

LABOR IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Viewpoint 8A

Poor Europeans Should Come to America as Indentured Servants (1666)

George Alsop (c. 1636–1673)

INTRODUCTION *A significant problem facing Virginia, Maryland, and other American colonies in the 1600s and 1700s was a shortage of labor. One answer devised by the Virginia Company was indentured servitude, a system by which impoverished people in England and other countries agreed to bind themselves for a fixed period of labor in exchange for passage to America. The exact contractual agreements and conditions of service varied depending on the master and local laws. However, servants were often treated harshly and many died before their terms of service were over. The lot of survivors also varied. In the 1600s Maryland law entitled ex-servants to claim fifty acres of land (if they could afford to have the land surveyed), and many did become landowners. Virginia law only required ex-servants to receive a new suit of clothes and a year's supply of corn; many servants there became destitute laborers. Some people compared indentured servitude to slavery.*

The following viewpoint is taken from a 1666 book published in England; its purpose was in all likelihood to encourage people to settle in America as indentured servants. The author, George Alsop, an indentured servant himself in Maryland who eventually returned to England for health reasons, paints an idealized picture of life in the colony.

What beliefs does Alsop express about human equality and justice? How does he say indentured servitude has improved his own life?

As there can be no Monarchy without the Supremacy of a King and Crown, nor no King without Subjects, nor any Parents without it be by the fruitful off-spring of Children; neither can there be any Masters, unless it be by the inferior Servitude of those that dwell under them, by a commanding enjoyment: And since it is ordained from the original and superabounding wisdom of all things, That there should be Degrees and Diversities amongst the Sons of men, in acknowledging of a Superiority from Inferiors to Superiors; the Servant with a reverent and befitting Obedience is as liable to this duty in a measurable performance to him whom he serves, as the loyalest of Subjects to his Prince. Then since it is a common and ordained Fate, that there must be Servants as well as Masters, and that good Servitudes are those

From *A Character of the Province of Mary-Land* by George Alsop (London, 1666), as reprinted in *Narratives of Early Maryland*, edited by Clayton Colman Hal (New York: Scribner, 1910).

Colledges of Sobriety that checks in the giddy and wild-headed youth from his profuse and uneven course of life, by a limited constraint, as well as it otherwise agrees with the moderate and discreet Servant: Why should there be such an exclusive Obstacle in the minds and unreasonable dispositions of many people, against the limited time of convenient and necessary Servitude, when it is a thing so requisite, that the best of Kingdoms would be unhing'd from their quiet and well settled Government without it. . . .

There is no truer Emblem of Confusion either in Monarchy or Domestick Governments, then when either the Subject, or the Servant, strives for the upper hand of his Prince, or Master, and to be equal with him, from whom he receives his present subsistence: Why then, if Servitude be so necessary that no place can be governed in order, nor people live without it, this may serve to tell those which prick up their ears and bray against it, That they are none but Asses, and deserve the Bridle of a strict commanding power to reine them in: For I'me certainly confident, that there are several Thousands in most Kingdoms of Christendom, that could not at all live and subsist, unless they had served some prefixed time, to learn either some Trade, Art, or Science, and by either of them to extract their present livelihood.

Then methinks this may stop the mouths of those that will indiscreetly compassionate them that dwell under necessary Servitudes; for let but Parents of an indifferent capacity in Estates, when their Childrens age by computation speak them seventeen or eighteen years old, turn them loose to the wide world, without a seven years working Apprenticeship (being just brought up to the bare formality of a little reading and writing) and you shall immediately see how weak and shiftless they'le be towards the maintaining and supporting of themselves; and (without either stealing or begging) their bodies like a Sentinel must continually wait to see when their Souls will be frighted away by the pale Ghost of a starving want.

Then let such, where Providence hath ordained to live as Servants, either in England or beyond Sea, endure the prefixed yolk of their limited time with patience, and then in a small computation of years, by an industrious endeavour, they may become Masters and Mistresses of Families themselves. And let this be spoke to the deserved praise of Mary-Land, That the four years I served there were not to me so slavish, as a two years Servitude of a Handicraft Apprenticeship was here in London; *Volenti enim nil difficile* [Nothing is difficult to the willing]: Not that I write this to seduce or delude any, or to draw them from their native soyle, but out of a love to my Countrymen, whom in the general I wish well to. . . .

