

SLAVERY WHITE:
A STUDY OF RUNAWAY SERVANTS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY VIRGINIA

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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The plight of indentured servants is an overlooked drama of the American past. The history of servants in America has been distorted by current scholarship that tends to favor racial slavery. The world is uncomfortable with the concept of whites in bondage, and even more so, whites enslaving other whites. Modern scholars who are not interested in protecting the sensitivities of modernity, such as Abbot Smith, Aaron Fogelman, and Edmund Morgan, are few and far between. Other academics who are aware of the treatment of poor whites fear that acknowledging a shared experience between blacks and whites would diminish the legacy of racial slavery. The preference of slavery studies has come at the expense of poor Europeans whose conditions were comparable to enslaved blacks. A simplistic myth of indentured servitude has been perpetuated throughout American history as a consequence. A lower class European who could not afford the price of the trans-Atlantic voyage entered into an indentured contract to labor for seven to twelve years. Upon completing the conditions of the contract, the servant was granted a plot of land upon which to build a new life in British

America. In an effort to shatter this misconception, *Slavery White* will explore the experience of indentured servants in eighteenth-century Virginia.

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Dedication

To my family.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1607 and 1800, approximately seven hundred thousand Europeans immigrated to British North America. Two-Thirds of those who crossed the Atlantic were indentured servants, individuals who for the cost of the passage to the New World bound themselves to employers for three to seven years, if not longer. Most indentured servants voluntarily entered into contracts. Others, like convicts and felons, were compelled to render labor. Apprentices entered into indentured contracts in exchange for learning certain skills.¹

A Felon's Story: James Revel's Life in Early Virginia

Life for the "poor and unhappy felon," James Revel, began as all men who fall into wickedness: the darling son of loving parents.² Born sometime around 1652 of poor but "honest parents," Revel grew up near Temple Bar. Temple is that point in London where Fleet Street becomes the Strand and where the city planners erected a barrier to regulate trade.³ Temple Bar attracted an assorted lot of peculiar subjects from peasants to artisans, beggars to drunkards, and vendors to peddlers. Despite the dangers of city life, Revel

¹ Aaron Fogelman, "From Slaves, Convicts, and Servants to Free Passengers: The Transformation of Immigration in the Era of the American Revolution," *Journal of American History* 85.1 (June 1998): 43-45.

² James Revel, "The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account of His Fourteen Years Transported at Virginia in America," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 59 (1948): 180-194. JSTOR, www.jstor.org.

³ "Temple Bar," The City of London, accessed: January 28, 2014, <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/about-the-city/history-and-heritage/our-buildings-in-the-city/Pages/Temple-Bar.aspx>.

managed to walk “for some years on virtues path.” Though of modest birth, Revel received instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics until he “aged thirteen years.” The Revels “took a great delight” in their only child, and with the hope that he would live a comfortable life, they bound him out to a tinsmith in Moorfields.⁴

In the wake of the Great Fire of 1666, the streets of Moorfields became a hub for a variety of wayward persons. Open-air markets, shows, and vendors sprouted out among makeshift tents, giving the place the appearance of a grand carnival. In a short time, structures and homes near or within Moorfields became an oasis for highwaymen, pickpockets and prostitutes, the poor, the sexually perverse and deviant. These temptations proved to be too much for the young boy. Shortly after arriving, James Revel yielded to the lures of the streets.⁵

Although he did not know it at the time, this was the beginning of Revel’s tragic tale as an indentured servant. He fell into wicked company; he “rov’d about the streets both night and day” with a gang of thieves and filled his parent’s “hearts with grief and woe.” Though his master and mistress “lik’d [him] well” and provided “food for the belly, and cloaths for the back,” he repeatedly ran away. Exasperated, his master might have advertised for the boy’s return to his care. He more than likely *published* a manuscript notice in a public space, if not in the newspapers of the day. However, such gestures of paternalism from his master and parents inspired little in the way of deference. The young Revel forsook a comfortable home for a life of vice. Strong liquor banished any thoughts of “fear and dread, and great

⁴ Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon,” 189.

⁵ “Moorfields and Finsbury,” *Old and New London: Volume 2* (1878), pp. 196-208. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=45091>. Date accessed: 29 July 2014.

uneasiness” that he might have had as he stalked the streets of Moorfields preying on the weak and innocent, fighting among rival gangs, and robbing the poor.⁶

But Revel and his young gang members did not evade justice for long. During one of the gang’s escapades, authorities picked up one of them. Since “thieves can never one another trust,” the apprehended youth implicated his partners in crime. In this manner, Revel and the rest were taken up and put in a local jail. Not long after their arrest, they stood before the judge. Three of his vile companions were hanged. Even though Revel was not the model son and steadfast Christian he used to be, he was new to the art of mischief. The courts pitied the young man and offered him a choice: to die quickly at the gallows, or slowly toil in the tobacco fields of Virginia as an indentured servant.⁷

Though he professed “I [did] much rather chuse to die than go,” Revel chose the latter. Shortly after being sentenced, he boarded a convict vessel destined for America. In a few days they had lost the sight of England. While en route, James and his fellow convicts—“threescore” in number—were “us’d well” by the ship’s Captain and his crew. To prevent rebellion they were kept below. Five perished during their journey of either malnourishment or disease. Their bodies were tossed overboard “into the Ocean wide.” For “seven Weeks and more,” they endured the vile stench of the vessel, an odious combination of urine, sweat, feces, and vomit, made worse by the lack of clean clothing and the closeness of the quarters in which they lived.⁸

After arriving in Virginia, James’s ordeal continued. Once on shore, he and his crewmates were refreshed; in other words, they were prepared for sale. So as to ensure

⁶ Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon,” 189.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

successful transactions, James and his party were given clean linens to wear. Their faces were shaved; their wigs were combed. The *disgraced* women were separated from the men.⁹ Those who were found sickly, despite being given slightly better rations shortly after arriving, were prepared for sale by using a thick mixture of water and oats or ground corn as a salve to conceal the horrors of many trans-Atlantic voyages: dysentery. So began James Revel's fourteen years transportation to Virginia as an indentured servant.¹⁰

The Overlooked Story: A Historiography of Indentured Servitude

Save for the work of a few scholars, the plight of indentured servants like James Revel is an overlooked drama in American history. Scholarship on bondage in America tends to favor slavery studies. As Robert C. Davis pointed out in his recent study of Christian and Muslim slavery in the early-modern Mediterranean, the word slavery is associated primarily with the Trans-Atlantic institution. Put another way, slavery is principally the tragic story in which millions of Africans were forced to labor in the New World. Servitude, however, is a different matter. Because most servants entered into contract with masters, the brutal politics of servitude is disregarded. Furthermore, Davis observed "the doubts and disdain that many modern scholars expressed in dealing with European enslavement narratives may tell us more

⁹ Transported servants, especially convicts, held few, if any, rights and privileges aboard ships. Revel's reference to women being separated from the men is a light hint at the sexual assault women faced during the trans-Atlantic voyage.

¹⁰ The validity of James Revel's account remains a subject of question in colonial American history. John Melville Jennings attempted to authenticate the text in 1948. He determined that Revel arrived prior to 1671, before the 46-year ban on felon transport and the dissolution of Rappahannock County into Richmond and Essex. Jennings concludes that the multiple place-names and travel routes mentioned suggests that the text was authored by someone familiar with Virginia. Also, he contends that the narrative is not overdrawn or dramatic; the scenes depicted present a realistic look at life for Virginia servants. "The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account of His Fourteen Years Transported at Virginia in America," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 59 (1948): 180-194. JSTOR, www.jstor.org.

about our present-day mind-set than about the actions and experiences of the past. We are, by and large, uncomfortable seeing White Europeans as anything other than dominators of this historical era. Our masters [sic] narratives of the Early Modern, Atlantic world, built on the foundation of colonialism and the enslavement of Blacks by Whites, has little or no place for White Europeans as victims.”¹¹

Among the scholars who have not overlooked indentured servitude is James Curtis Ballagh, whose *White Servitude in the Colony of Virginia* (1875) is probably the earliest study of indentured servitude in America. Ballagh noted that politics had been the primary interest among pre-modern colonial American history scholars; this preference came at the expense of “many interesting social and economic developments.”¹² Ballagh utilized an extensive number of primary sources in an attempt to get at those neglected developments, including the Virginia Company of London records, the General Court of Virginia records, and various “documents, correspondence, orders, instructions, proclamations, laws by the Company, [and] Governor’s commissions.”¹³

Ballagh argued that indentured servants were primarily free persons from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland who left their homelands with the desire to “better their condition, but were too poor to bear the charges of their transportation.”¹⁴ Once settled into their new lives, indentured servants contributed to the social and economic development of America and greatly benefited England and other portions of Europe by providing a solution to the problem of what to do with the vagrant, poor, and unemployed. Servitude in British

¹¹ Robert C. Davis, *Holy War and Human Bondage: Tales of Christian-Muslim Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), 11-12.

¹² James Curtis Ballagh, “White Servitude in the Colony of Virginia: A Study of the System of Indentured Labor,” in *Historical and Political Science*, ed. Herbert B. Adams (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1895), 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

America matured from an informal system to a formal enterprise tied to the economic and social development of the colonies. The practice originated with the Virginia Company “disposing apprentices and servants to planters on their agreeing to reimburse the Company for the expense of the servant’s transportation.”¹⁵ As the practice solidified into a formal system, masters’ and servants’ duties and rights were codified into law. Towards the late eighteenth-century, the institution slowly declined and gave way to black slavery.¹⁶

Since Ballagh, there have been few modern historical treatments of indentured servitude. Abbot Emerson Smith’s seminal work, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America 1607-1776*, is the first modern study on the subject. Smith examined “the white people who went to the British colonies in North America and who, because they were unwilling or unable to pay the cost of their own passage [sic] became bond servants for a period of years to some colonial masters who paid it for them.”¹⁷ To explicate the lives of indentured servants, criminals, and redemptioners, he turned to the Virginia Company records, and indentured servant registries from Bristol, Middlesex, Guildhall, London Guildhall, and Pennsylvania. He also delved into the colonial office papers, state and Privy Council papers, parliamentary proceedings and judicial records in England, and other sources.

From this vast pool of materials, Smith concluded that indentured servitude was essentially “a workable [though at times illegal] means of supplying white settlers and cheap labor.”¹⁸ Servants were cheap because they were riffraff from the lowest rungs of English

¹⁵ Ibid, 43.

¹⁶ Ibid, 65 and 90.

¹⁷ Abbot Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America 1607-1776* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1971), 3.

¹⁸ Ibid, 306.

society, that is “convicts from the jails transported instead of being hanged...rogues, whores, vagabonds, cheats, and rabble of all description.”¹⁹ Despite their criminal past, indentures were a useful lot, without whom the early settlements in the New World would not have succeeded. Despite their lowly place in the minds of their social betters, Smith contended that “one in ten was a sound and solid individual, who would if fortunate to survive his ‘seasoning,’ work out his time, take up land, and wax decently prosperous.”²⁰

Edmund Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom* also focused on indentured servitude and particularly the role it played in the development of British North America. While A.E. Smith’s study examined servitude throughout the colonies, Morgan limited his to seventeenth-century Virginia, the largest of Great Britain’s colonies overseas. Like Smith, Morgan argued that indentured labor played a vital role in the early history of the colony. Besides addressing issues of overcrowding in England, the institution of labor provided the crown a useful economic base for its overseas enterprises. Between 1607 and 1667, indentured servitude made rich a handful of men in the tobacco colony, a group Morgan characterized as the grandees or the gentry of Virginia.²¹

The colony’s dependence on indentures also marked an important development in the history of labor in America. Morgan departed from Ballagh’s assertion that white servitude died out by the eighteenth-century, and used Nathaniel Bacon’s rebellion of 1676 as the end date for indentured servitude and the rise of black slavery. In the wake of Bacon’s Rebellion, Morgan noted, the gentry that had grown rich on cheap white labor had also grown fearful of their increasing numbers. In the decades that led to the uprising that included many

¹⁹ Ibid, 3.

²⁰ Ibid, 301.

²¹ Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 292.

indentured servants, the colony's gentry began to distrust indentures, many of whom they thought were a dangerous and rowdy group who could potentially upset their power, or worse, challenge their authority in the colony. With the trifecta of failed tobacco prices of the 1630s and 40s, lowering mortality rates, and what seemed to be a shortage of land, a stage was set in which indentured servants' demand for land would push them to rebel against those who wielded power in the Chesapeake.²²

These problems culminated in Bacon's Rebellion and in turn signaled the emergence of racial slavery in Virginia. In the shift from white servitude to black slavery, Morgan argued that a paradox emerged, one in which freedom and slavery became wedded to one another, as those with power and influence relied on forced labor to ensure their standing in society. Old fears and prejudices of white labor ebbed as increasing numbers of African slaves replaced indentured servants as the economic engine of the colony. With a permanent underclass in place, many of the anxieties that the gentry once felt toward the landless, poor European immigrants were projected onto the Africans and were amplified on account of their skin color. Racism emerged and became a defining characteristic of the new labor order driving the economy in the Chesapeake. Ultimately, in their dependence on black labor, the gentry achieved simultaneously unbridled freedom and wealth.²³

Like Morgan and A.E. Smith, Warren Smith focused on indentured servitude, but in colonial South Carolina. In his *White Servitude in Colonial South Carolina*, he contended that scholars—namely, Arthur Henry Hirsch, Verner W. Crane, Robert L. Meriwether, and Abbot Emerson Smith—had overstated the assumption that slavery degraded the need for white labor in the lower South and that indentured servants did not represent a serious factor

²² Ibid, 158, 204, 292, 405.

²³ Ibid, 331, 381, 386.

in the growth and stability of the colony. Most of these assertions are based on the assumption that the large quantity of black slaves signified the preference of black labor over white labor. Warren Smith's work attempted to disprove this widely accepted idea, and illustrate that while there were not "as many indentured servants in South Carolina as there were in Virginia or Maryland...they did constitute [nonetheless] an important factor in the growth of the colony."²⁴

Where A.E. Smith utilized sources from both sides of the Atlantic, Warren Smith worked exclusively with primary sources from South Carolina, including *Cooper's Statutes at Large*, runaway servant advertisements featured in *The South Carolina Gazette*, vestry books and parish registries, warrants for land grants, and various state records.²⁵ Combined with an extensive bibliography of secondary literature, W. Smith identified poor protestant Europeans as the "largest and most important group of white indentured servants" and noted the three factors driving the need for their labor.²⁶ First, the implementation of the head-right system spurred the importation of white servants. Priority of land allotments went "first to freemen who would immigrate; second, to those who would bring in others (including servants and slaves); third to servants for their own account after they had served their time."²⁷ The second and principal reason for their transportation was "the demand for the labor."²⁸ As South Carolina planters turned to African slave labor in their fields, the demand

²⁴Warren B. Smith, *White Servitude in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1961), ix.

²⁵ Vestry books are the records of service held in local churches.

