

# *Indentured Servitude in Eighteenth-Century Maryland*

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*This study of the role of indentured servitude in late colonial Maryland offers a new perspective on the transformation of its labour force from white servants to African slaves. Based on contemporary legislation, correspondence and periodicals, it argues that increased economic stratification, consequent in part on the introduction of a self-perpetuating work force on the large plantations, slowed the transition to slavery in the early eighteenth century. Among smaller planters too poor to buy slaves, the demand for relatively unskilled white servants persisted throughout the colonial period.*

*Cette étude du rôle des engagés au Maryland à la fin de la période coloniale offre une perspective nouvelle de la transformation de la force de travail dans cette colonie. La législation, la correspondance et les périodiques de l'époque suggèrent que la stratification économique résultant en partie du remplacement des engagés par les esclaves sur les grandes plantations a ralenti cette transformation de la main-d'oeuvre coloniale au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ne pouvant prendre le même avantage d'une main-d'oeuvre servile capable de se reproduire, les petits planteurs continuèrent tout au long de la période coloniale d'avoir recours aux engagés blancs peu qualifiés.*

In 1703 an indentured servant named Daniel Dulany arrived in Annapolis from Ireland. He was eighteen. Six years later he was admitted to the bar in Charles County, Maryland, and by the 1720s had become a popular and influential figure in Maryland politics. Through his own industry and a series of advantageous marriages, he accumulated influential connections and a great fortune based on land speculation and various mercantile ventures.<sup>1</sup> By 1729, Dulany had come full circle: the former indentured servant was now an importer of slaves.<sup>2</sup>

This spectacular career in no way typifies the experience of indentured servants in eighteenth-century Maryland,<sup>3</sup> but it encompasses both the perspectives from

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1. Aubrey C. LAND, *The Dulanys of Maryland: A Biographical Study of Daniel Dulany, the Elder (1685-1753) and Daniel Dulany, the Younger (1722-1797)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955), pp. 1-106.

2. *Maryland Gazette*, 20 May 1729. Daniel Dulany and two other men advertised 200 slaves for sale in an advertisement which ran until late July of that year.

3. Dulany had been a student at the University of Dublin prior to indenturing himself. On arrival his indenture was purchased by Colonel George Plater, a former Attorney-General of Maryland, who took Dulany into his law practice. Dulany's legal training, augmented by a term at Gray's Inn in 1717, qualified him for a number of lucrative government posts, which is not to accuse him of impropriety but to demonstrate that he enjoyed advantages far, far beyond those of most indentured servants.

which the institution of indentured servitude is usually studied: its efficacy as a means of upward mobility and its role as a precursor of slavery. Court records, probate inventories and muster rolls have been cited as evidence that, by 1720, the possibility of upward mobility for freedmen had been eroded by the growth of an indigenous black labour force.<sup>4</sup> However, indentured servitude did not wither away in eighteenth-century Maryland, and its persistence and place in the late colonial period offer a new perspective on the economic stratification which accompanied the growth of slavery.

Recent scholarship has provided a model of indentured servitude which suggests that its importance diminished over time in all the British colonies. According to the model, demographic factors and the thrust of mercantilist theory diminished the supply of servants from England towards the end of the seventeenth century. At the same time, conditions in the Caribbean colonies deterred prospective English servants, compelling planters there to change to a slave labour force. As colonial entrepreneurs met their labour requirements with slaves, the age and skill level of those servants who continued to emigrate in the eighteenth century appear to have risen and the proportion of women, presumably less skilled, to have declined. Over time it became apparent that slaves could be trained even to skilled trades and that they were a much sounder investment. As the percentage of slaves in the labour force rose, the importations of white servants declined, until in the eighteenth century they were comprised chiefly of skilled craftsmen.<sup>5</sup>

This model has proven very useful for understanding those transformations to enslaved labour forces which took place in the Caribbean and the Southern mainland colonies. Maryland's first labourers were indentured servants. Slaves began to be introduced into the Chesapeake region in small numbers after 1650, and large numbers were imported in the 1690s. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, African slaves comprised the larger proportion of the bound labour in Maryland.

**Table 1** Population Distribution, Maryland, 1707, 1755

Year	Free whites	White servants	Slaves	Total
1707	26,223	3,003	4,657	33,883
1755	98,357	8,852	46,356	153,565

Source: Evarts P. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790*, pp. 124-26.

4. Indentured servitude in seventeenth-century Maryland has been the subject of intensive study. See, for example, Lois Green CARR and Russell R. MENARD, "Immigration and Opportunity: The Freedman in Early Colonial Maryland", in *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Thad W. TATE and David L. AMMERMAN (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), pp. 206-42; Russell R. MENARD, "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System", *Southern Studies*, XVI (Winter 1977): 355-90; Lorena S. WALSH "Servitude and Opportunity in Charles County, Maryland, 1658-1705", in *Law, Society and Politics in Early Maryland*, eds. Aubrey C. LAND et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 111-33.

5. This analysis is drawn from the following sources: David W. GALENSON, *White Servitude in Colonial America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); MENARD, "From Servants to Slaves", pp. 355-90; and Henry A. GEMERY and Jan S. HOGENDORN, "The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Tentative Economic Model", *Journal of African History*, 15, 2 (1974): 223-46.

However, at this point the pace of the transition slowed considerably. Although the ratio of servants to slaves widened gradually, importations of servants continued in significant numbers,<sup>6</sup> and servitude and slavery coexisted for the remainder of the colonial period. Despite rapid growth of both the indigenous white and black populations, one in every twelve white persons in Maryland in 1755 was an indentured servant.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the evidence does not suggest that the majority of these were skilled craftsmen.

The growth of the black population masks the extent to which indentured servitude persisted in Maryland after 1700. Table 2 demonstrates that in 1707 the colonists met approximately 40 percent of their bound labour requirements with indentured servants and 60 percent with slaves.

**Table 2** Proportion of Servants in the Maryland Population, 1707, 1755

Year	% of bound population	% of white population	% of total population
1707	39.2	10.3	8.9
1755	16.0	8.2	5.8

Source: See Table 1.

As most of the blacks in 1707 were newly arrived from Africa,<sup>8</sup> it can be assumed that, like servants, most were workers. But this assumption is less warranted for the figures for slaves at mid-century. Although all the servants who appear in the census of 1755 laboured in one capacity or another, half of the slave population in much of Maryland by this time may have been comprised of children.<sup>9</sup> Slave children worked to some extent, but their contribution was offset by the diminishing productivity of elderly slaves and the time lost by female slaves as a consequence of pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>10</sup> When all these factors are taken into account, probably no more than two-thirds of well-established slave populations were engaged in productive labour. This being the case, the number of indentured servants in 1755 represents more than 20 percent of the *actual workers* in the bound labour force, a decline of less than 50 percent from the levels of 1707.

6. Abbott Emerson SMITH, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607-1776* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1947), p. 325.

7. Robert V. WELLS, *The Population of the British Colonies in America Before 1776* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 149-50.

8. Russell R. MENARD, "The Maryland Slave Population, 1658 to 1730: A Demographic Profile of Blacks in Four Counties", *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *WMQ*), 3d ser., XXXII (1975): 42.

9. *Ibid.* See also Paul G.E. CLEMENS, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 188; and Evarts P. GREENE and Virginia D. HARRINGTON, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 126.

10. Robert W. FOGEL and Stanley L. ENGERMAN, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, 2 vol. (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1974), 1: 207. But see also Daniel C. LITTLEFIELD, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 69.

The geographical distribution of servants in 1755 underscores the strength of their persistence. A clear correlation between the predominance or scarcity of slaves and the number of servants in a given area does not emerge (Spearman's  $r = .32$ ). The areas with the smallest proportion of servants are not those with the highest proportion of slaves, nor is the reverse true. Areas where slavery predominated — Anne Arundel, Calvert, St. Mary's, Charles and Prince George's counties — continued to absorb substantial numbers of indentured servants.

**Table 3**                      **Distribution of Bound Labour by County, Maryland, 1707, 1755**

County	% of colony's population	% of colony's servants	% of colony's slaves
Cecil	5.0	9.0	3.2
Kent	6.2	9.1	6.0
Queen Anne's	7.3	10.9	6.1
Talbot	5.6	6.3	6.5
Dorchester	7.7	4.3	6.0
Somerset	5.6	1.0	7.0
Worcester	6.6	1.4	4.6
Baltimore	11.2	17.4	9.6
Anne Arundel	8.6	10.1	12.2
Calvert	3.7	2.9	5.7
St. Mary's	7.3	5.2	8.2
Charles	8.5	9.7	10.9
Prince George's	7.6	5.2	9.8
Frederick	9.1	7.4	4.2
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Robert V. Wells, *The Population of the British Colonies in America Before 1776*, p. 147.

Only in Calvert County does the proportion of servants approach the figure which might be expected to represent artisans, overseers and storekeepers; and only in Cecil County is there a clear preference for indentured over enslaved labour. The census of 1755 seems to discount a simple regional explanation for the persistence of servants. In almost every county, purchasers of additional labour were confronted with the choice between servants and slaves throughout the eighteenth century.

Despite the growth of African slavery, the market for indentured servants continued to an extent much greater than the need for skilled labour warranted. This article identifies and discusses the factors which induced some purchasers to continue to opt for servants rather than slaves. In order to analyze the market for indentured servants, the supply and the demand for their labour and also the structures of the servant trade will be examined. An effort will be made to determine who required the labour of the servants and the type of work for which they were wanted. This analysis of the role of indentured servitude in the economy of late colonial Maryland will provide an explanation of why the market for white servants continued once a steady supply of slaves became available.

