American Life in the Seventeenth Century, 1607–1692

Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness, but they cried unto the Lord, and he heard their voice, and looked on their adversity.

William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation

Prologue: The unhealthful environment of the Chesapeake region killed off the first would-be settlers in droves. Mostly single men, the earliest Virginia and Maryland colonists struggled to put their raw colonies on a sound economic footing by cultivating tobacco. At first, indentured servants provided much of the labor supply for tobacco culture, but after discontented former servants erupted in Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676, the dominant merchant-planters shifted to importing African slaves. By the end of the seventeenth century, both white and black populations in the Chesapeake were growing through natural reproduction as well as through continued immigration. New England, in contrast, was settled from the start by colonists in family units, who thrived almost from the outset. As their numbers grew, they built a prosperous, diversified economy, founded schools and tidy towns, and established a tradition of self-government. The Puritan faith pervaded all aspects of New England life, encouraging, in one extreme instance, the persecution of a number of women for witchcraft at Salem in 1692.

A. Indentured Servants in the Chesapeake Region

1. A Contract for Indentured Service (1635)

Indentured servitude took many forms, and many different types of contracts survive from the colonial era. In this blank contract from 1635, what are the principal obligations undertaken by the two contracting parties? What areas of discretion or choice

1Blank indenture form in Anon. [Father Andrew White], A Relation of Maryland (London: 1635, 1966), pp. 53-54.
did either servant or master have? How might that discretion have been abused—by either party?

The forme of binding a servant.

This indenture made the [Incomplete due to typographical error]

yeere of our Soveraigne Lord King Charles, &c.

betweene [Completes the sentence]

betweene of the one party, and on the other party, Witnesseth, that the said

doth hereby covenant promise, and grant, to and with the said

his Executors and Assignes, to serve him from the day of the date hereof, untill his first and next arrivall in Maryland; and after for and during the tearme of yeeres, in such service and imployment, as he the said

or his assignes shall there im­ploy him, according to the custome of the Countrey in the like kind. In consideration whereof, the said doth promise

and grant, to and with the said

and to pay for his passing, and to find him with Meat, Drinke, Apparell and Lodging, with other necessaries during the said terme; and at the end of the said terme, to give him one whole yeeres provision of Corne, and fifty acres of Land, according to the order of the countrey. In witnesse whereof, the said hath hereunto put his hand and seale, the day and yeere above written.

Sealed and delivered in the presence of

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2. A Londoner Agrees to Provide a Servant (1654)

The earliest Virginia settlers hungered for more workers so that they could plant more land in tobacco, the colony's richly profitable cash crop. Agents in England served as "brokers" who found laborers, arranged for their transportation to the New World, and drew up contracts specifying the terms of labor and the duration of the period of service. In the following contract, what sort of worker does Thomas Workman of Virginia want? What might be the implications of the contract's conspicuous failure to mention the terms of the servant's termination of service in four years' time?

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Recorded this 20th Day of June 1654

Be it known unto all men by these presents that I Richard Garford of London Inhoulder doe Confess and acknowledge my selfe to owe and stand indebted unto Thomas Workman of the Little Creeke in the County of Lower Norffolk in Virginia, planter, his Executors Administrators or assignes the full and Just some of Tenn pounds of good and lawfull money of England to be paid uppon demand of the abovesaid Thomas Workman or his true and lawfull At terny or Attornyes at the now dwelling house of Mr. Willyam Garford Innkeeper at the Red Lyon in fleet streete without either Equevocation fraud or delay, and to the true performance of the same well and truly to bee made and done I bind my selfe my Executors Administrators and Assignes, firmly by these presents in winnesse heereof I have hereunto sett my hand and seale this 4th day of Aprill 1653

Richard Garfford*

The Condition of this obligation is such that the within bounden Richard Garford or his Assignes shall well and truly deliver or cause to be delivered unto the above mentioned Thomas Workman, his Executors Administrators or assignes here in Virginia a sound and able man servant betweene Eightenee and 25 yer es of age that shall have fower yeres to serve at the least, and that in the first second or third shipp that shall arrive in the Port of James River in Virginia from London, that then the bond above to be voyd and of noe effect or else to stand in full force and vertue

Richard Garfford

Sealed and delivered in the presence of

Thomas Ward

3. A Servant Describes His Fate (c. 1680)

Mostly impoverished and unemployed in England, the great mass of indentured servants possessed neither the learning nor the leisure to reflect in writing on their experience in Virginia. A notable exception was James Revel, a criminal with some education who was “transported” to Virginia as punishment for his offenses. He eventually returned to England and wrote the following remarkable poem. What did he find most difficult about life in Virginia? What was his attitude toward the blacks he encountered?

*The inconsistent spelling of Garford/Garfford's name reflects the frequently irregular orthography of the seventeenth century. William Shakespeare's name, for example, was rendered in at least a dozen different ways, including Shakespear, Shakespeare, Shackspere, Shakspeare, Shakspeare, Shackespeare, Shackspere, and Shackespere.

Part I

My loving Countrymen pray lend an Ear,
To this Relation which I bring you here,
My sufferings at large I will unfold,
Which tho' 'tis strange, 'tis true as e'er was told,
Of honest parents I did come (tho' poor,)
Who besides me had never Children more;
Near Temple Bar was born their darling son,
And for some years in virtue's path did run.

My parents in me took great delight,
And brought me up-at School to read and write,
And cast accompts likewise, as it appears,
Until that I was aged thirteen years.

Then to a Tin-man I was Prentice bound,
My master and mistress good I found,
They lik'd me well, my business I did mind,
From me my parents comfort hop'd to find.

