

Start/Home

Headright

Indenture

Results

Review

So What?

Tobacco & Labor Saves Virginia

As tobacco crops start to make Virginia a profitable place to live, there was a labor shortage. The crop was labor intensive; and many English men and women did not want to risk the travel over the Atlantic.

Sir Edwyn Sandys proposed a headrights system which your text describes—and is one of your assigned terms for reading. The system brought labor and families into the Chesapeake.



Tobacco quickly became the major export to England and the best bartering bargain in Virginia. Fines were paid in pounds of Tobacco; and engaged couples paid for the Church services with pounds of tobacco.

Start/Home

Headright

Indenture

Results

Review

So What?



Headright

Using land to attract settlers went like this:

- ...50 acres to each émigré
- ...50+50 for “man & wife”
- ...Heads were to clear and farm tobacco

The results of the program coupled with indentured servitude were significant:

- ...Population swelled
- ...Western areas cleared
- ...Family stability by 1670...

Tobacco required intensive care. Tiny seeds had to be cultivated inside during January and February. Seedbeds were prepared in March and seedlings transplanted. By May the seedlings could be transplanted to the fields. For almost two months each plant needed careful weekly raking or hoeing to deter insects and weeds. Tobacco roots are shallow and care had to be taken not to cut the roots in this phase. After two months the plants were trimmed at the top and bottoms (near the ground) in order to produce large leaves. This initial pruning only caused the plant to grow small shooters out from the pruning cuts—so they too had to be pruned. The plants were inspected daily for the so-called horn worm. The tobacco plants also turned ripe at different times, spreading harvest over several weeks. First the plant was cut just below the lowest leaves, and allowed to wilt which retained the moisture. Then leaves were cured by a drying process. The now tan colored leaves were ready to sweat in a barn. The last step before shipment was to twist the leaves into a rope, and wind the rope pieces into large balls.

National Park Service. “Tobacco: Colonial Cultivation Methods”. 1998. May 2010.

<<http://www.nps.gov/jame/historyculture/tobacco-colonial-cultivation-methods.htm>>.

Start/Home

Headright

Indenture

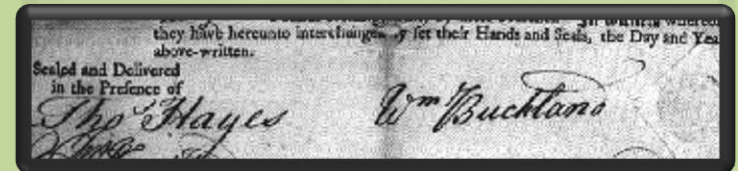
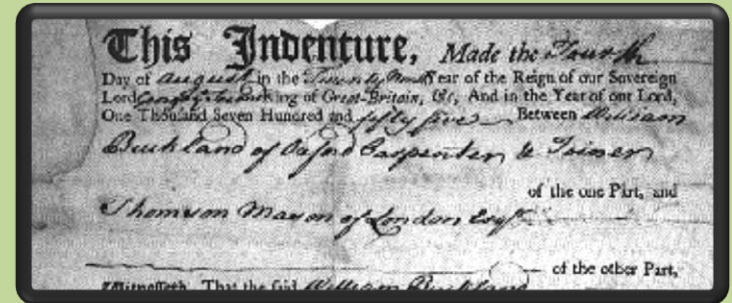
Results

Review

So What?

Failed Reform?

The headright system was part of the Virginia Company's plans to diversify the economy of Virginia. These reform efforts largely failed, as Tobacco converted Virginia into a "mono-crop" economy. Unfortunately, this new system had loopholes allowing the wealthy to pay for the passage of others—thus gathering large tracts of land, and the services of the people who came.



In this cut-a-way view of an indenture contract notice that the top includes some printing, followed by blanks where the name of the indentured person, and certain conditions were written in by hand. At the bottom, the person, William Buckland, signs on August 4, 1755. MLA citation for an online image of a primary document:

Teaching American History in Maryland. "Indentured Servants in Maryland". Online image. 4 August 1755. 1December 2009.
<<http://teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000183/html/t183.html>>.



Start/Home

Headright

Indenture

Results

Review

So What?

Immediate Results...

