The Bound "Giddy Multitude": Runaway Indentured Servants Convicts and Slaves in Colonial Virginia

Nicole K. Dressler
Old Dominion University

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THE BOUND "GIDDY MULTITUDE": RUNAWAY INDENTURED SERVANTS, CONVICTS, AND SLAVES IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA

by

Nicole K. Dressler
B.A. and B.S. May 2008, Longwood University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
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Approved by:

Jane T. Merritt (Director)

Mau[...]

Carolyn J. Lawes (Member)
ABSTRACT

THE BOUND "GIDDY MULTITUDE": RUNAWAY INDENTURED SERVANTS, CONVICTS, AND SLAVES IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA

Nicole K. Dressler
Old Dominion University, 2011
Director: Dr. Jane T. Merritt

This thesis explores the social, political, and cultural significance of escaped indentured servants, convict servants, and slaves in colonial Virginia. By analyzing judicial records, letters, diaries, independent documents, and particularly, runaway advertisements, researchers can develop a clearer understanding of bondsmen’s activities and identities while gaining valuable insight into the relationship between masters and laborers. As a key group of defiant laborers, runaway servants and slaves engaged in powerful acts of resistance that exposed the precarious nature of the colony’s social order and added to planters’ worries over labor management and colonial affairs, facilitating Virginia elite’s participation in the movement for independence.

Virginia’s colonists built their wealth by depending on bondsmen to cultivate land and harvest tobacco, and when laborers defied planters by escaping, they threatened planters’ authority and economic security. After Bacon’s Rebellion in the late seventeenth century, wealthier planters exercised their political power to better control their laborers and mitigate class conflict. Lawmakers and planters developed strict legal measures, such as the slave codes, promoted class and racial divides, and developed new measures of social control; however, laborers’ defiance and class conflict continued to trouble tobacco growers. Wealthy planters used patriarchism to better articulate their supremacy, and by the late 1730s, Virginia emerged as a distinct slave society built upon
hierarchal responsibilities and deference. Planters continued to strive for domestic tranquility, but the activities and crimes of defiant bondsmen weakened their authority. Runaway advertisements show that despite the harsh consequences of capture, many bondsmen devised clever strategies and used vital resources to reinvent themselves as free people, challenging the institutions of servitude and slavery. Throughout the eighteenth century, colonists worried over escaped laborers’ resistance and their fears culminated when the royal governor, Lord Dunmore, emancipated laborers in 1775. For decades, colonists sought to minimize the number of runaways and defiant laborers, and emancipation not only undermined planters’ objectives and legislation, but it threatened their way of life and their identity. Colonists were well aware of the problems that bondsmen caused once they declared their own freedom, thus Dunmore’s emancipation of bondsmen encouraged Virginia’s participation in the American Revolution.
For Jeff, whose wise words always make me smile, and for Charlene, who always brings happiness to those around her
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

RUN away from the subscriber, in Cumberland county, on the 26th of February, a Mulatto man slave named SANCHO, appears to be about 40 years old, stoops a good deal, and is by trade a carpenter and cooper; had on, when he went away, the usual cloathing of Negroes, and carried with him a broadcloth Coat, mixed with something of a violet colour, a blue dual coat and blanket, a large knife, made in the shape of a butcher's, the blade of which is broad, and about 15 inches long. Absconded with him a white servant woman named ELIZABETH BEAVER, about 20 years old, of a fresh complexion, low, but thick, her hair, being cut in a very uncommon manner, is short, but long about her temples. She went off without either hat or bonnet; but I imagine she now wears a man's hat, as the fellow carried with him two of that sort. She took with her one yarn, one cotton, and one linen striped holland gown, a very good blue calimanco quilt, and many other things. I expect they will change their names, and endeavour to pass for husband and wife, as free people. Whoever will bring the said runaways to me shall receive SIX POUNDS, if taken in Virginia, and TEN POUNDS, if out of it, besides what the law allows. I forewarn all persons from carrying them out of the colony. The fellow is outlawed. JOSEPH CALLAND

Elizabeth and Sancho are two of the many servants and slaves who decided to escape from their master and reinvent themselves as free people during the eighteenth century in Virginia. Runaway advertisements, such as the one above, flooded colonial newspapers as a means to capture fugitives and return them to their masters, and just as Calland’s ad revealed, many planters struggled to keep laborers subservient. Throughout the colonial period, the actions of defiant laborers, such as runaways, pressured Virginia’s planters to modify laws and enforce harsh punishments in order to protect the colony’s tobacco economy and social order. Despite planters’ measures of control, hundreds of bound laborers escaped from authority figures and many engaged in dangerous illegal activities, adding to white colonists’ worries over labor management. By resisting their masters and declaring their freedom, runaway indentured servants, 

\[1\] Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg, March 17, 1774.
convict servants, and slaves threatened the colony’s domestic tranquility, shaping the political and social context of Virginia, and in a greater sense, the United States.

In the early seventeenth century, England hoped the American colonies would emerge as a lucrative investment; however, in order for this to occur, the economy in the New World needed to be strengthened. In Virginia, tobacco emerged as an increasingly important crop during the 1600s, but the success of this cash crop relied heavily on the labor needed for its production. Thus, laborers became the cornerstone of the colonial economy, and subsequently, planters developed an elaborate social structure to manage the thousands of migrants coming from all parts of the Atlantic to work in the colony.

Despite colonists’ hopes for a subservient work force, many laborers outwardly resisted their bondage. Harsh working conditions, cruel punishments, divided families, and poor nutrition are a few key reasons why bondsmen dared to escape from their masters. Runaway bound laborers were a part of Virginia’s “giddy multitude,” which included indentured servants, convict servants, slaves, debtors, and poor laborers who defied whites’ authority. Masters posted runaway advertisements to detain their escapees and they described how bondsmen reinvented their identities to maximize their chances for successful flights. By escaping together, Elizabeth, a white servant woman, and Sancho, a mulatto slave man, defied their masters’ authority by reinventing

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themselves as married “free people.”

Runaways, just like these two fugitives, formed common bonds and fled with one another, demonstrating that the pursuit of freedom transcended the racial and social barriers forged into the laws of colonial society. Virginia’s runaway advertisements reveal how race, gender, and class became an integral part of the story of escaped bound laborers.

For runaways, flight was a means to resist colonial oppression, but for planters, bound laborers’ departure often had legal repercussions since it gravely threatened colonial stability. Runaways committed a variety of unlawful acts to sustain their flights. Before they escaped, Sancho stole coats, a blanket, and a knife, and Elizabeth took gowns, a quilt, and “many other things.”

Stealing these items would have certainly aided them on their journey, but removing themselves and valuable items could become very costly for their owners. Also, runaways’ flights posed a major challenge to planters’ position as masters. Legislators created strict laws to penalize laborers for taking flight; they extended servants’ contracts, enforced harsh physical punishments, and sometimes sentenced fugitives to death for their illegal activities. Capturing runaways was not only a means for masters to restore their authority and regain their laborers, but it was also a measure to deter other ambitious bondsmen hoping to take flight. Despite planters’ courses of action, the fear of the consequences of capture did not prevent many of Virginia’s bound laborers from running away.

Planters spent the latter seventeenth century and early eighteenth century creating a slave society, and they devoted the rest of the eighteenth century to maintaining its social order. Year after year, runaway advertisements described how the “giddy

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5 *Virginia Gazette*, Williamsburg, March 17, 1774.

6 *Virginia Gazette*, Williamsburg, March 17, 1774.
multitude" used deception, theft, violence, and alliances against planters— all jeopardizing domestic tranquility. Runaways’ actions weakened planters’ political and social power and their illegal activities influenced the ruling class’s legal decisions in the advent of the American War for Independence. In 1775, Lord Dunmore’s proclamation to free Virginia’s bound laborers sent whites into a panic because colonists had spent decades minimizing bondsmen’s endeavors for freedom and their crimes, which laborers certainly found easier to commit once they were free from planters’ surveillance. Runaways’ actions demonstrated their lack of deference for masters’ authority and property, and many planters feared that bound laborers’ independence would culminate into a colonial disaster. Manumitting bondsmen not only compromised planters’ security, but it removed tobacco growers main source of labor, which would devastate the plantation system. Colonial leaders were mindful of the troubles that laborers caused once they declared their own freedom, thus Dunmore’s actions, and specifically, the emancipation of bondsmen, propelled Virginia’s elites to take part in the movement for independence. Hence, runaway indentured servants, convict servants, and slaves not only dynamically influenced the colony’s participation in the war, but their activities shaped the evolution of Virginia.

Historians have studied bound laborers using a variety of different approaches and methodologies, but the focus on Virginia’s runaway bondsmen specifically, has been limited. When studying Virginia’s colonial events, many historians have interwoven the cultural, social, economic, and political fibers of the colony’s past to add to the

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compilation of Virginia’s dynamic histories. To explain Virginia’s colonial evolution, James Horn, in *Adapting to a New World*, investigates the seventeenth-century Chesapeake’s social origins, economic progression, and cultural developments using a transatlantic comparison between England and the colonies of Virginia and Maryland. Horn dismisses earlier historians who neglected to explore the “cultural continuity” of the Old World’s cultural and social factors present in the New World. People living in the Chesapeake continued to practice English religious services, maintained similar cultural perceptions, and abided by British law; however, they adopted their own set of distinct customs. Hence, Horn argued that England’s new colonies did not abruptly emerge as a new definitive culture, but immigrants adapted to the region based on their heritage, background, and experiences. While placing his work in a transatlantic context, he investigated settler patterns, centering his argument on the fact that “Virginia and Maryland were *immigrant* societies.”

England wanted resources from the American colonies and colonists had a voracious appetite for European goods. Horn explained that England’s domestic products doubled its value from the 1640s to 1700; however, importing and reselling items increased the profit by four times. By the end of the 1600s, England received one third of its imports by means of the transoceanic trade. Both tobacco and sugar emerged as two critically important cash crops in the New World, and Europe’s mass markets and growing demands for these products stimulated England’s economic expansion. Consequently, these economic factors accelerated the development of colonial plantations complexes and steered the progression of the region’s labor system. It is imperative to

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9 Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 5-16.

10 Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 11.
examine the early Chesapeake society’s social origin and cultural adaptation to gain a better insight to the planters’ attitudes and approaches towards economic issues, including the distribution of settlements on the tobacco coast, labor management, and cultural exchange.\(^{11}\)

While understanding economic factors and cultural origins are critical to investigating the nature of the Chesapeake society, exploring the beginnings of the plantation complex can help us make sense of labor and the commodities they produced. Phillip Curtin, in *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, discusses unfree laborers in the context of the American plantations. He argues that during the seventeenth century, the plantation complex emerged as one of the dominant and influential economic sectors in the Americas; it drove the Atlantic slave trade, fueled global markets, and steered international transactions. Not only did plantation owners utilize more workers than the average European agricultural unit, but they typically owned all means of production. In addition, the political power of the American plantation complex resided overseas in Europe. Thus, the plantation system functioned as an interconnected economic system – one which was interdependent between three continents, yet bound to the European competitive markets and capital. Similar to Horn, Curtin discusses the significance of migration patterns.\(^{12}\) He contends that the plantation complex “was the main impetus behind the Atlantic slave trade, the largest preindustrial population movement in the history of the world.”\(^{13}\) While coerced labor helped to propel international trade and

\(^{11}\) Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 5-16.


\(^{13}\) Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, 204.
augment planters’ capital, the plantation complexes grew exceedingly dependent on these laborers for its survival.

Land and labor were closely intertwined in the Chesapeake. Lois Green Carr and Russell R. Menard examine how bound laborers and land cultivation techniques were imperative to a plantation’s success. Carr and Menard discuss how colonists in seventeenth-century Maryland and Virginia improved agricultural methods, in what they called the “Chesapeake system of husbandry” – a blend of European and native American techniques and methods devised by the settlers through persistent experimentation.”14 This system required minimal tools, specifically an ax and hoe, with little labor during a time in which labor was not always available. It proved to be lucrative during the colonies’ early years, but land shortages, lack of returns to scales, and crops, such as tobacco and corn, drained the soil’s nutrients which did not allow this system to flourish. Planters needed to adjust their measures to use land as well as the productivity levels of laborers to increase profits.

During the eighteenth century, planters found ways to expand their agricultural productivity. Planters began to use more plows and fewer hoes on their farms, saving time and labor. As a result, they had more time to plant other crops, such as corn. The increased number of crops allowed planters to feed more livestock on their farms. Planters could now acquire more manure as fertilizer and use more animals to draw plows, which encouraged them to obtain more bound laborers. Planters increased their number of slave laborers, as they could coerce slaves to work more hours in more arduous conditions than white servants. These advances helped planters to produce more

crops, including grains, which did not weaken the tobacco trade, and increased workers’
efficacy per acre. This, in turn, allowed planters to expand their work force during the
latter part of the century.\footnote{Carr and Menard, “Land, Labor, and Economies of Scale in Early Maryland,” 409, 413, 415-417.}

While these advances helped many planters to become wealthy in the eighteenth
century, this prosperity was much more challenging to attain for those who did not or
could not afford to incorporate bound laborers into their agricultural units. Poor planters
found it difficult to acquire plows and fence-in livestock, which minimized opportunities
to fertilize fields. Consequently, this led to poorer harvests. In addition, land limitations
forced planters to plant corn crops closer together and this reduced the harvests’ yield,
emphasizing the need for fertilizer. Many small farmers did not have the labor or money
necessary to expand their productivity and their numbers declined during the century.
Some farmers did merge with the class of great planters and others traveled to the frontier
to settle new arable lands.\footnote{Carr and Menard, “Land, Labor, and Economies of Scale in Early Maryland,” 417-418.} The remainder lived, “eking out livings on small farms,
trapped in the seventeenth-century mold.”\footnote{Carr and Menard, “Land, Labor, and Economies of Scale in Early Maryland,” 418.} Carr and Menard’s research illustrates how
land and labor dynamically effected the survival of plantations during the eighteenth
century.

Although much of the literature concerning Virginia’s unfree laborers discussed
the complexities of the institution of slavery, white servants comprised an important part
of colony’s labor source as well. Abbot Smith’s classic work *Colonists in Bondage*
explains the origins, status, and difficulties servants endured in American from 1607-
1776. It also sets the framework to explore indentured servitude and convict labor in
colonial Virginia more closely. Smith asserts that England encouraged people to travel to the colonies, specifically those who were considered undesirable. People who were considered undesirable ranged in all ages. They were mostly those of a lower status, which included English rogues, prisoners, whores, German and Swiss refugees, and Scottish and Irish peasants. During the first decade of the 1600s, the Virginia Company enticed “Adventurers” to travel to the colony with a promise of a free passage, clothing, meals, and housing in exchange for their contracted labor which usually lasted seven years. These travelers were assured that once they were freed they would receive some money and land to help them become self-sufficient. With these luring promises, many of Europe’s poor traveled across the Atlantic to pursue opportunities in the colonies.

While some people volunteered to travel to the colonies, others were forced into colonial servitude. Many captains or ship owners were more than willing to pay kidnappers, also known as “Spirits,” a couple pounds to persuade or force credulous men, women, or children to board the ships heading westward bound. England also sentenced many of their convict laborers to the colonies as well. Whereas the punishment for a felony was death, a judge could pardon an offender if he opted to take a term of servitude in the colonies. James I explained that the deportation of convicts was an effective method to correct their behavior as well as a way to send more laborers to the colonies. Patent rolls from 1661 to 1700 show that judges sent approximately 4,500 of these lowly offenders across the Atlantic Ocean. Smith seemed critical of both felons and the system; to him, they “were a sorry lot of human beings,” and deportation to the colonies.

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19 Smith, *Colonists in Bondage*, 67-69, 89-93, 96.
did little to correct their behavior.\textsuperscript{20} With so many felons arriving to British America, colonists soon became resentful and hoped that England would halt the exportation of these felons to the colonies. Both Maryland and Virginia banned the importation of criminal laborers; however, in 1717, England announced that the colonies must accept these convicts and stated that these laborers could serve a term of servitude for up to fourteen years. Smith estimated that about 20,000 convicts, mostly those who committed acts of larceny, came to Maryland and Virginia during the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{21}

Once servants reached the colonies, many had a hard time adjusting to their new environment. Servants were not used to the warm climates in Virginia and death from disease was not uncommon. In 1671, Governor Berkeley stated that in years past as many as 80 percent of the servants perished from illnesses not long after they arrived in the colony. In addition, soil preparation and tobacco cultivation was labor intensive and very strenuous work. It was challenging for European laborers to toil in tobacco fields and possibly even more so for those rogues and thieves who had performed little physical labor in the past. Many of these workers lived in small huts, often self-constructed, slept in poor bedding, and ate little or no meat. Also, servants received harsh punishments for insubordination, such as whippings, serving time in the stocks, and extended terms of servitude. These conditions encouraged laborers to escape from their masters.\textsuperscript{22}

Whereas Smith examines white servitude in the American colonies more broadly, James Ballagh explores the social and legal parameters of white servitude in colonial Virginia. He largely focuses on the seventeenth century and discusses how the colony

\textsuperscript{20} Smith, \textit{Colonists in Bondage}, 106.

\textsuperscript{21} Smith, \textit{Colonists in Bondage}, 110-111, 119.

\textsuperscript{22} Smith, \textit{Colonists in Bondage}, 254, 256-257, 264, 278.
depended on servants as both tenants and workers on their plantations during the colonial period, thus maintaining and organizing servants became essential to planters' success. Most of Virginia’s servants were of English, Irish, or Scottish decent. Merchants could make a substantial profit by transporting these servants across the Atlantic for approximately £6 to £8, and selling them to planters for up to £40 to £60. The number of servants entering the colony increased significantly, and in 1619, the General Assembly legally recognized servants, as lawmakers obligated masters to fulfill their portion of the contracts with the completion of servants’ dutiful services. By 1624, there were about 378 servants in the colony’s population of 2500 and planters typically owned only one or two servants. In 1671, the number of servants burgeoned to 6000 and some planters had as many as thirty servants.23 The growth in the number of servants exemplifies the importance of servitude as an institution in Virginia. With a focus on both the legal and social relationships of servants, this thesis will expand upon Ballagh’s work to help construct the narrative of Virginia’s runaway servants.

During the seventeenth century, planters faced a number of problems with the system of servitude. Planters not only asserted their control over laborers’ work, but also over their personal decisions. For example, planters denied marriage rights to servants, as laborers’ marriages, especially ones performed in secret, often clashed with planters’ objectives. The Virginia Assembly passed a law in 1643 that added another year of service if a male servant married without the consent of his master and doubled the term of servitude if a female servant committed the same offense. Planters also administered strict physical punishments in Virginia to enforce obedience; they branded servants,

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forced them to serve in shackles, and whipped them. In 1662, the legislators promoted the construction and use of whipping posts in each county. Some of masters’ disciplinary measures became so severe that courts ordered for servants’ burials to be open to the public to minimize mistreatment.24

As one of the largest problems of labor management, planters struggled to prevent bondsmen from taking flight. Some servants ran away on their own accord and sometimes other colonists enticed them to escape by offering them better working conditions. The courts tried to alleviate this problem in 1642 by allowing servants to make formal complaints against masters; however, the legislation did not trump their desires to be free. Also, the number of runaways increased as more convict servants arrived in the colony. Convict servants were more likely to escape than indentured servants, and colonists often blamed these felons for pressuring other servants to escape. Some servants escaped in “troops” and encouraged slave laborers to join them. During the latter part of the century, the number of slaves rose in the colony and many white and black laborers worked together, often performing similar duties in tobacco fields. This close proximity allowed laborers to build common bonds, which were helpful when they wanted to form alliances to escape. Bound laborers began to run away so frequently that laws did not always differentiate between the consequences for runaway servants and runaway slaves.25 Indeed, their willingness to flee together indicated that both white servants and African slaves shared social commonalities that bridged some of the racial and social barriers.

24 Ballagh, White Servitude in the Colony of Virginia, 50-52, 59, 77. Since 1619, female servants needed to obtain the permission of their masters before they could get married.

