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During the 1640s, Governor John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony recorded in his diary the story of a master who could not afford to pay his servant's wages. To meet this obligation, the master sold a pair of oxen, but that transaction barely covered the cost of keeping the servant. In desperation, the master asked the employee, a man of lower social status, "how shall I do . . . when all my cattle are gone?" The servant replied, "you shall then serve me, so you may have your cattle again." In the margin of his diary next to this account, Winthrop scribbled "insolent."

The servant's presumptuousness appalled Winthrop because it violated the governor's concept of social order. From Winthrop's perspective, the idea of improving one's social status was unthinkable. "God Almightie . . . ," he observed, "hath soe disposed of the Condition of mankinde, as in all times some must be rich, some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subjeccion." Every person had an assigned place in God's hierarchy.

Conditions in the New World, however, eroded this conception of the structure of society. Some individuals rose, others fell. People refused to stay in their assigned places. To Winthrop's dismay, the social order that developed in the American colonies did not conform to some divine plan. Instead, it was the product of several critical elements: shortage of labor, abundance of land, unusual demographic patterns, and commercial ties with European markets.

These factors varied from place to place. In the Chesapeake, for example, the staple economy based on tobacco created an almost insatiable demand for the controlled labor of slaves and servants. In Massachusetts Bay, the extraordinary longevity of the early settlers generated a level of social and political stability that Virginians and Marylanders did not attain until the end of the seventeenth century. In short, regional differences appeared during the earliest decades of settlement. Like Winthrop's concept of social order, the ideas and assumptions transported from Europe and Africa were recast to meet the demands of these particular colonial environments. Since historians know relatively little about the details of family life in other seventeenth-century colonies such as New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, this discussion focuses upon New England and the Chesapeake, England's wealthiest and most populous possessions.

Stable Societies: The New England Colonies in the Seventeenth Century

The family was central to the development of social stability in early New England. This observation may seem commonplace, but the modern reader must remember that in the seventeenth century many activities now performed by the state were the responsibility of the family. It was within the family unit that men and women earned a livelihood, educated their children, maintained religious traditions, nursed each other in sickness; in short, established a societal and cultural identity. The healthy environment of New England allowed the family to thrive. Indeed, New Englanders expected social institutions—church and state, in particular—to complement and support rather than to take over family functions. The character of the family life cycle, therefore, was of fundamental importance in shaping the stable economic and political patterns of early New England.

Immigrant Families and Social Order

Early New Englanders believed that God ordained the family for human benefit. It was essential to the maintenance of social order, since outside the family, men and women succumbed to carnal temptation. Such people had no one to sustain them, no one to remind them of Scripture. "Without *Family care*," declared the Reverend Benjamin Wadsworth, "the labour of Magistrates and Ministers for Reformation and Propagating Religion, is likely to be in great measure unsuccessful."

The godly family, at least in theory, was ruled by a patriarch, father to his children, husband to his wife, the source of authority and object of unquestioned obedience. The wife shared responsibility for the raising of children, but in decisions

of importance, especially those related to property, she was expected to defer to her spouse.

The New Englanders' concern about the character of the godly family is not surprising. This institution played a central role in shaping their society, for in contrast to those who migrated to the colonies of Virginia and Maryland, New Englanders crossed the Atlantic within *nuclear* families. That is, they moved within established units consisting of a father, mother, and their dependent children, rather than as single youths and adults.

This familial experience exercised a powerful influence upon early New England life. People who migrated to America within families, mature adults in their twenties and thirties, preserved local English customs more fully than did the youths who traveled to other parts of the continent as single men and women. The comforting presence of immediate family members reduced the shock of adjusting to a strange environment three thousand miles from home. Even in the 1630s, the ratio of men to women in New England was fairly well balanced, about three males for every two females. Persons who had not already married in England could expect to form nuclear families of their own.

The great migration of the 1630s and '40s brought approximately 20,000 persons to New England. After 1642, the English Civil War reduced the flood of people moving to Massachusetts Bay to a trickle. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, the population of New England had reached almost 150,000, an amazing increase considering the small number of original immigrants. Historians have been hard pressed to explain this striking rate of growth. Some have suggested that New Englanders married very young, thus giving couples extra years in which to produce large families. Other scholars have maintained that New England women must have been more fertile than were their Old World counterparts.