My master near unto Moorfields did dwell,
Where into wicked company I fell;
To wickedness I quickly was inclin'd
Thus soon is tainted any youthful mind.

I from my master then did run away,
And rov'd about the streets both night and day:
Did with a gang of rogues a theiving go,
Which filled my parents heart with grief and woe....

One night was taken up one of our gang,
Who five impeach'd and three of these were hang' d.
I was one of the five was try' d and cast,
Yet transportation I did get at last;....

In vain I griev'd, in vain my parents weep,
For I was quickly sent on board the Ship:
With melting kisses and a heavy heart,
I from my dearest parents then did part.

Part II

In a few Days we left the river quite,
And in short time of land we lost the sight,
The Captain and the sailors us'd us well,
But kept us under lest we should rebel....

Five of our number in our passage died,
Which were thrown into the Ocean wide:
And after sailing seven Weeks and more,
We at Virginia all were put on shore....

Our faces shav'd, comb'd out our wigs and hair,
That we in decent order might appear,
Against the planters did come down to view,
How well they lik'd this fresh transported crew.
The Women s{e}parated from us stand,  
As well as we, by them for to be view'd;  
And in short time some men up to us came,  
Some ask'd our trades, and others ask'd our names.

Some view'd our limbs, and other's turn'd us round  
Examening like Horses, if we're sound,  
What trade are you, my Lad, says one to me,  
A Tin-man, Sir, that will not do, says he[.]  
Some felt our hands and view'd our legs and feet,  
And made us walk, to see we were compleat;  
Some view'd our teeth, to see if they were good,  
Or fit to chew our hard and homely Food.

If any like our look, our limbs, our trade,  
The Captain then a good advantage made:  
For they a difference made it did appear.  
'Twixt those for seven and for fourteen year. . . .

At length a grim old Man unto me came,  
He ask'd my trade, and likewise ask'd my Name:  
I told him I a Tin-man was by trade,  
And not quite eighteen years of age I said.  
Likewise the cause I told that brought me there,  
That I for fourteen years transported were,  
And when he this from me did understand,  
He bought me of the Captain out of hand.

Part III

Down to the harbour I was took again,  
On board of a sloop, and loaded with a chain;  
Which I was forc'd to wear both night and day,  
For fear I from the Sloop should get away. . . .

At last to my new master's house I came,  
At the town of Wicocc[oomo]co call'd by name,  
Where my Europian clothes were took from me,  
Which never after I again could see.

A canvas shirt and trowsers then they gave,  
With a hop-sack frock in which I was to slave:  
No shoes nor stockings had I for to wear,  
Nor hat, nor cap, both head and feet were bare.

Thus dress'd into the Field I nex[t] must go,  
Amongst tobacco plants all day to hoe,  
At day break in the morn our work began,  
And so held to the setting of the Sun.

My fellow slaves were just five Transports more,  
With eighteen Negroes, which is twenty four:  
Besides four transport women in the house,  
To wait upon his daughter and his Spouse,  
We and the Negroes both alike did fare,
Of work and food we had an equal share;  
But in a piece of ground we call our own,  
The food we eat first by ourselves were sown,  

No other time to us they would allow,  
But on a Sunday we the same must do:  
Six days we slave for our master’s good,  
The seventh day is to produce our food.  

Sometimes when that a hard days work we’ve done,  
Away unto the mill we must be gone;  
Till twelve or one o’clock a grinding corn,  
And must be up by daylight in the morn. . . .  

And if we offer for to run away,  
For every hour we must serve a day;  
For every day a Week, They’re so severe,  
For every week a month, for every month a year  
But if they murder, rob or steal when there,  
Then straightway hang’d, the Laws are so severe;  
For by the Rigour of that very law  
They’re much kept under and to stand in awe.  

Part IV  

At length, it pleased God I sick did fall  
But I no favour could receive at all,  
For I was Forced to work while I could stand,  
Or hold the hoe within my feeble hands.  

Much hardships then in deed I did endure,  
No dog was ever nursed so I’m sure,  
More pity the poor Negroe slaves bestowed  
Than my inhuman brutal master showed.  

Oft on my knees the Lord I did implore,  
To let me see my native land once more;  
For through God’s grace my life I would amend  
And be a comfort to my dearest friends. . . .  

The Lord above who saw my Grief and smart,  
Heard my complaint and knew my contrite heart,  
His gracious Mercy did to me afford,  
My health again was unto me restor’d.  

It pleas’d the Lord to grant me so much Grace,  
That tho’ I was in such a barbarous place,  
I serv’d the Lord with fervency and zeal,  
By which I did much inward comfort feel.  

Thus twelve long tedious years did pass away,  
And but two more by law I had to stay:  
When Death did for my cruel Master call,  
But that was no relief to us at all.  

The Widow would not the Plantation hold,  
So we and that were both for to be sold,
A lawyer rich who at James-Town did dwell,  
Came down to view it and lik’d it very well.  
He bought the Negroes who for life were slaves,  
But no transported Fellons would he have,  
So we were put like Sheep into a fold,  
There unto the best bidder to be sold.

**Part V**

A Gentleman who seemed something grave,  
Unto me said, how long are you to slave;  
Not two years quite, I unto him reply’d,  
That is but very short indeed he cry’d.  
He ask’d my Name, my trade, and whence I came  
And what vile Fate had brought me to that shame?  
I told him all at which he shook his head,  
I hope you have seen your folly now, he said.  
I told him yes and truly did repent,  
But that which made me most of all relent  
That I should to my parents prove so vile,  
I being their darling and their only child. . . .  
He straightway came to me again,  
And said no longer here you must remain,  
For I have bought you of that Man said he,  
Therefore prepare yourself to come with me. . . .  
He said he would not use me as a slave,  
But as a servant if I well behav’d;  
And if I pleased him when my time expir’d,  
He’d send me home again if I required.  
My kind new master did at James Town dwell;  
By trade a Cooper, and liv’d very well:  
I was his servant on him to attend.  
Thus God, unlook’d for raised me up a friend.

