

Excerpts from

WHITE TRASH – THE 400 YEAR UNTOLD HISTORY OF CLASS IN AMERICA

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We know what class is. Or think we do: economic stratification created by wealth and privilege. The problem is that popular American history is most commonly told—dramatized—without much reference to the existence of social classes. It is as though in separating from Great Britain, the United States somehow magically escaped the bonds of class and derived a higher consciousness of enriched possibility. After all, the U.S. Senate is not the House of Lords. Schoolbooks teach the national narrative along the lines of “how land and liberty were won” or “how ordinary folks seized opportunity.” The hallowed American dream is the gold standard by which politicians and voters alike are meant to measure quality of life as each generation pursues its own definition of happiness unfettered by the restraints of birth (who your parents are) or station (the position you start out from in the class system).

Our cherished myths are at once bolstering and debilitating. “All men are created equal” was successfully employed as a motto to define the promise of America’s open spaces and a united people’s moral self-regard in distinguishing themselves from a host of hopeless societies abroad. The idea of America was presented by its chief promoters with great panache, a vision of how a modern republic might prove itself revolutionary in terms of social mobility in a world dominated by monarchy and fixed aristocracy.

All that is bolstering. However, the reality on the ground was and is considerably different. In the most literal terms, as we shall see, British colonists promoted a dual agenda: one involved reducing poverty back in England, and the other called for transporting the idle and unproductive to the New World. After settlement, colonial outposts exploited their unfree laborers (indentured servants, slaves, and children) and saw such expendable classes as human waste. The poor, the waste, did not disappear, and by the early eighteenth century they were seen as a permanent breed. This way of classifying human failure took hold in the United

States. Every era in the continent’s vaunted developmental story had its own taxonomy of waste people—unwanted and unsalvageable. Each era had its own means of distancing its version of white trash from the mainstream ideal.

By thinking of the lower classes as incurable, irreparable “breeds,” this study reframes the relationship of race and class. Class had its own singular and powerful dynamic, apart from its intersection with race. It starts with the rich and potent meaning that came with the different names given the American underclass. Long before they were today’s “trailer trash” and “rednecks,” they were called “lubbers” and “rubbish” and “clay-eaters” and “crackers”—and that’s just scratching the surface.

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America's class language and thinking began with the forceful imprint left by English colonization. The generations of the 1500s and 1600s that first envisioned the broad-scale English exploitation of America's natural environment employed a vocabulary that was a mix of purposeful description and raw imagery. They did not indulge in pretty talk. The idea of settlement had to be sold to wary investors; the planting of New World American colonies had to serve Old World purposes. In grand fashion, promoters imagined America not as an Eden of opportunity but as a giant rubbish heap that could be transformed into productive terrain. Expendable people—waste people—would be unloaded from England; their labor would germinate a distant wasteland. Harsh as it

sounds, the idle poor, dregs of society, were to be sent thither simply to throw down manure and die in a vacuous muck. Before it became that fabled "City upon a Hill," America was in the eyes of sixteenth-century adventurers a foul, weedy wilderness—a "sinke hole" suited to ill-bred commoners. Dark images of the New World accompanied more seductive ones. When early English promoters portrayed North America as a rich and fertile landscape, they grossly and perhaps knowingly exaggerated. Most were describing a land they never had seen, of course. Wary investors and state officials had to be convinced to take the plunge into a risky overseas venture. But most important, it was a place into which they could export their own marginalized people.

Can we handle the truth? In the early days of settlement, in the profit-driven minds of well-connected men in charge of a few prominent joint-stock companies, America was conceived of in paradoxical terms: at once a land of fertility and possibility and a place of outstanding wastes, "ranke" and weedy backwaters, dank and sorry swamps. Here was England's opportunity to thin out its prisons and siphon off thousands; here was an outlet for the unwanted, a way to remove vagrants and beggars, to be rid of London's eyesore population. Those sent on the hazardous voyage to America who survived presented a simple purpose for imperial profiteers: to serve English interests and perish in the process. In that sense, the "first comers," as they were known before the magical "Pilgrims" took hold, were something less than an inspired lot. Dozens who disembarked from the *Mayflower* succumbed that first year to starvation and disease linked to vitamin deficiency; scurvy rotted their gums, and they bled from different orifices. By the 1630s, New Englanders reinvented a hierarchical society of "stations," from ruling elite to household servants. In their number were plenty of poor boys, meant for exploitation. Some were religious, but they were in the minority among the waves of migrants that followed Winthrop's *Arbella*. The elites owned Indian and African slaves, but the population they most exploited were

