Week 8
The “Biggest” Minority

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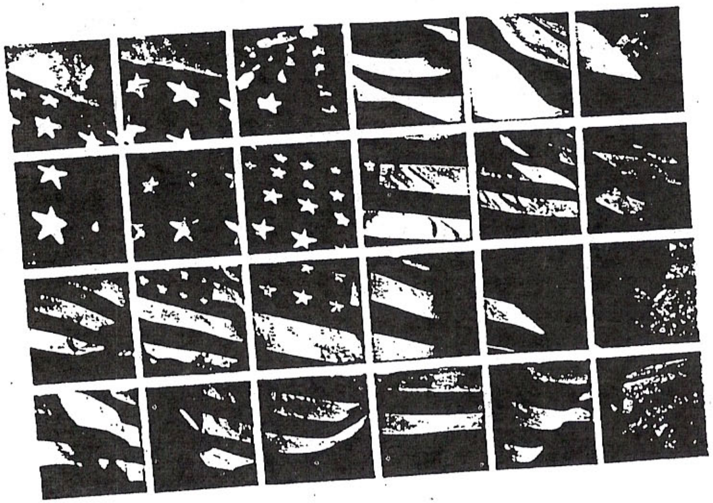
A Different Mirror



A HISTORY OF MULTICULTURAL AMERICA

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RONALD TAKAKI

A DIFFERENT MIRROR

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A History of Multicultural America

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3

THE "GIDDY MULTITUDE"

The Hidden Origins of Slavery

BUT CALIBAN COULD have been African. As they watched *The Tempest* in London, the theatergoers were aware of this possibility. Some might have seen Africans in England. In 1554, according to trader William Towrson, five "Negroes" were transported to England where they were "kept till they could speak the language," and then they were taken back to Africa as translators for English traders. Two decades later, in 1578, voyager George Best stated: "I myself have seen an Ethiopian as black as coal brought into England, who taking a faire English woman to wife, begat a son in all respects as black as the father was. . . ." Best speculated about the cause of the African's skin color: "It seemeth this blackness proceedeth rather of some natural infection of that man, which was so strong that neither the nature of the Clime, neither the good complexion of the mother concurring, could anything alter. . . ."[1]

"Freckled," dark in complexion, a "thing of darkness," Caliban was a "bastard": his father was a demon and his mother was Sycorax, a witch who had lived in Africa. As historian Winthrop Jordan noted, what struck the English most about Africans was their color. "These people are all blacke, and are called Negros, without any apparell, saving before their privities," wrote an English traveler during his visit to Cape Verde in the 1560s. In the English mind, the color black was freighted with an array of negative images: "deeply stained with dirt," "foul," "dark or deadly" in purpose, "malignant," "sinister," "wicked." The color white, on the other hand, signified purity, innocence, and goodness.[2]

To the English, Caliban seemed to personify what they considered African traits. "Brutish," he belonged to a "vile race"; he was sexually interested in Miranda, threatening to people the isle with little Calibans. In travel reports, the theatergoers could read about Africans as "a people of beastly living, without a God, law, religion." Their color allegedly made them "Devils incarnate." The Devil had "infused prodigious Idolatry into their hearts, enough to rellish his pallat and aggrandize their tortures" when he was ready to "fry their souls, as the raging Sun had already scorched their coal-black carcasses." Africans were also said to be cannibals: they allegedly ate human beings as the English would eat "befe or mutton."[3]

Described as a "monster," Caliban appeared onstage at a time when the English were reading about associations between apes and Africans. In his *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes,* published in 1608, Edward Topsell reported that apes could be found in "all that desert Woods betwixt *Egypt, Æthiopia* and *Lybia,*" and offered the following comparison: the men with their "low and flat nostrils" were "Libidinous as Apes," and their thick lips were like the lips of apes. In one scene, Caliban appeared as a "strange beast"; hiding on his knees under a cover, he seemed to have "four legs."[4]

In 1611, when Shakespeare's play was first performed, there were no African Calibans in Virginia. Indeed, the introduction of Africans was something that had not even been considered at the time. As it turned out, the presence of Africans in America did become a reality. But how they came to be enslaved and numerous has been largely "hidden" from our understanding of the making of multicultural America.

A View from the Cabins: White and Black Laborers in Early Virginia

Caliban, as described in the list of actors, was not only a "savage" but also a "deformed slave." The audience heard Prospero refer to him as "Caliban, my slave." "We cannot miss him," declared the master. "He does make our fire, fetch our wood, and serves in offices that profit us." In history, Caliban turned out to be African. Some Indians were enslaved: captured in wars by the English colonists, they were shipped as slaves to the West Indies. Indian slavery, however, did not develop in the continental colonies. Indian slaves could escape and find refuge outside the settlements, and formidable Indian military power deterred the English from exploiting them as slaves.

Eight years after the first performance of *The Tempest,* a Virginia colonist recorded a significant moment in the history of the English New World. "About the last of August," wrote John Rolfe in his diary, "came in a dutch man of warre that sold us twenty Negars."[5]

These twenty Africans had probably been captured in wars or raids by enemy tribes before they were sold to the Dutch slaver. Their ordeal must have been similar to the experience of Olaudah Equiano. After he had been captured by members of another tribe, he was marched to the seacoast.

> The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived [he recalled] was the sea, and a slaveship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror. . . . When I was carried on board I was immediately handled, and tossed up, to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had got into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, which was very different from any I had ever heard, united to confirm me in this belief. . . . When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. . . . I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat. . . . [After a long voyage, the slaves finally sighted land.] We thought . . . we should be eaten by these ugly men . . . and . . . there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch that at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work. . . .[6]

Though they had been "sold," the first twenty Africans might not have been slaves, persons reduced to property and required to work without wages for life. Like many English colonists who were also sold as indentured servants, many or possibly all of them were bound by contract to serve a master for four to seven years in order to repay the expense of their passage. While Africans continued to be transported to Virginia during the next several decades, they remained a very small population. But what happened to them paved the way for the establishment of slavery in Virginia as well as Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia, and would have consequences for all of America down the corridors of time.[7]

