



Britain's Solutions for Manpower in the Virginia Colony

Materials:

- Comparisons of indentured servants, convicts, and slaves
- Illustrations of white slaves
- Painting, *The Baker's Cart* by Jean Michelin, 1656
- Document ruling on Anthony Johnson to keep his servant, as a slave, in 1655

Plan of Instruction:

1. **Introduction:** In 1613, John Rolfe produced the first successful commercial tobacco crop in the Virginia Company that was acceptable to English taste. Cultivating the crop would demand large masses of labor and be so burdensome, that few could till the soil for long – the turnover in labor would be monumental. Virginia's grim reputation – harsh working conditions, disease, starvation, beatings, Indian raid killings - would make it challenging to attract the workforce needed to grow the tobacco and populate the Virginia Colony. So, early in 1615, it was decided that white Britons: convicts, vagabonds, children, and felons would be transported to the New World for forced labor.

2. **Lecture: Background Information:**

In the late 1610s, the Virginia Company devised a system of indentured servitude to help recruit and finance the transportation of individuals from England to the colony. At first, some were volunteers, or "free-willers," who came with hope and expectation for a better life. They would soon find that they were no freer than any other indentured servant coming to the New World.

The Virginia Company allowed anyone to pay for a person's transportation to the colony. In return for this passage, that person was required to work four to seven years of indentured servitude, mostly in the tobacco fields. They were a source of cheap, expendable labor. From 1618 until 1775, some 200,000 to 300,000 indentured servants were exported to the colonies from Britain, Ireland, and Scotland during the colonial era. White slavery was thought to be the cheapest way to provide the needed workforce in the tobacco fields. Thousands died while in bondage in the New World due to the harsh working conditions, beatings, Indian raid killings, starvation, and diseases.

3. Pass out two Illustrations of treatment of women in the colonies.



4. Whole class discussion:

- What kind of conditions did women face within the Colonies?
- Were there differences between the treatment of men and women in the Colonies?
- These indentured servants were treated as white slaves. What evidence supports that position?
- Why did England try to populate the Colonies with white slaves?

5. Analyze the painting, *The Baker's Cart* by Jean Michelin, 1656



Not only were men, women, vagabonds, and convicts sent to the colonies, but children were sent too. Children were picked off the streets in London, stolen from their parents, and sold as slaves. Other children were taken from prisons and transported to the British colonies. These children were considered cargo and often abused. Some were thrown overboard, and fifty percent who made it to the colonies died within one year.

6. Whole class discussion:

- What does the artist convey about the condition of this group of people?
- What clues support that opinion?
- Are they all members of the same family?
- Why did Britain send white slaves to the colonies?

7. Continue with lecture: Convicts and the headrights system

English Convicts were one of the largest groups of Colonial immigrants and were forced to become indentured servants for a chance to get reduced sentences for crimes. There were 400 convict ships that transported 50,000 men, women, and children to the New World between 1618 – 1775. In the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin would demand an end to this convict trade, by writing in the Pennsylvania Gazette, “rattle-snakes seem the most suitable returns for the human serpents sent to us by our mother country.”



When the Virginia headrights system was introduced in 1618, it became a scheme, for those with money, to secure land in Virginia on the backs of the poor. Initially, servitude promised that each was to be given freedom, citizenship, and a land grant of fifty acres after several years of indentured servitude. Unfortunately, wealthy businessmen imported indentured servants, and the land went to those who paid the settler's passage. Some indentured servants worked for more than fifteen years without ever becoming landowners.



The Anthony & Mary Johnson Family: Successful Headrights Settlers

John Rolfe wrote: "About the latter end of August, a Dutch man of war of the burden of 160 tons arrived at Point Comfort. The Commander's name was Capt. Joep, his pilot for the West Indies one Mr. Marmaduke an Englishman...He bought not anything but 20 and odd Negroes, which the Governor and Cape Merchant (Virginia Company trading agent) bought for victuals (whereof he was in great need as he pretended) at the best and easiest rate they could buy." (the Commander was actually John Colwyn Jupe, a Cornishman and the White Lion was an English ship, not Dutch) "...On the slender basis of those few words from John Rolfe describing the bartering of twenty and odd Negroes' history moulded a story of a Dutch slave trader selling the first slaves to America... "In reality, the road to slavery was already being laid through indentured servitude and John Jupe's Africans were merely joining it, for they were treated as indentured servants." White Cargo by Don Jordan, Michael Walsh

Revisionist historians often want to change the narrative and leave out the details that tell the complete story of slavery and civil rights. One such story is about a family, Anthony, and Mary Johnson, who lived in the Virginia Company. Anthony was enslaved by rival tribes in Angola, sold to the Spanish, and eventually arrived on the English ship, White Lion, at the Virginia Company in 1619.

Anthony and Mary were married in 1625, and because they appeared to convert to Christianity, they were made indentured servants. They had four children and claimed 250 acres due to the five headrights of either indentured servants on their estate, or persons from whom they purchased their headrights. By 1650, their sons acquired an additional 550 acres adjacent to Anthony's farm.

For more than forty years, Johnson prospered on the eastern shore of Virginia, owned livestock, bought more land, owned slaves, and won court cases. On March 8, 1655, the Northampton County court ruled in favor of Anthony Johnson when he was accused of keeping an indentured servant, John Castor, as a slave. Castor had not been purchased as a servant but as a slave. Johnson asked the court to award him,



John Castor, as a slave, Johnson won. This case changed the American landscape because this was the first legal sanction of slavery in the New World, 1664.

Johnson was not the only black man that owned slaves. According to the official U.S. Census of 1830, 3,775 free blacks owned 12,740 slaves. There were 10,689 free blacks who lived in New Orleans; more than 3,000 were slave masters, almost 30% of free blacks owned slaves. The U.S. Census report of 1860 indicated that 261,988 of southern blacks were not slaves. Blacks in one South Carolina city claimed over \$1.5 million in taxable property, including slaves valued more than \$300,000.

By the early eighteenth century, as demand for labor grew and servant prices rose, indentured servants were replaced by slaves in the plantation districts. Now the long road to slavery began, and the institution of hereditary lifetime service for blacks developed.

8. Whole Class Discussion:

- What were the conditions in the colonies that caused England to send their undesirables to the colonies?
- How were people treated as indentured servants? Were they successful in completing their indentured servitude?
- How did the Colonies feel about having convicts, vagabonds, and children sent to the Colonies for forced labor?
- What were the differences between "free-willers." indentured servants, and those that secured land by the headrights system?
- Anthony Johnson, a black man, owned slaves; his court case to keep John Casor as a slave was the first legal sanction of slavery in the New World. Did you know that there were other free blacks that owned slaves in America?
- What did you learn about indentured servitude and the beginning of slavery in the Colonies?
- What conditions caused the indentured servant to be replaced by the import of blacks from Africa?

Sources:

Benjamin Franklin open letter <http://www.earlyamericancrime.com/convict-transportation/in-the-new-world/reaction>

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0040>

<http://www.earlyamericancrime.com/convict-transportation/in-the-new-world/reaction>

Anthony Johnson court ruling

https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Court_Ruling_on_Anthony_Johnson_and_His_Servant_1655

Virtual Jamestown Timeline <http://www.virtualjamestown.org/timeline2.html>

Women Indentured Servants



