

A Slow and Messy Transition: From Indentured Servitude to African Slavery in Bermuda and Virginia's Northern Neck, 1610-1710

Scholars continue to disagree about how African slavery came to be the dominant form of labor within much of the British Atlantic World. The nexus of this debate for early Americanists has centered on the Chesapeake region and around whether the transition from labor reliant on white, indentured servants to one dependent on black slaves was based on economics, race, or some combination of the two. Much of the discussion about Virginia in particular has revolved around England's oldest and more populous settlements on the Eastern Shore and along the James and York Rivers. Meanwhile, historians of the seventeenth-century British Caribbean have mostly focused on the prosperous sugar island of Barbados. This has created a limited picture of unfree labor in the early British Atlantic World. These studies forsake the rest of Virginia, like the periphery counties of the Northern Neck region (see Map 1 in the Appendix), and largely ignore Bermuda, England's second permanent colony. By incorporating these less studied areas into the debate, the usual story of a relatively seamless and quick transition from indentured servitude to African slavery in the British Atlantic World falls apart to some degree.

This project will investigate the labor transition in significant detail by analyzing county court records and other contemporary documents from Virginia's Northern Neck and Bermuda. While this study fits into numerous historiographies, the most important is certainly the trend towards Atlantic history over the last two decades or so. By entering this growing subfield, but doing so with an intense, local microscope, claims about the nature of unfree labor can be broadened out and compared to other places experiencing similar transitions. Methodologically, this dissertation will employ a thorough statistical analysis of all available data on unfree

workers from these various sources and chart, with as much exactitude as possible, the labor transition in great detail. Native Americans and the “exploitation” of white apprentices will also be of significant interest as they have long been overlooked by labor historians of early America.

Virginia and Bermuda have several things in common that makes this comparison both useful and revealing. The slave cultures of the two colonies are forever linked by the closeness of the dates that blacks were first brought to each place – 1616 for Bermuda and 1619 for Virginia, roughly a decade or so after colonization began. But, as already noted, Virginia’s more populous regions were, by the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, becoming more directly involved in the Atlantic slave trade while Bermuda largely remained on its edges. This is the impetus for a comparison between Bermuda and a more specific region of Virginia – the Northern Neck – that shares the Old Dominion’s statutory history but has some greater similarities to Bermuda with regards to its transition to African slavery. Both regions transitioned to slavery in non-linear ways, using several stopgap measures like Natives to fill needs when they arose that were not being addressed through existing supplies of unfree labor. In general, the Northern Neck, like Bermuda, would largely remain on the periphery of the emerging British Atlantic Empire throughout the colonial period, both places having mixed unfree labor populations that developed with little if any forethought or planning. Studying these two places together also reveals a lot about how intercolonial trade worked, given that Virginia and Bermuda were regular trading partners in this period, including in people. That trade had significant consequences for all involved, namely the English, Irish, French, African, and Native American men and women who were both the creators and often the victims of that trade.¹

¹ Another anecdotal but telling comparison can be made between the Northern Neck and Bermuda based on a 1639 letter from the Governor of Bermuda to the “Lords Commissioners for Forraigne Plantations” in London. The Governor was concerned about the overpopulation of the small island by both planters and freed indentured servants. They were no longer able to subsist in Bermuda any longer, he said, and “fouer or five hundred” were

This type of study is best approached locally and comparatively, and the community study is extremely important and appropriate when charting the development of American slavery. As Ira Berlin, Philip Morgan, Michael Jarvis, and several others have recently shown, slavery was an ever-changing process of negotiation and existed in different ways throughout its history in the Atlantic World. In other words, both the institution of slavery changed as did its everyday reality, based on time, place, and a number of other external and internal factors. So, can we then intimate that it was also different even within a fairly small area or region? It has been well proven that slavery in Bermuda was not the same as slavery in Barbados, just as the “peculiar institution” differed significantly between colonial Virginia and South Carolina. Taking an Atlantic perspective and considering how these earliest British settlements differed from each other and from other early colonies in the New World can only serve to better our understanding of this fateful transition that helped define the demographics and economies of the modern Western Hemisphere.²

Historiographies

Because of the large number of works already written on the subject of slavery and its beginnings in the Atlantic World broadly and the Chesapeake specifically, this project can fit into a multitude of distinct yet overlapping historiographies simultaneously. The first and oldest – the discussion over the “origins” of African slavery in early British America, along with the “labor switch” debate, charting the reasons for the transition from indentured servitude to slavery

ready to depart immediately, if only they could “finde out some convenient place.” The place the Governor suggested was “a reasonable proportion of Land, situate and being betwixt the two Rivers of Rapahanock and Patowmeck. . .not yet Inhabited by any of his Magisties Subjects.” Bermuda’s Governor literally asked the Crown to grant Bermudians land in the Old Dominion’s Northern Neck in 1639. Sir John Henry Lefroy, *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands, 1515-1685*, volume I (London: 1877), 557-8.

² Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Belknap Press, 1998); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (University of North Carolina, 1998); Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010, forthcoming).

– has been a topic of disagreement for historians for well over one hundred years (and shows no sign of letting up). Secondly, the study of the onset of slavery in the British Atlantic World more broadly is a rather new direction in the study of American slavery, only appearing in the last two decades. Thirdly, the study of Caribbean slavery is much more established than that of Atlantic slavery but Bermuda has largely been left out, not fitting easily into Caribbean histories, American histories or anywhere else for that matter.³ Lastly, the historiography of non-traditional, unfree labor more generally, including the use of Native Americans as servants or slaves in early America, has had a much more jagged and recent scholarly history while other laborers such as apprentices have gotten little or no attention at all.

Starting with the oldest debate among early American historians, concerning the “origins” of African slavery in early British America and the transition from white, indentured servitude to black slave labor in the Chesapeake especially, notable and groundbreaking works abound, especially over the last half-century or so. Beginning as early as the 1940s, the main discussion over the onset of African slavery in the British colonies revolved around the question of the status of those first blacks: were they some type of indentured servant or were they slaves? With little resolved after almost three decades of academic hand-wringing, Winthrop Jordan’s monumental 1968 study *White over Black* altered the debate dramatically. Instead of the previously benign, economic reasons for explaining the shift in labor systems, Jordan introduced the notion that planters’ racism and prejudice paved the way for a so-called “unthinking” transition to slavery in the colonial Chesapeake.⁴

In the 1970s, the floodgates opened, and numerous studies of servitude and slavery in the early Chesapeake appeared, including Edmund Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom*

³ Bermudian slavery has not been grappled with by any notable group of regional historians but many Caribbean historians consider Bermuda to be part of a “circa-Caribbean.”

⁴ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Pelican Books, 1969).

and Russell Menard's article "From Servants to Slaves." Morgan showed how economics, both internally within Virginia, and externally in the greater Atlantic World, were the impetuses for the transition. Racial prejudices thus developed in concert with the change following Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, but had certainly not preceded it according to Morgan. Menard, meanwhile, contributed to the growing debate by reasserting and complicating the economic justification for the switch by pointing to decreasing birthrates and rising wages in England and increased British involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. Fewer servants were available then at the exact same time (the 1680s) when more slaves were coming into the region more steadily than ever before.⁵

Subsequently, several scholars have since strengthened these ideas and reaffirmed the Morgan-Menard theory that economic factors were paramount even if there was significant disagreement in evidentiary focus if not necessarily in conclusion.⁶ Legal arguments, provoked a slightly different take by Warren Billings in his 1991 article "Law of Servants and Slaves" and Kathleen Brown in her 1996 book *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*. Although coming to a similar conclusion as Morgan in opposition to Jordan's notion of an "unthinking decision," Billings and Brown placed their emphasis squarely on the Old Dominion's "inventive" legal statutes of the mid-seventeenth century – a subject largely overlooked or downplayed in the preceding decades. Billings, for one, found an "explicit comprehension" of blacks as slaves in the General Assembly's statutes in 1671, five years earlier than Morgan's watershed moment. Kathleen Brown, meanwhile, furthers Billings' legal

⁵ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (Norton, 1975); Russell R. Menard, "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," *Southern Studies* 16 (1977): 355-90. A confirmation of Menard's theory about the transition being based on a drying up of the indentured servant trade came four years later in David W. Galenson's "White Servitude and the Growth of Black Slavery in Colonial America," *The Journal of Economic History* 41, no. 1 (March 1981): 39-47.

