

"... They Would Have Destroyed Me": Slavery and the Origins of Racism

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In the period before the Civil War, one of the standard arguments made for racial slavery was that it made possible a practically air-tight system of social control. The strife-torn and ism-riddled plight of wage-labor societies in Europe was contrasted with the long tradition of social peace in the South, where, despite intramural grudges, the great majority of the poor whites would side with the slaveholders in any confrontation between black labor and the plantation bourgeoisie.

The high courts of South Carolina well understood that "the peace of society... required that slaves should be subjected to the authority and control of all freemen when not under the immediate authority of their masters"; that where "a slave can invoke neither Magna Charta nor common law", social peace depended upon "the subordination of the servile class to every free white person,"

If the black bond-laborer sought to flee, any white person had the legal right, indeed duty, to seize the fugitive, and stood to be rewarded for the deed. "Poor white men," writes one historian, "habitually kept their eyes open for strange Negroes without passes, for the apprehension of a fugitive was a financial windfall."

Chancellor William Harper of South Carolina confidently reassured those who were apprehensive of another Santo Domingo in the American slave states. "It is almost impossible," he wrote, "that there should be any extensive [insurrectionary] combination among the slaves." The reason was simple: "Of the class of freemen, there would be no individual so poor or so degraded (with the exception of here and there a reckless outlaw or felon) who would not ...be vigilant and active to detect and suppress it."

"We do not govern them [the free states] by our black slaves but by their own white slaves. We know what we are doing—we have conquered you once and we can again ..."

John Randolph of Virginia, opposing the Missouri Compromise of 1820

The pioneer slaveholding sociologist George Fitzhugh described in terms even more explicit the indispensable role of the poor whites in the social order established by and for the plantation bourgeoisie. "[The poor whites]," he said, "constitute our militia and our police. They protect men in the possession of property, as in other countries; and they do much more, they secure men in the possession of a kind of property which they could not hold a day but for the supervision and protection of the poor." Here Fitzhugh has perfected our definition of racial slavery. It is not simply that some whites own black slaves, but that no whites are so owned; not simply that whites are by definition non-slaves, but that the poor and laboring non-slave-holding whites are by racial definition enslavers of black labor.

Contrast the serene sense of power expressed by Fitzhugh and Harper in the nineteenth century with the troubled mind of the seventeenth-century planter elite at the time of Bacon's Rebellion. "How miserable that man is," wrote Sir William Berkeley to his friend Thomas Ludwell, "that Governes a People where six parts of seven at least are Poore, Endebted, Discontented and Armed." Since 1642, whenever kings had reigned in England, Berkeley had served as Royal Governor over Virginia, which then had

two-thirds of the total population of the South. Now in the last year of his time, he was to be driven from his home, his capital city was to be burned, and most of his territory was to be taken over by armed rebels.

"While the workingmen, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative, of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor ..."

Karl Marx, letter to Abraham Lincoln, 1865

Colonel Francis Moryson, who had served many years in the government of Virginia, and who for that reason was chosen as one of the King's Commissioners to inquire into the state of affairs of the colony in the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion, expressed wonderment that in Virginia, "amongst so many thousand reputed honest men there should not be found a thousand to fight five hundred inconsiderable fellows." He could only conclude that "the major part of the country is distempered."

To understand how the anxiety of the Berkeleys and the Morysons was transformed into the self-assurance of the Harpers and Fitzhughs, is to understand the origins of racial slavery in this country. (1)

II

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Virginia and Maryland, the tobacco colonies, experienced a severe and protracted economic crisis. It was a period of intense class struggle, including armed struggle, of the people against the bourgeoisie. It was in Virginia that these events reached their fullest development. There, the proletariat — one-fourth to one-half of the population — was the most consistent combatant of all the poor and oppressed masses struggling to throw off capitalist domination. (2) These proletarians were politically more advanced, as indeed were the other rebelling colonists, than even the Leveller left wing of the Revolution in the Mother country, England. But the most significant fact of all, from the present point of view, is that the Afro-American and European-American proletarians made common cause in this struggle to an extent never duplicated in the three hundred years since.

From the time of the 1663 Servants' Plot for an insurrectionary march to freedom, to the tobacco riots of 1682, there were no fewer than ten popular and servile revolts and revolt plots in Virginia. The decisive encounter of the people against the bourgeoisie occurred during Bacon's Rebellion, which began in April, 1676 as a difference between the elite and the sub-elite planters over "Indian policy", but which in September became a civil war against the Anglo-American ruling class.

When Bacon's forces besieged, captured, and burned the colonial capital city of Jamestown and sent Governor Berkeley scurrying into exile across the Chesapeake Bay, the rebel army was composed mainly of European and African bond-servants and freedmen recently "out of their time".

After Bacon's death, late in October, the rebel cause declined due to faltering leadership. The eleven hundred British troops that were sent in eleven ships to aid the Cover-

nor's cause did not leave England until around December first, and they did not arrive in Virginia until the shooting was over. But armed English merchantmen were employed with effect on the rivers to harry the rebels. The captain of one of these ships was Thomas Grantham, whose policy of unabashed deception and lying, combined with exploitation of class differences among the rebels, played a decisive role in bringing about a final defeat of the rebels in January, 1677. Despicable as his role was, Grantham's account of his exploits is a historical record of the most profound significance.

