

# Prva kolonija: društvo i kultura u britanskoj Americi

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**THE FIRST COLONY: SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN BRITISH AMERICA**

Završni rad

Pula, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_godine

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**THE FIRST COLONY: SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN BRITISH AMERICA**

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Potpis

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U Puli, \_\_\_\_\_

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Located on the east coast of North America, colonial Virginia proved to be one of the most important elements of American history. It was a promising and dangerous land where English settlers decided to explore new riches and later founded the first permanent English colony in the New World. With the founding of Jamestown in 1607, Virginia became the epicenter of English exploration, colonization, and the mixing of diverse cultures.

The colonization of Virginia marked a pivotal moment in the Age of Exploration. The English explorers, driven by dreams of wealth, religious fervor, and a thirst for adventure, set their sights on the distant horizon and decided to sail across the Atlantic. This journey marked a major turning point, as the Old World encountered the New World, a land never explored before.

However, the Virginia that welcomed these new settlers was not the promised land they imagined it to be. It was a harsh wilderness, full of untamed forests, dangerous rivers, and unexplored areas that presented huge barriers to their aspirations. The first settlers arrived unprepared for the challenges that were yet to come. Diseases, famine, and conflicts with the indigenous population tested their resourcefulness. Nevertheless, thanks to all these adversities that befell the colonists in the New World, a story of resilience and determination emerged that defined not only the history of Virginia but the history of the future American nation, as well.

From a small colony whose population consisted of only a few Englishmen who could afford such a trip, Virginia grew over the years into a multiethnic and multi-confessional territory. Agriculture, especially tobacco cultivation, shaped Virginia into an economically strong colony which attracted ever more settlers pursuing the dream of a better tomorrow. Such economic development came not only from the resourcefulness of the colonists, but from something that shaped all North American colonies as well as the history of North America itself, and that was the introduction of the African slaves. Religion and politics also proved to be very important in the development of the colony, initially following the patterns set in England.

The determination, resilience, and adaptability exhibited by Virginia's early settlers remain an enduring source of inspiration for the American nation. Colonial Virginia's legacy is not only a testament to the past but a guiding light for the nation's continued growth and development.

## **2. THE COLONIZATION OF VIRGINIA**

### **2.1. CONDITIONS IN ENGLAND AND REASONS FOR COLONIZATION**

Sixteenth century Europe was characterized by discoveries: technological, administrative, religious, and geographical, to name just a few. When explorers first brought back news of landfall in the West, European powers set out to conquer these new territories to preserve and increase their power and influence in Europe. England also had aspirations of great power status, and this could only be achieved by acquiring colonies and controlling trade routes.

After the Spanish and Portuguese made their first voyages, England realized that the profits they would accrue from these new lands would weaken its own standing in Europe and found itself pressured to also dispatch explorers to the new continent, both to achieve parity with its rivals and to have a clearer insight into their intentions. In contrast to the aforementioned powers, England decided to send colonists to North America at their own expense.<sup>1</sup> Thus in 1606, King James I granted a charter to a group of investors and businessmen to found the Virginia Company, which then split into the Virginia Company of Plymouth and the Virginia Company of London, with the former in charge of establishing a colony in what is now New England, and the second in charge of founding the colony of Virginia.<sup>2</sup> In this way, the government of England ensured its expansion on the new continent without any cost to the state treasury.

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution in Early Virginia, 1607-1786*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Crutchfield, Candy Moulton, Terry A. Del Bene, *The Settlement of America: Encyclopedia of Westward Expansion from Jamestown to the Closing of the Frontier*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2013, p. 389.



The charter James signed carefully balanced corporate goals with national needs. The company had complete ownership of the colony and could trade and govern it as it pleased, as long as it did not conflict with England's laws and interests. As long as trade was carried out by English ships through England's ports, the Crown did not interfere.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the main motives for colonization, many colonists had numerous other reasons for moving to the new continent. Although some of them just wanted to find a way to get rich or to thwart Spain's ambitions, many colonists decided to settle there permanently, and over time, thirteen colonies were created, planting the seeds for the creation of a new state and nation.

## **2.2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JAMESTOWN AND THE FIRST SETTLERS**

"There had been earlier attempts by the English to settle in the region, but it was not until 1607 that a permanent foothold was established in the area, which was to become Jamestown, named after the King of England James I."<sup>4</sup>

the Chesapeake region consists of low-lying coastal areas along the eastern coast of what are now the U.S. states of Maryland and Virginia. It encompasses the shores of the Chesapeake Bay as well as its numerous bays, tributaries, and estuaries, creating a landscape of waterways, swamps, and fertile plains that were crucial for agriculture and commerce during colonial times.

More than a hundred colonists left the London area on December 19, 1606, embarking on a voyage to the Chesapeake region on three English ships: *the Susan Constant*, *the Godspeed*, and *the Discovery*. Led by Captain Christopher Newport, a commander with experience in the West Indies, the fleet braved many storms on its four-month transatlantic journey. After reaching the Chesapeake Bay at Cape Henry, English explorers finally landed on the afternoon of April 26, 1607.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., D. Boyd Smith, *Jamestown Colony: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2007, pp. 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Mary K. Geiter, W.A. Speck, *Colonial America: From Jamestown to Yorktown*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Seth Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown*, Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2006, p. 81.

The location of Jamestown was carefully thought out. It was supposed to be a place that would serve as a defensive outpost in case of an attack by the Spanish. Although King James I made peace with Spain, the threat did not disappear. Spain considered Jamestown to be encroaching on their territory, so they had a reason to attack the English as they have previously attacked the French after they had entered their territory. The threat did not materialize, however, but remained ever-present, looming on the horizon. For this reason, the English feared the Spanish more than the neighboring Indians who were a real threat to them.<sup>6</sup>

Among the first settlers there were mainly rich English gentlemen, but there were also laborers, bricklayers, tailors, hairdressers, and preachers. The first settlers did not come to settle in a new area, but to explore it and with luck find new sources of wealth, such as gold and silver. They expected to return home wealthy after a year or two. They were encouraged to sow and cultivate the land, but only for their own needs. For this reason, women and children were not among the first settlers, because there was no need to develop a family life there. They came much later, after the colonists saw that life in the area was possible by discovering a new source of their prosperity, tobacco.<sup>7</sup>

“The newcomers immediately set about building a fort based upon a model they had used elsewhere: triangular and palisaded with tree trunks set close together. Fortifications of that sort remained the English goal wherever they settled in Virginia for the first three decades of the seventeenth century.”<sup>8</sup> Although the population was constantly faced with the threat of war from the neighboring Indians, the number of inhabitants grew, especially when the cultivation of tobacco became a lucrative industry.

### **2.3. INDIANS AND THE COLONISTS**

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, New York, NY: Basic Books, 2005, pp. 41-42.