**Part VI**

. . . At length my fourteen years expired quite,  
Which fill’d my very soul with fine delight;  
To think I shoud no longer there remain,  
But to old England once return again. . . .  
My Father and my Mother wel I found,  
Who to see me, with Joy did much abound:  
My Mother over me did weep for Joy,  
My Father cry’d once more to see my Boy;  
Whom I thought dead, but does alive remain,  
And is returned to me once again;  
I hope God has so wrought upon your mind,  
No more wickedness you’ll be inclined. . . .
A. Indentured Servants in the Chesapeake Region

I begg'd them from all grief to refrain,
Since God had brought me to them home again,
The Lord unto me so much grace will give,
For to work for you both While I live,
My country men take warning e'er too late,
Lest you should share my hard unhappy fate;
Altho' but little crimes you here have done,
Consider seven or fourteen years to come,
Forc'd from your friends and country for to go,
Among the Negroes to work at the hoe;
In distant countries void of all relief,
Sold for a slave because you prov'd a thief.

Now young men with speed your lives amend,
Take my advice as one that is your friend:
For tho' so slight you make of it while here,
Hard is your lot when once the[y] get you there.

4. A Servant Girl Pays the Wages of Sin (1656)

Single, lonely, and hard-used, indentured servants enjoyed few liberties. Those who went astray could be severely punished. In the following record from Charles City County Court, Virginia, what are the consequences of the servant girl's having borne an illegitimate child?

Whereas Ann Parke servant to Elizabeth Hatcher widdow is Complained of and proved to have Comitted Fornication and borne a Child in the time of her service: It is therefore ordered that the said Ann shall double the time of service due to be performed by her to her mistress or her assigns, from the time of her departure, according to act in that Case made and provided.

5. An Unruly Servant Is Punished (1679)

The planter-employers and masters struggled constantly to keep their hard-drinking, fractious servants in line. Sometimes matters got seriously out of hand, as in the following account from Virginia’s Accomack County Court records in 1679. What were the terms of the offender’s punishment? Were they justified?

The Examination of Elizabeth Bowen Widdow—saith—that on Sunday evening being the eighteenth day of May 1679 Thomas Jones her servant did come into her Roome and with a naked Rapier in his hand did
tell her he would kill her and said shee had sent Will Waight to her Mothers and that shee had got a master for them, but hee would bee her Master and allso said that he would not kill her if shee would let him lye with her all night and bade her goe to bed and she answered she would not and Runn in with his Rapier and bent it, then he said he would cutt her throat but she getting [to] the dore did run out of dores and he after her and ketchet [her] in the yard and as she was standing did endeavor to cutt her throat with a knife but could not and then he threw her down and did there allso indeavour to cutt her throat but she prevented it by defending her throat with her hands and bending the knife hee took her [petticoats and threw [them] over her head and gave her two or three blows in the face with his fist and bade her get her gun and did in this act with the Knife scurrify her throat and brest and cut her right hand with six or seven cutts very much and that she with bending the Rapier and knife cut her hands and fingers very much

Elizabeth Bowen

Whereas Elizabeth Bowin Widdow did by her examination upon oath in open Court declare that Thomas Jones her servant in a most barbarous and villanous nature sett upon and most desparately attempted to murder the said Bowin with a naked Rapier and Knife to cut her throat which had been perpatrated and committed had it not bee[n] Providentially and strongly prevented by the said Bowins resistance receiving severall wounds in her endeavours to prevent the sam[e] which was allso confessed by the said Jones: The Court takeing the same into their serious Considerations do order as a just reward for his said horrid offense and crime that the sherriff Forthwith take him into Custody and that he forthwith receive thirty nine lashes on the bare back well laid on: and to have his haire cutt off and an Iron Coller forthwith put about his neck dureing the Courts pleasure and after the time for which he was to serve his said mistriss is expired to serve his said mistriss or assignes one whole yeare according to Act for laying violent hands on his said mistriss and allso two yeares for his wounding her as aforesaid and after due punishment inflicted accordingly The Court do further order that the sherriff deliver the said Jones to the said Elizabeth Bowin or order (it being by her request) and the said Bowning [sic] to Pay Court Charges the said Jones makeing satisfaction for the same after his time of service is expired—

B. Bacon's Rebellion and Its Aftermath

I. The Baconite Grievances (1677)

Angry former servants, impoverised and resentful, crowded into the untamed Virginia backcountry as the seventeenth century wore on. Governor William Berkeley's

1The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 4 (1896): 121-122.
unwillingness to protect the hardscrabble planters on the frontier against Indian butcheries gave rise to ugly rumors of graft and helped spark a rebellion led by his wife's kinsman, the well born Nathaniel Bacon. After the uprising had collapsed, a royal commission sent out from England prepared the following report, which was not friendly to Berkeley. What were the governor's alleged shortcomings? Did they justify Bacon's defiance of his authority?

The unsatisfied people, finding themselves still liable to the Indian cruelties, and the cries of their wives and children growing grievous and intolerable to them, gave out in speeches that they were resolved to plant tobacco rather than pay the tax for maintaining of forts; and that the erecting of them was a great grievance, juggle, and cheat, and of no more use or service to them than another plantation with men at it; and that it was merely a design of the [tidewater] grandees to engross [monopolize] all their tobacco into their own hands.