In the early days of the Virginia colony, most workers were white indentured servants. In fact, 75 percent of the colonists came as servants during the seventeenth century. In 1664, the Council of Foreign Plantations reported that the colony's population had been "increased principally by sending of Servants." Production and the improvement of property depended on these workers. Describing how one planter with six indentured servants had made a thousand pounds with one crop of tobacco, John Pory of Virginia observed: "Our principal wealth . . . consisteth in servants."[8]

Coming mainly from England but also from Germany and Ireland, these men and women were the outcasts of society. As described by historian Abbot Emerson Smith, they included convicts, "rogues, vagabonds, whores, cheats, and rabble of all descriptions, raked from the gutter," "decoyed, deceived, seduced, inveigled, or forcibly kidnapped and carried as servants to the plantations." They were regarded as the "surplus inhabitants" of England. Virtually all of these indentured servants came without families.[9]

Like the Africans, many white indentured servants came involuntarily, "spirited" here by unscrupulous recruiters. The "spirits," an Englishman reported, "take up all the idle, lazie, simple people they can entice, such as have professed idleness, and will rather beg than work. . . ." In an English court, Christian Chacrett was accused of being "a Spirit, one that [took] up men and women and children and [sold] them on a ship to be conveyed beyond the sea" to Virginia. Some of the servants were victims of the Irish "slave-trade." English poor laws for the correction and punishment of rogues and idle people were enforced in Ireland, and this led to the wholesale kidnapping of young Irish women and men to supply the labor needs of the colonies. One of them, John King, recalled how he and others were "stolen in Ireland" by English soldiers. Taken from their beds at night "against their Consents," they were put on a ship. "Weeping and Crying," the Irish captives were kept on board until "a Lord's day morning" when the ship set sail for America.[10]

Coming from different shores, white and black laborers in Virginia had very limited understanding as well as negative notions of each other, and mutual feelings of fear and hostility undoubtedly existed.

Still both groups occupied a common social space — a terrain of racial liminality that had not yet developed rigid caste lines. White and black, they shared a condition of class exploitation and abuse: they were all unfree laborers. Sometimes they had to wear iron collars around their necks. When they were recalcitrant, they were beaten and even tortured. They were required to have passes whenever they left their plantations. White and black, laborers experienced the day-to-day exhaustion and harshness of work. They had to cut trees and clear brush, plow the soil and prepare it for planting. In the hot and humid tobacco fields, they worked side by side — their backs bent over row after row of tobacco, their arms sore from topping young plants, their legs cramped from carrying heavy loads of tobacco leaves to the wagons, their nostrils filled with dust, and their ears stinging from the barking commands of their masters. Weary from work, they returned to their roughly built cabins and huts where they were fed a dreary mess made from ground Indian corn called "lob-lolly." A white servant in Virginia was undoubtedly expressing the anguish of many laborers, whether from Europe or Africa, when he wrote: "I thought no head had been able to hold so much water as hath and doth daily flow from mine eyes."[11]

Occasionally, perhaps often, whites and blacks ran away together. Court records indicated repeated instances of blacks and whites conspiring to escape together. In one case, the Virginia court declared: "Whereas [six English] . . . Servants . . . and Jno. a negro Servant . . . hath Run away and Absented themselves from their . . . masters Two months, It is ordered that the Sherriffe . . . take Care that all of them be whipped . . . and Each of them have thirty nine lashes well layed on. . . ." The problem of whites and blacks absconding together became so serious that the Virginia legislature complained about "English servants running away with Negroes."[12]

Some blacks and whites formed another kind of partnership. In 1630, the Virginia court decided that Hugh Davis was "to be soundly whipped before an assembly of negroes and others for abusing himself to the dishonor of God and the shame of Christianity by defiling his body in lying with a negro." The court again punished a white man and a black woman in 1640: "Whereas Robert Sweat hath begotten with child a negro woman servant belonging unto Lieutenant Sheppard, the court hath therefore ordered that the said negro woman shall be whipped at the whipping post and the said Sweat shall tomorrow in the forenoon do public pennance for his offence at James city church in the time of divine service." Similarly, William Watts, a white man, and Mary, a black servant, were punished for fornication in 1649. A year later, a white man and black woman, found guilty of having sexual relations, were required to stand clad in white sheets before a congregation. In 1667, the court convicted Irish servant John Dorman of getting a "Negro woman" with child. Between 1690 and 1698 in Westmoreland County, fourteen white women were punished for having illegitimate children; at least four of these nineteen children were mulatto.[13]

Increasingly, black servants were separated from white servants and singled out for special treatment. In 1640, for example, the Virginia legislature passed a law stating that masters should furnish arms to all men, "excepting negros." Blacks were also serving longer time periods for indenture as punishment for running away. In 1640, for example, three runaway servants — two white men and a black man — were captured and returned. They were each given thirty lashes. In addition, both white men were required to work for their masters for an additional year and for the colony for three more years. But the third runaway received the most severe punishment: "Being a Negro named *John Punch* shall serve his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural Life here or elsewhere." During the same year, six white men and a black man were arrested for running away. Communicating between two plantations, they had carefully planned their escape and gathered "corn powder and shot and guns"; after stealing a skiff and sailing down the Elizabeth River, they were apprehended. One of the white men, Christian Miller, received an especially harsh penalty — thirty lashes, an "R" (for Rogue) to be burned into his cheek, a shackle on his leg for at least a year, and seven years of service to the colony after he had completed his obligation to his master. The Negro Emanuel was given a similar punishment, except he was not ordered to serve additional time, implying he was required to labor for life. In other words, he was a slave.[14]

Some estate inventories showed that African laborers were more valuable than English indentured servants, indicating that the former had a longer period of bound service. For example, the inventory of the estate of William Burdett, dated November 13, 1643, included this list:

	lb tobacco
Sarah Hickman to serve one year at	0700
John Gibbs to serve one year at	0650
Nehemia Coventon Aged 12 years to serve 8 years at	1000
Symon Caldron a boy very Lame and 14 years old to serve 7	0500
William Young another boy full of the scurvey to serve six years at	0600
Edward Southerne a little Boy very sick having seven years to serve at	0700
Michael Pacey a boy to serve six years at	1100
Caine the negro, very ancient at	3000
One negro girl about 8 years old at	2000
32 goats young and old at	2500
A parcel of hogs at	1800[15]

