

BECOMING VIRGINIANS



Mann Page II (1749–1803) and his sister, Elizabeth Page, are depicted in this c. 1755 portrait by John Wollaston. The Page family were residents of Rosewell, in Gloucester County.



BECOMING VIRGINIANS

Virginia never became the intended replica of England. Instead, a distinctive, hybrid culture emerged in the colony out of English, African, Indian, and later German, Huguenot, and Scots-Irish influences. Over time the colonists gradually came to think of themselves as Virginians.

STANDARDS OF LEARNING

K.1, K.2, I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, I.7, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.7, 2.9, VS.1, VS.2, VS.3, VS.4, VS.6, VUS.1, VUS.3, GOVT.1, GOVT.2



KEY POINTS

- Virginia was an establishment colony in the 1600s. Initially, most people came to Virginia for economic advancement rather than for political and religious freedom.
- In 1619 the General Assembly was established, the first elected legislative body in America.
- For the most part, Virginia in the 1600s was an unfree society based on servitude for many whites and most blacks, and on the subordination of women.
- Virginia developed a code of slave laws that was adopted later by other British colonies.
- Slavery prevented Africans from recreating their different African lifestyles. A distinctive Afro-Virginian culture emerged that mixed African and English elements.
- The climate, abundant land, dispersed population, and especially the presence of Africans and slavery meant that Virginia never came close to replicating England.
- Thousands of Germans and Scots-Irish came to Virginia and contributed new ideas and cultural plurality to the colony.
- By the 1700s, a century of coping with changing conditions had separated the colonists from their English roots. A blending of various peoples and cultures had created a new society. These people began to think of themselves as Virginians.

THE GENTRY

Sir William Berkeley, royal governor of Virginia from 1642 to 1652 and 1660 to 1677, worked to create a class-based society, like the one that existed in England. At the time, white Virginia was composed of a few ruling gentry families, a small class of yeoman farmers, a larger group of white tenant farmers, and indentured servants. At the very bottom of the social ladder were enslaved Africans. In an attempt to maintain order, Governor Berkeley persecuted political and religious dissenters. Although the General Assembly was instituted on orders from London in 1619, only white males who owned land could vote or hold office.

Right: A portrait of Sir William Berkeley (1605–1677) by Sir Peter Lely (*Trustees of the Berkeley Will Trust*)



But I thank God, there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience, and heresy, and sects into the world, and libels against the best government. God keep us from both!
—Governor Sir William Berkeley, 1671

WILTON AND THE GENTRY OF THE 1700s



Gentry family dynasties were founded mostly between 1650 and 1680. Slave labor made possible the emergence of this class living a gracious lifestyle unimaginable to the first settlers of Jamestown. Virginia’s gentry exercised enormous control over the colony’s internal affairs, and they came to think of themselves as “Virginians,” a term first applied to the native peoples.

Above: The elegant Georgian mansion, Wilton, was once located on a large plantation on the James River. The house was built in 1750–53 by William Randolph II and occupied by five generations of the Randolph family. General Lafayette used Wilton as his headquarters during the American Revolution. An exact “doll house” model of Wilton has been carefully constructed and is in the Becoming Virginians gallery. Each room, with fine paneling and elegant furnishings, represents the wealth of some of Virginia’s large landowners.

THE COMMON PEOPLE

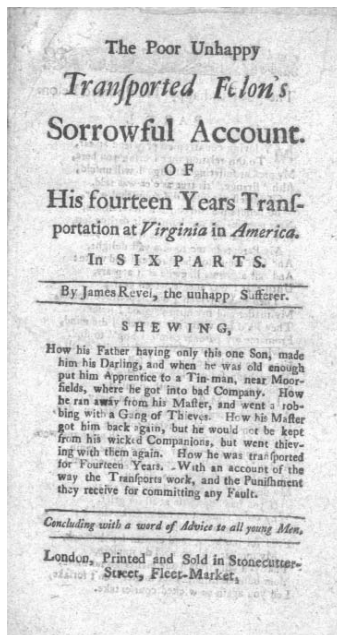
In 1618, Virginia adopted the headright system that gave fifty acres of land to anyone who brought settlers to Virginia. Because the unskilled and unemployed laborers of England had little money, they signed indentures, or contracts, to become servants for four to seven years in exchange for the cost of the passage to Virginia. (An example of this contract can be viewed in the exhibition.) The fifty acres of land went to the person who paid the passage, not to the immigrant. Besides those who became servants voluntarily: convicts, prostitutes, and prisoners of war were forcibly transported from England to Virginia.