Grantham procured the treachery of the new rebel general, Laurence Ingram (whom Grantham had known before), and Ingram's Lieutenant, Gregory Walklett, to help him in securing the surrender of the West Point garrison of three hundred men in arms, freemen and African and English bond-servants. A contemporary account says, however, that

"... the name of Authority had but little power to ring the sword out of these Mad fellows' hands . . . [and therefore Grantham] resolved to accost them with never to be performed promises." [of pardon for the freemen and freedom for the bond-servants, African and English]

Then Grantham tackled the main stronghold of the rebel forces, three miles further up the country, and, in Grantham's own words :

"I there met about four hundred English and Negroes in Arms who were much dissatisfied at the Surrender of the Point, saying I had betrayed them, and thereupon some were for shooting me, and others for cutting me in peeces : I told them I would , willingly surrender myselfe to them, till they were satisfied from his Maj[estie], and did engage to the Negroes and Servants, that they were all pardoned and freed from their Slavery : And with faire promises and Rundlets of Brandy, I pacified them, giving them severall Noates under my hand . . . Most of them I persuaded to goe to their Homes, which accordingly they did, except about eighty Negroes and twenty English which would not deliver their Armes...."

Grantham tricked these one hundred men on board a sloop with the promise of taking them to a rebel fort a few miles down the York River. Instead, towing them behind his own sloop, he brought them under the guns of another ship and forced their surrender, although "they yielded with a great deal of discontent, saying had they known my resolution, they would have destroyed me." Grantham then proceeded to disarm these last of the rebels and to deliver them to their respective owners.

The transcendent importance of this record is that there, in colonial Virginia, one hundred and twenty-nine years before William Lloyd Garrison was born, the armed working class, black and white, fought side by side for the abolition of slavery. (3)

III

The bourgeoisie had succeeded in crushing the revolt, as they were again able to do, but only with great difficulty, in the tobacco riots six years later. All this, however, was merely a defensive action; their basic problem remained and, was more pressing than ever: The securing of an increasing supply of plantation labor and the establishment a stable system of social control for its maximum exploitation.

The supply of labor could be increased in two ways: by

increasing the number of bond-servants, and by lengthening their time of service. From the standpoint of maximum profit the ultimate step would seem to have been to combine these two approaches to the fullest extent, to tap all possible European and African sources and to extend the period of servitude to life. This, of course, would have required the resort to forced transport of European as well as African bond-servants.

On the basis of perpetual servitude the 250,000 African laborers brought to the southern colonies up to 1790 had developed into a bond-servant population of 650,000. On the same basis, the importation of thirty-eight thousand European life-long bond-servants would have been sufficient to develop more than the maximum number, never more than 100,000, that were actually used in the southern colonies. Perpetual servitude, furthermore, afforded the plantation capitalist important incidental benefits aside from the extension of the period of service. The children of these bond-servants would belong to the master, as lifelong bond-servants; the women would work in the fields along with the men; deprived of all civil rights, they would be more completely exploitable; and the benefits of improved labor skills, where they developed, would accrue exclusively to the master, not at all to the servant.

The sale price of life-time bond-servants was almost twice the price of limited-term bond-servants. But even at a doubled price, 38,000 European bond-servants sold into perpetual bondage like that of the Africans, would have cost only one-half to two-thirds as much as what the plantation bourgeoisie actually paid for the 125,000 to 150,000 European bond-servants they did import.

How are we to account for this deviant behavior of the class whom Shakespeare mocked in Timon's satiric encomium to glittering gold, and who practiced so religiously the folk wisdom about a penny saved, a penny got? This brings us to the hard part, of the question, "Why racial slavery?" The hard part is, not "Why were African bond-servants reduced to perpetual servitude?", but "Why were European bond-servants not reduced to perpetual servitude?" (4)

IV

Domestic political and economic considerations would have made it impossible to impose such a policy as a general thing in England. But, a policy of forced transportation to perpetual servitude, restricted to convicts only, in England, and to Irish and Scottish rebels, "vagrants", and "rogues", and the extension to life of the terms of all such categories of servants already in the colonies, would not have imperiled the fundamental ruling power of the bourgeoisie in England. If this course was not followed, it was not for reasons of social order in England, but of the establishment of a system of social control in the unique conditions of the plantation colonies. The Anglo-American bourgeoisie did not make slaves of black and white together because it was not in its power to do so in the historical context, to have attempted to do so would have put in mortal jeopardy what power it did have, considerable as that power was. The non-slavery of white labor was the indispensable condition for the slavery of black labor. This is no mere conjecture; it is a fact that the events of Bacon's Rebellion, and of the whole turbulent quarter-century following 1660, made unmistakably clear.