²⁶ W.B. Smith, *White Servitude in Colonial South Carolina*, 44.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 19.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

for skilled and semi-skilled white servants increased. “The third reason for servants was for protection” as a result of increasing tensions with the Spanish in Florida.²⁹

The next major text regarding indentured servitude was David W. Galenson’s *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis*. Galenson’s entry into the historiography of indentured servant studies marked a departure from the traditional method of utilizing social history to study servitude in British America. While Warren Smith, Edmund Morgan, and Abbot Smith used primarily archival sources, his study was the first economic analysis of the system “aimed at establishing the characteristics of a large indentured system...[and analyzing] the functioning of the transatlantic market for servants.”³⁰ Based on a collection of six servant registration lists from London, Liverpool, and Bristol from 1654 to 1775, he created a complex portrait of indentured servitude in America. Although the data is incomplete, he estimated that approximately three-quarters of the European population in North America were indentures.³¹ Before the mass importation of African slaves, unfree or semi-free white laborers were the economic backbone of many southern colonies. But as the colonist’s economic needs changed over time and the cost of passage decreased, the need for white servants and the indenture system diminished. White labor was slowly replaced with black labor.

Using Ira Berlin’s temporal and spatial model, Kenneth Morgan’s work, *Slavery and Servitude in Colonial North America*, examined the relationship between indentured

²⁹ Ibid, 27.

³⁰ David W. Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 4.

³¹ Ibid, 173.

servitude and slavery from 1600 to 1800.³² Specifically, Morgan explored the transition from servitude to slavery and the paradox of slavery and freedom in the Revolutionary era. K. Morgan disputed Edmund Morgan's thesis that "Bacon's Rebellion rocked the social fabric of white society, and that the demand for great imports of blacks reflected fears in the Chesapeake about the white underclass."³³ Instead, Kenneth Morgan ascribed to the argument advanced by David Galenson that the Atlantic labor market and the fluctuating "supply and demand...plus the increased availability of African slaves" explained the shift from indentured to slave labor.³⁴

Russell Menard's *Migrants, Servants, and Slaves: Unfree Labor in Colonial British America* examined the demographic experience of servants and slaves in the Chesapeake and South Carolina. Menard looked at the transition from indentured servitude to African slavery with a comparative analysis of demographic conditions between indentured servants and slaves. His central argument was that the transition from white to black labor was an economic process driven by changes in the labor supply. He ultimately concluded that statistically, life for "slaves and recently freed servants was not as different as one might expect." Like Kenneth Morgan, his thesis argued against Edmund Morgan's thesis, specifically that the transition of labor was a cultural process influenced by social instability and elite fear created by Bacon's Rebellion. Menard arrived at this conclusion by analyzing

³² See: Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (1980): 44-78.

³³ Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and Servitude in Colonial North America: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 37.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 37 and 49.

labor markets in the Chesapeake and South Carolina. His work also relied heavily on secondary literature to support his thesis.³⁵

While Kenneth Morgan disputed the work of Edmund Morgan, more recent studies of indentured servitude supported the paradox argument. Don Jordan and Michael Walsh's *White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain's White Slaves in America*, for example, continued the discourse on indentured servitude pioneered by Edmund Morgan. *White Cargo* traces the evolution of the indentured system in which tens of thousands of Englishmen and women were held like chattel in Virginia and Maryland from the 1600s to the late 1700s. Jordan and Walsh argued that class played an important role in the history of white slavery. Servitude in America was driven by Britain's fear of being overwhelmed by the poor and vagrant. Anthony Parent's study concurred. In his *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740*, he too examined the gap between Bacon's Rebellion and the Revolutionary period. Parent, however, challenged "the generally accepted belief that the shift to racial slavery was an 'unthinking decision' on the part of planters who were responding to labor market forces."³⁶ In his view, planters consciously turned to African slave labor. Confronted with irregular shifts in the market, they plotted to enslave African people partly because of deep-seated racism and partly because slavery was economically advantageous to them.

³⁵ Russel R. Menard, *Migrants, Servants, and Slaves: Unfree Labor in Colonial British America* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001) vii and viii.

³⁶ Anthony S. Parent, *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2.

Absent from these studies about indentured servitude are the numerous individual stories concealed in advertisements for runaway servants. For example, while Abbot E. Smith's *Colonists in Bondage* provided an insightful analysis regarding servants transported to America, which showed how they were forcibly coerced in many instances, he omitted from his analysis a discussion of resistance and a more direct treatment of those instances in which servants rebelled by absconding. The same is true of Edmund Morgan, Warren Smith, David Galenson, Kenneth Morgan, Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, and Anthony Parent's studies. James Curtis Ballagh briefly touched on runaways and the legal context in which servants lived their lives. However, he failed to expand on how the legal and social constraints on servants influenced their lives and informed their decisions to abscond. Except for Kenneth Morgan, all studies revealed a similar portrait of indentured servitude.

In various parts of British North America, colonial grandees turned to poor white laborers to meet their needs. Like James Revel, some indentures were petty criminals who were offered a choice of death or bondage. Instead of death, they agreed to bind themselves to a master for a term of years. While many servants saw the New World as a prison, others saw it as a land of promise. Regardless of their circumstances or how they envisioned America, all servants toiled for the prospect of land ownership at the end of their contracts. Men, women, and children willingly sold themselves to planters who desperately needed their help, for a better life. However, a third group of indentured servants had no choice; those persons were tricked or kidnapped, and sold into bondage.

Once in America, the promises of the New World gave way to reality. Some servants wrote home expressing doubt. "This is to let you understand," Richard Frethorne wrote to his parents in 1623, "that I your child am in a most heavy case by reason of this country, [which]

is such that it caused much sickness, [such] as the scurvy and the bloody flux and diverse other disease, which maketh the body very poor and weak.”³⁷ Since his arrival in Virginia, he noted, his diet consisted mainly of “a mess of water gruel and a mouthful of bread and beef.”³⁸ Writing over twenty years later, James Revel endured a similar situation. By his own account, his primary staple had been ground corn. Like Frethorne, he too received harsh treatment from his master. Shortly after arriving, Revel was inspected like a horse, purchased by a grim old Man, and transported to his property in the town of Wicocomo located near the Rappahannock River in tidewater Virginia. In his transition from British subject to lowly bondservant, Revel’s European clothes were taken from him and he was given “a hop-sack frock” to wear.³⁹ He worked tobacco from sunup to sundown alongside the five transported felons and “eighteen Negroes.” When he became sick he was still forced to work. Although he was mistreated by the first of two masters to whom he belonged, Revel chose not to run, likely because doing so would have added more time to his contract. “And if we...run away,” he explained, “for every hour we must serve a day; For every day a Week...For every week a month, for every month a year.”⁴⁰

Though James Revel chose to persevere and not abscond, other servants fled. This thesis explores their stories which were captured in the runaway advertisements that appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* between 1736 and 1800. Contrary to the work of Morgan and others who have claimed that Bacon’s Rebellion marked the quick end of indentured servitude and Aaron Fogleman’s recent study in which the American Revolution symbolized the death

³⁷ Richard Frethorne, “Letter to His Father and Mother, March 20, April 2 & 3, 1623,” in *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, ed. Susan Kingsbury (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), 4: 58-63.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Felon,” 190.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 190-191.

knell of unfreedom in America, this thesis will argue that that is not the case. In the wake of Washington's victory at Yorktown, Virginia servants continued to abscond. Unlike the handful of indentured servants who wrote back, or the few, like James Revel, who managed to make it home and tell their stories, the notices masters placed in the *Virginia Gazette* documented the efforts of numerous servants who adamantly protested their condition. Many servants thought their plight was no different than their African comrades with whom they worked alongside. James Revel certainly thought so.⁴¹

Chapter One will examine indentured servitude as a social and legal institution in early Virginia. Similar to other parts of the English-speaking world, servants enjoyed some privileges but fewer rights. In this environment where they were considered part property and part free, many servants rebelled against their owners and their lower status. Chapter Two will explore the precarious nature of early Chesapeake life for indentured servants in which everyone played a part in a pervasive culture of surveillance. Whether colonial Virginians owned servants or not, they observed their neighbors and their fellow Christians with suspicious eyes. In this climate of constant alarm, hair and body marking signified status. This chapter will also explore how this culture of surveillance manifested itself in the colony's public discourse. Chapter Three will create a profile of the runaway servant using primarily the advertisements masters had posted in the *Virginia Gazette* from 1736 to 1789. Together, these chapters challenge the assumption that indentured servitude disappeared after the American Revolution, debunk the idyllic view of indentured servitude as a simple labor system in which people of European descent worked for a time and gained land afterward, and refute the idea that racial slavery emerged in a vacuum.

⁴¹ Fogelman, "From Slaves," 45.

CHAPTER ONE
LIFE BEFORE FLIGHT: INDENTURED SERVITUDE IN THE COLONIAL
CHESAPEAKE

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most indentured servants lived proscribed lives. This explains why many servants protested with their feet. Prior to James Revel's transportation to Virginia, indentured servants were considered semi-free, and therefore, simple chattel. Despite Abbot Emerson Smith's contention that they were to be treated as fellow Christians, humanely and "protected against arbitrary and unnatural cruelties," the statutes passed in the Virginia colony told a different story; a story in which indentured men, women, and children, enjoyed few liberties.⁴² As Revel observed, "We and the Negroes both alike did fare."⁴³ In other words, save for the slightly different treatment of African and African-American slaves, white servants were not treated as fellow Christians. Instead, they endured many unnatural cruelties.⁴⁴

Lawful Subjects

Most servants lived in a cage, a prison constructed without walls. In James Revel's Virginia, servitude was a prison built on the rule of law. The "Laws," he remembered, "are so

⁴² A.E. Smith, *Colonists in Bondage*, 234.

⁴³ Revel, "The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon," 180-194.

⁴⁴ A.E. Smith, *Colonists in Bondage*, 234.

severe” and rigorously enforced, servants were “much kept under and to stand in awe.”⁴⁵ For those who crossed the Atlantic after Revel’s time, life in Virginia seemed even harder.

The earliest laws explicitly dealing with servants were passed in 1623. The General Assembly demanded obedience to superiors as a matter of law. The Assembly declared that “no person within this colony...[should] presume to be disobedient to the present government, nor servants to their private officers, masters, or overseers at their uttermost perills.”⁴⁶ But just as a servant’s life was proscribed by law, so too were the responsibilities of his or her master. The law required that masters provide their servants with a “compotent dyett, clothing and lodging.”⁴⁷ In addition to meeting their servant’s material needs, masters were responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of every individual within the household. To ensure that Virginia would be a Christian colony, the Assembly allowed all matters concerning the Church to “respectively be referred to their owne ordering...as they shall think fit.”⁴⁸ All Virginians were to keep the Lord’s Day holy; however, certain masters failed to observe the Sabbath and ordered servants to work the fields on this day. At the insistence of the Church, the Assembly instituted legislation to ban servants from engaging in any form of labor on the Lord’s Day and required their attendance during weekly service. Masters who failed to honor the Sabbath were fined one hundred pounds of tobacco.⁴⁹ As a result, the relationship between masters and servants was as closely tied to the local parish as it was to the courts.

⁴⁵ Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon,” 192.

⁴⁶ William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of Laws of Virginia from the First Session of Legislature to the Year 1919* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), 1: 128. Hening’s Statutes at Large will henceforth be cited as SAL.

⁴⁷ SAL, 2: 118.

⁴⁸ SAL, 1: 433.

⁴⁹ SAL, 1: 433.

The relationship between masters, their servants, and the church was not one sided. Ministers were forbidden to marry servants without “their masters and mistresses being...made privy thereto.”⁵⁰ To prevent ministers from overstepping their bounds, all ministers found guilty of marrying servants without license from the masters forfeited “ten thousand pounds of tobacco.”⁵¹

As a member of the household, however, servants were entitled to just treatment. Under the law servants were provided some recourse against harsh masters. The law declared that “where any servant shall have just cause of complaint against their masters or mistress by harsh or unchristianlike usage or otherways for want of diet, or convenient necessaryes that then it shall be lawfull for any such servant or servants to reparaire to the next commissioner to make his or their complaint.”⁵² However, most, if not all, magistrates and commissioners who presided over civil suits, that servants brought before the courts, were themselves members of the same class as masters. The law, in short, represented a tool to protect masters’ interests. It was, after all, the commissioners’ judgment that determined the validity of a servant’s claim: “If the commissioners shall find by good sufficient proofes that the said servant’s complaint is just...[the complaint] shale be decided as in their discretions shall think fit.”⁵³ In retrospect, laws codifying servant treatment were not necessarily instituted to protect bondsmen and women prior to their arrival in Virginia. Instead, laws reflected the mindset that servants were simple chattel. Some laws, however, were put in

⁵⁰ *SAL*, 1: 252.

⁵¹ *SAL*, 3: 444.

⁵² *SAL*, 1: 255.

⁵³ *SAL*, 1: 255.

place to quell the unsavory reputation that the colony had acquired as a result of “the barbarous usage of some servants by cruell masters.”⁵⁴

The time a servant served under indenture was determined prior to transportation, as a matter of fact, because of Virginia’s unsavory reputation. The length of service was negotiated between the individual and a clerk at a registry office or by the judge who sentenced a convict to transport to Virginia. Free servants, those who were not convicts or kidnapping victims, served on average a five year term.⁵⁵ Servants entering the colony without indentures found themselves in one of two circumstances; they were either in a prime position to negotiate favorable terms of service or were at a great disadvantage. Either way, one party had a great advantage at the other’s expense. To address this issue, the General Assembly declared that any individual entering Virginia without indentures was to serve no more than four years if under the age of twenty, five years if over the age of twelve, and no more than seven years if the transported was under the age of twelve.⁵⁶ Servants were to have their age determined by the courts no later than four months after their arrival in Virginia.⁵⁷

Servants were compensated at the end of their terms. Land allotments, or any form of freedom dues, were left to the discretion of the owner. However, custom dictated that masters provided their servants with “corn and cloaths” at the end of their service.⁵⁸ More often than not, owners did not fulfill their end of the contract and left newly freed servants destitute with no choice but to bind themselves to another master. To rectify this situation, formal freedom dues were written into law in the early 1700s: “to every male servant, ten bushels of

⁵⁴ *SAL*, 2: 118.

⁵⁵ London II Registers, Virtual Jamestown, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia, accessed: May 8, 2014
http://www.virtualjamestown.org/indentures/advsearch_london2.html.

⁵⁶ *SAL*, 1: 257.

⁵⁷ *SAL*, 2: 169.

⁵⁸ *SAL*, 3: 451.

Indian corn, thirty shillings of money, or the value thereof in goods, and one well fixed rifle or fuzee, of the value of twenty shillings, at least, and to every woman servant, fifteen bushels of Indian corn, and forty shillings in money, or the value thereof in goods.”⁵⁹ Should a master refuse to honor the law, a servant had the right to petition the courts at the master’s expense.⁶⁰ The acquisition of land was closely associated with freedom dues and most colonies codified land acquisition as a matter of law.