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their child laborers. Even the church reflected class relations: designated seating affirmed class station.¹⁴

Virginia was even less a place of hope. Here were England's rowdy and undisciplined, men willing to gamble their lives away but not ready to work for a living. England perceived them as "manure" for a marginal land. All that these idle men understood was a cruel discipline when it was imposed upon them in the manner of the mercenary John Smith, and the last thing they wanted was to work to improve the land. All that would keep the fledgling colony alive was a military-style labor camp meant to protect England's interests in the country's ongoing competition with the equally designing Spanish, French, and Dutch governments. That a small fraction of colonists survived the first twenty years of settlement came as no surprise back home—nor did London's elite much care. The investment was not in people, whose already unrefined habits declined over time, whose rudeness magnified in relation to their brutal encounters with Indians. The colonists were meant to find gold, and to line the pockets of the investor class back in England. The people sent to accomplish this task were by definition expendable.¹⁵

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Most settlers in the seventeenth century did not envision their forced exile as the start of a "Citty upon a Hill." They did not express undying confidence in Penn's "Holy Experiment." Dreamers dreamt, but few settlers came to America to fulfill any divine plan. During the 1600s, far from being ranked as valued British subjects, the great majority of early

colonists were classified as surplus population and expendable "rubbish," a rude rather than robust population. The English subscribed to the idea that the poor dregs would be weeded out of English society in four ways. Either nature would reduce the burden of the poor through food shortages, starvation, and disease, or, drawn into crime, they might end up on the gallows. Finally, some would be impressed by force or lured by bounties to fight and die in foreign wars, or else be shipped off to the colonies. Such worthless drones as these could be removed to colonial outposts that were in short supply of able-bodied laborers and, lest we forget, young "fruitful" females. Once there, it was hoped, the drones would be energized as worker bees. The bee was the favorite insect of the English, a creature seen as chaste but, more important, highly productive.¹⁸

The colonists were a mixed lot. On the bottom of the heap were men and women of the poor and criminal classes. Among these unheroic transplants were roguish highwaymen, mean vagrants, Irish rebels, known whores, and an assortment of convicts shipped to the colonies for grand larceny or other property crimes, as a reprieve of sorts, to escape the gallows. Not much better were those who filled the ranks of indentured servants, who ranged in class position from lowly street urchins to former artisans burdened with overwhelming debts. They had taken a chance in the colonies, having been impressed into service and then choosing exile over possible incarceration within the walls of an overcrowded, disease-ridden English prison. Labor shortages led some ship captains and agents to round up children from the streets of London and other towns to sell to planters across the ocean—this was known as "spiriting." Young children were shipped off for petty crimes. One such case is that of Elizabeth "Little Bess" Armstrong, sent to Virginia for stealing two spoons. Large numbers of poor adults and fatherless boys gave up their freedom, selling themselves into indentured servitude, whereby their passage was paid in return for contracting to anywhere from four to nine years of labor. Their contracts might be sold, and often were, upon their arrival. Unable to marry or choose another master, they could be punished or whipped at will. Owing to the harsh working conditions they had to endure, one critic compared their lot to "Egyptian bondage."¹⁹

Discharged soldiers, also of the lower classes, were shipped off to the colonies. For a variety of reasons, single men and women, and families of the lower gentry, and those of artisan or yeoman classes joined the mass

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migratory swarm. Some left their homes to evade debts that might well have landed them in prison; others (a fair number coming from Germany and France) viewed the colonies as an asylum from persecution for their religious faith; just as often, resettlement was their escape from economic restrictions imposed upon their trades. Still others ventured to America to leave tarnished reputations and economic failures behind. As all students of history know, slaves eventually became one of the largest groups of unfree laborers, transported from Africa and the Caribbean, and from there to the mainland British American colonies. Their numbers grew to over six hundred thousand by the end of the eighteenth century. Africans were found in every colony, especially after the British government gave full encouragement to the slave trade when it granted an African monopoly to the Company of Royal Adventurers in 1663. The slave trade grew even faster after the monopoly ended, as the American colonists bargained for lower prices and purchased slaves directly from foreign vendors.²⁰

