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The Invention of the White Race

Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America

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The Labor Supply Problem: England a Special Case

In 1497, within half a decade of Columbus's first return to Spain from America, the Anglo-Italian Giovanni Caboto, or John Cabot as he was known in his adopted country, made a discovery of North America, and claimed it for King Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch of England. The English westering impulse, after then lying dormant for half a century, gradually revived in a variety of projects, schemes and false starts. By the first decade of the seventeenth century, an interval of peace with Spain having arrived with the accession of James I to the throne, English colonization was an idea whose time had come.1 In 1607 the first permanent English settlement in America was founded at Jamestown, Virginia. By the end of the first third of the century four more permanent Anglo-American colonies had been established: Somers Islands (the Bermudas), 1612; Plymouth (Massachusetts), 1620; Barbados, 1627; and Maryland, 1634.2 The English were confronted with the common twofold problem crucial to success in the Americas: (1) how to secure an adequate supply of labor; and (2) how to establish and maintain the degree of social control necessary to assure the rapid and continuous expansion of their capital by the exploitation of that labor. In each of these respects, however, the English case differed from those of other European colonizing powers in the Americas, in ways that have a decisive bearing on the origin of the “peculiar institution” – white racial oppression, most particularly racial slavery – in continental Anglo-America.

European Continental Powers and the Colonial Labor Supply

The continental European colonizing powers, for economic, military and political reasons, and in some cases because of access to external sources, did not employ Europeans as basic plantation laborers.

Spain and Portugal

The accession in 1516 of Francis I of France and in 1517 of Charles I of Spain, and the installation of the latter as Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman
Empire, in 1519, set off a round of warring that would involve almost every country in Europe, from Sweden to Portugal, from the Low Countries to Hungary, for a century and a quarter. The Spanish-headed Holy Roman Empire was at the same time heavily engaged in war with the Ottoman Turks until the defeat of the latter in the Mediterranean naval battle of Lepanto in 1571. Portugal, with a population of fewer than 1.4 million, was involved in protecting its world-circling empire against opposition from both Christian and Moslem rivals. France was Spain’s main adversary in the struggle over Italy, the Netherlands and smaller European principalities.

These wars imposed great manpower demands on every one of the continental governments seeking to establish colonial ventures. Belligerents who could afford them sought to hire soldiers from other countries. The bulk of Spain’s armies, for example, were made up of foreign mercenaries. Portugal, however, lacking Spain’s access to American silver and gold to maintain armies of foreign mercenaries, had to rely on its own resources. So critical was the resulting manpower situation in 1648 that the temporary surrender of Brazil to Protestant Holland as the best way out of the sea of troubles besetting the Portuguese interest in Africa, Asia, America, and, indeed, vis-à-vis Portugal’s Iberian neighbor. Portugal was so depleted of men for defense, he said, that “every alarm” took “laborers from the plough.” Even if, despite this circumstance, a ploughman did manage to get to Brazil, he was not to be expected to do any manual labor there: “the Portuguese who emigrated to Brazil, even if they were peasants from the tail of the plough, had no intention of doing any manual work.”

Bartolomé de Las Casas, concerned with the genocidal exploitation of the native population by the Christian colonizers in the West Indies, suggested that “If necessary, white and black slaves be brought from Castile [Spain] to keep herds, build sugar mills, wash gold” and otherwise be of service to the colonists. In 1518, Las Casas briefly secured favorable consideration from King Carlos for a detailed proposal designed to recruit “quiet peasants” in Spain for emigration to the West Indies. The emigrants were to be transported free of charge from their Spanish homes to the colonies. Once there, they were to be “provided with land, animals, and farming tools, and also granted a year’s supply of food from the royal granaries.” But, again, these emigrant peasants were not expected to do much labor. Rather they were to be provided with slaves from Spain. It was specified that any emigrant who offered to build a sugar mill in the Indies was to be licensed to take twenty Negro slaves with him. With his assistants, Las Casas toured Spain on behalf of the plan and received a favorable response from the peasants he wanted to recruit for the project. But as a result mainly of the opposition of great landowners who feared the loss of their tenants in such a venture, the plan was quickly defeated. Thus was defined official emigration policy; it assured that Spaniards going to the American colonies were not to be laborers, but such as lawyers and clerks, and men (women emigrants were extremely few) of the nobility or knighthood, who were “forbidden by force of custom even to think of industry or commerce.” A few Spanish and Portuguese convicts, presumably of satisfactory Christian ancestry, were transported to the colonies early on, but they were not intended and themselves did not intend to serve in the basic colonial labor force.

The single instance in which basic plantation labor needs were supplied from the Iberian population occurred in 1493. In that year, two thousand Jewish children, eight years old and younger, were taken from their parents, baptized as Christians, and shipped to the newly founded Portuguese island sugar colony of São Tomé, where fewer than one-third were to be counted thirteen years later.

In Spain, seven years of plague and famine from 1596 to 1602, followed by the expulsion of 275,000 Christianized Moors in a six-year period beginning in 1602, reduced the population by 600,000 or 700,000, one-tenth of all the inhabitants. Thus began a course of absolute population decline that lasted throughout the seventeenth century. As it had been with the Jews before, the expelled moriscos were officially ineligible for emigration to the Americas, since emigrés were required to prove several generations of Catholic ancestry.

Holland

For the better part of a century up to the 1660s, Holland, in the process of winning her independence from Spain in the Eighty Years’ War (1568–1648), was the leading commercial and trading country of Europe. Holland’s 10,000 ships exceeded the total number held by the rest of northern Europe combined. On this basis the new Dutch Republic developed a thriving and expanding internal economy. Large areas were diked and drained to increase the amount of cultivable land. Up until 1622, Dutch cities grew, some at a phenomenal rate; in that year, half of Holland’s population lived in cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants. The population of Amsterdam alone had grown to 105,000, three and a half times its size in 1585. These cities were expanding not from an influx of displaced Dutch peasants, but because urban needs were growing faster than those of rural areas, and because Holland’s “obvious prosperity . . . acted as a lodestar to the unemployed and the under-employed of neighboring countries.”

Although the casual laborer in Holland was frequently out of work, unemployment . . . was never sufficiently severe to induce industrial and agricultural workers to emigrate on an adequate scale to the overseas possessions of the Dutch East and West India Companies.” Those who did decide to emigrate to find work “preferred to seek their fortune in countries nearer home.” Plans for enlisting Dutch peasant families for colonizing purposes came to little, outside of the small settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, which in the seventeenth century was mainly a way station for ships passing to and from the Dutch East Indies. As far as the East Indies were
concerned, it was never contemplated "that the European peasant should cultivate the soil himself." Rather, he would supervise the labor of others. 25

France

In seventeenth-century France the great majority of the peasants were holders of small plots largely large enough to provide the minimum essentials for survival. The almost interminable religious wars that culminated in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) had ravaged much of the country, and epidemic disease had greatly reduced the population. 26 But while French poor peasants groaned under the burden of feudal exactions, they were still bound by feudal ties to the land; 27 they had not been "surplus"ed by sheep, as many peasants had been in Spain and England.

The first successful French colonization efforts were undertaken on the Bay of Fundy (1604) and at Quebec (1608). The laborers for the colony's upbuilding and development were to be wage workers, transported at the expense of the French government or other sponsoring entity, and employed under three to five year contracts. But New France was not destined to become a plantation colony, indeed not even a primarily agricultural colony. 28 A century after these first Canadian settlements were established, their population was only ten thousand, including a few persons representing a soon abandoned notion of supplying the labor needs of Canadian colonies from African sources. 29 Some time before the end of the seventeenth century, the French government turned to the idea of Christianizing and Gallicizing the Indians as a means of peopling New France and developing a labor force for it; that plan also failed, however, because the Indians did not perceive sufficient advantage in such a change in their way of living, 30 and they had the resources and abilities to be able to fend off French pressure on the tribal order. Indeed, until the establishment of the Louisiana colony early in the eighteenth century, the entire question of supplying labor for French agricultural undertakings became irrelevant for North America.

French participation in the development of plantation colonies was to occur in the West Indies and, as mentioned, in Louisiana. Having begun with Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1635, and in 1697 the French capped a series of Caribbean acquisitions by taking control from Spain of the previously French-invested western half of Hispaniola under the terms of the Treaty of Ryswick. 31 In the beginning, wage laborers called engagés, hired under three-year contracts at rates four or five times those prevailing in France, were shipped to serve the labor needs of these colonies. 32 The supply of labor in this form seems to have reached its peak, however, well before 1697. Although the total number of engagés is not known, some 5,200 were shipped from La Rochelle, the chief embarkation point, in the period 1660-1710, a rate of around one hundred per year. 33 This was numerically minuscule compared to the total number of imported laborers, which was running at a rate of 25,000 to 30,000 per year in the latter half of this period.

The reasons for the relegation of engagé labor to economic insignificance were both economic and political.34 The mortality rate among plantation laborers on St Domingue, whatever their nativity, was such that most did not survive three years. 35 However, the obligation to pay relatively high wages to the engagés, be their numbers large or small, coupled with the fact that the French colonies had ready access to African labor supplies, first through the Dutch and later from French businessmen, made engagé labor relatively less profitable, provided that the costs of social control of the laboring population drawn from African sources could be kept satisfactorily low. 36 Moreover, the need to recruit large French armies for the wars first with Spain and then with England, and the drain on revenues entailed in their support, rendered politically inappropriate the export of engagés to the French West Indies. Louis XIV finally forbade even the forcible transportation of indigenous persons to the American colonies. His chief minister from 1661 to 1683, Jean Baptiste Colbert, declared that he had no intention of depopulating France in order to populate the colonies.37

Other sources of labor

The Spanish and the Portuguese first looked to the native populations to solve their colonial labor problem. The Spanish did so with such spirit that, in the course of a century and a half from 1503 to 1660, they tripled Europe's silver resources and added one-fifth to Europe's supply of gold. 38 In the process, the fire-armed and steel-bladed Conquistadors almost completely destroyed the indigenous population by introducing exotic diseases, and by the merciless imposition of forced labor in gold mining and in the fields. The native population of Hispaniola was thus reduced from 1 million in 1492 to around twenty-six thousand in 1514, and to virtual extinction by the end of the sixteenth century. 39 The same genocidal labor regime in mines and fields simultaneously destroyed the native population of Cuba at a comparable rate. 40

Epidemic European diseases—smallpox, measles, and typhus—and forced labor under a system of encomienda and repartimiento 35 reduced the population of central Mexico from 13.9 million in 1492 to 1.1 million in 1605.42 The impact of disease and of the mita, 43 the equivalent of the Mexican repartimiento, was equally devastating to the Indian population of Peru, which was reduced from 9 million to 670,000 in 1620.44

In Brazil, the Portuguese (and the Dutch as well, during the life of the New Holland colony, 1630-54) also sought to recruit their labor force from the native population. However, they found that, while the people were prepared to work intermittently for such tools and trinkets as they fancied, they were unwilling to work for them as long-term agricultural laborers, or as bond-servants. 45 In the test of wills that lasted until late in the seventeenth century, the indigenous population was largely successful in avoiding reduction to slavery.46

Thus for two opposite reasons—the accessibility of a native labor force that
eventually led to its destruction, and the inaccessibility due to resistance by the native population enconced in dense continental forests – the Iberians turned to Africa as a source of labor for colonial America. This was a labor reserve with which they, as part of medieval Europe and as colonizers of Atlantic islands, were already somewhat familiar. Medieval Europe secured its slaves by trade with southern Russia, Turkey, the Levant and the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea (the ethnic name Slav is the root of the various Western European variations of the word "slave"), as well as by purchasing Negroes supplied by North African Arab merchants. Spain enslaved Moslem "Moors" in border regions during the "reconquista" wars against the Arab regime on the Iberian peninsula. In the middle of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese established direct access to African labor sources by successfully executing a maritime end run around the North African Arabs. By the end of that century Portuguese enterprise, with papal blessing, had supplied twenty-five thousand Africans as unpaid laborers to Europe, plus one thousand to São Tomé, and seven and a half thousand to islands in the Atlantic. In the sixteenth century the African proportion of the slave population increased in Portugal and Spain. In Lisbon, a city of 100,000 people in 1551, there were 9,950 slaves, most of them Africans. In Seville (1565), Cadiz (1616), and Madrid (up to about 1660), the slave population included Turks and Moors, but the largest number were Africans. During the very early days of American colonization, a number of American Indians were shipped to be sold at a profit in Spain.