Incidentally, Virginia was one of the few British colonies with fixed freedom dues that did not provide land to freed servants.⁶¹ Throughout the colonial era, there were few instances in which indentured servants gained land. By 1753, freedom dues for servants (convicts were excluded from receiving any dues) were significantly reduced. For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, servants received relatively little support from their masters at the end of their terms. At the expiration of an indenture, most, by law, were only entitled to “receive three pounds ten shillings current money, for freedom dues.”⁶²

The law also ensured that servants, regardless of their condition, were to be cared for. If by some means a servant became infirm or disabled to the point that he or she could not be sold for his or her full value, he or she became the ward of the Church. Disabled servants remained under the Church’s care until they recovered enough to be sold or their indenture expired in accordance to the colony statutes.⁶³ In this setting, A.E. Smith’s assessment of indentured servitude is indeed accurate. But, in all likelihood, pragmatism as opposed to faith probably explained why masters took care of their servants when they fell ill. If a planter’s

⁵⁹ *SAL*, 3: 451.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ A.E. Smith, *Colonists in Bondage*, 275.

⁶² *SAL*, 5: 359.

⁶³ *SAL*, 3: 449.

servant was infirm, they then used the church as a vehicle to dissuade their disabled servant from engaging in potentially wayward and unlawful activities.

By the eighteenth-century, masters became concerned not only with the physical wellbeing of their servants, but also their psychological wellbeing. As racial slavery began to change the landscape in Virginia, the planter-magistrate class thought it was in the best interests of both their servants of European descent and themselves to prohibit others from owning servants. To ensure Christendom, they decreed that “no negro[s], mulattos, or Indians, although Christian, or Jews, Moors, Mahometons, or other infidels,” were allowed to purchase white servants.⁶⁴ Non-European masters were only allowed to purchase servants of the same complexion and nationality. White Christian servants who were discovered to be bound to non-white masters or mistresses would “become free and acquit[ed] from any service then due.”⁶⁵ Barring non-whites from owning European servants was perhaps a thinly veiled attempt to convince white servants, and perhaps the General Assembly itself, that European servants were of a different stock than their non-white counterparts.

Servants relinquished several freedoms in exchange for food, shelter, and their master’s protection. All servants were expected to “serve faithfully and obediently, all the whole time of their service, [and] do all their masters or owners just and lawful commands.”⁶⁶ Servants who resisted the authority of their master, mistress, or overseer, or acted violently towards their superiors (even in cases of self-defense) were whipped for their transgression and subject to “serve his or her master or owner one whole year of service for

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *SAL*, 3: 450.

⁶⁶ *SAL*, 3: 551.

every offence” upon the expiration of their indenture.⁶⁷ Crimes were punishable by lash as opposed to fine to distinguish servants from free persons. Twenty lashes on the bare back were prescribed regardless of the offence for every “five hundred pounds of tobacco or fifty shillings current money” charged for breaking the law.⁶⁸ This was clearly more than just a superficial attempt to separate the gentry from the middling and lower sorts; whip marks were a visual marker of status. Throughout colonial Virginia, stripes on the back signified servitude and social rank. However, if a servant was fortunate enough to have a benefactor who agreed to pay the fee, as a matter of law, he or she, paid reciprocity at a rate of one and a half months of service for every one hundred pounds of tobacco.⁶⁹

Owners exerted control over every aspect of their servant’s lives and utilized the law as a device to that purpose.⁷⁰ Sex, for example, represented one such controlled aspect of indentured life. While laws regulating decency and morality applied to all Virginians, servants did not fare well. The courts punished servants guilty of fornication physically unless their master paid a fine of twelve to fifteen pounds of tobacco.⁷¹ A close reading of this 1657 legislation indicated that adult servants held the same position in their master’s household as that of a child. The punishment for fornication was revisited within the same year. Offending servants were fined five hundred pounds tobacco, which was an obscene amount since most servants had no money. Because most servants could not pay, all servants

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *SAL*, 3: 452.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Though servants lived proscribed lives, the law did secure for them several freedoms. Servants on the voyage to Virginia were to be provided four months provisions, clothing, and bedding. Servants were also allowed to keep all parcels and goods that they brought into the colony or sent by friends and family after their arrival for themselves or sell them for their own benefit, with the consent of their master. To prevent masters from extending their servant’s indentures, masters were not allowed to contract with servants unless in the presence of a justice of the peace. Also, unsold servants were liable to pay taxes. *SAL*, 1: 435. *SAL*, 2: 164-165; 388; 488.

⁷¹ *SAL*, 1: 433.

found guilty of fornication were given an unspecified number of lashes which were administered at the common whipping post.⁷²

Male servants convicted of fornication paid with two additional years of service (one for his punishment and the second for the “losse of her service”), but the punishments against English women were particularly harsh.⁷³ If a bondswoman’s transgression had been discovered, she would have to serve an additional term of years at the expiration of her original contract. When it came to matters of lust, men fared comparably better than women. Bondswomen were forced to suffer an additional burden for the unseemly act of assuming control over her sex.

In spite of the burden of the law, Anne Collins of York County proved to be one of many servant women who refused to bear the shame of her transgression alone. Rather than remain silent, as many women who committed the act of fornication did, she told her story, a story in which there were two participants. In January of 1662, the twenty-one-year-old confessed to the crimes of fornication and pregnancy out of wedlock. Instead of “mutely receiving her sentence, as did most women servants in her situation, Collins spoke out in her own defense.”⁷⁴ Prior to being judged, she offered the court an extended confession or, testimony that she hoped would elicit the court’s compassion.⁷⁵ By her account, Collins willingly yielded to the passions of Robert Pierce after he had made her certain promises. “Hee told mee,” she declared before all who attended court proceedings that day, “that hee would free mee from my master whatsoever it would cost him and that hee had stocke Cattle

⁷² *SAL*, 1: 439.

⁷³ *SAL*, 1: 252-253.

⁷⁴ Terri L. Snyder, *Brabbling Women: Disorderly Speech and the Law in Early Virginia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

servants and a plantacon and that I should ride his Mare and then your Mistress will thinke much [of you].”⁷⁶ Her testimony clarified that Pierce had promised Collins marriage and financial security in exchange for sex. The York County justices were moved by her tragic tale, at least in part. To atone for his part in the crime, “Pierce was ordered to answer the York summons and provided a bond of security for his appearance after the child’s birth as well as present a bond for his good behavior in the interim.”⁷⁷ The court also ordered him to pay five hundred pounds in tobacco for his indiscretion. Now that he was a registered fornicator, Pierce had little choice but to bear the mark of shame that accompanied such a title. Anne Collins also bore a type of scarlet letter, as she was made to pay through an extended sentence. After she completed her contract, she had to toil an additional two and a half years.⁷⁸

The life of a servant was even harder on bondswomen who committed the crime of miscegenation.⁷⁹ In 1705, a white female servant who had a bastard child with a black or mulatto father was to pay fifteen pounds Virginia currency to the parish in which the child was born immediately upon the expiration of her contract. At the end of the contract, she was sold and bound as a servant for an additional five years.⁸⁰ By no fault of their own, children begotten of mixed unions were compelled to serve the local parish as a servant until thirty years of age.⁸¹ Consequently, most mulattoes were indentured servants of a most peculiar sort, largely because their contracts were unusually long compared to their European counterparts.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 50.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 51.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

⁷⁹ *SAL*, 1: 252- 253.

⁸⁰ *SAL*, 3: 453.

⁸¹ *SAL*, 3: 87.

These extended contracts might explain why an unnamed “MULLATO Servant Man,” not to mention many other persons of mixed race backgrounds, ran away.⁸² In 1771, Richard Timberlake reported that his manservant had disappeared. According to the advertisement the veteran of the French and Indian War had printed in the *Virginia Gazette*, the twenty-one year old mulatto had been born into servitude. Purportedly, his mother had been an unruly servant, who occasionally did as she pleased. During her indenture as Timberlake’s property, she had sex with either an African or a Native American man that resulted in pregnancy. Despite the colony’s efforts to prevent abominable mixtures between whites and blacks (especially involving white women), Timberlake’s advertisement suggests that the problem of miscegenation had been a persistent one. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whites and blacks clearly engaged in the taboo of interracial sex.⁸³

Punishments against fornication were clearly a gendered matter. A master’s authority was absolute and so they could abuse their servants with relative impunity since laws, more often than not, protected the owners if they fathered a child with a servant. Female servants who “got with child by their masters after their time expired [were] to be sold by the Churchwardens for two years for the good of the parish.”⁸⁴ Unmarried mothers, primarily the victims of sexual abuse or a renege promise of matrimony, continued to serve their masters. Such measures were necessary to protect masters from women who would “lay all their bastards to their masters.”⁸⁵

In addition to prohibiting fornication, masters also forbade marriage among their servants. Male servants who married without the permission of their owners were subject to

⁸² *SAL*, 3: 86.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *SAL*, 2: 167.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

“serve his or their master or mistress one complete year more for such offence committed.”⁸⁶

Female servants guilty of secret or clandestine marriage served “double the tyme of service with her master or mistris.”⁸⁷ Market forces offered one plausible explanation as to why masters passed such legislation and continued to revisit the matter. Marriage among servants threatened the authority that masters claimed over their servants. For example, marriage between servants from different counties could undercut productivity as they demanded time off to visit their spouses and children. What is more, in the case of bondswomen, marriage encouraged sex and sex undermined work.⁸⁸

Avarice and self-interest also offer plausible reasons as to why masters prohibited their servants from wedding. Very few women entered Virginia during the seventeenth-century, and those that did, especially women of repute, were imported for the purpose of becoming wives in order to tie the men to the land. It was for this purpose that marriage and fornication of women and servants might have been closely regulated. Planters did not want to lose women, a scarce resource, to a lowly but handsome male servant. In spite of planters’ close reigns, servants resisted and formed relationships with whom they pleased. Laws regulating marriage among servants proved ineffective and were amended to forbid ministers from either publishing “the banns or celebrat[ing] the contract of marriage between any servants unless he have from both their masters a certificate that it is done with their consent.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *SAL*, 1: 252-253.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *SAL*, 2: 114. See: Lois G. Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, “The Planter’s Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland,” *The William and Maryland Quarterly*, Third Series, 34, No. 4 (October 1977): 542-571.

In addition to making it illegal for servants to marry without masters' permission, masters restricted their servants' movement. Masters sought to suppress "the unlawful meeting of servants" and required that all bondsmen and women traveling outside of their property carry travel papers.⁹⁰ Servants could not leave their master, mistress, or overseer without a pass. Servants who were caught with no pass were automatically assumed to be a fugitive runaway. Those who were apprehended with a forged or stolen certificate were sentenced to "stand two hours at the pillory" and "shall forfeit and pay ten pounds current money."⁹¹ In the event that a fine could not be paid, the "offender [would] receive thirty-nine lashes, on his or her bare back, well laid on."⁹²

Judging from the laws of the time, most masters thought that the forging of passes was a particularly egregious act on the part of fugitives. While freedom dues provided bondsmen "ten bushels of Indian corn, thirty shillings in money," and "one well fixed musket or fuzee," and "every woman servant, fifteen bushels of Indian corn, and forty shillings in money, or the value thereof, in goods,"⁹³ a forged pass provided servants, particularly fugitives, with something much more important: credit. With a pass in their possession, a runaway servant could not only pass as free, but could also secure food and lodging. With a pass, a runaway servant could undermine, if not destroy, his or her master's reputation, which may explain why masters passed strict legislation when it came to forgery.

Masters also prohibited their servants from owning a horse. The General Assembly made it a matter of law that no servant "whatsoever, shall be owner of any unpaid mare, nor shall keep any horse, mare, or colt, without the license, in writing, of his master or mistress"

⁹⁰ *SAL*, 2: 195.

⁹¹ *SAL*, 3: 362.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *SAL*, 3: 451.

to keep servants close.⁹⁴ Similarly, masters also curtailed their servant's mobility by prohibiting bondsmen from purchasing a boat. Any person, they affirmed, shall not without the consent of the owner "take away any boat, or canoe." Those who did were compelled to pay "five hundred pounds of tobacco" to the owner. If the offender could not pay, they were beaten. More importantly, however, "if such person trespassing, be a servant, he or she shall make the like satisfaction, by his or her service, when the time due to his or her master shall be expired." If a group of servants committed the theft together, it was "declared, that every person shall pay the whole fine." Most servants received the lash after being found in possession of a watercraft due to their inability to pay the fine.⁹⁵

When masters were not determining who their servants could and could not marry or when and where they could travel, masters regulated their servants' ability to generate income and thus the potential to buy themselves out of their contracts. As early as 1660, servants were restricted from engaging in trade with anyone without leave of their owners. Such restrictions were imposed under the pretense that servants would embezzle and sell goods from their masters. While theft and embezzlement was certainly a reasonable fear for masters whose servants absconded, the law had serious implications for servants who wanted to sell or trade their own goods. The punishment for servants was not explicitly stated and was therefore feasibly left to the discretion of masters and mistresses. In all likelihood, the servants were whipped. However, the offending person who was found guilty of trading with any servant "without lycence" or consent of the master "was imprisoned in the public jail for

⁹⁴ *SAL*, 4: 49.

⁹⁵ *SAL*, 2: 124.

one month without bail or mainprize” and “also forfeite[d] and restore[d] to the master of the said servant fower [sic] times the value of the things so bought, sold, trucked or traded for.”⁹⁶

Servants were not even allowed the simple luxury of drowning their problems in liquor at the local ordinary without leave of their masters.⁹⁷ Ordinary keepers forfeited ten shillings to the master of any servant for selling liquor without an appropriate license or the consent of the owner.⁹⁸ Ordinary keepers were not willing to suffer a ten shilling fine for a pint of ale worth a few pence. Spirituous drinks might have prompted rebelliousness among their servants and so masters were wise to deny servants access to drinking houses. The consumption of alcohol inspired surly countenances, if not open violence or revolt, among servants.

Masters also placed restrictions on servants’ interactions with Native Americans. Relations between colonists and Native Americans were contentious throughout the colonial period. The General Assembly heavily regulated the interactions between whites and Native Americans, especially when servants dealt with Native Americans. Since Bacon’s Rebellion, servant insurrections were sources of consternation among the master class. Where those of the upper and middling sorts faced steep fines and loss of property for engaging with Native Americans, bound persons faced a more lethal punishment. Death sentences were typically reserved for servants who had been labeled outlaws. However, the law declared that it was a felony punishable by death for servants to “carrie either piece, powder and shott, And leave either all or any of them with Indians.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *SAL*, 1: 445.

⁹⁷ Ordinary: Eighteenth-century colloquial term for an inn.

⁹⁸ *SAL*, 3: 400.

⁹⁹ *SAL*, 1: 255.