<sup>8</sup> Helen C. Rountree, E. Randolph Turner, III., *Before and After Jamestown: Virginia's Powhatans and Their Predecessors*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002, p. 140.

Although newly discovered lands seemed desolate and uninhabited to the colonists, this was far from the truth. The American continent was long inhabited by numerous Indian tribes. They were spread all over America and spoke a variety of regional languages and dialects. They lived off their land, and fought with other tribes, but were technologically inferior to Europeans.

“At the time of the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 the area of present-day Virginia was occupied by Indians of three linguistic stocks: Algonquin, Siouan, and Iroquoian.”<sup>9</sup> For the Virginia Colony, the most remarkable were the Algonquins, mostly known as the Powhatans, who were immediate neighbors of the Colony. They lived in a land they called Tsenacomoco. The Powhatan Indians lived according to customs and practices long forgotten in Europe. They did not have any economic specialization and their life was reduced to guarding their territory and taking care of the community. Thanks to favorable territory with abundant water, forest, and fields in eastern Virginia, each village had enough resources to provide decent living for its people. It was considered advantageous if the family had at least one man and one woman so that the family could live normally from their labor.<sup>10</sup> The Powhatan Indians were farmers, and all their farming work, except the clearing of fields, was done by women, assisted by children. Since women were food producers and food preparers, they had a higher status in their society than English women had in theirs. Fishing and hunting were considered a man's job, but since they were not farming, they were seen as lazy by the English.<sup>11</sup>

What distinguished the Powhatan Indians was the good governance of their leader, or Powhatan, Wahunsonacock. He was the leader of several Indian tribes united in the Powhatan Confederacy. Fortunately for the colonists, their power base was along the lakes and rivers further north from their settlement. Jamestown was founded on the site of an abandoned village of the Paspahigh Indians who were adjacent to the Chickahominy tribe. The Chickahominy tribe numbered about 950 Indians and was the only tribe that Powhatan could not bring under his control. Although the Chickahominy sometimes cooperated with the Powhatans, they feared a close alliance between the

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<sup>9</sup> Walter S. Robinson, *Mother Earth: Land Grants in Virginia, 1607-1699*, Williamsburg, VA: Virginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corp., 1957.

(Online version, available at <https://gutenberg.org/files/28499/28499-h/28499-h.htm>)

<sup>10</sup> Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989, p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990, p. 5.

colonists and the Powhatans because they thought they would be removed from their land. Because of this, the Chickahominy decided to be good to the colonists and trade with them regularly.<sup>12</sup>

Relations between the colonists and the Indians were unstable. When the colonists first arrived, the Indians did not know what to expect, just as the colonists did not know what kind of threat the Indians represented. Although there were conflicts in the beginning, there were indications of good relations between the two sides. The colonists found themselves on a new land, not knowing what the climate was like and what could be done with that land. The colonists suffered several bouts of starvation and on several of these occasions the Indians came to the rescue. In other cases, the colonists managed to grow crops or relied on supplies brought by English ships. That is where the colonists met with corn for the first time and how the exchange of goods started. The Indians gave the colonists food, and the colonists gave them supplies from England. When the colonists got what they wanted, they began to take the Indians for granted and pose an increasing threat to them. However, the Indians were not so much dependent on the colonists as the colonists were on them. The Indians got things from the colonists that were useful but not necessary, while the colonists got food from the Indians that they desperately needed.<sup>13</sup>

Such relations between the two sides created a fertile ground for conflicts, some of which were very fatal for the colonists. It was difficult to maintain good relations because a compromise could not be found. The Indians wanted to protect their land and the colonists wanted to subjugate the Indians and bring them under their control. This led to a series of wars known as the Anglo-Powhatan Wars, the most significant of which was the Indian Massacre of 1622, in which a quarter of the total population of the colony was killed and only Jamestown received sufficient warning to mount a defense.

## **2.4. THE MYTH OF JOHN SMITH AND POCAHONTAS**

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<sup>12</sup> Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., D. Boyd Smith, *Jamestown Colony: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2007, pp. 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> Helen C. Rountree, E. Randolph Turner, III., *Before and After Jamestown: Virginia's Powhatans and Their Predecessors*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002, pp. 142-143.

When talking about colonial Virginia, it is hard not to mention John Smith and Pocahontas, two very significant characters who marked the colonial period and still serve as an inspiration to many. John Smith distinguished himself as a colony leader, explorer, and cartographer, and he was particularly noted for his relationship with the Indians and his attempts to cooperate with them. Pocahontas also proved to be a symbol of the relationship between the two sides, but she went a step further, completely immersing herself in British culture.

Smith often traded with Indians, and thanks to him, the colonists were introduced to corn and thus overcame the periods of hunger that prevailed in the beginning.<sup>14</sup> He also distinguished himself in his relationship with the colonists. He motivated them to grow their own food and to fend for themselves in the new colony and from that came his famous saying “He who shall not work, shall not eat.” Of significant importance was also Smith’s map of Virginia which stands as the first detailed rendering of the Chesapeake Bay region.<sup>15</sup>

“In his first account of the cultural encounter with the North American natives, John Smith narrates his captivity among the Algonquians as well as the early skirmishes between English settlers and natives. He mentions Pocahontas in this early document as a messenger between Powhatan and the settlers.”<sup>16</sup> Pocahontas was an Algonquian princess living in Tsenacomoco, and she was the daughter of Wahunsenaca, the paramount chief of the Powhatan Confederacy.<sup>17</sup> She was always friendly to the colonists, even when the two sides were at odds. In 1613, an English ship arrived in the Chesapeake area and Pocahontas decided to visit it. Just before that, her people imprisoned several colonists, including John Smith, so the relationship between the colonists and the Indians was very unstable at that time. The captain of the ship, Samuel Argall, saw how useful Pocahontas could be in negotiations with the Indians, so he decided to lure her on board. He succeeded, but the negotiations lasted for months and during that time Pocahontas was indoctrinated into the behavior and

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred A. Cave, *Lethal Encounters: Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011, pp. 50-51.

<sup>15</sup> Jean B. Russo, J. Elliot Russo, *Planting an Empire: The Early Chesapeake in British North America*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2012, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Heike Paul, *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Working, *Lives in Transit in Early Modern England: Identity and Belonging*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022, p. 185.

religion of her captors. At that time, she met John Rolfe, who eventually fell in love with her and decided to marry her in 1614.<sup>18</sup> Their marriage promised a period of relative calm, but in truth was merely a truce rather than an end to the conflict.<sup>19</sup>

Both John Smith and Pocahontas played key roles in the early years of English colonization in Virginia. Their actions, leadership, and interactions with Native Americans left a lasting impact on the history and cultural memory of colonial America, and they continue to be important figures in the broader narrative of American history.

