

The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century

1601–1700

Chapter Learning Objectives

1. Why did England decide to establish colonies in the New World, and what challenges did early colonists face?
 2. How did the introduction of tobacco into the Chesapeake region shape the Virginia colony?
 3. What social, political, and economic inequalities led to Bacon's Rebellion?
 4. How did the Spanish colonies in New Mexico and Florida differ from the Chesapeake, and why did Pueblo Indians in New Mexico revolt against Spanish rule in the late seventeenth century?
 5. How did the British develop a slave labor system in the West Indies, Carolina, and the Chesapeake? How were the systems in each of these colonies similar, and how were they different?
2. The fort demonstrated the colonists' awareness that they needed to protect themselves from Indians and Spaniards.
 3. Colonists faced additional threats from disease and starvation.
 4. Powhatan, a powerful chief of nearly fourteen thousand Algonquian people who lived in the Chesapeake, rescued the weakened and demoralized English colonists by offering them corn for barter.
 5. Despite promises by the Virginia Company that the colony would make settlers rich, most colonists went to an early grave.
- B. Cooperation and Conflict between Natives and Newcomers
1. Powhatan's people maintained a healthy distance from the English settlers.
 2. The colonists' use of violence against the Indians compelled the Algonquian to regard the English with suspicion.
 3. Although the Indians retaliated against the English, they did not organize an all-out assault against the intruders because they needed the colonists as allies against other tribes in the region.
 4. Despite continued trade with Powhatan's people, English colonists proved unable to feed themselves for more than a decade.

Annotated Chapter Outline

- I. An English Colony on the Chesapeake
 - A. The Fragile Jamestown Settlement
 1. English colonists arrived at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay on April 26, 1607; on May 14, the colonists built a fort on a small peninsula, the first building in a settlement they named Jamestown.

5. Nevertheless, the colony persisted, posing difficulties for Powhatan's chiefdom.
 6. When Powhatan's brother, Opechancanough, became supreme chief in 1622, he launched an all-out assault on English settlers, compelling the colonists from that point forward to regard the Algonquians as their perpetual enemies.
- C. From Private Company to Royal Government
1. Opechancanough's near success in pushing the colonists back to the Atlantic prompted a royal investigation of affairs in Virginia.
 2. The king appointed a royal governor for Virginia, but many of the features of local government established under the Virginia Company remained intact.
 3. The demise of the Virginia Company marked the end of the first phase of colonization of the Chesapeake region.
- II. A Tobacco Society
- A. Tobacco Agriculture
1. Tobacco was a demanding crop that required close attention and a great deal of hand labor year-round.
 2. Primitive tools and methods made this intensive cycle of labor particularly taxing.
 3. The English colonists worked hard because they realized that tobacco held out the promise of immense riches to especially enterprising and fortunate farmers.
- B. A Servant Labor System
1. Powerful incentives to immigrate to the Chesapeake combined with the colonists' desperate need for labor to create a servant labor system.
 2. About 80 percent of the immigrants to the Chesapeake during the seventeenth century were indentured servants.
 3. These indentured servants borrowed the cost of transportation from a merchant or a ship captain in England who sold this contract to a tobacco planter in North America; the servants agreed to work for four to seven years to repay the loan.
 4. The system allowed for planters to reap handsome profits.
 5. Indentured servants were overwhelmingly male, young, and unskilled; women and skilled craftsmen were rare in the Chesapeake.
 6. Servant life was harsh by the standards of seventeenth-century England and even by the frontier standards of the Chesapeake.
7. Most former servants saw little advantage to the arrangement.
 8. Planters devised severe laws to keep servants in their place.
 9. Women servants were subject to special restrictions and risks.
10. Punishments reflected four fundamental realities of the servant labor system: The demand for labor induced planters to devise legal ways to extend the period of servitude, the hopes of survival and freedom compelled servants to continue to come to the Chesapeake, these demands and hopes frequently stood in conflict, and the alternatives seemed less appealing to both planters and servants.
 11. Planters could not easily hire free workers because land was abundant, and free people preferred to work on their own land for themselves.
- C. Cultivating Land and Faith
1. Vast acres of wilderness interrupted by tobacco farms characterized the Chesapeake landscape.
 2. Most Chesapeake colonists were nominally Protestants, but on the whole, religion did not awaken the zeal of Chesapeake settlers.
 3. The situation was similar in the Catholic colony of Maryland.
- III. The Evolution of Chesapeake Society
- A. Social and Economic Polarization
1. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the principal division in Chesapeake society was between free farmers and unfree servants.
 2. Three major developments splintered the equality among freemen during the third quarter of the century: Oversupply of tobacco depressed prices in Europe, more servants survived their indentures, and a declining mortality rate encouraged the formation of a planter elite.
 3. By the 1670s, the society of the Chesapeake had become polarized.
- B. Government Policies and Political Conflict
1. In general, government and politics amplified the distinctions in Chesapeake society.
 2. As discontent mounted among the poor during the 1660s and 1670s, colonial officials tried to keep political power in safe hands.

