THE EVOLUTION OF GENTILITY IN

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND AND COLONIAL VIRGINIA

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This study analyzes the impact of eighteenth-century commercialization on the evolution of the English and southern American landed classes with regard to three genteel leadership qualities--education, vocation, and personal characteristics. A simultaneous comparison provides a clearer view of how each adapted, or failed to adapt, to the social and economic change of the period. The analysis demonstrates that the English gentry did not lose a class struggle with the commercial ranks as much as they were overwhelmed by economic changes they could not understand. The southern landed class established an economy based on production of cash crops and thus adapted better to a commercial economy. The work addresses the development of class-consciousness in England and the origins of Virginia's landed class.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study compares the impact of commercialism during the eighteenth century on the English gentry and the landed class of Colonial Virginia in order to better understand how the economic environment shaped gentility in both societies. Specifically, I analyze how both forms of gentility reacted to the growth of an economy centered on business and profit by examining three specific genteel qualities within each society: education, vocation, and personal characteristics. In both regions these qualities often served as determinants of political and social leadership, which in turn directly influenced how each society reacted to the development of a its respective commercial economy. Through such a comparison two points become clear. First, the landed class of the American South adapted much better to the rise of a commercial economy than did the English gentry primarily because their environment forced them to change their way of thinking. Secondly, the genesis of the gentry's social, economic, and political downfall is not found in their struggle with a cohesive and aggressive commercial class but rather in the overwhelming fundamental changes posed by the growth of a commercial economy in the eighteenth century, which then produced a nineteenth-century commercial class that naturally assumed power within the new economic system. How the gentility of both England and colonial Virginia adapted to the rise of the developing commercial economy in the eighteenth century dictated in what form each survived into the nineteenth century,

and how successful each would be at interacting with the post-eighteenth century development of economically defined social classes.

The changes within the gentry both in England and in the American South during the eighteenth century is a well documented subject, yet few studies have explicitly compared the English gentleman with his Colonial Virginian counterpart. The importance of such a comparison lies in the ability to put into perspective the social changes that were occurring in each society. The gentry of England in some cases literally gave birth to the Virginia planter class, and where direct links through ancestry are absent, English ideas and concepts regarding social ranks and class-consciousness certainly influenced the societal development in the American South. Yet if studied as separate subjects one must take a specific quality at a given time and compare it only to the past and present of the society under review. By examining these two societies side-by-side, one has the ability to compare two simultaneous snapshots of similar yet different societies. What is revealed is that the two shared a close relationship with regard to beliefs in a genteel education, the proper vocation, and required personal characteristics, but the environment in which each society lived shaped the practices of these beliefs and, in time, the two societies diverged in their concepts of social orders and the expected traits of their respective gentry. My primary focus is the eighteenth century, but it will be necessary to go back as far as the sixteenth century to provide a perspective of where gentility stood in 1700, and look forward as far as the mid nineteenth century to show how the development of gentility during the eighteenth century affected the concept of a gentleman after 1800. I will principally deal with men within genteel society, not because

women are insignificant to the topic--on the contrary, the changing role of women was a major factor in the development of social class structure--but rather because men occupied central leadership roles with regard to education, vocation, and socially proper conduct. Attempts to define the qualities of the English gentry and to classify societal orders date to well before the eighteenth century. A small book in 1555 entitled The Institucion of a Gentleman set fairly specific social and occupational parameters for the gentry.[1] In 1688 Gregory King attempted to draw class distinctions by identifying thirty-one groups of men ranging from Temporal lords to vagrants. King identified some 15,000 families led by men with the title "gentlemen." By 1803, Patrick Colquhoun had expanded King's list to over forty-five categories, including 20,000 families of gentlemen.[2] Daniel Defoe categorized his early seventeenth-century society into seven layers from "the great" to "the miserable," while the author of The Cheats of London Exposed (1770) suggested four social rankings beginning with "The Nobs" at the top and followed by "the Citizens" and "The Mechanics," and finally "The Refuse."[3]

The wrestling among pre-twentieth century scholars regarding the proper segregation of their rapidly changing society produced a new way to label socioeconomic

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[1] Thomas Marte, The Institucion of a Gentleman (London: 1555; reprint, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., 1974). Marte's book laid out chapters on the honorable occupations a gentleman may have, such as "Howe Gentlemen May Profit in Bearing Offices in a Commune Wealth" and the recreation a Gentleman may pursue in a chapter entitled "What pastimes Gentlemen Ought to Use, Howe, and What games are to be Used."

[2] Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords (Oxford: Oxford University Press paperback, 1997), 19, 21. Gregory King's dissection of social ranks was based on income, and included detailed breakdowns on aristocratic men (Baronets, Bishops, Knights, etc.), men of trade (merchants by sea, merchants by land) and various occupations such as lawyers, artisans, military officers and freeholders, as well as the lower classes of farmers, miners and labouring people and outservants.

[3] David Cannadine, The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 29.

groups in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Instead of societal orders and ranks based on a person's family, land holdings, or leisured lifestyle, people began to refer to "classes" of people based on common economic characteristics, particularly their income. Aristocrats, peers, country gentry, wealthy urban professionals, industrialists, and successful merchants, once placed in separate small categories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, became members of the generic "upper class" or "ruling class" by the nineteenth century. Similar class groupings appeared for the middling sort (small farmers and modest businessmen) and the poorer orders of society (mostly manual laborers), resulting in a new way of viewing and discussing society. This new "language of class" developed, according to Asa Briggs, around the emerging commercial society of the late eighteenth century. A major catalyst of the changing economic environment and thus the emerging language of class was the development of the steam engine. English society prior to the introduction of industrial technology depended upon the bonds of deference and paternalism (the idea that one accorded proper respect to their social superiors and, in turn, the ruling class would look after the best interests of society as a whole) to be the mortar that connected the hierarchy of social orders. The growth of industry and an economy centered on commerce instead of landed wealth produced a new bond, a "cash nexus" in Briggs' words, between social orders. This new bond based on trade existed in its most prevalent form in urban areas. "Class," stated Briggs, "allowed for a sharper and more generalized picture of society." In other words, while ranks and orders existed alongside classes in the eighteenth century, the idea that people existed within economic classes took root and overcame the concept of ranks with the growth of

industrialism and commerce. The term class was first applied to designate the expanding

commercial men in society in the late eighteenth century as middle class and , in the early

nineteenth-century, the term working class came to mean those who manually labored.

Together these two groups also formed the productive or industrious class. The wealthy

leisured sort, comprised primarily of the aristocracy and gentry, was first referred to as the

"higher classes" by Edmund Burke in 1791, and was later labeled the non-productive

class by nineteenth-century reformist writers such as Robert Owen and Patrick

Colquhoun. These distinctions within the developing language of class formed the

framework for future debates about social structure from the seventeenth to the nineteenth

centuries.[4]

Briggs' essay highlights one of the most pressing problems in any study of the

development of social classes, that being the connection of class to Marxist doctrines.

Twentieth-century society readily accepts the three-tiered structure of social classes

(upper, middle, and lower classes) with little question, although rarely is any thought

given to any real monetary delineation between the three classes other than the obvious

polarity between an hourly wage earner and a high salaried professional. These modern

concepts are part of a philosophy of class that developed as a result of the nineteenth-

century ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who cast social change as a by-product

of class struggle between the workers and the commercial class (who were part of the

ruling class that they emulated). "The history of all hitherto existing society," began Marx

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[4] Asa Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England," Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1960), 43-73. See also G. D. H. Cole, Studies in Class Structure (1955), 28-30.

and Engels in their Manifesto of the Communist Party, "is the history of class struggles."[5] The two authors did not seem to care that they layered a nineteenth-century concept across thousands of years of history. How could history encompass a concept that heretofore had been unknown? The Roman slave, the feudal serf, or the Renaissance artisan most likely did not think of themselves as belonging to a "class"; thus how could history be summarized in terms of class struggles? The result of Marx and Engels' work was an approach to social history that tied class to a mode of production--the workers were the proletariat, the businessmen the bourgeoisie, and those with ties to nobility were naturally the upper class. This same Marxist formula is evident in modern definitions of class; the lower class is equated with the workers, the middle class is cast as management, and the wealthy owners of land, businesses, or simply the idle rich form the upper class.

Historians have, in the latter half of the twentieth century, sought to re-define class from the rigid form that Marx and Engels presented into a more fluid study of social groupings based not just on production but on other factors such as shared experiences, common interests, and similar backgrounds. David Cannadine (discussed below) best summarized this approach in his appeal to stop exploring class as a means to describe historical events and instead study history in order to clarify the development of class.[6] Some historians continue to cast history in the more rigid parameters of the Marxist approach, while others offer new ways to study class, particularly as it pertains to English society during the eighteenth century.

[5] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, introduction by A. J. P. Taylor (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Paperback Classics, 1986), 79.
[6] Cannadine, The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain, 15.

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  The Marxist perspective essentially divides society into two groups: the politically

and economically powerful aristocracy and landed gentry, and the great mass of those

with little to no political power and limited economic power (the middle class

"bourgeoisie" and the working class "proletariat") who became locked in an ongoing

struggle for societal supremacy. The bourgeoisie and working class, according to the

Marxist approach, used the weapons of class solidarity and emerging capitalism to

triumph over the old ruling order. A leading proponent of this approach, Harold Perkin,

offered three ideals of the eighteenth-century English gentleman: the aristocratic ideal

(the peerage and landed gentry), the entrepreneurial ideal (the commercial middle-class),

and the working class ideal (the bulk of lower society), each with its own competing

moral concepts. Perkin's theory stated that the commercial gentleman fought what Perkin

called "the battle for the heart" and became the "ascendant class" by imposing its

morality upon society at large. Perkin concluded that the entrepreneurial ideal prevailed

after the middle ranks of businessmen and industrialists gained class-consciousness in the

nineteenth century and then openly opposed the gentry's leadership.[7]

  E. P. Thompson agreed that social upheaval was brought on by class struggle, but

he altered the Marxist idea that the bourgeoisie were the agents of social change, arguing

instead that class conflict truly emerged with the rise of a working-class mentality in the

eighteenth century that challenged the combined upper and middle-class power structure

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[7] Harold Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880 (London: Routledge, 1969; reprint, paperback 1996), 273-79.

in the nineteenth century. Thompson's The Making of the Working Class (1963) focused

on the period from 1780 to 1832, when he stated that "most English working class people

came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and

employers." Thompson believed that class could not be viewed as a thing but instead as a

relationship, a growing organism that does not "lie as a patient in the Adjustor's table" to

be analytically probed by the historian.[8]

J. C. D. Clark presented a separate conservative revisionist philosophy on social

classes that focused on the belief that the eighteenth-century was significant not because

it was "a seedbed for the nineteenth" as the Marxist doctrine suggests but because it was

itself a pivotal period in the development of class.[9] Clark attacked the notion that

capitalism, spurred on by "a fictitious entity named the Industrial Revolution," brought

down the landed class. Clark suggested that the commercial middle class attained their

own power by associating with the upper ranks during the eighteenth century, which

forced the lower classes to form a separate class identity that challenged the ruling order

in the nineteenth century.[10] While both Clark and Thompson argued that the Marxist

concept of class struggle between the powerful bourgeoisie and the working class was

flawed, one should not confuse their differing approaches to the problem--Thompson

stayed within the Marxist guidelines of class struggle, while Clark's conservative

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[8] E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworh, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963; reprint, 1972), 9-15.
[9] J. C. D. Clark, English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; 1995), 3.
[10] Ibid., 1-7; 70-71.

approach stresses a willing alliance between the commercial and landed interests to retain power, which in turned forced the working class to seek strength through class solidarity.

David Cannadine believed that the Marxist approach to class was wholly contradictory to how class should be studied. Marx identified class-consciousness, or what Cannadine called class "for itself" (as opposed to the grouping of individuals into categories based on economic and social factors, or class "in itself") as a driving factor in the study of history. Instead of using class to explain history, Cannadine believed that history should be used to study and explain the formation of class-consciousness.[11] Essentially what Cannadine said is that groups of people with shared interests did not simply formulate a consciousness of their class and then seek to effect social and political change based on their newly found class-consciousness, but rather that people were naturally brought together based on common economic interests and shared circumstances, bonded for a common cause, and only then realized some form of class-consciousness. In other words, events were the catalyst for, not the result of, class-consciousness. Cannadine offered three models by which class could be historically viewed: the hierarchical model (a series of social orders flowing seamlessly from top to bottom), the triadic model (the traditional three layered society of upper, middle and lower classes) and the dichotomous model (the "us versus them" scenario which pitted two primary groups against one another). The hierarchical model seemed to be favored in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Cannadine stated, because most people viewed their society as a series of layers, resulting in the numerous social categories of King and

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[11] Cannadine, <u>Rise and Fall of Class</u>, 1-24.

Colquhoun. Those who saw themselves in the middle or commercial class (such as Defoe, who narrowed his seven-tiered structure to three social orders-- the labouring, middling, and landowning ranks) preferred the triadic model. Others both during the period (Jonas Hanway in 1772) and in modern times (E. P. Thompson in 1963, who opted for the ancient terms 'patrician' and 'plebeian' to split society) chose to use the dichotomous model to categorize eighteenth-century English society.[12] None of these models are better or worse than another, and all three could be used to properly define society during the eighteenth century. Cannadine's analysis is important in that it illustrates the elusive nature of the study of class, how two or three separate perspectives of the subject can all be equally relevant. Understanding the ambiguity inherent in the categorization of societies is a critical beginning to any study of social class.

The degree to which people moved between social classes is an integral part of the arguments surrounding all historical approaches to the study of class in the eighteenth-century. It has been, and continues to be, the general belief that some degree of social mobility occurred between the growing commercial class and the traditional ruling class who held offices and owned country estates. What is at question is the extent to which this mobility took place, in what form it occurred, the degree to which such social mobility was encouraged by the gentry or desired by the commercial class, and the overall impact of social mobility on society. The traditional argument, most often attributed to J. H. Hexter, states that the best of the commercial class desired to become landed gentry, and that the landed gentry accepted the wealthiest commercial men into their ranks, often

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[12] Ibid., 16-35.

through marriage, to solidify their position at the top of the social structure, which depleted the middle class of its leadership.[13] Penelope Corfield, in her essay "The Rivals," supported this theory by pointing out that the number of knights and baronets actually fell from 1,150 in 1700 to 859 in 1800, and thus the number of commercial men comprising the gentility (estimated at anywhere from 12,000 to 200,000) must have grown.[14] Linda Colley showed that one-third of landed families in the eighteenth century faded due to lack of heirs, forcing a co-option of new wealth from both the commercial class and the existing Welsh and Scottish gentry.[15]

Other historians, among them Perkin, T. S. Willan, K. G. Davies, and K. G. Lang, believed the wealthy industrialists and financiers did not move into the gentry as much as they created their own power structure apart from the gentry. Richard Grassby agreed, stating that the commercial class established its own economic and political power base because the sons of landed wealth could not compete with the business savvy of the mercantile-born sons in England's growing commercial economy. Grassby concluded that commercial wealth did not, however, radically alter social structures or institutions. Nicholas Rogers and Henry Horwitz each studied the origins of London businessmen and aldermen and found a large degree of intermarrying between the urban commercial class

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[13] J. H. Hexter, "The Myth of the Middle Class in Tudor England," Explorations in Entrepreneurial History 2 (1949-1950), 128-40. See also Henry Horwitz, "'The Mess of the Middle Class' Revisited; The Case of the 'Big Bourgeoisie' of Augustan London," Continuity and Change 2 (no. 2, 1987), 263. Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, An Open Elite? England 1540-1880 (Oxford: Oxford University Press abridged edition, 1986), 3-6.
[14] Penelope J. Corfield, "The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentlemen," Land and Society in Britain, 1700-1914, ed. by Negley Harte and Roland Quinault (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 19.
[15] Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 156-64.

and the landed gentry. While Rogers declared that the basic class affinities which existed between the gentry and the "big bourgeoisie" of London altered the urban landscape and created "permanent city dynasties," Horwitz believed the evidence showed only a trend (a dynasty, Horwitz says, requires more time). Nonetheless, both authors supported the idea that a new urban class had formed and it wielded a separate but equally strong version of social, economic, and political power.[16]

Other historians argued that social mobility either could not be accurately determined on a national basis or, if it did occur, it was very limited. In 1986 Keith Wrightson proposed that eighteenth-century English society had become too complex and ambiguous to be successfully contained within the confines of simple social categorizations, and instead should be viewed from a regional approach within a limited scope of time. Wrightson says that only through examining "clusters" of society can any real social labels be used effectively.[17] Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone presented the most prominent challenge to the idea of class mobility in their 1984 book An Open Elite that examined the ownership of country houses in counties outside of London from 1540 to 1880. The authors argued that their evidence showed only a small portion of the country homes surveyed were purchased by families of commercial or middle-class