In 1518, King Charles I of Spain, acting with papal sanction, authorized the supply to Spanish America of four thousand Africans as bond-laborers, for which project he awarded the contract to a favorite of his. This was the origin of the infamous Asiento de negros (or simply Asiento, as it came generally to be called), a license giving the holder the exclusive right to supply African laborers to Spanish colonies in the Americas (and to Portuguese Brazil as well during the sixty years, 1580–1640, when Portugal was united with Spain in a single kingdom). At various times it was directly awarded by the Spanish crown to individuals or to governments by state treaty. The Asiento was the object of fierce competition among European powers, especially in the last half of the sixteenth century. Allowing for brief periods of suspension, it was held successively by Portugal, Holland, and France, and passed finally to Britain as a part of the spoils of the War of Spanish Succession (1702–14). The Asiento was finally ransomed from Britain for £100,000 in 1757.

Scholars' estimates of the total number of Africans shipped for bond-labor in the Americas under the Asiento and otherwise range from 11 to 15 million. Of the 2,966,000 who disembarked in Anglo-America, 2,443,000 went to the British West Indies and 523,000 to continental Anglo-America (including the United States). Two other aspects of the matter seem to have been slighted in previous scholarship: first, the significance of this movement of labor in the "peopling" of the Americas; and, second, the implications to be found in the story of this massive transplantation of laborers for the history of class struggle and social control in general in the Americas.

I am not qualified to treat these subjects in any comprehensive way, but I venture to comment briefly, prompted by an observation made by James A. Rawley, whose work I have cited a number of times:

The Atlantic slave trade was a great migration long ignored by historians. Euro-centered, historians have lavished attention upon the transplanting of Europeans. Every European ethnic group has had an abundance of historians investigating its roots and manner of migration. The transplanting of Africans is another matter...[that] belongs to the future.

As to the first of the questions – the African migration and the "peopling" of the Americas – it is to be hoped that among subjects that belong to the future historiography invoked by Rawley, emphasis may be given to the degree to which the migration (forced though it was) of 10 or 11 million Africans shaped the demographics of the Americas as a whole. It is certain that more Africans came to the Americas between 1500 and 1800. It would seem that such a demographic assessment might add strength to arguments that place the African-American and the "Indian" in the center of the economic-history of the hemisphere, and in so doing sustain and promote the cause of the dignity of labor in general. Such a demographic assessment might be of service in responding to the cry for justice for the Indians from Chiapas (from Las Casas to Subcommandante Marcos), or to an African-American demand for reparations for unpaid bond-servitude; or in assessing the claim of the "Unknown Proletarian," in a possibly wider sense than even he intended:

We have fed you all for a thousand years –
For that was our doom you know,
From the days when you chained us in your fields
To the strike of a week ago
You have taken our lives, and our babies and wives,
And we're told it's your legal share;
But if blood be the price of your lawful wealth,
Good God! We have bought it fair.8

Second, with regard to the class struggle and social control in general in the Americas, attention will need to be given to the resistance and rebellion practiced by the African bond-laborers and their descendants, from the moment of embarkation from the shores of Africa to the years of maroon defiance in the mountains and forests of America, from the quarry's first start of alarm to the merger of the emancipation struggle with movements for national independence and democracy four hundred years later.

Historically, most significant of all was the Haitian Revolution – an abolition and a national liberation rolled into one; it was the destruction of French rule in Haiti that convinced Emperor Napoleon to see and cede the Louisiana territory (encompassing roughly all the territory between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains) to the United States, without which there would have been no United States west of the Mississippi. By defeating Napoleon's plan to keep St Domingue in sugar plantation slavery, the Haitian Revolution
ushered in an era of emancipation that in eighty-five years broke forever the chains of chattel bondage in the Western Hemisphere – from the British West Indies (1833-48), to the United States (1865), to Cuba (1868–78), to Brazil (1871–78). It was in Haiti that the Great Liberator, Simón Bolívar, twice found refuge and assistance when he had been driven from Venezuela. Pledging to the Haitian president, Pétion, that he would fight to abolish slavery, Bolívar sailed from Haiti at the end of 1816 to break the colonial rule of Spain in Latin America.57

England and the Colonial Labor Supply

English colonialists were to share the motives and aspirations felt by their counterparts looking westward from the European continent: the search for uncontested access to the fabled treasures of the East; the hope of finding rich gold and silver mines; an eagerness to find alternate sources of more mundane products such as hides, timber, fish and salt; and the furtherance of strategic interests vis-à-vis rival military and commercial powers in the development of this new field of activity.60 Much would be said and proposed also in the name of the defense of one Christian faith (of the Protestant variety) by the gravitational field of capital accumulation.61 In regard to the problem of a colonial labor supply, however, the situation of the English bourgeoisie was unique; this was as a result of developments making industry into its historic role as the transformer of life and the colonies a playground for this new form of activity.62 Principal among these circumstances were: (1) the emergence of a strong monarchy; (2) England’s relative isolation, compared to the countries of continental Europe;63 (3) improved means of navigation, especially benefiting the coastal shipping so well suited to the needs of an island nation; (4) improved and extended use of water power for cloth-filling mills, and for other industrial purposes; and (5) the rural setting of the cloth industry, outside the range of the regulations of the urban-centred guilds.

The price of wool rose faster than the price of grain, and the rent on pasture rose to several times the rent on crop land.65 The owners increased the proportion of pasture at the expense of arable land. One shepherd and flock occupied as much land as a dozen or score of peasants could cultivate with the plough. Ploughmen were therefore replaced by sheep and hired shepherds; peasants were deprived of their copyhold and common-land rights, while laborers on the lords’ demesne lands found their services in reduced demand. Rack-rents and impoverishing leasehold entry fees were imposed with increasing severity on laboring peasants competing with sheep for land. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, somewhere between one sixth and one third of all the land in England belonged to abbeys, monasteries, nunneries and other church enterprises. In the process of the dissolution of the monasteries, most of the estimated 44,000 religious and lay persons attached to these institutions were cast adrift among the growing unemployed, homeless population.67 As these lands were expropriated, under Henry VIII the process of conversion to pasture was promoted more vigorously than it had been by their former owners.68 Henry VIII’s return of 48,000 English soldiers in 1546 from a two-year turn in Boulogne tended further to the creation of a surplus proletariat.69 The effect was only partially offset by the participation of regular and volunteer English soldiers in the Dutch war for the independence of Holland from Spain later in the century, and by the Tyrone War in Ireland.70 Generally speaking, the sixteenth century was relatively free of war and plague.71 The population of England is estimated to have grown by 1.3 million in the last six decades of the sixteenth century, to 4.1 million, but by only another 0.9 million in the entire seventeenth century.72 Occurring at a time when employment in cultivation was being reduced more rapidly than it was being increased in sheep raising and industry, this demographic factor added substantially to the swelling surplus of the semi-proletarian and vagrant population.73 During the early decades of the seventeenth century, the oppressive effects of this catastrophic general tendency to increasing unemployment and vagrancy were exacerbated by purely political and cyclical factors, and by market disruptions occasioned by continental wars. In 1614–17, James I – enticed by Alderman Cockayne’s scheme whereby the Crown coffers were to be enriched by five shillings on each of 36,000 pieces of finished and dyed cloth to be exported annually – imposed extremely strict limitations on the export of unfinished cloth.74 The effect was a serious dislocation of trade, and mass unemployment in the cloth industry. English cloth exports fell until in 1620 they were only half the pre-1614 level.75

The man who had been serving for some time as treasurer and chief officer of the Virginia Company, Edwin Sandys, urged the colony’s cause by pointing out that in Britain, “Looms are laid down. Every loom maintains forty persons. The farmer is not able to pay his rent. The fairs and markets stand still . . .” Recovery was slow. In 1624, an investigating committee of the House of Commons reported that there were still twelve thousand unemployed cloth workers.76 A modern scholar has concluded that the next decade did not mark much improvement, noting that the proportion of the people receiving poor relief was greater in the period than at any other time before or since.77 East Anglia, the native region of most of the emigrants to Anglo-America in those years, was at that time especially hard hit by a depression in the cloth trade.78

The English case for colonization came thus to be distinguished from those of Spain, Portugal, France, and Holland in its advocacy of colonization as a means of “venting” the nation’s surplus of “necessitous people” into New World plantations.79 Francis Bacon (1561–1626) favored colonization as a way to “disburthen the land of such inhabitants as may well be spared.” Just who
those were who could be spared had been identified some time before by the premier advocate of overseas exploration and settlement, Richard Hakluyt (1552?-1616): it was the surplus proletarians who should be sent. Contrasting England with the continental countries interminably devouring their manpower in wars and their train of disease and pestilence, Hakluyt pointed out that “[t]hrough our long peace and seldom sickness we are grown more populous . . . (and) there are of every arte and science so many, that they can hardly lyve by one another.” Richard Johnson, in his promotional pamphlet Nova Britannia, noted that England abounded “with swarmes of idle persons . . . having no meanes of labour to relieue their misery.” He went on to prescribe that there be provided “some waies for their forreine employment” as English colonists in America. Commenting on the peasant uprising in the English Midlands in 1607, the House of Lords expressed the belief that unless war or colonization “vent” the daily increase of the population, “there must break out yearly tumours and impostures as did of late.”

The English Variation and the “Peculiar Institution”

The conjunction of the matured colonizing impulse, the momentarily favorable geopolitical constellation of powers, the English surplus of unemployed and underemployed labor, coupled with the particular native demographic and social factors as the English found them in Virginia, and the lack of direct English access to African labor sources, produced that most portentous and distinctive factor of English colonialism: of all the European colonizing powers in the Americas, only England used European workers as basic plantation workers. This truly “unthinking decision,” or, more properly, historical accident, was of incidental importance in the ultimate deliberate Anglo-American ruling class option for racial oppression. Except for this peculiarity, racial slavery as it was finally and fully established in continental America, with all of its tragic historical consequences, would never have been brought into being.

Essential as this variation in the English plantation labor supply proved to be for the emergence of the Anglo-American system of racial slavery, however, it was not the cause of racial oppression in Anglo-America. The peculiarity of the “peculiar institution” did not derive from the fact that the labor needs of Anglo-American plantation colonies came to the colonies in the chattel-labor form. Nor did it inhere in the fact that the supply of lifetime, hereditary bond-laborers was made up of non-Europeans exclusively. These were common characteristics throughout the plantation Americas.

The peculiarity of the “peculiar institution” derived, rather, from the control aspect; yet not merely in its reliance upon the support of the free non-owners of bond-labor, as buffer and enforcer against the unfree proletariat; for that again was a general characteristic of plantation societies in America.