What was happening was evident: Africans, unlike whites, were being degraded into a condition of servitude for life and even the status of property. According to the Virginia court records of 1642, Thomas Jacob transferred a "negro Woman Susan" to Bridgett Seaverne and her son: "I do hereby declare that I have given the negro unto them and their heirs and Assigns Freely forever. . . ." Two years later, William Hawley borrowed money from William Stone and provided as collateral "my Negro Mingo." In 1646, Francis Pott sold a Negro woman and boy to Stephen Charlton "to the use of him . . . forever." Wills provided that white servants were to serve their "full term of time" and Negroes "forever." African slaves as well as their future children could be inherited. A 1648 deed included a provision for a "Negro woman and all her increase (which for future time shall be born of her body)." In 1652, a Negro girl was sold to H. Armsteadinger "and his heirs . . . forever with all her increase both male and female." A year later, William Whittington sold John Pott "one Negro girl named Jowan; aged about Ten years and with her Issue and produce during her (or either of them) for their Life time. And their Successors forever." In 1645, Ralph Wormeley presented in court a certificate of a gift to Agatha Stubbings in "Consideration of Matrimony" — "Four Negro men and Two women . . . Ten Cows, six Draft Oxen."[16]

Clearly, blacks were enslaved before 1660. Yet historian Oscar Handlin asserted: "The status of Negroes was that of indentured servants and so they were identified and treated down to the 1660s." What Handlin failed to recognize was *de facto* slavery — chattel bondage in practice if not in law. By the 1650s, according to Alden T. Vaughan's count, 70 percent of the blacks in Virginia were serving as slaves.[17]

In 1661, the Virginia Assembly began to institutionalize slavery, to make it *de jure*. A law regarding the punishment of servants referred to "those Negroes who are incapable of making satisfaction by addition of time." In other words, they were required to serve for life. Eight years later, the Virginia legislature defined a slave as property, a part of the owner's "estate."[18]

English colonists in Virginia did not develop the institution of slavery for Africans on their own: they knew of its existence elsewhere in the English New World. In the West Indies, Africans were slaves. In 1636, Governor Henry Hawley and the Council in Barbados resolved "that *Negroes* and *Indians*, that came here to be sold, should serve for Life, unless a Contract was before made to the contrary." In New England, the Puritans believed that captives of a "just war" could be enslaved; after their victory over the Pequots in 1637, they shipped Indian captives to the West Indies in exchange for African slaves. Eight years later, in a letter to his brother-in-law, John Winthrop, Emanuel Downing calculated the economic potential of such exchanges: "If upon a Just war [with the Narraganset Indians] the Lord should deliver them into our hands, we might easily have men and women and children enough to exchange for Moors [Africans], which will be more gainful pillage for us than we conceive, for I do not see how we can thrive until we get into a stock of slaves sufficient to do all our business." Twenty black slaves, Downing added, could be maintained cheaper than one English servant. A colonist in Massachusetts attempted to breed two of his African slaves. "*Mr. Maverick* was desirous to have a breed of Negroes," an English visitor reported in 1639, "and therefore seeing [that his Negro woman] would not yield by persuasions to [make] company with a Negro man he had in his house; he commanded him [to go to bed with her] which was no sooner done but she kicked him out again, this she took in high disdain beyond her slavery."[19]

Slavery did not develop in New England, however, for the region did not produce a staple crop and therefore did not have a significant need for labor, slave or indentured. In the 1650s, a contemporary observed that colonists in New England do their own work and "so have rarely above one Servant." But, he added, "Virginia thrives by keeping many servants."[20]

Indeed, Virginia was developing into a tobacco-producing colony, and the need for labor was expanding. Yet, the African population increased very slowly. In 1650, Africans constituted only 300 of Virginia's 15,000 inhabitants, or 2 percent. Twenty-five years later, of the colony's approximately 32,000 inhabitants, they totaled only 1,600, or 5 percent. The Barbados represented a striking contrast. By 1645, there were 5,000 blacks in the islands and 20,000 by 1660, constituting a majority of the total population.[21]

Why was it that English settlers in Virginia did not seek more "gainful pillage" by increasing their stock of African slaves?

Carrying to Virginia negative images of Africans, English settlers undoubtedly felt hesitant about peopling their colony with Calibans. Unlike their counterparts in the Barbados, they were not businessmen seeking to make money and return to England. Rather, the Virginians had brought their families with them and were planning to stay. They were making new homes for themselves and had to determine who should and should not settle in the colony. To them, religion and race mattered greatly.

Initially, religion served to identify different racial groups. The English colonists viewed themselves as Christians and the Africans as heathens. But this line was shortly ruptured by the conversion of Africans to Christianity. Hence, laws were passed that separated race from religion. In 1667, Virginia declared that "the conferring of baptism does not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom." Three years later, Virginia enacted a law declaring that "no negro or Indian," though baptized and free, should be allowed to purchase Christians. The distinction was no longer between Christianity and heathenism or freedom and slavery, but between white and black.[22]

This division based on race helped to delineate the border between savagery and civilization. In the wilderness, the English colonists felt a great urgency to destroy what historian Jordan described as "the living image of primitive aggressions which they said was the Negro but was really their own." Far away from the security and surveillance of society in England, the colonists feared the possibility of losing self-control over their passions. "Intermixture and insurrection, violent sex and sexual violence, creation and destruction, life and death — the stuff of animal existence was rumbling at the gates of rational and moral judgment." If the gates fell, the colonists feared, so would civilization. Thus, they projected their hidden and rejected instinctual parts of human nature onto blacks. Jordan imagined them insisting: "We, therefore, do not lust and destroy; it is someone else. We are not great black bucks of the fields. But a buck *is* loose, his great horns menacing to gore into us with life and destruction. Chain him, either chain him or expel his black shape from our midst, before we realize that he is ourselves." Internal boundaries of control were required, or else whites would be swept away by the boundlessness of the wilderness.[23]

The vision of Virginia as a colony for the settlement of English families, combined with the powerful negative feelings and fears that the English harbored toward Africans, generated pressures to minimize the number of blacks in the colony.

