

The Network

An Enslaving Virginia Publication

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The third issue of "The Network" includes a bibliography of additional readings in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century West African History and Culture, an examination of the way in which St. George Tucker and his family came to effectively repudiate emancipation after the turn of the nineteenth century, and a story about James Armistead Lafayette, a slave who spied for the Americans during the Revolution.

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Lorena S. Walsh—"Suggested Additional Readings in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century West African History and Culture" (March 1999)

This bibliography is intended to provide an introduction to the most recent, most available, and most readable sources that address issues of West African history and culture in the era of the slave trade for anyone interested in pursuing these topics beyond the brief summary in the Prologue of the Enslaving Virginia Resource Book.

Because African history is relatively unfamiliar to most interpreters and scholars at Colonial Williamsburg, a good starting point is basic texts in African history. By far the most comprehensive recent text is Philip Curtin, Steven Feierman, Leonard Thompson, and Jan Vansina, *African History From Earliest Times to Independence* (2nd ed.; London, 1995). Chapters 6 (Africa North of the Forest, 1500-1880), 7 (West African Coast in the Era of the Slave Trade, and 8 (Equatorial Africa before the nineteenth century) cover the periods and places most relevant to colonial American historians. John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of A Continent* (Cambridge, Eng., 1995), chapters 5 (Western Africa from the 11th to mid 17th centuries), and 7 (West Africa in the era of the slave trade) provides a more thematic approach. This is not the first text one might wish to read, but it provides a helpful supplement to Curtin, et. al. J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa* (2 vols., 3rd ed.; London, 1985), vol. 1, is also useful. Elizabeth Isichei, an African scholar who has pioneered in the history of the Ibo people of south eastern Nigeria, in *A History of African Societies to 1870* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), chapters 13, 14, 16, 18, and 19, explores the history of West Africa in the same period from the perspective of ordinary African peoples. The more formidable, heavily illustrated, UNESCO *General History of Africa, Volume V, Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, B. A. Ogot, ed., (Berkeley, Ca., 1992) is a collection of essays by a number of scholars of Africa on broad themes in period history and on developments in its various regions. These essays vary widely in their readability for non-specialists. Readers with a greater than average tolerance for fine detail will find the essays on trade (1, 4), political, economic, and social developments (2, 3, 29), the African diaspora (4, 5), and surveys of specific West African regions (10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 19) of interest.

Contemporary traveler's accounts give an idea of the kinds of information about West Africa that 18th century Virginians might have read, or, more likely, heard about from mariners and merchants. Selections from some as well as some period court cases are reproduced in Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (4 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1932-35; reprint, New York, 1969). A number of other travel accounts were published in volume 5 of Awnsham and John Churchill, *Collection of Voyages and Travels* (6 vols.; London, 1732), available in Swem Library Rare Books. Other traveler's accounts are abstracted in Thomas Astley, comp., *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels Consisting of the Most Esteemed Relations Which Have Been Hitherto Published in Any Language* (4 vols.; London, 1745-47; reprint, London, 1968) [The reprint edition is not yet available in Williamsburg, but can be ordered through interlibrary loan].

Among the more important individual published accounts in Williamsburg libraries is *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa, 1678-1712*, ed. P.E.H. Hair, Adam Jones, and Robin Law (London, 1992), a heavily annotated edition which identifies (and largely deletes) Barbot's borrowings from other authors which appear in the 1732 version of his works published in Churchill, *Collection of Voyages*. See also William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (1704; reprint, London, 1967); Sieur Froger, *A Relation of a Voyage Made in the Years 1695, 1696, and 1697 on the Coasts of Africa* (London, 1698; microform in Swem), and William F. Hutchinson, "A Seventeenth Century Slaver's Diary," *Elder Dempster Magazine* 4 (1935): 60-62, 141-43; 5 (1936): 32-34 (copy in CW Library). Additional contemporary accounts are listed in J. D. Fage, *A Guide to Original Sources For Precolonial Western Africa Published in European Languages* (Madison, Wis., 1987)

Narratives written by enslaved Africans, including Job ben Solomon and Olaudah Equiano, are conveniently reproduced in Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, Wis., 1968).