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[16] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 431-34. Horwitz, "'The Mess of the Middle Class' Revisited," 263-69. Horwitz provides an excellent summary of the work of Willan, Davies, Lang, Grassby, and Rogers in the beginning of his essay. For more detail, see T. S. Willan, The Muscovy Merchants of 1555 (Manchester, 1953); K. G. Davies, "The Mess of the Middle Class," Past and Present 22 (1962), 77-83; R. Lang, "Social origins and Social Aspirations of Jacobean London Merchants," Economic History Review, 2nd Ser., 27 (1974), 28-47; Richard Grassby, "Social Mobility and Business Enterprise in Seventeenth-Century England," D. Pennington and K. Thomas, eds., Puritans and Revolutionaries (Oxford, 1978), 355-81; Nicholas Rogers, "Money, Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London," Social History 4, No. 3 (October, 1979), 437-54.

origins, and argued that widespread mobility did not occur and that the ruling gentry strictly policed class mobility. The Stones' 1984 work also claimed that the gentry willingly and actively recruited the cream of the upper commercial class by allowing certain commercial families to mentally assume a role among the gentry. "The fact remains," wrote the Stones, "that the great strength of the English landed elite was their success in psychologically co-opting those below them into the status hierarchy of gentility."[18]

The theory presented by the Stones relied on the belief that people in the middling ranks sought to achieve genteel status, if not through money and land, then by socially imitating the conduct and behavior of the gentry. This idea, known as emulation, also has its proponents and detractors. Adam Smith acknowledged that the "disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least neglect persons of poor and mean condition," was "the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments."[19] Jonas Hanway wrote in 1774 that "the most ignorant naturally look up for example: the common people will be what their superiors are."[20] Although Perkin, Horwitz, and Clark argued that the upper levels of the commercial class formed their own power structure, that does not mean they did not seek to copy the gentry. Perkin wrote, "clergymen, lawyers, physicians, bankers and overseas

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[17] Keith Wrightson, "The Social Order of Early Modern England: Three Approaches" in The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure, ed. Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith, and Keith Wrightson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), 156-77.
[18] Stone and Stone, An Open Elite? 293.
[19] Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie with W.B. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), 61.
[20] Clark, English Society, 104.

merchants . . . knew that the only worthwhile thing to be in the old society was a completely leisured--which in effect meant landed--gentleman."[21] Clark stated that the upper ranks dictated manners and morals, which was "an influence which operated via cultural emulation in situations in which no process of coercion from above was conceivable."[22] Corfield pointed to the rise in courtesy manuals as evidence that members of the middling ranks imitated the gentry's manners, making the concept of a gentleman "a matter not for law, but for social negotiation."[23]

Scholars do not universally accept the theory of emulation. K. G. Davies, in his review of Hexter's compilation of essays entitled Reappraisals in History (1961), did not directly refute the proposition that the middle class emulated the gentry, but he did argue that the commercial class of the eighteenth century grew richer and more powerful. "The aristocracy had not been displaced," wrote Davies, "but it had moved up and made room."[24] Rogers' theory of "class affinities" works on the premise that the two separate classes benefited each other (the commercial class encouraged economic growth, which helped the landed interests, while the landed interests worked with the commercial men in various ventures, both in trade and in land). In Rogers' model the commercial class augmented more than emulated the gentry on a regional basis, and the flight of the wealthy bourgeoisie was "both partial and protracted." Working together both the ruling class and the bourgeoisie became more wealthy and powerful.[25] Margaret Hunt most

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[21] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 55-56.
[22] Clark, English Society, 103-04.
[23] Corfield, "The Rivals," 10.
[24] Davies, "The Mess of the Middle Class," 81.
[25] Rogers, "Money, Land and Lineage," 452-53.

openly attacked the theory of emulation, using the statistics cited by Horwitz in support of the commercial class' close identity with the gentry. "Even [Horwitz] cannot show that any more than three-tenths of the eldest sons of the top tier of businessmen abandoned trade of the professions to become landed proprietors," wrote Hunt, whose work strongly supports the idea that the middle class created their own class structure around the ideas of hard work and modest desires that they felt were superior to the codes and morals of the idle gentry. The middle class understood, in Hunt's words, that "there was a distinct difference between knowledge that was likely to swell the coffers and appetites that were almost guaranteed to deplete them." [26]

The idea of emulation is closely associated with the debate over the Marxist structure of class in eighteenth-century England. Those scholars who believe that the middle class emulated and moved into the gentry (conservative anti-Marxists) use emulation to show that no middle-class social structure developed, and without a middle-class identity there could be no Marxist class struggle. Those historians who subscribe to the Marxist approach claim that the lack of emulation proves the formation of a middle-class structure and identity that solidified and won the class war in the nineteenth century. Most historians fall somewhere in between these two polarized positions, arguing that some emulation did exist, yet the rapid growth of the economy fostered a commercial class that eventually demanded more social and political power. It is hard to pinpoint the time and place that the gentry "fell" and the commercial class "rose," or the moment England's industrial growth suddenly became the "industrial revolution." This study does

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[26] Margaret Hunt, <u>The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780</u>

not purport to answer these broad questions, but the themes of class conflict, emulation, and mobility will continually be addressed in my comparison of the two social structures of England and Colonial Virginia and subsequent conclusions regarding the similarities in the beliefs of the gentry versus the divergent practice of the qualities of education, vocation, and personal characteristics.

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In eighteenth-century England the social rank of sons from ancient families who could claim noble birthright and landed wealth was beyond question, but the clarity of the line between the ranks of the gentry and the growing merchant and business citizenry, as discussed above, grew more cloudy as industrialization and urban growth changed society. The society of the American South also harbored a strong perception of the gentleman as a landed social superior. Communities revered the great planters and the plantations they owned, but questions about ancestry still blurred the line between the gentry planter and the industrious merchant in the American South. Many great planter families could only tenuously claim noble heritage in England.[27] The Lee family, for example, has long been considered one of the most noble of American families, yet recent research indicates that the parents of Richard Lee, who settled in Virginia in 1640, were both from families in the cloth trade, hardly a genteel ancestry.[28] In a society founded on

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[27] Thomas J. Wertenbaker, <u>Patricians and Plebeians in Virginia</u>, 3rd ed. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1959), 23. Wertenbaker claims only twenty-four men who came to Virginia between 1649 and 1670 who could truly claim noble heritage. This point has been argued by, among others, David Hackett Fischer in <u>Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) in his section on the Cavaliers of Virginia (207-419).

[28] Paul C. Nagel, <u>The Lees of Virginia: Seven Generations of an American Family</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 2-5. Quotes on 3 and 5.

the idea of boundless opportunities to create wealth and where land generated income more from agricultural products destined for trade than from tenant rents, the classification of "gentleman" became even more ambiguous than in England.

The picture that emerges of the two societies from this examination clearly reflects the presence of emulation and class mobility, but certainly no blanket statements covering entire socioeconomic groups can be made. It is only natural for some men and women to seek to better their economic *and* social positions, which constitutes emulation to some degree. And, while the move from the commercial ranks to the status of a landed gentleman presented overwhelming obstacles for almost who did emulate the gentry, it is clear from the findings both within this study and in the writings of most every historian of the problem that some social mobility took place in the eighteenth century, especially through the use of marriage. I believe that Wrightson probably came to the truest conclusion when he suggested that society in England by 1800 had simply grown too complex to approach as a whole and thus is more accurately studied in small regional groups.[29] The conclusions of the Stones, which focused on several counties outside of London, might not hold true in other regions of the country.[30] Yet this study does suggest that some within the upper middle class did rise to become landed gentlemen, and in the case of the American South such men did shape the landed ruling class from the time of the founding of the colonies.

As to whether the social and economic rise of a commercial class constituted a

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[29] Wrightson, "The Social Order of Early Modern England," 156-177.
[30] Stone and Stone, An Open Elite? 3-39, 277-306.

Marxist overthrow of the ruling classes in the nineteenth century, I believe that the application of the basic Marxist model is too simplistic to fully explain the changes that occurred at various economic and social levels of society. Clearly political and economic power changed hands in England in the nineteenth century, but it was not an overthrow of the ruling order as much as an inevitable shedding of the old rule of landed gentry. With money and wealth came power in the emerging capitalistic society of eighteenth-century England, and to assume differently and to ignore the impact of new wealth and its natural association with the desire for power would be naïve and wrong. The linear equation that solves the question of social and political change in eighteenth and nineteenth-century English society does not begin with the formation of class-consciousness, then progress to economic self-awareness which instigated class conflict and produced a new language of social class (which is the Marxist formula of social change equating to class conflict). I believe fundamental economic changes occurred within society that forced a new way to view social orders and resulted in a shifting of class boundaries. People within these new class groupings gained an awareness of their social similarities, and only then developed class-consciousness. Class, borrowing from Cannadine, does not define history, rather history describes class. Such a transformation took place in the American South, but not in the same cataclysmic terms, because the men who established the landed class within that society and became southern gentlemen aided in the establishment of a society that reflected gentry control in terms of actions and responsibilities, but the economic underpinnings of southern society were commercialism and trade, not the English version of landed leisure. Political power in America, as evidenced by the evolution its more

merit-based political system and demonstrated by the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, became attainable to men outside of the traditional ruling circles.

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * *</p>

As stated above, this study will focus on the eighteenth century as a general time frame, but it is necessary to look back as far as the sixteenth century for the seeds of eighteenth-century society, and forward to the mid-nineteenth century for an understanding of how eighteenth century society progressed. In England, for example, the accession of William of Orange in 1688 marked the beginning of a period of unification within the ranks of the gentry, whose control of both houses of Parliament continued unabated for over 140 years. The pressure of the growing urban commercial ranks led to reform of the Parliamentary election law in 1832, which provided a voice in government to men below the rank of the landed elite and proved to be the first sign of the end of the gentry's control of the British government.[31]

The society of the colonial and American South emerged from the wilderness of Virginia in 1607, and grew through a tumultuous revolution to become an interconnected economic part of the new nation by 1860, only then to seek the destruction of the very nation it helped create in 1776. The success of the Revolutionary War in 1781 formally turned the American colonies into politically separate governments and allowed the Virginia planter class (which in essence was the southern gentry) to more easily redefine

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[31] Stone and Stone, <u>An Open Elite?</u> 13. The Stones cite statistics that show that of 658 MPs in 1867, over 500 were members of the landed gentry.

itself apart from the Old World. The new American government eventually placed a

greater emphasis on merit, although class deference and paternalism remained in practice.

These changes redefined what constituted a gentleman in both societies, for the victory

over the English caused a retrenching of the ruling class and a broader acceptance of the

commercial class in England. The importance of comparing the two concepts of the

English gentleman and Virginia gentleman in the period stretching from the seventeenth

to the mid-nineteenth century is found in the difference between the shared beliefs that

existed in the nascent years of the colonial period and the practices that evolved

throughout the eighteenth century and into the years of America's early nineteenth-

century independence. Social ideals, in other words, were replaced by realistic practices.

The concept of the English leisured gentleman, for example, was eclipsed by the reality

that the planter class in the South had to tend to its cash crop and become directly

involved in the trade of its product.

I use the terms "gentry" and "gentleman" liberally within this work. The gentry

encompass landowners, both large and small (the "wealthy gentry" and the "lesser

gentry"), who owned lands and lived to some degree off the rents of their land. (In this

work I will, when appropriate, use masculine pronouns to avoid complicated

nomenclature). This definition also includes the landed peerage, who occupied most seats

in Parliament and who could officially document their families' ties to landed nobility.

The gentry did not include mere farmers and freeholders, although these men sometimes

lived partially off rents of their land.[32] The term "gentleman," however, will also refer to wealthy urban traders and merchants, and professionals in both cities and in the countryside. It is not, and has never been, an exact definition, which will become evident throughout the work.

As discussed above, it was difficult to determine who was and was not a gentleman in the eighteenth century primarily because the concept of social classes was in an incipient and evolving state during this time, and boundaries between classes were shifting and debatable. A man might be born into the higher ranks of society, for example, but he still needed to *behave* as a gentleman. "A title no more made a gentleman than the lyon's skyn would make the ass a lyon; The gentleman must have the merit, or he is not at all advanc'd by his title" wrote Daniel Defoe in The Compleat English Gentleman in 1729.[33] Writing twenty-six years after Defoe, John Chamberlayne claimed that "all are accounted gentlemen in England who maintain themselves without manual labour."[34] But many in the expanding merchant ranks, who dirtied their hands through the labor of trade and amassed fortunes well in excess of many sons of noble gentry, pushed to be acknowledged as gentleman. The shifting attitudes about the merchant-made gentleman can be seen as early as 1703, when Guy Miège wrote, "trading formerly rendered a Gentleman ignoble, now an ignoble person makes himself by

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[32]G. E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 6-7.

[33] Daniel Defoe, The Compleat English Gentleman, ed. Karl D. Bulbring (London: Balantyne Press, 1889), 25.

[34] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 24.

merchandizing as good as a gentleman."[35] This vague and complex mixture of qualities expected in a gentleman--birthright, education, wealth, income, vocation, civic responsibilities, and personal virtue--make a strict definition of a gentleman difficult to compose. To lay the foundation for the comparison between the English gentleman and the southern gentleman, it is necessary to look at how eighteenth-century English society constructed class concepts.

I have organized this study to first provide some background on the origins of the concept of social classes in England, followed by chapters which explore the nature and attributes of the English gentleman and American southern gentleman (hereafter referred to as the "southern gentleman"). To be more specific, the second chapter focuses on contemporary definitions of a gentleman and the social factors that existed during the time that gave shape to society's construction of class ideals in England. Chapter 3 examines the individual qualities of the English gentleman, while chapter 4 identifies the characteristics of the southern gentleman. In both chapter 3 and chapter 4 I scrutinize three defining aspects of the respective gentility--a gentleman's education, his acceptable vocations, and the personal virtues expected from a member of the gentry. The picture that emerges from this study is one of two concepts of gentility in flux, and the gentlemen who comprise the gentry in both societies trying to maintain power in an evolving economic system that changed the centuries-old code of the gentleman. Broad concepts of class structure and labels such as Marxism simply cannot define the realities of logistically providing a proper education for the son of a landed man, the problems

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[35]Quoted in Peter Earle, The Making of the English Middle Class (Berkeley, CA.: University of California

inherent in ignoring the pressures of wealth derived through trade, or the emulation of

personal honor by a populace that demanded to not only be acknowledged as powerful

but also sought a voice in government through their enhanced economic position.

Press, 1989), 8, from Guy Miege, <u>New State of England Under Our Sovereign Queen Anne</u> (1703).

CHAPTER 2

The Foundations of Class Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century England

To understand the specific qualities that defined an eighteenth-century English gentleman we must first interpret how people of the time constructed and viewed their overall society. Class-consciousness in the modern sense had not developed in the eighteenth century. No true class conflicts existed between the gentry, the laboring poor, and the middling sort that socially and economically existed between the two extremes in the eighteenth century, aside from specific economic tensions that occasionally exploded into violence between the poor and the middle class grain merchants due to crop failures. The middling sort had not developed any form of class identity or cohesion in the eighteenth century. A man did not say he was part of the middle or lower ranks, or lived within the leisured or working class, but rather he defined himself by how he made his living. A man was a farmer or a cottager, a shopkeeper or a milliner, a merchant or a lawyer, but did not connect these occupations into a greater class. Middle and lower rank people did, however, define themselves by what they were not--landed gentry. People in the upper ranks of society, those who could or might call themselves gentlemen, did possess some degree of social awareness and, by the eighteenth century, had developed a class-consciousness that those in the middle or lower orders lacked.[1] Eighteenth-century

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[1] The lack of class awareness or any degree of class-consciousness among eighteenth-century English society is consistently stated by historians of various interpretive and analytical camps. David Cannadine in

English citizens who were not members of the gentry defined their place within society by their relationship to the gentry, and the average man's role model was the gentleman. Given this statement, how then did individuals in the eighteenth century distinguish themselves from the rest of society? How did they define their place within their society? What were the boundaries between social groups, and how porous were those boundaries? Did people aspire to rise into the ranks of the gentry, or were they content to comfortably dwell within the ranks of the middle orders? To answer these questions, we must look at definitions of the gentleman during the period and examine how society constructed class ideals in eighteenth-century England .