⁶ Most notably, Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (University of North Carolina, 1986).

emphasis but instead highlights Virginia's 1643 law taxing black women as laborers, distinguishing them from untaxed white, female servants on the basis of their race.⁷

Two recent critiques have created doubts about the prevailing interpretation of early Virginia slavery. Anthony Parent's *Foul Means* (2003) postulates that major planters in the Old Dominion could afford substantial numbers of black slaves by the 1660s and were therefore able to procure significant slave labor much earlier than previously thought. Those great planters, furthermore, had a choice in their search for more labor, but opted for Africans over still plentiful white servants on an increasingly large scale during the 1670s and 1680s. In effect, Parent reaffirms Jordan's explanation that makes race paramount, even if he believes it was not necessarily an unthinking decision. Meanwhile, John Coombs's recent dissertation (and upcoming publication) criticizes the lack of concern for what he calls the "process of conversion," finding fault with the methodology and sources used. Coombs notes that much of the research thus far has been confined to areas with more complete records, such as Maryland and the Eastern Shore, hardly representative of the Old Dominion at large.⁸

As the debate over the transition to slavery in Virginia continues, the history of slavery more generally has grown to be more Atlantic-oriented and comparative in nature. The last two decades in the study of a "black" Atlantic have seen works build on older, more America-centric monographs and incorporate the African Continent ever more into them. John Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, published in 1992, was one of the earlier studies to take a wider geographic view of colonial slavery. Thornton pointed out that British and

⁷ Warren Billings, "The Law of Servants and Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99: 45-62; Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (UNC Press, 1996).

⁸ Anthony S. Parent, *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (University of North Carolina, 2003); John C. Coombs, "Building 'The Machine': The Development of Slavery and Slave Society in Early Colonial Virginia" (unpublished dissertation, William and Mary, 2004), vii. Notably, Coombs also gives little attention to the Northern Neck in his wide-ranging analysis.

Dutch colonists doubtlessly had exposure to Spanish laws concerning the status of slaves well before Africans arrived in North America in any significant numbers. The earliest settlers therefore “certainly understood” that the Africans they purchased were “legally different from the indentured servants they bought from Europe.”⁹

More comparative works in the late 1990s brought about a scholarly sea change, with books such as *Many Thousands Gone* altering the nature of the “origins debate” substantively. Ira Berlin, in both a 1996 article and *Many Thousands Gone* (1998), introduced the term “Atlantic Creoles” to describe some of the first slaves available to Europeans in the initial years of settlement in North America (and elsewhere). These cosmopolitan Atlantic creoles were too dangerous to be sold into the Caribbean, or what Berlin calls “the human tinderbox created by the sugar revolution,” because of their mixed heritage. They were therefore shipped to marginal areas such as seventeenth-century North America and Bermuda. For Berlin, race did not play a significant role in North American slavery until the Plantation Generation of the late seventeenth century when slaves started pouring into the Chesapeake.¹⁰

While Berlin’s focus was broader geographically and longer chronologically than many to that point, David Eltis’ 1999 book *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* went broader and longer still. Eltis channels Winthrop Jordan, whose focus was similarly expansive, in claiming his own “unthinking decision” by Europeans to reject enslaving other Europeans, a decision he claimed allowed for the acceptance of African slavery. Eltis also reversed Morgan’s contention that desire for social control of “unruly and propertyless whites” was what led to the

⁹ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 146-7.

¹⁰ Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African- American Society in Mainland North America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2, 3 (April 1996): 251-288 and *Many Thousands Gone*, especially p. 17 and 24.

transition to slavery in Virginia. The need and increased reliance on slave labor actually caused Europeans to stress their commonalities with one another in opposition to the African “others.”¹¹

April Lee Hatfield, meanwhile, has gone the farthest in linking the local with the international contending in her 2004 *Atlantic Virginia* that Virginia planters, with their direct connections to Barbados via intercolonial trade, “knew that many Caribbean colonists were growing rich using enslaved African laborers.” She then criticizes historians like Morgan for paying “little attention to the relationship between the previous existence of slavery elsewhere in the Americas and its evolution in the Chesapeake” – for not employing an Atlantic perspective.¹²

As Hatfield explains, British Caribbean historians have largely been focused on colonies such as Barbados that made the switch to slaves quickly, those colonists seeing the benefits of the sugar plantation complex early on. Bermuda, meanwhile, has been “largely overlooked” by both American and Caribbean historians.¹³ Slavery in Bermuda especially has seen few book-length studies – only two in the last quarter-century and two more before that. Virginia Bernhard is the closest thing to a historian of Bermudian slavery, publishing one book and two articles on the topic. Bernhard, however, errs when comparing Virginia’s early experience with slavery – focusing mainly on the population centers as so many others have done – to Bermuda’s unique unfree labor history. Michael Jarvis, meanwhile, is the most recent scholar to tackle the subject of Bermudian slavery with his 2002 article on the extraordinary Bermudian slave divers and mariners and a just-released tome on the same topic entitled *In the Eye of All Trade*.¹⁴

¹¹ David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge University, 1999), 242.

¹² April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 141.

