

Slave Law in Colonial Virginia: A Timeline

1607: Jamestown, the first British North American settlement, was founded in Virginia.

1619: The first African Americans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia.

1640: Virginia courts sentenced a black run away servant, John Punch, to "serve his said master . . . for the time of his natural Life."

1660: Virginia law enacted on *English running away with negroes*.

BEE itt enacted That in case any English servant shall run away in company with any negroes who are incapable of making satisfaction by addition of time, *Bee itt enacted* that the English so running away in company with them shall serve for the time of the said negroes absence as they are to do for their owne by a former act.

1662: Virginia law enacted on: *Run-aways*.

WHEREAS there are diverse loytering runaways in this country who very often absent themselves from their masters service and sometimes in a long time cannot be found, that losse of the time and the charge in the seeking them often exceeding the value of their labor: *Bee it therefore enacted* that all runaways that shall absent themselves from their said masters shalbe lyable to make satisfaction by service after the times by custome or indenture is expired (vizt.) double their times of service soe neglected, and if the time of their running away was in the crop or the charge of recovering them extraordinary the court shall lymitt a longer time of service proportionable to the damage the master shall make appeare he hath susteyned, and because the adjudging the time they should serve is often referred untill the time by indenture is expired, when the proofoe of what is due is very uncertaine, *it is enacted* that the master of any runaway that intends to take the benefitt of this act, shall as soone as he hath recovered him carry him to the next commissioner and there declare and prove the time of his absence, and the charge he hath bin at in his recovery, which commissioner thereupon shall grant his certificate, and the court on that certificate passe judgment for the time he shall serve for his absence; and in case any English servant shall run away in company of any negroes who are incapable of making satisfaction by addition of a time, *it is enacted* that the English soe running away in the company with them shall at the time of service to their owne masters expired, serve the masters of the said negroes for their absence soe long as they should have done by this act if they had not beene slaves, every christian in company serving his proportion; and if the negroes be lost or dye in such time of their being run away, the christian servants in company with them shall by proportion among them, either pay fower thousand five hundred pounds of tobacco and caske or fower yeares service for every negroe soe lost or dead.

1662: Virginia law enacted: *Negro womens children to serve according to the condition of the mother*.

WHEREAS some doubts have arrisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or ffree, *Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly*, that all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother, *And* that if any christian shall committ ffornication with a negro man or woman, hee or shee so offending shall pay double the ffines imposed by the former act.

1667: Virginia law enacted, *declaring that baptisme of slaves doth not exempt them from bondage*.

WHEREAS some doubts have risen whether children that are slaves by birth, and by the charity and piety of their owners made pertakers of the blessed sacrament of baptisme, should by vertue of their baptisme be made ffree; *It is enacted and declared by this grand assembly, and the authority thereof*, that the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedome; that diverse masters, ffreed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavour the propagation of christianity by permitting children, though slaves, or those of growth if capable to be admitted to that sacrament

1669: Virginia law enacted: *An act about the casuall killing of slaves*.

WHEREAS the only law in force for the punishment of refractory servants (*a*) resisting their master, mistris or overseer cannot be inflicted upon negroes, nor the obstinacy of many of them by other then violent meanes suppress, *Be it enacted and declared by this grand assembly*, if any slave resist his master (or othe by his masters order correcting him) and by the extremity of the correction should chance to die, that his death shall not be accompted ffelony, but the master (or that other person appointed by the master to punish him) be acquit from molestation, since it cannot be

presumed that premeditated malice (which alone makes murder a felony) should induce any man to destroy his own estate.

1672: The King of England encourages the Royal African company to expand the British slave trade. Within 16 years the company transports nearly 90,000 Africans to the Americas.

1680: Virginia law enacted: *An act for preventing Negroes Insurrections.*

WHEREAS the frequent meeting of considerable numbers of negroe slaves under pretence of feasts and burials is judged of dangerous consequence; for prevention whereof for the future, *Be it enacted by the kings most excellent majestie by and with the consent of the generall assembly, and it is hereby enacted by the authority aforesaid*, that from and after the publication of this law, it shall not be lawfull for any negroe or other slave to carry or arme himselfe with any club, staffe, gunn, sword or any other weapon of defence or offence, nor to goe or depart from of his masters ground without a certificate from his master, mistris or overseer, and such permission not to be granted but upon perticuler and necessary occasions; and every negroe or slave soe offending not havinge a certificate as aforesaid shalbe sent to the next constable, who is hereby enjoyned and required to give the said negroe twenty lashes on his bare back well layd on, and soe sent home to his said master, mistris or overseer. *And it is further enacted by the authority aforesaid* that if any negroe or other slave shall presume or lift up his hand in opposition against any christian, shall for every such offence, upon due proove made thereof by the oath of the party before a magistrate, have and receive thirty lashed on his bare back well laid on. *And it is hereby further enacted by the authority aforesaid* that if any negroe or other slave shall absent himself from his masters service and lye hid and lurking in obscure places, comitting injuries to the inhabitants, and shall resist any person or persons that shalby any lawfull authority be employed to apprehend and take the said negroe, that then in case of such resistance, it shalbe lawfull for such person or persons to kill the said negroe or slave soe lying out and resisting, and that this law be once every six months published at the respective county courts and parish churches within this colony.