Ballagh explores the development of indentured servitude in Virginia focusing largely on male indentured servants while Walter Blumenthal traces the voyages and activities of female convict laborers in his work, *Brides from Bridewell*. Drawing on England’s prison records from Newgate, Marshalsea, and Bridewell, Blumenthal reconstructs the narrative of England’s female felons arriving in Virginia and Maryland. Abbott Smith assumes that 25 percent of transported felons were female. Blumenthal adds that Virginia and Maryland were “woman-hungry colonies,” and these female convicts contributed to approximately one third of British America’s early families.

Just as indentured servants had done, many of these convicts, both men and women, defied their masters and resisted bondage. Many colonists belittled convict servants because of their lowly status as both criminals and bound laborers. According to Blumenthal, Doctor Samuel Johnson reported in 1769 that “They are a race of convicts and ought to be thankful for any thing we allow them short of hanging.” To control defiant convict servants, both men and women, some planters used iron or steel collars, including neck-yokes and leg-irons; however, members of the lower class sometimes thwarted masters’ attempts to control unruly convict servants. According to the author, one steward concerned about runaways, reported that the planters’ efforts to shackle fugitive laborers were futile because many blacks who worked as blacksmiths were willing to free them. This suggests that some convict servants had maintained a level of

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27 Blumenthal, *Brides from Bridewell*, 57.

28 Blumenthal, *Brides from Bridewell*, 47.
amiable relations with members of the lower class of freemen and debtors. Building upon the scholarship of historians such as Blumenthal, Ballagh, and Smith, this thesis will further the discussion on the role of indentured servants and convict servants in Virginia and investigate how they responded to the system of servitude.

While relations among indentured servants and convict servants reflected the tensions among social groups, slaves also complicated labor relations in colonial Virginia. As a pioneer in the field, Edmund Morgan argues that people in the British colonies fought fervently for freedom during the American Revolution; however, they paradoxically constructed their society on the institution of slavery, a system that suppressed liberty. This thesis will build upon Morgan’s work to explain the rise of a tobacco culture and the development of a coercive system of labor in colonial Virginia.

In American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia, Morgan explores how colonial Virginia reached its initial stages of “racial consciousness.” He argues that since the establishment of Jamestown, the local Indians had supported the colony with food subsidies, but they also had attracted Jamestown’s deserters at a time when labor was essential to the colony’s survival. In addition, Englishmen saw that Native Americans successfully cultivated and smoked tobacco, which impelled colonists to produce their own; however, their initial efforts were in vain. Although Englishmen struggled during the colony’s initial years of development, in 1617, Jamestown had enough tobacco to make a shipment to its mother country, selling the harvest for three shillings per pound. Despite its early production, colonists feared Jamestown’s collapse

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29 Blumenthal, Brides from Bridewell, 46-47.

and grew resentful of the Indians’ ability to sustain themselves. The Native Americans’ success threatened Englishmen’s sense of racial superiority; colonists disparaged the Indians as “heathen savages,” and condemned those who joined the Indians to bolster their own superiority. Englishmen burned Indian villages, destroyed their cornfields, and even killed their children. Morgan argues that this dynamic clash of culture was the root of “racial consciousness” in Virginia—a racial discrimination fueled by fear.  

Throughout the seventeenth century, Virginia’s legislators and planters sought a greater means to increase their control over society. After the first half of the century, mortality rates decreased and Virginia saw an increasing number of white bondsmen outliving their servitude and establishing themselves as freemen and tobacco planters. Thus, the markets had a growing supply of tobacco which reduced the cost of the crop and decreased profits. Servants were also a problem because those who were unhappy challenged planters’ authority by stealing from local farms, persuading fellow laborers to escape, and instigating uprisings, such as the servant rebellion in Gloucester in 1663. Colonial leaders—affluent planters and legislators—looked for a means to stabilize the colony’s economy and manage bondsmen and poor laborers; however, without an efficient militia and with a relatively weak religious institution in the colony, the council and burgesses had limited measures to control colonial affairs. To remedy this problem, colonial leaders reserved governmental positions for their immediate supporters and implemented laws to enforce order and deference for authority figures. Their measures for power engendered resentment and social discord, which culminated in Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 and the plant-cutting rebellion in 1682. In result of these events, Virginia’s colonial leaders learned the dangers of a volatile society and spent the

subsequent decades enacting new laws and punishments to promote their legitimacy as authority figures and to maintain order in the colony.\textsuperscript{32} However, as this thesis will explore, bound laborers challenged their laws by running away to reestablish themselves as free people.

During the eighteenth century, Virginia developed into a unique slave society. After the conflicts of the late seventeenth century, tobacco growers began to purchase fewer servants and more slaves to create a more manageable labor force. It was not long before lawmakers and planters drove a wedge between whites and blacks to better control social groups. They sought to gain white support and exploited blacks in order to build their power in the colony. Virginia’s gentry grew dependent on slaves to produce lucrative tobacco crops, which buttressed whites’ livelihoods and culture. By the 1770s, Virginia not only held forty percent of British America’s slaves, but the colony also cultivated, produced, and sold one of the most valuable goods that financed the war: tobacco. Morgan asserts that slavery and freedom were inherently intertwined in early Virginia and the former allowed the founding fathers the liberty to pursue independence from Great Britain.\textsuperscript{33} Morgan successfully constructed an exhaustive yet pivotal historical study to demonstrate that “the rise of liberty and equality in America had been accompanied by the rise of slavery.”\textsuperscript{34}

While Morgan’s work explores the historical paradox of slavery and freedom, Allan Kulikoff centers his work, \textit{Tobacco and Slaves}, on the economic, demographic, and

\textsuperscript{32} Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom}, 215-217, 220-221, 245-248, 308.

\textsuperscript{33} Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom}, 3-6.

\textsuperscript{34} Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom}, 4.
political changes in the Chesapeake, focusing heavily on the period between 1680 and 1750. Tobacco prices decreased from 1620-1680, but workers' productivity levels increased significantly which allowed planters, including affluent growers and ex-servants who invested in farms, to earn substantial profits from the business. However, after the 1680s, a number of changes occurred that altered the course of Virginia’s development. First, declining tobacco prices and fewer land opportunities discouraged whites from traveling to the colonies, leading to the growth of the natural population. Second, planters began to purchase slaves as the bulk of their workforce, which raised lower-class whites' social standing and helped slave owners build their wealth. Third, descendants of early political officials developed powerful families in the colony, forming the basis for the ruling class. These changes ignited conflicts over labor and tobacco management. During the early eighteenth century, elite planters and poor farmers entered into a number of intense power struggles as they argued over tobacco regulations and trade. However, by the 1730s and 1740s, with the implementation of tobacco inspections, the gentry finally emerged as a supreme political and economic authority over the lower classes.\footnote{Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 3-5, 9-10.}

Kulikoff's study also reveals the emergence of a distinct black society related to tobacco production. He observes that the development of African culture in America, including religious practices, kinship networks, and social groups, was contingent upon migration patterns, planters' objectives, and economic demands. He divided the development of black societies into three time periods. The first, from 1650 to 1690, was an assimilation period in which white elites enforced compliance and subservience. During the second period, between 1690 and 1740, many small plantations emerged and
the colony imported a larger number of African slaves, which caused tension among differing African groups in the colony. During the last period, from 1740 to 1790, plantations expanded, African imports decreased, and slaves developed elaborate kinship networks. Slaves were better able to endure the hardships of the slave system and also to resist whites, as separation from loved ones and new social connections inspired many slaves to escape from their masters.36

While Morgan and Kulikoff discuss the economic and social developments in Virginia, Kathleen Brown in *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, expands upon their works to explain how both gender and the ideas of race fit into the colony’s practices of labor management, political legitimacy, and social values. Brown explores England’s social standards and defined gender roles, which underscored female reliance on male authority. Brown argues that Englishmen used the ideas of women’s subservience as a “powerful metaphor for other social relationships in which power is unevenly distributed.”37 In the early seventeenth century, Virginia’s colonists, many of whom had little if any interaction with Africans hitherto, were uncertain where skin color should fit in their social hierarchies and moral codes. Because Christianity attached a negative connotation to the color black, the English associated darker skin tones with immorality and malice. Many scholars have neglected to focus on both gender and race as social constructs in Virginia, but Brown emphasizes that southern planters interwove

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these characteristics into the colony's social fabric in order to support their positions as patriarchs and preserve a politically male-dominated system.\footnote{Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 1-4.}

Where Edmund Morgan saw Bacon's Rebellion as a means to create racial solidarity among whites, Brown asserts that the event was a major turning point in gender, race, and class status which contributed to the formation of colonial identity. After the uprising, lesser men were included in wealthier men's cultural activities, such as horse racing and gambling, more frequently. The growth of a white male culture in the colony resulted from wealthy men's pursuit of an Anglo-Virginian identity and lesser men's measures to establish their political legitimacy and social manhood.\footnote{Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 140, 184-185.} According to Brown, "loyalty oaths, militarization, and racist campaigns against Indians during Bacon's Rebellion culminated a process of lower-class white male politicization that left a legacy of racism, strengthened white domestic patriarchal authority, and forged a new political culture to which all free white men who could acquire property had access."\footnote{Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 185.}

Both Brown and Blumenthal stressed the importance for scholars to recognize that unfree labor is an unwelcomed truth of America's heritage. However, Brown and historian Anthony Parent, in \textit{Foul Means}, go further to explore the patriarchal ideologies in order to better understand the growing racially-based institution of slavery in colonial Virginia. Although Parent credits Edmund Morgan with unearthing one of the largest paradoxes in colonial American history, he asserted that there was room to explore the influences and evolution of the pre-revolutionary generations in greater detail.\footnote{Parent, \textit{Foul Means}, 1-5.}
Parent examines issues regarding class creation, behavior, and dogmas from the planters' perspectives. He argues that "friction and conflict in white society made the planters fearful of the enslaved, the class they exploited the most. Class status was not a vulgar determination of economic interest; it was spawned by the social and cultural expectations of a burgeoning planter class."42 Planters recognized the white race, and more specifically the ruling class, as supreme, but the agency of social groups eroded their hegemony. Both women and small planters challenged great planters' authority, but the thought of successful black resistance threatened their core identity. Planters sought assistance from the judicial system to help them control defiant laborers. For instance, in 1660, the General Assembly enacted a law to deter interracial runaway alliances, by punishing white fugitives who escaped with blacks. The decree extended a servant's contract to make up for the lost time of all of the fugitives in the group, both white and black.43 Despite planters' legal measures, bondsmen and freemen were not docile members of society, and great planters began to look for another form of control.

During the eighteenth century planters embraced the ideology of patriarchism to better assert their authority over the lower classes. Patriarchism is an "organizational belief system in which society is structured around the supremacy of the patriarch, or father."44 Great planters emphasized men's inherited privileges and distinguished themselves from women by emphasizing feminine roles as domestic workers. The

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42 Parent, Foul Means, 4.


44 Parent, Foul Means, 199. According to Parent, Philip D. Morgan "describes patriarchalism as more authoritarian, more distant, and more realistic in understanding the slave demeanor than paternalism, which was more intimate, more engaging, and dissimulate. These distinctions, however, are 'complex and confused.' Accepting that paternalism might have emerged after 1750, Morgan believes that it does not become pronounced until the nineteenth century," 198.
planter elite also stressed their superiority over lower classes by exercising their own cultural practices; they flaunted their costly attire, manner of speech, and dedication to the sports, such as horse-racing. They used elements in their own culture to justify their positions as colonial leaders. In addition, planters used Christianity as a means to legitimize their role as patriarchs and as a way to manage slaves by teaching them moral values and the appropriate behavior for bondsmen in society. By and large, patriarchism was a means for planters to face the social challenges that threatened their security and suppress slaves in order to keep them in bondage.45

To fully explore the depths of an eighteenth-century slave society, it is necessary to examine the cultural context of slaves' relations, values, and roles. Few laborers, and far fewer runaways, left documentation of their existence during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, therefore, we can only turn to the surviving records, including runaway advertisements, judicial, and personal narratives left by others to attempt to piece together bondsmen's stories. Phillip Morgan uses these sources to investigate two regional slave cultures, one in the Chesapeake and the other in the South Carolina Lowcountry, to assemble a structural history of African-American slave culture.46

The slave population grew rapidly in the eighteenth century. In the late seventeenth century, slave traders brought a larger number of African men and boys, creating an unbalanced adult sex ratio, but after the 1710s, the population grew by natural means. In some parts of the Chesapeake during the 1690s, there were as many as 180 male slaves to 100 female slaves, but in 1745, some records show that there were about


130 males per 100 females. During the 1730s, the number of slaves grew by approximately 3 percent each year reaching 65,000 slaves in 1740 and 105,000 in 1750. With a better balanced sex ratio, the population began to increase rapidly.47

With an increasing amount of enslaved laborers, slaves created a separate culture building upon key characteristics including, language, entertainment, belief systems, alliances, and kinship. By developing a distinct black culture, slaves mitigated the brutality of bondage and gained a small piece of autonomy, which exposed the limitations of planters’ measures to control their laborers’ lives.48 Morgan argues that the creation of African-American culture was “the most significant act of resistance.”49 Morgan’s focus on black culture was not an effort to ignore or even neglect the views and actions of the upper class, as they penned so many of scholars’ source materials; however, historians should not overlook the groups who did not have their personal experiences recorded in documents. Morgan stated that “history is not just the action of the ruling groups; it is the sweat, blood, and tears, and triumphs of the common folk.”50 This, in part, inspires my approach for exploring the nature of coerced labor and resistance.

Besides using runaway advertisements and personal narratives to understand slaves’ culture and identity, legal and judicial documents honed in on the political implications and status of defiant laborers. Phillip Schwarz, in Twice Condemned, argues that a community’s conflicts and criminal trials can expose its underlying character. By researching Virginia’s labor laws and over four thousand trials between the years of 1705

47 Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, 4, 61, 81-82.

48 Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, xv-xxii.

49 Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, xxii.

50 Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, xxi.
and 1865, Schwarz showed how planters responded and managed criminal behavior over time. He argued that slaves in Virginia were twice condemned, once for their skin color and the other under criminal laws.\(^{51}\)

Schwarz's work explained how laws and punishments reflected the social and cultural conditions of a society. He contended that colonial Virginia emerged as a “biracial society, a combination of dominant whites and enslaved blacks, with Native Americans nearly forgotten and free blacks living in between as ‘slaves without masters.’”\(^{52}\) Although labor laws, such as the slave codes of 1705 and 1748, reflected the elite’s hopes to regulate slaves’ behavior, the staggering number of criminal cases, including accounts of poisonings, arson, runaways, and uprisings, revealed how the social fabric began to tear at the seams in colonial Virginia. Schwarz discusses how planters responded to criminal behavior. For instance, some sent out slave patrollers to capture runaways, but more commonly planters punished laborers in a number of cruel ways, which included the use of plantation jails, stocks, iron collars, and in some cases, “hot boxes,” which were holding cells that subjected prisoners to the sun’s intense heat.\(^{53}\) Planters administered punishments as a form of justice for laborers’ crimes, but these measures did not always correct laborers’ behavior.

Judicial records are imperative to examine planter’s management of recalcitrant laborers, but examining the reasons for bound laborers’ defiance is the key to understanding the dynamics of resistance. Gerald Mullin centers his work, *Flight and*


\(^{52}\) Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 4.

\(^{53}\) Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, ix-x, 4, 8, 10-13.
Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia, on African-Americans' assimilation to the New World and black resistance to slavery during the eighteenth century. Previous scholars concentrated their works on African heritage, strict chronologies, and structural characteristics, but these factors, Mullin argues, led researchers to focus on slaves as a static component of the white elite's labor institution. He examined judicial documents, census returns, and runaway advertisements to construct his project. He affirmed that this documentation, or "unconscious evidence," was never intended for scholarly examination, hence they are valuable sources of insight into the slave society.54

Using a bottom-up approach, Mullin explains that slaves' level of acculturation and the type of work they performed were two critical factors for determining their behavior and reaction to their enslavement. Because of the nature of their work, plantation slaves – house servants and field workers – were limited by their English skills and their access to the outside world.55 Thus, they often directed their measures of resistance towards the plantation environment, committing acts of "inward-directed rebelliousness."56 This type of rebelliousness included destroying planters' tools, assaulting overseers, truancy, or lying about an illness. An outlawed slave, who directed their anger toward the plantation environment, is an example of this type of rebelliousness. On the other hand, slaves who were skilled or literate saw the value in


55 Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 34-36.

56 Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 36.
their knowledge and realized that they could locate work outside of the plantation. By taking flight and directing their resistance outside the plantation environment, slaves removed themselves from their masters' control; these slaves, such as skilled runaways, "resisted outwardly." Mullin contends that as "slaves acculturated they became outwardly rebellious and more difficult for whites to control."

Runaway advertisements often portray escaped bondsmen's measures of resistance. To demonstrate the historical value of runaway ads and evaluate class and labor in colonial America, Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz in *Blacks Who Stole Themselves* examine Pennsylvania's eighteenth-century slave advertisements. They analyzed masters' perceptions of laborers' identity and bound laborers' acts of insubordination in order to better understand the characteristics of colonial life.

Laborers escaped into an environment full of challenges and risks which could lead to their capture. Weather played a large part in the decision to escape. More fugitives ran away during the warmer months of the year as cold weather not only made traveling more difficult, but food, including roots, plants, and fruits, were more plentiful in the warmer seasons. Small animals were also an easily attainable source of food, whereas the loss of larger animals from farms would indicate to owners that fugitives were in the proximity. Many runaways stole supplies from their own plantations to aid

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57 Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 36-38, 81-82.


them during flights as well. Once they departed, many took refuge in deserted buildings, such as old barns or shacks, or in the density of the forests.⁶¹

Runaway ads also show how escaped laborers influenced colonial laws. Smith and Wojtowicz assert that legislators in all of the colonies established laws that restricted blacks' freedom. They prohibited them from assembling into groups, placed restrictions on hazardous items, such as guns and liquor, and required bondsmen to carry a pass when traveling without their masters. While legislators passed a number of laws throughout the eighteenth century to ensure laborers' obedience, they dedicated many of their regulations specifically to minimizing the number of runaways.⁶²

Perhaps more pertinent to this project is Lathan Windley in A Profile of Runaway Slaves in Virginia and South Carolina from 1730 Through 1787, who discusses the legal actions used to manage black runaways in Virginia and South Carolina. For instance, in Virginia, if a slave traveled without a pass or “ticket,” lawmakers punished them with whippings, and if they escaped more than once, lawmakers authorized slaves’ dismemberment. Although the true number of runaways will probably never be known, Windley used over 3,600 slave accounts for his study and found approximately 1,276 runaway slaves in Virginia between 1730 and 1787, in which 1114 were male and 148 were female. He defines runaways’ travel patterns, assimilation to white colonial culture, and describes their personal characteristics. For example, he explains that gender and age factored into the likelihood of absenteeism. Prior to the American Revolution, one female slave escaped for every eight male slaves in Virginia, probably since having children often made it exceedingly challenging for women to make an escape. Also,

⁶¹ Smith and Wojtowicz Blacks Who Stole Themselves, 11-12.

⁶² Smith and Wojtowicz Blacks Who Stole Themselves, 9-10.
bondsmen tended to escape when they were younger rather than older. Between 1730 and 1790, approximately sixty-three percent of escapees were under thirty years old. There was a higher demand for younger slaves in the colony because of their physical strength and stamina. Consequently, the largest group of runaways was young men. Windley uses the colony’s legislation and the runaway advertisements to argue that slaves created “autonomous cultures” that challenged the institution of slavery. This thesis will expand upon Windley’s work, incorporating convicts and indentured servants, in order to better understand the motives and identities of runaway laborers in eighteenth-century Virginia.63

Tom Costa’s database, Geography of Slavery in Virginia, allows researchers to compare Virginia’s runaway advertisements across decades. With over 4,000 advertisements from Virginia and Maryland’s newspapers, scholars can investigate runaways’ characteristics, motives, and relations more easily. The advertisements are arguably more objective than other traditional narrative sources. Although they do maintain some bias, most subscribers did not have an underlying motive to lie about laborers’ abilities because they needed to relay factual information in order to capture their workers. With electronic access to the ads, scholars can better evaluate runaways’ patterns and trends during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.64

One way bound laborers hoped to gain autonomy was to run away to a maroon community. Hugo Leaming in Hidden Americans explains that maroons – those who

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63 Lathan A. Windley, A Profile of Runaway Slaves in Virginia and South Carolina from 1730 Through 1787 (New York: Garland Pub, 1995), xi, xvii, 8, 30-31, 39-40, 48-49, 159. Windley found that out of the 1,276 slaves he examined, fourteen were not assigned a specific gender.