During the last quarter of the century, however, the black population of Virginia increased steeply to 9,000 and possibly even to 20,000 out of 63,000 for the entire colony. Their proportion was around 25 percent in 1715 and over 40 percent by 1750. "There were as many buyers as negros," Francis Nicholson commented on a sale of 230 slaves in Virginia in 1700, "and I think that, if 2000 were imported, there would be substantial buyers for them." "The negroes are brought annually in large numbers," a visitor to Virginia reported. "They can be selected according to pleasure, young and old, men and women. They are entirely naked when they arrive, having only corals of different colors around their neck and arms." Unlike the first "twenty Negars," these Africans arrived as slaves. A 1705 Virginia law provided that "all servants imported and brought into this country, by sea or land, who were not christians in their native country . . . shall be . . . slaves, and as such be here bought and sold notwithstanding a conversion to christianity afterwards."[24]

Why was there such a dramatic turn away from white indentured servants and toward enslaved blacks? According to Handlin, planters suddenly realized the advantages of having laborers bound for life. "By mid-century the servitude of Negroes seems generally lengthier than that of whites," he explained; "and thereafter the consciousness dawns that the blacks will toil for the whole of their lives, not through any particular concern with their status, but simply by contrast with those whose years of labor are limited by statute." Soon laws institutionalizing slavery for blacks were passed, and it became "obvious which was the cheapest, most available, most exploitable labor supply."[25]

But, as we have seen, such "consciousness" had "dawned" much earlier, at least in practice. Moreover, if the planters were aware of the advantage of slaves in the 1650s, why did they wait until after 1675 to change their labor force? Other factors must have come into play. First, as historian Russell Menard noted, there was a decrease in the number of indentured servants migrating to Virginia after the 1670s. This would have produced pressure to draw from an African labor supply. Despite this shortage, however, planters still did not seem to prefer African slaves to white servants. "It was not until at least a decade after the decline in

the supply of servants," Menard observed, "that the number of blacks imported each year rose above a trickle. . . ." Second, as conditions in Virginia improved, both whites and blacks were living longer. Hence, where earlier it had been more expensive to invest in blacks as slaves than in whites as indentured servants, it became less of a risk as longevity increased for everyone. Lifetime servitude had become more profitable. But something else also happened after 1675 that opened the way for a switch from indentured white labor to black slave labor.[26]

"English and Negroes in Armes"

That "something" occurred within white society in Virginia. To understand race relations by focusing on race sometimes obscures; indeed, the "hidden" origins of slavery were rooted in class. Here again, *The Tempest* might be illuminating. The theatergoers were given a scenario that was uncanny in its anticipation of what would happen in Virginia. What they saw on the stage was an interracial class revolt to overthrow Prospero. When the jester Trinculo and the butler Stephano first encountered Caliban, they found him repulsive — a fishlike monster and a devil. They gave him wine, and the inebriated Caliban offered to show Trinculo every "fertile inch o' the island" and worship him as a god. Defying Prospero, Caliban chanted:

> *'Ban, 'Ban, Ca-Caliban*
> *Has a new master. Get a new man.*

A fierce desire drove the subversive stance: "Freedom, highday! highday, freedom! freedom, highday, freedom!" Complaining about how Prospero had colonized his island, Caliban concocted a plot for rebellion. If Stephano would kill Prospero ("knock a nail into his head"), Caliban declared, the butler would become the lord of the island and husband of Miranda. Caliban promised Stephano: "She will become thy bed." Stirred by these promises, the butler exclaimed: "Lead, monster; we'll follow." Warned in advance about the "foul conspiracy of the beast Caliban and his confederates," Prospero unleashed his hunting dogs against the rebels: "Fury, Fury! There, Tyrant, there! Go, charge my goblins that they grind their joints. . . ." A victim, Caliban was also an actor, a participant in the making of events. What attracted Stephano and Trinculo to his revolutionary leadership was their shared "otherness" rooted in class.[27]

Like Prospero, the English settlers had brought to America not only racial prejudice but also a hierarchical class structure. While a few were from the aristocracy and many were from what could be called the middle class, most English colonists migrated to Virginia as indentured servants. They planned to complete their period of indenture and become landowners. According to Governor William Berkeley, white servants came with a "hope of bettering their condition in a Growing Country." They thought the American expanse offered the possibility of starting over, creating new selves and new lives. Land in Virginia, taken from the Indians, was available and cheap, and each freeman could claim title to fifty acres. Perhaps they could even become wealthy, for a new cash crop, tobacco, offered farmers the opportunity to enter the market. Like the butler Stephano and the jester Trinculo, they wanted to become "lords" of land in America.[28]

The very abundance of land and the profitability of tobacco production, however, unleashed a land boom and speculation. Colonists with financial advantage quickly scrambled to possess the best lands along the navigable rivers. Representing a landed elite, they dominated the Virginia Assembly and began to enact legislation to advance and protect their class interests. They passed laws that extended the time of indentured servitude for whites and increased the length of service for white runaways. In this way, they minimized competition for lands and at the same time maximized the supply of white laborers by keeping them in servitude for as long as possible.[29]

Consequently, white freemen increasingly found it difficult to become landowners. In 1663, the House of Burgesses turned down a proposal to levy taxes on land instead of polls. Such a basis for taxation, it was argued, would limit the suffrage to landholders, and such a restriction would be resented by "the other freemen" who were "the more in number." The majority of freemen, the burgesses were acknowledging, did not own land. Thirteen years later, two members of the Virginia council, Thomas Ludwell and Robert Smith, estimated that at least one-fourth of the population consisted of "merchants and single freemen and such others as have no land." A growing group of tenant farmers existed.[30]

Hopes of landownership became dreams deferred for many English colonists. Frustrated and angry, many white workers felt they had been duped into coming to America. In 1649, pamphleteer William Bullock warned planters about the men and women who, "not finding what was promised," had become "dejected" and recalcitrant workers. In England, they had been viewed as the "Surcharge of necessitous people, the matter or fuel of dangerous insurrections." In Virginia, they became an even greater threat to social order, forming what the planter elite fearfully called a "giddy multitude" — a discontented class of indentured servants, slaves, and landless freemen, both white and black, the Stephanos and Trinculos as well as the Calibans of Virginia. They constituted a volatile element. In the early 1660s, for example, indentured servant Isaac Friend led a conspiracy to band together forty servants and "get Arms." He issued the rebellious cry: "who would be for Liberty, and free from bondage." Others would join the revolt, Friend promised, and together they would "go through the Country and kill those that made any opposition," and would "either be free or die for it." The authorities were informed about Friend's plan and quickly suppressed the plot. Again, in 1663, a Gloucester court accused nine "Laborers" of conspiring to overthrow the Virginia government and sentenced several of them to be executed. This incident gave planters a frightening example of "the horror" in Virginia — the presence of "villains" engaged in a "barbarous design" to subvert "rights and privileges" in the colony.[31]