It is the interconnections between Africa and the Americas and the possible extent of direct Africans carry-overs or syncretisms (combinations of differing customs, beliefs, or cultural forms) that is of most interest to Americans. John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), was the first major historical work to address "the creation of African America from the perspective of African society" [quotation from Ira Berlin, review in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 51 (1994): 544-47]. The second edition (Cambridge, Eng., 1998) replicates the original text and goes on to include a short chapter on the eighteenth century. Initially judged "controversial" and "contentious" by mainstream American historians, many of Thornton's major points have subsequently become widely accepted among most scholars. However, Thornton's contention that in most of the Americas, slaves came from only a few national groupings and thought of themselves as part of communities that had distinct ethnic or national roots remains contested. The best summary of the arguments against slaves forming identifiable communities based on specific ethnic pasts is Philip D. Morgan, "The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African

Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments,” in David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity and Mortality in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London, 1997), pp. 122-45. This is one academic dispute of which everyone at CWF needs to be aware. Both sides make powerful arguments for their respective positions, but evidence in support of one position or the other is just beginning to be explored. This is almost certainly going to be one of the main areas of research in the first decade or more of the new century, and many museum visitors are likely to arrive with decided opinions about one or the other interpretations. This is just the sort of material that shows up frequently in articles in *The Washington Post*, often with little context and sometimes accompanied by overstated generalizations. There will be a continuing need to provide that missing context.

To answer some of these anticipated questions, interpreters should optimally be prepared, not just with some general knowledge of period West African history, but also with more detailed information about the specific societies from which most enslaved peoples transported to the Chesapeake came. Recent work on the trans-Atlantic slave trade demonstrates that different North American colonies received quite different mixes of African peoples. The most recent, concise summary of rates of importation and geographic origins of forced migrants to the mainland colonies is Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), chapter 2. Chapter 7 provides an overview of possible cultural transmissions and transformations.

The different forced migration patterns and different mixes of peoples in colonial Virginia and South Carolina overall is described in Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), pp. 58-101. In “Ethnicity Among Africans in North America” (presented at “Transatlantic Slaving and the African Diaspora: Using the W. E. D. Du Bois Institute Dataset of Slaving Voyages” conference in September 1998) and “New Findings About the Virginia Slave Trade” (forthcoming in the Summer 1999 issue of the *Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter*), Lorena S. Walsh analyzes Virginia district naval office records and demonstrates that markedly different mixes of forced African migrants came initially into the various subregions of Virginia in the eighteenth century.

The full implications of this new information on unexpected concentrations of African peoples from different parts of West and West Central Africa remain to be explored. At this point what the new information does provide is a much better understanding of the specific parts of Africa from which most forced African migrants to Virginia came. Chesapeake historians have long known that the backgrounds of most European settlers in the region are to be found in the British Isles and, for the Shenandoah Valley, in the collection of small states that later became Germany. Now Virginia historians can as confidently prioritize Senegambia, present day southeastern Nigeria, and the West Central regions of Kongo and Angola as the places from which the majority of forced African migrants to Virginia came, and thus the areas on which to concentrate. Senegambia and Kongo/Angola were major sending areas in the 17th century, and

significant numbers of peoples from these regions also arrived in various parts of Virginia later in the 1700s. Peoples from southeastern Nigeria (the Bite of Biafra) were especially prominent on Virginia's lower peninsula and central piedmont.

For Senegambia, Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (2 vols; Madison, Wis., 1975) remains the most comprehensive study. Also useful are George Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1650* (Boulder, Co., 1993); James Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860* (Cambridge, 1993); and Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (1st ed. Paris, 1988; English translation, Cambridge, Eng., 1998), chapters 1-8. Books that address the Senegambian backgrounds of Africans brought to parts of North America include Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, La., 1992), chapter 2; Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community* (Charlottesville, Va., 1997), pp. 55-66; and Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, chapter 3. Interesting case studies of specific states in Senegambia include Michael Gomez, *Pragmatism in the Age of Jihad: The Precolonial State of Bundu* (Cambridge, 1991); Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (London, 1997); and Adrian Adams, *A Claim to Land by the River: A Household in Senegal, 1720-1994* (Oxford, 1996).

For the Ibo (or Igbo) of southeastern Nigeria, Douglas Brent Chambers, "He Gwine Sing He Country: Africans, Afro-Virginians, and the Development of Slave Culture in Virginia, 1690-1810" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1996), especially chapter 2, provides a masterful synthesis of Ibo history and culture. Briefer summaries appear in Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove*, pp. 66-80, and in Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, chapter 6 (Ibo and Kongo/Angola).

For West Central Africa from an anthropologist's perspective see Georges Balandieri, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (New York, 1968). Recent histories include John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641-1718* (Madison, Wis., 1983); Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford, 1985); David Birmingham, *Trade and Conquest in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbors under the Influence of the Portuguese, 1483-1790* (Oxford, 1966); Joseph C. Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola* (Oxford, 1976); and Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison, Wis., 1986), chapters 1-11.

The most comprehensive survey of the impact of both the American and trans-Saharan slave trades on different African societies is Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slavery* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990).

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Philip Hamilton examines how and why the Tucker family came to effectively repudiate emancipation after the turn of the nineteenth century in "Revolutionary Principles and Family Loyalties: Slavery's Transformation in the St. George Tucker Household of Early National Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, LV (1998): 531-556.

