

*For
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MANUMISSION IN VIRGINIA 1782-1806

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B.A., University of Michigan, 1973

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate
Faculty of the University of Virginia
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Corcoran Department of History
University of Virginia

August

1974

I cannot say as much for his [Gallatin's] friends Jefferson, Madison and Monroe, about whom I have been for years hard at work. In regard to them I am incessantly forced to devise excuses and apologies or to admit that no excuse will avail. I am at times sorry that I ever undertook to write their History, for they appear like mere grasshoppers kicking and gesticulating on the middle of the Mississippi River. There is no possibility of reconciling their theories with their acts, ... They were carried along on a stream which floated them, after a fashion, without regard to themselves.

My own conclusion is that history is simply social development along the lines of weakest resistance and that in most cases the line of weakest resistance is found as unconsciously by society as water.

Henry Adams to Samuel J. Tilden
24 January 1883

The study of manumission in Virginia from 1782 to 1806 reveals frustrated men who discovered that they could not control or visibly alter the destiny of slavery. Their hopes and wishes for slavery were quite opposite to what happened. The disparity has led some historians to point an accusing finger at Virginians and to call them hypocrites, while others have ignored reality and only discussed their good intentions. This study will do neither; rather it will attempt to sort out the conflicting opinions, search behind the oratory and prose, and look for the underlying forces which determined Virginians' actions toward slavery and manumission. The solution to understanding manumission lies in the use of old data in new ways, through quantitative methods, and in the similar exploitation of new data. In analyzing the results, any condemnation of slavery and the rising social system must be suppressed so that the data can be seen through unprejudiced eyes.

The intent of this paper is to show that contrary to previous notions, Virginians did not have a consensus of opinion about slavery and manumission.¹ Virginians, like all

¹John Russell, The Free Negro in Virginia 1619-1865 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1913) is the important work on the free black in Virginia. His work is extensively used by Winthrop Jordan in White Over Black (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). Russell's book has also come under attack by Robert McColley in Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1964). Either way, historians writing about slavery and manumission in Virginia have to come to grips with Russell's work.

people faced with a difficult and uncomfortable situation, reacted in a variety of ways. Slavery was one predicament that made all Virginians uneasy from colonial times until the Emancipation Proclamation solved the problem for them. Though the roots of this predicament are to be found in the colonial period, the effort to come to grips with slavery reached its crescendo in the period 1782 to 1806, which marked the only era of unrestricted manumission. 1782 was the year in which private manumissions were legalized by the General Assembly while 1806 was the year in which the General Assembly placed an inhibiting provision to manumission. The 1782 law allowed manumissions by will, deed or other instruments in writing. The 1806 law modified manumissions in that all those freed had to leave the state within one year of their emancipation. During these years fears, anxieties and paradoxes were generated in Virginia society at an unprecedented rate; these help to explain Virginians' attitudes on slavery, the slaves and manumission. Manumission was only one response to the dilemma of slavery, and this is its history during that period.

The history of manumission in Virginia actually began long before the 1782 law was enacted. The first evidence of manumission came before the existence of any statutes regarding slavery; unfortunately this movement expired prematurely.²

²Ibid., p. 46.

During April of 1691, the House of Burgesses passed a statute ordering;

That no negro or mulatto to be after the end of this present session of the assembly set free by any person or persons whatsoever, unless such person or persons, their heirs, executors or administrators pay for the transportation of such negroes out of the country within six months after setting them free...³

It is doubtful that many manumissions occurred after 1691 in Virginia's history, and the law is indicative of a theme that runs through Virginia's history until the Civil War. White Virginians did not want black people around, particularly free blacks. The reaction against free blacks manifested itself again thirty-two years later when the House of Burgesses enacted a statute which prohibited all manumissions except those awarded by the legislature to slaves for "meritorious service".⁴ This statute of 1723 was a direct descendant of the 1691 law, and both were attempts to curb and prevent the growth of a free black population.

During the colonial period, Virginians were also active in preventing the growth of the slave population. They placed a duty on imported slaves twenty-three times during this period.⁵

³William Waller Hening, The Statutes of Virginia (14 Vols.; Philadelphia: Thomas DeSilver, 1823), Vol. 3, p. 87.

⁴Jane Purcell Guild, Black Laws of Virginia (Richmond: Whittett & Shepperson, 1936), p. 53.

⁵St. George Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery with a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of it in the State of Virginia (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1796), p. 43. See also Henry Wilson, History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1872), p. 4.

The purpose of these duties was fourfold: to raise revenue, to keep slave prices high by closing the external source of supply, to reduce the danger of slave insurrections and to encourage white immigration.⁶ The weight of evidence indicates that the main purpose of the duties was to prevent the importation of slaves because they were unwanted. As early as 1728, Francis Fane wrote in his report to the King:

"Laying a Duty on Negroes can only tend to make them Scarcer and Dearer the two things that for the good of our British trade and for the Benefit of Virginia ought chiefly be guarded against." Fane went on to argue that the statute was inconsistent with British policy and that it would wreck the Atlantic trade.⁷ However, the colonial protest over the importation of slaves continued undeterred. George Mason, in December, 1765, sounded a prophetic warning of the hazards of continuing the importation of slaves.

The policy of encouraging the importation of free people and discouraging that of slaves has never been duly considered in this Colony, or we should not at this day see one half of our best lands unsettled & the other cultivated with slaves; not to mention the ill effect such a practice has upon the Morals and Manners of our People: one of the first signs of Decay & perhaps the primary Cause of the Destruction of the most flourishing Government that ever existed was the Introduction of Great Numbers

⁶Robert D. Meade, Patrick Henry Patriot in the Making (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1957), p. 297.

⁷John Van Horne, "The Correspondence of William Nelson 1770-1771" (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1974), p. 187. See also, Hening, Statutes, Vol. 4, p. 182.

of Slaves--and Evil pathetically described by Roman Historians--but 'tis not the present Intention to expose our weakness by examining this Subject to [sic] freely.⁸

Four years later the House of Burgesses again passed a law to raise the duty on imported slaves. The intent was to shut off the slave trade; at least the British saw this as the duty's sole purpose. The Board of Trade in its report to the King on 23 November 1770 recommended, as Fane had forty-two years earlier, that he disallow the Act because "these duties, which in the whole amount to twenty five Per Cent. upon every purchase, must have the effect, and...are...intended to operate as an intire [sic] prohibition to the importation of Slaves in Virginia."⁹ Again the British were concerned that the flow of trade would be disrupted by the exclusion of imported slaves in Virginia.

Virginians also realized that the British felt the slave trade was crucial, and in 1769 and 1770 the Virginia Non-Importation Association banned the importation of slaves in retaliation for British taxes and duties.¹⁰ Although this action was politically motivated, such was not true of all proceedings against slavery. Rather, the various duties were

⁸George Mason, The Papers of George Mason 1725-1792, Robert A. Rutland editor (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 61.

⁹Van Horne, "William Nelson", pp. 176, 182, 183-4. See also, Hening, Statutes, Vol. 8, pp. 337-338.

¹⁰Rutland, ed., George Mason, pp. 105, 122.

enacted to prohibit the importation of slaves because Virginians did not want any more slaves, and based on the two previously mentioned acts dealing with manumission, they did not want a free black population either. To Mason and other Virginians slavery was a blight and it had to be destroyed. The first draft and the reported draft of the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson, a Virginian, contained a strong condemnation of the British sovereign for imposing slavery on the colonies.

He has prostituted his negative for Suppressing every legislative Attempt to prohibit or to restrain an execrable Commerce, determined to keep open a Market where men should be bought and sold, and that this assemblage of Horrors might want no Fact of distinguished die.¹¹

Once independent from Britain, Virginians took the first step to halt the expansion of slavery and hopefully to sow the seeds of its demise. The revolutionary legislature in 1778 enacted a statute to ban the importation of slaves:

That hereafter no slave shall be imported into the commonwealth by sea or land. Every slave imported contrary to the interest and meaning of this act shall become free.¹²

The reasons for this act are clear: it not only cut off foreign importation of slaves but also curtailed the domestic

¹¹Thomas Jefferson, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes, Paul Leicester Ford, editor (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), Vol. 2, p. 210-212.

¹²Hening, Statutes, Vol. 8, p. 471.

slave trade. Virginians did not want any more slaves, and in 1778 they had the legal power to prohibit the importation of these unfortunate people without fear of British interference.

The War for Independence also provided a reason for Virginians to want to shut off the importation of slaves. Virginia needed money to pursue its war against Great Britain and the importation of slaves would drain what little existing specie was needed for the war effort. However, this reason for the embargo on slaves was preempted by a more immediate fear of a growing slave population and its insurrectionary potential.

In 1775, from his ship anchored off Norfolk, Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, issued a proclamation which sent Virginians into a state of panic. The proclamation declared that any slave who took up arms against the rebellious Virginians would be granted freedom. This revived old fears of slave insurrections incited by outsiders. As early as the French and Indian Wars, Governor Dinwiddie wrote to the Earl of Halifax, after General Braddock's defeat, that he had to station troops in each county "to protect it from the combinations of the negro slaves, who have been very audacious on the defeat on the Ohio. These poor creatures imagine the French will give them their freedom."¹³ Twenty years later

¹³"Governor Dinwiddie to Earl of Halifax, July 23, 1755," The Writings of George Washington, John C. Fitzpatrick, editor (37 Vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931), Vol 1, p. 151 note.

Dunmore adopted similar tactics to lure the slaves into rebellion. Fortunately for Virginia, few slaves responded to the call for rebellion, and Dunmore was forced to flee. Many slaves also fled with him and some joined his "Ethiopian Regiment" which consisted of 300 former slaves.¹⁴ The cumulative effect of long felt fears of slave insurrection and Lord Dunmore's proclamation was hysteria and outbursts of embittered indignation. Richard Henry Lee caustically remarked: "Is it possible that his Majesty could authorize him [Dunmore] thus to remedy evils which his lordship himself created?"¹⁵ In a similar vein Jefferson observed that Dunmore had promoted the "negroes to rise in arms among us; those very negroes by an inhuman use of his negative he hath refused permission to exclude by law."¹⁶ The actual effect of the proclamation was more emotional than real but the consequence was telling. The possibility of a slave insurrection remained cemented in the minds of Virginians, who never forgot the disaster that almost occurred in 1775.