The Servants here in Mary-Land of all Colonies . . . have the least cause to complain, either for strictness of Servitude, want of Provisions, or need of Apparel.

They whose abilities cannot extend to purchase their own transportation over into Mary-Land, (and surely he that cannot command so small a sum for so great a matter, his life must needs be mighty low and dejected) I say they may for the debarment of a four years sordid liberty, go over into this Province and there live plentifully well. And what's a four years Servitude to advantage a man all the remainder of his dayes, making his predecessors happy in his sufficient abilities, which he attained to partly by the restraint of so small a time?

Now those that commit themselves unto the care of the Merchant to carry them over, they need not trouble themselves with any inquisitive search touching their Voyage; for there is such an honest care and provision made for them all the time they remain aboard the Ship, and are sailing over, that they want for nothing that is necessary and convenient.

The Merchant commonly before they go aboard the Ship, or set themselves in any forwardness for their Voyage, has Conditions of Agreements drawn between him and those that by a voluntary consent become his Servants, to serve him, his Heirs or Assigns, according as they in their primitive acquaintance have made their bargain, some two, some three, some four years; and whatever the Master or Servant tyes himself up to here in England by Condition, the Laws of the Province will force a performance of when they come there: Yet here is this Priviledge in it when they arrive, If they dwell not with the Merchant they made their first agreement withall, they may choose whom they will serve their prefixed time with; and after their curiosity has pitch on one whom they think fit for their turn, and that they may live well withall, the Merchant makes an Assignment of the Indenture over to him whom they of their free will have chosen to be their Master, in the same nature as we here in England (and no otherwise) turn over Covenant Servants or Apprentices from one Master to another. Then let those whose chaps are always breathing forth those filthy dregs of abusive exclamations, which are Lymbeckt from their sottish and preposterous brains, against this Country of Mary-Land, saying, That those which are transported over thither, are sold in open Market for Slaves, and draw in Carts like Horses; which is so damnable an untruth, that if they should search to the very Center of Hell, and enquire for a Lye of the most antient and damned stamp, I confidently believe they

could not find one to parallel this: For know, That the Servants here in Mary-Land of all Colonies, distant or remote Plantations, have the least cause to complain, either for strictness of Servitude, want of Provisions, or need of Apparel: Five dayes and a half in the Summer weeks is the allotted time that they work in; and for two months, when the Sun predominates in the highest pitch of his heat, they claim an antient and customary Priviledge, to repose themselves three hours in the day within the house, and this is undeniably granted to them that work in the Fields.

In the Winter time, which lasteth three months (*viz.*) December, January, and February, they do little or no work or employment, save cutting of wood to make good fires to sit by, unless their Ingenuity will prompt them to hunt the Deer, or Bear, or recreate themselves in Fowling, to slaughter the Swans, Geese, and Turkeys (which this Country affords in a most plentiful manner:) For every Servant has a Gun, Powder and Shot allowed him, to sport him withall on all Holidayes and leasurable times, if he be capable of using it, or be willing to learn.

Viewpoint 8B

Poor Europeans Should Not Come to America as Indentured Servants (1754)

Gottlieb Mittelberger (dates unknown)

INTRODUCTION *Many of the people who migrated to the American colonies were indentured servants—people who paid for their passage by pledging themselves to be servants for a set period of time. The following viewpoint is taken from an account by Gottlieb Mittelberger, a German schoolmaster and organist who lived in America as an indentured servant from 1750 to 1754. His account describes the hardships of both the Atlantic voyage and life in America.*

Mittelberger's description of the indentured servant's life is much more negative than that of George Alsop (see viewpoint 8A). The differences between the two viewpoints can be attributed in part to differing times and circumstances. Alsop's account was written a century earlier at a time when most indentured servants came from England and settled in the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland. In the eighteenth century the majority of servants came from non-English ethnic backgrounds, including German, Dutch, and Scotch-Irish, and most landed in Pennsylvania and neighboring colonies. Many, called "redemptioners," were at the mercy of the sea captains who paid for their passage to America and who sold them as servants to the highest bidder at the port of arrival.

How do the conditions of the sea voyage and American life described by Mittelberger differ from those depicted by George Alsop, author of the opposing viewpoint?

What are some aspects of American life that Mittelberger finds most objectionable?