The nature of a colony's agricultural production determined its labour demands. Bound labour appears to have been specifically linked to staple agriculture.<sup>11</sup> Yet

11. GALENSON, *White Servitude*, pp. 126-27.

staple production did not require an enslaved labour force. Virtually every staple-producing colony began by supplying its needs for additional labour with indentured servants. For most of the seventeenth century Maryland had met its labour requirements with indentured servants from England. Seventy percent of the immigrants to Maryland between 1634 and 1681 were servants. Throughout this period the tobacco industry burgeoned, combining with high mortality levels in the Chesapeake region to create a voracious demand for labour.<sup>12</sup> By the 1670s, however, the supply of English servants began to fall significantly below demand.<sup>13</sup> The population growth that had occurred in England since the beginning of the sixteenth century ceased about the middle of the seventeenth, easing the dislocations caused by agricultural innovations and by disruptions in the cloth trade. Thus the impetus to leave affected areas of England — East Anglia and the West Country especially — subsided. Simultaneously, official attitudes towards emigration changed, expressing fears that England would be depopulated by the exodus of servants.<sup>14</sup>

The decline in the supply of English servants occurred prior to the arrival of large numbers of slaves in Maryland in the 1690s.<sup>15</sup> Marylanders appear to have responded to these developments as early as 1666. In that year the Assembly of Maryland extended the term of adult servants bound according to the “custom of the country” — those arriving without written indentures — from four to five years. This suggests that planters were attempting to compensate for a labour shortage by extending the duration of the servants’ terms.<sup>16</sup> The planters argued that they could not recoup their investment in four years. The act included a safeguard which stipulated that any master who wished to claim more than five years, i.e., that his servant was under 22 years of age, must bring such a servant to the county court to have the age of the servant determined by a Magistrate, “except he, shee or they [the master] claime but five years service of such serv<sup>t</sup>.” This provision was backed by a fine for non-performance in the case of an underage servant. However,

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12. WALSH, “Servitude and Opportunity”, p. 117. Walsh estimates that of males imported into the Chesapeake region in the seventeenth century, 43 percent would not survive the first year and a further 4 percent would die before serving out their indentures.

13. Public Record Office, *Calender of State Papers: Domestic* (hereafter referred to as PRO, CSP: Domestic), eds. William John HARDY et al., 23 vols. (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprints, 1969), 10 (1699-1700): 78.

14. “The two last great Plagues, the Civil Wars at Home, and the several wars with Holland, Spain and France, have destroyed several hundred thousands of men, which lived amongst us, besides vast numbers have transported themselves or been transported into Ireland, and our other Foreign Plantations ...”, *The Grand Concern of England Explained* (London, 1673), quoted in Klaus E. KNORR, *British Colonial Theories, 1570-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1944), p. 72.

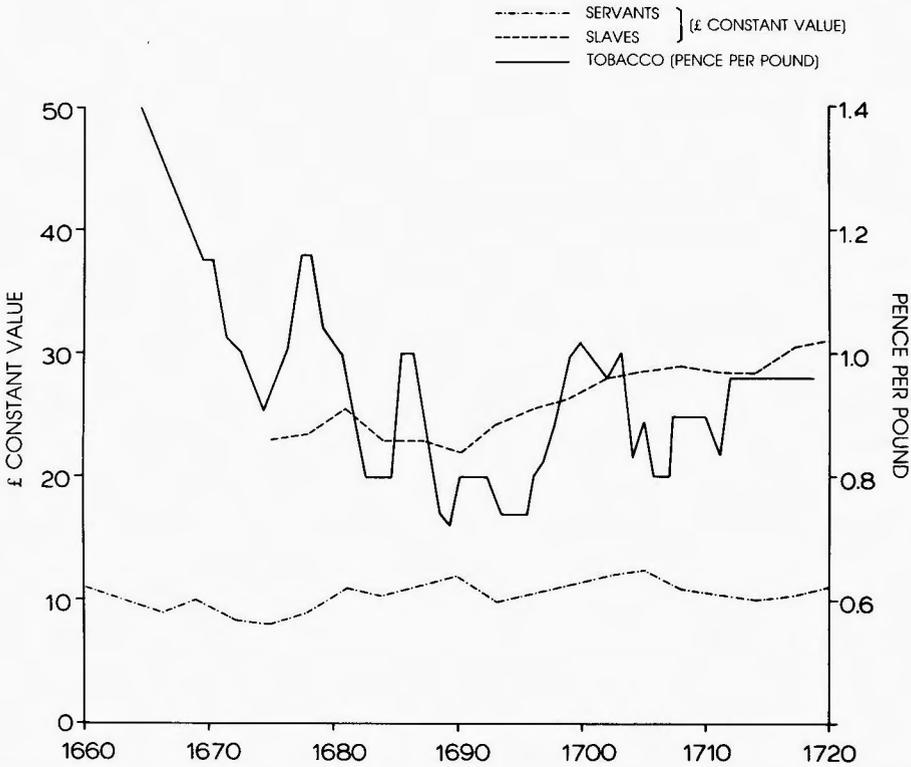
15. Blacks were imported into Maryland after 1650, although several factors kept the numbers low until the 1690s. Prior to 1698, slave ships came only occasionally directly from Africa to the Chesapeake, nor did Maryland have a large trade with the West Indies which would enable the purchase of slaves there (CLEMENS, *Atlantic Economy*, pp. 59-60). Stagnation in the tobacco trade also militated against the acquisition of slaves. In 1685, an additional duty was imposed which quintupled the cost of importing tobacco into England (*ibid.*, p. 36). This not only prevented the expansion of the domestic market for tobacco there, but the discount offered for immediate payment of the duty depleted the operating funds of the merchants and lowered prices paid to planters. The re-export trade to Northern Europe, the only area where the market could expand, was interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1689, depressing prices even further (*ibid.*, p. 39). Thus planters had neither the opportunity nor the resources to purchase substantial numbers of slaves. See also MENARD, “Servants to Slaves”, pp. 372-73.

16. *Proceedings and Acts of the Assembly of Maryland* (hereafter *Proceedings and Acts*), April-May 1666, *Archives of Maryland* (hereafter *AM*), 2: 147.

the assumption that the resulting records document all of the servants arriving in the Province is unwarranted. Planters were unlikely to go to the time and expense involved in a court appearance to certify what the law already guaranteed them for adult servants.

An analysis of servant and slave prices for the period 1660-1720 demonstrates neither the sharp rise in the price of servants prior to 1690 which would be characteristic of increasing scarcity in the face of continued demand,<sup>17</sup> nor the declining price for servants after 1700 which should be apparent if slaves displaced servants in the labour market.

Figure 1. Price Movements for Servants, Slaves and Tobacco  
1660-1720



Sources: Paul G.E. Clemens, The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) p.53 and Russell R. Menard "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," Southern Studies Winter 1977, pp.370, 372.

17. MENARD, "Servants to Slaves", p. 370.

Throughout this period servant prices rose and fell approximately in keeping with tobacco prices. War in Europe curtailed the supply of servants and drove up servant prices as the levels of 1689-91 demonstrate, but war also diverted slave ships from the Caribbean to the Chesapeake. After the influx of slaves into Maryland in the early 1690s, the prices of servants and slaves tended to rise together in periods when tobacco was booming, as at the turn of the century. Rises in the price of servants tended to parallel rises in the price of slaves. This reinforces the likelihood that demand for both continued: a possibility which a concentration on the ratio of servants to slaves obscures. In 1720, twenty-five years after Maryland gained access to a steady supply of slaves, the price differential between servants and slaves does not suggest a declining demand for servants. Instead, the evidence of price levels suggests a fairly constant demand for servants and a moderate but steady increase in competition for slaves.

Governor Nicholson reported to the Council of Trade and Plantations in 1697: "The impost on liquors has amounted to very little this year, as also that upon negroes, though both negroes and servants are much wanted here, which ... is one of the causes of the decay of trade in Maryland."<sup>18</sup> Four years later, despite sizeable influxes of servants and slaves which coincided with booming tobacco prices, the Maryland House of Delegates was informed: "The gentlemen, appointed to purchase a servant for James Baker say there is none to be had in the town [Annapolis]."<sup>19</sup> Three years later, when war arrested the flow of servants, the Council and Assembly instructed their agent in London, (former Governor) Nathaniel Blakiston: "That you should Endeav' to procure a Law giveing Leave and making the way Easy for transporting Servants to this place since Experience shows that peopleing a Countrey is the greatest step to its Growth and Improvement."<sup>20</sup> Though slaves were now readily available and tobacco prices high, the demand for servants had not abated.

The purchase of servants undoubtedly varied with the level of tobacco prices. These rose sharply in the late 1730s following the introduction of paper currency in Maryland in 1734. This provided the planters with ready money and generated mild inflation. Although tobacco prices rose 100 percent, slave prices rose only 25 percent. Merchants in Oxford, Maryland, sold twice as many slaves (600) in the years 1739 to 1743 as they had done in the preceding fifteen years. However, during the same period, they sold just as many *servants* as they did slaves.<sup>21</sup> The Maryland Assembly passed a tobacco inspection act in 1747 which led to higher prices because it improved the quality of the product, but as the population figures from 1755 demonstrate, the increased revenues did not eradicate the demand for indentured servants.

The best evidence of the continued demand for servants is that price levels for servants remained remarkably steady throughout the eighteenth century. David Galenson reports the average price of males with four years to serve as £8.95 with

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18. Public Record Office, *Calender of State Papers: Colonial Series, America and West Indies* (hereafter referred to as PRO, *CSP: Colonial Series*), eds. Cecil HEADLAM et al., 43 vols. (Vaduz: Kraus Reprints, 1964), 15: 550, no. 1178.

19. *Ibid.*, 19: 249, no. 448; and CLEMENS, *Atlantic Economy*, p. 55.

20. *Proceedings and Acts*, 1 May 1704, *AM*, 24: 394.

21. CLEMENS, *Atlantic Economy*, p. 166.

a median price of £9. For a nineteen-year-old female the average price for the same period was £7.75 with a median of £8.<sup>22</sup> In the early 1770s a Parliamentary Committee was informed that the average price received for convict servants (who served for seven years) was £10, with women bringing £8-9 and skilled men £15-25.<sup>23</sup> As convicts were considered the least desirable category of servant, these figures can be regarded as the lower bound of servant prices and when taken together with the moderate inflation which took place in Maryland towards the end of the colonial period, they support the contention that price levels for servants, and therefore the demand, remained stable and constant.