In the 1600s, 75 percent of all English colonists in Virginia had been indentured servants at one time. Half of indentured servants died before their service was completed. One-quarter remained poor, and only one-quarter

eventually achieved a degree of prosperity as free men. The position of women was somewhat better. Because there were few females, wives were highly prized and husbands easily found. Women were central to the economy, not only producing food and clothing but also adding to the labor force by bearing and raising children. Women were seen as inferior to men, and their legal status reflected this. Ironically, women had more freedom in the primitive Virginia of the 1600s than in the more stable conditions of the next century.

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Life was brutish and short in early Virginia. The appalling death rate made colonists think largely of the present, not the future. From the beginning, however, Virginia was part of the transatlantic world economy. In exchange for tobacco, colonists could obtain goods from the British Isles, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, the West Indies, the Netherlands, and sometimes even Turkey or China.



Above: Cover of *The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account of His Fourteen Years Transportation at Virginia, in America . . .* (London, c. 1800)



In the Classroom

A Colonist's Diary

After viewing the model of Wilton House and the simple log cabin, students may create a journal written from the point of view of a poor farmer or farmer's wife or a member of a gentry family. Research the period in order to include details of their daily chores, struggles, and pleasures. Diaries and journals of the colonial period, such as the *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian*, may be used as primary sources.



In the Museum


Identifying Seventeenth-century Artifacts

Archaeologists from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources have unearthed objects from this early period. Can you find and identify these simple but basic utensils of everyday life in colonial Virginia?

SLAVES

As late as 1640, there were more Africans in New England than in Virginia. Only after the supply of European indentured servants declined in the late 1600s did tobacco planters turn increasingly to enslaved Africans. In the mid-1600s, before social and racial hierarchies hardened, a slave such as Anthony Johnson, the black patriarch of Pungoteague Creek on the Eastern Shore, could gain his freedom, acquire a farm, and own a slave. Soon Virginia began to pass laws that made hereditary slavery legally binding on Africans, mulattoes, and some Indians.


Virginia slaves came from every part of West and Central Africa. A few came from East Africa. They had to learn English to communicate with each other and with the immigrants from Europe. Most Africans adopted Christianity, but the influence of African religious practices helped shape the form and substance of their worship. Africans brought their traditional folkways to Virginia. Virginia and Maryland slaves originated the banjo tradition that later became a mainstay of American music.




RUN away from the subscriber in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto slave called *Sandy*, about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low, inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light; he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is insolent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is expected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoemakers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in *Albemarle*, shall have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere within the colony, and 20 l. if in any other colony, from
THOMAS JEFFERSON.

years of age, about 5 feet 7 inches high, who has on an osnabrug shirt and trowsers, and Negro cotton waistcoat with large metal buttons, and says he belongs to *George Berry*, of *Albemarle* county, who is desired to send for him, and pay charges.
 Tf **WILLIAM LANE.**


For SALE,
FIVE hundred acres of very valuable LAND, lying on *Shining creek*, in the county of *Brunswick*, within 45 miles of *Petersburg*. Six months credit will be allowed for one half the purchase money, and twelve months for the other half. Bond (to carry interest from the date, unless punctually discharged) with good security, will be required.
 Tf **W. STITH,**