1682: Virginia laws enacted

Act I. It is enacted that all servants. . . which [sic] shall be imported into this country either by sea or by land, whether Negroes, Moors [Muslim North Africans], mulattoes or Indians who and whose parentage and native countries are not Christian at the time of their first purchase by some Christian. . . and all Indians, which shall be sold by our neighborign Indians, or any other trafficking with us for slaves, are hereby adjudged, deemed and taken to be slaves to all intents and purposes any law, usage, or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.

1698: The English Parliament ends the monopoly of the African slave trade by the Royal African Company. As a result, the number of Africans transported to the British colonies increases from 5,000 to 45,000 a year. England becomes the largest trafficker in slaves in the Western world.

1705: The Virginia General Assembly declared:

"All servants imported and brought into the Country...who were not Christians in their native Country...shall be accounted and be slaves. All Negro, mulatto and Indian slaves within this dominion...shall be held to be real estate. If any slave resist his master...correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction...the master shall be free of all punishment...as if such accident never happened."

XIX. And for a further prevention of that abominable mixture and spurious issue, which hereafter may increase in this her majesty's colony and dominion, as well by English, and other white men and women intermarrying with negros or mulattos, as by their unlawful coition with them, Be it enacted, by the authority aforesaid, and it is hereby enacted, That whatsoever English, or other white man or woman, being free, shall intemarry with a negro or mulatto man or woman, bond or free, shall, by judgment of the county court, be committed to prison, and there remain, during the space of six months, without bail or mainprize; and shall forfeit and pay ten pounds current money of Virginia, to the use of the parish, as aforesaid.

XXXIV. And if any slave resist his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such accident had never happened: And also, if any negro, mulatto, or Indian, bond or free, shall at any time, lift his or her hand, in opposition against any christian, not being negro, mulatto, or Indian, he or she so offending, shall, for every such offence, proved by the oath of the party, receive on his or her bare back, thirty lashes, well laid on; cognizable by a justice of the peace for that county wherein such offence shall be committed.

1705: The Virginia General Assembly declared: *And be it further enacted*, That no minister of the church of England, or other minister, or person whatsoever, within this colony and dominion, shall hereafter wittingly presume to marry a white man with a negro or mulatto woman; or to marry a white woman with a negro or mulatto man, upon pain of forfeiting and paying, for every such marriage the sum of ten thousand pounds of tobacco; one half to our sovereign lady the Queen, her heirs and successors, for and towards the support of the government, and the contingent charges thereof; and the other half to the informer; To be recovered, with costs, by action of debt, bill, plaint, or information, in any court of record within this her majesty's colony and dominion, wherein no essoin, protection, or wager of law, shall be allowed.

The 1705 code, which would also serve as a model for other colonies, went even further. The law imposed harsh physical punishments, since enslaved persons who did not own property could not be required to pay fines. It stated that slaves needed written permission to leave their plantation, that slaves found guilty of murder or rape would be hanged, that for robbing or any other major offence, the slave would receive sixty lashes and be placed in stocks, where his or her ears would be cut off, and that for minor offences, such as associating with whites, slaves would be whipped, branded, or maimed.

1723 - Virginia's Anti-Assembly Law impeded negroes from meeting or having a sense of community. ⁵

1723 - Virginia's Weapons Law forbade negroes from keeping weapons. ⁵

1723 - The Virginia colony enacted laws to limit the increase of free negroes to those who were born into that class or manumitted by special acts of the legislature. Free negroes were denied the right to vote and forbidden to carry weapons of any sort.

1750

Virginia passes laws defining the distinction between a slave and a servant, relegating all slaves to the status of property.

Slavery and the Law in Virginia The Growth of the Black Population:	
1625	23
1648	300
1671	2,000
1680	3,000
1700	16,390
1720	26,559
1730	30,000
1740	60,000
1775	210,000