Though the change to slaves was initiated by a shortage of English servants, there were alternative sources of indentured labour. The factors which slowed the emigration of English servants did not obtain in Ireland. Unlike England, Ireland experienced rapid population growth throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> Ireland had no Poor Law to tie its people to their parishes or provide them with a meagre sustenance, thus emigration was one of very few options for the rural poor.<sup>25</sup> The Navigation Acts placed major restrictions on Irish commerce, stifling the re-export trade in tobacco which had developed between Ireland and the continent towards the end of the seventeenth century,<sup>26</sup> and Irish manufacturing was also hampered by the restrictions. A series of natural crises of famine and disease maintained the flow of emigrants during the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> This emigration posed no threat to English interests, and the trade in Irish servants was specifically exempted from the controls in the Navigation Acts.<sup>28</sup> The tobacco fleets sailing in ballast for the Chesapeake continued to victual at Waterford, Wexford and Cork, and found there many labourers willing to indenture.

Bad harvests increased the flow of English servants between 1697 and 1701.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, 600 or 700 Irish servants entered the province in 1700.<sup>30</sup> During the next decade, agents from Maryland used promises of religious toleration to recruit servants in Ireland,<sup>31</sup> to the very great consternation of Governor Seymour. He perceived "the importation of so many Irish servants" as "a growing mischief".<sup>32</sup> In 1704, an impost was laid on Irish Catholic servants imported into the province. Although its avowed intent was "to Prevent the Importing of Too Great a Number

22. GALENSON, *White Servitude*, p. 100, and n. 13, p. 253. Galenson notes that the majority of the probate inventories from which these figures are drawn were extrapolated from inventories derived from the earlier part of the period. This means that most of these servants would have been purchased prior to the tobacco boom of the late 1730s.

23. Duncan Campbell to Parliamentary Committee, 10 April 1774, *Journals of the House of Commons* (London, 1803), 23: 310-11.

24. L. M. CULLEN, "Population Growth and Diet: 1600-1850", in *Irish Population, Economy and Society: Essays in Honour of K. M. Connell*, eds. J. M. GOLDSTROM, Leslie A. CLARKSON (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 90.

25. Audrey LOCKHART, *Some Aspects of Emigration From Ireland to the North American Colonies Between 1660 and 1775* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), p. 9.

26. CLEMENS, *Atlantic Economy*, p. 114.

27. LOCKHART, *Some Aspects*, p. 10.

28. 12 Car. 2, ch. 18.

29. CLEMENS, *Atlantic Economy*, p. 55.

30. Governor Sir Frances Nicholson to the Board of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations (hereafter referred to as Board of Trade), 13 July 1697, PRO, CSP: *Colonial Series*, 16: 36, no. 760.

31. *Ibid.*, 8 March 1705/6, 23: 67, no. 160, and 2 August 1706, 23: 195, no. 470.

32. *Ibid.*, 8 March 1705/6, 23: 67, no. 160.

of Irish Papists into This Province",<sup>33</sup> it was coupled with an act renewing the duty on negroes, and as such seems to have been at least in part a revenue bill thereby implying the expectation that imports would continue. In 1715 Governor Hart informed Lord Townshend that these acts "raise[d] a considerable supply for defraying the necessary charges of ye Governmt."<sup>34</sup> In the same year the impost was doubled to finance *An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, and Erecting Schools in the several Counties within this Province*,<sup>35</sup> a further indication that the trade in Irish servants was significant and was expected to continue. In the early 1730s London merchants appealed to the Board of Trade and to the House of Lords in a concerted but unsuccessful attempt to have these and other imposts lifted,<sup>36</sup> further evidence of the importance attached to the trade in Irish servants.

Irish servants were regarded as undesirable for religious and racial reasons. In addition to this, a great many of them were also convicts, although it must be said that half of these were transported for vagrancy and vagrancy in Ireland did not necessarily have criminal implications. Irish newspapers from the eighteenth century record regular sailings of transport ships, and ships' captains advertised for potential servants throughout the period.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, notice of the arrival of these servants from Irish ports appeared frequently in Maryland papers.<sup>38</sup> Between 1745 and 1775, roughly 25 percent of the servants known to have entered Maryland were from Ireland.<sup>39</sup>

Convicts from England, Ireland and Scotland entered Maryland in undetermined numbers during the seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup> An act of the Maryland Assembly of 1679 forbade such importations, which suggests not only that they were taking place, but that the labour situation was not so desperate at that point that some choice could not be exercised. Twenty-one years later the colonists could no longer afford to be so selective, and the legislation was disallowed in 1700.<sup>41</sup> An act of the Irish parliament in 1704 permitted judges to commute sentences to transportation.<sup>42</sup> A similar act entitled *An Act for the further preventing Robbery, Burglary, and*

33. *Proceedings and Acts*, 1 May 1704, *AM*, 24: 397.

34. PRO, *CSP: Colonial Series*, 30 July 1715, 28: 249, no. 541.

35. *Proceedings and Acts*, 25 July 1716, *AM*, 30: 515. Following the reassertion of the Proprietary powers by Lord Baltimore in 1733, the Assembly attempted to fight back by putting time limits — usually 3 years — on all finance bills (Aubrey C. LAND, *A Colonial History of Maryland* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1981). This particular Act was supplemented in 1735 and then re-enacted in 1740, 1744, 1747, 1749, 1754, 1757, 1762, 1765, and 1763. It is unlikely that the impost would have been continued if there had been at any time the expectation that the flow of Irish Catholic servants was about to cease.

36. The London merchants argued that the provisions of the act which made these imposts payable by the importer and exempted native Marylanders discriminated against them. Micajah Perry et al. to the Board of Trade, 8 October 1731, PRO, *CSP: Colonial Series*, 38: 294, no. 434, i (ii-iii); and Council of the Board of Trade to the House of Lords, 23 January 1733/4. *Journals of the House of Lords* (London, 1772), 24: 328-29.

37. Francis Godwin JAMES, *Ireland in the Empire: 1680-1770* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 300.

38. For example, advertisements of shipments of servants from Ireland in the *Maryland Gazette*, 28 June 1764, 25 June 1767, 20 October 1774, and many others.

39. SMITH, *Colonists in Bondage*, p. 325.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-6 and pp. 199-200; see also Ian C. C. GRAHAM, *Colonists from Scotland: Emigrants to North America, 1707-1783* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 111.

41. *Proceedings and Acts*, August-September 1681, *AM*, 8: 215.

42. SMITH, *Colonists in Bondage*, p. 134.

*other Felonies; and the more effectual Transportation of Felons; and unlawful Exporters of wool*, was passed by the British Parliament in 1717.<sup>43</sup> This act provided for contracting shippers to transport convicts to the various plantations and to sell them there for terms of seven or fourteen years. The merchants had to post a bond and produce proof that they had in fact landed their cargos and that the convicts would not return to Britain until their sentences had expired.<sup>44</sup> Transport of those who came to be known as “His Majesty’s seven year passengers” began in 1718.

Convicts were transported from all the English provincial circuits, though towards the end of the colonial period it was conceded that most came from London and Home counties. Prospective shippers bid for the contracts annually and after 1722 were simply paid £5 per convict. The contractors had to take all the convicts ordered to be transported, regardless of health or age, which meant that sometimes the old and infirm could only be disposed of by giving a premium to anyone who would take them. Conditions on the transports were reminiscent of those on slave ships. Convicts were chained below decks and there was little or no ventilation. The food was generally adequate, but nonetheless about 15 percent of the convicts died at sea.<sup>45</sup>

By the mid-1720s opinion was growing among the larger planters against continuing the importations. In 1723, convinced that they were experiencing a crime wave which was a direct result of the convict importations, the Assembly of Maryland attempted to restrict the trade by demanding large bonds from shippers before they could land convicts. The shippers protested vehemently that the action of the Assembly prevented them from fulfilling their contracts. Jonathan Forward, one of the largest shippers, appealed to the Proprietor, and the act was disallowed.<sup>46</sup> However, the problem had not been solved. An act of the Maryland legislature in 1727 made masters responsible for fines arising from their servants’ actions, and compensated them by up to three years’ extension of their servants’ time.<sup>47</sup> In 1728, another act was passed, requiring captains landing convicts to make a statement of the crimes for which their passengers had been transported.<sup>48</sup> Servants were ready scapegoats for any public concern.

In 1737 another menace was addressed. An act was passed which provided that any white servant who aided or enticed a runaway slave, “shall after the Expiration of his time of Servitude become a Servant to the Master or Owner of such slave for and During the Term of four years or Satisfie and Pay to the Master or Owner the Value of Such Slave.”<sup>49</sup> This provision was to be read in public at every county court session. In 1748 the penalty for harbouring runaway servants was increased.<sup>50</sup> Convicts appear to have been the most likely of all servants to abscond. Eleven of the twenty-four runaway servants advertised in the *Maryland*

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43. 4 Geo. 1, ch. 11.

44. SMITH, *Colonists in Bondage*, pp. 113-14.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Proceedings of the Council of Maryland* (hereafter referred to as *Proceedings of the Council*), 1724, *AM*, 25: 435-39.

47. *Proceedings and Acts*, October 1727, *AM*, 26: 82-83.

48. *Ibid.*, October/November 1728, *AM*, 34: 298-302.

49. *Ibid.*, May 1737, *AM*, 40: 94-95.

50. *Ibid.*, 10 June 1748, *AM*, 46: 149-51.