Both in Rotterdam and in Amsterdam the people are packed densely, like herrings so to say, in the large sea vessels. One person receives a place of scarcely 2 feet width and 6 feet length in the bedstead, while many a ship carries four to six hundred souls, not to mention the innumerable implements, tools, provisions, water-barrels and other things which likewise occupy much space.

On account of contrary winds it takes the ships sometimes 2, 3 and 4 weeks to make the trip from Holland to Kaupp [Coves] in England. But when the wind is good, they get there in 8 days or even sooner. Everything is examined there and the custom-duties paid, whence it comes that the ships ride three 8, 10 to 14 days and even longer at anchor, till they have taken in their full cargoes. During that time every one is compelled to spend his last remaining money and to consume his little stock of provisions which had been reserved for the sea; so that most passengers, finding themselves on the ocean where they would be in greater need of them, must greatly suffer from hunger and want. Many suffer want already on the water between Holland and Old England.

THE LONG VOYAGE

When the ships have for the last time weighed their anchors near the city of Kaupp in Old England, the real misery begins with the long voyage. For from there the ships, unless they have good wind, must often sail 8, 9, 10 to 12 weeks before they reach Philadelphia. But even with the best wind the voyage lasts 7 weeks.

But during the voyage there is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of sea-sickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like, all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably.

Add to this want of provisions, hunger, thirst, frost, heat, dampness, anxiety, want, afflictions and lamentations, together with other trouble, as . . . the lice abound so frightfully, especially on sick people, that they can be scraped off the body. The misery reaches the climax when a gale rages for 2 or 3 nights and days, so that every one believes that the ship will go to the bottom with all human beings on board. In such a visitation the people cry and pray most piteously. . . .

Many sigh and cry: "Oh, that I were at home again, and if I had to lie in my pig-sty!" Or they say: "O God, if I only had a piece of good bread, or a good fresh drop of water." Many people whimper, sigh and cry piteously for their homes; most of them get home-sick. Many hundred

From *Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754* by Gottlieb Mittelberger, trans. By Carl Theo. Eben (Philadelphia: John Joseph McVey, 1898).

people necessarily die and perish in such misery, and must be cast into the sea, which drives their relatives, or those who persuaded them to undertake the journey, to such despair that it is almost impossible to pacify and console them. . . .

Children from 1 to 7 years rarely survive the voyage. I witnessed . . . misery in no less than 32 children in our ship, all of whom were thrown into the sea. The parents grieve all the more since their children find no resting-place in the earth, but are devoured by the monsters of the sea. . . .

That most of the people get sick is not surprising, because, in addition to all other trials and hardships, warm food is served only three times a week, the rations being very poor and very little. Such meals can hardly be eaten, on account of being so unclean. The water which is served out on the ships is often very black, thick and full of worms, so that one cannot drink it without loathing, even with the greatest thirst. Toward the end we were compelled to eat the ship's biscuit which had been spoiled long ago; though in a whole biscuit there was scarcely a piece the size of a dollar that had not been full of red worms and spiders' nests. . . .

ARRIVAL IN AMERICA

At length, when, after a long and tedious voyage, the ships come in sight of land, so that the promontories can be seen, which the people were so eager and anxious to see, all creep from below on deck to see the land from afar, and they weep for joy, and pray and sing, thanking and praising God. The sight of the land makes the people on board the ship, especially the sick and the half dead, alive again, so that their hearts leap within them; they shout and rejoice, and are content to bear their misery in patience, in the hope that they may soon reach the land in safety. But alas!

When the ships have landed at Philadelphia after their long voyage, no one is permitted to leave them except those who pay for their passage or can give good security; the others, who cannot pay, must remain on board the ships till they are purchased, and are released from the ships by their purchasers. The sick always fare the worst, for the healthy are naturally preferred and purchased first; and so the sick and wretched must often remain on board in front of the city for 2 or 3 weeks, and frequently die, whereas many a one, if he could pay his debt and were permitted to leave the ship immediately, might recover and remain alive. . . .