History is always a moving target, as soon as one “thing” happens, there is a “result” —or another thing happens based on the first. The Headright system and the larger rush for land and tobacco created new issues. Soon, Virginia was engulfed in an Indian war; Sandys was disgraced and the Virginia Company near bankruptcy; and the tobacco planters began the importation of slaves.



Start/Home

Headright

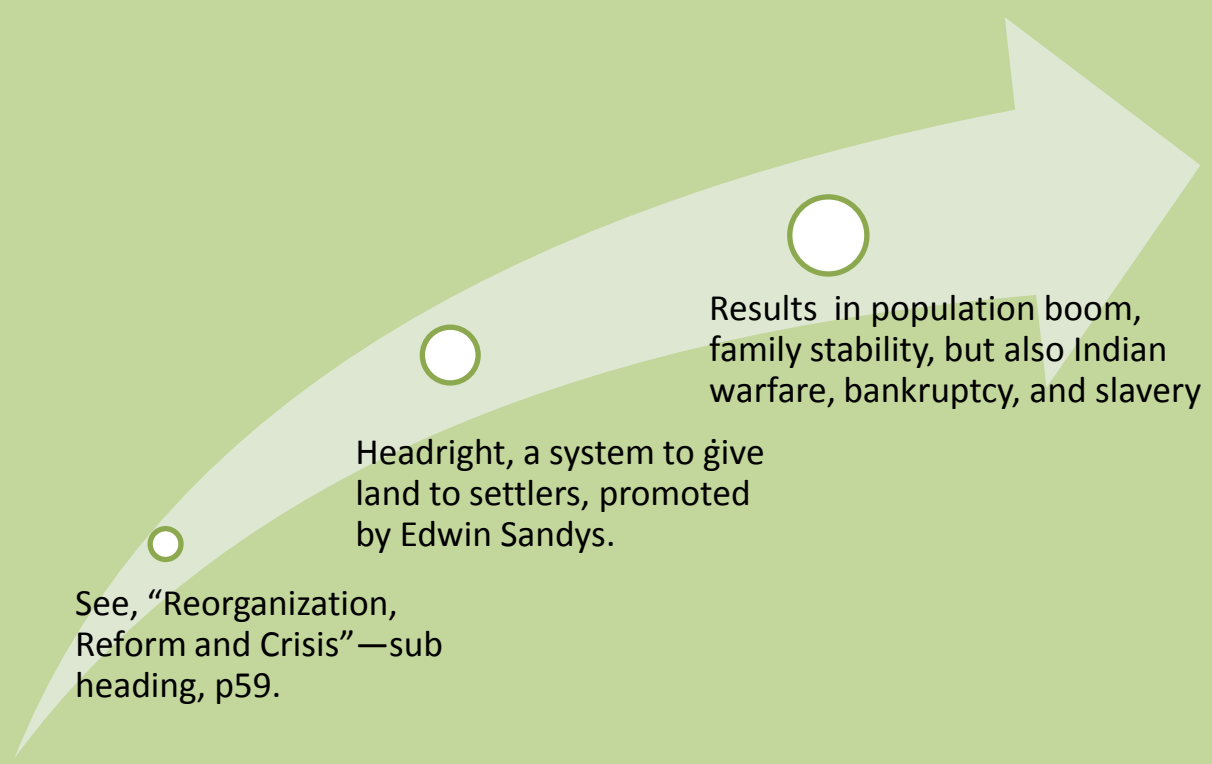
Indenture

Results

Review

So What?

Review



Start/Home

Headright

Indenture

Results

Review

So What?

What do we make of this?

By digging only a little deeper into one aspect of early colonial Virginia we learn a great deal.

We see the greed in both English investors and landowners. We see the birth of a landed class of wealthy individuals. We see growing dependency on African slavery. We see a population boom, followed by devastation and a ten year war. We can also see great courage—can you imagine getting in a leaky boat for weeks on end to arrive indentured to work for others for years? Much like government plans in our own contemporary eras, we can see that “reforms” meant to solve one issue, can often produce different or unexpected results.

As Virginia is taken over by Crown rule, the colony is given a local governing body for local affairs—The House of Burgesses. By 1640, Virginia is finally stable and so is Tobacco dependence, a landed aristocracy, and slavery.

Hint: Approach your field trips and all of your assigned terms with a desire to dig a little; and your grades will improve and you will actually learn something!