The defeat of the popular forces in this struggle cleared the way for the distinctive southern plantation system. In that economy the disparity of wealth and social power between the few grandees and the great mass of the dependent poor was much more developed than in the rest of the country; and the middle-class presence was corres-

pondingly weak and insignificant. Under these circumstances, the plantation bourgeoisie established a system of social control by the institutionalization of the white race whereby the mass of poor whites was alienated from the black proletariat and enlisted as enforcers of bourgeois power.

V

The most common form of resistance to bond-servitude was to run away. English and Africans working side by side in the field or in the tobacco shed plotted their escape, met at their rendezvous, and fled to freedom together. The Assemblies of all the plantation colonies enacted cruel and vicious penalties for such "stealth of oneself". The form of corporal punishment most commonly used was flogging and branding, but mutilation and even death were legal retribution against the captured fugitive. The most common form of penalty, because it was most profitable to the owners, was to extend the period of service: for each day away, added service of two days in Virginia, seven in South Carolina, and ten in Maryland. But by the law of 1661, if, in Virginia, any English bond-servant ran away in company with "Shy" African life-time bond-servant, the English bondservant would have to serve the penalty time twice, once for his own absence and once for the African's. (5)

Another, most elementary and human, form of servant solidarity was marrying without the consent of the master. Not only did the marriage impose some barrier to extremes of exploitation, but it led to "lost" time when a wife became pregnant. For this "offense" there were severe legal penalties. The usual penalty was a year's extension of time for marrying and a year for a pregnancy. The children of bondservants were themselves bond-servants until they were over twenty years of age. But the heaviest penalties were those for white women who bore children where the father was African. For those women the penalty was as much as seven years of extended service and a severe whipping at the public whipping post, with the child to be a bond-servant until thirty-one years of age.

This policy was generalized on the largest scale in connection with Bacon's Rebellion itself. Governor Berkeley condemned Bacon and his followers as rebels and traitors when the rebellion was primarily a quarrel among white planters over "Indian policy". Berkeley captured Bacon, then pardoned him and gave his blessing to an anti-Indian campaign. But when, in the second phase, the rebellion became directed primarily against the elite and, as it necessarily had to do, united black and white bond-servants and free poor, Berkeley, in victory, treated the captured rebel leaders with such vengeful severity as was said to have evoked from King Charles II, his sovereign, the remark that "that old fool has hang'd more men in that naked country than I did for the Murder of my Father." T.H. Breen notes the same pattern: "Had Bacon somehow confined his dispute to the upper class, he might have been forgiven for his erratic behavior, but once the servants, slaves and poor freemen became involved, he had to be crushed."

However, special repressive measures for specific acts of solidarity by whites with blacks were not sufficient. The social turbulence of the time showed that the unifying effect of the common lot of bond-servants was stronger than the divisive effect of the penalties for specific illegal acts. Edmund S. Morgan makes a perceptive comment in this connection: "It is questionable (he writes) how far Virginia could safely have continued ..., meeting discontent with repression and manning her plantations with annual importations of servants who would later add to the unruly ranks of the free ... There was another solution which allowed Virginia's magnates to keep their lands, yet arrested the dis-

content and repression of other Englishmen "

VI

The shift to African labor was precipitate after 1685, the newly rechartered Royal African Company, with the unsolicited aid of the interlopers, now making England the world leader in the traffic in human beings. Stressing the importance of "a trade so beneficial to the Kingdom", the Lords of Trade and Plantations adjured the governors of all the American colonies to see to "the well supplying of the Plantations and Colonies with negroes at reasonable prices." The result was that the number of African lifetime bondservants in 1708-09 in the three main southern colonies exceeded the number of European bond-servants by 12,000 (tithables) to none in Virginia, 4,657 to 3,003 in Maryland, and 4,100 to 120 in South Carolina.

Now a new note is heard; the terms "deficiency laws", "quota", and "the need for white servants", appear with increasing frequency in the records. "White servants rarely come of late," said one of William Penn's trustees, "and consequently the country is in danger of becoming a country of negroes." The Council of Trade and Plantations urged the King to direct the colonial governors to enforce strictly "the acts for increasing the number of white men in their colonies " The King, William of Orange; complied just seven days later. On October 8, 1698, South Carolina enacted its first "deficiency law" providing penalties for plantation owners who failed to maintain a ratio of at least one white bond-servant for every six male Negroes above sixteen years of age on each plantation. Governor Francis Nicolson reported in 1698 his concern that in Maryland and Virginia the ratio of African bond-servants to English bond-servants had risen as high as six or seven to one. The Council of Trade and Plantations voiced similar fears that in Jamaica, in 1709, the plantation owners were not maintaining their required "quota" of white men to African bond-servants, in spite of the fact that each plantation owner was liable to a fine of five pounds sterling for every three months and for every white bond-servant of his "deficiency". The editor of the Calendar of State Papers for 1716-1717 makes the general comment that "Everywhere the problem of increasing the white population by means of the import of indentured labor was coming to the fore."