The peculiarity of the system of social control which came to be established
English Background, with Anglo-American Variations Noted

The same economic, social, and technological developments in sixteenth-century England that supplied the material means for the final overthrow of Celtic Ireland in the Tyrone War (1594–1603) provided the impetus that launched England on its career as a world colonial power. The capitalist overthrow of the English peasantry in the first half of the sixteenth century was the forerunner of the destruction of the Celtic tribal system in the seventeenth. The expropriated and uprooted sixteenth-century English copyholders had their counterparts in the “kin-wrecked” remnants of broken Irish tribes reduced to tenantry-at-will and made aliens in their own country. But while the adventitious factor of the English Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was a decisive condition for the seventeenth-century English option for racial oppression in Ireland, it was not the force that shaped the events that culminated in the establishment of racial oppression in continental Anglo-America.

Rather, the system of class relations and social control that emerged in the colonies in the seventeenth century rested on the rejection in fundamental respects of the pattern established in England in the sixteenth century. With few exceptions, historians of the origin of racial slavery have generally ignored, or inferentially denied, the significance of this oceanic disjunction in social patterns. The “social control” approach which the present work takes to the origin and nature of “the peculiar institution” makes it necessary to revisit the epoch of English history that produced the founders of Jamestown.

On the Matter of “Transitions”

Many economic historians, taking the long view, have agreed with Adam Smith that the transition to capitalist agriculture in England in the sixteenth century was “a revolution of the greatest importance to public happiness.”19 At the threshold of the sixteenth century, however, the English copyholder, plowing the same land that his grandfather had plowed with the same plow, had little feeling for “transitions.” If it had been given to him to speak in such terms, he might well have made his case on historical grounds. It was the laboring people – the copyholders, freeholders, serfs, artisans and wage earners – and not the bourgeoisie, who had swept away the feudal system. Out of the workings of the general fall in agricultural prices in the period between the third quarters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a result of which landlords preferred to get cash rents rather than rents in produce; out of the shortage of labor induced by the worst-ever onset of plague in England, which, within a space of sixteen months in 1349–50 carried off from one-fifth to one-half of the population; out of the constant round of bloody and treacherous baronial wars for state hegemony (ended only with the Wars of the Roses, 1450–85), and the desultory Hundred Years’ War with France, 1336–1453; and, above all, out of the Peasant Revolt of 1381, Wat Tyler’s Rebellion, which drew a line in the ancient soil beyond which feudal claims would never be reasserted – thus had been wrought the end of the feudal order in England. And so occurred the English peasant’s Golden Age, wherein the self-employed laboring peasant, as freeholder, leaseholder, or copyholder, held ascendancy in English agriculture.

Our copyholder might then go on to say that now the bourgeoisie,burgesses, landlords, merchants and such were apparently attempting to destroy the peasantry; and if that was what was meant by transition to capitalism, the price was too high. And he would conclude with a reminder and a warning: he – his kith and kin – had fought once, and would fight again, to maintain their place on the land and in it.10

Fight they did. Between 1500 and 1650, “hardly a generation ... elapsed without a peasant uprising.” In local fence-destroying escapades, in large riots, and in rebellions of armed forces of thousands which “at intervals between 1530 and 1560 set half the counties of England in a blaze,”11 the English “commons” fought. In some cases they were allies of the anti-Reformation, sensing the connection between the Reformation and the agrarian changes that threatened the majority of the peasantry. Even then, the peasants still forwarded their own demands regarding land ownership and use, enclosures, rack-rents, etc. Years that their revolts have made memorable include 1536, 1549, 1554, 1569 and 1607.

In these struggles the peasants made clear their sense of the great heart of the matter; in the words of Tawney:

Reduced to its elements their complaint is a very simple one, very ancient and very modern. It is that ... their property is being taken away from them ... [and] to them it seems that all the trouble arises because the rich have been stealing the property of the poor.12

For this they fought in the northern rebellion of 1536, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace.13 This revolt, set off by Henry VIII’s suppression of monasteries, confronted that king with the greatest crisis of his reign.14 Although ecclesiastical issues united the movement, “the first demands of the peasants were social and not religious”; for them it was a class struggle “of the poor against the
The peasants fought again in 1549, climaxing a three-year period of "the greatest popular outcry against enclosing."16 In that year, peasant revolts spread to more than half the counties of England. Led by Robert Ket, himself a landowner, a rebel army of sixteen thousand peasants captured Norwich, England's second-largest city. They set up their "court" on Mousehold Heath outside the city, where they maintained their cause for six weeks.17 They demanded that "lords, knights, esquires, and gentlemen" be stopped from commercial stock-raising, and rent-gouging, and from privatizing common lands. We can agree with Bindoff that this was "a radical programme, indeed, which would have clipped the wings of rural capitalism."18

The peasants fought also in 1607, the very year of the founding of Jamestown. These were the peasants of the Midland counties. Thousands, armed with bows and arrows, with pikes and bills, and with stones, sought justice by their own direct action. The later use of the term "Levellers," though more figurative, still was socially congruent with the literal sense in which these Midland rebels applied it to themselves as "Levellers" of fences and hedges set up by the landlords to bar peasants from their ancient rights of common land. To the royal demand that they disperse, they defiantly replied that they would do so only if the king "wolde promis to reforme those abuses."19

The peasants fought, but in the end they could not stop the "rich ... stealing the property of the poor." Small landholders constituted the majority of the laboring population in English agriculture at the end of the fifteenth century,20 but by the end of the seventeenth century more than one-third of the land was held by capitalist employers of wage-labor.21 Well before that time, the majority of the English people were no longer self-employed peasants but laborers dependent upon wages.22

Not only were they to be dependent upon wages, making crops and cloth that they would never own, but at wages lower than they had ever been. In the course of the sixteenth century the real wages of English laborers fell into an abyss from which they would not emerge until the end of the nineteenth century.23 As a typical peasant, "Day labourer was now [his or her] full description ... and the poor cottager[s] could expect only seasonal employment at a wage fixed by the justice of the peace."24 One-fourth of the people of England in the 1640s were but "housed beggars," the term used by Francis Bacon to distinguish them from wandering roadside mendicants.25

"Why No Upheaval?"

"Why did it not cause an upheaval?" That is a logically compelling question which some historians have posed in light of their findings regarding the general deterioration wrought upon the lives of the laboring population during the "long" sixteenth century, 1500-1640.26 The same question, but in a form more particularly suited to this present study, is, "How did the English bourgeoisie maintain social control?"

In establishing its dominance over the pillaged and outraged peasantry, the English bourgeoisie did, of course, meet rebellion with armed repression (generally after deceitful "negotiations" designed to divide the opposition and to buy time for the mobilization of government military forces). Having traditionally no standing army, the government employed German and Italian mercenaries on some occasions, along with men recruited from the personal retinues of the nobility. But foreign mercenaries, however important they might have been in certain critical moments, for fiscal and political reasons could not supply the basic control functions on a regular basis. And the very economic transformation that brought the laboring masses of the countryside to revolt was simultaneously reducing the ranks of the retainers whom the nobility might profitably maintain for such ongoing repressive services.

Saving a portion of the yeomanry.

The solution was found by deliberately fostering a lower-middle-class stratum. It was in the nature of the capitalist Agrarian Revolution that non-aristocrats rose out of the ranks of the bourgeoisie into the highest councils and organs of power to serve side by side with the increasingly bourgeoisieified old-line aristocrats. Likewise, lower and local functions at the shire level were filled by men from the ranks of the lesser bourgeois country gentlemen and exceptionally upwardly mobile peasants turned capitalist farmers, who might buy into a knighthood. But yet another layer was needed, which would be of sufficient number to stand steadfast between the gentry and the peasants and laborers.

But the juggernaut of the Agrarian Revolution threatened the land titles of the laboring peasants of all categories, from those with hereditary freeholds through all the gradations of tenants to the "customary" tenant-at-will.27 The state therefore made a political decision to preserve a sufficient proportion of peasants - preference going naturally, but not exclusively, to hereditary freehold tenants - as a petit bourgeois yeomanry (typified by the classic "forty-shilling freeholder") to serve in militia and police functions.28 The case has not been better understood or stated than it was by Francis Bacon, looking back at close range in 1625 to write his History of the Reign of King Henry VII (1485-1509):

Another statute was made for the ... soldiers and militia forces of the realm ... That all houses of husbandry, that were used with twenty acres of ground and upwards, should be maintained and kept up for ever; together with a competent proportion of land to be used and occupied by them; and in no wise severed from them (as by another statute in his successor's [Henry VIII's] time was more fully declared) ... This did wonderfully concern the might and mannerhood of the kingdom, to have farms of a standard, sufficient to maintain an able body out of penury, and did in effect amortise a great part of the lands of the kingdom unto the
Bacon likened the process of expropriation of the peasants to the necessary allowing sound growth of the rest for future needs. By this policy, he said, England would escape certain ills besetting the governments of other countries; and, again, as land-grabbing, rack-renting landlords, gentry, merchants, squires, and occasional interloping peasant upstarts, “like tame hawks for their master, and like wild hawks for themselves,” as Bacon put it—caused this basic policy to evolve by vicissitudes. But the center held: the same guiding principle obtained when Bacon wrote his history of Henry VII’s reign that been in force more than a century before.

The successful day-to-day operation of the social order of the newly ascendant bourgeoisie depended upon the supervisory and enforcement functions performed at the parish level by yeoman constables, church wardens, Overseers of the Poor, jailers, directors of houses of correction, etc. They were charged with serving legal orders and enforcing warrants issued by magistrates or higher courts. They arrested vagrants, administered the prescribed whippings on these vagrants’ naked backs, and conveyed them to the boundary of the next parish, enforcing their return to their home parishes. As Overseers of the Poor, they ordered unemployed men and women to the workhouses and apprenticed poor children without their parents’ leave. Trial juries were generally composed of yeomen, and they largely constituted the footsoldier of the militia, the so-called “trained bands.” They discharged most of these unpaid obligations unenthusiastically, but with a sense of duty appropriate to their social station. Nevertheless, prior to the Great Rebellion and Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century, yeomen militiamen showed themselves less than reliable for major armed clashes with peasants. In Ket’s Rebellion they were left behind when the final assault was made by the king’s forces of cavalry and one thousand foreign mercenaries. And, on account of the “great backwardness in the trained bands,” the king’s commanders were constrained to rely exclusively on the gentlemen cavalry and their own personal employees in the battle against one thousand peasant rebels at Newton in the Midlands in 1607.

Yeomen did enjoy certain special privileges. For one, they were entitled to vote for their shire’s member of Parliament. Of far more substantial importance was their right to apprentice their sons to lucrative trades and commerce, and to send their sons to schools and universities. But like the civic duties to which they were assigned, these privileges were theirs because, and only because, of their property status. It never occurred to the ruling classes of England that they could enlist such a cheap yet effective social control force from the ranks of the propertyless classes, the housed beggars, laborers and cottagers, or the vagabonds. That notion would await the coming of the Anglo-American continental colonies.

The “Labor Question”: Conflict and Resolution

The ruling class effected the same balance of class policy and the blind instinctual drive for maximum immediate profits by its individual parts in regard to the costs of employment of propertyless laborers. In the century and a half, 1350–1500, following the great plague, it had been seen that no amount of legislation could keep down labor costs where labor was in short supply. Laws designed to prevent laborers from moving about in search of higher wages, and laws fixing penalties for paying or receiving wages in excess of statutory maximums, were equally ineffective in restraining wages. Half a dozen such laws were passed in that period, but by its end the laborer’s real wage was nearly thrice what it had been at its beginning. The objective might have been accomplished if it had been possible to reimpose serfdom, but the landlord class no longer had the power to do so.