Neither theory adequately explains how so few migrants produced such a large population. Early New England marriage patterns, for example, did not differ substantially from those recorded in seventeenth-century England. The average age for men at first marriage was the mid-twenties. Wives were slightly younger than their husbands, the average age being about twenty-two. There is no evidence that New Englanders favored child brides. Nor, for that matter, were Puritan families unusually large by the standards of the period.

The explanation for the region's extraordinary growth turned out to be longevity, rather than fertility. Put simply, people who, under normal conditions, would have died in contemporary Europe survived in New England. Indeed, the life expectancy of seventeenth-century settlers was not very different from our own. Males who survived infancy might have expected to see their seventieth birthday. Twenty percent of the men of the first generation reached the age of eighty. The figures for women were only slightly lower. Why the early settlers lived so long is not entirely clear. No doubt, pure drinking water, a cool climate that retarded the spread of fatal conta-

gious disease, and a dispersed population promoted general good health.

Longer life altered family relations. New England males lived not only to see their own children reach adulthood, but also to witness the birth of grandchildren. One historian, John Murrin, observed that New Englanders "invented" grandparents. In other words, this may have been one of the first societies in recorded history in which a person could reasonably anticipate knowing his or her grandchildren, a demographic surprise that contributed to social stability. The traditions of particular families and communities literally remained alive in the memories of the colony's oldest citizens.

Family Life Cycle

The life cycle of the family in New England began with marriage. Young men and women generally selected their own partners, and if parents had a voice in such matters, it was only to veto an objectionable choice. New Englanders usually managed to fall in love with a neighbor, and most marriages took place between persons living less than thirteen miles apart. Prospective brides were expected to possess a dowry worth approximately one half what the bridegroom brought to the union. Women often contributed money or household goods, while men provided farmland. The overwhelming majority of the region's population married, for in New England, the single life was not only physically difficult, but also morally suspect.

The household was primarily a place of work—very demanding work. One historical geographer estimates that a Pennsylvania family of five needed seventy-five acres of cleared land just to feed itself. Additional cultivation allowed the farmer to produce a surplus that could then be sold, and since agrarian families required items that could not be manufactured at home—metal tools, for example—they usually grew more than they consumed. Early American farmers were not self-sufficient; the belief that they were is a popular misconception.

During the seventeenth century, men and women generally lived in the communities of their parents and grandparents. Moving to a more fertile region might, of course, have increased their earnings, but such thoughts seldom occurred to early New Englanders. Religious values, a sense of common purpose, and the importance of family reinforced traditional communal ties.

Towns, in fact, were collections of families, not individuals. Over time, these families intermarried, so that the community became an elaborate kinship network. Social historians have discovered that in many New England towns the original founders dominated local politics and economic affairs for several generations. Not surprisingly, newcomers who were not absorbed into this family system tended to move away from the village with greater frequency than did the sons and daughters of the established lineage groups.

Congregational churches were also built upon a family foundation. During the earliest years of settlement, the churches accepted persons who could demonstrate that they were among God's "elect." Members were drawn from a broad social spectrum. Once the excitement of creating a new society had passed, however, New Englanders began to focus their attention upon the spiritual welfare of the members of their own families. Because many of their sons and daughters failed to experience saving grace, a synod in 1662 adopted the so-called Half-Way Covenant. This compromise allowed the grandchildren of persons in full communion to be baptized even though *their* parents could not demonstrate conversion. Congregational ministers assumed that "God cast the line of election in the loins of godly parents." Obsession with family—termed "tribalism" by some historians—meant that by the end of the century, Congregational churches failed to meet the religious needs of New Englanders who were not members of the select families.