3. In 1660, the king tightened the royal government's control of trade and collected substantial revenue from the Chesapeake by requiring the colonists to trade exclusively with England and by levying an import duty on tobacco.
- C. Bacon's Rebellion
1. Colonists accepted the social hierarchy and inequality as long as they believed government officials ruled for the general good.
 2. The colonists and the Algonquian Indians agreed to a treaty in the 1640s in which the Indians relinquished all claims to land already settled by the English.
 3. The number of land-hungry colonists continued to multiply, encroaching on Indian lands and threatening the viability of the treaty.
 4. The colonial government hammered out a fragile peace with the Indians, but frontier settlers saw little in those terms that would benefit them.
 5. The leader of the frontier settlers was Nathaniel Bacon, who charged the elite with operating the government for their private gain.
 6. Elections in 1676 ousted the political elite and put in power local leaders, including Bacon.
 7. The new legislature passed a series of reform measures that favored small planters and the frontier settlers.
 8. Governor Berkeley branded Bacon a traitor, prompting Bacon and his followers to declare war on the governor and the elite.
 9. Berkeley and his men crushed the rebellion, and the elite strengthened their positions.
 10. In the aftermath of the rebellion, tensions lessened between great planters and small farmers, in part because the elite recognized that it was safer for colonists to fight Indians rather than each other and so they made little effort to restrict settlers' encroachment in Indian lands.
- IV. Religion and Revolt in the Spanish Borderlands
- A. While English colonists in the Chesapeake grew and prospered with the tobacco trade, the northern outposts of the Spanish Empire in New Mexico and Florida stagnated.
- B. Few Spaniards migrated to New Spain's northern borderland during the seventeenth century.
- C. Royal officials considered eliminating both colonies because their costs greatly exceeded their benefits.
- D. Dozens of missionaries came to Florida and New Mexico, however, to convert the Indians to Catholicism.
- E. These missionaries supervised the building of scores of Catholic churches across Florida and New Mexico.
- F. Indians retaliated against Spanish exploitation, but Spaniards suppressed the violent uprisings.
- G. In 1680, however, Pueblo Indians organized a unified revolt; Florida Indians never mounted a unified attack on Spanish rule.
- V. Toward a Slave Labor System
- A. The West Indies: Sugar and Slavery
1. The most profitable part of the British New World empire in the seventeenth century lay in the Caribbean, where sugar production fueled the export market.
 2. Sugar production was an expensive proposition made possible by costly machinery and extensive slave labor; only the wealthiest planters could participate.
 3. For slaves, work on a sugar plantation was a life sentence to brutal, unremitting labor.
- B. Carolina: A West Indian Frontier
1. The early settlers of what became South Carolina were immigrants from Barbados.
 2. The Barbadian immigrants brought their slaves with them; by 1700, slaves made up about one-half of the population of Carolina.
 3. The Carolinas experimented unsuccessfully to match their semitropical climate with profitable export crops of tobacco, cotton, indigo, and olives; by the mid-1690s, colonists took advantage of the knowledge of rice cultivation among their many African slaves to build rice plantations.
- C. Slave Labor Emerges in the Chesapeake
1. Most inhabitants of the southern colonies of British North America lived in the Chesapeake; by 1700, one out of eight people in the region was a black person from Africa.
 2. By the end of the seventeenth century, the system of slavery made economic and political sense to planters.
 3. The slave labor system also polarized Chesapeake society along lines of race

and status: All slaves were black, and nearly all blacks were slaves; almost all free people were white, and all whites were free or only temporarily bound in indentured servitude.