*Gazette* between 1729-30 can be at least tentatively identified as convicts,<sup>51</sup> and of those advertised in the same paper between 1760 and 1764, 115 of 178 were described as convicts.<sup>52</sup> Others were described variously as of "true Newgate Breed", as "hardened idle cunning rogue[s]", and so forth.<sup>53</sup>

In 1751, after a year of particularly heavy imports of convicts, magistrates in Baltimore attempted to demand a bond of £50 per felon, but this action was overruled by the Provincial court.<sup>54</sup> As in 1723 shippers in London were very much alive to any action which might prejudice their trade. When the Maryland Assembly imposed a cleverly worded duty of 20s., for servants "to serve for the term of seven years or upwards", the act was confirmed because it did not specifically refer to convicts. However, the major shipper at that time, one Steuart, forbade his agents in Maryland to pay the duty and it lapsed the following year.<sup>55</sup> Ten years later the Assembly again attempted to restrict the trade by passing a quarantine law after a purportedly convict-borne epidemic. The law compelled shippers to improve conditions on the ships and to wait twenty days before disembarking their "passengers".<sup>56</sup> Despite this an observer noted in 1765 that out of "at least ten thousand Convicts and passengers, or indented Servants, imported yearly into the Different Colonies, the first are Sent to Virginia and Maryland only."<sup>57</sup> Nearly half of all the servants imported into Annapolis, Maryland, after 1745 were convicts, as were a considerable portion of the Irish servants.<sup>58</sup> However, these were not foisted on an unwilling populace, for as Governor Charles Calvert remarked in 1723: "I could heartily wish they were sent to any other of His Majesty's Plantations but while we purchase they will send them, and we bring the Evil upon ourselves."<sup>59</sup>

Women participated in the system of "service in husbandry" in England which had given rise to the indenture system in its earliest phases,<sup>60</sup> but the assumption that they did not undertake field work in the colonies has made their persistence in the servant population of Maryland difficult to explain. Demographic research into English society at the beginning of the eighteenth century affords some insight into this persistence. In urban centres the ratio of men to women was as low as 89/100.<sup>61</sup> In a proto-industrial society such as England in the period just prior to

51. Jack and Marion KAMINKOW, *Emigrants in Bondage* (Baltimore: Magna Carta Book Co., 1967), lists the date of embarkation, destination and port of captain for thousands of convicts transported from England in the eighteenth century. By comparing the information given in the advertisements for runaways (name, place of residence and date), and by assuming that most convicts served seven years, eleven of the runaways were identified as probably having been convicts. Since many convicts either used several names or changed their names on entering the province, this figure is probably not too high.

52. *Maryland Gazette*, June 1760-June 1764.

53. *Maryland Gazette*, 19 July 1734 and 1 November 1734.

54. SMITH, *Colonists in Bondage*, p. 130.

55. *Proceedings of the Council*, 1756, *AM*, 31: 118-19. See also *The Calvert Papers* (microfilm), ed. Richard J. COX, reel 19, no. 584.

56. Governor Sharpe to Hugh Hammersby, 27 July 1767, *Sharpe Correspondence*, vol. 3, *AM*, 14: 11-13.

57. "Journal of a French Traveller, 1756-II" (document), *American Historical Review*, XXVII (October 1921): 84.

58. SMITH, *Colonists in Bondage*, pp. 325-28.

59. *Proceedings and Acts*, 15 October 1725, *AM*, 35: 212.

60. GALENSON, *White Servitude*, pp. 6-10.

61. Roger THOMPSON, *Women in Stuart England and America* (London, Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 34-35.

the Industrial Revolution, women experienced more geographic mobility, and parental authority slackened somewhat from earlier norms. Some women migrated to cities in hopes of finding a husband or avoiding an unwelcome match. Wages available to female labourers in London barely met subsistence requirements,<sup>62</sup> and some found they were forced by poverty into prostitution.<sup>63</sup> Indenturing themselves was one alternative to this.

Of 169 women who signed indentures in London between 1718 and 1759, 49 gave as place of origin a location beyond London and its suburbs,<sup>64</sup> and there are indications that an unknown proportion of the others may not have been long resident in London.<sup>65</sup> Crimps (agents employed to recruit servants) frequented port towns and inveigled both men and women onto ships sailing for the colonies. The heroine of *The Sotweed Factor* was probably not the only servant to lament that:

Kidnapp'd and fool'd, I hither fled,  
to shun a hated Nuptial Bed;  
and, to my Grief, already find  
Worse Plagues than those I left behind.<sup>66</sup>

Elizabeth Sprigs came to Maryland as an indentured servant in the 1750s. In a letter of 1756 to her father, she hinted that she had come as a consequence of some youthful indiscretion or wilfulness:

... O Dear Father, believe what I am going to relate the words of truth and sincerity, and Ballance my former bad Conduct [to] my sufferings here, and then I am sure you'll Pity your Destress[ed] Daughter, What we unfortunat English people suffer here is beyond the propibility of you in England to Conceive, let it suffice that I one of the unhappy number, am toiling almost Day and Night, ... now I beg if you have any Bowels of Compassion left show it by sending me Relief, ...

Your undutifull and Disobedient Child  
Elizabeth Sprigs<sup>67</sup>

Neither woman felt that emigration had improved her predicament.

There is evidence that considerable numbers of women entered Maryland during the eighteenth century. In 1697 the House of Delegates informed the Board of Trade: "only some single persons mostly woemen are of late come from England or Ireland in the quality of servants."<sup>68</sup> In 1708 Governor Seymour reported: "as to the increase of trade here, of late years, few white servants have been imported from England, and most of them woemen, but severall men servants as well as woemen, from Ireland."<sup>69</sup> In 1755 one of every three adult servants entering Maryland

62. George RUDÉ, *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), pp. 88-90.

63. Lawrence STONE, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, abridged ed., 1979), pp. 391-93.

64. Jack and Marion KAMINKOW, *A list of Emigrants from England to America: 1718-1759* (Baltimore, Md.: Magna Carta Book Company, 1981), transcribes the details of over 2500 indentures found in the Guildhall in London, approximately 250 of which were for women.

65. J. WAREING, "Migration to London and Transatlantic Emigration of Indentured Servants: 1683-1775", *Journal of Historical Geography*, VII (1981): 356-78.

66. Ebenezer COOKE, *The Sotweed Factor or A Voyage to Maryland* (1708).

67. Elizabeth Sprigs to John Sprigs, 22 September 1756, quoted in *Colonial Captivities, Marches and Journeys*, ed. Isabel M. CALDER (New York: National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1935), pp. 151-52.

68. *Proceedings and Acts*, 8 June 1697, *AM*, 19: 539.

69. PRO, *CSP: Colonial Series*, 23 June 1708, 23: 760, no. 1570.

was female.<sup>70</sup> By 1774 one-fourth of transported convicts were women, and the shippers believed that they survived the journey better than their male counterparts.<sup>71</sup> Throughout the late colonial period, women appear to have constituted a substantial proportion of the servant importations.

As the demand for servants was in Maryland and the supplies of potential servants were in the British Isles, means were necessary to bring the two together. There were two institutional aspects to the servant trade: the legal and the commercial arrangements upon which it was based. The first grew out of abuses in the trade and the second came about quite informally. Encouraged by legal protection, ships' captains, agents, merchants and many others carried on the trade, each on a scale proportionate to his means. The most significant legislation for the servant trade in the eighteenth century was the act of 1717,<sup>72</sup> to which was appended a clause requiring servants leaving England to sign an indenture before a magistrate. The act was not motivated by a concern for the servants, but by a desire to protect the merchant who carried the servant out of England from charges of kidnapping. Merchants argued that the risks encountered were a major impediment to the servant trade.<sup>73</sup> The act of 1717 reduced the risks faced by the shippers and also illustrates the continuing strength of the demand for servants.

The servant trade was easily accommodated to the shipping arrangements of the tobacco trade. Ships on their way to collect Chesapeake tobacco would carry anywhere from a handful to over a hundred servants. A shipper might have his own ships or might contract with an owner-captain to transport a parcel of servants.<sup>74</sup> While some merchants did not think the trade repaid its expenses, others clearly made a considerable profit. Despite entreaties from his partners in Maryland, Joshua Johnson was at first reluctant to include servants in his shipments to the province: "The expense of water casks and a temporary deck will cost more than they would clear." The expense was "considerable and all ready money"; however, he overcame his misgivings, hoping that: "if Capt. Buchanan is lucky enough to get the quantity of servants that he expects, I am in hopes their passage will reduce the [cost of the] outfit still more."<sup>75</sup> Shipments of servants were a profitable counter in the tobacco trade. Such shipments could reduce the cash outlay where tobacco was purchased outright in Maryland and could serve to bind those who shipped on a consignment basis more closely to the London merchants.<sup>76</sup>

70. At that time the sex ratio among adult servants was 196.1 males per 100 females, and if children and convicts were included, 232.6. GREENE and HARRINGTON, *American Population*, pp. 125-26.

71. *Journals of the House of Commons*, 10 April 1774, 37: 310-11.

72. See n. 43.

73. Joshua Gee to Board of Trade, 3 January 1716/17, 3: 217. See also Isaac Norris to Jeffrey Pinall, 12 July 1699, *Letter Books of Isaac Norris*, vol. I (1699-1702), for another version of this problem.

74. Shipments of servants were decidedly seasonal. To accommodate the tobacco trade, shipments of servants tended to occur in the winter, spring and early summer. Shipments from London and the Channel ports were curtailed during periods of war at sea.

75. Joshua Johnson to Wallace, Davidson & Johnson, no. 120, 2 February 1774, no. 123, 25 February 1774, no. 125b, 5 March 1774, in *Joshua Johnson's Letterbook, 1771-1774: Letters from a Merchant in London to His Partners in Maryland*, ed. Jacob M. PRICE (London: London Record Society, 1979).

76. For example, the *Lyon*, a ship of 140 tons burthen, carried 91 convicts to Maryland in December of 1756 and returned to England with 395 hogsheads of tobacco. *Calvert Papers*, reel 19,

Many of the outports participated in the servant trade, although London remained pre-eminent. As with Ireland, the outports' connection with the servant trade came with their involvement in the tobacco industry. Outport merchants were more likely to pay cash for their tobacco in Maryland, rather than accepting it on a consignment basis as the London merchants did. The servant trade permitted the outport merchants to recoup the cash paid for tobacco immediately. In the seventeenth century, Bristol was a major departure point: 10,000 servants left there between 1650 and 1686. Convicts, at least, continued to be shipped from Bristol throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>77</sup> Liverpool's involvement dated from the 1670s, long before it began to eclipse Bristol. Although Liverpool became the major focus of the slave trade, it continued to ship servants until at least the 1750s.<sup>78</sup> Whitehaven does not seem to have participated in the servant trade during the eighteenth century, possibly as a consequence of improving employment opportunities in the West Riding and Lancashire.<sup>79</sup> Although Scottish servants were highly prized as storekeepers and clerks,<sup>80</sup> the Glasgow merchants do not seem to have involved themselves to any great extent in shipping servants, perhaps because they did not play a major role in the tobacco trade until mid-century and possibly because the remote locations of their factors and stores would have increased the costs of the servant trade.<sup>81</sup>

In the late colonial period, the demand for skilled craftsmen was such that men with certain skills could bargain for their passage without indenturing themselves. Where an indenture was signed, a craftsman was often able to demand wages or other special conditions.<sup>82</sup> A large planter who required a special type of craftsman, perhaps to build or decorate his home or to attend to his business affairs, would entrust a captain to engage such an artisan or person on his behalf, and the captain would try to strike an acceptable bargain. However, even when crimps and agents were used it often proved very difficult to find the required man.<sup>83</sup> At the same

no. 591, MS. 174. At a penny a pound a servant selling at £10 would cost 2400 lbs of tobacco, nearly 3 hogsheads, thus up to 334 hogsheads of the *Lyon's* return cargo may have been generated by the sale of servants. If the *Lyon* carried any additional cargo on the outward voyage, the cost outlay would be even smaller and the owners would also have realized £455 for landing the convicts in Maryland.