Even before Dunmore sent the colony into panic, Madison expressed a deep fear that if relations were ruptured with Great Britain, the British would induce the slaves to revolt

¹⁴Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 28.

¹⁵"Richard Henry Lee to Mrs. Catherine Macaulay, November 29, 1775," The Papers of Richard Henry Lee, James C. Ballagh, editor (2 Vols., New York: MacCillan Co., 1914), p. 163.

¹⁶"Proposed Constitution for Virginia, June 1776," Ford, The Works of Jefferson, Vol. 2, p. 163.

against their masters.¹⁷ However, some Virginians could "not believe the Spirit of the English would ever allow them publicly [sic] to adopt so slavish a way of Conquering."¹⁸ Unfortunately, the British did adopt the scheme knowing, as the Virginians did, that anyone who could successfully incite the slaves would cause Virginia to "fall like Achilles by the hand of one that knows that secret."¹⁹ The war experience, particularly the early years, frightened all Virginians because the British demonstrated that they not only knew Virginia's fatal weakness, but they planned to exploit it.

Coming out of the war, Virginians had successfully fought for "equal rights" and had defended their claim that all men were "created equal." The ideology generated by the conflict presented Virginians with a new paradox to work out in light of the continued institution of slavery. In addition to the already existing fear of blacks, and the belief that slavery inhibited economic growth, a new weapon had been added to the anti-slavery arsenal, "equal rights."²⁰ The war added two more impulses to the anti-slavery feeling: it had devastated the economy, thus tending to make slavery unprofitable, and

¹⁷"James Madison to William Bradford, November 26, 1774," The Papers of James Madison, William T. Hutchinson, editor, (8 Vols., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Vol. 1, pp. 129-130.

¹⁸"William Bradford to James Madison, January 4, 1775," ibid., Vol 1, pp. 131-132.

¹⁹"James Madison to William Bradford, June 19, 1775," ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 151-153.

²⁰Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1967), p. 235.

slaves were identified as the chief threat to Virginia's security.

[In May of 1782, shortly before the war was officially concluded by the Treaty of Paris, the Virginians passed the law allowing private manumissions. Unfortunately, no account of any legislative debates over the passage of the law survives; in fact, there are no accounts at all, public or private. The documentation shows only that the law was enacted. Laws, however, do not occur in a vacuum, rather they are the result of some social force or forces which necessitate or demand them.

The law of 1782 was the result of necessity and demand. The demand for the law stemmed from the fact that many Virginians were leaving wills in which slaves were freed in spite of legal proscriptions.²¹ Since it was illegal to free slaves before May 1782, any of these wills brought in for probate were rejected in part or in whole. The net result was chaos in the probate court and among relatives who now had only an invalid will and no legal charge to divide up the deceased's estate.]

[The best known case of a pre-legal manumission attempt was that of John Pleasants, the father of Robert Pleasants, a Quaker abolitionist. John Pleasants freed several hundred slaves in 1777 by his last will and testament. Illegal at

²¹James Curtis Ballagh, A History of Slavery in Virginia (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1902), p. 121.

that time, it was nevertheless later validated by the Court of Appeals.²² There were several others who sought to free slaves before it became legal to do so. Joseph Mayo, who wrote his will 27 May 1780, provided that all of his 176 slaves be freed upon his death. When Mayo died five years later, the provision for manumission was contested since he died in debt and the will had been written before it became legal to free slaves. A petition was presented to the General Assembly 10 October 1786 requesting that Mayo's slaves be freed after one year's work to be applied toward payment of the debt; the petition was granted.²³ Mayo and Pleasants were two examples of growing interest in manumission. Both were motivated by "revolutionary ideals" to free their slaves, and the legislature, detecting the growing demand to legalize private manumissions enacted the law.]

Certainly the ideology and demand for legalized private manumission were present before May 1782, so why did the legislature wait until then to enact the law? There were two key reasons. First, the British were present in Virginia at various times throughout the war, thereby making manumission inopportune or hazardous. Second, there was hostility among Virginians toward manumission. In 1769, Jefferson later wrote that he "made one effort in that body [the House of

²²Russell, The Free Negro, p. 57.

²³Legislative Petition, Henrico County, October 28, 1786.

Burgesses] for the permission of the emancipation of slaves which was rejected." Jefferson placed the failure of this plan squarely on the shoulders of the British Crown, who would allow nothing liberal to succeed.²⁴ Jefferson also attributed the failure to "the public mind [which] would not bear the proposition, of manumission nor will it bear it today [1779]." He went on to predict: "Yet the day is not distant when it must bear it and adopt it , or worse will follow."²⁵ Though his proposition of 1769 was concerned with a plan of gradual emancipation, its rejection and the hostility then and later ^{were} are symptomatic of the problem of liberating slaves through any means.

As late as 1781, an attempt to enact a manumission law was defeated with the aid of Benjamin Harrison, then the Speaker of the House.²⁶ What occurred between 1781 and 1782 to persuade the General Assembly to pass the law? The exact answer may never be known, but one can put forth plausible reasons.

Jefferson has been credited with the successful passage of the 1782 law by other historians.²⁷ There is no evidence to the contrary and there is some circumstantial evidence to

²⁴"Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson," Ford, The Works of Jefferson, Vol. 1, p. 7.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 76-77.

²⁶Stephen B. Weeks, Southern Quakers and Slavery (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press; 1896), p. 212.

²⁷Russell, The Free Negro, p. 59.

support this contention, and the same evidence sheds some light on the motivation behind the law. Late in 1781 Jefferson finished his manuscript of what was later published as Notes on the State of Virginia. It contained the first comprehensive plan for the gradual emancipation of the slaves. The plan called for the emancipation of females at age eighteen and males at age twenty-one and suggested that they be colonized in some other part of the world. Unless this was done he warned, "deep rooted prejudices by whites; ten thousand recollections by the blacks, of injuries they have sustained; ...and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, produce convulsions, which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race."²⁸ It is clear that Jefferson remembered the fears of the blacks stirred up by the Revolution, and he sought to eliminate those fears with his plan. However, Jefferson was above all else a realist, who was sensitive to the fears of the people and quick to feel their pulse. He knew that his plan for mandatory gradual emancipation was unacceptable and perhaps impractical as well because the burden of transporting slaves out of the United States could not be borne by Virginians alone, and no other help could be expected. The plan also required that Virginia's chief source of wealth be destroyed without compensation. Thus the only alternative to a mandatory eradica-

²⁸Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, edited by Thomas Perkins Abernathy (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 132-133.

tion of slavery was a voluntary one.

The manumission law of 1782 can be interpreted as the first attempt by well intentioned men, like Jefferson, Madison and Wythe, to put slavery on the road to extinction. The law seems to have received its political justification from the bottleneck in the probate courts. Certainly that alone would have justified the law: additionally, it would seem that the law could have been the first attempt to eradicate slavery through a voluntary plan. A voluntary plan for the eradication of slavery was a logical outgrowth of the colonial-revolutionary experience. Virginians would have perceived any mandatory plan as a tyrannical attempt by the legislature to destroy private property. Even if a mandatory plan could have been passed it would have thrown Virginia into political, social and economic chaos. Politicians would have been chased from office by an enraged populace, society would have been gripped with hysterical fear of the newly freed black population, and the economy would have collapsed without its labor force. The voluntary plan through private manumission at worst only threatened the political careers of the legislators, and this did not materialize.²⁹ Fear of a suddenly large free black population was minimized. The existing laws in Virginia were harsh enough, or could be made

²⁹Only 36.6% of the members of the House of Delegates were returned to the House for the session during which the manumission law was enacted while 51.3% were returned to the next session.

harsher, to force the free blacks to look for another place of residence.

The voluntary plan also allowed the slaveowner to free his slaves when he could afford to do so, thus minimizing economic dislocation and individual hardships. One of the curses of slavery was that it discouraged free white labor, and without this labor to replace slaves Virginians would not be able to operate their plantations. However, under a voluntary plan of manumission, a master could free his slaves when he was able to replace their labor with free white labor. Using free black labor would not solve the problem because free blacks were more feared than slaves.³⁰ Economic chaos would be minimized by the orderly transfer from slave labor to free labor at the master's discretion.

A petition from Accomac County dated 3 June 1782 vigorously opposed the manumission law and suggested the opposition view of the intent of the law.

That your petitioners are much alarmed at several applications which they are informed will be made to the assembly at the approaching session (that passing) acts for the manumission of all slaves the property of certain persons within this this county; that however desireable an object that of universal liberty in this country may be, however religious or upright the intentions of their owners may be, Your petitioners humbly conceive the objections of sound policy and publick good will prove motives to prevent such Bills passing.³¹

³⁰For an interesting discussion see Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," Journal of American History, June 1972, pp. 5-29.

³¹Legislative Petition, Accomac County, June 3, 1782.

Though the petition was received after the enactment of the manumission law it clearly was meant to protest any attempt to pass the law, since there was no mention of manumission in the next session. The sixty-two signers felt, first that there would be an attempt to manumit all the slaves, hence to eradicate slavery. The petitioners went on to argue that such a law was dangerous because many of the slaves that would be freed had betrayed their masters during the Revolution and had caused much trouble and damage. These traitorous blacks should not be freed because they would present even a greater threat to the white population as freedmen. Second, the petitioners argued that "such an act would greatly tend to depreciate that part of our property which is still in slaves." Third, the act would destroy any incentive for "meritorious service" among the remaining slaves and this could harm the public good. Finally, newly freed blacks "indiscriminately set at liberty without proper funds established for their support, many would likely become chargeable and increase the demand on the people already highly taxed."³² The petition had no effect; the bill had already become law. Nevertheless, it shows that some Virginians perceived the manumission law as an attempt to wipe out slavery.