But the emergence of a massive labor surplus in the early decades of the sixteenth century presented the employing classes with an opportunity which they were quick to exploit for regulating labor costs. At a certain point it...
ORIGIN OF RACIAL OPPRESSION IN ANGLO-AMERICA

occurred to the government to redress the imbalance by instituting slave labor. Parliament accordingly in 1547 enacted a law, 1 Edw. VI 3, which would have had the effect of creating a marginal, yet substantial, body of unpaid bond-labor, to serve as an anchor on the costs of paid labor. Refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the offspring of their own agrarian revolution, the ruling class presumed that every unemployed person was merely another “vagabond,” willfully refusing to work and thus frustrating the proper establishment of fair wages. The 1547 law sought remedy along the following lines:

who so ever ... man or woman [being able-bodied and not provided with the prescribed property income exemption] shall either like a serving man wanting [lacking] a master or lyke a Beggere or after any other such sorte be lurking in any howse or howses or hoyrtrige or Idlely wander[ing] by the high wales syde or in strees, not applying them self to soem honnest and allowed art, Seyence, service or Labour, and so do continew by the space of three dayes or more to eather and offer them self to Labour with anny that will take them according to their facultie, And yt no man otherwise will take them, doe not offer themself to work for meat and drynk ... shall be taken for a Vagabonde ... 44

Any person found to be transgressing the provisions of the law, upon information provided to a magistrate by any man, was upon conviction to be formally declared a “vagabond,” branded with a V, and made a slave for a period of two years to the informant. The slave was to be fed only bread and water and, at the owner’s discretion, such scraps as the owner might choose to throw to the slave. The law specified that the slave was to be driven to work by beating, and held to the task by chaining, no matter how vile the work assignment might be. Such a two-year slave who failed in a runaway attempt was to be branded with an S and made a slave for life to the same owner from whom he or she had tried to escape. A second unsuccessful attempt to escape was to be punished by death.

This was not just one of the many anti-vagabond laws enacted by the English Parliament in the sixteenth century;46 it was distinguished from others by three features: (1) the definition of “vagrancy” was extended to cover any unemployed worker refusing to work for mere board, (2) the beneficiary of the penalty was not the state in any of its parts, but private individual owners of those who were enslaved; (3) the enslaved persons were reduced to chattels of the owners, like cattle or sheep, and as such they could be bought, sold, rented, given away, and inherited (“as any other movable goodes or Catelles”).46 With this 1547 law, the quest for wage control had passed its limits in a double sense, by going to zero wages, and by exceeding the limits of practicability. In 1550, Parliament repealed the law, citing as a reason the fact that “the good and wholesome laws of the realm have not been put in execution because of the extremity of some of them.”47

Many contemporary observers perceived the causal connection of the officially deplored depopulating enclosures of arable land and the growth of vagrancy, and they viewed the case of the displaced peasants and laborers with sympathy. “Whither shall they go?” asked one anguished commentary. “Forth from shire to shire, and to be scattered thus abroad ... and for lack of masters, by compulsion driven, some of them to beg and to steal,”48 During the life of the slave law, bold, honest preacher Bernard Gilpin made the point in a sermon in the presence of Edward VI himself: “Thousands in England beg now from door to door who have kept honest houses.”49

There were those who considered such facts a justification for slavery as a means of saving these victims of expropriation from running further risks to their very souls, by the sin of idleness. But a widespread reluctance to attempt slavery as the answer seems to have had much to do with the paralysis of the will that kept the law from being “put in execution.”50

The interval between the passage and the repeal of this slave law was also the period of “the greatest popular outcry against enclosing,”51 which, as we have noted, took the form of mass peasant revolts, culminating in Ket's Rebellion. John Cheke, scholar, member of Parliament and former tutor of Edward VI, lectured the Norfolk rebels on “The Hurt of Sedition,” linking their contumacy with the spirit of lawless vagabondage plaguing the country.52 Certainly the rebels were as aware as anyone else of the connection between the threat they were facing, that of depopulating enclosures, and the rise of vagrancy. But there seem to be no reports as to the attitude, if any, that the rebels may have had towards vagrancy in general, or toward the slave law of 1547 in particular. Perhaps we may agree with Davies in seeing this fact as evidence that the law was effectively defunct in 1549.53 In any case, the Ket rebels evinced no disposition to clear their skirts of the splatters of John Cheke’s vagabond-baiting.

What they did say, touching bondage, was this: “We pray that all bondmen may be made free, for God hath made all free with his precious bloodshedding.”54 There has been some conjecture about the significance of the inclusion of this demand in the program issued from Moushold Heath.55 Whatever scholars may finally conclude on the point, it was a demand that sounded in sharp dissonance to the cruel clanking of chains in the 1547 slave law. The rebels were, furthermore, voicing the main moral scruple which contributed so much to the nullification of the law: namely that it was wrong “to have any Christen man bound to another.”56

“Doubtless, moral scruples could have been overcome,” Davies says, “if slavery had been practical and profitable.”57 He explains that “dealing with a single slave or a small number... slavery would have been utterly uneconomic; the constant driving, the continuous need to check into the work done, the ease of flight, the difficulty of recapture, easily outweigh any advantage which might have accrued from ‘cheap labor.’” He then takes note of a fact that is of particular relevance for the understanding of racial slavery and social control. He contrasts the situation as it would have obtained under the 1547 law in England and the slavery system in continental Anglo-America, which was operable only because “half the population of the South [was] employed in seeing that the other half do their work.”58 The maintenance of such a system
of social control was neither an economically valid option nor a necessary resort of bourgeois social control in sixteenth-century England. In this attempt to turn "anti-vagabondism" into a paying proposition by enslaving laborers, the bourgeoisie found that its reach exceeded its grasp. When in 1558-59 diehards proposed that the old slave law be reinstated, even with amendments to lessen its "extremity," the idea failed of adoption.\(^59\)

**Wages had to be paid, low though they were**

The slave-law experiment had revealed to the English employing classes a limit beyond which they could not go; but they were not disposed to miss the opportunity to validate their prerogative to intervention.\(^60\) The result was the Statute of Artificers,\(^61\) which was made law on 10 April 1563.\(^62\) Whether the aim of controlling labor costs was achieved by this act, and, if so to what degree, is a subject beyond the concern of this present work. What is significant is that it remained the basic English master-servant law for more than two and a half centuries until its repeal in 1813.\(^63\) It represented the achievement of an historic equilibrium – after two centuries of class struggle, blow and counter-blow – between high wages and unpaid bondage, between freedom and compulsion, in the disposition of alienable labor power.\(^65\)

English historians of the liberal, labor and socialist tendencies have rightly emphasized the compulsion aspect of the Statute of Artificers.\(^66\) This emphasis would seem to be altogether appropriate for the study of the continuum of English national development. But when one comes to consider Anglo-American history, particularly during the crucial seventeenth century, special concern needs to be directed to the limits of compulsion under the Statute of Artificers, to that counter-balancing residue of freedom of labor which experience had shown to be necessary for the maintenance of social control in England in order that the process of normal capitalist accumulation might go forward. Consider briefly the relevant provisions of the Statute of Artificers in terms of a compulsion-versus-freedom analysis.

Any unpriopertied, unemployed, unapprenticed man between the ages of twelve and sixty was obliged to work at farm labor by the year in his locality, for any farmer requiring his services. But he had to be paid the established wages. Equally significant, recalling the law of 1547, the 1563 Statute of Artificers put the onus on the employers to offer employment, rather than on the workers to find employment, before the penalties of vagrancy could be imposed upon the worker.

Workers who entered into contract to perform specific works were compelled to continue in them, without leaving to seek other employment, until that job was finished, on penalty of a month in jail and, in some cases, being liable to a suit (in "Action of Debt") by the employer for damages amounting to five pounds sterling. But the punishment entailed no extension of service to

the private employer, and the employer had no further recourse than the debt action.\(^67\)

Workers bound to serve by the year were subject to a penalty of thirty days in jail for leaving their employers' service before the completion of their terms. But they could terminate their employment legally by giving three months' notice prior to the scheduled completion of their terms. If a person wished to go outside his own parish or town to take a job, he had first to secure from the authorities a formal written testimonial from the town authorities. If such a worker failed to present such a testimonial when taking a job outside his own town or parish, he was to be given twenty-one days to obtain the needed testimonial, being held in jail the while. Upon failure to secure the testimonial within that time, he was "to be whipped and used as a Vagabond."\(^68\)

Male youths were indentured as apprentices to employers, usually for seven years, but sometimes for longer periods. No person might, without prohibitive penalty, practice any trade without having completed the appropriate apprenticeship. Therefore, the more lucrative the prospective trade, the greater was the incentive and the less the compulsion involved in the recruitment of apprentices. In the more remunerative occupations, apprenticeship was restricted to sons of men already in the trade, or to owners of property yielding an annual revenue of two or three pounds. For more common trades, there were no property or family qualifications, but the number of apprentices might be limited to a quota of one apprentice to one journeyman, after an initial quota of three to one. For "Apprenticeship to Husbandry [farming]," however, there were no restrictions except as to age, and it had generally more the aspect of impressment than selection of a career. Under a policy conceived "for the better Advancement of Husbandry and Tillage," any male between the ages of ten and eighteen and "fit" for such employment was obliged to enter into an "indenture" to serve as a "husbandry apprentice" to any farmer who required him for that purpose, for a term lasting until the youth reached twenty-one years of age at least, and possibly until he was twenty-four, depending upon the terms of the individual arrangement.

Refusal to serve as an apprentice was punishable by commitment to jail until the culprit was placed under bond to assure compliance. An apprentice was forbidden to marry without the employer's consent. He was a member of the employer's household and was obliged to obey the employer in any legal command.

It would seem therefore that, observing the limits of the law of 1547, the English bourgeoisie had decided – as far as male workers were concerned – to venture no further in that direction than the terms prescribed for Apprenticeship to Husbandry. Whatever the apprentice's infractions of the terms of the apprenticeship, his punishment for them entailed no extension of his time of service. If the proper authorities approved, in special circumstances and if the apprentice consented, he might be assigned to another master.\(^69\) The apprentice could be freed from his service before the end of his term upon a validated complaint made to the authorities (magistrates, mayors, etc.) of ill-treatment...
or of misuse, including failure to provide instruction in the trade agreed
 upon in the indenture.

Finally, any woman of the laboring class, between the ages of twelve and
fifty, being unmarried and "forsake work" (unemployed) was compellable to
serve by the year, week, or day in any "reasonable" sort of work and at such
wage rates as any two magistrates or aldermen, or the mayor, having local
jurisdiction might assign for her. Upon refusal to serve, the woman was to
be held in jail "until she shall be bounded to serve." Even if impressed for
labor, she was to be paid wages. At least as far as this law was concerned,
was there no impediment to her marrying and chancing thereby whatever
better escape such a course might afford.

The oppressive intent of the Statute of Artificers was obvious on the face of
it. In a situation made especially difficult by the oversupply of labor, workers
were compelled to work for whatever the employing class, through the
magistrates, chose to offer, and to forgo any improvement through individual
or collective bargaining. By both its general and its apprenticeship provisions,
the statute consigned the generality of the wage-earning population to agricul-
tural labor. Women workers were excluded from apprenticeship and made to
serve in the lowest-paid drudgery. The severest censures of the anti-vagabond
laws were threatened against the worker who sought to move from one place
to another to improve his lot, unless he bore the magistrate's certificate of
permission. Yet oppressive as that law was, neither its contrivers nor its
victims would have believed that within several short generations, in a "New
Albion," English workers would be worked as unpaid chattel bondmen and
bondwomen, bought and sold from hand to hand for long terms of years,
subject, for infraction, to extensions of that servitude for private owners;
denied the right to marry, their children "bastards" by definition — and that
such would be the common lot (not a real apprentice in a hundred) under "the
custom of the country!"

The Poor Law as Social Control

A third major problem of social control — after the peasant revolts and labor
relations — arose out of the mass pauperization wrought by the Agrarian
Revolution. The presence of a set of persons having no fixed abode was not a
new phenomenon in England. But prior to the sixteenth century it was more
likely to be associated with a shortage of labor, leading laborers to slip their
villein bonds to take better offers from new employers. The vagrancy problem
of the sixteenth century, by contrast, was associated with a protracted general
decline of wages, and with a stubborn struggle by laboring people to maintain
their rights to stay on their land.

