-intro-01.faces (Accessed April 27, 2008). The database shows that between 1626 and 1660, three hundred fifty-five enslaved Africans had disembarked in Virginia’s ports. Between 1626 and 1660, nearly fifty thousand enslaved Africans embarked from the Luanda port in West Central Africa, compared to just over nine thousand persons who embarked from ports in the Bight of Benin, the next largest region of slave embarkations to the Americas during this period.  
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid. From 1651 to 1700, one hundred twenty thousand seven hundred persons left the Bight of Benin for the Americas while thirty thousand seven hundred nineteen left Luanda.
international system of slavery that included Africa, the Americas, Western Europe, and the Islamic world. It was during this time that Virginia legislators began to enact a number of laws that ensured that African women, men, and children would remain in bondage for life, making Elizabeth Key’s freedom suit all the more important in delineating the consequences of Virginia’s participation in the progressing international slave system.

West Central Africa was also an active participant in the international system of slavery. Indigenous forms of slavery were a central feature of African societies over the past millennium. For example, in West Central Africa, slavery was practiced in various forms including pawnage, concubinage, and chattel bondage. Such persons were traded, sold to outsiders, and used as collateral. Slave exports from Africa rose gradually during the first one hundred fifty years of the Atlantic trade, amounting to about four hundred nine slaves from 1450 to 1600. From 1601-1700, the slave trade was very large, approximately one and a half million peoples. The world appetite for slaves during this period helped to push these indigenous forms of slavery in Africa further away from a social framework in which slavery was another form of dependency to a system in which slaves played an increasingly important role in the economy. As a consequence, the external demand for slaves resulted in the emergence of slave societies in West African communities where previously there had only been a few slaves. Similarly, the

30 Virginia slave laws of the 1660s and 1670s include: 1662-the child of a slave takes on the status of the mother, 1667-Baptism does not bring freedom to Blacks, 1669-allows the casual killing of slaves, 1670-servants for life the deemed as the normal condition of Blacks, and 1670-forbade Blacks and Native Americans, though baptized, to own Christian slaves. See Hening, The Statutes at Large, II: 170, 260, 266, 270.
32 Ibid.
demand for slaves in Virginia as well as in some of England’s other North American colonies, resulted in their transformation from a society with a few slaves to slave societies.

My account of slavery in early Virginia differs from most other studies of slavery not only in its use of a global framework but in its attention to the very spaces and places that reflect the international system of slavery. Whereas most previous studies of slavery in early Virginia explain the rise in slavery in terms of changes in labor needs--cost, demand, and the use of Black females--I argue that the transatlantic adventures of English explorers who settled in Virginia provide crucial context for judgments about slavery in the colony.

A further departure concerns geography. Since the fifteenth century, the expansion in the international system of slavery grew to include the landscape surroundings of the built environment in the exploitation of the labor of millions of Africans and the elimination or subduing of indigenous populations. In West Central Africa, between 1600 and 1800, Europeans developed a complex network of routes, towns, ports, and fortified castles that enabled the subjugation and export of a startling number of enslaved people. Similarly, from its founding in 1607, Virginia leaders organized the colony so that the plantation, the church, and the judicial system overlapped to better govern the daily lives of colonial residents. One must ask in what ways was the plantation system of governance in Virginia characteristic of the slave routes and networks that existed in the international system of slavery and how, in the span of twelve years, 1607 and 1619, was the same landscape through which White Virginia servants and planters traveled, (plantation, church, and courthouses) experienced by African peoples? Finally, given that the slave castles of West Central Africa and the plantation systems of Virginia were both about maintaining dominance over large groups of people, how can we recognize the agency of
Virginia’s early African residents within such a regulated milieu--their resistance and their manipulation of the very landscapes designed to restrict them? This dissertation illustrates how Virginia’s built environment and the percolating international system of slavery was interrelated.

Legal scholar Cheryl Harris helps us understand the consequences of this relationship in Virginia by explicating how property and race were conflated in physical and non-physical forms to reproduce subordination. Throughout the early decades of the seventeenth century, as Harris points out, only Blacks were enslaved and treated as property and only White possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis of property rights. These distinct forms of property exploitation facilitated the evolution of whiteness and blackness, the enslavement of Africans, and the conquest, removal, and extermination of Native American life and culture; all attributes, in varying degrees, of the international system of slavery. My dissertation reveals how the geography of Virginia and the ways of looking at one’s surroundings by many different groups-planters, African and Native groups, poor Whites, indentured servants, and small farmers-made slaves and Native exploitation possible, just as this same geography became an area of resistance and community for these peoples.

Linking the early history of Virginia to the expanding international system of slavery provides an account of the deployment of laws and policies, the structure and organization of communities, the processes by which rank was expressed and compliance was won, and how subjugation was instituted and mitigated, resulting in a culture complicit in and shaped by global systems of slavery. However, as I show, behind nearly every system of exploitation and method of social control in early seventeenth century Virginia there was the resistance of African women.

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and men, for example, the freedom suit, running away, interracial sex, the development of fictive kinships, or the expression of one’s memory of Africa.

Black people’s resistance has always taken on a variety of expressions. Sometimes African groups in Virginia exploited whatever opportunities their environment afforded—what James Scott calls the “weapons of the weak.” In the early periods these included everyday routines, and subversive practices to lessen oppression and build community. At other times, Blacks outwitted or fooled Whites using what Patricia Hill Collins called “outsider-within knowledge.” The present study joins several others who challenge works that undervalue the influence of African culture in assisting in Black people’s survival in the New World, during the Middle Passage, and as shapers in the development of Virginia. My research reveals how Black people used various methods common to many African ethnic groups to survive the Middle Passage and daily life in their new environment. Survival, for many African groups caught in the transatlantic slave trade required what Michael Gomez called “reinterpretation,” using indigenous African ethnic traditions and coercion of the plantation system to meet the demands of the new world they were in.

Writing the history of Africans in early Virginia within the context of the growth of the international system of slavery invites careful focus on what Rebecca Ginsburg calls the “Black landscapes.” According to Ginsburg, “Black landscapes” refers to more than the network of

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38 Patricia Hill Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women in Search for Justice (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 5-8. According to Collins, “outsider-within-knowledge” is gaining knowledge about or of the dominant group without gaining the full power accorded to that group.
specific physical sites and passages that Black peoples traveled in a given community. It also refers to a particular cognitive order that African persons generally imposed on the settings that surrounded them and through which they connected those settings to other places.\(^41\) For early Africans in Virginia that alternative setting was the Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa, specifically, kingdoms such as Kongo and Mbundu, and the kingdom of Luanda, the home of the port where the bulk of slaves heading to the New World in the first half of seventeenth century embarked.\(^42\) Their attempt at making sense of the New World was steeped in this regional culture and early on came to constitute an “Angolan” Diaspora in Virginia.\(^43\) Common traditions and cultural forms from the Angola region supplied Black peoples in Virginia’s with coping skills, as Walter Hawthorne demonstrated so convincingly in \textit{From Africa to Brazil}, and they formed the basis for the recreation of indigenous institutions and kinship systems that were in place across the Atlantic.\(^44\) I argue that Key and other Black people in the New World made sense of their surroundings by recreating a broad “Angolan” identity within the plantation system of Virginia that allowed them to survive and build community. Key’s freedom suit was an example of an incorporative and cross-cutting unification strategy that connected ethnically diverse groups of people from the Kongo/Angola region of West Central

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Sandra E. Greene, \textit{West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth-and Early Twentieth-Century Ghana} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 148, 204. I ground my notion of an Angolan Diaspora from Greene’s analysis that an Atlantic perspective is key to understanding the transatlantic slave trade and its aftermath.
\(^{44}\) Walter Hawthorne, \textit{From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1830} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15-18. Hawthorne suggests that although there were great differences in African societies within relatively small regions, members of all ethnic groups held multiple overlapping identities and cultural forms. I argue that the process of developing and implementing various strategies to achieve freedom in the New World cross-cut ethnic boundaries and worked to unify diverse groups of African peoples.
Africa with one another in the “White landscape” of Virginia. This dissertation provides an assessment of how successful these common traditions and cross-cutting strategies of incorporation were and what that meant for Black freedom in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

The research from this study is drawn primarily from county court records (deeds, orders, and wills), estate inventories, statutes, and letters from various counties between 1619 and 1660. Using this diverse array of data, I have identified several shifts in the social order of Virginia with an explicit link to global systems of exploitation, such as surveillance, structuring communities for purposes of social control, and targeted laws and social policies that disproportionately privilege Whites and excluded non-Whites. Similarly, county and court records have revealed pattern’s of overlap among social, legal, religious, and governmental institutions that was consistent with the international systems of slavery. Wills and deeds have provided information about particular families and individuals. However, I have not attempted the massive reconstruction of shifts in slave trade exports between West Central Africa, Virginia, and other English colonies. I have instead relied upon the excellent research of David Eltis, Russell Menard, Paul Lovejoy, Elizabeth Donnan, Walter Rodney, and Joseph Miller, whose analyses of the transatlantic slave trade have allowed me to make more confident generalizations about the regional impact of the slave trade on parts of West Central Africa, Virginia, and other English colonies. Although quantitative data indicates that Virginia’s participation in the slave trade is small relative to that of other English colonies, I argue here for Virginia’s place within

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45 I ground my notion of incorporation from the research of Suzanne Miers, and Igor Kopytoff, ed. Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 19. They show how incorporation involves movement from a marginal and unfree status in the community towards one with greater acceptance and standing.
the developing international system of slavery. Equally, I locate the origins of local racism within this system. Finally, with respect to data, I have combined court records and archaeological site reports to offer insight into daily life and work in the colony at a time when little is known about the everyday routines of English inhabitants and even less about African peoples.

My ultimate concern in this dissertation is to plot the role of the growing international system of slavery within the development of Virginia, its institutions, the regulation of labor, the creation of racial difference, and the formation of English and African identities. From the moment English women and men landed in Virginia, fundamental beliefs about the superiority of Englishness and Christianity over “heathen” Native cultures played a crucial part in the unfolding drama of encounter and settlement. In Chapter One, I present the early observations of colonial leaders about Native groups that show how they defined themselves vis-à-vis the indigenous population. These observations contain astonishing similarities to the writings of sixteenth century English voyagers about African peoples in West Central Africa. In the process of establishing policies for dealing with Native groups, colonial officials looked to England, and England looked to other European nations that participated in the international system of slavery, for guidance. These models were fundamental to establishing the colony’s hierarchical social structure that produced unequal relations between European immigrants and African and Native groups.

The challenges presented in “civilizing” indigenous peoples and the arrival of enslaved Africans in 1619 led to the implementation of social policies to differentiate the labor of European and African groups. In Chapter Two, I describe how the migration of European
laborers developed alongside the advancing transatlantic slave trade. Although Virginia officials remained optimistic about European servants’ eventual capitulation to the social order of “White over Black” that was being proselytized, their social interactions with bonded Africans on the plantation gave rise to numerous rules, regulations, laws, and policies meant to divide the groups, train Europeans, and oppress Africans. My work shows that these policies were characteristic of the practices of early countries like Spain and Portugal who participated in the international system of slavery. In early Virginia, laws and policies governing social relations had to be constantly managed because they did not always mitigate the character and frequency of the personal interactions between Africans and Europeans.

As colonists and officials shaped Virginia institutions and communities, they did so within the framework of the transatlantic system of slavery. Like it was for the Portuguese and the Spanish in their design of slave castles in West Central Africa to maximum social control in the ever-expanding slave trade, so too it was the design of Virginia Company officials to organize the colony around selected plantations to control Virginia inhabitants. As the geography of the plantation grew to incorporate more churches and courthouses, these institutions began passing their own laws and policies to regulate local communities. I use the institutional records of the Virginia Company, as well as those of planters, churches, and the courts in Chapter Three, to connect these institutions to the progress of international system of slavery and to track the construction of whiteness and blackness as many former European indentured servants moved up the social ladder via these institutions. Moreover, I employ county court records to highlight how the many European and some African peoples challenged the social order. Most notably, there were several instances where enslaved African people became free or served out their
indenture and even owned property. During this evolution, African peoples recreated a variety of survival strategies that were common to many ethnic communities in West Central Africa in order to improve life in the New World.

Some of the county records of Virginia between 1619 and 1660 are incomplete as a result of fires set by the Confederate Army as it retreated from Richmond in 1865. For example, many records of the eight original counties formed in 1634—James City, Henrico, Charles City, Elizabeth City, Warwick River, Warrosquyoake, Charles River, and Accawmack Counties, were destroyed in the 1865 fire. Most of the records through 1632 were generally spared from fire damage. The records of Northumberlad County (formed in 1645 out of Charles River), where Elizabeth Key resided, start in 1650. The records of the two Eastern shore counties located across the Chesapeake Bay from Jamestown, Accomack, formed in 1634 and Northampton County in 1643, survived the fire, as did those of York County, also formed in 1643. Despite their shortcomings, Virginia’s county records were invaluable to this dissertation for providing a comprehensive depiction of colonial society that includes various interactions between various free and unfree European, African, and Native groups.

Chapter Four uses these county records to describe the influence that pre-colonial West African culture had in helping African peoples in Virginia prior to 1660 to alleviate oppression and bring about community. The process by which West African women and men sought to incorporate into Virginia society was revealed in the colonial records. Although the first two groups of enslaved Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, these persons survived oppression and fashioned a new life in the colony largely as a product of their experiences prior to being brought

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to the New World. It was in the many regional landmarks of the transatlantic slave system—the barracoons and the slave pens of West Central Africa, slave ships, European trading factories, fortified castles and seaports in Luanda and Virginia—that African peoples’ commonality rather than their differences was revealed and put to use in order to survive enslavement. This dissertation concludes with an assessment of how the history and development of Virginia was linked with the advancing transatlantic slave trade.

Chapter One
The influence of the International System of Slavery on the Early Development of Virginia

The colony of Virginia emerged out of more than a century of captures, sales, legal formulas, and justifications that linked it to the growing international system of slavery via a network of European countries and colonies that exploited the labor of millions of African peoples and eliminated or subdued indigenous populations for the purposes of advancement. Even before the first ships sailed for Virginia in 1606, English governments knew of the transatlantic slave trade as early as the sixteenth century from observing slave trading in the Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa by Spain and Portugal. By the seventeenth century, Spain and Portugal had the only successful colonies in the Americas, both having imported and exported slaves to the continent for nearly a century. Their success within the expanding international system of slavery provided enterprising countries a blueprint for overseas slave trading.

From the time of the earliest Portuguese voyages along the coasts of West Central Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, England looked at Portuguese history as well as Spain’s to guide their rationale for conquering Virginia’s indigenous populations and importing enslaved Africans into the colony. Moreover, the success of Portugal and Spain early in the international system of slavery also provided England, Virginia’s mother country, a framework for the development of slavery in the New World. The features of the evolving international system of slavery that anticipated colonization and enslavement in the New World included religious intolerance and persecution, territorial expansion, colonial settlement, elimination or subduing of indigenous peoples, religious justifications for slavery, racial exclusion, and legal formulas for

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48 Portugal imported enslaved Africans to its colony in Brazil in 1504, and Spain began importing enslaved Africans to its colony in Santo Domingo in 1501.
social control. Virginia leaders engaged in many of these practices when settling the colony to charm current investors and signal to future shareholders its plans for the region.

Transatlantic migration was essential to successful colonization under the international system of slavery. Its evolving patterns and practices linked colonizers and indeed colonial emigrants to a network of other nations that had subjugated, subdued, enslaved, planted, and occupied foreign lands. For the English, this process began in 1606 when the Virginia Company of London induced women and men to leave their country for greater opportunities in Virginia. Settlers anticipated that Virginia would offer better jobs and the chance to own land or obtain political appointments. This belief was reinforced by the 1623 royal order approving the recruitment of English emigrants, which promised that any settler could easily become “lord of 200 acres of land;” an amount far beyond the reach of most English people. Yet, in Virginia, land grants were not immediately available to everyone. In the first few years of the colony, the Virginia Company only awarded land to investors. They later expanded the criteria in 1618 to include those who paid their own transportation and the transportation of others into the colony. Early investors in the Virginia Company, of which there were two types, the initial investors and the secondary investors, were the first group to receive land, and because of their standing, they enjoyed greater stature in the colony than other immigrants.

The initial investors referred to men who provided the financial backing that underwrote the Virginia Company settlement program. The charter of 1606 granted these men lands which lay within fifty miles of the Jamestown settlement in any direction, together with the islands

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within one hundred miles of the coast. Initial investors were also afforded a number of other privileges, including the right to freely transport workers into the colony and the freedom to import armament and other provisions duty free, all evidence of the intercolonial and overseas networks, routes, and communication lines that preceded and facilitated the initial occupation of Virginia.

Secondary investors referred to those who purchased stock in the Virginia Company after the initial offering and who immigrated to Virginia sometime after 1607 and before 1616. These groups of shareholders were awarded land based on whether they arrived in Virginia before or after the departure of Sir Thomas Dale (the governor of Virginia, 1611, 1614-1616) in the spring of 1616. Secondary investors who arrived in Virginia before the departure of Dale were affectionately known as “Old Adventurers.” Those who arrived after 1616 were called New Adventurers. Within the class of secondary investors, Old Adventurers held an important status in the colony because of their tenure. In recognition of their early investment, they received one hundred acres of land after three years of residency. “New Adventurers” in the secondary adventurer group received fifty acres of land after seven years of tenancy. The increased residency requirements and the smaller land grants meant that new adventurers were a step below Old Adventurers in social rank. Yet all the groups (initial and secondary investors) were nonetheless connected by a shared sense of purpose in the success of Virginia. As one Company official put it “the ways to success is to make yourselves all of one mind for the good of your

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54 Ibid.
country and your own.” 55 Going forward this sentiment undergirded their logic for conquering Native Americans and exploiting the labor of millions of Africans.

Transatlantic migration also coincided with England’s growing interest in the rapidly expanding international system of slavery. The willingness to emigrate enhanced the significance of the slave trade as a path to prosperity in the New World. Initial and secondary investors saw in Virginia a locale within which to introduce African slavery into the region. These men, who were of varied backgrounds, including English merchants, aristocrats, and members of Parliament, were well versed in the travel writings of privateers who participated in the international system of slavery in Bermuda and in the Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa. In fact, the first enslaved persons to be imported into North America, an enslaved “Indian and a Negro,” arrived in Bermuda in 1616. 56 Initial and secondary investors knew of Bermuda’s slave trading ventures because several of the men who helped colonize Virginia in 1607 also colonized Bermuda in 1609. 57 Some of the men who were founding settlers in both colonies include: Virginia governor, Thomas Gates; Virginia’s secretary of State, William Strachey; and a Virginia Company founder, Edwin Sandys. The governor of Bermuda in 1616, Daniel Tucker, had been a resident of Virginia between 1608 and 1614. Tucker enacted many of the same laws and policies in his administration as those he observed in Virginia during his five-year residency under the administration of Governor Thomas Dale. 58 Thus, the intercolonial

56 Nathaniel Butler, “The Historye of the Bermudaes “, ed. Sir J.H. Lefroy (London: 1882), 78, 84-5. According to Michael Jarvis, “In the Eye of All Trade,” 150, there were seventy-five or more enslaved Africans that were imported to Bermuda before 1620 including a few women and their children.
58 Ibid., 71-2.
links between Bermuda and Virginia reveals the extent to which New World colonialists helped to shape the development of each other’s institutions.  

Colonial investors traveled regularly between Virginia and Bermuda during the first few decades of the colony’s existence. Some of these same men also oversaw the importation of enslaved Africans into both colonies. For example, the “20 and odd Negroes” were part of a larger shipment of enslaved persons who were divided between Bermuda and Virginia. Evidence suggests that John Rolfe, the man mentioned in the Introduction as having written a letter to Edwin Sandys explaining how the “20 and odd Negroes” ended up in Virginia, not only participated in the capture of these enslaved Africans but also had a hand in dividing the entire cargo of Africans between the colonies. Rolfe’s involvement in this venture makes sense given that he, like Sandys, was also one of the Virginia settlers who helped colonize Bermuda.

Further emphasis on the slave trading connection between the colonies reveals that Daniel Elfrith, the captain of the ship that delivered the “20 and odd Negroes” to Virginia in 1619, was also involved in bringing other enslaved Africans to Bermuda. In 1618, a year before he brought enslaved persons to Virginia, Elfrith, transported twenty-nine enslaved Africans to Bermuda, selling some to colony residents and to the Earl of Warwick, England, Robert Rich. Whether enslaved persons were disembarking in Virginia or Bermuda or whether the colonies split a cargo of enslaved persons, colonial officials intended to have slavery in their regions. They managed to do so by situating themselves as stops along the multiplying transportation routes of

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59 Hatfield, Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century, 2.
the transatlantic slave trade. The intercolonial and emigrant history of Virginians and Bermudians to the New World challenges the notion that slavery had not been thought about in the initial settlement of English colonies.\(^{63}\)

At a critical moment in colonial development some of the earliest maritime voyages into English America were transatlantic slave trading voyages. Both Bermuda and Virginia embraced the tradition of transatlantic slave trading intending to transform the colonies into international market places to meet the expectations of their early investors, expectations which were increasingly met by the importation of enslaved Africans. In doing so, Virginia and Bermuda extended the trade routes of the international system of slavery, which began along the coast of West Africa, to their regions. The voyage known as the Middle Passage began after slave ships were packed with a startling number of Africans, upwards of seven hundred persons, in individual spaces no bigger than a coffin.\(^{64}\) The journey from Africa to the New World usually included a layover in the West Indies before arriving in Bermuda and/or Virginia. Within this context, overseas travel and intercolonial communication connected England and its colonies to the broadening international system of slavery very early in their settlement.

England’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade stemmed from its connection to other European countries like Portugal who were active in the development of the trade. The strongest and perhaps most formal tradition in the mounting international system of slavery used by the Portuguese to justify the enslavement of African peoples was religious intolerance. In

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\(^{63}\) The early slave trading history of Bermuda as well as the exchange of enslaved persons between Bermuda and Virginia challenges the interpretation of Winthrop Jordan, who claimed that “at the start of English settlement in America, no one had in mind to establish the institution of Negro slavery.” Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 44.

\(^{64}\) Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese 1483-1790*, 32.
time Virginians would employ this same logic to justify over two centuries of conquest and enslavement.

By the first half of the sixteenth century Portuguese explorers had a long standing tradition of depicting African ethnic groups as heathens and in need of Christianizing—an image that was emulated by the English in the latter half of the period. Almost from the beginning of Portuguese contact with African peoples, plans for enslavement and conversion often went hand in hand, so much so that priests were often a part of slave trading delegations. Moreover, many Portuguese officials believed that acceptance of the Christian faith eased the enslavement process. In 1520, a Portuguese authority surmised that once African rulers and their courts had been converted to Christianity, the process of “redemption” would be manageable; redemption in this case was another word for enslavement.65 Also during this period a Portuguese priest theorized that “converting the heathens would give them the opportunity to lead a Christian life as slaves in a country far removed from the temptations from their old environment.”66 Forty-three years later, in 1563, Father Gouveia, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, indicated that “the only way seriously to convert a ‘heathen’ people to Christianity was by subjecting them to colonial rule,” also a euphemism for enslavement when used by Europeans in this part of the world.67

England’s rivalry with Portugal over slave trading territories in West Central Africa during this period led English advisors to the Queen to incorporate similar ideas about Christianity into their pre-colonization rationale. For instance, Sir George Peckham, a prominent English

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65 Ibid., 30.
66 Ibid.
67 Report on Angola drawn from the letters of Father Gouveia and Paula Dias de Novais, BNL, FG, MS. 8123 cited in Ruela Pombo, Angola Menina (Lisbon, 1944.)
merchant and adventurer wrote a lengthy treatise in 1583 called, *The Advantages of Colonization*, to advise Queen Elizabeth I on colonial ventures. In it, he outlined three doctrines for England to follow in order to lay claim to the New World— the *Laws of Nations*, the *Laws of Arms*, and the *Laws of God*. The *Laws of Nations* sanctioned trade between Christians and “Infidels or Savages;” the *Laws of Arms* allowed the taking of foreign lands by force; and the *Laws of God* enjoined Christian rulers to settle those lands “for the establishment of God’s worde.”68 These three doctrines, outlined in *The Advantages of Colonization*, were the ideological principles that guided England’s ambitions for Virginia, the taking of Native lands, the elimination of Native peoples, and the exploitation of the labor of Africans. Based on these three principles, which according to Peckham had been in effect from ancient times to “the nativitie of Christ,” he advised the Queen to “plant, possesse, and subdue.”69 Here Peckham used the term “plant” to suggest the establishment of a colony in a foreign land.70

Like Peckham, John Dee, astrologer, alchemist, and mathematician, also advised the Queen on colonial ventures. He drew on the successes of Portugal in West Africa and the Americas to shape his assessments. Dee advocated the building of a strong navy in order to take possession of “foreyn regions,” and to do as “other Christian Princes do now adayes make Conquests upon the heathen people.”71 But, it was Richard Hakluyt, the foremost proponent of colonization of his age, who best articulated England’s justification for colonization that would lay the foundation for England’s expansion in North America, including its participation in the growing

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70 The term “plant” in this context was a program of social control in which colonizers attempted to gain control of land from indigenous populations. In this case it was English leaders gaining control of land occupied by Native Americans. Plantations were the actual settlements where European immigrant labor was co-opted to assist in the colonization processes. For a history of this concept see Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, II vols., vol. I (New York: Verso, 1994), 58-60, 65-70.
transatlantic slave trade. In 1582, Hakluyt wrote that planting English colonies in America would be a “moste godly and Christian work” that would ultimately lead to “gayninge…the soules of millions of those wretched people” bringing “them from darknes to lighte.”

The writings of Peckham, Dee, and Hakluyt show Christianity as an ideological link between Old World and New World colonizers. Moreover, their writing anticipates the fallout from Elizabeth Key’s 1655 freedom suit in that it lays out a rationale for using Christianity as a framework to justify the enslavement of African “believers.” Early Virginians embraced religious intolerance as a justification for the conquest of Native Americans. Although ideas about foreign religions varied from culture to culture, within context of an expanding international system of slavery, participating countries shared some common principles; one being avoiding intimate contact with the indigenous population.

Virginia officials enacted a number of rules to regulate the behavior of newly arriving immigrants toward Native peoples. These policies were outlined in a set of instructions written in 1606 called the Great Charters. Drafted nearly a year before Europeans ever formally occupied Virginia; the orders expressed sentiments towards indigenous peoples that linked Virginia to other countries and colonies (England and its colonies, Portugal, and Spain) in the enlarging international system of slavery. In the Great Charters, the Virginia Company leaders offered vivid testimony of their belief in the “savageness” of Native persons, warning settlers of the inappropriateness of interacting with the colony’s indigenous population. On the topic of land, Company leaders instructed colonists’ to view it as unoccupied, stating that “these savages have no particular propertie in any part or parcel of that country, but only a generall residencie

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there, as wild beasts have in the forest…” The charter’s focus on property rights implies that only White possession and occupation of land was valid, a point that was crucial in the establishment and maintenance of the colonies racial and economic distinction. In the area of trade, Company officials demanded that “no man of what condition soever shall barter, trucke, or trade with the Indians except by lawful authority.” The expectation was that this instruction would discourage Europeans from engaging in communal relationships with Native groups. Moreover, the edict presupposes that such exchanges would lead to more intimate interactions.

A 1612 exchange between Virginia Company officials expressed their worry about settlers marrying Native women, fearing that they would become possessed with “savageness.” The following correspondence illustrates this anxiety:

Some of the people who have gone there, think now some of them should marry the women of the savages, and he tells me that there are already 40 or 50 thus married. Other Englishmen, after being put among them, have become savages where they have been received and treated well.

This passage as well as the instructions from the Virginia Company of London to settlers reveals the assumptions of colonial leaders about the consequences of intimate relations with Native Americans. Thus, the term “savage” as used by Virginia authorities provided women and men with a practical image of the debasement and corruption to be associated with Native groups of people who were already believed to be uncivilized. But more than that, the passage and instructions mark Virginia’s formal adoption of the principles of the international system of slavery, which overtime grew to include religious intolerance and persecution, territorial expansion, colonial settlement, elimination or subduing of indigenous peoples, religious

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73 Robert Gray, "A Good Speed to Virginia," (Providence: John Carter Brown Library, 1609), C3-D.
75 Gray, "A Good Speed to Virginia," 64.
76 Correspondence taken from James City records, V: 2589, folio 61.
justifications for slavery, racial exclusion, and legal formulas for social control. By setting down specific policies for the conquering of Native lands and by instituting laws restricting trade and marriage with Native peoples while also mocking their culture as “savage,” Virginia echoed the tradition of countries like Portugal, Spain, and England, who by this time had done the same to other indigenous populations for more than a century in the international system of slavery. 

What followed was the mass exploitation of African labor. However, the word “Negro” rather than “savage” provided logic for their exploitation of African peoples.

The use of the word “Negro” to distinguish Black peoples dates back to the fourteenth century within the context of the transatlantic slave trade. 77 The Portuguese writer Gomes Eannes de Azurara was one of the first to document the association of African persons with slavery using the word Negro, which means black in both Portuguese and Spanish. In his 1453 text, Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea, de Azurara describes the following eyewitness account of a Portuguese slave trader along the coast of West Central Africa:

But when the negroes saw that those in the ship were men, they made haste to flee… but because our men had a better opportunity than before, they captured four of them, and those were the first to be taken by Christians in their own land… 78

Throughout the history of the transatlantic slave trade European countries reinforced their perception of “Negroes” as slaves. For England the substitution of “Negro” for slave gained traction as contact with the transatlantic slave trade increased. Those contacts emerged in 1530, when Portugal, which had been exporting slaves from Africa to Brazil since 1504, paved the way

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77 Abraham Cresques, "Catalan Atlas," (1375). “Negro” was used in the atlas to reference the Blacks from Guinea.
78 Gomes Eannes de Azurara, "Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea," (1453). The first English translation of this work was by Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage, and printed for the Hakluyt Society in two volumes, the first of these in 1896. You will find the English translation on page 99 of this volume.
for a small group of merchants in Western England to begin trading in the region.\textsuperscript{79} By this time, Portugal had built up at least a dozen fortified trading stations in Brazil. Portuguese slave traders found an increasing market for enslaved laborers in Brazil. The demand for slaves in Brazil during first half of the sixteenth century was so strong that it forced Portugal to seek an even more plentiful supply of slaves than what they had established in the Kongo region of West Central Africa. To get more slaves, Portugal turned to Angola, a broad region south of Kongo and home of the Luanda seaport where the first two sets of enslaved Africans to arrive in Virginia embarked. Portuguese merchants, and indeed, Portuguese officials dominated the slave trade in the Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa for most of the sixteenth century. However, during this period England was its most dangerous rival.\textsuperscript{80} It was Portugal’s success in the kingdoms of Angola that likely propelled England in 1536 to form the \textit{English African Company} for the purpose of exploring the possibilities of slave trading in the region.\textsuperscript{81} It was also during this time that the word Negro came to symbolize England’s knowledge about African peoples in ways that would inform their ideas about slavery in Virginia. This was most evident in English, Portuguese, and Spanish literature. Among the best narratives that exhibited English usages of Negro to reference African enslavement were those found in Richard Hakluyt’s published accounts of John Hawkins’ (1562-1563, 1564, and 1567-1568) slave trading ventures in Spanish America, most of which were financed by wealthy London businessmen.\textsuperscript{82} In his account, Hawkins observed that “Negroes were very good merchandise in Hispaniola, and that a

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid. 7.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid. 8.
store of Negros might easily bee had upon the coast of Guinea.”