4. In contrast to slaves in Barbados, most slaves in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake colonies had frequent and close contact with white people.
5. Slavery resolved the political unrest caused by the servant labor system, but it created new political problems.

Lecture Strategies

LECTURE 1

The Process of British Colonization

In this lecture, you may want to stress the expectations the British held about colonization. Have your students consider the “promises” of colonization. Relate the ways in which those expectations led to the pattern that characterized most of the early British colonies. Explain that each colony obtained a charter from the king, recruited colonists, established a beachhead settlement, and forced the indigenous peoples to aid in the colonists’ survival and later to relinquish land that they desired. Here, you might direct your students’ attention to the *American Places* feature “Jamestown, Virginia” (p. 73). Then, referring back to chapter 2, compare the process of English colonization with that of the Spanish in Central and South America. Neither group of colonizers included farmers in its initial wave, but both included soldiers and adventurers to aid in the conquest of new lands. Both groups used alliances with the natives to their advantage, and both could have been easily exterminated by the numerically superior local peoples. Unlike the Spanish, who were largely motivated by religion, the English colonists who settled in the south of the North American mainland and in the Caribbean were motivated chiefly by profit. The king was not directly involved in the initial risks of colonization in either the British or the Spanish Empire. Compare colonization by means of joint stock companies with the use of the *encomienda* in New Spain. Prepare your students for discussions (in later chapters) about American ideas regarding corporations by examining what it meant to put together a joint stock company. Finally, point out that unlike New Spain, where the traditions of agricultural production for domestic consumption

already existed under the centralized Inca and Mexica empires conquered by the Spaniards, the English colonies in North America languished until they were able to develop successful export-oriented staple agriculture. The Caribbean colonies grew sugar, the Chesapeake grew tobacco, and Carolina grew rice. Here, you might want to have your students review the detailed discussion in the textbook on how tobacco is grown and the tools used in its cultivation. Then, have students look at the *Beyond America’s Borders* feature “American Tobacco and European Consumers” (pp. 82–83). Describe the process of finding and exploiting a successful agricultural strategy, and explain the way export markets operate. Consider ending this lecture by comparing the fate of Chesapeake society with that of the Spanish outposts in Florida and New Mexico during the late seventeenth century.

LECTURE 2

From Servitude to Slavery in the Chesapeake

You can start this lecture by exploring the conditions of the tobacco boom that made servitude so widespread in the Chesapeake. Then describe the process of becoming an indentured servant, making clear that servitude was normal at that time. Show the brutality of the system, and define the mortality rates for servants through the 1650s. Have students discuss indentured servant James Revel’s verse (p. 85) describing the hardships of servitude. Finally, talk about the shift to slave labor. There had been Africans in Virginia since 1619, but not all Africans were imported as slaves. A slave-for-life was more costly than a servant-for-a-period-of-years. Moreover, no one expected a servant to survive the term of contract. The cost of a slave was therefore an unnecessary expense. With the drop in mortality rates in the 1640s, slavery became more cost-effective. The Virginia authorities finally set laws defining slavery in 1660: Children of female slaves followed the matriarchal line into slavery, in contrast to the English tradition of inheritance following the male lineage. But African slaves were not imported in great numbers until the 1680s. Bacon’s Rebellion partly explains the shift. Other factors also help explain the shift. Demographic changes in England reduced the number of jobless seeking indenture as a desperate last chance. Also, the rise of other colonial destinations, without the Chesapeake’s reputation for brutality, drew potential servants away from the Chesapeake. Make the point that indentured

servitude continued to provide laborers in America until the American Revolution. In the South, however, a society based on slavery came into existence by 1700, and portions of the southern colonies had a larger slave population than free population. Slavery was determined by race in part because the English read divine intent into skin color. Use the *Historical Question* feature “Why Did English Colonists Consider Themselves Superior to Indians and Africans?” (pp. 90–92) to discuss this predisposition.