### **3. POLITICS AND ECONOMY OF VIRGINIA**

#### **3.1. GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF VIRGINIA**

England, having sent certain number of colonists to the American continent, had to provide a system of governance to manage the colony more easily. The colony was located thousands of kilometers across the Atlantic Ocean, and it was difficult to control such an area.

Virginia was founded and run by the Virginia Company and the Company sold shares to the individuals to share the risk in case the attempt to establish a colony failed. The royal council appointed in 1606 was a composite group of investors, London and West Country merchants, and politicians interested in overseas expansion.<sup>20</sup> The Virginia Company's council established a second council to govern Virginia according to the company's directions. This local council selected its president from a group of seven members, but this role had limited authority. Recognizing the lack of effective leadership, King James I issued a second royal charter in 1609, shifting full control of Virginia from the Crown to private investors. These investors were tasked with

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<sup>18</sup> Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., D. Boyd Smith, *Jamestown Colony: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2007, pp. 168-169.

<sup>19</sup> David Brown, Clive Webb, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., D. Boyd Smith, *Jamestown Colony: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2007, p. 23.

appointing a powerful governor to oversee the colony.<sup>21</sup> This was autocratic rule through martial law, and it was around this time that Virginia's tobacco economy came into being. Some in the Company's leadership believed that there were better ways to speed up development of the tobacco industry through radical changes in administration and economy of the colony. These changes included the transition to the free market through private land ownership as well as the establishment of a representative council in 1619 called The House of Burgesses.<sup>22</sup>

"The House of Burgesses was representative of the sentiments and interests of the farmers and planters of the Tidewater region."<sup>23</sup> It consisted of free male colonists elected by their constituents and represented all free males without any land or tax requirements, until 1670.<sup>24</sup>

Due to mismanagement and several crises that emerged in the following years in the colony, the Virginia Company of London went bankrupt. Consequently, King James revoked the Company's charter in 1624, and the colony became a royal jurisdiction.<sup>25</sup> During this period, the Crown's agents appointed the colony's Governor and Council of State. In this way, colonial governors had the freedom to make significant changes to Virginia's government. Up to the coming of Governor Berkeley, the House of Burgesses met with the Council of State as a single body. Berkeley divided them in two, creating a bicameral legislature known as the General Assembly, and that split enabled the House of Burgesses to grow and become the kind of body capable of meeting the challenges it would face in the Interregnum period.<sup>26</sup>

Virginia flourished as a Crown colony. The Assembly continued to function, and membership grew as counties were carved out of newly settled lands. "The county courts dispensed justice and the parishes performed tasks such as poor relief like the

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<sup>21</sup> John Kolp, "Elections in Colonial Virginia", written December 7, 2020, in Encyclopedia Virginia, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/elections-in-colonial-virginia>.

<sup>22</sup> Warren M. Billings, *A Little Parliament: The Virginia General Assembly in the Seventeenth Century*, Richmond, VA: Library of Virginia, 2004, p.14.

<sup>23</sup> James B. Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution in Early Virginia, 1607-1786*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Warren M. Billings, *A Little Parliament: The Virginia General Assembly in the Seventeenth Century*, Richmond, VA: Library of Virginia, 2004, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> James B. Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution in Early Virginia, 1607-1786*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Warren M. Billings, *A Little Parliament: The Virginia General Assembly in the Seventeenth Century*, Richmond, VA: Library of Virginia, 2004, p. 27.

quarter sessions and vestries familiar to seventeenth-century Englishmen.”<sup>27</sup> In Virginia, unlike in England, the government had control over the church. The General Assembly was responsible for managing church affairs, including creating and dividing parishes, funding and building churches and parsonages, and buying or exchanging church-owned land. This also meant that Virginia sometimes hired clergy who had not been ordained by bishops in England, Scotland, or Ireland.<sup>28</sup>

“Ultimate authority rested with the Crown until 1776, but the royal governors, acting on behalf of the Crown, shared responsibility with locally elected representatives of the colony’s population, the House of Burgesses, and councilors elected by the governor, who together formed the General Assembly and who made laws to govern the colony.”<sup>29</sup> The House of Burgesses was the seed from which the self-government and democratic principles that later became the basis of the new American identity gradually grew. The government of colonial Virginia helped develop legal and political structures that shaped the course of American history and served as a prototype for the democratic experiment that would eventually lead to the birth of a new nation.

### **3.2. TOBACCO AND SLAVES: THE BEDROCK OF VIRGINIAN PROSPERITY**

The manufacture and trade of Virginia depended on one thing, and that was tobacco. The first group of settlers consisted mostly of gentlemen who had no interest in cultivating the land or creating something new on the new continent. They continued to live in the colony as they had lived in the homeland, enjoying the fine and expensive things that came from England. However, as time passed, they did not manage to find new sources of wealth with which they would return to England. Virginia was going through periods of crisis, and it was obvious that the colonists would have to do something to make their journey worthwhile. Colonists were forced by hunger to cooperate with the Indians, and there appeared the first indications of trade in the new

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<sup>27</sup> Mary K. Geiter, W.A. Speck, *Colonial America: From Jamestown to Yorktown*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> James B. Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution in Early Virginia, 1607-1786*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> “Political Life in Virginia: Colonial Virginia”, The Library of Virginia, accessed June 25, 2023, <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/political/colonial.htm>



colony. The Indians provided food, and the colonists provided supplies. The exchange went on peacefully until the situation in the colony improved, and the colonists continued to implement their expansionist plans. The trade stopped there, and the colonists found themselves in new crises, which lasted until a favorable terrain for growing tobacco was discovered, and which managed to save the colony and enable its further development.

Agriculture was the driving force in Chesapeake. There were various attempts to grow grains, chief among which being corn, which was then introduced into Europe. Toward the end of the century, planters began to cultivate crops like wheat, barley, and oats which were sold in periods when tobacco prices were low.<sup>30</sup> There was also progress in manufacturing because England needed new sources of materials and thus relied on Virginia to procure them. One of the examples was iron mining which began in 1608 when work began on the construction of the first ironworks. When it started production in 1619, it was the first such facility in North America, making Virginia the birthplace of the American iron and steel industry.<sup>31</sup> Some planters recognized that agriculture was not the only route to riches in the Chesapeake, so they pursued fur trade in the region.<sup>32</sup>

“Foreign trade in a range of export staples generated considerable wealth, with the most profitable one being tobacco.”<sup>33</sup> The colonists did not discover tobacco, it had existed for a long time, but they still proved to be among the most skilled who could grow it and sell it well. Their neighbors, the Indians, also had their own tobacco fields, but the colonists found their tobacco too bitter and too strong. It was John Rolfe who first realized that Virginia might be suitable for growing tobacco after trying to experiment with tobacco from the West Indies in 1616.<sup>34</sup> What was conducive to cultivation were precisely the Indian fields, abandoned and ready to receive new

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<sup>30</sup> Kathleen A. Staples, Madelyn Shaw, *Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Charles E. Hatch, Gregory Thurlow Gates, “The First American Blast Furnace, 1619-1622: The Birth of a Mighty Industry on Falling Creek in Virginia.” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 70, no. 3, 1962, p. 259

<sup>32</sup> Paul Musselwhite, *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> J. McAllister, “Colonial America, 1607-1776.” *The Economic History Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1989, p. 249.