¹³ Book-length studies such as Wesley F. Craven’s *An Introduction to the History of Bermuda* (1938) are rare; quote from Virginia Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda, 1616-1782* (University of Missouri, 1999), xiii.

¹⁴ Michael J. Jarvis, “Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680-1783,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 3, Third Series (July 2002): 585-622 and *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

Slaves and indentured servants were of course not the only unfree laborers in the seventeenth-century English Atlantic World. Landowners looked to native workers, non-English servants, wage laborers and apprentices of many different types to fill part of that need. The use of these alternative sources of labor is mentioned throughout the historical literature, but it is often done anecdotally and with little indication as to whether the practice was occasional or institutionalized – with the recent exception of Native labor. Many planters in more peripheral areas of the burgeoning British Empire turned to Indian servants and slaves to staff their plantations. Much of the book-length literature on native workers has focused on the prosperous Indian slave trade in areas such as southeastern North America. Alan Galloway's *The Indian Slave Trade* (2003) and Paul Kelton's *Epidemics and Enslavement* (2007) are the two most recent books of note but each does little to incorporate Virginia into their works.

Virginia's Natives, therefore, are largely absent from early American historiography, especially after the 1644 war between the colonists and the remnants of Powhatan's Chiefdom, and before the Seven Years' War over a century later. Scholars such as Michael Guasco and Owen Stanwood have attempted to address this omission recently. In both Guasco's "To 'Doe Some Good Upon Their Countrymen'" and Stanwood's "Captives and Slaves," Indian slaves – both captives caught in "just wars" and those who became part of the larger southeastern Indian Slave Trade discussed at length by Galloway and Kelton – are treated less like mere anecdotes in the transition to African slave labor. Stanwood, for example, claims that "these Indian laborers help to identify both the power and the limits of the plantation revolution" in colonial Virginia.¹⁵

¹⁵ M. Guasco, "To 'Doe Some Good Upon Their Countrymen': The Paradox of Indian Slavery in Early Anglo-America," *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2007), 389-411; Owen Stanwood, "Captives and Slaves: Indian Labor, Cultural Conversion, and the Plantation Revolution in Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 114, no. 4 (2006), 435-63; quotation from p. 435.

From my work on Northumberland County, white apprentices tend to be even more important than Indian labor in places yet rarely if ever mentioned in prevailing historiographies. This, even though records point to many if not most of these workers – often children who were “bounded out” by the county courts due to being orphans or by parents who could not afford to care for them – toiling at least part of the time in the tobacco fields. As the need for labor in that county increased in the late-seventeenth century and whenever the number of imported indentured servants dropped, apprenticeship contracts increased proportionally. And while a select few were “excepted from Common Employment in the ground at the hoe,” most were not and were likely used in the fields, especially at peak times like planting and harvest.

Methodology and Sources

Without a narrow and “microscopic” lens, important but numerically small groups such as apprentices or Atlantic Creoles can be forgotten. Thus, the community study still has immense potential to shape our understanding of the past. In highlighting the advantages of local studies, historian Ian Steele explains that such works “imply that life for most people was lived face-to-face, and that previous historians overlooked...or distorted this reality.” While Steele acknowledges there are limitations in this approach, the county study “remains a fruitful and manageable way to practice ‘total’ history.”¹⁶ More pointed microhistories often provide the demographic statistics and attention to quantitative detail that more synthetic works require.¹⁷ This current project hopes to contribute to the value of local studies, somewhat forgotten in the field’s movement toward Atlantic history and the corresponding re-emergence of interest in larger forces like trade, migration, and empire. My study hopes to revive the county study and its

¹⁶ Ian K. Steele, “Exploding Colonial American History: Amerindian, Atlantic, and Global Perspectives,” *Reviews in American History* 26.1 (1998), 71.

¹⁷ Two perfect examples, often cited in larger works on Virginia, are Darrett Bruce Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750* (Norton, 1986) and James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (University of North Carolina, 1994).

attendant advantages of nuanced, detailed quantitative approaches to local social conditions – but, crucially, done with a greater consciousness of the broader hemispheric or Atlantic contexts.