LECTURE 3

Chesapeake and Carolina Societies Compared

Virginia and South Carolina were, and continue to be, very different places. Use a comparison of the two to discuss the racial composition and class origins of each colony. Although indentured servitude did exist in South Carolina, slavery, from the outset, became the major system of labor in the colony. Carolina was the only colony established by settlers from another colony rather than by settlers directly from Britain, and its social institutions reflected that origin. Like Barbados, the Caribbean island from which most of Carolina’s colonists came, Carolina had a majority black population, often working in large groups on plantations isolated from the white masters, who resided in town. Virginia had a white majority; large plantations were much less predominant, and most masters worked beside their few slaves. Draw students’ attention to the photo “Inside a Poor Planter’s House” (p. 89) to give them some idea of the living conditions of yeoman farmers. The slave population in the Caribbean was not self-sustaining because of high mortality rates. It therefore depended on continuous imports from Africa. The Carolina slave population followed this pattern until the 1760s. Declining slave mortality rates in the Chesapeake allowed that population to reproduce itself by the 1720s. Among whites, Virginia did not create a self-replicating elite until the 1660s, when lesser nobles bought established plantations for their younger sons. Until that time, everyone was affected by high mortality rates. An elite was formed in Carolina from the beginning, with younger brothers and sons of Barbadian planters migrating to Carolina and establishing Barbadian culture there. For this lecture, have students refer to Map 3.1, “The Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century” (p. 81), and Map 3.2, “The West Indies and Carolina in the Seventeenth Century” (p. 96).

Anticipating Student Reactions: Common Misconceptions and Difficult Topics

1. *The Earliest Immigrants Had the Best Chance of Obtaining Wealth and Position*

It is generally true that the first arrivals in a new colony somewhat arbitrarily decided on the rules of political participation and the protection of property. And they usually made these rules to their own advantage, and to subsequent colonists’ detriment, in order to guarantee and perpetuate their status as the political and economic elite of the colony. But these general rules were tempered by two conditions in the Chesapeake and in other British colonies. First, not everyone was equal on arrival; some had greater wealth, distinction of ancestry, or simply better connections. Thus, some had better access to the decision-making process than others. Second, the death rate eliminated many influential families who helped make the initial rules. In Virginia, the grandees against whom Nathaniel Bacon railed got themselves established not during the tobacco boom of the 1620s, when massive profits were possible and the first rules for consolidation of wealth were laid out, but in the 1660s, after two generations of entrepreneurial Virginians had died. With chances of survival increasing in the colonies after the 1640s, minor nobility in England started sending younger sons to purchase established plantations and buy their way into an existing system that guaranteed their establishment as the economic and political elite of the colony. Participants in Bacon’s Rebellion were not only members of the lower classes fighting exploitation by the elite but also displaced middling planters who saw this recently imported elite as a challenge to their chances for social mobility.

2. *Servitude Was an Abnormal Condition*

You may need to explain to students that servitude was a normal part of early modern European and, by extension, early American society. It was common for men, women, and even children to be bound out for a period of time. It is important, however, to make clear that the seven-year indenture of the Chesapeake servants was abnormal within this social system of servitude. Such an indenture was similar to the apprenticing of orphans — lengthy periods of servitude with no legal requirements for the master to provide more than basic needs during the period of indenture. Also abnormal was the

servant's lack of voice in choosing a master. The condition often approached that of slaves. Even "freedom dues" could be evaded by clever masters who offered or forced servants to take their freedom a few months early in exchange for renouncing the little food and clothing owed them at the end of their service. So, while servitude was commonplace in seventeenth-century society, the indentured servitude of the Chesapeake was unusually harsh. Finally, students may be surprised to learn that these servants were usually their age or younger. The average age of Chesapeake servants was sixteen. In fact, most colonists were under the age of thirty, and in the "killing years" of Virginia's first decade, most were under twenty. Help students identify with colonists of every social class, but emphasize that servants made up the majority of colonists.