Many resourceful bondsmen and women looked to the land to meet their needs since servants were barred from trade with Natives. Though the law ensured that servants were to be fed a competent diet, they often supplemented their meager rations by hunting. Deer herds roamed Virginia in abundance, and wild game was hunted to either eat or sell to Native Americans, or slaves, or even whites. Towards the end of the seventeenth-century, however, the deer population was left “very much destroyed and diminished by...unseasonable killing.”¹⁰⁰ In an effort to replenish the population and limit servants’ options to feed themselves, any man caught hunting deer between February first and July first was fined five-hundred pounds of tobacco. Servants who were unable to pay the fine received “on his or their bare backs thirty lashes well laid on.”¹⁰¹ Some servants turned to hog stealing once barred from hunting deer, and in doing so confronted harsher penalties. Hog stealing earned a servant twenty-five lashes and a fine of four hundred pounds of tobacco to be paid by the master. Servants served extra time at a rate of one month’s service per one hundred and fifty pounds of tobacco paid in restitution to their masters. Those who were not discouraged by stripes or added time, in other words, repeat offenders, stood for two hours “in the pillory, on a court day, and [had] both ears nailed thereto.”¹⁰²

All in all, a hard life awaited many who were transported to Virginia. Shortly after arriving in the colony, they were transformed into servants who were neither free nor slave. As James Revel revealed in his narrative, after being sold, his European clothes were taken from him. His new masters issued him a coarse suit and directed him to the fields. This transition was not an uncommon occurrence. In the Chesapeake, indentured servitude

¹⁰⁰ *SAL*, 3: 180.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *SAL*, 3: 276-277.

represented a legal institution that offered poor men and women few rights and protections and conspired to keep them in a condition of semi-bondage. Servants were essentially non-persons once the ship transporting them docked in Virginia. In many ways, their status in Virginia exemplified what Orlando Patterson defined in his seminal study of slavery as “natal alienation.” All servants were outsiders in the eyes of their masters. Even English servants were considered foreigners although Virginia was a British colony. Simply put, they belonged to no one and had no identity. Psychologically, they were designated as persons who were not fully accepted in the larger society and resided in a cultural purgatory.¹⁰³

Most servants lived daily in fear of their masters. As a matter of law, servants did not own themselves; they were the property of others. They could not barter or trade without permission. They could not leave their master’s estates without consent. They could not marry or hope to start a family without first winning the approval of their owners. What is more, in the event that servants trespassed the delicate balance that existed between masters and themselves, they could be beaten. If servants became defiant in matters pertaining to sex, they could have their children stripped from them and bound to a master for what might have seemed a lifetime. If they ever spoke out, they could add years to their service. In this peculiar environment, many servants had little recourse to protest their plight but to run away.

¹⁰³ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1-2.

CHAPTER TWO
A CULTURE OF SURVEILLANCE: PURSUING COLONIAL VIRGINIA'S MOST
WANTED

If the phrase tragically cruel defined life for an indentured servant in colonial Virginia, then the term tumultuous perhaps best defined life as a fugitive servant. Most fugitives did not trust anyone because they lived in fear of being captured, returned, or even resold. In 1643, the colony's General Assembly recorded the precarious life of absconded servants in writing. The Assembly observed that "there [were] divers loytering runaways in the collony who very often absent themselves from their masters service...And sometimes in two or three monthes cannot be found, whereby their said masters are at great charge in finding them." Many times, masters lost their servant's labor for an entire year. In other words, as early as the 1640s, fugitives had become a problem in Virginia which caused masters to invest considerable efforts to reclaim their servants who stole themselves. To that end, the assembly declared that "all runaways that shall absent themselves from their said masters service shall be lyable to make satisfaction by service at the end of their tymes by indenture (vizt.) double the tyme of service soe neglected."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ *SAL*, 1: 254.

Distinguishing Signs and Characteristics

The General Assembly passed legislation that employed the use of force to encourage servants not to run. The Assembly proscribed a much more painful punishment for those who left their masters a second time: a letter R branded on the cheek. The law also targeted those who would aid runaways. For example, if a runaway left his or her master to find safe haven among Native Americans and took with him or her powder or firearms, such incorrigible rogues were considered outlaws and could therefore be punished with death. However, for those unsavory persons who would harbor or conceal an absconded servant, they would be compelled to compensate the servant's master twenty pounds for every night the bondservant remained at large.¹⁰⁵ Over the course of the late seventeenth-century, this piece of legislation would be revisited and expanded, thus not only forging new prohibitions for fugitive servants, but also creating a complex culture of surveillance in which everyone, whether they were willing or not, played a role as *ad hoc* servant patrols.

Legislators in the eighteenth-century were no less concerned with the subject of indentured servants. To more readily identify a runaway, servants throughout the colonial era were branded on their cheek, the shoulder, or the flesh in between the index finger and thumb with the letter R. Regardless of the brand's location, its presence served as a visual marker of servitude. These brandings were so commonplace at the time, most masters who advertised fugitives made casual or as a matter-of-fact references to them. For example, when Thomas Dansie advertised for the return of his Irish convict Billy Hughes, with a half-pistole reward,

¹⁰⁵ *SAL*, 1: 253.

he noted that the “notorious Villain” was “burnt in the hand last December court.”¹⁰⁶ The burn on Hughes’s hand indicated that the bondservant ran before.

Persistent servants also bore the stripes of their repeated attempts at flight. Those servants who managed to travel a considerable distance before they were arrested were conveyed from constable to constable until their master or owner arrived with a receipt of ownership. If no one claimed ownership within two months, the servants were passed from jail to jail and received “many lashes as the said justice [thought] fit, not exceeding thirty-nine,” until the master was located or the fugitive was hired out to cover the cost of housing, food, and clothing.¹⁰⁷ Keepers of public jails were authorized to release any “runaway to hire to any person or persons whatsoever...[provided that] a strong iron collar to be put on the neck of such...runaway, with the letters (P.G.) stamped thereon; and that thereafter, the said keeper shall not be answerable for any escape of the said...runaway.”¹⁰⁸ If at any time during this process a constable allowed a fugitive to escape, he was “liable to the action of the party grieved, for recovery of his damages, at the common law with costs.”¹⁰⁹

On the subject of identifying marks, an analysis of the runaway advertisements show that a number of servants branded themselves, which added to the complexity of indentured servant life. Several notices reveal that it was not uncommon for servants to decorate themselves with tattoos that were burned into their skin with gunpowder or Indian ink. Some of these markings were simple tattoos such as a name “mark’d on one...arm in blue letters.”¹¹⁰ Others were intricate works of art. John Hoodford’s tattoo, for example,

¹⁰⁶ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter), Williamsburg, May 9, 1751.*

¹⁰⁷ *SAL*, 6: 457.

¹⁰⁸ *SAL*, 4: 171.

¹⁰⁹ *SAL*, 6: 458.

¹¹⁰ *Virginia Gazette (Parks), Williamsburg, October 24, 1751.*

embellished religious iconography and depicted on one hand the “Savior upon the Cross between two Thieves; and, on the other, the Image of Adam and Eve.”¹¹¹ The “Picture of a Woman and several Children before her” adorned John Peters’s chest. A crucifix and the “Jerusalem Arms” likely stood out from the Kentish man’s pale complexion.¹¹² Hence, while the law branded fugitive servants for running, some fugitives branded themselves, adding unintentionally a distinguishing characteristic for those who would return them to their masters.

In addition to branding servants, the General Assembly passed legislation to make the identification of fugitives easier. “For everie runaway,” they declared in a law aptly entitled “How to know a Runaway Servant,” they decreed that masters “shall cutt or cause to be cutt, the hair of all such runawayes close above the ears, whereby they may with more ease be discovered or apprehended.”¹¹³ Not surprisingly, a reading of the advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette* reveals that many masters did indeed follow this law. When Thomas Williams advertised for his “Irish Servant Man, named Michael Gramley,” the Prince William County grandee informed the public that the “25 Years of Age, of a middle Size” man’s head had been shaved.¹¹⁴ Alexander Dissit made a similar report:

RUN away from the subscriber in Petersburg, the 17th of this instant (July) an Irish servant man named WILLIAM INNES, about 20 years old, about 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high, a blacksmith by trade, is well set, has very little beard, having been shaved but once, talks the brougue very much, sometimes lisps a little, of a fair complexion, and

¹¹¹ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, July 13 to July 20, 1739.

¹¹² *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, October 28 to November 4, 1737.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)*, Williamsburg, July 18, 1751.

has black curling hair; he took with him a claret coloured coat, a whitish coloured and black frieze jacket, double breasted and without linings. Whosoever takes up the said servant, and brings or contrives him to me, shall have 5 I. reward.¹¹⁵

Newspaper notices also revealed something else. Servants were not dumb; they were not unaware of their master's efforts to recapture them. Many servants carried wigs with them to conceal the brute politics of servitude; others preferred hats, handkerchiefs, or caps. For instance, when a convict servant by the name of Bryan Kelly ran away, he made sure to take a headpiece to cover his "close shav'd," black hair. According to the advertisement his master had posted, he stole away with "two old Black, and one Yellowish Natural Wigg."¹¹⁶

In Kelly's mind, wigs signified status. Linda Baumgarten suggested in her study of clothing in colonial and federal America that "clothing choice [was] ordered by cultural standards that determine[d] (some would say dictate) what [was] considered appropriate wear for a given person in a particular place and time."¹¹⁷ Clothing in the eighteenth-century functioned as a language of sorts in which even servants were conversant. Kelly understood that his wigs were more than just elements of style and fashion; they punctuated the meaning of the entire ensemble. Depending on the wig's color, it could connote class or rank. Wigs were limited to the grandees due to the high cost of creating and maintaining them.¹¹⁸ While black and brown were common colors for wigs and were worn by the gentry and on occasion

¹¹⁵ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, July 21, 1768.*

¹¹⁶ *Virginia Gazette (Parks), Williamsburg, August 26 to September 2, 1737.*

¹¹⁷ Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2002), 52 and 54.

¹¹⁸ Bryon Paul Howard, "Had on and Took with Him: Runaway Indentured Servant Clothing in Virginia, 1774-1778" (Doctoral Dissertation: Texas A&M University, 1996), 158 and 169. By the mid eighteenth-century, the growing availability of hair expanded the wig market to lower class Virginians.

by those of the middling sort, the color yellow suggested greater nuance. Not quite gray, it may have represented age, wisdom, or experience. With a proper suit of clothing, a yellow wig easily informed onlookers that Kelly was a man who owned himself. Indeed, in the form of his hairpiece, most church attending Virginians were reminded of their biblical instructions. Many Virginians probably recalled Proverbs, chapter 16: 31: “a gray head is a crown of glory; it is found on the way to righteousness.”

But not all servants were this discreet. Quite the contrary; several were quite outlandish in their choices of head coverings. John Ocinyser, to cite one example, elected to make a statement. In 1775, when he disappeared, he took an assortment of clothes with him. “A blue coat with brass buttons; three waistcoats, one white kersey, another striped with blue and white, and the other a kind of brownish white, much worn, with sleeves,” Peter Bowser reported. He also carried with him “a pair of black everlasting, a pair of clack stocking, and a pair of negro cotton breeches: two pair of stockings, one black, the other blue with a pair of brass carved shoe buckles.” To complete his assorted allotment of clothing, Ocinyser also carried with him two hats, “one bound and one macaroni.”¹¹⁹

Presumably, the Dutch servant thought himself a dandy. The baker’s macaroni hat stood out, decorated with either a feather or perhaps a large dyed plum. By donning the hat, John Ocinyser poked fun at the grandees’ protestations against the tyranny of England. At the very least, he did not take Virginia’s non-importation resolutions seriously, which adopted six years before that and unanimously declared to “promote and encourage Industry and Frugality, and discourage all Manner of Luxury and Extravagance” in the colony.

¹¹⁹ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie)*, Williamsburg, February 24, 1775.

Instead, the bondservant probably wore the outlandish headpiece not only because he fancied it, but also because the hat offered him a way to express his own particular form of protest.¹²⁰

Disseminating Reports

While brandings and cropped hair could certainly betray a servant's flight, the mass dissemination of information had been key to the culture of surveillance that existed in Virginia. Oral and print culture had indeed played essential parts in getting the word out. Before the emergence of the newspaper, a strong oral tradition bonded colonial Virginians together irrespective of race, class, or gender. Regardless of one's rank, Rhys Isaac explained in his study of the tobacco colony, "within an oral culture words can only be experienced in socially structured context where setting, dress, and demeanor are likely to ensure that communication reinforces existing relationships."¹²¹ In their efforts to reclaim their wayward servants, the gentry had a vested interest in making certain kinds of information readily available to the wider public.

By the eighteenth-century, Virginia was under the "influence of *both* the oral-dramatic and the script-typographic media of communication," and both mediums contributed to the surveillance state that helped masters regain fugitives.¹²² The elite grounded class distinction and social customs into written law, "which provided security and legitimacy that could not be achieved in a legal system based on oral or manuscript law."¹²³

¹²⁰ William Maxwell, *The Virginia Historical Register and Literary Note Book, Volumes 3-4* (Richmond: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1850), 19.

¹²¹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 122.

¹²² David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1997), 122.

¹²³ Roger P. Mellen, *The Origins of a Free Press in Prerevolutionary Virginia: Creating a Culture of Political Dissent* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press. 2009), 37.

County sheriffs and undersheriffs held responsibility for properly handling fugitives. By custom, the sheriff wrote a notice to be fixed to the doors of the county courthouse, which would remain in plain view for the span of two months for every fugitive brought to the county jail.¹²⁴ Word of the fugitive would spread throughout the county and surrounding area once “a copy of such notice [was] sent to the clerk or reader of each church or chapel within [the] county.”¹²⁵ To ensure that this ritual was upheld, the sheriff faced a fine of five hundred pounds of tobacco for noncompliance.¹²⁶ This repeated process of taking notices and posting them at the courthouse and reading them at church kept Virginians informed.

The transition from “oral communication, to written, and then to printed communication” significantly altered the way the elite, middling, and servile classes viewed one another “and the way government related to the people.” The codification of laws meant that legal codes were more readily available to the public, whereas before laws were only recited during the beginning of each session of the legislature or painstakingly kept in manuscript form. This democratization of law, combined with a continued presence of strong oral communications, had a deep impact on the lower classes. Through venues of oral dissemination, the law became physical as lower class Virginians became the embodiment of codified law.¹²⁷ Consequently, the print culture that would emerge in the Chesapeake during the eighteenth-century relied on the oral traditions established beforehand and heavily on newspaper advertisements for absconded servants.