77. SMITH, *Colonists in Bondage*, p. 329.

78. Paul G. E. CLEMENS, "The Rise of Liverpool, 1665-1750", *Economic History Review*, XXIX (May 1976): 211-25; also Charles CARROLL (of Annapolis), *Journal of Charles Carroll's Voyage to England, 1757*, 1 July 1757; Charles Carroll of Carrollton Papers, no. 17.

79. J. E. WILLIAMS, "Whitehaven in the 18th Century", *Economic History Review*, VIII (September 1956): 393-404; and J. D. CHAMBERS, *Population, Economy, and Society in Pre-Industrial England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 136-37.

80. Typically the Scottish "servants" who became clerks and storekeepers in the Chesapeake region were recruited from the sons of the gentry and of the mercantile and professional classes in Scotland. There were plenty of applicants as this was the "first step on the ladder" in the tobacco industry. Such men served a five-year term and were given their keep and a salary scaled from £5 to £25 over the five years, with the possibility of promotion at the end for the industrious. See T. M. DEVINE, *The Tobacco Lords: A Study of the Tobacco Merchants of Glasgow and their Trading Activities, c. 1740-90* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1975), pp. 83-84.

81. Jacob M. PRICE, "The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707-1775", *WMQ*, 3d ser., XL (April 1954), 179-99.

82. For example, the indenture of John Eason, a gardner from Blairgowrie in Scotland which was signed in Edinburgh in 1741 and stipulated that he should receive £5 Maryland currency per annum. Scottish Record Office, Miscellaneous Papers, R.H.9/17/308.

83. For example, see Joshua Johnson to Wallace, Davidson & Johnson, 25 February 1774, no. 123: "It is impossible to get the workmen you want ..."; and *ibid.*, 23 July 1774, no. 152c: "I was in hopes to have been able to [have] sent Mr. T. Wright out a joiner, ... the crimp having engaged to have one down for me, but he has disappointed me ...."

time, though, shippers had little difficulty assembling parties of other servants, presumably those without skills or with skills not in great demand in the colony.<sup>84</sup>

Once the servant was landed in Maryland, legal provisions guaranteed that a prospective purchaser could profit by his investment. Servant codes were enacted and revised by the legislature several times during the eighteenth century.<sup>85</sup> It is perhaps indicative of the importance of servants to the province's economy that runaway servants from Maryland had to serve five times longer for the time they were absent than did those from Virginia.<sup>86</sup> Although the codes included provision to limit the physical abuse of servants and to preclude attempts by masters to extend the duration of the indentures, they also provided for masters to be compensated, usually by extension of the period of service in the event that a servant committed any offence. Disputes between masters and servants were to be settled by petition to the Provincial or County Courts,<sup>87</sup> and severe penalties were enacted for anyone who assisted or harboured runaway servants.<sup>88</sup>

Indentured servitude persisted in Maryland in the eighteenth century because the classical components of a market relationship persisted. The demand appears to have continued, a supply of potential servants was available to be exploited, and the institutional means to bring the two together evolved over the period. But enumerating these aspects fails to explain the conditions which perpetuated the demand for relatively unskilled servants in Maryland once planters there gained access to regular supplies of slaves.

The solution to this problem is difficult because the documentary evidence, especially the court records which permit historians to speak with such authority about seventeenth-century Maryland, became much more formalized in the eighteenth century. Because indentured servants played a less obvious role in eighteenth-century Maryland than they had done in the earlier period, some historians have concluded that the institution diminished in importance in the late colonial period, becoming limited to skilled craftsmen. However, a closer reading of the legislation, correspondence and periodicals of the time can and does support a different conclusion.

Indentured servants comprised one-twelfth of the white population of Maryland by the mid-eighteenth century, but they appear on only six to seven percent of the surviving probate inventories, giving rise to the possibility that those who owned servants are underrepresented in the surviving probate records. Contemporary observers implied that servant ownership was more widespread than these figures would suggest. In the crisis which arose over the enlistment of servants into the armies of General Braddock during the French and Indian War, Governor Sharpe advised the Council that:

... the Inhabitants having a great part of their property vested in servants, unanimously oppose the Executions of Such Instructions, [ie. to enlist servants] that on such opposition violences have been committed, and that unless their Cause of Complaint be speedily removed an Insurrection of the people is likely to ensue ...<sup>89</sup>

84. *Ibid.*, nos. 4, 31a, 123, 152c.

85. *Proceedings and Acts*, 1704, *AM*, 26: 254-61; 1715, *AM*, 30: 283-92; 1727, *AM*, 34: 82-83.

86. *Ibid.*, *AM*, 36: 254.

87. *Ibid.*, 259.

88. *Ibid.*, *AM*, 30: 283.

89. *Proceedings of the Council*, 23 March 1756, *AM*, 31: 105.

To his brother, Sharpe observed that when servant enlistments did occur:

... their Masters made innumerable Applications to me for Relief which I was sorry to be unable to grant ... Many of the People's cases really called for pity and redress as the Planters Fortunes here consist in the number in their Servants (who are purchased at high rates) much as the Estates of an English Farmer do in the multitude of Cattle.<sup>90</sup>

Clearly, there was a significant element of the Maryland population which still depended on the labour of indentured servants. The identification of these owners, insofar as it is possible, is the key to understanding the role which indentured servitude played in the economy of eighteenth-century Maryland. A consideration of the various levels of Maryland society will shed some light on this question.

The legislation regarding indentured servants suggests a growing antipathy to the institution on the part of the members of the Assembly of Maryland. There were repeated attempts to limit the importations. In the enlistment crisis the Assembly voted meagre compensation for masters whose servants had enlisted, an unlikely course if they had numbered many servant owners in their midst. The Assemblymen were drawn from and responded primarily to the needs of the upper echelons of Maryland society, the merchant-planter class, which comprised only about ten percent of Maryland's population in the eighteenth century.<sup>91</sup> Apart from clerks and skilled craftsmen — and the need for these was beginning to be met by slaves — this level of society did not need indentured servants because they had the means and the opportunity to purchase slaves. Some of their number sold slaves,<sup>92</sup> and as the probate records indicate, most owned few if any servants. Thus the interests of those who did depend on white servants were not well represented in the Assembly.

The great fortunes of Maryland were not based on agriculture alone, but were diversified to include commerce, money-lending, land speculation, patronage and industrial investment in iron works and flour mills.<sup>93</sup> The large planters of the Eastern Shore and the head of Chesapeake Bay gradually diversified their agricultural production to include cereal grains over the course of the eighteenth century, and became involved in supplying the West Indies, and later Southern Europe, with wheat. This gave them the capital, the credit facilities and the opportunity to purchase slaves.<sup>94</sup>

Although they had little need for indentured labour, the upper levels of society are those for whom wills and/or inventories are most likely to have been registered. If the purchase of slaves was restricted to those with accumulated capital and/or access to credit facilities, then those who had to make do with a cheaper (albeit in the long run a less economical) form of labour are precisely those who were least likely to have acquired enough personal property to impel them to make a will. By the middle of the eighteenth century the tremendous mortality of the earlier period had receded somewhat from the consciousness of Marylanders and may have rendered them less scrupulous about stipulating their provision for their families. A small

90. Governor Sharpe to Joshua Sharpe, 24 May 1756, *Sharpe Correspondence*, vol. I, *AM*, 6: 211.

91. Aubrey C. LAND, "Economic Base and Social Structure: The Northern Chesapeake in the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of Economic History*, XXV (1965): 654.

92. See n. 2.

93. LAND, "Economic Base", pp. 639-54.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 646-47.

wealthholder only needed to make a will if he wished to bequeath more than the law of intestacy permitted to one or other of his survivors. The records of the Maryland Orphan's Court provide another possible explanation. Small estates were often bound over during the lifetime of the owner, thus obviating the need for a will or inventory.<sup>95</sup> It is also probable that ownership of indentured labour was more likely at certain stages of an individual's life. Once a man had older children, his need for additional labour diminished, and he was less likely to purchase indentured labour the older he grew. (Increased revenue from his children's production might also enable him to contemplate the purchase of a slave at this point.) Thus, those most likely to own servants may not yet have made wills or may not have owned servants at the time of their deaths.

Tenancy increased in Maryland towards the end of the colonial period. Fifty percent of householders in 1775 were not landowners.<sup>96</sup> An examination of probate inventories from a sample of six Proprietary Manors revealed that virtually all tenant farmers who resided on their land<sup>97</sup> subsisted by their own labour and by that of their families.<sup>98</sup> Since the leases on these properties were usually for a number of lives designated at the outset (further obviating the need for a specific bequest), it is likely that the surviving inventories would not be those of the poorest tenants. Yet even these inventories rarely mention servants or slaves. It seems reasonable to conclude that the purchase of additional labour was beyond the means of most tenant farmers.

Tenant farmers did not purchase servants because they did not have the resources to do so. They paid between one-quarter and one-third of their production in rents.<sup>99</sup> Even minimal consumption of such goods as utensils or clothing strained their resources. For tenants, the exigencies of a staple economy were particularly severe. Crop failure could ruin them. Rents and debts were often payable in tobacco,<sup>100</sup> but restrictions in their leases limited their capacity to grow it. They were constantly

95. *Proceedings of the Council*, 1715, AM, 25: 321.