Turn, and turn again. First prefer white labor, then black labor, now white labor again. Why? Of course these European bond-servants were to be exploited, and heavily exploited, on the plantations. That point was made repeatedly. To cite one example, in 1682, "Sundry merchants possessing estates in America" were anxious lest the enforcement of the anti-kidnapping laws in England inhibit the flow of bond-servants to the colonies. They urged consideration of the fact that "every white man's work at tobacco for a year is worth 7 (seven pounds sterling) to the king." That was just the part of the profit that went to the king, and did not include the profits of the planters, shipmasters and merchants. When we note that European bond-servants were selling at less than three pounds per year of unexpired term and that their maintenance came to practically nothing, we can see how remunerative their exploitation was for the owners.

But labor is labor, smoke the pipe or sniff the snuff; taste the sugar or rice. You cannot tell whether African, English or Irish labor made it for you. The renewal of interest in white men for bond-servants was, therefore, not due to any special qualities of their labor power, in which they were the same as the Africans.

The reason was simple. The special demand for white servants was now primarily to "people the country", to serve in the militia, to serve as a basic means of social control based on the perpetual and hereditary bond-servitude of Africans and Afro-Americans. There are literally scores of documents in the records of the time which attest to this fact. I mention a few.

The same letter from merchants possessing estates in Virginia and Maryland made the point that they "have no white men to superintend our negroes, or repress an insurrection of negroes" The Council of Trade and Plantations reported to the King on September 8, 1721 that in South Carolina "black slaves have lately attempted and were very near succeeding in a new revolution ... and therefore, it may be necessary... to propose some new law for encouraging the entertainment of more white servants in the future. The militia of this province does not consist of above 2,000 men." In his preface to volume sixteen of the *Calendar of State Papers*, Fortescue writes that by 1697-98, "The system of defense by white servants had broken down." "The defense of the West Indies," he tells us, "depended, apart from the fleet, entirely on the militia, which was composed of white servants." But the island plantation colonies were finding it impossible to hold European servants once their time was out because of the strict limits of land available for occupation by freedmen. The record is replete with dire pronouncements on the consequences of the relatively small and diminishing number of white men in those islands. In 1688, the Governor of Barbados complained of the Quaker planters' failure to maintain their fair share of the number of white bond-servants "required to suppress the danger of an insurrection by negroes." The Governor of Jamaica wrote to the Prince of Wales on 24 September 1716 that his island was "...almost defenceless, as well from the want of white people to prevent any insurrection of the Negroes, as ships of war to secure the coasts, trade and navigation...." The House of Commons, on November 3, 1691, received "a petition of divers merchants, masters of ships, planters and others, trading to foreign plantations ... setting forth, that the plantations cannot be maintained without a considerable number of white servants, as well to keep the blacks in subjection, as to bear arms in case of an invasion."

Parliament, in 1717, responded to these cries of alarm by making transportation to bond-servitude in the plantation colonies a legal punishment for crime. Persons convicted of felonies, for which the death penalty could be imposed, could instead be sentenced to fourteen years' transportation to the American plantations. Persons convicted of lesser offenses were liable to seven years' servitude. A study cited by A.E. Smith, for the years 1729-1770, indicated that at least seventy per cent of those convicted in the Old Bailey court in London were sent to Maryland and Virginia. Thenceforth "His Majesty's passengers" constituted a large proportion of the white bond-servant population in the southern | plantation colonies, being a majority of those arriving from England. Nevertheless, the majority of the total number of European bond-servants coming to the southern colonies (including those who originally disembarked at Philadelphia or other non-South ports) were, for the greater part of the eighteenth century, Irish, Germans, and Scots. Aside from convicts, the number of European bond-servants in Maryland more than doubled between 1707 and 1755. Whereas the number of white servants in Virginia in 1708 was negligible, Governor Gooch reported to the home government that great numbers of bond-servants, white as well as black, had been imported into that colony since 1720. Separate bond-servant statistics are lacking for South Carolina, except for 1708, when, out of a population of nearly ten thousand, there were

only 120 European bond-servants. However, it is generally agreed that a majority of the Europeans coming to the colonies were bond-servants; therefore, as the white population of South Carolina increased from 4,000 to 25,000 between 1708 and 1755, the white-servant immigration must have amounted to several thousand. (6)

VIII

The bourgeoisie could get European bond-servants to come to the southern colonies, but how was it to avoid another Bacon's Rebellion or Servants' Plot in which African and European bond-servants would join in challenging the ruling elite? How was the bourgeoisie to turn that old situation around, break up the solidarity of black and white, and then enlist the poor whites in the social control apparatus of the ruling class? Professor Morgan, at one point in the article previously cited, comments as follows: "I do not mean to argue that Virginia deliberately turned to African slavery as a means of preserving and extending the rights of Englishmen." Quite right; but reverse the order of the clauses and you have a profoundly correct statement: The plantation bourgeoisie deliberately extended a privileged status to the white poor of all categories as a means of turning to African slavery as the basis of its system of production.

The seventeenth-century Anglo-American plantation bourgeoisie drew the color line between freedom and slavery, a line that had not previously existed under English custom or law. (7) James C. Ballagh, in his well-known old essay, A History of Slavery in Virginia, first published in 1902, detailed how the Virginia Assembly, "in a long series of... statutes ... first drew and applied the color line as a limit upon various social and political rights, and finally narrowed its application definitely to the negro race with respect to liberty and customary or legal privileges and rights." This drawing of the color line was accomplished by defining who was to be a slave; then, of course, everybody else would be by definition a non-slave. The process took place over a period of nearly half a century.

