

# **BRITAIN'S SOLUTIONS FOR MANPOWER IN THE VIRGINIA COMPANY**

**POPULATED BY INDENTURED  
SERVANTS, CONVICTS, AND SLAVES**



# **VIRGINIA COMPANY 1607, BECOMES THE VIRGINIA COLONY IN 1624**

Harsh labor-intensive crop demands, disease, starvation, beatings, Indian raid killings would make it difficult to attract needed manpower to grow tobacco and populate the colony; the King revoked the company's charter in 1624



# SELLING WIVES TO THE PLANTERS

The harsh conditions in Jamestown caused the London Company to permit the purchasing of wives

Early in 1615, it was decided that white Britons: convicts, vagabonds, children, and felons would be transported to the New World for forced Labor



# **VIRGINIA'S SYSTEM OF INDENTURED SERVITUDE TO RECRUIT INDIVIDUALS**

- Some individuals were volunteers or “free-willers” who came with hope for a better life
- Virginia Company allowed anyone to pay for a person’s transportation to the colony
- In return that person must work for 4 to 7 years of indentured servitude in tobacco fields
- Indentured servants were cheap and expendable labor
- From 1618-1775, 200,000 to 300,000 indentured servants were imported from Britain, Ireland, and Scotland
- Convict ships transported 50,000 men, women, children between 1618-1775
- Benjamin Franklin demanded that England stop sending these “human serpents” to us
- White slavery was the cheapest way to provide the needed workforce in the fields
- Thousands died while in bondage in the New World, fifty percent of the children were dead within one year of their arrival





# BRITAIN ATTEMPTS TO REPLACE THE MONUMENTAL TURNOVER IN LABOR IN THE VIRGINIA COMPANY



## Arrival

Indentured servants arriving in Jamestown



## Beatings

Indentured woman servant being beaten



## Forced Labor

White Britons: convicts, children, vagabonds and felons



## **“THE BAKER’S CART” BY JEAN MICHELIN, 1656**

EVEN POOR CHILDREN  
WERE SENT FROM LONDON  
TO THE BRITISH COLONIES



# VIRGINIA HEADRIGHTS SYSTEM INTRODUCED IN 1618

- A scheme for those with money to secure land on backs of the poor
- Indentured servant promised freedom, citizenship, & land grant of 50 acres for 4-7 years of servitude for each head
- Wealthy businessmen imported these servants, and the land went to those who paid the servant's passage
- Some indentured servants worked for more than 15 years without becoming landowners



# ANTHONY & MARY JOHNSON FAMILY: SUCCESSFUL HEADRIGHT SETTLERS

- ▶ Reported to arrive in Jamestown 1619
- ▶ A captured slave aboard the White Lion
- ▶ Anthony was treated as an indentured servant
- ▶ He married Mary in 1625, by 1651, earned 250 acres
- ▶ Additional headrights bought to a total of 1000 acres
- ▶ 1655 won a court case to keep his indentured servant as a slave
- ▶ This case changed the American landscape; this was the first legal sanction of slavery in the New World





# SUMMARY

- Virginia's grim reputation made it difficult to populate the needed settlers for the colony
- Britain decided to devise a system of indentured servitude to bring settlers to the colony
- 200,000 to 300,000 indentured servants were the main source of expendable labor
- This white slavery was the cheapest way to provide the needed workforce for the tobacco fields
- Thousands died while in bondage from harsh working conditions, beatings, Indian raids, diseases
- 50,000 English convicts were sent with the promise of reduced sentences for their servitude
- The first official sanction of slavery in the American Colonies was won by a black man, Anthony Johnson
- Eventually "white slavery" would slowly be replaced by blacks from Africa
- By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, indentured servants were replaced by the institution of hereditary lifetime service for blacks