<sup>34</sup> James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, New York, NY: Basic Books, 2005, p. 233.

tobacco seeds, and after the attempt to grow tobacco on Virginia soil succeeded, the economic rise of the colony began.

Once settlers discovered a market for tobacco in England, they abandoned most other economic activities, but for the production and sale of tobacco to be successful, it was necessary to bring enough workers to work on these plantations. Because of this, the colonists often used their profits to bring in English servants to work in their tobacco fields. These servants were ordinary people from England who came to Virginia in the hope of better opportunities. They paid for their trip with their labor, a relationship called indentured servitude. They served for a couple of years and after that were considered free members of society. However, as time went on, the number of servants was no longer sufficient to cover the needs of growing plantations and the colonists had to turn to a new source of labor.<sup>35</sup> Indentured servitude dominated labor practices until about 1680 when Chesapeake planters began relying on African slaves giving birth to the legal institution of slavery.<sup>36</sup> In 1619 a Dutch ship landed at Jamestown and sold twenty Africans to the English colonists, the first in the colonies.<sup>37</sup> From there on, slavery began taking shape and affecting the social structure in Virginia, creating a new class and racial society.

Slave ownership became a normal phenomenon in the colonies. Many colonists wanted to be free from the English government and did so by seeking freedom through creating financial independence in the New World. This was only possible through the introduction of slave ownership, and although some colonists did not like such methods, they still considered it a necessary evil.<sup>38</sup> Thus began a new period of Virginia's development, increasingly moving away from England and its influence in Virginia. In small steps, the colonists began to dictate new rules, and create new conditions for the development of the colony, and thus more and more laid the foundations that later conditioned the creation of a new state. And just like that, the government in England slowly began to lose influence in the colony which had already begun to show signs of independence.

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<sup>35</sup> Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Terri L. Snyder, *Brabbling Women: Disorderly Speech and the Law in Early in Virginia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Alan Pifer, *The Higher Education of Blacks in the United States*, Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1973, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Prud'Homme, *Faith and Politics in America: From Jamestown to the Civil War*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2011, p. 182.

## 4. SOCIETY IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA

Society in Virginia was not very diverse in the early days. As already said, wealthy gentlemen came to Virginia and did not intend to settle permanently in the area, but to find new sources of wealth, mainly gold and silver. Gold and silver were nowhere to be found, and what they managed to find as a possible source of income required the permanent settlement of the area. Although these new sources attracted an increasing number of settlers, the society was still not fully formed. The reasons for this were various. There were too few women for the number of men: male servants were more profitable because they could work in more demanding jobs and would not need to take extended pregnancy leave. Mortality was high in the beginning, mostly because of starvation and rampant diseases. This was exacerbated by the inability of the population to reproduce normally on account of gender imbalance.

When conditions began to normalize, Virginia started to attract more and more people, and social groups began to form. After English men and women left home, at about age twenty, and came to the Chesapeake, they worked for several years as indentured servants.<sup>39</sup> Their contracts were typically from four to seven years, after which they would become free members of society. They work in the house or on the plantation. As the years passed, these servants began to rebel more and more because of poor living and working conditions. They often left their plantations to seek better conditions in other colonies. They could not stay in Virginia and buy the land because the large landowners had seized it all. As a result, one-fourth of the free servants did not own land at all and had to either move away or work on someone's plantation as paid laborers. Because of all this, Virginia was no longer a desirable colony where settlers could hope for a better life. This had a negative impact on emigration from England and the colonists had to turn to new sources of labor: African slaves.<sup>40</sup>

Two social groups were conspicuously absent from the Chesapeake: the aristocracy and skilled and specialist craftsmen. There was no aristocracy because there was nothing to attract them there, and there were few craftsmen because there

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<sup>39</sup> Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003, pp. 37-40.

were no cities, and the sparsely populated settlements were scattered, making it difficult to set up a profitable shop in the colony. Since there was no aristocracy in the colony, the Chesapeake elite could simply develop from the echelons of gentlemen and successful merchants. Because of the fluidity of the social structure, many who were lower or middle class in England could easily rise to the upper class in Virginia.

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All in all, although quite homogenous in the beginning, the social structure gradually evolved into a diverse, structured, and hierarchical society. Virginia progressed socially, from the first settlers who were mostly gentlemen to a society made up of people of different sexes, ages, occupations, races, religious beliefs, and nationalities. All those crises which in the beginning did not allow the progress of society in Virginia were overcome and stand as a clear indication of the resilience of the settlers and their resourcefulness.

#### **4.1. FAMILIES**

During the colonial period, families in Virginia were structured according to the English model, where the man of the house was responsible for all household members. Colonial families were extended, so the household consisted of parents, children, extended family, and indentured servants.<sup>42</sup>

Colonial Chesapeake families grew to only modest proportions, especially in the seventeenth century. High mortality in the beginning allowed them to have only four to five children, two or three of whom managed to reach maturity. In the eighteenth century, the situation improved somewhat, and families managed to have up to seven or eight children, five of whom managed to reach adulthood. The family life of planters was characterized by a sense of order, authority, and self-restraint. These were patriarchal families where each member had their role and rules they had to follow.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kathleen A. Staples, Madelyn Shaw, *Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013, pp. 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> Kathleen A. Staples, Madelyn Shaw, *Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013, p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 26-27.

Domestic patriarchy encompassed beliefs and behaviors within families. It prioritized husbands over wives, legally subordinated women to men, and divided economic roles: men were responsible for family finances and civic engagement, and women were responsible for raising children and running the household. In patriarchal families, husbands controlled all the wealth, there were different economic roles for each family member, and parents influenced the marital decisions of their children. Compliance led to affectionate, even compassionate relationships, especially in wealthy households supported by servants. This differed significantly from the development of the middle-class family structure in England and the American North.<sup>44</sup>

“Housing was uniform in the beginnings and one-room dwellings were the norm. Household goods were simple and neither numerous nor fashionable. Clothing did not yet distinguish the small planters from either their servants or the few well-to-do landowners and merchant-planters who lived and traded among them.”<sup>45</sup> When the economic situation in Virginia improved, larger houses began to be built, which later increasingly denoted one's social status. The houses were further and further away from each other because they were surrounded by ever-larger tobacco fields. Given that the entire region lay on rivers, many landowners built docks along with their properties, which put them in direct contact with ship captains.<sup>46</sup>

It can be said that families played an important role in colonial Virginia. They were the foundation that made development possible. To preserve social and political positions, strong ties were needed, which were established by uniting different families. The plantation fields had to be transferred to someone to preserve the wealth. A man's house could not function without a woman to oversee it. The family was therefore very important, not only emotionally and socially, but also politically and economically. After all, the family was not only the foundation of society but also the foundation of the colony itself. As families grew, so did Virginia itself.