The "revolutionary ideals" of liberty and equality provided the needed ideological justification and impetus to

³²Ibid.

carry out this voluntary plan by calling into question the morality of enslaving fellow men. Some historians have suggested that these ^{1780's} ideals were solely responsible for the manumission movement; however, that argument for the passage of the 1782 law does not make sense in light of a later discussion of ideology in this paper. In summary, the manumission law seems to have grown out of a demand to relieve the probate courts and for a viable solution to the problem of slavery. Unfortunately the true motivations behind the manumission law can never be known; only simple and plausible guesses can be made in light of the available evidence.

Given the existence of the law, the next question and probably the most interesting one is what were its effects, how persuasive were the revolutionary ideals, how many manumitters were there and how many slaves were freed. Until recently only poor unsubstantiated guesses could be made about the number of slaves freed by the 1782 law. Now, a new, though crude, methodology can estimate that number fairly accurately.

The data was collected from wills and deeds since these were the only two legal instruments prescribed by the manumission law. The wills contained a wealth of information such as the testator's family and their names and from his inventory his wealth could be approximated. The inventory also exposed the number of slaves owned, their sex and value and in some cases their ages. The deeds were not quite as

rich. Primarily they only provided data on the particular slave or slaves who were being manumitted. Both sources contained some information on the manumitter's justification for his act and both provided data to determine literacy rates. Data on manumissions was collected from a sample consisting of six counties chosen by geographical location. The general demarcation lines are the Tidewater and Piedmont regions, with each of these regions further subdivided into northern, central and southern areas. The Valley and Transmountain region were ignored since the slave population there was very small. The three counties from the Tidewater region were Charles City, Norfolk and Westmoreland, and from the Piedmont region they were Amelia, Loudoun and Orange. Years were also sampled during the period 1782-1806. The first set of years selected were the first four years after the enactment of the manumission law, 1782-1785. The second set of years, 1792-1795, came ten years after the law was passed and ten years before restrictions were again placed on manumission. The final five years, 1802-1806, were the last years of unrestrained manumission. A law was enacted in 1806 stating that all slaves freed after 1806 had to leave the state within twelve months of their emancipation. This law seems to have put a damper on manumissions, and hence the reason for concluding this study at that date. Because the selection of the sample counties and years was not random in the strict sense of the word, it is a violation of statistical law to make

inferential statements about the data derived from these counties and years. However, it is possible to use these data cautiously in inferential work since it can be shown that they were reasonably representative of the state as a whole.³³

From the raw data the number of slaves manumitted is calculated from two formulas, one for the early period (1782-1790) and one for the later period (1790-1810).³⁴ This is necessary because the manumission rate in the early period is curvilinear in form while in the later period it is relatively linear.³⁵ Computation of the number of manumissions in the earlier sample years 1782-1785 is more complex due to the curvilinear form of the manumission rate curve; this makes prediction harder. However, a fairly accurate prediction can be made from other data derived from the sample. The average slaveowner owned 9 slaves³⁶ and the average slave population in Virginia 1782-1790 was 246,933; therefore, there were approximately 27,437 slaveowners in Virginia at this time.³⁷ The sample data also shows that .09 of all sample slaveowners freed slaves,³⁸ therefore, 2469 slaveowners freed

³³See Appendix A.

³⁴1810 was used as the concluding date because there are no population figures for 1800.

³⁵See Appendix B.

³⁶Table, p. 50.

³⁷Virginia D. Harrington and Evarts B. Green, American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 152-153 records a slave population of 201,239 slaves in 1782 and 292,627 in 1790.

³⁸Table, p. 52.

slaves. Finally the average manumission included approximately 3 slaves,³⁹ which when multiplied with the predicted number of manumittors in Virginia gives 7408 slaves freed during this period (1782-1790).

The calculation for the number of manumissions in the later period is somewhat easier. It requires only the assumption that all slaves in Virginia had an equal chance of being manumitted. The mathematical formula which is derived from the assumption is a simple ratio;

$$\frac{\text{Number of slaves manumitted in Virginia during the sample years}}{\text{Number of slaves in Virginia}} = \frac{\text{Number of slaves manumitted in the sample during the sample years}}{\text{Number of slaves in the sample counties}}$$

example: The sample counties and the sample years yield 385 slaves manumitted. These counties had an average slave population of 32,530 in the years 1790-1800. The state of Virginia had an average slave population of approximately 307,458 in the same years.⁴⁰ Using the formula:

$$\frac{X}{307,458} = \frac{385}{32,530} = 3639$$

The figure obtained for the number of slaves manumitted in the state of Virginia will reflect the total predicted manumissions in the time period of the sample (1782-1785). In other words, if the sample years were 1792-1795 and 1802-1806, as they are in the above example, one must set up another

³⁹411 slaves were freed by 130 instruments.

⁴⁰The average Virginia and County slave populations was obtained from the First and Second Census.

simple ratio to determine the total number of predicted manumissions in the period 1790-1810.

$$\frac{\text{Number of years in the sample}}{\text{Total number of years want to predict}} = \frac{\text{Number of manumissions in the sample}}{\text{Total number of manumissions predicted in period}}$$

example: In the period 1790-1810, the sample years were 1792-1795 and 1802-1806 or nine sample years. The period encompassed twenty years. 3639 slaves were predicted to have been freed in the state for the sample years. Using these three pieces of information one can set up a simple ratio and predict total manumissions in the period 1790-1810.

$$\frac{9}{20} = \frac{3639}{X} = 8086$$

In the period 1790-1810, 8086 slaves gained their freedom through private manumission in Virginia.

Based on these two calculations only 15,494 slaves achieved their freedom through private manumission from 1782 through 1810. This figure is considerable less than predicted previously by historians.⁴¹

The initial eight years of manumission were not graced with 10,000 manumissions as John Russell asserted in his book, The Free Negro in Virginia 1619-1865.⁴² There were three additional factors which pushed the free black population from 2800 in 1782⁴³ to 12,866 in 1790. The first factor,

⁴¹Russell, The Free Negro, p. 61.

⁴²Ibid., p. 61.

⁴³Ibid., p. 61, and the First Census.

though numerically insignificant, technically, is important. The natural increase of the free black population over this eight year period was 732.⁴⁴ This leaves 1926 free blacks unaccounted for in the expansion of the population.⁴⁵ This group arose due to the direct and indirect influences of the War for Independence and migration from other states.

The physical presence of two contesting armies throughout the war encouraged slaves to run away at unprecedented rates. "Slaves had been running away a century and a half before the Revolution, but what in peacetime was a rivulet became a wartime flood."⁴⁶ The chaos of war provided unequalled opportunity for slaves to make a successful escape and that many did cannot be doubted, though the exact number can never be known. Another crucial factor indirectly related to the wartime experience which influenced the growth of the free black population were slaves freed by the act of 1783, which stated:

During the Revolutionary War, many slaves were enlisted by their owners as substitutes

⁴⁴This number was derived by multiplying 2800 (the free black population in 1782) times the estimated natural increase rate .0327. The natural increase rate is the figure used by George Tucker in Progress of the United States in Population and Wealth in Fifty Years as Exhibited by the Decennial Census (New York: Hunt's Merchant Magazine, 1843).

⁴⁵Using the base population figure plus the predicted number of manumission and natural increase minus the known population in 1790 (12,866) yields 1926, which is the number of free blacks unaccounted for in the expansion of the free black population.

⁴⁶Quarles, The Negro in The American Revolution, p. 115.

for free persons, and were represented to recruiting officers as free, and afterwards the owners, contrary to the principles of justice have attempted to force slaves to return to servitude. Because such slaves have contributed toward American liberty and independence they are all deemed free and may sue, informa pauperis; and may recover damages if detained.⁴⁷

This law was the direct outgrowth of a massive attempt to deprive many slaves who had fought or otherwise served in American armies of their deserved freedom. Though the direct use of slaves was hotly debated and never approved during the war, many served anyway, both legally and illegally.⁴⁸

Benjamin Quarles cites examples of extensive use of slaves by the Virginia navy. These men were used as ship pilots because they were cheaper than whites and they knew the coastal waters better than most whites. Apparently, 140 blacks served in this navy, of which only ten percent were already free, and "the remainder were slaves, many of whom were enlisted in the guise of freemen as substitutes for their masters."⁴⁹ Late in 1782, according to Quarles, "the Virginia Council ordered five counties to furnish 3500 men to level the works at Yorktown. Anyone summoned to duty was

⁴⁷Guild, Black Laws, p. 191. See also, Henning, Statutes, Vol 11, pp. 308-309.

⁴⁸"Thomas Jefferson to the Speaker of the House, May 10, 1781," Ford, The Works of Jefferson, Vol. 3, p. 277. See also, "Joseph Jones to James Madison, November 18, 1780," "James Madison to Joseph Jones, November 28, 1780," "Joseph Jones to James Madison, December 8, 1780," Hutchinson, Madison Papers, Vol. 2, pp. 182-183, 209, 233.

⁴⁹Quarles, The Negro in The American Revolution, p. 87.

permitted to 'send an able bodied (free) Negro man in his stead'. Consequently, the force contained a goodly number of Negroes. When the time came for the black substitutes to be discharged, their former masters in numerous instances tried to re-enslave them." The response to this outrage was the enactment of the 1783 law prohibiting masters from re-enslaving blacks who had been represented as free to serve in their place.⁵⁰ There is further evidence that many blacks served in Washington's army and some of them surely were slaves serving as replacements for Virginia white men.⁵¹ Finally, there are those few slaves who were freed by special legislative act for "meritorious service." These heroic souls did not count for much numerically but they attracted attention.⁵² The 1783 law and special enactments added an undetermined but significant number to the free black population.