Likewise, Edward Lopes, a Portuguese merchant who visited Angola in 1578, also interchanged Negro and slave:

Besides, there is also a greater Trafficke and Market for slaves, that are brought out of Angola, then any place else. For there are yearely bought by the Portugais above five thousand head of Negroes, which afterwards they conveigh away with them, and so sell them to divers parts of the World.

These works were primarily concerned with reporting on the prospects for transatlantic slave trading in West Central Africa, which, by this time, included nearly a half million Blacks who had left the continent as commodities headed toward the Americas. Nonetheless, the accounts of both Hawkins and Lopes illustrate the history of how, within the context of the growth of the transatlantic slave trade, the English came to regard the term “Negro” as synonymous with African peoples.

Transnational communications between Portugal and England about the prospects of Africans as a valuable commodity piqued the interest of English privateers and furthered the association of African peoples with enslavement. In 1578, Master Thomas Turner, who lived in Brazil, began travelling to the Angola region to explore the market for slaves. While there he found the potential for slave trading in the area even more favorable than what Lopes reported. According to Turner:

Out of Angola that is said to bee yeerely shipped eight and twenty thousand slaves and there was a Rebellion of slaves against their Masters, tenne thousand making a head and barracadoing themselves, but by the Portugals and Indians chased, and one or two thousand reduced. One thousand belonged to one man, who is said to

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85 Elbl, “The Volume of Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450-1521,” 75.
As a result of Turner’s exploration, other English merchants were sent to the Angola region to secure slaves. One English merchant, Andrew Battell, traveled to the Angolan city of Benguela in 1589 to look for slaves. 

His communication to English officials about slave trading in Angola expands our understanding of English participation in the unfolding transatlantic trade. Battell’s account was as follows: “we laded our ship with slaves in seven days, and bought them so cheap that they did not cost one real, which were worth in the city of Loando twelve milreis.”

These reports by Hawkins, Lopes, Turner and Battell reveal the extent to which the word Negro and slave were mutually constitutive terms used by Europeans to rationalize African enslavement. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the first use of the word Negro by Virginians occurred in 1619 to describe the two sets of enslaved Africans in the colony. The March 1619 census describes “32 Negroes” (seventeen women and fifteen men) “in the service of seu[er]all planters.” In August of 1619, John Rolfe famously spoke about the cargo aboard the ship the Treasurer as including “not any thing but 20. and odd Negroes.” Moreover, all the twenty-three West African peoples (all of whom were likely enslaved) listed in Virginia’s census were described as Negroes.

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88 Ibid.
89 The March 1619 census is contained in Ferrar Papers, MS 1597A, document 159 on microfilm reel 1. It is also reprinted in Thorndale, "The Virginia Census of 1619," 168-70. The census indicates that the European population at that date was around nine hundred twenty-eight. Other manuscripts in the Ferrar collection give census data through June 1619 which suggest the population was one thousand one hundred ninety-four.
The 1624 census had Negro before or after their names. In fact, from this group, eight had just the term Negro and the person’s gender next to their entry, seven had only the word Negro documenting their existence, three had their first name and the label Negro for their record, and three others had a combination of the person’s first name, gender, and the term Negro.91 The word was so ubiquitous in its association of African ancestry with bondage that in 1659 a Virginia farmer named his cow “Negar Nose.”92

The use of the word Negro to reference African peoples was perhaps the most potent evidence linking Virginia to the international system of slavery. Yet, the international system of slavery cannot be made to fully account for the totality of European thinking regarding African people; nor can slavery solely be used to define the personhood of African groups caught in this exploitive system. African people (and Native groups) had a flourishing culture, government, and social system in their countries prior to contact with Europeans. Although we have very little to document the worldview of the thirty-two Blacks listed in the March 1619 Virginia census or the “20 and Odd Negros” who arrived in Virginia in August 1619, we know that most came to the New World from out of the port of Luanda in West Central Africa, as did most of the roughly three hundred fifty African people in Virginia through 1640.93 If we are to understand the personhood of early Africans and how they overcame oppression and built community in Virginia, our study must begin in this region. For that, the excellent research and analysis of Joseph C. Miller whose studies of sixteenth century Mbundu people in north-western Angola

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92 “Charles City County Court Order Book, 1658-1661.” 177.
allows us to make more confident generalizations about “Angolan” people in early Virginia. What can we learn from Mbundu societies that may help us understand Angolan peoples in the New World? Did life in this region supply African peoples with the tools for overcoming or mitigating the oppressive conditions of the New World? How did regional Angolan cultures foster the ability to create and recreate a home away from home in Virginia? Miller’s study provides us with knowledge of early Angolan culture that allows us to better answer such questions.

The lineage system was perhaps the most important social formation in the Angolan region that helped African peoples survive the in Virginia. Lineages were a social system that organized groups of people based on descent. For example, Miller shows us that Mbundu lineage societies were matrilineal with descent and inheritance reckoned through women but with most of the authority in the hands of men. According to Miller, Mbundu girls were usually born in their father’s lineage village, where they remained until marriage.94 Once married, the women lived with their husband’s relatives-returning to their mother’s village only after they ceased to bear children or after becoming divorced or widowed. Boys, on the other hand, were reared among their father’s kinfolk but soon after puberty they typically returned to the village of their mother’s brothers where they remained for the rest of their lives.95 The standards that dictated matrilineal living arrangements reinforced lineage affiliations across Mbundu communities in the Angolan region and likely prepared their descendents across the Atlantic to build new lineal attachments in Virginia.

95 Ibid.
Just as lineages had rules for governing the movement of family members, they also had rules for managing the flow of nonrelatives or “outsiders” into the group, which also proved useful to “Angolan” peoples in the New World. Outsiders were nonrelatives such as a pawn or slave. Their position in the group usually depended on the rank of their sponsor. Official lineage affiliation was granted to the descendents of the group’s founder. The founder’s kinfolk, who Miller calls “insiders,” carried the most status within the group, while nonrelatives, (outsiders) carried the least.\textsuperscript{96} Insiders held certain rights and privileges such as the right to call on kinsmen for support (spiritual, economic, and a general helping hand) and the right to grow food, privileges that were less available to outsiders.\textsuperscript{97} The ability of these lineage structures to manage and adapt to a wide variety of social dynamics, including the incorporation of outsiders, supplied a framework for creating community within context of the New World for most early Africans in Virginia.

In the Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa, Blacks were immersed in a society where descent was a basis of belonging and survival. Similarly, there were practical examples in Virginia of African peoples recreating these kinship forms in an effort to adapt to the dramatic transitions of life in the New World. For example, when the thirty-two Blacks listed in the March 1619 census and the “20 and Odd Negros” who arrived in Virginia in August 1619 came into contact with one another while they were being bought and sold by colonial investors, the opportunity to construct lineal attachments arose. With the exception of their ethnic affiliation, blackness became a basis for developing kinships.\textsuperscript{98} Blackness was a logical reason for African

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 277.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 48.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Here I draw on the excellent work of Michael Gomez, \textit{Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South}, 154., to illustrate how enslavement (and possibly the}
persons to organize themselves given that nearly all of their masters were White. Take the case of the “20 and odd Negroes,” the majority of whom were purchased by two White men, George Yeardley and Abraham Peirsey. Yeardley bought eight of the Africans—five women and three men, and Peirsey purchased seven—two women, a child, and four men. Although these individuals probably did not know each other in the Kongo/Angola region prior to their capture, the dichotomy of whiteness and blackness became evident to them while being stored in slave pens and castles in Luanda, sometimes for up to five months, and throughout their transatlantic voyage. Therefore, once in Virginia, blackness rather than descent became the basis for recreating lineal attachments between these disparate peoples.

The dynamism of lineage systems provided the women and men enslaved by Yeardley and Peirsey with the tools with which to function as a family. It was in the plantation setting that the fluidity of the lineage system proved most useful, particularly when newly enslaved Africans were brought into the fold through a purchase, or when others were sold. This was the case for Brase, a “Negro Man,” who in 1625 was added to the group of eight enslaved Africans on the Yeardley plantation. His bondage with Yeardley began by court order when a magistrate assigned Brase to him “until further notice.” It was during such episodes such as the sudden addition of a newly enslaved person that prior knowledge of lineage systems hastened solidarity

Middle Passage) eliminated most ethnic and cultural barriers between African peoples such that racial awareness and unity were allowed to develop. Gomez builds his analysis upon the earlier research of Sterling Stuckey, Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundation of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Jester, ed. Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625, 22, 27. The other enslaved persons were listed in the households of other prominent men in the colony. Also see pages 34, 46, 49, 62.


among the African peoples. This was most possibly the case for the five women and three men who were enslaved on the Yeardley plantation. They were probably quick to welcome Brase into the fold, just as they would in West Central Africa when a slave was added to their group.

A familiarity with various types of lineage systems likely steadied enslaved peoples through the upheavals and ruptures that resulted from the sale of “family” members. For the enslaved persons on Yeardley’s plantation, upheavals of this sort came on October 3, 1625, when Brase was “[re]assigned” from the Yeardley’s to work for the then governor, Sir Francis Wyatt.\textsuperscript{102} It was likely that Brase was sold to Governor Wyatt without warning as was common in many New World slave societies. The women and men on Yeardley’s plantation were probably just getting to know Brase before he was sold. Perhaps they had just recently discovered his ethnic affiliation, or perhaps they had just learned about his biological family in the Angola region. Whatever the degree of familiarity that had been established between Brase and the other eight enslaved persons before his departure, Miller explains that once established, lineage affiliations were not broken as a result of separation but rather kept alive in memory by relatives. According to Miller, residential transitions did not destroy the lineal ties because the structure of lineage systems contemplated the constant shuffling of people in and out of and in-between descent groups, be it in the context of matrilineal arrangements in Angolan kingdoms or internal slave trading in Virginia.\textsuperscript{103} Thus, even in his absence, Brase would remain a “descendent” of the enslaved persons on the Yeardley plantation indefinitely, and, similarly, they to him.

\textsuperscript{102} Hening, ed. The Statues at Largex: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the year 1619, 3. Wyatt was Governor from November 18, 1621 to May 1626. Yeardley succeeded Wyatt as Governor of Virginia in May 1626.

\textsuperscript{103} Miller, Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola 45.
In keeping with Miller’s analysis of Mbundu lineages, the lineal line of the Blacks from the Yeardley plantation would also extend to those on the Wyatt plantation through Brase, resulting in the conjoining of Black people on both plantations. In this way, the geographical space between the Yeardley plantation and the Wyatt plantation becomes part of what Rebecca Ginsburg calls the “black landscape.” Ginsburg defines the black landscape as the ways of looking at one’s surroundings that made slaves’ exploitation of such sites possible.104 For the Black peoples on Yeardley’s plantation, this means that the Wyatt plantation was home to one of their lineal descendents by way of their relationship to Brase. As a result, both settlements become less threatening since Brase was a “family” member to those on the Yeardley plantation who possessed “outsider-within knowledge” of the interworkings of the Wyatt plantation.105 Such information could prove to be useful to women and men on Yeardley’s plantation who someday maybe held in bondage to Wyatt, or visa versa. Thus, African persons in Virginia were able to mitigate the stresses of internal slave trading using the indigenous social system of lineages to make the very institutions designed to subjugate them, the plantation and enslavement, less threatening. Doing so allowed Black peoples to create their own spaces, “a black landscape,” in the Yeardley and Wyatt plantations, a world within a world that paralleled the “white landscape” of the plantation.106 According Ginsburg, this world was visible only to the enslaved populations. It was “indecipherable to most whites,” and “it spoke of a black

105 Hill Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women in Search for Justice, 5-8. According to Collins, “Outsider-within-knowledge” is gaining knowledge about or of the dominant group without gaining the full power accorded to that group.
106 According to Dell Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia” in Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery, eds., Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 126-9, the “white landscape” consisted of a network of spaces (rooms, houses, and plantations) and public institutions (churches and courthouses) that expressed the racial and social rank of great planters.
occupation of land.”

So, as each of the “32 Negroes,” and the “20 and odd Negroes” were bought and sold and spread amongst several planters throughout Virginia as happened with Brase, the lineal affiliations traveled with them to their new location creating a black landscape that coexisted alongside the white landscape.

The lineage system offers new ways of thinking about the perceptions of African women and men caught in Virginia’s slave trading system. Moreover, the lineage system provides an important framework from which to examine how enslaved persons viewed their surroundings, thus rendering their manipulation of the plantation system possible. The lineage system also enabled African peoples to survive the constant movement of residents whether in the kingdoms of Angola or in Virginia. Within this context, the lineage system was perhaps the most important broad regional social practice that linked Black peoples in Virginia to one another and to Africa.

The opportunity for building political alliances during the enslavement process was not the exclusive province of Africans. Diverse groups of colonial investors, like Yeardley and Peirsey, also became allies during these times. Their investor status, their connections to a ballooning transatlantic slave trade, and their ongoing links to Bermuda and England, all facilitated an awareness of their whiteness. Fueled by the purchase of the majority of the “20 and odd Negroes,” Yeardley and Peirsey exemplified the possibilities of privilege in a Virginia that was active in growing and evolving Atlantic trade system. As such, the two men enjoyed greater access to the colony’s bounty of resources because of their local standing and global vision.

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George Yeardley was part of a diverse cluster of men who made it their mission to succeed in Virginia. Yeardley arrived in the colony in 1609 as a secondary investor of the Old Adventurer class, making him eligible for the land grants that ultimately led to the development of the famous Flowerdew plantation. The *Flowerdew Hundred*, as it was called, was one of the earliest English settlements in the New World. Patented by Yeardley in 1618, this fourteen-hundred acre site was located on the south side of the James River, roughly halfway between the present-day Richmond and Williamsburg. Yeardley eventually sold this plot of land to his business partner, Abraham Peirsey.\(^{110}\) Peirsey was hired by the Virginia Company of London in 1616 to be the colony’s merchant. In this capacity, the Virginia Company provided him with fifteen hundred acres of land and fifty laborers.\(^{111}\)

At the time Yeardley and Peirsey purchased the fifteen enslaved peoples, George Yeardley was the governor of Virginia and leader of the General Assembly, and Abraham Peirsey was a burgess. Their early success became a model for current and future generations of investors. For his part, Yeardley was a slaveholder who eventually served three stints as governor.\(^{112}\) His standing was also enhanced by his wife, Temperance (Flowerdew) Yeardley, who was a passenger aboard the ship, the *Sea Venture*, when it ran aground in Bermuda, an event that led to its colonization.\(^{113}\) She was the daughter of a prominent English family (her parents were Anthony Flowerdew and Martha Stanley), which ultimately facilitated Yeardley being knighted in 1617. Peirsey’s path to success, although different than Yeardley’s, still yielded similar

\(^{110}\) Yeardley sold the Flowerdew plantation to Peirsey in 1624.


\(^{112}\) Jester, ed. *Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625*. Yeardley’s three stints as governor were from 1616-1617, 1619-1621, and 1626-1627. The final term was interim governorship while the former governor, Francis Wyatt, was on leave in Ireland attending to the affairs of his gravely ill father George Wyatt.

\(^{113}\) Jarvis, "In the Eye of All Trade: Maritime Revolution and the Transformation of Bermudian Society, 1618-1800", 19.
results. Peirsey made his mark as colony merchant by providing settlers with a market for their tobacco crops. One of the perks of the merchant position was that it gave Peirsey a platform from which to parlay his network of business contacts into other profitable ventures, such as his partnering with Yeardley in the purchase of “20 and odd Negroes.” His collaboration with Yeardley and other investors facilitated his being one of the larger beneficiaries of the fruit of the transatlantic slave trade, holding upward of thirty-nine servants and enslaved persons during his lifetime. In fact, in 1624, when there were only twelve hundred people living in Virginia, Peirsey was one of only fifteen men who owned ten or more servants and/or slaves. In order of the number of persons they owned the list of these fifteen individuals is as follows:

- Ralph Hamor 10
- John Pott 12
- Edward Bennett 12
- William Epps 13
- Roger Smith 14
- William Barry 15
- Edward Blaney 17
- William Pierce 17
- Francis Wyatt 17
- William Tucker 18
- Daniel Gookin 20
- Samuel Mathews 23
- George Sandys 37
- George Yeardley 39
- **Abraham Peirsey** 39

It is important to note that in 1624, Peirsey and Yeardley were the top servant and slave owners in Virginia. Thus, it should come as no surprise that they became the first men in Virginia, documented by name, to have purchased enslaved Africans in the transatlantic slave trade. In keeping with the traditions of the trade, the term Negro was used by both men to distinguish their enslaved workers from the White workers in their households. Undoubtedly,

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this fact did not go unnoticed by the Blacks on their plantations. If they did not already know it from their experience with Whites in the port in Luanda, the eight persons owned by Yeardley and the seven owned by Peirsey learned that “Negro” denoted not only their African ancestry but also their status as slave. This fact was made clearer to them upon contrasting the terms that Yeardley and Peirsey used to reference bonded Whites in their households. For example, of the sixteen European servants documented in the 1624 census as living in Yeardley’s household, all were recorded using their full names. Likewise, all twenty-nine Europeans servants in Peirsey’s household were also listed in this way. If hearing the word Negro was part of the Africans’ awareness of their blackness, then not hearing it was part of the Europeans’ awareness of their whiteness.

Their auditory senses told Black peoples that being other than “Negro” distinguished European people from African people around the issue of labor, with “Negro” linking Africans to slavery, and words that denoted “other than Negro,” disconnecting Europeans from it. Even if African peoples in the households of Yeardley and Peirsey did not have a grasp of the English language, their “outsider-within knowledge” told them that white skin was what distinguished the two groups of laborers. Within the black landscape, outsider-within knowledge was “a way of knowing not just the land but also white people.”

Not only did Black people “hear” the distinctions being made between Africans and Europeans in Virginia, they could also “see” it. For example, European workers did not serve

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115 Ibid., 22.
116 Ibid., 27.
117 Hill Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women in Search for Justice, 5-8. According to Collins, “outsider-within-knowledge” is gaining knowledge about or of the dominant group without gaining the full power accorded to that group.
for as long a period as did the Africans. The standards for length of service for European laborers varied based on their date of arrival and the terms of their contract, which was typically five to seven years. This information, along with their ages, and the names of the ships on which they arrived, was stored in a servant’s registry. Servant registries were established to document the service record for all European servants in Virginia, whether they held a formal labor contract or not. It was intended to provide Virginia courts with the evidence necessary to adjudicate disputes over length of service. By contrast, no official registry was used to document the arrival date or service record of enslaved Africans. This double standard confirms that the term of service for Blacks was intended to be indefinite as opposed to the service of requirement of Whites, which was intended to be temporary. This too delineated the differences that African peoples observed between black-skinned and white-skinned workers.

In addition to seeing their White co-workers complete their service requirement much sooner than they did, Black women and men on the plantations of Yeardley and Peirsey also observed their masters providing some of their White co-workers “freedom dues.” Freedom dues were provisions given to indentured servants by their masters to jump start their new life of independence. For those fortunate enough to get them, the receipt of items such as food, clothing, and/or guns were at the discretion of the master.\(^\text{119}\) This benefit certainly did not go unnoticed by African women and men on Yeardley and Peirsey’s plantations. Such inequalities confirmed that black skin was subordinate to white skin, a fact that proved to be a useful organizing principle not only for African people but for Whites as well.

Another pattern in Virginia society that facilitated an awareness of whiteness was the circumstances surrounding their migration. Most Blacks arrived in Virginia in bondage while

most Whites arrived voluntarily, sometimes selling their freedom for a period of five to seven years in exchange for an opportunity at prosperity. Thus, poor European settlers came to Virginia expecting to earn the same land grants and good jobs as what the initial and secondary investors enjoyed. So, although both Africans and Europeans arrived in Virginia on ships that crossed the Atlantic Ocean, Blacks in Virginia no doubt recognized that European servants arrived in the colony voluntarily. This observation was confirmed by the fact that Whites sometimes came to Virginia with families or had their transportation to Virginia paid for by a relative. African people’s perceptions of such differences in migration conditions was also fueled by the reality that many European servants lived with relatives while working to build a better life than what they had in England.

The Virginia Company recruited the first one hundred seventy-two European workers to Virginia in 1607 with promises of prosperity. The Company’s 1606 charter declared that these settlers would enjoy “all liberties” of those residing in “our realm of England.” European women and men were likewise inspired by the refrain of initial investor John Smith: “No man will go from [England] to have less freedom, in America.” Even criminals were said to have a second chance in Virginia. Smith had scarcely arrived in Virginia when in 1607 he wrote that in America “every man may be the master and owner of his own labor and land.”

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121 Samuel M. Bemiss, ed. The Three Charters of the Virginia Company of London with Seven Related Documents, 1607-1621. Charlottesville: The Virginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corporation, 1957, 38. The charter was granted by James I in 1606.
123 Ibid., 56.
Given these circumstances by 1624, some six thousand European persons had migrated to the colony.124

After 1618, most European workers arrived in Virginia as part of the headright program; a labor project put in place by the Virginia Company to help promote immigration and settlement. The sponsor of a “headright” received fifty acres of land for paying for a person’s transportation to Virginia. William Tucker was an Old Adventurer and a secondary investor who migrated to Virginia in 1610. By 1624, he was a financial sponsor of at least sixteen headrights and three enslaved persons: “Antoney Negro: Isabell Negro: and William theire Child,” making him one of the leading owners of servants and slaves in Virginia.125 His early arrival in the colony facilitated his fortune via the newly developed headright program and the expanding transatlantic slave trade. Having settled in the colony before Governor Dale returned to England in 1616 meant that Tucker received one hundred acres of land sometime in 1613. Tucker’s first headrights were his three brothers-in-laws, George, Paul, and William Thompson. In 1623, Tucker received one hundred fifty acres of land (fifty acres per person) under the headright program for paying for their transportation to Virginia. In return, George, Paul, and William worked for Tucker for roughly five years and then were given freedom dues to jumpstart their life of independence.126 Like earlier settlers, the Thompson brothers arrived in Virginia with high expectations.

124 Ibid.
125 Jester, ed. Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625, 49.
126 Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, I: 279. According to the records of the General Assembly, servant’s contracts lasted four to five years for adults arriving in the colony at age twenty and older. The term of service for those who arrived in the colony between twelve and twenty years of age was a minimum of five to seven years.
Unlike in Europe, the underclass in the New World had a real chance for advancement if they survived the illnesses and diseases that typically struck newcomers during their first year in Virginia. By contrast, English society had a clear pecking order. Everyone knew their place and was expected to fulfill the duties appropriate to their rank. Social inequality in England was maintained because property qualifications and other restrictions limited political participation to a select segment of the adult male population, and because most men lacked the freedom that came with economic independence. The New World offered an alternative to the rigid class system of England. Thus, female and male headrights firmly fixed their identity, prosperity, and allegiance to Virginia, and in doing so, joined them to upper class Europeans in building a successful Virginia.

The prospects of owning land enticed poor Europeans and indentured servants to not only migrate to Virginia, but once there, to act in accordance with the behavior of any aspiring adventurer-they too desired servants and slaves. This mindset was as central to success in the across the Atlantic as it was for success in Virginia.

How the European indentured servants were conditioned to embrace the culture of this Virginia is discussed in the next chapter. Chapter Two explores poor and working class White people’s integration into the developing international system of slavery through their appropriation of the land occupied by indigenous Powhatan groups. Vulnerable European women and men were gradually indoctrinated into this system through various processes that intertwined two important aspects of the burgeoning international system of slavery: race and property. The Virginia Company advanced a program of White racial solidarity by holding out

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127 Lorena S. Walsh and Russell R. Menard, "Death in the Chesapeake: Two Life Tables for Men in Early Colonial Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* LXIX (1974): 215. According to the authors, European men who were twenty-two years of age and survived their first year in Virginia, typically live another twenty years.
hopes of property ownership and slaveholding to poor European men in order to gain their cooperation. These immigrants agreed to being worked like slaves, and in some cases, being treated like slaves, believing that all their work would eventually pay off in land, jobs, and political appointments. They also believed that someday, with any luck, they may even own their own servants and slaves. This practice fueled the racial character of the colony such that property ownership and guarantees against enslavement became the basis for White racial identity.
Chapter Two  
Duty Boys, Company Tenants, Slaveholding Ladies, and Wealthy Planters:  
How the International System of Slavery Made European Emigrants White, 1619-1650

Almost every European during the seventeenth century who moved to or was born in Virginia participated directly or indirectly in the development of the international system of slavery. This was especially true of the poor and indentured European emigrants who became constituents in the expansion of the international system of slavery at the precise moment that they heeded the call to help planters and investors in the occupation and colonization of Virginia. In voluntarily supplying the colony with much-needed labor, European workers became accomplices in multiplying the transatlantic culture of colonialism. Moreover, their lengthy and intense interactions with and dependence on European planters and investors also ensured European servants full immersion in the racial views that pervaded the growth of the international system of slavery. Indeed, barriers against permanent bondage combined with the hope of landownership and good jobs contributed to an emerging concept of whiteness by lower class European people that was rooted in the social policies of the international system of slavery but not dependent on achieving the level of wealth enjoyed by the colony’s elite.\(^{128}\) In fact, indentured servitude did not hinder the possibilities of prosperity for Europeans; it just narrowed the options for achieving that wealth. But more than that, indentured servitude was the mechanism by which lower class Europeans were ensured social mobility. How exactly did European servants achieve security? The most successful in Virginia did so by emulating their

\(^{128}\) Matthew Pratt Guterl, “A Note on the Word “White” American Quarterly 56, no.2 (June 2004): 439-447. One of the ways Guterl’s defines whiteness is as an “inchoate conglomeration of factors that give group advantage to white people, often without showing it explicitly, but also including old-fashion, in-your-face racism, and color-blind things.” I draw on his analysis when discussing the ways in which European immigrants held advantages over African persons in early seventeenth century Virginia in areas such as good jobs and barriers against permanent bondage.
masters in exploiting the homeland of indigenous peoples and the labor of Africans. And in doing so, they became constituents in the creation of a New World influenced by an enlarging international system of slavery.

Historically, countries that have participated in the build-up of the international system of slavery have always relied on imported European laborers to support their efforts to colonize and conquer. Much about this history will seem familiar to us and will provide a useful model for understanding the role of White labor in shaping not only the international system of slavery but also the racial character of Virginia before and after the arrival of enslaved Africans.129

Most European nations have used their countrymen to perform a variety of the laborious tasks associated with colonization. Countries like England and Portugal for example sent their “undesirables” to its colonies to build the institutions of hegemony like forts, slave castles, homes, churches, and courthouses that became the machinery of colonization through which laws were enacted, subjection justified, and indigenous lands conquered. The Portuguese shipped Jewish peoples and criminals in the early sixteenth century to build its colony of São Tomé, an island in the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, while in the early seventeenth century England dispatched its criminals, orphans, and vagabonds to help colonize Virginia.130

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129 For an extensive discussion on evolution of the White laboring class in seventeenth century Virginia see Theodore W. Allen, The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America, II vols., vol. II (New York: Verso, 1997). His thesis is laid out concisely on pages 240-41 in volume two. I draw on Allen’s historical analysis of English attempts to colonize Ireland from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries to support my analysis of the attempts at colonization in West Central Africa in the sixteenth century and Virginia in the seventeenth century. Also see Allen’s volume one 52-70.

Colonizers also exported European labor to temporarily facilitate the production of cash crops to be sold in overseas markets. In sixteenth century São Tomé and early seventeenth century Bermuda, it was sugar cane; in early Virginia, it became tobacco. European laborers were also brought into colonial territories to perform a number of non-agricultural duties. For example, in 1571 the Portuguese transported eighteen masons and builders, a physician, and a barber to occupy and fortify São Tomé.\footnote{Ibid., 46.} Similarly, in 1607, England dispatched one preacher, one surgeon, six carpenters, one blacksmith, one sailor, one barber, one mason, and two bricklayers, to help settle Virginia.\footnote{Barbour, ed. The Complete Works of Captain John Smith, 1580-1631 20-21.} Sometimes these persons were also used to carry out minor military duties, such as when Virginia’s first one-hundred seventy-two inhabitants were ordered to secure occupied territories by building fortified communities in areas near the woods.\footnote{———, The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter, 1606-1609, 24.} At other times, European emigrants were routed to colonies specifically to engage in military combat, like when six hundred White soldiers were sent to São Tomé in 1560 to help conquer kingdoms in Angola.\footnote{Birmingham, Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese 1483-1790 45.} Both colonial ventures, (São Tomé and Virginia) show that throughout the early history of European colonization of Africa and North America, from the sixteenth century to the seventeenth century, very little had changed in the circumstances surrounding the use of White labor. Perhaps the most consistent narrative was the temporary nature of their servitude. Historically, Europeans temporarily agreed to lend their labor to New World colonization projects in the hopes that it would eventually lead to increased opportunities for social mobility that would distinguish them from the indigenous populations. In early
seventeenth century Virginia, the distinction was first between European immigrants and Native Americans, and later between European servants and bonded Africans.

Despite the banal characteristic of the work that was demanded of them, the status of European emigrant workers in the New World was by no means secure. In Virginia, planters strictly regulated the labor of European workers in order to ensure their obedience by requiring them to adhere to rigid orders or face whippings and/or incarceration. In fact, before the arrival of the “32 Negroes” in March 1619, it was European indentured servants who were synonymous with debasement. The indentured laborers recruited under the Sandys program illustrate the vulnerability of these workers as well as the gap between rich and poor Europeans before and shortly after the arrival of African peoples. The treatment and work conditions of European servants were often so bad that only enslavement could be more miserable than their condition. When enslaved Africans finally did begin arriving, the European servants’ social positions improved and their opportunities for advancement stabilized, making the Sandys program an important framework within which to view European servants’ upward mobility and their emerging racial awareness.

The Sandys program was designed and implemented in 1619 for the acquisition of temporary European labor. Named after its architect, Sir Edwin Sandys, a founder of the Virginia Company and a son of the Archbishop of York, the Sandys’ program delivered much-needed labor to Virginia. Eager planters and investors looked to the Sandys program for workers to “cleere grounds, fell trees, set corne, square timber, and plant vines and other fruits brought out of England” in order to transform Virginia’s uncultivated lands into crop producing farms
and plantations.\textsuperscript{135} The program was only in existence for three short years, 1619-1622, but during that time Sandys drafted around three thousand five hundred men from England to work the fertile lands of Virginia.\textsuperscript{136} This period also marked the arrival of enslaved Africans, the “32 Negroes in March 1619 and the “20 and odd Negroes” in August of that year, who supplanted Sandys recruits as the lowest class of laborers.

Driven by the spirit of acquisition that infused the activities of early seventeenth century Virginians, Sandys solicited England’s cities and counties for its poor and indigent as a cheap form of labor with which to man Virginia’s labor force.\textsuperscript{137} One such overture by Sandys to the city of London garnered one hundred destitute boys for the program.\textsuperscript{138} Public discussion about filling the labor needs of its first North American colony convinced English officials that ridding the country of its indigent and idle was a public good that also benefited the country’s colonization efforts. Such discussions raised awareness of the benefits of disposing of English outcasts, which absolved the government of its obligation, and it also provided Virginia investors with an accessible yet powerless labor force, a situation already familiar to them given England’s rigid pecking order. It was with such sensibilities that officials in England gladly ceded their vagrants to Sandys, thereby providing the colony with the human resources it needed to achieve its settlement goals.