Churches were important centers of information in Virginia, particularly for information concerning runaway servants. The Sabbath was as much a business affair as it

¹²⁴ *SAL*, 4: 169.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Mellen, *The Origins*, 59 and 14.

was a day to hear the Lord's word. Churchgoers traded talk, contracted deals, and heard the latest news. Churches and chapels were perhaps the most prominent centers for getting the word out about runaways since church attendance on Sundays was mandatory.¹²⁸ For the gentry, "parish churches were the most important or numerous communications centers [to] promote their vision of culture." By Philip Fithian's account, Sundays were brimming with news of all kinds. As the schoolmaster made plain in his diary, prior to Sunday service, men received letters of business and read the weekly advertisements. During service, "prayers [were] read over in haste."¹²⁹

Second only to the church and chapel, courthouses were also central hubs for disseminating information. Advertisements for absconded servants were read aloud before and after proceedings. Owners typically handwrote many of these notices. The local sheriff or constable received instruction on the particulars of a bondsman or woman from the master, mistress, or overseer. Servant advertisements were published in this manner. After the court day proceedings, these advertisements were affixed to the doors of the courthouse, or a bulletin posted nearby.

Throughout the eighteenth-century, court days represented a form of entertainment and news dissemination. Virginians would not only go to watch the trials of servants, slaves, and others, but to also see whippings, mutilations, and to harass criminals at the pillory. Every courthouse had a "pillory, whipping post, and a pair of stocks," and a dunking pool. The law also dictated that every individual county was responsible for erecting and

¹²⁸ Without a reasonable excuse an absent member could be fined 1-50 pounds of tobacco; while a minister absenting himself for more than two months out of the year would forfeit "halfe his means and whosoever shall be absent above fowre months in the year shall forfeit his whole means and cure." *SAL*, 1: 123-124.

¹²⁹ Richard Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 56.

maintaining each of the supporting structures close to the courthouse. The penalty for noncompliance was five hundred pounds of tobacco to be paid by the public.¹³⁰ Hence, during the colonial era, the administration of justice was immediate and quite public.

General court was held three days out of the year on the twentieth of March, September, and November.¹³¹ Men and women from all over the county attended court day proceedings. Though attendance was not mandatory, most Virginians attended their county courts if for no other reason than to witness the violent nature of justice firsthand. However, court days also functioned as a type of theater; it was a form of entertainment for most Virginians in attendance. The courtroom was full of a certain pomp and circumstance and served not only “to make the community a witness to important decisions and transformations but also to teach men the very nature and forms of government.”¹³² Virginians attended court days to witness the brutality of justice and to hear the local news.

Lastly, when they were not informed at church or at the courthouse, Virginians stayed abreast of daily news at their local drinking houses. In addition to the monthly summits at the courthouse and weekly meetings at church, most masters also relied on taverns to get the word out on their absconded servants. Most tavern keepers affixed bulletin boards next to the doors leading into their inns where the public could post notices and other news items at their leisure. Some advertisements made for the subject of light entertainment or song. Jane Carson explained in her study of colonial Virginians at play that tavern proprietors, “regularly served coffee, tea, wine and light refreshments between meals and offered facilities for a number of people to sit down while they talked, smoked, drank, gambled, read

¹³⁰ *SAL*, 2: 75.

¹³¹ *SAL*, 2: 59. Dates were amended numerous times throughout the eighteenth-century.

¹³² Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 92.

letters and newspapers, wrote letters [or advertisements] and set in order business and political papers.”¹³³ Tavern patrons discussed manuscripts for absconded servants over a game of cards or possibly billiards.

Runaway Culture

On the 23rd of December in the year 1770, Matthew Thorp, “an Irish convict servant” of 27 years, absconded from his master Gilbert Campbell in Westmoreland County. The Irishman fled well prepared for the cold, carrying sundry items belonging to his master. When he ran away, he took with him “two Virginia cloth jackets, a purple and white crape coat unlined, a brown ditto, an old crape coat, most of the yellow lining tore out,” and other articles of clothing, some of which he may have sold for victuals, or a place to stay. Of his appearance, Campbell noted that his escaped servant “[was] very remarkable,” and “having a blemish on his left eye, and the third finger of his right hand he cannot bend inwards.” What is more, “one of his legs has several hard lumps, occasioned by the bite of a dog,” and much neglected black hair. But perhaps the most significant detail in the advertisement that the Westmoreland County grandee had printed was a reward to those persons who apprehended, secured, or returned his convict: three pounds current money.¹³⁴

Without question, servants were valuable, particularly those who decided to abscond. Servants were valuable to masters because the master owned their labor without which the master or mistress could not realize good fortune. However, as fugitives, servants were also

¹³³ Jane Carson, *Colonial Virginians at Play* (Williamsburg: University Press of Virginia, 1965), 262.

¹³⁴ *Virginia Gazette (Rind)*, Williamsburg, January 17, 1771.

valuable to others who profited from their flights and the cottage industries that emerged to return them to their owners. The business of arresting runaways proved to be a lucrative venture for both law enforcement and for the enterprising public at large. The law gave great incentives for participating in the search and for the capture of fugitive servants.

To encourage constables to “make diligent search and inquiry throughout all his precinct,” constables apprehending runaways were awarded two hundred pounds of tobacco paid by the servant’s master.¹³⁵ In their zeal to realize a payday, some jailers arrested strangers whom they suspected were runaway servants. For example, on the eighth of August 1766 Thomas Campbell, a jailor residing in Winchester County, committed 31 year-old Thomas Robinson to the Frederick County jail. According to the advertisement he had printed in the *Virginia Gazette*, he imprisoned the man primarily “on [his] suspicion of [him] being a runaway.”¹³⁶ The law dictated that Campbell was “enjoyed first to carry him before the next justice who [was] to take cognizance of his good service, and to certifye it to the next assembly, and then to deliver him to the constable of the parish where that justice dwells, who [was] to convey him to the next constable, till he be restored to his master.”¹³⁷ As the jailor for the county, Campbell was required to write a receipt that Robinson had not only been in his care, but that the fugitive had been delivered to the next jailor. The receipt created a paper trail for the runaway and protected constables from a fine of one thousand

¹³⁵ *SAL*, 2: 21.

¹³⁶ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon)*, Williamsburg, October 30, 1766.

¹³⁷ *SAL*, 2: 274.

pounds of tobacco should the fugitive escape the accountable constable's custody.¹³⁸

Custodians of runaways “who [could not], or [would not] declare the name of his or her owner,” were to commit the individual to jail, and to record a physical description of the fugitive's appearance, clothing, and any items in their possession. Upon completing this task, custodians were instructed to post the manuscript notice to the doors of the courthouse and ensure that each notice was read aloud in church and printed in the newspaper.¹³⁹

The courts offered Virginians a substantial rewards to encourage them to aid in the capture of fugitive servants. As early as 1669, *ad hoc* patrols were established. “Whosoever apprehends any runaways withier servant by indenture, custome, or covenant,” the General Assembly decreed, “not haveing a legall pass, by those in every county shall be appointed to give passes, or a note from his master, shall have a thousand pounds of tobacco allowed him by the publique.”¹⁴⁰ Though the reward was later reduced, it was still a tempting offer: “the summe of one thousand pounds of tobacco therein granted to the taker of them up shall be, and hereby reduced to two hundred pounds of tobacco, if the runaway be found above ten miles from his masters house, to be paid by the publique in the county where the party dwells.”¹⁴¹ To as to keep Virginians who ordinarily would not care one farthing about a fugitive servant interested, the General Assembly instituted specific rewards for taking up fugitive servants which were prorated in proportion to the distance a fugitive had been apprehended from their master's residence. The promise of a bounty encouraged the manhunt for running indentured servants.

¹³⁸ *SAL*, 2: 274.

¹³⁹ *SAL*, 6: 364.

¹⁴⁰ *SAL*, 2, 273.

¹⁴¹ *SAL*, 2: 278.

Masters also offered rewards beyond the amount that was required by law as an additional incentive. Francis Willis, for example, offered a two-pistole reward “besides what the Law allows” for his servant man, Alexander Clerk.¹⁴² A “pistole” was a Spanish gold coin, sometimes called a doubloon. By the middle of the eighteenth-century, a pistole was worth almost a pound or a little over 18 shillings. In the colony’s tobacco currency, a pistole represented approximately 400 pounds of tobacco, which was double the amount required to be paid under the law.¹⁴³ Advertisements similar to Willis’s were not rare. Another advertisement placed by William Lynn for an “English Servant Man,” offered “a Pistole Reward, if taken up within 10 Miles of Fredericksburg, or Two Pistoles if taken up at a greater Distance, besides what the Law allows.”¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, the value of the additional reward varied from subscriber to subscriber.

Apart from offering Virginians monetary incentives for the apprehension of servants, masters also used the law as a tool to discourage sympathetic parties from aiding and abetting the fugitives. Several advertisements demonstrated that masters were often suspicious that their servants were aided by outside parties. For example, in 1737 an Irish servant by the name James Lee absconded from Charles Carter of King George County. Shortly after he left, Carter turned to the public for help. In addition to describing Lee as a “short thick well-set Fellow, fresh Colour’d, pitted with the Small Pox, with a Scare in his Forehead, speaks through the Nose, and has the Brouge in his Speech, and stoops forwards as he walks,” Carter also noted that his stout manservant “was harbour’d by some of the Irish Inhabitation

¹⁴² *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)* April 10, 1752.

¹⁴³ “Currency: What is a Pistole?” *The Geography of Slavery*, accessed: May 12, 2014, <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/currency.html>.

¹⁴⁴ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)* July 30, 1752.

of these Parts.”¹⁴⁵ To dissuade such “persons who entertain and enter into covenants with runaway servants,” grandees like Carter had legislation passed in which the offending party forfeited twenty pounds of tobacco for “every night that he or she entertaineth any servant either as hireling or otherwise.”¹⁴⁶ Later the General Assembly revisited the law and increased the fine. Individuals caught hiring a servant without a certificate of freedom paid “to the master of the servant thirty pounds of tobacco per day and night for all the time they [did] harbor or entertain them.”¹⁴⁷ In 1666, the fine for harboring fugitive servants had been increased again to sixty pounds of tobacco per day and night.¹⁴⁸ Because such legal measures limited a servant’s ability to hire themselves out (in another county), servants would think twice before they left their masters. Ancillary warnings against harboring and concealing fugitives became a common feature of most runaway servant advertisements to remind colonists of the steep consequences for aiding runaways.

In the end, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of these legal declarations concerning runaway servants were revisited and refined which effectively constructed a society primarily based on class and rank. The grandees in Virginia created a complex culture of surveillance in the tobacco colony. Hair, body markings such as brandings or clipped ears, and clothing all signified a certain type of cultural capital. Judging from the laws passed in the Chesapeake between 1619 and 1789, appearances mattered. All Virginians, unwittingly or not, became deeply invested in how particular individuals looked because they could potentially cash in on it. Between Bacon’s Rebellion and the American Revolution, most fugitives lived precarious lives. Because most persons of European descent

¹⁴⁵ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, March 4 to March 11, 1737.

¹⁴⁶ *SAL*, 1: 254.

¹⁴⁷ *SAL*, 2: 116.

¹⁴⁸ *SAL*, 2: 239.

in the colony were unfree, fear and anxiety more than likely filled the air; the tension seemed ever present.

CHAPTER THREE A PROFILE OF RUNAWAY SERVANTS IN THE VIRGINIA GAZETTE

Between 1736, when William Parks started the *Virginia Gazette*, and 1800, over one thousand indentured servants left their masters, who in turn used the newspaper to retrieve their property. Many of the advertisements demonstrated that masters were an observant lot, in the process of requesting the public's assistance, few traits seem to have escaped their attention. The colonial grandees got the word out at a cost of three to five shillings per subscription. Advertisements for absconded servants were read aloud in churches, chapels, courthouses, and taverns throughout the Chesapeake, which revealed the efforts of hundreds of indentured servants who were determined to own themselves.

Unlike ship registries and indentured servant contracts that listed only a servant's name, his or her skills, his or her place of origin, and points of destination, advertisements for absconded servants gave a more detailed description. Advertisements often divulged complex resistance narratives in which bondsmen and women registered complaints against the peculiar institution of servitude. While the printed notices expressed some parts of these nuanced stories clearly, scholarly research has uncovered other elements. Though some resulting conclusions depended on informed speculation, others were based on firm facts disclosed by the advertisements themselves. Regardless, for all they revealed, runaway servant notices only represented the tip of the iceberg of indentured servitude in colonial Virginia.

Like newspapers in other colonies, notices for runaway servants in the Chesapeake sold newspapers. Not long after William Parks started the *Virginia Gazette*, he posted an “Advertisement, concerning advertisements” to solicit subscribers.¹⁴⁹ Masters and mistresses who sought to place “any Publick Notice”—the most frequent of which were notices for missing servants, slaves, and horses—were instructed to send their request to Parks’s print shop located on Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg, Virginia. In that missive, he also made plain the process by which subscribers could secure his services.¹⁵⁰ At a cost of three shillings, approximately one-fourth the price of an annual subscription in the eighteenth-century, Parks agreed to print verbatim masters’ descriptions of their absconded servants. Large advertisements were printed for five shillings. Reprints went for “Two Shillings *per* Week.”¹⁵¹ To further promote the *Gazette*, Parks invoked the established oral traditions of the colony. “As these Papers will circulate (as speedily as possible) not only all over This, but also Neighbouring Colonies,” he explained, “and will probably be read by some Thousands of People, it is very likely they may have the desired Effect.”¹⁵² Parks had confidence that the masters of runaway servants would employ the *Virginia Gazette* in order to retrieve their missing property.

Charles Neilson was one master of hundreds who thought Parks’s scheme was a good one. Two days after his servant, Irishman James Keays, absconded from Hampton, Virginia, Neilson turned to the *Gazette* to implore the public to aid in the search for his servant man. Keays assumed the alias Murphy and likely intended to establish himself as a joiner under this new identity. The “smooth-fac’d” convict escaped with several articles of his master’s

¹⁴⁹ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, October 8, 1736.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

property: shirts, stockings, a hat, and a dark colored wig.¹⁵³ In whatever way Keays intended to use the stolen goods, it did him little good, as he was apprehended in Carolina a short time afterwards.¹⁵⁴ James Keays was one of over a thousand servants, convicts, and bound apprentices who chose freedom over servitude from 1736 to 1800. Flight during the mid to late 1730s only accounted for twelve percent of the overall number of runaway servants. This figure is likely an underestimation, as William Parks did not establish the *Virginia Gazette* until 1736. By the next decade, flight dropped to five percent. Any number of factors could have influenced servants' decision to abscond; eighteenth-century Virginia was rife with religious and social upheaval. Following the initial decline in earlier decades, the number of runaways steadily increased before exploding during the 1770s. Servants no doubt took advantage of the revolutionary spirit of freedom and liberty. After the war, servant flight faced a steep decline; however, servitude did not die out in America. Men, women, and children were still shipped across the Atlantic.

Charles Neilson thought James Keays had a better chance than most fugitives to gain his freedom. Two days after his convict servant left, he turned to the *Virginia Gazette* for help. Instead of giving Keays time to return on his own, Neilson rushed to publish his advertisement. Neilson's hasty actions were unusual; most masters circulated a handwritten notice before they employed the printer. By word of mouth, masters spread information about their servants who had disappeared. Rhys Isaac demonstrated in his study of the colony, that Virginians relied not only on printed information but also on news transmitted orally for much of the eighteenth-century. The rapid spread of knowledge "throughout Virginia," he noted, "the absence of newspaper publicity [gave] an indication of the

¹⁵³ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)*, Williamsburg, April 4, 1751.