96. Gregory A. STIVERSON, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty: Tenancy in Eighteenth-Century Maryland* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 80.

97. As distinct from those who owned land elsewhere and merely rented additional land from the Proprietors (by implication more wealthy than resident tenants).

98. Family reconstruction for tenants on the Proprietary Manors revealed, typically, large families, averaging 5.9 to 7.7 children (STIVERSON, *Poverty/Tenancy*, p. 83), as one would expect to find in family units engaged in labour-intensive agriculture (see A. V. CHALANOV, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, eds. Daniel THORNER et al. [Homewood, Ill.: The American Economic Assn., 1966], p. 64). Although a large family would increase a man's labour force eventually, it also raised his subsistence requirements. The more land and labour a man devoted to subsistence, the less he could devote to tobacco.

99. CLEMENS, *The Atlantic Economy*, p. 160.

100. Although favourable rates were offered to those who could pay taxes or debts in cash, there were drawbacks. Taxes could only be paid in cash: "Provided always, that every Person ... allowed by this Act to pay money instead of Tobacco ... shall make an Oath ... That he doth not, by himself or children, servants or slaves, make any Tobacco for sale," *Proceedings and Acts*, 1747, AM, 44: 629. Differential rates were offered for cash as opposed to tobacco by many factors and merchants but the net result was that many small planters became increasingly indebted, often borrowing from these same merchants and factors to pay their taxes and their servants' freedom dues. See Aubrey C. LAND, "Economic Behaviour in a Planting Society: the 18th Century Chesapeake", *Journal of Southern History*, XXXIII (1967): 476-78; Richard K. MACMASTER and David C. SKAGGS, "The Letterbooks of Alexander Hamilton, Piscataway Factor", *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 41, no. 2 (1966): 151-52; PRICE, "Glasgow and Tobacco Trade", p. 197.

in debt to the storekeepers, who as often as not were also the tobacco factors. They lacked independent access to credit facilities. Diversification to cereal production was difficult for individual tenants because they did not have easy access to the infrastructure of the grain trade, i.e., the mills and shipping arrangements.<sup>101</sup> For all these reasons it was virtually impossible for tenant farmers to accumulate the necessary capital to purchase additional labour.

A tenant farmer's surplus income was consumed by rent, but an individual who owned his land did not face this expense. By the mid-eighteenth century, small landowners, those whose estates were worth less than £200, probably comprised between one-third and one-half of the landowners in Maryland.<sup>102</sup> Small landowners were in a much better position to accumulate the capital necessary to purchase additional labour. Ownership of land provided collateral. If a small planter borrowed money to purchase a servant, in theory the servant's labour would generate enough extra income to repay his master's investment and more. In a very good year, when tobacco prices were high, a planter might accumulate £5 or £6 over and above his subsistence needs through his own labour and that of his family. He would then have four purchase options: (i) he could spend his money on consumables, or livestock; (ii) he might be able to purchase or lease more land, although supplies of this were diminishing in the late colonial period and he might not possess the additional labour necessary to exploit it; (iii) he could save money in the hopes of one day accumulating enough to buy a slave, well aware that a tobacco boom could substantially inflate the cost of a slave, or (iv) he could mortgage some of his property and buy a servant immediately. For a £10 investment in a fourteen-year convict he could expect only six years' less service than the average working life of an adult male slave.<sup>103</sup> His production capacity would double immediately and if his servant had any skills beyond those of an agricultural labourer he could be hired out and his master's revenue would increase accordingly. Although a planter could not anticipate profiting from the ownership of any progeny of such a servant, neither could he do so if he purchased a male slave.<sup>104</sup> What is more, the limited term of a servant's indenture could be an advantage when tobacco prices slumped as a master would not be compelled to go on feeding a servant indefinitely.

Thomas Saunders is an example of a planter who appears to have made exactly those choices. Saunders was a joiner by trade, who emigrated from England and settled on the Patapsco River in what was then Baltimore county. He wrote to his mother in London in 1756:

i have like a great many other prodigall sons gone through a great deal of trouble ... i bought an irich Convict servant Named Owen desmond from Cork Just as i was married

101. STIVERSON, *Poverty/Tenancy*, pp. 85-86.

102. CLEMENS, *Atlantic Economy*, p. 145, and LAND, "Economic Base", p. 645.

103. Compare the analysis of these options in CLEMENS, *Atlantic Economy*, p. 160. See also Richard S. DUNN, "The Recruitment and Employment of Labour", in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, eds. Jack P. GREENE and J. R. POLE (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 171. DUNN cites a forthcoming article of Kenneth Morgan's to the effect that most convict servants appear to have been purchased singly, and were in fact a very inexpensive form of labour.

104. To enjoy this advantage it would be necessary not only to purchase a female slave and to give her time off for pregnancy and childcare, but also to support an unknown number of children for a minimum of ten years. The real "cost-efficiency" of slavery depended on a fairly large investment and required an initial outlay beyond the means of the average small planter.

[.] ... his first cost was twenty pounds and at the same time i lost a mare Cost me Eight Pounds [.] thes loss seem to hurt me at first but thanck god i rubd through them and saved my land wich was of more value than all but was obliged to mortgage it But it is just Clear i have 160 Acrer of good land wich i bougt before i was married ...<sup>105</sup>

Thomas Saunders, like other small planters, could not aspire to the long-term cost efficiency of slavery.

Economic circumstances in eighteenth-century Maryland circumscribed the prospects of many of its inhabitants. As has been demonstrated, tenancy offered very limited opportunity. Even the minimum objective of owning land and passing it on to one's children was beyond most tenants by mid-century.<sup>106</sup> Land prices were high and Maryland had a relatively small frontier in comparison to Virginia and Pennsylvania.<sup>107</sup> A pattern of out-migration of landless freemen became apparent by mid-century. Small landholders faced a different problem. Their resources did not permit them to purchase the slaves which would enable them to begin competing on the same footing as the great planters. Some undoubtedly hired slaves. Nevertheless, indentured servants figured largely in the efforts of the smaller planters to maintain their position in the colonial economy.

First and foremost, indentured servants worked as agricultural labourers. The small planters needed additional labour to increase their production of tobacco, which explains their willingness to purchase servants who at first appearance might seem undesirable and who were certainly deemed so by the upper levels of Maryland society. However, tobacco farming required neither brawn, nor honesty, nor a certain type of national background or religious belief, so women, convicts or Irish servants were quite acceptable.

Governor Sharpe lamented in 1756:

... however I think the People richly deserve it [having their servants enlisted], they have brought it on themselves and they ... will feel the burthen of it as there are more Indented Servants in these two colonies [Maryland and Pennsylvania] than in all the rest ...]

At the same time he recognized: "... that the people cannot manage their Business without their [the servants] assistance."<sup>108</sup> For a small planter the loss of his servant could mean the loss of his crop; this accounts for the virulence of their response to the projected enlistments. Benjamin Franklin explained the situation to a correspondent in England in 1756:

When a Man's Servants are taken from him, he knows not where to find Hands to assist him in cultivating his Land, or carrying on his Business, hired Labourers and Journeymen not being so readily obtain'd here at any time as in England, People chiefly depending on their bought Servants, and in the present Case the Labourers and Journeymen had

105. Thomas Saunders to Theodosia Saunders, 9 October 1756, in CALDER, *Colonial Captivities*, pp. 153-54.

106. For example Clemens observes that of 400 tenants on the tax list in 1733, only 25 owned land in 1748 and of these 25, 18 had purchased and previously leased from their parents. CLEMENS, *The Atlantic Economy*, p. 163. Speculation drove up land prices so much that by the time the frontier of settlement reached a given tract, the price of the land was beyond the means of most of the prospective purchasers and the land had to be let to tenants if it was to return a profit at all.

107. STIVERSON, *Poverty/Tenancy*, p. 26; also see R. Bruce HARLEY, "Dr. Charles Carroll: Land Speculators, 1730-1755", *Maryland Historical Magazine*, XLVI (June 1951): 93-107.

108. Governor Sharpe to Cecaelius Calvert, 21 August 1756, *Sharpe Correspondence*, vol. I, AM, 6: 467.

been before rendered much scarcer by the long continued Recruitings. Thus many Masters are reduced to the greatest Distress in their Affairs.<sup>109</sup>

The value of a servant lay not in what he cost but in what he could produce.

The evidence provided by the advertisements for runaway servants suggests that many of them laboured in rural areas.<sup>110</sup> It must quickly be said that apart from Annapolis and Baltimore there were very few “towns” in colonial Maryland. The nature of the tobacco industry with its direct links to Britain, and the Chesapeake itself with its innumerable bays, rivers and creeks hindered urbanization. 114 of the 178 advertisements for runaways which appeared in the *Maryland Gazette* between 1760 and 1764 specified no trade for the masters and gave as a place of residence a location outside of a town, suggesting that most of these masters would have been planters. Typically, these locations were given as “on Gunpowder Falls, Baltimore County, Mr. Major Thomas Franklin’s”, “from the subscriber’s plantation near Northampton Iron Works”, and from “Frederick County, 12 miles above Bladenburgh”.<sup>111</sup> Of these servants 71 percent were not described as having any particular trade or skill in contrast to 64 percent of the overall sample. Since almost everybody in Maryland cultivated tobacco to some extent, the absence of any other designation makes it likely that most of these masters planted tobacco and employed their servants in its cultivation.

Contemporary observers give the impression that servant ownership was not centred among the higher ranks of Maryland society. Father Joseph Mosley, S.J., was scandalized by the sight of servants being sold like slaves to the highest bidder:

... to be used at his mercy, without any redress at law ... These Masters (as they are chiefly accustomed to negroes, a stubborn dull set of mortals, that do nothing but driving) are, in general, cruel barbarous and unmerciful — some worse than others ... The servant’s labour is chiefly in the fields, with an ox, plow or hoe, with an overseer by them, armed with a cudgel, to drive them on with their work ...<sup>112</sup>

Edward Kimber also perceived the planters as a class to be uneducated, cunning, hard-drinking and very harsh in their treatment of their servants.<sup>113</sup> William Eddis described the plight of servants as being “worse than Egyptian bondage”<sup>114</sup> and

109. Benjamin Franklin to Sir Everard Fawkener, 27 July 1756, reprinted in *Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1756: Selected Documents from the Cumberland papers in Windsor Castle*, ed. Stanley McGrory PARGELLIS (New York & London: D. Appleton-Century Co. Incorporated, 1936), p. 186. I am indebted to O. Rosenkrantz of the University of New Brunswick for this reference.