Thus the sense of this oppression and the dread of a common approaching calamity made the giddy-headed multitude mad, and precipitated them upon that rash overture of running out upon the Indians themselves, at their own voluntary charge and hazard of their lives and fortunes. Only they first by petition humbly craved leave or commission to be led by any commander or commanders as the Governor should please to appoint over them to be their chieftain or general. But instead of granting this petition, the Governor by proclamation, under great penalty, forbade the like petitioning for the future.*

This made the people jealous that the Governor for the lucre of the beaver and otter trade, etc., with the Indians, rather sought to protect the Indians than them, since after public proclamation prohibiting all trade with the Indians (they complain), he privately gave commission to some of his friends to truck with them, and that those persons furnished the Indians with powder, shot, etc., so that they were better provided than His Majesty's subjects.

The peoples of Charles City County (near Merchants Hope) being devised [denied] a commission by the Governor, although he was truly informed... of several formidable bodies of Indians coming down on the heads of James River within fifty or sixty miles of the English plantations... they begin to beat up drums for volunteers to go out against the Indians, and so continued sundry days drawing into arms, the magistrates being either so remiss or of the same faction that they suffered this disaster without contradiction or endeavoring to prevent so dangerous a beginning and going on.

The rout [mob] being got together now wanted nor waited for nothing but one to head and lead them out on their design. It so happened that one Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., a person whose lost and desperate fortunes had thrown him into that part of the world about fourteen months before... framed him fit for such a purpose... .

*The governor feared that the settlers would attack, as they did, both friendly and unfriendly tribes.
2. The Governor Upholds the Law (1676)

The youthful Bacon, putting himself at the head of about a thousand men, chastised both the Indians and Berkeley’s forces. He died mysteriously at the moment of victory, and his rebellion ended. The ferocity with which Berkeley executed Bacon’s followers (more than twenty all told) shocked Charles II, who allegedly remarked, “That old fool has killed more people in that naked country than I have done for the murder of my father.” Before the rebellion collapsed, Berkeley pleaded his own case with the people of Virginia as follows. What is the strongest argument in defense of his position? Comment critically on it.

But for all this, perhaps I have erred in things I know not of. If I have, I am so conscious of human frailty and my own defects that I will not only acknowledge them, but repent of and amend them, and not, like the rebel Bacon, persist in an error only because I have committed it. . . .

And now I will state the question betwixt me as a governor and Mr. Bacon, and say that if any enemies should invade England, any counselor, justice of peace, or other inferior officer might raise what forces they could to protect His Majesty’s subjects. But I say again, if, after the King’s knowledge of this invasion, any the greatest peer of England should raise forces against the King’s prohibition, this would be now, and ever was in all ages and nations, accounted treason. . . .

Now, my friends, I have lived thirty-four years amongst you, as uncorrupt and diligent as ever governor was. Bacon is a man of two years among you; his person and qualities unknown to most of you, and to all men else, by any virtuous action that ever I heard of. And that very action [against the Indians] which he boasts of was sickly and foolishly and, as I am informed, treacherously carried to the dishonor of the English nation. Yet in it he lost more men than I did in three years’ war; and by the grace of God will put myself to the same dangers and troubles again when I have brought Bacon to acknowledge the laws are above him, and I doubt not but by God’s assistance to have better success than Bacon hath had. The reasons of my hopes are, that I will take counsel of wiser men than myself; but Mr. Bacon hath none about him but the lowest of the people.

Yet I must further enlarge that I cannot, without your help, do anything in this but die in defense of my King, his laws and subjects, which I will cheerfully do, though alone I do it. And considering my poor fortunes, I cannot leave my poor wife and friends a better legacy than by dying for my King and you; for his sacred Majesty will easily distinguish between Mr. Bacon’s actions and mine; and kings have long arms, either to reward or punish.

Now after all this, if Mr. Bacon can show one precedent or example where such acting in any nation whatever was approved of, I will mediate with the King and you for a pardon and excuse for him. But I can show him an hundred examples where brave and great men have been put to death for gaining victories against the command of their superiors.

Lastly, my most assured friends, I would have preserved those Indians that I knew were hourly at our mercy to have been our spies and intelligence, to find out

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Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Fourth Series (Boston, 1871), vol. 9, pp. 179–181.
our bloody enemies. But as soon as I had the least intelligence that they also were
treacherous enemies, I gave out commissions to destroy them all, as the commis­sions themselves will speak it.

To conclude, I have done what was possible both to friend and enemy; have
granted Mr. Bacon three pardons, which he hath scornfully rejected, supposing him­self stronger to subvert than I and you to maintain the laws, by which only, and
God’s assisting grace and mercy, all men must hope for peace and safety.

3. Slavery Is Justified (1757)

Following Bacon’s ill-starred rebellion, tobacco culture continued to flourish. The Vir­ginians had early learned that the path to wealth and leisure involved the use of
African slaves. Even ministers of the gospel parroted the arguments in behalf of slav­ery, as is evident in this brutally frank letter by the Reverend Peter Fontaine, of West­over, Virginia, to his brother Moses. Is the attempt to shift the blame onto the British
convincing? Was there a valid economic basis for slavery?

As to your second query, if enslaving our fellow creatures be a practice agree­able to Christianity, it is answered in a great measure in many treatises at home, to
which I refer you. I shall only mention something of our present state here.

Like Adam, we are all apt to shift off the blame from ourselves and lay it upon
others, how justly in our case you may judge. The Negroes are enslaved [in Africal]
by the Negroes themselves before they are purchased by the masters of the ships
who bring them here. It is, to be sure, at our choice whether we buy them or not; so
this then is our crime, folly, or whatever you will please to call it. But our Assembly,
foreseeing the ill consequences of importing such numbers amongst us, hath often
attempted to lay a duty upon them which would amount to a prohibition, such as
ten or twenty pounds a head. But no governor dare pass a law, having instructions
to the contrary from the Board of Trade at home. By this means they are forced
upon us, whether we will or will not. This plainly shows the African Company has
the advantage of the colonies, and may do as it pleases with the [London] ministry.