Migration from other states was also a significant factor in the growth of the free black population in Virginia until 1793.⁵³ North Carolina was probably the biggest contributor

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 183.

⁵¹Walter H. Mazyck, George Washington and the Negro (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1932), p. 46.

⁵²Rutland, George Mason, pp. 456, 517, 521. See also, Hening, Statutes, Vol. 12, pp. 102, 138; Vol. 13, p. 103, Legislative Petitions, Halifax County, October 22, 1789 and Norfolk County, October 9, 1792.

⁵³Guild, Black Laws, p. 95.

because she forced all newly freed blacks to leave the state within six months or face being sold back into slavery.⁵⁴

Most of North Carolina's slave population lay along or close to Virginia's southeastern border.⁵⁵ This meant that most slaves who were freed in North Carolina probably came from that area, and it would seem logical that they would just move north to Virginia to secure their freedom. The number of slaves who migrated to Virginia from North Carolina can be determined; however, it has not yet been done.

The initial eight years of the manumission law saw a rapid increase in the manumission rate, but that rate never achieved the numbers previously supposed. There were other sources of growth in the free black population which have been ignored or insufficiently emphasized, and they added a significant number. During the next twenty years, according to calculations already done, Virginians freed 8,086 slaves. For the same period natural increase was 8,414.⁵⁶ The number of slaves freed plus the natural increase added to the base free black population of 12,866 in 1790 yields an expected

⁵⁴John Hope Franklin, The Free Negro in North Carolina (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), p. 20.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁶To get the natural increase over the twenty year period 1790-1810, the base population of 12,866 in 1790 is multiplied by the natural increase rate of .0327 which gives the per year expected increase in the free black population. To get it for twenty years multiply this figure times 20.

free black population of 29,366 in 1810. The actual census figure was 30,570.⁵⁷ The figures are not identical but they are very close, and it is safe to assume that they are equivalent. Therefore, during the entire twenty-eight year period of unrestricted manumission 15,494 slaves were freed. This is 55.7% of the entire growth of the free black population, and is only a small fraction (5.5%) of the total average slave population. In either instance the figure is far smaller than any previous estimates.

The manumission rate was never great enough to threaten the existence of slavery nor was it massive enough to validate the theory that "revolutionary ideals" spurred men to manumit their slaves in large numbers. The key issue then is why were there so few manumissions at a time when the "revolutionary ideals" were at their strongest and slavery at its weakest? The answers, which provide insights into Virginians' social mechanisms, can be found in the attitudes of individuals and religious groups toward slavery, together with the forces that directly influenced manumission such as ideology, economy, family and fear.

The interplay of ideology and slavery has been the most carefully studied, least understood, and most confusing of all the influential forces. All previous histories of manumission have been written from within the framework of the

⁵⁷Third Census.

"revolutionary ideals." The wellsprings of this "equal rights" ideology were both secular and religious. The religiously inspired manumission movements were more visible and effective in the propagation of this ideological war against slavery because they were better organized and had better resources.

The most famous and probably the best organized religious group was the Quakers. From early colonial days, Quakers agitated for the manumission of slaves; by the Revolution they had begun to free their own slaves before it was legal to do so. The enactment of the manumission law in 1782 quickened the Quaker impulse to abolish slavery in Virginia. On November 8, 1785, a joint group of Quakers and Methodists from Fredrick County petitioned the State Legislature to destroy slavery.

That your petitioners are clearly and fully persuaded that liberty is the Birth Right of Mankind, the right of every rational Creature without exception, who has not forfeited that right to the laws of his Country.- That the Body of Negroes in this state have been robbed ought in Justice to have their rights restored. That the Glorious and ever Honorable Revolution can be Justified on no other principles, but what do plead with greater force for the Emancipation of our slaves:⁵⁸

The petitioners went on to argue that slaves were more oppressed than they were before independence, and that there was no legal,

⁵⁸Legislative Petition, Fredrick County, November 8, 1785. See also, In a letter to Jefferson dated January 22, 1786, Madison mentions that there were several petitions presented. This was the only one found.

historical or moral justification for this oppression. They refuted the argument that slaves were inherently inferior because of physical differences. The petitioners argued that as free people, blacks could be a source of strength.

The Riches & Strength of every Country consists in the number of its inhabitants who are Interested in the support of its Government: Therefore to bind the Vast body of Negroes to the State by the powerful ties of Interests, will be the highest Policy.⁵⁹

The petitioners concluded "that of Consequence, Justice, Mercy and Truth, every virtue that can Adorn the man or the Christian, the Interest of Religion, the honour & real Interest of the State, and the Welfare of Mankind do unanswerably, uncontrollably plead for the removal of this grand Abomination."⁶⁰

James Madison was in the House of Delegates when this petition was presented and wrote to George Washington:

...The pulse of the H. D. was felt Thursday with regard to a general manumission by a petition presented on the subject. It was rejected without dissent but not without an avowed patronage of its principles by sundry members. A motion was made to throw it under the table, which was treated with as much indignation on one side as the petition was on the other. There are several petitions before the House against any step towards freeing the slaves, even praying for a repeal of the law which licenses particular manumissions.⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Hutchinson, Madison Papers, Vol. 8, pp. 403-404.

Madison identified two distinct responses, one favorable and one that almost destroyed the entire manumission movement. The favorable response resulted in the drawing up of a bill which called for a gradual emancipation of slaves; however, it was premature and "was thrown out on the first reading by a considerable majority."⁶² Jefferson wrote that the bill did not fail because neither he nor George Wythe were present, but because the legislature "saw that the moment of doing it with success was not yet arrived."⁶³ The Quaker-Methodist drive to secure legislative emancipation for all slaves failed, and out of the wreckage sprang a reactionary movement. Those forces aligned against manumission counterattacked immediately. On November 8, 1785, the same day the abolition petition was received, an opposition petition was also presented and read.⁶⁴ Over the next two days four more petitions were read, each calling for a repeal of the manumission law and demanding that no emancipation plan be enacted. The opposition was well organized, and presented five petitions (four of which were identical but from different counties) signed by 776 persons.

⁶²"James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, January 22, 1786," James Madison, The Writings of James Madison, Gaillard Hunt, editor (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901), Vol. 2, p. 219.

⁶³"Observations on the Article Etats-Unis prepared for the Encyclopedie, June 22, 1786," Ford, The Works of Jefferson, Vol. 5, p. 71.

⁶⁴Legislative Petition, Mecklenberg County, November 8, 1785.

The basic theme in the petitions was fear that blacks were being freed by "the enemies of our country, Tools of the British Administration, and supported by certain among us of considerable weight, to effect our Destruction by Subtlety & Craft, which [they] could not do by force, by wresting from us our slaves by an Act of the Legislature for a general Emancipation of them."⁶⁵ The petitioners argued that those who wished to force emancipation on the people did so behind the "Veil of Piety," but that the veil was false because it was contrary to the word of God. The scheme was seen as "pregnant with evil consequences to this state."⁶⁶ Recalling the reasons for the Revolution the petitioners drew a parallel to their present circumstance.

When the British Parliament usurped a Right to dispose of our property without our consent we dissolved the Union with our parent Country, and established a Constitution & Form of Government of our own that our property might be secure in the Future....But notwithstanding this we understand a very subtle and daring Attempt is made to Dispossess⁶⁷ us of a very important Part of our Property.

Not only did the petitioners enlist the causes of the revolution to support their case against any general emancipation, they also appealed to Biblical authority. Citing Leviticus, chapter 25, verses 44, 45, 46, the petitioners stated that

⁶⁵Legislative Petitions from: Mecklenberg County, November 11, 1785; Amelia County, November 10, 1785; Pittsylvania County, November 10, 1785; Halifax County, November 10, 1785; Brunswick County, November 10, 1785.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

both bondmen and bondmaids should be heathens and that they should be bought and made the master's possession as should their inheritance. Continuing, they argued that the freedom of Christ was the freedom from the bondage of sin and not from human bondage. If the human bondage was broken, then the heathen blacks would suffer neglect, famine and death; furthermore, the white population would be faced with "the horrors of all the Rapes, Robberies, Murders, and Outrages, which a vast multitude of unprincipled, unpropertied, vindictive, remorseless Banditti are capable of perpetrating."⁶⁸ The petitioners concluded that manumission and emancipation were evil and inconsistent with the ideals of the Revolution, that manumission should be made illegal and any emancipation rigidly opposed.⁶⁹

The culmination of this counteroffensive was the introduction of a bill in the House of Delegates by Carter Henry Harrison to repeal the 1782 manumission law. The decision on the bill was close and it worried many delegates. Madison hoped that the repeal would fail because if it "should prove otherwise this retrograde step with regard to emancipation will not only dishonor us extremely but hasten the event which is dreaded by stimulating the friends to it."⁷⁰ The dreaded

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰"James Madison to Ambrose Madison, December 15, 1785," Hutchinson, Madison Papers, Vol. 8, p. 442.

event was a general emancipation, which Madison argued was dangerous at this time and that it would be wiser to wait until the slaves could be transported out of the United States.⁷¹ Though the bill was defeated by Speaker Benjamin Harrison's tie breaking vote,⁷² Madison's fears that the Friends would become more aggressive were confirmed.

The Quakers continued relentlessly to push their attempts to destroy slavery. Their agitation infuriated George Washington, who expressed his hostility towards the Quakers and their methods in a long letter to Robert Morris. The letter dealt with an event that occurred in Philadelphia but one that Washington surely felt would reoccur in his own state. A suit was presented by the Quakers on behalf of a slave owned by Mr. Dalby of Alexandria, who was temporarily residing in Philadelphia with his slave while on business there. The Quakers sought to win freedom for the slave based on the premise that slavery was illegal in Pennsylvania, hence any slave brought into the state for any reason should be freed. Washington felt that the Quakers had acted irresponsibly toward justice, adding that "there is no avoiding the snares of individuals or private societies" who were bent on applying the law to dubious cases. Washington went on to say that he hoped to see emancipation achieved everywhere, but "there is only one proper and effectual mode by which it can be accom-

⁷¹Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 442, note.