The Eighteenth-Century Gentleman

The term "gentleman" in the history of England presents an interesting contradiction. There was no strict definition of what traits constituted a gentleman. There

The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pages 23-24, states that there has been little evidence of class consciousness in British history, but there has been a "consciousness of class" within the social thinking of the British over the past three hundred years. Cannadine presents three models of social division in the eighteenth century -- the hierarchical model, which was a series of groupings from top to bottom, the triadic model consisting of the traditional upper, middle, and lower orders of society, and the dichotomous model pitting the upper class against the rest of society. J. C. D. Clark, in English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure, and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; 1995), pages 90-91, breaks society into a dichotomous grouping, assigning the term "patrician" to the gentry and "plebeian" to everyone else. Clark says that the ideal of the gentry as a "class" became more recognized after 1832. See also Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords (Oxford: Oxford University Press paperback, 1997), page 30, who state that the middling sort were by no means a Marxist type of middle class, for they lacked any cohesion to link their collective interests into a single unit in opposition with the landed gentry. Keith Wrightson, in his essay "The Social Order of Early Modern England: Three Approaches" in The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure, ed. Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith, and Keith Wrightson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), pages 192-201, agrees with Hay and Rogers that Marxist social structures do not work when describing eighteenth-century English society since no class consciousness existed below the gentry level of society.

were some specific criteria that helped the average man determine who was a real

gentleman--wealth, government position, activity within the Anglican church, and the

degree of deference accorded him. But along with these tangible criteria were intangible

factors such as behavior, dress, courtesy, valor, education, and intelligence, which could

provide an otherwise well off non-gentleman the ability to claim some degree of gentility

within his social circle or community. The elusive nature of the gentleman in the

eighteenth century is reflected in the descriptions offered by writers of the period. Daniel

Defoe, for example, admitted the confusion of the term when he suggested that the

definition of a gentleman would "serve in the schools for a good thesis and long learned

dissertations may be made upon it."[2] Despite his own warning, Defoe attempted to

define the qualities of a gentleman in his work <u>The Compleat English Gentleman</u>, written

between 1728 and 1729. Defoe first separates gentlemen into two groups -- the "born

gentleman" and the "bred gentleman." Of the born gentleman, Defoe states that he is "a

person BORN (for therein lies the essence of quality) of some known, or ancient family;

whose ancestors have at least for some time been rais'd above the class of mechanicks."

Clearly, however, Defoe believed that being a gentleman involved more than birthright

and idle living, for in his broader definition he states that the term signified "a man of

generous principles, of a great generous soul, intimates a kind of an obligation upon those

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Wrightson suggests that all "systems" such as hierarchical groupings be thrown out and that society should
be viewed as something very flexible and ambiguous and definable only on a regional basis.
[2] Daniel Defoe, <u>The Compleat English Gentleman</u>, ed. Karl D. Bulbring (London: Balantyne Press, 1889),
12.

who assum'd the name to distinguish themselves from the rest of the world by generous and virtuous actions."[3]

That gentlemen behave in a socially acceptable manner was not a new concept in the early eighteenth century. As early as 1583 a nobleman, Sir Thomas Smith, offered the following definition of a gentleman that stressed a man's behavior and reputation:

> For whosoever studieth the lawes of the realm, who studieth in the universities, who professeth the liberall sciences, and to be shorte, can live idly and without manual labour, and will beare the port, charge, and countenaunce of a gentleman, he shall be called master, for that is the title which men give to esquires and other gentlemen, and shall be taken for a gentleman.[4]

Smith's definition does not include ancient lineage as a specific quality, although his inclusion of living idly without manual labor most likely excluded anyone not born to a landed and titled family in the sixteenth century. Smith does place an emphasis on a gentleman's education, a quality not particularly stressed in the sixteenth century.[5] The most significant aspect of Sir Thomas Smith's description, however, is the importance of personal characteristics such as leadership, manners, and good social standing. In the author's time a man's "port" meant his power within the community, his "charge"

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[3] Ibid., 3, 12-13.
[4] Penelope J. Corfield, "The Rivals," Land and Society in Britain, 1700-1914, ed. by Negly Harte and Roland Quinault (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 5. This quote is also attributed to William Harrison in 1577, but Corfield states that the Smith version of the quote is better known and has been used more throughout history.
[5] See L. Stone and J. C. F. Stone, An Open Elite? England 1540-1880 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, abridged edition 1986), 168-71. The Stones point out that a formal education for the sons of the landed elite was not believed to be necessary until about 1620, when it became fashionable to attend a College or an Inn of Court. Approximately 35% to 55% of the sons of gentry families attended some form of additional education around 1620 to 1640, according to the Stones' statistical study of three counties. By 1700 to 1750, the Stones' statistics show that only approximately 20% to 40% of the sons of landed gentry attended schools of higher education. By 1800, according to the Stones' research, some 50% of sons of landed gentry attended institutions of higher learning. Chapter 3 of this work contains more detailed information on the educational history of the landed gentry.

referred to his level of responsibility within the community, and his "countenaunce" pertained to his social manners.[6]

Guy Miège, a Swiss-born author writing 120 years after Sir Thomas Smith, echoed similar sentiments regarding the importance of a gentleman's social behavior when he defined a gentleman as any man who could convincingly pose as a member of the upper ranks. "Any one that, without a Coat of Arms, has either a liberal or genteel education, that looks gentleman-like (whether he be so or not) and has the wherewithal to live freely and handsomely, is by the courtesy of England usually called a gentleman," wrote Miège.[7] Like Sir Thomas Smith, Miège places an emphasis on a higher education and states that a gentleman should have the ability to live a gracious lifestyle without the need to work. Despite the apparent breadth of the above definition, these two requirements severely limited the ability of most common men to qualify as gentlemen.

Adam Smith had a less than flattering opinion regarding "the man of rank and distinction" in the eighteenth century. In his classic study of human virtue and ethics, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, published in 1759, Smith discusses the ranks within his society. The gentleman, Smith says, "is observed by all the world" and seems to be the picture of the "perfect and happy state" that every man desires. But do the great and wealthy deserve this admiration? In answering this question, Smith provides some insight on what he believed made a gentleman:

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[6] Corfield, "The Rivals," 6.
[7] Quoted in Peter Earle, The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 6.

By what important accomplishments is the young nobleman instructed to support the dignity of his rank? . . . Is it by knowledge, by industry, by patience, by self-denial, or by virtue of any kind? . . . His air, his manner, his deportment, all mark that elegant and graceful sense of his own superiority, which those who are born to inferior stations can hardly ever arrive at. These are the arts by which he proposes to make mankind more easily submit to his authority, and to govern their inclinations according to his own pleasure: and in this he is seldom disappointed. These arts, supported by rank and preheminence, are, upon ordinary occasions, sufficient to govern the world.[8]

Smith's definition revolves around his argument that the common man looks to the landed gentleman for leadership despite the seemingly low level of moral virtues and absence of public good that the idle rich bring to society. While Smith believed that wisdom and virtue were superior qualities to birth and wealth, he admits that it is more natural for people in the lower ranks of society to look to the landed upper class for their own sense of security. "Nature has wisely judged," admitted Smith later in the same work, "that the distinction of ranks, the peace and order of society, would rest more securely upon the plain and palpable difference of birth and fortune, than upon the invisible and often uncertain difference of wisdom and virtue."[9] Smith also did not generally believe that the landed gentry contributed anything tangible to society, calling their duties within society "follies." In a letter to Lord Shelburne on April 4, 1759, Smith decries the uselessness of the Scottish noblemen, saying "they call themselves improvers" yet beyond their immediate estate they "allow the rest of their country to lie in waste,

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[8] Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie with W.B. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), 53-54.
[9] Ibid., 226.

almost uninhabited and entirely unimproved . . . without thinking themselves answerable to God, their country and their posterity for so shameful as well as do foolish a neglect."[10]

An equally dismal view of gentlemen as a group is made by Richard Steele in The Guardian, an early eighteenth-century periodical written and edited by Steele and his partner, Joseph Addison. In an essay entitled "Letter from a Gentleman-like Man" dated April 24, 1713, Steele drolly laments the dilution of the social standing of gentlemen by the rise of imposters, what Steele calls "pretty gentleman":

> As the world goes now, we have no adequate idea of what is meant by
> 'gentlemanly, gentleman-like' or 'much a gentleman:' you cannot be cheated at
> play, but it is certainly done by 'a very gentleman-like man;' you cannot be
> deceived in your affairs, but it was done in some 'gentlemanly manner;' you
> cannot be wronged in your bed, but all the world will say of him that did the
> injury, it must be allowed 'he is very much a gentleman.'[11]

Clearly Steele, who wrote primarily for the growing London commercial class, believed that a true gentlemen recognized and respected the moral and ethical values of society.

John Locke had little patience for the ambitious gentleman whom he considered to be lazy and intellectually shallow. "Their hot pursuit of pleasure, or constant drudgery in business," scorned Locke in 1689, "engages some men's thoughts elsewhere: laziness and oscitancy in general, or a particular aversion for books, study, and meditation keep others from any serious thoughts at all." Locke warned "those who call themselves gentlemen" that despite their birth, wealth and power that "they will find all these still carried away

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[10]Adam Smith, Correspondence of Adam Smith, Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, ed. E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), 32.
[11] Richard Steele, "On Pretty Gentlemen--Letter from a Gentleman-like Man," The Guardian no. 38 (April 24, 1713) in The Guardian: A Periodical Paper vol. 1 (London: J. Richardson and Co., et.al., 1823), 187-91.

from them, by men of lower condition who surpass them in knowledge."[12] It is not

surprising that Locke, who was not of noble lineage, took a dim view of the idle wealthy.

Edmund Burke, a conservative defender of aristocratic rule, held the gentry in far

higher regard than did Locke a century earlier. In Burke's mind the gentleman embodied

civilization, and was an integral support that kept society from crumbling into anarchy, as

he warned would happen in France in 1790 in his Reflections on the Revolution in

France.

> Nothing is more certain than our manners, our civilization, and all good things
> which are connected with manners and with civilization, have, in this European
> world of ours, depended for the ages upon two principles, and were, indeed, the
> result of both combined: I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of
> religion.[13]

Burke's prediction that a society devoid of the civilized principles of the upper ranks is

doomed to crumble into chaos was proven accurate in France by the bloody period known

as The Terror between 1793 and 1794, so his defense of the gentleman carries some

merit. It was necessary, Burke believed, to have the rules and decorum inherent in the

uppermost ranks of society to provide widespread societal order and, as Defoe suggested,

give the masses hope and aspirations.

If the leading writers of the eighteenth century could not agree on the qualities and

traits that made a gentleman, how was the common merchant or farmer to determine the

true gentleman among them and where they themselves fit within their society? In short,

what parameters did eighteenth-century people use to construct their own class ideals?

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[12] John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (London: Penguin Paperback Books, 1997),
626.

Construction of Class Ideals

The English believed, to some degree, that their societal hierarchy was vastly

different than most in Europe during the eighteenth century. In 1824, Blackwood's

Edinburgh Magazine noted:

> In most other countries, society presents hardly anything but a void between an
> ignorant labouring population, and a needy profligate nobility…but with us the
> space between the ploughman and the peer, is crammed with circle after circle,
> fitted in the most admirable manner for sitting upon each other, for connecting the
> former with the latter, and for rendering the whole perfect in cohesion, strength
> and beauty.[14]

While the above passage illustrates an awareness of a growing, economically driven

specialization and fragmentation within society in the early nineteenth century, most

people, especially in the eighteenth century, recognized only the wealthy peerage as a

distinct class. Those not born to nobility were relegated to a generic "other" rank. Adam

Smith admitted that only two ranks of persons existed. "Birth and fortune," Smith wrote,

"are evidently the two circumstances which principally set one man above another. . .

they are the two great sources of personal distinction, and are therefore the principal

causes which naturally establish authority and subordination among men."[15] If a man did

not belong to the landed gentry, or if he did not beg for his living as a pauper, what was

his social rank? Most men fell between these two extremes, and the emerging middle

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[13]Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (Garden City, New York: Dolphin Books,
Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), 92.
[14] Quoted in Harold Perkin, The Structured Crowd: Essays in English Social History (Brighton, Sussex:
Harvester Press, 1980), 32.
[15] Adam Smith, An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Glasgow Edition of the
Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner with W.B. Todd (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1976; reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), vol. II, 714.

class constructed their class ideals and measured their social rank from how similar or different they were from those of "birth and fortune."

Many individual factors shaped people's perceptions of social rank. How a man dressed or what he ate, for example, could provide a clue to his level of gentility, or detract from his true gentleman status. An article on "Fine Gentlemen" in The Guardian in April, 1713 satirically pointed out how dress and manners could distinguish a gentleman:

> A nimble pair of heels, a smooth complexion, a full bottomed wig, a laced shirt, an embroidered suit, a pair of fringed gloves, a hat and feather; any of one of these and the like accomplishments ennobles a man, and raises him above the vulgar, in a female imagination. On the contrary, a modest serious behavior, a plain dress, a thick pair of shoes, a leather belt, a waistcoat not lined with silk, and such like imperfections degrade a man, and are so many blots in his escutcheon. I could not forbear smiling at one of the prettiest and liveliest of this gay assembly, who excepted to the gentility of Sir William Hearty, because he wore a frieze coat, and breakfasted upon toast and ale.[16]

While class distinctions could be made simply by what a man ate for breakfast, social identity was broadly formed by four major influences -- economics, religion, politics, and the ingrained traditions of paternalism and deference. These influences did not act alone but were intertwined with each other in each individual's life. A man may, for example, have made a fortune as a merchant, but still feel societal pressure to pay deference to the son of a financially ailing gentry family. The wealthy merchant might hold a modest local office that would likely be the pinnacle of his political potential, while the gentry son might sit in the House of Commons. These same influences also served as the

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[16] Richard Steele, "Conversations on Fine Gentlemen," The Guardian 34 (April 20, 1713), in The Guardian: A Periodical Paper, vol. 1 (London: J. Richardson and Co., et al., 1823), 168-71.

catalysts that would eventually force great changes in English government, economy, and

society by the mid-nineteenth century.

Economics, both personal and national, obviously played a role in how people

viewed and gauged themselves against the rest of society. Personally and practically, a

person's individual wealth and income dictated how genteel he could afford to be.

Whereas a Duke might have an annual income of £10,000, a laborer might make a mere

£10 per year.[17] The minimum annual income for an aspiring gentleman in 1690 was about

£150; by 1790, that figure had roughly doubled to £300 per year.[18] The bulk of the

population between 1688 and 1800, however, led modest if not poverty-level lives.

According to Joseph Massie's 1759 census, approximately 70 % of the population of

England had annual household incomes of below £70 and 50 % of the households fell

below £25 per year.[19] Eighteenth-century fortunes are hard to gauge since they could

quickly be squandered. Many of the largest landowners had estimated personal fortunes in

excess of £100,000 -- although those fortunes were often countered by enormous debt.[20]

A personal fortune of between £5,000 to £10,000 provided a man with a very comfortable

lifestyle and the ability to consider buying an estate, while a man with wealth of between

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[17] Cannadine, Rise and Fall of Class , 46. Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Penguin Books, 1982; reprint Penguin Paperback, 1990), 48.
[18] G. E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), 25-26.
[19] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 20.
[20] David Cannadine, Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994; New York; reprint Penguin Paperback Books, 1995), 165. Cannadine details the fortunes of the Fifth Duke of Devonshire who inherited an estate in 1811 producing some £70,000 in annual income, yet also had debt in excess of £300,000 against the estate.

£500 to £5,000 would be considered moderately wealthy, and comprised what could be loosely defined as the middle class.[21]

Economics on a national scale also provided a framework from which people of the eighteenth century measured and outlined their society. The growing commercial nature of the British economy changed the way people lived, worked, and thought, and a man's social position was determined more by what he did than how much he made. Despite the growth of the urban commercial class, land remained the primary yardstick of genteel status.[22] A large estate allowed a man to live without manual labor by providing rental income and profits from the sale of crops. Yet the trend toward a more commercial economy posed a threat to the gentry. Could the wealthy trader or merchant also be a gentleman? Daniel Defoe believed he could. "Trade," Defoe wrote in 1726, "is so far here from being inconsistent with a gentleman, that, in short, trade in England makes a gentleman, and has peopled this nation with gentlemen."[23] The landed gentry recognized the threat to their power, and reacted by embracing the principles of capitalism when it was advantageous to them. Early in the eighteenth century, for example, most landed gentry believed that the system of community farming produced men who were good soldiers, husbands, and citizens, as opposed to mere wage laborers. By mid-century, however, many landowners promoted enclosure of open land to maximize their profits despite turning many small farmers and freeholders from owners to simple wage

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[21] Earle, Making of the Middle Class, 14-15.
[22] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 189.
[23] Harold Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society: 1780-1880 (London: Routledge, 1969; reprint, paperback 1996), 59.

laborers.[24] Arguing that enclosure helped the landowner maintain competitiveness,

Parliament passed some four thousand enclosure acts between 1750 to 1810.[25] The

gentry's attempts to accept the principles of capitalism is also reflected in their changing

attitudes toward food riots. Landowners hoping to keep the trust of tenant farmers had

historically shown their support for the common people during food shortages by

prosecuting forestallers and engrossers who made money through the wholesaling and

retailing of foodstuffs. As the principles of free enterprise gained a firm hold on the

economy and society, however, landowners realized that prosecuting the middlemen gave

the masses a degree of control over prices; thus by the end of the century the gentry

routinely prosecuted the rioters.[26] Such examples show how changing national economics

forced the eighteenth century Englishman to re-evaluate their dependence on, or

resistance to, gentry leadership.