110. This sample was drawn from advertisements appearing in the *Maryland Gazette*, June 1760-June 1764. Only runaways from Maryland points of origin were included. Runaways designated either as “mulatto” or “mulatto servant” were omitted as their exact status was frequently unclear. Each runaway was counted only once, regardless of the number of times the advertisement appeared or the number of times the same servant absconded.

111. *Maryland Gazette*, 3 May 1764, 5 April 1764, and 21 May 1761 respectively.

112. Father Joseph Mosley, S.J., to Mrs. Dunn, Jr., 5 June 1772, in Edward I. DEVITT, S.J., “Letters of Father Joseph Mosley, S.J. and Some Extracts from His Diary (1757-1786)”, *American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia Records*, XVII (1906): 207. It should be noted that Father Mosley was responding to the suggestion that an acquaintance of his sister was considering indenturing himself to come to Maryland.

113. W. Gordon MILNE, “A Glimpse of Colonial America as Seen in an English Novel of 1754”, *Maryland Historical Magazine*, XLII (December 1947): 239.

114. William EDDIS, *Letters from America*, ed. Aubrey C. LAND (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 38.

advised that prospective servants should be warned about the horrors that awaited them. Elizabeth Sprigs lamented:

... I one of the Unhappy number, am toiling almost day and Night, and very often in the Horses druggery, with only this comfort that you bitch you do not half enough, and then tied up and whipp'd to that Degree that you'd not serve an Animal, scarce anything but Indian Corn and Salt to eat and that even begrudged nay many Neagrees are better used, almost naked no shoes nor stockings to wear, and the comfort after slaving dureing Masters pleasure, what rest we can get is to rap ourselves in a blanket and ly upon the ground.<sup>115</sup>

Sprigs's complaint is significant because it is unlikely that a family which could afford to purchase a domestic servant would be unable to provide a bed for that servant.<sup>116</sup>

The circumstances of her situation make it almost certain that Sprigs performed agricultural labour. The accepted view has been that white women did not do field work (except of course in family units). However, in Maryland at least, indentured females were being employed in this way to some considerable degree. Governor Seymour, who was no friend to Roman Catholics, attempted to get a bill through the Maryland legislature in 1706, forbidding the sale of Protestant servants to Catholic masters, an abomination in his view:

... Which was presently understood by the Roman Catholicks. They used such means by their friends and partys to have the Bill clogged with another clause to inhibit all white servant women from working in the Tobacco cropps, which I was advised would be of diminition to H. M. Revenue, and therefore could not consent to it.<sup>117</sup>

Seymour's concern is plain; if the employment of female servants in the production of tobacco were outlawed, production would be affected to such an extent that the Crown would lose a significant portion of its customs revenue.

When one remembers that in Maryland, female servants, unlike black women, were not taxable,<sup>118</sup> the canniness of the planters becomes more apparent. In 1681 a bill had been put forward in the Assembly which complained that "Divers and very Many the House keepers Inhabiting within this Province do frequently Purchase Women Servants and Employ them to work in the Ground on purpose to be exempted from paying Levys", and proposed to outlaw the practice.<sup>119</sup> The bill was not successful, but the issue re-emerged in 1726 during the preparation of a bill entitled *An Act to Advance the Staple of Tobacco*. A long slump in tobacco prices had followed Queen Anne's War and the proposed bill attempted to raise prices by limiting the amount of tobacco each planter might grow.

The Question was put whether all white women servants shall be excluded from making tobacco or not? It was carried in the affirmative....

115. Elizabeth Sprigs to John Sprigs, 22 September 1756. See n. 67.

116. On the priority afforded beds in early colonial Maryland, see Gloria L. MAIN, *Tobacco Colony, Life in Early Maryland, 1650-1720* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 169, 174-76 and 221-23.

117. *PRO. CSP: Colonial Series*, 8 March 1705/6, 23: 196, no. 470.

118. This was not the case in Virginia after 1662. See "Abridgement of Virginia Laws, 1694", *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, X (1902): 63. The Maryland Statute of 1704 specifies that "all Male persons Resid<sup>ts</sup> in this province and all Female Slaves therein of the Age of Sixteen yeares or above shall be Accounted Taxables" (*AM*, 38: 158).

119. *Proceedings and Acts*, 1681, *AM*, 7: 166.

The Question was put whether there shall be any allowance for white women servants in this present crop or not? It was carried in the affirmative.<sup>120</sup>

The assemblymen wanted the practice stopped, but they recognized that female servants were engaged in tobacco cultivation and were needed in the upcoming harvest. Aubrey Land points out that many large planters held notes and mortgages for smaller planters. Thus the assemblymen were neither altruistic nor inconsistent. If the smaller planters failed, their creditors would suffer as well.

That bill did not pass, but another attempt to restrict production was proposed two years later. This bill would have limited the number of plants each grower might produce for every taxable he owned. The details reveal the ways in which some planters were trying to maximize the loopholes in the taxation policy:

... all male and female labouring persons, above twelve and under sixteen years of Age, [were restricted to 3500 plants] ... [heads of households with only one taxable might plant only 10,000 plants] ... and for every white woman, belonging to such Housekeeper, 5000 plants, and no more; and that [no] such Housekeeper have any allowance for more than two white women ... Be it enacted, and Declared, That no ... white Women (except as before excepted) shall be allowed to plant any tobacco.<sup>121</sup>

Low tobacco prices drove the smaller planters to use these stratagems in order to increase their production. The act passed but was disallowed by the Proprietor. Rumblings over the low state of the tobacco trade continued until 1749, interrupted only by the brief boom in tobacco prices at the end of the 1730s. In 1747 *An Act for Amending the Staple of Tobacco* was passed, but it operated by providing for inspection of tobacco before it was shipped rather than by limiting cultivation.<sup>122</sup> It is possible that women were no longer involved in tobacco production, but the continued imports of women servants make this unlikely.

By the late colonial period Philadelphia merchants advised their European agents to "send no more women."<sup>123</sup> The work of Sharon V. Salinger has demonstrated that the growing affluence of many residents of Philadelphia created a demand for domestic servants. The number of female servants emigrating rose in response to this demand, but by the late colonial period the market in Philadelphia had become saturated. Freed women competed with newly arrived servants for domestic positions, to the disadvantage of both.

The situation in Maryland was different. A concern about a superfluity of women is not apparent in Joshua Johnson's anxious and detailed communications to Wallace, Davidson and Johnson in Maryland. Servant women in Maryland were not employed solely as domestics in family situations. At the highest levels of Maryland society, slaves did the domestic work (an option coming into increasing disfavour in late colonial Philadelphia). Below this level, many indentured women probably did work in this capacity. A female servant cost about one-third as much as a female slave,<sup>124</sup> but either a servant or a slave purchased for this purpose

120. Ibid., 1726, AM, 35: 548.

121. Ibid., 1728, AM, 36: 266-67.

122. Ibid., 1747, AM, 44: 629.

123. Sharon V. SALINGER, "Send no more Women: Female Servants in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia", *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, CVII (January, 1983): 30-33.

124. Advertisements in the *Maryland Gazette* quoted a price for an Irish servant woman at £15 current money in 1764 (*Maryland Gazette*, 31 May 1764) and a decade later (during which Maryland experienced some inflation) a 17-year-old mulatto slave girl was advertised for £65 (*Maryland Gazette*, 8 December 1774).

implied a certain level of affluence, as domestic work would not be remunerative to the master. More often domestic work devolved on the mother and older daughters of a family.<sup>125</sup>

The incidence of female runaways from the towns (4 of 14) was lower than from rural areas despite the greater opportunities for escape. Possibly domestic work in an urban setting was a circumstance more likely to have been mutually congenial to master and servant. Of those who did run away only Mary Clew was designated as a domestic servant; and she was suspected of robbing her master's house.<sup>126</sup> Two other women probably did domestic work but not in family situations. Frances Burrows was indentured to John Ducker, an Annapolis tailor who had several servants who were tailors indentured to him.<sup>127</sup> Since Burrows does not appear to have been a seamstress, she was probably purchased to cook and clean for the male servants. The same is probably true of Margaret Tasker<sup>128</sup> who was indentured to Thomas Harrison and Company at the Patapsco Furnace on Elk Ridge. But most of the women for whom advertisements appeared (10 of 14) were from areas outside of the towns. Judging by the size of the rewards offered for their rendition (40s. or less) their masters were not wealthy men, making it unlikely that they could afford an investment in domestic servants.

Consider the case of Mary Freeborn: "Thomas Tulley and Mary Freeborn being warn'd by Mr. Thomas Hynson, Churchwarden, to appear before the Vestry of the Parish Church of St. Paul's [Kent County] on Whitsun Monday, they being suspected of Incontinency, he the said Tulley appears and producteth and Indenture and that the Sd. Mary is his Indented Servant..."<sup>129</sup> It is most unlikely that the vestry men would have acted if there had been another woman, orphaned children or several labourers resident in Tulley's home. The fact that the "incontinency" was only "suspected" suggests that there were *no* other people resident in Tulley's home. Freeborn does not appear to have been pregnant nor is reference made to a specific accusation of immorality. The vestry men could not see any good reason for Freeborn's presence. But leaving aside the question of "incontinency" and the very real problem of the extent to which Freeborn may or may not have consented or been coerced, a female servant could perform essential domestic chores in addition to planting tobacco. Since she would not be taxable, a female servant would be especially valuable to a young man trying to start planting as cheaply as possible. Like the maid in *The Sotweed Factor*, Mary Freeborn and Elizabeth Sprigs could probably claim that:

At the Hoe I daily work  
and Bare-foot go  
In weeding Corn or feeding Swine  
I spend my melancholy Time.<sup>130</sup>

125. MAIN, *Tobacco Colony*, p. 221, concludes that a domestic servant would not be acquired until a household could afford facilities for cooking and laundering separate from the main living area or hall. One would also expect evidence of enough household implements to occupy two women and this, too, would necessitate a certain degree of affluence.