64 The Geography of Slavery in Virginia, Tom Costa and The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia, http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/ (accessed October 6, 2009).
lived simultaneously and separately from white colonists – developed a distinct culture in free communities in the United States. During the seventeenth century, some indentured servants journeyed to the Great Dismal Swamp of Virginia and North Carolina, a place the Tuscarora and Roanoke settlers already called home. After 1714, the year the Tuscarora War came to a close, the swamp attracted many new inhabitants which led to an increase in the swamp’s black population. After the 1740s, the Scratch Hall people – a mix of predominantly Tuscaroras and Roanoke settlers and some whites, blacks, and other Native Americans – took charge as the dominant social group in the swamp, demonstrating their ability to survive as a community. Newcomers found and integrated into the maroon settlements, marrying into each other’s families and creating alliances based on trust and dependency. These maroons learned from each others’ trades, memorized pathways, and discovered survival tactics together, their experiences and skills merged to form a distinct and vibrant culture.

Although they had fresh water and plenty of wildlife to sustain their communities, living in the swamp was not easy. Maroons led raids on planters in the proximity, taking horses and cattle, and their guerrilla bands recruited new members by offering bondsmen opportunities to live in the free communities. Their ability to escape, assault, and defend was the foundation of their existence and their measures to form alliances facilitated these endeavors. During the American Revolution, maroons threatened white planters to a larger extent by supporting the British forces. For planters, this was a great threat, but for escaped laborers and maroons, it was a means to challenge the institution of slavery.

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Learning argues that "maroon activity, together with slave insurrections, have been seen as the most militant expression of the Black resistance to slavery."\(^67\)

By the latter part of the century, runaways’ actions influenced Virginia’s ideas of freedom and oppression in respect to the rise of a developing nation. In David Waldstreicher’s *Runaway America*, he juxtaposes Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography and the impact of bound laborers on the development of the American Revolution. Franklin worked as an apprentice and a servant for a printer, and his resourcefulness and diligence helped him to become an educated statesman. Waldstreicher draws parallels between Franklin’s challenges and accomplishments, and runaways’ struggles to integrate into society. Just like Franklin and other “self-made men and women” who used their skills to elevate their status, runaway servants and slaves also used their resources and abilities to forge new identities. Because laborers with trades were more likely to blend in as freemen, many escapees attempted to appear as free artisans and sought out employers in order to join the free society.\(^68\) Waldstreicher argues that as the quintessence of freedom and liberty, “Franklin’s life serves as a central connecting thread tying the social history of unfree labor to the political history of nation-making.”\(^69\)

Waldstreicher used slavery and servitude as a metaphor for the colonies relationship with Great Britain. Americans were the “children and servants” of England, and the American Revolution was their escape from servitude. Franklin blamed the English for founding a corrupt empire based on slavery, and he employed antislavery

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\(^67\) *Learning, Hidden Americans*, xiii-xiv.


ideas against the mother country during the American Revolution. Waldstreicher argues that America itself was a runaway seeking to reinvent its society as an autonomous one.\textsuperscript{70}

Waldstreicher discusses the circumstances surrounding the American Revolution, but Virginia had a particularly important effect on the movement for independence. When discussing the American Revolution, many historians have credited the gentry’s power and endeavors for liberty as the impetus for the war, but Woody Holton, in \textit{Forced Founders}, emphasizes how Indians, debtors, and slaves in Virginia influenced both smallholders and the gentry to initiate a movement for independence. Building upon Woody Holton’s argument in \textit{Forced Founders}, this thesis will examine how runaways influenced colonial participation in the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{71}

Many colonists felt that a break from England would allow them to have more control over their political environment. England limited the colony’s power to manage affairs concerning Native Americans, British merchants, and slaves, making it more difficult for Virginia to grow economically and politically. In addition, the Navigation Acts already strained relations with the colony, and England’s additional taxes on colonists only magnified their resentment. Also, the tensions between debtors and merchants damaged commercial relations. While the relationship between Virginians and the British deteriorated, colonists also argued with one another over colonial management. Small farmers found themselves surrounded by low tobacco prices and growing debts, leading them to detest the gentry’s management of colonial affairs even more so. A boycott, though, would decrease the colony’s debt and encourage England to remove some of the regulations that colonists found limiting. The First Continental

\textsuperscript{70} Waldstreicher, \textit{Runaway America}, xiv, 6, 185-186, 196-197.

\textsuperscript{71} Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}, xvi-xix, 160.
Congress initiated a boycott which encouraged small farmers to side with the gentry against British merchants, causing even greater amounts of friction between England and the colony. These tensions pushed the ruling class from a state of discontent in 1774 into a movement for rebellion in 1776.\textsuperscript{72}

Virginia planters' response to Lord Dunmore's actions helped to set the foundation for the American Revolution. In 1775, Lord Dunmore offered bound laborers their freedom if they joined the British forces. Freeing these laborers frightened planters to such a degree that a number of loyalists began to support the patriots' endeavors. The lack of repercussions for Dunmore's actions suggested that England did not disapprove, which caused relations between the colony and the mother country to deteriorate. Dunmore also aggravated tensions by manipulating other social groups. He sent representative John Connolly to recruit the Ohio Indians to attack Virginia rebels. When Connolly and two others were captured, the rebels discovered that the prisoners planned to bribe colonial militia leaders with land titles in order to persuade them to join British forces. Lord Dunmore's proclamation and his efforts to align the Native Americans against the colonists exemplified that he clearly understood how social groups threatened the Virginia gentry. Consequently, many colonists began to feel that England was no longer able to govern the colonies.\textsuperscript{73}

Virginia faced a number of economic, political, and social factors that shaped the events of the American Revolution, but the agency of bound laborers was one of the most critical components that fueled planters' drive to participate in the American Revolution. This thesis will discuss runaway laborers as a collective group and shed light on how

\textsuperscript{72} Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}, xvi-xxi, 106-107. 129.

\textsuperscript{73} Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}, 155-159, 162-163.
their activities added to whites’ fears over colonial stability. Throughout the eighteenth century, runaways not only defied Virginia’s social order, but like our fugitives Elizabeth and Sancho, runaways’ crimes jeopardized planters’ security. For decades, runaways stole from whites’ farms, persuaded other bondsmen to escape, and in some cases, acted violently to attain their freedom. When Dunmore offered freedom to slaves in the 1770s, planters felt pressured to establish a greater control over their own colonial affairs in order to protect their livelihoods. Uniting the colonies and declaring independence would eliminate British interference in Virginia’s affairs, strengthening the elites’ political and social power.

Many researchers have examined aspects of colonial runaways’ actions; however, few have thoroughly examined them as a single group – a group with numerous social, economic, and cultural, commonalities – that accelerated Virginia’s movement for independence. Much of the current literature analyzes black and white laborers independent of one another, but many laborers crossed racial boundaries, as they formed common bonds and shared resources to reinvent their identities as free people. Runaway groups often transcended race, class, and gender boundaries, showing the importance of freedom over social status. While servants and slaves were treated differently during the colonial era, the project will elaborate on the relations of both black and white bondsmen, as members of a working class that resisted bondage and took flight – one of the most daring forms of resistance next to rebellion. It is my hope that this thesis will shed light on the bound “giddy multitude” of runaway laborers with regard to their experiences, mutual bonds, and relations with the ruling class.74

Although this work will discuss Virginia’s runaways as a whole, the bulk of the work will build upon the documents relating to the Chesapeake and Piedmont regions, as most of the documentation focuses on these areas. The second chapter will use a more traditional top-down approach to investigate the colony’s laws, conflicts, and developments in order to explain how planters created a slave society. Bacon’s Rebellion set the cornerstone for labor management in the colony, and consequently, the colonial elite created new measures of control to better manage an insubordinate labor force. The third chapter will use more of a bottom-up approach to explain how runaways influenced the Virginian gentry’s social practices and political decisions. Runaways’ activities added to whites’ concerns of laborers’ agency and their worries culminated in the events surrounding Lord Dunmore’s proclamation, encouraging whites to gain greater control over colonial affairs by taking part in the movement for independence. While tracing the events surrounding Bacon’s Rebellion through the beginnings of the American Revolutionary War, this text will add to the growing literature of Virginia’s colonial history.

My interest in Virginia’s runaway laborers emerged out of a desire to give these bondsmen a voice. These runaway accounts are just one small piece of these laborers’ stories, and by nature, they are limited, being written from the viewpoint of white authority figures. Nevertheless, the runaway ads can help piece together the narrative of Virginia’s colonial laborers and explain the dynamics of coerced labor and resistance. It is my hope that this work will provide insight into the value of colonial runaway advertisements, as these accounts describe Virginia’s struggles, experiences, and most importantly, people.
CHAPTER II

DISCONTENT AND RESISTANCE

If vertue be a sin, if Piety be giult, all the Principles of morality goodness and Justice be perverted, Wee must confesse That those who are now called Rebells may be in danger of those high imputations...If to plead ye cause of the oppressed, If sincerely to aime at his Mat[ies] Honour and the Publick good without any reservation or by Interest, If to stand in the Gap after soe much blood of o' dear Brethren bought and sold, If after the losse of a great part of his Mat[ies] Colony deserted and dispeopled, freely with o' lives and estates to indeavor to save the remaynders bee Treason God Almighty Judge and lett guilty dye.¹

With the ideas of the proclamation above, Nathaniel Bacon initiated a rebellion that aimed to redistribute political power in seventeenth-century Virginia. Colonists argued over land, battled over economic affairs, and struggled to control laborers, which caused the social and political tensions in the colony to escalate. During the 1670s, the colony was in a state of social unrest and Nathaniel Bacon, remembered as both a rebel and a hero, shattered elites' hopes of maintaining an obedient labor force and a docile class of freemen.² This did not bode well for wealthy elites, and after Bacon's Rebellion, colonial leaders strengthened their social and political power to better regulate the activities of bound laborers and freemen.³ Throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, colonial elites created strict laws, redefined cultural expectations with class and racial divides, and implemented new measures of social control in order to stem discontent and prevent widespread resistance in Virginia.

¹ Nathaniel Bacon, "Proclamations of Nathaniel Bacon," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 1, no. 1 (July 1893): 55-56.


During the 1670s, Nathaniel Bacon and "those who are now called Rebells" demonstrated the dynamic ramifications of social disorder.\(^4\) In the years after the rebellion, insubordinate members of the lower classes continued to challenge the elite's authority, and runaway laborers emerged as some of the most significant agents who contributed to colonial disruption. Runaways particularly frightened planters because they found waged jobs, committed crimes, and most importantly, passed as free people. Consequently, the elite planters spent the subsequent decades devising new courses of action to ensure that the "giddy multitude" of defiant bondsmen as well as freemen could not endanger their colonial power again.\(^5\) Legislators implemented laws to inhibit laborers' mobility by extending servants' contracts, authorizing harsh punishments, and fining those who unlawfully aided bondsmen. They also enacted slave codes in order to align whites together and ostracize blacks. In order to solidify their social power, planters embraced the ideology of patriarchism, which they used to create a more rigid and deferent social hierarchy in Virginia. These measures allowed planters to strengthen their authority, facilitate their economic endeavors, and suppress those who thwarted their control. Thus, when the British overruled colonists' measures to pursue their objectives, it aggravated tensions and caused colonists to distance themselves from their mother county. With the rise of the economic and social challenges that stretched from Bacon's Rebellion to the establishment of a slave society in the 1730s, planters imposed drastic forms of control to manage those who disrupted colonial life.

\(^4\) Bacon, "Proclamations of Nathaniel Bacon," 55.

The origin of the colony’s social discontent derived from the management of both tobacco and land, which fueled Virginia’s early colonial expansion. During the late 1630s, colonists sold approximately 1,395,063 pounds of tobacco per year, but by 1669, they exported over 9 million pounds per year. Tobacco production was so successful that crops began to flood the markets, which caused prices to drop. As a result, planters incurred large debts and England worried about the future of Virginia’s economic contribution to the empire. Parliament passed the Navigation Acts in 1660, which ordered the colony to transport tobacco to English ports only — curtailing competition in an expanding Atlantic market. In response, Virginia’s colonial governor, William Berkeley, traveled to England in hopes to dissuade Parliament from restricting trade; however, the governor was unsuccessful. England wanted to ensure the colony’s economic stability, but the planters in Virginia struggled with higher taxes and lowered profits from the English market.

To ensure tobacco fields’ maximum yield and in turn, maximum profits, planters sought a cheap and dependable source of labor that they could control with little resistance. Much to their dismay, planters discovered that many laborers were not docile and compliant workers, but rather, they were agents who actively resisted by committing unlawful acts, rebelling, and taking flight. Especially in the cases in which masters mistreated laborors or exhausted them with arduous work responsibilities, laborors were

6 Parent, Foul Means, 1-3.


more inclined to remove themselves from their place of bondage. Planters often blamed the "wickedness of servants" rather than their harsh working conditions for such attempts to "free [sic] themselves from their master." Planters' focused on producing lucrative tobacco crops, but insubordinate bondsment jeopardized their agriculture business.

During the seventeenth century, the planter elite increased their social and economic control over indentured servants. As one of the earliest forms of labor in the colony, indentured servitude filled colonists' need for a cheap labor force. Servants, unlike slaves, became free at the end of their contracted term of servitude (see Appendix, Figure 1), and with the decreasing mortality rates in the latter part of the century, many ex-servants became tobacco farmers. This not only drove competition between ex-servants and former masters, but it lowered tobacco prices due to an increase in crop production. Planters needed to keep their laborers working on their farms because the longer these laborers remained bound, the longer they could exploit their services and increase profits. Consequently, planters sometimes extended their terms of service. Between 1658 and 1666, the Virginia Assembly enacted bills to indenture servants who were nineteen years old and older for five years, despite previous legislation that bound individuals of twenty years of age and older to four year contracts. Additionally, masters extended servants' bondage for criminal behavior. For instance, if a master caught a servant stealing a hog, he could add two additional years to that servant's contract. Also, masters penalized female servants who had illegitimate children by adding two years to their term. The purpose of extending servants' contracts was twofold: it punished

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laborers for escaping and it also kept them in bondage, increasing planters’ productivity and profits.\textsuperscript{11}

Planters also worried about controlling other types of laborers during the seventeenth century. Many of the British Empire’s convicts, who were also referred to as ‘jailbirds,’ became servants in the colony. Unlike servants, and later, slaves, convict servants were often unwelcomed by colonial planters. In the latter part of the century, colonists complained that “we apparently loose our reputation, whilst we are beleived to be a place onely fitt to receive such base and lewd persons.”\textsuperscript{12} In addition, convict laborers spread news of better opportunities for white bondsmen who lived in England, making indentured servants resentful of their living conditions in the New World.\textsuperscript{13}

Planters worried about convict servants’ resistance to colonial authority. In the aftermath of a plotted servant’s rebellion in 1663, Virginians complained that the convicts who participated lacked deference for colonial laws. With reports of domestic problems involving convicts in Gloucester, York, and Middlesex Counties, the General Court stated in 1670 that they hoped to “hinder and prohibite the importation of such dangerous and scandalous people.”\textsuperscript{14} Colonists believed that the convicts threatened Virginia’s social stability. Several councilmen pleaded that “the peace of this collony be too much hazarded and endangered by the great nombers of fellons and other desperate


\textsuperscript{12} Hening, ed., \textit{Statutes}, II, 509-510.

\textsuperscript{13} Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 151-152.

\textsuperscript{14} Hening, ed., \textit{Statutes}, II, 509-510.
villaines sent hither from the several prisons in England."\textsuperscript{15} Despite the colonists' aspirations to stop the use and trade of these "villaines," Virginian planters remained loyal to the English crown and deferred to the British Empire's criminal justice system. This only strained the relationship between England and its colony, as they had different ideas of how to efficiently organize labor.

While indentured and convict servants created problems for colonists, it was not long before slaves also complicated labor management. By the 1680s, Virginians imported slaves in larger numbers, as they gradually became cheaper compared to the increasing costs of servant laborers. In addition, slaves were easier to exploit and they often had more knowledge of agricultural practices.\textsuperscript{16} However, as more slaves arrived in the colony, Virginians had to adjust their legal system to address new behavior problems. For instance, colonists worried about dangerous conspiracies. According to Kathleen Brown, "black men and women [gathered] on Saturdays and Sundays 'whereby they wine opportunity to consult on unlawful p'jects and combinations to the danger and damage of the neighbors.'"\textsuperscript{17} Also, planters worried about slaves' thefts. In Surry County, the justices ordered all masters to ensure that slaves dressed in canvas linen to discourage them from stealing "fine Linninge and other ornaments."\textsuperscript{18} Thus, their clothes became recognizable symbols of their enslavement.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} Hening, ed., Statutes, II, 509-510.

\textsuperscript{16} Parent, Foul Means, 55.

\textsuperscript{17} Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 154.

\textsuperscript{18} Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 154.

\textsuperscript{19} Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 154.
By the end of the 1660s, the colony emerged with a discernable social hierarchy and bound laborers comprised its base. The elites positioned themselves at the top of the social pyramid. Many of these colonial leaders came from wealthy families, such as the Lees, Masons, Byrds, Carters, Beverleys, Harrisons, Ludwells, and Washingtons. They managed large estates and built their political clout by securing government positions. They typically owned large tracts of land, ranging from hundreds to thousand acres, and managed dozens of servants. With less wealth and power than the elites, established householders often owned one or a small number of servants. Underneath the established householders was a burgeoning class of freedmen. Freedmen often found it challenging to purchase their own land and house, and many worked as tenants. Below these freedmen, bound servants worked to finish their servitude and join the free society. Slaves, although there were only about a thousand during the mid-seventeenth century, were at the bottom of colony’s social order. As members of the bottom two tiers of this hierarchy, servants and slaves who resisted their bondage comprised a substantial threat to colonial stability.

Lawmakers worried about bondsmen who escaped from their masters and introduced legislation to help capture and discourage them from that behavior. Historian James Ballagh stated that “more than anything else the habit on the part of servants themselves of absconding from their masters’ service, stealing their masters’ goods and enticing others to go with them, worked to the detriment of the masters and the peril of

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the colony." To ensure colonial order, the Virginia Assembly imposed its authority over defiant bondsmen and controlling their physical appearance was one way to distinguish runaways. In 1655, the Virginia’s Grand Assembly ordered that a runaway servant who escaped twice have the letter R branded on their skin and work for twice the length of the absence, passing “vnder the statute for an incorrigible rogue.” To make runaways more detectable, in 1670, the court ordered that if a servant escaped two times, they must “keepe his haire close cut.” These laws convey how legislators imposed their authority over laborers’ physical bodies in order to discourage flight.

Lawmakers and masters relied heavily on other members of society to help identify and track down runaways. Whites worried over runaways’ fraternization once they escaped, as they readily aligned themselves with other groups, such as Indians, against the colonists. In one case in 1672, the Assembly stated:

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many negroes have lately beene, and now are out in rebellion in sundry parts of this country, and that noe meanes have yet beene found for the apprehension and suppression of them from whome many mischeifes of very dangerous consequence may arise to the country if either other negroes, Indians or servants should happen to fly forth and joyne with them.
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To reduce the chances for bondsmen to flee to Indian tribes, the Assembly ordered that “neighbouring Indians doe and hereby are required and enjoyned to seize and apprehend all runaways whatsoever that shall happen to come amongst them, and to bring them

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24 Billings, Selby, and Tate, *Colonial Virginia*, 80.

before some justice of the peace.\textsuperscript{26} Lawmakers used their legislative power to fortify the divides between laborers and Indians.

To encourage freemen to help control runaways, legislators offered large rewards for those who captured escaped laborers. In 1669, the reward for a runaway was 1,000 pounds of tobacco. Legislators required servants to reimburse the reward fees after they were freed.\textsuperscript{27} In the following year, the Assembly decreased the amount to 200 pounds for those runaways who traveled more than ten miles away from their masters' residence because the previous amount became "too burthensome to the publique by the greatnes of the summe."\textsuperscript{28} Legislators modified laws to encourage freemen to support their endeavors to detain runaways.