So, as early American histories become more geographically vast and ethnically diverse, illuminating how smaller communities existed within and connected to this larger Atlantic World will become even more important. Whether it is studies of small but influential groups like Native laborers or Berlin’s “Atlantic Creoles,” or discussions of geographic peripheries attached to the greater Atlantic World, continuing studies that look at “the interaction of metropolitan, colonial, and frontier elements in the life of American communities should prove revealing.” Part local history and part Atlantic history, part comparative work and part analytical study, this dissertation will fit into many historiographies at the same time, hoping to further the connection between them while carving out a niche of its own. By analyzing in great detail all available records on Bermuda and Virginia’s Northern Neck, and compiling as large an amount of data as possible for the numbers of servants, slaves and non-traditional laborers, the goal is to chart the transition fully and to compare the processes of these peripheral regions to one another.¹⁸

This study will also follow in the footsteps of many historians of the 1970s Chesapeake School of Social Historians, most of all Russell Menard. Menard, in “From Servants to Slaves,” exhaustively gathers all available data on indentured servants and slaves in Virginia’s Lancaster and York Counties, comparing the two in great detail. Menard’s conclusions should be viewed in their proper context, however. For instance, while Menard’s claim that “the number of servants imported remained stable in the 1660s and 1670s and then fell off in the 1680s and 1690s”¹⁹ is correct when looking at both York and Lancaster Counties combined, the Northern Neck’s Northumberland County is a different story altogether. My research on the latter county shows

¹⁸ Steele, “Exploding Colonial American History,” 71, 84-5.

¹⁹ Menard, “From Servants to Slaves,” 363.

that a large influx of servants in the last two years of the seventeenth century caused the 1690s to be that county's most plentiful decade for young servant importation in its fifty year history. In fact, the numbers suggest that the servant trade did not lessen there until 1703 and the transition from indentured servitude to slavery did not occur until around 1710. It is distinctly possible an even later and messier labor switch occurred in the even more peripheral counties of Westmoreland, Stafford and old Rappahannock (see Map 1).

Some critics may question the representativeness of the transition in a group of frontier counties such as Northumberland or Westmoreland (Lancaster too is part of the Northern Neck but much less a peripheral county since it grew sweet-scented tobacco, a much higher grade than the rest of the Northern Neck's Oronoco variation – see Map 2 in the Appendix). Two responses can be made. First, Menard claimed that studying the transition in York and Surry counties, two areas that “perhaps comprehend the extremes of the colonial economy,” could then be extrapolated to all of Virginia. Slaves first outnumbered servants in the 1680s in both counties according to Menard, early in the decade in York and later in the 1680s for Surry. He then posited that “it is reasonable to project this pattern to Virginia as a whole.”²⁰ Northumberland, a county in between York and Surry economically, certainly proves otherwise and I expect the rest of the Northern Neck to do the same. Furthermore, scholars such as John Coombs and Anthony Parent have argued for an earlier transition date, at least when considering only the disproportionately influential big planters. Northumberland's data, however, indicate a significantly later transition there and should prove analogous to the Northern Neck's other

²⁰ Ibid. Surry County, on the southside of the James River, was on the periphery of the good tobacco-growing regions of Virginia. Planters there shifted away from tobacco well before the end of the seventeenth century. Surry also was equal to Northumberland in population by 1699, according to Edmund Morgan, but had almost half the number of tithables the Oronoco-growing county had in that year. See Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 413.

counties. This information assuredly complicates further that fateful transition from servitude to slavery in the Chesapeake colonies.

Meanwhile, no one has done an analytical study of Bermuda's transitioning unfree labor situation, including the few scholars such as Michael Jarvis and Virginia Bernhard who have written on the subject of Bermudian slavery at all. While Jarvis and Bernhard's works outline the condition and employment of slaves in Bermuda through much of the colonial period, no attempt is made by either (or anyone else) to study and categorize the history of bound labor on the island more analytically like this study proposes to do.

One of the reasons this kind of analytical study has not been attempted could be due to the availability of readable sources. One major problem, naturally, is the location of Bermuda's county court records: the Bermuda National Archives. Traveling to and staying in Bermuda for any length of time is an expensive endeavor. While there is a possibility of those sources being copied and sending to the States, there is also good news in that other source material exists for Bermuda that can not be found for Virginia, especially in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A compilation of an early Bermudian governor's papers called *The Rich Papers: Letters from Bermuda, 1616-1646*, a two-volume documentary history (only excerpts but fairly well-rounded) by nineteenth-century governor Sir J.H. Lefroy, and other collections are available at the Library of Congress among other nearby libraries and archives.