Indeed, since we have been exhausted of our little stock of cash by the [French
and Indian] war, the importation has stopped; our poverty then is our best security.
There is no more picking for their [slave traders’] ravenous jaws upon bare bones,
sure, but should we begin to thrive, they will be at the same again. . . .

This is our part of the grievance, but to live in Virginia without slaves is morally
impossible. Before our troubles, you could not hire a servant or slave for love or
money, so that unless robust enough to cut wood, to go to mill, to work at the hoe,
etc., you must starve, or board in some family where they both fleece and half starve
you. There is no set price upon corn, wheat, and provisions, so they take advantage
of the necessities of strangers, who are thus obliged to purchase some slaves and
land. This, of course, draws us all into the original sin and the curse of the country
of purchasing slaves, and this is the reason we have no merchants, traders, or artifi­cers of any sort but what become planters in a short time.

A common laborer, white or black, if you can be so much favored as to hire one, is a shilling sterling or fifteen pence currency per day; a bungling carpenter two shillings or two shillings and sixpence per day; besides diet and lodging. That is, for a lazy fellow to get wood and water, £19.16.3 current per annum; add to this seven or eight pounds more and you have a slave for life.

C. Slavery in the Colonial Era

I. The Conscience of a Slave Trader (1694)

In September 1693, the thirty-six-gun ship Hannibal, commanded by Thomas Phillips, set sail from England for West Africa, where Phillips bought slaves for sale on the West Indian sugar island of Barbados. What does Phillips’s account reveal about the involvement of the Africans themselves in the slave trade? What was Phillips’s own attitude toward the Africans? How could he reconcile such sentiments with the brutal business in which he was engaged?

We mark’d the slaves we had bought in the breast, or shoulder, with a hot iron, having the letter of the ship’s name on it, the place being before anointed with a little palm oil, which caus’d but little pain, the mark being usually well in four or five days, appearing very plain and white after.

When we had purchas’d to the number of 50 or 60 we would send them aboard, there being a cappasheir, intitled the captain of the slaves, whose care it was to secure them to the water-side, and see them all off; and if in carrying to the marine any were lost, he was bound to make them good, to us, the captain of the trunk being oblig’d to do the like, if any ran away while under his care, for after we buy them we give him charge of them till the captain of the slaves comes to carry them away: These are two officers appointed by the king for this purpose, to each of which every ship pays the value of a slave in what goods they like best for their trouble, when they have done trading; and indeed they discharg’d their duty to us very faithfully, we not having lost one slave thro’ their neglect in 1300 we bought here.

There is likewise a captain of the sand, who is appointed to take care of the merchandize we have come ashore to trade with, that the negroes do not plunder them, we being often forced to leave goods a whole night on the sea shore, for want of porters to bring them up; but notwithstanding his care and authority, we often came by the loss, and could have no redress.

When our slaves were come to the seaside, our canoes were ready to carry them off to the longboat, if the sea permitted, and she convey’d them aboard ship, where the men were all put in irons, two and two shackled together, to prevent their mutiny, or swimming ashore.

The negroes are so wilful and loth to leave their own country, that they have often leap’d out of the canoes, boat and ship, into the sea, and kept under water till

they were drowned, to avoid being taken up and saved by our boats, which pur­sued them; they having a more dreadful apprehension of Barbadoes than we can have of hell, tho' in reality they live much better there than in their own country; but home is home, etc: we have likewise seen divers of them eaten by the sharks, of which a prodigious number kept about the ships in this place, and I have been told will follow her hence to Barbadoes, for the dead negroes that are thrown over­board in the passage. I am certain in our voyage there we did not want the sight of some every day, but that they were the same I can't affirm.

We had about 12 negroes did wilfully drown themselves, and others starv'd themselves to death; for 'tis their belief that when they die they return home to their own country and friends again.

I have been inform'd that some commanders have cut off the legs and arms of the most wilful, to terrify the rest, for they believe if they lose a member, they cannot return home again: I was advis'd by some of my officers to do the same, but I could not be perswaded to entertain the least thought of it, much less put in practice such barbarity and cruelty to poor creatures, who, excepting their want of christianity and true religion (their misfortune more than fault) are as much the works of God's hands, and no doubt as dear to him as ourselves; nor can I imagine why they should be despis'd for their colour, being what they cannot help, and the effect of the climate it has pleas'd God to appoint them. I can't think there is any intrinsick value in one colour more than another, nor that white is better than black, only we think so because we are so, and are prone to judge favourably in our own case, as well as the blacks, who in odium of the colour, say, the devil is white, and so paint him ....

The present king often, when ships are in a great strait for slaves, and cannot be supply'd otherwise, will sell 3 or 400 of his wives to compleat their number, but we always pay dearer for his slaves than those bought of the cappasheirs. . . .

2. The Stono River Rebellion in South Carolina (1739)

Black slaves made up a majority of the population in early-eighteenth-century South Carolina. Naturally, they dreamed of freedom, and the refuge of nearby Spanish Florida held out the promise of turning their dream into reality. In 1739, a number of South Carolina slaves rose up in arms and struck out for Florida and freedom. What did their behavior suggest about the character of colonial slavery? In the following account by a white contemporary, what appear to be the greatest fears of the white slaveowning minority?

