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Southern Tobacco and New England Declension

Let's return to the Chesapeake. When we left these settlers, they were suffering from a series of set backs and disasters. Starvation, disease, and laziness seemed to doom Jamestown. In 1619, the Virginia Company instituted three reforms aimed at creating some profits, but the colony still struggled.

Tobacco

Tobacco became the "gold" that early settlers hoped to find. John Rolfe discovered a way to make the indigenous tobacco more mild and a boom took place. Initially, tobacco was not smoked or chewed, but was snuff that people snorted. It was, by most accounts a disgusting messy habit and even the English king, James I, though it was "loathsome." But, it could be taxed and James needed the money for his military (remember that the 1600s was a time of conflict between the monarchy and aristocrats).

Tobacco was the first thing that actually succeeded in the Chesapeake and a boom followed. People planted tobacco everywhere. No vacant space was ignored.   Demand was high and thus, prices were high (adjusted to roughly $17/pound today). Finally the colony turned a profit.

Planters, who a few years early refused to grow food, now went crazy growing tobacco. Perhaps farming food seemed to peasant-like, while tobacco was a cash crop.

The estimate is that one person could grew 50 pounds sterling (British money) per year. A decent amount, not a great fortune though. While a person and a few laborers could grew 500 pounds sterling per year. Now that's a decent fortune. And remember that these gentry sons hoped to strike it rich!

 Chesapeake society was transformed. Greed, aggressiveness, need for land (even if it meant evicting Native Americans, and the exploitation of labor became hallmarks of the next two centuries of Southern history.

Labor

Tobacco is a very sensitive crop that is labor intensive. It's difficult to grow, you need to fuss over it and transplant it and baby it. It has to be hand picked and the leaves cured. It also rapidly depletes the land, but promises great profits.

Virginia has land (taken from the Native people, of course). Virginia needs laborers.

Tobacco planters used two forms of labor:

Indentured Servitude – This was not a new concept to the English. Indentured servants (people who literally sold themselves and their labor) existed in England as a yearly contract system to control the labor market, especially in urban areas.

The system, however, was transformed in America. Typically, a person would indenture themselves to a planter for 4-7 years. The planter would use the persons labor during the length of the contract and would pay transportation costs as well as room and board. After the contract expired the planter owed the servant his/her freedom plus either money or land. The assumption is that the ex-servant would then become a planter, too.

Indentured servants accounted for the bulk of the Chesapeake's settlers in the 17th Century, perhaps 100,000 people. Economic conditions in England generated a large number of people willing to enter this type of arrangement. The country was in the midst of a depression and indentured servitude offered both opportunity and a method for urban areas to get rid of their lower class and unemployed. The mayor of London noted that indentured servitude would "ease the city of a swarm of unnecessary inmates, redeeming many fro the hands of the executioner." The implication is that most who made the journey were little better than criminals or potential criminals.

Of course, the life of a servant was very difficult. It was in the masters interest to provide just enough for the servant to live and the ideal situation, fro the planters perspective, was to have the servant die after 6 years 364 days, thus using the labor but not having to pay out the contract. Many servants did die and women were in a difficult situation. Pregnancy extended the contract by nine months, yet because there were so few women, their sexual services were in demand. Eventually, the low number of women would work to their advantage in that they would be able to select husbands from a large pool of suitors.

This system worked for a few decades. Over time, though, more servants lived and those that did became planters and competitors. Additionally, the economy in England recovered and fewer people desired to indenture themselves.

Black Slavery – Tobacco culture still required labor even as fewer indentured servants were available.   Black slaves became a solution to this labor crisis. So, slavery began NOT for racial reasons but to resolve a labor shortage.

The first blacks entered Virginia in 1619 (probably not a coincidence given the reforms we've seen at the exact same time). Of the 20 that imported, not all were actually slaves, some were free, though they still were in an

ambiguous position. At this point, the English had experience with slavery, but it was not definitively recognized in English law. Even slaves in Virginia at this early point could gain freedom and seem to be more like indentured servants than slaves.

After 1660, when the supply of servants began to dry up and as tobacco price fell, it became more economical to purchase slaves, who would be obliged to work for life, not 4-7 years.

If we look at the laws and legal system you'd see a slow process by which slavery eventually became a racial caste system. Here's some examples:

> 1630 - Virginia introduces the system of social ranks, not originally based on race.
> 1639 – Maryland grants all Christians, except slaves, the rights of Englishmen.
> 1640 – Virginia orders white to arm to protect against Indian attacks. Blacks not allowed weapons.
> 1662 – Slavery is a condition inherited from the mother.
> 1667 – Christian conversion would not free a slave.
> 1690 – Manumission (ability of a master to free a slave) forbidden.
> 1691 – Racial intermarriage forbidden.
> 1705 - Virginia forbids the whipping of white servants.
> 1712 – South Carolina institutes a slave code regulating black activity

> The result was that by at least 1690 slavery rested on race and that even the lowest white person was higher the most elite black person. A strong racial line was created to bind white society together.

> Numbers- In 1670 Virginia had 2000 African slaves, by 1750 there were 120,000 slaves.

<u>New England Declension</u>

Declension is like decline, a movement away from original ideals.   New England experiences declension as the second and third generation matures. Over time these generations generally fell away from the religious ideals that led to the colonies founding.

Although many influenced by Arminianism equated commercial achievement with election, tension between the religious errand and economic success was apparent. Many drifted away from the church and church membership. This was a threat to government and order since only church members could vote! To be a church member, a parent had to be a member. So the second generation could possibly become members (if their parent was a member), but many in the third generation were out of luck, since their parents did not pursue

church membership.

Ministers come up with a solution – the half-way covenant – which allowed limited church membership and participation without formally seeking election. The hope was that those accepting this covenant would eventually seek full membership. But the half-way covenant clearly demonstrates that church participation was declining.

The Salem Witchcraft trials also reflected declension. If the devil possessed local people, it was a clear sign that the society had slid away from it errand.

MAIN CONCEPT – This is important. The framework for understanding the first half of United States history is what I call the developmental/convergence model.

What is it? Here's a drawing for you to digest and ask questions about.

New England

North

Middle Colonies
New York, New Jersey
Pennsylvania, Delaware

Chesapeake
Virginia, Maryland

South   **South**
South Carolina, Georgia

1600s   1776   1860

Time