In 1662 the Virginia Assembly decreed that all persons born in Virginia were to follow the condition of the mother. This was a direct result, according to Ballagh, of "fornication" of Englishmen with Negro women; but it was also intended as a "deterrent to the female" English. For, as the historian Philip Bruce put it, "It is no ground for surprise that in the seventeenth century there were instances of criminal intimacy between white women and negroes. Many of the former had only recently arrived from England, and were therefore comparatively free from . . . race prejudice" It was in this connection that the very first legislative enactment of white-skin privilege for white labor was passed when, by excluding white women bond-servants from the list of taxable persons, the Assembly provided for the general exemption of white women bond-servants from field work. In 1662 interracial fornication by "Christian" men was made punishable by a fine double the amount otherwise imposed for that offense. In 1705 a white servant woman became liable to five years added servitude for this offense, and the son or daughter born in result of the "crime" was to be a bond-servant until he or she became thirty-one years of age.

After 1670, baptism in Christ in Virginia was to have no emancipative effect in this world. But this left still free those Negroes who came from Spanish, Portuguese or English territory already baptized. In 1680, therefore, the Virginia Assembly decreed that imported servants were slaves unless they had been born of Christian parents in a Christian land and first purchased by a Christian. That seemed to cover all contingencies, except for the limited-term black

bond-servants, free Negroes and Indian slaves. In 1705, the last step was taken: All servants who were brought into the country, by sea or land, were to be slaves, unless they came as three-star Christians as specified in the 1680 law. Only blacks were slaves, not Indians, in Virginia. (8)

There remained the question of the free persons of color. But their position was clearly defined as one of a lower status than any white person. In 1705, for instance, the law forbade any Negro to own any white servant. In 1723, free Negroes, who had until then been voters on the same basis as whites, were deprived of this right. Some years later, Lieutenant Governor William Gooch justified this and other special deprivation of rights to free Afro-Americans: The purpose, he explained, was "to fix a brand on free negroes and mulattoes... (because) a distinction ought to be made between their offspring and the descendants of an Englishman." He deplored the "pride of a manumitted slave, who looks upon himself immediately on his acquiring his freedom, to be as good a man as the best of his neighbors." Gooch was determined to break that simple pride, and "to preserve... a distinction between them (free Negroes) and their betters." The Council of Trade and Plantations in England, who had asked the question, indicated its satisfaction with the answer.

The white-skin privileges of the poor free whites were simply reflexes of the disabilities imposed on the Negro slave: to move about freely without a pass; to marry without any upper-class consent; to change employment; to vote in elections in accordance with the laws on qualifications; to acquire property; and last, but not least, in this partial list, the right of self-defense.

Not only the free whites, but the white bond-servants were given privileges in relation to the African. In 1680 the Virginia Assembly repealed all penalties that had been imposed on white servants for plundering during Bacon's Rebellion. The language of the act implicitly excluded from this benefit any Afro-American freedmen or limited-term bond-servants who had taken part in the Rebellion, Negro children were made tithable, hence workable, at twelve years of age, while white bond-servants were exempt until they were fourteen.

In 1680, Negroes were forbidden to carry arms, defensive or offensive. In 1705, the specified freedom dues for a white bond-servant included a musket. In 1680, the law provided that any Negro who raised his or her hand against any Christian white would be liable to receive thirty lashes, well laid on. Under the law of 1705, a white servant raising a hand against the master, mistress or overseer was liable to an extension of a year of his or her servitude. Under the same law, the killing of an Afro-American life-time bondservant was legal if the bond-servant resisted "correction" by the master or his agent. Here is a classic clear distinction between race and class oppression.

In 1680, it was made legal to kill a fugitive Negro bond-servant if he or she resisted recapture. In 1705, the law specified that a white servant might not be whipped naked except by order of a Justice of the Peace. The same law gave the white bond-servant the right to seek legal redress against the master for severity of treatment or for inadequacy of provisions.

In 1705; white bond-servants, upon completion of their terms of servitude, were to receive under the law the following freedom dues: men, 10 bushels of corn, 30 shillings in money, and a musket worth 20 shillings; women, 15 bushels of corn and 40 shillings in money. The Afro-American laborers were not to receive freedom dues, since they were not to have freedom. (9)

IX

In 1692, representatives of Virginia in England made the point, that Virginia and Maryland, being on the continent, could not keep the bond-servants under control so simply as the authorities could do on the island colonies, of the West Indies with the help of the fleet. From Virginia reports of insurrectionary plots by Negroes became frequent. The editor of the Calendar of State Papers describes Virginia in 1728-29 as "a community filled with anxiety and in constant dread" on this account.

The experience of Bacon's Rebellion had shown that the continental colonies were too far from England to be controlled by troops based in the Mother Country. The Crown was unwilling to maintain at its own expense a permanent army in the colonies for this purpose. Although the plantation owners on some occasions appealed for British troops for the maintenance of order against the rebellious population, they were unwilling to pay the cost. Increasingly, therefore, the colonial governments concerned themselves with the development of the white militia.