TEN POUNDS REWARD.
RUN away from the subscriber's plantation, in *Loudoun* county, from *James Whaley*, overseer, on last *Easter Monday*, **TOM**, a Negro man slave, by some called *Tom Salter*, of a middle size, well made for strength, about 38 years old, has bad teeth, and many small pimples about his beard; he can read, and play on the fiddle, and had a variety of clothes, but his common working dress was dyed brown cotton. He managed several years as an overseer for me, under *Capt. Robert Downman*, at a plantation of mine on *Moratico* creek, in *Richmond* county, where he always lived until lately. He is a dissembling artful fellow, and generally smiles when he speaks. I suspect he is lurking about a plantation belonging to *Charles Carter*, Esq; in *Hanover* county, at or near *South Wales*, where he has a wife named *Sebra*, and perhaps at times about his old haunts at *Moratico*. Whoever will deliver him to me, in *Prince William* county, shall have the above reward; or if they will secure him in any of his Majesty's gaols, so that I may get him again, 5 l. and if he is taken out of the colony, and brought home to me, 20 l. paid by
 Tf **HENRY LEE.**



To be SOLD,
TWO TRACTS of LAND, lately belonging to *Col. John Fry*, one of them about 1000 acres, on the branches of *Hardware* river, a branch of *James* river, in the county of *Albemarle*; the other about 1200 acres, on the branches of *Willis*'s river, in the county of *Buckingham*. The above tracts of land were taken up and surveyed in small parcels, but are now included in two patents. For terms apply to the subscribers, who have deeds for the same, and will dispose of them either according to the inclusive patents or in separate parcels, agreeable to the said surveys.
 Tf **HENRY FRY.**
JOHN SCOTT.
JOHN NICHOLAS.

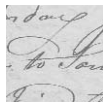


Left and above: Advertisements posted in a 1769 issue of the *Virginia Gazette*; below: a 1774 advertisement to sell a slave

To be SOLD,
TWO likely young *Virginia* born **NEGRO WOMEN** about seventeen Years of Age each; they are good Spinners, and understand most Sorts of Household Work, though of late they have been employed in Plantation Business, and are reputed very good Hands. A reasonable Credit will be given to a punctual Purchaser, on giving Bond with good Security.
ELIZABETH MARTIN.
KING WILLIAM, August 1, 1774.



The Old Plantation by an unknown artist (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)



Primary Source

A Selection of Virginia Slave Laws, 1662–1705

The status of the first Africans who arrived in Virginia varied according to many factors. It is believed that most were classed as indentured servants. According to Winthrop Jordan, however, by 1640, Africans and their descendants increasingly were seen as bound for life. In *White Over Black*, Jordan writes that “the legal enactment of Negro slavery followed the social practice, rather than vice versa.” Between 1662 and 1705, the Virginia House of Burgesses codified slavery. These laws served as a model of those passed in other colonies.

- 1662** Children born to Negro women were free or bonded according to the status of the mother.
- 1667** The baptism of slaves as Christians did not alter their status as slaves.
- 1669** A master who killed a disobedient slave could not be accused of a felony.
- 1670** Free Negroes and Indians were prohibited from buying Christian indentured servants.
- 1680** Slaves were prohibited from carrying weapons and leaving their home plantation without a pass.
- 1682** No master or overseer could permit another’s slave to remain on his plantation for longer than four hours without permission of that slave’s owner.
- 1691** Any white man or woman who married a Negro, mulatto, or Indian was banished from Virginia.
- 1705** All servants not Christians in their native countries (except Turks, Moors, and others who could prove they were free in England or another Christian country) and imported to Virginia were slaves. Slaves remained slaves even if they traveled to England.

THE WESTWARD MOVEMENT

In the 1600s, settlements stopped at the fall line of Virginia's rivers. In the 1700s, the frontier was pushed into the Piedmont region, across the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Shenandoah Valley, and farther west to the Appalachian Mountains. In the Piedmont, and beyond, ethnically and religiously diverse people settled and helped create an atmosphere of toleration that helped lay the foundations for the American Revolution.



Huguenots (French Protestants) settled above the falls of the James River at Manakintown. The German Lutherans and the Pietists; Scots-Irish Presbyterians from northern Ireland; and a smattering of Welsh, Dutch, Scots, Swiss, and Swedes settled in the Piedmont, Blue Ridge Mountains, Valley, and Allegheny Mountains.