Elite planters relied on freemen's deference to the law, but tensions between wealthy planters and freemen escalated, making their cooperation difficult. Purchasing land became exceedingly challenging for poor men after the 1660s because of the increase in land prices, decrease in wages, and the decline in value of tobacco due to a market surplus. In addition, Governor William Berkeley limited land expansion for both freedmen and planters who sought more territory near Indian tribes. Thus, when countless freedmen, many of whom were ex-servants, were forced to work as wage laborers, tenants, or travel to the frontier which was notorious for Indian raids, they grew resentful of the upper elite.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{26} Hening, ed., Statutes, II, 300.

\textsuperscript{27} Hening, ed., Statutes, II, 273-274.

\textsuperscript{28} Hening, ed., Statutes, II, 277.

\textsuperscript{29} Parent, Foul Means, 21, 28-29, 36-37.
To further consolidate their power, members of the upper class limited freedmen's influence on governmental affairs. In 1670s, legislators deemed that only freedmen who were housekeepers or owned land could have voting privileges. Also, Governor Berkeley strengthened the power of his Assembly by keeping members in office from 1662 through 1676. Consequently, assemblymen were beholden to the governor not their fellow colonists. Furthermore, increased taxes combined with low tobacco prices overburdened planters and freemen from the 1660s to the 1680s, causing local conflicts. Legislators increased taxes to protect the shores from a possible Dutch attack, but colonists, many of whom worried more about Indian assaults than European campaigns, contested the additional financial burden. Some people refused to pay the taxes, and in Lawnes Creek parish, protests almost erupted into a dangerous uprising. Smaller planters and poor freedmen harbored a bitter resentment towards local elites which fueled the discontent and resistance in the years to come.30

Tensions between planter elite and poor freedmen culminated in what became known as Bacon's Rebellion.31 In July of 1675, a group of angry Doeg Indians killed an overseer and stole hogs from Thomas Mathew's plantation in Stafford County for his unpaid debts. This sparked a number of violent raids and many colonists wanted vengeance. In order to protect the best interests of England and colonists, Governor William Berkeley forbade any assault on the Indians without his authorization and he raised taxes to sustain a garrison of 500 men and nine forts. Colonists were frustrated with the continuous Indian raids and beseeched him to employ a leader to attack the

30 Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 154-156.
31 Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 232.
Indians, but Berkeley remained steadfast.\textsuperscript{32} A royal commissioner reported that “the sense of this oppression and the dread of a comon approaching calamity made the giddy-headed multitude madd.”\textsuperscript{33} This incident exacerbated the already tense relations among the colonists and Indians, and it was a precursor to the rebellion that would give laborers a chance to overthrow oppressive government officials.\textsuperscript{34}

Colonists expressed their discontent of governmental management in more drastic ways. In April 1676, planter, Nathaniel Bacon Jr., invited some of his companions to his Henrico plantation for “Drinking and making the Sadnesse of the times their discourse, and the Fear they all lived in.”\textsuperscript{35} Bacon, who arrived in Virginia during his twenties, had familial ties that made him a man of both status and wealth.\textsuperscript{36} However, like the men who would serve with him in the months to come, Bacon disliked Virginia’s gentry, “whose tottering Fortunes have bin repaired and supported at the Publique chardg.”\textsuperscript{37} Bacon though, also harbored a personal resentment towards the Indians. The Susquehannocks “slew Mr. Bacon’s Overseer who He much Loved, and one of his Servants, whose Bloud Hee Vowed to Revenge if possible.”\textsuperscript{38} The potential threat of more Indian raids frightened colonists and they began to collectively identify all Indians

\textsuperscript{32} Billings, Selby, and Tate, \textit{Colonial Virginia}, 82-85.


\textsuperscript{34} Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenchels, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 139.


\textsuperscript{37} Bacon, “Proclamations of Nathaniel Bacon,” 56-57.

as enemies, because "among the Vulgar it matters not whether they be Friends or Foes Soe they be Indians."³⁹

Upon attending a rally of angry colonists, who argued over whether to remain loyal to the governor or protect themselves, Bacon decided to lead the group to victory over the Indians.⁴⁰ His supporters requested an official commission for their leader to remedy the problems with the hostile indigenous tribes, but Berkeley did not want any interference with his Indian policies.⁴¹ Thus, Bacon sought out the assistance of backcountry colonists, and many who came to support him were "Free men that had but lately crept out of the conditions of Servants."⁴² The royal governor released Bacon, who worked as a councilman, from his duties on May 10, 1676, and he called for a new election for the House of Burgesses. This was the first election in fifteen years and Berkeley soon found that many colonists supported Bacon’s campaign. Filled with a bitter resentment for the gentry, Bacon sought to remedy the colony’s problems by removing the dangerous Indian enemies with or without legislators’ consent.⁴³

Berkeley attempted to assuage small planters’ anger about Indians relations before it escalated out of control. The rebels assaulted the Occaneecchees, a friendly nation living close to the Roanoke River in the southern part of the colony, but Bacon continued to offer his allegiance to Berkeley even though he intended to continue his campaign to remove Indians. With social pressure mounting against political officials, they decided to

³⁹ Andrews, Narratives of the Insurrections, 123.
⁴⁰ Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 159-160.
⁴¹ Wiseman and Oberg, Samuel Wiseman’s Book of Record, 16.
⁴³ Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 259; Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 160-161.
adjust their policies to appease freemen. Berkeley pardoned Bacon and allowed him to rejoin the council in June. The Virginia Assembly granted voting rights to all freeholders, removing the 1670 law that implemented voting restrictions. In addition, they affirmed that all councilors would pay the appropriate amount of taxes. They also provided Bacon with a commission and called for 1,000 men to assemble to execute a formal campaign against the Indians. The Assembly declared "that all such Indians shall be accounted and prosecuted as enemies." Although these acts of conciliation would enfranchise a larger group of potentially disgruntled freemen, the hatred towards Indians and the struggle for political participation did not subside.

Bacon’s efforts to reallocate colonial power encouraged opposing political leaders to find a way to remove him from his position. Upon hearing a false report that Bacon’s mutineers were causing havoc in Gloucester – a report that allegedly was created by the colony’s acting secretary, Philip Ludwell, and Robert Beverly – Governor Berkeley denounced the leader’s commission. The governor then raised his own force of nearly 1,200 people, but when this group discovered that the governor planned to subdue Bacon, they refused to fight. Consequently, Berkeley announced that Bacon was a traitor, but the governor’s actions caused a growing amount of discontent and he fled to the Eastern Shore for safety.

With Berkeley’s power dwindling, Bacon took greater steps to win over followers. To convey his mission, Bacon conveyed powerful messages such as, "If vertue be a sin

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... [then] ... lett guilty dye," in hopes to recruit more people to join his cause.\textsuperscript{48} He appealed to rich gentlemen to help sponsor his campaign and to ordinary men and women to tell others of his mission.\textsuperscript{49} In order to give the lower classes more power, Bacon dispensed his "Declaration in the Name of the People" on July 30, 1676. He denounced the governor and "his wicked and Pernicious Councillors" for their "unjust Taxes upon the Commonaltie," and their measures to protect the natives. He condemned their means of gaining wealth as they had "abused and rendered Contemptible his maties."\textsuperscript{50} He appealed to people of different social and economic backgrounds, including burgesses, militia officers, servants, slaves, and other fervent Baconians, in order to build a force to resist the governor and his supporters.\textsuperscript{51} The unruly lower classes now posed an imminent threat to colonial stability, as Bacon's "precipitate giddy multitude" intensified the power struggle between the elite and lower classes.\textsuperscript{52}

Bacon took action to remove the royal governor from power permanently. The rebel spent the next three months resolving the Indian problem, but before his departure, Bacon assigned lieutenants, Giles Bland and William Carver, to apprehend the governor. However, Philip Ludwell detained these two commanders, impeding their mission. Upon learning of Bacon's departure and the lieutenants' arrest, Berkeley returned to Jamestown. Bacon, though, not only gained supporters by showing his Indian captives to fellow

\textsuperscript{48} Bacon, "Proclamations of Nathaniel Bacon," 55.

\textsuperscript{49} Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 162.


\textsuperscript{51} Horn, \textit{Adapting to a New World}, 373, 377.

\textsuperscript{52} Kennedy and McIlwaine, eds., \textit{Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1776, 1659/60-1693}, 73.
colonists, but he pledged to emancipate the servants and slaves of his adversaries if they
joined his campaign against the governor. Bound laborers must have found this
opportunity of chaos irresistible. Bacon traveled with his fellow rebels to Jamestown to
ensure Berkeley did not regain power, and after a short siege, Berkeley and his supporters
fled once again, leaving the “giddy multitude” in power. On the night of September 19, the mutineers set fire to Jamestown.\textsuperscript{53}

Bacon’s forces then traveled to Gloucester, where they plundered several of the elites’ estates, but their victory was short-lived. Bacon’s supporters broke into several stores and took a variety of expensive goods during September and October. By the end of October of 1676, the “bloody flux” ended Bacon’s life, and the spirit of the rebellion dissolved with the death of their leader. Meanwhile, the crown learned of the disruption in the colony and sent royal forces to persuade the rebels to reaffirm their loyalty to England. After Bacon’s death, most colonists reported that they were now faithful to Berkeley, with the exception of approximately eighty slaves and twenty indentured servants, but they were quickly detained and sent back to their masters. By January, the colonial governor had returned to his estate, Green Spring plantation, and began to reestablish his political power in the colony.\textsuperscript{54}

English intervention showed colonists that their cooperation was imperative to domestic diplomacy. Royal commissioners encouraged the Assembly to require land ownership for voting privileges, but they also advocated decreasing the burgesses’ shares

\textsuperscript{53} Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 267-269. Morgan asserts that Berkeley also offered freedom to servants who joined him, but many lacked confidence in Berkeley’s abilities, deterring them from supporting his cause; Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 166.

\textsuperscript{54} Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 268-269. According to Morgan, the “bloody flux” was, more than likely, an illness related to dysentery.
of daily expenses from 150 to 120 pounds of tobacco.\textsuperscript{55} According to historian Kathleen Brown, "by presenting themselves as neutral investigators and asserting the king's interest in protecting the happiness and traditional liberties of the people, the royal commissioners assuaged fears of 'slavery' at the hands of the colonial government."\textsuperscript{56} In the aftermath of the rebellion, colonists learned the dangerous consequences of discontented lower classes and the magnitude of their resistance.

With the servile insurrection still haunting colonists after 1676, planters took more drastic steps to control laborers' behavior to ensure they could not threaten domestic security again. Although in 1679, the king ordered the governor, Lord Thomas Culpeper, to ensure planters and Christian servants had guns, in 1681, the governor attested that guns in the hands of servants was too dangerous for free colonists.\textsuperscript{57} Convict laborers in particular concerned planters and many colonists wanted to stop their importation all together. In 1678, the king wrote to Culpeper stating that he would need to "permit and suffer" fifty-two banished felons whom Ralph Williams brought from Scotland to Virginia.\textsuperscript{58} Slaves too, posed a grave threat to planters after the rebellion. By the early 1680s, there were approximately three to four thousand blacks in the colony and their support would strengthen a servile insurrection.\textsuperscript{59} Planters felt that their labor force consisted mostly of "poor and ignorant persons" who could form into a "coalition of


\textsuperscript{56} Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 167-168.


\textsuperscript{58} The King to Thos. Lord Culpeper, December 1678, ed. W. N. Sainsbury, Virginia in 1678-1679 (continued), \textit{The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography} 24, no. 2 (1916): 163.

servants, Slaves & Debtors' would defy established authority if the opportunity arose."

After Bacon’s Rebellion, planters not only fretted over labor control, but they also worried over freemen’s activities. Due to a decline in tobacco prices, planters wanted to halt the crops’ production in order to increase its market value. However, Parliament did not want to decrease revenue and in April 1682, the crown forbade Henry Chicheley, who stood in for Governor Culpeper, to allow the assembly to address planters’ measures concerning the restriction of tobacco. Planters were disgruntled, but one affluent planter took initiative to protest the royal regulations. The justice of the peace in Middlesex County, Robert Beverley, led poor planters into an uprising. These rioters, many of whom were servants that participated in Bacon’s Rebellion, went from plantation to plantation to cut and destroy all tobacco plants. Lord Culpeper wrote that the rioters "tumultuously and mutinously assembled and gathered together, combineing, and presumeing to reform this his Majesties gouerment, by cuting up and destroying all tobacco plants, and to perpetrate the same, in a traiterous and rebellious maner." These nightly plant “cutters” defied English tobacco regulations, and cavalry troops arrived to put down the rebellion. Lasting over a month, the plant-cutting riots were the last time poor white laborers participated in such a major demonstration during the colonial period.

Bacon’s Rebellion, combined with the plant-cutting riots, revealed the dangers of class

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61 Parent, Foul Means, 80-84. Parent stated that the English eventually permitted Culpeper to allow tobacco cessation, but a rebellion prevented Culpeper from arriving to Virginia in time; Breen. “A Changing Labor Force,” 12.

unrest and these conflicts encouraged wealthy planters to find new means to alter economic regulations and manage the lower classes.63

After the early 1680s, the nature of labor began to change in the colony. Tobacco prices increased after 1684, but servants became more difficult to acquire. England implemented stricter regulations on indentured servants' passage, hoping to impede "spirits," those who deceived people to travel to the New World, from selling unwilling English men and women to the colony. Also, after the 1680s, English merchants were able to transport slaves from Africa rather than the West Indies more easily, increasing the availability of these laborers.64 In addition, in 1682, the Virginia Assembly announced that incoming non-Christians servants, specifically Indians, mulattoes, and Africans, would be converted to Christianity and then become slaves, increasing the number of enslaved laborers.65 The 1682 law placed slaves, mulattoes, and Indians into one category of laborers and helped to codify racial slavery, but the exchange of servants for slaves did not extinguish planters' concerns regarding the bound "giddy multitude."66

During the last decade of the seventeenth century, planters' worries over labor management influenced the nature of political agendas. Although Governor Francis Nicholson, may have simply followed the Board of Trade's instructions to ensure


64 Breen, "A Changing Labor Force," 6-7, 13-14, 16-17; Abbot Smith explained that the word kidnapper has its roots in the 1670s term "kidnabber," which disparaged those who captured young children and drunks from their relatives and friends and sold them into servitude. See Abbot Emerson Smith, "Indentured Servants: New Light on some of America's "First" Families," The Journal of Economic History 2, no. 1 (May, 1942): 46-47, 50.

65 Hening, ed., Statutes, II, 490-492; In 1700, there were about 70,000 whites living in the colony, and between 1698 and 1708, the number of slaves rose from approximately 6,000 to 12,000, Gerald W. Mullin, Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 16.

66 Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 309, 329.
planters and Christian servants had weapons in case of a French or Indian assault, the House of Burgesses contested that equipping servants with guns was unsafe. Councilman James Blair personally detested the governor and argued that Nicholson sought to create his own army of servants. Thus, when Nicholson prepared the militia for an attack, Blair confirmed that the governor built a force of “Servants and Bankrupts and other men in uneasy and discontented circumstances” that could facilitate the governor’s personal control of colonial affairs. This damaged Nicholson’s political clout, as the burgesses complained:

Christian Servants in the Country for the most part consists of the Worser Sort of the people of Europe... That according to our present Circumstances we can hardly governe them if they were fitted with Armes and had the Opertunity of meeting together by Musters We have just reason to feare they may rise upon us.

The governor hoped that his popularity would undermine the councilmen’s power, but worries over the governor’s agenda for servants discouraged planters’ support. Nicholson depended on small planters’ votes to elect his cohorts to the House of Burgesses, and a larger number of supporters would help him override the councilmen’s political power. However, Blair prevented the governor from alienating councilmen and he portrayed Nicholson as one who sought to undermine English rule by demeaning the councilors and manipulating planters’ laborers. An army of servants endangered both small and large planters, but it was especially dangerous for small planters because servants comprised a large portion of their labor since many could not afford slaves at this time. England became dissatisfied with the Nicholson’s performance and Blair

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68 Kennedy and McIlwaine, eds., *Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1695-1702*, 188.
convinced England’s officials to remove the unpopular governor. The struggle between these two affluent political officials demonstrated how colonists’ fears of servants’ free agency could affect the outcome of political battles.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the planter elite were mindful of the problems that servants and slaves posed, and legislators implemented stricter laws to control laborers. In respect to the events of the late seventeenth century, planters took steps to align whites, both bound and free, and ostracize blacks, to discourage white opposition to their authority. Legislators introduced the slave codes of 1705, which offered whites a variety of liberties while stripping African slaves, the alien race, of theirs. Legislators designated slaves, including Africans, mulattos, and Indians, as “real estate,” which allowed freed men to inherit them as property. These codes also laid out more severe punishments for defiant slaves, including brandings, mutilations, and hangings. In addition, legislators took away free blacks’ civil liberties. For instance, the courts tried free blacks in the counties along with slaves, but they sent white felons to Williamsburg for trials. Also, legislators formally ordered civil organizations, the military, and churches to employ only whites in executive positions, which ensured blacks had no official part in colonial administration. Overall, these laws demoralized blacks, especially slaves, while boosting whites’ social and political clout – increasing the divide between races.

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71 Hening, ed., *Statutes*, III, 333. The law stated that slaves were not to be considered as “chattels,” but “real estate,” in which they could be “held, taken, and adjudged.”

White servants, on the other hand, received some measure of legal protection and assistance from these laws. The Assembly ordered that all masters must offer their servants adequate meals, clothing, and housing. It also prohibited certain degrading punishments for whites, such as whipping a naked Christian white bound laborer without the appropriate permission from the justice of the peace.73 According to Kathleen Brown, racism and patriarchal privilege, which was discernable in the slave codes, played a vital role mollifying class conflict as both of these factors "addressed the mounting demands of white servants and freemen for greater consideration of their rights by the elite planters who sought to control the political system."74 These concepts also allowed white colonists to create a unique colonial identity which not only promoted their supremacy and masculinity, but it helped to protect their political system and power from English intervention.75

Legislation may have shifted to protect white servants and restrict black slaves, but laws still meted out harsh punishments to all runaways. Servants who completed their contracts received certificates of freedom, and sometimes, bondsmen bought or falsified these certificates. Some servants as well as slaves bought or forged a pass. Masters wrote passes for their bondsmen so they could perform errands or find work (see Appendix, Figure 2), but these passes also allowed bondsmen to familiarize themselves with localities and some ran off with them.76 To discourage laborers from abusing the

73 Hening, ed., Statutes, III, 448.

74 Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 184.

75 Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, 184.

privileges of a pass, lawmakers ordered that “if any runaway shall make use of a forged certificate... the said runaway, besides making reparation for the loss of time, and charges in recovery, and other penalties by this law directed, shall ... stand two hours in the pillory, upon a court day.” Bondsmen’s proclivity to escape compelled lawmakers to enact new legal measures and further develop their political institution to better control bound laborers and minimize the number of escapees.

Elites often penalized white runaway servants by extending their time of servitude. In 1726, lawmakers punished servants who changed their name or hid their true identity with an extra six months of service. For those who feigned to be tradesmen, planters extended their service or legislators ordered them to pay their owner to compensate them for lost productivity. James Revel, a convict servant, discussed the consequences of running away and the intensity of colonial punishment when he sorrowfully protested:

> if we offer once to run away, For every hour we must serve a day, For every day a week, they're so severe, Every week a month, and every month a year. But if they murder, rob, or steal, when there, They're hang'd direct the laws are so severe.  

Although the veracity of this account cannot be confirmed, it gives context to the life and challenges of a convict servant in the face of flight.

Planters also included slaves in their measures to discourage runaways. If an individual detained a runaway, he had to deliver the fugitive to a justice of the peace, and if the fugitive refused to reveal his or her name, masters’ name, or simply lacked the

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77 Hening, ed., Statutes, III, 455.

78 Hening, ed., Statutes, IV, 174-175.

language skills to communicate this information, that runaway would be imprisoned until
the master paid the fines to claim the fugitive. Constables took custody of runaways and
they could whip them up to thirty-nine times as punishment. If no one claimed them,
runaway slaves were eventually sold at auctions. To pay for the runaways’ upkeep
while imprisoned, lawmakers stated in 1726 that the constable could “cause a strong iron
collar to be put on the neck of such negro or runaway, with the letters (P.G.) stamped
theron.” The collar relieved the constable of personal responsibility when they hired
fugitives out to other colonists. Also, the courts received any profits made from the
runaways’ work. Lawmakers not only enforced measures to properly detain runaways,
but they collected any profits they could garner from imprisoning the fugitives.