The extent of this "structural unemployment," as it would be called today,
is not statistically verifiable, but it cannot be doubted that its appearance
presented the state with serious difficulties. It was fundamental; a by-product
of the vitality of ascendant capitalism. It was intimately linked with the
resistance of the copyholders to expropriation of their lands. In the words of
Queen Elizabeth's chief adviser, Lord Burghley, the problem arose from "the
depopulating of whole towns ... and keeping of a shepherd only, whereby
many subjects are turned without habitation and fill the country with rogues
and idle persons."

The repeal of the 1547 slave law (1 Edw VI 3), after three years of
indefatigability, marked the first glimmers of official acknowledgement that
unemployment was not synonymous with willful idleness, vagabondage and
roguey. A series of laws still sought to draw a significant distinction between
the "impotent poor," who were to be relieved, and the "sturdy beggars." The
former were to be certified and provided for by propertied persons of their
parishes. But the "sturdy beggars" were still to be subject to whipping, to
transportation to their home parishes, and, in some cases, to exile or hanging
as felons.

But the threat to the orderly transaction of affairs continued. "All parts of
this realm of England and Wales," said Parliament in 1572, "be presently
with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars exceedingly pestered . . . to the
great annoyance of the common weal." They had become so emboldened by their
desperate plight that in 1580 they even pressed their clamor upon the Queen
personally "one evening as she was riding abroad to take the air."

"Many thousands of idle persons are within this realm," warned Hakluyt in
1584, "which, having no way to be set on work, be either mutinous and
seek alteration in the state, or at least [are] very burthensome to the
commonwealth." Two years later, another observer expressed fear that a
surfeit of paupers must lead to "divers kinds of wrongs, mutinies, sedition,
commotion, & rebellion."

A royal decree of 1593 demanded stricter enforcement of the laws against
the multitudes of rootless people who were wandering the highways, begging
and extorting relief from the more prosperous persons they encountered. It
was said that many of the predators were military and naval veterans "exacting
money on pretense of service in the wars."

In time the government came to see, as Nicholls, the pre-eminent student of
the Poor Law, puts it, that "severe punishment loses its terrors in the presence
of actual want — that a man will beg, or steal, or resort to violence rather
than starve," and that it was not wise to force the unemployed into that hard
choice. In 1601 Parliament accordingly made the law (43 Eliz. 2) that was to
govern English poor relief for more than three centuries: It provided for a
system of guaranteed work to be maintained under the supervision of the
Overseers of the Poor of each parish, comprised of the church wardens and
from two to four other property owners. In central locations, called work-
houses, or in their own abodes, the otherwise unemployed persons were to be
set to work on materials such as hemp, wool, iron and thread. The proceeds
from their products were to defray the costs incurred and to provide for
payment for the workers "according to the desert of their work." Refusal to
work on such terms was a legal offense, punishable by a term in the house of correction or common jail. Funds needed for furtherance of work and relief programs were to be raised by the Poor Rate, a regular tax periodically assessed against the property holders of each parish.

In practice this formal relief was supplemented by illegal or semi-legal resort by the pauperized population to unauthorized infiltration into supposedly guild-protected trades or by "squatting" on wastelands to eke out enough of an existence to escape the ministrations of the Overseers of the Poor. But to the extent that such diversions were attempted, they were but supplementary to the workings of 43 Eliz. 2, the Poor Law, the ultimate monumental "attempt on the part of the powerful Tudor state to prevent the social disorder caused by economic changes, which in spite of its efforts it had not been strong enough to control."

Notorious as the operation of the English system of Poor Relief was ever to be for its parsimony and sanctimony, the right of workers to be paid wages for the work done under its program, and the right to leave that employment if and when a turn of fortune—a legacy, a good apprenticeship opportunity, a decent job, or, for a woman, a marriage prospect—occurred, were matters never questioned by those who first established the system in 1601. Yet within a few decades, irreducible rights and privileges of the most condemned ward of the parish were to be denied to the general run of English workers performing the most essential labor in Anglo-America. To those contrivers of the Poor Rate, it would have seemed unthinkable that the support of the poor might, even in the slightest degree, be derived from impositions on other propertyless laborers.

Oppression of Women

The social transformation wrought by the Agrarian Revolution and the rise of capitalism in England was indeed great. But the class coming to power found no need to amend common or statute law with regard to the subordination of women; it found male domination to be no less congenial to the functioning of the new order than it had been to the old.

Given the absence of a women's rights movement—the first concerted cries for justice would not be heard for another two centuries; and, given the quick bourgeois appetite for wealth accumulation, making their historical ruling-class antecedents dilettantes by comparison—the brutal treatment of women in the new era proceeded unchecked.

As it was in man's record of the beginning, and had since been, the non-person civil status of women should ever be, so far as the bourgeoisie of England was concerned. Classed in children in matters of civil rights, women continued to be classed with heretics when punishment for treason was prescribed, only women were to be burned at the stake for that offense. And, like servants who killed their masters, women who killed their husbands were guilty of petty treason. By law, persons convicted of a felony were subject to the death penalty. But priests so convicted could be pardoned for the first offense by claiming "benefit of clergy," a relic of a former time when clerics were dealt with by ecclesiastical courts. Persons granted this privilege were to be branded in the meat of the thumb to prevent their claiming that right a second time. From the eve of the sixteenth century onwards, increasing categories of non-clerical men were admitted to this privilege. But women, barred by gender from being priests, were excluded from this mercy. They were granted full access to the benefit-of-clergy plea only in 1692.

The men of the ruling classes had immemorially exercised sex-class privileges at the expense of the women of the laboring classes. In feudal times in England the custom said to have been most hated by the serfs was that of "merchet," which required payment in kind or in money by the serf to the lord when the serf's daughter was to be married. This was considered the most degrading and certain mark of servile status, since it forced the serfs to acknowledge possessory claims of one degree or another by the lord to every female within his "family" of "dependants." The same theme was evident in the fact that a woman serf who married a free man and was later divorced by him again became a serf of her former lord. On the other hand, a woman who had originally been free but who married a serf herself, fell to the status of servdom, which she could not escape by being divorced; instead she remained a serf, at least during the lifetime of her husband. The widow of a serf was designated by the special term "widowe," meaning the lord's widow. She was obliged to guarantee production sufficient to meet the lord's due. Falling in that, a woman was required to surrender her holding, or else to make arrangements (with the lord's sanction) for the proper performance of her duties, as the ward of some man.

In the new order, women of the propertied classes continued to be hostages to the property to which they were linked through inheritance laws. As before, the cult of female chastity, with all its concomitant social and legal repression and sanctions imposed on women, remained an essential of the process of fortune-building through inheritances and marriage portions. When the most important decisions were to be made concerning a woman's life, her personal interests or preferences carried less weight than the property and power interests of the men with whom her life was involved.

As of old, but with possibly greater cynicism, fatherless under-age daughters were, as "wards," dealt about like commodities. A man well regarded by the Court of Wards stood to gain when such a girl or woman was made his ward, for that brought him control of her property with all the opportunity for self-advancement it might make possible for him.

There was to be for women no reformation in the Reformation. The notorious 1547 slave law, even in its general extremity, found a special disability to impose on the woman. If a man slave, by coming into an inheritance or otherwise, secured a "convenient living" he was to be freed. If, for instance, such a possibility presented itself in the form of marriage, a male
slave had the unimpeded right to free himself by that course. But the female slave, if she were under twenty years of age, could avail herself of such an opportunity only if she could secure the permission of her owner to do so.\textsuperscript{93} And, as we have seen, the Statute of Artificers of 1563 assigned unmarried, unaproperied women to the lowest labor status. If they were unemployed and between the ages of twelve and forty, they could be compelled to serve in any employment to which the magistrates might assign them. Furthermore, their wages were set at only about half of those paid to men doing comparable services.\textsuperscript{94}

Above all, there were the reasons of state. The "ancient rights and liberties" of the small-propertied and propertyless classes were, as noted, subject to heavy assault in the sixteenth century. But the new order brought no threat to their rights and liberties as English men \textit{vis-à-vis} English women.

\textbf{Sir Francis Bacon} voiced official sanction of this limitation on interference with traditional ways, saying that male domination and patriarchy were "natural and more ancien than the law." Addressing "The Lord Chancellor and all the Judges of England" in his capacity as Solicitor-General in 1608, Bacon set forth the premise that \textit{monarchy was the best form of rule because its authority was first of all based on the "platform" of male domination and patriarchy.}

The first [platform], he submitted, "is that of a father or chief of a family; who governing over his wife by prerogative of sex, over his children by prerogative of age, and because he is author to them of being, and over his servants by prerogative of virtue and providence (for he that is able of body and improvident of mind is \textit{natura servus}), is the very model of a king."\textsuperscript{95}

\textbf{But before the king is every man, every man must be a king.}\textsuperscript{96} In feudal England, in the exercise of male domination over the wife, the seignior's claims had priority over those of the feudal lord. The wife was a \"feme covert,\" against whom the lord had no process of claim except through the husband. And in the new day, after the repression of the Pilgrimage of Grace, Henry VIII did not venture to pursue vengeance against the persons of a number of women who had been active rebels. The definitive work on this event explains that royal discretion as follows:

Henry knew that in the excited state of public opinion it would be dangerous to meddle with them. His reign was not by any means the age of chivalry, but there still remained a good deal of the old tribal feeling about women, that they were the most valuable possessions of the clan, and that if any stranger, even the King, touched them all the men were disgraced.\textsuperscript{97}

\textbf{In the "new age", a man's home was still to be his castle and, if the matter were forced to an issue, a woman's prison.} Men could divorce women; women could not divorce men. Some time late in the sixteenth century, Joan Wynstone ran away from her husband John, a man of humble station.\textsuperscript{98} Taken up as a vagrant, she was sentenced under the law to work as a servant of the husband she had fled. Finding that life intolerable, Joan again escaped, but she was again recaptured. For this second offense she was hanged on the gallows.

The poor and laboring people of England might not prevail over their kings, or their queens, or their lords and masters, but the man of these classes could be \textit{king and lord and master to his wife}. Male domination in this way served as a link between the beaten-down peasants and proletarians and the very authority that was beating them down. As such it operated as another instrument of ruling-class social control, disguised as the natural outcome of the sexual differentiation occurring in the population.

\textbf{No English man of that day, from Lord Chancellor Francis Bacon to lowly John Wynstone, would have imagined that propertyless, yet non-apprenticed, English men would ever be so degraded (as they would have considered it) that under the law they might not have their own "castles" and the male privileges appertaining to their gender status.}\textsuperscript{99} Nor would Bacon or Wynstone have thought to find in "nature" an apology for the assertion of a general sexual privilege by one set of men - propertied and unpropertied - over all women of another set of the propertyless population. Yet the first of these inconceivable ideas would not only be thought of, it would become an essential operating principle of the Anglo-American plantation economy.\textsuperscript{100} And, more amazing, the second, thought of and instituted, would become an indispensable element in the maintenance of bourgeois social control in continental plantation Anglo-America.\textsuperscript{101}
Euro-Indian Relations and the Problem of Social Control

For all the talk of using colonies as vents for proletarian discontent, the first group of English to arrive in Virginia in 1607 included a disproportionate number of aristocrats and gentlemen, and their personal attendants, for whom productive labor was as unthinkable as it was for any Spanish hidalgo bound for New Spain. Like Cortés, they were prepared to find ready access to gold and silver rather than to start cultivation of the soil. By 1622, however, the Virginia Company investors, realizing that Virginia was to be no El Dorado, rationalized their abandonment of dreams of emulating the treasure hunts of the Spanish in Mexico and Peru. "[T]o think that Gold and Silver mynes in a Country [Virginia] (otherwise most rich and fruitful) the greatest wealth of a Plantation is but popular error," wrote Edward Waterhouse in a long letter of advice to fellow members of the Virginia Company. He now saw the Spanish case in a different light. The law of diminishing returns had set in for silver and gold mining in Spanish America, he said, and Spain had turned to agricultural products, such as sugar, cotton, indigo, and brazilwood, to offset the decline of mining output. He left no doubt that, in his opinion, the future prosperity of the Virginia plantation likewise lay in exploiting the country's natural potential for commodity production.