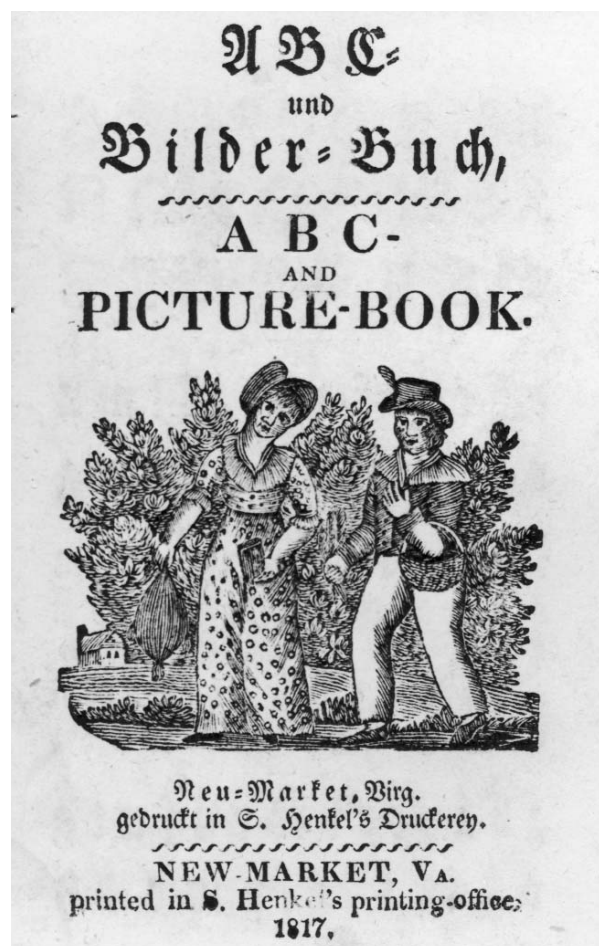
About 100,000 German-speaking Protestants came to British America between 1683 and 1775. They were fleeing war, conscription, ruinous taxes, and persecution. These immigrants included Lutherans, Pietists, Calvinists, Brethren, Amish, Mennonites, Schwenkfelders, and Moravians. Many of these came south and settled in the northern Shenandoah Valley, bringing with them a distinctive culture. By 1790, 28 percent of white Virginians were Germans. Generally these western settlers opposed

slavery and preferred that their churches, communities, and families be left alone by the government.

The Scots and Scots-Irish flocked to the southern part of the Valley and the mountains. They shared a heritage of living in disputed, unstable regions wracked by violence that bred warrior cultures. Their culture became dominant in the Appalachians from Pennsylvania to Georgia. These were independent people whose dialect is remembered in the speech of country and western singers and cinematic cowboys.

That part of Virginia on the other side of the great [Appalachian] Mountains may be Peopled, if proper Encouragements for that Purpose were given . . . [to] Germans and Swissers lately come into Pensilvania . . . by encouraging Foreigners to come Hither, we can cutt off all communications between [French controlled] Canada and Mississipp.

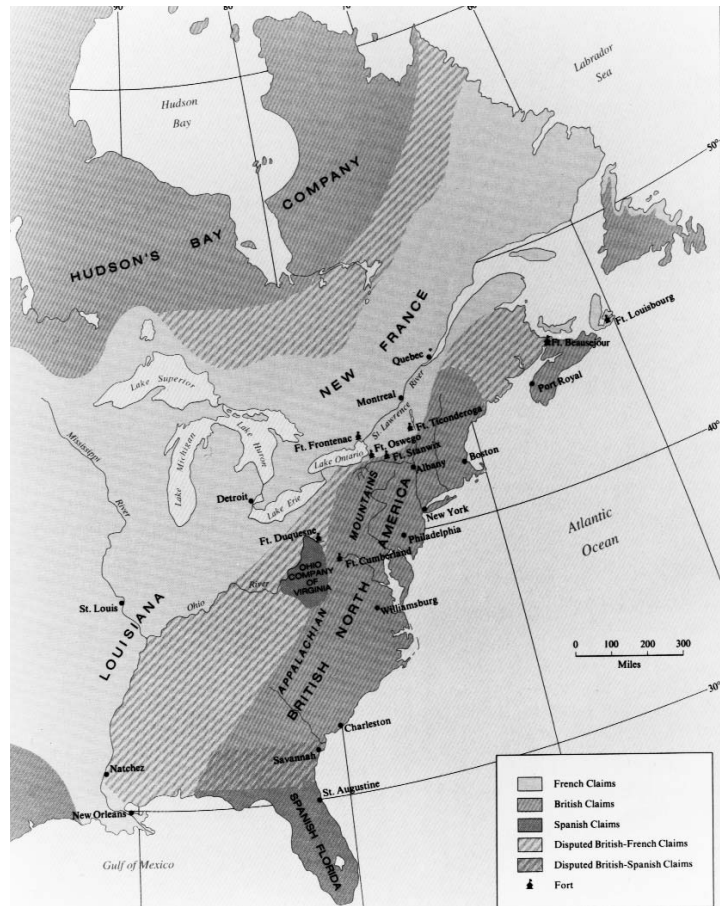
—Gov. William Gooch to the Board of Trade, 1734