Planters also dismembered and killed slaves as punishments for running away. In
1710, Robert “King” Carter could not thwart his two slaves, Bambara Harry and Dinah’s
attempts to escape, so he requested that the courts allow him to sever their toes to prevent
flight. He won his case. In 1723, the Assembly affirmed that if masters discovered
slaves “notoriously guilty of going abroad in the night, or running away, and lying out,”
then they could punish them “by dismembering, or any other way, not touching life, as the
said county court shall think fit.” Courts typically sided with planters because


81 Hening, ed., Statutes, IV, 171.


84 Hening, ed., Statutes, IV, 132.
bondsmen, especially slaves, had little in the way of social or political clout to contest their decisions. In some cases, the legislators authorized colonists to take the lives of their slaves. In 1705, legislators ruled that if runaways refused to return to their master after officials posted their names on church doors for all to see, then “it shall be lawful for any person or persons whatsoever, to kill and destroy such slaves by such ways and means as he, she, or they shall think fit.”

Slaves’ refusal to submit to planters’ demands was a public challenge to their master’s authority and power, and planters inflicted harsh punishments to deter slaves from running away.

Besides asserting their authority over bondsmen’s bodies, masters also established their legal power over laborers’ sexuality and families. Miscegenation became a prevalent issue in Virginia and legislators created laws to ensure the “prevention of that abominable mixture.” From 1690 to 1698, fourteen white women in Westmoreland endured punishment for bearing nineteen bastard children, and at least four of whom resulted from interracial unions. From 1702 to 1712, twenty-six white women in Lancaster County received punishment for bearing thirty-two bastard children and nine of whom were from interracial unions. To discourage interracial mixing, in 1705 legislators reiterated the 1691 law and forbade any white man or woman to marry an African, Indian, or mulatto, regardless of whether they were bound or free. Legislators punished white servant women who bore illegitimate children with an additional two years of service to their masters and then they were sold for a five-year term. In addition, legislators forced mulattoes, children of white and black unions, to serve as servants until they were thirty-one years old. Although there were too few children born to free black women at the
time to distinguish their status, the children of slave women and white men served as slaves because planters did not consider slave women’s marriages as legitimate.  

Runaway alliances were also particularly threatening to planters. On April 21, 1713, six blacks, led by Robin Mingo, escaped from their masters in Middlesex County, and robbed a storehouse for supplies. “For preventing the mischeifs which may ensue to Her Majesty’s Subjects from the said Negroes,” lawmakers ordered the sheriffs in surrounding counties to search for the runaways. Whoever captured the fugitives would receive a five pound reward for the leader, Mingo, and fifty shillings for each of the other fugitives. Planters worried about local slaves forming alliances, but they also fretted over runaway groups in other places, including New York, South Carolina, and the Caribbean. William Byrd, for instance, expressed his concerns about slave runaways and a growing slave population in the mid-1730s. Byrd knew that escaped slaves formed secret settlements in the Caribbean, which were “troublesome & dangerous,” and he feared that if slaves were not controlled in Virginia, they would “do as much mischeif as they do in Jamaica.” Planters worried about black collective resistance so much that in 1723, Virginia’s legislators ordered that if more than five slaves “consult, advise, or

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90 Parent, Foul Means, 201, 223; Schwarz, Twice Condemned, 61.
conspire, to rebel or make insurrection, or shall plot or conspire the murder of any person
or persons whatsoever,” they will “suffer death” as punishment.\textsuperscript{92}

Colonists recognized that runaways formed alliances with bondsmen but also with
freemen, as there was a sense of solidarity among members of these lower classes.
Phillip Morgan argues that “slaves and plain white folk not only lived near one another
but were most likely to work alongside one another, speak the same dialect, have their
children play together, commit crimes jointly, and runaway together.”\textsuperscript{93} Even though the
racial divide was discernable throughout Virginia, it was sometimes easier for members
of the lower classes, both black and white, to identify with one another rather than with
members of the upper class. Morgan reported that 20,000 convicts came into the
Chesapeake during the eighteenth century alone – enough to eventually increase the
number of poor lower-class whites.\textsuperscript{94} Escaped convict, James Revel drew parallels
between white and black laborers in his account, as he stated, “We and the negroes both
alike did fare, Of work and food we had an equal share.”\textsuperscript{95} Revel wrote his account in the
seventeenth century, but a sense of commonality among laborers carried over in to the
next century, as they suffered under similar, although certainly not the same, oppressive
conditions (see fig. 1).

\textsuperscript{92} Hening, ed., Statutes, IV, 126.

\textsuperscript{93} Philip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and

\textsuperscript{94} Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, 301.

\textsuperscript{95} Revel, “The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon’s Sorrowful Account,” Documenting the American
Planters found that some colonists readily sustained runaways’ flights and they imposed strict laws to discourage these actions. In 1705, the Assembly ruled that if someone traded with servants or slaves without the master’s permission or the appropriate licenses, that person would be sent to prison for at least a month. Also, if one decided to harbor or entertain a servant without a certificate of freedom, that person would have to compensate the master with sixty pounds of tobacco for every day he or she sheltered the escapee. By 1723, harboring, entertaining, or unlawfully meeting with slaves costs offenders one hundred and fifty pounds of tobacco or fifteen shillings, and if they did not pay the sum, they received twenty lashes. In 1726, the courts ordered sheriffs who detained a runaway to post a description of the fugitive’s apparel and physical appearance on the courthouse door for a period of two months. Sheriffs also

forwarded this report to local churches so clerks or readers could announce the information. If the sheriffs and clerks did not complete these duties, sheriffs were fined five hundred pounds of tobacco and clerks or readers were fined two hundred pounds of tobacco. Law enforcement mechanisms became more pervasive, as legislators sought to build a higher level of deference among colonists while encouraging them to help minimize the number of runaway laborers.

Although the planter elite inflicted harsh punishments on free people who harbored escaped laborers, some refused to abide by the laws. In one case of interracial cooperation in 1724, Caesar, a slave on the Eastern Shore, escaped and a number of people helped him survive as a fugitive. He received food from free black couples and a yeoman farmer’s wife. Slaves also offered him provisions and places to sleep. A lower class widow, Alice Cormack, provided him with food and shelter, and he brought her game, corn, and pork for her young family. Upon learning of this infringement, authorities apprehended Cormack, whipped her twenty-five times, and sent her to jail for a month. This sense of commonality and mutual bonds among laborers and members of the lower class helped runaways find resources and refuge, exhibiting the limitations of planters’ racial, gender, and social parameters.

The planter elite searched for a better way to control laborers and freemen’s activities during the early decades of eighteenth century, and they turned to the ideology of patriarchism. In accordance with this ideology, planters provided protection and provisions for slaves in exchange for their subservience and loyalty. Masters emphasized bound laborers, specifically slaves’ dependency on whites, which helped to justify

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98 Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, 304.
planters' positions as patriarchs. To assert their authority over their slaves, masters often provided them with a limited amount of provisions. Masters controlled laborers' diets, which were usually inadequate. Slaves had hominy and corn for their meals and on a few occasions planters gave them meat, but it was often a poor quality. Some greater plantations allotted for meat only six times per year. Also, masters provided most slaves with poor-quality clothing in order to save money and distinguish their lowly status. Black women had similar clothes as men, and their clothing, usually a shift or a smock, hung loose around them. Slaves, indentured servants, and convict servants, received similar articles of clothing, unless a laborer's trade required different articles to perform his or her duties, such as in the case of a blacksmith. Convict servants, like many slaves, received a set of clothes twice a year, usually in the summer and winter. However, both house servants and artisans had more clothing than field slaves. Asserting their control over laborers' bodies was an essential component of patriarchism, but the need to practice this ideology as a whole reveals planters' shortcomings in their labor management.

Christianity was as an integral part of the ideology as well. Colonists associated Christianity with English customs and freedom, thus initially, colonists fretted over baptizing blacks. Some unfree laborers requested the courts to consider their conversion as justification for granting their freedom, and planters worried that more laborers would use Christianity for the same purpose. With the crown and clergy's encouragement to

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100 Frederick Hall Schmidt, "British Convict Servant Labor in Colonial Virginia" (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1976), 220, 223-224.

101 Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 130.
create a Christian colony and the rise in number of Creole slaves, in 1727, Virginia permitted blacks born in the colony to be baptized. Masters began to use the moral teachings of religion to mold laborers to more subservient workers and dissuade them from attempting flight. 102

During the 1730s, planters' worries materialized when blacks used Christianity as the grounds to pursue their freedom. A rumor that the crown arranged to free Christian slaves inspired hundreds of blacks to escape from Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties in September 1730. They organized leaders to direct smaller groups – a Congolese combat strategy – in order to escape into the Great Dismal Swamp. The colonial elites recruited Indian trackers, the Pasquotanks, to help stop the rebellion. It was not long before the fugitives were caught and leaders were hanged. 103 John Brickell reported that he "saw four and twenty of these Negroes hanged in Virginia, for conspiring against their Masters, who had taken Sanctuary in the Woods." 104 Planters sought to prohibit laborers from taking flight and reestablishing themselves as free people on the basis of Christian conversion.

Planters pursued other avenues to minimize disruption in the colony. Labor management and economic control were inextricably tied together, and great planters attempted to command both in order to stabilize Virginia's precarious society. After the 1710s, legislators implemented stricter regulations on slaves and tobacco to fulfill their economic objectives. After the General Assembly enforced a tax of five pounds in 1710

102 Parent, Foul Means, 236-237, 243-244, 249, 264.

103 Parent, Foul Means, 159-161.

104 John Brickell, John Lawson, and J. Bryan Grimes, The Natural History of North-Carolina With an Account of the Trade, Manners, and Customs of the Christian and Indian Inhabitants ... (Raleigh: Printed by James Carson, 1737), 357.
on all arriving black slaves in order to reduce laborers, thus reducing production, tobacco prices increased.\textsuperscript{105} To ensure that prices did not dip low again due to overproduction, in 1713, Governor Alexander Spotswood encouraged the Assembly to enact a law which assigned inspectors to examine tobacco and burn any that was of poor quality -- decreasing the supply which would increase the price.\textsuperscript{106} Poorer planters harbored a bitter resentment towards wealthier planters for this act, as they were often the producers of lower-quality tobacco plants.

Despite the growing tensions among planters, the act increased tobacco prices. English merchants began to sell more slaves to the colony, and more laborers helped planters produce larger harvests. Thus, more crops landed in markets, decreasing the prices by the early 1720s. African slave dealers wanted more money from British merchants for the slaves, which eventually increased planters’ debts. During the 1720s and 1730s, the price of a new slave was about thirty pounds sterling. Many buyers who acquired slaves at the turn of the century had not paid for all their purchases yet and with lowered tobacco prices, merchants refrained from selling to Virginia’s planters. Great planters could not acquire supplies due to poor credit and they could not coerce smaller planters to pay their growing debts. Thus, colonists lost confidence in great planters’ ability to conduct business as brokers for the colony.\textsuperscript{107}

Failure of economic remedies led to the violent reactions of small planters, but the ultimate control of tobacco production and sale belonged to wealthy planters. The

\textsuperscript{105} Parent, \textit{Foul Means}, 90.


\textsuperscript{107} Parent, \textit{Foul Means}, 92-94. Parent states that between 1710-1713, no more than three hundred Africans arrived in the colony; however, between 1715 and 1718, that number jumped to four thousand. After 1740, planters had to spend more money to buy a creole slave, and by the beginning of the 1770s, they purchased slaves for about forty-five pounds, Kulikoff, \textit{Tobacco and Slaves}, 134, 136.
Assembly passed a forty-shilling tax on all slaves coming into the colony in 1723 and again in 1728, hoping to limit trade and generate profits for planters. Despite efforts, the British Crown’s Privy Council dismissed both of these duties as they felt the taxes would hurt poorer farmers. British interference curbed wealthy planters’ monopoly over labor.\textsuperscript{108} To increase profits, Governor William Gooch implemented the Virginia Inspection Act of 1730 to ensure that warehouses disposed of “trashy tobacco.” This act appointed more inspectors than the similar 1713 law. Assembly members could not apply for the new inspector positions, but middling planters were now eligible.\textsuperscript{109}

Despite some efforts at reconciliation, small planters were infuriated and set tobacco warehouses on fire in Lancaster, Falmouth, Northumberland, and King George Counties. After terminating the uprising, the planter elite continued to enforce the law and renewed it in 1734 for another four years.\textsuperscript{110} The Inspection Act of 1730 was vital for the planter elite, as they successfully demonstrated their economic power over the lower classes.\textsuperscript{111}

By the end of the 1730s, the gentry demonstrated their social dominance by successfully implementing tobacco regulations that would benefit their own class while reinforcing Virginia’s economic hierarchy. The class conflicts that surfaced in the 1720s decreased and after 1735, the tobacco market stabilized. The elite not only legitimized their economic power, but they also established their political dominance by the end of the decade. Also, the planter elite won the support of an emerging class of yeoman farmers. These yeoman farmers voted for the gentry during elections and worked as


\textsuperscript{109} Kulikoff, \textit{Tobacco and Slaves}, 106-110.

\textsuperscript{110} Brown, \textit{Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs}, 253.

jurors, and in exchange, the elites increased the yeoman farmers’ credit and offered them support if they wished to create new counties or parishes in their localities.112 The gentry solidified a society based on class status and hierarchal responsibility – a society built on the backs of bondsmen.

Virginia’s planters spent decades creating a slave society to coexist under the direction of the elite. Legislators imposed strict laws to manage colonial affairs, but Bacon’s Rebellion combined with the tobacco-cutting riots demonstrated laborers and freemen’s willingness to violently challenge colonial authority in order to improve their political and social status. After the conflicts, colonists worried over the hostile nature of an increasingly volatile labor force and at the turn of the eighteenth century, planters implemented distinct racial divides to bolster their supremacy, secure white cooperation against blacks, and limit laborers’ opposition to authority. Although these new social and cultural boundaries certainly curtailed some acts of resistance, legislators still enforced harsh laws and strict disciplinary measures on runaway servants and slaves. Planters not only relied on others in the colony to catch runaways, but legislators also punished those who aided runaways. With bondsmen and freemen’s lack of deference for colonial authority, planters used patriarchy as a means to legitimize their positions as colonial leaders. During the first few decades of the century, large planters struggled for dominance over both laborers and smaller planters, but by the 1730s, they successfully manipulated economic policies and won political support from yeoman farmers which solidified the establishment of a distinct slave society in Virginia.

From Bacon’s Rebellion to the end of the 1730s, the planter elite sought to manage land, augment finances, and control laborers by any means necessary. However,

laborers’ resistance challenged their ability to reach their objectives. Planters sought to limit bondsmen’s defiant acts with a number of regulations and punishments, but many indentured servants, convict servants, and slaves responded to the elites’ measures of oppression by taking flight – a formidable measure of resistance. By influencing whites’ colonial management strategies and regulations, the bound “giddy multitude” of runaway laborers played a vital role in Virginia’s evolution as they facilitated the colony’s development from a society with slaves to a slave society. Runaway laborers compelled Virginia’s planters and legislators to fortify their own measures of control over the labor force, decreasing their reliance on England’s management of colonial affairs. The colony’s labor management policies caused tension to rise among colonists and English authorities in the years to come. Planters depended on their legislation and their measures of social control to sustain colonial order and minimize interference, whether from defiant laborers in the colony or from lawmakers abroad.
CHAPTER III

THE CROSSROADS OF DISRUPTION AND FREEDOM

After the 1730s, colonists' attention shifted from the creation of Virginia's slave society to the preservation of order and prosperity. Colonial leaders expanded their economic power by asserting their influence over the tobacco trade, organizing new legislation, and manipulating classes, but bondsmen's insubordination demonstrated the limitations of their power. Planters' enforcement of laws and punishments, class and racial divides, and measures of social control certainly challenged, but did not prohibit laborers from taking flight. Hundreds of bondsmen developed creative strategies and used vital resources in order to flee from their masters, engage in illegal activities, and reinvent themselves as free people. Planters' understood that labor control played a dynamic role in the colony's success, and being mindful of runaways' crimes and actions that disrupted domestic tranquility, they sought to limit bondsmen's freedom. Thus, when their control over laborers was endangered by British intervention in the 1770s, colonists took critical steps to remove the threat. By escaping from their masters and engaging in illegal activities, runaway bondsmen influenced the social and political development of Virginia and challenged the institution of servitude and slavery.

The great colonial and revolutionary leaders are often credited as the impetus for the American Revolution, but the agency of laborers in Virginia, and more specifically, runaway bondsmen, also influenced the drive for independence. Runaways certainly

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troubled free colonists throughout the colonial period, but it was their continual resistance after Virginia's formative years -- their defiance of laws, manipulation of colonists' measures of control, and ability to engage in levels of collective resistance -- that disrupted colonial life and influenced Virginia leaders' political decisions. Runaways' activities exposed planters' failure to keep laborers subservient and pressured legislators and planters to continually reassert their colonial power over laborers. Planters fretted over escaped laborers' minor criminal offenses, but they also feared laborers' ability to flee and then organize uprisings and commit hostile acts against white colonists. This fear materialized with the announcement of Lord Dunmore's proclamation in 1775 -- an event that widened the divide between the British and Virginians and encouraged colonists to take steps towards autonomy. By taking measures to secure their own freedom, runaway servants and slaves challenged planters' supremacy, threatened their ability to manage colonial affairs, and added to whites' worries over labor control, which facilitated Virginia's participation in the War for American Independence.

During the mid and latter half of the century, Virginia planters depended on laborers' productivity to reap the benefits of the colony's growing economic prosperity. For many planters, their success was contingent on the growth of the slave population and the value of tobacco. By 1730, there were about 20,000 slaves in the colony. In 1763, the number increased to about 170,000 slaves, which was approximately the same number of whites residing in Virginia at the time. The slave population grew rapidly, reaching 188,000 just seven years later.\(^3\) Whereas the number of slaves rose, so did the value of tobacco. Even though the crops' prices vacillated from the 1740s to the 1770s,

the prices increased overall after 1750. England’s economic prosperity not only
increased the demand for American commodities, but it also increased the credit supply
to colonists. Another factor that added to this prosperity was the rise in the demand for
grain in the 1760s, which contributed to higher prices in the Chesapeake. These
economic changes encouraged planters to capitalize on new lucrative opportunities and
by consolidating control over laborers, they could gain larger profits.4

During the mid century, legislators implemented laws to better define laborers’
duties and legal status. By 1748, it was evident that legislation failed to prevent
bondsmen’s criminal actions, as whites struggled to discourage their thefts, poisonings,
conspiracies, and violence.5 In 1748, legislators reminded all servants to serve “faithfully
and obediently,” and if a servant decided to “resist his or her master, mistress, or
overseer, or offer violence to any of them” the owner could add a year of service for each
insult.6 Lawmakers also limited laborers’ legal rights. Legislators deemed that convict
servants and blacks, both free and slave, were “commonly of such base and corrupt
principles,” and they gave “precarious evidence” when they testified in courts.
Consequently, in 1748, they were no longer eligible to “give evidence in any cause, civil,
or criminal” in court or to the justice of the peace unless they testified against someone of
the same bound status.7 Masters relied heavily on the colony’s political system to limit

4 Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-

5 Schwarz, Philip J. Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865 (Baton

6 William W. Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the
First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, 13 vols. (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1971), V,
551.

bondsmen's acts of insubordination, but also to strengthen the divides between blacks and whites and between free people and laborers.

Bondsmen's illegal activities greatly troubled white colonists, but one of the most problematic criminal offenses was bound laborers' flights. With just one laborer absent from his or her regular duties, the work of his or her group of fellow laborers could be lost. Virginia planter, Landon Carter remarked that "if any one person, the most trifling hand, is ill but a day or a piece of a day, it generally excuses the loss of a whole day's work of the gang." This loss of productivity must have multiplied if laborers ran away. During the middle of the century, lawmakers enforced stricter disciplinary measures to discourage laborers from taking flight. For instance, in 1748, escapees who forged a certificate of freedom to get hired had to repay the recovery costs, compensate for their lost labor, and remain in a pillory for two hours. Laborers' activities concerned masters to such a degree that in 1754 legislators authorized the militia to form patrol groups to search slave quarters, or "other places suspected of entertaining unlawful assemblies of slaves, servants, and other disorderly persons." The justice of peace punished offenders with a maximum of twenty lashes to discourage these illegal gatherings.