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<sup>44</sup> Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, p. 166.

<sup>45</sup> Nancy L. Struna, “The Formalizing of Sport and the Formation of an Elite: The Chesapeake Gentry, 1650-1720s.” *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1986, p. 214.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Musselwhite, *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019, p. 5.

## 4.2. LANDOWNERS AND THEIR SOCIAL STATUS

Landowners were the main driver of Virginia's economy. Virginia was an agricultural colony that based its wealth on the cultivation of tobacco and grain, and therefore the amount of land the colonists owned was extremely important to them. When tobacco had just started to prove profitable, the colonists began to appropriate more and more land to enrich themselves. As the colony developed and more and more land was turned into tobacco plantations, the hierarchy among landowners began to develop. Thus, plantation owners were divided into three groups: small planters, middling planters, and large planters. The amount of their land also indicated their position in society, so whoever had more land had more privileges.

The colonists who were placed in the small planter subgroup were the least successful immigrants. They had less land and worked on it themselves because they could not afford servants or slaves. Planters in the middle rank came to Virginia at their own expense and brought in a few servants to work on their land. They bought land as much as their income allowed and in addition to farming, they engaged in various businesses to strengthen their position and gain more income.<sup>47</sup> The great planters were large landowners, and they constituted the new ruling elite in Virginia. These were the sons of well-to-do families in England, and this was the main incentive for them to reach the top of the social ladder in Virginia. They did not stand out too much among the settlers, they were all ordinary men and women, but the wealth of their families was enough to make them very competitive among the settlers. Their wealth was not based on land alone. They, like middle landowners, were involved in various other businesses. They were among the wealthiest because they maintained close ties with English merchants, and they maintained this status through family ties thus establishing themselves as a permanent ruling class. There were not many of them, and only about 125 could count themselves as great planters in 1700.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to visible differences in property and resources, the hierarchy of the Chesapeake region also included significant differences in access to political power and influence. The members of the elite managed to take control of all levels of power

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<sup>47</sup> Warren M. Billings, *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1600-1700*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 125-126.

<sup>48</sup> Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003, p. 30.

within their society. Small planters may have had enough property to vote, and middling planters routinely served on juries or acted as police and street supervisors, but great planters occupied almost all positions of power in the public sphere. They held lucrative provincial positions as royal officials or property owners and served locally as justices of the peace.<sup>49</sup>

Marriage was one of the primary means by which Virginia's great planters maintained their dominance until the end of the century. Wealthy families consolidated their social position through strategic intermarriage which enabled their children to acquire a near monopoly on important political positions. Meanwhile, their daughters gained financial security and were freed from some of the manual labor that characterized the lives of less wealthy and enslaved women.<sup>50</sup>

The social position of great planters was also reflected in the architecture of their plantation houses. As their self-awareness and economic power grew more and more, houses began to be built to clearly express their need to distinguish themselves from ordinary people. A man's house revealed his vision of himself in the new society, his relationship with England, his dominance in colonial society, and his authority over the members of the household.<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, owning land was very important for the colonists, not only because it was the source of their wealth, but also because it marked their position in society. Large landowners thus secured high positions in the colony and created a new elite that governed Virginia. Agriculture, which in England was considered an occupation for less well-off residents, turned out to be the most profitable business for the wealthier colonists in the colony. There were not many of those great planters, but there were enough of them to dominate the colony and dictate new rules that benefited them.

### **4.3. WOMEN IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA**

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<sup>49</sup> Jean B. Russo, J. Elliot Russo, *Planting an Empire: The Early Chesapeake in British North America*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2012, p. 194.

<sup>50</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, p. 249.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

In the early years of the colonization of Virginia, there were very few women in the colony. After the colonists realized that they would have to settle the colony permanently, women started immigrating in greater numbers. Women in colonial Virginia were found in all social positions. Some were indentured servants, some were laborers, and some were wives of wealthy landowners who did not have to work. Later there were also black women, but they did not form a social class; they were dependent slaves without any rights.

Women managed domestic affairs inside and around the "great house." Typically, women and their house servants were charged with such tasks as tending the vegetable garden, caring for the dairy and poultry yards, cooking, cleaning, making clothes, spinning, sewing, and knitting. In wealthy households, female servants performed much of this work while the planter's wife supervised, and her daughters helped wherever they were needed. Only on the frontier and in the poorest families did women share any of the hard physical labor, such as plowing and tilling the fields.

"An important responsibility of adult women, in addition to their domestic work, was to aid their female friends and relatives in times of sickness. In the early stages of an illness, women would usually treat each other and provide emotional reassurance and encouragement for recovery. More importantly, women were frequently called on to manage the almost exclusively female business of lying-in, childbirth, and recovery."<sup>52</sup>

Many women who were not already married came from England as indentured servants. Young women went into service to prepare themselves for marriage, which they regarded as their ultimate, inevitable, and desirable destiny.<sup>53</sup> When they finished their term of service, women were ready to get married. Since there were more men than women in the colony, more egalitarian relations between husbands and wives developed than were common in rural English families. Given that many men were interested in one woman, the woman could choose her suitable spouse.<sup>54</sup>

Women who wed rich landowners lived a life of relative comfort and leisure life. The organization of space and work within the plantation complemented the public

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 76-77.

<sup>53</sup> Rosemary O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships, 1500-1900: England, France & the United States of America*, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994, p. 179.

<sup>54</sup> Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, p. 168.



performances of the male gentility and indicated the position a woman held in such a house. The workspace was separated from the living space, and additional entertainment rooms were built in the houses, which separated the gentlemen and elite women from their servants and the work in the house. Kitchens, laundry rooms, and dairies that were once part of the living space began to separate and deepen the gap between servants and owners. By separating the space and assigning slave women to work in the house, the man clearly emphasized the position his wife had in the house. She was his wife, a mother of his children, and a hostess, and it was up to her to perform the duties that complemented his social status. Thus, she was firmly tied to him and thus lost her identity.<sup>55</sup>

In their free time, many women still looked to spend time with close female friends and family members to find companionship and emotional comfort. Sisters, cousins, nieces, aunts, mothers, and daughters, along with friends, regularly visited each other and sometimes stayed together for extended periods, ranging from days to weeks. If a man had to be away from home for court sessions or to meet business associates, his wife would often leave the plantation to stay with a sister or daughter. Elderly women dedicated a significant portion of their time to nurturing and maintaining connections within their growing network of relatives.<sup>56</sup>

