Module 02: Unthinking Decision? Why Did Slavery Emerge in Virginia?

Evidence

<u>Racial</u>	<u>Labor</u>	<u>Economics</u>	<u>Public</u>
<u>Attitudes</u>	<u>Regimes</u>		<u>Safety</u>

The documents below explore several factors that may have influenced Virginians' decision to replace servants with enslaved Africans. The documents were carefully selected to demonstrate certain aspects of early Virginia life and the way Virginians and others viewed the world. Each document presents one element of a larger picture, and only by reading the evidence presented below as a whole can you begin to make out the larger picture. Keep in mind that English as a language has changed much since the seventeenth century. Careful reading, however, should enable you to understand and analyze the documents.

Racial Attitudes

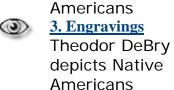
Although slavery did not exist in England, many English had heard or read about slavery and had formed mental images of the sorts of people seemingly fit to be slaves. The availability of such people may have played a role in the Virginians' decision to adopt slavery.



1. Generall Historie of Virginia John Smith



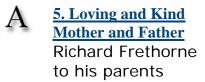
describes Native



2. A true discourse of the three Voyages of discoverie George Best describes Africans 4. Sketches John Barbot depicts Africans

Labor Regimes

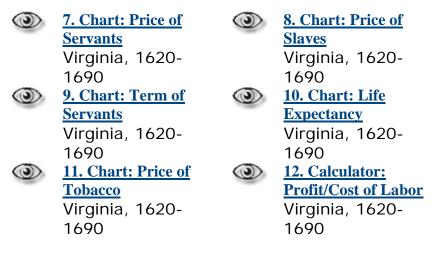
Freedom and slavery make up opposite ends of the spectrum, yet there exist stages in between that may have made it easier for English planters to move towards slavery. Indentured servitude certainly was not slavery - indentures remained under obligation for set periods of time, not for life, and enjoyed citizenship with basic rights — although servitude in the seventeenth century was at times so harsh as to seem close to slavery.



6. A Gallows Confession Thomas Helier's confession

Economics

At its core, slavery was an economic system adopted for profit. Precise information on prices (excluding tobacco) or life expectancy remains hard to come by for seventeenth-century Virginia, although most scholars accept the general trends shown in the graphs below.



Public Safety

Both servants and slaves were believed to be dangerous; which group thought to be *more* dangerous may have influenced Virginians' decision to choose slavery over servitude.



<u>13. A History of</u> <u>Bacon's Rebellion</u> Virginia, 1675-1676 14. Executions A list of those executed after

Bacon's Rebellion