3. *Native Americans Retreated and Disappeared in the Face of English Superiority*

Indians were everywhere in British North America. Some groups were forced to retreat when the English arrived. Others were completely wiped out in the systematic warfare envisioned by Nathaniel Bacon. But many others, "the protected and Darling Indians" mentioned by Bacon, were treaty Indians who paid tribute to the governor in exchange for being left in peace. Hence, many Indians lived directly among the newly freed servants who were in direct competition with them for the limited lands available. Colonial authorities were not opposed to the eventual assimilation of the Indians, unlike African slaves. To see how Europeans' views of Indians compared with their perspective on African slaves, refer students to the *Historical Question* feature "Why Did English Colonists Consider Themselves Superior to Indians and Africans?" (pp. 90–92). Finally, make the point that colonial authorities profited from the Indians' continued presence through payment of tribute and through monopolies on trade with them. The Indians did not really retreat abruptly; they were subjected over time to disease, genocide, and assimilation.

In-Class Activities

Using Film and Television in the Classroom

When discussing the transformation of servant to slave labor in the British colonies, you can use the first episode of the PBS series *Africans in America*,

"The Terrible Transformation," which covers the institutionalization of slavery in America.

Class Discussion Starters

When discussing the early settlement of Jamestown, have your students consider, "What if English farmers had colonized Virginia?" What would have been the possible ramifications for colonial-native American relations if the colonists had not depended on Powhatan's confederation for survival? Would the colonists have resorted to African slavery if they had built an economy based on food crops rather than cash crops? Here, bring in *The Promise of Technology* feature "Corn, the 'Life-Giver'" (pp. 78–79) to have students think about the ways in which corn could have transformed the British colony. Would corn have been enough to sustain the colony?

Historical Debates

When discussing the institutionalization of slavery in the British colonies, have your students consider the degree to which the colonists were motivated by economics and the degree to which they were motivated by racism. You may want to use the *Historical Question* feature "Why Did English Colonists Consider Themselves Superior to Indians and Africans?" (pp. 90–92). Was slavery a manifestation of the colonists' racism? Or did the colonists become racist after they enslaved Africans? Although most historians now concur that modified versions of both positions are valid, students can benefit from working through the arguments and evidence themselves.

Additional Resources for Chapter 3

For Instructors

Transparencies

The following maps and images from chapter 3 are available as full-color acetates:

- Map 3.1 The Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century
- Map 3.2 The West Indies and Carolina in the Seventeenth Century
- *John Smith's Map of Virginia*
- *Tobacco Cutter*

Instructor's Resource CD-ROM

The following maps and image from chapter 3, as well as a chapter outline, are available on disc in both *PowerPoint* and *jpeg* formats:

- Map 3.1 The Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century
- Map 3.2 The West Indies and Carolina in the Seventeenth Century
- *Pocahontas in England*

Additional relevant images are available on disc in *jpeg* format only:

- *John Smith and Chief Opechancanough*
- *The Tobacco Economy*
- *Rice Hulling in West Africa and Georgia*

Using the Bedford Series with *The American Promise*

Available online at bedfordstmartins.com/usingseries, this guide offers practical suggestions for incorporating volumes from the Bedford Series in History and Culture and the Historians at Work Series into the U.S. history survey. Relevant titles for chapter 3 include:

- *Envisioning America: English Plans for the Colonization of North America, 1580–1640*, edited with an introduction by Peter C. Mancall
- *How Did American Slavery Begin?* by Edward Countryman

For Students

Reading the American Past

The following documents are available in chapter 3 of the companion reader by Michael P. Johnson, Johns Hopkins University:

1. Opechancanough's 1622 Uprising in Virginia: Edward Waterhouse, *Declaration*, 1622
2. Francisco Pareja Instructs Spanish Missionaries about the Sins of Florida's Timucuan Indians: *Confessionario*, 1613
3. A Yeoman Planter's Tobacco Farm: Robert Cole, *Inventory*, 1661
4. Sex and Race Relations: *Testimony from Virginia Court Records*, 1681
5. Bacon's Rebellion: Nathaniel Bacon, *Declaration*, 1676

Online Study Guide at bedfordstmartins.com/roark

The Online Study Guide helps students synthesize the material from the textbook as well as practice the skills historians use to make sense of the past. The following Map and Visual activities are available for chapter 3:

Map Activity

- Map 3.1 The Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century
- Map 3.2 The West Indies and Carolina in the Seventeenth Century

Visual Activity

- *Secotan Village*