Women in colonial Virginia had limited legal rights. Women in general could not vote, serve in juries, or work in any public office. It is important to mention the law of coverture, which essentially merged a woman's legal identity with that of her husband upon marriage. Under coverture, a married woman lost many of her legal rights and became legally subservient to her husband, who had control over her property and decisions.<sup>57</sup> The only ones who had some control over their property were unmarried women and widows. Although widows were the sole owners and the only authority on the property, this authority was often threatened by disobedient servants and slaves, neighbors who did not have excessive respect for women as owners of properties, and

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<sup>55</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, p. 250.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> Joan R. Gundersen, Gwen Victor Gampel. "Married Women's Legal Status in Eighteenth-Century New York and Virginia." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1982, pp. 114–134.

officials who questioned their right to inheritance. Because of this, widows often sought the help of the local legal fraternity to protect their authority.<sup>58</sup>

Although women in colonial Virginia had restricted rights, they were still crucial in maintaining the power and wealth of their family. The man was the head of the house, but the woman was the one who managed it. Even the wives of smaller planters played an important role because they helped cultivate the land. The maids were important because they took care of the housework, just like the slave women which constituted a significant portion of the labor force. Although they seemed to be secondary members of society, women had a significant impact on the shaping of colonial Virginia.

#### **4.4. SLAVES**

In 1619, the first African slaves arrived in America. Their purpose was to increase the income of large planters and they were deprived of human rights. They lived in difficult conditions, and the colonists would only provide them with enough to survive. They rarely became free, and their status was hereditary.

In the beginning, planters imported more male than female slaves and this significantly affected the demographics of slaves in the colony. Such an imbalance made it difficult for slaves to start families. Since the colonists exploited female slaves as much as male slaves, their needs during pregnancy were ignored and thus the slave society could not reproduce. Because of this, mortality increased while the birth rate fell, and diseases that Africans encountered on their way to the colony also contributed significantly to this.<sup>59</sup> The situation improved by the beginning of the 18th century. Slaves were able to create bonds with each other and have children which then improved the ratio of men to women among the slave population. However, it was difficult to live a normal family life as a slave. Colonial law did not allow slaves to marry, nor did it give them any rights since they were considered human chattel, so generally

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<sup>58</sup> Terri L. Snyder, *Brabbling Women: Disorderly Speech and the Law in Early in Virginia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003, pp. 117-118.

<sup>59</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, pp. 111-112.

their families would be separated and sold off. Their children mostly stayed with their mothers, so it can be said that the slave society was matriarchal.<sup>60</sup>

There were two types of slaves. Some were plantation slaves, and some were house slaves. The vast majority of able-bodied slaves worked on plantations and grew tobacco and grain. Elderly women took care of their children who were still too young to work. Older men were tasked with looking after the cattle. Wealthy landowners who owned many slaves were able to assign some of them as servants and maids in their mansion. Female slaves cooked, cleaned, washed clothes, and cared for the owner's children, while their male counterparts served as gardeners, and horses, carriage drivers, or valets. House slaves generally lived more comfortably than plantation slaves. They had access to better food and training but were expected to always be at their master's disposal. On the other hand, plantation slaves were allowed some free time after the work was done.<sup>61</sup>

Initially, the living conditions of slaves were quite poor, but they improved gradually over the decades. Skilled slaves could live where they worked, but for field slaves, a dormitory-like structure, called quarters, developed early on, in which large numbers of slaves (or even several families) lived together in one or two rooms. Over time, free-standing pole cabins became the norm, followed by larger log cabins with fireplaces; Some lucky slaves were able to occupy houses abandoned by their masters or other whites. Furthermore, as the slave population grew, groups of houses and even small villages emerged. And as housing conditions for whites improved, so did housing conditions for slaves. However, slave quarters were overcrowded throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup>

The relationship between the owner and his slave was cold and brutal. The owners did not treat their slaves as human beings, for them, they were just property that should serve the owner however and whenever he wanted. The owners often punished their slaves and inflicted injuries on them, so life on the plantation was harsh and unforgiving for the slaves. Slaves reacted differently to such actions, but what they all had in

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<sup>60</sup> Rosemary O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships, 1500-1900: England, France & the United States of America*, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994, pp. 189-191.

<sup>61</sup> Jean B. Russo, J. Elliot Russo, *Planting an Empire: The Early Chesapeake in British North America*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2012, p. 171.

<sup>62</sup> Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., D. Boyd Smith, *Jamestown Colony: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2007, p. 201.

common was their resilience and strength. Some still decided to revolt, and some even ran away from the plantations. Those who did not dare to rebel publicly decided to do it a little more subtly. Thus, some slaves deliberately destroyed tools, acted carelessly, worked poorly, and deliberately got sick, and women did this by pretending to be pregnant. All this created an even deeper chasm between the colonists and the slaves and created a war field between them that could escalate at any time.<sup>63</sup>

Slaves suffered greatly in colonial Virginia. They were exploited whenever possible, lived in harsh conditions, and were punished for any disobedience or negligence. They could not hope for a better tomorrow because their only destiny was to work on plantations for the rest of their lives. Starting a family was almost impossible, and while some did succeed, those families were quickly separated and sold on. What they could look forward to was the little free time they had after work, where they could enjoy a bit of social life. Slaves became increasingly isolated in society. In the early days of the colony, when white servants were common in the service of wealthy planters, racial slavery was not prevalent. When indentured servants became a thing of the past, they were swiftly replaced by African slaves, and this created a society marked by slavery and inhumanity that marked the colonial period of the American South.

## **5. INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN VIRGINIA**

### **5.1. EDUCATION**

Access to education was limited and largely reserved for the elite class during the colonial period. It was heavily influenced by the Church of England and focused on the classical education of young men. The lack of public education and the exclusion of certain groups from formal learning contributed to social inequalities in colonial society.

“Many colonial Virginians regarded a child's education as adequate if he learned some sort of trade, and perhaps how to write his name.”<sup>64</sup> The age at which any form

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<sup>63</sup> David Brown, Clive Webb, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 53.

<sup>64</sup> Robert J. Vejnar, III., “The State of Education in Colonial Virginia”, *International Social Science Review*, 77(1/2), 2002, p. 16.

of education began varied from family to family. Basic education included learning to read starting at the age of four, while only boys learned to write to be able to keep accounts and other paperwork later, and they mostly learned this from the age of eight. When the girls learned to read, they started learning how to be real housewives, so they learned how to sew and cook, which they learned mostly from older family members or by serving in other households.<sup>65</sup>

There have been several attempts to establish free schools in Virginia. The first was intended for the education of the Native Americans with the direction to instruct a "convenient number of Indian youth in the art of reading" and in the principles of the Christian religion. The plan was abandoned following the Indian massacre of 1622. The second attempt to establish a free school was intended for the white children of the colony. This was to be known as the "East India School" and the school was to be located at Charles City. This venture seems to have shared the same fate as others that preceded it and was brought to a premature end. The Symms Free School was established in 1634 and was the first free school in Virginia to operate on a permanent basis.<sup>66</sup>

"If parents desired their children to pursue professional training, such as in law or medicine, they had little choice but to send their young men abroad."<sup>67</sup> Given that more and more Englishmen who had already obtained higher education at English and Scottish universities were arriving in the colony, the need for higher education in Virginia was not so present.<sup>68</sup>

"In 1693, King William III and Queen Mary II of England signed the charter for a "perpetual College of Divinity, Philosophy, Languages, and other good Arts and Sciences" to be established in the Virginia Colony as "The College of William and Mary in Virginia", the first college in Virginia."<sup>69</sup> For about twenty years after the charter in 1693, the College was only a grammar school where boys from 8 to 15 years were

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<sup>65</sup> Kathleen A. Staples, Madelyn Shaw, *Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013, pp. 373-374.

