

## **Hugh Jones Describes Virginia's Slave Society (1724)**

*Slavery was well established in the Chesapeake region by the third decade of the eighteenth century. Virginia's slave population grew from 3,000 in 1680 to 27,000 by 1720. Hugh Jones, a recently arrived immigrant from England who served as a minister in Jamestown and professor of mathematics at the College of William and Mary, described the beginnings of African-American culture in the region. In a romanticized account, Jones wrote about the enslaved population's contact with whites, the growth of a smaller group that spoke English, and the emergence of strong kinship bonds that facilitated a naturally increasing population, which was unique in the New World at the time. He authored The Present State of Virginia (1724), which outlined a distinctive slave society of elite planters, small landowners, poor white laborers, and black slaves.*

The Negroes live in small cottages called quarters, in about six in a gang, under the direction of an overseer or bailiff; who takes care that they tend such land as the owner allots and orders, upon which they raise hogs and cattle, and plant Indian corn (or maize) and tobacco for the use of their master; out of which the overseer has a dividend (or share) in proportion to the number of hands including himself; this with several privileges is his salary, and is an ample recompence for his pains, and encouragement of his industrious care, as to the labour, health, and provision of the Negroes.

The Negroes are very numerous, some gentlemen having hundreds of them of all sorts, to whom they bring great profit; for the sake of which they are obliged to keep them well, and not overwork, starve, or famish them, besides other inducements to favour them; which is done in a great degree, to such especially that are laborious, careful, and honest; though indeed some masters, careless of their own interest or reputation, are too cruel and negligent.

The Negroes are not only increased by fresh supplies from Africa and the West India Islands, but also are very prolific among themselves; and they that are born there talk good English, and affect our language, habits, and customs; and though they be naturally of a barbarous and cruel temper, yet are they kept under by severe discipline upon occasion, and by good laws are prevented from running away, injuring the English, or neglecting their business.

Their work (or chimerical hard slavery) is not very laborious; their greatest hardship consisting in that they and their posterity are not at their own liberty or disposal, but are the property of their owners; and when they are free, they know not how to provide so well for themselves generally; neither did they live so plentifully nor (many of them) so easily in their own country, where they are made slaves to one another, or taken captive by their enemies.

The children belong to the master of the woman that bears them; and such as are born of a Negroe and an European are called Molattoes; but such as are born of an Indian and Negroe are called Mustees.

Their work is to take care of the stock, and plant corn, tobacco, fruits, etc. which is not harder than thrashing, hedging, or ditching; besides, though they are out in the violent heat, wherein they delight, yet in wet or cold weather there is little occasion for their working in the fields, in which few will let them be abroad, lest by this means they might get sick or die, which would prove a great loss to their owners, a good Negroe being sometimes worth three (nay four) score pounds sterling, if he be a tradesman; so that upon this (if upon no other account) they are obliged not to overwork them, but to cloath and feed them sufficiently, and take care of their health.

Several of them are taught to be sawyers, carpenters, smiths, coopers, etc. and though for the most part they be none of the aptest or nicest; yet they are by nature cut out for hard labour and fatigue, and will perform tolerably well; though they fall much short of an Indian, that has learned and seen the same things; and those Negroes make the best servants, that have been slaves in their own country; for they that have been kings and great men there are generally lazy, haughty, and obstinate; whereas the others are sharper, better humoured, and more laborious. The languages of the new Negroes are various harsh jargons, and their religions and customs such as are best described by Mr. Bosman in his book intituled (I think) A Description of the Coasts of Africa.

The Virginia planters readily learn to become good mechanicks in building, wherein most are capable of directing their servants and slaves....

The country is yearly supplied with vast quantities of goods from Great Britain, chiefly from London, Bristol, Liverpool, Whitehaven, and from Scotland. The ships that transport these things often call at Ireland to victual, and bring over frequently white servants, which are of three kinds, 1. Such as come upon certain wages by agreement for a certain time. 2. Such as come bound by indenture, commonly called kids, who are usually to serve four or five years; and 3. those convicts or felons that are transported, whose room they had much rather have than their company; for abundance of them do great mischiefs, commit robbery and murder, and spoil servants, that were before very good: But they frequently there meet with the end they deserved at home, though indeed some of them prove indifferent good. Their being sent thither to work as

slaves for punishment, is but a mere notion, for few of them ever lived so well and so easy before, especially if they are good for any thing....

These [white indentured] servants are but an insignificant number, when compared with the vast shoals of Negroes who are employed as slaves there to do the hardest and most part of the work; the most laborious of which is the felling of trees and the like, to which kind of slavery (if it must be so called) our woodcutters in England are exposed; only with this difference, that the Negroes eat wholesomer bread and better pork with more plenty and ease; and when they are sick, their owners interest and purse are deeply engaged in their recovery, who likewise are obliged to take all the care imaginable of the children of their slaves for their own great profit; so that the Negroes, though they work moderately, yet live plentifully, have no families to provide for, no danger of beggary, no care for the morrow.