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Who therefore wishes to earn his bread in a Christian and honest way, . . . let him do so in his own country and not in America; for he will not fare better in America.
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The sale of human beings in the market on board the ship is carried on thus: Every day Englishmen, Dutchmen, and High-German people come from the city of Philadelphia and other places, in part from a great distance, say 20, 30, or 40 hours away, and go on board the newly arrived ship that has brought and offers for sale passengers from Europe, and select among the healthy persons such as they deem suitable for their business, and bargain with them how long they will serve for their passage money, which most of them are still in debt for. When they have come to an agreement, it happens that adult persons bind themselves in writing to serve 3, 4, 5, or 6 years for the amount due by them, according to their age and strength. But very young people, from 10 to 15 years, must serve till they are 21 years old.

Many parents must sell and trade away their children like so many head of cattle; for if their children take the debt upon themselves, the parents can leave the ship free and unrestrained; but as the parents often do not know where and to what people their children are going, it often happens that such parents and children, after leaving the ship, do not see each other again for many years, perhaps no more in all their lives. . . .

HARD WORK

Work and labor in this new and wild land are very hard and manifold, and many a one who came there in his old age must work very hard to his end for his bread. I will not speak of young people. Work mostly consists in cutting wood, felling oak-trees, rooting out, or as they say there, clearing large tracts of forest. Such forests, being cleared, are then laid out for fields and meadows. From the best hewn wood, fences are made around the new fields; for there all meadows, orchards and fruit-fields are surrounded and fenced in with planks made of thickly-split wood, laid one above the other, as in zigzag lines, and within such enclosures, horses, cattle, and sheep are permitted to graze. Our Europeans, who are purchased, must always work hard, for new fields are constantly laid out; and so they learn that stumps of oak-trees are in America certainly as hard as in Germany. In this hot land they fully experience in their own persons what God has imposed on man for his sin and disobedience; for in Genesis we read the words: In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread. Who therefore wishes to earn his bread in a Christian and honest way, and cannot earn it in his fatherland otherwise than by the work of his hands, let him do so in his own country and not in America; for he will not fare better in America. However hard he may be compelled to work in his fatherland, he will surely find it quite as hard, if not harder, in the new country. Besides, there is not only the long and arduous journey lasting half a year, during which he has to suffer, more than with the hardest work; he has also

spent about 200 florins which no one will refund to him. If he has so much money, it will slip out of his hands; if he has it not, he must work his debt off as a slave and poor serf. Therefore let every one stay in his own country and support himself and his family honestly. Besides I say that those who suffer themselves to be persuaded and enticed away by the man-thieves, are very foolish if they believe that roasted pigeons will fly into their mouths in America or Pennsylvania without their working for them.

FOR FURTHER READING

Clifford L. Alderman, *Colonists for Sale: The Story of Indentured Servants in America*. New York: Macmillan, 1975.

David W. Galson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Daniel Meaders, *Dead or Alive: Fugitive Slaves and White Indentured Servants Before 1830*. New York: Garland, 1993.

Sharon V. Salinger, "To Serve Thee Well and Faithfully": *Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

The complete text of Alsop's book can be found at the web site of the Early Americas Digital Archive at http://narcissus.umd.edu:8080/eada/html/display.jsp?docs=alsop_character.xml&action=show.

Viewpoint 9A
Slavery Is Immoral (1700)

Samuel Sewall (1652–1730)

INTRODUCTION *The economies of many of the American colonies rested on a foundation of raising and selling cash crops, especially tobacco in Virginia and Maryland and rice in South Carolina. However, successful cultivation of these crops required intensive labor—something in short supply in the thinly populated colonies. Pressing captured Indians to work proved unsuccessful, in part because many Indians quickly succumbed to diseases brought over from Europe. Indentured servitude (see viewpoints 8A and 8B) formed in its wake an impoverished white underclass of former servants—a development that often caused political instability and violence.*

A lasting solution to the colonies' labor shortage was finally found by importing black Africans as slaves. Since the early 1500s, Africans had been captured and transported to Spanish, Portuguese, and (later) British colonies in South America and the Caribbean. Although blacks were present in Virginia as early as 1619, it was not until the 1680s that they began to replace the white indentured servants as the main source of labor in Virginia, South Carolina, and other colonies. Unlike indentured servants, black slaves were bound for life and lacked all legal and political rights. Their different skin color made escape much more difficult. By 1700 slavery was legal in all English

colonies in America and Africans (mostly slaves) accounted for 15 percent of the population in southern colonies. Although legal in New England, slavery was not as widespread as in colonies farther south.