⁷²Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 405, note 4.

plished, and that is by legislative authority." Any other way "begets discontent on one side and resentment on the other, and when it happens to fall on a man, whose purse will not measure with that of Society, and he loses his property for want of means to defend it; it is oppression in the latter case, and not humanity in any, because it introduces more evils than it can cure."⁷³ Washington clearly was upset at what he saw as the Quakers' excessive and improper use of the law and governing bodies to obtain their goals; however, he did not deny the virtue of that goal.

The Quakers, unaware of Washington's hostility and unconcerned, vehemently pressed for the abolition of slavery. Robert Pleasants wrote James Madison in 1791 on behalf of the Abolition Society of Virginia, a Quaker dominated organization, to ask him for his "judgement on the propriety of a Petition to our assembly for a law declaring the children of slaves to be born after the passing such act, to be free at the usual ages of eighteen and twenty-one; and to enjoy such privileges as may be consistent with justice and sound policy."⁷⁴ Madison replied that although he was in favor of the eventual abolition of slavery, he could not use the "public station" given him by those who would be most affected by emancipation to promote it without their consent, which he believed would

⁷³"Washington to Robert Morris, April 12, 1786," Fitzpatrick, Washington Papers, Vol. 28, pp. 407-408.

⁷⁴Hunt, Writings of Madison, Vol 5, p. 60, note 1.

not be forthcoming. Madison also felt that a petition for emancipation was a subject too delicate ever to risk the discussion of it. Any attempt to submit such a petition ought to weigh carefully all the hazards. Recalling the chilling events of six years earlier, when the Quakers first petitioned for the emancipation of slaves, Madison said that this attempt, like the previous one, could only ignite another anti-manumission offensive. "It might be worth your consideration whether it might not produce successful attempts to withdraw the privilege now allowed to individuals, of giving freedom to slaves."⁷⁵ The events of 1785 left Madison with an uneasy awareness that slavery and manumission were best left alone, for if they were not and agitation continued, all might be lost.

The Quakers were the vanguard of the anti-slavery movement. They acted as a society to abolish the institution, and set an example of themselves by purging the church of slaves and recalcitrant slaveholders. However, not all Quakers were true to their professed belief in anti-slavery. Some freed their slaves but kept them in a state of peonage. This was suggested in a letter from Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Edward Bancroft written 26 January 1789, in response to Bancroft's query about the ability of ex-slaves to adapt to free society and liberty. Jefferson wrote:

⁷⁵"Madison to Robert Pleasants, October 30, 1791," ibid., pp. 60-61.

Many quakers in Virginia seated slaves on their lands as tenants. They were distant from me, and therefore I cannot be particular in the details, because I never had very particular information. I cannot say whether they were to pay rent money, or share of the produce: but I remember that the landlord was obliged during every season & according to the weather to watch them daily & almost constantly to make them work, even to whip them.⁷⁶

Undoubtedly some Quakers set up this system of sharecropping to avoid expulsion from the Society and to maintain their much needed source of labor; however, they were probably a minority.

The Quakers were not the only religious group which actively campaigned against slavery. The Methodists and Baptists were also involved. The Methodists wrote their first anti-slavery pronouncement in April of 1780, more than two years before the manumission law.⁷⁷ The pronouncement ordered every Methodist to execute an instrument agreeing to free all his slaves within one year and that all pastors were to record such transactions.⁷⁸ Four years later another attempt was made to abolish slavery within the church. In this proclamation Virginia members were given an extra two years to complete the emancipation of their slaves.⁷⁹ Late

⁷⁶"Jefferson to Dr. Edward Bancroft, January 26, 1789," Ford, The Works of Jefferson, Vol. 5, pp. 447-450.

⁷⁷William W. Sweet, Virginia Methodism (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1955), p. 192.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 192-193.

⁷⁹Leroy Madison Lee, The Life and Times of the Reverend Jesse Lee (Richmond: John Early, 1848), p. 166.

in 1785, the Methodists as well as the Quakers submitted petitions to the state legislature calling for the end of slavery. The effect of this joint agitation was a reaction that almost destroyed unrestricted manumission.

Virginia Baptists joined the Quakers and Methodists in 1787 when the Baptist Association of Kettocton debated the lawfulness of hereditary slavery and concluded that it was a breach of divine law. The association then appointed a committee which drew up a plan for the gradual abolition of slavery; unfortunately negative reaction flooded the association, and the subject was dropped at the next meeting.⁸⁰ Two years later at the General Committee Session held in Richmond, slavery was again debated. It was

Resolved, that slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with a republican government, and therefore recommend it to our brethren to make use of every legal measure to extirpate this horrid evil from the land; and pray Almighty God that our honorable legislature may have it in their power to proclaim the Great Jubilee, consistent with the principles of good policy.⁸¹

The results of the Methodist and Baptist abolitionist stance have not been quantitatively determined. Though it can be safely assumed that it had little effect on most, it did, however, have its effects on some people. Mrs. William

⁸⁰Robert B. Semple, A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia (Richmond: Pitt & Dickinson, 1894), p. 392.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 105.

Russell, sister of Patrick Henry, converted to Methodism and freed her husband's slaves upon his death, 21 July 1795.⁸² Mrs. Russell was an extraordinary individual; and she was not representative of the effects of religion on attitudes toward slavery.

Another side to the Baptist-Methodist story of the anti-slavery campaign was the strong reaction against clerical meddling in slavery. The Methodists, in particular, had to cope with a groundswell of anti-manumission opinion. By 1785, the Methodist Conference retracted the resolution of 1784 calling for the eradication of slavery within the church, saying it "discovered it had traveled too quickly in advance of public opinion." Backpedaling quickly, the Conference decided to leave "the whole subject to be modified by the legitimate influence of Christianity and ultimately to the issue of wise and humane laws, guided on either hand by patriotism and philanthropy."⁸³ Reverend Jesse Lee opposed emancipation because continued attempts from the pulpit to pressure slaveholders on the subject would violate their civil rights, or worse, it would harden their opposition and preclude any future attempts to secure a general emancipation. Lee also feared that such theological pressure could only create unnecessary strife within the church. In

⁸²Sweet, Virginia Methodism, p. 195.

⁸³Lee, The Life and Times of the Reverend Jesse Lee, pp. 114-115.

short, the public support for the church might melt away if its anti-slavery stance continued, and with it would go the church.⁸⁴

Lee further noted that although the church had influenced a few members to manumit their slaves, most had not and would not.⁸⁵ Bishop Ashbury in his journal observed similar behavior. The entry dated 9 January 1789 notes:

I am brought to conclude that slavery will exist in Virginia for ages: There is not sufficient sense of religion or liberty to destroy it: Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, in the highest flights of rapturous piety, still maintain and defend it.⁸⁶

By 1808 the bulk of Methodist rules on slavery had been abolished, and the goal of eradicating slavery from the church by manumission, either forced or voluntary, had become a dismal failure.⁸⁷ Only the Quakers had been successful in achieving corporate compliance of their members in emancipation of their slaves and in maintaining constant anti-slavery pressure on the legislature. However, the Quakers were small in number in Virginia and unpopular because of their constant agitation.

Secular ideological impulses against slavery also seemed to have a minimal effect. These attitudes may be detected in

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 170.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 161.

⁸⁶Sweet, Virginia Methodism, pp. 199-200.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 195.

the wills and deeds of manumitters in the sample studied (an admittedly biased sample). For purposes of analysis the manumitters have been taken at their word, that is if they mentioned religious motivation, this is recorded, or if they mentioned "the revolutionary ideals" in general terms, then this is recorded, and so on. Of 130 instruments of manumission, 16 (or 12%) mentioned "equal rights" as their motivation. Religious motivations were never mentioned in the sample wills and deeds. Only 13 others mentioned any other motivation, and all of these manumitters freed their slaves because the slave bought his own freedom, or some other person, usually a free black, bought that slave's freedom. The implication is clear, "equal rights" were not a powerful motivating force, and the economic consideration was at least as powerful.

Religious and secular ideology failed to sustain anti-slavery momentum in Virginia, since it was ineffective in encouraging manumission. What caused the failure of ideology to influence and successfully promote manumission in Virginia? There are three crucial forces that nullified any ideological impulses and frustrated any widespread manumission movement. The forces were economy, family and fear.

Slaves and slavery presented a dilemma for Virginians who perceived slavery as destructive to the land and a discouragement to free labor. Furthermore, because it chased away free labor, Virginians saw slavery as the only source of

labor, thus its eradication would economically cripple and socially disrupt the state. The effects of slavery were not lost on Virginia planters. . Patrick Henry observed in 1776:

How come is it that the lands in Pennsylvania are five times the value of ours? Pennsylvania is the country of the most extensive privileges with few slaves.... Take an instance nearer to us, the country beyond the mountains is settled on a plan of economy very different from ours. Europeans, instead of Africans, till the lands and manufacture.⁸⁸

Henry clearly blamed the system of slavery and the presence of Africans for the low land prices and for Virginia's economic backwardness. Thirty years later George Washington observed the same phenomena.

From what I have said, you will perceive that the present prices of Land in Pennsylvania are higher than they are in Maryland and Virginia, although they are not of superior quality. Two reasons have already been assigned for this, first, that in the settled part of it, the land is divided into smaller farms, and more improved; and 2dly being, in a greater degree than any other the recepticle of emigrants...and because there are laws here [Pennsylvania] for the gradual abolition of Slavery which neither of the two states above mentioned have, at the present, but which nothing is more certain than that they must have, and at a period not remote.⁸⁹

Washington and Henry saw slavery as a blight on the land, as an inhibitor of improvements and a discourager of white settlers who could work the land intensively and increase its

⁸⁸Meade, Patrick Henry, Vol. 1, pp. 114-116.