By 1621, the Sandys’ program had initiated several plans to attract new investors in order to improve the efficiency of its labor force and speed up settlement. These measures coincided

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., I: 304-7.
with an increase in Bermuda’s population of enslaved Africans. By 1620, there were at least seventy-five such persons in that colony.\textsuperscript{139} This fact, combined with Bermuda’s rapidly growing tobacco and sugarcane production, put increased pressure on Virginia leaders to match the agricultural output of its sister colony. Until 1624, Bermuda’s tobacco production consistently surpassed Virginia’s, yielding profits for investors in both England and Bermuda.\textsuperscript{140} Sandys’ new initiative was a reaction to Bermuda’s preeminence as England’s most fruitful colony-attracting forty-four ambitious planters to Virginia, among them Edward Bennett, who by 1625 was one of the top fifteen men in Virginia who owned ten or more servants and enslaved persons.\textsuperscript{141} Bennett was the type of investor that Sandys had in mind when designing this program.\textsuperscript{142} He was a wealthy merchant from London eager to take advantage of the opportunity to turn land and laborers into a profit.\textsuperscript{143} By purchasing stock in the Virginia Company, Bennett and other investors got one hundred acres of land for every share purchased plus an additional fifty acres for every laborer they brought in to work their lands.\textsuperscript{144} Bennett’s prosperity in Virginia exemplified the aspirations of a new generation of planters who saw the opportunity to obtain land and laborers not just as a means of gaining wealth but for something even more important, stature.

\textsuperscript{139} Jarvis, "In the Eye of All Trade: Maritime Revolution and the Transformation of Bermudian Society, 1618-1800", 149.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 87-8. The wealth generated from tobacco produced by enslaved laborers, who were brought to the island duty-free, made Bermuda England’s most prosperous colony prior to 1625.
\textsuperscript{142} Wesley Frank Craven, \textit{Dissolution of the Virginia Company: The Failure of a Colonial Experiment} (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1964), 59.
\textsuperscript{143} Kingsbury, ed. \textit{The Records of the Virginia Company of London: The Court Book, from the Manuscript in the Library of Congress}, I: 21. New Adventurers arrived in the colony after Sir Thomas Dale’s 1616 departure. Also new adventurers received fifty acres of land after seven years of residency, instead of one hundred acres after three years like Old Adventurers.
The Sandys’ program offered certain investors a chance to establish a plantation in their own name, like the aforementioned Flowerdew Hundred patented by Governor George Yeardley in 1618. Immortalizing one’s name in a plantation gave investors more of a personal stake in Virginia’s success. It improved the speed of land development and reinforced a planter’s commitment to the mushrooming transatlantic slave trade as a means of gaining wealth. The Virginia Company also made the purchase of enslaved Africans viable for planters by subsidizing part of the expense of housing European indentured servants.

By 1625 Bennett had ten European servants and two enslaved Africans described only as “Antonio a Negro” and “Mary a Negro woman.”145 As it turns out, “Antonio” and “Mary,” who I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, were the famous couple, Anthony and Mary Johnson, eventually property owners who also owned a slave and several servants. In obtaining enslaved Africans like the Johnsons during the growth of the international system of slavery and indentured servants under the Sandys program, Bennett represented the emergence of a new class of planter who regularly manipulated two of the world’s most utilized bondage systems for personal gain. The records do not indicate how much land Bennett received as an investor under the Sandys program. However, from his indentured servant holdings alone, Bennett would have received five-hundred acres (fifty acres per person). One indication of the vastness of his land, servant, and slave holdings was the fact that he had to dispatch his nephews Robert and Richard Bennett to Virginia to help manage all the property that he acquired while participating in the Sandys program.146

145 Jester, ed. Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625, 46. Evidence suggested that “Antonio” was Anthony Johnson, the enslaved African who owned a slave and several servants. Johnson eventually married Mary.

146 Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 119. Richard Bennett (Edward Bennett’s nephew) was the governor of Virginia from April 30, 1652 to March 2, 1655.
The Virginia Company recommended that planters use the profits from the cost savings they realized as a result of the Virginia Company’s subsidies to experiment with commodities other than tobacco, like silk grass, pitch, tar, and lumber, even though enslaved Africans’ expertise lay in growing and curing tobacco and other tropical crops, such as sugar cane.\textsuperscript{147} Investors generally scoffed at such recommendations. As an incentive to the investors to diversify their mix of commodities, Sandys allowed planters to keep a share of the profits made by European servant labor even though Virginia was clearly moving toward importing more enslaved Africans into the colony.\textsuperscript{148}

By 1625 six of the largest planters, including Bennett, George Yeardley, and Abraham Peirsey, had acquired enslaved Africans probably because their skill in tobacco cultivation had proved invaluable to Bermuda.\textsuperscript{149} Despite this trend, Sandys extolled the virtue of indentured European servants for more than their labor, but as purveyors of English culture. European indentured servants assisted masters like Bennett in “educating Native children, teaching them English skills, and acquainting them with the more sophisticated aspects of Christianity and civility,” which further tied emigrant Europeans to the colonial experiment in Virginia.\textsuperscript{150} The positive associations of servitude and patriotism compelled Sandys to seek out a special type of


indentured servant, known then as tenants and duty boys, to help in the settlement of Virginia. These men built the churches, homes, courthouses, and plantations that defined the spatial and social relations between them and Native and African groups, and in doing so they built a new social and political identity for themselves as White.151

The seeming compatibility of European servants with their planters and investors because of their “whiteness” was at odds with the servile nature of their indentured servitude, especially since most planters still expected their European laborers to work almost as hard as slaves. For example, tenant laborers and duty boys were required to work a significant number of years before gaining their freedom, for tenants it was seven years and for duty boys it was fourteen. Although tenant laborers were the highest ranked of the Sandys program servants, they were also subject to immense exploitation. Tenants were enticed to the colony by the prospect of work that was akin to that of a sharecropper. The plan was that these men would rent themselves out to the Virginia Company and that, in return for their labor, the Company would pay their transportation to the colony. Once in Virginia, a Company official would then assign the tenants to work for men like Bennett or other high-ranking persons, such as members of the General Assembly, for a period of seven years. During their term of service, they were required to give half their earnings to the Virginia Company.152 Once their obligation was completed, the tenants would receive fifty acres of land and some form of freedom dues.153

151 Guterl, “A Note on the Word “White,”” 439-44. Such institutions were part of what Guterl calls the “inchoate conglomeration of factors that give group advantage to White people.”
152 Kingsbury, ed. The Records of the Virginia Company of London: The Court Book, from the Manuscript in the Library of Congress, III: 99-100. The tenants were left with very little money after giving over half to the Virginia Company and some to the planter.
153 Ibid.
Despite the touted benefits of being a tenant laborer, in reality the occupation was anything but honorable. These men were sometimes treated quite harshly. Some complained of being treated like slaves.\textsuperscript{154} Moreover, they were often poorly fed, consuming a diet that typically consisted of corn and water.\textsuperscript{155} Investors like Bennett regularly exploited tenant laborers by hiring them out to privately-owned plantations for profit. In one instance, fifty of the one hundred “lusty” tenants who arrived in Virginia in 1619 to clear, fence, plant, and build on investors lands were hired out by their owners to other plantations.\textsuperscript{156} George Sandys (father of Edwin Sandys) hired out two of his tenant laborers, David Mansfield and John Claxon, to work on a privately owned plantation.\textsuperscript{157} We have no way of knowing more precisely the extent to which Mansfield, Claxon, and other workers were hired out, but we do know that once under the supervision of the hirer, tenant laborers were so “unmercifully used that it [was] the greatest cause of [their] discontent.”\textsuperscript{158}

If tenant laborers were the highest ranked servants in the Sandys program then duty boys were the lowest. The term “duty boy” was based on the name of the ship (the \textit{Duty}) that transported a number of European workers into Virginia. Instead of the seven-year maximum work requirement that applied to tenant laborers, the term of service for duty boys was fourteen years. If a duty boy committed a crime at any time during the first seven years, his term of service was extended for an additional seven years, so that they often ended up serving in excess of the typical fourteen years. After their fourteen-year period of labor, duty boys, like tenants,

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., III: 479, 489.
\textsuperscript{157} Jester, ed. \textit{Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625}, 39.
still received fifty acres of land to jumpstart their life of independence. The muster of 1624 shows a total of twelve European male servants who were transported on the *Duty*, suggesting that these twelve men were in fact duty boys.\(^\text{159}\)

It is tempting to interpret the harsh working conditions of tenants and duty boys as evidence that there were no appreciable differences between bonded Africans and Europeans and, therefore, no evidence of fully formed racial categories during this time, a claim some scholars have made.\(^\text{160}\) Indeed, working conditions seem to be a good starting point for examining the social distinctions between various classes of workers. However, the amount of time spent in servitude provides an even better means of analyzing the differences between European and African laborers. The fact was that the Europeans’ service was temporary and that of the Africans was indefinite. Although not all Africans were slaves, virtually all slaves were *not* European, which suggests incipient white racial solidarity.\(^\text{161}\) Moreover, it shows that the amount of time spent in servitude was a seventeenth century expression of racial sensibilities, if not actual evidence of race.

By volunteering their labor, European emigrants participated in the colonization of Virginia, and even if they assigned different meanings to their reasons for immigration, they were, nonetheless, allies with planters and investors in a colonial project that encompassed all sorts of religious and racial justifications for settlement, enslavement, and the subjugation of indigenous peoples. So, although many performed hard labor, tenants and duty boys were the labor and social equivalent of an apprentice, most of them having contracts stipulating their

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\(^{160}\) Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 155, 318. Breen and Innes *Myne Owne Ground*, 111, 112, suggest that free Blacks were treated the same as Whites.

length of service and, in some cases, the type of work they performed. African laborers, on the other hand, had no equivalent entry level position. Instead they were imported into the colony mostly as permanent labor. Although tenants and duty boys could be physically punished and treated as badly as the Africans, they still had some rights and real prospects for freedom. In addition, tenants and duty boys spoke their masters’ language and were familiar with his customs. It was for these reasons that White servants were ranked higher in Virginia than Blacks.

The trial of John Punch was an exemplar of the extent of such disparity. John Punch, an African man, and his two European friends “Victor, a Dutchman, and James Gregory, a Scotchman,” were all on trial for running away to Maryland from their master, Hugh Gwyn. The group was sentenced by the General Court on July 9, 1640 after Gwyn brought the men back to Virginia for punishment. Their penalty was detailed in a lengthy opinion that stated:

The court doth therefore order that the said three servants shall receive the punishment of whipping and to have thirty stripes apiece… Victor and James Gregory shall first serve out their times with their masters according to their Indentures, and one whole year apiece after the time of their service is Expired By their said Indentures in recompence of his Loss sustained by their absence, and after that service to their said Master is Expired to serve the colony for three whole years apiece, and that the third being a negro named John Punch shall serve his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural life here or elsewhere.  

The Court’s ruling was illustrative of a society influenced by the principles of the international system of slavery, one in which Victor and Gregory were ranked above Punch, as a result of which their punishment, even for the same crime, could be no more severe than a whipping or an increase in their fixed term of service. Lifetime servitude, prescribed for Punch, was simply out of the question for the two White men. The details of this case shows that the time spent in

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servitude was indeed a proxy for race, and as such, anticipates the concerns of a restless indentured servant class, eager to improve their social position.

Outside the courtroom, Punch, Victor, and Gregory were most likely aware of their unequal social positions. Despite this, by running away, Punch achieved some dignity and autonomy because, in doing so he challenged the codes and customs designed to reinforce his subordinate status within the social structure of the plantation, one that ranked workers according to their position in the international system of slavery, “white over black.” Yet, even within the restrictive geography of the plantation, African workers like Punch were sometimes able to circumvent this hierarchy through a variety of tactics that made the plantation’s institutions, homes, churches, and courthouses, penetrable. According to Ginsburg, one way enslaved persons restored their dignity and even achieved their freedom was through the manipulation of the very landscapes designed to restrict them. By running away, Punch was able to exploit the physical landscape of Gwyn’s settlement, and in doing so, showed the plantation structure to be a space capable of exploitation by Black people. Thus, the black landscapes of Virginia were more than the physical spaces that Black peoples inhabited; they also held cognitive dimensions that expressed their perceptions and dissatisfactions with the highly regulated plantation structure.

The Black landscape, however, did have physical dimensions. It paralleled the spaces on the plantation where Punch, Victor, and Gregory resided. It was also a distinctive Black

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163 Barbara Heath, "Space and Place within Plantation Quarters in Virginia, 1700-1825 " in Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery, ed. Clifton and Rebecca Ginsburg Ellis (New Haven Yale University Press, 2010), 6. Heath defines idea of “place” as a space that is perceived and experienced. I draw on this definition to illustrate how the experiences and perceptions of Black peoples about the plantation structure make it a Black place.
165 Ibid., 29, 56.
geography that extended into the woods, the fields, and onto other plantations between Gwyn’s settlement and Maryland by way of the unofficial ties to friends, relatives, spouses, and lovers. In the official layout of the plantation structure, Victor and Gregory outranked Punch, but in the private black landscape that paralleled this setup, Victor and Gregory lacked standing and Punch had the upper hand, possessing a Black perspective of the landmarks of the plantation. Here, Punch knew the language, the customs, the nods, winks, sounds, and gestures that connected Africans from other plantations to each other in ways that likely eluded the consciousness of Victor and Gregory prior to their escape. Perhaps Punch introduced Victor and Gregory to this space during their time on the run and, in doing so, recovered a modicum of his autonomy and dignity. However, once the men were captured and back on the official geography of the white landscape where the General Court presided over their fates, Victor and Gregory once again had the clear advantage. In this arena, a lack of economic success was all that hindered Victor’s and Gregory’s standing, whereas for Punch, the rules of the advancing international system of slavery stalled his advancement by permitting his indefinite bondage.

Indeterminate lengths of service were even more prevalent by mid-seventeenth century when planters began using the labor of the roughly three hundred Africans in more diverse ways-opening up more opportunities for newly freed European servants and creating an important flashpoint against the formation of alliances between Black and White workers. The bodily metaphors such as “negro” and “savage” used by the Virginia Company to discourage coalescence, admonished European servants to behave in a way that reflected their whiteness. In Virginia, that meant that they should have no intimate contact with African or Native groups.

As it was with Native Americans, Virginia leaders frowned upon intimate relations between European emigrants and African women. The colony’s ideology about interracial sex had its roots in the international system of slavery’s use of religious intolerance as a justification for enslavement and colonization. Ideas about Black women found in Richard Hakluyt’s sixteenth-century collection of transatlantic travel narratives, *Principal Navigations*, mentioned previously in Chapter One, made their way into Virginia’s public policy to limit interactions between European men and African women and to maintain the racial order. In this collection, Hakluyt published several essays suggesting that the African female body was abnormal.\(^{167}\)

Writer Richard Ligon, depicted Black women in the Caribbean as having outsized breasts. Noting that Black women’s “breasts hang down below their Navels, so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost to the ground, that at a distance you would think they had six legs.”\(^{168}\) This notion of the abnormal and animalistic Black female body was a proxy for the colony’s ideology about race, and it also doubled as an image of the alien and subordinate nature of Africans relative to Europeans. Aspects of this assumption were revealed in the Hugh Davis trial.

Hugh Davis was a European indentured servant who had sex with an African woman. On September 17, 1630, the General Court punished Davis for this offense, ruling that:

> Hugh Davis to be soundly whipped, before the assembly of Negroes and others for abusing himself to the dishonor of God and shame of Christians, by defiling his body in lying with a negro, which fault he is to acknowledge next Sabbath day.\(^{169}\)

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\(^{167}\) In *Principal Navigations and Voyages*, edited by Richard Hakluyt, London, 1598-1600.


\(^{169}\) Hening, ed. *The Statutes at Large: Being a collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*, I: 146.
While it is unclear whether Davis’s sexual partner was enslaved, we learn several things about the colony’s racial views from this verdict. We learn from this decision who was White, as the opinion defined the behavior expected of Davis as a Christian. Just as important, we learn who was not White. The judgment that Davis be whipped before an assembly of “Negroes and others” discloses a racial identification of the persons who were to witness his punishment. The ruling also presupposes that the Court had an image or conception of its own racial group. So, when the Court convened a crowd of “Negroes and others” to observe Davis’s beating, the Court was clearly distinguishing itself and Davis as White, thereby suggesting it was unchristian for Whites to have sex with Blacks.

This image of the abnormal and animalistic Black female embodied the beliefs that European elites used to justify the continued enslavement of Black people in Virginia. Colonial leaders used this trope to propagate assumptions about European and African women that anticipate the 1643 slave law, which taxed the labor of Black women the same as it did that of men, but from which European women were exempt. This legislation appeared during a time when Virginia leaders were clarifying the social position of Black women as both a symbol of status and wealth, a process that prefigured the 1662 slave law that unambiguously codified racial slavery. The 1662 Act states:

Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a Negro woman shall be slave or free… all children

171 Pratt, “A Note on the Word “White,”” 439, according to Pratt the courts were one of the institutions that gave group advantage to White people.
172 Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, I: 243. The 1643 statute reads in part as follows: “Be it also enacted and confirmed there be ten pounds of tob'o. per poll & a bushell of corne per poll paid to the ministers within the several parishes of the collony for all tithable persons, that is to say, as well for all youths of sixteen years of age as vpwards, as also for all negro women at the age of sixteen years…”
born in this colony shall be bond or free only according to the condition of
the mother...\textsuperscript{173}

The law’s redefinition of the status of Black women’s progeny occurs on the backend of growth in the colony’s initial participation in the burgeoning transatlantic slave trade nearly two decades prior, just over two hundred African persons were imported into Virginia between 1635 and 1656.\textsuperscript{174} When examined in tandem with the 1643 slave law and an increase in the colony’s enslaved population, the two measures expand our understanding of the expectations for enslaved labor, which forever altered the social distance between European and African workers.

Specifically, the 1640s and 1650s were marked by changes in the usage of Black female labor to include the gifting of enslaved females. Giving rituals were the cornerstone of a new sense of race and class consciousness in the 1640s and the 1650s. Depending on the context, the gifting of an enslaved female could have multiple meanings, it could be done to express status or, for other symbolic reasons. What was clear was that gifting practices were as much of a way of talking about class distinctions among planters as they were about distinctions between European and African workers. For a middling planter bargaining with a larger one, receiving an enslaved female as a gift from the larger one might express prestige among the planter class or signify one’s improved standing in the community. For instance, Francis Pott, on April 10, 1646, gave Stephen Charlton “one Negro woman called Marchant and one boy Negro (likely her son) called Will for peaceable enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{175} If Pott’s gift was to help Charlton get started as a slaveholder then the gift signified prestige. If Pott was trying to help Charlton in a time of financial distress, then gifting was a way to ease the burden, which still could be read as an expression of Pott’s

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., II: 26.
\textsuperscript{174} “Virginia Land Patents, 1623-1660.”
\textsuperscript{175} “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” 28.
stature. One year after receiving the enslaved woman from Pott, Charlton gifted a two-year old “Negro childe,” Grace-Susanna, to his widowed sister also named Grace, to “enjoy until she be of the age of thirty years.” Perhaps Charlton had gifted the young girl to help his sister and to flaunt his standing as a slaveholder.

It was a common practice in the 1640s to gift enslaved girls or women if a friend or family member needed assistance in overcoming the uncertainties of daily life. An English mariner, named Thomas Jacob, was probably motivated by a similar set of concerns as was Charlton when, in 1642 he gifted a “Negro” woman, Susanna, to a newly widowed Bridget Severne and her son John to be used by “their heirs freely and “for ever.” However, it was just as likely that Jacob’s was trying to impress the widow as a potential suitor. In this circumstance, the gifting of the enslaved woman represented upper class membership as much as it served as a shelter against life’s unexpected events.

Besides communicating privilege among elites, gifting rituals were also one way by which planters communicated their superior class ranking to lower class Europeans relative to Africans. The gifting of enslaved African women as Charlton and Jacobs did, told ambitious Whites (servants, former servants, and middling planters) that “African women’s bodies were the vessels for crafting real and imagined legacies” for themselves and their families. A key factor to warrant this belief was the fact that an African woman’s “increases,” or the children she bore, were subject to permanent bondage, which was why most men purchased a Black female as their

176 “Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Orders, Deeds, Wills, Ect., 1645-1651 Book 3,” 289. The transaction was made on March 19, 1647.
178 Morgan, Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery, 83.
first slave. Thus, Black “women’s work and [Black] women’s bodies were inseparable from the landscape” of slavery and the transformation of colonial Virginia.

By making an enslaved female the first purchase, an aspiring planter successfully incorporated the trappings of the international system of slavery into his identity. In this fashion, when English emigrant John Custis bought an enslaved girl named Doll in 1653, he was buying his way into the master class. Custis bought Doll from Argoll Yeardley-his brother-in-law and son of the former governor, George Yeardley. Yeardley sold his “Negro girl” to Custis for him to “have her and her increase to be in full satisfaction of him and his heirs.”

In 1653, Custis was a new immigrant and was newly married. Purchasing Doll was a way of establishing a name for himself in the community. Possibly, too, he decided to purchase an enslaved female so that her increase could belong to him, thereby multiplying the value of his initial investment. Either way, Doll represented Custis’s passage from the status of non-slaveholder to slaveholder, after which time he joined his brother-in-law, Yeardley, in the upper classes of Northampton County, Virginia society.

Two years after purchasing Doll, Custis was elected to the bench as member of the Northampton, County court. A few years later, after he acquired more enslaved Africans, he broadcasted his legitimacy as established slaveholder by selling Doll to William Gascoigne, a former European indentured servant. The life of Doll enables us to focus on the daily practices of Virginia planters that connected them to the growing transatlantic slave trade. Moreover, the

179 “Reasons of ye Planters of Barbados about Nonpayment of Custom,” in Thomas Povey, Booke of Entrie of Forreigne Letters, 1655-1660. This text had Barbadian slaveowners’ referring to female slaves of childbearing years as “increasers.” Although it was not until 1662 that the children of enslaved women were legally deemed slaves and, thus, also the property of her owner, in practice this was the defacto law of the land prior to 1662.
180 Morgan, Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery, 3.
181 “County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1640-1645.” f.150.
life of Doll illustrates the variations in planters’ perspectives regarding Black female labor. In selling Doll to Custis, Yeardley was able to use his wealth generated by slave labor to jump start the life of his emigrant brother-in-law. Along the same lines, Custis, with the purchase of Doll, signaled to the community his intent on being part of Virginia’s master class. He showed the community that his ambitions had finally come to fruition after he sold Doll to Gascoigne. For Gascoigne, Doll was proof of the potential for upward mobility of former indentured servants like him who constituted a large block of Europeans in Virginia, with three-fourths of Europeans living in Virginia during the seventeenth century having arrived as indentured servants.183

The importance of enslaved females and the developing transatlantic slave trade to the advancement of European emigrants explains why girls like Grace-Susanna and Doll would command a higher price on the open market than European servants, male or female.184 Generally, an enslaved African female in the 1640s would cost around twenty-five hundred pounds of tobacco.185 In contrast, the cost of European female and male indentured servants during this same period averaged around thirteen hundred and eighteen hundred pounds of tobacco respectively.186 These higher values for enslaved African females reflect the planters’ interest in substituting enslaved African females for uses beyond agriculture, which may account for the parity in the ratio of enslaved females and males through 1660.187 The diverse use of enslaved female labor in the English colonies might have even affected the intercolonial trade in

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184 As an example of the cost of African versus European laborers, the estate inventory of William Burdett showed that his eight year old enslaved girl (no name recorded) was valued at three thousand pounds of tobacco while his twelve year old boy servant with eight years of service remaining was valued at one thousand pounds of tobacco. "County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1640-1645," 423.
185 "York County, Virginia Records, 1638-1644." The cost of black male servants averaged around 2, 700 lbs of tobacco.
186 Ibid.
African women, given that the vast majority of enslaved persons in the seventeenth century were imported rather than born in Virginia. In fact, through the 1670s, most Blacks arrived in Virginia after a layover in another English colony.\(^\text{188}\) Therefore, the variations in the uses and expectations for African women in Virginia may have been influenced by other colonies, like Bermuda, which were more active in the transatlantic slave trade. Black female labor was an important boundary-crossing commodity that connected European peoples in Bermuda and Virginia. Examples of such intercolonial connections around Black women can be observed in the transactions of several planters. Take the Bermudian planter, Thomas Durham, who requested three enslaved Black men and one Black woman from Nathaniel Rich in 1620 to work his land.\(^\text{189}\) We have no way of knowing where Rich got his slaves, but it possible that he was assisted by his brother, Robert, mentioned in Chapter One, who was a Virginia Company shareholder and a planter in both colonies. A similar scenario as that of Nathaniel Rich occurred in 1621, when Daniel Elfrith, who had captained slave ships into both colonies, attempted to broker a deal between Rich and another planter that would have landed Rich two more enslaved Black women.\(^\text{190}\) The cases reveal the extent to which ideas about Black female labor influenced English colonies via the evolving international system of slavery.

Although we have very little to document the lives of enslaved girls like Doll and Grace-Susanna, (or the women in Bermuda), we know that their mothers were likely African born, as were most of the roughly three hundred fifty African peoples in Virginia through 1660.\(^\text{191}\) If we

\(^{188}\) Susan Westbury, "Slaves of Colonial Virginia: Where They Came From," *William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (1985): 228-37. According to Westbury, enslaved persons came to colonial Virginia by three routes: directly from Africa, from Africa with a protracted stay in the West Indies, and from other mainland British colonies.

\(^{189}\) Jarvis, "In the Eye of All Trade: Maritime Revolution and the Transformation of Bermudian Society, 1618-1800", 151.


are to understand the personhood of African girls and women during the initial years of slavery and how they overcame their oppression and built community under this system, we must begin by studying the lives of women in the Angola region of West Central Africa. Again, I turn to the excellent research of Joseph Miller on the Mbundu peoples of Angola in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, which allows us to make more confident generalizations about African females in early Virginia since the seaport in Luanda, Angola was the place where they, and most other Blacks in the New World during this time, departed from. What can we learn from women in Mbundu societies that may help us understand Black women in the New World? What skills did they possess that show how Black women in Virginia may have mitigated their oppression? How did Mbundu women train their daughters to alleviate threats to their autonomy? Although we do not know the exact birthplaces of the African women in Virginia or their ethnic group, Miller’s study provides us with knowledge about overlapping and regional cultures common to kingdoms in Angola that allow us to better answer such questions.

According to Miller, Mbundu societies were matrilineal with descent and inheritance reckoned through women but with most forms of authority in the hands of men.¹⁹² Under this structure girls were usually born in their father’s village where they remained until marriage, and then went to live with the kinsmen of their husbands. As a result, most Mbundu women never lived in their own lineage village until they reached old age. This constant movement between lineages meant that most Mbundu women would raise their children in their husband’s lineage group rather than with their own. Lacking a reliable chronicler of the perceptions of West African women about their working conditions in Virginia, we are left to speculate about whether they used their indigenous knowledge of lineage systems towards mitigating the

upheavals of internal slave trading. For instance, the women on the plantation where Grace-Susanna and Doll were sold might have appointed a woman to care for the girls while they were separated from their mothers. If so, this woman would be each girl’s surrogate mother for the entire time they were on the settlement. It would be unlikely that the girl’s new owners were aware of such arrangements because these relationships were common to matrilineal societies, where girls and women established a variety of kinship relations with other females who moved in and out of their group as a result of marriage or divorce or because of their status as a concubine, pawn, or slave. It is from this context that we imagine that Grace-Susanna and Doll’s surrogate mother raised her new “daughters” like any mother would, teaching her about agricultural production, such as how to grow and tend to crops, and training her in domestic skills—how to cook and make food stretch, and how to sew and mend her clothing to make it last, as well as other methods essential to her survival. As Grace-Susanna and Doll got older, they would learn from the women in their community how to navigate the black and white landscapes, learning—who to trust and not to trust. They would also likely be taught each group’s unique language and customs and how to code switch between the two as needed. These skills were probably what Grace-Susanna and Doll mastered from the women on the plantations where they resided, and it was possibly what the eight-year-old “negro girle” on the plantation of William Burdett experienced.

Burdett was a former indentured servant who, before he died in 1643, had achieved a certain amount of upward social mobility. He had amassed at least one thousand five hundred acres of land, had at least nine confirmed servants and/or slaves, and had been appointed as a
Burgess to represent Accomack County in the General Assembly. An inventory of his estate listed “one negro girle about 8 years old at 2000 pounds of tobacco,” which was twice the value of any one of his White servants. Probably unbeknownst to Burdett, the women in the black landscape surrounding his plantation saw to it that the young girl had a surrogate mother to train her in agricultural techniques and other survival skills while she lived on his plantation. This scenario would likely repeat itself once the girl was sold during the liquidation of Burdett’s estate.

The reality of life under the 1643 slave law meant that once Doll, Grace-Susanna, and the eight-year-old girl were of age, almost no amount of work was viewed as too strenuous for her given the that the law taxed African women’s labor as equal to that of any man. As such, slave masters of the 1640s, just as those from earlier decades, surely endeavored to “wrench as much labor as possible from [Black women] without injuring her capacity to bear children.”

To this end, female African children like Grace-Susanna, Doll, and others held particular historical significance to the class mobility of European men, be it a former indentured servant like Burdett or a poor European emigrant like John Custis or relatively wealthy men like Stephen Charlton or Argoll Yeardley.

Although most European men who could afford to purchase an enslaved African did so, those less wealthy, including many former servants, obtained the trappings of the international system of slavery by purchasing European indentured labor. The increasing importance of

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193 "County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1640-1645," 423.
194 Ibid.
195 Hening, ed. _The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619_, I: 242.
enslaved women (and men) in the colony as a result of increased participation in the transatlantic slave trade meant that bonded Blacks cost two to three times as much as any class of European servant. Thus, many former tenants and duty boys could only afford to enter the ranks of mastery by purchasing a European indentured servant. This was the case for former tenants Richard Berkeley and John Smyth who, in 1626, requested two duty boys apiece “for their owne pryvate benefit and imploymentes.” Likewise, in the same period, two former tenants, Francis Fowler and Thomas Dunthorne, each owned a European servant. Owning indentured servants allowed European emigrants to write themselves into the upper classes, just as planters and masters had done before the arrival of enslaved Africans in 1619. Although owning an indentured servant did not hold the same prestige as owning a slave, as laborers they were still part of an emerging international system of slavery since their work facilitated the elimination of Native peoples and the enslavement of Africans. For this aspiring group of European emigrants, indentured labor represented the nearest model to owning a slave and, as a result, the men stole them, lured them, and even fought over them. In doing so, these men were able to distance themselves from some former indentured servants. It was within this historical context that many former European servants entered into mastery.