As for the Northern Neck, certainly one of the biggest drawbacks to studying colonial Chesapeake history is dealing with the lack of dependable sources and the occasional unreliability of the sources that do exist. Most of the documentation for analytical studies such as this rely almost exclusively on county court records in opposition to the significantly broader research base available for Bermuda. Especially useful for my scholarship are the many court

entries that mention apprentices, indentured servants or black and Indian slaves. Many of these cases contain valuable, even if possibly inaccurate, information about these bound laborers such as their age, owner, sex, and length of service for those with indentures. Some of the indentured individuals – servants and apprentices – only appeared in court as criminals, evidence, or in some cases, suing for their freedom. Unfortunately, all of these unfree workers show up rarely and often only in reference to their owners but there is still much useful information to be gained especially when taking the composite view of all these laborers and counties together.

Turning to the physical condition of the Northern Neck's county court records and Bermuda's more extensive records, problems and opportunities exist simultaneously. Unfortunately, Virginia's records contain several ripped pages and occasional water marks due to fires, war, floods, mishandling and carelessness that make some pages illegible. A few records are also missing for a variety of reasons, some known and some unknown. Northumberland's Record Book from 1672 to 1705, containing all the inventories from those years, was destroyed in a 1710 fire and is just such a loss.²¹ Northumberland County does, however, have a mostly continuous run of largely readable documents from three years after its founding in 1648 through the early eighteenth century. Westmoreland has considerably less surviving documentation but by looking at these two counties, plus Stafford, Richmond and old Rappahannock, most if not all of the gaps should be plugged by records from neighboring counties. Furthermore, much secondary literature has been written on Lancaster County by scholars such as Russell Menard and James Horn. That analysis will play a key comparative part in my work, but extensive documentary evidence also exists for that county if needed. These documents offer an amazing amount of information available from no other contemporaneous source in Virginia.

²¹ Beverley Fleet, ed., *Virginia Colonial Abstracts* (Baltimore, 1988), 499.

Furthermore, these records provide much insight into the number, demographic makeup, and status of bound laborers in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Northern Neck.

Bermuda's records, meanwhile, have some holes in them but where records are available, they are in near-perfect condition. Virginia Bernhard's *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda* outlines a rather extensive list of documents – in her words, a “treasure trove”²² – available to a researcher in colonial Bermuda. While gaps certainly exist, my hope is that the multitude of different sources available in the Bermuda Archives and locally will at least partly make up for those missing documents.

Chapter-by-Chapter Outline and Description

- I. Introduction
- II. Part I: The Transition from Servitude to Slavery in Virginia's Northern Neck
 1. Chapter 1: Indentured Servants
 2. Chapter 2: Transition to Black Slaves
 3. Chapter 3: Other Unfree Labor (Natives and Apprentices especially)
- III. Part II: The Transition from Servitude to Slavery in Bermuda and Its Comparisons to Virginia's Northern Neck
 1. Chapter 4: Indentured Servants (including early Africans)
 2. Chapter 5: Transition to Black Slavery
 3. Chapter 6: Native Slave Labor
- IV. Conclusion

The introduction will survey the historiographies touched on in this prospectus and lay out how this project differs from those various works and where it fits into the prevailing lines of

²² Bernhard, xiii.

historical thought. It will also briefly describe the two regions being discussed in the dissertation with special attention given to agriculture, environment and economies.

My first section then will consist of an intense discussion of colonial Virginia's Northern Neck region and its unfree labor system (or more appropriately, systems), with special attention to the northern portion of the peninsula along the Potomac River. This means the counties of Northumberland (formed in 1648) and Westmoreland (formed from Northumberland in 1653) will be the center of this study but with significant incorporation of the extensive secondary literature on Lancaster County (formed from Northumberland and York Counties in 1651) for comparison purposes.²³ Meanwhile, a further comparison to more rigorously studied regions such as the York and James River areas will be offered when appropriate.

The first chapter will address the importation of indentured servants into the Northern Neck region beginning in the 1640s and extending throughout the rest of the century and into the eighteenth century. This chapter will thus include as detailed of a count of these unfree laborers as is possible given the legible records available. It will also address issues as thoroughly as possible such as when these various servants were freed, what happened to them after their indentures expired and other details on their lives and statuses that are available.

The second chapter will chart the arrival of blacks into the region in the 1650s with as much exactitude as possible. After a detailed count is explained given the hindrances of the available records, a comparison between the numbers calculated in Chapter One will be offered to determine the approximate date for the transition to African slavery and its immediate aftermath in the Northern Neck region. A comparison will also be drawn between the northern portion of the Neck and Lancaster and other counties to the south.

²³ More "frontier" counties such as Stafford (formed from Westmoreland in 1664), old Rappahannock (created from Lancaster in 1656 but became extinct in 1692 when it divided into Essex and Richmond Counties), and Richmond may also be included to some, as yet undetermined degree.