From almost the beginning, members of the colonial ruling elite and their key agents, auxiliaries, and employees were generally exempted from militia duty. The Act of 1705 thus excused "Any present or past member of the colony council, speaker of the house of burgesses, attorney-general, justice of the peace, or any person who has borne commission of captain or higher in the colony, ministers, clerks, schoolmasters, overseer of 4 or more slaves, constable, miller" Under that law bond-servants were also excluded from the militia. In 1723, however, when exemptions were in each instance required to find and furnish "one able white man" for a substitute, no specific exclusion of bonded servants was provided in regard to those who might serve as substitutes. In fact, it was provided that "nothing in this Act contained, shall hinder or deter any captain from admitting any able-bodied white person, who shall be above the age of sixteen years, to serve in his troop or company in the place of any person required by this act to be enlisted."

By 1727, the special form of militia known as the slave patrol was established in Virginia to deal with the "great dangers that may... happen by the insurrections of negroes" The patrols were to be appointed by the chief militia officer in each county, and employed for the purpose of "dispersing all unusual concourse of negroes ...and for preventing any dangerous combinations which may be made amongst them at such meetings." The poor white men who constituted the rank and file of the militia were to be rewarded for this service by such things as exemption from attendance at regular militia musters, and for payment of taxes and parish levies." An article in the Act of 1727 that especially catches the attention is the one that specifies the militia pay-scale in pounds of tobacco according to rank. The poor whites when on patrol duty were to receive pay according to that scale.

And paid for what? — to crush plots and rebellions such as their own grandfathers may have taken part in along with black bond-servants fifty years before.

X

But their own position, vis-a-vis the rich and powerful — the matter that lay at the root of that old civil strife — was not improved, but weakened, by the white-skin privilege system. That system, after all, was conceived and instituted as an alternative method to that of Grantham and Berkeley, but with precisely the same aims and same effect. On that we have the most unimpeachable testimony.

In 1831, less than a hundred miles from the spot where the "four hundred English and Negroes in Armes" had wanted to shoot Berkeley's mendacious Captain, or cut him in pieces, there occurred that brief proletarian uprising known as Nat Turner's Rebellion. That event sent a premonitory shudder through the frame of the United States ruling plantation bourgeoisie. It brought to the surface thoughts and dreads not ordinarily spoken. All that winter and spring of 1831-32 the Virginia Legislature and the press debated the meaning and possible consequences of this battle cry of labor enslaved. They were looking to their defenses, and they talked much of the poor whites.

T. J. Randolph, nephew and namesake of the author of the Declaration of Independence, put the rhetorical question to his fellow legislators: "... upon whom is to fall the burden of this defense (against slave-proletarian revolts): not upon the lordly masters of their hundred slaves, who will never turn out except to retire with their families when danger threatens. No sir, it is to fall... chiefly upon the non-slaveholders... patrolling under a compulsory process, for a pittance of seventy-five cents per twelve hours..."

George W. Summers of Kanawha County made many in the House of Delegates wince. "In the character of Patroles," he said, the poor white "...is thus made to fold to his bosom, the adder that stings him." Summers, of course, was as opposed as all the rest of the members to freeing the poor white of "the adder" by establishing equality of black and white labor in Virginia.

"Civis", an Eastern Virginia slaveholder, pointed out that in his part of the state more than half the white minority had "little but their complexion to console them for being born into a higher caste."

Another slaveholder, who signed himself with the prophetic name "Appomattox", spoke of the status of the white workers in terms surely even wiser than he knew: "... forced to wander vagabonds around the confines of society, finding no class which they can enter, because for the one they should have entered, there is substituted an ARTIFICIAL SYSTEM of labor to which they cannot attach themselves." (10)

Profoundly true! The artificial, i.e., unequal, system of labor prevented them from "entering" their own class by "attaching themselves" to the proletarian class struggle.

In these Virginia debates we hear published to the world the social degradation that a century and a half of white supremacy had brought to the poor whites, who had forgotten those blood-vows sworn by the triumphant light of the Jamestown fire, and in the gloaming waiting for Grantham.

FOOTNOTES

For publication here footnote references have been condensed and greatly reduced. A standard reference used in this essay is the CAL-ENDAR OF STATE PAPERS, COLONIAL, published by the British Public Record Office. The source for the laws of Virginia frequently cited in the text is W. W. Hening, STATUTES-AT-LARGE OF VIRGINIA (11 Vols.; Richmond, 1799-1814). A complete set of references can be obtained by writing to RADICAL AMERICA.)

1. Edmund S. Morgan and T. H. Breen have recently made notable contributions to an integral theory of early colonial history by suggesting a connection between the social turbulence in Virginia between 1660 and 1692, including Bacon's Rebellion, and the establishment of racial slavery. (See Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox", JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY, June, 1972; and Breen, "A Changing Labor Force and Race Relations in Virginia, 1660-1710", JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY, Fall, 1973). It seems to me, however, that their efforts fail fundamentally to establish that connection, and their well-begun arguments trail off into unhelpful, indeed misleading, speculations. This essay is an attempt, by a re-sifting of familiar materials in a different light, to discover that crucial link.