White men were not the only group that benefited from the social transformation that arose from Virginia’s increased participation in the growing transatlantic slave trade. Many White women, their wives, mothers, and sisters, also reaped benefits. The proliferation of male European emigrants into Virginia at a rate of eight to ten thousand a month by the mid-

seventeenth century to do the hard labor of colonization, and the corresponding demand that White men not form intimate relations with Native or African women, put pressure on the Virginia Company to avidly recruit White women into the colony to marry these men.¹⁹⁹ Like the men, European women heeded the call to perform the work of colonization as domestic partners to male workers. Although the vast majority of White women who immigrated to the region in the seventeenth century came as indentured servants, the expectation was that the bulk of their labor would be of a domestic nature. Thus, in 1620, Virginia Company officials sent ninety unmarried Englishwomen to the colony with the hopes that they would marry and procreate with European male settlers. In 1621, they again solicited subscriptions for single girls and widows, which led to fifty-seven women immigrating to the colony.²⁰⁰ Company officials expected that the women “at their first landing be housed, lodged, and provided for of diet till they be married. And in case they cannot be presently married we desire they may be put to several householders that have wives till they can be provided husbands.”²⁰¹

Virginia Company leaders insisted that the colony “can never flourish till families be planted.”²⁰² White women’s labor was deliberately exempted from taxation to achieve the type of family-centered society that officials envisioned for Virginia. Outnumbered by men four or five to one, White woman’s facility for domestic work factored little in the Virginia Company’s

²⁰² Ibid. Here the term “planted” means people settling in a colonized area.
recruitment policies. Given the gender imbalance between Europeans, it appears that the primary goal of Company officials was to prevent men like Hugh Davis from forming intimate ties with Native and Black women.

The willingness of White women to serve in this domestic capacity, and thereby help to advance the pace of Virginia’s colonization, made them, like their male counterparts, constituents in the developing international system of slavery. In voluntarily supplying the colony with the domestic labor needed to form the families that would “fix people to the soil” and prevent copulation with African and indigenous women until the White population increased naturally, European women became accomplices in the culture of colonialism at home and abroad. Like their male comrades, White women’s intense dependence on planters and investors ensured their full immersion in the racial practices that pervaded an advancing international system of slavery. As a result White women could claim a sense of whiteness on par with that of their mates.

It is tempting interpret the tax exempt status of White female laborers as part of what historian Kathleen Brown labels “English gender conventions” rather than race. Indeed, in England, as Brown explains, field work was not the primary responsibility of most English women. The majority, she posits, spent their time maintaining households. Once in Virginia, colonial leaders did not spend a great deal of time scrutinizing their assumptions about European women’s labor. However, planters participating in the transatlantic slave trade in the early decades of the seventeenth century did find themselves examining their beliefs about Black

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women’s labor. Absent such introspection, Black women might have been viewed in a domestic capacity and perhaps the 1643 law would not have come about. Nonetheless, the progress of the transatlantic slave trade did influence the assumptions about White women’s and men’s labor.

Nowhere was racially inflected social power expressed as much as it was for slaveholding women. Slaveholding played a part in creating a new domestic identity for White women as a slave mistress. For example, once her husband had acquired eight enslaved persons in 1619 from aboard the *Treasurer*, Mrs. Yeardley was instantly set apart from the approximately two hundred women living in Virginia between 1620 and 1622 whose husbands only owned European indentured servants. Her duties as a slave mistress included managing the eight nameless Negroes (three women and five men) who were listed in the 1624 census as part of their household. Perhaps the three enslaved women helped Mrs. Yeardley raise her two sons, Argoll and Francis, born in 1621 and 1624, respectively, and maybe the five enslaved men did the routine tasks that were needed to maintain their two plantations, *Flowerdew Hundred*, and the one on Hogs Island. Possibly, too, the five men were assisted by the three other African persons, Anthony, John, and William, known to have resided on the *Flowerdew* plantation in 1624. Either way, owning enslaved Africans gave women like Mrs. Yeardley a distinct class position at a time when very little separated the lives of people in the upper classes. Such distinctions probably encouraged a degree of class envy among the Europeans who would have been in the same social position as the Yeardley’s if they also owned African peoples. The simple fact was that those who only owned European servants were ranked in a lower position.

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205 McIlwaine, H. R. “The Maids Who Came to Virginia in 1620 and 1621 for Husbands” in *The Reviewer*, 1 (April 1, 1921):105-113. Also see Virginia *Magazine of History and Biography*, VII, 364-67, for population estimates.

than those who owned African peoples, like the Yeardley’s, and those with no servants or slaves were ranked lower still. Consequently, women like Mrs. Yeardley were freed from the worry of having to return to work in the fields. The lifting of this anxiety allowed her to focus on making a household that was suitable for a governor.207

Mary Tucker, the wife of William Tucker, one of the fifteen prominent masters in the colony referred to in Chapter One, was also a slaveholding lady. In her case, she was the mistress over an entire enslaved African family. They were recorded in the 1625 muster of the Tucker household as: “Antoney Negro: Isabell Negro: and William their Child Baptised.”208 The records do not indicate which of them they acquired first, Antoney or Isabell. No matter the order, ownership of an enslaved family made the Tucker legacy all the more secure since a bonded nuclear family could reproduce itself. For this reason, Tucker might have acquired Antoney first and then later purchased Isabell to be his wife. Alternatively, perhaps Isabell was initially bought by Tucker to be a nurse to their infant daughter Elizabeth or a maid for his wife Mary. Nonetheless, the history of slaveholding in the 1620s suggests that enslavement was about more than economics, it also created an emerging aesthetic of class that by the 1640s, turned men into masters and women into mistresses. During the 1620s, women and men in Virginia were still learning how to be masters within a growing international system of slavery, and doing so had real consequences for how European people became White, as they envisioned their identity as slaveholders.209 By the 1640s, the status of owning slaves had trickled down from the early entrants into slaveholding, like the Yeardley’s, the Tuckers, and Peirsey, to new

207 Nora Miller Turman, *George Yeardley: Governor of Virginia and Organizer of the General Assembly in 1619* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, inc, 1959), 130. The records indicate that Mrs. Yeardley often hosted parties and received guest into their home as part of her official role as Virginia’s gubernatorial first lady.
adventurers, like Stephen Charlton and Richard Vaughan, who likewise participated in the transatlantic slave trade and experienced its transformative effects within their families.

Understanding the emergence of slaveholding as a transformative status and an expression of one’s wealth and whiteness brings us back to the relationship that European emigrants in Virginia had with an expansive international system of slavery, which facilitated the proliferation of enslavement and colonization around the world. This history’s various subtexts spanned nearly a century, from English emigrant’s participation in the colonization of São Tomé in the sixteenth century, which helped Portugal’s attempt at conquering Angola kingdoms, to their role in building the institutions that helped subdue Virginia’s Native peoples after 1607, which paved the way for the enslavement of Africans. By the 1640s, guarantees against permanent bondage combined with the hope for landownership and good jobs, contributed to an emerging concept of whiteness such that lower class Europeans came to define themselves by the factors that they held in common with elites such as the enslavement African peoples as means for rewriting their future, just as the generation before them had done more than twenty years earlier. I call this the “trickle-down effect of whiteness,” which developed via participation in the rapid growth of the transatlantic slave trade, allowing Europeans of all classes to identify their social position in opposition to Africans.\(^{210}\)

Reconstructing the major transformations in European identity after the arrival of African peoples in 1619 creates new perspectives from which to analyze white racial formations that

\(^{210}\) Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9, 31-59. Morrison in her reading of whiteness indicates that it became defined by its opposite, blackness. My analysis of seventeenth century Virginia indicates that lower class Whites defined themselves in opposition to Blacks because of impermanence of their bondage and in doing so sought to align themselves with elite Whites in using enslavement as a means to define their social position.
predate Bacon’s Rebellion. Whereas most studies point to the rebellion led by Nathaniel Bacon in 1676 as a catalyst in spearheading racial solidarity among the laboring and elite classes of Whites, I argue that institutional protections against permanent bondage was a driving force. The enslavement of Africans and their potential for permanent bondage since their arrival in 1619 provided the basis for racial identification among Whites. Thus, there were two core assumptions upon which European identity rested in the early decades of the seventeenth century, that Whites ranked higher than Blacks regardless of class and, that owning even one slave symbolized belonging to the dominant group. As slaveholding became a viable option for former indentured servants, who because of their contracts could not expect to purchase a slave of their own until their mid-twenties, most jumped at the chance to hold this symbol of wealth, self-sufficiency, and White racial identity, as soon as their finances allowed. This was the case in 1647 for Stephen Charlton when he gifted two-year-old Grace-Susanna to his widowed sister and her new husband Richard Vaughan until they could establish their own family of enslaved persons. In doing so, Charlton was embracing the legacy of whiteness through a thriving transatlantic slave trade that men like William Tucker had participated in more than twenty years earlier. In turn, when Richard Vaughan purchased Grace-Susanna’s mother, Galatia, by way of the same system, the acquisition showed that aspiring planters embraced slavery as a means of securing their family’s financial future.

Historians disagree about the role that the demand for slaves had on the growth and development of the transatlantic trade. But there is little disagreement that the growth of the

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international system of slavery resulted in transformations in both West Central Africa and in Virginia. African kingdoms like Angola and Benin were weakened as a result of the depletion of their most valuable resource, human beings. These African women and men were the commodities by which colonies like Virginia and Bermuda were strengthened. Quite simply, Africa’s loss was England’s and Europe’s gain. Changing forms and expectations about slave labor, new uses for enslaved women, and the resulting class distinctions they engendered, all supported a transformation in Virginia society through a diffusion of slaveholding up and down the social ladder. In an effort to embody class position through slaveholding, middling planters adopted these practices, rearing their children in keeping with the principles of this international system of exploitation.

Owning a slave was a product of a particular organization of domestic life, in which children were schooled by their parents in the principles of hierarchy rooted in the evolving transatlantic system of slavery. For example, when Richard Vaughan bequeathed his “Negro Susan” (Grace-Susanna mentioned earlier in this chapter) and his “Negro Jane” (her sister) to his seventeen-year-old stepson John Waltham on April 22, 1656, Vaughan was setting the stage for how John was to transition from being a former playmate of Grace-Susanna and Jane to that of being their master. By bequeathing “Negro” slaves to his son, Vaughan lovingly nudged John into his identification with whiteness both as a patriarch and a slaveholder via the growing transatlantic slave trade.

emerged from the native institutions of slavery that was deeply embedded in various African societies. Scholars debate the volume of the trade, the regional and ethnic origins of the exported population, and the sex and age profiles of slaves and their impact on African history and slavery in the Americas.

212 “Northampton County, Virginia Deeds, Wills, Etc., 1654-1657 Book 5.” In 1656 Grace-Susanna would have been eleven and Jane five. Records indicate that John Waltham was a one year old in 1640.
Although John Waltham was seventeen when he became master over Grace-Susanna and Jane, his stepfather Vaughan actually began the process of grooming him in some of the tenets of slaveholding much earlier. The process started in 1649, when John turned eight and Vaughan deeded him four hundred fifty acres of land near their home in Northampton County. The proximity of the land to the family’s estate allowed Vaughan to carefully manage John’s development as a soon-to-be planter. One could imagine that Vaughan taught young John about the ups and downs of planting and all that it entailed, such as buying and selling slaves in anticipation of trends, financial hardships, and other unexpected pitfalls. The special instructions Vaughan likely issued to John—advice on navigating the international system of slavery, both internally and externally, and its function as a source of a family’s financial security and social standing—all made slaveholding a part of the project of preparing John for membership in the upper class.

Much of their father-son relationship probably entailed Vaughan teaching his stepson how to exert his authority over his household, which in the early seventeenth century included his wife, children, servants, and enslaved persons. Even for seventeen year-old Waltham, being a slave master meant that he legally had unfettered sexual access to his female laborers. It also meant that he held control over other men’s sexual access to the women in his household and that he had the right to punish his family members and laborers as he saw fit. To this end, growing up in a household in 1647 with enslaved African women such as Grace-Susanna and

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215 Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia, Chapter One.
Jane, and then becoming their master in 1656, John experienced firsthand the powerful legacy of whiteness through the institution of slavery and patriarchy, or what Cheryl Harris calls “racial patriarchy,” that is, the ideology of white supremacy and white male control over women’s (Black and White) reproduction and sexuality.216 Racial patriarchy would be a status that his son, John Waltham, III, would eventually inherit from him in the form of enslaved property after his death. Perhaps this is why slavery, an institution that represented the transnational nature of wealth in the early seventeenth century, became such a powerful symbol of freedom towards the end of the seventeenth century. What were the transnational institutions of slavery in early seventeenth century Virginia and what did they look like? How did Blacks and Whites navigate and manipulate this landscape? How did both interpret it? The next chapter looks into the geography of the white landscape, showing the influence of the international system of slavery on its spatial design.

Chapter Three
From Slave Pen to Plantation: The Influence of the International System of Slavery On Virginia’s Built Environment, 1618-1634

Virginia’s institutions in the early decades of the seventeenth century were closely intertwined with the advances of the international system of slavery through the built environment. Long before English settlers first occupied Virginia in 1607, the international system of slavery had provided privateers and explorers a blueprint for colonization and enslavement through the physical environment. Colonial settlement and territorial expansion, two mechanisms central to conquest and enslavement, required the construction of buildings and fortified communities, much like what the Portuguese did in São Tomé in the late sixteenth century. Forts and castles were erected by the Portuguese in 1565, after they made a conscious decision to attempt to conquer kingdoms in the Angola region. Early approaches to conquest had Portuguese laborers building temporary fortifications to guard against surprise offensives by the Mbundu peoples in the Angola area. Over a ten-year period, the buildings grew more sophisticated in size and design to include castles that facilitated the storage and sale of enslaved Africans.217 Virginia Company officials likewise believed in the power of the physical environment to promote colonization. They saw well-built towns as instruments for establishing dominion over Native peoples and for controlling New World settlers.218 Consequently, Company leaders initially directed early settlers to construct fortified communities in order to avoid attack by Native Americans. When tensions eased, colonists were instructed to encroach farther onto Native lands, building homes, plantations, churches, and courthouses.

217 Birmingham, Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese 1483-1790 46.
The first inhabitants of Virginia were told not to “settle in woodsy areas as it may act as a cover for your enemies.” Describing the indigenous population as the enemy was a backhanded way for Company officials to condemn the civilization of the Native Powhatan Confederacy and to justify the “arrogant imposition” of the European settlers onto indigenous lands. Virginia leaders also invented rhetoric around the idea of Native peoples as “savages” in order to validate the regular breach of their lands. When combined with promises of wealth and prosperity, this language supplied the Virginia Company with the narrative framework to encourage the colonists to occupy indigenous areas and to “expect success from God” as they built churches, communities, cities, towns, and plantations.

Early in the seventeenth century, Company officials realized that a centrifugal physical environment was conducive to social control, which led to Virginia communities being constructed around a large plantation settlements with all other buildings (homes, churches, and courthouses) seated outward from it. The concept for this design was modeled after the English parish system. Parishes were local units of government, sometimes comprised of only a few hundred acres. In 1618, the Virginia Company ordered that the assemblage of the colony’s plantation settlements be divided into parishes to facilitate social control, with the

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plantation owner (usually one of its investors) as the commander of each parish. As commander, planters had jurisdictional authority over the members of his community. Through 1629, approximately thirteen parish districts housed the colony’s more than twelve hundred inhabitants. These parishes were located in Virginia’s five boroughs: James City, Elizabeth City, Charles City, Henrico, and the Eastern Shore. Seated on each settlement was a parish church. Inside of every church was a local court. Each parish church appointed a staff of priests, vestrymen, and churchwardens who were charged with supervising the day-to-day activities of community residents, including prosecuting any immoral activities. Parish church officials held complementary power with the plantation owner. The configuration of the parish system, with its array of homes, plantation settlements, churches, and courthouses, uniquely mirrored the built environment of institutions of the transatlantic slave trade in that these structures facilitated the subjugation of Virginia residents, just as slave castles, slave pens, and forts promoted the exploitation and enslavement of the indigenous peoples of West Central Africa. The efficiency of housing colonial institutions all in one location around specific settlements, allowed Virginia planters, as it had Portuguese slave merchants, to better monitor and control the behavior of their indentured servants, slaves, and other inhabitants.

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225 Brydon, George MacLaren. Parish Lines in Diocese of Virginia, 4. By 1662 there were between forty-five and forty-eight parishes districts. Roger Green, Virginia’s Cure (London: W. Godbid for Henry Brome, 1662).
228 Rebecca A. Goetz, "From Potential Christians to Hereditary Heathens: Religion and Race in the Early Chesapeake, 1590-1740" (Dissertation, Harvard University, 2006), 34. English Protestantism was the religion that was practiced by the overwhelming majority of Virginians in the early decades of the seventeenth century.
229 Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 61. Prior to 1634 parish commanders made up Virginias local judiciary.
Eleven years after the first fort was erected in Jamestown, a group of settlers formed Martin’s Hundred, one of the first organized plantation communities in Virginia, managed by large planters to carry out the Virginia Company’s program of social control. Martin’s Hundred was an eighty thousand acre settlement located in James City. It was founded in 1618 by a group of private adventurers, “The Society of Martin’s Hundred,” named after Richard Martin, an attorney for the Virginia Company. The 1624 census indicates that twenty-seven persons were living in Martin’s Hundred, all of European ancestry, eleven of whom were indentured servants. By 1712, Martin’s Hundred ceased to exist as a separate locale, and was incorporated into a larger area called Merchant’s Hundred.

William Harwood, who arrived in Virginia in 1620, was a planter and the commander of Martin’s Hundred. Harwood had only been in Virginia for less than one year when the Virginia Company made him leader of Martin’s Hundred. It was Harwood’s job to discipline the actions of the residents living in this community. His responsibilities included preserving the area’s fortifications and ensuring that residents were supplied with the basic provisions for survival: food, clothing, tools, and livestock. As the head of Martin’s Hundred, Harwood had immense power over the day-to-day lives of area residents. Besides overseeing food provisions, livestock, and weaponry, Harwood also chose the church officials who would assist him in

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230 George Carrington Mason, *Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia* (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1945), 2; Cooke, *Parish Lines Diocese of Virginia*, 5. The term “hundred” is a geographical term loosely referring to an area that was inhabited by a hundred families.
231 *Colonial Records of Virginia*, 48.
policing the actions of the people under his charge. It was also within the purview of his authority to dole out privileges to selected residents, such as determining which settlers were allowed to send their children to the East India School.236

In supervising plantation communities like Martin’s Hundred, commanders such as Harwood were connected to the development of the international system of slavery as managers of the spatial arrangement that controlled the day-to-day lives of enslaved Africans, European indentured servants, and others who had passed through the global system en route to Virginia. Channeling the community’s social structure around the plantation streamlined the surveillance of parish residents into manageable units, which allowed planters, as it had Portuguese slave agents, to monitor the behavior of their indentured servants and enslaved Africans by concentrating the communities’ living spaces in close physical proximity to their home.

The nexus of the parish system and the plantation to the growth of the international system of slavery became clearer in 1619, one year after the formation of Martin’s Hundred, with the arrival of the first two sets of enslaved Africans in Virginia. One of those persons was a woman named Angelo, an African woman who arrived in Virginia on the Treasurer destined for the plantation of Captain William Pierce in the James City parish. When the ship anchored in late August or early September 1619 at the docks of Old Point Comfort, Angelo was greeted by her owner, Pierce, and his son-in-law, John Rolfe. Seeing the two White men on the Virginia waterfront awaiting her arrival must have been an ominous sight for Angelo, considering how eerily similar this scene must have been to the one at the port of Luanda before her journey to North America. Angelo’s last visions of her homeland after capture were probably similar to Equiano’s: “The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and

236 Ibid., IV:562-67.
a slaveship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo.” How horrifying it must have been for Angelo to experience the same exploitive geography in Virginia that she had left behind on the coast of West Africa, except that in this case Pierce was her owner instead of a slave agent, and rather than being housed in a slave pen, she would reside on his plantation. Thus, Angelo’s first experience in Virginia reflected the landscape of the international system of slavery that she left behind in Luanda; being held captive by White men in a building constructed to subjugate her.

While living on Pierce’s plantation, the first physical space that Angelo encountered that mirrored the slave pens in Luanda was the slave quarters. On February 16, 1624, Angelo was recorded as residing in Jamestown in a home or a part of a home designated for Pierces servants and enslaved persons. The 1624 census indicates that there was only one house on Pierce’s settlement. If this was the case, then Angelo and Pierce’s three European indentured servants: “Thomas Smith 17 yeares, Henery Bradford aged 35 yeres, and Ester Ederife a maid servant,” all lived in the home with Pierce and his wife Jone. Typically, separate living spaces were constructed to house servants and enslaved peoples when there were more than four persons residing on a plantation. However, when plantations had only one house, as it appears was the case for Pierce, then European servants and enslaved persons shared the inferior portion of the home. In either case, the isolation of servants and enslaved persons in a part of the main house,

as it was in the slave pens of Luanda, helped planters control their servants’ movements and made it difficult for them to avoid surveillance.  

We have no way of knowing how the internal dynamics of these living arrangements impacted Angelo, but we do know something about the social rank accorded to European servants over bonded Africans in Virginia society. Because the international system of slavery was evolving to be such a powerful tool for communicating social position to its participants, we know that Smith, Bradford, and Ederife were ranked higher on Pierces’ plantation than Angelo given their emigrant and indentured status. As was mentioned previously, European emigrants were rated above Africans in the international system of slavery and in Virginia because they volunteered their labor to advance the progress of colonization for a fixed period of time. The term of service for European indentured servants was typically shorter, five to seven years, while for bonded Africans; their time spent in servitude was indefinite. For Whites, their temporary servitude reflected their lack of economic success, whereas for Blacks, bondage involved the indeterminate appropriation of their labor for the enrichment of the planter. For these reasons, Angelo’s position in the ballooning international system of slavery made her socially subordinate to her roommates Smith, Bradford, and Ederife. This meant that Angelo would work the fields as a laborer at least on the same terms, if not higher, as Smith and Bradford, while the maid servant Ederife, who although indentured, was also probably being groomed for marriage by Mrs. Pierce, given the social engineering of the day that encouraged planter’s wives to care for emigrant maid’s and widow’s until they were married. 

Thus, the physical spaces of the

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plantation landscape regulated and reproduced the uneven social relations that were developing in the international system of slavery, one in which Angelo ranked below Pierce’s servants.

Although details of Angelo’s life are scant, the geography of the plantation allows us to speculate about how she experienced her surroundings as she traveled out from the servant’s quarters. One of the many things that Angelo probably did when she stepped out of Pierce’s home was to take inventory of the plantation and its arrangement of buildings to consider how best to navigate this landscape.\textsuperscript{242} Outside, Angelo observed that the landscape was organized hierarchically, with Pierce’s home at the center and a procession of other structures-houses, settlements, churches, and courthouses-around it. Scholars call this the “white landscape” because of the manner in which such spaces and places affirmed the culture and values of the Europeans who inhabited these areas.\textsuperscript{243} To offset this spatial imbalance, perhaps Angelo reinterpreted this landscape from the perspective of Black persons living in the area.\textsuperscript{244}

Census records indicate that most of the African people in Virginia in the early 1620s, during the time Angelo was enslaved on Pierce’s settlement, were owned by approximately seven planters. Angelo may have met some of these Black people in the wooded areas, or the trails and paths between their plantations.\textsuperscript{245} Angelo would recognize aspects of Africa in these persons, perhaps via their dialect or distinctive markings or hair styles. If they could communicate with each other, maybe Angelo told of her location and her living conditions, and perhaps they shared the same information with her. For example, had she meet the seven

\begin{footnotes}
\item[242] Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” 135.
\item[243] Dell Upton’s important article “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia” offers an excellent analysis of this space.
\item[244] See Ellis and Ginsburg, eds., \textit{Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery} for several essays on the Black persons interpretations of the landscape.
\end{footnotes}
enslaved Africans (two women, four men, and one child) who lived on Abraham Peirsey’s settlement, which was, in fact, located near Pierce’s home, it was probable that they discussed the ups and downs of sharing living space with White servants. Unlike Pierce’s single dwelling, Peirsey’s land contained ten dwellings on it, at least one of which was likely used as servant’s quarters to house his seven enslaved Africans and twenty-nine European indentured servants.\footnote{Ibid., 22.}

The use of the term “quarters,” when referring to housing for servants, regularly appeared in the county records during the first half of the seventeenth century.\footnote{See "County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1640-1645," 204, 457. "Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Orders, Deeds, Wills, Ect., 1645-1651, Book 3," folio 116.} As mentioned earlier, separate living quarters were generally located on plantations that employed four or more servants and enslaved persons.\footnote{Deal, Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans on the Eastern Shore During the Seventeenth Century, 106.} Relegating servants and enslaved persons to a specific location or to nearby buildings allowed planters to more easily detect absences, particularly that of African persons. Indeed the black skin of Angelo stood in stark contrast to that of her roommates Smith, Bradford, and Ederife, and thus any indiscretions committed by her would be all the more noticeable because her pigmentation made her actions all the more conspicuous than it did for the Whites. However, just as black skin was sometimes a burden, at other times it was a comfort, for it drew Blacks, like Angelo and those enslaved by Peirsey and other planters, together. Of the twelve hundred persons living in Virginia in 1624, just over fifty were of African ancestry.\footnote{Sluiter, "New Light on the '20. And Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia, August 1619," 396.} Thus when Blacks came across one another in their travels, their African
features were no doubt a sight for sore eyes. It was possible that these women, men, and children gravitated to each other looking for guidance and acceptance.

For Africans who were “fortunate enough” to be enslaved with other Blacks, like those on Peirsey’s settlement, they undoubtedly grew close, forming familial like bonds because of their common condition. Usually these bonds would develop in the slave quarters or while at work or during travel. Inside the servant’s quarters on Peirsey’s settlement, the seven “Negros,” as they were called in the 1624 muster, probably addressed one another by their African names, which was both affirming and empowering. Yet, African names were regarded as subversive within the plantation and in the international system of slavery, in these spaces the term “Negro” was the word used by Whites to communicate the personhood of Blacks. The slave quarters and the outdoor spaces of Peirsey’s settlement could also facilitate bonding and a culture of resistance if the two women, four men, and one child who were enslaved there could keep alive the languages, rituals, and other ties to their African past. In these spaces, Black women and men learned to combine aspects of their ethnic customs to instruct their children and each other on how best to handle their master. Perhaps, too, the women and men shared what Patricia Hill Collins called “outsider-within knowledge,” about life on other plantations. The spaces out-of-doors of the plantation are an excellent source for examining how enslaved persons

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252 Hill Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women in Search for Justice, 5-8. According to Collins, “outsider-within-knowledge” is gaining knowledge about or of the dominant group without gaining the full power accorded to that group.
incorporated the landscape of plantation, including the houses, fields, and woodlands adjoining it, to meet their needs in spite of the subjugating intent of the landscape.253

Like plantation settlements, the rise in the power of the parish church was comparable to the rising power of the international system of slavery. Just as the Portuguese made a conscious decision to attack Angolan kingdoms with a view to territorial conquest using the Christian church, so too did English leaders use this institution to facilitate the colonization of Virginia. It was in 1571 that the Portuguese assigned its first governor, Paulo Dias, with the responsibility of building a church dedicated to promoting the conquest of Angolan territories. The Royal Charter ordered the establishment of a church in the region with “all the necessary furnishings, ornaments, and vestments” that expressed the hegemony of the Portuguese. More important, the charter dictated that church doctrine be used to facilitate their enslavement objectives. One provision stated that “before slaves were certified as true captives and shipped to the mother country, the necessary justifications should be made in accordance with ecclesiastical instructions.”254 As Portugal’s most potent rival in Angola during this period, England emulated Portugal in their use of the church as a means of social control when settling Virginia. It was in churches like St. Mary’s, where the hegemony of White Virginians was on display and evident for all to see just as it was with the Portuguese in the churches they were set to erect in Angola.

St. Mary’s was one of the first parish churches established in Virginia. It was located on a settlement called Smith’s Hundred, which was the first plantation parish formed in the

254 Birmingham, Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese 1483-1790 47.
Jamestown settlement. Named after Sir Thomas Smith, the first president of the Virginia Company, the community was formed in 1618 by “The Society of Smith’s Hundred,” and was “the first [settlement] of any moment” in Virginia to be established at private expense.255 This meant that individual adventurers invested their own money in the establishment of Smith’s Hundred rather than receiving subsidies from the Virginia Company, which gave them more authority to manage the region as they saw fit.

St. Mary’s church was partially sponsored by Mrs. Mary Robinson of London, who gave two hundred shillings “toward the helpe of the poor people in Virginia, towards the building of a church and reducinge them to the knowledge of God’s word.”256 In recognition of her patronage, the church came to be known as “St. Mary’s church in Smith’s Hundred.”257 Yet, despite the esteem that patrons like Mrs. Robinson were held in, it was the planters and high-ranking government officials who garnered the most recognition at St. Mary’s. The most common scene in early Virginia churches was not that of women and men engaged in worship, but the parading of planters and other officials around the church with elaborate regalia to express their hegemony over the average attendee. Dell Upton, historian of architecture and material culture, offers vivid testimony of the scene. According to Upton, planters and government officials in early Virginia would enter the sanctuary in a formal procession, accompanied by a guard of attendants. These men where then seated apart from other parishioners in private pews that were cushioned.

According to Upton, the tradition of the ranked processional, maintained throughout the colonial period, first included the colony’s governors, like Sir Thomas Gates, Virginia’s first

governor, and then later grew to include influential planters. It was by design that large planters like Abraham Peirsey who with lots of servants and enslaved persons were paraded into the sanctuary and conspicuously seated apart from those without such assets. Moreover, it was standard during this period, Upton explains, for the pews of planters to be cushioned and embroidered with elaborate detail to distinguish a planter’s stature over not only his servants and slaves, who sat adjacent to him on hard benches, but also over those who were less wealthy.

Cushioned pews were only one of the many conspicuous displays of power that set Virginia planters, governors, and other high ranking men apart from other parishioners. Worshiping with fine church artifacts was also integral an part of the trappings provided to these men. For instance, Governor Gates was provided with a table with a cloth and a velvet cushion to kneel to pray. According to Upton, the governor’s prayer cushions were embellished with long tassels at the corners to contrast their stature from that of laymen. These artifacts provided a fitting backdrop to the message of inequality that melded with other carefully selected symbols of authority that adorned parish churches such as a “bible and prayer books in folio, communion vessels, cloths to cover the pulpit and alter table, and a cushion for the pulpit and a bell.” Visually, such ornaments not only emphasized godliness but also submission to plantation authority.