Religion played a central role in the daily lives of most British men and women of

the eighteenth century, and it is not surprising that the church, specifically the Anglican

church, carried great sway in shaping people's views on societal orders. After the

accession of William of Orange in 1688, the Anglican Church grew more influential, and

its leaders were not shy about exerting its power in the form of laws and outright

persecution. Anglican rule especially targeted Catholics through punitive and prohibitive

laws, outlawing the most basic freedom of open worship. Catholic men could not hold

elected office, sit in Parliament, bring lawsuits, practice medicine or law, or own

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[24] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 102.

weapons. Catholic children were denied access to schools. Catholic landowners were

subject to additional taxation, and many were forced to sell their land.[27] Catholic gentry

families with ancestral ties to the Stuart monarchy or those suspected of harboring Stuart

sympathies suffered physical persecution and even death. The Radcliffes, Earls of

Derwentwater, were a prosperous Catholic landowning family in northeast England for

centuries, but the family and the estate disappeared because of their blood ties to and

support of the Stuart throne. At least one Radcliffe family leader was beheaded as a result

of his suspected Stuart support.[28]

The deep anti-Catholic bias among the English can be traced both to the English

fear and hatred of Catholic Spain and then France and a firm belief that Protestantism was

a superior religion. Fear of a major Jacobite invasion aimed at re-establishing a Catholic

monarchy in England fueled Protestants' fears of widespread French-supported schemes

to gain hegemony over England, leading to the branding of all Catholics as unpatriotic

French sympathizers. Protestants also believed that Catholicism was an archaic faith built

around superstition and rotted through by corruption. It was rumored that the Catholic

Church defrauded its followers and keep them poor and uneducated while its leaders

lived in grand palaces. This belief is reflected in a poem written by Lord Hervey during a

visit to Italy in 1729:

> Throughout all Italy beside,
> What does one find, but want and pride?

[25] Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; reprint, Oxford University Press Paperback, 1992), 435.
[26] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 110-12.
[27] Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 19.
[28] Mingay, English Landed Society, 42.

Farces of superstitious folly,
Decay, distress and melancholy:
The havoc of despotic power,
A country rich, its owners poor;
Unpeopled towns, and lands untilled,
Bodies unclothed, and mouths unfilled.[29]

In the eyes of most Protestants, Catholicism fostered ignorance, poverty, oppression, and

wastefulness. Protestants considered themselves socially superior to Catholics, and were

depicted in sermons, books, pamphlets, paintings, and within social conversation as

industrious, open-minded, highly educated, and morally strong people.

England's economic and educational advancement beyond France and most of

Europe during the eighteenth century contributed mightily to the belief in the superiority

of Protestant England. Literacy rates in England increased sharply by the beginning of the

eighteenth century, and literacy continued to grow through the century. It is estimated that

men's literacy rates at the start of the sixteenth century stood at only 10%, but by 1714

reading ability had soared to 45%, and by 1750 had jumped to 60%.[30] The belief in

Protestant superiority, coupled with deep-rooted distrust of Catholics, hindered the social

status of non-Anglican gentry. In short, it was a firmly entrenched Protestant ruling class

that presided over a strong and expanding economy and a prosperous and contented

populace, and if a man wished to be considered a gentleman or exercise local power, he

needed to be Protestant.

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[29] Colley, Britons, 18-43. Poem quoted on page 35.
[30] John Brewer, The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), 167. These figures should be taken as estimates only. In Brewer's words, these are "the most reliable figures (and they are not very reliable)." Nonetheless, even with a margin of error of 10%, there is demonstrated in these figures a distinct improvement in literacy rates.

The Anglican Church, being the lynchpin of gentry power, often came under attack by those who saw waste, greed and corruption within the ruling class. Protestant dissenters and religious sects that pressed for more strict religion in daily life attacked the Anglican gentry as spiritually insincere. George Fox, leader of the Quakers, warned the gentry in 1706 that their day of rule was soon to end: "O ye great men and rich men of the earth! Weep and howl for your misery that is coming . . . The fire is kindled, the day of the Lord is appearing, a day of howling . . . All the loftiness of men must be laid low."[31] Despite Fox's somewhat bombastic prediction, the landed gentry and the Anglican Church remained firmly ensconced in power. In fact, the Anglican Church was so powerful that some feared that Anglican clergy sought to gain power and exert control over the gentry. Writing in 1720, John Trenchard warned that the church should not assume excessive power when he contemptuously recalled the ambitions of the seventeenth century Archbishop William Laud:

> This upstart, plebeian priest, hoped to see the time, when ne'er a jack gentleman in England would dare to stand before a parson with his hat on. A fine scene truly! To see a gentleman of fortune and breeding, stand stooping, and bare-headed, to a small, ill-natured vicar; who had, perhaps, formerly cleaned his shoes, and lived upon the crumbs that came from his table.[32]

By the nineteenth century the attacks on the Anglican ruling order and calls for Whig reform had had become too frequent and valid to ignore. One of the most damning attacks on the Church was made by John Wade, a Unitarian, in The Black Book; or,

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[31] Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down (London: Penguin Books, 1975; reprint, Penguin Paperback, 1991), 234.
[32] Quoted in Clark, English Society, 289.

Corruption Unmasked! in 1820. In 1831, Wade republished his book using a title that left

no doubt as to the point of his work: The Extraordinary Black Book; An Exposition of the

United Church of England and Ireland; Civil Lists and Crown Revenues; Incomes,

Privileges and Power, of the Aristocracy…Presenting a Complete View of the

Expenditure, Patronage, Influence, and Abuses of the Government, in Church, State, Law

and Representation.[33]

The Parliamentary reform of 1832 was seen by many as a crushing blow to the

power of the Anglican Church within the ruling order. Gladstone admitted he saw "an

element of Antichrist in the Reform Act." Lord Wellington lamented the passing of

power from the hands of the Anglican gentry when he wrote in 1833: "The revolution is

made, that is to say, the power is transferred from one class of society, the gentlemen of

England, professing faith in the Church of England, to another class of society, the

shopkeepers, being dissenters from the church, many of them Socinians, others

atheists."[34] Wellington clearly believed that a man's religion dictated his social status.

The Anglican Church exerted its influence through class associations--the wealthy landed

gentry, together with the King, controlled the government, and the lower orders followed

the gentry's rule, which in turn meant they followed Anglican rule.

The gentry maintained their social status through land, wealth, and religion, but

politics and government were the primary tools of their societal management since

government played a central role in the daily lives of the lower and middle ranks.

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[33] Ibid., 414.
[34] Ibid., 412-14.

Involvement in, or opposition to, government and elected officials defined a person's social rank, for a government position was one of the few acceptable vocations of landed wealthy. Even the lowest classes were affected by the laws passed by parliament and, in indirect ways they even played a role in government, if only, in the words of David Cannadine, in "walk-on parts as rioters, players in crowd scenes, and extras."[35]

The fact that the landed wealthy controlled the Parliament is no great surprise, and is supported by a wealth of factual information. Statistics show that as late as 1820 approximately 70% of the seats in Parliament were held by landed members of peerage descent.[36] Those peers who were not active in Parliament or did not attend the House of Lords still exercised considerable influence over the membership of the Commons. In 1831, one year before parliamentary reform, 90 members of the peerage controlled one-third of the MPs in Parliament.[37] To ensure their continued control of National government, Parliament in 1710 passed the Qualifications Act of England and Wales. The Qualification Act prohibited any man who made less than £600 from land and rentals from holding a seat in Parliament, thereby allowing only those men from proper landed families held the reigns of government.[38] The Qualification Act remained in force until 1838.

What the landed gentry did while in Parliament had not only a direct affect on people's lives but on the mindset of where they fit in the social hierarchy. Enclosure laws

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[35] Cannadine, Rise and Fall of Class in Britain, 48.
[36] Colley, Britons, 191.
[37] Ibid., 155.
[38] Corfield, "The Rivals," 9-10.

aided landlords in their push to maximize profits by parceling off lands that had been open for community farming. Some 30% to 50% of the lands within Huntingdonshire, Leicester, Northampton, Bedfordshire, Rutland, Lincolnshire, and Oxford were transformed from open community lands to parceled and leased farms between 1760 and 1820.[39] While the gentry profited, the small farmer and poorer freeholders were forced into a system that converted them from somewhat self-sufficient men with some modicum of self respect to simple wage laborers with little control of their own destiny and no hope of economic prosperity. In essence, enclosure reminded the middle and lower ranks of men that they had only as much power over their own lives as the gentry-led Parliament would allow them.

The control of parliament by the landed gentry had a direct connection to the paternalistic relationship that most landed families had with their community. Parliamentary laws, for example, reminded the very poor where they ranked within society, sometimes literally labeling them for all to see. Poor laws written in 1662 required men who sought community aid to wear a badge with a "P" to designate themselves as recipients of community aid.[40] Parliament and local government passed laws throughout the eighteenth century that regulated the apprenticeship of children, outlined the organization of workhouses, and even outlined acceptable forms of "outdoor relief."[41] Local laws stipulating that a man's income be supplemented so that he and his

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[39] Eric J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire From 1750 to the Present Day, vol. 3 of The Penguin Economic History of Britain (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968; reprint, paperback edition, 1990), 100-1.
[40] Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century, 128.
[41] G. E. Mingay, The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class (London: Longman Group Limited, 1976), 76.

family had a minimum standard of living illustrate the most ambitious attempts at social legislation. This "minimum wage" was tied to the price of corn--if corn prices fell below a set level, the farmer was paid the difference--and led in times of poor harvests to rapid increases in the poor rates paid to farmers. Poor rates doubled between 1750 and 1780, doubled again by the early 1800s, and again by 1817. As poor rates rose, attacks from conservative landed gentlemen, who believed the policy deteriorated society and led to more poverty than they alleviated, also grew.[42] To the farmers who were oblivious to the social debate and who struggled to put food on their families tables, price supports and wage supplements were subtle reminders of where they ranked in society.

Politics and government did not only draw lines between the gentry and non-gentry through legislation, but also through the growing demand of rising commercial class men to have more say in the government. Non-landed middle-class merchants, businessmen, and professionals lobbied their local government leaders in Parliament in support of laws that benefited their business, or against laws that hurt their business. It was not uncommon for men of particular industries to band together in union-like fashion to fight potentially damaging legislation. From 1697 to 1699 tanners and leatherworkers throughout England lobbied Parliament to repeal the duties on leather products. Similarly, shopkeepers nationwide petitioned Parliament in the 1730s and 1780s to pass stronger laws against street vendors. The increasing involvement of the middle ranks of society in politics is illustrated in the growing number of bills signed into law under

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[42] Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, 104-08. Hobsbawm discusses how the Corn Laws forced a larger rift between the rich and the poor. When they were abolished in 1846, the larger landowners prospered while

Hanoverian rule. Fifty-eight bills per session on average were signed into law during the

reign of George I (1714-1727), a figure that jumped to 81 bills on average while George II

sat on the throne (1727-1760), then dramatically increased to 250 bills on average during

the long rule of George III (1760-1820).[43]

The most influential determinant of class-consciousness in eighteenth-century

England were the social bonds of paternalism and deference, which themselves were the

by-products of the power and authority wielded by the gentry from its control of land,

church, and government. Those in the middle and lower ranks had an ingrained belief that

the gentry would always do what is best for society and protect its customs (paternalism)

and, in return, the gentry should receive reverence and courtesy from the non-gentry

(deference). Unlike the physical characteristics of money, land, church, and political

office, paternalism and deference were mental ties between the ruling class and the lower

orders, and as such were very strong factors in the formation of people's conceptions of

class within their society.

Paternalism and deference went hand-in-hand with wealth and power. Since

members of the peerage and the wealthy gentry held the majority of government posts, it

was only natural that the populace, from the most successful merchant to the lowliest

beggar, saw the landed class as societal father figures, and as the ordained class meant to

set the laws and define right from wrong. The system did not always run smoothly, for the

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many of the older, less wealthy gentry families who had had their estates propped-up by the price supports
disappeared.
[43] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 190.

interests of the upper classes and the lower classes did not often coincide, as illustrated by

the gentry's change from supporting the masses against wholesalers during food shortages

to prosecuting rioters in the late eighteenth century food rioting. The tie between

paternalism and government, and the strains caused by this system in the rapidly changing

economy of the period, are clearly reflected in the exasperation of Samuel Garbett, an

ironmaster, who lamented in 1766 that the "old country families look upon themselves as

patrons of the trade in the neighbourhood, and really have an inclination to serve it when

they understand the subject . . . we sorely want somebody who is not only intelligent but

hath enlarged views to take the lead in considering our commerce as a subject of

politiks."[44]

People of the eighteenth century understood the principles of paternalism and

deference within their society. Adam Smith was well aware that the two concepts were

vibrant among his society, and he considered them to be a natural reaction.

> Our obsequiousness to our superiors more frequently arises from our admiration
> for the advantages of their situation, than from any private expectations of benefit
> from their good will . . . we desire to serve them for their own sake, without any
> recompense but the vanity of the honor of obliging them. Neither is our deference
> to their inclinations founded chiefly, or altogether, upon a regard to the utility of
> such submission, and to the order of society, which is best supported by it. Even
> when the order of society seems to require that we should oppose them, we can
> hardly bring ourselves to do it. That Kings are the servants of the people, to be
> obeyed, resisted, deposed or punished, as the public conveniency may require, is
> the doctrine of reason and philosophy; but not the doctrine of Nature. Nature
> would teach us to submit to them for their own sake, to tremble and bow down
> before their exalted station, to regard their smile as a reward sufficient to
> compensate any services, and to dread their displeasure, though no other evil were
> to follow from it, as the severest of all mortifications . . . the strongest motives,

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[44] Ibid., 192.

the most furious passions, fear, hatred, and resentment, are scarce sufficient to balance this natural disposition to respect them.[45]

Whereas Smith merely recognized paternalism and deference as natural in society, Edmund Burke, writing about the atrocities of the Revolution in France, glorified these twin traits as the mortar that held together the orders of mankind. Burke described the first time he saw the Queen of France, whom he thought "a delightful vision" that would never be harmed at the hands of her own subjects. "I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult," wrote Burke. "The age of chivalry is gone," he woefully commented, "never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom."[46] To Burke (who was born in Dublin, was the son of an Irish attorney, and in 1765 gained a seat in Parliament thanks in part to his writing skill but especially because of his close relationship with the Marquise of Rockingham who was appointed Prime Minister in 1765) the orders and ranks that existed in society were preordained.[47] The inherent deference given to the ruling class, and the care of those born to lower callings by those in the ruling class, was what kept his society from crumbling into an abyss of anarchy. That some were born to rule the majority is what Burke believed made his a civilized society.

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[45] Smith, <u>Theory of Moral Sentiments</u>, 52-53.
[46] Burke, <u>Reflections,</u> 89.
[47] On Burke's life, see Peter J. Stanlis, ed., <u>Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches</u> (Washington: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1963), 1-46.

An important part of paternalism was the idea that those in power would specifically assist those in their charge through laws, special favors, or charity. This concept, called patronage, was especially useful to keep the deference of those in the lower orders. Patronage in its most tangible sense also meant that friends and relatives benefited by appointments to positions within the local government. Robert Walpole readily admitted that his position allowed him to bestow tokens of patronage on those who had helped him, stating that he "frankly owned that while he was in employment, he endeavoured to serve his friends and relations" and that "in his opinion, nothing was more reasonable, or more just."[48] Walpole openly practiced political patronage during his tenure in government, as evidenced by political positions he obtained for his three sons which paid a combined sum of £13,400 per annum. Patronage also existed outside national office, and often extended beyond family members. Admiral George Brydes Rodney purchased commissions that allowed his son to rise from midshipman to captain by the age of 16. Bernard Edward Howard, who became the Duke of Norfolk, gave the son of a valued employee a lease that allowed him to develop one of the first cotton mills. Lord Moira, who gained the title Marquess of Hastings in 1817 and served as Governor of India from 1813 to 1823, arranged for the education of a local farmer's son who exhibited an exceptional proficiency for foreign languages. Patronage at its best aided the careers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century's most noted writers, among them Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, John Locke, and Joseph Addison.[49]

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[48] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 45.
[49] Ibid., 46-50.