⁸⁹"Washington to Sir John Sinclair, December 11, 1796," Fitzpatrick, Washington Papers, Vol. 35, p. 328.

productivity and its value. Washington strongly suggested that the only way to redeem Virginia's land prices and economy was to cut out the cancer, slavery. That would be unbearably painful, potentially fatal, and both Henry and Washington knew it. Neither could escape slavery and its unending pressures to expand. Both continued to purchase slaves despite personal protests and statements against the institution. In 1773 Henry wrote Robert Pleasants: "Would anyone believe that I am Master of Slaves of my own purchase! I am drawn along by ye. general inconvenience of living without them, I will not, I can not justify it."⁹⁰ Perhaps Henry realized that he was the slave and slavery was his master. Washington also learned that slavery enforced its hold even after he swore never to acquire another slave. Throughout his later life he was plagued by the addition of new slaves to his already large stock. These new slaves came to him as payment for debts, and though he often accepted that "very troublesome specie of property" as payment, he did it with regret and cursed every transaction.⁹¹

Washington was fully aware of how troublesome owning slaves could be. Circumstances obliged him to write the Reverend Jonathan Boucher 13 May 1770, in order to inform

⁹⁰Meade, Patrick Henry, Vol. 1, pp. 114-116.

⁹¹"Washington to John Francis Mercer, November 6, 1786," "Washington to John Fowler, February 2, 1788," "Washington to Alexander Spotswood, November 23, 1794," Fitzpatrick, Washington Papers.

him that one of his students, Jacky Custis, was in financial difficulties and that his estate was tottering. "...Tho' he is possessed of what is called a good estate, it is not a profitable one. His lands are poor, consequently the crops short; and tho' he has a number of slaves, slaves in such cases only add to the Expense."⁹² The meaning was clear: though Custis owned what on paper seemed to be a good estate, his lands had grown tired and barren; the slaves still had to be cared for even if the crops were too meager to support them.

Poor crops did not prevent slavery from perpetuating itself. It continued to grow and expand without the encouragement of the planter. Bayard's Voyage dans l'Interior des Etats-Unis, summed it up in a mythical conversation between two planters.

What is the matter, neighbor, has the blight attacked your tobacco?
 ...No; but two wretched negresses have been brought to bed. These creatures breed like flies.⁹³

No doubt the exploding slave population was more of a hazard to planters harnessed to poor lands and declining yields than any tobacco blight.

Virginians perceived another fatal flaw in the institu-

⁹²"Washington to Reverend Jonathon Boucher, May 3, 1770," ibid., Vol. 13, p. 14.

⁹³Lewis Cecil Gray, History of Agriculture in Southern United States to 1860 (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), Vol. 2, p. 616.

tion of slavery. They noted that the presence of slavery discouraged immigration to Virginia and encouraged emigration from the state. L. C. Gray in his work on southern agriculture stated that slavery checked immigration and thereby prevented the growth of a strong and balanced economy.⁹⁴ Evidence from eighteenth century Virginia shows that Virginians were sensitive to this problem. A petition from Fairfax County presented to the state legislature 20 October 1789, called for an active policy to encourage immigrants and prevent depopulation.⁹⁵ The author of the petition was George Mason, who protested the importation of slaves from colonial times through the Federal Convention of 1787 because the new constitution allowed the slave trade to continue unimpeded by the national government for twenty years. Clearly, Mason saw that slavery directly and indirectly ruined the economy and posed a threat to Virginia's economic health.

Slavery not only discouraged white immigration; it also encouraged an exodus of free white labor. Dwight Dumond estimated that 300,000 free white laborers and their families were driven from Virginia by 1847 because slavery stigmatized all labor and because the state economy was geared to planting and not marketing, shipping, and other enterprises associated

⁹⁴Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 458-459.

⁹⁵Rutland, George Mason, pp. 1175-1177.

with free labor.⁹⁶ Slaves not only stigmatized all labor, they competed directly with free labor. James Madison realized the danger of this, and promoted a law which restricted the ratio of slaves to free whites that could be used as labor on river boats. The law stated that the presence of slaves on these "small country craft" discouraged free white seamen and that the public good would be best served by increasing the number of free white seamen. The law was enacted 10 June 1786 and called for a fine of one hundred pounds if more than one third of the seamen were slaves.⁹⁷

Virginians perceived that slavery drove out free laborers, seamen, farmers and mechanics, with the ironic result that slaveowners became more closely wedded to slavery. The wedding was an unwanted one, and yet one which had to occur given the nature of the Virginia labor system. Since slave labor effectively destroyed its alternative, free labor, slaveowners, even if they desired to emancipate their slaves, faced the dilemma of where to get free white labor to replace slave labor. The use of newly freed slaves seemed like a probable solution, but it was not. The employment of free blacks re-created a problem that manumission could destroy, that is the removal of the black population. Besides the

⁹⁶Dwight Dumond, Anti-Slavery (New York: Norton Library, 1966), pp. 88, 90-92.

⁹⁷Hutchinson, Madison Papers, Vol. 8, p. 66, note 2. See also, Hening, Statutes, Vol. 11, pp. 403-404.

fact that employment of free blacks only frustrated one intent of manumission, their presence among whites was more feared than the presence of slaves. The historical record documents this fear well and it will be fully treated later.

With no free white labor to replace slave labor, Virginia was caught in one of history's cruelest ironies. Slavery continued to expand, creating racial imbalance and threatening to ruin the Virginia economy. The racial imbalance could only be stopped if white workers immigrated, but they avoided Virginia in favor of other lands. Henry and particularly Washington, saw slavery as the root of Virginia's economic trouble and suggested that the only way to redeem Virginia was to abolish slavery. But that could not be done without a severe economic dislocation and a radical social change, neither of which Virginians wanted. Economic dislocation would have resulted with the transfer of labor systems and labor forces and the new social fabric would have grown from the new system. Virginians chose the conservative and less painful avenue. They chose to succumb to growing racial imbalance and a slow economic strangulation rather than submit to the pain of social and economic revolution.

Not all Virginians saw slavery at the root of Virginia's trouble. John Taylor of Caroline saw slavery as a positive good. However, in reading Taylor, it must be remembered that above all else he was bound to the agricultural way of life

and in Virginia agriculture could only be performed with slave hands. Taylor's defense of slavery became familiar in later American history. Broadly, Taylor felt that since Greece and Rome produced the greatest civilizations ever known with slavery, and slavery had produced great men like Washington and Jefferson, it was a positive good. The meanness of the slaves served as a mirror through which white virtues could be exposed and admired, but if slavery was destroyed so would the mirror and white virtues would no longer be visible. According to Taylor, slavery was benevolent and humanitarian, and if destroyed, the tranquility of society would be shattered by conflicts between black and white.⁹⁸

During the year of 1813, John Taylor of Caroline published a series of essays, Arator, pertaining to Virginia agriculture. Two of these essays dealt with slavery and its relationship to agriculture, both its effects and consequences. Taylor felt that slavery was legally and practically impossible to destroy.⁹⁹ Since slavery was to be the means of labor, it had to be reformed in order to reach its maximum efficiency. The chief reform was to tighten control over the slaves to prevent irregularities "by which a multi-

⁹⁸Eugene Tenbroeck Mudge, The Social Philosophy of John Taylor of Caroline (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 205-206.

⁹⁹John Taylor, Arator; Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical & Political in Sixty-One Numbers (Georgetown: J. M. Carter, 1814), p. 57.

tude of mischiefs and others are produced."¹⁰⁰ Taylor defined uncontrolled irregularities as thefts and runaways. He charged that these two actions, in particular, created disorder which inevitably ruined the agricultural system. Taylor's answer was simple, sell the thieves and runaways out of state.¹⁰¹ However this alone would not end these nuisances which created so much disorder. According to Taylor, the root of slave mischief was the presence of a free black population. Free blacks were parasites, they did no productive work, and encouraged slaves to steal their master's property. This not only caused the loss of the value of the property, but also of valuable labor.¹⁰² The remedy: send the free blacks elsewhere.¹⁰³ Only by removing the troublesome slaves and free blacks could the "hopeless conclusion be avoided and the necessary agricultural improvements made." If a refutation of these irregularities was not accomplished, there was no hope "of any considerable agricultural improvement" and Taylor's majestic agrarian republic based on slavery would remain only a dream.¹⁰⁴

Taylor realized that Virginia was irrevocably wedded to

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 260, note B.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 260.

a system of slave labor which was often badly managed, but he argued that the wrongs could be corrected and his agrarian republic achieved. Taylor could not place slavery as the cause of Virginia's problems; to do so meant that his ideal state could not be achieved. Taylor realized Virginia's dilemma and sought intellectual justification for slavery's continued existence, despite its evils, through reformist arguments. He realized that Virginia had no viable alternative to slave labor and that it was best to make do instead of revolutionizing the economic system. A slow strangulation was better than a sudden death.

It is ironic that Taylor, an advocate of the small yeoman farmer, chose to defend the system that drove the small farmer out of Virginia. Both he and Jefferson idolized the small farmer, yet it was the small non-slaveholding farmer who could not survive in the midst of the plantation system. The destruction of slavery and the plantation system of agriculture would have allowed the small yeoman farmer to survive and would have encouraged immigration into Virginia and the development of its lands through intensive farming and improvements. But the growth of the yeoman farmer would have spelled the doom of the plantation system economically, socially and politically.

Slavery not only stirred reformers and abolitionists; it also created its defenders. Slavery was seen by some as an economic evil that had to be cut out. Manumission was one

relatively painless cure, but it failed. Economic resistance undermined the manumission movement. Slavery as a labor system was the only source of labor open to Virginians. They had no alternative, so they resisted any reform attempts. Out of the realization that there was no alternative labor system to slavery in Virginia grew the positive defense of slavery. Manumission was doomed as a reform since Virginians could not bear the pain of destroying slavery and coping with the resultant economic and social revolution that would have been born in the ashes of the old system.