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8 Landon Carter, June 28, 1771, in The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778, ed. Jack P. Greene, vol. 2 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965), 588; Generally, Chesapeake planters used the gang system, while Lowcountry planters commonly, but not exclusively, used the task system. The gang system required one or two bondsmen to lead a group of fellow workers for the entire day. The task system, on the other hand, required workers to complete a set amount of duties per day or week and once they finished, they had free time. The nature of the gang system did not provide laborers with any motivation to promptly complete their tasks, which encouraged laborers' idleness and their desire to absent themselves from their duties, Philip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 179, 191. For more information on laborers' field duties and the cultivation process of tobacco and wheat, consult Morgan's Slave Counterpoint, 146-203.

9 Hening, ed., Statutes, V, 552.

10 Hening, ed., Statutes, VI, 421. Patrol groups typically consisted of four members or less.
By mid-century, slave runaways troubled planters to such a degree that lawmakers devised stricter disciplinary policies. Legislators differentiated "outlying" runaway slaves, those who escaped for shorter periods of time, from "outlaws" who were fugitive runaways. In 1748, the Virginia Assembly encouraged the public to "kill and destroy" outlying slaves if they refused to return to their masters. Outlawed fugitives committed more horrendous offenses. They were no longer just the masters' problem, but they became the public's responsibility. Colonists could collect a reward for killing these criminals.\textsuperscript{11} Regardless of the duration of the flight, lawmakers permitted slave owners to dismember their incorrigible slaves who were "notoriously guilty of going abroad in the night, or running away, and laying out."\textsuperscript{12} Legislators enacted brutal punishments to deter slaves from flight, indicating that their actions threatened colonists more directly.

Legislators also continued to enforce harsh legal consequences on colonists who aided runaways. In 1748, the punishment for sheltering a runaway servant was thirty pounds of tobacco for each day. Anyone who forged a pass for a runaway would be charged ten pounds; if the offender did not pay within six months, that person suffered thirty-nine lashes "well laid on, at the common whipping post."\textsuperscript{13} Legislators enacted financial and physical punishments to reduce colonists' proclivity to aid runaways.

Whereas legislators discouraged freemen's efforts to help runaways by enforcing severe penalties, they also encouraged them to capture escapees by offering large


\textsuperscript{12} Hening, ed., Statutes, VI, 111. The punishment for sheltering a runaway decreased from the stipulations in the 1705 law, which may suggest that the situation became increasingly troublesome for owners to attain money from offenders, Hening, ed., Statutes, III, 454-455.

\textsuperscript{13} Hening, ed., Statutes, V, 551-552.
rewards. Typically, the reward was based on the distance the laborer traveled. In 1748, if an individual captured a runaway servant or slave within five to ten miles of the fugitive’s home, that person received a hundred pounds of tobacco as a reward, and if an individual captured a fugitive ten or more miles away, the reward doubled.\textsuperscript{14} In the eighteenth century, people filed thousands of claims in the judicial system in order to collect rewards for escapees. Most of these captors were not members of Virginia’s ruling class, but almost two-thirds of these claims reported that the black escapees were owned by the gentry. As so many of the runaways belonged to members of the ruling class, these planters used rewards to encourage freemen to regulate the slave system.\textsuperscript{15}

By the 1760s, legislators increased the incentive to detain runaways. In 1765, the House of Burgesses determined that the method for capturing and returning escapees was “very inconvenient to the owners...burthensome to the constables ....[and a] great trouble and expense in settling the publick claims.”\textsuperscript{16} Legislators passed an amendment which required an individual who detained a fugitive to take that runaway to the justice of the peace “immediately” where they could record the fugitive’s name, master’s name, and log the details of the flight, including the runaway’s legal residence, distance traveled, and location of capture. After receiving the servant or slave, owners reimbursed the captor five shillings for their efforts and four pence for every mile the captor traveled to return the fugitive.\textsuperscript{17} However, in 1769, the House of Burgesses declared that the 1765 act concerning the “method of taking up and proceeding with runaway servants and

\textsuperscript{14} Hening, ed., Statutes, V, 552.

\textsuperscript{15} Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, 310.

\textsuperscript{16} Hening, ed., Statutes, VIII, 135.

\textsuperscript{17} Hening, ed., Statutes, VIII, 135-136.
slaves, is found ineffectual."\(^{18}\) Lawmakers increased the reward to ten shillings for capturing a runaway and sixpence for every mile traveled. Legislators provided the same set of rewards and guidelines to apprehend both runaway servants and slaves, suggesting that escapees – as a group of defiant laborers – troubled planters enough to spend a greater amount of money to detain them. In addition, efforts on the part of small and large planters to control their runaways with legal mechanisms bonded them to a common identity, as both were masters and neither were bondsmen.\(^{19}\)

To help publicize laborers’ escape and solicit colonists to capture them, authority figures published newspaper advertisements for their runaways. Subscribers, including planters, jailers, officers, and crewmen, depended on ads to reach a wide audience, and some offered additional rewards to further entice colonists to capture their runaways.

One slave owner, John Matthews, explained that his slave, Sawney, escaped with a forged pass, but "my advertisements happening to get before him," and he was captured.\(^{20}\) Virginia subscribers placed ads in a number of newspapers (see Appendix, Figure 3), some even as far north as New York.\(^{21}\) Although the precise number of runaway servants and slaves is unknown, in Lathan Windley’s study on runaway advertisements, he found that there were at least 659 male and 83 female runaway slaves

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\(^{18}\) Hening, ed., *Statutes, VIII*, 358.


\(^{20}\) *Virginia Gazette*, September 5-12, 1745.

from 1730-1774 in Virginia. Whités did not place ads for every escapee because some believed they would return eventually or felt that their value as a laborer was too low.

Gerald Mullin, who focused his study on runaway slaves as well, reported that between 1736 and 1801, the newspapers in Williamsburg, Fredericksburg, and Richmond printed about 1,500 ads for runaways (see fig. 2), which included 1,382 men and 142 women, and an additional 400 notices posted for captured laborers.

![Image of runaway advertisements, one for a convict servant named Patrick Molloy and another for a slave named Nanny.]

Figure 2. Above left, Runaway advertisement, for a convict servant named Patrick Molloy. Source: *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 29 October 1767; right, Runaway advertisement, for a slave named Nanny. Source: *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 30 June 1768.

The value of laborers encouraged owners to advertise for escapees, but more problematically, many masters wanted to find their laborers because they had absconded

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23 Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz. *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1790* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). 4. The conclusion that some owners believed their runaways would return is discernable (for some cases, but certainly not all) in the amount of time between the flight and the advertisement date which could range from a single day to years; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 40, 55-56. Masters knew that some slaves escaped during the day—some finding refuge in forests or fields—and came back at night for meals and shelter, which discouraged masters from publishing ads.

with valuable possessions. Edward Hill stated that he wanted his runaway to be caught and searched because he suspected that the fugitive stole “some silver work and tools” from him. Many runaways committed more audacious crimes which also drove masters to advertise for them. Subscriber Ben Johnston stated that because Charles Evans, a runaway mulatto slave, was a “notorious villain,” it “occasions my advertising him, to caution every person harbouring or entertaining him; and that he may be apprehended, dealt with, and conveyed as the law directs.” Some masters placed a great deal of trust in their bondsmen and their departure affected them more personally. Gabriel Jones explained that he trusted his runaway slave, Bacchus, and mentioned that he “constantly rode with me for some years past.” Jones reported that someone had seen Bacchus with five pounds currency a few days before he escaped, and he complained that “most or all of which, I suppose, he must have robbed me of, which he might easily have done, as I trusted him much, and placed too great a confidence in his fidelity.” The value of bondsmen’s labor and their willingness to commit crimes were the keys that encouraged planters to capture them.

While the ads depicted subscribers’ efforts to find and return runaways, they also conveyed the nature of the relationship between masters and defiant laborers. The *Virginia Gazette*, launching its first publications in 1736, gained revenue from subscribers who published runaway ads, announcements, and captured notices. When William Rind began publishing his version of the *Virginia Gazette* in 1766, his prices for

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25 *Virginia Gazette*, July 25, 1766.

26 *Virginia Gazette*, March 15, 1770.

27 *Virginia Gazette*, June 30, 1774.

28 *Virginia Gazette*, October 8, 1736. For each runaway ad, the *Virginia Gazette* charged three shillings for a week and two shillings for each subsequent week (the same price as an ad for a horse, cow, or land).
advertisements of “moderate Length” were the same as they were three decades earlier, but the costs of the “long Ones [were] in Proportion” to the length of the ads. Longer ads had more information, suggesting that subscribers had a greater level of familiarity with their bondsmen. They provided more details of runaways’ personal characteristics, which offers researchers a window to examine their abilities to resist authority. Over time, masters became more familiar with their bondsmen and their myriad methods for escape, thus, giving them more information to include in the ads.

While each ad was unique, the ads collectively reveal a number of trends subscribers used to describe and locate runaways. Subscribers used a wide range of descriptions to group runaway bondsmen into three simple categories: “surely” and “bold,” “shy” and “meek,” and “cunning” and “artful.” These descriptors helped planters to deduce reasons for runaways’ absenteeism and predict how escapees would integrate in the free society. Although many bondsmen traveled out of the colony, the majority of them stayed in Virginia (see Appendix, Table 1). Also, when subscribers posted a single ad listing multiple runaways, they frequently described more valuable runaways before less valuable ones. From the ads observed, it was common for subscribers to list males before females, white laborers before black laborers, and tradesmen before common workers. For example, two subscribers in 1752 listed an English servant who was a joiner by trade before they listed a Scottish servant, who did not have a trade listed. In another example, in 1768, three subscribers posted an ad for three convict servants: the

26 Virginia Gazette, May 16, 1766. Longer ads cost more which suggests that these laborers may have been worth more to the planters.

30 Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” 261.

31 Smith and Wojtowicz, Blacks Who Stole Themselves, 2-3.

32 Windley, A Profile of Runaway Slaves, 132.
first was a white cabinet-maker, the second was white and did not have a specific trade listed, and the last one was mulatto who also did not have a trade listed. The subscribers offered three pounds for the first two white servants and forty shillings for the mulatto.

Rewards in the ads may have also reflected planters' perception of laborers' value, especially the value of women laborers. In 1751, subscriber John Elliot listed his two male servants before his female servant and offered three pistoles for each of his male servants, but only a half a pistole for his female servant. Listing more valuable runaways first may have been a method to draw readers' attention to their most important bondsmen. Moreover, with so much of the information regarding runaways scattered, missing, or illegible, analyzing the placement of runaways in ads could provide researchers with additional insight into the value that subscribers placed on laborers.33 Historian Winthrop Jordan concluded that "probably more time, money, and energy was expended on this problem by white slaveowners, legislators, constables, jailers, and newspaper printers than on any other aspect of administering the slave system."34 Laborers and bondsmen had an intimate relationship and the ads reflected this relationship by indentifying runaways' background, physical features, and motivations.35

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33 Virginia Gazette, March 5, 1752; Virginia Gazette, September 22, 1768; Virginia Gazette, May 2, 1751; Historian Antonio T. Bly reports that 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," Antonio T. Bly, "'Pretends he can read': Runaways and literacy in colonial America, 1730–1776," Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal 6, no. 2 (2008): 293; These observations are discernable patterns, but are not definitive as a more in-depth analysis is needed. Also, it is worth mentioning that subscribers may have listed laborers that they knew more intimately before ones they knew less intimately.


Subscribers published runaway ads to place escapees back into bondage, but the ads also conveyed how bondsmen took important steps to secure their freedom. The ads show that laborers sought to transform their status from bound to free bound using six different strategies: manipulation of visual identities, command of language, domestic activities, thefts, violence, and formation of alliances. These measures demonstrated that runaways had a sound understanding of the dynamics of colonial practices and culture, as they actively resisted planters by reinventing their identities as free people.

Once laborers escaped, they manipulated their visual identities in a number of ways. As one of the most visible physical characteristics, skin tone complicated colonists’ ability to identify an individual’s status. Slaves generally had a “swarthy,” “dark,” or “black” complexion and whites had a “pale” or “fair” complexion; however, some whites and blacks had “tawney” or “brown” complexions, making it easier when laborers wanted to conceal their identities or pass as free. For instance, John Past was an English servant, but because of his darker complexion, he could “be taken for a Mulatto.” Mulatto slaves especially muddied racial lines because many passed for whites if they had lighter skin tones. Jack was a mulatto, but because of his lighter skin, he could “easily pass for a white man.” Sara was a “very artful” slave and “though not a Mulatto, [she] may attempt to pass for a free Woman.” In one case, bondsmen even painted their skin to disguise themselves. Jack, John Benhan, and John Miller, a slave and two English convict servants, escaped from Loudoun County in 1768, and they left

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37 Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” 257, 262; *Maryland Gazette*, November 11, 1747; *Virginia Gazette*, July 18, 1751.

38 *Virginia Gazette*, September 27, 1770.

39 *Virginia Gazette*, May 6, 1773.
behind "some Coal and Tallow" in one their kettles, which they may have found useful to
"black'd themselves" for a crafty disguise. Bondsmen manipulated colonists' perceptions of racial identities to elude whites and pass as free.

Runaways also used clothing in number of ways to change their visual appearance. Clothing articles were significant commodities during the colonial period, not only as valuable commercial products, but as symbols of the wearers' wealth and status. Accordingly, bondsmen often wore clothing that was loose and made of cheap materials, but runaways often dressed in any garments they could use to conceal their bound status. For instance, when Chelter escaped with likely intentions to visit his wife in North Carolina, he "carried with him an old brown broadcloth coat, a green jacket, three white shirts, two hats, and sundry other clothes, very suitable for carrying on the cheat of a pretended freeman." Chelter packed a large amount of clothing articles so he could conceal his true identity as a runaway laborer. Will was such an "artful subtle fellow" that he probably traveled "as much in disguise as possible, to prevent suspicion." In a more telling case, a slave named Peter wore irons on his legs, making flight difficult. However, he sought his freedom despite his disadvantage and escaped

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40 Maryland Gazette, May 5, 1768.

41 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 252-253; Slaves often dressed in rough fabrics created from the flax and tow yarns that were initially produced in Osnabrück, Germany. After the non-importation agreements during the 1760s, masters began handing out "cotton wool weave" clothing to laborers, often referred to as "country linen," Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 51; If clothing was unknown, subscribers often described bondsmen's dress as "clothed as Servants commonly are," or "common labouring dress," Virginia Gazette, July 8, 1773; Virginia Gazette, August 16, 1770.

42 Jonathan Prude, "To Look upon the 'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800." The Journal of American History 78, no. 1 (Jun., 1991): 145. Shirts and trousers were commonly made of osnaburg, breeches made of leather, petticoats and gowns were fabricated using tow, linsey, or calico materials, shoes and stockings consisted of yarn and leather, and hats were made of felt - all described as old, "plain," or "coarse" materials.

43 Virginia Gazette, November 8, 1770.

44 Virginia Gazette, November 15, 1770.
with a “Cotton Pair of Breeches, laced on the Sides for Conveniency of putting them on over his Irons.” Some runaways used their clothes in even more creative ways to avoid arrest. In 1752, Sara Knox escaped from Lancaster County and dressed in men’s clothing and used several false names, such as Charles Hamilton, to conceal her feminine identity. In 1768, Johnny, also known as Jack Ash, arranged his clothes, which he wore during his escape, by the local waterside of King’s Mill, possibly to fool authorities into thinking that he drowned. Johnny creatively devised a scheme using his clothes as the major prop in order to mislead captors. Runaways used clothing to redefine their status in society and minimize the chances of detection.

In addition to clothing, runaways also used different hairstyles and wigs to alter their appearance. David had hair “of the Negro Kind,” which he kept “very high and well combed,” but in order to appear free, he was likely to “cut it off, and get a Wig to alter and disguise himself.” David escaped hoping to travel to “some foreign Part” or Carolina, as he understood that removing himself from the colony may increase his chances of maintaining his freedom. Runaways who changed their haircut and wore wigs made it more challenging for captors to apprehend them because it was much harder for colonists to identify runaways when the ads simply stated the fugitives’ hairstyle changed.

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45 Virginia Gazette, May 2-9, 1745.


47 Virginia Gazette, February 11, 1768.

48 Virginia Gazette, November 5, 1772.

49 Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” 254.
Another way runaways altered their visual identity was to appear as free tradesmen. Bound laborers used a variety of tools, clothes, and accessories to build these identities. In 1745, leather-dresser, William Quirk, escaped and took with him “Deer-skins, wearing Apparel, Wools and Utensils, to the Value of Twenty-four Pounds, or upwards” from his subscriber, a Leather Breeches maker, which would have helped him play the role of a free tradesman. In another case, Sambo worked as a carpenter and he not only played the fiddle, but he also made these instruments. Sambo, who surely found his skills lucrative, escaped in 1766 and was still at large two years later, passing for a “free fellow.” Peter Deadfoot, a mulatto slave, learned a multitude of skills by the time he was twenty-two years old. He was a “good butcher, ploughman, and carter; an excellent sawyer, and waterman, understands breaking oxen well, and is one of the best scythemen, either with or without a cradle, in America.” In the spring of 1768, Deadfoot escaped from the Loudoun area and since he was “so ingenious a fellow, that he can turn his hand to anything,” he understood that he could find employment easily. In another example, a cooper and carpenter, Curry Tuxent, acquired tools for his trades before he journeyed “towards JAMES river, after a parcel of Negroes lately purchased by Sir Peyton Skipwith.” Tuxent needed to reinvent his identity promptly in order to join his comrades and he knew the tools supported his role as a free tradesman. Runaways recognized the value of skills and used them to appear as free people to capitalize on job opportunities available in the colony.

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50 Virginia Gazette, June 13-20, 1745.
51 Virginia Gazette, August 18, 1768.
52 Virginia Gazette, September 22, 1768.
53 Virginia Gazette, August 4, 1768.
Although runaways who were not tradesmen sometimes feigned skills to appear as free laborers, many masters hesitated to give actual skilled bondsmen credit for their talents. Skilled laborers could claim a higher value than unskilled laborers, and possessing skills also increased their chances of working as free people if they escaped. Thus, it was not uncommon for masters to state that their runaway “passes for a sailor,” “professes the coachmaker’s business,” or “pretends to teach Dancing.” Sara Knox, a convict servant, had skills in dancing, but her master announced that she will only “pretend to be a dancing Mistress.” Sara was sly enough to understand she could use her dancing skills to invent a new identity as “masterful” – as a teacher rather than as a servant.

While servants and slaves altered their appearances and used their skills to disguise their bound status, their command over language was also an important ability that helped laborers reinvent themselves as free people. Laborers arrived from all over the Atlantic world with a variety of language styles, dialects, and conversational habits and those who had a better command of the English language passed as free more easily. Will had a “little knock kneed” which probably hindered his mobility, but he spoke so well that he could “trump up a plausible story to induce people to let him pass.” With his ability to carefully narrate a story with enough details to ensure its plausibility,

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54 Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” 256-257.

55 David Waldstreicher, Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 8-9, 22; Virginia Gazette, September 3, 1767; Virginia Gazette, August 18, 1774; Virginia Gazette, September 19-26, 1745.

56 Virginia Gazette, July 3, 1752.

57 Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways,” 259-260.
Will had a distinct advantage when traveling on his flight. Since Christmas worked in his masters' house and tended to him since infancy, he probably found a number of opportunities to improve his language skills. Christmas not only became “very fluent of Speech,” and learned to read, but he was “so artful that he can invent a plausible Tale at a Moment’s Warning.” Christmas made his escape and he knew that he could use his language skills to quickly present a persuasive argument in order to defend his freedom to anyone who questioned it. In another case, Billy, who was “capable of doing almost any sort of Business,” spoke so convincingly that he won the “good Graces of almost every Body who will listen.” Billy knew his charisma combined with his work experience would increase his chances of success and he traveled to the James River “in the Character of a Freeman.” Runaways with trades and excellent communication skills, such as Billy, may have been more likely to stay in the colony to find work.

