

Name: _____

Colonial Perspectives: Indentured Servants

In Virginia land owners became desperate for workers and wrote letters to England telling everyone that they had plenty of food and work. Between 1620 and 1624 over 80,000 people came from England to North America. People in Europe were desperate to get a ticket to America. It was very expensive to cross the ocean and not everyone who wanted to come to the colonies could pay for a ticket. Some agreed to be indentured servants. An indentured servant who agreed to come to the colonies and work for a period of time, anywhere from five to twelve years usually, in exchange for a ticket over to the Colonies. After their time of working they would then be free to leave.

Indentured servants were good for the land owner and the servant. Maryland and Virginia offered landowners more land to bring people over from England to work. The landowners would pay for the ticket over and get free land and then labor from the worker. The servant would have a place to live and food while he worked for his master. After he finished his time of work he would get "freedom dues". This was sometimes land, money, clothes, or food depending on what they had agreed on in the beginning. It seemed like a great deal for everyone.

However, this deal was really not that great for most servants. Over half of indentured servants never lived to the end of their contract to get their freedom. If a woman got pregnant the land owner would add more time to her contract to make up for it. Some servants were promised land after they finished their time and when they finished there was no land left. All the large land owners had taken all the land and they had to go out west to find good land. Being an indentured servant was not an easy task in Colonial America and they were often mistreated. However, after their years were finished they were in America and were free to make their own life.

Name: _____

Colonial Perspectives: Edward

I've worked for Mr. Ellerby for five years now. I've only got two more years until he's going to give me some land and let me go out on my own, I hope. He says that's what he plans to do but I've heard of other people like me who didn't get what they were promised. But this is hard work, he has to keep up his end of the deal, right? Mr. Ellerby seems like a good guy, he's pretty mean to the slaves but overall he's nice to me. Or at least he was.

My wife Anna agreed to come work for Mr. Ellerby too. She and I both agreed we would do seven years. But now, five years into our deal, Anna is going to have a baby. We should be really excited but Mr. Ellerby says that since Anna won't be able to work as hard when she's pregnant or after the baby comes that she has to stay another year. He told Anna that he might make me stay another year too because he will have to pay for the baby to eat while we live here. It just doesn't seem fair. By the time we get done working for him all the good land is going to be taken and then what are we going to do??? We don't know anyone here and without land we will never survive. I don't have a trade, I can't be a blacksmith, or a shoemaker, or a silversmith. All I know how to do is grow tobacco.

Anna and I talked about running away and breaking our contract and then we changed our mind after we saw a slave try it. Things seem hard for us but we have hope that one day it will all be over and we can live free here in America. Those slaves don't have any hope. Everyone in England is dreaming about coming here for money or land and all the slaves here are dreaming about leaving here and going anywhere they can be free. At least Anna and I know that one day we can raise our baby on our own farm, where we are free to work hard and make our own way.