The pomp of parading officials, of private pews, and embroidered cushions ultimately leads us to a connection to the growth of the international system of slavery because these elaborate symbols of power were purchased with tax proceeds collected from planters based on their

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259 Ibid., 175-96.
260 Ibid., 154.
261 Ibid., 139.
number of enslaved laborers, male and female, and the number of White male servants over sixteen years of age.\textsuperscript{262} The bottom line was that “every parish church [in Virginia] of which there is a record was constructed entirely from taxes” on enslaved and servant labor; linking the parish church and plantation settlements in the Virginia to the development of the transatlantic slave trade.\textsuperscript{263}

Since the early seventeenth century taxes (known then as “tithes”) were collected from planters on individuals in their household who were legally identified as able to perform taxable or “tithable” labor. The labor of Black women and men, and of White men, the three groups most crucial to a country’s success in the international system of slavery, were all tithable. On the other hand, White women were not because they were considered to be the householders’ dependents. Thus, the issue of female labor, both Black and White, was central to the institutional history of slavery in Virginia. We can trace this history to various pieces of legislation such as the 1643 law that taxed Black women’s labor the same as any man, while exempting White female labor from this regulation, and the 1662 statute, which imposed on the children of an enslaved woman the same status.\textsuperscript{264} The increase in tax revenues as a result of an increase in the taxable population as a consequence of this legislation, allows us to visibly connect the transatlantic slave trade to one of early Virginia’s most sacred institutions, the parish church. What a powerful image it must have been that the building and ornamentation of the parish church was financed by proceeds from taxes derived from laborers imported (directly or indirectly) through the international system of slavery and that the most revered symbols of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{262} Ibid., 15.
\item \textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{264} Hening, ed. \textit{The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619}, I: 242, II: 26.
\end{itemize}
power (the bible, communion vessels, cloths to cover the pulpit and alter table, prayer cushions, and bells), which engendered deference to the parish church from the common settler, were all purchased with revenues from enslaved labor. In effect, this cultivated allegiance to historical systems of domination like slavery and colonization. Visually and physically, the environment of the parish church was an important metaphor for these global systems of exploitation.

Although there was no specific record of Black tithables in the early seventeenth century, we do have information on the number of Black headrights, that is, those persons for whom a planter paid for their transportation into the colony. This allows us to safely speculate the degree to which the transatlantic slave trade underwrote the development of Virginia churches. Data collected between 1632 and 1661 from the record books of Northampton, York, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Charles City counties indicate that one hundred five Blacks were imported into Virginia by thirty different men. The fifteen imported by one man, George Minifee, in 1639, constituted the largest number of Blacks known to be imported by one individual in the first half of the seventeenth century.²⁶⁵ During this same period these men also imported four hundred fifty-three European servants into the colony under the headrights program. Assuming that most of the Black imports were either enslaved or at least sixteen years of age, the legal age at which White labor was taxable, then roughly twenty percent of the proceeds used to build, outfit, and ornament parish churches was derived from enslaved labor. The use of revenues from enslaved labor in the early seventeenth century to help finance the construction of parish churches was perhaps the strongest institutional link to the rise of the transatlantic slave trade outside of the plantation. Both having emerged out of conquest and

²⁶⁵ Conway Robinson, "Notes from the Council and General Court Records," in Robinson Notes (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society).
colonization, the plantation and the church, therefore, advanced a concept of white privilege that was rooted in the principles of an expanding international system of slavery. Planters and high ranking officials embraced this history as they paraded in and out of service, and as they sat in private pews with embroidered cushions reserved for their exclusive use, and as they knelt at elaborate prayer tables. Not surprisingly such displays of power also supplied poor and middling parishioners with a framework for understanding their whiteness, one that they shared directly and indirectly with Europeans who participated in the transatlantic slave trade.

Although many early White Virginians may not have perceived their racial identity as we do today, they clearly understood their elevated social rank relative to most Africans and eagerly greeted opportunities for class mobility generated by the racial inequalities that existed as a byproduct of the slave trade. For example, aspiring masters undoubtedly viewed changes in their social station through the lens of where they sat in church, so that moving up a row or nearer to large planters was evidence of a rise in their stature. The same might hold for upwardly mobile minded European indentured servants, for if high ranking planters and politicians were seated so as to convey their prominence in the community, then perhaps European servants were likewise set apart in some fashion from enslaved Africans in the church. Thus, it was likely that Peirsey’s twenty-nine European indentured servants sat in an order that represented their social superiority to his seven “Negroes.” Similarly, maybe Pierce’s servants, Smith, Bradford, and Ederife, had better seats in the church than Angelo had.

Besides class, parishioners were seated by gender, which leads us to speculate whether Angelo sat apart from Ms. Ederife, Pierce’s White female servant. If so, then once again Black women were singled out and isolated from White women just as the 1643 tax law had

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done. Seating by gender and class also meant that Angelo could be separated from enslaved Black men as well. What did the “Black” section of the church (female or male) look like? What was its proximity to White servants? How did Black people perceive this set up, including the parading of planters and all the church artifacts? We will never know, but one can imagine that they did have views about this scene, probably measuring their own social station against the backdrop of this hierarchal arrangement of European servants and planters. To this end, the seating arrangement of the church reminds us that the church was a satellite of the plantation hierarchy, and that sorting one’s placement in the pews by race, class, and gender, reinforced the social relations of the plantation that were derived from the rising international system of slavery.

Seating parishioners by race, class, and gender was done by a team of church officers: churchwardens, vestrymen, clergy, and a parish clerk. Each position was equally important in upholding the hierarchy of the plantation, but none was more important to understanding the features of the parish church that reflected the influence of the international system of slavery than the churchwarden. Churchwardens were the chief investigative officers of parish churches. The Virginia Company ordered every parish to have two churchwardens, each with a different level of experience. The name churchwarden was synonymous in authority with an overseer, whose power to police the actions of area residents were ordained by the Virginia Company. We

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267 Hening, ed. *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*, I: 243. The statute reads in part as follows: “Be it also enacted and confirmed there be tenn pounds of tob’o, per poll & a bushell of corne per poll paid to the ministers within the severall parishes of the collony for all tithable persons, that is to say, as well for all youths of sixteen years of age as vpwards, as also for all negro women at the age of sixteen years…”
find mention of churchwardens in Virginia records as early as 1619, the same year in which enslaved African women and men arrived in Virginia.\textsuperscript{268} Many of the early churchwardens were former tenant laborers and duty boys in the Sandys program, one of the organizations that were foundational in perpetuating the colony’s race and class lines.\textsuperscript{269} As such, churchwardens embodied the possibilities of upward mobility for former European indentured servants while also reflecting the evolving politics of the international system of slavery.

Some of the duties of a churchwarden were to investigate accusations of fornication, adultery, drunkenness, abusive and blasphemous speaking, absences from church, Sabbath breaking, and other moral violations, such as those outlined in this 1631 oath for churchwardens:

YOU shall swear that you shall make presentments of all such persons as shall lead a profligate or ungodly life, of such as shall be common swearer, drunks or blasphemers, that shall ordinarily profane the sabbath days or contemne God’s holy word or sacraments. You shall also present all adulterers or fornicators, or shall as abuse their neighbors by slandering tale carrying or back biting, or that shall not behave themselves orderly and soberly in the church during divine service, likewise they shall present such masters and mistresses as shall be delinquent in the catechising the youth and ignorant persons. So help you God!\textsuperscript{270}

This oath institutionalized the authority of churchwardens to police the residents of parish communities in a way that was on par with slaveholders. For example, in 1619, the General Assembly endowed churchwardens with the authority to monitor church attendance and to punish violators based on their position in the international system of slavery.\textsuperscript{271} The Assembly ordered that the punishment for freemen who missed church be three shillings while for enslaved

\textsuperscript{268} Oliver P. Chitwood, \textit{Justice in Colonial Virginia} (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 84.
\textsuperscript{269} For further elaboration on the Sandys program, see Chapter Two of this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{270} Hening, ed. \textit{The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619}, I: 56.
persons, it was a whipping. With the backing of the General Assembly, churchwardens enjoyed a wide range of latitude in investigating the aforementioned transgressions, creating a fair amount of anxiety, submissiveness, and even a sense of envy and admiration, by some residents of parish communities.

Being a churchwarden offered men in this position the opportunity to rub elbows with the upper-class since it was they who were responsible for collecting the tithe (or tax) from planters on every enslaved female and male and every indentured servant over sixteen years of age. Within this context, the churchwarden was an agent that connected Virginia to the thriving international system of slavery and, as such, perhaps reaped some of the tangential rewards that his proximity to power offered. Maybe during his interactions with planters he learned how to buy and sell enslaved persons, particularly Black females. Or perhaps churchwardens curried favors with planters (who tried all sorts of schemes to avoid paying taxes on their servants) by deliberately failing to record newly acquired servants and enslaved persons on the tax rolls.

Some planters and government officials who participated in the growth of the transatlantic slave trade probably spoke candidly with churchwardens about African people’s aptitude for fieldwork, while others may have commented on the religious reasons for the enslavement of Blacks. The closeness with which churchwardens worked with planters in collecting taxes on enslaved and indentured labor probably supplied them with opportunities to take advantage of their insider status, reminding us that the opportunities born out of the growth of the international system of slavery had its rewards. But Virginia’s connection to an advancing international system of slavery alone cannot alone account for the power of the churchwarden. It was also the acceptance of his legitimacy by other members of society that gave the churchwarden position its

272 Ibid.
authority. In a society with a rigid pecking order, like that in Virginia, deference to churchwardens was probably motivated by self-interest and even self-preservation, especially since many wardens brought charges against those deemed in violation of the colony’s many laws and customs. In this context, the international system of slavery created new opportunities for former indentured servants to not only move up in social rank, but through the duties of the churchwarden post, to participate with elites in governing Virginia society.

The importance of the churchwarden position for upholding the plantation hierarchy took on new meaning in the day-to-day life of women and men as churchwardens were able exploit the parish systems code of conduct, like mandatory church attendance, as a pretext to mine information about the goings on of community members. This access also allowed churchwardens to easily disseminate official notices, proclamations, and orders on behalf of the General Assembly.273 Thus, the parish church was a central place for local officials to obtain the intelligence necessary to police the actions of parish residents and regulate social relations among its members.

Churchwardens probably learned about many of the offenses being committed through casual conversation with residents in their jurisdiction before and after church service. These exchanges often took place in the churchyard, where neighbors met to discuss the latest news and sometimes even transact business.274 It was probably in the churchyard that the churchwarden learned of Hugh Davis’s affair with a Black woman in 1630, (mentioned in Chapter Two), an

274 Ibid., 128.
offense for which Davis was prosecuted in the parish court for “lying with a Negro.” Such examples illustrate the degree to which churchwardens made use of the captive milieu of the churchyard to detect criminal behavior.

In spite of the constant surveillance that parish residents were under by churchwardens, parishioners generally looked forward to attending church service because it provided relief from the isolation of life in widely separated farms and plantations. As such, church service was the public center of social interaction in most parish communities. For example, it was probably in the churchyard that Angelo got to meet other Blacks who may have lived in her parish district. Perhaps she had noticed them along the paths that crisscrossed the trails that led to her church. In such instances, the churchyard offered a legitimate place within the white landscape for Blacks to commune. The churchyard was also part of the black landscape when Black persons appropriated the usual function of this milieu to meet their social and political needs. In this context, we can think of the churchyard as melding aspects of the private life of the plantation with the public life of the church service.

For Whites, the public and private dichotomy of the churchyard took on different meanings depending on one’s class. For planters who conducted business with other planters in the churchyard, this public space was where the thirty largest importers of enslaved persons could congregate with their slaveholding peers and discuss the ins and outs of planting and mastery, before filing into the sanctuary. For European indentured servants, the churchyard held dual meanings in that the public space of the churchyard reminded servants of their

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275 Hening, ed. *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*, I: 146. For further elaboration on the Hugh Davis case see Chapter Two of this dissertation.

whiteness and of their bondage. Here a double consciousness existed for Whites when interacting with Africans and planters. For example, when servants like Smith, Bradford, and Ederife engaged in friendly repartee with Angelo or other enslaved Blacks, the churchyard was a place of camaraderie with fellow workers, despite their elevated rank in Virginia’s pecking order. Yet, when eyeing the churchwarden commiserating with planters, the churchyard became a place to behold the transformative possibilities available to European servants once their term of service expired. Within this framework, bondage and upward mobility were all part of European servant’s immersion into both worlds, one Black and one White, and one that sometimes relegated them to the periphery of these groups.

The phenomena of being “in-between” on the part of European servants appeared in the political discourse of the colony’s civil war, Bacon’s Rebellion. Nathaniel Bacon articulated the frustration of working class European men in 1676 over the lack of access to frontier lands occupied by Native Americans. The rhetoric used by Bacon to articulate White peoples dissatisfaction with government officials curtailing their opportunities to own land reveals a connection between race and the plantation hierarchy and suggests that White workers had an expectation that the plantation structure would ultimately work to their benefit. Indeed, it appears that the observations of early European servants around the hierarchy of the churchyard, with Blacks at one end and planters at the other and they in the middle, anticipated not only their grievances that led to their support of Bacon’s Rebellion but also their decision to side with the planter elite and forgo interracial class solidarity with the few Black men who participated in the rebellion.277

277 Scholars such as Breen and Innes, Myne Owne Ground, 5, suggest that before Bacon’s Rebellion there was a real possibility of an integrated society of Blacks and Whites. Also see Kathleen Brown’s Good Wives, Nasty Wenches,
In the first few decades of the colony when indentured servants were still struggling to prove their legitimacy as members of the dominant group, the churchwarden post offered former European servants an opportunity to integrate into the privileged class. Such was the case for George Parker, Jr. who was a churchwarden of the Upper Parish in Northampton County in the early 1650s. In 1649, at the age of sixteen, Parker and his older brother Robert were indentured servants to Robert Barlow. The records show that by the age of seventeen, Parker obtained his freedom. We do not know the circumstances surrounding his freedom, nor do we know how it was that one year after obtaining his freedom, at the age of eighteen, George had the means to pay for the transportation of nine servants into the colony, which netted him four hundred fifty acres of land. Four years later, in 1654 Parker was a churchwarden, and during this time he was awarded thirteen hundred acres for bringing twenty-six more persons into the colony, one of whom was his wife, Florence Cade Parker. The people that Parker sponsored were considered to be his taxable property, whereas his wife was not because she was his dependent. Besides the land he received for paying for the transportation of his wife and servants into the colony, Parker and his brother Robert also inherited land and money from their father, George Parker, Sr., an Old Adventurer. His father’s standing in the community probably accounted for the

and Anxious Patriarchs, and Edmund Morgan’s American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia.
280 Ibid., 307.
281 “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” 227. Headrights are persons who had their transportation into the colony paid for by another person. In doing so, the sponsor would be granted fifty acres of land per person.
speed for his appointment as churchwarden. George Parker’s wealth in servants also probably facilitated his rise to the level of commander of his parish district in 1658. Not long after that, in 1661, Parker purchased seventeen enslaved persons and acquired six more indentured servants, for which he received thirteen hundred acres of land.

Parker’s entry into slaveholding occurred as the enslaved population in Virginia was growing at a rate of about sixty per year, swelling from roughly fifty in 1625, to three hundred in 1649, to about two thousand in 1670. The example of Parker’s life as a former indentured servant turned churchwarden makes him an interesting model for observing how the church codified social relations of the plantation that were set by the progresses of the international system of slavery.

Besides collecting taxes from planters on enslaved and indentured laborers, another of the many duties required of a churchwarden was the investigation of acts of fornication. Specifically, parish churches worried about affairs that produced a child out of wedlock, a condition known as bastardy. Given that the parish church was responsible for setting and enforcing a standard of moral conduct for its members, parish officials were anxious about how the actions of the residents under their charge reflected upon the social order they were attempting to control. Moreover, because the welfare of “bastard” children sometimes fell upon the parish, churchwardens took great pains to stay abreast of rumored indiscretions, especially those that undermined race and class lines, like sexual relations between free European men and

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282 His father’s will stipulated that George was to receive twenty shillings at age twenty-one. George Parker, Sr. was born in Southampton, England. He later became a judge in the Accomack County, Virginia court before he died in 1640. For an important discussion on the rise and selection of certain men to high ranking positions in Virginia see Charles S. Sydnor, Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952).


bonded African women. It was such concerns that, in 1640, moved the James City churchwarden in 1640 to investigate rumors of fornication between Robert Sweat, a White servant and an African woman. The result of the inquiry led to Sweat being ordered “in the forenoon [to] do public penance at a church in James City for having a child with a Negro woman.”

In 1649, a similar concern may have been behind the Norfolk parish churchwarden’s prosecution of William Watt, a White servant, for fornicating with “Cornelius Lloyd’s Negro Woman, Mary.” With the Sweat and Watt cases, churchwardens joined planters in a popular chorus of connecting the body of Black women to new visions of prosperity that began in 1643 with the law that made African women’s labor the legal equivalent of men’s, culminating in the 1662 law that assigned slave status to children based on the status of the mother. These cases stand as further evidence of the importance of the parish church in replicating aspects of the international system of slavery in Virginia society.

Even as churchwardens came to model the possibilities of advancement available to former indentured servants, they were assisted in maintaining the pecking order of colony by the parish vestry. Similar to a board of directors with judicial powers, the vestry was a small committee of officials, sometimes including a minister, who were responsible for overseeing the business of their parish. Like churchwardens, their position also provides insight into the rise of White racial identity and the role of the church as a continuation of systems of exploitation found in the plantation culture, much of which mirrored the culture of the international system of slavery.

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286 McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia with Notes and Excerpts from Original Council and General Court Records, into 1683, Now Lost, 477.
288 Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, 55. Sometimes there were up to twelve vestrymen per parish church.
The mention of vestries appears in colonial records as early as 1624. Initially, they were established because of a scarcity of ministers in the colony--there were only ten in 1662--and the need for effective church organization in the newly-formed parishes and counties.\footnote{Smith, ed. \textit{Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History}, 139.} The vestry’s duties included the appointment of clergymen to their parish, making decisions about land boundaries, working with churchwardens in adjudicating charges like adultery and fornication, and organizing care for the indigent in their parishes.\footnote{Cooke, \textit{Parish Lines Diocese of Virginia} 10-11.} Vestrymen also levied the taxes on tithable labors (that of enslaved Black women and men and White men servants) which the churchwardens were sent to collect. Thus like churchwardens, vestrymen were constituents in the advancement of the international system of slavery.

The General Assembly institutionalized the authority of the vestry in 1634 when it ordered that each parish should have one.\footnote{Hening, ed. \textit{The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619}, I: 240.} The law read:

There shall be a vestrie held in each parish, for the makeing of the leavies and assessments for such use as are requisite and necessary for the repairing of the churches, etc. and that there be yearly chosen two or more churchwardens in every parish. That the most men be chosen and joyned to the minister and churchwardens to be of that vestrie.\footnote{Hening, ed. \textit{The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619}, I: 204.}

Each parish’s vestry was composed of prominent men in the community; usually large planters and slaveholders. As such, vestrymen were more than sympathetic to the sovereignty of planter’s to exert control over their bonded laborers without interference from government officials. For instance, in 1624 vestrymen helped push through a law barring the Governor from appropriating private servants and enslaved laborers for “his own service,” a victory that
illustrates the degree to which the capacity of the international system of slavery grew to shape Virginia’s public policy battles. Moreover, it shows just how much the interests of Virginia’s churches were interwoven with the culture of the plantation.

Vestrymen were also charged with selecting the parish minister, who was as much as any other person an extension of the advancing scope of the international system of slavery, because clergymen were exempted from paying taxes on as many as six of their servants or enslaved persons. The policy would have applied to Reverend William Cotton, a minister who had been living in Virginia since 1632, and who owned two enslaved men, Sampson and Domingo. Like other ministers, Cotton’s salary was paid by the leaders of the church in which he officiated. Thus, as a slaveholder and a minister, Cotton in effect sanctified the institution of slavery by accepting the salary and the tax exemptions, which made him beholden to planters and other high ranking officials in the community. This information allows one to view clergymen as the “servants” of Virginia elites. For instance, Cotton could find himself unemployed if he failed to adhere to the social order of plantation culture. However, if he managed his enslaved persons and indentured servants in accordance to the customs of Virginia, then he would be given his due as chief servant of the house of God.

The Virginia Company felt that the church and its clergy were essential to a properly ordered community, so much so, that a minster was selected by the Virginia Company to be one of first one hundred seventy-two original settlers. The position of clergy, as host and servant to planters and parishioners, was held in such high esteem that it was illegal to disparage one

293 Ibid., I: 124. At the time Sir Francis Wyatt was the Governor of Virginia.
294 Ibid., I: 124, 424.
without sufficient proof.\footnote{297} One resident, Stephen Charlton, mentioned in Chapter Two, learned this lesson in 1634 when he was punished for slandering Reverend Cotton. As punishment, Charlton was ordered “for the Syd offense [to] buyld a pare off Stocks and Sett in them three Severall Sabouth days in the tyme of Dyvine Servis and their aske Mr. Cotton foregiveness.”\footnote{298} Charlton’s punishment was an example of the parish churches’ authority and its prominence in the plantation hierarchy. The salary and tax breaks on enslaved and indentured persons made it inevitable that ministers were answerable to planters, and by extension, to the international system of slavery.

Offices of the parish church (clergy, vestry, and churchwarden) were a space in the social structure of Virginia that were reserved for White men, even when there were Black men of comparable background. That being the case, poor men of European ancestry had access to avenues of power through parish church positions, like churchwardens and vestrymen that were most always unavailable to men of African descent. William Burdett, the owner of “Caine the Negro,” was the beneficiary of such a system. Burdett arrived in Virginia in 1615 at age sixteen aboard the \textit{Susan} as an indentured servant. He was listed in the 1624 muster as the servant of Captain William and Margaret Epps of the Eastern Shore.\footnote{299} In spite of Burdett’s poor start in Virginia as an indentured servant with Epps, by 1639 he was appointed to the Vestry in Accomacke County.\footnote{300} Before he died in 1643, he had amassed at least one thousand five

\footnotetext[297]{Hening, ed. \textit{The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619}, I: 124.}
\footnotetext[298]{“Northampton/Accomacke County, Virginia Orders, Deeds and Wills: Book I, 1632-1640,” 4.}
\footnotetext[299]{Jester, ed. \textit{Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625}, 66.}
\footnotetext[300]{“Northampton?Accomacke County, Virginia Orders, Deeds and Wills: Book I, 1632-1640.”}
hundred acres of land, had at least nine confirmed servants and enslaved persons, and had been appointed as a Burgess to represent Accomack County in the General Assembly. Like many court officials during this time, including George Parker, Burdett’s European ancestry was one factor that accounted for his selection to the vestry, the other being his wealth in physical and human property, which he acquired after his release as a servant. These same privileges, however, were not extended across racial lines to similarly situated men of African ancestry, such as Anthony Johnson.

Anthony Johnson, like Burdett, was also listed in the 1624 muster as a servant. Johnson was a member of Edward Bennett’s household in Warrosquyoak, a settlement just outside James City. Most historians conclude that Johnson arrived in Virginia in 1621 as a captive in the transatlantic slave trade. Yet, it appears that by the mid-1640s Johnson and his wife Mary were free. During the same period as Burdett, Johnson was known to have owned at least five indentured servants and an enslaved man named John Casar and, like Burdett, Johnson was awarded land from the Virginia government under the headrights program for paying the transportation of laborers into the colony. In Johnson’s case, it was three hundred-fifty acres of land. Despite his accomplishments and relative wealth, the records do not indicate that Anthony Johnson was selected as a vestryman. Such an omission suggests that he was not, given the fullness of the era’s records on Johnson, and his high degree of prominence. In the early

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301 “County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1640-1645.” These figures were based on his November 13, 1643 estate inventory. Burdett was appointed to the House of Burgess in 1641.
302 Jester, ed. Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625, 46. Warrosquyoak was the namesake of a group in the Powhowtan Confederacy. On the proximity of Burdett and Johnson to one another during the 1620s, Warrosquyoak was a neighboring County close to Accomack County.
303 For see scholars who make this claim see Breen and Innes, Myne Owne Ground and Deal, Race and Class in Colonial Virginia.
304 Under the headright program, a person would receive fifty acres of land for paying another person’s (or their own) transportation to Virginia.
305 “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” folio 37.
1660s (1661 or 1662) Johnson relocated to Somerset County, Maryland, perhaps because it offered more fruitful opportunities, given the extent of racial discrimination in Virginia at the time.\textsuperscript{306}

Although the wealth of Johnson was rare for a Black man during the seventeenth century, nonetheless the juxtaposition of the lives of Anthony Johnson and William Burdett demonstrates how the politics of the burgeoning international system of slavery shaped Virginia society. The system provided opportunities for White advancement to offices like the vestry, because of their elevated social position in that system relative to Blacks. Such outcomes were highly probable given that enslavement, which was the exclusive province of Africans, ensured that Blacks lagged behind Whites, whose length of servitude was temporary. In addition, by the time of Johnson and Burdett’s rise in Virginia, the colony had been active in the international system for nearly a half a century, which meant that persons of African ancestry had less access to the economic, social, and political capital needed to support their advancement for much of this time. Thus, even though both Johnson and Burdett came to Virginia in bondage and both were owners of human property and modest parcels of land, and both were apparently well-liked, the byproduct of a social order heavily shaped by the tenets of a developing international system of slavery meant that Burdett rather than Johnson was selected to the vestry.\textsuperscript{307} Although Johnson’s accomplishments were remarkable, his exclusion from the upper reaches of political power as a Black man was not. The politics of a colony influenced by the policies of a growing

\textsuperscript{306} Somerset County Judicial Record, 1671-1675, 159-61.

\textsuperscript{307} We can claim that Johnson was held in high esteem because after a fire in February 1653 the county court decided to help the Johnson’s out financially based on their tenure in the colony by exempting the women in his household from all public taxes and levies. “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” folio 161. As for Burdett, his selection to the House of Burgess illustrates the respect he held in the community.
international system of slavery dictated the terms of Johnson’s access to Virginia’s most sacred institutions.

Until now, Anthony Johnson’s accomplishments have been used by historians of early America to argue the lack of influence of the international system of slavery in producing racism and racial categories in Virginia prior to 1660. However, Johnson’s experience, especially when measured against similarly situated European men like Burdett, provides evidence to the contrary. It speaks clearly of the impact the international system had in shaping Virginia society, particularly since so many of Virginia’s founding institutions (plantations and churches) were underwritten by slave labor. Thus, in Johnson, we are able to see how these institutions worked to marginalize African peoples and also how it was that Black people were able to express their independence in a society that was highly influenced by the growing scope of the international system of slavery.

In purchasing his freedom, Johnson resisted the strength of Virginia’s social structure. Although it took several years for Johnson to accumulate the funds to purchase his freedom, every penny he saved from his arrival in Virginia in 1621 to his freedom in the 1640s was more than an act of resistance but also an appropriation of the very policies designed to restrict him. In the early seventeenth century, many African peoples, including Johnson financed their freedom by selling livestock. Yet, purchasing one’s freedom in this manner was made difficult by prohibitions against “truck and trade” with Blacks. Just as the Virginia Company instructed colonists in 1612 not to trade with Native groups in order to discourage the formation of intimate relations and formal alliances, so too did leaders routinely outlaw trade with Blacks

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308 The work of Breen and Innes, Myne Owne Ground, is one of the most notable of works that depicts Johnson’s life as a free African as proof that the international system of slavery did not produce racial categories prior to 1660. 309 Strachey, For the Colony in Virginea Brittania: Lawes Divine, Morall, and Martall, 10-17, 21, 24-27.
out of fear that it would undermine the colony’s growing institution of slavery. For example, in March 1644, planter William Andrews petitioned the court to block truck and trade with his enslaved man. His request was upheld by a Northampton County magistrate in a ruling that stated that “no man shall Truck or Trade with John his Negro, upon penalty or the forfeiture of what he or they do truck, trade, barter, buy or sell with said Negro.” Truck and trade laws were an important way in which planters incorporated local courts into the cadre of institutions under their control to assist them in subordinating African peoples.

As it was with the parish churches, local courts were part of the network of institutions in Virginia that were influenced by the expanding orbit of the international system of slavery. The enforcement of trade restrictions was one example of how the courts were used by planters to subjugate their enslaved property. This process was made easier because area courts were seated on plantations, with the hearings taking place inside parish churches. Consequently, the court system grew organically out of the parish church structure, hence the name parish court, as they were commonly called during this era. There were three parish courts in 1623, one in Charles City, one in Elizabeth City, and one in James City. Parish courts were the forerunner to county courts, which first began in 1634. The physical closeness of parish courts to the plantation meant that the courts’ organizational structure generally mirrored the hierarchical composition of the plantation. Most of the court justices were slaveholders and most of its clerks were former indentured servants. In fact, planters were so connected to the local courts that

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311 Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, I: 246.
sometimes court sessions were held in their homes. Often the presiding judge was a plantation leader like Harwood or some other large planter or slaveholder. For example, in 1637, court sessions were held in the homes of Stephen Charlton and Argoll Yeardley.\(^{313}\) Undoubtedly, some of the courtroom visitors and participants may have even worked for these men. If this was the case, then the courthouse culture also replicated the culture of the international system of slavery via the plantation structure.

Persons of African ancestry were generally excluded from holding court positions, which meant that Virginia’s judiciary was likewise influenced by the spread of the international system of slavery-particularly since the court was managed by owners of large plantations and slaveholders. The obvious byproduct of this mutual dependency (the court system and slaveholding) was the strict enforcement of trade restrictions against bonded Blacks in an effort to thwart their quest for independence. Thus, when Johnson purchased four head of livestock from four different planters between May 1647 and December 1648, Johnson was probably in violation of this custom.\(^{314}\) Johnson challenged the power of the courts through the sale of his livestock. Using “outsider-within knowledge” of the white landscape, Johnson was able to circumvent the laws against trading with “Negroes” and, thereby, secure his and his family’s freedom despite these regulations.\(^{315}\)

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\(^{313}\) Whitelaw, *Virginia’s Eastern Shore*, I: 246. See Chapter Two of this dissertation for additional references on Stephen Charlton.

\(^{314}\) "Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Orders, Deeds, Wills, Ect., 1645-1651, Book 3," f.75. Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” 123. Johnson was thought to be free by the 1640s since it was then that he had acquired his slave, John Casor.

\(^{315}\) Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women in Search for Justice*, 5-8. According to Collins, “outsider-within-knowledge” is gaining knowledge about or of the dominant group without gaining the full power accorded to that group.
Johnson’s knowledge of White people was gained by living and working with them, an awareness that allowed him to convince planters, like John Pott, Edward Douglas, James Berry, and James Winberry, to sell him the cattle that ultimately led to his freedom. Yet Johnson’s knowledge of the value of livestock was probably not gained only from experiences in Virginia but also from his life in West Africa. Perhaps Pott, Douglas, Berry, and Winberry did not know that Johnson and other Blacks were well versed in animal husbandry prior to arriving in Virginia. Like most Black women and men living in Virginia prior to 1640, Johnson was born in Africa and likely arrived in Virginia by way of the Luanda seaport, which meant that he possessed any number of agricultural skills before ever having set foot in North America. According to Miller, the Mbundu people of Angola tended chickens, goats, and some sheep and cattle. In addition to domestic animals, Miller posits that Mbundu men hunted for wild game with bows, arrows, and traps throughout the year and with fire towards the end of the year. The dry months also provided opportunities for fishing. Such proficiencies undoubtedly served Johnson well in Virginia where as early as 1621, was home to an “abundance of cattle and hogs both wild and domestic.” One early planter, Peter Arondelle, noted that the colony was “soe well furnished with all sorts of provisions as well as with Cattle that any laborious honest man many in a shorte time become ritche in this Country.” Over the twenty-year period from slavery to freedom, Johnson clearly made use of his prior farming knowledge to exploit the agricultural environment of Virginia toward gaining his and his family’s freedom and prosperity.