Slavery's iron grip on Virginia is clearly reflected in the study of the manumittors. These individuals were the ones who, in spite of economic restraints and other hindrances, freed some of their slaves. Why were these individuals unique? The statistical profile of the manumittors tells a story by itself. It is a story mirrored by the previous discussion of the economics of slavery. The family, the number of slaves owned, and the type of slave freed, vividly express on an individual scale the various obstacles confronting any potential manumittor.

The sample of wills and deeds contained only 130 (or 9% of all slave owners in the sample) manumittors. These people had two clearly distinct characteristics not shared by non-manumittors. The presence of children or a wife or both inhibited manumissions.

TABLE 1

	Number of Children Manumittors	(data from wills only) Non-Manumittors
Number of Children	54	1964
Number of manumittors	51	0
Number of non-manumittors	0	552
Average number of children	1.05	3.55
Median number of children	1	3

It is clear from this table that non-manumittors were survived by more children than manumittors. This should not be surprising since the fewer children one had the less was the pressure to pass the wealth on intergenerationally. To put it another way, if the planter had no heirs to receive his wealth, then he was under no obligation to distribute that wealth to the next generation. Two examples further demonstrate the strength of intergenerational pressure. Patrick Henry was influenced by "revolutionary ideals," and yet he failed to free his slaves.¹⁰⁵ He was inhibited from manumitting his slaves because he was survived by ten children and a wife. Undoubtedly there was tremendous pressure put upon him to distribute his wealth to the next generation. George Mason, another strong believer in "equal rights,"

¹⁰⁵Meade, Patrick Henry, Vol. 2, p. 437.

and never an advocate of slavery, failed to free his slaves; he was survived by heirs who demanded their share of his wealth.

Slave wealth was crucial to the next generation. Slaves provided the only labor source available to work the lands, without which lands would die fallow and unproductive. To many sons and daughters, possession of slaves and tilled lands were all that lay between them and the common laborer or yeoman farmer. If the slaves were lost through some idealistic action of their parents, then they, not their parents, would suffer.

The presence of a wife also curbed emancipationist sentiments. Only 52.9% of all manumittors were survived by their wives as compared to 63.9% for spouses of the non-manumitting slaveowners.

TABLE 2			
Number of Manumittors versus Non-manumittors survived by their Wives ¹⁰⁶			
	Wife	No Wife	Total
Manumittors	27	24	51
Non-manumittors	353	169	522

Widows were probably old and had very little chance of remarrying, thus making their support necessary. Income from slave labor provided support for the rest of their days. Patrick Henry was caught in this bind. His wife maintained control over his slaves until her death, at which time they could be passed on to her children.¹⁰⁷ Washington, who had

¹⁰⁶All data taken from wills.

¹⁰⁷Meade, Patrick Henry, Vol. 2, p. 437.

no children, provided for his wife but stipulated that the slaves be freed after her death. Family structure differed considerable between non-manumittors and manumittors. Most slaveowners were inhibited by family pressure while manumittors were free of this. Families also stifled ideological convictions. Only those not burdened with a large family were free to follow their beliefs.

The number of slaves owned by manumittors was considerably less than the number owned by non-manumittors.

TABLE 3¹⁰⁸

	Number of owners	Number of slaves owned	Average	Median
Manumittors	51	274	5.32	4
Non-Manumittors	474	4468	9.42	6

The table clearly demonstrates that the manumittors had only two-thirds the number of slaves of non-manumittors. The reason for this discrepancy seemed to be that with a large holding there was more capital involved in the act of manumission than in an act which freed only a few slaves. In other words, it was harder to break up a large estate than a moderate to small one.

Literacy rates provide an insight into the possible effects of ideology on slaveowners. If a slaveholder was literate, then one might expect that he would exhibit similar

¹⁰⁸All data taken from wills.

literacy rates.¹⁰⁹ The significance of the same literacy rates is that both manumitters and non-manumitting slave-owners could read the various arguments for and against manumission. Pro-manumission arguments apparently did not influence slaveowners to manumit in mass. If they had, there would have been more manumissions. This is only another indicator of the failure to apply revolutionary ideals to slavery.

The distinctions between manumitters and other slave-owners were clearly related to family and wealth. Literacy and ideology did not seem to be crucial factors. The strength of the family can be further demonstrated by studying the manumitters, but before this is done a reference point must be established. One common tie all manumitters shared was that they owned and freed slaves. The average manumitter owned five slaves but freed only three of them.¹¹⁰ The data can be broken down by family structure to show why manumitters did not free all of their slaves.

¹⁰⁹ Literacy Rates	signature	marks	Literacy
Slaveowners	396	143	72.5%
Manumitters	40	10	80.0%

A person was considered literate if he signed his will and illiterate if he did not. For further clarification of this method of determining literacy see the new book by K. A. Lockridge due out summer of 1974.

¹¹⁰The manumitters in the will data owned 5.32 slaves (274) and freed 2.86 (146).

TABLE 4¹¹¹

Twenty-one Manumitters who were Survived by a Wife and Children

	Number of Slaves	Average	Median
Freed	35	1.66	1
Owned	104	4.95	4

TABLE 5¹¹²

	Number of Slaves	Average	Median
Freed	75	4.41	2
Owned	96	5.64	2

Clearly the existence of lineal heirs and a wife affected the percentage of one's holding freed. Those who were not survived by immediate family freed all their slaves, while those who were survived by a wife and children freed only 25% to 30% of their slaves. Pressure to provide for one's wife and to pass wealth on intergenerationally was clearly strong and effective. Family exercised the final veto on any manumission, and it exercised that power consistently and effectively.

A description of the type of slave freed also provides an insight into manumission. The slaves averaged 33 years old, though the mode was between 20 and 25.¹¹³ The slave was just

¹¹¹All data taken from wills

¹¹²All data taken from wills

¹¹³Age Distribution--From the Register of Free Blacks

Number	4	41	33	13	8	12	6	11	12
Age	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-

as likely to be female as male, and stood a one in four chance of being a mulatto.¹¹⁴ The two most important statistics are age and the percentage that were mulattoes. Age is crucial because it reflected the value of the slave to the master. Thirty-three is a deceptive statistic since it represents the average age on a badly skewed curve; the mode is probably more representative. The fact that most slaves were freed around the age of twenty-one is significant. When male slaves reached this age their masters did not have to support them after they were manumitted.¹¹⁵ The next mode, though not as significant as the first, occurs at 40-45 years, which is near the upper limit at which masters could free their slaves without having to continue to support them.¹¹⁶ The implication is clear; a master would free his slave just before that slave was too old to be useful, but still young enough to be freed without penalty. The fact that one in four freed slaves was a mulatto indicates that sometimes masters were freeing their own children. There is no hard proof that this is so since masters rarely admitted this in writing.

The manner of manumission shows a confused picture. Almost 60 percent of all manumissions were executed by deed, indicating that the manumittor was freeing his slaves before he died and

¹¹⁴A person was determined to be a mulatto if he/she was described that way in the Register of Free Blacks.

¹¹⁵Hening, Statutes, Vol. 11, p. 39.

¹¹⁶Ibid., Vol. 11, p. 39.

thus they were still of value to him. During the 1790's, however, wills accounted for 54 percent of the instruments through which slaves were freed.¹¹⁷ Even which instrument freed the greatest number of slaves leaves a very unclear picture, though deeds seem to hold the edge. One can only conclude that those who manumitted tended to do so by deed and probably freed more slaves than those who freed by will. One explanation of this is that those who freed by deed acted unselfishly upon their convictions feeling that slavery was wrong and evil, while those who freed by will got full use of the slaves before freeing them.

The psychological predicament created by slavery produced a dual fear of the institution which resulted in schizophrenic rationalizations by Virginians. From the earliest days, Virginians demonstrated extreme fear of the black man, particularly the free black. By 1691, they had enacted a statute to exclude the free black population from Virginia. Later the French and Indian Wars and the American Revolution confirmed Virginians' worst fears of the insurrectionary potential of slaves. The manumission law, as has been argued earlier, was partially an attempt voluntarily to eradicate slavery and the threat of insurrection. Fear of slaves and slavery manifested itself in many way in the post

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Method of manumission Will-Deed Ratio	Number of Slaves Freed		By Will vs. Deed	
	Number	Number Freed	Average	Median
1782-85 3/8	Wills 51	146	2.86	1
1792-95 25/21	Deeds 79	275	3.48	2
1802-06 23/50	Total 130	421	3.24	1

war era, the most obvious being the fear of insurrection, but there were other fears. Virginians were afraid of the political and moral consequences of slavery.

Jefferson eloquently explained the brutalizing effect slavery had on the morals of society. The often quoted passage from The Notes on The State of Virginia needs repetition to drive home its full meaning:

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal.¹¹⁸

The implication is clear: the slaveholder's children learned by experience to be despotic and cruel and this learned habit had the most unfortunate consequences. It lowered the dignity and humanity of all participants, but more importantly, it reinforced the idea of tyranny, a style of government despised by Virginians. Robert Carter was one who was influenced by this line of reasoning. He sent his son John Tasker Carter north for schooling so he would not grow up under the influence of slavery, which was "destructive both to the morals and Advancement of Youth!"¹¹⁹

The idea that slavery could undermine democratic feelings

¹¹⁸Jefferson, Notes, p. 155.

¹¹⁹Louis Morton, Robert Carter of Nomini Hall (Charlottesville: Dominion Books, 1941), p. 269.

was also recognized by Virginians. Both St. George Tucker and Jefferson observed that slavery was incompatible with the principles of democratic government.¹²⁰ George Mason in one tirade against the Federal Constitution stated that slaves "produce the most pernicious effect on manners. Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant."¹²¹ Tucker summarized one consequence of this unhappy commerce between master and slave:

Slavery not only violates the Laws of Nature, and of Civil Society, it also wounds the best Form of Government: in a democracy where all men are equal, Slavery is contrary to the Spirit of the Constitution.¹²²

However, there were less obtuse fears that directed the pattern of manumission. It did not require any analysis or logic to know this; it was in the Virginians' blood. They grew up fearing slave rebellions and died fearing them. Slavery was a threat to the safety and security of every white Virginian, even after the passage of the manumission law. Slaves were still in the state they had always been in; the law changed the circumstances of only a few slaves. Consequently other slaves, over 200,000, felt no affinity for Virginia or white Virginians. As Jefferson observed, when one half is allowed to trample on the rights of the other, the first becomes despotic and the other his enemy with no loyalty to

¹²⁰Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery, p. 98.