Colonists regarded education as primarily a family responsibility. Parents were supposed to instruct children in the principles of Christianity; and so it was necessary to teach boys and girls how to read. In 1642 the Massachusetts General Court reminded the Bay Colonists of their obligation to catechize their families. Five years later the legislature ordered towns containing at least fifty families to open an elementary school supported by local taxes. Villages of one hundred or more families had to maintain more advanced grammar schools, which taught a basic Latin

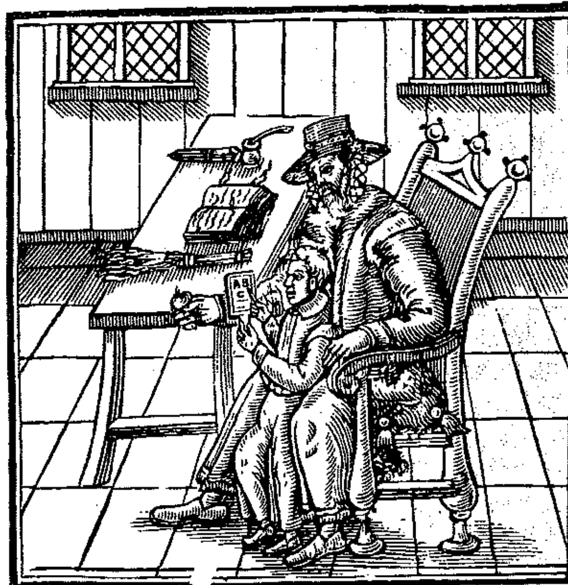
curriculum. At least eleven schools were operating in 1647, and despite their expense, new schools were established throughout the century.

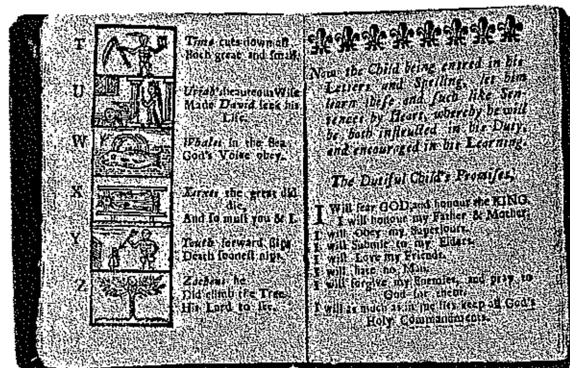
This family-based education system worked. A majority of the region's adult males could read and write, an accomplishment not achieved in the Chesapeake colonies for another century. The literacy rate for women was somewhat lower, but by the standards of the period, it was still impressive. A printing press operated in Cambridge as early as 1639. *The New-England Primer,* first published in Boston by Benjamin Harris, taught children the alphabet as well as the Lord's Prayer. This primer announced, "He who ne'er learns his ABC, forever will a blockhead be. But he who to his book's inclined, will soon a golden treasure find."

But the best-seller of seventeenth-century New England was Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* (1662), a poem of 224 stanzas describing in terrifying detail the fate of sinners on Judgment Day. In words that even young readers could comprehend, Wigglesworth wrote of these unfortunate souls:

> *They cry, no, no: Alas! and wo!*
> *Our Courage all is gone:*
> *Our hardiness (fool hardiness)*
> *Hath us undone, undone.*

Many New Englanders memorized the entire poem. After 1638 young men could attend Harvard College, the first institution of higher learning founded in England's mainland colonies. Yale College followed, admitting its first students in 1702.





T Time cuts down all
Both great and small.

U Uriah's beauteous Wife
Made David seek his
Life.

W Whales in the Sea
God's Voice obey.

X Xerxes the great did
die,
And so must you & I.

Y Youth forward slips
Death soonest nips.

Z Zacheus he
Did climb the Tree
His Lord to see.

Now the Child being entred in his Letters and Spelling, let him learn these and such like Sentences by Heart, whereby he will be both instructed in his Duty, and encouraged in his Learning.

The Dutiful Child's Promises,

I Will fear GOD, and honour the KING.
I will honour my Father & Mother.
I will Obey my Superiours.
I will Submit to my Elders.
I will Love my Friends.
I will hate no Man.
I will forgive my Enemies, and pray to God for them.
I will as much as in me lies keep all God's Holy Commandments.