316 “Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Orders, Deeds, Wills, Ect., 1645-1651, Book 3,” f.75; “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4.”
317 Miller, Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola , 36.
319 Ibid.
During his time in bondage, Johnson also relied on his friendships with other Africans to get around the rules against Whites trading with Blacks. Two Black men named Richard and John Johnson (likely no relation to Anthony Johnson) were important in Johnson’s life, so much so that Johnson named his two sons, Richard and John, after these men. The census records do not show that these two Black men, Richard and John, were enslaved with Johnson on the Bennett plantation. So it was likely that the men became friends while living on separate plantations, getting acquainted while moving in and around their master’s plantations or in their parish churchyards. It was somewhere in these spaces that the men would have exchanged information about how to obtain their freedom. Maybe Richard and John knew that Pott, Douglas, Berry, and Winberry were the type of White men who could be fooled into selling cattle to Blacks or perhaps Richard and John perceived the men to be sympathetic to the plight of Black peoples. Such enlightened knowledge of the complexities of plantation life reminds us that the path from slavery to freedom is not walked alone. Often one is assisted by other people (both Black and White), who provide aid and assistance along the way during the journey. To this end, Johnson’s road to freedom and prosperity depended on his pooling his resources toward mastering the finer points of navigating the Black and White landscapes of Virginia. However, for each success Johnson had in circumventing the plantation hierarchy there were equally forceful attempts by Whites to prevent Johnson from upsetting the social order of Virginia that was highly influenced by the politics of a developing international system of slavery.

Although Anthony Johnson was one of the more famously documented Africans who possessed many of the visible trappings of wealth (servants, a slave, and land), there was
considerable evidence to suggest that, despite his accomplishments, his success led to him leaving or being forced out of Virginia in the early 1660s because he disrupted the social order and crossed many of the social boundaries set to preserve a system of white supremacy. As an African man who was also a slaveholder, Anthony Johnson held a status that few men in Virginia of his background occupied prior to 1660. Many leaders of Northampton County may have challenged Johnson’s authority precisely because he was an African man who was also a slaveholder, which could have been what prompted churchwarden George Parker and his brother Robert, in November 1654, to lure Johnson’s slave, John Casar, to their nearby plantation to work for them.\textsuperscript{321} Johnson later sued the Parkers and regained custody of Casar. The rejection of the Parkers social standing over his human property enhances the cultural significance of the relationship between Johnson and Casar embedded in this dispute. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the complex distinctions between a “slave” as a commodity and a “slave” as a member of one’s household are what was at stake in Johnson’s response to the Parkers. G. Ugo Nwokeji tells us in his book, \textit{The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra}, that households in many West African communities consisted of a variety of persons who held a variety of statuses. A household, according to Nwokeji, included “the nuclear family, the polygynous family, and other persons or families, who could be slaves, refugees, long-term guests, or clients.”\textsuperscript{322} In seeking to regulate Johnson’s household, George Parker used a framework of social relations that was born out of European perspective of African peoples within the international system of slavery, which did not contemplate the degree of assimilation that persons under Johnson’s charge likely held. So, when Parker reported in November 1654 that “Richard Johnson Negrowe and a Negrowe

\textsuperscript{321} NCo SW 1654-5, f.35; and NCo DW 1651-4, 226-f.226.
woman of the family of Anthony Johnson Negrowe,” were engaged in fornication, he was ignorant of the complexities of the domestic relationships that were common in societies in West Central Africa and in the Johnson household.  

Therefore, whether it was because of jealousy, contempt, or ignorance, the attacks against Johnson’s human property by the Parker’s suggest that Johnson’s station as head of household challenged strongly upheld New World ideas about the sophistication of African societies that had been established within the international system of slavery since the fifteenth century.

Cheryl Harris’s analysis of the colony’s early history of property rights may be useful in explaining Parker’s actions within the context of a society influenced by mounting incidents of colonialism within the international system of slavery. Harris contends that historical systems of domination such as conquest, removal, and the extermination of Native American life and culture produced a system in America whereby only White possession of land was validated as the basis of property rights, a paradigm that ultimately formed the basis for property rights long before the arrival of Africans in Virginia. In fact, this paradigm was manifest in West Central Africa as early as the fifteenth century, leading to four centuries of enslavement and exploitation of the labor and lands of Black peoples. Within this context, Anthony Johnson, as landowner and “slave master,” violated long-established racial precedents, turning the idea of property rights as the exclusive domain of White peoples on its head. As a result, Johnson and his family were targeted and harassed until they eventually relocated. For example, there were failed attempts to swindle land from his sons. One instance in 1654 involved Anthony Johnson’s nineteen-year-old son, John Johnson and his attempt to patent five hundred fifty acres of land on

the south side of Pungoteague Creek. Having not received confirmation of this transaction, Johnson inquired into the matter and discovered that the sheriff, through ignorance or malice, had sent the patent to a European man also named John Johnson. The European Johnson refused to return the paperwork, claiming that he was the rightful owner of the property. The African Johnson eventually prevailed in court, but only after the testimony of the powerful planter Edmund Scarburgh, who actually surveyed the land, confirmed that the acreage did, in fact, belong to the African John Johnson. Given the racial politics of Virginia society at the time, the African Johnson would probably not have triumphed in the courts without the help of the influential Scarburgh. The fact that some Whites like Scarburgh would at times be of assistance to Blacks in their freedom struggles does not mitigate the idea of a proprietary claim to property rights that Harris suggests undergirded white supremacy and racial hierarchies.

Thus, the ruthless actions taken against the Johnson family suggest that racialized notions about property may have been behind the attempts to challenge their right to amass large amounts of land and servants.

This may have been why other men also tried to steal land from the Johnson’s. In 1658, a man named Matthew Pippen successfully stole land from Anthony Johnson’s other son, Richard. In this instance, Pipen beat Richard Johnson out of one hundred acres of land by patenting property for which Johnson could not prove ownership, and afterward boldly lived next to him.

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325 "Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-54 Book 4," f.103. Pungoteague Creek was thought to be the first African community in America. It was said to be made up of more than a dozen Native Africans. Writers’ Program of the Works Project Administration, The Negro in Virginia (New York: Hastings House, 1940), 11.


327 Scarburgh was one of the fifteen planters that owned ten or more servants and/or enslaved persons in Virginia. See Chapter One for that list.

328 Blumer, "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position," 222.
for the next five years. From this light, we can view George Parker’s challenge to Anthony Johnson’s rights over his land and human property as an attempt to preserve the domain of mastery for Europeans.

Despite these actions, Johnson continued to petition the courts, an institution designed to subordinate him, in order to have his property rights recognized. For instance, he successfully sued Parker in 1654 over Casor, forcing him to return his human property. Johnson even won a reprieve from his taxes in 1652 after his home had been destroyed in a fire. Such examples reveal the extent to which Johnson was able to circumvent Virginia’s institutions in order to mitigate, albeit temporarily, attacks against his freedom and property. How did Johnson develop his strategies of resistance? The next chapter examines the early history of resistance by African peoples to the subordinating forces of Virginia society. Some of their resistance strategies can be traced back to West African social systems, many of which were refashioned to meet the needs of the New World. This next chapter located such resistance tactics within the context of pre-colonial West African cultural systems. What did resistance in an African context look like in early Virginia? More important, how did it work to alleviate their circumstances and, in some cases, free Black people?

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329 Nell Marion Nugent, Cavaliers and Pioneers: A Calendar of Virginia Land Grants, 1623-1800, vol. I (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 1934), 296, 532. Whitelaw, Virginia’s Eastern Shore, I: 699. This land was known to have been in the Johnson family for several years. It was not clear what happened to the patent.


Chapter Four
From Freedom Suits to Fictive Kin: African Life in Colonial Virginia, 1619-1660

Pre-colonial West African social systems powerfully shaped the nature of Black people’s responses to enslavement and oppression in Virginia during the early decades of the seventeenth century. The portability of West African social systems for combating the exploitive conditions in the New World emerged out of prior struggles with European groups who traveled along the coast of West Central Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries looking for slaves. Trade negotiations between greedy European merchants and eager African rulers supplied Black peoples with crucial information about the ways of White peoples that proved to be a useful leveraging tool. In bargaining for European goods, ethnic leaders would often appeal to the vanities of European traders in an attempt to gain an edge in negotiations. For a time, this strategy worked to the economic and political benefit of some communities. Once in the New World, such tactics formed the framework of Black resistance for decades to come.

As early as the sixteenth century, we find evidence of African groups manipulating European institutions to their advantage. For example, in 1504, the Mbundu peoples of Angola tolerated Portuguese proselytizing in order to maintain cooperative trade relations. Some ethnic leaders welcomed, and even courted, Portuguese missionaries into their communities for political and commercial purposes. In 1577, one ruler, Ngola Inene, even went so far as request to be baptized by Jesuit missionaries in order to promote diplomatic relations between the Mbundu people and the Portuguese. But as the Portuguese began to exploit the internal warfare taking place in the Angola region over European consumer goods, and as the global

332 Birmingham, Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese 1483-1790. 29.
demand for slaves led to Angola being targeted as a major source in the trade of human beings, one that continued until the nineteenth century with over three million enslaved persons shipped from this region alone, African rulers abandoned Christianity as a diplomatic strategy but continued the internal fighting.334

Despite the short-lived success of the Mbundu peoples in fooling European merchants about their religious beliefs, African peoples grew effective at appealing to the cultural sensibilities of European peoples in order gain a strategic edge in various types of negotiations. This strategy laid the foundation for subsequent interactions with White peoples in the New World, especially for the approximately three hundred Black persons in Virginia through 1650, nearly all of whom were born in the continent and captured and exported from the port in Luanda and, thus, were quite familiar with the conceits of European slave traders. Although most of these three hundred or so Blacks were enslaved, they were empowered to resist enslavement and oppression in Virginia by recreating the successful maneuvers used by African peoples in pre-colonial West Africa. A signal of this adaptation was found in the advent of freedom suits, petitions by enslaved African persons seeking freedom through the courts. During the first half of the seventeenth century, lawsuits that manipulated Virginia’s legal and religious institutions were the standard, although freedom suits that played one slaveholder against another were becoming more common, especially if an enslaved child was involved.

Elizabeth Key initiated her freedom lawsuit in 1655 on the grounds that she was a Christian and of English ancestry. Born of a free English father and an enslaved African mother, Key’s appropriation of these titles as part of her legal strategy fashioned the idea that Christianity and Englishness could include persons of African ancestry and thereby prohibit enslavement. Key’s freedom suit was indicative of the progress that African people’s had made in just a few short years in confusing the meaning of staid social identities like Christianity and Englishness to their betterment, just as their forbearers had done with Christianity nearly a century earlier.

Like the Mbundu people of Angola, Christianity held a variety of meanings and uses to most Black persons in early Virginia. To many in the Angolan region, Christianity was seen as just another religious order or as a means that allowed them to become freer. Similarly, African peoples in early Virginia coupled salvation for the soul with liberation for the body, while European peoples saw in Christianity not only a spiritual identity but also one that justified their social position, allowing for the conquest and enslavement of so-called heathens. Key, in her freedom suit, recognized the contradiction in the social construction of Christianity and Englishness as it applied her enslavement, and reconceptualized them to meet her own idea of freedom in the hopes of being incorporated into Virginia society without prejudice.

In this chapter, I argue that the indigenous social systems of pre-colonial West Africa provided the Black persons who arrived early in Virginia with the framework for interpreting, reinterpreting, negotiating, and outwitting the bureaucracy of Virginia’s institutions, including its

religious and legal policies, which were fundamental to their oppression. How did Blacks employ indigenous African-based cultural systems to manipulate the white landscape of Virginia? African peoples found ways to connect their surroundings in Virginia to their homelands. Oral traditions were one mechanism that African peoples used to link their freedom struggles to their pre-colonial past.

Oral traditions were perhaps the strongest indigenous West African cultural practice in the New World in the seventeenth century. It was the medium by which memories of one’s kingdom and ethnic traditions were kept alive. Oral traditions were also the path by which women and men communicated knowledge of White folks to each other. The use of the oral tradition to combat the institutional bureaucracies of Virginia introduced stability into the community of African peoples trying to survive the early decades of the colony after the trauma of the Middle Passage. We see evidence of the stabilizing force of the oral tradition in the life of Anthony Johnson and his family, one of the more documented Black families in early American history. In 1677, Anthony Johnson’s grandson, John Johnson Jr., named his forty-four acre estate in Somerset County, Maryland, Angola. We should not underestimate the value that the name Angola had in making the memory of an African past a concrete physical space in which to offset the mounting legislation that made it increasingly difficult for Black peoples to remain free.338 Nor should we underestimate the value the name Angola has as a source into the perceptions of early Africans to illustrate “who they thought they were,” or “where they hailed

338 A series of laws enacted in 1670 like the one that deemed lifetime servitude the “normal” condition for Black persons made it increasingly difficult for persons of African descent to remain free. See Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, II.
from in Africa,” particularly since most embarked out of the port in Luanda, Angola.\(^{339}\) We do not know the birth places of the Africans aboard any of the ships, but because of their common embarkation point, Johnson’s invocation of the name Angola suggests a broad regional identity of shared descent that connected him to the many thousands of Black persons that passed through the port in Luanda.

Anthony Johnson had planted the seeds of an Angolan identity into his family legacy using the oral tradition. Even though John Johnson’s actions occurred in Maryland in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, presumably, the process of transmitting the notion of Angola as the family’s place of origin began while they were still in Virginia as he described the region to his son John Johnson, Sr., who, in turn, passed the details onto John Johnson, Jr. Anthony Johnson died seven years before his grandson honored his memory by naming his estate Angola.\(^{340}\) Yet, for all the numerous essays and monographs about his wealth and prosperity, perhaps Johnson’s greatest achievement, one that is absent in the historiography, was instilling a connection to Angola in the hearts and minds of his children. Arriving in Virginia in 1621, probably having departed from the Luanda port in Angola, Anthony Johnson must have provided detailed and vivid information about his homeland to his son John Johnson, Sr. for it to have made such a searing impression on John Johnson, Jr. Thus, we can reasonably assume that Anthony Johnson’s oral stories were steeped in West African culture.

Since the mid-1500s, the Mbundu peoples in the Angola region used a variety of oral traditions, such as testimony, about the family tree, proverbs, and songs for purposes of

\(^{339}\) Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1830*, 11. My reading of Hawthorne’s work suggests that what African people called themselves provides insights into who they were and where in Africa they hailed or identified with.

preserving a family’s lineal traditions. Oral traditions were probably used for similar purposes by African peoples in Virginia, particularly during life’s dramatic transitions, at birth, before marriage, at death, or other important moments. Such events afforded the community of African born adults the opportunity to instill rich imagines of their countries into the spirit of their children, just as Anthony Johnson did with his family.

The naming of the estate after a location so important to the transition of African peoples in the New World, confirms not only the success of Anthony Johnson’s child rearing efforts but also the durability of West African oral traditions to ultimately communicate to succeeding generations the beauty of Angolan life before the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. The telling and retelling about life in the Angolan region left an imprint on the lives of Anthony Johnson’s children in a way that allowed the region to flourish as a “well spring to which [his] descendents could return in times of doubt to be refreshed” or to pay homage during times of celebration such as marriage, the purchase of land, or the birth of a child.

The emergence of Angola as an alternate geography to Maryland and Virginia took shape decades before John Johnson, Jr. was ever born. Anthony Johnson and his wife Mary, who arrived in Virginia in 1622, probably shared stories of their homeland and ethnic communities with each other while enslaved on the plantation of Edward Bennett. Perhaps Johnson told of how he hunted for wild game with bows, arrows, and traps throughout the year to provide food for the group. Maybe Mary Johnson recounted information about the land that she had

341 Miller, Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola 16-18.
343 Miller, Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola 51.
inherited from her mother and how she used it to produce millet and sorghum for her family.\textsuperscript{344} Such exchanges about their life in the Angola region most likely occurred out of the earshot of their owner Bennett and his ten European servants.\textsuperscript{345} Conceivably, these stories were told at night, after a long day of work or when traveling in and around the plantation or on the way to church or in the churchyard.

By the 1640s, when the Johnsons were free and living on their own land, they were at liberty to discuss Angola openly, raising their sons John and Richard with all sorts of accounts about the region and perhaps even sharing their experiences with other African peoples who traveled past their home or with their invited guests. As landowners, the Johnsons were enfranchised to give Angola as prominent a place in their home as they wanted. Consequently, they probably spoke a lot about Angola around their slave, John Casar, who himself likely hailed from this region. Not surprisingly, scholars of early America have tended to emphasize the fact that Johnson owned a slave when discussing his standing in Virginia.\textsuperscript{346} This narrow view of Johnson’s household is incomplete and fails to take into account the context of the term “slave” that Johnson was familiar with across the Atlantic. Perhaps Casar was what G. Ugo Nwokeji called “a person of the household,” meaning “persons or families who [were] slaves” that were incorporated into the nuclear family, rather than a “market slave,” who was treated like a commodity.\textsuperscript{347} The degree of kinship with those labeled a “slave” in pre-colonial West African societies allows us to see Johnson’s relationship with Casar in a more diasporic fashion. It is from this context that we come to understand the influence that West African cultural traditions

\textsuperscript{344} Greene, \textit{Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe}, 3.
\textsuperscript{345} Jester, ed. \textit{Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607-1625}, 46.
\textsuperscript{346} For scholars who present Johnson as slaveholder in the Western sense see Breen and Innes, \textit{Myne Owne Ground} and Deal, \textit{Race and Class in Colonial Virginia}.
had in shaping the experiences of the Johnson’s in Virginia and ultimately his grandson’s actions in Maryland. One can imagine any number of physical spaces or structures within the black landscapes of Virginia that were given names that signaled knowledge or invocations of an African past. Thus, from Johnson’s grandson’s act of naming his estate Angola, we learn how oral traditions facilitated an emotional attachment to the region such that Angola became his, and perhaps other Black persons, most salient cultural reference.348

Just as Anthony Johnson provided his children with oral accounts of Angola that offered a alternative geography to the New World, one that ultimately framed their view of themselves and Virginia society, so too did Elizabeth Key’s mother perhaps provide her with stories of how the Mbundu people used Christian conversion for furthering trade relations with the Portuguese.349 Little is known about Key’s mother except that she gave birth to Elizabeth in 1630 and that she was listed as a slave in the 1655 General Assembly committee report.350 Other references in this report show Key’s mother as the “Negro woman with Childe,” that led to Thomas Key’s being fined for impregnating her.351 Despite the scant details about her mother, Key’s birth year, 1630, suggests that she too embarked from the Luanda port in Angola as did almost all the other Black persons in Virginia prior to 1650. Therefore, she probably raised Elizabeth with the insights and

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348 This source challenges the claims by scholars such as E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), who contend that first-generation children born in the New World to African parents held no cognitive attachment to Africa and that their cultural references were “American.” This sources is also consistent with the research of Michael Gomez, Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South, 188-92., which found that the children of African-born parents did hold an outlook that was more African than American.
351 Ibid.
values that she grew up with in the Angola region. As such, it was not surprising that Elizabeth knew the value that European peoples placed on Christianity, nor was it surprising that she employed this knowledge in crafting her freedom strategy.

Oral tradition was a link between the descendents of the Angola region in the New World and their forbearers on the African continent. This connection was maintained by the steadily increasing population of African peoples in Virginia, fifty or so in 1625, three hundred in 1649, roughly two thousand in 1670, and nearly six thousand by the turn of the century about half of whom were African born. At this rate, information about West Africa would continue to saturate Virginia. Consequently, knowledge gained from oral accounts about Angolan kingdoms would undoubtedly influence their children, who ultimately would be the key players in the struggle for Black freedom at the turn of the century.

Perhaps the greatest value of oral traditions for African peoples in the early decades of Virginia was its transmission of resistance strategies, from one generation to the next, about how to transcend enslavement and oppression, build community, and outwit White folks. Oral stories provided Black peoples with means of looking at the organization of Virginia in a way “that made [their] exploitation” of the social system possible. Negotiating Virginia’s institutions of social control (courthouses, churches, and plantations) armed with knowledge gained from oral

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sources, allowed Black persons to manipulate these institutions so that the spaces they occupied as well as their surrounding areas were less threatening to enslaved workers. Often, oral sources allowed African peoples to know as much about Virginia’s culture and its institutions as did many Europeans. Recounting stories of other Black persons who had found loopholes in the system helped encourage others to replicate those proven strategies. Evidence from freedom lawsuits between 1641 to 1655 offers several examples of Black peoples exploiting gaps in Virginia’s institutional structure to gain their freedom or that of a family member.

Elizabeth Key’s 1655 freedom suit offers one model for reorienting our perspective about just how much African people understood the politics of the New World. As a strategy for self-emancipation, Key exploited the colony’s partiality for Englishness and Christianity to circumvent her enslavement and stamp her membership in Virginia society as a free person. Other models include the manipulation of the colony’s religiosity and plantation structure in order to gain the freedom of a loved one. John Graweere’s lawsuit to regain custody of his enslaved daughter evidenced that this practice was in existence some fourteen years before Key’s lawsuit, clearly marking the saliency of oral traditions in African communities.

Graweere was an African “servant” of a planter named William Evans. On March 31, 1641, he brought suit against Robert Sheppard for custody of his daughter whose mother was enslaved by him.356 Despite his bonded status, Graweere had a relative amount of freedom with Evans in that he was permitted to raise hogs and keep half of the profits from their increase.357 This measure of freedom is what probably made it possible for Graweere to have fathered a child

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356 Henry R. McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622-1632, 1670-1676, with Notes and Excerpts from Original Council and General Court Records, into 1683, Now Lost (Richmond: The Colonial Press, Everett Waddey Co., 1924), 477.
by a “negro maid servant” on Sheppard’s plantation.\textsuperscript{358} Moreover, it was possible that Graweere’s regular presence on his plantation helped Sheppard feel comfortable enough with him to initially consent to allowing him to purchase his daughter’s freedom. But, for reasons that are unclear in the record, Sheppard in the end refused to release the child to Graweere.

Nonetheless, on March 31, 1641, the General court ruled in Graweere’s favor, agreeing that the child “be free from the said Sheppard or his assign and to be and remain at the disposing and education of the said Graweere and the child’s godfather [Evans] who undertaketh to see it brought up in the Christian religion.”\textsuperscript{359}

The case provides an important framework for reconstructing the history of freedom suits, revealing how African peoples used them to manipulate the social structure of Virginia in an effort to obtain the freedom of a loved one. We have no way of knowing the circumstances that led Graweere to elicit the help of Evans in the lawsuit. However, we do know that the plantation system of Virginia dictated that an enslaved person could not obtain sole custody of his or her child without a White master approving the exchange, a fact that Graweere and his wife used to their advantage by involving Evans. We can assume that it was a decision that he and the child’s mother made together, realizing that the best chance for the child’s freedom ultimately lay with Graweere and Evans rather than with herself and Sheppard, particularly since Evans had already allowed Graweere to earn money on the side. The couple undoubtedly knew that the Court would not recognize the paternal rights of an enslaved person given the influence of slaveholders

\textsuperscript{358} Robert Samuel Cope, "Slavery and Servitude in the Colony of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century" (Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1950), 14.

\textsuperscript{359} Several sources cite this case including: Cope, (above), 14; McIlwaine, \textit{Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia with Notes and Excerpts from Original Council and General Court Records, into 1683, Now Lost}, 477., and Palmer, “Servant into Slave: The Evolution of the Legal Status of the Negro Laborer in Colonial Virginia,” 357.
on the judiciary, many of the court judges and officers owning slaves themselves.\textsuperscript{360} In fact, high level officers in Virginia owned seventy-seven percent of all enslaved persons imported in Virginia between the 1630s and 1640s.\textsuperscript{361} Moreover, between 1651 and 1680, sixty-one percent of planters owned between five and nine slaves.\textsuperscript{362} This data confirms that Graweere and his wife stood little chance in the courts without the assistance of a White person. Had Graweere or his wife been European, the decision about the child’s custody would not have been litigated in the courts. Given these circumstances, Graweere and his wife probably used Evans to circumvent Virginia’s politics in the hopes that, in the end, the custody arrangement would provide a more direct route to their daughter’s freedom. Thus, to increase the probability of their daughter’s freedom, Graweere and his wife had to find a way to get Evans to sponsor a freedom suit on behalf of their child.

The records do not tell us why Evans stood up for Graweere in the freedom suit. Perhaps Graweere agreed to work harder, maybe even hire himself out and give the proceeds to Evans. Or, Evans could have just been a nice man who intended to free Graweere anyway and, therefore, decided to help him obtain his child’s freedom as a gift for all his hard work. We have no way of knowing for sure, but what we do know is that this case laid the foundation for other freedom suits like Elizabeth Key’s that appropriated the cultural values of Europeans in order to circumvent the institutional barriers to their freedom.

The seeming incongruence of a freedom strategy that includes moving a child from one slave master to another is not so farfetched if Graweere and the child’s mother were reared in a

\textsuperscript{360} John C. Coombs, "Building "The Machine": The Development of Slavery and Slave Society in Early Colonial Virginia" (Dissertation, College of William and Mary, 2003), 38, 248.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid.
matrilineal society like the Mbundu people of Angola. Among the Mbundu, girls were usually born in their father’s lineage village, often remaining there until marriage.\textsuperscript{363} Even after marriage, women in matrilineal societies sometimes lived with their husband’s relatives, returning to their mother’s village only after they ceased to bear children or after becoming divorced or widowed. Perhaps this was the context in which the couple sought the help of Evans. If so, then the release of her daughter into the custody of Graweere by way of Evans demonstrates the sophistication with which Black people reinterpreted matrilineal customs to meet the challenges of Virginia society. By adapting their understanding of common matrilineal practices to circumvent the lineage system of Virginia (Englishness and Christianity), Graweere and his daughter’s mother were able to exploit the identity politics of the colony in order to further the possibility of freedom for their daughter and to increase her chances for independence.

Another man, Mihill Gowen, also got his owner to help him obtain custody of his child. In 1655, the same year that Key brought her freedom suit, Gowen followed a pattern similar to that of Graweere to gain custody of his son William.\textsuperscript{364} In this case, Anne Barnhouse turned the child over to him without a court battle. Nonetheless, the cases were strikingly similar in one regard. Like Graweere’s and Key’s lawsuits, Gowen had to negotiate the politics of Christianity and Englishness before the transfer could take place. This meant that not only did the child need to be baptized in the Christian faith, but also that a White master had to support the exchange. Barnhouse acknowledges these conditions when she declared that:

\begin{quote}
I Anne Barnhouse hath given unto Mihill Gowen Negro hee being att this time Servant unto Robert Stafford a male child borne of my negro Prosa being baptized
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{363} Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola* 44.
\textsuperscript{364} Although Key’s suit began in 1655 it was not settled until July 1659.
by Mr. Edward Johnson… [and ] I the said Anne Barnhouse doth bind myself never
to trouble or demand my Service of the said Mihill or his said Sonne William.365

Like the Graweere case, Robert Stafford, Gowen’s master, had to support the reassignment of
Gowen’s son, William. Although the release of Gowen’s son was not the result of a court order,
it did require a sworn affidavit to certify the transfer. Also like Graweere’s daughter, it appears
that the fact that Gowen’s son was baptized was important to his release, all of which elucidates
the significance of the physical proximity of churches and courthouses to plantation settlements
had in the regulation of slavery in Virginia. The case reveals the high degree of knowledge
African peoples had about the institutions of Virginia and about how to circumvent their
bureaucracy. Undoubtedly, the oral tradition held an important function in disseminating
information to those in the Black community about loopholes in the colonial system.

The records do not indicate why Ann Barnhouse decided to release Gowen’s son, William,
to him and Stafford. Perhaps Barnhouse did it as a favor to Gowen or perhaps the child was
released as part of a financial arrangement between her and Stafford. Either way, because
William had been baptized in the Christian faith and because he would be under the charge of a
White master, Stafford, William was allowed to reunite with his father. Consequently, the
possibility of William’s freedom was established through Stafford, showing the degree to which
Christianity and Englishness together were not only an identity but also racial markers that could
provide or prohibit freedom based on one’s ancestry. In this context, Elizabeth Key’s
appropriation of these titles becomes an important lens through which to observe how Black
peoples played with these constructs to their advantage when possible.

The transfer of Black children held in bondage from one planter to another who was possibly more lenient, represents a reorientation of how Black peoples adapted to New World systems in order to achieve freedom. However, it gets us no closer to understanding why the children in the Graweere and Gowen cases were transferred from their enslaved mothers to their enslaved fathers. Perhaps in Virginia, like in West Africa, enslaved Black women were highly valued by planters because they could produce more children and, thereby, increase the planters’ pool of laborers. Furthermore, because Black women were expected to work as hard as the men, and because she could also produce children meant that it was less likely that a Black woman would be manumitted before a Black man. If this was the case, then Black couples probably made a calculated decision to push their masters to release their children to the father in the hopes that their offspring would be freed sooner. The strategy of freeing a child to its father was informed by the realities of the slave system in Virginia. It may also have informed by West African social practices. Black women in Virginia may have pressed for the release of their children to their father because it was common in some matrilineal societies that children grew up away from their own lineage, that is, the mother’s village, and returned only when they got older. Thus, Prossa, the mother of William, may have felt safe in turning over her child to Gowen and his master because she also believed that the child may return to her down the road, if and when he became free.

The seeming incongruence of a freedom strategy that required a mother to give up custody of her child is not so strange when it is considered within the context of other tough choices that many African women had to make in their homelands regarding marriage, settlement, and
childrearing, in order to retain some control over their lives.\textsuperscript{366} For example, when matrilineal Mbundu societies required women to raise their children in the lineage of her husband resulted in her relinquishing her rights of inheritance, that requirement did not detract Mbundu women from their duty to their children or their duty as a wife in her husband’s lineage.\textsuperscript{367} In this vein, Prossa and Graweere’s wife both made difficult decisions about the fate of their children in order to retain some control over their future even as they faced permanent bondage. By contrast, bonded European women held complete authority over the freedom of their children during the entire term of their indenture. Moreover, the children of European women remained with her even after her term of service expired. Unlike White women, Prossa and Graweere’s wife were forced to find a way around the apparatus of the plantation system in order to retain some authority over their children’s future. Thus, whether it was by moving into a new lineage community in Angola or whether it was transferring the custody of a child to another planter in Virginia in the hopes that it would hasten their child’s freedom, the choices of Black women during the seventeenth century were never the same as those of White women. Thus, it was probable that enslaved Black women in early Virginia drew on their experiences in Angola in order to protect their children who were victims of the colony’s internal slave trading, and in doing so, shared information about the interworking of area courts with one another so to mitigate their families oppression.

\textsuperscript{366} Greene, \textit{West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth- and Twentieth Century Ghana}. I ground my analysis of the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on Black women’s lives on the work by Greene that suggests that analysis of slavery and the slave trade was influenced by gender and by ones personal circumstances. In this way, many Black women caught in the transatlantic slave trade shared a commonality about issues such as motherhood that crossed time and space.