¹⁵⁴ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)*, Williamsburg, August 8, 1751.

customary relationship of the press to the total information system of the time.¹⁵⁵ Printed reports authenticated news of local importance that was expected to circulate in fuller versions by mouth.”¹⁵⁶ Throughout the colony, “the contents of the fine print would reach the plain folk through reading aloud and through conversation at courthouses, ordinaries, and other places of assembly. This oral dissemination incorporated news into the common stock of knowledge, opinion, and feeling.”¹⁵⁷ Charles Neilson’s rush to advertise may have reflected something of his relationship with Keays. Whatever his reason may have been, the information printed in the notice spread fast throughout Virginia.¹⁵⁸

While Charles Neilson advertised quickly, most owners waited too long. Virginians continued to employ informal discourse to relay information in the eighteenth-century and so most masters waited a few weeks before advertising for their absconded servants in the *Virginia Gazette*. Between 1736 and 1789, seventy-three percent of absconding servants were reported as runaways less than one month after they left their masters. Less than six percent reported that their servants were missing after two months. Instances in which masters waited a year or more to advertise in the press were extremely rare.

Daniel Hornby advertised for the return of his runaway, John Doten, in October 1737. Considering that Doten absconded a full three years prior to the notice’s appearance in print, the likelihood of recovery surely appeared slim. After years of manuscript notices and word of mouth did not yield the return of his property, Hornby turned to the *Virginia Gazette*. Armed with new intelligence of his bondservant’s whereabouts he offered all of the information that he could on Doten; “He is supposed to be gone among the Cherikey

¹⁵⁵ Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 245.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Indians.”¹⁵⁹ Three years after his bondservant’s escape, Hornby was able to recall that the fugitive was a middle-sized man of a sanguine complexion and aged about thirty years. The “full Faced” Irishman carried with him “a dark brown Cloth Coat, a Pair of Drugget Breeches, of the same Colour, Two Oznabrigg, One Checkt, and One white Shirt, a Pair of Oznabrigg Trowsers, a Pair of good Shoes and a Pair of grey worsted Stockings.”¹⁶⁰ Though Hornby had no choice, he was at a significant disadvantage for waiting to take out a notice. Even though Hornby’s account of his servant was incredibly detailed, Doten’s appearance and clothing had likely changed during his three-year absence.¹⁶¹

Age

A servant’s age mattered; success tended to favor those servants who chose who were relatively young. Fugitives in their twenties accounted for forty-seven percent of runaways during the eighteenth-century and teenaged runaways followed closely behind at thirty-one percent. However, teen fugitives steadily surpassed twenty-year-olds after the Revolutionary period. Toward the end of the eighteenth-century, apprentices absconded in greater numbers compared to indentured servants. As servants progressed to middle age, flight became a less attractive option and runaways in their thirties only account for fifteen percent of fugitives. The number of runaways dwindled to two percent for fugitives in their fifties and beyond that age were virtually nonexistent (see Table 7). The effort needed for servants to plan, coordinate, and ultimately carry out their escape required physical stamina that diminished as

¹⁵⁹ *Virginia Gazette (Parks), Williamsburg, October 14 - October 21, 1737.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

a servant aged. Though most runaways were in their prime, servants both young and old took their chances at flight.

Considering the advertisements that appeared in the *Gazette* between 1736 and 1800, Richard Hatton was the youngest fugitive reported. Though he was only a child of twelve or thirteen years of age, Richard Hatton was already a seasoned criminal. No doubt the convict boy was part of a juvenile gang in his native country, similar to the poor felon James Revel. He was transported to Virginia as punishment for what was likely a petty crime, where he found himself the property of George Graham. The boy was certainly a felon. However, his fair complexion and hair, that Graham described as long enough to tie, indicated that he had not yet been indoctrinated into a life of servitude. Hatton apparently knew enough to abscond prepared despite his short time as a servant. He took with him when he went away “a suit of mixed Broadcloth of Claret Colour, bound with Worsted Binding of a brighter Colour, a drab Coloured Jacket and Breeches, a Pair of Osnabrig long Breeches, [and] a Felt hat bound with black Binding.”¹⁶² Graham described his convict servant as a “stout well-set Boy.” However, despite Hatton’s solid build he still found it necessary to compensate for his young age. In addition to carrying off several articles of clothing, Hatton also stole “a Pair of Screw barrell’d Brass mounted Pistoles.”¹⁶³ For added protection, he also left in the company of “another Boy much taller,” named Jack Coleson.¹⁶⁴

Similar to their younger counterparts, older runaways tended to abscond with company. Richard Bulling ran from his master in Westmoreland County during the winter of 1739. Though the shoemaker was “an old Man, and very grey,” he fully intended to continue

¹⁶² *Virginia Gazette (Rind)*, Williamsburg, July 23, 1767.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

at his trade and he “carried his Tools with him.”¹⁶⁵ A man of Bulling’s advanced age would not hazard the cold alone; the old man enlisted the aid of David Powell, a forty-year-old bricklayer and the servant of a neighboring master. Powell brought more than youth to the pair’s escape. Prior to their flight, Powell secured a “Pass from the said” Francis Evans.¹⁶⁶ With an authentic pass—one that had not been forged—the men could move about Virginia more freely and purchase supplies and lodging on credit. Though Bulling and Hatton found accomplices to escape with, servants of any age left alone if a companion could not be found.

Gender

An overwhelming portion of runaway servants were male. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, male servants were imported en masse to populate the colony and to meet the labor demands. As a result, the sex ratio in Virginia was largely unbalanced. Of the English citizens transported to British America, “women did not make up as much as one-third of servants.”¹⁶⁷ Once in Virginia, men also had more opportunities to abscond, therefore increasing the gender disparity among fugitive servants. During the offseason for tobacco cultivation, masters hired their servants labor to clients in neighboring counties or as journeymen, which afforded men greater mobility. Conversely, women were purchased to serve in a primarily domestic capacity; therefore, female servants performed their duties under heavier scrutiny by their masters and mistresses than their male counterparts. Though the number of female servants was considerably less than the population of males, both genders followed a similar pattern. Eleven percent of male servants

¹⁶⁵ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, February 16 to February 23, 1738 [1739].

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America*, 23.

absconded from 1736 to 1739, compared to only one percent of females during that same period. However, both numbers declined during the following decade to four percent and less than one percent, respectively (see Table 2).¹⁶⁸

Female servants were likely dissuaded from absconding by familial ties. Many bondswomen elected to stay with their masters because of marital ties and their children. Colonial legislation made it plain that many servant women were afforded some form of relationship with their children. Typically, children produced of secret marriages or of other unlawful behaviors were not sold away from their mothers. Instead, most of those children became wards of the church that was located in the same county or parish as their mothers resided.

For other women, however, the prospect of motherhood may have inspired their flights. In the fall of 1749, an Irish servant woman by the name of Rebecca ran away from her owner Richard Lee, who resided in Westmoreland County. Her master printed an advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette*, which noted that she had “been in the Country upwards of two Years, and has been burnt in the Hand,” indicating that the surely-tempered woman had runaway before.¹⁶⁹ The article additionally informed the public that the domestic servant left in the company of two others; John Wiglay, a farm hand, and Edmund Cryer, “a very good Shoemaker” and a rogue “given to drinking and whoring.”¹⁷⁰ The notice also suggested that the woman’s reason for leaving her master might have been her family. When

¹⁶⁸ Billy G. Smith, “Black Women Who Stole Themselves in Eighteenth-Century America,” in *Inequality in Early America* edited by Carla G. Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 134-159. Though a study of slave women, Smith’s essay reveals that similar to female servants, slave women were agents of their own lives and freedom. In addition, slave women also absconded less frequently than their male counterparts, primarily due to gendered labor divisions that limited slave women’s opportunities to abscond and secure work after flight.

¹⁶⁹ *Maryland Gazette (Green)*, Annapolis, September 13, 1749.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

the washwoman left, Lee described her being “very big with Child.”¹⁷¹ Likewise, when George Ashman, Jr. advertised for the return of his “mulatto woman named Margaret Grant, about twenty years old,” he too observed that she was pregnant.¹⁷² The thought of giving birth to a child who would suffer the indignity of being bound to a master for as few as two or as many as twenty one years seemed to be a sufficient reason to disappear.

Ethnicity and Prejudice

Servants were an ethnically diverse group. Masters were decidedly generous in including the place of origin of their fugitive servants. According to the advertisements, most fugitives were of English, Irish, and Scottish descent, and those of British heritage made up the majority of runaways. Forty nine percent of runaways were of English, Kentish, or Welsh origins. Advertisement subscribers indicated that Irish bondsmen and women account for thirty-nine percent of runaways during the eighteenth-century. Though their presence was not as strong, Scottish servants were the third significant ethnic group of European descent in Virginia at ten percent. Country born, or men and women born in British America, servants were sprinkled throughout the advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette* and accounted for less than one percent of fugitives. Runaways who were identified as country born generally served in the colony of their birth, such as Robert Croson, a tailor who was born in Virginia (see Table 6).¹⁷³ However, men and women from other colonies did become fugitive servants in Virginia. Many of them were from Maryland or the Carolinas, but there were some who hailed from New England or as far north as New York.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² *Maryland Gazette (Green)*, Annapolis, May 13, 1773.

¹⁷³ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, October 8 – 15, 1736.

Besides these ethnic differences, advertisements also demonstrated certain racial prejudices as well. Even though the English grantees held strong ethnocentric prejudices against non-English settlers, they did not hold their bound fellow English brethren in high esteem either. Because English servants were sent to the colonies as transported felons or to extract labor from the thousands of poor littering British streets, subscribers colored their in almost racial terms. These bondsmen and women were certainly not of the same stock as the grantees; to accentuate their differences, masters who advertised for their runaways characterized their servants in terms that carried deep racial connotations. Samuel and George Mathews, for example, did not consider any of their five fugitive convicts to be white and described them as they would an African or African-American slave: as brown, sandy, or black. Samuel and George even denied the only Englishman, Jonathan Boothman, his whiteness. They described the twenty three-year-old with a thievish look and as having a “dark brown Complexion.” For the grantees, qualifying race among other Englishmen and women denoted class and rank.¹⁷⁴

Typically, racial characterization was reserved for non-English settlers. During the seventeenth-century, Englishmen treated servants of non-English origins “especially Scottish and Irish servants, with condescension and frequently with exploitive brutality.”¹⁷⁵ The law reflected the harsh treatment of non-English servants in the colony. All Irish servants brought into Virginia without indentures were to serve six years if under sixteen years of age, and “all under to serve till they be twenty-four years old.”¹⁷⁶ Conversely, English servants who entered Virginia under the same circumstances served only four years if they were over

¹⁷⁴ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon)*, Williamsburg, November 11, 1773.

¹⁷⁵ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1971), 86.

¹⁷⁶ *SAL*, 1: 411.

sixteen and served “till hee or shee shall be one and twenty yeers of age” if they were under fifteen.¹⁷⁷

The General Assembly’s discriminatory legislation against Irish immigrants proved detrimental to Virginia’s prosperity. Religious and political conflict drove Irish transport during the eighteenth-century; however, even a tumultuous environment in Ireland seemed like a better deal than the terms offered by the English. Despite the animosity the English felt towards the Irish, the legislation discriminating against Irish immigrants was quickly, though begrudgingly, repealed by the General Assembly to ensure Virginia’s prosperity. The unfairness discouraged Irish men and women from traveling to the colony, and “by that means the peopling of the country retarded.”¹⁷⁸ To encourage Irish citizens to travel, the Assembly declared that no servant “of what christian nation soever, shall serve longer then those of our own country, of the like age.”¹⁷⁹ Though the revised law acknowledged Virginia’s need for Irish immigrants, the prejudice did not die out.

Months of Departure

For most servants, the decision to run away was not an arbitrary one; considerable planning went into the endeavor. Servants avoided running during the winter months and the harsh conditions kept flight well below six percent from November to January. As the weather improved, the number of runaways increased steadily to eight percent by May. Summer brought with it good weather and another increase in runaways. By July, servant

¹⁷⁷ *SAL*, 1: 442.

¹⁷⁸ *SAL*, 1: 539.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

flight peaked at ten percent (see Table 3). Weather clearly influenced servants' decision to abscond.

Battling the elements was easier for servants during the summer when compared to the winter. Flight by foot, horse, or boat was considerably easier for servants escaping bondage during the warmer seasons. Fugitives who avoided towns could easily sustain themselves off of the land by gathering wild edibles, hunting, and fishing. Servants did not have to account for freezing temperatures during the summer and could more easily abscond with as little as the clothes on their backs. More items were stolen during the winter months in order for servants to finance their flight or to obtain enough resources to survive the cold. John MacNeal and Philip Macmillion absconded from the "Parish of Wicocomoco" in the dead of winter, but fortunately for the fugitives, they left in a "two Mast Vessel."¹⁸⁰ The pair took with them "a large...mounted Gun" to be used for protection and they also stole "an Iron Pot, of about Three Gallons, and Four Hundred Weight of Pork."¹⁸¹ Though servants certainly took weather into consideration when planning their escape, another factor remained.

The work cycle provided another explanation. The flight patterns of servants by the month also reflected the seasonal cultivation of tobacco. Tobacco cultivation began in March when the seeds were sown. During this time, servant flight increased to seven percent, which was higher than the five percent in February. By mid May, tobacco stalks were about six inches in height and were then carefully transported from the patch to the field. The grueling work involved with this process drove flight up to eight percent among servants who worked the ground. By harvest season in August, the majority of fugitive servants had abandoned

¹⁸⁰ *Virginia Gazette (Parks), Williamsburg, January 13 to January 20, 1737 [1738].*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

their masters during the previous month.¹⁸² As the seasons changed and the work cycle became more laborious, servants left. Masters did not wait to advertise for their missing property because of the loss of profits.

Skill

Runaway advertisements reveal a wide range of trades and occupations that servants were purchased to fulfill, including professions such as schoolmasters, artisans, surgeons, and the common laborer. Skill sets among servants could be divided into four categories: husbandry, skilled, domestic, and semi-skilled. Servants trained in husbandry cared for and cultivated crops and animals. Skilled laborers trained as an apprentice in a specific trade. Domestic occupations could include men and women who were employed in a home to cook, clean, or wait on members of the household. Semi-skilled laborers filled jobs that required more training than unskilled labor, but less than their skilled counterparts.