The last chapter of the first section will address the multitude of other unfree laborers in the region not included in the first two chapters. The two most important groups here were Native workers (both “servants” and “slaves”) and various types of white Apprentices, many who probably worked in the tobacco fields and a few who likely did not. Comparing these groups to the trends in importation of more traditional indentured servants and black slaves could result in certain discernable patterns such as an increased reliance on these workers when the two groups of traditional unfree laborers were not numerous enough to fill the labor needs of the region.

Part Two will address Bermuda and its unique transition from both white *and* (technically) black indentured servant labor to mostly black and Indian slave workers. Then, in each chapter, comparisons will be offered both to the Northern Neck information in Part One and to other British colonies such as Barbados for further context. For example, Chapter Four will look at the indentured servant population in Bermuda, largely present during the first half-century of British presence on the island but continuing in smaller numbers throughout the seventeenth century. Interestingly, the first blacks brought to the island during the first three decades after 1616 were given terms of service, when defined at all, of “four score and 19 years.” While this was undoubtedly a life term for all involved, there was hesitancy among Bermudian planters to establish an “official” system of lifelong slavery, most importantly one that was perpetual and passed on from parent to child.

Chapter Five will chart the transition of blacks to lifelong and perpetual slaves along with the full shift from a significant reliance on indentured servants to one mostly dependent on slave labor (both black and Indian, although the latter will likely be discussed in the next chapter). This chapter will also include a brief description of slave jobs such as pearl diving and boating,

largely distinct from those performed in Virginia (or almost anywhere). Both the timing of the switch and the “process of conversion” will be addressed as fully as possible and compared to the data in Chapter Two.

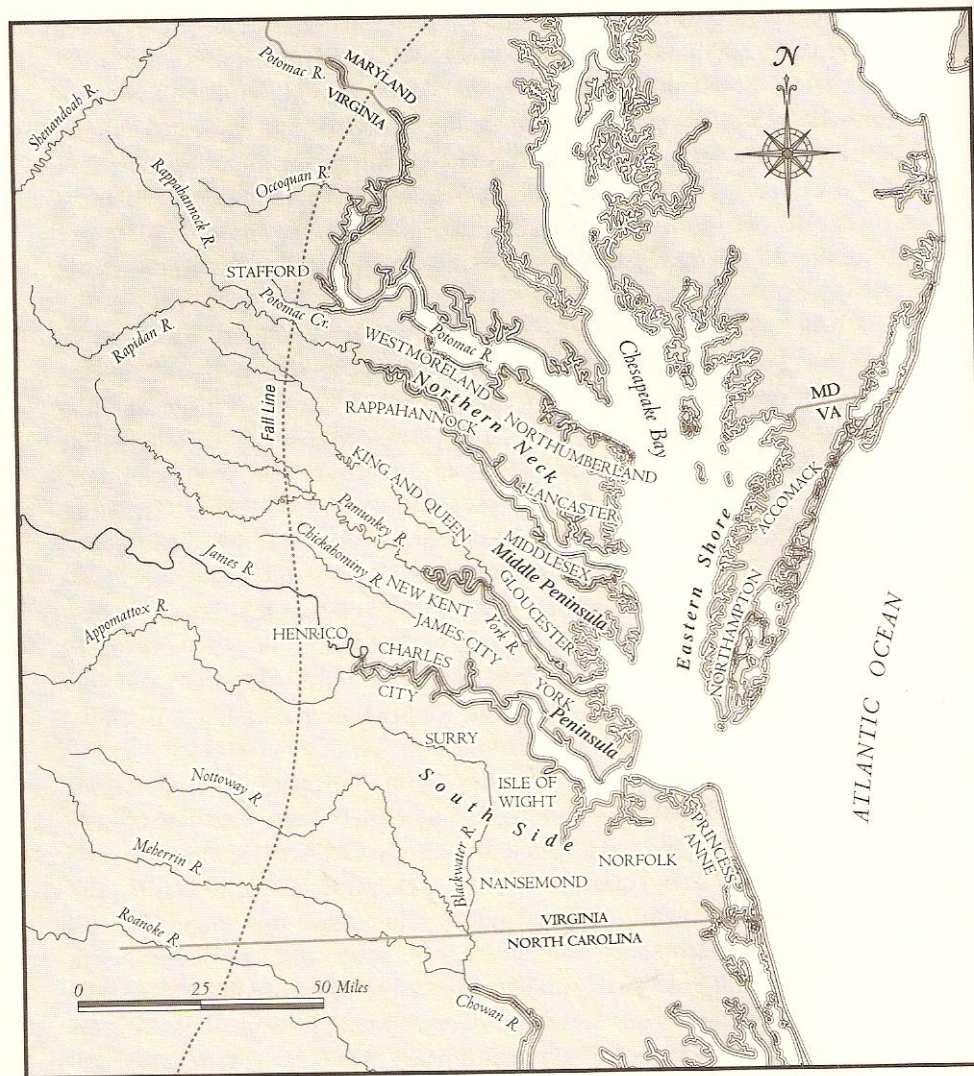
The final chapter will pay special attention to non-traditional unfree laborers, like its counterpart in Chapter Three. For Bermuda, however, that means almost exclusive attention on Native American servants and slaves. Those workers mostly followed the same trajectory as blacks, from what amounted to lifelong “servants” to official slaves with no possibility (however slim it was before) of outliving their “indentures.” These laborers were imported from British holdings in North America (including Virginia) and the Caribbean, Bermuda being devoid of native life when the British arrived there accidentally in 1609. An attempt will be made to find the origins of these servants and slaves whenever possible. A comparison between Bermuda’s reliance on Native workers and the Northern Neck’s dependence on Native and Apprentice field hands to fill their appetites for unfree labor will then be offered.