¹²¹Rutland, George Mason, pp. 965-966.

¹²²Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery, title page quote.

the nation.¹²³ The injustice of this situation could not go on. God's "justice cannot sleep forever...a revolution of the wheel of fortune" would result in "an exchange of situation."¹²⁴ Jefferson believed that with God's help the slaves would revolt and enslave their former masters if this evil was allowed to persist.

The evil was not only continuing, it was growing at a spectacularly fast rate. In 1796, St. George Tucker urged a plan of gradual emancipation and warned:

If we doubt the propriety of such measures, what must we think of the situation of our country, when instead of 300,000, we shall have more than two millions of slaves among us? This must happen within a century if we do not set about the abolition of slavery. ...The rigour of the law respecting slaves unavoidably must increase with their numbers: what a blood stained code that must be for the restraint of millions held in bondage.¹²⁵

The fear of the growing slave population was coupled with the most devastating slave revolt in modern history. In 1793, Santo Domingo erupted and sent shock waves throughout American slave states. Jefferson saw that what happened there could well happen in Virginia unless something was done to avert it.¹²⁶ Virginia passed a law that year banning the immigration of any free blacks, fearing that they would incite

¹²³Jefferson, Notes, p. 155.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 156.

¹²⁵Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery, p. 105.

¹²⁶Ford, The Works of Jefferson, Vol. 7, pp. 449-450.

the slaves to rebellion.¹²⁷

There had been earlier plans for the abolition of slavery, but none had been openly and forcefully proposed. In 1796, St. George Tucker, stimulated by visions of Virginia engulfed in a slave rebellion, presented a plan to the state legislature. The plan was an outgrowth of Jefferson's and called for the freeing of all female slaves born after the enactment of the law on their twenty-eighth birthday. All descendants of these original females would be free, but if born while still on the plantation, they too would have to wait until their twenty-eighth birthday to be free.¹²⁸ The plan would take twenty-eight years before the first effects were felt and another seventy-seven for it to be completed.¹²⁹ The plan was simple and gradual, thus minimizing the economic and social shock. It also was forced, and thus overcame the fatal flaw of a voluntary attempt to eradicate slavery.

To get rid of the unwanted free black population, Tucker suggested that all civil rights and privileges be withdrawn in order to encourage them "to seek these privileges in some other climate." This had to be done to avoid interracial wars, but the removal had to be gradual or else there would be rebellion.¹³⁰ Tucker suggested that free blacks be allowed

¹²⁷Hening, Statutes, Vol. 14, p. 239.

¹²⁸Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery, pp. 91-95.

¹²⁹Ibid., pp. 29, 30, 109 note.

¹³⁰Ibid., pp. 79-80.

to migrate in small numbers to settlements outside the United States.¹³¹ Africa was clearly out of the question since removal across the ocean could be accomplished only if the seas were to part, and as Tucker noted, that was unlikely.¹³² The solution lay in sending the free blacks to Spanish Louisiana along the Gulf of Mexico. The climate was hospitable, and more importantly, the free blacks would no longer be a threat to the safety and security of white society.¹³³

Tucker's plan was rejected outright by the General Assembly, and no reason was given.¹³⁴ Jefferson also received a copy of the plan and wrote a long, insightful reply prophesying Gabriel's Revolt.

...and to the mode of emancipation, I am satisfied that must be a matter of compromise between the passions, the prejudices, & the real difficulties which will have weight in that operation. Perhaps the first chapter has begun in St. Domingo, & the next succeeding ones, which will recount how whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceful accomodation between justice, policy & necessity; & furnish an answer to the difficult question, whither shall the colored emigrants go? and the sooner we put some plan underway, the greater hope there is that it may be permitted to proceed peacefully to its

¹³¹Ibid., p. 95.

¹³²Ibid., pp. 77-79, 84.

¹³³Sylestris (St. George Tucker), Reflections on the Cession of Louisiana to the United States (Washington: Samuel Harrison Smith, 1803), p. 25.

¹³⁴Charles T. Cullen, "St. George Tucker and Law In Virginia 1772-1804" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1971).

ultimate effect. But, if something is not done, & soon done, we shall be murderers of our own children. The 'mumura venturos nautis prodentia ventos' has already reached us; the revolutionary storm, now sweeping the globe, will upon us, and happy if we make timely provision to give it an easy passage over our land. From the present state of things in Europe & America, the day which begins our combustion must be near at hand; and only a single spark is wanting to make that day tomorrow.¹³⁵

Tomorrow occurred three years later in early September 1800 when the plot of a slave was uncovered by two fellow slaves near Richmond. Governor Monroe acted quickly, ordering the militia to the defense of Richmond and Petersburg, the focus of the revolt. Five days later with the aid of a rain storm, the revolt was broken without a shot being fired or a white life lost.¹³⁶ In its failure, the revolt left a mark on Virginia society. Twice more during Monroe's governorship, Virginia was struck with chilling rumors of impending slave insurrections.¹³⁷ The fear never subsided. Eventually through the tricks only the human mind can play, free blacks were seen as the source of the insurrection, and it was they who the Virginians despised more than the slaves.

In 1806, Virginia ended unrestricted manumission because the free black population had grown too big and was identified

¹³⁵Ford, The Works of Jefferson, Vol. 8, pp. 334-336.

¹³⁶James Monroe, The Writings of James Monroe, Stanislaus Hamilton, editor (New York: AMS Press, 1969), Vol. 3, pp. 205-206.

¹³⁷Ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 32, 334-349.

as the source of rebellion.¹³⁸ All newly freed blacks had to leave Virginia within one year of their emancipation or face re-enslavement. Finally, the fears of a free black population had matured to the point where they could determine Virginia's policy toward free blacks and ultimately toward slavery. By 1823 James Madison had even become infected with irrational fear of the free black population. He wrote at that time that it was the free blacks who promoted rebellion and not the slaves.¹³⁹

Free blacks had always been more feared than slaves, and it was the fear of a free black population which finally crippled the manumission movement. The idea of colonization was one manifestation of this immense paranoia free blacks created. But colonization never stood a chance; it was too massive a project for Virginia, or even the United States. Consequently, Virginia could free itself of slavery but not of the presence of a free black population. This unfortunate predicament led to the nullification of any attempt to free the slaves through legislative acts and frustrated voluntary eradication of slavery through private manumission. White Virginians, given a choice of free blacks or enslaved blacks, chose the latter by resounding opposition to the former. They felt as Madison did, that the largest insurrectionary threat came from the free blacks and not the slaves. This fear

¹³⁸Hening, Statutes, Vol. 16, p. 252.

¹³⁹Hunt, The Writings of Madison, Vol. 9, pp. 133-134.

served as the final obstacle for emancipation of slaves through any means and as the terminal blow to unrestricted manumission.

All attempts to eradicate slavery during 1782-1806 failed. It was not until twenty-five years later that the idea of abolishing slavery was again revived only to be stillborn again. The only legislative action which dealt with the destruction of slavery was the Manumission Law of 1782, and it failed in spite of strong ideological supports because of the dictates of economy, family, and fear. Even if manumission was not an attempt to eradicate slavery voluntarily and was purely the result of "revolutionary ideals," those ideals proved ineffective in abolishing slavery. Even those Virginians who acted on ideology when freeing their slaves did so only if the other variables were in place.

The economics of slavery and the family rendered any "equal rights" beliefs impotent, while fears generated a new set of beliefs which would deter the abolition of slavery. Those who lived through this period felt the agony and frustration that arose from fighting the monster, slavery. All the good intentions and pure ideologies could not curb or defeat it. Slavery devastated its opponents until they collapsed, wasted by their fight, into apathy, and later, others learned to defend and love the institution, realizing they had no acceptable alternative.

Appendix A

If the counties were not representative, then any extrapolations done would not be consistent with what is already known about the population. Fortunately, a comparison of an extrapolation based on the same and a known population parameter is possible. The extrapolation of the manumission rate in the sample counties plus the expected natural increase rate of the free black population in the period 1790-1810 should account for most of the known population change. The base population figure in 1790 is 12,866 and the population in 1810 was 30,570. The actual increase in the free black population during these twenty years was 17,704. Manumission accounted for 8,086 of this increase (see the calculation on pages 19-21). To compute natural increase the natural increase rate of .0327 per year is multiplied into the base population figure 12,866 to get a per year expected natural increase. This figure, 421, is then multiplied by the number of years, 20, predicted. The result is 8414 free blacks were added to the population over the twenty year period by births. The natural increase rate figure is derived from George Tucker's estimate in 1843 of the growth of the free black population. This figure also is the rate needed to double a population every thirty-three years.

Adding the expected natural increase to the predicted number of manumissions, the result is 16,500 new free blacks. The actual increase was 17,704. The difference between these two figures is 1204 or only .068 of the actual increase. Based

on this comparison of the known free black increase and the projected free black increase, it is safe to assume that the six sample counties are reasonably representative of all of Virginia. Therefore, statistical inferences about Virginia derived from the sample data should be fairly accurate, even though randomness has been violated.

Appendix B

The manumission rate for the early period seems to be an accelerating curve upwards. This was determined by the fact that a straight extrapolation like what was done for the later period, yielded a ridiculously low figure of 385 slaves freed.

The calculation done for the early period is not dependent on the form of the curve; rather it is dependent on the various population estimates derived from the sample. This methodology, when applied to the later period, gives a rough estimate of the extrapolated figure.

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