But unruliness and discontent continued to grow. Fearing this landless class, the Virginia legislature restricted the suffrage to landowners in 1670. Governor William Berkeley was worried about the explosive class conditions in his colony where "six parts of seven" of the people were "Poor Indebted Discontented and Armed." The ownership of guns was widespread among whites, for every white man had a right to bear arms and was required by law to have a gun in order to help defend the colony. The landed elite distrusted this armed lower class of whites so much that they were even afraid to organize them for military service. On one occasion, in 1673, Governor Berkeley raised troops to defend Virginia against Dutch warships, but he did so very reluctantly. Of the men he enlisted in his army, Berkeley apprehensively noted, at least one-third were freemen or debtors. They could not be trusted, he cautioned, for in battle, they might revolt and join the enemy "in hopes of bettering their Condition by Sharing the Plunder of the Country with them."[32]

Three years later, the very revolt Berkeley feared took place. One of the landholders in the upcountry was Nathaniel Bacon, a friend of Berkeley's and a member of the Virginia council. Seeking to protect settlers against the Indians, he helped raise a militia. Bacon recognized the danger of organizing armed men who came from the ranks of the "giddy multitude." But Bacon calculated that an expedition against the Indians would serve a dual purpose — eliminate a foe and redirect the white lower class's anger away from the white elite to the Indians. The unruly and armed poor would focus on the external red enemy, rather than on the legislature's high taxes and the governor's failure to provide for defense against the Indians. "Since my being with the volunteers," he wrote to Berkeley, "the Exclaiming concerning forts and Leavys has been suppressed and the discourse and earnestness of the people is against the Indians. . . ."[33]

Bacon's actions shocked Berkeley and his council, who were more worried about armed white freemen than hostile Indians. In their view, Bacon's followers were a "Rabble Crew, only the Rascallity and meanest of the people . . . there being hardly two amongst them that we have heard of who have Estates or are persons of Reputation and indeed very few who can either write or read." Ignoring their concerns, Bacon led a march against the Indians, killing Susquehannahs as well as friendly Occaneechees. He justified his expedition as a "Glorious" defense of the country. But the governor angrily declared Bacon a rebel and charged him with treason, an act punishable by death. Bacon retaliated by marching five hundred armed men to Jamestown.[34]

Blacks joined Bacon's army: they realized that they had a greater stake in the rebellion than their white brothers in arms, for many of them were bound servants for life. White and black, Bacon's soldiers formed what contemporaries described as "an incredible Number of the meanest People," "every where Armed." They were the "tag, rag, and bobtayle," the "Rabble" against "the better sort of people." A colonial official reported that Bacon had raised hundreds of soldiers "whose fortunes & Inclinations" were "desperate," and that almost all of them were either "Idle" and would not work, or in debt because of "Debaucherie or Ill Husbandry." Bacon had unleashed a radical class boundlessness that threatened the very foundations of order in Virginia.[35]

The rebels forced Berkeley to escape by ship and burned Jamestown to the ground. Shortly afterward, Bacon died, probably from dysentery; Berkeley then returned with armed ships. Like Prospero with his hunting dogs, the governor violently suppressed the rebellion. At one of the rebel fortifications, Captain Thomas Grantham encountered some four hundred "English and Negroes in Armes." Lying to them, Grantham said they had been "pardoned and freed from their Slavery." Most of them accepted his offer, but eighty black and twenty white rebels refused to surrender. Promised safe passage across the York River, the holdouts were captured when Grantham threatened to blow them out of the water. All of the captured "Negroes & Servants," Grantham reported, were returned "to their Masters."[36]

By force and deceit, the rebels of the "giddy multitude" had been defeated, but they had fought in what historian Edmund Morgan called "the largest rebellion known in any American colony before the [American] Revolution." Bacon's Rebellion had exposed the volatility of class tensions within white society in Virginia. During the conflict, the specter of class revolution had become a reality, and the scare shook the elite landholders: they were no longer confident they could control the "giddy multitude." Five years after the rebellion, planters continued to harbor fears of class disorder and urged the king to keep royal soldiers in Virginia to "prevent or suppress any Insurrection that may otherwise happen during the necessitous unsettled condition of the Colony." Large landowners could see that the social order would always be in danger so long as they had to depend on white labor. They had come to a crossing. They could open economic opportunities to white workers and extend political privileges to them. But this would erode their own economic advantage and potentially undermine their political hegemony. Or they could try to reorganize society on the basis of class *and* race. By importing and buying more slaves, they would decrease the proportion of white indentured servants. They would then be able to exploit a group of workers who had been enslaved and denied the right to bear arms because of their race. To increase the black population would mean to create a biracial society. However, such a development could help the planters control an armed white labor force and possibly solve the class problem within white society.[37]

While such a scenario of the "hidden" origins of slavery might not have been a deliberate strategy, what was so striking about the transition from white to black labor was its timing. The planter elite were becoming increasingly concerned about the growing discontent and rebelliousness among white servants during the 1660s — the very moment when the legislature made slavery *de jure*. During this time, the black population began to increase, an indication that planters had started shifting to this source of labor. But it was still not clear whether Africans would become the major work force and slavery would become the primary system of labor. After Bacon's Rebellion, however, the turn to slavery became sharp and significant. Even though the supply of white indentured servants seemed to have declined at this time, planters did not try to expand their recruitment efforts. Instead, they did something they had resisted until then — prefer black slaves over white indentured servants. In a letter to Ralph Wormely in 1681, William Fitzhugh noted that there were "some Negro Ships expected into York now every day." "If you intend to buy any for yours self, and it be not too much trouble," Fitzhugh added, ". . . secure me five or six." The growing dependency on slave laborers rather than white indentured servants can be measured decade by decade from the tax lists of Surry County. Slaves constituted 20 percent of households in 1674, 33 percent in 1686, and 48 percent in 1694. In other words, by the end of the century, nearly half the work force in Surry County was black and enslaved.[38]