Why, he thought, could not the English do as the Spanish had done and recruit a labor force from the native population for that purpose? True, the colony was intended as a vent for the "troublesome poor" of England, but why should they not serve in the English plantation as an intermediate stratum, as overseers and tradesmen, such as had been formed by a certain portion of Spanish immigrants and Spanish creoles in Mexico and Peru? Why should not the Virginia Indians be compelled to servitude and drudgery, and supply the roome of men that labour, whereby even the meanest [Englishmen] of the Plantation may employ themselves more entirely in their Arts and Occupations, which are more generous, whilst Savages performe their inferior worke of digging in mynes and the like, of whom also some may be sent for the service of the Sommer Islands [Bermuda Islands].

Old planter John Martin likewise suggested that the Indians be "brought into subjection," they being "apter for worke then yet our English are . . . and fitt to rowe in Gallies & friggetts and many other pregnant uses." Captain John Smith (1580–1631), the most famous leader of the early Jamestown settlers, retrospectively regretted that the English had not from the beginning done as the Spanish had done, namely "forced the . . . [Indians] to do all manner of drudgery worke and slavery for them, themselves [the Spanish] living like Souldiers upon the fruit of their [the Indians'] labour[s]." The Spanish option was not to be dismissed out of hand. Indeed Captain John Smith reasoned that, vis-à-vis the respective native populations, the English in Virginia and New England were better situated than the Spanish had been in the West Indies. The Spanish, outnumbered by the West Indies Indians by fifty or more to one, had "no other remedy" but mass extermination of the natives. "Ours," said Smith, referring possessively to Virginia and New England Indians, were "such a few, and so dispersed, it were nothing in a short time to bring them to labour and obedience."

If the English had subdued and forced "their" Indians into "drudgery and slavery," they would have had to confront, as the Iberians had had to do, the problem of establishing a system of social control over the native population that would be, as the phrase is nowadays, "cost-effective."

Social Control: Haiti (Hispaniola), Cuba and Puerto Rico

When European colonization of the so-called New World began in Hispaniola in 1492, the population density of that island was about the same as that of Portugal (around 33 and 38 inhabitants per square mile, respectively), but the society of the island was not highly stratified. Speaking of the Indians of the West Indies, Las Casas said, "They are very poor folk, which possess little . . . they are accustomed to have no more store than they ordinarily have need of and that such as they get with little travall [labor]." He elaborated with notations of the people's diet, apparel, and shelter. There was no distinct native social stratum that could act as a buffer between the laboring people and the Spanish conquerors in the administration of a normal, orderly, colony. Hence the encomienda system, whereby the King of Spain "commended" the natives to "the care" of individual Spanish colonists as laborers, was conducted in an irregular, uncontrolled, and highly exploitative form. Spaniards raided Indian communities, took captives, and, in order to prevent escape or to ensure the full measure of work, practiced large-scale enslavement.

The native population did not willingly submit to such brutal administration. In Hispaniola the Maguana people rose in revolt after the treacherous Spanish killing of the captive Maguana chief Canaobo. In 1511 in Puerto Rico, the Borinquens under the leadership of a cacique named Guaybana mounted a major rebellion against the imposition of the Spanish system of forced labor. A second Borinquen uprising was led by another cacique, Humacao, four years later. Other Borinquens, possibly one-third of the population, sought refuge in remote mountainous areas, or fled by boat to other islands. But in
Haiti (Hispaniola/Santo Domingo) and Cuba, the Spanish advantage of overwhelming military strength exerted without restraint, in the context of the even more devastating toll of epidemic European diseases, resulted in almost complete extermination of the native population. There was a mathematical certainty that without an intermediate social stratum, "social control" by mere unbridled military force would be self-defeating because it exceeded the limits that had to be observed to preserve an exploitable labor force.

**Social Control: Mexico and Peru**

At the time of the Spanish invasion in 1519, the population of central Mexico, representing an area of about 200,000 square miles, was an estimated 13.9 million, representing a density of almost 70 people per square mile. Of this population, 2.5 million, concentrated more than 350 per square mile, lived in the 8,000-square-mile area in and near the Basin of Mexico. Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), in the heart of this area, had a population of 300,000.

The invaders found already in place "an elaborate system of levy providing products of all kinds, slaves, and services for the three capitals of the so-called Aztec Empire," and a similar system in other large states outside the Aztec territory. In each case it was organized to support its central government products of all kinds, slaves, and services for the three capitals of the so-called Aztec Empire. Originally a three-layered stratum, the ruling group came to be designated by the Spanish under the general name of caciques.

The Spanish were able to adapt this pre-existing form of social organization to extort labor and tribute from the Indians, even in the most rapacious manner, using "Indian office-holders ... at the subordinate levels of the hierarchy for the enforcement of Spanish rules." In the opinion of the well-known historian of colonial Mexico Charles Gibson, it was "[t]he power and prestige of the pre-Spanish states, and their continuing traditions of popular subservience, [that] made it possible for the Spaniards to exact labor and tribute with little opposition." Summarizing, Gibson writes that in both Mexico and Peru, "Spaniards took charge of an established society, substituting themselves for the rulers they had deposed or killed."

But such a displacement at the top would not have been effective in gaining the Spaniards' purposes without the preservation of a buffer social control function for the socially demoted caciques.

The ease with which the first Spaniards manipulated huge numbers of native peoples, even the ease with which the first missionaries induced huge numbers of conversions, depended upon the intermediate position of the caciques. ... Caciques were in the vanguard in the adoption of Spanish dress, foods, language, and styles of house construction. They were excused from tribute and labor exactions and given special privileges, such as permission to ride horses and carry arms. ... Indian caciques and Spanish corregidores [Spanish officers in charge of local districts] joined forces to extract from the mass of the Indian population whatever wealth it possessed over and above the subsistence level of its economy.

**EURO-INDIAN RELATIONS AND SOCIAL CONTROL**

Considered in terms of social control and resistance, the story of the Spanish defeat of and rule over the Inca civilization of Peru in the sixteenth century closely corresponds to the pattern set in Mexico. The Inca word for chiefs, *kurakas*, was by Spanish decree in 1572 changed to *caciques*. Appropriately enough it would seem, since the buffer social control function of that office in Peru was identical with its function in Mexico. The hereditary Peruvian *caciques* were exempt from paying tribute or labor service. They were the collectors of tribute to be paid to the Spanish by Indians between the ages of eighteen and fifty. They were responsible also for furnishing the *mita* laborers for service to Spanish masters in industries, in farming and, worst of all, in the silver and mercury mines of Potosí and Huancavelica.

In Peru, the *caciques* "exercised considerable power over Indians, even within the borders of Spanish towns." In 1558, supreme Inca chief Sayri Tupac struck a sort of surrender-and-regrant "bargain" with the Spanish - as O'Neill and other Irish chieftains had done a few year earlier in Ireland (see Volume One).

For at least a century and a half, the *caciques* of Mexico and Peru served as the principal buffer social control stratum in the Spanish system of social control in those domains. But in Mexico, the relatively class-undifferentiated Chichimecs drew a line, and long maintained it, beyond which the Spanish *encomienda* could not be established. In Peru, the Incas defended the remnants of their independent state in two open rebellions. In 1536, Inca Manco and his uncle Titu Yupanqui, taking advantage of a momentary political and military division among the Spanish, rose in revolt to end the desecration of their lands and temples. Manco led a five-month siege of Cuzco, and Titu headed a large army in an assault on Lima. Thirty-five years later, Tupac Amaru, youngest son of Inca Sayri Tupac, served as a rallying symbol for a last great uprising to throw off the Spanish yoke.

**The Social Control Problem in Brazil**

Brazil, like Hispaniola, presented no previously established social stratum adaptable to the colonizing power's social control purposes, and Catholic religious orders, most notably the Jesuits and Franciscans, largely succeeded in substituting themselves in that function. It was the Jesuit Bartolomé de las Casas who first raised the standard of battle for "protection of the Indians" of the West Indies in the sixteenth century, but his pleas were brushed aside by the gold-crazed colonists. A basic factor in the genocide of the native peoples of the West Indies in the early sixteenth century was the difficulty of their making a mass flight by sea. The Indians of Brazil, on the other hand, would serve to establish a general principle of social control in European colonies in the Americas: dominance was less easily established and maintained over continental colonies than over insular colonies.

In the continental expanse of Brazil, there was space, and therefore time,
for development of an effective class struggle of the Indian laborers and the Portuguese plantation bourgeoisie (the *moradores*). The Indians, as we have noted, were successful in making the point in the sixteenth century that they had no desire to become long-term sugar plantation bond-laborers (see page 7). Indeed, in the sixteenth century a number of projected areas of Portuguese settlement had to be abandoned in the face of Indian attacks.

More generally, the Indians resisted plantation servitude by removing themselves to the continental interior. The Portuguese plantation owners countered by conducting armed expeditions (*entradases*) into the interior in order to “entice or force” Indians into Portuguese-controlled villages (*aldeias*), which were located to provide easy access to a supply of Indian plantation laborers, to be used under conditions that were, for all practical purposes, mere slavery. Just as elsewhere in the plantation Americas, super-exploitation of labor and the spread of epidemic European diseases took a heavy toll on the indigenous labor supply in Brazil. In any case, since Indians, having the continental advantage, “deserted their *aldeias* in large numbers,” the colonists were unable to solve the labor-supply problem by resort to raw force through the *entradas*.

It was in the Amazon region of Brazil during the seventeenth century that the Franciscans and then the Jesuits, led most prominently by Antônio Vieira, after a campaign lasting from 1624 to 1686, were able to win a royal decree outlawing enslavement of Indians and bestowing custody of the *aldeias* Indians on the religious orders. These Indians were then to be assigned by the religious authorities as free laborers to plantation owners for a limited part of each year. In terms of social control, the religious orders were filling in relation to a class-undifferentiated native population a role similar to that performed by the caciques in relation to the native class differentiated societies of Mexico and Peru.

In the Amazon region, Portuguese plantation owners rebelled against the idea of non-enslavement of Indians as government interference with free enterprise; they insisted that the free play of market forces required slave labor. Vieira met the objection by proposing the extension to the Amazon region of the practice that had been in operation in more southern coastal regions of Brazil since the middle of the sixteenth century, namely, the enslavement of Angolans “of both sexes to assure their propagation.” The principle was to be “The Negroes to the colonists, the Indians to the Jesuits.” A suitable religious exegetical rationale was contrived. The Angolans, by being baptized Christians, were afforded an opportunity to escape the everlasting torment to which they had been certainly doomed as “pagans.” Their souls were to be redeemed by the Calvary-like suffering of lifetime hereditary servitude in the sugar industry. The Indians, having been made wards of a Christian order, could not be consigned to slavery. For an indication of the widespread failure of Afro-Brazilian bond-laborers to find comfort in this thesis, see the note on the Palmares *guilombo* in Appendix II-A.