2. The "slavery-as-capitalism" school of American historians in-

cludes W.E. B. DuBois, Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Lewis C. Gray, Roger W. Shugg, Carl N. Degler, and Winthrop D. Jordan. Eric Williams and C. L. R. James view Caribbean slavery in the same light. Karl Marx invariably referred to the American plantation economy as capitalist enterprise. If one accepts this view, there is no reason for denying that the slaveholders were capitalists —a plantation bourgeoisie —and the slaves were proletarians. Of course, that form of labor was a contradiction of the basic requisites of general capitalist development — a contradiction that was purged away in the American Civil War. The fact remains that for a time that form of labor was not a barrier to rapid capitalist accumulation, but its main engine. Finally — academic considerations aside —the question of who is or who is not a proletarian has absolutely no significance except in relation to the class struggle conducted by propertyless laborers against their capitalist exploiters. Such laborers constituted the majority of the rebels in the Civil War phase of Bacon's Rebellion, and of the entire population of the plantation colonies.

3. Important published accounts of Bacon's Rebellion are to be found in Wilcomb E. Washburn, THE GOVERNOR AND THE REBEL (Chapel Hill, 1957), and Charles M. Andrews, ed., NARRATIVES OF THE INSURRECTIONS, 1675-1690 (New York, 1915). Unpublished sources include Captain Grantham's "Account", in the Bath Mss., Vol. LXXVH, folios 301-302; and the George N. Chalmers Collection, "Letters Relating to Virginia", I, folio 49, in the New York Public Library.

4. Winthrop D. Jordan, in his WHITE OVER BLACK (Chapel Hill, 1968), suggests this same question and makes the unsupported assertion that the plantation owners could have enslaved non-English Europeans if the owners had been able to conceive of such a monstrous transgression against white Christian fellowship. Since I am here occupied in presenting positive theses, I leave polemics aside. Just one note: "White-over-white" perpetual slavery was instituted in Britain, for Scottish coal miners and salt-pan workers, in 1606, a year before Jamestown was founded, and it was not completely ended until 1799. Only objective difficulties, not moral or racial principles, prevented a wider practice of the system and eventually were decisive in bringing about its discontinuance. See "Slavery in Modern Scotland", EDINBURGH REVIEW, Vol. 189 (1899), pp. 119-148.

5. The most important secondary sources on European bond-servants in Colonial America are A. E. Smith, COLONISTS IN BONDAGE: WHITE SERVITUDE AND CONVICT LABOR IN AMERICA, 1607-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1947); Richard B. Morris, GOVERNMENT AND LABOR IN EARLY AMERICA (New York, 1947); and Marcus W. Jernegan, LABORING AND DEPENDENT CLASSES IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1607-1783 (Chicago, 1931). The most useful specialized studies for this essay have been E. I. McCormac, WHITE SERVITUDE IN MARYLAND, 1634-1820 (Baltimore, 1895); and Warren B. Smith, WHITE SERVITUDE IN COLONIAL SOUTH CAROLINA (Columbia, 1961).

6. In the continental colonies, even in the good times, no more than one-third of the European bond-servants were able to complete their terms of service and establish themselves as independent farmers; and by the end of the seventeenth century, the proportion was only five or six per cent. (T. J. Wertenbaker, THE PLANTERS OF COLONIAL VIRGINIA (New York, 1959). But the situation of the freedmen in the insular colonies, Jamaica, Barbados, and others, was even worse. Bond servants completing their terms there left the islands by the thousands. Those who did not succeed in getting away began to constitute a destitute proletarian white sub-class. The special measures enacted, or at least considered, by the Anglo-Caribbean ruling class to provide some safety margin of racial privileges in this circumstance, anticipated similar measures in the continental plantation country. Among them were the exclusion of non-whites from work as skilled tradesmen, and the extension of the franchise in order that these destitute whites might then be able to sell their votes to the bourgeois candidates at election time.

7. Which came first, racism or slavery? In the post-World War II era of national-liberation upsurge, a related controversy has occupied much attention of American historians. One side, the "psycho-cultural" side, holds that white supremacy is "natural", the result of an "unthinking decision"; that it derives from human attributes not subject to effective eliminative social action. The other side, the "social" side, believes that racism arises from socio-economic, rather than natural, conditions; that (at least by implication) it is susceptible of elimination by social action.

Evidence of early instances of enslavement of Afro-Americans is stressed by the "psycho-cultural" school as proof of the "natural antipathy" of white and black. On the other hand, as Jordan (foremost of the "psycho-cultural") puts it, "Late and gradual enslavement undercuts the possibility of natural and deep-seated antipathy toward Negroes... if whites and Negroes could share the same status of half freedom for forty years in the seventeenth century, why could they not share full freedom, in the twentieth." (Winthrop D. Jordan, "Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery", JOURNAL OF SOUTHERN HISTORY,

vol. 28 (1962), pp. 19-30, loc. cit., p. 20.