*Although slavery did establish itself as a lasting solution to the colonies' labor shortage problem, its morality did not go unquestioned in colonial times. The following viewpoint is taken from one of the earliest antislavery pamphlets published in America. The author, Samuel Sewall, was a Massachusetts Superior Court judge who became involved in a legal dispute involving a black slave owned by another judge. Sewall wanted the judge to honor a contract calling for the slave's release. In defense of his position, Sewall wrote and circulated a pamphlet attacking slavery, *The Selling of Joseph*, that was published in Boston in 1700.*

What objections does Sewall have to slavery? Why might he use Biblical citations to support his views? Does Sewall exhibit racial prejudice in this viewpoint? Explain your answer.

Forasmuch as Liberty is in real value next unto Life: None ought to part with it themselves, or deprive others of it, but upon most mature consideration.

The Numerousness of Slaves at this Day in the Province, and the Uneasiness of them under their Slavery, hath put many upon thinking whether the Foundation of it be firmly and well laid; so as to sustain the Vast Weight that is built upon it. It is most certain that all Men, as they are the Sons of Adam, are Co-heirs, and have equal Right unto Liberty, and all other outward Comforts of Life. God hath given the Earth [with all its commodities] unto the Sons of Adam, *Psal.*, 115, 16. And hath made of one Blood all Nations of Men, for to dwell on all the face of the Earth, and hath determined the Times before appointed, and the bounds of their Habitation: That they should seek the Lord. Forasmuch then as we are the Offspring of God. &c. *Acts* 17, 26, 27, 29. . . . So that Originally, and Naturally, there is no such thing as Slavery. Joseph was rightfully no more a Slave to his Brethren, than they were to him; and they had no more Authority to Sell him, than they had to Slay him. . . .

And all things considered, it would conduce more to the Welfare of the Province, to have White Servants for a Term of Years, than to have Slaves for Life. Few can endure to hear of a Negro's being made free; and indeed they can seldom use their Freedom well; yet their continual aspiring after their forbidden Liberty, renders them Unwilling Servants. And there is such a disparity in their Conditions, Colour, and Hair, that they can never embody with us, & grow up in orderly Families, to the Peopling of the Land; but still remain in our

From *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* by Samuel Sewall, Boston, 1700 (Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, 1864).

Body Politick as a kind of extravasat Blood. Moreover it is too well known what Temptations Masters are under, to connive at the Fornication of their Slaves; lest they should be obliged to find them Wives, or pay their Fines. It seems to be practically pleaded that they might be lawless; 'tis thought much of, that the Law should have satisfaction for their Thefts, and other Immoralities; by which means, *Holiness to the Lord* is more rarely engraven upon this sort of Servitude. It is likewise most lamentable to think, how in taking Negroes out of Africa, and selling of them here, That which God has joined together, Men do boldly rend asunder; Men from their Country, Husbands from their Wives, Parents from their Children. How horrible is the Uncleaness, Mortality, if not Murder, that the Ships are guilty of that bring great Crouds of these miserable Men and Women. Men thinks when we are bemoaning the barbarous Usage of our Friends and Kinsfolk in Africa, it might not be unreasonable to enquire whether we are not culpable in forcing the Africans to become Slaves amongst ourselves. And it may be a question whether all the Benefit received by Negro Slaves will balance the Accompt of Cash laid out upon them; and for the Redemption of our own enslaved Friends out of Africa. Besides all the Persons and Estates that have perished there.

OBJECTIONS AND ANSWERS

Obj. 1. *These Blackamores are of the Posterity of Cham, and therefore are under the Curse of Slavery. Gen. 9, 25, 26, 27.*

Ans. Of all Offices, one would not beg this; viz. Uncall'd for, to be an Executioner of the Vindictive Wrath of God; the extent and duration of which is to us uncertain. If this ever was a Commission; How do we know but that it is long since out of Date? Many have found it to their Cost, that a Prophetical Denunciation of Judgment against a Person or People, would warrant them to inflict that evil. If it would, *Hazael* might justify himself in all he did against his master, and the *Israelites* from 2 *Kings* 8, 10, 12.