New England parents took seriously their responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their children. To seek the word of God, young people had to learn to read. The New-England Primer, *shown here, was their primary vehicle.*

Women's Work and Women's Rights

The role of women in the agrarian society north of the Chesapeake is a controversial subject among colonial historians. Some scholars point out that common law as well as English custom treated women as inferior to men. Other historians, however, depict the colonial period as a "golden age" for women. According to this interpretation, wives worked alongside their husbands. They were not divorced from meaningful, productive labor. They certainly were not transformed into those frail, dependent beings much admired by middle-class males of the nineteenth century. Both views provide insights into the lives of early American women, but neither fully recaptures their experiences as members of communities.

To be sure, women worked on family farms. They did not, however, necessarily do the same jobs that men performed. Women usually handled separate tasks, including cooking, washing, clothes-making, dairying, and gardening. Their production of food was absolutely essential to the survival of most households. Sometimes wives

raised poultry, and by selling surplus birds achieved some economic independence. When people in one New England community chided a man for allowing his wife to peddle her fowl, he responded, "I meddle not with the geese nor turkeys for they are hers." Women also joined churches in greater numbers than did men, and it is possible that their involvement in these institutions encouraged them to express their ideas. From this perspective, the Anne Hutchinson affair (see chapter 2) takes on new meaning, since Hutchinson implicitly challenged the commonly imposed constraints on the public role of women.

In political and legal matters, society sharply curtailed the rights of colonial women. According to common law practice, a wife exercised no control over property. She could not, for example, sell land, although if her husband decided to dispose of their holdings, he was free to do so without her permission. Divorce was extremely difficult to obtain in any colony before the American Revolution. Indeed, a person married to a cruel or irresponsible spouse had little recourse but to run away or accept the unhappy situation.

Yet most women were neither prosperous entrepreneurs nor abject slaves. Surviving letters indicate that men and women generally accepted the roles that they thought God had ordained. One of early America's most creative poets, Anne Bradstreet, wrote movingly of the fulfillment she had found with her husband. In a piece entitled "To my Dear and loving Husband," Bradstreet declared:

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me the women if you can.

Although Puritan couples worried that the affection they felt for a husband or a wife might turn their thoughts away from God's perfect love, this was a danger they were willing to risk.

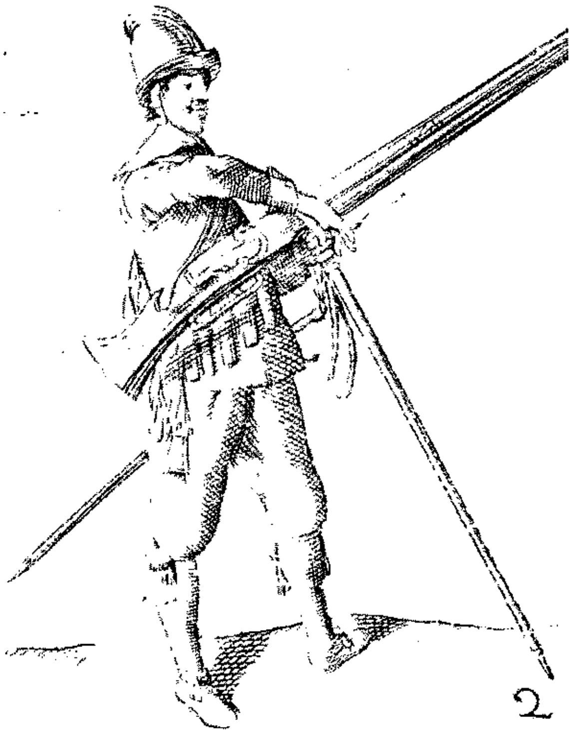
Rank and Status

During the seventeenth century, the New England colonies attracted neither noblemen nor paupers. The absence of these social groups meant that the American social structure seemed incomplete by contemporary European standards. The settlers were not displeased that the poor remained in the Old World. The lack of very rich persons—and in this period great wealth frequently accompanied noble title—was quite another matter. According to the prevailing hierarchical view of the structure of society, well-placed individuals were *natural rulers*, people intended by God to exercise political authority over the rank and file. Migration forced the colonists, however, to choose their rulers from men of more modest status. One minister told a Plymouth congregation that since its members were "not furnished with any persons of *special eminency above the rest*, to be chosen by you into office of government," they would have to make due with neighbors, "not beholding in them the *ordinariness of their persons*."