Runaways often invented false names to disguise their true status as bound laborers. In November 1769, a slave named Bristol escaped from his master, Maxamillian Calvert, the mayor of Norfolk. By December, Bristol resided in Richmond where he changed his name to Tom and passed as a free man; he was still at large in January the following year. James Gibson used Johnson as an alias and crafted “several Stories concerning his Freedom.” Some runaways defended their false names and accounts fervently. When Peter Deadfoot (who was mentioned earlier) made his first

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58 *Virginia Gazette*, September 24, 1767.

59 *Virginia Gazette*, March 19, 1772.

60 *Virginia Gazette*, April 14, 1774.

61 *Virginia Gazette*, November 30, 1769; *Virginia Gazette*, February 15, 1770.

62 *Virginia Gazette*, October 24 -31, 1745.
escape from his master, he used William Swann as his false name and "got as far as Noland's ferry, on his way to Philadelphia." When he escaped again in April 1768, Deadfoot was likely to rename himself once more and to bolster his account, he was "apt to speak quick, swear, and with dreadful curses upon himself, in defence of his innocence." Runaways craftily used their linguistic abilities to create false, but convincing accounts of their free status.

Runaways also used their literacy skills to support their accounts as free people. Joseph Green, an English servant, spoke in a way that was "easily detect[able]," and to help him move about the colony more freely, he acquired pen and paper to forge a pass. Even more dangerous than literate laborers who wrote their own passes were those who helped bondsmen acquire these documents. Since the early 1760s, Peter caused disciplinary problems for his master. Once Peter "learned to write a little," he not only forged passes for himself, but he also wrote them for other slaves to "go a little distance." Demonstrated in Peter's case, bondsmen's ability to read and write empowered them to give fellow bondsmen a means to travel more easily.

Whereas runaways benefited from their linguistic skills, when traveling as free people, women's knowledge of domestic activities also played a critical role in runaways' flights. Women often performed domestic chores; they cooked meals, cleaned, and tended to children. They also performed housewifery duties, which

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63 *Virginia Gazette*, September 22, 1768.

64 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 261.

65 *Virginia Gazette*, February, 18, 1768.

66 *Virginia Gazette*, February 9, 1769.
included tending to dairy and poultry animals, and mending clothing. Female runaways' knowledge of domestic activities, such as sewing and cooking, not only added to their ability to survive while on the road, but it helped them find work as waged laborers. Women often took jobs as seamstresses, washers, ironers, food vendors, bakers, and house servants. For instance, Moll developed her sewing, washing, and ironing skills and she was “very handy about waiting and tending in a House.” With a solid command over her domestic duties, Moll escaped and sought to “pass for a free Woman and hire herself.” In another example, Elizabeth Berry was such an “excellent dairy maid, and a good worsted spinner” that when she escaped, she likely pursued the former as “chiefly her business.” Women’s laboring positions allowed them to sharpen their domestic skills and bondswomen profited from their knowledge of domestic activities when they ran away.

Women’s laboring positions also provided them with greater access to clothing and supplies. Sarah worked as a house slave and was a “fine Sempstress, Knitter, Washer, and Ironer.” She was so discontented with her working conditions that she

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67 Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, 196, 246. White servant women were more likely to work in these domestic positions than black slave women, as the masters were less likely to send the former to work in the fields.


69 Virginia Gazette, October 27, 1752.

70 Virginia Gazette, July 20, 1769.
contrived at least four flights within approximately four years.\textsuperscript{71} To prepare for her escape in the spring of 1773, she took with her a variety of supplies including:

- red and white Calico Jacket and Petticoat, a white Holland and blue Plains Ditto, a red Flannel Petticoat, a purple Cloth Cloak, a black furred Hat, with a Gold Band, Button, and Loop, a black Silk Hat, several white Linen Shifts and Aprons, a spotted Yarn Rug and Dutch Blanket, a Pair of English made Leather Shoes, and several Pairs of Thread, Cotton, and Worsted Stockings, with a small red Leather Trunk\textsuperscript{72}

Sarah understood that she could sell these commodities for extra money or create a disguise in order to appear as a free woman. Some women laborers used indentures to help them pass as free. In 1769, Amy took an old indenture, belonging to Betty Brown in 1744, and when she was captured in Norfolk, she presented the indenture and "gained her liberty."\textsuperscript{73} In 1745, Isabella Pierce not only acquired another servant's indenture, but she also took "two Gold Rings, a Silver Stock Buckle, and about 6 l.[£] in Cash" from her master.\textsuperscript{74} These valuable supplies were relatively small, which may have made them harder to find unless one, such as Isabella, was familiar with their location.

Women laborers often sought out accomplices for their escape and they resourcefully used their skills to help sustain runaway groups. In August 1749, Rebecca Wooley, an Irish servant, escaped with two male servants, John Wiglay and Edmund Cryer. She could "sew, wash, and iron, very well." When she escaped, she took a "sattin Gown, a Virginia cloth Gown, two Virginia cloth Petticoats, and a red Cloak." Since the satin gown was not commonly worn by bondswomen, she may have used it to disguise

\textsuperscript{71} Virginia Gazette, May 6, 1773. William Black listed Sarah in two other ads: one in Virginia Gazette, July 9, 1772, and the other in Virginia Gazette, December 13, 1770.

\textsuperscript{72} Virginia Gazette, May 6, 1773.

\textsuperscript{73} Virginia Gazette, October 26, 1769.

\textsuperscript{74} Maryland Gazette, June 21, 1745.
herself or to sell for extra money. Her subscriber declared that “Cryer and Wooley will pass for Man and Wife,” and noted that she was “very big with Child.” Rebecca not only acquired extra clothes, but she could care for her male counterparts and maintain the group’s clothes during their flight. In that sense, bondswomen were the most valuable to runaway groups because of their domestic skills and labor positions provided them with better access to certain goods.

One of the most telling activities runaways used to maintain their freedom was thievery. Whereas women had better access to vital domestic supplies, many runaways used their knowledge of commodities and commerce to gain valuable resources and sustain themselves as free people. William Ryan, an Irish convict servant, “stole some purchas'd Wigs, &c.” and used his knowledge as a wig-maker to sell these commodities around the James River. Runaways also stole tools to capitalize on the commercial opportunities available in the colony. Thomas Todd was a shoemaker and before he escaped he stole all of his masters’ tools, which undoubtedly helped him to find work as a freeman.

Runaways also stole modes of transportation to escape more quickly. In 1763, a mulatto slave named Bob escaped from his owner, James Scott, in Prince William County and traveled to Maryland, where he “pass'd for a Freeman, and was hired there to reap, and saw Plank or Framing for Mills.” Bob was apprehended as a runaway, but he outwitted his captors by stealing a horse and fleeing so he could sustain his freedom.

75 Maryland Gazette, September 13, 1749.
76 Virginia Gazette, November 10, 1752.
77 Virginia Gazette, April 11, 1771.
78 Maryland Gazette, August 25, 1763.
Horses were a more popular means of transportation in the Chesapeake, but runaways found that stealing boats also helped them to elude captors quickly. In June of 1752, John Johnstone, a white servant plowman, and a mulatto named Syphax escaped from Middlesex County with a variety of supplies, including clothes, two guns, and a “neat Virginia built Canoe with a small Iron Chain.” In November, they still navigated the waterways together. Although someone saw them at “Smith's Point on the South Side of Potowmack, intending for Point Look Out,” they “steer'd towards the Tangiers,” getting away. With the stolen canoe, John and Syphax used their waterman skills to get away swiftly with their supplies.

Bondsmen not only engaged in small thefts, but they also committed robberies. Before John Hutchinson made his escape from his residence in Lancaster in November 1772, he acquired a large amount of cash because he “broke open the House of Mr. Anthony M'Qubae, and stole about forty Pounds.” Edward Duberg “robbed one Mrs. Hume,” acquiring “about 20 l.[£] worth of Wearing Apparel, among which were some Jewellery, Caps, Aprons, Handkerchiefs.” Duberg and his accomplice, Thomas Puttrell, easily sold these items as they traveled southward, giving them extra money for food and supplies during their flight. In 1771, Will, a slave, broke into his masters store and stole “many Things, viz. Shag, Broadcloth, Linen, Hats, and Checks.” Will had “been much whipped for the Crime he committed,” and he probably felt that flight was a way to

79 Morgan, Slave Counterpoint, 56-57.
80 Maryland Gazette, June 12, 1752, November 16, 1752.
81 Virginia Gazette, November 26, 1772.
82 Virginia Gazette, May 12, 1774.
escape his master and “pass for a Freeman.” In another case in Mecklenburg County, Jack bore the scars “R” and “M” on his cheeks, suggesting that he received punishment for running away once before; however, he refused to let his punishment prevent his unlawful activities. He incited a number of “late disorderly meetings among the Negroes” and committed “many robberies” before he fled from his master, Robert Munford in April 1766. To Jack, the potential punishment for a robbery and flight did not outweigh the rewards of freedom.

Bondsmen engaged in robberies to gain valuable commodities and fund flights, and some runaways took more daring steps to elude authorities after these crimes. Caesar was a “notorious runaway” and while he was at large, he committed a robbery in Essex in 1773. Caesar successfully evaded authorities until he reached Middlesex where he was detained; however, it did not take long before he escaped from the constable there. Cunningly, Caesar remained at large for at least six more months and while he was “often in custody” he “always contrived to get at liberty.” Bondsmen’s bold endeavors to remain free after robberies showed that they understood, at least in some sense, how to elude and escape from authorities.

Runaways not only committed acts of larceny to sustain their freedom, but they also engaged in violent activities and destroyed property. James Nouchtie “broke open” the window of his master’s store in order to acquire clothes for his flight. In 1768, Mann, who was about fifty years of age, threatened to burn down John Smith’s houses.

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83 *Virginia Gazette*, February 7, 1771.


85 *Virginia Gazette*, September 30, 1773.

86 *Virginia Gazette*, April 27, 1769.
Mann became an outlaw for his crime, but he avoided captors by seeking refuge near “Col. Corbin’s quarters, in King & Queen.” As a laborer who “gives very sensible answers,” and was much older than a typical runaway, Mann must have had a significant motive to assert such an audacious claim.  

In 1769, James Burks, not only “burnt” his master’s house, but he likely “took every thing out of it that could be of any service to him.” Bondsmen’s willingness to destroy planters’ property may have been a form of revenge, but more critically, it allowed them to acquire valuable supplies needed for life away from the plantation.

Whereas some bondsmen violently destroyed property, others brutally assaulted whites to protect their freedom. One suspected runaway who “was a hymn singer, and had a book of them in his pocket,” entered into Benjamin Warburton’s kitchen, but when Warburton attempted to apprehend him, the fugitive stabbed the man and fled. Although the unnamed runaway may have simply wanted food or supplies, he was willing to brutally defend his freedom, and he severely wounded Warburton as a result.

In another violent case, on July 3, 1752, Dick was so infuriated with his master that late one night he crept up to his master’s room while he was asleep and “grievously wounding him with a Broad-Ax, In the left Shoulder and Arm, with an Intent to murder his said Master.” Dick then fled and was still at large in September. He was an “artful, and cunning” slave with knowledge of “going by Water, Shoe-making, Carpenters Work, and Sawing.”

Dick’s actions demonstrated the consequences of discontented laborers, and

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87 *Virginia Gazette*, February 4, 1768.

88 *Virginia Gazette*, June 1, 1769.

89 *New York Journal, or General Advertiser*, February 15, 1770, Supplement.

90 *Virginia Gazette*, September 15, 1752; *Virginia Gazette*, August 21, 1752.
whites were left to pay the price for implementing a system of coerced labor they could not fully control.

Bondsmen not only assaulted whites, but they also successfully committed violent murders. In September 1745, two servants, Alexander Jamieson and John Skerum removed themselves from bondage through violence. When they traveled back from Norfolk in a schooner, Jamieson and Skerum “barbarously murder[d]” the skipper of the vessel, whose “Body having been since found on the Bay Shore.” They had the skipper’s extra clothes on board to use for disguises and with Jamieson’s waterman skills, they “ran away with the Vessel and Cargo.” The two servants brutally murdered the skipper in order to control the schooner and travel “outward bound,” where they could be free. In 1769, Phill and Winny also engaged in hostile actions to ensure their freedom. The “very cunning and artful” slave couple escaped, but while they were “outlying,” their master, John Knox, “was most barbarously murdered near the door of his dwelling-house.” Phill and Winny, who were “principally concerned in the horrid murder,” evaded authorities. Although they were captured “several times,” once in Frederick and another time in Loudoun County, they “always contrived to make their escape.” The couple carefully prepared to establish their lives as free people by acquiring a “variety of clothes,” using “forged indentures, with certificates of their freedom thereon,” and renaming themselves as Daniel Watts and Mimy Howard. Phill and Winny pursued their freedom, and after

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91 Virginia Gazette, September 19-26, 1745.

92 Virginia Gazette, June 15, 1769; Virginia Gazette, June 29, 1769; Despite Phill and Winny’s efforts, within a few weeks, they were caught and sentenced to death for their crime along with a female house laborer. Although the two lost their lives, they worried the brothers enough for them to offer a hefty sum of £105 for their arrest and conviction, Holton, Forced Founders, 139.
the murder of their master, they took the critical steps necessary to reinvent their identities as free people.

Runaways’ violent actions played an important role in their escape, but their measures to acquire aid and establish alliances emerged as a key strategy to remove themselves, companions, and relatives from bondage. Although in Virginia, more laborers ran away alone rather than in groups, one of the key advantages of an alliance among fugitives was that they could share resources.93 In 1766, Joseph Wain and William Cantwell, two English servants, fled together from Marlborough, Stafford County in order to join four Scottish servants residing on a local farm on “Potowmack run.” The group planned to flee towards Carolina because one of the Scotsman had an uncle there. To prepare for their journey, the six servants may have found it useful to “exchange their clothes” in order to avoid detection. Also, “several horses were missing,” suggesting that they did not “take such a journey on foot.” Due to the flight’s distance and since both Wain and Cantell stooped while they walked, which might have slowed them down, the group found that escaping on horseback was more conducive to their flight.94 Runaways’ measures of mutual cooperation provided them with opportunities to share each others’ resources and social connections to escape undetected.

Bondsmen also found that many free people cooperated with runaways and readily provided assistance. In 1762, John Grocott, an English servant, and Betty, a Virginia-born slave, escaped from Westmoreland County with the assistance of their

93 Windley, A Profile of Runaway Slaves, 136; Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 118-119.

94 Virginia Gazette, June 6, 1766.
master’s previous employee, William Wood.\textsuperscript{95} Both, Grocott and Betty took a variety of clothing articles and “stole sundry Bedcloaths.” Grocott also had an acquaintance provide him with an indenture for the flight. The group departed in a Schooner and “took with them a large Pine Canoe,” which would be helpful if they needed to part ways once they escaped.\textsuperscript{96} In another case, Will escaped in June of 1770 and he acquired a forged pass and he “passed for a Freeman, by the Name of Austin Cousins.” He met with George Kelly, an Irishman, who may have found it favorable to shelter Will, as he “had some Dealings with the above Slave before he ran away.” In August, Kelly, his wife, and child absconded across the Roanoke River and may have met Will in Carolina to help him pass as a free man. Will was still at large in February 1771.\textsuperscript{97} Acts of interracial cooperation, such as between Will and Kelly, revealed the limitations of racial divides in the colony.

Some measures of cooperation were more alarming. In 1752, Caesar received the death penalty for “Felony and Burglary,” but while awaiting his punishment, he managed to break out of jail. “There is great Reason to suspect that the said Nathaniel Harrison [his owner] is concerned in said Rescue, and is fled with the said Negro.”\textsuperscript{98} In 1751, one servant became intimate with his masters’ wife. William Frye and Mary took two horses, a variety of clothes, and tack to help them escape. Frye and Mary were “supposed to pass for Man and Wife.”\textsuperscript{99} Laborers who cooperated with free members of society not only

\textsuperscript{95} Maryland Gazette, August 8, 1762.

\textsuperscript{96} Maryland Gazette, August 8, 1762.

\textsuperscript{97} Virginia Gazette, February 21, 1771.

\textsuperscript{98} Virginia Gazette, March 20, 1752.

\textsuperscript{99} Virginia Gazette, October 31, 1751.
demonstrated that some free colonists and bondsmen formed powerful bonds, but it also revealed that planters’ efforts in enforcing the concepts of patriarchal ideology had some shortcomings. In addition, free people and laborers’ cooperation reflects the appeal of revolutionary ideology, which was deep rooted in measures to uplift oppressive interferences. This concept grew more pervasive as laborers continued to form alliances with freedmen, indicating that some social and racial boundaries could be bridged by measures to sustain freedom as well as opportunities for personal gain.

Many laborers also formed groups that allowed them to defy whites using more dangerous measures. Despite being constrained by an iron collar, convict servant Thomas Winthrop met with his accomplices and “broke open the house of Anthony Hileendale, and took from thence three pair of new leather breeches, and a parcel of dressed deer skins.” Winthrop’s iron collar may have hindered his mobility, but the group’s measures of cooperation allowed them to execute the crime. In May 1751, six slaves, including two brothers, a mulatto child and a slave woman, and a young mulatto couple, organized their escape from Accomack County. They equipped their group with “Guns, &c. and broke open several Houses in the said County, committed Felonies, [and] have taken a Canoe.” They hoped to aboard another vessel that would take them to the other side of the bay. Although these six slaves were caught in a matter of days, they prepared defensively for whites to respond to their operations to gain freedom.

Runaway groups demonstrated escapees’ efforts for mutual cooperation and some runaways engaged in long-term alliances. Due to the nature of the Chesapeake’s

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100 *Virginia Gazette*, July 20, 1769. Although the perpetrator for this crime was not positively identified, the subscriber stated that Winthrop was “strongly suspected” in the crime.

101 *Virginia Gazette*, May 24, 1751; Accomack County Order Book, 1744-1753, 511-12; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 464-465.
geography, runaways did not have as many places to take refuge, but some were able to venture into the Great Dismal Swamp to join permanent free communities. There, fugitives constructed homes and tended to gardens and animals.\footnote{Eugene D. Genovese, \textit{From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 68.} In October 1768, Tom escaped from his master in Cumberland and may have found comfort in the securities of the swamp.\footnote{\textit{Virginia Gazette}, Williamsburg, October 6, 1768.} The swamp provided runaways with a space to live, at least in some sense, independently of whites’ control and permanently reinvent themselves as free people.

In the 1770s, planters were well aware of the problems that bound labors posed if they escaped. Since the 1730s, runaway ads circulated warnings of escaped laborers’ criminal actions and intentions. By the 1770s, both the slave population and the availability of newspapers increased – and so did the number of advertisements.\footnote{Windley, \textit{A Profile of Runaway Slaves}, xvii.} These ads conveyed reports as to how “artful Thieves” robbed colonists of valuable possessions, “daring and dangerous villains” committed the “most horrid crimes” to property and people, and how the “ill disposed” public was all too willing to facilitate runaways’ endeavors.\footnote{\textit{Virginia Gazette}, July 11, 1751; \textit{Virginia Gazette}, September 22, 1775; \textit{Virginia Gazette}, May 23, 1771.} For years, the newspapers listed numerous ads describing how laborers escaped and the materials they took with them (see Appendix, Table 2). In April 1770, Charles Carter, a slaveholder troubled by his escaped laborers, complained to Landon Carter that he was “so plagued with Runaways.”\footnote{Charles Carter to Landon Carter, April 24, 1770, in The Geography of Slavery in Virginia, Tom Costa and The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia, http://people.uvawise.edu/runaways/plant/cart70apl.html (accessed January 10, 2011).} Although planters spent years trying to minimize the number of defiant laborers, the rising number of runaways and
advertisements explaining their activities and crimes showed the limitations in planters' policing system.

