

LAND AND LABOR: THE VIRGINIA CONNECTIONS

The Virginia Company of London was organized in 1606 by investors who were hoping to make money by discovering precious metals, minerals, dyestuffs, medicines and perhaps by opening a northwest passage to the Pacific. Its members viewed the native population in Virginia as a primitive people who were in need of Christian teachings. Regarding the native populations, the aim of the London stockholders was "to cover their naked miserie, with civill use of foode, and cloathing, and to traine them by gentle meanes, to those manuell artes and skill, which they so much affect, and do admire to see in us."

Once Christianity was brought to the Indian population, the Virginia Company's shareholders believed that English settlers and the Indians could live in peace once their primitive natures were extinguished by a conversion to Christianity. With stockholders in London eagerly awaiting high returns on their investments, settlers on the ground in North America faced a different reality and developed a set of expectations that were unlike those of the Virginia Company members. "Most of the adventurers who ventured their capital lost it. Most of the settlers who ventured their lives lost them. And so did most of the Indians who came near them."

In 1622, after an Indian attack in the colony of Virginia, the Secretary of the Virginia Company suggested what might be done to solve the problem between the native population and the Virginia settlers:

Indians "now most justly be compelled to servitude and drudgery, and supply the roome of men that labour, whereby even the meanest of the Plantation may employ themselves more entirely in their Arts and Occupations, which are more generous whilst Savages performe their inferiour workes of digging in mynes and the like,..."

A force of African people had previously arrived in Virginia colony during the year 1619. Scholars today debate the status of the African arrivals. Most likely, some

African arrivals were held as slaves and others were indentured servants whose labor commitments ended after many years.

The African labor force would perform the hard work that had to be done to create a profitable settlement. Some members of the Native population would be added to the labor force or sold outside of the colony for a profit.

Questions:

From the reading, do you find any similarities between the treatment of African and Native American populations?

What role did economics (making money) play in how African and Native people were regarded?

Footnotes:

- [1] Morgan, Edmund S. American Slavery, American Freedom, The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia, (New York, 1975) pg 45
- [2] Ibid pg 98-99
- [3] Ibid, pg 48
- [4] Ibid pg 98-99