

Russo, Jean B. & J. Elliott Russo,
Planting an Empire:
The Early Chesapeake in British North America
(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

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Planting an Empire offers a fresh new synthesis of colonial Chesapeake history. Eschewing a more traditional study focused on a single colony, Jean B. Russo and J. Elliott Russo engage in a comparative analysis of the two coterminous British American colonies that were dubbed the “two fruitful sisters” by John Hammond’s 1656 pamphlet (5). This important addition to the substantial body of scholarship known as the “Chesapeake School,” weaves multiple narratives into a well-researched history of the colonized Chesapeake.

Beginning with European explorations in the New World and the first permanent English settlement in America, and ending with the American Revolution, *Planting an Empire* takes us on a chronologic journey of more than one hundred and sixty years. This study makes clear the often-contentious yet symbiotic relationship between the Chesapeake colonies and the mother country. The first Chesapeake towns, Jamestown settled in 1606 and St. Mary’s City settled in 1634, evolved in large part due to unique geographical conditions. Waterways were plentiful in Virginia and Maryland, providing import and export opportunities for ships on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Planters in

Virginia reaped the benefits of fertile soil by growing sweet scent tobacco. Maryland soil was primarily fit for growing Oronoco tobacco and planters were quick to realize soil limitations, diversifying crops to maximize yield and provide insulation against fluctuating tobacco prices. Visitors to both colonies observed tobacco fields often riddled with tree stumps left from girdling because tobacco did not require cleared land. This agricultural practice, so different from England where fields of orderly furrows were necessary for grain crops, prompted European visitors to remark on the untidy nature of Chesapeake farming. Additionally, Chesapeake field rotation negated the need for spreading manure, a practice necessary to maintain the fertility of English enclosed fields. Animal husbandry also evolved quite differently in the Chesapeake, as domesticated animals in a free range setting required less maintenance. Raising grains for enclosed domestic animals required additional land and farm hands, both often in short supply for Chesapeake farmers.

The rise of African slavery in the Chesapeake, driven by agricultural labour needs and the late seventeenth-century decrease in indentured servitude, is an important thread running through this study. From the first recorded Africans arriving in Jamestown in 1619, to the increased numbers of enslaved women, men and children in the eighteenth century, the intricate and unsavoury connections between slave ownership and personal wealth emerge. Wealthy planters increased their reliance on imported bond labour near the end of the seventeenth century and ships continued to import enslaved workers throughout the next century in ever

increasing numbers. European bound labour (indentured servants, redemptioners, and convict bondservants) continued to arrive until the late eighteenth century, but in numbers far less than that of enslaved Africans.

Colonial women (free, bound, or enslaved) brought skills to the Chesapeake that ensured the survival of colonists and communities, producing goods for local consumption and export. In the eighteenth century, paid employment occupations, such as seamstress and tavern keeper, opened up for women in Virginia and Maryland. Analysis of women's conditions adds a layer of complexity to this Chesapeake history. Issues of marriage, motherhood, and childbirth illuminate situations in which widowed free women realized limited degrees of autonomy as *femme soles*, inheriting property from husbands and managing estates in trust for young sons. Marriage was a means of gaining social and economic standing in Chesapeake communities. English women arriving as servants throughout the seventeenth century encountered an unbalanced sex ratio in both colonies, with an increased potential for marriage. For an unmarried woman in the eighteenth century, pregnancy meant social ostracism and economic devastation. Issues of gender and race combine in the descriptions of mixed-race bastard children born to free white mothers. These children were forced to "labor as servants until age thirty-one (186)." Russo and Russo note this practice often produced a cycle of servitude through successive generations, as female children were sold into service and became more likely to bear bastard children of their own during their service period. Enslaved

African and African American mothers were often enmeshed in a cycle of perpetual servitude as they too coped with similarly devastating losses when their children were sold away from family and natal home.

Adding to the value of this book is its accessibility for a wide readership. The authors make a sustained effort to qualify terms and phrases by including brief explanations throughout the text, making it an excellent text for undergraduates and emerging history scholars. Taking a long view of the Chesapeake, the authors bring together the disparate threads of colonization in a cohesive narrative. The many themes explored for both colonies include: agricultural development, labor acquisition and maintenance, production and marketing, plantation economics and farm building, religion and spirituality, social organization and class structure. Carefully selected images complement the text. One example, a 1715 Chesapeake map, illustrates the rate of settlement in the region with locations and dates of origin for all Maryland and Virginia counties (128).

Both authors are skilled Chesapeake historians, with numerous publications to their credit. Their research on primary sources, such as probate records from both colonies, brings us closer to a more complete image of Chesapeake colonial life. The discussions on asset distribution gleaned from colonial wills reveal family size, number of servants and slaves, and the multitudinous variety of domestic items commonly used in colonial households. Russo and Russo seamlessly weave together events in England and the Chesapeake colonies, clearly explicating the benefits and

drawbacks of the colonial relationship. The mother country gained in terms of trade imports and exports: a steady supply of tobacco, lumber, pig iron, and ship supplies. And the Chesapeake colonies provided an outlet for surplus population that would eventually dissolve the bonds through revolution. *Planting an Empire* reminds us that the Chesapeake and its history remain “a work in progress (211).”

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Harrison, Mark

Contagion: How Commerce Has Spread Disease.

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Quarantine represents one of the most fundamental measures to prevent and contain disease. It has been (and still is) the source of much deliberation and interest among medical historians and medical writers alike. To see the different ways in which quarantine was implemented, in various cultures throughout the ages, gives us an insight into the progression of human understanding of disease, pestilence and contagion; how our natural ability (as human beings) to reason and see patterns after significant events, developed