During the pre-revolutionary period, colonists’ ability to control bondsmen was integral to their domestic success and planters quarreled over how to better regulate the slave system. By the 1760s, smallholders in the Piedmont area bought the majority of Africans slaves so they sought to decrease the duties on incoming Africans. Larger planters, on the other hand, did not want to revamp the international slave trade because it would increase tobacco growers’ debt and dependency on British merchants. Limiting the number of laborers in the colony would also boost tobacco prices because it would reduce the supply in the markets. In addition, with an increasing number of slaves in the colony, many whites grew more fearful of slave plots and insurrections. Virginia House of Burgesses member, Richard H. Lee argued that because of the nature of bondage, slaves were “natural enemies to society” and that “their increase consequently [was] dangerous.” Larger planters supported the House of Burgesses’ efforts to double the slave trade duties in 1767 and 1769 and to terminate the slave trade 1772, but British merchants convinced the Privy Council in England to refuse their appeals. Historian Woody Holton argued that, “Where, in other cases, the power that merchants wielded over the London government hurt gentry Virginians financially, here – in combination

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108 Richard H. Lee, Memoir of the Life of Richard Henry Lee And His Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Men in America and Europe ... (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea, 1825) I, 18.

109 Holton, Forced Founders, 70-72.
with the threat that slaves posed— it also endangered their lives. The lure of political independence grew as a consequence."

In the advent of the American Revolution, fear and violence loomed throughout the colony. During the first half of the 1770s, rumors of dangerous slave insurrections combined with colonists' growing resentment towards England caused British authority to wane in the colony. The last colonial governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, grew increasingly wary of these discontented colonists, and as a security measure, he removed the store of powder kegs from the Williamsburg magazine to the HMS Magdalen during the night of April 20, 1775. Infuriated, colonists protested the governor's actions, but the town officials decided to allow the powder to remain in its new location. Worried that irate colonists might become violent, Dunmore threatened colonists with their own labor force. He proclaimed that "if any Injury or insult was offered to himself, or either of them [his supporters, Captain Foy or Captain Collins], that he would declare Freedom to the Slaves, and reduce the City of Williamsburg to Ashes." This threat caused patriot leaders to back down.

Lord Dunmore used Virginia's labor force as a leverage to prevent colonists' hostile actions and restore British authority over the colony. In response to Dunmore's actions and with news of the battles at Lexington and Concord, patriot militia groups assembled throughout Virginia. In early May 1775, Patrick Henry directed a band from Hanover County to respond to the governor's actions and march on Williamsburg. Once Dunmore learned of the militia's approach, he dispensed a proclamation reaffirming that

110 Holton, Forced Founders, xx.

111 Holton, Forced Founders, 30, 140-145.

he would defend his political position at all costs. He contended that colonists were unable to control their slaves or prevent their revolts, and he insisted that he would use slaves against whites if needed. To fortify his defenses, the royal governor provided weapons to his servants and Shawanese prisoners, who were taken the year before.\textsuperscript{113} One witness also recounted that “Parties of negroes mounted guard every night” at the governor’s residence.\textsuperscript{114} The governor now appeared to collaborate with both slaves and Indians. Henry, who may have been apprehensive of Dunmore’s warning, eventually negotiated to receive money for the powder kegs, and the stores stayed on the ship.\textsuperscript{115}

In the second half of 1775, Dunmore used bondsmen as a means to assert his control over the colony. In the summer, the governor unofficially began encouraging both servants and slaves to join him. The number of runaways grew and in the fall, Dunmore presented laborers with a greater opportunity for freedom. In November, Dunmore secured victory over a patriot militia from Princess Anne County. The governor was so pleased with the results that he issued a proclamation that provided freedom to all servants and slaves who served with British troops.\textsuperscript{116} Dunmore “declare[d] all indented servants, negroes, or others (appertaining to rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining his majesty’s troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing his colony to a proper sense of their duty to his majesty’s crown

\textsuperscript{113} Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}, 145-148.

\textsuperscript{114} John Burk, \textit{The History of Virginia, from Its First Settlement to the Present Day}, vol. 3, (Petersburg, VA: Printed for the Author, by Dickson & Pescud, 1805), 409.

\textsuperscript{115} Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}, 148.

\textsuperscript{116} Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}, 154-157. Joseph Hutchings led the militia from Princess Anne and ironically, two slaves he previously owned detained him.
and dignity.” Approximately a thousand joined Dunmore’s cause. Just as Nathaniel Bacon did in 1676, Dunmore had now created his own “giddy multitude” in order to better control the colony’s affairs. With bound laborers “flying to Lord Dunmore” and colonial emancipation imminent, colonists endured one of the greatest threats to their way of life – a threat perpetrated by the country that was allegedly their protector. The break between England and Virginia was now practically inevitable. The governor continued his campaign until he was pushed out of the colony and into New York in August 1776, but his actions directly contributed to Virginia’s movement for independence.

Although Dunmore’s campaign in Virginia was short, the consequences of his proclamation were long-lived. Dunmore’s efforts for emancipation failed, but his actions exacerbated tensions between Virginia and England. Colonists felt that Dunmore’s “Scheme [was] the most diabolical... [as] to offer Freedom to our Slaves, and turn them against their Masters.” Benjamin Waller, a patriot committee member in Williamsburg, remarked that the governor “had lost the Confidence of the People and not so much for having taken the Powder as for the declaration he made of raising and

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118 Holton, *Forced Founders*, 156, 212.

119 *Virginia Gazette*, November 18, 1775.

120 Holton, *Forced Founders*, 157-158.


freeing the slaves." The governor’s proclamation swayed colonists, such as affluent planters, William Byrd III and Robert Carter, to join the patriots’ cause. In addition, the lack of repercussions from England for Dunmore’s actions against the colonists only widened the divide between Virginia and its mother country. Thomas Jefferson contended that the governor’s proclamation was one of the most crucial reasons for the independence movement. Henry Lee Richards remarked that the proclamation “united every Man in that Large Colony.” William Eddis, an avid writer from Maryland, stated that governor’s “measure of emancipating the negroes has excited an universal ferment, and will, I apprehend, greatly strengthen the general confederacy.” Dunmore’s actions also made it less likely for England and Virginia to make amends. Thus, colonists, including many key colonial figures, felt that there was only one solution that would stabilize an increasingly precarious society: a movement for independence.

Dunmore would not have been as successful in provoking this solidarity and fervor among Virginians if the enslaved laborers that fled to his service did not pose a significant threat to colonists. Runaway laborers are often overlooked in the coming of the revolution – that is, until the advent of Lord Dunmore’s proclamation. The root of colonists’ apprehensions over Dunmore’s threat lies with the agency of laborers and the

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123 Holton, Forced Founders, 149; McIlwaine and Kennedy, eds. Journal of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1776, 232.

124 Holton, Forced Founders, 158-159; The British used Dunmore’s proclamation as a model to accept servants and slaves to fight with them in the war years to come. There are also reports indicating that maroons joined the British forces as well, Hugo Prosper Leaming, Hidden Americans: Maroons of Virginia and the Carolinas (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 233-235.

125 Holton, Forced Founders, 158-159.


127 Holton, Forced Founders, 137, 158, 208-212.
activities of runaways. For over a century, escaped bondsmen’s criminal actions attested to their resolve for freedom. Their efforts to gain independence by joining the enemy pressured Virginia’s leaders to take more daring measures to control the colony’s affairs. Consequently, the governor’s efforts to organize fugitive bondsmen into a force of his own “giddy multitude” contributed to the colonists’ drive for independence — a drive to fight for the preservation of their prosperity and to remove British interference from colonial affairs.\textsuperscript{128}

Throughout the eighteenth century, indentured servants, convicts, and slaves responded to their coercive labor conditions by escaping from authority figures. Colonial laws, penalties, and rewards limited runaways’ success, but did not prevent laborers from escaping. Runaways’ ability to manipulate their appearance and use their language skills to elude captors and deceive colonists demonstrated that they understood the complexities of eighteenth-century identities and colonists’ social practices. Women fugitives boldly defied paternal power by using their domestic skills and access to essential items as a means to sustain their freedom. Also, laborers extended their criminality by committing thefts to gain valuable commodities for their flights. As one of the more expressive means to demonstrate their abhorrence for their enslavement, escaped laborers engaged in violent activities. Lastly, runaways’ ability to find aid and form alliances demonstrated that their unlawful pursuit for freedom transcended social and racial barriers, ultimately weakening the slave codes. Bondsmen’s decision to escape arrived at the crossroads of freedom and disruption. Laborer’s criminal activities threatened masters’ identity as authority figures and their wealth, but more importantly,

\textsuperscript{128} Waldstreicher, \textit{Runaway America}, 210; Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}, xvi-xviii, 137, 158, 208-212.
they exhibited the multitude of measures runaway slaves and servants used to resist bondage and reinvent themselves as free people.

Throughout the mid and latter years of the eighteenth century, runaway laborers influenced the nature and development of Virginia’s society. Subscribers used runaway advertisements to explain fugitives’ recalcitrant actions and malicious intentions. More drastically, they conveyed the dangers runaways imposed on colonial life. These advertisements were spaces for whites to reestablish their social authority over laborers. The ads were also a way to reconstruct the individual identities of the people they placed in bondage who had escaped to gain independence. At the same time, the ads show that these bondsmen sought to transform their identities from enslaved laborers to free people. This was a mutually exclusive relationship— one in which masters asserted their authority by impeding runaways’ freedom, while runaways undermined masters’ authority by reinventing themselves as free people. Throughout the colonial period, masters and bondsmen sought to triumph over the resolve of the other; both groups hoped to legitimize their identity in the eyes of colonists, which caused an increasing amount of friction among bondsmen, masters, and other colonists. This climate of tensions culminated during the 1770s and shaped Virginia’s participation in the American Revolution. Thus, it was runaway servants and slaves, as a collective group, who responded to bondage in such a way that drove planters to assert their authority in order to better define legal constructs, reinforce a complex social order, and fortify their power to preserve Virginia’s prosperity.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, runaway indentured servants, convict servants, and slaves engaged in activities that not only contributed to whites’ worries over labor management, but also challenged colonial authority and the institution of coerced labor, shaping the nature of both Virginia and the United States. The success of Virginian planters was so deeply intertwined with the cultivation of land for crop production, specifically tobacco, and the productivity of their bondsmen. To limit laborers’ insubordination and protect their tobacco economy, lawmakers and colonial leaders adjusted the legal system to address laborers’ behavior problems, constructed cultural and racial boundaries, and implemented new measures of social control; however, bondsmen’s aspirations for freedom were not quelled by the fear of colonial authority. Bound laborers took flight in an endeavor to reinvent themselves as free people and many committed crimes to maintain their freedom. Throughout the colonial period, runaways’ actions pressured planters to continuously reassert their power over laborers’ work and bodies, cultivating a fear that culminated during Lord Dunmore’s emancipation of bondsmen in the 1770s.

Fueled by political discontent and social distress, Bacon’s Rebellion set the stage for the complex power struggles that accompanied the formation of the slave society. The dissonance between the upper class elites and the lowly Baconians became a clash of honor and prerogatives: white elites capitalized on their social status and embraced their ability to conduct political affairs, while small planters, the poor, and bondsmen strived to uphold their ability to defend themselves from Indian raids and maximize their
opportunities for freedom. With the support of white men of status, poor freemen, as well as slaves and servants – members of the “giddy multitude” – Bacon successfully reallocated colonial control and redefined the social relations among the lower classes and the elites.\(^1\) Bacon’s “giddy multitude” demonstrated the consequences of mismanaging class conflict and forever changed the way Virginia’s upper-class managed laborers.

By the early eighteenth century, wealthy planters and lawmakers strengthened their political system and used class and racial divides to keep poorer farmers and bondsmen subservient. Virginia elites consolidated their power to increase the efficiency of agricultural production, pacify white landholders, and improve their management over laborers. With the creation of the slave codes, planters divided whites and blacks by extending privileges to white servants and taking away blacks’ liberties. As Kathleen Brown argues, the codes united whites by infusing ideas of racism and patriarchal privilege into colonial culture. These laws not only served as a means to alleviate the friction between classes, but the codes reinforced planters’ political clout and, more notably, their Anglo-Virginian culture from English intervention.\(^2\) Thus, protecting their power over the lower classes was key to preserving planters’ identity and when some of the lowliest members of the colony’s classes, such as bound laborers, continually broke laws, planters were forced to further develop their political institution and fortify social and cultural boundaries. These ideas and actions reveal the roots of planters’ drive for colonial authority and domestic supremacy.


Despite planters’ efforts to bolster their authority over the lower classes, bondsmen, specifically runaway servants and slaves, became increasingly difficult for masters to control, complicating labor management. By punishing runaways for their disobedience, planters exercised their superiority as white masters and they hoped that the pains and physical marks of punishment would be enough to deter those fugitives and other laborers from escaping in the future. Even more distressing than runaways’ escape, masters found that freemen were willing to assist laborers during their flights. Thus, legislators also disciplined free people for aiding or hiring these fugitives, hoping to discourage their measures of cooperation. People who continued to commit unlawful acts to assist runaways in flight were particularly vexing, as it revealed the weaknesses in the colony’s racial and social barriers. Virginia’s elite found that that their political measures were not enough to impede bondsmen and freemen’s defiant actions, and they needed to better fortify their positions as colonial leaders in order to stabilize the precarious social order in the society.

During the early decades of the eighteenth century, Virginia’s ruling class embraced the ideology of patriarchism and reinforced their political power over the lower classes. Great planters found that patriarchism provided them with a way to justify their management of a coerced labor system, organize a hierarchal society, and solidify their social and political authority as patriarchs. Although the planter elite used patriarchism to better manage the tensions between classes and assert their dominance over laborers, it did not dissolve the social unrest in the colony. There was an increasing number of volatile arguments over tobacco and slaves, creating social conflicts, but with the enactment of the Virginia Inspection Act of 1730, the gentry solidified their social and
political dominance over smaller planters and reinforced a hierarchal society – limiting
the magnitude of discontent and resistance.\(^3\)

Although by the 1740s, great planters created a unique slave society, they had to
constantly reassert their authority over bondsmen who challenged their authority.
Runaway laborers particularly vexed planters. Legislators offered lucrative rewards for
their capture and enforced new punishments to deter bondsmen from taking flight. One
of the most vital measures to detain escapees was the publication of runaway
advertisements. These ads were critical step-by-step instructions to identify the
runaways.\(^4\) In addition, the circulation of these ads helped colonists build an elaborate
network to transport detained fugitives, buy bondsmen, and warn people of the legal
consequences that followed if they assisted escapees. Runaway advertisements are one
of the few genres of eighteenth-century text that depicts bondsmen as the focal point of
the text, which allows historians to obtain a more complete view of laborers as
individuals.\(^5\)

Planters and lawmakers used a variety of measures to control laborers, but the
runaway advertisements provide valuable clues to evaluate how laborers responded to the
confines of their bondage. Laborers’ decision to escape was indeed a bold one – one that
met at the crossroads of freedom and disruption. For runaways, the consequences of
capture were harsh and the choice to forge new lives as free people was not without its

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trials and tribulations. From the ads observed, flights were often premeditated rather than spontaneous decisions. Premeditation is even more apparent when analyzing group flights, because laborers who escaped in groups needed to develop a level of trust with their accomplices. Despite the ramifications, many laborers risked their lives to liberate themselves. Runaway servants and slaves used six important strategies to sustain their freedom; they manipulated their visual identities, relied on their command of language, used their knowledge of domestic activities, committed thefts and violent actions, and formed alliances. The runaway ads not only shed light on laborers' abilities and visual identities, but also, their discernable understanding of colonial culture. Runaways used vital resources to escape from masters, bridged social, gender, and racial boundaries in acts of solidarity, and evaded authorities time and time again. As Parent argues, many indentured servants and slaves banded together "in common cause as fugitives, lovers, and rebels."6 Our two fugitives, Elizabeth and Sancho are an excellent example, as this interracial couple dared to escape from their master to pass as a free married couple.7 Runaways' resolve for freedom was not extinguished by masters' measures to suppress them, which challenged planters' political power and social authority and fostered colonists' fears of laborers' free agency. Previous research on Virginia's role before and during the American Revolution focused on the ideas and actions of the ruling class, but Virginia's runaways played a significant part in the colony's movement for independence as well. It is no surprise that Lord Dunmore's threat to unite slaves against planters caused such an uproar. For decades, runaway ads alerted colonists to laborers' schemes for manipulation, ploys for

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6 Parent, Foul Means, 267.

7 Virginia Gazette, March 17, 1774.
robberies, and in some cases, their strategies to perform murders. Consequently, runaways’ crimes and the possibility of insurrection haunted colonists. Hence, Dunmore’s employment of escaped laborers combined with his emancipation of bondsmen, not only disregarded decades of colonial legislation and defied the constructs of the social structure, but it was a direct threat to planters’ agriculture industry. British relations with colonists were already tense by the early 1770s, but emancipation challenged their security and identity. From the colonists’ perspective, the crown was willing to risk their safety and culture to demonstrate English political legitimacy. Thus, after Dunmore dispensed his proclamation, many colonists sympathized with the British less and sided with the American cause during the war.

Runaway servants and slaves left a powerful legacy that was twofold, one of discontent and resistance, but also one of solidarity and liberty. They asserted control over their own lives and built common bonds to reconstruct identities that would remove themselves from the inequalities of a coerced labor system. Although certainly not all runaways were successful, their actions demonstrated the fortitude of human agency and the magnitude in which social unrest shaped the nature of Virginia’s society. By taking part in one of the most important forms of resistance, runaway indentured servants, convict servants, and slaves contributed to southern planters’ growing worries over labor management, exposed the fragility of the Virginia’s elaborate social order, and challenged the American institutions of servitude and slavery.

Constructing a history of Virginia’s runaway bondsmen is much like putting a puzzle together with many of the picture’s pieces hidden from view. Although colonists and bondsmen did not, and many times, could not document all of their actions and
struggles, newspapers provide a window in which to examine runaways’ behaviors, relations, and measures of resistance. It is impossible to fully study the history of the United States without acknowledging the impact of those who resisted the institution of slavery and servitude. There are many more questions concerning Virginia’s labor history that still need to be explained in order to understand the social, political, and cultural context of colonial America more clearly. Furthermore, runaway advertisements are incredibly rich source materials for researching a transatlantic labor force and the colony’s cultural dynamics. The ads not only depict planters’ perceptions and cultural expectations of Virginia’s coerced labor force, but they illustrate the portrait of lowly colonial laborers, creating the image of eighteenth-century bondsmen and bondswomen that many people think of today. More broadly, they reveal the levels of discontent and resistance in the colony, which not only facilitated colonists’ participation in the Revolution, but it also accelerated the fall of the institution of slavery in the nineteenth century. Since the 1730s, advertisements circulated throughout Virginia as a medium to convey the details of runaways’ flights, activities, and crimes, but the ads were also discernable markers of the incongruence between masters’ plans for economic prosperity and the bound giddy multitude’s aspirations to be free.
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Articles and Essays


### Table 1. Virginia: Probability of Destination of Runaway Slaves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destinations</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remained in Colony: To a town (usually Williamsburg, Norfolk, Richmond); to relatives or acquaintances; to where former owners lived; harbored or lurking about plantations in the neighborhood</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left the Colony: Board some vessel (usually to leave the country, sometimes to go to another colony); to some neighboring colony (North Carolina or Carolina, Maryland or Pennsylvania); to enlist</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remained in or Left Colony: Somewhere within colony; gone out of colony or board some vessel</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100</td>
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Table 2. Virginia Slaveowners’ Estimates of Runaway Slaves’ Items Taken Along and Disguises

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<th>Number of slaves</th>
<th>Disguises</th>
<th>Number of Slaves</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boats</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Change Dress</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Change Name</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>Forge Pass</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Pass for Free</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 399 447

Transcription:

Permit.

The Bearer hereof Negroe George. to pass from Marlborough in Stafford County to the House of Col. Frances Payton Esqr. at or near the Bull Run Mountains. & there deliver himself to Mr. Battle Muse. he having my leave for the spare [illeg.] to be computed from the date here . . .

my hand this 12th day of July

Thos Oliver
VITA

Nicole K. Dressler
History Department
BAL 8000
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 23539

Nicole Dressler is from Clarksville, Virginia. She graduated from Longwood University, magna cum laude, in 2008 and earned a Bachelor of Arts in History and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. While at Old Dominion University, Nicole worked as a graduate teaching assistant under the direction of Dr. Carolyn Lawes for an American history course and Dr. Jelmer Vos for an African history course. In 2009, Nicole was the recipient of the Harriet and Burl Fisher Endowed Scholarship in History. She currently lives in Norfolk, Virginia and plans to pursue a career in museum studies or education.