While those in the middle and lower ranks could not expect the benefits of patronage to radically affect their lives, they nonetheless realized that those in power could change their lives in small ways. Legislation could either help or hurt men and their families, as seen in the examples of the poor laws and enclosure legislation, and local landed gentlemen could help swell the coffers of small businesses in strong economic times or drain them during years of bad harvests or war. At the most local level, landlords served as arbitrators of disputes among their tenants or directly administered assistance, as in the case of Thomas Mansell of Margam, who regularly made donations of corn to the poor of his town in the early eighteenth century.[50] To most of eighteenth-century English society, the equation was simple--land was wealth, wealth was power, and power was control--and whether those lower on the social hierarchy liked it or not, such control demanded obedience, loyalty, courtesy, and deference.

Deference to one's superiors was pervasive in English society throughout the eighteenth century, but it was by no means practiced uniformly throughout the country. In a community where several landlords vied for control of local leadership, the demands for deference from commoners was likely to be stronger than in a village where one landlord, secure in his social position, clearly ruled. Some communities, especially those in the woodland areas and fen regions, operated in almost complete independence because of the absence of any local gentry.[51] Similarly, many urban areas did not have specific resident gentry, sparking concerns that the "utter recklessness of impure thought and

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[50] Philip Jenkins, The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry, 1640-1790 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 207.

unclean living that is so lamentably prevalent in some mining and manufacturing districts in England" would spread without the influence of a genteel class. In some towns the gentry faced open defiance to their patriarchal authority, particularly where a strong local industry existed. In Newcastle, for example, the local gentry, who also controlled much of the town's coal trade, faced opposition on many issues from radical Tory groups who used local and national economics and politics to split the town's loyalties throughout most of the eighteenth century.[52] Despite certain regional exceptions, most English people believed that the gentleman's paternalistic nature toward society and the corresponding deference from the lower classes made English society superior to its European neighbors. "The morals and intelligence, the good regulations and conduct that emanate from him," declared Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, "spread throughout the country."[53]

Of course, not everyone readily accepted the nebulous concepts of paternalism and deference, and many questioned the integrity of the gentry and challenged the system of government they believed was rigged to protect the wealthy. In the mid-seventeenth century, Gerard Winstanley, the leader of the Leveller movement, believed the Parliament and its gentry members did not offer paternalism or patronage to the lower ranks of society, but rather sought to exploit those below them through the Parliament and its

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[51] Wrightson, "The Social Order of Early Modern England," 194-95.
[52] Kathleen Wilson, The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785 (Cabridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 287-385. Wilson discusses the social make-up of Newcastle, particularly the role of local gentry in the regions coal industry, in Chapter 6, "Changing Contexts: Newcastle and Norwich in the eighteenth century" (287-314). In Chapter 7 entitled "The rejection of deference: Newcastle, 1715-1785," Wilson discusses the challenges to the authority of the Newcastle gentry.

laws. Winstanley wrote that "The laws of kings have been always made against such actions as the common people were most inclinable to, on purpose to ensnare them into their sessions and courts; that the lawyers and the clergy, who were the king's supporters, might get money thereby and live in fullness by other men's labours." In Winstanley's words, "the law is the fox, poor men are the geese; he pulls off their feathers and feeds upon them."[54]

Not all attacks upon the ruling class in the eighteenth century exhibited Winstanley's vitriol, and often more mainstream and subtle questioning of the landed gentry's social and political leadership proved more damaging, for it reflected the fundamental changes in the British economy. David Hume, in his Essays, Moral, Political and Literary published in 1742, did not discount the importance of the "landed interest" as consumers and lenders, but he did point out the importance of the mercantile class as "agents between those parts of the state, that are wholly unacquainted, and ignorant of each other' necessities." Hume concluded that an economy devoid of an industrious merchant class would not function:

> There is no craving or demand of the human mind more constant and insatiable than that for exercise and employment; and this desire seems the foundation of most of our passions and pursuits. Deprive a man of all business and serious occupation, he runs restless from one amusement to another; and the weight and oppression, which he feels from idleness, is so great, that he forgets the ruin which must follow him from his immoderate expences.[55]

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[53] Quoted in Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 275.
[54] Quoted in Hill, The World Turned Upside Down, 269-70.
[55] David Hume, Essays, Moral, Political and Literary, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987), 295-307. Quotes on pages 300-1. Hume published his essays in various forms and collections

Adam Smith, like Hume, made it clear that he valued the productive nature of the

merchant over the wealthy landowner, even stating in Wealth of Nations (1776) that

successful merchants make better country gentlemen. In Smith's words, a merchant "is

more accustomed to employ his money chiefly in profitable projects; whereas a mere

country gentleman is accustomed to employ it chiefly in expence." Merchants are

"commonly bold" according to Smith, while a country gentleman is usually a "timid

undertaker."[56] Daniel Defoe was not so subtle. Much of Defoe's 1729 work The

Compleat English Gentleman was devoted to what was wrong with the ancient gentry,

whom he called "poor unhappy heirs . . . abandoned to ignorance and indolence, till they

become objects of pity rather than worship and homage." Defoe believed that the "born

gentleman" was superior to the "bred gentleman" even if the ancient gentry objected to

the mercantile class taking such title. Defoe tells the story of a rich merchant's response

to a country squire who told him he was no gentleman: "No sir," replied the merchant,

"but I can buy a gentleman."[57] Later in the century, Thomas Paine, who refuted Burke's

defense of the glories of a gentry-led civilization, dismissed titles carried by men of the

upper ranks in Rights of Man (1791), saying they were childish, senseless and

meaningless "nick-names."[58]

The attacks on the government, peerage, and gentry as a corrupt, immoral, self-

interested, society-draining group rose sharply in the years prior to the Reform Act of

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from 1741 until his death in 1776. His collected works were published posthumously in 1777 under the title
Essays, Moral, Political and Literary (Volume 1 of Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects).
[56] Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations, 1: 411-12.
[57] Defoe, Compleat English Gentleman, 256-57.

1832. Patrick Colquhoun, in his 1814 work <u>A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire</u>, placed the gentry and nobility in the same category as paupers, prostitutes, and criminals with regard to their usefulness to society:

> It is only those who pass their lives in vice and idleness, or who dissipate the surplus labour acquired by inheritance or otherwise in gaming and debauchery, and the idle class of paupers, prostitutes, rogues, vagabonds, vagrants, and persons engaged in criminal pursuits, who are real nuisances to society--who live upon the land and labour of the people, without filling any useful station in the body politic, or making the smallest return or compensation to society for what they consume.[59]

T. H. B. Oldfield, seemingly relying more on facts and research than on opinion, published an expose in 1816 entitled <u>Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland</u> in which he detailed the extent of control exercised by the landed gentry on the electoral process.[60] Preeminent scholars and popular writers also attacked the ruling gentry as interested only in self-gain and self-aggrandizement. David Ricardo, who was already acknowledged as a distinguished economist, argued in his work <u>Principles of Economic History</u> (1817) that the systems of rent and agricultural production, and of landlord and tenant, heavily favored the landlord. "The dealings between the landlord and the public are not like dealings in trade, whereby both the seller and the buyer may equally be said to gain," wrote Ricardo, "but the loss is wholly on one side, and the gain wholly on the other." James Mill, a disciple of Jeremy Bentham and Ricardo's colleague and friend, attacked the aristocracy in his <u>Essay on Government</u> (1820), saying "they will take from the rest of the community as much as they please of the objects of desire" and predicted

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[58] Thomas Paine, <u>Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings</u>, ed. with introduction by Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 131-32.
[59] Quoted in Perkin, <u>Origins of Modern English Society</u>, 276-77.
[60] Colley, <u>Britons</u>, 152.

that they would "defeat the very end for which Government was instituted."[61] John

Wade's <u>Black Book: or corruption unmasked</u>, published in 1820, painted the ruling class

as a small inter-related group of families who use their power only for self-gain at the

expense of the rest of English society. "They patronize a ponderous and sinecure church

establishment," wrote Wade, "wage long and unnecessary wars . . . conquer and retain

useless colonies . . . keep up unnecessary places in the royal household, in the admiralty,

the treasury, the customs, excise, courts of law, and every department of the public

administration." Wade's book sold over fifty thousand copies, confirming the ready

acceptance of his claims and damaging the gentry's image as the caring paternal ruling

class.[62]

The landed classes also failed in many ways as role models for society. Their

habitual disregard for paying their bills, for example, while living in ostentatious homes,

practicing overt consumption and harboring contempt for work made them easy targets

for ridicule among both the uneducated masses and leading scholars of the period.

Elizabeth Cornish, a shopkeeper in Richmond, knew that she was fortunate to have had a

large order for ribbon from the Duke of Clarence, for, as she specifically pointed out in a

letter to her brother in 1789, unlike many members of the upper ranks, "he pays his

tradesmans bills every Monday."[63] Jeremy Bentham speculated that a nobleman who

owes an identical debt to a fellow nobleman and to a tradesman is more likely to pay "the

companion of his amusements" because it maintains the nobleman's honor and feeds his

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[61]Quoted in Perkin, <u>Origins of Modern English Society</u>, 215.
[62]Colley, <u>Britons</u>, 152-53.

"love of reputation," although Bentham stated that paying the tradesman is "the worthier principal of benevolence."[64] The French encyclopaedist Diderot wrote that "gambling debts are so rigorously honored in polite society" because "in gambling one accepts a man's word in a situation where there is no legal recourse . . .a trust has extended to which one must reply."[65] While Diderot may have been thinking about French society, his analysis holds true among the English gentry. Honor, trust, and a gentleman's reputation were closely tied to gambling debts, but not to a debt to a common merchant.

The landed gentry's harsh attitude toward manual labor and their haughty attitude toward trade did little to endear them to those in the commercial ranks. The disdain for the gentry is reflected in Anna Gomersall's novel Eleonora, published in 1789. In the story, Eleonora's mother, who is "of small fortune, tho' of high birth" is so driven to keep up the appearance of gentility that she drives Eleonora's merchant father to ruin and, ultimately, death through her excessive spending. Their Aunt, Lady Barton, then abandons Eleonora and her sister, because their father's background in trade is "as a circumstance highly disgraceful."[66] Gomersall's villains are the upper class, whose vanity and arrogance kill the humble merchant father and leave poor Eleonora an orphan.

The promiscuous sexual activity of some members of the genteel class cast a harsh light on the group as a whole and tarnished their image as a virtuous lot to be

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[63] Hunt, Middling Sort, 203.

[64] Jeremy Bentham, The Principals of Morals and Legislation (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1988), 138.

[65] Thomas M. Kavanagh, Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 42.

[66] James Raven, Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 125.

respected by the ruder classes. Sir Dudley Ryder (1691-1756), a landed gentleman who

served as Attorney General and Chief Justice from 1746 to 1756, recorded in his diaries

nine separate interludes with whores in a fifteen month period between 1715 and 1716.

In the passages, Ryder (who was not yet knighted) spoke of his encounters in strikingly

casual tones while expressing concern for his reputation.

> Came home from the tavern near 12. As I came along Fleet Street had a mind to
> attack a whore and did so: went along with her a good way, talked with her
> tolerably well, and at last left her. Did so with another girl. It makes me a little
> uneasy for fear somebody that knows me should have seen me, though with the
> first I went down another street and with the second did but just speak to her and
> went a little way with her. Asked her whither she was going, and came home.
> Went to bed a quarter to one.[67]

While Ryder's diaries were not for public consumption during his life, they do illustrate

the gentry's awareness of their national image. Public revelations of deviant behavior,

unscrupulous agreements, personal family squabbles or, worse of all, sex scandals not

only hurt the people involved, but damaged the reputation of the entire ruling class.

Despite the efforts to keep personal and family matters quiet, public airing of

scandals did occur. Such was the case of the Lennox sisters, who had unquestioned

aristocratic blood yet whose family secrets became public gossip. Sarah Lennox, while

married to Thomas Bunbury, had an affair in 1768 with Lord William Gordon, which

produced an illegitimate child, Louisa. Despite the pleadings of her sisters to stay with

Bunbury (the sisters were as concerned with the reputation of the Lennox name as they

were for Sarah's own well being), Sarah left her husband to be with Gordon. Making a

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[67] Dudley Ryder, The Diary of Dudley Ryder; 1715-1716 (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1939), 71-72.

bad situation worse for the Lennox family, the sordid tale was duly recorded in the London press for all to read. Town and Country magazine commented that Sarah's "rank and beauty have been her ruin" and suggested that, unable to find a husband in the upper echelons of the gentry, she had married Bunbury "through pique and disappointment."[68] The entire episode provided entertainment for the masses while damaging the paternal image of the ruling class.

The gentry, aware of their reputation and its connection to maintaining the proper paternal image and receiving due deference, countered scandals such as that of Sarah Lennox by accounts of noble and virtuous genteel men and women in journals, novels and guide-books. James Nelson, an apothecary who believed that the interaction of the upper and middle ranks made each better, painted a portrait of a Countess turned loving mother in his 1758 work Essay on the Government of Children. Nelson's Countess gave up "the Splendor of the Court" for "the stronger Attractions of Parental Affection" and Nelson speculated that the middle and lower ranks would emulate the Countess' actions when she accepted the "office of a tender mother."[69] Stories and articles from widely read sources such as The Tatler and The Spectator cast the ruling gentry in a positive light. A June 10, 1710 article in The Tatler linked the contemporary British ruling class to that of ancient Rome and pointed out the importance of the gentry's role in society.

> There is not a citizen in whose imagination such a one does appear in the same light of glory as Codrus, Scaevola, or any other great name in old Rome. Were it not for the heroes of so much per cent. as have regard enough for themselves and

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[68]Stella Tillyard, Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa, and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 239-62.
[69]Hunt, Middling Sort, 205-6.

their nation, to trade with her with their wealth, the very notion of public love would long before now have vanished from among us. But however general custom may hurry us away in the stream of a common error, there is no evil, no crime, so great as that of being cold in matters which relate to the common good.[70]

In a March 17, 1710 article in The Spectator, an account of an aristocratic woman named Aurelia portrays her as a loving wife, mother and employer. Aurelia and her husband are so in love that when they go out, it is only so "that they may return with the greater delight to one another" and are both "beloved by their children, adored by their servants, and are become the envy, or rather the delight, of all that know them."[71]

Paternalism and deference, as illustrated in the above examples, were complex yet ambiguous qualities. Both were expected by the upper and lower ranks of society pursuant to an unwritten social contract, yet people often resented the application of the two traits because of the obligatory and patronizing nature of both. Furthermore, the gentry found through the eighteenth century that, to receive the deference owed to them, they had to not only exhibit social leadership but also proper public morals and decisions. As the eighteenth century progressed the gentry found themselves in positions of defending their actions, as in the case of the sexual activities mentioned above. Part of this change can be attributed to the growth of published material which put gentry members under much more public scrutiny. But certainly some of the defensive posturing of the gentry as the century progressed came as a result of the challenge to their social primacy from the industrious working class, which for the first time presented society

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[70] Richard Steele, The Tatler, No. 183, in Walter Graham, ed., Selections from the Tatler, The Spectator and Their Successors (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1928), 117-18.

with an alternative image to emulate. The changing economic environment of the eighteenth century placed a greater strain on the social bonds of paternalism and deference and played a central role in the psychological construction of class ideals in eighteenth-century England.

Certainly the strict differences between social ranks were clear to the citizens of eighteenth-century England. They knew who was a noble, a landowner, a professional, a merchant, or a vagrant. As the English economy became more complicated, however, and as more people from humble origins took advantage of the diversifying commercial opportunities available in the eighteenth century, simple designations based on a man's background and job slowly became obsolete. As people wrestled with determining a man's social rank according to the factors of wealth, job, religion, and degree of social subjugation owed, they subconsciously built the principles and parameters of class ideals, the same ideals that blossomed in the nineteenth and twentieth century into modern social classes. The evolving nature of social rank to socio-economic class affected the nature and status of the English gentleman. What was once a more-or-less strict member of the upper social hierarchy became a less distinct character within society. A gentleman might be of noble birth, or he might be the son of a tradesman grown wealthy through business, or he might be an imposter posing as a gentleman. A gentleman, then, became more a general description of the way a man carried himself, dressed, behaved, and spoke, a transformation tied to the development of class ideals in England during this period.

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[71] Joseph Addison, The Spectator, No. 15 (March 17, 1710), in George Washington Greene, ed., The Spectator (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1890), vol 1, 53-57.

Class, although not yet a word in the contemporary sense, was nonetheless present in an

embryonic sense in the minds of the eighteenth-century Britons.

CHAPTER 3

The Qualities of the Eighteenth-Century English Gentleman

Defining the qualities of an eighteenth-century English gentleman, like many aspects of social history, is an inexact science. A comprehensive description of a gentleman, as Daniel Defoe illustrates in a passage of <u>The Compleat English Gentleman</u>, proved a difficult task in the eighteenth-century, for a porous barrier separated the true gentleman from an aspirant merely posing as one. Defoe tells the story of two brothers who argued the point. The older brother stood to inherit an estate yielding £3000 per year and expected to be elected to a seat in Parliament (the "born" gentleman), while the younger brother had recently obtained a "liberal education" from a university (the "bred" gentleman). The passage is too long to be included here in its entirety, but the following excerpt illustrates how opinions differed regarding the qualities that comprised a gentleman.