The colonists gradually sorted themselves out into distinct social groupings. Persons who would never have been "natural rulers" in England became provincial gentry in the various northern colonies. It helped, of course, if an individual possessed wealth and education, but these attributes alone could not guarantee that a newcomer would be accepted into the local ruling elite, at least not during the early decades of settlement. In Massachusetts and Connecticut, Puritan voters expected their leaders to join Congregational churches and defend orthodox religion.

The Winthrops, Dudleys, and Pynchons—just to cite a few of the more prominent families—fulfilled these expectations, and in public affairs they assumed dominant roles. They took their responsibilities quite seriously and certainly did not look kindly upon anyone who spoke of their "ordinariness." A colonist who jokingly called a Puritan magistrate a "just ass" found himself in deep trouble with civil authorities.

The problem was that while most New Englanders accepted a hierarchical view of society, they disagreed over their assigned places. Both Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut passed sumptuary laws—statutes that limited the wearing of fine apparel to the wealthy and prominent—to curb the pretentions of those of lower status. Yet such restraints could not prevent some people from rising and others from falling within the social order. Indeed, by the end of the century, the character of the ruling class in New England had



The matchlock musket used by the colonists for defense was so heavy it had to be propped on a forked stick when it was fired.

changed, and personal piety figured less importantly in social ranking than did family background and large estate.

Most northern colonists were yeomen (independent farmers) who worked their own land. While few became rich in America, even fewer fell hopelessly into debt. Their daily lives, especially for those who settled New England, centered upon scattered little communities where they participated in village meetings, church-related matters, and militia training. Possession of land gave agrarian families a sense of independence from external authority, but during the seventeenth century, this independence was balanced by an equally strong feeling of local identity. Not until the late eighteenth century, when many New Englanders left their familial villages in search of new land, did many northern yeomen place personal material ambition above traditional community bonds.

It was not unusual for northern colonists to work as servants at some point in their lives. This system of labor differed greatly from the servitude that developed in seventeenth-century Virginia and Maryland. New Englanders seldom recruited servants from the Old World. The forms of agriculture practiced in this region, mixed cereal and dairy farming, made employment of large gangs of dependent workers uneconomic. Rather, New England families placed their adolescent children in nearby homes. These young persons contracted for four or five years and seemed more like apprentices than servants. Servitude was not simply a means by which one group exploited another. It was a form of vocational training program in which the children of the rich as well as the poor participated.

Roots of Southern Plantation Societies

An entirely different regional society developed in England's Chesapeake colonies. This contrast with New England seems puzzling. After all, the two areas were founded at roughly the same time by men and women from the same mother country. In both regions, settlers spoke English, accepted Protestantism, and gave allegiance to one crown. And yet, to cite an obvious example, seventeenth-century Virginia looked nothing like Massachusetts Bay. In an effort to explain the difference, colonial historians have studied environmental conditions, labor systems, and agrarian economies. The most important reason for the distinctiveness of these early southern plantation societies, however, turned out to be the Chesapeake's death rate, a frighteningly high mortality that tore at the very fabric of family life.

Family Life in a Perilous Environment

Unlike New England's settlers, the men and women who emigrated to the Chesapeake region did not move in family units. They traveled to the New World as young, unmarried servants, youths cut off from the security of traditional kin relations. Although these immigrants came from a cross section of English society, most had been

poor to middling farmers in the mother country. It is now estimated that 70 to 85 percent of the white colonists who went to Virginia and Maryland during the seventeenth century were not free, that is, they owed four or five years' labor in exchange for the cost of passage to America. If the servant was under fifteen, he or she had to serve a full seven years. The overwhelming majority of these laborers were males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. In fact, before 1640 the ratio of males to females stood at 6 to 1. This figure dropped to about 2 1/2 to 1 by the end of the century, but the sexual balance in the Chesapeake was never as favorable as it had been in early Massachusetts.