Among the various classes of occupations, Virginians preferred skilled tradesmen to their semi- and unskilled counterparts, no doubt to strengthen and develop the colony. Servants who were skilled in a trade accounted for sixty-five percent of runaways. Interestingly, husbandry is a greatly underrepresented category, despite the fact that tobacco cultivation was the primary industry in Virginia. Only nine percent of runaways were listed in advertisements to have been involved in husbandry; however, the portion of runaway servants engaged in husbandry was likely underrepresented. Advertisement subscribers only

¹⁸² This account of the tobacco season is based on T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 46–58 and Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 146–178.

acknowledged that four percent of fugitive women participated in a specific trade. Most women were purchased to serve in a domestic capacity and so it was likely understood that fugitive women were not employed in male occupations. In addition, semi-skilled laborers accounted for twenty-two percent of runaways (see Table 9).

While these statistics suggested that servants were skilled, the main tool all servants brought with them were their hands. Most men could fulfill the duties of a common laborer or adapt to their master's needs and many servant men shifted between various jobs in their master's homes and plantations. For example, John Minor absconded from his master in Gloucester County with three other servant men. Of his companions, Minor was the only servant who could boast knowledge of multiple professions. Minor's master noted that "He is a Plaisterer by trade, but can do Glaziers and Bricklayers work."¹⁸³ The servant specialized in multiple aspects of the same profession, and his skills likely saved his master the trouble and resources of procuring servants who specialized in each individual trade. In some situations, servants such as William Parker specialized in one trade, but their master used them for a different purpose. Parker was described as a blacksmith by trade, though during his service to Archibald M'Kendrick, he instead "acted as a waiting man."¹⁸⁴

Though servants were used to fill a variety of occupations, those with a learned trade could easily hire themselves out after their escape. Joseph Morton had an advertisement printed for his "Servant Man, named John Tippett."¹⁸⁵ In this notice, he enumerated the various articles of clothing the "middle aged Man" absconded with and the former resident of Richmond County, who now lived in Orange County, suspected that his servant, who "knows

¹⁸³ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, April 21 to April 28, 1738.

¹⁸⁴ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie)*, Williamsburg, March 3, 1775.

¹⁸⁵ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, June 8 to June 15, 1739.

something of the Carpenter's Trade," would attempt to hire himself out.¹⁸⁶ Morton did not think his manservant would succeed in his endeavor to pass as a free man by exploiting his skills as a wood smith. "If he hires himself," Morton explained, "he may be discovered by a lazy Disposition that I think he will never overcome."¹⁸⁷ While Joseph Morton did not place much confidence in his servant's ability to find employment, the advertisement he had printed in the newspaper nonetheless documented one instance that shows why more men ran away than women.

Male occupations had greater variety than those available to women, as evidenced by notices and servant registries. Registration forms always included a trade for male passengers, while women's work was based on marital status and were listed as either married or spinster.¹⁸⁸ However, once in Virginia, female servants filled a variety of roles and trades. Women's work was primarily domestic in nature and it is noted of several females servants that, "she [was] a good needle woman and cook, and can wash and iron very well."¹⁸⁹ Though women performed traditional gendered labor, most female servants had to fill various roles in a husband's, brother's, or master's business. Mary Sournas, who ran off with one of her husband's servants, was "a neat Woman in Sewing, Spinning, and knitting Stockings, and can do almost any manner of Taylors work."¹⁹⁰ Patrick Lockhart wrote of Welsh runaway Elizabeth Lewellin that "she [was] smart and active and capable of any Business, [could] read and write."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ London II Registers, Virtual Jamestown, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia, accessed: May 8, 2014

http://www.virtualjamestown.org/indentures/advsearch_london2.html.

¹⁸⁹ *Maryland Gazette (Green)*, Annapolis, May 13, 1773.

¹⁹⁰ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)*, Williamsburg, October 31, 1751.

¹⁹¹ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon)*, Williamsburg, May 26, 1774.

While women primarily served as domestics, some women fugitives, such as Mary Sournas, excelled at occupations that were traditionally male and were successful in hiring themselves out. William Taite employed the services of the *Virginia Gazette* in his effort to reclaim his valuable property when two Irish convict servants, William Dylies and Hannah (his wife or sister), left his estate in Northumberland County. By Taite's account, "they both wore white shirts, with very short ruffles, and white thread stockings. They [also] had a complete set of tinkers tools. They were seen to have two English guineas and a good deal of silver, and said in Essex county they lived in Augusta, and inquired the road that way."¹⁹² But of the two, Taite expected that Hannah would find work more readily. They were tinkers by trade and he noted that "of which the woman is extremely good," revealing that he thought Hannah was the better of the pair.¹⁹³

Fugitive servants also possessed varied skill sets. Advertisement subscribers would generally list their servant's profession; however, those who provided additional information provided insight into how skilled their servants were. There were a fair amount of apprentices running away, particularly towards the final two decades of the eighteenth-century. Samuel Ballenger, an "apprentice to the house Joiner's business," obviously had little experience in his trade.¹⁹⁴ It was common for subscribers to remark that a runaway "[knew] something of the trade,"¹⁹⁵ "[understood] the work,"¹⁹⁶ "[was] a very tolerable practical farmer, and in particular an excellent ploughman,"¹⁹⁷ "[was] an excellent

¹⁹² *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon)*, Williamsburg, March 26, 1767.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Alexandria Advertiser and Common Intelligencer (S. Snowden & Co.)*, Alexandria, July 27, 1803.

¹⁹⁵ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, June 8 to June 15, 1739.

¹⁹⁶ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon)*, Williamsburg, April 19, 1770.

¹⁹⁷ *Virginia Gazette (Rind)*, Williamsburg, May 11, 1769.

sawyer.”¹⁹⁸ One advertisement subscriber in particular exceedingly praised of his servant’s skill. Mingo Harvey not only described Robert Robinson as “a valuable joiner and carpenter” but listed work that Robinson completed prior to his transportation to Virginia: “Worked long in the city of Edinburgh, and in the town of Kelso upon Tweed, and also undertook and built a church at Inverness, in the north of Scotland.”¹⁹⁹ Servants would also boast of their own skill, like the man whose master wrote “He is a good groom, and boasts his skill in that way.”²⁰⁰

Particularly interesting are those instances in which absconded servants feigned an occupation. While only thirty-four servants were reported to pretend a trade, those rare advertisements also revealed several insights into master/servant relationships. European men, women, and children willingly sold themselves into bondage to reap the benefits of the New World. Men with valuable trades crossed the Atlantic to work for planters who were eager to exploit their talents. Tobacco cultivation in Virginia ensured that even the semi- and unskilled laborers would find work. However, in order to make themselves more attractive to prospective masters, many indentures engaged in the act of pretending. In other words, a servant professed knowledge and mastery of a trade that he would later be discovered to have no skill in, to the great loss and disappointment of his master. In an effort to deter these artful men and women, all servants “found not to understand such trade or employment...satisfaction [would] be made to the master or owner of such servant, either by defalcation of the wages, or part of thereof.”²⁰¹ Among those pretenders was the twenty five year old servant man, John King. Thomas Willis purchased the swarthy young man “to

¹⁹⁸ *Virginia Gazette (Rind), Williamsburg, April 15, 1773.*

¹⁹⁹ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie), Williamsburg, June 23, 1775.*

²⁰⁰ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie), Williamsburg, December 1, 1775.*

²⁰¹ *SAL*, 4: 174-175.

practice Physick and Surgery,” though when called upon to perform his supposed trade, it was discovered that King “[understood] nothing of either.”²⁰²

Indirect Resistance

Though the servant’s lot in British America was certainly tough, servants in Virginia refused to see themselves as property. Runaways employed all manner of devices to carve out an agency for themselves and avoid capture. Fugitives would assume an alias, alter their dress, or—if they were literate—forge a pass, indenture, or discharge letter. The easiest way for runaways to evade capture was to adopt an alias. When Mrs. Bordland of Hampton advertised for her servant William Brown, the Irishman went by the alias Henry Danally. It was likely that Brown’s alias was of little use to him. There were likely several Irishmen in Virginia of “a middle Stature;” however, not many of them had “a fair Complexion” or were “mark’d with the Letter W. on one...hand.”²⁰³ An alias would certainly aid a fugitive if they made it outside of their sphere of influence. However, artful servants found more clever methods to outwit their pursuers.

Virginia runaways often absconded with various items to aid their flight. Clothing was the most common item taken, as a considerable portion of advertisements were dedicated to listing clothing items. On many occasions the fugitive stole so many items that subscribers often included, “and sundry often items,” or more specifically, “his apparel I cannot easily describe, he having of his own and stole, sundry cloaths.”²⁰⁴ Servants stole multiple items to

²⁰² *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)*, Williamsburg, February 28, 1750-1.

²⁰³ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, September 9 to 16, 1737.

²⁰⁴ *Virginia Gazette (Rind)*, Williamsburg, September 21, 1769.

either fund their escape and/or change out of their clothes to avoid detection. Thirty-three year old convict servant man John Booker absconded with Thomas Drybrow, a fellow English convict from an adjoining plantation. The pair took little with them other than the clothes they owned, which consisted of a few shirts, trousers, and coats between them, and mostly worn, save for a “Frieze Frock, almost new.”²⁰⁵ Despite the clothes’ lack of value, James Duncanson offered that it was “probable they may change Clothes with each other.”²⁰⁶ Masters were aware that fugitives would disguise themselves in order to avoid capture. Runaways of affluent Virginians often robbed their masters of fine clothing, wigs, and other valuable items. Armed with the trappings of wealth, the runaway donned the fine clothing and hid in plain sight disguised as a member of the gentry.

Without access to finery, servants of middling Virginians did what they could to blend in. Disguises were particularly helpful to servants with low mobility, especially women. Convict Mary Davis used the alias Philips in her attempt to flee from John Catlett. Prior to Catlett advertising for Davis’s return, she was “seen lurking about in Gloucester and Middlesex, Passing as a Beggar, saying she has lost her husband and has two children to maintain.”²⁰⁷ Disguising herself as a beggar not only decreased the likelihood of her being taken up, but also helped her financially. Men were not the only ones who could negotiate their way onto a vessel. Hannah Wilson absconded from her master with the assistance of “some Sailors that were in the Battle on the Monogahela.”²⁰⁸ The fifty year-old Danish

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, April 23, 1772.*

²⁰⁷ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, March 4, 1773.*

²⁰⁸ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter), Williamsburg, September 29, 1752.*

woman intended to leave on whatever ship her new companions would board, and she “dress’d herself in Sailor’s Apparel.”²⁰⁹

Taking on mens’ dress likely gave women servants more confidence as they navigated Virginia as fugitives. It was written of Mary Hunt, “’Tis supposed she will change her Name, and put on Man’s Apparel.”²¹⁰ By the mid-1700s masters were fed up with their runaways disguising themselves and looked to the law to end the deception. To prevent runaways from altering “his or her name, or usual habit, or otherwise disguise him or herself” with the intent to escape bondage, pretenders were forced to serve their master or mistress six additional months “over and above all other service due for running away.”²¹¹

Revolutionary Fugitives

Servant flight peaked during the Revolutionary period, forty-nine percent of runaways absconded during the 1770’s. No doubt servants took advantage of the confusion and disarray the war brought to the colony and the number of runaways fluctuated between twelve and fifteen percent each year for most of the decade. Near the end of the decade, the number of fugitives decreased to five percent in 1776 and then abruptly dropped to one percent by 1778 (see Table 8).

On the seventh of November in 1775, “His Excellency the Right Honorable JOHN Earl of Dunmore,” declared that every “Person capable of bearing Arms, to [refort] to His MAJESTY’S STANDARD, or be looked upon as a traitor to His MAJESTY’S Crown and

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter), Williamsburg, June 5, 1752.*

²¹¹ *SAL*, 4: 174.

Government.”²¹² Dunmore gave this ultimatum to men who could choose their loyalty and proclaimed freedom for all men who could not. However, a myth surrounded the proclamation that Lord Dunmore only offered slaves their freedom if they abandoned their rebellious masters to fight for the Crown. In actuality, his promise of emancipation was extended to white servants, arguably even more so than slaves: “I do hereby further declare all Servants, Negroes, and others free that are able and willing to bear arms.”²¹³ Despite his impassioned plea, Dunmore’s proclamation did not yield the result that the embattled governor had hoped for.

Although Dunmore craftily played on the anxieties of the Virginia grandees of servants and slaves catching the revolutionary spirit and rising up against the patriots, he inspired little or no feelings among bound persons that were not already present. The majority of servants who absconded in 1775 fled between April and July. By the time Dunmore made his proclamation, winter had set in. By the next spring, the General Assembly increased armed land and water patrols in anticipation of a servile uprising.²¹⁴ Lord Dunmore’s proclamation hindered rather than helped servant flight and after 1775 servants did not hazard the chance to flee.

Though the number of runaways who answered Dunmore’s call to arms were few according to the advertisements, some masters’ fear of their bondsmen and women absconding to him was realized. Englishman Samuel Taylor, absconded with a free “Virginia

²¹² Richard Johnson, “Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation on Slave Emancipation (1775),” accessed: February 15, 2014, http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHv3/Content/PDFs/Dunmore_Proclamation_1775.pdf.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *SAL*, 9: 75-76; 83.

born Negro” and an “East Indian” by fleeing from the sloop “Betsy” on Corotoman River.²¹⁵ Though most runaways endeavored to leave the country during the war for independence, the three fugitives made their way to Lord Dunmore. Several witnesses noticed a boat “going across the Bay, opposite to Gwynn’s island in which” the men were sailing.²¹⁶ Dunmore’s offer of emancipation applied only to those who could reach him at Norfolk at Gwynn’s Island which had become his base of operations after the royal governor fled Williamsburg. Though Tailor and his companions were conveniently onboard a sloop traveling the Chesapeake Bay, other fugitives endured longer journeys to reach Dunmore. Baker Fullam absconded from his master in Prince William Country near Dumfries. His master, Thomas Blackburn believed that Fullam might “offer his services to lord Dunmore.”²¹⁷ If Fullam’s intention had been to flee to Dunmore, there would have been 153 miles between the fugitive and his freedom.

Flight and Destination

On July third, the eve of independence day, Irishman James Walsh absconded from his master. The shoemaker intended to make his way to North Carolina, “having some acquaintances about the Plank bridge and Edenton.”²¹⁸ However, being that he “[was] much addicted to liquor,” securing a pint of ale may have been more pertinent to him than his freedom. Though he was a quarrelsome drunk, Walsh was representative of most servants; they often chose to run away alone.²¹⁹ Of those who chose to escape with company, eighty

²¹⁵ *Virginia Gazette (Rind), Williamsburg, March 7, 1771.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie), Williamsburg, December 1, 1775.*

²¹⁸ *Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer (Duncan), Norfolk, July 5, 1775.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

percent ran with fellow servants. Runaways often absconded with a family member or an acquaintance who possessed a skill that would aid in their escape, such as the ability to forge a pass, for example. For some fugitives, sharing the burdens of escape made their flight easier. For example, on the 27th of October in 1737 Sarah Carrol fled from her master in Middlesex County. Though she might have easily found work in her trade as a weaver, a lone female “with a wry Look, and a swarthy Complexion” would rouse the suspicion of wary Virginians.²²⁰ Carrol left in company with the Irishman Patrick Flood to limit suspicion. Though of a similar black swarthy complexion, Flood spoke “pretty good English” and was literate. He forged a pass and “his Indentures Discharged;” with both documents in hand, the pair could travel freely to Carolina.²²¹ Though women were more likely to abscond in pairs and groups, men certainly shared the benefits of running with an accomplice (see Table 10).