In this setting, St. George Tucker's human property presented him with an unresolved dilemma. The sale of slaves through William Haxall in 1796-1797 demonstrates that Tucker still regarded African Americans as key to his family's financial health. Because so much of their capital was human, he had to make the most effective use of this "property" as possible. Love for and loyalty to his children demanded no less. As a member of the economic elite, Tucker also understood that slaves equaled prosperity and status. To deprive the next generation of such assets through manumission might undermine its future rank and power—something he, a devoted father, could not do. Even so, Tucker's allegiance to the natural rights ideology of the American Revolution remained undiminished. Despite the inherent contradiction in liberal thought, Tucker maintained the dual notion that blacks, by nature, deserved freedom and that all property rights were intrinsically sacred. The *Dissertation on Slavery* should be viewed primarily as an attempt to reconcile these two dimensions of Lockean thought. The proposal permitted Tucker, perhaps unconsciously, to walk a middle line between his responsibilities as a father and his convictions as an American Revolutionary. If adopted according to his extended timeline, both loyalties could be served: his family's human property would be protected well into the next generation while Virginia would fulfill its Revolutionary promise.

Following the General Assembly's rejection of his plan, attitudes about slavery began to shift both in the Tucker family and among the state's white population. After Tucker's *Dissertation on Slavery* was tabled, "it was almost as if a line had been crossed and even the tentative moves toward reform ended." Proponents of slavery's continuation began to win the debate, because white Virginians in general reconciled themselves to the institution's permanence. The reasons behind this shift are several: first, from the Revolution's conclusion to 1810, slaveowners saw the number of African Americans throughout the Tidewater nearly double. Although such growth undoubtedly added to estate valuations, it also fueled fears that one day whites would become a distinct minority in the state. If that occurred, many concluded, discipline could be maintained and insurrections avoided only through the creation of a garrison state. Amid this demographic explosion, Tucker's apprehensions mounted. During the Quasi-War of 1798, Tucker feared that France was preparing to land "an Army of Negroes, from St. D[omingue]" led by "military Officers of the same Complexion" somewhere along America's southern coast. If this occurred, he bleakly predicted, it would likely "produce a general Insurrection of Slaves," resulting in "the separation of the [United] States, and perhaps in the Subjugation of the Southern part of the Union."

Two years later, Tucker and other Virginia planters discovered the slave Gabriel's massive conspiracy to overthrow the institution. The passionate expressions of slaves captured and heading for the gibbet revealed with exceptional force that African Americans had imbibed the Revolution's ideology and were keenly aware of the

injustices perpetrated against them. John Randolph, Jr., St. George Tucker's youngest stepson, attended some of the interrogations and was aghast. The slaves, he wrote, "exhibited a spirit, which, if it becomes general, must deluge the Southern country in blood. They manifested a sense of their rights, and contempt of danger, and a thirst for revenge which portend the most unhappy consequences."

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Thus, by 1800, the Tuckers and other members of the elite believed that Virginia and their place in it were imperiled. Despite the previous decade's improvement, the Tidewater economy remained largely stagnant. Virginia's agrarian way of life and republican government seemed under assault from corrupt politicians to the north and lowborn social climbers from within. Worst of all, the state's slaves were increasingly numerous, ill disciplined, and rebellious. Amid such potential chaos, many concluded that emancipation, or even its open discussion, would only cause further dislocation. Around the turn of the century, therefore, the Tucker family made its peace with slavery. Even as members continued vaguely to hope for emancipation, they resigned themselves to its permanence. By 1803, St. George had come to label his *Dissertation on Slavery* a "Utopian ideal" and to confess that he was "without any sanguine hope, that it will receive countenance."

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Domestication and sentimentalism began to spread soon after most Virginians retreated from reform. When the Tuckers started to consider their property rights and labor efficiency, they had to explain (to themselves and to the outside world) why natural rights and freedom no longer applied to African Americans. They tried to do it in a way that would allow them to escape the obvious charge of hypocrisy. In short, the Tuckers sought rationalizations to justify chattel slavery. Like many southern planters unwilling to sacrifice their interests, the Tuckers redefined blacks downward on the scale of humanity, portraying them as beings inherently unfit for freedom. They came to consider African Americans inferior souls who needed white benevolence to survive. And, as white benevolence became a key component of slavery, the institution was sentimentalized and domesticated—further justifying its continuation. In the home, slaves (especially favored household servants) could be treated better in hopes of making them more submissive and obedient. At the same time, white owners could congratulate themselves on their increased compassion for the poor helpless creatures.

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The Tuckers' efforts to come to terms with slavery from the Revolution to the Missouri crisis reveal a great deal about early national Virginia. Their story explains how one influential family (and probably others) struggled with the profound tensions and contradictions in the nation's founding ideology. Like many Virginians, the Tuckers understood that slavery and natural rights could not coexist for any length of time.