To put class back into the story where it belongs, we have to imagine a very different kind of landscape. Not a land of equal opportunity, but a much less appealing terrain where death and harsh labor conditions awaited most migrants. A firmly entrenched British ideology justified rigid class stations with no promise of social mobility. Certainly, Puritan religious faith did not displace class hierarchy either; the early generations of New Englanders did nothing to diminish, let alone condemn, the routine reliance on servants or slaves. Land was the principal source of wealth, and those without any had little chance to escape servitude. It was the stigma of landlessness that would leave its mark on white trash from this day forward.

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Richard Hakluyt the younger was an Oxford fellow and clergyman who devoted his life to compiling the travel narratives of explorers. In 1589, he published his most ambitious work, *Principall Navigations*, an exhaustive catalogue of all the accounts he could track down of English travelers to the East, the North, and of course America. In the age of Shakespeare, everyone who was anyone read Hakluyt. The unstoppable John Smith quoted liberally from his writings, proving himself more than a brute soldier of fortune.³

This powerful conception of land use would play a key role in future categorizations of race and class on the experimental continent. Before they even established new and busy societies, colonizers denoted some people as entrepreneurial stewards of the exploitable land; they declared others (the vast majority) as mere occupiers, a people with no measurable investment in productivity or in commerce.

Whether barren or empty, uncultivated or rank, the land acquired a quintessentially English meaning. The English were obsessed with waste, which was why America was first and foremost a “wasteland” in their eyes. Wasteland meant undeveloped land, land that was outside the circulation of commercial exchange and apart from the understood rules of agricultural production. To lie in waste, in biblical language, meant to exist desolate and unattended; in agrarian terms, it was to be left fallow and unimproved.

Wasteland was idle land. Arable tracts of desirable property could only be associated with furrowed fields, rows of crops and fruit trees, golden waves of grain, and pasture for cattle and sheep. John Smith embraced the same ideological premise with a precise (if crude) allusion: the Englishman’s right to the land was ensured by his commitment to carpeting the soil with manure. An English elixir of animal waste would magically transform the Virginia wilderness, making untilled wasteland into valuable English territory. Waste was there to be treated, and then exploited. Waste was wealth as yet unrealized.⁸

In his “Discourse of Western Planting,” Hakluyt confidently described the entire continent as that “waste firm of America.” Not terra firma, but *waste firm*. He saw natural resources as raw materials that could be converted into valuable commodities. Like other Englishmen of his day, he equated wastelands with commons, forests, and fens—those lands that sixteenth-century agrarian improvers eyed for prospective profits. Wasteland served the interest of private owners in the commercial marketplace, when the commons was enclosed and sheep and cattle grazed

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there; forests could be cut down for timber and cleared for settlements; fens or marshes could be drained and reconstituted as rich, arable farmland.⁹

It was not just land that could be waste. People could be waste too. And this brings us to our most important point of embarkation: Hakluyt's America required what he classified as "waste people," the corps of laborers needed to cut down the trees, beat the hemp (for making rope), gather honey, salt and dry fish, dress raw animal hides, dig the earth for minerals, raise olives and silk, and sort and pack bird feathers.¹⁰

He pictured paupers, vagabonds, convicts, debtors, and lusty young men without employment doing all such work. The "fry [young children] of wandering beggars that grow up idly and hurtfully and burdensome to the Realm, might be unladen and better bred up." Merchants would be sent to trade with the Indians, selling trinkets, venting cloth goods, and gathering more information about the interior of the continent. Artisans were needed: millwrights to process the timber; carpenters, brick makers, and plasterers to build the settlement; cooks, launderers, bakers, tailors, and cobblers to service the infant colony.¹¹

Where would these workers come from? The artisans, he felt, could be spared without weakening the English economy. But the bulk of the labor force was to come from the swelling numbers of poor and homeless. They were, in Hakluyt's disturbing allusion, "ready to eat up one another," already cannibalizing the British economy. Idle and unused, they were waiting to be transplanted to the American land to be better (albeit no more humanely) put to use.¹²