In addition to becoming acquainted with fellow servants, runaways also formed bonds with slaves. Fourteen percent of fugitives absconded with a single slave companion while only five percent of group flights consisted of multiple servants and slaves. The servant man John Past ran away from his master in Augusta with an unnamed “Negroe Fellow” from another plantation.²²² Though Past was an Englishman, any person who could easily “be taken for a Mulatto” traveling by themselves, let alone in the company of a “tall and streight limm’d” Negro, would likely be questioned by suspicious Virginians.²²³ The pair probably anticipated such a scenario and left with Alexander Fullerton, a young Scotch servant “employ’d some Time in keeping School.”²²⁴ Because they had a literate servant amongst

²²⁰ *Virginia Gazette (Parks)*, Williamsburg, March 10-March 17, 1738.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)*, Williamsburg, July 18, 1751.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

them, the subscribers found it probable that Fullerton “forg’d Passes for them all,” similar to Carrol and Flood.²²⁵ However, running with slaves brought its own risks. If anything had happened to the “Negroe Fellow” who Past and Fullerton traveled with and if they were recaptured, they would have been responsible for serving time to the slave’s master at the conclusion of their own contracts in restitution.

²²⁵ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Hidden in Plain View: Advertisements as a Story

The profile notwithstanding, advertisements about fugitive servants also revealed complex narratives in which servants declared independence. For many of the servants who appeared in the *Virginia Gazette*, the words that their masters used to describe their property was perhaps the only record of their existence. Within these notices were nuanced stories of men and women who were determined to own themselves. In 1737, Winnefred Thomas became one such servant, who fled from her master in pursuit of freedom. The Welsh woman left her master, William Pierce, who lived in Nansemond County. Pierce noted that his bondswoman was competent in knitting and spinning, a craft that would serve her well in acquiring employment in another master's service. By Pierce's account, the convict woman fled his residence near "Theophilus Pugh's Merchant" for the shores of eastern North Carolina "by the Way of Curratuck, and Roanoke Inlet."²²⁶ Whether or not Thomas secured her freedom in Carolina was left unknown and fortune did not seem to favor the runaway. The merchant Theophilus Pugh had purchased several acres of land in the neighboring colony and firmly established an enterprise in Nansemond County that extended well into North Carolina. Both William Pierce and Pugh's acquaintances from Nansemond to Carolina

²²⁶ *Virginia Gazette (Parks), Williamsburg, July 29 to August 5, 1773.*

were on the alert for a “short black Hair’d” young woman.²²⁷ Though Pierce gave little in the way of a description of his absconded bondswoman, he provided solid evidence of her identity and status. The “Inside of her right arm” bore the initials “W.T. and the Date of the Year underneath;” these markings, burned into her skin “with Gun-powder,” identified the date of her purchase.²²⁸ Though she was marked as a servant, Powell’s advertisement told a story in which Thomas refused to think of herself as another person’s property.²²⁹

David Galloway captured an equally compelling narrative in his advertisement. Bondmen Alexander Jamieson and John Skerum traveled by water in a small schooner to return to their master in Norfolk. Galloway likely hired the pair of servants out to a Virginian in Northumberland who was in need of a weaver and a baker, or simply an extra set of hands, as the men carried extra sets of clothes with them. Jamieson commonly wore “a small blue Jacket (made of the Sailor’s Manner),” which was most likely a token of his time as a crewmember aboard some ship.²³⁰ He also had “a dark coloured Bear-skin Coat, with a small Velvet Neck, and yellow Metal Buttons” in his possession. Skerum was equally prepared for the September weather with “a light Drab colour’d Coat, with large, flat, white Metal, or Silver Plate Buttons” and he also traveled with “a Suit of old, blue Broad-Cloth Cloaths.”²³¹ Despite the confidence and freedom Galloway entrusted with Jamieson and Skerum with, his bondsmen ultimately aspired to own themselves and were willing to achieve that end by any means necessary. They took advantage of the distance between their schooner and their master and the pair planned a daring escape. Being “of a grave Behavior,” Skerum convinced

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ *Virginia Gazette (Parks), Williamsburg, September 19-26, 1745.*

²³¹ Ibid.

Jamieson to help him barbarously murder the skipper, Mr. Tobias Horton.²³² They dumped the poor man's body overboard without conscience to be found by unsuspecting folks along the Bay Shore. Once the skipper was disposed of, the two men "ran away with the Vessel and Cargoe."²³³

Fortune seemed to favor these murderers; the skipper had bequeathed to them "three Hogshead of Rum one suit of dark coloured double Allapeen Cloaths, lined with Scarlet Allapeen, and had Gold Buttons; also a blue Silk Vest, with Silver Buttons; and two Dozen Wool Cards," and other "Things wrote for."²³⁴ The pair likely disposed of the hogsheads—a cask/barrel used to store rum, wine, or tobacco—in the same manner as the skipper. The standard dimensions established by the courts for a hogshead were forty three inches in length and twenty six wide. With nine hundred liters of rum in their possession, Jamison and Skerum could easily sell the casks for money or barter with a shadowy captain for passage out of Virginia since they were so close to the ocean.²³⁵

James Burks absconded from his master, John Mason, in a similar manner, and though Mason escaped with his life, Burks's violent exit certainly left a lasting impression. Burks took his leave from Mason on the fourteenth of May in 1769. Like many servants, the Irishman preferred to travel on horseback and he left with a small bay mare. Burks likely intended to travel far from his master's home in Lunenburg County, which was located toward the interior of Virginia. He had on when he went away, "a brown sailor's jacket."²³⁶ The twenty year old convict likely intended to pass as a sailor until he reached the coast.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, June 1, 1769.*

Once among the various ports, he might have offered his services as a crewmate in exchange for passage back to Ireland. Regardless of Burks's ultimate destination, he desired to put as many miles between himself and Lunenburg County as possible.²³⁷

Driven by some great injury or emotion, Burks burnt his master's house to the ground prior to his escape. In what was certainly a dramatic scene, the avenged Irishman fled on horseback against the backdrop of towering flames consuming his master's home. Burks had taken "everything out of [the house] that could [have been] of any service to him."²³⁸ He could have been moved to destroy his master's property by any number of reasons, or by nothing at all. However, Burks likely did not destroy his master's home arbitrarily. A runaway would simply not risk the attention of such an extreme act of violence if the situation did not warrant it.

Despite their bondage, servants managed to find companionship with those around them, to the detriment of many masters. In October of 1751, William Frye absconded from his master in Stafford County. The servant man dressed appropriately for the cold, donning "a bluish grey Kersey Coat," and fled Stafford atop a "Chestnut colour'd Sorrel Horse, and Saddle, branded on the near Buttock S," with a "dark Spot on the Inside of his Fore Legs."²³⁹ Nicholas Sournas immediately put the details of Frye's flight to paper on the thirteenth of October. However, he waited until the thirty first before posting the notice in the *Virginia Gazette*, holding out hope that his wife, Mary, who absconded in company with Frye would return to him. When it was clear that Mary had no intention of returning to their home, a

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ *Virginia Gazette (Hunter), Williamsburg, October 31, 1751.*

dejected Sournas placed a notice in order “to have them again.”²⁴⁰ Though the thirty year old Mary surely spurned her husband by running off with the help, she was likely a valuable asset and assisted her husband in his trade as a tailor. “A neat Woman in Sewing, Spinning, and knitting Stockings,” she was just as capable as her husband in performing “almost any Manner of Taylors Work.”²⁴¹ Mary and her bondsmen may have been lovers, or she might have been a convenient pawn in Frye’s pursuit of freedom. Regardless, as the wife of an established tradesmen, she was free to open lines of credit in her husband’s name. Sournas warned “all Persons from trusting her on my Account, for I will not pay any Debts she shall contract,” after the publication of the advertisement.²⁴²

While James Burks and William Frye, as so many other fugitives, absconded with their master’s property, other runaways were forced to carry away certain items without choice. On the night of September 25, 1774, three Englishmen absconded from Dorsey’s Forge in Elkridge, Maryland. William George, a carpenter by trade, left the ironworks in the company of Solomon Burnham and Samuel Chapman. The men absconded with sundry items, including shirts, shoes, hats, and stockings. Burnham and George, however, also left Dorsey’s with iron collars around their necks. The pair likely caused some sort of disturbance at the forge and the owner, Samuel Dorsey, had them restrained as a punishment or precaution. Irons greatly hindered the fugitives’ escape; the added weight slowed the men down and were considerably difficult to conceal. Virginians easily took notice of two men wearing irons. Chapman or another accomplice could have removed the irons or they could have bartered with an ironsmith using the “new Shoes with Buckles, and a new Felt Hat” that

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

Chapman had fled with.²⁴³ However, even if Burnham and George managed to break free of their irons, the chains and collars left impressions and scars that would reveal to suspicious Virginians that they were runaways.²⁴⁴

A Felon Returns Home

While hundreds of servants ran away and purportedly hundreds more filed grievances through the court, a few indentured servants, such as James Revel, completed their contract and managed to return home to their native country. Twelve long years passed before “Death for [Revel’s] master [called].”²⁴⁵ Alas, the old man’s passing did little to assuage the convict servant’s grief and woe. Revel’s widowed mistress could not hold the plantation, so servants and slaves alike were sold. A wealthy lawyer from Jamestown quickly purchased the slaves but would take no transported felons. One gentleman, a cooper by trade, took notice of Revel and approached the poor felon, who commented “I hope you’ve seen your folly now.”²⁴⁶ The sincerity of Revel’s repentance prompted the cooper to purchase him and promise “not to use [him] as a slave/ But as a servant if [he] well behav’d.”²⁴⁷ Revel served out the remaining two years of his contract “in plenty and at ease.”²⁴⁸ In the comings and goings of his life, Revel grieved to see “so many transported felons there to be...like old Horses forced to trudge and slave.”²⁴⁹ Two years transpired, and the cooper, true to his word, provided Revel

²⁴³ *Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, December 8, 1774.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Felon,” 192.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 194

passage to Old England. James Revel returned to his home, a man of 27, where he had left as a boy of 13.²⁵⁰

Back home, James Revel published *The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Account of His Fourteen Years Transported at Virginia in America* circa 1680. For the price of one penny, the former servant entreated his countrymen to “take warning e'er too late” and to avoid his “hard unhappy fate.”²⁵¹ He warned that although a crime committed may be small trifling, “consider seven or fourteen years to come...Sold for a slave because you prov'd a thief.”²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 194.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 194.

²⁵² Ibid, 194.

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APENDIX A:
TABLES

Table 1 Colonial Virginia Servant Runaways Measured over Time

Periods	Runaways Absconded
1736- 1739	139
1740-1749	51
1750-1759	110
1760-1769	163
1770-1779	549
1780-1789	55
1790-1799	48

Table 2 Gender Characteristics of Runaway Servants Measured over Time in Colonial Virginia

Periods	Male	Female
1736- 1739	126	13
1740-1749	47	4
1750-1759	98	12
1760-1769	150	13
1770-1779	530	19
1780-1789	55	0
1790-1799	47	1

Table 3 Runaway Servants' Month of Departure in Colonial Virginia

January	41
February	36
March	51
April	60
May	65
June	62
July	75
August	52
September	52
October	46
November	43
December	41
Not Specified	157

Table 4 Placement Intervals for Runaway Servant Advertisements in Colonial Virginia

Periods	>1 month	one month	two months	3-5 months	6-12 months	over 1 year
1736- 1739	65	8	6	5	1	3
1740-1749	22	6	2	2	1	0
1750-1759	57	7	2	2	0	0
1760-1769	49	19	7	6	1	1
1770-1779	192	37	17	17	2	1
1780-1789	27	5	0	0	0	0
1790-1799	36	4	1	3	0	0

Table 5 Runaway Servant Background Characteristics in Colonial Virginia

Periods	Convicts	Indentured	Apprentice
1736-1739	27	103	0
1740-1749	22	28	1
1750-1759	23	88	1
1760-1769	71	80	9
1770-1779	212	289	40
1780-1789	0	41	10
1790-1799	0	2	47

Table 6 Runaway Servant Ethnic Characteristic in Colonial Virginia

Periods	Ethnicity					
	English	Irish	Scot	Spanish	Dutch	German
1736-1739	41	33	4	0	1	0
1740-1749	16	17	3	0	0	0
1750-1759	31	20	8	0	1	0
1760-1769	53	18	9	0	2	0
1770-1779	166	140	42	0	2	0
1780-1789	4	23	0	0	3	0
1790-1799	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 7 Runaway Servant Age Groupings Measured Over Time in Colonial Virginia

Periods	Group by Ages				
	teens	20s	30s	40s	50s
1736-1739	8	42	10	5	3
1740-1749	7	8	7	3	1
1750-1759	9	36	9	4	3
1760-1769	14	39	16	4	1
1770-1779	64	177	63	20	4
1780-1789	8	20	2	2	0
1790-1799	28	6	0	0	0

Table 8 Instances of Servant Flight during the 1770's in Lord Dunmore's Virginia

Years	Male	Female
1770	64	4
1771	54	2
1772	55	0
1773	126	4
1774	77	7
1775	106	0
1776	30	0
1777	21	1
1778	6	0
1779	0	0

Table 9 Work Characteristics of Colonial Virginia Runaway Servants

Occupations				
Periods	Husbandry	Skilled	Domestic	Semi-Skilled
1736-1739	7	52	2	7
1740-1749	1	15	1	1
1750-1759	7	40	2	11
1760-1769	8	59	2	16
1770-1779	28	178	13	32
1780-1789	1	14	0	10
1790-1799	0	1	0	47

Table 10 Characteristics of Colonial Runaway Servants who Absconded in Groups

Periods	Nature of Flights		
	with Servants	with Slaves	with Servants and Slaves
1736-1739	30	8	1
1740-1749	9	0	0
1750-1759	20	2	2
1760-1769	24	2	5
1770-1779	99	17	3
1780-1789	10	4	2
1790-1799	3	2	0

Table 11 Literacy Characteristics of Runaway Servants in Colonial Virginia

Periods	Read	Write
1736-1739	5	5
1740-1749	3	3
1750-1759	1	1
1760-1769	9	8
1770-1779	30	30
1780-1789	1	1
1790-1799	0	0

Table 12 Articles Runaway Servants Stole in Colonial Virginia

Items	
Horses	78
Firearms	17
Passes	13
Tools	15
Additional Clothes	180
Accessories	103
Money	16
Bedding/Linen	5
Boats/Watercraft	11
Weapons	8

Table 13 Runaway Servant Height Characteristics in Colonial Virginia

	Male	Female
Short Stature	303	11
Medium Stature	298	10
Tall Stature	61	2
Not Specified	222	30

Vita

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