<sup>66</sup> Cornelius J. Heatwole, *A History of Education in Virginia*, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1916, pp. 40-61

<sup>67</sup> Robert J. Vejnar, III., "The State of Education in Colonial Virginia", *International Social Science Review*, 77(1/2), 2002, p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> "Education in Colonial Virginia: Part IV, The Higher Education." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1898, pp. 171–187.

<sup>69</sup> "About W&W: History & Traditions", William & Mary University, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://www.wm.edu/about/history/>

taught reading and writing, and the Latin and Greek languages. Later in 1727, the Board of Visitors drew up a plan of government which provided for three courses. First was the grammar school where Latin and Greek languages were taught, the second was the school of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics and the school of Moral Philosophy, and the third was a post-graduate and professional course that was confined to preparing young men for the ministry.<sup>70</sup>

One final option remaining for those who hoped to see their offspring receive an education was to hire a tutor. There were several advantages to it. The children did not have to go to school because their classroom was at home, and parents could choose their tutor and make decisions about what their children would have to learn. In the beginning, when there were not so many teachers in the colony, tutors were often chosen from the circle of family, friends, and business acquaintances. Later, parents started hiring real tutors who then often lived in their homes and were supervised.<sup>71</sup>

## 5.2. MEDICINE

Medicine in Virginia in the early days was very scarce. Considering that the first settlers did not intend to stay longer than planned on the new continent, the need for a doctor was not a priority at the time. However, conditions on the new continent proved otherwise. What the colonists faced there were hunger, cold winters, various diseases and infections, and many other hardships. There was still no doctor, and the colonists began to fend for themselves, implementing the knowledge they had acquired in England as well as Indian remedies and practices.

Formal and informal health care choices included roles such as housewife, midwife, pharmacist, surgeon and doctor. Of these, only doctors received formal training and were considered individuals of high social standing. Housewives were expected to have the knowledge and skills to care for their family's health needs and often offered

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<sup>70</sup> "Early Courses and Professors at William and Mary College." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1905, pp. 71–83.

<sup>71</sup> Robert J. Vejnar, III., "The State of Education in Colonial Virginia", *International Social Science Review*, 77(1/2), 2002, p. 24.

help to neighbors. They dispensed medicines made from plants and other ingredients, relying on recipes passed down orally through generations.<sup>72</sup>

It was not really expected of medical practitioners to provide reliable healthcare to patients, positioning medicine below law and ministry, both in social status and in the intellectual qualifications required of its practitioners. It offered little in the way of real therapeutic value, and health care providers did not think about diseases and treatments from the viewpoint of modern scientific understanding. The prevalence of ancient medicines, empirical methods and speculative medical theories meant that unsanitary conditions, disease, and untrained medical enthusiasts prevailed during the settler era. Only a small number of doctors have received formal education and training without ever attending lectures, performing laboratory experiments, or performing dissections. They did not acquire the title "doctor" because of their academic degrees, but because they performed the duties traditionally associated with individuals with such qualifications: patient care.<sup>73</sup>

"Most colonial physicians were formally trained in medicine at a British or European university."<sup>74</sup> They left no written traces of their professional work, and contented themselves with devoting their lives, like many doctors today, to the care of patients in their offices or apothecary shops. A significant number of physicians, regardless of their level of education, engaged in both medical practice and pharmacy work because it was financially profitable. Similarly, "wise" female neighbors doubled as midwives and "doctoresses". On occasion, the head of the household treated his family with home remedies.<sup>75</sup>

Medicine was extremely important in the colony, especially since the beginnings of the colony were marked by many crises and diseases. However, the colony was not sufficiently developed to be able to train doctors locally. As long as Virginia was closely tied to England, it did not even seem necessary to establish an educational institution for doctors because wealthy colonists went abroad to be educated. Only later, when the colony had already progressed and formed, did the colonists start thinking about

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<sup>72</sup> Kathleen A. Staples, Madelyn Shaw, *Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Ira Rutkow, *Seeking the Cure: A History of Medicine in America*, New York, NY: Scribner, 2010, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> Kathleen A. Staples, Madelyn Shaw, *Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013, p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon W. Jones, "Medicine in Virginia in Revolutionary Times." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1976, pp. 250–270.

opening schools and colleges. Until then, they managed and performed medical duties as they had learned in England, as well as implementing Indian methods.

### 5.3. RELIGION

Religion in Virginia was influenced by Anglicanism as the established church, but there were also indications of religious diversity and a gradual transition toward religious tolerance. Religion was closely tied to politics and strongly influenced the government in Virginia.

Although the official religion was established in the colony, England did not appoint a bishop to serve as its spiritual head. Throughout the colonial period, the faithful of Virginia were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. Because of this, a much more independent church developed in Virginia, which was still led by educated clergy, but that clergy was influenced by the common people.<sup>76</sup> This combination of religious factors was attractive to those whose beliefs were marginalized in England. Roman Catholics settled in Virginia; Puritans could be found on the eastern shore by midcentury; and Quakers put down roots throughout the region.<sup>77</sup>

The void created by the lack of a resident bishop was filled in various ways. The royal governor was entrusted with several episcopal duties, including issuing marriage certificates, legalizing wills, receiving ministerial orders, recommending vicars for parishes, and formally admitting them as vicars. Parishes became state and church units. The vestry, generally composed of twelve parish leaders, exercised considerable control over the secular and religious affairs of this geographical area, particularly when qualified clergy were unavailable.<sup>78</sup>

All counties in Virginia were divided into parishes. These parishes were the most important local units of government because the parish priests themselves had great powers in the colony. they were in charge of maintaining roads and bridges, were responsible for the poor, widows, and orphans, maintained moral order, and saw to it

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph Prud'Homme, *Faith and Politics in America: From Jamestown to the Civil War*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2011, pp. 4-5.