This view of poverty was widely shared. One persistent project, first promoted in 1580 but never realized, involved raising a fleet of hundred-ton fishing vessels comprising ten thousand men, half of whom were to be impoverished vagrants. The galley labor scheme was designed to beat the famously industrious Dutch at the fishing trade.¹³ Leading mathematician and geographer John Dee was another who imagined a maritime solution to poverty. In 1577, as the British navy expanded, he proposed converting the poor into sailors. Others wished for the indigent to be swept from the streets, one way or another, whether gathered up as forced laborers building highways and fortifications or herded into prisons and workhouses. London's Bridewell Prison was chartered in 1553, the first institution of its kind to propose reformation of vagrants. By the

1570s, more houses of corrections had opened their doors. Their founders offered to train the children of the poor to be "brought up in labor and work," so they would not follow in the footsteps of their parents and become "idle rogues."¹⁴

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Seeing the indigent as wastrels, as the dregs of society, was certainly nothing new. The English had waged a war against the poor, especially vagrants and vagabonds, for generations. A series of laws in the fourteenth century led to a concerted campaign to root out this wretched "mother of all vice." By the sixteenth century, harsh laws and punishments were fixed in place. Public stocks were built in towns for runaway servants, along with whipping posts and cages variously placed around

London. Hot branding irons and ear boring identified this underclass and set them apart as a criminal contingent. An act of 1547 allowed for vagrants to be branded with a V on their breasts and enslaved. While this unusual piece of legislation appears never to have been put into practice, it was nonetheless a natural outgrowth of the widespread vilification of the poor.¹⁷

By 1584, when Hakluyt drafted his "Discourse of Western Planting," the poor were routinely being condemned as "thriftless" and "idle," a diseased and dangerously mobile, unattached people, everywhere running "to and fro over all the realm." Compared to swarms of insects, labeled as an "over-flowing multitude," they were imagined in language as an effluvial current, polluting and taxing England's economic health.¹⁸

Slums enveloped London. As one observer remarked in 1608, the heavy concentrations of poor created a subterranean colony of dirty and disfigured "monsters" living in "caves." They were accused of breeding rapidly and infecting the city with a "plague" of poverty, thus figuratively designating unemployment a contagious disease. Distant American colonies were presented as a cure. The poor could be purged. In 1622, the famous poet and clergyman John Donne wrote of Virginia in this fashion, describing the new colony as the nation's spleen and liver, draining the "ill humours of the body . . . to breed good blood." Others used less delicate imagery. American colonies were "emunctories," excreting human waste from the body politic. The elder Richard Hakluyt unabashedly called the transportable poor the "offals of our people."¹⁹

The poor were human waste. Refuse. The sturdy poor, those without physical injuries, elicited outrage over their idleness. But how could vagabonds, who on average migrated some twenty to eighty miles in a month, be called idle? William Harrison, in his popular *Description of England* (1577), offered an explanation. Idleness was wasted energy. The vagabonds' constant movement led nowhere. In moving around, they failed (like the Indians) to put down healthy roots and join the settled labor force of servants, tenants, and artisans. Harrison thought of idleness in the same way we might today refer to the idling motor of a car: the motor runs in place; the idle poor were trapped in economic stasis. Waste people, like wastelands, were stagnant; their energy produced nothing of value; they were like festering weeds ruining an idle garden.²⁰

Wasteland, then, was an eyesore, or what the English called a "sinke

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hole." Waste people were analogized to weeds or sickly cattle grazing on a dunghill. But unlike the docile herd, which were carefully bred and contained in fenced enclosures, the poor could become disruptive and disorderly; they occasionally rioted. The cream of society could not be shielded from the public nuisance of the poor, in that they seemed omnipresent at funerals, church services, on highways and byways, in ale-houses, and they loitered around Parliament—even at the king's court. James I was so annoyed with vagrant boys milling around his palace at Newmarket that he wrote the London-based Virginia Company in 1619 asking for its help in removing the offensive population from his sight by shipping them overseas.²¹

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The governor and members of his governing council pleaded with the