Elder:	. . . look, 'tis that beggarly fellow, sir Tho. . .
Younger:	Why brother? he is a very pretty gentleman I assure you, a man of merit, and fit for any employment whatsoever.
Elder:	A gentleman and a man of merit, what d'ye mean by that? What family is he of? Why, his grandfather was a citizen, a tradesman! he a gentleman!
Younger:	I don't kno' what his father was, or his grandfather; but I assure you he has all the qualifications of a ---
Elder:	Of a what? of a scoundrel. I tell you he is but one remove from a shopkeeper, his father was a ---
Younger:	Nay, I must interrupt you now, brother, as you did me. Let his father be what he will, his merit will make him a gentleman in spite of family; besides, he is a baronet by birth.

Elder:	A baronet? yes, his father got money by bubbling and tricking and jobbing, and bought a patent of a poor gentleman who was starving.
Younger:	Let the patent be bought by who it will; he inherits it, he didn't buy it.
Elder:	Well that does not make him a gentleman; you kno' what King Charles said, that he could make a knight, but could not make a gentleman.
Younger:	But I tell you, Sir Thomas was a gentleman before he was a knight.
Elder:	How do ye make out that, Doctor, with all your schollarship?
Younger:	Don't be so witty upon your younger brother: I am no Doctor, and yet I can make out that well enough. He was a man of vertue and modesty, and had a universall knowledge of the world, an extraordinary stock of sence, and withall is a compleat schollar.
Elder:	And those things, you suppose, make a gentleman, do ye?
Younger:	They go a great way towards it, in my opinion, I must confess.
Elder:	Not at all! they make him a good man, perhaps and a good Christian; nay, they may make him good company, but not a gentleman, by no means. I can't allow that.
Younger:	Then I don't know what a gentleman is at all, or what it means.
Elder:	Then I am sorry for your head. Have you gone all this while to school, and don't know what a gentleman is?[1]

Defoe's point is clear--there were those who firmly believed that only blood could make a gentleman, and those who believed that a man could attain the status of gentleman through the accumulation of wealth and the display of personal attributes such as honor, morality, and modesty. The passage highlights, in its condemnation of the tradesman background of Sir Thomas' father, the quandary over the gentlemanly status of the growing number of wealthy commercial men.

The goal of this chapter is to sharpen the definition of the eighteenth-century English gentry by identifying the traits and qualities associated with its members.

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[1] Daniel Defoe, The Compleat English Gentleman, ed. Karl D. Bulbring (London: Balantyne Press, 1889), 44-45.

As shown in Chapter 2, certain broad characteristics were subtly at work forming class-consciousness within English society, and many of the characteristics of the gentleman were extensions of these concepts. Wealth and religion formed the most fundamental requirements of a genteel member of society--a true gentleman professed Anglican faith and had an acceptable level of wealth derived through the ownership of land. Since a majority of the English population was Anglican, this requirement was not difficult to achieve. Ownership of land and the level of a man's wealth, however, was not as easily attainable or as strict a test to meet. How much land was required to be owned to be a gentleman? How much of a man's overall income had to be derived from rents of his land? What minimum level of wealth allowed a man to be labeled a gentleman? Wealth and income, simply put, were more ambiguous social qualifiers than religion, as were a man's education, vocation, or personal attributes and vices. These vague and equivocal qualities could assist or impede a man in his quest to attain the title of gentleman in eighteenth-century England.

Birth into a family with aristocratic or landed gentry status provided a man with the unquestionable right to use the label of "gentleman," therefore peerage and ancestry will not be a part of this examination. A note is necessary, however, regarding the order of birth (first versus second son). The practice of primogeniture, which was widely practiced during the time, provided the first born son with the bulk of the family wealth and attendant status. Second sons often followed career paths into the clergy which, while still considered a genteel vocation, did not have the same status as a landed gentleman who held political office. Third and fourth sons were usually left to pursue less genteel

vocations such as professional occupations in law or medicine, or in many cases went into commercial and trading endeavors.[2] Younger sons, therefore, relied on intangibles such as education, vocation, personal characteristics, and public reputation to build their credibility as gentlemen, as did wealthy businessman and prosperous freeholders. These intangibles are the focus of this chapter.

An English Gentleman's Education

Until the mid-sixteenth century education was not a particularly essential requirement for the sons of gentry families. Serving one's king through military service, being well versed in the art of hunting, and properly practicing the social obligations of nobility were far more important factors to a gentleman in the 1500s. In the words of one sixteenth-century diplomat, "it becomes the sons of gentlemen to blow a horn nicely, to hunt skillfully, and elegantly train and carry a hawk."[3] Thomas Marte gave the education of a gentleman only the briefest mention in his 1555 guidebook The Institucion of a Gentleman (1555), yet saw fit to include in-depth chapters on how gentlemen may profit in public service or as officers in the Army and, most importantly, what pastimes and social games gentlemen should master. This is not to say that the sons of sixteenth-century gentry families were not educated. Examinations of ecclesiastical records reflect

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[2] For more information on primogeniture and how family estates were passed from generation to generation, see Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, An Open Elite? England 1540-1880 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, abridged edition, 1986), 68-91; Lloyd Bonfield, "Affective Families, Open Elites and Strict Family Settlements in Early Modern England," Economic History Review, 2d Ser., 39, no. 3 (August 1986): 341-54.

[3] David Castronovo, The English Gentleman: Images and Ideals in Literature and Society (New York: The Ungar Publishing Co., 1987), 52-53.

much higher levels of literacy among the gentry and clergy as compared to those in the laboring classes.[4] The basic education for the sons of gentry families in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century came through private grammar schools, however, not from extended University training. Between 1480 and 1660, some 410 new grammar schools opened, and the number is likely much higher if smaller, fee-paying schools are included.[5] Many of these schools taught basic reading and writing to sons of yeomen and tradesmen, while the more advanced programs (especially those that taught Latin) saw a much larger enrollment from the gentry. Only in the most rural areas did one find somewhat equal social representation in the classroom. Some 50% of the 1656 enrollment of Bury St. Edmund grammar school, for example, was composed of sons of aristocratic or landed gentry blood, while the other 50% hailed from families just outside of the landed gentry (professionals, clerics, and wealthy tradesmen, merchants and yeomen). When compared to the small percentage of the overall population that these social ranks represent, it becomes clearer that education beyond simple rote skills was limited to the upper echelons of society.[6]

Higher education during the sixteenth and seventeenth century focused primarily on religious training for sons from middle and lower rank families and, to a lesser degree, gentry sons not in line to receive the family estate. Sons of "plebeians" in the terminology of Oxford University records (meaning the 90% of the population below the gentry,

[4] David Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 104-24.
[5] R. A. Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800 (London: Longman Group Limited, 1988), 32.
[6] Ibid., 50-52.

including wealthy merchants and well-off yeomen and tradesmen as well as the modest to

poor husbandman and laborer) comprised the majority of the Oxford student body until

1680.[7] University training in the eyes of the sixteenth and seventeenth century gentleman

provided either a cursory "varnish of learning" for the first son or proper clerical training

for the second or third son.[8] This trend is reflected in the career paths chosen, or

prescribed for, the sons of Richard Oxinden of Barnham. Henry Oxinden, Richard's first

son, attended but did not graduate from Oxford, and took over the family estate upon his

father's death in 1629. James, the second son, attended both Cambridge and Oxford

where he studied theology and, it is presumed, entered the clergy. The third and fourth

sons, Richard and Adam, pursued careers in the military and merchant trade,

respectively.[9]

     In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century the casual desire among the

members of the gentry to polish their gentlemanly credentials with a few classes at

Oxford grew to become a pressing need to not only attend Oxford or Cambridge

Universities but to finish the program and gain a degree. The increased interest among the

highest ranks of society to obtain higher education for their sons caused the number of

students from "plebeian" backgrounds (using Oxford's terminology) to plummet between

1700 and 1800. In 1680 the total number of landed gentry sons matriculating at Oxford

[7] Lawrence Stone, "The Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body, 1500-1909," in The University in Society, vol. 1, Oxford and Cambridge from the 14th to the Early 19th Century, ed. Lawrence Stone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 3-110.
[8] Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 78.
[9] Louis B. Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class. (Charlottesville, Virginia: Dominion Books, a division of The University Press of Virginia, 1964), 25-26.

surpassed those of the sons from more modest ancestry, a trend that continued throughout

the eighteenth century. The number of sons from aristocratic backgrounds (peers, knights,

and baronets) also began to rise in the 1680s, and by 1800 comprised the largest

percentage of the student body. To put this transformation into better perspective, in 1579

the student body of Oxford was roughly comprised of sons representing the following

groupings: 55% plebeian, 26% gentry, 16% aristocracy/ennobled peerage and 3% clergy.

By 1711 the figures had shifted to 27% plebeian, 33% gentry, 19% aristocracy/ennobled

peerage, and 21% clergy. By 1835, the student body of Oxford reflected statistically 0%

from the plebeian ranks (although records do show one boy of plebeian birth), 21% from

gentry households (or those who were by then calling themselves gentlemen), 55% from

the aristocracy/ennobled peerage, and 24% who had fathers in the clergy.[10]

From the above figures it would seem that by the mid-eighteenth century Oxford

had become the playground of the elite class, but raw statistical data can be deceptive and

should be analyzed carefully. The social categories used by Oxford, for example, were

very fluid class labels (with the exception of the clergy, which denoted a specific

profession and, by association, social rank). Furthermore, the number of titled positions

increased under the Stuart reign, so naturally the statistics reflect more sons from

ennobled families in the eighteenth century than in the seventeenth century. More men by

1800 were also likely to list themselves as "gentlemen" since the term was becoming

more generic with each generation. It is also important to realize that these statistics refer

to the number

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[10] Stone, "Size and Composition of Oxford Student Body," 18-28; Table 2, p. 93.

of first-born sons who only attended Oxford or Cambridge, not the number who actually completed their studies and earned a degree. General enrollment statistics would likely show an increase in the number of sons from the upper ranks, especially in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when graduation and higher learning were not a priority of the gentry. Nonetheless, despite potential statistical discrepancies these figures clearly show that the titled, the landed, and the wealthy began to dominate England's institutions of higher learning during the eighteenth century.

The trend toward a more complete education among the seventeenth and eighteenth-century gentry is reflected in the courtesy and conduct manuals of the time. Richard Braithwait wrote in 1630 that education was "the principal seasoner of youth."[11] Thirty years later Henry Peacham felt that the importance of education warranted an entire chapter in his 1662 work The Compleat Gentleman. Defoe laments the lack of education he perceived existed in his 1720s and 1730s society, warning "of what may be the unhappy consequence of this generall defect in the educacion of our gentry" and offered his own "rational proposal for preventing those consequences."[12]

There were several reasons why education grew in importance to the uppermost sector of English society through the seventeenth century, all of which can be neatly huddled under the umbrella of simple survival. The world was becoming too complex for the gentleman to merely know how to hunt well and dance nicely and expect to maintain his place on the top of the social spectrum. Lawrence Stone suggests that the

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[11] Richard Braithwait, The English Gentleman (London: John Hailand, 1630; reprint, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd. and Walter J. Johnson, 1975), 101.

centralization of the government by the Tudor monarchy and the transformation in the

gentleman's role from soldier to government bureaucrat resulted in the need for

gentlemen to have better writing and verbal skills. The expanding English empire, the

increasingly complex British economy, and rapid advances in industrial technology made

government, business, and trade more global endeavors. Thus a gentleman with hopes of

a rising government career had to be well versed in languages, history, and the arts.[13]

The broadening English economy caused fundamental demographic shifts that

further challenged the social dominance of the gentry. Population growth throughout

England made governing the country far more difficult and complex. Between 1550 and

1688 it is estimated that England's population grew by 65.5%, from 2.96 million to 4.90

million. By 1832 England's population topped 13.42 million, an increase of 174% from

1688.[14] Deficiencies in urban housing and poverty, disputes between growing cities and

regions, and the need to provide adequate food for a growing population were but three

natural problems of such rapid growth. Industrialization and economic growth led to

urban growth, which had a profound effect on the necessity of an education for the

English gentleman. In 1500 only about 3% of England's population lived in cities of more

than 10,000; by 1800 over 24% of the populace lived in cities in excess of 10,000.[15]

Increasing urbanization consistently thrust the country gentleman into competition with

more savvy and ambitious commercial men for prized bureaucratic posts. To compete,

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[12] Defoe, Compleat English Gentleman, 144.

[13] Stone and Stone, An Open Elite? 168.

[14] E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, The Population History of England, 1541-1871 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981; reprint, paperback edition 1993), 531-35.

[15] Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 97-98.

the country gentleman had to become better educated. England's growing population was also becoming more literate. Based on studies of marriage licenses that required both parties to either sign or make a mark, it is estimated that total illiteracy among men dropped dramatically from near 90% in 1500 to less than 5% by 1900. In 1688 only about four in ten men could read or write, yet by 1832 seven in ten men claimed moderate to complete literacy.[16] With growing literacy came a rapid expansion in the printing and book selling trades. Some 5,100 titles were published between 1485 and 1605, and by 1660 almanacs and chapbooks were so popular an estimated 400,000 copies were sold annually. Between 1695 (the last year of the stationer's monopoly) and 1725, thirteen new presses were established in provincial town outside of London.[17] The combination of rapid population growth and a swiftly diversifying economy driven by industrial advances and global trade produced a more literate, mobile, and diversified society that put the unlearned man at a distinct disadvantage.

The adolescent gentleman-in-waiting in eighteenth-century England had several educational alternatives. Tutors were used extensively for the education of the eldest son up through 1720, when the practice of private tutors declined among Anglican families but remained an alternative to sons of wealthy Catholic families (Oxford banned Catholics in 1581 and did not allow their return until 1854).[18] As early as the age of seven Anglican boys of aristocratic and gentry families were sent away to either public or private schools. The two most prestigious public schools were Eton and Westminster, but

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[16] Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order, 177.
[17] Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 117; 157.

a host of lesser public schools such as Rugby, Harrow, and Bury St. Edmunds provided

excellent training to the sons whose family name could get them in.[19] Private schools,

usually operated by one or more clergymen and with enrollments often no more than

twenty or thirty students, became popular when concerns arose about the poor education

and lack of adult supervision found in most public schools. Eton, for example, saw major

student rebellions in 1729, 1743, 1768, and 1783. Stories of drunkenness, physical abuse,

whoring, masturbating, and homosexuality in public schools caused many parents to

choose the smaller and more controlled environments of the private school.[20] By 1750

about 66% of England's school age children attended private schools financed by fees.[21]

Regardless of the type of school a boy attended, early education at a preferred grammar

school was a prerequisite for acceptance into England's two major universities, Oxford

and Cambridge.

Grammar schools and universities provided young men with two basic types of

education--specific academic instruction and training in how to be a man. The curriculum

of eighteenth-century English grammar schools and universities is not well documented,

but most likely emphasized theology, philosophy, and a cursory level of Latin (many

dissenting grammar schools did not stress the need for Latin outside of theological and

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[18] Stone, "Size and Composition of Oxford Student Body," 7; Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 92.
[19] Randolph Trumbach, The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 254.
[20] Ibid., 260-281.
[21] Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 48.

legal writings).[22] Legal training was the exclusive domain of the Inns of Court and, as

such, was not taught at Oxford or Cambridge. Aside from specific educational

instruction, however, most upper level grammar schools and the two primary universities

stressed turning boys into men and placed special emphasis on the proper public behavior

of gentlemen. An eighteenth-century education centered on class distinction more than

specific academics.[23] Lord Willoughby made this point clear when he stated "as is the

attitude of the average Englishman to someone who was not an Englishman, so is the

attitude of all Etonians to someone who is not an Etonian."[24] Virtue, deference, honor,

and manners were non-classroom subjects that held as much, if not more, importance

than Latin and theology. Dr. John Nicholl, headmaster of Westminster from 1733 to

1753, would punish students by shaming them in public, which "was a degree of

punishment, compared to which the being sentenced to the rod would have been

considered as an acquittal or reprieve."[25] A boy sent off to grammar school at seven or

eight years old would learn how to make friends, how to defend his name, and essentially

how to navigate the world they would enter. Public school, argued Lord William Russell

in the seventeenth century, "taught a boy to be a man . . . to be able to contend with the

difficulties of life . . . to take part in public affairs."[26] Although fears of the public

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[22] Stone states that "very little is known about either the contents and significance of the curriculum or the quality of the teaching provided" at Oxford: "Size and Composition of Oxford Student Body," 3; Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 76-77, 25.
[23] David Cannadine, The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 49.
[24] O. F. Christie, Transitions from Aristocracy (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1928), 41.
[25] J. C. D. Clark, English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure, and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; 1995), 103.
[26] Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1705-1837 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 170.

schools' lack of discipline and marginal education eventually led to the flowering of private schools through most of the eighteenth century, young boys were sent off to grammar schools to become young men, and for those from gentry families, young men were sent to Oxford and Cambridge to be polished into gentlemen.