Sometime since there was a Proclamation published at Augustine, in which the King of Spain (then at Peace with Great Britain) promised Protection and Freedom to all Negroes [sic] Slaves that would resort thither. Certain Negroes belonging to Cap­tain Davis escaped to Augustine, and were received there. They were demanded by General Oglethorpe who sent Lieutenant Demere to Augustine, and the Governor assured the General of his sincere Friendship, but at the same time showed his Or­ders from the Court of Spain, by which he was to receive all Run away Negroes. Of

this other Negroes having notice, as it is believed, from the Spanish Emissaries, four or five who were Cattel-Hunters, and knew the Woods, some of whom belonged to Captain Macpherson, ran away with His Horses, wounded his Son and killed another Man. These marched to Georgia, and were pursued, but the Rangers being then newly reduced the Country people could not overtake them, though they were discovered by the Saltzburghers, as they passed by Ebenezer. They reached Augustine, one only being killed and another wounded by the Indians in their flight. They were received there with great honours, one of them had a Commission given to him, and a Coat faced with Velvet. Amongst the Negroe Slaves there are a people brought from the Kingdom of Angola in Africa, many of these speak Portuguese [which Language is as near Spanish as Scotch is to English] by reason that the Portuguese have considerable Settlement, and the Jesuits have a Mission and School in that Kingdom and many Thousands of the Negroes there profess the Roman Catholic Religion. Several Spaniards upon diverse Pretences have for some time past been strolling about Carolina, two of them, who will give no account of themselves have been taken up and committed to Jayl in Georgia. The good reception of the Negroes at Augustine was spread about, Several attempted to escape to the Spaniards, & were taken, one of them was hanged at Charles Town. In the latter end of July last Don Pedro, Colonel of the Spanish Horse, went in a Launch to Charles Town under pretence of a message to General Oglethorpe and the Lieutenant Governour.

On the 9th day of September last being Sunday which is the day the Planters allow them to work for themselves, Some Angola Negroes assembled, to the number of Twenty; and one who was called Jemmy was their Captain, they surprized a Warehouse belonging to Mr. Hutchenson at a place called Stonehow [Stono]; they there killed Mr. Robert Bathurst, and Mr. Gibbs, plundered the House and took a pretty many small Arms and Powder, which were there for Sale. Next they plundered and burnt Mr. Godfrey’s house, and killed him, his Daughter and Son. They then turned back and marched Southward along Pons Pons, which is the Road through Georgia to Augustine, they passed Mr. Wallace’s Tavern towards day break, and said they would not hurt him, for he was a good Man and kind to his Slaves, but they broke open and plundered Mr. Lemy’s House, and killed him, his wife and Child. They marched on towards Mr. Rose's resolving to kill him; but he was saved by a Negroe, who having hid him went out and pacified the others. Several Negroes joined them, they calling out Liberty, marched on with Colours displayed and two Drums beating, pursuing all the white people they met with, and killing Man Woman and Child when they could come up to them. Colonne Bull, Lieutenant Governour of South Carolina, who was then riding along the Road, discovered them, was pursued, and with much difficulty escaped & raised the Countrey. They burnt Colonel Hext’s house and killed his Overseer and his Wife. They then burnt Mr. Sprye’s house, then Mr. Sacheverell’s, and then Mr. Nash’s house, all lying upon the Pons Pons Road, and killed all the white People they found in them. Mr. Bullock got off, but they burnt his House, by this time many of them were drunk with the Rum they had taken in the Houses. They increased every minute by new Negroes coming to them, so that they were above Sixty, some say a hundred, on which they halted in a field, and set to dancing, Singing and beating Drums, to draw more Negroes to them, thinking they were now victorious over the whole Province, having marched ten miles & burnt all before them without Opposition, but the Militia being raised, the Planters with great briskness pursued them and
when they came up, dismounting; charged them on foot. The Negroes were soon routed, though they behaved boldly, several being killed on the Spot, many ran back to their Plantations thinking they had not been missed, but they were there taken and Shot. Such as were taken in the field also, were, after being examined, shot on the Spot. And this is to be said to the honour of the Carolina Planters, that notwithstanding the Provocation they had received from so many Murders, they did not torture one Negro, but only put them to an easy death. All that proved to be forced & were not concerned in the Murders & Burnings were pardoned, And this sudden Courage in the field, & the Humanity afterwards hath had so good an Effect that there hath been no farther Attempt, and the very Spirit of Revolt seems over. About 30 escaped from the fight, of which ten marched about 30 miles Southward, and being overtaken by the Planters on horseback, fought stoutly for some time and were all killed on the Spot. The rest are yet untaken. In the whole action about 40 Negroes and 20 whites were killed. The Lieutenant Governour sent an account of this to General Oglethorpe, who met the advices on his return from the Indian Nation. He immediately ordered a Troop of Rangers to be ranged, to patrole through Georgia, placed some Men in the Garrison at Palichocolas, which was before abandoned, and near which the Negroes formerly passed, being the only place where Horses can come to swim over the River Savannah for near 100 miles, ordered out the Indians in pursuit, and a Detachment of the Garrison at Port Royal to assist the Planters on any Occasion, and published a Proclamation ordering all the Constables &ca. of Georgia to pursue and seize all Negroes, with a Reward for any that should be taken. It is hoped these measures will prevent any Negroes from getting down to the Spaniards.

D. Life Among New England’s Puritans

I. Cotton Mather on the Education of His Children (1706)

Cotton Mather (1663–1728), grandson of John Cotton, was among the most famous of New England’s Puritan preachers. Entering Harvard at age twelve, he went on to a long and prolific career as a minister, political activist, and scientist. A pillar of orthodoxy, he lectured and wrote frequently on the application of Puritan doctrine to everyday life, including child-rearing. In the following selection, what does Mather see as the main responsibilities of parents? What was the role of religion in his ideal Puritan family? Did he assume that children are naturally good or evil? How do his child-rearing precepts differ from those popular today?