Virginia Company to send over more indentured servants and laborers, who, like slaves, were sold to the highest bidder. Indentured servants were hoarded, overworked, and their terms unfairly extended. Land was distributed unequally too, which increased the class divide. Those who settled before 1616, who had paid their own passage, were given one hundred acres; after that date, new arrivals who paid their own way received only fifty acres. More important, from 1618, those who brought over an indentured servant received an additional fifty acres. The head-right system, as it was known, allotted land by counting heads. More bodies in a planter's stable meant more land. Significantly, if a servant died on the voyage over, the owner of the indenture still secured all of his promised acreage. It paid to import laborers, dead or alive.³²

Contracts of indenture were longer than servant contracts in England—four to nine years versus one to two years. According to a 1662 Virginia law, children remained servants until the age of twenty-four. Indentures were unlike wage contracts: servants were classified as chattels, as movable goods and property. Contracts could be sold, and servants were bound to move where and when their masters moved. Like furniture or livestock, they could be transferred to one's heirs.³³

The leading planters in Jamestown had no illusion that they were creating a classless society. From 1618 to 1623, a good many orphans from London were shipped to Virginia—most indentured servants who followed in their train were adolescent boys. As a small privileged group of planters acquired land, laborers, and wealth, those outside the inner circle were hard-pressed to escape their lower status. Those who did become poor tenants found that little had changed in their condition; they were often forced to do the same work they had done as servants. A sizable number did not survive their years of service. Or as John Smith lamented in his 1624 *Generall Historie of Virginia* . . . , "This dear bought Land with so much bloud and cost, hath onely made some few rich, and all the rest losers."³⁴

Among the more insidious practices in the colony, wives and children were held accountable for their husband's or father's indentured period of labor. After the Natives attacked in 1622, a colonist named Jane Dickenson was held by them in captivity for ten months. When she returned to Jamestown, she was told that she owed 150 pounds of tobacco to her husband's former master. Unable to pay, she would be forced to work off

her dead husband's unmet obligations. She appealed to the governor, writing that her treatment was identical to the "slavery" she experienced among the "cruel savages." Had English civilization been sacrificed in this colonial wasteland? That was Dickenson's unspoken message. Nor was her treatment unusual. John Smith acknowledged in his *Generall Historie* that "fatherless children" were left "in little better condition than slaves, for if their Parents die in debt, their children are made bondmen till the debt be discharged."³⁵

The leaders of Jamestown had borrowed directly from the Roman model of slavery: abandoned children and debtors were made slaves. When indentured adults sold their anticipated labor in return for passage to America, they instantly became debtors, which made their orphaned children a collateral asset. It was a world not unlike the one Shakespeare depicted in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock demanded his pound of flesh. Virginia planters felt entitled to their flesh and blood in the forms of the innocent spouses and offspring of dead servants.³⁶

All that was required of the women was that they marry. Their prospective husbands were expected to buy them, that is, to defray the cost of passage and provisions. Each woman was valued at 150 pounds of tobacco, which was the same price exacted from Jane Dickenson when she eventually purchased her freedom. Not surprisingly, then, with their value calculated in tobacco, women in Virginia were treated as fertile

commodities. They came with testimonials to their moral character, impressing on "industrious Planters" that they were not being sold a bad bill of goods. One particular planter wrote that an earlier shipment of females was "corrupt," and he expected a new crop that was guaranteed healthy and favorably disposed for breeding. Accompanying the female cargo were some two hundred head of cattle, a reminder that the Virginia husbandman needed both species of breeding stock to recover his English roots.³⁷

At the heart of the Jamestown system was the indentured contract that made laborers disposable property. In so harsh an environment, survival was difficult, and the unappreciated waste people were literally worked to death. Young men and boys who came without families were the most vulnerable and most exploited of all. Unable to plant roots, many failed to produce heirs and secure the cherished English ideal of attachment to the land.

Class divisions were firmly entrenched. The ever-widening gap in land ownership elevated large planters into a small, privileged faction. At the same time, the labor system reduced servants to debt slaves, and, living so far from home, they had little recourse to demand better treatment. Isolation, then, increased the potential for abuse. The only liberty for colonial servants came with their feet—by running away. Jamestown's founders reproduced no English villages. Instead, they fashioned a ruthless class order.