\textsuperscript{367} Miller, \textit{Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola} 43-4.
The enslavement of Graweere’s and Gowans’s children was not the earliest known case of children being held as slaves. In 1624, two children were known to have been enslaved; both were listed with their parents in that year’s muster. Abraham Piersey’s record lists one of these children in an entry that simply read “Negro Woman and a young Child of hers.” The other enslaved child was the son of Isabella and Anthony, named William. They were recorded in the muster of William Tucker as “Antoney Negro: Isabell Negro: and William theire Child Baptised.” These records suggest that Virginia practiced enslavement of children as early as 1619, since most of the Black peoples listed in the 1624 muster were thought to be among the first to have arrived in Virginia. Other cases of child enslavement, previously mentioned in Chapter Two, occurred in the 1640s. One instance had Stephen Charlton gifting a two-year-old “Negro childe” to his sister in 1645, and the other, which also involved Charlton, was in 1646 when he purchased a “Negro woman and a boy.” Both cases were indicative of a pattern of children being enslaved in the early part of the century. These cases of child enslavement along with the enslavement of Graweere’s daughter in 1641 and Gowan’s son in 1655 occurred years before the enactment of the 1662 law that made a child’s status contingent on the mother’s status. All of this suggests that slavery in Virginia was more common and more pernicious and more systematic during this period than has been recognized by scholars of early American history.

368 The African peoples included in the 1624/25 muster are thought to be the “20 and Odd Negroes” who arrived in Virginia aboard the Treasurer in 1619.
370 Ibid., 49.
372 Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, II: 26.
The transfer of children from one planter to another in the hopes that they would become free sooner marked the emergence a new approach in the resistance strategies of African peoples in the early seventeenth century. Attempts to protect children from indefinite bondage offer unique insight into early African people’s perceptions about family that point to another important pre-colonial African social system besides oral traditions that was used to mitigate the ravages of enslavement, the concept of lineages.

Lineages were another African cultural system retained by Black peoples that shaped how they interpreted the conditions of early Virginia. In the pre-colonial period of Angola, lineages were a social system that organized groups of people based on descent. Depending on whether the lineage structure was matrilineal or patrilineal, family members moved in and out of lineage groups at various moments of their life such as birth, marriage, or the death of a spouse. Lineages also allowed women, men, and children who had lost their natal attachments to be incorporated into a new group as kin. The fluidity of lineage systems supplied most early “Angolans” in Virginia with a framework for reclaiming family members who had been sold or from whom they were separated through the vagrancies of the colony’s internal slave trading. So, by the middle of the seventeenth century, we find that the earliest arriving Africans, like Angelo and Anthony and Mary Johnson, did not develop their sense of attachment from a spatial connection to the colony’s plantations, churches, and courthouses as Europeans settlers did. Rather, evidence suggests that African peoples found closeness in a host of personal

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373 Miller, Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola 44.
374 The act of incorporation, used by many pre-colonial West African ethnic groups, involves movement from a marginal and unfree status in the community towards one with greater acceptance and standing. Miers, ed. Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives, 19.
relationships that mirrored the descent and affinity arrangements that were prevalent in pre-colonial Angolan communities.

As early as the sixteenth century, Angolan kingdoms of West Central Africa, the region where nearly all of the early Blacks in Virginia originated, organized their societies around a series of relationships, fathers-sons, husbands-wives, daughters, brothers, nephews, nieces, and outsiders; all of these were incorporated into the group through a variety of pathways including marriage or as a concubine, pawn or slave.\(^{375}\) Rooted in this structure was the genealogical history of the group, which formed the basis of belonging and acceptance. Early African peoples in Virginia reinterpreted this social system across the geography of the New World to create new relations between Black persons, transforming the notion of what constituted family. As a consequence of the separation and dislocation of the families that resulted from the transatlantic slave trade, persons of African descent in Virginia reformulated familial categories to include non-biological relations such as fictive mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons. This helped to mitigate the trauma that such sales and separations inflicted on them as a result of external and internal slave trading. It also expressed the emergence of the West African social system of lineages being reconstructed in Virginia to protect the sanctity of an indigenous cultural form to facilitate the formation of family ties between those of different ethnic groups.

According to Rebecca Ginsburg, negotiating Virginia using a set of overlapping social systems and cultural forms like lineages and oral traditions, demonstrates the “geographical intelligence” of Black women and men in Virginia.\(^{376}\) This geographical intelligence allowed Black peoples like Graweere and Gowan to define family in a way that was more consistent with

\(^{375}\) Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola* 16.

the familial arrangements in West Central Africa, leaving open the possibility that indigenous approaches to creating family ties made institutions of the white landscape, the courthouses, churches, and plantations, less threatening.

The experience of the Middle Passage allowed for the creation of a variety of familial relationships between women and men from various ethnic groups who were shipped out of the port in Luanda to the Americas. According to Hawthorne, slaves out of Angola who arrived in Brazil in the sixteenth century on the same ship often called each other malungo, a Mbundu word for “ancient authority symbols brought by ancestors from the sea.” For the slaves who landed in Brazil together, the name malungo suggests that these persons saw each other as more than just shipmates; the name demonstrates their understanding of their ancestral connection created through their common origins and common condition. Just as shipmates from various ethnic Angolan kingdoms in Brazil were connected through their experience together in the Middle passage, so too were early Africans in Virginia. Despite their obvious ethnic differences, the women, men, and children who left Angola out of the seaport in Luanda were more like family members than strangers. As such, fictive kinships were perhaps the most common and strongest formal program developed by women and men of African ancestry in Virginia to recreate familial ties.

Fictive kinships were a type of familial relationship with persons who were not related by blood. These persons often stood in for relatives who could not be present as a result of the ruptures in families that occurred because of external and internal slave trading systems.

Enduring familial bonds, already a strong cultural value of Black women and men reared under

Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1830*, 132.
lineage systems, paved the way for fictive kinship to take root in Virginia, allowing those sold away from loved ones to retain their family ties despite being separated. Emanuel and Frances Driggus probably drew on fictive relationships to sustain them while they were separated from their children on at least two occasions by their owner Francis Pott.

Francis Pott was part of an emerging cadre of up and coming planters in the 1640s who participated in local and transatlantic slave trading as a means of wealth creation. As the numbers of enslaved Africans increased throughout that period, two hundred-nine enslaved persons were imported into Virginia between 1635 and 1656; owning slaves became associated with prosperity, wealth, and stature.\textsuperscript{378} Taking advantage of the uptick in slave trading in the era, Pott had purchased at least twelve Black persons by 1650. Eight were children, five of them girls, including Elizabeth and Jane, the daughters of Emanuel and Frances Driggus.\textsuperscript{379} Ironically or tragically, Pott bought Elizabeth and Jane from Robert Sheppard, the same man who enslaved the wife and daughter of John Graweere. A court document dated May 27, 1645 certifying Pott’s purchase of Elizabeth and Jane is detailed in the following affidavit:

\begin{quote}
I Francis Pott has taken to service two daughters of my Negro Emanuel Drigus to serve and be with my heirs, the named Elizabeth Drigus, around 8 years old to serve 13 years which will be completed and ended on the first day of March in the yeare of our Lord God One thousand six hundred and fifty eight in which time she will be around only sixteene years of age (or there abouts) old, and the other child named Jane Dregis being about 1 year old to serve I Francis Pott as they did Elizabeth until they are 30 years old, if she do live that long, to be completed May 1, 1674.\textsuperscript{380}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{378} "Virginia Land Patents, 1623-1660," 41.
\textsuperscript{380} Ibid.
This source provides us with much information about Virginia’s institution of slavery. It reveals information about the buying and selling of Black children, the prospects of intergenerational wealth among Whites, and the power of a planter to control the fate of Blacks peoples. What the source does not provide however, is information about the circumstances that led to Elizabeth and Jane being separated from their family or how Emanuel and Frances coped during the separation. Potts’ declaration of purchase was typical of the county court records of the 1640s in its failure to offer insights into the views of those African peoples who were affected by local slave trading. After having survived the traumas of the Middle Passage, we know that early Africans in Virginia had definite ideas about the transatlantic slave trade.\(^{381}\) We cannot regret sufficiently the inadequacy of early seventeenth documents to tell the story of New World slavery. Scholars have noted that documents alone cannot tell the full story of the New World slavery, its connection to Africa, or the continents role in the development of African American culture.\(^{382}\) Although county records do provide evidence of the many instances when the Driggus family was separated as a result of local slave trading, much still remains unclear.

A survey of the records show that a separation occurred in 1647, when Emanuel and Frances were sold by Pott to Stephen Charlton, leaving their two daughters Elizabeth and Jane, alone again on Pott’s plantation.\(^{383}\) In December 1652, Emanuel and Frances were repurchased by Pott, and the family was reunited back on his plantation.\(^{384}\) In 1657, there was further

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\(^{381}\) Here my work draws on the scholarship of Ralph Austen “The Slave Trade as History and Memory: Confrontations of Slave Voyage Documents and Traditions” that concludes that historical memory can serve as an empirical historical source. I also draw on the work of Michael Gomez that posits that the Middle Passage was not a period of erasure of Africa for those captured and sent to the Americas, but rather the Middle Passage was a period of survival that facilitated bonding and consciousness around their Africaness.


\(^{383}\) Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” 22.

\(^{384}\) Ibid., folio: 81, 114, pages 82, 114.
upheaval in the family when two of the Driggus’s other children, Ann, aged nine or ten, and Edward, aged three or four, were sold. Ann was sold to John Pannell “for ever” for five thousand pounds of tobacco. Edward was said to have been sold to Henry Armitrading “for [his] whole life.” Despite this basic information, the records do not indicate when Emanuel and Frances or their children became free. Several documents suggest that by 1658, when Pott died, the family was free. However, they do not provide documentation about Emanuel and Frances’ perspectives on being enslaved or sold away from their children and friends. As such, we are left to read against the grain of early seventeenth century documents to understand how it was that the Driggus’s or other Black people survived enslavement and separations. In the absence of documents showing the views of African peoples regarding the upheavals suffered under Virginia’s slave system, fictive kinships offer an important framework for some understanding about the outlook of early Africans, information that is absent in colonial documents.

The circumstances that Emanuel and Frances Driggus found themselves in were illustrative of the wild upheavals endured by many enslaved families in the early seventeenth century. Sometimes plantations like Pott’s, Charlton’s, and Sheppard’s were a revolving door of activity—buying, selling, trading, and the hiring out of enslaved women, men, and children to fulfill a variety of personal, economic, and social needs. Recurring separations of families and friends surely reminded early Africans of the dire consequences of the transatlantic slave trade, and it also throws light on the importance of overlapping West African cultural traditions and social

386 Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” 22.
formations to the connectedness of Black persons in seventeenth century Virginia. The threat and reality of separation must have broken down any divisions that may have existed between African peoples, leading to the formation of alliances between disparate groups of Black peoples. Thus, an interest in maintaining some sort of familial associations under such uncertain conditions provided the context for fictive kinships to take root as a modified form of West African lineage systems.

In the wake of the barriers to the maintenance and creation of biological kinships as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, early Africans in Virginia reinterpreted the lineage system, developing fictive mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons, in order to mitigate the trauma arising from sale and separation. In instances where children were separated from their biological parents, Black parents relied on other Black peoples to look after their children. In the case of Emanuel and Frances, the couple depended on a group of surrogate parents to take care of Elizabeth and Jane. We have no way of knowing exactly who assumed the role of mother for the girls while they were apart from their parents. Perhaps it was a woman like the one who cared for Frederick Douglass, “a feeble woman too old for field labor,” or maybe it was a network of providers, female and male, who became acting parents for Elizabeth and Jane. Whatever the arrangement, someone assumed the parental role for the girls. Perhaps it was a consciousness of their own position at the margins of Virginia society that motivated African peoples, who themselves were fearful of being caught in similar circumstances, to assist in the care of a motherless child.

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We do not know for how long Elizabeth and Jane were separated from their parents before Pott purchased them in May 1645. Given their ages at that time, age eight and one, respectively, it is safe to assume that it was for a short period of time. There were occasions though, when the family was separated for an extended length of time. One separation lasted five years, from 1647 to 1652, which in the life of a child is a long time. During this long separation, Elizabeth would have turned fifteen, which meant that she entered puberty and transitioned into a young lady without her parents around. For Elizabeth this reality meant that her surrogate mother would teach her about the changes that her body was experiencing as a young adolescent. The most common lessons in this regard would have revolved around her menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and motherhood.

The enslaved Black peoples on Pott’s plantation were also probably those who integrated Elizabeth into the work force and taught Elizabeth about life under slavery. With her parents having been sold after the 1643 law, which made Black women’s labor taxable, we can assume that, at the very least, Elizabeth’s work duties were not much different from those of a fifteen-year-old boy, Black or White. Her work regime might have entailed lots of chopping and hoeing. Perhaps she received more specialized instructions on crop management and animal husbandry. Maybe her surrogate parents even shared with her some of the horticultural practices that they used in Angola which were modified for the environment of Virginia.

An enslaved girl entering puberty, like Elizabeth, had to be taught skills of self-preservation to prevent her from “falling prey to the licentious Black and White men on Pott’s plantation.”\(^{390}\) Neither of her biological parents could assist her in such matters. Thus any

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\(^{390}\) Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 96.
teachings on how to avoid the sexual overtures of men would have had to come from the women and men of the Black community. The literature on child enslavement argues that enslaved girls and boys had “virtually no childhood because they entered the work place early and as a result were subjected to arbitrary plantation authority, punishments, and separations.” Thus, it was up to surrogate parents to teach children in their care the ways of White and Black peoples.

Jane was only three when her parents were sold. The nature of the parenting provided by her surrogates during the five years that she was apart from her mother and father probably entailed more nurturing given her young age, than it did for Elizabeth. Some enslaved woman on Pott’s plantation mothered Jane for several years, which meant she had to be taught many of the childhood basics, such as bathing, toilet training, and manners, by a surrogate. Jane also probably spent the majority of her time at play. However, as the progeny of an enslaved family she was ultimately under the jurisdiction of Pott even after her parents returned. It was the responsibility of her surrogate parents to teach Jane about the plantation’s pecking order: Pott, his wife, his children, his European servants, and then enslaved Black peoples. Jane had to be instructed that conversations among Black persons were not to be discussed with Whites. Thus, by the time the family was reunited in 1652, Elizabeth and Jane would have been schooled in the particulars of Virginia’s institution of slavery by her fictive parents. As the institution of slavery in Virginia continued to grow, importing enslaved Africans at a rate of about sixty persons a year during this period, increasingly the persons charged with raising Black children would be fictive kin.

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392 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, 93.
The community’s interest in the rearing of Elizabeth and Jane led not only to the formation of fictive kinships, but presumably to the creation of an “underground railroad” of informal communication between Pott’s plantation and Charlton’s that allowed Emanuel and Frances to keep up with their daughters’ development. In the spaces and places between the plantations perhaps women and men found ways to provide regular updates to Emanuel and Frances about how the girls were doing. Maybe the parents occasionally were able to sneak back to visit with the girls without being detected. Conceivably, their interactions were like those of Frederick Douglass’s mother: “very short in duration and at night.” Perhaps the parents had a chance to talk with the girls in the churchyard or along the paths to the parish church. Either way, such networks of communication were undoubtedly part of the environment of enslaved Africans, one that was largely unknown to White persons and, therefore, part of the terrain of the black landscape. Fictive kinships were an investment in the security of Black families against the horrors of the slave trade and, as such, they paved the way for a black space to exist in and around Pott’s plantation.

The bonds that developed between Elizabeth and Jane and their caretakers probably were not undone when their parents returned. Conceivably, their relationship evolved into that of niece-aunt or niece-uncle. Thus, the fluidity of fictive relations created “perpetual kinship” bonds between Black peoples across the plantation landscape, similar to those that existed among the Mbundu peoples of Angola who, while moving in and out of lineage groups, maintained

immutable affinities to their former village.\textsuperscript{396} Any effort to compile a history of early Africans in Virginia must begin by introducing their African cultural practices, before they had contact with Europeans, into any discussion about the various methods Black peoples used to survive oppression and build community in the New World, particularly while in bondage.

Fictive kinships were one strategy born out of an interpretation of their traditional African lineage systems. They allowed free and enslaved people to construct enduring bonds of attachment in the absence of biological family members who were regularly sold. The Driggus family, like other enslaved African families, undoubtedly drew on this idea during their years of bondage as well as while free. As one of the multiple intelligences used to combat enslavement, the formation of fictive kinships allowed early African peoples to better manage within the exploitive institutions of the plantation system. Therefore, we can assume that while Emanuel and Frances were away from Elizabeth and Jane from 1647 to 1652, they felt somewhat at ease knowing that a fictive kinship system, which they were familiar with, was in place.

African lineage systems and the transatlantic slave trade were mutually constitutive explanations for the emergence of fictive kinships in early Virginia. For Black peoples, the familial separation that came with New World enslavement was the political equivalent in pre-colonial West Africa of “social death,” that is, being without kin.\textsuperscript{397} The sale of loved ones impacted the entire Black community, regardless of whether the transaction involved a blood relative. Emanuel and Frances Driggus had the unpleasant experience of witnessing the effect of

\textsuperscript{396} Miller, Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola 45-6.
\textsuperscript{397} Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 21. According to Patterson “social death” is when a slave is natally alienated and liminally incorporated as a marginal person who is dishonored and degraded. Kinlessness in pre-colonial West Africa was a state of detachment from one’s biological family. Miers and Kopytoff, eds. Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives, Chapter One.
the sale of a child in their community. In November 1646, Emanuel and Frances were present when the children of one of their enslaved co-workers, a woman named Marchant, were sold while Pott was in England on business. Pott directed his nephew John to sell Marchant’s daughter and son, Pew and William, to pay off a debt. 398 Although it would be another year before Elizabeth and Jane were separated from their parents, the sale of Marchant’s children was no doubt seared into the consciousness of Emanuel and Frances, illustrating the vulnerability of their family to the avarice of slave traders. Thus, the selling of Black peoples was a reminder of the peril that nearly all descendents of Africa faced during the early decades of the seventeenth century.

Like Elizabeth and Jane, Pew and William were young when they sold away from their mother: Pew was about five years old and her brother William was about three. They were sold to another slaveholder in the area, a man named John Browne. Like Elizabeth and Jane, Pew and William’s nurturing, comfort, and rearing became the responsibility of surrogate mothers and fathers on John Browne’s plantation. Did observing Marchant’s grief prepare Emanuel and Frances for the hurt they would feel in the next year from being separated from their children? Probably not, although, the pain of separation was possibly eased to some degree by the custom of Black adults looking after Black children.

Fictive kinships in the form of Black adults acting as surrogate parents to Black children, with its emphasis on nurturing and rearing those separated from their biological parents, might have been a natural response to the threat of being sold. Nonetheless, the kind of benevolence that fictive kinship brought with it was not only directed at children but also existed between adults, many of whom formed sibling-like bonds with one another while enslaved. Often, these

bonds developed around efforts to obtain one’s freedom or the freedom of one’s spouse and children. Self-purchase was the most common way for enslaved women and men like Marchant and the Driggus’s to be able to free themselves and their children. Usually, the terms of manumission were some combination of extra work, such as hiring out one’s services to another planter and using the proceeds toward self-purchase, or by the sale of livestock and/or crops. Emanuel Driggus probably received assistance from one of his close friends on Pott’s plantation to help finance his and his family’s freedom. Most likely his help came from his friend and a fellow enslaved person named Bashawe Farnando.

The friendship between Driggus and Farnando spanned over a decade and from it we can track how sibling-like kinships developed between adults over time through the ups and downs of enslavement. Their brotherly relationship began in 1645, when Farnando and Driggus were part of the group of enslaved persons Pott brought with him to the Eastern Shore. Farnando and the Driggus’s, as well as Pott’s other enslaved persons and indentured servants all lived on a fifteen hundred acre plot of land in an area of Northampton County called Magotha Bay. In 1658, Pott purchased another thirty-five hundred acres before his death that year. With such large landholdings and holdings of White servants and enslaved persons, Pott probably owned several homes, including servants’ quarters, which was typical of planters who held four or more persons in bondage. It was probably in the quarters that Driggus and Farnando got to know each other really well, perhaps discussing the myriad of changes that they experienced together as enslaved persons. For example, in October 1646, Frances, Emanuel, and Bashawe were used as

399 Ibid., folio 51, p.8. The records indicate that Pott owned at least twelve slaves, Emanuel and Frances Driguss, Bashawe Farnando, and six children of the Driggus’s: Elizabeth, Jane, Thomas, Frances, Edward and Ann, and a woman named Marchant and her two children William and Pew.

400 Whitelaw, *Virginia’s Eastern Shore*, I: 64.
collateral in a debt Pott owed to his cousin, Mary Menifie, the widow of the great planter George Menifie.\(^{401}\) Although their time in bondage with Menifie was short because they were later sold to Pott’s brother-in-law, Stephen Charlton, in March 1647, Barshawe, nonetheless, shared in the trauma of Virginia’s slave system with Emanuel and Frances and, thus, could testify to the obvious hurt and pain the couple felt while separated from their children.\(^{402}\)

Like the time spent in a foxhole during war, going through stints of enslavement together produced bonds and intimacies that broke down any distinctions, such as those of ethnicity, age, or gender. We have no way of knowing about where in Angola that Driggus and Farnando had lived before being shipped out of the port in Luanda or what their ethnic or lineal affiliation was. However, we do know that the experience of enslavement, such as what the two men shared for over a decade while enslaved together on Pott’s plantation, created a perpetual kinship between them in much the same way it did with non-relatives who were brought into a Mbundu lineage group and, over time, came to be thought of as family. The bondage experiences of Driggus and Farnando offer scholars of early American slavery a perspective on social relations between Black adults. These were very different from the alliances formed between free and indentured Whites who mostly came to Virginia with family or to be with family and, thus, for whom the need to create fictive kinships as a survival or resistance strategy was superfluous. However, for persons of African descent, fictive kinships outline the contours of affect between Black persons

\(^{401}\) Ibid., 182. George Menifie was at one time one of the wealthiest men in Virginia. He owned several thousand acres of land and upwards of forty-five European indentured servants and fifteen slaves. “Council and General Court Records, Robinson Transcripts,” 40. According to Warren M. Billings, *A Little Parliament: The Virginia General Assembly in the Seventeenth Century* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 2007), 89., Great Planters held most of the high ranking political positions in the General Assembly; positions such as councilor, or burgess. Great Planters also owned lots of land; usually more than seven thousand acres. Moreover, Great Planters owned roughly seventy-seven percent of all African servants/enslaved persons in Virginia.

\(^{402}\) “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” folio 25, p. 28. Charlton lived about twenty miles to the north of Potts plantation. In 1652, Emanuel, Frances, and Barshawe had returned to the Pott plantation.
enslaved together be it during the Middle Passage or on a plantation. Driggus, perhaps confided his anguish to Farnando at being separated from his children during the short time they were held as collateral by Menefie. Later, when Driggus and Frances were sold to Charlton in 1647, in what ended up being a five-year stretch, maybe the pain of separation was so great that two men began to dream, plan, and seek out the counsel of other Blacks regarding to how to go about gaining their freedom.

Although the records do not include references on Farnando that suggest that he was a husband or a father, it would be a mistake to assume that he had not formed close attachments with other Blacks before he was enslaved by Pott or while on his plantation. Undoubtedly he too felt a sense of loss after being sold. The profound sense of detachment felt by Driggus and Farnando while away from loved ones probably hastened their closeness and propelled them to help each become free.

The regularity in the number of enslaved Black persons being imported into the area between 1635 and 1656 set in motion several changes over the course of the many decades, changes that became important to the formation of fictive kinships namely, enslaved African peoples collaborating in their freedom struggle. In these fictive kinships, the most common cooperation came in the form of pooling resources, livestock and crops, to fund manumission. Driggus and Farnando helped each other in this manner. Ironically, their master, Frances Pott, supplied the men with their first animal, perhaps unwittingly providing the means for them to effect their own emancipation. Upon arriving in Northampton County in 1645, Pott “delivered unto [his] servant Emanuel Driggus a black cow and a red calf forever with all their increase to

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403 Virginia Land Patents, 1623-1660” 41. Two hundred-nine enslaved persons were imported into Virginia between 1635 and 1656.
dispose of in his lifetime or after his death.”\textsuperscript{404} On the same day, Pott also “gave unto [his] Negro Mann Bashawe Ffanndo one red cow calf, and the said calfe is Bashawe’s with its increase forever.”\textsuperscript{405} Driggus and Farnando’s quest for freedom created a brotherly alliance that was precipitated not only by their experiences together in bondage but also by their aptitude for raising livestock and cultivating crops.\textsuperscript{406}

The records do not indicate why Pott bestowed the animals on Driggus and Farnando. Perhaps it was a reward for their hard work, or maybe the men had made an arrangement with Pott, as did many enslaved persons, to secure their freedom using the proceeds from the sale of their animals. If so, then the five years spent together on the plantation of Charlton could have been part of an arrangement between all four of the men, in which Pott hired out Driggus and Farnando to work for Charlton with the stipulation that part of their earnings went towards their manumission. We have no way of knowing for sure, but what we do know is that while with Charlton, the two men continued to accumulate more livestock.\textsuperscript{407} For example, on April 22, 1647, a Northampton County planter named John Roberts sold Emanuel Driggus “one black heifor aged 2 ½…and [likewise assigned a] heifor and all her increase to Barshaw Farnando and his heirs.”\textsuperscript{408}

By 1652, the amount of livestock owned by Driggus and Farnando had grown so large that Pott and Charlton were compelled to acknowledge the legality of the men’s considerable holdings, given the local prohibitions against trading with Black persons. In an affidavit

\textsuperscript{404} “Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Orders, Deeds, Wills, Ect., 1645-1651, Book 3.”
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{406} Breen, “Myne Owne Ground:” Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640-1676, 81.
\textsuperscript{407} “Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Orders, Deeds, Wills, Ect., 1645-1651, Book 3.”
\textsuperscript{408} Ibid., 161.
certifying their awareness of the men’s animal collection, Pott and Charlton professed to the court that their enslaved workers, Driggus and Farnando:

Have cartaine cattle, hogs, and poultreye nowe in their possession the which they have lawfullie gotten, and purchased in their service formelie under the said Capt. Pott, and since augmented and increased under the service of Capt. Stephen Charlton…. [These] are the proper goods of the abovesaid Negroes and…they maye freely dispose of them either in their life tyme or att their death.  

This declaration, admitting that Driggus and Farnando had lawfully accumulated livestock over the course of seven years, lends support to the idea that Pott and Charlton permitted their buildup of cattle. The initial motives for the men’s accumulation of animals are unknown, although one can guess that they were aware of the fact that the sale of their animals could help them buy their freedom. Nonetheless, their collection of livestock over the years shows that Driggus and Farnando possessed the means to buy their freedom. One could imagine the collaboration that ensued between Driggus and Farnando included such decisions as which animals to buy, a cow or a bull, or a calf or a heifer.

The going rate for a ten-year-old cow during this period was around five hundred pounds of tobacco and a young cow with her calf cost about six hundred pounds tobacco. Such prices made self-purchase feasible given that a Virginia mistress Jane Eltonhead charged her enslaved man, Francis Payne, whom I will discuss later in this chapter, “fifteen hundred pounds of tobacco” for his freedom. This price may have been prohibitive if one had to work alone to accumulate this much tobacco. However, by pooling their resources, Driggus and Farnando had a real chance of buying their freedom and the freedom of their family. This was particularly so because between 1645 and 1652 the men had combined their assets to acquire several heads of

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410 Ibid., 149a, 150. Prices for cattle varied according to age and condition of the animals.
411 Ibid.
cattle as well as some hogs and poultry, which at a rate of several hundred pounds of tobacco each, could indeed help to finance their freedom.

If Driggus and Farnando were planning to use the animals to fund their freedom, then the men may have had to be careful not to be too public about their intentions for fear of offending the sensibilities of conservative planters who supported the colony’s “no trade with Negros” policy. The possibility of Driggus and Farnando using their livestock to finance their manumission was clearly on the mind of Pott and may have been what prompted him to file a petition on August, 18, 1654, ordering that the “inhabitants of Northampton County take notice not to truck, trade, buy, sell, or bargain with any of his Negro servants without his consent.”

We get a sense of the general anxiety Pott felt over the potential loss of his slaves in an earlier letter written to his nephew, John, while he was away in England. Needing money to settle a debt, Pott, in 1646, directed John to pay the bill with tobacco or land, but not his slaves. According to Francis Pott, he would “rather parte with any thinge or all I have besides; then with my Negroes.” Knowing this made it all the more crucial for Driggus and Farnando to stick together and play down their intentions of using the animals to purchase their freedom.

We will never know exactly what prompted Pott’s admonition to the residents of Northampton County. However, we do know that many planters relied on the labor of enslaved people to finance their lifestyles. The trade in animals with enterprising Blacks created opportunities for their freedom that upset Virginia’s internal slave trading system, which helps one to understand why Pott may have been anxious about White residents engaging with his

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slaves in this manner. Pott’s directive attests to the progress that African peoples made in the procurement of animals as a means to freedom and independence.

Although much of the development of fictive kinships among the enslaved Blacks can be traced to new standards of familial relationships between adults joined together in the struggle to overcome the deleterious impact of Virginia’s slave trading system, fictive kinships also formed the basis of a cohesive Black community. Fictive kinships provided early Africans in Virginia with a defense against the sale and separation of loved ones and in doing so organized disparate groups of Black peoples around a common goal of freedom. Caring for children and assisting one another in freedom struggles laid the foundation for a united Black community, which expanded throughout the seventeenth century. The recognition that livestock was the currency of freedom encouraged Black women and men to pool the vast agricultural knowledge initially gained in pre-colonial West Africa and then used in Virginia, increasing the probability of their freedom in the process. The growth in enslaved Black peoples arriving in Virginia between 1635 and 1656, meanwhile, compelled women and men to pursue additional avenues for gaining freedom besides the accumulation of livestock.414 As the dominant cash crop of the region, tobacco also became an important commodity in the freedom aspirations of African women and men.

Just as tobacco and slavery went together, so did tobacco and freedom. Tobacco dominated Virginia’s agriculture for most of the seventeenth century, beginning around 1613.415 In 1630, workers harvested four hundred thousand pounds from Virginia tobacco crops and by

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414 “Virginia Land Patents, 1623-1660,” 41. Two hundred-nine enslaved persons were imported into Virginia between 1635 and 1656.
1660, tobacco yields exceeded fifteen million pounds.⁴¹⁶ Tobacco also served as Virginia’s principal currency for much of the century. So much was this so that on March 27, 1637, an Accomack County court ordered all debts to be paid in the form of tobacco.⁴¹⁷ Most African peoples in Virginia hailed from societies steeped in agrarian culture, which meant that many of them were able to master the science of tobacco production rather quickly. In fact, many arrived in Virginia already highly skilled in tobacco culture. In as early as the sixteenth century, enslaved African peoples had “cured tobacco in Cuba, Hispaniola, and the northern coast of Venezuela, and in other Spanish colonies,” so that by the time the first Africans had arrived in the British colony of Bermuda in 1613, Africans had nearly a century of experience in tobacco cultivation under their belts.⁴¹⁸ Ironically, Bermuda’s early rise as a world leader in tobacco production can be attributed to the acumen of African women and men.⁴¹⁹ The aptitude of African peoples in tobacco production was so extensive that the Bermuda “assembly denied Blacks the right to buy, sell, or barter tobacco without the knowledge or consent of their master” for fear that it could undermine the system of slavery.⁴²⁰ The standard set by their long history with cultivating tobacco crops enshrined in many Black people a discourse about freedom that included tobacco.