126. *Maryland Gazette*, 21 January 1762.

127. See advertisements in the *Maryland Gazette*, 28 August 1760, 21 May 1761, 23 July 1761 and 30 December 1762.

128. *Maryland Gazette*, 19 January 1764.

129. Gerald E. HARTDAGEN, "The Vestries and Morals in Colonial Maryland", *Maryland Historical Magazine*, LXII (December 1968): 361.

130. COOKE, *The Sotweed Factor*, pp. 6-7.

A servant who did not contribute to production was a luxury few Marylanders could afford.

In Pennsylvania servants came to play an important role in manufacturing. If one purchased or hired a skilled craftsman, the productivity of that craftsman could be increased greatly by the purchase of unskilled or semi-skilled servants. A skilled ship's carpenter could keep three or four relatively unskilled men working much more profitably than they could do on their own.<sup>131</sup> But Pennsylvania (at least the southeastern portion of Pennsylvania) enjoyed conditions which were much more conducive to the advancement of manufacturing than did Maryland. The nature of the tobacco trade with its direct links to Britain militated against urbanization or the economic organization of outlying communities as a hinterland focused on a Maryland centre. As a result overland communications developed only late in the period. Moreover, the workings of the tobacco trade kept Marylanders chronically cash-poor and closely linked to the tobacco factors or shippers, both of whom imported and retailed English goods. These realities constituted a major disincentive to domestic manufacturing and were reflected in the fact that English goods were two to three times cheaper than those produced in the Province.<sup>132</sup>

Nicholas Maccubbin, a cordwainer in Annapolis hundred in the 1760s, planted tobacco as well.<sup>133</sup> Sometime around 1760, Maccubbin acquired a 40-year-old English convict servant, one Richard Letan, who "underst[ood] Plowing, Sowing, Hedging and Ditching and pretend[ed] to be a Cobbler."<sup>134</sup> However, despite this fortunate combination, prosperity eluded Maccubbin until the Non-importation agreements in the 1770s increased the demand for American-made shoes.<sup>135</sup> By 1783, Maccubbin was a prosperous merchant who also owned a flour mill; but it was the Revolution, not the purchase of an indentured servant, which had been the key to his success.

Direct access to cheaper English goods limited the opportunities for craftsmen in colonial Maryland. In addition to this, the number of skilled craftsmen in the slave population was growing. If one could afford to invest in skilled labour, slaves offered a better return. The evidence of the runaway advertisements reveals that 13 of the 64 servants for whom some skill or occupation was designated were not working in those trades. These included a farmer, a gardener, two domestic servants and a house-painter, several of whom were indentured to the various ironworks in the Province. This being the case, it is unlikely that the much greater numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled servants imported into colonial Maryland were employed

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131. This practice was another factor in the reaction to the enlistment of servants in 1756. See B. Franklin to Sir E. Fawkener, 27 July 1756: "... the Taking of one Servant may render useless several that are left. For instance, Taking the Spinners from a Ropewalk, the other Servants who know not how to spin, tho' they do not inlist, cannot go on with the Business, and must stand idle. Taking the Compositors from a Printing House (my own Case) the Servants who are Pressmen, tho' left behind, not knowing how to compose, must remain idle. Therefore the Allowance directed by the Act for the Time the Spinner or Compositor had to serve, is by no means a Composition for the Damage done."

132. CLEMENS, *The Atlantic Economy*, pp. 89-90.

133. Edward C. PAPENFUSE, *In Pursuit of Profit: The Annapolis Merchants in the Era of the American Revolution, 1763-1805* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 148, 151.

134. *Maryland Gazette*, 26 May 1763.

135. PAPENFUSE, *Pursuit of Profit*, p. 151.

in manufacturing. Father Mosley's observation was probably accurate. In Maryland in the eighteenth century, "the servant's labour [was] chiefly in the fields."

Another aspect of the economy of colonial Maryland was closely involved with the institution of indentured servitude. From the 1720s the annals of the Assembly of Maryland began to record appeals for the relief of growing numbers of debtors "languishing in prison". Ironically, while many Marylanders attempted to use indentured servants in their attempts at upward mobility, some of those who were unsuccessful experienced downward mobility and became themselves indentured servants. An act of the Assembly in 1744 allowed debtors to be indentured to their creditors,<sup>136</sup> and this may only have given official sanction to an existing practice. There were two native Marylanders among the 24 runaways for the period 1729-34,<sup>137</sup> and 13 among the 178 in the 1760-64 sample (11 men and 2 women).

By June of 1766, William Abell, a carpenter, was indebted for £56 1s. to Richard Henderson, factor for John Glassford and Co. at Bladensburg in Prince George's County.<sup>138</sup> Abell had several other creditors besides Henderson and he appears to have been bankrupt as it was necessary for him to borrow a further 5s. from Henderson to provide for his family. Abell owned no land, but leased 100 acres on which he planted tobacco and raised some livestock. It is not known how he came to be so deeply in debt, although the inventory of his family's possessions suggests that he placed a premium on their personal comfort. In any event, his situation was such that Abell was compelled to indenture himself to Henderson and to assign to Henderson his lease and all his goods. In return for this all of Abell's debts were to be assumed by Henderson. The forms of the indenture provided that Abell's debt and the interest were to be amortized at the rate of £2 per month. Henderson would allow Abell the use of his tools and provide him and his family with provisions and lodging for the duration of the indenture. Since the total of Abell's debts and the rate of interest are not specified, the exact term of the indenture cannot be projected; but Abell would probably have been bound for at least three years. Abell's predilection for pewterware, featherbeds and arm chairs probably precluded the purchase of a servant. Now as a consequence of some unknown reverse Abell was a servant himself.

The extent to which native Marylanders were being indentured is not known. The revised servant code of 1704 permitted the Provincial Court to bind out individuals for servitude,<sup>139</sup> but the grounds for doing so were not specified. Some Maryland

136. *Proceedings and Acts*, May/June 1744, *AM*, 42.

137. *Maryland Gazette*, 22 December 1730, carried an advertisement for one Richard English aged 23, the indentured servant of William Rumsey of Bohemia, Maryland. The advertisement described English as a native of Cecil County and offered 30s. reward for his return.

*Maryland Gazette*, 21 July 1729, carried an advertisement for nineteen-year-old John —, the indentured servant of Abraham Woodward. John was described as a native of Maryland and as having taken a weeding hoe with him when he absconded. This suggests that he was working in tobacco prior to his departure. An additional reward was offered for John, perhaps because of the hoe or because of the approaching harvest.

Both of these advertisements accord with the tone and terms of those for other runaway servants and suggest that native-born servants were neither more or less sought after than immigrant servants.

138. Indenture of William Abell to Richard Henderson, 9 June 1766, Bladensburgh, Maryland, in the Tods Murray & Jamieson Collection (G.D. 237), Scottish Record Office, Ex GD 224/876, p. 42.

139. *Proceedings and Acts*, 1704, *AM*, 36: 261.

felons may have been sold as servants.<sup>140</sup> The significance of these types of indenture lies in the fact that despite a flourishing trade in African slaves, the Maryland economy appears to have been capable of accommodating servants from any source.

Once Maryland planters gained access to regular supplies of slaves, it quickly became apparent that the greater returns which slave labour promised would only be accessible to those with surplus profits to invest. When the price of additional labour had been uniform, i.e., when the only source of additional labour had been indentured servants, only the very largest planters could enjoy economies of scale. However, the introduction of a self-perpetuating labour force gave a clear advantage to those who could afford to purchase slaves.

As a consequence, indentured servitude figured at both the upper and lower bounds of the middle range of the Maryland economy. Once a planter had accumulated sufficient capital to invest in additional labour, he had at least the hope of financial security. He could expect, even given the volatility of the tobacco trade, to produce at a level which would exceed at least marginally his subsistence requirements. Without surplus labour, this was no longer a certainty. Without land of one's own, subsistence itself was at risk. The increase of tenancy, the growing numbers of debtors and the out-migration which characterized the late colonial period all suggest diminished levels of economic opportunity for Maryland freemen. Not only would few servants enjoy the success of a Daniel Dulany, but without servants the Thomas Saunderses of Maryland could easily share the fate of William Abell.

After the American Revolution, tobacco cultivation in areas of marginal productivity ceased and out-migration from these areas accelerated.<sup>141</sup> These developments have traditionally been attributed to the upheavals in the tobacco trade caused by the Revolution and to soil exhaustion. What is less well known is that these developments came within a decade of the end of the servant trade in Maryland.<sup>142</sup> Surely the availability of a cheap supply of additional labour had contributed to the economic viability of these marginal lands.

The introduction of slavery had not displaced indentured servitude in eighteenth-century Maryland; instead it had fostered economic stratification among the planters. Slavery and servitude co-existed. The smaller land-owning planters bought unskilled servants to grow their tobacco, because in the short run, servants were cheaper. Lacking the financial resources to invest in slaves, the short run was as far as these planters could look.

The role of white servitude as a precursor of slavery is well understood, and its decline in some colonies is clearly related to the growth of slavery and the continued importation of African blacks into the American colonies. However, in colonial Maryland, in the eighteenth century, indentured servitude did not decline

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140. A few runaways were described as having "broke his bail", "escaped his bail", etc. As the status of these servants was uncertain they were not included in the sample of runaway servants. See *Maryland Gazette*, 20 September 1763, advertisement for John Davis, and 30 May 1764, for John Abdell.

141. PAPPENFUSE, *Pursuit of Profit*, pp. 219-21.

142. Although servants were specifically exempted from the Non-Importation agreements and continued to be landed in 1775-76, shipments of convicts ceased in 1775 and only a trickle of European servants entered the state of Maryland after that date.

to the same extent. It persisted because it was one means by which small planters, who comprised a significant portion of the population, attempted to withstand the effects of slavery on their economic position and prospects. Ironically, it was also one fate which might await them if their efforts were unsuccessful.