The bias in the English educational system during the eighteenth century toward the upper classes and the flaws in curriculum and environment led to much skepticism and criticism. Thomas Hobbes called universities "Fountains of Civill, and Morall Doctrine, from whence the Preachers, and the Gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same (both from the Pulpit, and in their Conversation) upon the People."[27] Yet the educational system was never designed to provide a truly well rounded education for its students since in-depth intellectual knowledge was not a requirement of a gentleman. Parents cared more about the social training a boy received and the status afforded by attendance at certain schools. Sir John Holles wrote in the mid-seventeenth century about his grandfather, "I have heard him say he would have a gentleman to have some knowledge in all the arts but that it did not become him to be excellent in any of them."[28] The lack of adult supervision at public schools led to great concerns over the welfare of children. Reports of older boys sending younger students to "fetch them strong drink" or "flinging them on the ground, dragging them by their hair, treading them under foot, only to show their authority" naturally worried parents.[29] Stories of violent punishment rituals designed to make the boys disciplined and strong emanated from

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[27] Thomas Hobbes, <u>Leviathan</u> (London: Pelican Books, 1968; reprint, Penguin Classics paperback, 1985), 728.

Westminster and Eton. Thomas Keate gained a degree of infamy for his penchant for

flogging his ill-behaved Eton students. The stress on impressionable young boys on the

cusp of adolescence gave rise to non-genteel activities such as excessive drinking,

masturbating, whoring, and homosexuality, sparking parental concerns for both the safety

and education of their children . Ironically, the schools' elitist emphasis on privilege and

training gentlemen in waiting led to very ungentlemanly behavior. In 1779 for example

six Westminster boys were sentenced for beating a man who refused to kneel to them and

ask their pardon. Eton was described as being in a "state of anarchy" after the 1729 riot.

Despite such incidents, gentry families continued to send their children to these schools,

and then on to Oxford and Cambridge, throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries.[30]

The poor public perception of English schools and the limited availability of

educational alternatives for most everyone outside of the gentry and wealthy commercial

class led to radical proposals for more universal education for all ranks of society. As

early as the mid-seventeenth century Gerald Winstanley sought to de-emphasize formal

divinity training in universities and argued that any man had the right to preach.

Winstanley promoted the extension of educational opportunities to all men and women

and proposed combining schooling and manual labor to root out the elitist corruption,

which he said "occasions all the troubles in the world."[31] Attempts to reform the

[28] Wright, First Gentlemen , 31.
[29] Trumbach, Rise of the Egalitarian Family, 257.
[30] Ibid., 252-65.
[31] Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution
(London: Pelican Books, 1975; reprint, Penguin Paperback 1991), 300-2.

educational system from a privilege of the wealthy and landed classes into a more

comprehensive school system for all ranks of society met with strong resistance. Many

considered the education of the laboring masses dangerous. "Whenever the lower orders

of any great nation have obtained a smattering of knowledge," argued <u>Blackwood's</u>

<u>Edinburgh Magazine</u> in 1825, "they have generally used it to produce national ruin." The

same publication emphasized ties between education and crime in 1827: "As education

has increased amidst the people, infidelity, vice, and crime have increased. At this

moment the people are far more vicious and criminal, in proportion to their numbers, than

they were when comparatively uneducated. The majority of criminals consist of those

who have been 'educated.'"[32] The lack of schools for middle and lower class children or

non-Anglican students in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries mirrored the

attitude expressed in <u>Blackwood's</u>. Only a handful of smaller public schools such as

Ashworth for Quakers and the Presbyterian Mill School existed for those not of landed

Anglican ancestry.[33]

     Ironically, many in the laboring classes viewed education as an unnecessary and

even harmful addition to their way of life. Countering the proponents of a charity school

in eighteenth-century Shropshire, one writer speculated that "the grown-up people are

mostly illiterate, and . . . are willing their children should be so too."[34] The growing urban

industrial economy of England during the period left little time for education of children,

and for those families who made their living in agriculture the harvesting seasons took

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[32] Harold Perkin, <u>Origins of Modern English Society: 1780-1880</u> (London: Routledge, 1969; reprint, paperback, 1996), 293.

precedence over idle reading. Concerns arose that education might confuse a boy as to his station in life. The mother of Stephen Duck, who rose from his common origins to become a recognized poet, took her son out of school at fourteen years of age for fear that "he might become too fine a gentleman for the family that produced him."[35] Bernard Mandeville suggested in 1723 that education for the masses served only to delude the working man:

> Reading, Writing and Arithmetick are very necessary to those, whose Business require such qualifications, but where Peoples Livelihood has no dependence on these arts, they are very pernicious to the Poor, who are forc'd to get their Daily Bread by their Daily Labour . . . every Hour those of poor People spend at their Book is so much time lost to the Society. Going to school, in comparison to Working is Idleness, and the longer Boys continue in this easy sort of Life the more unfit they'll be when grown up for downright Labour, both to Strength and Inclination.[36]

Defoe did not concur with Mandeville, but he did believe that formal schooling was not necessary for his version of a gentlemen (which was more inclusive of commercial men), not because school detracted a man from his work, but rather because a man can always learn on his own. "No gentleman ought to throw up to the point and grow desperate because he was not sent to school," stated Defoe, for "he may still form his genius with the sublimest studyes, and store himself with all the learning necessary to make him a complete gentleman."[37]

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[33] Ibid., 292.

[34] Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 114.

[35] Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 39.

[36] Bernard Mandeville, "An Essay on Charity, and Charity Schools," in The Fable of the Bees, ed. Phillip Harth (London: Pelican Books, 1970; reprint, Penguin Classics, 1989), 294-295.

[37] Defoe, Compleat English Gentleman, 225.

Despite the limited intellectual scope of the English gentleman's education throughout the eighteenth century, the positive qualities of education nonetheless did seep through to society overall. The grammar school and university emphasis on manners and courtesy (and quite probably the need to compete with the rising commercial class) led to a decrease in the amount of general drunkenness and a decline in smoking among the gentry. Reading for pleasure and education became popular among some large landowners, whose libraries illustrated a diverse range of subjects ranging from politics and world history to philosophy and literature. The library of Roger North included Bacon's Henry VIII, Hakluyt's Voyages, Hobbes' Leviathan, and Ricaut's History of the Turkish Empire.[38] The cost of books usually put ownership out of reach for most in the middle and lower classes--a copy of Fielding's Tom Jones cost the equivalent of a laborer's weekly wage. Reading among the masses did grow nonetheless through the growth of circulating libraries.[39] Begun in London as early as 1725, circulating libraries allowed groups of people to pool their limited resources to purchase and share books. By 1800 some 390 circulating libraries existed in England, with over 120 in London alone. Circulation of periodicals also increased throughout the century. The Spectator reached an estimated circulation of somewhere between 3,000 to 14,000 in the years 1711-1714, and the Gentleman's Magazine in the 1730s reached over 10,000 paying customers.[40] The

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[38] G. E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), 143-46.

[39] Watt, Rise of the Novel, 42.

[40] Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Pelican Books Ltd., 1982; paperback edition 1990), 235. Porter estimated the circulation of The Spectator at 3,000, while an 1890 collection of Addison's Spectator essays puts the circulation at a conservative figure of 14,000. See The Spectator, ed. George Washington Greene, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1890), xviii.

growing interest in education and the growth in industrialization and global trade

produced an increase in the demand for and number of teachers and private tutors,

especially those with language skills.[41] Work schools, such as the one founded by Lord

Beaumont near his mining operations in Leicestershire, were founded near industrial

enterprises to provide fundamental education for laborers.[42] Trade unions in the late

eighteenth century stressed education for its members to keep from being exploited by

employers. Similarly, women realized that a lack of education made them susceptible to

exploitation by men, especially their husbands.[43] By the mid-nineteenth century new

public schools such as Cheltenham, Wellington, and Marlborough had begun operations

with curriculum designed for both the landed gentry and the rising commercial middle

class.[44]

Private schools designed to provide more comprehensive and modern learning to

the sons of the commercial class grew rapidly, and by 1865 numbered in excess of

10,000. Education reform concepts such as Jeremy Benthem's Chrestomathic school took

root as the educational system in England finally became open to more members of

society and stressed subjects beyond the traditional courses in theology and Latin.[45]

Oxford and Cambridge saw dramatic increases in enrollments after 1860, in large part

because of the growth of the number of qualified students graduating from the new

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[41] Geoffrey Holmes, Politics, Religion and Society in England, 1679-1742 (London: The Hambleton Press, 1986), 323.
[42] Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe, 15.
[43] Ibid., 102.
[44] Eric J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire From 1750 to the Present Day, vol. 3 of The Penguin Economic History of Britain (London: Pelican Books Ltd., 1968; reprint, Penguin Books, 1990), 81, 168-69.
[45] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 290-98.

private and public schools. By 1900, applicants at both schools had more than doubled

from 1850.[46] Education was slowly moving beyond the private confines of the gentleman

by the late nineteenth century, in part due to industrialization, expanded trade, growth in

the commercial economy, and the expansion of England's colonial possessions.

England's leaders realized in the nineteenth century that theirs was an educational system

in dire need of specific reforms, and introduced several measures that expanded

educational opportunities for the greater populace. The Government's passage of the

Newcastle Commission (1858) for education of working class children, the Clarendon

Commission (1861) which reformed the curriculum of the favored public schools of the

elite class, and the Tauton Commission (1864) that further expanded the education of

"those large classes . . . between the humblest and the very highest" acknowledged that

society did benefit from education for all social ranks. The extent to which these new

laws were a direct result of the shedding of the old economy based on land to a new

economy based on global trade and industrialism (as Professor Harold Perkin believed

when he pointed to these laws as an example of "the complete triumph of the

entrepreneurial ideal" in education) is still subject to debate.[47] Nonetheless, it seems clear

that the pressures of the changing English economy served in some part as a catalyst for

these dramatic changes in England's educational system.

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[46] Stone, "The Size and Composition of Oxford Student Body," 65.
[47] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 299-300.

An English Gentleman's Vocation

Economics, as pointed out in Chapter 2, played a major role in the formation of class concepts in eighteenth-century England. Income and wealth were the foundations of social ranks, a fact acknowledged by Adam Smith when he wrote that "upon this disposition of mankind, to go along with all the passions of the rich and the powerful, is founded the distinction of ranks, and the order of society."[48] But how a man attained his wealth, and what he did (or did not do) to earn his living, played perhaps an even greater role in determining social status. The amount of a man's wealth and how he earned his income had proven to be very reliable distinctions of a gentleman in centuries past, but in the vastly changing economic environment of eighteenth-century England they began to work counter to one another. Drastic changes in the British economy--the growth of industrialization, the expansion of trade, and the growth of urban centers to name three-- placed greater wealth in the hands of industrialists, bankers, merchants, traders, lawyers and other professions that had previously been held in low regard by the gentry. This is not to say that social barriers abruptly disappeared and wealthy traders, merchants, or lawyers were suddenly considered fine gentlemen and accepted into the ranks of the gentry, but a distinct shifting of social barriers is evident from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. Records from 1633-1635 show that, of 1,172 men who were included in the heralds of the College of Arms as 'gentlemen' of London, 792 listed their

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[48] Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner with W.B. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 52.

occupation as merchants, lawyers, or physicians.[49] Commercial and professional men in

England's rapidly growing cities accumulated wealth and challenged the concept of the

idle, landed gentleman. Nathaniel Bailey made this point clear in 1730 when he wrote "in

our days all are accounted gentlemen that have money."[50]

To understand how industrialization and the rise of a powerful commercial class

changed the accepted vocations for gentlemen, it is necessary to first look at the

traditional vocations of the upper ranks of society. For centuries the peerage and gentry

considered only three activities as acceptable ways to spend their time--operating their

estates (which meant collecting rents as landlords), serving as military officers, and

involvement in politics through service in the Parliament and in a host of national and

local bureaucratic posts. The limited scope of the gentleman's acceptable vocations is

reflected in the seventeenth-century guidebooks. Richard Braithwait wrote in 1630 that a

gentleman should be "imployed in affairs of the state, either at home or abroad." Such

service, said Braithwait, was vital and proper to keep a gentleman from becoming a drain

on society, for "no civil state can subsist" when "idleness maketh of men, of women,

beasts."[51] Henry Peacham left little doubt of what he considered the proper vocations for

gentlemen, saying lawyers had "especiall worth and dignitie," labeling doctors as

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[49] Penelope J. Corfield, "The Rivals," in Land and Society in Britain, 1700-1914 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 7. Of the 792 gentlemen of commercial or professional background, 696 were merchants, 67 were lawyers, and 29 were doctors or physicians.

[50] Peter Earle, The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 6. Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers also talked of how the prospering merchant could cross into the realm of the gentleman, but that such upward mobility was "heavily policed against the 'middling sort'. . . with the weapons of snub, ridicule, and parental approval of marriages." See Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords (Oxford: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1997), 21-22.

[51] Braithwait, The English Gentleman, 136, 124.

"mechanique and base," and dismissing any merchant activity as "much derogating from nobilitie" and "contrary to vertue."[52] John Locke agreed in 1703 that service to the country was a gentleman's "proper calling."[53]

The foremost profession of the landed gentleman was the operation of his estate. Most landed men spent little time actually farming or pursuing any form of agriculture, for the value of land to a gentleman lay in its rental to yeomen and small farmers. The concept of the idle gentry landlord flourished on the country estate, where the gentleman exercised ultimate authority, leaving little reason to venture into the cities. The Duke of Chandos often left the "abominable smells" of London to return to his country estate. Examples of gentlemen hunting with tenants or, in the case of the Duke of Dorsett, playing cricket with his gardener, provide examples of the landlord's leisured life at home.[54] Of course some more industrious landlords did take some interest in the business of farming and several became innovators in breeding livestock, experimenting with growing techniques, and reclamation of land for farming. The Marquis of Rockingham, for example, personally oversaw several thousand acres of his estate in Wentworth where he experimented with lime and manure as fertilizers to see how they would affect the growth of turnips. Lord Cowdor of Pembrokeshire drained bogs and reclaimed land for farming. In Audley, Lord Braybrooke discovered new techniques in sheep breeding.[55]

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[52] Henry Peacham, The Compleat Gentleman (London: Francias Costable, 1662; reprint, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., 1968), 10-12.
[53] John Locke, "Some Thoughts Concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman," Political Essays ed. by Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 349-50.
[54] Mingay, English Landed Society, 205-8.
[55] Ibid., 163-72.

Whether landed men pursued agriculture or merely collected rents, their first duty was the operation of their land.

Landed gentlemen who chose to dignify themselves through military action had two options, the army or the navy. Of the two the army emphasized social status over merit in the promotion of its members. A 1710 article in The Examiner reflected the genteel nature of the Army, stating that the coaches of its officers, who were "a species of men quite different from any that were ever known before the revolution," clogged the streets in London during the winter breaks in their military campaigns.[56] The officer ranks within the Royal Navy reflected a less aristocratic make-up, with many examples of non-gentry men who ascended from the lower deck to become officers. One of the finest examples of social mobility within the navy was that of Cloudesley Shovell, who rose from a cabin boy at 14 to a rear admiral at 31.[57] Despite such inspiring stories, there were far fewer men like Admiral Shovell than there were naval officers from the ranks of the gentry. Sons of landed wealth comprised over 40% of the navy officer corps just after the beginning of the nineteenth century. Service in the military served a dual purpose by aiding a gentleman's future political career since it provided him an opportunity to prove his prowess at riding, hunting, and other such gentlemanly skills while also allowing him to pose as the patriotic and paternal protector of England. Between 1790 and 1820, almost

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[56] Holmes, Politics, Religion and Society, 345-46.
[57] Ibid., 347-49.

half of the over 2,000 members of Parliament served in the militia or as volunteer officers.[58]

Aside from the men who chose to spend their days on the estate or in pursuit of military honors, most landed gentlemen concentrated on their political careers. The nobility dominated the House of Lords and, indirectly, the House of Commons, and served as lords-lieutenant in the counties, while the landowning gentry resided in the House of Commons and filled magistrate posts and other positions in local government.[59] Through about 1760, roughly three-fifths of the House of Commons consisted of men from the peerage and wealthy gentry, and most of the men remaining members of the Commons had some degree of landed wealth despite backgrounds in law or trade.[60] Although there is some evidence that the commercial class made strides in membership to Parliament, the gentry continued to hold the majority of seats throughout the century. Between 1734 and 1832 some 70% to 75% of the most powerful men in Parliament had ancestral ties to landed wealth or were commercial men "often with one foot on the land."[61] It was no coincidence that landowners dominated Parliament, since the Qualification Act of 1710 stipulated that no man who made less than £600 in rents from lands (£300 for burgess members) could hold a seat in Parliament.[62]

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[58] Colley, Britons, 177-85.
[59] Mingay, English Landed Society, 8.
[60] Ibid., 113.
[61] J. G. Judd, Members of Parliament, 1734-1832 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 71; Perkin, Origins of Modern English History, 39, Colley, Britons, 191.
[62] Paul Langford, Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 289. See also Corfield, "The Rivals," 9-10.