### The Powhatans of Virginia

Of all the Ibero-American cases, Brazil was the one that most resembled Anglo-American Virginia with respect to the problem of establishing that degree of social control essential for basing the colonial economy on the forced labor of the indigenous population. Like Brazil, Virginia was a continental colony, not an insular one. Like the indigenous society of Brazil, the Powhatan society exhibited little significant stratification, lacking a strong rulership and concomitant intermediate stratum adaptable to the social control purposes of the conquerors. Storage facilities were insufficient to permit long-term accumulation in the hands of the ruling element of products upon which the people were dependent. There was no wealth in the form of domesticated animals, nor did wealth exist in any other form such as to permit accumulations adequate for the support of a permanent leisure class or a non-productive politico-military bureaucracy. The people derived three-fourths of their living from hunting, fishing and gathering, one-fourth from cultivation. With a population density of only one to two persons per square mile, the Powhatan Indians for most of the year were on the whole well-provisioned, so that they could even share with the starving English colonists on occasion.

There was a degree of social stratification: a chief (Powhatan, the person himself, when the English first arrived) lived on the tribute assessed on the people and had privileged access to the best hunting grounds; he received labor tribute by having his fields planted for him, and tended by a multiplicity of women bound to him. But social distinction was insufficient to produce a permanent category “intermediate between rulers and ruled,” or any politico-military bureaucracy. Powhatan had authority to make alliances and war, and to control trade with other tribes and the English. But he was not always able to enforce his will on all his subjects, nor was he always able to enforce it upon the supposedly tributary tribes. The result was to limit the intensity of the exploitation of the laborers; indeed, the chief himself did productive labor at “men’s work” such as hunting and hand crafts.

Any attempt by the English plantation bourgeoisie to subjugate the Indians to “drudgery and slavery” would have to face the “Brazilian” problem, but without the agency of the Catholic religious orders; they had been banned in the sixteenth-century English Reformation. More immediately to the point, at the time that Smith and others were fantasizing about emulating the Spanish Conquistadors, the English simply did not have the preponderance of military force such as that which the Spanish unleashed against the indigenous peoples upon whom they made war. The weakness of the English colony in the early period was such that in the three years 1620–22 the colony was dependent upon *trade* with neighboring Indians to save itself from “absolute starvation.”

In these respects, the Powhatan social order was essentially the same as those found among the Pequots, Narragansetts, Wampanoags, and other peoples in New England, and the Yamases, Creeks, Tuscororas, Cherokees, Chocaws, Chickasaws, and other peoples confronting the colonists of the...
southernmost region, the Carolinas. With regard to establishing social control, the Anglo-American continental bourgeoisie faced the “Brazilian” problem: a continental people without a cacique class. 

Despite their early difficulties, the English from the beginning had a fundamental potential advantage over the Indians due to the discrepancy in the development of productive forces and productivity of labor. This advantage was enhanced by the fact that the Indians could not possibly have known what the appearance of the first handfuls of settlers portended for the future. By 1644, the chief means of production of the Indians changed markedly to the disadvantage of the latter in the period between 1622 and 1644, the dates of two concerted Indian attacks on the colony. By 1644, the relative superiority of the forces at the disposal of the colony was well established, and all Indian hope of ousting the settlers from the Chesapeake region was lost. The treaty of 1646 that ended the Indian war begun by Opechancanough, Chief Powhatan’s brother and successor, marked the beginning of Anglo-American “Indian policy.” At first that policy contemplated only the displacement of the Indian tribes obstructing the advance of the Anglo-American “frontier,” but ultimately it would challenge the legitimacy of Indian tribal society itself. In this context of the chapter, consideration is limited to the relationship of that policy to the general labor supply and social control problem faced by the continental colonial bourgeoisie. The basic considerations that shaped the policy, the optimizing of the combination of the rate of capital accumulation and social control, were essentially the same in Virginia as elsewhere, although in one respect, namely the commerce in Indian chattel bond-laborers, the grossest development occurred in South Carolina and secondarily in New England.

Fourteen years after the 1646 treaty, the Virginia General Assembly declared that if the Indians of Northumberland County failed to pay the damages to be assessed by the court of that county for damages done by the Indians to a colonist there, then “soe many off them as the court shall determine shall be apprehended and sold into a forraigne country to satisfie the award.” Although in that particular instance no legal justification was cited, it appears to have been under the principle of lex talionis, simple retaliation. In general, however, the Anglo-Americans throughout the continental colonies drew on the ancient principle that victors in “just” wars who spared the lives of “heathen” captives thereby gained the right to hold them as slaves, which Europeans used to justify the forced transportation of Africans to perpetual servitude in the Americas. The Virginia Assembly gave this principle the force of law regarding Indians during Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676. It was reasserted in 1677 following the defeat of Bacon’s Rebellion, and subsequently in 1679, 1682, 1711 and 1722.

Enslavement of Indian captives – children and women as well as men – was general in Massachusetts following the Pequot War of 1636–37, and again after King Philip’s War of 1675–76. In Carolina province (both before and after its division into South and North Carolina, first called Albemarle, in 1691), the Anglo-Americans made direct war on Indians and enslaved the captives.

But the chief means of securing Indian bond-laborers was by trade with Indian tribes, in the course of which captives of intertribal warfare, along with deer skins and beaver pelts, were exchanged for English commodities such as firearms and ammunition, metal tools and containers, woven fabrics and garments, mirrors and rum. It was English policy to foment “just wars” between tribes for the particular purpose of securing Indian captives as chattel bond-laborers. As tribes became increasingly dependent upon the English for trade goods, some, out of narrow considerations of tribal interests, made war on other tribes in order to maintain their trade with the English. Nash states for a certainty that the number of Indians enslaved reached into the tens of thousands in the half-century after Carolina was settled by Europeans.

The Abandonment of the Native Sources of Plantation Bond-labor

Yet the fantasy of an Anglo-America based on Indian drudgery and slavery was not to be realized. Why not? The standard reference work in the field is still Almon Wheeler’s Lauber’s Indian Slavery in Colonial Times within the Present Limits of the United States, published more than eighty years ago.

Lauber presents four theses to explain “the decline of Indian slavery.” First, depopulation caused by a combination of European diseases, a declining birth rate, and intertribal wars in considerable degree fomented by the English interested in trading for the captives whom they would then use in commercial transactions, principally with other English colonies, most often those in the West Indies. Second, Indians “disappeared” as a result of “the amalgamation of red and black slaves.” Third, Indians were “unfitted for servitude,” being “unable to endure sustained labor,” incapable of developing to a “civilized” social level, and bred and reared to be “opposed to all restraint … by an exterior force.” Fourth, if kept in the capturing colony, Indian bond-laborers were possibly even more likely than other bond-laborers to run away, because of the Indians’ hope of “returning to their own people.” It is argued here, from a somewhat different perspective, that the failure of the European power to establish a plantation system based on the bond-labor
of the native population in the Anglo-American continental colonies was analogous to that of the Portuguese colonizers in Brazil. The decisive factors in each case were two: each colonization was enacted on a continental land mass, as distinct from insular areas such as those in the West Indies; and, second, the indigenous society was not stratified, in any case not stratified enough to produce a separate and distinct social class of caciques, accustomed to command and adaptable for colonialist social control purposes, particularly as mobilizers of forced labor for the European capitalist investors.

From those premises I venture a criticism of Lauber’s first and third theses about “the decline of Indian slavery.” I take them in reverse order because the third directly confronts the one assumption for which I crave indulgence in the first paragraph of the Introduction of this work.

The “unfitness” sour-grapes rationale

Some historians whose approach to the subject is informed with the spirit of the civil rights movement, and whose citations of Lauber have been quite appropriate, have perhaps thought it redundant to take note of the white-supremacist assumptions encountered in a work conceived in what Rayford W. Logan called the “nadir” of the struggle for civil rights in the United States. One latter-day scholar even endorses the Lauber view of this issue, “despite the racist implications of arguments about the relative adaptability of one people over another to tropical labor.”

In my view, if being “constitutionally unfit” for servitude could explain the “decline of slavery,” then it should have led to the extinction of bond-servitude in such places as the following:

- Virginia, where for four or five early decades, not one in five of the English chattel laborers survived the period of “indenture.” (Governor William Berkeley in reply to queries of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, in 1671 [Hening 2:511].)
- St. Domingue, where the average French engaged or African bond-laborer survived only three years. See note 35 of Chapter 1.
- Barbados, where in 1680 an annual supply of five thousand African laborers was required to maintain a Negro population of forty thousand (Vincent T. Hartow, A History of Barbados, 1625–1685 [1926; Negro Universities reprint, 1969], pp. 323–4); where from 1680 to 1800 hundreds of thousands of African bond-laborers arrived, but the population increased by less than ten thousand. (David Lowenthal, “The Population of Barbados,” Social and Economic Studies, 6:445–501.)
- The British West Indies as a whole which, between 1700 and 1780, absorbed about 850,000 African bond-laborers, yet the Negro population increased only 350,000. (Gary B. Nash, Red, White, and Black [Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1974] p. 178.)
- Mexico and Peru, where in the first centuries after the beginning of Spanish rule, the repartimiento and mita recruitment by the caciques contributed so heavily to the reduction of the Mexican and Peruvian native populations. (See page 7.)

Why were the Spanish so slow to learn what the Portuguese capitalists, with whom they shared a common realm for much of the time, had learned: “the unfitness” of Indians for sustained labor? Was it perhaps because they were laughing so hard all the way to the counting house in Seville? Or could it have been that they felt satisfied that the total value of the gold and silver produced by the Indians of Mexico and Peru was probably as great as, if not greater than, that of the sugar produced by Angolans in colonial Brazil?

Did forced labor itself exact a greater toll among Indians than it did among Africans and their descendants? Despite pious protestations in religious quarters and in occasional formal governmental expressions of sympathy, neither the encomenderos of Mexico and Peru, nor the moradores of Brazil, nor the “planters” of Anglo-America cared a fig about the unfitness of the labor as long as they could be assured of an affordable functioning supply.

Time and again in the seventeenth century the Portuguese moradores in northern Brazil rebelled against royal and religious authority in order to keep the Indians enslaved, driving out the religious troublemakers, who themselves were forced to admit that “without the Indians the inhabitants [meaning the Portuguese settlers] would die.” In South Carolina, for fifty years, the English colonists ridiculed and evaded the strictures of the London proprietors against trading in captive Indian laborers, the profits of which went to the locals rather than to London.

On the other hand, as the record shows, laborers throughout the Americas considered forced labor “unfit for themselves, and resisted servitude as well as they could. In the cacique-habituated countries of Mexico and Peru they could not prevail. But the tribal Indians in continental situations did resist enslavement successfully, and in the process provided the frustrated colonialists with the sour-grapes argument about the “unfitness” of Indians for plantation labor.