Despite Jamestown's intractable problems, a group of English investors and religious separatists secured a patent from the Virginia Company and set their sights on land near the mouth of the Hudson River. Whether

by accident or, as some have speculated, by secret design, their first ship, the *Mayflower*, landed on Cape Cod, beyond the purview of the Virginia Company, in 1620. The small, struggling band lost half their number to starvation and disease during the first year. The wife of one of the leaders, William Bradford, mysteriously disappeared over the side of the *Mayflower*. It would be a full decade before the English settlers in Massachusetts made significant inroads in attracting new settlers to the region.³⁹

When the mass migration of 1630 did take place, it was the well-organized John Winthrop who led a fleet of eleven ships, loaded with seven hundred passengers and livestock, and bearing a clear objective to plant a permanent community. Far more intact families migrated to the colony than had to Virginia, and a core of the settlers were Puritans who did not need the threat of a death sentence to attend church services on the Sabbath—one of the many examples of heavy-handedness practiced in the early days of Jamestown.

Land ownership was New England's most tempting lure. During its first decade, the Bay Colony received some twenty-one thousand settlers, only about 40 percent of whom came from East Anglia and the coastal towns where a high percentage of Puritan converts lived. For every religious dissenter in the exodus of the 1630s, there was one commercially driven emigrant from London or other areas of England. The majority in these years came as extended families accompanied by their servants. And almost 60 percent of the arrivals were under the age of twenty-four—one-third of them unattached males.⁴⁰

In Puritan society, the title of "gentleman" usually applied to men with some aristocratic pedigree, though wealthy merchants who held prominent positions in the church could acquire the same designation. "Master" or "Mister" and "Mistress" were for educated professionals, clergymen, and their wives. "Goodman" attached to the honorable husbandman, who owned land but did not occupy a prominent position as magistrate or minister. New Englanders used these titles sparingly, but they were certainly conscious of them; the government they abided by, after all, imitated English county oligarchies in which the landed elite monopolized government offices.⁴³

The Puritan elite depended on a menial labor force. At the top of the pecking order were apprentices and hired servants. Lower down were those forced into servitude because of debt or after having committed a crime, as we have seen in Virginia. Case in point: in 1633, Winthrop presided over the trial of a man accused of robbery. Upon conviction, his estate was sold and used to repay his victims. He was then bound for three years of service, and his daughter, as added collateral, bound for fourteen. This was typical. The 1648 *Laws and Liberties* established two classes of an even lower order who could be divested of liberty: Indians captured in "just wars," and "strangers as willingly sell themselves, or are sold to us." The "strangers," in this case, were indentured servants from *outside* the colony as well as imported African slaves.⁴⁴

For servants, seventeenth-century New Englanders relied most heavily on exploitable youth, male and female, ages ten to twenty-one. By law, single men and women were required to reside with families and submit to family government. Children were routinely "put out" to labor in the homes of neighbors and relatives. The 1642 Massachusetts General

Court's order for the proper education of children treated apprentice, servant, and child as if all were interchangeable. Parents and masters alike assumed responsibility to "breed & bring up children & apprentices in some honest Lawfull calling." Family supervision policed those who might otherwise become "rude, stubborn & unruly."⁴⁵

While servants were expected to be submissive, few actually were. Numerous court cases show masters complaining of their servants' disobedience, accompanied by charges of idleness, theft, rudeness, rebelliousness, pride, and a proclivity for running away. In 1696, the powerful minister Cotton Mather published *A Good Master Well Served*, which was an unambiguous attempt to regulate the Bay Colony's disorderly servant population. Directing his words toward those who served, he insisted, "You are the *Animate, Separate, Active Instruments* of other men." In language that is impossible to misunderstand, he reaffirmed, "*Servants, your Tongues, your Hands, your Feet, are your Masters, and they should move according to the Will of your Masters.*" Those of mean descent would learn from a sharp tongue or a ready whip that submission was expected of them.⁴⁶

D

Puritan wariness did not end there. Among servants, and those of "meane condition" above them, were men and women of enlarged ambition who were deemed undeserving. At least according to anxious oligarchs. Puritans never opposed commerce or the acquisition of wealth, but they were clearly conflicted when it came to social mobility. The government enacted sumptuary laws, penalizing those who wore rich silks or gold buttons in an attempt to rise above their class station. Overly prosperous people aroused envy, and Puritan orthodoxy dictated against such exhibition of arrogance, pride, and insolence. In the 1592 tract *On the Right, Lawful, and Holy Use of Apparel*, the English Puritan clergyman William Perkins had shown how appearance demarcated one's standing in the Great Chain of Being, God's class hierarchy. Unsancionned displays of finery were disruptive, an infraction on the same order as masters who treated servants too leniently. Both were perceived as early indicators of a society falling from grace.⁴⁹