But it is possible that by cursory reading, this Text may have been mistaken. For *Canaan* is the Person Cursed three times over, without the mentioning of *Cham*. Good Expositors suppose the Curse entailed on him, and that this Prophesie was accomplished in the Extirpation of the *Canaanites*, and in the Servitude of the *Gibeonites*. . . . Whereas the Blackamores are not descended of *Canaan*, but of *Cush*. *Psal.* 68, 31. *Princes shall come out of Egypt* [Mizraim]. *Ethiopia* [Cush] shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. Under which Names, all Africa may be comprehended; and their Promised Conversion ought to be prayed for. *Jer.* 13, 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his Skin?* This shows that Black Men are the Posterity of *Cush*. Who time out of mind have been distinguished by their Colour. . . .

Obj. 2. *The Nigers are brought out of a Pagan Country, into places where the Gospel is preached.*

Ans. Evil must not be done, that good may come of it. The extraordinary and comprehensive Benefit accruing to the Church of God, and to *Joseph* personally, did not rectify his Brethren's Sale of him.

Obj. 3. *The Africans have Wars one with another: Our Ships bring lawful Captives taken in those wars.*

Ans. For aught is known, their Wars are much such as were between *Jacob's* Sons and their Brother *Joseph*. If they be between Town and Town; Provincial or National: Every War is upon one side Unjust. An Unlawful War can't make lawful Captives. And by receiving, we are in danger to promote, and partake in their Barbarous Cruelties. I am sure, if some Gentlemen should go down to the [town of] *Brewsters* to take the Air, and Fish: And a stronger Party from *Hull* should surprise them, and sell them for Slaves to a Ship outward bound; they would think themselves unjustly dealt with; both by Sellers and Buyers. And yet 'tis to be feared, we have no other Kind of Title to our *Nigers*. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets. *Matt.* 7, 12.

Obj. 4. *Abraham had Servants bought with his Money and born in his House.*

Ans. Until the Circumstances of *Abraham's* purchase be recorded, no Argument can be drawn from it. In the mean time, Charity obliges us to conclude, that He knew it was lawful and good.

It is Observable that the *Israelites* were strictly forbidden the buying or selling one another for Slaves. *Levit.* 25. 39. 46. *Jer.* 34. 8–22. And God gages His Blessing in lieu of any loss they might conceit they suffered thereby, *Deut.* 15. 18. And since the partition Wall is broken down, inordinate Self-love should likewise be demolished. God expects that Christians should be of a more Ingenuous and benign frame of Spirit. Christians should carry it to all the World, as the *Israelites* were to carry it one towards another. And for Men obstinately to persist in holding their Neighbours and Brethren under the Rigor of perpetual Bondage, seems to be no proper way of gaining Assurance that God has given them Spiritual Freedom. Our Blessed Saviour has altered the Measures of the ancient Love Song, and set it to a most Excellent New Tune, which all ought to be ambitious of Learning. *Matt.* 5. 43. 44. *John* 13. 34. These *Ethiopians*, as black as they are, seeing they are the Sons and Daughters of the First Adam, the Brethren and Sisters of the Last Adam, and the Offspring of God; They ought to be treated with a Respect agreeable.

Viewpoint 9B
Slavery Is Moral (1701)

John Saffin (1632–1710)

INTRODUCTION *John Saffin was a wealthy landowner and Massachusetts judge. In 1700 he became embroiled in a legal dispute when he refused to give a black slave in his possession his freedom. He viewed Samuel Sewall's tract The Selling of Joseph, a Memorial (see viewpoint 9A) as a personal affront, and in 1701 published a reply defending the institution of slavery (and his own actions as a slaveowner). The tract, reprinted here, is notable in that many of its arguments appear repeatedly in later proslavery literature.*

How does Saffin respond to Samuel Sewall's "Objections" to slavery? What beliefs does Saffin express about equality? What beliefs does he express about blacks?

That Honourable and Learned Gentleman, the Author of a Sheet, Entitled, *The Selling of Joseph, A Memorial*, seems from thence to draw this conclusion, that because the Sons of *Jacob* did very ill in selling their Brother *Joseph* to the *Ishmaelites*, who were Heathens, therefore it is utterly unlawful to Buy and Sell Negroes, though among Christians; which Conclusion I presume is not well drawn from the Premises, nor is the case parallel; for it was unlawful for the *Israelites* to sell their Brethren upon any account, or pretence whatsoever during life. But it was not unlawful for the Seed of *Abraham* to have Bond men, and Bond women either born in their House, or bought with their Money, as it is written of *Abraham*, *Gen. 14.14 & 21.10 & Exod. 21.16 & Levit. 25.44, 45, 46 v.* After the giving of the Law: And in *Josh. 9.23*.