Adjustments had to be made. Once reform had failed, definitions of freedom and liberty needed to be narrowed, especially to protect family interests in difficult economic times. The family's experiences also illustrate the pervasiveness of slavery. The institution touched all aspects of the Tuckers' lives, from politics to social status to economics to family concerns. The interplay of slavery with these issues created powerful pressures not only to accept the institution but also to sentimentalize and domesticate it. Moreover, for bondage to make sense in a land of liberty, family members had to dehumanize African Americans and redefine them as lesser humans—as children—who could never cope in this rapidly changing and bewildering republican society. Finally, this transformation in the Tucker family points to how and why early nineteenth-century southerners discarded the nation's founding principles in favor of a profound conservatism that sought to advance both slavery and agrarian interests. Indeed, the Tuckers' actions and beliefs reveal that the true dynamics of slavery, disunion, and civil war were rooted, not in South Carolinian "reaction," but rather in Jeffersonian "liberalism."

Source: Hamilton, "Revolutionary Principles and Family Loyalties: Slavery's Transformation in the St. George Tucker Household of Early National Virginia," pp. 540-542, 543, 545, 556.

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Wayne Dawkins—"Local slave was a patriot to be honored"

James Armistead of New Kent County was a slave who helped free America from its British masters. After the Revolutionary War, Armistead gained his freedom.

Now a descendant is on a mission to win wider recognition for the hero and patriot.

Armistead's master was the commissary feeding American and French soldiers. Armistead served meals to the soldiers camped in Hampton Roads.

He offered to do much more. Armistead volunteered to spy on the British in exchange for his freedom.

Gen. Marquis de Lafayette needed information on the British fleet docking in Norfolk. Armistead, a tall black man in his early 30s, assured Lafayette that he could get the information. The British, Armistead said, will think he is merely an escaped slave and pay no attention to his movements.

"I can row my boat back and forth over Hampton Roads at night, and no one will see me," he said.

Armistead did. He counted ships, sailors and guns and briefed the revolutionists. In the meantime, Armistead's movements did catch the eye of the British.

They were impressed with his knowledge of the area.

They asked him to spy on the Americans.

Armistead agreed. But his acceptance was a trick. He gave British Gen. Charles Cornwallis and his ground forces misleading information that got them trapped by Gen. George Washington and Lafayette's forces at Yorktown.

Armistead's intelligence allowed the French Navy to cut off British ships. That prevented a clean getaway for Cornwallis. The British surrendered.

Nearly five years after Yorktown and a year before the U. S. Constitution was written, Armistead was declared a free man in 1786 by a special act of the Virginia Legislature. He adopted the surname Lafayette in honor of the French General who recommended his freedom. James Armistead Lafayette (1748-1832) lived out his days in New Kent with his wife and son.

Since 1994, Virginius Bray Thornton III, the great-great-great-great grandson of Armistead and a West Point native, has been writing hundreds of letters encouraging people to endorse a commemorative U. S. Postage Stamp honoring James Armistead Lafayette, the former slave, spy, patriot.

Thornton is urging supporters to write to the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 4474E, Washington, D. C., 20260-6347. The committee recommends who goes on commemorative stamps. Thornton said it often takes about three to four years to get a stamp approved.

Thornton, 63, is a history professor at Massachusetts Bay Community College. He said his grandfather told stories about James Armistead, but it took an August 1994 article in *Military History* magazine titled "Slave turned double agent James Armistead Lafayette risked his life for America's freedom—and eventually his own," that convinced him to act.

Recognizing Armistead as a national historic figure, Thornton said, was long overdue. "No one was saying, 'Let's do something.'"

Thornton says he has sent about 2,000 letters to civic and academic leaders. He has received about 200 responses so far. They include encouragement from Bill Bradley, Pat Schroeder, the governors of Maryland, New York, Arkansas and Alabama, the University of Virginia and University of Florida and historian John Hope Franklin, who called the Armistead story "a well-documented and accepted event by historians."

Meanwhile, New Kent is preparing to erect a lasting memorial to James Armistead Lafayette. And, of course, Lafayette High School in Williamsburg was named in honor of both Lafayettes.

John Crump, a member of the New Kent Historical Society, said last fall that a historical marker was created. Residents are ready to plant it in a spot on Courthouse Circle in New Kent Courthouse. They are waiting for the county to finish paving the sidewalks at the site.

The historical society is to meet on 2 p.m. April 18 and give an update on the project.

Source: *Daily Press*, Sunday, April 11, 1999. See p. 484 in the "Enslaving Virginia" Resource Book for the letter that Lafayette wrote to assist James Armistead in his quest to gain his freedom and Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, vol. 12, pp. 380-381 for the October 1786 legislation entitled "*An act to emancipate James, a negro slave, the property of William Armistead, gentleman.*"