Some Special Points, relating to the Education of my Children

1. I pour out continual Prayers and Cries to the God of all Grace for them, that He will be a Father to my Children, and bestow His Christ and His Grace upon them, and guide them with His Councils, and bring them to His Glory.

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And in this Action, I mention them distinctly, every one by Name unto the Lord.

II. I begin betimes to entertain them with delightful Stories, especially scriptural ones. And still conclude with some Lesson of Piety; bidding them to learn that Lesson from the Story.

And thus, every Day at the Table, I have used myself to tell a Story before I rise; and make the Story useful to the Olive Plants about the Table.

III. When the Children at any time accidentally come in my way, it is my custom to let fall some Sentence or other, that may be monitory and profitable to them.

This Matter proves to me, a Matter of some Study, and Labour, and Contrivance. But who can tell, what may be the Effect of a continual Dropping?

IV. I essay betimes, to engage the Children, in Exercises of Piety; and especially secret [silent] Prayer, for which I give them very plain and brief Directions, and suggest unto them the Petitions, which I would have them to make before the Lord, and which I therefore explain to their Apprehension and Capacity. And I often call upon them; Child, Don't you forget every Day, to go alone, and pray as I have directed you!

V. Betimes I try to form in the Children a Temper of Benignity. I put them upon doing of Services and Kindnesses for one another, and for other Children. I applaud them, when I see them Delight in it. I upbraid all Aversion to it. I caution them exquisitely against all Revenges of Injuries. I instruct them, to return good Offices for evil Ones. I show them, how they will by this Goodness become like to the Good GOD, and His Glorious CHRIST. I lett them discern, that I am not satisfied, except when they have a Sweetness of Temper shining in them.

VI. As soon as tis possible, I make the Children learn to write. And when they can write, I employ them in Writing out the most agreeable and profitable Things, that I can invent for them. In this way, I propose to fright their minds with excellent Things, and have a deep Impression made upon their Minds by such Things.

VII. I mightily endeavour it, that the Children may betimes, be acted by Principles of Reason and Honour.

I first begett in them an high Opinion of their Father's Love to them, and of his being best able to judge, what shall be good for them.

Then I make them sensible, tis a Folly for them to pretend unto any Witt and Will of their own; they must resign all to me, who will be sure to do what is best; my word must be their Law.

I cause them to understand, that it is an hurtful and a shameful thing to do amiss. I aggravate this, on all Occasions; and lett them see how amiable they will render themselves by well doing.

The first Chastisement, which I inflict for an ordinary Fault, is, to lett the Child see and hear me in an Astonishment, and hardly able to beleive that the Child could do so base a Thing, but beleiving that they will never do it again.

I would never come, to give a child a Blow; except in Case of Obstinacy; or some gross Enormity.

To be chased for a while out of my Presence, I would make to be look'd upon, as the sorest Punishment in the Family.

I would by all possible Insinuations gain this Point upon them, that for them to learn all the brave Things in the world, is the bravest Thing in the world. I am not fond of proposing Play to them, as a Reward of any diligent application to learn
what is good; lest they should think Diversion to be a better and a nobler Thing than Diligence.

I would have them come to propound and expect, at this rate, I have done well, and now I will go to my Father; He will teach me some curious Thing for it. I must have them count it a Priviledge, to be taught; and I sometimes manage the Matter so, that my Refusing to teach them Something, is their Punishment.

The slavish way of Education, carried on with raving and kicking and scourging (in Schools as well as Families,) tis abominable; and a dreadful Judgment of God upon the World.

VIII. Tho' I find it a marvellous Advantage to have the Children strongly biased by Principles of Reason and Honour, (which, I find, Children will feel sooner than is commonly thought for;) yet I would neglect no Endeavours, to have higher Principles infused into them.

I therefore betimes awe them with the Eye of God upon them.

I show them, how they must love JESUS CHRIST; and show it, by doing what their Parents require of them.

I often tell them of the good Angels, who love them, and help them, and guard them; and who take Notice of them: and therefore must not be disobliged.

Heaven and Hell, I sett before them, as the Consequences of their Behaviour here.

IX. When the Children are capable of it, I take them alone, one by one; and after my Charges unto them, to fear God, and serve Christ, and shun Sin, I pray with them in my Study and make them the Witnesses of the Agonies, with which I address the Throne of Grace on their behalf.

X. I find much Benefit, by a particular Method, as of Catechising the Children, so of carrying the Repetition of the public Sermons unto them.

The Answers of the Catechism I still explain with abundance of brief Quaestions, which make them to take in the Meaning of it, and I see, that they do so.

And when the Sermons are to be Repeated, I chuse to putt every Trust, into a Quaestion, to be answered still, with Yes, or, No. In this way I awaken their Attention, as well as enlighten their Understanding. And in this way I have an Opportunity, to ask, Do you desire such, or such a Grace of God? and the like. Yea, I have an Opportunity to demand, and perhaps, to obtain their Consent unto the glorious Articles of the New Covenant. The Spirit of Grace may fall upon them in this Action; and they may be seiz'd by Him, and Held as His Temples, thro' eternal Ages.

2. A Dutchman Visits Harvard College (1680)

Jasper Danckaerts was an emissary from the Dutch Reformed Church who in 1679–1680 visited a colony of his coreligionists who flourished briefly in Maryland and Delaware. On his way home, he spent nearly a month in the Boston area and, while there, called at Harvard College. Founded in 1636, Harvard was then nearly half a century old and already the proud citadel of New England learning.

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Danckaerts, however, was unimpressed. What did he find lacking? How might Harvard's alleged deficiencies be explained?