Timeline

May – Aug 2010:	Finish research on Northumberland County
Aug/Sept 2010:	Take Orals; advance to candidacy
Sept/Oct 2010:	Research trip to Bermuda
Oct ‘10 – May ‘11:	Research Bermuda records along with Westmoreland and other counties
June – Aug 2011:	Write Part One (Chapters 1-3)
Sept – Dec 2011:	Write Part Two (Chapters 4-6); Revise Part One
Jan – Mar/Apr 2012:	Revise Part Two; Revise more; Write Intro and Conclusion
April/May 2012:	Format and Defend Dissertation

Appendix

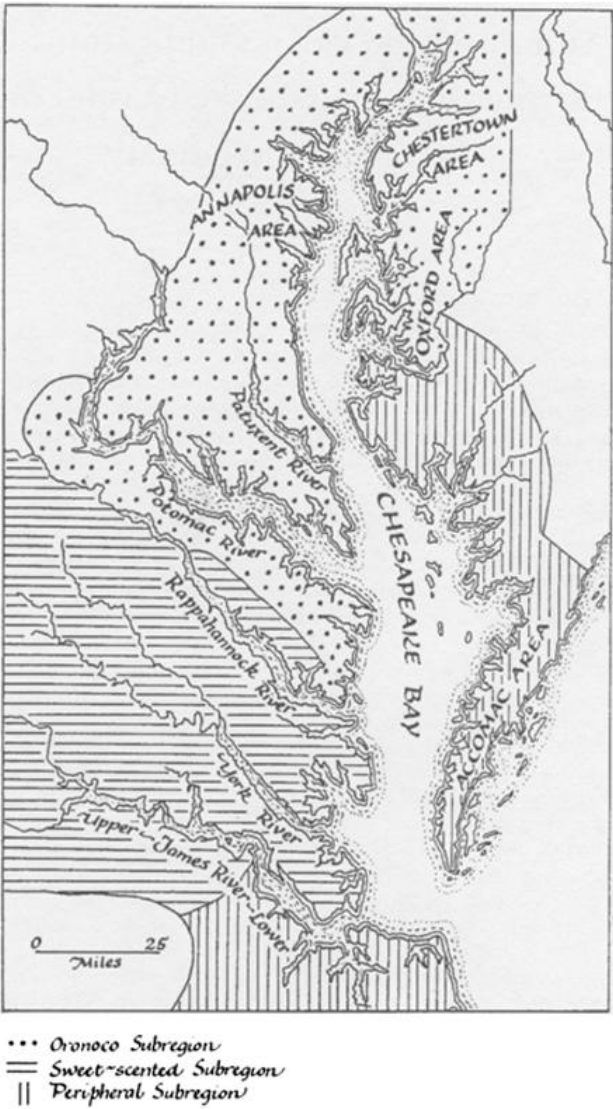
Map 1 – Virginia Counties circa 1680²⁴



Map 1. Seventeenth-Century Virginia

²⁴ Pulled from Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia*, 4.

Map 2 – Virginia’s Tobacco Subregions²⁵



²⁵ Pulled from Lorena S. Walsh, “Summing the Parts: Implications for Estimating Chesapeake Output and Income Subregionally,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 1, Third Series (January 1999): 54; map drawn by Gayle Henion.

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