Moreover, what the landed gentry systematically developed after the rebellion was a racially subordinated labor force. After 1680, they enacted laws that denied slaves freedom of assembly and movement. The "frequent meeting of considerable number of negroe slaves under pretense of feasts and burials" was "judged of dangerous consequence." Masters and overseers were prohibited from allowing "any Negro or Slave not properly belonging to him or them, to Remain or be upon his or their Plantation above the space of four hours." Militia patrollers were authorized to visit "negro quarters and other places suspected of entertaining unlawful assemblies," and to "take up" those assembling "or any other, strolling about from one plantation to another, without a pass from his or her master, mistress, or overseer." The gentry also disarmed blacks: in an act entitled "Preventing Negroes Insurrections," the legislature ordered that "it shall not be lawful for any negro or other slave to carry or arm himself with any club, staff, gun, sword or any other weapon." The planter class saw that black slaves could be more effectively controlled by state power than white servants, for they could be denied certain rights based on the color of their skin.[39]

Although the number of white indentured servants entering Virginia declined sharply after 1700, the white lower class did not disappear. In 1720, in Christ Church, Virginia, out of 146 householders, only 86 were landowners. The landed elite continued to view the white lower class as a bothersome problem. The planters offered a carrot: in 1705, the assembly provided that upon completion of their term, white servants would not only be entitled to fifty acres of land but would also be given ten bushels of Indian corn, thirty shillings, and a musket. The planters also wielded a stick: they petitioned the legislature in 1699 to pass a law punishing "Vagrant Vagabond and Idle Persons and to assess the Wages of Common Labourers." In 1723, the assembly enacted a poor law that empowered county courts to punish "vagrants" by giving them thirty-nine lashes or by binding them out as servants. The law complained that "diverse Idle and disorderly persons," who had "no visible Estates or Employments," frequently "strolled from One County to another" and would not labor or pay their taxes.[40]

By then, landless white Stephanos and Trinculos were less likely to join with enslaved black Calibans on a class basis. The cultural gap between white and black workers had widened in the late seventeenth century. Where the early black arrivals had been "seasoned" in the Barbados and were often able to speak some English, new blacks were transported directly from Africa. These Africans must have seemed especially strange to whites, even to those who occupied a common exploited class position.[41]

This cultural chasm between the whites and blacks of the "giddy multitude" was transformed into a political separation as the landed gentry instituted new borders between white and black laborers. Four years after Bacon's Rebellion, the Virginia Assembly repealed all penalties imposed on white servants for plundering during the revolt, but did not extend this pardon to black freemen and black indentured servants. Moreover, the gentry reinforced the separate labor status for each group: blacks were forced to occupy a racially subordinate and stigmatized status, one below all whites regardless of their class. Black was made to signify slave. In 1691, the assembly prohibited the manumission of slaves unless the master paid for transporting them out of the colony. New laws sharpened the lines of a caste system: who was "black" was given expanded definition. Earlier, in 1662, the legislature had declared that children born in Virginia should be slave or free according to the condition of the mother. In 1691, the Virginia Assembly passed a law that prohibited the "abominable mixture and spurious issue" of interracial unions and that provided for the banishment of white violators. The assembly took special aim at white women: the law specified that a free white mother of a racially mixed illegitimate child would be fined fifteen pounds and that the child would be required to be in servitude for thirty years. The effect of these laws was not only to make mulattoes slaves but also to stigmatize them as black. Moreover, the legislature also denied free blacks the right to vote, hold office, and testify in court.[42]

Meanwhile, the Virginia elite deliberately pitted white laborers and black slaves against each other. The legislature permitted whites to abuse blacks physically with impunity: in 1680, it prescribed thirty lashes on the bare back "if any negro or other slave shall presume to lift up his hand in opposition against any christian." Planters used landless whites to help put down slave revolts. In the early eighteenth century, Hugh Jones reported that each county had "a great number of disciplined and armed militia, ready in case of any sudden eruption of Indians or insurrection of Negroes." In 1705, Virginia legislated that "all horses, cattle, and hogs, now belonging, or that hereafter shall belong to any slave, or of any slaves mark . . . shall be seized and sold by the churchwardens of the parish . . . and the profit thereof applied to the use of the poor." Here was a policy to transfer farm animals and food from slaves to poor whites. Later, during the American Revolution, the Virginia Assembly went even farther: to recruit white men for the struggle for liberty, the legislature rewarded each soldier with a bounty of three hundred acres of land and a slave — "a healthy, sound Negro between ten and thirty years of age."[43]

The Wolf by the Ears

As the governor of Virginia during the Revolution, Thomas Jefferson supported the broadening of landownership, for he believed it provided the basis of social and political stability. Like the Virginia planters before him, Jefferson worried about class tensions and conflicts within white society. The New World, he saw, offered something Europe could not — an abundance of uncultivated land. Americans would remain virtuous as long as they were primarily involved in agriculture, and this would last as long as there were "vacant lands" in America. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Jefferson observed: "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. . . . [Let] our workshops remain in Europe. . . . The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body."[44]

In Jefferson's judgment, the way to avoid class conflicts in American society was to open opportunities for white men to become farmers. As free individuals and owners of property, they would become responsible citizens. "Here every one, by his property, or by his satisfactory situation, is interested in the support of law and order," Jefferson observed. "And such men may safely and advantageously reserve to themselves a wholesome control over their public affairs, and a degree of freedom, which, in the hands of the canaille of the cities of Europe, would be instantly perverted to the demolition and destruction of everything public and private." Jefferson's was a vision of a republic of independent and virtuous yeoman farmers.[45]