9th, Tuesday. We started out to go to Cambridge, lying to the northeast of Boston, in order to see their college and printing office. We left about six o'clock in the morning, and were set across the river at Charlestown. We followed a road which we supposed was the right one, but went full half an hour out of the way, and would have gone still further, had not a negro who met us, and of whom we inquired, disabused us of our mistake. We went back to the right road, which is a very pleasant one. We reached Cambridge about eight o'clock. It is not a large village, and the houses stand very much apart. The college building is the most conspicuous among them. We went to it, expecting to see something unusual, as it is the only college, or would-be academy of the Protestants in all America, but we found ourselves mistaken. In approaching the house we neither heard nor saw anything mentionable; but, going to the other side of the building, we heard noise enough in an upper room to lead my comrade to say, "I believe they are engaged in disputation." We entered and went up stairs, when a person met us, and requested us to walk in, which we did. We found there eight or ten young fellows, sitting around, smoking tobacco, with the smoke of which the room was so full, that you could hardly see; and the whole house smelt so strong of it that when I was going up stairs I said, "It certainly must be also a tavern." We excused ourselves, that we could speak English only a little, but understood Dutch or French well, which they did not. However, we spoke as well as we could. We inquired how many professors there were, and they replied not one, that there was not enough money to support one. We asked how many students there were. They said at first, thirty, and then came down to twenty; I afterwards understood there are probably not ten. They knew hardly a word of Latin, not one of them, so that my comrade could not converse with them. They took us to the library where there was nothing particular. We looked over it a little. They presented us with a glass of wine. This is all we ascertained there. The minister of the place goes there morning and evening to make prayer, and has charge over them; besides him, the students are under tutors or masters. Our visit was soon over, and we left them to go and look at the land about there. We found the place beautifully situated on a large plain, more than eight miles square, with a fine stream in the middle of it, capable of bearing heavily laden vessels. As regards the fertility of the soil, we consider the poorest in New York superior to the best here. As we were tired, we took a mouthful to eat, and left. We passed by the printing office, but there was nobody in it; the paper sash however being broken, we looked in, and saw two presses with six or eight cases of type. There is not much work done there. Our printing office is well worth two of it, and even more.

3. The Salem Witchcraft Hysteria (1692)

Thousands of suspected witches were hanged or burned in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and belief in witches was common in the American

colonies. In fact, the Bible decreed, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18). Hysteria swept Salem Village, Massachusetts, in 1692 after some children, mostly girls, brought witchcraft charges against certain persons, mostly women, whom they disliked. Before the special court had adjourned, nineteen persons and two dogs had been hanged, one man had been pressed to death in an attempt to wring from him an answer to the indictment, and 150 victims were in prison awaiting trial. Which aspects of the following testimony seem least credible? Would such testimony be allowed in courts today?

Martha Carrier was indicted for the bewitching of certain persons, according to the form usual in such cases pleading not guilty to her indictment. There were first brought in a considerable number of the bewitched persons, who not only made the court sensible to an horrid witchcraft committed upon them, but also deposed that it was Martha Carrier, or her shape, that grievously tormented them by biting, pricking, pinching, and choking of them. It was further deposed that while this Carrier was on her examination before the magistrates, the poor people were so tortured that every one expected their death upon the very spot, but that upon the binding [arrest] of Carrier they were eased. . . .

Before the trial of this prisoner, several of her own children had frankly and fully confessed, not only that they were witches themselves, but that this, their mother, had made them so. This confession they made with great shows of repentance, and with much demonstration of truth. They related place, time, occasion; they gave an account of journeys, meetings, and mischiefs by them performed, and were very credible in what they said. . . .

Benjamin Abbott gave in his testimony that . . . this Carrier was very angry with him upon laying out some land near her husband’s. Her expressions in this anger were that she “would stick as close to Abbot as the bark stuck to the tree; and that he should repent of it afore seven years came to an end, so as Doctor Prescot should never cure him.” . . . Presently after this he was taken with a swelling in his foot, and then with a pain in his side, and exceedingly tormented. It bred into a sore, which was lanced by Doctor Prescot, and several gallons of corruption [pus] ran out of it. For six weeks it continued very bad, and then another sore bred in his groin, which was also lanced by Doctor Prescot. Another sore then bred in his groin, which was likewise cut, and put him to very great misery. He was brought unto death’s door, and so remained until Carrier was taken and carried away by the constable, from which very day he began to mend and so grew better every day, and is well ever since.

Sarah Abbot also, his wife, testified that her husband was not only all this while afflicted in his body, but also that strange, extraordinary, and unaccountable calamities befell his cattle, their death being such as they could guess at no natural reason for. . . .

One Foster, who confessed her own share in the witchcraft for which the prisoner stood indicted, affirmed that she had seen the prisoner at some of their witch meetings, and that it was this Carrier who persuaded her to be a witch. She confessed that the devil carried them on a pole to a witch meeting; but the pole broke, and she hanging about Carrier’s neck, they both fell down, and she then received an hurt by the fall whereof she was not at this very time recovered.
Thought Provokers

1. What sorts of people became indentured servants? How did the life of the servant compare with that of the slave?
2. What caused Bacon's Rebellion? Were the Baconites justified in revolting? In what ways did their rebellion foreshadow the American Revolutionary War?
3. How did slavery affect the spirit of the enslaved? of the enslavers? Would you rather have been a slave or an indentured servant in colonial Virginia?
4. How did seventeenth-century New England differ from the seventeenth-century Chesapeake region? In what ways did such differences between the two regions persist into later periods of American history?
5. What caused the Salem witchcraft hysteria, and why did the Puritan rulers respond as they did? Was their reaction justified?