It would seem that little time need be spent in this post–World War Two era on Lauber’s notion that the North American Indians were not enslavable because of their inability to become “civilized.” Are we to believe that, to paraphrase Chairman Mao, “civilization grows out of the barrel of a gun”? Without that one advantage, the work of the Anglo-American “blessings-of-civilization trust,” as Mark Twain called it, would surely have been brought to an end before it ever got to South Carolina. In reacting to Lauber’s doubt about the “capacity of the Indian for civilization,” because “the dominant idea of Indian life was the love of liberty,” one can only ask, “What price
Looking at the figures on the depopulation of the indigenous Americas, one might better ask: If “civilization” is assumed to correlate with increased well-being, did the age of colonization of the Americas demonstrate a “capacity for civilization”? Finally, how was it that Lauber could ignore that precisely the opposite premise was the mainstay of slaveholder ideology, namely that slavery was the only possible normal basis for “civilized” people like themselves to relate to the “uncivilized”?72

Enslavement of Indian labor not a problem of supply, but of social control

Lauber’s first thesis, namely that European colonization had a devastating depopulating effect through infections of smallpox, tuberculosis, and other exotic diseases, is undoubtedly true. So also did the intensification of warfare, both against the English and between Indian tribes. These general conditions, coupled with the English policy of trading away a disproportionate number of male captives, would certainly tend to lower the birth rate among the Indians. Before South Carolina came to be chiefly a producer of rice and cotton early in the eighteenth century, the colony was primarily dependent upon commerce with the Indian tribes. It was in that colony’s trading sphere, therefore, that the depopulating effect of enslavement was most in evidence. In 1708, the Spanish governor of Florida charged that some 10,000 to 12,000 Florida Indians, chiefly Apalachee people, had been taken as slaves by Creek and Yamasee Indians, directed by English Carolinians; only 300 Florida Indians survived, by finding refuge in St Augustine.73 The extension of slave-trading into the interior in that same year was justified by South Carolina businessmen on the ground that “it serves to lessen their [the Indians’] number before the French can arm them.”74 The shipment of Indian captives from Carolina to bond-servitude in other English colonies, particularly those in the West Indies,75 was, while it lasted, a major cause of Indian depopulation. The practice was also a factor in New England in the wake of the defeat of the forces commanded by the Wampanoag chief Metacomet (called King Philip by the English) in 1675-76. An undetermined number of the captives were sent as bond-laborers “to various parts,” namely the Spanish West Indies, Spain, Portugal, Bermuda, Virginia, and the Azores.76 The Virginia colony showed that they could, even as chattel bondmen.77 Rather, the reasons were rooted in three intractable problems of “white race” social control: (1) resistance by the Indian bond-laborers, principally by running away, which merged sometimes with the same form of resistance of African and European bond-laborers; (2) the necessity to maintain nearby friendly, or “treaty,” Indians in the buffer role78 in the first instance between the Anglo-American colonies and the more remote “hostile,” or foreign-allied, tribes; and then against the escape of African-American bond-laborers beyond the Anglo-American “frontier”; and (3) with the institution of the “white race” system of social control, the key necessity of preserving “white skin” privileges of laboring-class European-Americans vis-à-vis all non-European-Americans.

Indian resistance to being reduced to plantation bond-labor

In the absence of a cacique class79 that from positions of traditional upper-class authority could be co-opted as recruiters of plantation bond-labor, the Anglo-American bourgeoisie adapted the phenomenon of inter-tribal rivalries for their purposes. This was a basic element of the colonialist “Indian policy,” and it was made to dovetail with the strategy according to which Indian “allies” were to serve as a protective buffer for the colony against the generally more remote tribes.
But if the English colonizers had the advantage of firearms and the buffer of dependent tribes, the victim tribes had a continental space at their backs. This "continental factor" made possible Indian resistance by migration. When the Savannah Indians of South Carolina migrated north in 1707, "[t]he Iroquois themselves received [them] as brothers and the Delaware called them grandsons." Sometimes migration would enable a tribe largely to avoid the enslaving onslaught; sometimes victim tribes retained sufficient cohesion to be able to maintain their identity even as they migrated; and in other cases broken remnants found refuge with other tribes into which they were adopted.

Unlike the African bond-laborers displaced from home by thousands of ocean miles into an utterly strange land, those relatively few Indian captives retained in a given colony were not so "completely broken from their tribal stems," and were still in at least somewhat familiar terrain, facing a familiar enemy whom they had already met in open battle. South Carolina Provincial policy was focused on the constant danger of Indian bond-laborers escaping into the woods, or conspiring with enemy tribes, or mounting insurrections, such as the one suspected in 1700.

Colonialist concern was heightened by fears of Indians joining with African-Americans in resistance to their common bondage. In 1729, the French governor of Louisiana expressed his concern that "Indian slaves being mixed with our negroes may induce them to desert." That same year he abandoned a mission of revenge against one Indian tribe, the Nabanez (Natchez?), lest Chocawas and Negroes seize the opportunity to attack New Orleans to "free themselves from slavery." In South Carolina, precautions were advised to prevent "intimacy" between Indians and Negroes, "any Intercourse between Indians and Negroes" being seen as a threat to the colony. In his signal study of the relationship of the Indians and African-Americans in the southeastern Anglo-American colonies, William S. Willis found that "[t]he determination [on the part of the English colonial authorities] to prevent Indian-Negro contacts within the White settlements was a main cause for curtailing the enslavement of Indians.

The threat was made more acute by the constant efforts of the Spanish in Florida and the French in Louisiana to encourage resistance to and flight from the English colonies. In 1716 and for some years thereafter, Yamasees and some Creeks, as well as numbers of Negroes, deserted English Carolina for Spanish Florida; from there Yamasees and Negroes carried on raids against the English colony, spreading the word to the South Carolina Indians and Negroes that freedom was theirs for the having in Florida. When the English commanded by General Oglethorpe invaded Spanish Florida in 1740–42, they were opposed there by joint forces of Indians, Negroes, and Spanish.

As time went on, Indian peoples grew less inclined to engage in intertribal wars simply to provide slaves for the trade and exploitation of English "planters" who were intruding on villages of "friendly" and "hostile" Indians alike. This trend matured in the great Indian revolt in 1715, called the Yamasee War (see page 44), which marked the beginning of the irreversible discontinuation of enslavement of Indians in South Carolina, the province where it had been most extensively practiced.

The inherent ambivalence of the "buffer" role

The buffer tribes had a dual role in the English colonial system of social control. They served as a shield for the English against hostile tribes, including those linked to French and Spanish colonial rivals. Prior to 1715, South Carolina colonial policy "sought to consolidate a double bulwark of Indian allies in the zone of the Savannah and Altamaha Rivers" (present-day east-central Georgia). In the northwestern region, it was the mountain-dwelling Overhill Cherokee who long "bore the brunt of the French Indians." In 1723 the South Carolina Assembly solemnly affirmed, "The safety of this Province does, under God, depend on the friendship of the Cherokees." In England the Commissioners of Trade and Plantations communicated to the King their concern that this dependence had even wider ramifications: if the Cherokees were to desert "your Majesty's interest," then "not only Carolina, but Virginia likewise would be exposed to their excursions.

The buffer tribes were also a buffer between the runaway African-American bond-laborer and refuge beyond the boundaries of the Anglo-American colonies. This function was a regular provision in every treaty or memorandum of understanding between the colonies and their Indian allies in the zone of the Savannah and Altamaha Rivers. Nash notes the "persistent inclusion in Indian treaties of a clause providing for the return of escaped slaves." Most treaties, Willis writes of the southeastern region in the eighteenth century, "stipulated that Indians surrender all Negroes and return all future runaways at an agreed price." But the pattern had been set more than half a century earlier in the 1646 treaty between the Virginia colony and "Necotowance, King of the Indians." Under the terms of the treaty made in 1700 between the Maryland colonial government and the chief of the Susquehannocks, "[i]n case any servants or slaves runaway from their masters" to any Piscataway town, "the Indians shall be bound to apprehend them and bring them to the next English Plantation," or be subject to the penalties of Maryland law for the harbors of fugitives.

By definition, "buffer" tribes were those located nearer to, more accessible to, and, above all, economically more dependent upon the English colonists than were other tribes. But by the same token they were therefore more vulnerable to the predations of colonists who were ready to risk, to some degree, the buffer's protective function. It was precisely this sort of undermining of the buffer understanding that led to the Westo War of 1708. For the same reason, in the 1701–8 period the Savannah Indians acted out their resentment by emigrating northward out of South Carolina, "much to the annoyance of the white government, which found them useful as a bulwark against other tribes, and what was probably more important, as slave raiders."
mentioned above, the aggravation of Indian grievances culminated in the Yamassee War (1715–17). The fate of southeast Anglo-America hung by a single thread, namely the loyalty of the Cherokees to the English, and that linkage was itself gravely weakened. But the tie held, and as a result the rebellion was defeated. But it was, nevertheless, a historic victory over Indian enslavement, which immediately went into decline. “Justice to the Indians,” Crane writes, “and, in particular the suppression of the traffic in Indian slavery, these were injunctions to successive [South Carolina Provincial] governors and councils,” from 1680 to 1715. In the wake of the Yamassee War, the issue could no longer be avoided. South Carolina was becoming a rice, cotton and indigo plantation enterprise for which were wanted African bond-laborers, such as many of the colony elite had been exploiting in the Barbadian sugar plantations. In 1690 the Lords Proprietors had sent an urgent instruction to the Carolina authorities:

We hear that Indians are still being shipped away underhand.... You will do your best to prevent this.... [W]ithout them you cannot recover runaway Negroes.

Twenty-five years later, the logic of their lordships’ warning finally struck home. That logic was fundamentally dictated by the “continental factor” — providing the vast area for bond-labor escape that no army could patrol, and no navy could surround — and by the absence of an Indian cacique class.

**Indian Labor and the Invention of the White Race**

If not by compulsion, if not as “drudges” for the English colonists of every class, what were the possibilities of voluntary enlistment by Indians in the work of the colony, alongside the “surplus” English men and women who were brought to Anglo-America? In the period ending in 1622, there were instances of Indians who did work voluntarily within the Virginia colony. In 1709 Robin, an Indian shoemaker, was granted leave to practice his trade among the English colonists “wherever he shall find encouragement.” But in general the Indians found their tribal life more comfortable and better supplied than the life offered by the English community so sore beset with starvation and disease. The English laboring people after 1622 worked as bond-laborers for terms which most of them did not survive; for debts they should not have had to owe for the trip to America. The Indians, as natives of the country, could not be bound by any such “transportation charges.” It was hardly to be expected that Indians would submit voluntarily to the oppressive life endured by the English bond-laborers. Nor would the English employers be willing to spend more for Indian laborers than they had to spend for English laborers in such plentiful supply.

Was there another way? Despite the general inaccessibility of Indians as plantation laborers and the continual displacement of the tribal settlements, could they not, as groups or individuals, still have abandoned the Indian way of life for the English way? Although by far the greater number of the European immigrants arriving in the southern colonies came as bond-laborers, there were some who were able to make the trip from Europe at their own expense, and who began their lives in Anglo-America as independent farmers or artisans. Why might not Indians have opted for the same sort of enterprise within the colony? The English homeland itself was mainly a nation of immigrants, Saxons, Angles, Danes, Normans, Flemings, consolidating with the ancient Angles, Celts and Scots. True, the Indians’ tribal lands were being taken away, but might not the inducements for individual Indians entering into the Anglo-American common economic life well have outweighed the disinclining factors, just as it did for some Scots-Irish, for example? Such inducements included credit from capitalist land speculators and freedom from taxes for as much as ten years. With access to English-made iron implements and utensils, and other manufactured goods and supplies, the prospects might well have persuaded enterprising Indians to take up the life of the free yeoman farmer or artisan. Evidence of the appeal of Anglo-American commodity culture would become woefully evident in its ability to dissolve Indian society. Why should not at least a few individual Indians be successful in that culture as members of the colony?

This avenue to use of the labor of the Indian was never taken. The policy of special inducements to independent farmers referred to above was not developed until the early eighteenth century. (The immigrants to whom this opportunity was opened were counted upon to provide a barrier against external dangers from French and hostile Indian attacks, and against the establishment of maroon centers of freedom and resistance by African-American bond-laborers in the Allegheny Mountains.) By that time, by a historical transformation which is the central concern of this volume, the bourgeoisie had drawn the color line between freedom and slavery and established white supremacy as article one of the Anglo-American constitution. Only European-Americans, as “whites,” were thereafter to be entitled to the full rights of the free citizen, Indians being by definition not “white.” The presence within the colony of free independent Indian farmers or tenants would have been a constitutionally intolerable anomaly.

**The fate of the Indians under the principle of racial slavery and white supremacy was thus in the end controlled by twin parameters: nonenslavability and nonassimilability. These parameters would eventually govern Anglo-American “Indian policy” throughout the continental colonies.**