One had to know his or her place in Puritan Massachusetts. Church membership added a layer of privilege before the courts and elsewhere to an already hierarchical regime. Expulsion from the church carried a powerful stigma. Heretics such as Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer were physically banished, cut off and ostracized. Only those who begged forgiveness and humbled themselves before the dual authority of court and church returned to the community. Dyer returned unrepentant, determined to challenge the ruling order. Between 1659 and 1661, she and three other Quakers were charged with "presumptuous & incorrigible contempt" of civil authority. After trial, they were summarily hanged.⁵⁰

Anne Hutchinson was excommunicated from the Boston congregation and expelled from the Bay Colony in 1638 for refusing to bend to the authority of the town fathers. She was sternly advised: "You have rather been a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer, and a Magistrate than a Subject." Hutchinson had held religious classes in her home, and had acquired a large following. Turning the social order upside down, she had undermined the carefully orchestrated moral geography of the Puritan meetinghouse. Male dominance was unquestioned, and ranks so clearly spelled out, that no one could miss the power outlined in something so simple as a seating chart. Members and nonmembers sat apart; husbands and wives were divided; men sat on one side of the room, women on the other. Prominent men occupied the first two rows

of benches: the first was reserved exclusively for magistrates, the second for the families of the minister and governor, as well as wealthy merchants. The more sons a man had, the better his pew. Age, reputation, marriage, and estate were all properly calculated before a church seat was assigned.⁵¹

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The Puritans used family authority, reinforced by the law, to regulate their servant population. Distrustful of strangers and religious outsiders, they also granted privileges to the religious "Elect," or those who

comprised the core constituency of the church laity. Children of the Elect gained the inherited religious privilege of an easier path to church membership. Indeed, the "halfway covenant" of 1662 established a system of religious pedigree. As Cotton Mather's long-lived father, Reverend Increase Mather, put it: God "cast the line of Election" so that it passed "through the loins of godly Parents." Excommunication alone ended this privilege, saving the flock from a corrupt lineage. Minister Thomas Shepard agreed, projecting that a child of the Elect would be pruned, nurtured, and watered, so as to grow in grace. By this method, religious station reinforced class station. And by celebrating lineage, the visible saints became a recognizable breed.⁵⁴

Colonizing schemes all drew on the language of breeding. Fertility had to be monitored, literally and figuratively, under the watchful supervision of household and town fathers. This was the case in disciplining unruly children, corralling servants, and dispensing religious membership privileges to the next generation (i.e., the offspring of the godly). Good breeding practices tamed otherwise unmanageable waste, whether it was wasteland or waste people; breeding sustained the pastoral tradition already associated with the Elizabethan age, which found its best literary expression in testaments to rustic beauty and cosmic harmony.

What separated rich from poor was that the landless had nothing to pass on. They had no heirs. This was particularly true in Jamestown, where the orphans of dead servants were sold off like the possessions of a foreclosed estate. As "beggarly spawn," the poor were detached from the land. Only proper stewards of the fertile ground deserved rights.

For all their talk of loving the land, Virginians were less skilled in the art of husbandry than their English counterparts. Few ploughs were used in seventeenth-century Virginia. The simple hoe was the principal tool in the raising of tobacco, an implement that demanded considerable human labor. The majority of those who landed on American shores did not live long enough to own land, let alone to master it. Slavery was thus a logical

outgrowth of the colonial class system imagined by Hakluyt. It emerged from three interrelated phenomena: harsh labor conditions, the treatment of indentures as commodities, and, most of all, the deliberate choice to breed children so that they should become an exploitable pool of workers.

Waste men and waste women (and especially waste children, the adolescent boys who comprised a majority of the indentured servants) were an expendable class of laborers who made colonization possible. The so-called wasteland of colonial America might have had the makings of a New Canaan. Instead, waste people wasted away, fertilizing the soil with their labor while finding it impossible to harvest any social mobility.