Of all the historians of the "social" school whose work I have read, only the black historian Lerone Bennett, Jr., in his article, "The Road Not Taken", *EBONY*, vol. 25 (1970), no. 10 (August), pp. 70-77, and in Chapter III of his new book *THE SHAPING OF AMERICA* (Chicago, 1975), succeeds in placing the argument on the three essential bearing-points from which it cannot be toppled. First, racial slavery and white supremacy in this country was a ruling-class response to a problem of labor solidarity. Second, a system of racial privileges for white workers was deliberately instituted in order to define and establish the "white race" as a social control formation. Third, the consequence was not only ruinous to the interests of the Afro-American workers, but was also "disastrous" (Bennett's word) for the white worker. Others (such as the Handlins, Morgan and Breen) state the first two points to some degree, but only Bennett combines all three.

Although I learned of Bennett's essay only a few weeks ago, the same three essentials have informed my own approach in a book I have for several years been engaged in writing (and of which this present article is a spin-off), on the origin of racial slavery, white supremacy and the system of racial privileges of white labor in this country.

The comparative study of the systems of social control in the various slave-labor plantation colonies in the Americas, combined with a study of Bacon's Rebellion, its origin and aftermath, can contribute much to the resolution of the question, in favor of "deliberate choice" and against "unthinking decision." In the continental plantation colonies (Virginia was the pattern-setter) the Anglo-American ruling class drew the color line between freedom and slavery on race lines; any trace of African ancestry carried the presumption of slavery. The same Anglo-American ruling class drew the freedom-slavery line differently in Jamaica and Barbados (as did other European ruling classes elsewhere in the Americas). The poor white became not only economically, but politically and socially, marginal in the British West Indies generally. In the southern continental colonies the bourgeoisie came to base their system of social control upon the white proletariat and semi-proletarian and subsistence agricultural classes. In the southern plantation colonies the free person of any degree of African ancestry was forced into an illegal or semi-legal status, as a general rule. The same Anglo-American ruling bourgeoisie deliberately created and nurtured this group as a petit-bourgeois buffer-control stratum in the Caribbean island societies. These are all decisive differences which cannot be explained on the basis of "psychology" or "English cultural heritage."

Finally, and more important, while the Anglo-American bourgeoisie had, by their prior experience in Providence (Bahamas) and Barbados, learned the profitability of equating, or seeking to equate, "Negro" and "slave", the masses of European (at that stage almost all English) bond-servants in Virginia had not accepted that point of view. Instead, they intermarried, conspired, ran away, and finally revolted in arms together with African bond-servants. Racial slavery could not have existed, and did not exist, under those circumstances. Under such circumstances, to attempt to solve the "labor problem" by increasing the number of African bond-servants, reducing them to hereditary lifetime servitude, and making them the main productive labor base of the society would have been like trying to put out the Jamestown fire with kerosene.

8. In South Carolina, in the earliest years of the colony, Indians were enslaved more extensively than was ever the case in other colonies. But this practice was, on the whole, counter-productive for a number of reasons. The Proprietors were anxious lest the practice cost the colony the services of those Indians who were serving as returners of runaway Africans. The European indentured servants were enticed with promises of land (only exceptionally realized); but no such illusions were possible for the Indians, who could only lose what land they had under the European plan. The English were, furthermore, concerned not to increase the danger of Indian collaboration with the Spanish and French. I do not share the occasionally expressed opinion that relatively few continental Indians were enslaved because of a lack of adaptability to agriculture.

9. To contrast the status accorded European and African bond-servants is not to suggest that the life of the white bond-servant was anything other than hard and oppressive. A. E. Smith believes that "the vast majority of them worked out their time without suffering excessive .CO cruelty or want, £and) received their freedom dues without suing for them." Presumably he means the "majority" of those who survived their period of service. He concedes that "the system of white servitude was cruel" on account of the hard labor it imposed on persons "generally unfitted for such a life", and so much so 'that in the early colonial period "fifty or seventy-five out of every hundred white servants died without ever having a decent chance at survival." (op. cit., pp. 278, 303-4.)

Morris says that the shift to main reliance upon African laborers did not bring with it an improvement in the conditions of the European bond-servants. They continued to be "subject to the severest disciplin-

ary measures." He cites with approval Edis' well-known comment that "Generally speaking they [the European bond-servants] groan under a yoke worse than [Biblical] Egyptian bondage." Morris relates in some detail the record of more than a score of cases of brutal treatment, including murder by violent blows and deliberate starvation, rape, torture, and inducement of suicide, in which the masters, with rare exception, were only lightly punished, if at all. Morris decided not to add more examples because to do so "would be to give the screw many a turn and in the long run immunize the reader by harsh repetition." (op. cit., pp. 484, 486-497.)

10. Randolph's speech to the Virginia House of Delegates, January 21, 1832, was published as an abolitionist pamphlet, and is available at the NYPL. Summers' speech to the House of Delegates was given four days earlier, and was printed in the *RICHMOND ENQUIRER* on February 2, 1832. "Civis's" comments appeared in the newspaper on May 4, and those of "Appomattox" on March 3.

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