Jefferson himself, however, was an elite planter. A beneficiary of the seventeenth-century turn to slavery, he was a slaveowner and actively participated in the buying and selling of slaves. "The value of our lands and slaves, taken conjunctly, doubles in about twenty years," he coolly

calculated. "This arises from the multiplication of our slaves, from the extension of culture, and increased demands for lands." His observation was not merely theoretical: Jefferson's ownership of lands and slaves made him one of the wealthiest men in Virginia. Yet he continued to expand his slaveholdings. In 1805, he informed John Jordan that he was "endeavoring to purchase young and able negro men." In a letter to his manager regarding "a breeding woman," Jefferson referred to the "loss of 5 little ones in 4 years" and complained that the overseers had not permitted the slave women to devote as much time as was necessary to care for their children. "They view their labor as the 1st object and the raising of their children but as secondary," he continued. "I consider the labor of a breeding woman as no object, and that a child raised every 2 years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man." By 1822, Jefferson owned 267 slaves.[46]

Jefferson was capable of punishing his slaves with great cruelty. He used James Hubbard, a captured runaway slave, as a lesson to discipline the other slaves: "I had him severely flogged in the presence of his old companions." On another occasion, Jefferson punished a slave in order to make an example of him in "terrorem" to others and then sold him to a slave trader from Georgia. Jefferson wanted him to be sent to a place "so distant as never more to be heard among us," and make it seem to the other slaves on his plantation "as if he were put out of the way by death."[47]

Jefferson felt profoundly ambivalent toward slavery, however. He could see that the switch from white to black labor in the seventeenth century had been terribly unfortunate, for this had led to the expansion of an immoral institution. "The love of justice and the love of country plead equally the cause of these people [slaves]," Jefferson confessed, "and it is a moral reproach to us that they should have pleaded it so long in vain. . . ." As a member of the Virginia legislature, he supported an effort for the emancipation of slaves. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* he recommended the gradual abolition of slavery, and in a letter to a friend written in 1788, he wrote: "You know that nobody wishes more ardently to see an abolition not only of the [African slave] trade but of the condition of slavery: and certainly nobody will be more willing to encounter every sacrifice for that object."[48]

Jefferson personally felt guilty about his slave ownership. In a letter to his brother-in-law, Francis Eppes, on July 30, 1787, he made a revealing slip. Once "my debts" have been cleared off, he promised, "I shall try some plan of making their [his slaves'] situation happier, determined to content myself with a small portion of their liberty [crossed out] labour." He tried to excuse himself for appropriating only their "labour," not their "liberty." In a letter to a friend written only a day earlier, Jefferson exploded with guilt: "The torment of mind, I will endure till the moment shall arrive when I shall not owe a shilling on earth is such really as to render life of little value." Dependent on the labor of his slaves to pay off his debts, he hoped to be able to free them, which he promised he would do the moment "they" had paid off the estate's debts, two-thirds of which had been "contracted by purchasing them." Unfortunately for Jefferson, and especially for his slaves, he remained in debt until his death.[49]

In Jefferson's view, slavery did more than deprive blacks of their liberty. It also had a pernicious and "unhappy" influence on the masters and their children:

> The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do. If a parent could find no motive either in his philanthropy or his self-love, for restraining the intemperance of passion toward his slave, it should always be a sufficient one that his child is present. But generally it is not sufficient. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manner and morals undepraved by such circumstances.[50]

Slavery had to be abolished, Jefferson argued, but when freed, blacks would have to be removed from American society. This had to be done as soon as possible because slaves already composed nearly half of Virginia's population. "Under the mild treatment our slaves experience, and their wholesome, though coarse, food," Jefferson observed, "this blot in our country increases fast, or faster, than the whites." Delays for removal only meant the growth of the "blot." Jefferson impatiently insisted: "I can say, with conscious truth, that there is not a man on earth who would sacrifice more than I would to relieve us from this heavy reproach, in any practicable way. The cession of that kind of

property . . . is a bagatelle which would not cost me a second t if, in that way, a general emancipation and expatriation could be effected."[51]

But how could a million and half slaves be expatriated? To send them away all at once, Jefferson answered, would not be "practicable." He estimated that such a removal would take twenty-five years, during which time the slave population would have doubled. Furthermore, the value of these slaves would amount to $600 million, and the cost of transportation and provisions an additional $300 million. "It cannot be done in this way," Jefferson decided. The only "practicable" plan, he thought, was to deport the future generation: black infants would be taken from their mothers and trained for occupations until they reached a proper age for deportation. Since an infant was worth only $22.50, Jefferson calculated, the loss of slave property would be reduced from $600 million to only $37.5 million. Jefferson suggested that slave children be shipped to the independent black nation of Santo Domingo. "Suppose the whole annual increase to be sixty thousand effective births, fifty vessels, of four hundred tons burthen each, constantly employed in that short run, would carry off the increase of every year, and the old stock would die off in the ordinary course of nature, lessening from the commencement until its final disappearance." He was confident the effects of his plan would be "blessed." As for taking children from their mothers, Jefferson remarked: "The separation of infants from mothers . . . would produce some scruples of humanity. But this would be straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel."[52]

One of the reasons why colonization would have to be a condition for emancipation was clear to Jefferson: blacks and whites could never coexist in America because of "the real distinctions" which "nature" had made between the two races. "The first difference which strikes us is that of color," Jefferson explained. This difference, "fixed in nature," was of great importance. "Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races?" he asked rhetorically. "Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers the emotions of the other race?" The differences between the races, in Jefferson's view, also involved intelligence. He publicly stated his "opinion" that blacks were "inferior" in the faculty of reason. However, he conceded that such a claim had to be "hazarded with great diffidence" and that he would be willing to have it refuted.[53]

But Jefferson received challenges and evidence contradicting his claim with a closed mind. For example, he refused to consider seriously the poetry of Phillis Wheatley. In 1773, this young black writer published a book of *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. Her poems stirred interest and appreciation among many readers. Praising them, a French official living in America during the American Revolution wrote: "Phyllis is a negress, born in Africa, brought to Boston at the age of ten, and sold to a citizen of that city. She learned English with unusual ease, eagerly read and reread the Bible . . . became steeped in the poetic images of which it is full, and at the age of seventeen published a number of poems in which there is imagination, poetry, and zeal. . . ." In one of her poems, Wheatley insisted that Africans were just as capable of Christian virtue and salvation as whites:

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan *land,*
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour *too:*
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negroes, *black as* Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

During the American Revolution, Wheatley proclaimed:

No more, America, *in mournful strain*
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain,
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny *with lawless hand*
Had made, and with it meant t'enslave the land.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom *sprung,*
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Afric's *fancy'd happy seat:*
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:

Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

Like Jefferson and many theoreticians of the American Revolution, Wheatley understood the meaning of the struggle for liberty. She, too, identified British tyranny as a form of slavery, but Wheatley reminded her readers that her understanding of freedom was not merely philosophical, for it tragically sprang from her black experience — the slave trade, forced separation from parents, and bondage in America.[54]

Whether Jefferson read her poems is not known, but he contemptuously dismissed her writing: "The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism." Jefferson considered blacks incapable of writing poetry. "Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry," he observed. "Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the sense only, not the imagination." Jefferson caustically commented: "Religion, indeed, has produced a Phyllis Whately [*sic*]; but it could not produce a poet." Significantly, Jefferson had misspelled her name.[55]

Like Phillis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker challenged Jefferson's "opinion" of black intellectual inferiority. On August 19, 1791, the free black mathematician from Maryland sent Jefferson a copy of the almanac he had compiled. "I suppose it is a truth too well attested to you, to need a proof here," Banneker wrote in his cover letter, "that we are a race of beings, who have long labored under the abuse and censure of the world . . . that we have long been considered rather as brutish than human, and scarcely capable of mental endowments." Noting that the almanac would soon be published, Banneker explained that he was sending Jefferson the "manuscript" of the work so that it could be viewed in his "own hand writing."[56]

Seeking to do more than demonstrate and affirm the intelligence of blacks, Banneker also scolded the author of the Declaration of Independence for his hypocrisy on the subject of slavery.

> Sir, suffer me to recall to your mind that time, in which the arms of the British crown were exerted, with every powerful effort, in order to reduce you to a state of servitude: look back, I entreat you . . . you were then impressed with proper ideas of the great violation of liberty, and the free possession of those blessings, to which you were entitled by nature; but, Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect that although you were

> so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of Mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of these rights and privileges which he hath conferred upon them, that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence, so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others.

The American Revolution, in Banneker's mind, had unleashed a new idea — "liberty" as a natural right. Commitment to this principle demanded consistency. The overthrow of the British enslavement of the colonies required the abolition of slavery in the new republic.[57]

On August 30, 1791, Jefferson responded: "Nobody wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren, talent equal to those of the other colors of men; and that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence. . . ." But actually Jefferson did not take Banneker seriously. In a letter to Joel Harlow, Jefferson claimed that the mathematician had "a mind of very common stature," and that the black scholar had aid from Andrew Ellicot, a white neighbor who "never missed an opportunity of puffing him."[58]

Parsimonious toward Wheatley as a poet and skeptical about Banneker as a mathematician, Jefferson was unable to free himself from his belief in black intellectual inferiority. Like Prospero, he insisted that, to borrow Shakespeare's poetic language, "nurture" could not improve the "nature" of blacks. Comparing Roman slavery and American black slavery, Jefferson pointed out: "Epictetus, Terence, and Phaedrus, were slaves. But they were of the race of whites. It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction." Black slaves in America, on the other hand, were mentally inferior: "In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. . . . [I]t appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous."[59]

In Jefferson's view, blacks were a libidinous race. "They [black men] are more ardent after their female," he claimed; "but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation." The black man, he added, "preferred" the white woman with her "flowing hair" and "more elegant symmetry of form" as "uniformly" as the male "Oranootan for the black woman of those of his own species." Dominated by their passions, blacks threatened white racial purity, Jefferson believed. "This unfortunate difference in color, and perhaps of faculty," Jefferson argued, "is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people. Many of their advocates, while they wish to vindicate the liberty of human nature, are anxious to preserve its dignity and beauty. . . . Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master." For Jefferson, interracial sex and racially mixed offspring would rupture the borders of caste. Such crossings had to be tabooed, for racial liminality undermined social order. To be betwixt and between would dangerously blur the division between white and black.[60]

What worried Jefferson more than the threat of miscegenation was the danger of race war. "Deep-rooted prejudices entertained by the whites," he anxiously explained, "ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions, which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race."[61]

Unless slavery were abolished, Jefferson feared, whites would continue to face the danger of servile insurrection. Commenting on the slave revolt in Santo Domingo, he wrote to James Monroe in 1793: "It is high time we should foresee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (south of Potomac) have to wade through, and try to avert them." In 1797, referring to the need for a plan for emancipation and removal, Jefferson anxiously confessed to a friend: "If something is not done, and soon done, we shall be the murderers of our children." Three years later, an attempted slave revolt shook Jefferson like "a fire bell in the night." The Gabriel Prosser conspiracy was crushed, and twenty-five blacks were hanged. Though the insurrectionary spirit among the slaves had been quelled in this instance, Jefferson warned, it would become general and more formidable after every defeat, until whites would be forced "after dreadful scenes and sufferings to release them in their own way." He predicted that slavery would be abolished — "whether brought on by the generous energy of our own minds" or "by the bloody process of St. Domingo." In Jefferson's nightmare, slaves would seize their freedom with daggers.[62]

By Jefferson's time, it had become clear that the seventeenth-century planters had not fully considered the explosive consequences of changing from white indentured servants to black slave laborers. They wanted to diminish the presence and power of a white proletariat, armed and numerous. African slaves seemed to offer a solution to the problem of class conflict within white society. Slavery enabled planters to develop a disfranchised and disarmed black work force. Negative images of blacks that had predated the institutionalization of slavery in English America dynamically interacted with economic and political developments on the stage called Virginia.

Driven by immediate economic interests and blinded by a short time horizon, the planters had not carefully thought through what they were doing to black people as well as to American society and future generations. They had created an enslaved "giddy multitude" that constantly threatened social order. "As it is," Jefferson cried out, "we have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other." Jefferson had hoped America would be able to abolish slavery and remove the blacks. But, by then, it was too late. Like Caliban, blacks had been forced to become slaves and serve in "offices that profited" their masters, who, unlike Prospero, could not simply free them and leave the island. "All torment, trouble, wonder, and amazement inhabits here," the English theatergoers heard the old counselor Gonzalo pray. "Some heavenly power guide us out of this fearful country!"[63]