DIFFERENT ORDERS OF MEN

To speak a little to the Gentleman's first Assertion: *That none ought to part with their Liberty themselves, or deprive others of it but upon mature consideration*; a prudent exception, in which he grants, that upon some consideration a man may be deprived of his Liberty. And then presently in his next Position or Assertion he denies it, *viz.: It is most certain, that all men as they are the Sons of Adam are Coheirs, and have equal right to Liberty, and all other Comforts of Life, which he would prove out of Psal. 115.16. The Earth hath he given to the Children of Men.* True, but what is all this to the purpose, to prove that all men have equal right to Liberty, and all outward comforts of this life; which Position seems to invert the Order that God hath set in the World, who hath Ordained different degrees and orders of men, some to be High and Honourable, some to be Low and Despicable; some to

be Monarchs, Kings, Princes and Governours, Masters and Commanders, others to be Subjects, and to be Commanded; Servants of sundry sorts and degrees, bound to obey; yea, some to be born Slaves, and so to remain during their lives, as hath been proved. Otherwise there would be a meer parity among men, contrary to that of the Apostle; *I Cor. 12 from the 13 to the 26 verse*, where he sets forth (by way of comparison) the different sorts and offices of the Members of the Body, indigitating that they are all of use, but not equal, and of like dignity. So God hath set different Orders and Degrees of Men in the World, both in Church and Common weal. Now, if this Position of parity should be true, it would then follow that the ordinary Course of Divine Providence of God in the World should be wrong, and unjust, (which we must not dare to think, much less to affirm) and all the sacred Rules, Precepts and Commands of the Almighty which he hath given the Son of Men to observe and keep in their respective Places, Orders and Degrees, would be to no purpose; which unaccountably derogate from the Divine Wisdom of the most High, who hath made nothing in vain, but hath Holy Ends in all his Dispensations to the Children of men.

In the next place, this worthy Gentleman makes a large Discourse concerning the Utility and Conveniency to keep the one, and inconveniency of the other; respecting white and black Servants, which conduceth most to the welfare and benefit of this Province: which he concludes to be white men, who are in many respects to be preferred before Blacks; who doubts that? doth it therefore follow, that it is altogether unlawful for Christians to buy and keep Negro Servants (for this is the Thesis) but that those that have them ought in Conscience to set them free, and so lose all the money they cost (for we must not live in any known sin) this seems to be his opinion; but it is a Question whether it ever was the Gentleman's practice? But if he could persuade the General Assembly to make an Act, That all that have Negroes, and do set them free, shall be Re imbursed out of the Publick Treasury, and that there shall be no more Negroes brought into the Country; 'tis probable there would be more of his opinion; yet he would find it a hard task to bring the Country to consent thereto; for then the Negroes must be all sent out of the Country, or else the remedy would be worse than the Disease; and it is to be feared that those Negroes that are free, if there be not some strict course taken with them by Authority, they will be a plague to this Country. . . .

Our Author doth further proceed to answer some Objections of his own flaming, which he supposes some might raise.

Object. 1. *That these Blackamores are of the Posterity of Cham, and therefore under the Curse of Slavery. Gen. 9.25, 26, 27.* That which the Gentleman seems to deny, saying, *they were the Seed of Canaan that were Cursed, etc.*

Ans. Whether they were so or not, we shall not dispute: this may suffice, that not only the seed of *Cham* or *Canaan*, but any lawful Captives of other Heathen Nations may be made Bond men as hath been proved.

Obj. 2. *That the Negroes are brought out of Pagan Countreys into places where the Gospel is Preached.* To which he Replies, *that we must not doe Evil that Good may come of it.*

Ans. To which we answer, That it is no Evil thing to bring them out of their own Heathenish Country, where they may have the Knowledge of the True God, be Converted and Eternally saved.