Left: Title page from Henkel's *ABC and Picture-Book* (New Market, Va., 1817), a bilingual children's primer

THE WEST AS A BATTLEGROUND

In 1754, George Washington was sent to the forks of the Ohio River to demand that the French evacuate the Ohio Valley, which was claimed by both Great Britain and France. The resulting incident triggered the French and Indian War, which ended in the expulsion of the French from North America. The new British king, George III, tried to reserve the West beyond the Appalachians for the Indians, but the Virginians (whom the Indians called “Long Knives”) continued moving west. The Indians’ response to repeated white incursions led to Lord Dunmore’s War (named for Virginia’s royal governor). The defeat of the Indians at Point Pleasant in 1774 opened up western Virginia (now West Virginia) and Kentucky to further settlement.



Map of the French and Indian War



John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore (1732–1809), was Virginia's last royal governor. He became a hero among Virginians for walking on foot and carrying his own pack during the Indian war that bore his name. Less than two years later, however, these same Virginians would hate him above all others for promising freedom to slaves who would fight for the king against the Continental Congress.



George Washington (1732–1799) is shown here in the uniform of a Virginia colonel, by Charles Willson Peale. This is the earliest known portrait of Washington, and although it was not painted until 1772, in it he chose to wear his uniform from the French and Indian War. (Courtesy of Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia)



Activity

Examine the Differences: Virginia and Massachusetts

In the exhibition we say that “Virginia was an establishment colony in the 1600s. People came to Virginia for economic advancement rather than political and religious freedom.” In contrast, Massachusetts was settled by religious dissenters—people unhappy with the Church of England. Largely because of this difference, a number of generalizations can be made about the early English settlers in Virginia and those in Massachusetts. This page compares the earliest, largest period of English migration of each colony—Virginia from 1642 to 1675 and Massachusetts from 1629 to 1641. The information is based on David Hackett Fischer’s *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America*.

IN VIRGINIA:

- Settled for economic benefit.
- Men outnumbered women by four to one.
- 75 percent of settlers came as indentured servants. 75 percent of this number were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four.
- Most adults were illiterate. Although most members of the gentry could read and write, only 25 to 30 percent of indentured servants and fewer than 1 percent of all slaves could sign their names.
- Despite official efforts to establish towns, Virginians lived predominantly in the countryside.
- Largely because of the climate, the death rate was twice as great as the death rate in Massachusetts. Nearly half of all children died before reaching adulthood.
- Fifty percent of child names came from the Bible. Virginians preferred the names of medieval knights and kings for the boys—William, Robert, Richard, Edward, George, and Charles. For girls, they selected Christian saints and English folk names—Margaret, Sarah, Elizabeth, Jane, Catherine, Anne, Mary, and Frances.

IN MASSACHUSETTS:

- Settled for religious and political freedom.
- Men outnumbered women by three to two.
- Fewer than 25 percent of settlers came as indentured servants. 40 percent of all immigrants were over 25 years of age, and nearly half were children under the age of sixteen.
- Two-thirds of all adults could sign their names.
- Residents lived close together in towns.
- Death rate was lower.
- Ninety percent of child names came from the Bible. More than half the girls were named Elizabeth, Sarah, or Mary. John, Joseph, Samuel, and Josiah were popular for boys.



Critical Thinking

Can you detect regional American accents, customs, or foods today? How did the environment influence economic differences between Virginia, the Middle Colonies, and New England?