<sup>77</sup> Kathleen A. Staples, Madelyn Shaw, *Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Prud'Homme, *Faith and Politics in America: From Jamestown to the Civil War*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2011, pp. 4-5.



that every resident had easy access to the church and attended mass at least once a month.<sup>79</sup>

“Virginia had no church buildings available for worship services that were equipped with necessary furnishings such as altars, pulpits, and baptismal fonts. After 1619, the House of Burgesses assumed responsibility for approving and allocating funds for the construction of church buildings. Between 1607 and 1680 the churches had a simple and plain design, but from 1680 and the following century the external and internal architecture and details of the church became more attractive and sophisticated.”<sup>80</sup>

Religion permeated all spheres of life in Virginia. It influenced the government, politics, education, and the very life of the colonists. Virginia was far from England, and this proved favorable for followers of other religious beliefs, eventually creating fertile ground for the development of diverse religious communities. Such diversity in an already diverse society caused Virginia to move further and further away from England.

## 5.4. LANGUAGE

The English language in colonial Virginia went through many changes thanks to the diverse population. The colony was inhabited by people from different parts of England and the world, so it was logical that the language would also change over time.

English settlers brought with them different dialects from different parts of England, but the Tidewater region of Virginia received most of its population from Southeastern England. The Piedmont region of Virginia was largely settled by the Scotch-Irish, who spoke a quite different dialect.<sup>81</sup> The Spaniards settled south of Virginia, but at first, there was no communication with them. Over time, the colonists began interacting with their neighbors and adopted some of their words into their language.<sup>82</sup> Virginia's immediate neighbors, the Indians, had a much more profound effect on their language

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<sup>79</sup> Paul Rasor, Richard E. Bond, *From Jamestown to Jefferson: The Evolution of Religious Freedom in Virginia*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011, p. 26.

<sup>80</sup> James B. Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution in Early Virginia, 1607-1786*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 71.

<sup>81</sup> Hans Kurath, “The Origin of the Dialectal Differences in Spoken American English.” *Modern Philology*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1928, pp. 391-392.

<sup>82</sup> H.L. Mencken, *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. (Online version, available at: <https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=B5C01AAE3A68734356FAC11C2973BEBE>)

as many of their words found their way into colonial English. As far as African slaves are concerned there is little extant evidence regarding language. What little is available, suggests that their patterns were similar to those of uneducated colonists.<sup>83</sup>

Colonists in North America, particularly those belonging to the middle or upper classes, sought to imitate English as it was spoken and written in England. Just like wealthy Britons, the upper-class colonists used this “proper” English to display their status.<sup>84</sup> Because the elites formed a fraction of the population, and few upper-class Britons crossed the Atlantic it was difficult for these British elite speech patterns to take root in the colonies. As a result, people from all social levels in every colony ended up using speech considered vulgar by upper-class Britons.<sup>85</sup>

Virginia dialect had its own vocabulary and distinctive pronunciation, and its speech was a soft, slow, melodious drawl that came not from the nose but the throat.<sup>86</sup> Around the 1720s, the majority of white residents living along the Atlantic coast were no longer newcomers who spoke various English dialects. Instead, they were now native-born individuals who spoke a standardized form of colonial English. While colonists of diverse background created regional variations in colonial English, these differences were not as significant as the variations found among the different British dialects in the homeland.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Rosemarie Ostler, *The United States Of English: The American Language from Colonial Times to the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. (Online version, available at: <https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=B14676A471A44972DDCEFA654EC1CDCD>)

<sup>84</sup> Paul K. Longmore, “‘They... Speak Better English than the English Do’: Colonialism and the Origins of National Linguistic Standardization in America.” *Early American Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2005, p. 280.

<sup>85</sup> Paul K. Longmore, “‘Good English without Idiom or Tone’: The Colonial Origins of American Speech.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2007, p. 531.

<sup>86</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989, P. 258.

<sup>87</sup> Paul K. Longmore, “‘Good English without Idiom or Tone’: The Colonial Origins of American Speech.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2007, p. 532.

## CONCLUSION

Colonial Virginia stands as the foundation of early American history, where the dreams, struggles, and triumphs of a fledgling society took root in the fertile soil of the New World. The journey from the perilous beginnings of Jamestown in 1607 to the eventual emergence of a vibrant and influential colony encapsulates the larger story of European exploration, colonization, and the creation of a distinctive American identity. Throughout its colonial period, Virginia developed into a colony that advanced significantly in all aspects. It took her just under two hundred years to establish her governing apparatus, settle a diverse population on her land, build a strong economy, and develop her own culture that was increasingly different from that of England. Virginia was a melting pot of different nations, cultures, and religions, and although a strict hierarchy was present in society, such a diverse society conditioned the emergence of a more liberal society later in Virginia. Virginia implemented English patterns in all aspects, but over time moved further and further away from them. The land that welcomed the colonists when they first set foot on new soil did not coddle them but tested their strength wherever and whenever it could. The colonists deftly overcame these challenges and prided themselves on their courage and resourcefulness. Virginia's historical significance is immense and forms the foundation of modern America. To discuss Virginia is to talk about a diverse society that faced adversity and created opportunities for future generations. It is about a colony that made the most of its land and prospered, welcoming different cultures and adapting to social changes. Above all, it is a story of courageous inhabitants who did not shy away from anything but bravely went on and skillfully faced all the adversities that tested their determination.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into the multifaceted history of colonial Virginia, offering a comprehensive overview of the colony's beginnings, development, and legacy. It examines the motivations behind English exploration and settlement in the early seventeenth century, the challenges and victories the settlers faced, and the complex interactions between different cultures, including English colonists, Native American communities, and enslaved Africans. The thesis also explores the economic, social, and political transformations that occurred in colonial Virginia, from the emergence of tobacco as a key economic force to the evolution of religious and political institutions. Throughout, it emphasizes the significance of colonial Virginia as a foundational element of American history, demonstrating its lasting influence on the nation's culture, identity, and trajectory.

**Key words:** Colonial Virginia, British Colonization, Tobacco, Slavery, Native Americans

## SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad zadire u višestruku povijest kolonijalne Virginije, nudeći opsežan pregled početaka, razvoja i nasljeđa kolonije. Ispituje motivaciju iza engleskog istraživanja i naseljavanja u ranom sedamnaestom stoljeću, izazove i pobjede s kojima su se doseljenici suočavali i složene interakcije između različitih kultura, uključujući engleske koloniste, indijanske zajednice i porobljene Afrikance. Rad također istražuje ekonomske, društvene i političke transformacije koje su se dogodile u kolonijalnoj Virginiji, od pojave duhana kao ključne ekonomske sile do evolucije vjerskih i političkih institucija. Cijelo vrijeme naglašava značaj kolonijalne Virginije kao temeljnog elementa američke povijesti, pokazujući njezin trajan utjecaj na kulturu, identitet i putanju nacije.

**Ključne riječi:** kolonijalna Virginija, britanska kolonizacija, duhan, ropstvo, američki domorodci