AFRICAN WARS

Obj. 3. *The Affricans have Wars one with another; our Ships bring lawful Captives taken in those Wars.*

To which our Author answer Conjecturally, and Doubtfully, *for aught we know*, that which may or may not be; which is insignificant, and proves nothing. He also compares the Negroes Wars, one Nation with another, with the Wars between *Joseph* and his Brethren. But where doth he read of any such War? We read indeed of a Domestick Quarrel they had with him, they envied and hated *Joseph*; but by what is Recorded, he was meerly passive and meek as a Lamb. This Gentleman farther adds, *That there is not any War but is unjust on one side.* etc. Be it so, what doth that signify: We read of lawful Captives taken in the Wars, and lawful to be Bought and Sold without contracting the guilt of the *Agressors*; for which we have the example of *Abraham* before quoted; but if we must stay while both parties Warring are in the right, there would be no lawful Captives at all to be Bought; which seems to be ridiculous to imagine, and contrary to the tenour of Scripture, and all Humane Histories on that subject.

Obj. 4. *Abraham had Servants bought with his Money, and born in his House. Gen. 14.14.* To which our worthy Author answers, *until the Circumstances of Abraham's purchase be recorded, no Argument can be drawn from it.*

Ans. To which we Reply, this is also Dogmatical, and proves nothing. He farther adds. *In the mean time Charity Obliges us to conlude, that he knew it was lawful and good.* Here the gentleman yields the case; for if we are in Charity bound to believe *Abraham's* practice, in buying and keeping *Slaves* in his house to be lawful and good: then it follows, that our imitation of him in this his Moral Action, is as warrantable as that of his Faith; *who is the Father of all them that believe. Rom. 4.16. . . .*

By the Command of God . . . , we may keep
Bond men, and use them in our Service.

And after a Serious Exhortation to us all to Love one another according to the Command of Christ. *Math. 5.43, 44.* This worthy Gentleman concludes with this Assertion, *That these Ethiopians as Black as they are, seeing they are the Sons and Daughters of the first Adam; the Brethren and Sisters of the Second Adam, and the Offspring of God; we ought to treat them with a respect agreeable.*

LOVING ALL PEOPLE EQUALLY
IS IMPOSSIBLE

Ans. We grant it for a certain and undeniable verity, That all Mankind are the Sons and Daughters of *Adam*, and the Creatures of God: But it doth not therefore follow that we are bound to love and respect all men alike; this under favour we must take leave to deny; we ought in charity, if we see our Neighbour in want, to relieve them in a regular way, but we are not bound to give them so much of our Estates, as to make them equal with our selves, because they are our Brethren, the Sons of *Adam*, no, not our own natural Kinsmen: We are Exhorted *to do good unto all, but especially to them who are of the Household of Faith, Gal. 6.10.* And we are to love, honour and respect all men according to the gift of God that is in them: I may love my Servant well, but my Son better; Charity begins at home, it would be a violation of common prudence, and a breach of good manners, to treat a Prince like a Peasant. And this worthy Gentleman would deem himself much neglected, if we should show him no more Deference than to an ordinary Porter: And therefore these florid expressions, the Sons and Daughters of the First *Adam*, the Brethren and Sisters of the Second *Adam*, and the Offspring of God, seem to be misapplied to import and insinuate, that we ought to tender Pagan Negroes with all love, kindness, and equal respect as to the best of men.

By all which it doth evidently appear both by Scripture and Reason, the practice of the People of God in all Ages, both before and after the giving of the Law, and in the times of the Gospel, that there were Bond men, Women and Children commonly kept by holy and good men, and improved in Service; and therefore by the Command of God, *Lev. 24:44*, and their venerable Example, we may keep Bond men, and use them in our Service still; yet with all candour, moderation and Christian prudence, according to their state and condition consonant to the Word of God.

THE NEGROES' CHARACTER

*Cowardly and cruel are those Blacks Innate,
Prone to Revenge, Imp of inveterate hate.
He that exasperates them, soon espies
Mischief and Murder in their very eyes.*

From *A Brief and Candid Answer to a Late Printed Sheet Entitled "The Selling of Joseph"* by John Saffin (Boston, 1701), as reprinted in *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* by George H. Moore (New York: D. Appleton, 1866).

Part 1: Colonial America (1582–1750)

*Libidinous, Deceitful, False and Rude,
The Spume Issue of Ingratitude.
The Premises consider'd, all may tell,
How near good Joseph they are parallel.*

FOR FURTHER READING

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

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