

“Of Servants and Slaves in Virginia”; an excerpt from *The History of Virginia* by Robert Beverley (1722)

In this excerpt from The History of Virginia, Virginian Robert Beverley Jr. describes slavery and indentured servitude in the colony. A member of the House of Burgesses, Beverley defends the institutions from naysayers. Beverley's History and Present State of Virginia was first published in 1705, but written earlier, before the institution of Virginia's slave code. This excerpt comes from Beverley's second, revised edition, published in 1722.

OF THE SERVANTS AND SLAVES IN VIRGINIA.

§ 50. Their servants they distinguish by the names of slaves for life, and servants for a time.

Slaves are the negroes and their posterity, following the condition of the mother....They are called slaves, in respect of the time of their servitude, because it is for life.

Servants, are those which serve only for a few years, according to the time of their indenture, or the custom of the country. The custom of the country takes place upon such as have no indentures. The law in this case is, that if such servants be under nineteen years of age, they must be brought into court to have their age adjudged; and from the age they are judged to be of, they must serve until they reach four and twenty; but if they be adjudged upwards of nineteen, they are then only to be servants for the term of five years.

§51. The male servants, and slaves of both sexes, are employed together in tilling and manuring the ground, in sowing and planting tobacco, corn, &c. Some distinction indeed is made between them in their clothes, and food; but the work of both is no other than what the overseers, the freemen, and the planters themselves do.

Sufficient distinction is also made between the female servants, and slaves; for a white woman is rarely or never put to work in the ground, if she be good for anything else; and to discourage all planters from using any women so, their law makes female servants working in the ground tithables [taxable], while it suffers all other white women to be absolutely exempted; whereas, on the other hand, it is a common thing to work a woman slave out of doors, nor does the law make any distinction in her taxes, whether her work be abroad or at home.

Source: Robert Beverley, *The History of Virginia, in Four Parts*, reprinted from the author's second revised edition, London, 1722 (Richmond: J. W. Randolph, 1855), 219–222.

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