Most immigrants to the Chesapeake region died soon after arriving. It is difficult to ascertain the exact cause of death in most cases, but malaria and other diseases took a frightful toll. Recent studies also indicate that drinking water contaminated with salt killed many colonists living in low-lying areas. Throughout the entire seventeenth century, high mortality rates had a profound effect upon this society. Life expectancy for Chesapeake males was about forty-three, some ten to twenty years less than for men born in New England! For women, life was even shorter. A full 25 percent of all children died in infancy; another 25 percent did not see their twentieth birthday. The survivors were often weak or ill, unable to perform hard physical labor.

These demographic conditions retarded normal population increase. Young women who might have become wives and mothers could not do so until they had completed their terms of servitude. They thus lost several reproductive years, and in a society in which so many children died in infancy, late marriage greatly restricted family size. Moreover, because of the unbalanced sex ratio, many adult males simply could not find wives. Migration not only cut them off from their English families, but also deprived them of an opportunity to form new ones. Without a constant flow of immigrants, the population of Virginia and Maryland would have actually declined.

High mortality compressed the family life cycle into a few short years. Marriages, for example, were extremely fragile, and one partner usually died within seven years. Only one in three Chesapeake marriages survived as long as a decade. Not only did children not meet grandparents, they often did not even know their own parents. Widows and widowers quickly remarried, bringing children by former unions into their new homes, and it was not uncommon for a child to grow up with persons to whom he or she bore no blood relation. The psychological effects of such experiences on Chesapeake settlers cannot be measured. People probably learned to cope with a high degree of personal insecurity. However they adjusted, it is clear that family life in this region was vastly more impermanent than it was in the New England colonies during the same period.

Women were obviously in great demand in the early southern colonies. Some historians have argued that scarcity heightened the woman's bargaining power in the marriage market. If she was an immigrant, she did not have to worry about obtaining parental consent. She was on her own in the New World and free to select whomever she pleased. If a woman lacked beauty or strength, if she were a person of low moral

standards, she could still be confident of finding an American husband. Such negotiations may have provided Chesapeake women with a means of improving their social status. Nevertheless, liberation from some traditional restraints upon seventeenth-century women must not be exaggerated. As servants, women were vulnerable to sexual exploitation by their masters. Moreover, in this unhealthy environment, childbearing was extremely dangerous, and women in the Chesapeake usually died twenty years earlier than did their New England counterparts.

Rank and Status in Plantation Society

Colonists who managed somehow to survive grew tobacco, as much tobacco as they possibly could. This crop became the Chesapeake staple, and since it was relatively easy to cultivate, anyone with a few acres of cleared land could produce leaves for export. Cultivation of tobacco did not, however, produce a society roughly similar in wealth and status. To the contrary, tobacco generated inequality. Some planters amassed large fortunes; others barely subsisted. The difference was labor, for to succeed in this staple economy, one had to control the labor of other men and women. More workers in the fields meant larger harvests, and, of course, larger profits. Since free persons showed no interest in growing another man's tobacco, not even for wages, wealthy planters relied upon white laborers who were not free, as well as on slaves. The social structure that developed in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake reflected a wild, often unscrupulous scramble to bring men and women of three races—black, white, and Indian—into various degrees of dependence.

Great planters dominated Chesapeake society. The group was small, only a trifling percent of the population of Virginia and Maryland. During the early decades of the seventeenth century, the composition of Chesapeake gentry was continually in flux. Some gentlemen died before they could establish a secure claim to high social status; others returned to England, thankful to have survived. Not until the 1650s did the family names of those who would become famous eighteenth-century gentry appear in the records. The first gentlemen were not—as genealogists sometimes discover to their dismay—dashing Cavaliers who had fought in the English civil war for King Charles I. Rather, such Chesapeake gentry as the Burwells, Byrds, Carters, and Masons consisted originally of the younger sons of English merchants and artisans.

These ambitious men arrived in America with capital. They invested immediately in laborers, and one way or another, they obtained huge tracts of the best tobacco-growing land. The members of this gentry were not technically aristocrats, for they did not possess titles that could be passed from generation to generation. They gave themselves military titles, sat as justices of the peace on the county courts, and directed local (Anglican) church affairs as members of the vestry. Over time, these gentry families intermarried so frequently that they created a vast network of cousins. During the eighteenth century it was not uncommon to find a half dozen men with the same surname sitting simultaneously in the Virginia House of Burgesses.