African people’s facility for agronomics and its use as a New World freedom strategy has its basis in pre-colonial West Africa. Since the fifteenth century, various groups of African

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⁴¹⁶ Horn, Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake, 142.
⁴¹⁷ “County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1640-1645.”
⁴¹⁸ Jarvis, "In the Eye of All Trade: Maritime Revolution and the Transformation of Bermudian Society, 1618-1800", 153-4.; Engel Sluiter, "Dutch-Spanish Rivalry in the Caribbean Area, 1594-1609," Hispanic American Historical Review 28 (1948): 165-96. In Hispaniola, tobacco became a favorite cash crop and was used as the local currency in the late sixteenth century.
⁴¹⁹ Jarvis, "In the Eye of All Trade: Maritime Revolution and the Transformation of Bermudian Society, 1618-1800", 87. Bermuda led Virginia in tobacco exports until 1624.
peoples grounded their social and economic independence around agricultural production. The Balanta peoples of Upper Guinea established a rice production system used in the trading of war captives that ultimately underwrote their independence. In what is now Sierra Leone, some unfree persons in bondage sold crops to purchase their freedom. For instance, some women in the region regularly acted as merchants in their communities, performing many of the tasks required to bring crops to market. At other times, female merchants would initiate trade with the merchants outside of her ethnic group. It was actually rather common for many African ethnic groups to include market-based strategies in their plans to surmount threats to their independence. Thus, the idea that agricultural skills could translate into freedom and opportunity for early Black persons in Virginia overlapped with those in other agrarian societies in West Africa who sought independence through an engagement in agricultural markets.

Tobacco emerged as a potent discourse for Black and White peoples in Virginia in the early seventeenth century who formed their ideals about freedom and enslavement with an eye towards this crucial commodity. Markets were made around the buying and selling of Black peoples using tobacco as the currency. In the 1640s, African females up for sale cost around twenty-five hundred pounds of tobacco. Planter William Burdett’s estate inventory valued “one negro girle about 8 years old at 2000 pounds of tobacco,” which was twice the value of any

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423 Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900* 152.
424 “York County, Virginia Records, 1638-1644.” The cost of enslaved Black men averaged around 2, 700 lbs of tobacco.
one of his White servants. As was mentioned earlier, one of Emanuel Driggus’s daughters, Ann, was sold to John Pannell for a startling five thousand pounds of tobacco. However, in as much as tobacco was the currency used to enslave Black peoples, it also was a key to their manumission. Thus, knowledge about the political economy of tobacco had real consequences for Black Virginians.

The arrival of newly-imported slaves from the Americas during the early decades of the seventeenth century made it all the more likely that Black peoples in Virginia would understand the value of tobacco vis-à-vis their own freedom. Francis Payne, an enslaved African man, who himself was valued at twenty-four hundred pounds of tobacco in an appraisal of his deceased owner’s estate, understood the market value of tobacco and used the proceeds from the sale of tobacco crops to purchase his freedom and, eventually, the freedom of his entire family.

Payne’s road to freedom began nearly twenty years after his arrival in Virginia when, on May 13, 1649, he struck an agreement with his mistress that set the terms of his eventual freedom. The agreement between them read as follows:

I Jane Eltonhead wife to William Eltonhead do covenant and agree to and with francis payne my Negro Servant (hee being parte of the Estate belonging to my children) as followeth first that I the said Jane do resign all my right of this insueing crop that he is now working, warranting him to enjoy the same (crop) quietly for any trouble or molestation that nay or can arise for any persons…Likewise I do authorize him to use the best means lawful be and can for the further bettering of the said crop.

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425 Ibid.
426 Ibid.
428 “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds, & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4,” folio 118.
The document leaves us with the impression that Payne was fully in charge of this land and could do with it whatever he deemed to be suitable to extract the most from it. As such, the record helps us to understand how tobacco was used to bring about freedom for Black peoples in the middle decades of the seventeenth century. Mrs. Eltonhead left Payne in charge of the plantation after she moved to Maryland with her husband William, which attests to her confidence in his agricultural skills. Payne’s adeptness at tobacco farming could have come from his experiences in Bermuda or from time spent in Spanish colonies if he had been enslaved there, as many Africans were, before arriving in Virginia. A more likely scenario was that he learned how to manage tobacco crops in the Angolan region of West Africa from his experience with an agronomic process called “shifting cultivation” that farmers there used to get the most out of their crops.429

In the sixteenth century, the Mbundu peoples of Angola, the region where most Blacks in early Virginia originated, rotated varieties of millet and sorghum crops from one area of land to another every few years in order to refresh the soil and increase harvests. Such practices translated well in Virginia, where over time, tobacco crops drained the soil of its fertility, thereby requiring frequent rotation.430 Most colonists lacked an agrarian tradition and knowledge of tobacco production. In contrast, many enslaved workers had a highly developed set of agronomic skills. With tobacco being the most valuable export of Virginia for much of the seventeenth century, adroit Black farmers like Payne enjoyed a greater amount of latitude in managing the crops, as Payne did with Eltonhead, his master. The horticultural experiences of Black peoples in Western Africa and the Americas around tobacco production represent a

429 Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola*, 44.
430 Ibid., 35.
“diffusion of an indigenous knowledge system” that became an especially valuable resource for negotiating the terms of their freedom.\(^{431}\) For Payne, his adroitness at crop management produced “fifteen hundred pounds of tobacco and six Bushels of corne,” which was enough to pay Eltonhead for his freedom.\(^{432}\) Thus, whether it was rice, tobacco, or livestock, indigenous agricultural systems fueled kinship and community links between African peoples in the mid-seventeenth century while serving as a means for achieving their freedom.

Tobacco cultivation and animal husbandry were valuable in the formation of fictive kinships. An agrarian culture cemented the relationship between Bashawe Farnando and Emanuel Driggus, both of whom used their farming knowledge to facilitate their freedom. The brotherly closeness that developed over the years was wedded through their accumulation of livestock, which occurred around the upheavals of enslavement that they experienced together on Pott’s plantation. In this context, “family” must have meant more than blood to Emanuel and Bashawe. It also included their shared experiences in captivity, such as the sale and recovery of a loved one as well as events that led to their personal freedom. This was how fictive kin relations in Virginia functioned, paralleling the lineage structures that women and men in pre-colonial West Africa experienced that regularly allowed non-relatives to incorporate into the group like family.\(^{433}\)

The success of fictive kinships, especially looking after children, the formation of a Black underground communication network, and adult bonding around the accumulation of livestock and the sale of marketable crops, motivated African peoples to ensure that the gains made in

\(^{432}\) “Northampton County Virginia, Orders, Deeds, & Wills 1651-1654 Book 4.”
\(^{433}\) Miers and Kopytoff, eds. *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, 8.s
their struggle for freedom extended into the next generation. Free Black peoples, for instance, took on a moral and financial responsibility for sustaining the progress made using a range of resistance tactics. By the mid to late 1650s, the responsibilities of formerly enslaved women and men included bequeathing property to each other. A typical example is found in the estate records of Francis Payne. He requested in his 1659 will that his heirs sell his mare colt to Anthony Johnson.434 Another example of wealth transfer between Black peoples also occurred in 1659, when Anthony Johnson’s son, John Johnson, Sr., along with two other African men, John Rogers and Jon Assford, requested in their wills that their heirs sell one of each of their animals and distribute the proceeds “unto John Williams and his heirs.”435 The records do not reveal why the men wanted John Williams to inherit their animals. Maybe they knew of his efforts to purchase his freedom or that of a loved one and knew he did not have the funds, so the men bequeathed Williams some of their livestock to ensure that he and his family would become free. Or perhaps the animals were a form of freedom dues that were meant to jumpstart his life of independence. Either way, committing property to other African persons was an important manifestation of the West African lineage system that blurred the biological connection between heirs and, in the process, further united the Black community around the common goal of freedom.

Wills were an important vehicle that allowed Black persons to project a broad regional West African identity (particularly the Angola region) in the form of lineage systems across the Virginia landscape during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. In its most basic form, wills supplied the framework for the continuation of fictive kinships into the next generation,

435 Ibid., 43.
muddling the lines between biological and fictive family members in the process. In addition, bequeathing property to family, biological or fictive, was the fruit of a life spent struggling against the upheavals of Virginia’s slave trading system. In the 1650s, Anthony Johnson owned roughly three hundred fifty acres of land, several servants, and one slave while in Virginia. After relocating to Maryland in the late 1660s, he likewise acquired several hundred acres of land. Interestingly, he died in the spring of 1670 without a will. Yet, although Johnson died intestate, his wife, Mary Johnson, did make arrangements for the disposition of her modest estate.

On September 3, 1672, Mary Johnson, of Somerset County, Negro, (relict of Anthony Johnson, late of the said county, Negro, deceased), made deed of gift for cattle to her grandchildren, viz; Anthony Johnson, son of John Johnson, Negro, and Francis and Richard Johnson, sons of Richard Johnson. 436

Mary Johnson’s will allows us to see more clearly how inheritance marked a new pattern in the freedom struggles of Black peoples. We can see in her will the degree to which animal transfers facilitated the opportunity for Black independence in the seventeenth century and beyond. Although Mary died sometime in 1682, she left little doubt about her belief in property inheritance as a means to sustain the freedoms she and her deceased husband worked so hard to achieve.

When they had the means, most African peoples embraced wills as a resistance strategy against the growing influence of the international system of slavery to relegate Blacks to indefinite bondage. A 1670 law, explicitly stating that “all servants not being Christians imported into the colony by ship shall be slaves for their lives,” made it difficult for any person

of African ancestry to remain free.\textsuperscript{437} In 1705, Black persons were made chattel through a law that declared that “all negroe, mulatto, and Indian slaves shall be made real estate.”\textsuperscript{438} Such legislation speaks to the urgent need for self-help programs that would mitigate the colony’s growing investment in the lifetime bondage of Black peoples. Moreover, with enslaved Africans arriving in Virginia in increasingly large numbers, over five thousand between 1650 and 1700, fictive kinships and the bequeathing of property would become more important to the maintenance of a cohesive Black community.\textsuperscript{439}

Overlapping webs of familial relations and various other resistance strategies firmly tied Black peoples to one another and to the continent of Africa in a way that began to transform Africans to African Americans beginning in the early decades of the seventeenth century. The focus on family in whatever form, biological or fictive, was not that different from their counterparts in pre-colonial West Africa, who regularly incorporated outsiders into lineal groups with little disruption to the groups cohesiveness.\textsuperscript{440} The concept of fictive kinships, the formation of familial like relations with persons who are not related by blood, created the foundation for unity among disparate groups of African peoples for decades to come. Thus, the degree of cohesiveness between Black peoples in a Virginia increasingly influenced by the development of the international system of slavery cannot be assessed simply by biology. It also resulted from the common condition of enslavement and oppression and the constitutive

\textsuperscript{437} Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, II: 283.
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid., III: 447-62.
\textsuperscript{440} The act of incorporation, used by many pre-colonial West African ethnic groups, involves movement from a marginal and unfree status in the community towards one with greater acceptance and standing. Miers and Kopytoff eds. Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives, 19.
processes used to alleviate them. This too was a product of the burgeoning transatlantic system of slavery.
Conclusion
Early Virginia in the Context of the International System of Slavery

Virginia’s participation in the growing international system of slavery in the early decades of the seventeenth century entailed more than just the act of enslaving persons of African descent. It was a process of replicating the policies and practices of the international community that gave rise to enslavement. Intrinsic to the culture of the evolving international system of slavery were a series of sordid enterprises, such as colonialism, territorial expansion, religious intolerance and persecution, arrogant imposition on indigenous lands, theological justifications for slavery, and racial exclusion, that focused as much on empire building as the act of enslavement.\(^{441}\) The growing popularity of slavery among the rival empires of Spain and Portugal, encouraged England’s entrance into the burgeoning trade that ultimately led to the arrival of the “20 and odd Negroes” in Virginia.

Decades before England entered into the advancing transatlantic slave trade, Spain and Portugal had employed most of the principles of the international system of slavery in West Africa in the early sixteenth century before, during, and after their actual entrance in the slave trade. Portuguese and Spanish lawmakers and bureaucrats acquired new power in this system as agents who paved the way for colonialism and enslavement long before the first African persons were shipped to São Tomé, Brazil, or the West Indies. Confronted by the task of controlling masses of enslaved people, Portugal charted the infrastructural course for how to contain large numbers of human beings, erecting forts, slave castles, and plantations. The construction of spaces large enough to house sizable numbers of enslaved persons meant that temporary European laborers, many of who were outcasts and criminals, were brought in to perform most

\(^{441}\) Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*, 33.
of the manual labor, such as tilling the soil, felling the trees, breaking the rocks, planting the seeds, and harvesting the crops, until they were supplanted by enslaved laborers.

When deciding on the most advantageous way to settle Virginia, England adopted many of the practices developed by Spain and Portugal in the international system of slavery. The social structure of Virginia mirrored the advances in international system of slavery through the built environment. The period between the settlement of Virginia and the arrival of the first groups of enslaved persons, from 1607 through 1619, was shaped by one essential feature that marked its entrance into the rising international system of slavery: the establishment of the colony’s complex plantation system of governance. In the first few years of settlement, Virginia communities were constructed around large plantations with all other building and institutions (homes, churches, and courthouses) seated outward from it. To better manage such a labyrinthine organizational system, each plantation owner was made commander over the community and given jurisdictional authority over the governance of the area. Plantations that employed four or more servants and enslaved persons were designed with separate living quarters for the servants on the plantation to help planters better monitor his servant’s movements. This arrangement mirrored the built environment of other European colonies, like São Tomé, Bermuda, and the West Indies, in that it allowed the plantation owner, like the slave merchant, to better monitor and control the behavior of their indentured servants, enslaved Africans, and other inhabitants.

The role of the church in this setup developed as a consequence of the increased need to control the behavior of recalcitrant laborers. During the early days of settlement, when the risk of keeping such a diverse group of European inhabitants functioning as a cohesive unit loomed
largest, which was, indeed, the challenge of colonialism, Virginia leaders ordered a church to be seated on each plantation. Inside of every church was a local court. Each church had a staff of priests, vestrymen, and churchwardens, who were charged with, among other things, collecting the taxes on servant and enslaved laborers and supervising the day-to-day actives of community residents, including prosecuting any immoral activities.\textsuperscript{442} Despite these efforts at social control, it may have been the fact that large planters and slaveholders were employed as the court’s judges and the fact that former indentured servants were employed as court clerks, that led European settlers to ultimately submit to the authority of the plantation system. If the social position of planters and slaveholders was not enough to promote acquiescence to institutional power, the Church and the Court took great pains to reinforce the symbolic authority of the plantation by conspicuously elevating large planters and politicians over not only indentured servants and enslaved persons, but also over Whites who were less wealthy. The growth and development of Virginia’s institutions, churches, courthouses, plantations, and their bureaucracies produced a politically spatial environment that reflected the values of an expanding international system of slavery, values that facilitated colonialism, enslavement, and the compliance of European settlers, who stood to benefit the most from this social system.

Intrinsic to the growth of the international system of slavery was a new role for European immigrants, both indentured and free. Initially, European indentured servants in Virginia did the work of colonization, including assisting in the subduing of Native populations. A key to luring European immigrants was the creation of a “heroic myth of colonization” whereby hundreds of thousands of adventurous men were asked to risk all they had to find a sponsor to Virginia or

\textsuperscript{442} Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom}, 61.
themselves pay for some of the settlement costs in the hopes of becoming land-rich.\textsuperscript{443}

Eventually many landed good positions, like churchwardens and vestrymen, and some even received low level political appointments, like burgesses. The rhetoric of colonization also created new ways of imagining what it meant to be European in a multi-racial Virginia where identities, such as Christian and English, were juxtaposed to those labeled “savage” and “negro.”

In the first few decades of the seventeenth century, laws discouraged intimacy and trade first with Native groups and then with African peoples, to invoke sharp distinctions in the minds of various classes of Europeans about their place in Virginia’s pecking order. Charges of “lying with a Negro” or “running away with a Negro” were met with punishments intended to shame and humiliate European offenders. Punishments also called for fines, whippings, and increases in terms of service, all in an effort to teach poor Whites their new-found social station in Virginia, that is, below European elites and above Black and Native persons. Even as European servants were sometimes worked as hard as a slave, the temporary nature of their servitude told them that they were not, a fact that reiterated the connection between African slavery and white skin privilege. This reality intensified the colony’s pecking order, protecting European indentured servants from a life of debasement as the lowest-ranked White group in the colony.

By mid-century, increases in the enslaved population, just over fifty in 1625, three hundred fifty-five in 1649, roughly two thousand in 1670, and nearly six thousand by the turn of the century, about half of whom were African-born, translated into better jobs and entry-level political posts for many former European servants.\textsuperscript{444} Despite their low rank in Virginia, the social standing of

\textsuperscript{443} Blackburn, The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800, 220.

\textsuperscript{444} Craven, White, Red, and Black: Seventeenth-Century Virginia, 85-6., Bruce, Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century: An Inquiry into the Material Condition of the People, Based Upon Original and
European workers was, on the whole, elevated as a consequence of an international system that promoted the expansion of European plantation economies in the Americas by using slave labor.

The expansion of European peoples across the Atlantic created the conditions for Virginia’s transition from observer to participant in the progress of the international system of slavery. With the first two shipments of enslaved persons to Virginia in 1619, part of a larger cargo of African peoples who were shared among several colonies in the Americas, including, Bermuda, the West Indies, Barbados, and Jamaica, Virginia joined with other colonies in the international community in importing enslaved African laborers.445 These colonies, in Vera Cruz and the West Indies particularly, were, more than anything, intermediaries in Virginia’s slave-supply network. Global ties to such colonies contributed to Virginia being listed as a port of call along transatlantic slave trading routes. Cargos of enslaved persons were offloaded in Virginia after having sailed directly from Africa or indirectly from Africa after a protracted stay in the West Indies, or from other mainland British colonies.446 It is not surprising, therefore, that Virginia’s role in the growth of the international system of slavery developed out of a web of connections linking it to Africa by way of England and its colonies, and by way of French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies. The emergence of this modern, more globally expansive slave system directly impacted the evolution of slavery in West Africa.447

Throughout the seventeenth century, participation in the explosion of the international system of slavery connected Virginia to the other European colonies that drained West Africa its

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most valuable commodity, its people. The small numbers of enslaved Africans imported into Virginia in the early decades of the seventeenth century did not stop Virginia’s growing appetite for enslaved people throughout the century, nor should it deter our analysis of Virginia’s place in the global pipeline of colonies in the Americas that demanded slaves from West Africa. Elite men pushed Virginia deeper into an ever-expanding transatlantic slave trade with consistent imports of African peoples into the colony-two hundred-nine enslaved persons were imported into Virginia between 1635 and 1656.448 They advised their sons about how to acquire slaves through the international system of slavery. Indeed, acquiring slaves, especially African women, was the means by which intergenerational wealth was produced in early Virginia.

The history of Virginia’s entrance into a developing international system of slavery suggests that we reexamine our assumptions, which hold that the transatlantic slave trade transformed Africa but not early Virginia. Owning slaves signified prosperity among Virginia elites. Enslaved women, men, girls, and boys were sold, willed, and gifted to meet a variety of social and economic needs. Enslavement meant that poor and indentured Whites would have access to jobs that otherwise may not have been available. While the African population in Virginia was relatively small compared to the numbers of Europeans, about two percent of the population in 1650, ten percent in 1670, twenty-five percent in 1700, slavery in Virginia did not develop slowly. In fact, all known records show that the first groups of Black peoples to arrive in Virginia were indeed enslaved and remained in that status for many years, insuring that the gains made by poor and indentured Whites were maintained.449 Such a society did not reflect an isolationist and exceptional Virginia, detached from the slave trade, but an international one,

which historians of early America have written about uncertainly within the context of a far-reaching transatlantic slave trade. However, examining Virginia within an international framework allows us to be more certain in one’s articulations about the colony’s racial character when we recognize that England’s colonial ambitions emerged at a time of European expansion around the world, which included enslavement as one of the important keys to the growth of its imperial power.

Almost from the beginning, early Africans in Virginia recognized the colony’s social structure, its built environment, and local landscape from their experiences with the Portuguese in pre-colonial West Africa. Black people’s responses to Virginia’s social and legal systems shifted as the move towards lifetime bondage intensified. Black persons such Anthony Johnson and his family, Elizabeth Key, and Frances and Emanuel Driggus, and others, used a variety of overlapping social systems and cultural forms indigenous to West Africa to manipulate the bureaucracy of Virginia and in the process, mitigate their oppression. One can identity three types of indigenous West African social systems used by Black persons in early Virginia to resist subjugation and build community, agrarian culture, oral traditions, and lineages. There were not mutually exclusive but rather overlapped in ways that supplied disparate groups of African peoples with the tools with which to alleviate the fallout from the rise in external and internal slave trading. Throughout the seventeenth century, African peoples worked diligently to remain connected to their West African roots and to one another. The period between 1636 and 1655 brought a steady supply of new arrivals, two hundred-nine enslaved persons, who, using oral traditions, helped keep the memory of “Angola” alive in the hearts and minds of Black
Stories were shared and information was exchanged not only about their shared connection to the Angola region but also about the happenings in Virginia. Black women and men communicated knowledge with each other about the ways of White people. They passed down successful strategies about how to exploit Virginia institutions in a way that alleviated, if only temporarily, the degree of their oppression. No matter how bad the situation was, African peoples found ways to remain linked to their homelands using oral traditions.

Although oral traditions were the medium by which African peoples remained connected to each other and their homelands, the sharing of agrarian knowledge systems motivated some to undertake more ambitious acts of resistance such as self-purchase. Animal husbandry and farming skills appear to have been the leading methods for effectuating emancipation. Those women and men who were highly skilled in tobacco production or livestock management were able to earn the funds necessary to finance their freedom as well as that of friends and loved ones late into the seventeenth century. The growing success of African peoples employing this freedom strategy moved a few planters to petition local courts to enforce restrictions against trading with Black persons. Large planters and government officials feared that trading with enterprising persons of African descent would undermine the growing institution of slavery. This legislation prompted populations of Black peoples to seek other means to mitigate the strains of bondage. Those unable to buy their freedom on their own found themselves pooling their resources with other enslaved persons. This process actually produced familial like bonds between women and men who collaborated in their freedom struggles.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, African peoples in Virginia began to link their bondage conditions with indigenous pre-colonial West African social systems in new ways.

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Concern for maintaining stable familial relations in the midst of the upheavals surrounding enslavement, Black peoples came to reconfigure the lineage system to mitigate the upheavals of Virginia’s expanding external and internal slave trading. Such kinships did not necessarily reflect existing biological relations. Rather, African peoples sometimes developed fictive kinships that stood in for the matrilineal and patrilineal arrangements that existed in pre-colonial West Africa. When the ruptures and dislocations associated with local slave trading intensified, a new era of resistance began. Black peoples became motivated to target the basis of their oppression and enslavement by attacking its most destructive feature, the separation of families, using fictive kinships to build new relational connections: fictive mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. Fictive relationships went beyond differences in gender, ethnicity, and religion. These relationships represented a new form of the lineage system that mirrored the ones Black peoples had experience in West Central Africa, which now provided African women and men in Virginia with a model for building a cohesive Black community. Refusing to buckle under the impediments to forming strong family bonds while enslaved, women and men relied on fictive kinships to add stability and a degree of certainty to those suffering from the immense sense of loss as resulting from the sale of a loved one.

Fictive relationships meant that a so-called “family member” was waiting to assume the role of a substitute caretaker at the other end of a slave trade or that emancipation or financial gain could be legitimately had by bequeathing animals from one generation to the next in a manner consistent with matrilineal and patrilineal practices. In many ways, this new sense of family reflected the self-determination of African peoples. Their self-reliance thus reorients our understanding of Black life in early Virginia. Each of the indigenous pre-colonial West African
social systems-oral traditions, agrarian culture, and lineages, functioned in slightly different ways, and yet each overlapped with the other and is necessary for understanding the outlook of Black persons in the early decades of the seventeenth century.

Throughout the development of the international system of slavery, African women and men in early Virginia inhabited multiple worlds. The first, the African world that existed in and around the plantations of early Virginia, which connected the mostly African-born population to one another through a shared connection to the Angolan region and the seaport of Luanda where most were held before being shipped to the Americas. The persons most central to this world were the nearly three hundred women, men, and children living in Virginia through 1640, nearly all of who arrived by way of the Luanda port. For this group, child rearing entailed the reformulation of cultural forms common to the Angola region in order to cope with the environment of the New World. Although the children of African-born parents may have picked up some of the habits of Virginia society, they were, nonetheless, raised with the values of their parents and scrutinized by this standard. As a consequence, these children were more African in their orientation than “American.”

African peoples of early Virginia also inhabited a White world, one that viewed Africa and African peoples as a source of labor with which to fuel its public and private ambitions. Black peoples in Virginia understood the conceits of European persons in this regard and used them to manipulate the churches, plantations, courthouses, and other spaces in and around the plantation. When negotiating in this world, either by enlisting the help of planters or playing one planter against another, a new era in Black resistance emerged, the freedom suit. Black women were

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452 Ibid.
keys to this shift in strategy. Laws, like the 1643 law that taxed African women’s labor at the same rate as men, and the 1662 law that established the status of children based on the condition of the mother, made it increasingly difficult for Black women or her children to become free.\footnote{Hening, ed. *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*, I:242, II:26. The 1643 statute reads in part as follows: “Be it also enacted and confirmed there be tenn pounds of tob’o. per poll & a bushell of corne per poll paid to the ministers within the severall parishes of the collony for all tithable persons, that is to say, as well for all youths of sixteen years of age as vpwards, as also for all negro women at the age of sixteen years...”}

To overcome this barrier, enslaved women and their husbands and partners looked to mediate deals between opposing masters to hasten the freedom of their children. Freedom lawsuits gave voice to a growing consciousness of Black mothers in the early decades of the seventeenth century who needed not only to be aware of the politics of the colony’s legal institutions but also the loopholes in the system so that she could give her child the best chance at freedom. The tension between the two worlds which African persons inhabited, the Black and the White, attributed to the agency of Black peoples in ways that highlight the racial character of the colony during the era.

The history of slavery in Virginia appears to both less exceptional and more global than we expect. The first groups of African persons imported to Virginia in the seventeenth century were part of the slave-supply chain to the Americas that transformed the social and political order of both continents. As Paul Lovejoy puts it, Virginia’s entrance into the rising international system of slavery occurred because Africa was an area of slave supply.\footnote{Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa, Second Edition*, 21.} Although slavery was actually a feature in pre-colonial West African society, its characteristics were more dynamic than Western conceptions of the term. It was just one of many forms of unfreeness, such as
pawns and concubines that allowed people to transfer from one social group to another. Some of the special features of “slavery” in the African context included:

the idea that slaves were property; that they were outsiders who were alien by origin or who had been denied their heritage through judicial or other sanctions; that coercion could be used at will; that their labour power was at the complete disposal of a master; that they did not have the right to their own sexuality and, by extension, to their own reproductive capacities; and that the slave status was inherited unless provision was made to ameliorate that status.455

When the transatlantic slave trade erupted in the fifteenth century, the indigenous African system of slavery competed with the production of trade slaves. Here is where colonies like Virginia make their entrance. European demand for slaves, “and only slaves,” produced a situation in which slavery became increasingly important to the West African economy.456

For African communities to meet this demand, more and more slaves had to be produced, making slavery a more prominent feature of African society rather than a peripheral one. The Kongo/Angola region of West Central Africa and the Bight of Benin, the two largest sources of slaves to North America during the seventeenth century, were drained of over one hundred twenty thousand persons and over nine thousand persons, respectively in the first half of the century, in which Virginia played a small, but nonetheless important part.457 When Virginia’s leaders were settling parts of North America, they drew upon concepts from the growing international system of slavery, such as colonialism, the conquering of indigenous lands, subduing Native peoples, and the exploitation of African labor to articulate their economic and political strategy. Virginia Company officials also looked to the writings of European travelers

455 Ibid., 1.
and promoters of investment like Richard Hakluyt and John Lok to inform their pre-colonization and pre-enslavement tactics. This history is necessary for understanding the reality of an early Virginia connected to the rise of the international system of slavery. Thus Virginia, its political structure, its laws, its religion, its connections to other colonial powers, and its links to West Central Africa, all provide the framework for understanding both Virginia and African peoples within the context of the international system of slavery that was rapidly advancing during the early decades of the seventeenth century.

Many elements of the international system of slavery that were present in the Virginia of the early seventeenth century persisted into the eighteenth century. For example, the number of slave disembarkations in Virginia not only continued but increased fivefold, the persistence of cohesive Black communities and African cultural traditions became even more pronounced and larger percentages of former indentured servants obtained political and judicial appointments, expanding the number of White political dynasties and patronage positions into succeeding generations. However, much about Virginia’s role in the expansion of the international system of slavery did change in the eighteenth century, namely, the passage of the 1705 slave codes that made enslaved persons chattel, a fact that makes the turn of the century a useful measure to observe the historical arc of the growth of the slave trade in the region. Early in the eighteenth century, slave rebellions changed in character as the importation of enslaved persons expanded across the regions of the North American mainland. Our understanding of slave life improved as first-person accounts of African life and the Middle Passage, such as Olaudah Equiano’s 1789 autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, gave voice to the millions who endured the Middle Passage and the brutality of
enslavement. While Virginia’s population of African-born peoples in the eighteenth century decreased to less than fifty percent, the first generation American-born Black persons were still raised by native African parents.\textsuperscript{458}

Changes in the makeup of Virginia’s European population in the eighteenth century also occurred as the slave exports to the New World grew to include a wider region of West Africa, namely, the Gold Coast and the Bight of Biafra, leading to greater job opportunities and living conditions. During the eighteenth century, European indentured servitude was nearly obsolete as a result of increases in slave imports and the expansion of territories used in the procurement of slaves.\textsuperscript{459} Moreover, the majority of Virginia’s European population was Virginia-born, and child mortality fell from thirty-nine percent to thirty-three percent.\textsuperscript{460} The consequence of a society of free White Virginians with mostly American origins who came of age after the enactment of Virginia’s 1705 slave codes was an overall increase in the number of slaveholders. Seventy-two percent of householders between 1733 and 1790 owned at least six slaves.\textsuperscript{461} The decline of European immigrant labor and the increase in slaveholders meant that the majority of White men became landowners during the eighteenth century. Landownership was the ultimate symbol of freedom given that the English government insisted on restricting voting rights to men who owned land. The combinations of landowning and slaveholding along with the

\textsuperscript{460} Walsh and Menard, “Death in the Chesapeake: Two Life Tables for Men in Early Colonial Maryland.”
\textsuperscript{461} Nancy L. Oberreider, “A Sociodemographic Study of the Family as a Social Unit in Tidewater, Virginia, 1660-1776” (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1975), 202-3.
enfranchisement of more White men became the ingredients for the republican ideals that framed the American Revolution.⁴⁶²

In the early seventeenth century, the growth and development of Virginia and its institutions can only be understood in the context of the growth and development of the international system of slavery. English observations of Spain’s and Portugal’s actions in the Angolan region of West Central Africa inform the context for its settlement of Virginia. Interactions with Vera Cruz, the West Indies, and Bermuda supplied early Virginia with its initial shipments of slaves and facilitated its place as a port of call along the transatlantic trade route. Indeed, the rising international system of slavery reveals an early Virginia that is more connected to the growth of the transatlantic slave trade than the existing historical literature on early America articulates. Perhaps increased attention to this connection might suggest new questions about “Angolan” peoples in Virginia during the first few decades of the seventeenth century.

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