Freemen formed the largest class in this society. Their origins were strikingly different from those of the gentry, or for that matter, from those of New England's yeomen farmers. Chesapeake freemen traveled to the New World as indentured servants and, by sheer good fortune, managed to remain alive to the end of their contracts. If they had dreamed of becoming great planters, they were gravely disappointed. Most seventeenth-century freemen lived on the edge of poverty. Some freemen, of course, did better in America than they would have done in contemporary England, but in both Virginia and Maryland, historians have found a sharp economic division separating the gentry from the rest of white society.

Below the freemen came indentured servants. Membership in this group was not demeaning; after all, servitude was a temporary status. But servitude in the Chesapeake colonies was not the benign institution that it was in New England. Great planters purchased servants to grow tobacco. No one worried whether these laborers received decent food and clothes, much less whether they acquired trades. These young people, thousands of them, cut off from family ties, sick often to the point of death, unable to obtain normal sexual release, regarded their servitude as a form of "slavery." Not surprisingly, the gentry

worried that unhappy servants and impoverished freemen, what the planters called the "giddy multitude," would rebel at the slightest provocation, a fear that turned out to be fully justified.

The character of social mobility—and this observation applies only to the whites—changed considerably during the seventeenth century. Until the 1680s, it was relatively easy for a newcomer who possessed capital to become a member of the planter elite. No one paid much attention to the reputation or social standing of one's English family. After the 1680s, however, life expectancy rates in the Chesapeake improved, and the sons of the great planters replaced their fathers in powerful government positions. They carved out large estates of their own. The key to success was possession of slaves. Those planters who owned more blacks could grow more tobacco and, thus, purchase additional laborers. Over time, the rich not only became richer, they also formed a distinct ruling elite that newcomers found increasingly difficult to enter.

Opportunities for advancement also decreased for the region's freemen. Studies of mid-seventeenth-century Maryland reveal that some servants managed to become moderately prosperous farmers and small officeholders. But as the gentry consolidated its hold on political and economic institutions, ordinary people discovered that it was much harder to rise in Chesapeake society. Those men and women with more ambitious dreams headed for Pennsylvania, North Carolina, or western Virginia.

Social institutions that figured importantly in the daily experience of New Englanders were either weak or nonexistent in the Chesapeake colonies. In part this sluggish development resulted from the continuation of high infant mortality rates. There was little incentive to build elementary schools, for example, if half the children would die before reaching adulthood. The great planters sent their sons to England or Scotland for their education, and even after the founding of the College of William and Mary in Virginia in 1693, the gentry continued to patronize English schools. As a result of this practice, higher education in the South languished for much of the colonial period.

Tobacco also influenced the spread of other institutions in this region. Planters were scattered along the rivers, often separated from their nearest neighbors by miles of poor roads. Since the major tobacco growers traded directly with English merchants, they had no need for towns. Whatever items they required were either made on the plantation or imported from Europe. Other than the centers of colonial government, Jamestown (and later Williamsburg) and St. Mary's (and later Annapolis), there were no villages capable of sustaining a rich community life before the late eighteenth century. Seventeenth-century Virginia did not even possess a printing press. In fact, Governor Sir William Berkeley bragged in 1671, "there are no free schools, nor printing in Virginia, for learning has brought disobedience, and heresy . . . into the world, and printing had divulged them . . . God keep us from both!"

The Black Experience in English America

Many people who landed in the colonies had no desire to come to the New World. They were taken as slaves to cultivate rice, sugar, and tobacco, and as the Native Americans were exterminated and the supply of white indentured servants dried up, European planters demanded ever more African laborers.

Roots of Slavery

A great deal is known about the transfer of African peoples across the Atlantic. During the entire history of this human commerce, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, slave traders carried between eight and eleven million blacks to the Americas. Most of these men and women were sold in Brazil or in the Caribbean. Only a small number of Africans ever reached British North America, and of this group, the majority arrived after 1700. Because slaves performed hard physical labor, planters preferred purchasing young males. In many early slave communities, black men outnumbered women by a ratio of two to one.

English colonists did not hesitate to enslave black people. While the institution of slavery had long ago died out in the mother country, New