There were two primary reasons why the landowning gentry tightly controlled seats in Parliament and held most bureaucratic posts: the protection of property and the twin bonds of paternalism and deference. In the twilight of the seventeenth century Locke made it clear that politics existed first for the protection of wealth and land, which in the long run, benefited all of society:

> Political power then I take to be a Right of making laws with Penalties of Death, and consequently all less Penalties, for the Regulating and Preserving of Property, and of employing the force of the Community, in the Execution of such Laws, and in the defence of the Common-wealth from Foreign Injury, and all this only for the Publick Good.[63]

Despite the industrial growth and the rise of a new and wealthy commercial class in England in the eighteenth century, protection of land remained the central focus of politics. Hume wrote in mid-century that it was the landed gentleman "in whose hands our legislature is chiefly lodged."[64] William Marshall proclaimed in 1804 that "landed property is the basis on which every other species of material property rests; on it alone mankind can be said--to live, to move, and have its being."[65] While land was the physical requirement for governmental power, the interaction between the paternalism offered by the landowning class and the deference extended from the common masses kept the landed gentry in power. Obtaining a position in government had little to do with a man's qualifications and everything to do with his connections within the power structure of the nobility and landed gentry. The lower ranks of society readily accepted this system,

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[63] John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed. with intro. and notes by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960; reprint, paperback edition, 1999), 268. This is the closing paragraph of Chapter I, Book II.
[64] Langford, Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 288-89.The passage is included in some versions of the essay "Of Taxes" from Hume's Essays Moral, Political and Literary published in 1752.

primarily because they believed power through government was the domain of the upper

class, who would in turn take care of their community and society overall. Defoe referred

to this mass acceptance of gentry power when he wrote: "Tis in the power of the gentry of

England to reform the whole Kingdom without either laws, proclamations, or informers;

and without their concurrence all the laws, proclamations and declarations in the world

will have no effect; the rigour of the laws consist in their executive power."[66]

The system that naturally paired men to offices based on the man's wealth and

importance is an excellent illustration of the eighteenth-century system of paternalism and

deference at work. David Cannadine points to politics and government as an example of

the "triadic" model of English society. The peerage and large landowning gentry ruled the

Parliament and controlled national offices in the rural and urban regions. Medium to

small landowners filled the local posts--those who were rural gentry filled the seats in

their region while the more growing number of urban commercial men who bought

estates filled positions within the larger cities. The laboring masses, the third tier of the

system, played the role of the governed, with an occasional protest or riot to remind the

upper ranks that they constituted the largest segment of the population.[67]

Landed gentlemen did not generally sully their reputations with business

endeavors, but they were certainly not strangers to the commercial aspects of the

economy. Some landed men did invest in business ventures, particularly the "lesser

gentry" (those men who had modest estates and who had often risen to the ranks of gentry

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[65] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 41-42.

through commercial activity). Mining enterprises, banking activities, canal building,

shipping, and manufacturing facilities were common businesses for those gentlemen who

ventured into commercial investments. For example, Henry Curwen, the squire of

Workington, made over twice as much annual income from his investments in coal mines

than from his estate. Not all landed men were as fortunate as Curwen. Speculative

investments in business ventures such as the South Seas Company left many men, both

landed and commercial, destitute when they failed.[68] The gentry and commercial classes

often intermingled in the training and vocations of the second or third sons of gentry

families. Most second and third-born sons, shut out of being landed gentlemen due to the

practice of primogeniture, opted for careers in the clergy or the professions, which is not

surprising considering the gentry's low opinion towards trade.[69] But the growing

commercial economy, together with increasingly depressed rents of land, forced many

landed gentleman to push for their sons to enter the professions and trade, or to marry a

wealthy daughter of a commercial family.[70]

Despite their traditional reliance on land and disdain for the concept of trade or

profit, the landed gentry could not ignore the growing commercial economy nor the men

of the middle ranks that grew wealthy from business activities. It is estimated that one in

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[66] Quoted in Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 41. From Daniel Defoe, The Poor Man's Plea in Relation to . . . a Reformation of Manners (1703), p. 129.

[67] Cannadine, Rise and Fall of Class in Britain, 46-49.

[68] Mingay, English Landed Society, 100-107; Langford, Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 42; 209-210. Henry Horwitz, "'The Mess of the Middle Class' Revisited: The Case of the 'Big Bourgeoisie' Revisited," Continuity and Change 2 (1987), 268.

[69] Margaret Hunt, The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 19.

[70] Ibid., 209.

five eighteenth-century families made their living through trade, and countless common

farmers and laborers depended upon trade for their jobs.[71] It was not unknown for

commercial families such as the Whitbreads and the Wardes, who made fortunes in

brewing and merchant businesses respectively, to become wealthy landowners.[72] Barriers

that had existed for centuries began to fall, such as the idea that an apprenticeship with a

trader or merchant barred a man from ever entering the gentry. Men of commercial

background had argued for years that trade was consistent with gentlemanly activity

(meaning it was not dirty physical labor) and that apprenticing in trade should not exclude

a man from the gentleman's ranks. Edward Chamberlayne, who had scorned younger

gentry sons for apprenticing with shopkeepers in the mid-seventeenth century in his

annual handbook Angliae Notitia, admitted in the1702 edition that commercial

apprenticeships did not dishonor the reputation of nobles and gentlemen.[73] Considering

that more sons of gentry background pursued commercial careers in the seventeenth and

eighteenth century, it is not surprising that the bias against trade apprenticeships began to

soften. Records from the mid-seventeenth century show that over one-quarter of all

apprentices listed their father's occupation as "gentleman."[74] Younger sons of gentry also

mixed with sons of the commercial class in the professions of law and medicine. The cost

of a legal or medical education in the early eighteenth century ranged from £5 to £20,

well within reach of more prosperous merchant families. At the same time, records reveal

[71] Colley, Britons, 56.
[72] Mingay, English Landed Society, 102.
[73] Corfield, "The Rivals," 7-9.
[74] Earle, Making of the English Middle Class, 7.

that over half of the 50 newly articled lawyers in London in 1712 listed their fathers as esquires or gentlemen.[75]

Many landowning gentlemen understood that their world was changing, and they realized that they must accept commercial activity as the mainstay of the English economy and acquiesce to the fact that successful merchants or traders considered themselves worthy of gentleman status. Realizing that other nations were similarly adjusting to the growth in trade and mercantilism, the gentry supported trade to buoy the English economy over its European rivals, and to provide alternative taxing sources other than land or gentry wealth. The landed ranks sought to control trade from above. They hoped to support the commercial ranks and forge a mutually beneficial relationship--the gentry would provide a stable government policy that would allow the commercial class to generate more revenue. Such a relationship, they argued, would help England continue to lead Europe in industrial output and global trade.[76] This argument is reflected in a May 19, 1711 article in The Spectator regarding the Royal Exchange:

> When I have been upon the Change, I have often fancied one of our old kings standing in person, where he is represented in effigy, and looking down upon the wealthy concourse of people with which that place is every day filled. In this case, how would he be surprised to hear all the languages of Europe spoken in this little spot of his former dominions, and to see so many private men, who in his time would have been vassals of some powerful baron, negociating like princes for greater sums of money than were formerly to be met with in the royal treasury! Trade, without enlarging British territories, has given us a kind of additional empire: it has multiplied the number of the rich, made our landed estates more valuable than they were formerly, and added to them an accession of other estates as valuable as the land itself.[77]

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[75] Holmes, Politics, Religion and Society, 341-42.
[76] Colley, Britons, 60-66.
[77] Joseph Addison, The Spectator, No.69 (May 19, 1711), in Greene, ed., The Spectator, 198-99.

Growth in the commercial economy also bolstered the expansion of the professions. As businesses grew in number and size, the demand grew for lawyers to draft documents dealing with debt borrowings, investment terms, and incorporation of companies. More wealth within society drove the demand for more personal legal work such as the drafting of property and marriage settlements, and improved better medical attention.[78] Joseph Addison stated in 1711 that the "three great professions of divinity, law, and physic" had become "overburdened with practitioners, and filled with multitudes of ingenious gentlemen that starve one another."[79] The abundance of professionals in London forced many men to relocate to outlying areas. Documents presented to the House of Commons in 1730 revealed that nineteen attorneys resided in or near Leeds, twenty-three in York, twenty-five in Manchester and surrounding communities. Even distant Cornwall boasted eleven barristers.[80] In medicine, the old methods of practice were being replaced with new professions such as surgery, which became so profitable that a 1745 guidebook to professions proclaimed "an ingenious surgeon, let him be cast on any corner of the earth, but with his case of instruments in his pocket, he may live where most other professions starve."[81] The number of apothecaries also grew, as did their income levels. Thomas Macro, an apothecary who started his career as a grocer, built the finest house in Bury St. Edmunds and sent his sons to Cambridge. Other

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[78] Holmes, Politics, Society and Religion, 316.
[79] Addison, The Spectator, No. 21 (March 24, 1711), in Greene, ed., The Spectator, 65-69.
[80] Holmes, Politics, Society and Religion, 310-11.
[81] Quoted in Holmes, Politics, Society and Religion, 330. From R. Campbell, The London Tradesman: being a Compendious View of all Trades, Professions, Arts, both Liberal and Mechanik, now practised in the Cities of London and Westminster (London: 1947), 57.

professions that saw an increase in popularity included architects, merchant bankers,

accountants, and investment consultants.[82] Since these professions did not involve

manual labor and usually provided very good incomes, they were placed in a purgatory-

like social categorization, not truly genteel vocations yet just on the cusp of gentility. Not

surprisingly many such professional men ignored traditional social groupings and strove

to achieve the leisured lifestyle of a gentleman.[83]

     The changing societal view that commercial and professional endeavors were

critical to the nation and that businessmen were intellectually superior to many men,

landed or not, added legitimacy to the emerging idea of the commercial gentleman. The

1718 edition of The Present State of Great Britain began the chapter on trade by stating

"next to the purity of our religion we are the most considerable of any nation in the world

for the vastness and extensiveness of our trade."[84] Defoe wrote: "a merchant in his

counting house at once converses with all parts of the known world. This, and travel,

makes a true-bred merchant the most intelligent man in the world."[85] To be a successful

merchant a man needed to be part accountant, part linguist, part geographer, part lawyer,

and a good judge of character. A 1713 article in The Guardian entitled "Extract from

General maxims of Trade" declares: "You cannot do your country greater service than by

informing all ranks of men amongst us, that the greatest benefactor to them all is the

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[82] Ibid., 314, 323-25.
[83] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 56.
[84] Colley, Britons, 59.
[85] Quoted in Earle, Making of the English Middle Class, 34. From Defoe's An Essay Upon Projects (1697),

merchant."[86] Bishop Burnet wrote in 1708 that men of trade and business are "generally speaking, the best body in the nation, generous, sober and charitable . . . upon the whole the best we have."[87]

The commercial class, meanwhile, continued to argue that they constituted a new type of gentleman. "We merchants," wrote a Bristol shopkeeper in 1722, "are a species of gentry that have grown in to the world this last century, and are as honourable and almost as useful as you landed folk, that have always thought yourselves so much above us."[88] The wealthiest of the commercial class bought estates. The Arcedeknes family used the proceeds from their fortune, which was made in Jamaica, to buy Glevering Hall in Suffolk. The Pyms, who were London merchants, bought property in Hertfordshire. The Best family of Kent moved from their small house next to the brewery that provided their income and bought land in Boxley. Wealthy commercial families literally grew closer to the elite ranks of society through marriage--both the Arcedeknes and Pym families owed a great deal of their landed status to strategic marriages into gentry houses.[89] Nicholas Rogers confirmed this trend in his study of 200 of the most prominent London businessmen from 1740-1759. Rogers verifies that 16.5% married wives of gentry or peerage backgrounds, up from 14.8% during the years 1694-1709. More revealing is the high proportion of daughters from commercial families who married into the landed class. Over 45% of the daughters of London businessmen married men of gentry or

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[86] Richard Steele, "Extract from General Maxims of Trade," The Guardian, No. 170 (September 25, 1713), in The Guardian; A Periodical Paper vol. 3 (London: J. Richardson and Co., et.al., 1823), 228.
[87] Earle, Making of the English Middle Class, 11.
[88] Ibid., 8.
[89] Mingay, English Landed Society, 102-3.

peerage status in the mid-eighteenth century versus only 36.5% at the turn of the century.

Clearly a rising number of wealthy commercial families sought to elevate their family

name through the female line, which Rogers labels as consistent with traditional

bourgeoisie mobility.[90]

Many commercial men further bolstered their case for gentry status through

holding local and national offices. Studies of London Aldermen between 1694 and 1714,

and from 1740 to 1759, indicate approximately 45% of men holding posts in the London

civic government were from the commercial ranks.[91] Not content to occupy only local

positions, business and professional men slowly seeped into Parliament. While the

peerage and landed gentry still controlled over 70% of the MP positions, the number of

merchants, bankers, lawyers, and industrialists serving in Parliament rose throughout the

century. In 1734 commercial men occupied about 11% of the seats in Parliament; in 1820

business and professional men accounted for 23% of Parliament's membership. The

doubling of the percentage of commercial men in Parliament over this 86 year period is

not terribly dramatic until one considers that the average age of a commercial man in

parliament was 40, compared to the average age of 24 for the first sons of peerage.[92] The

fact that men hailing from business backgrounds were typically almost twice the age of

peerage sons meant that the actual number of wealthy commercial men increased in order

to realize significant gains in Parliament (although the increase could be offset by the

expansion of the House of Commons in 1801 to include to include Irish representation). It

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[90] Nicholas Rogers, "Money, Marriage, Mobility: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London," Journal of Family History 24, no. 1 (January 1999), 19-34.

is likely that a number of these MPs were commercial men who had moved to the provinces or the country to become 'landed' since many successful men of business sought the leisured life of the country gentleman.[93] Eric Hobsbawn points to this movement from the urban commercial class to the country landed class as a reason England eventually lost its position of global dominance in trade and business.[94]

The changing fundamentals of the English economy and the increasing pressure from the growing numbers of wealthy mercantile men of eighteenth-century England slowly eroded the reputation of the traditional landed gentleman. Economic thinkers such as David Hume, writing on the role of interest and borrowing in an economic system, pointed out that without commerce, the country would "consist chiefly of landed gentry, whose prodigality and expense make a continual demand for borrowing; and of peasants, who have no sums to supply that demand."[95] Such comments in support of commerce within the growing economy could not help but cast the landed, leisured class in a harsh light. Patrick Colquhoun reflected this anti-gentry bias in 1814 when he wrote that the "professional labours" of mercantile class "sheltered them . . . from the prevailing vices of the age" and the middle and lower classes contained "many useful members of society." With regard to the nobility, Colquhoun claimed they spent most of their time "either at the gaming table, or in the pursuit of frivolous and contemptible amusements,"

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[91] Ibid., 21. See also , "'Mess of the Middle Class' Revisited," 269-75.
[92] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 189-90.
[93] Corfield, "The Rivals," 10. Corfield puts the average percentage of commercial men in Parliament between 1734 and 1832 at just over 50%, but adds that "many of the commercial MPs were simultaneously landowners.
[94] Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, 182-83.

while the gentry would rather "imitate the vices than the virtues of the highest orders of society."[96] Lord Balcarres expressed a similar disdain for landed wealth and praise for the industrious commercial man in 1762 when he wrote that "scarce anyone born to (high life) ever becomes eminent, either in science or station; it is only want that sharpens the mind of men."[97] Many viewed the upper ranks not as paternalistic protectors of society but as greedy, indolent drains on the economy. "If powers are put into the hands of a comparatively small number, called the aristocracy," wrote James Mill in 1820, "they will take from the rest of the community as much as they please the objects of their desire." More direct and sarcastic attacks came from groups such as the Anti-Corn Law League, who called the elite class a "foot pad aristocracy, power-proud plunderers . . . blood sucking vampires" who were "gluttons and debauchees."[98]

While the gentry were portrayed as idle non-productive members of society, the commercial class did not completely escape criticism. In the first half of the eighteenth century popular literature such as chapbooks often made ambitious commercial men the villain their formulaic story lines. As the popularity of the novel grew in the later part of the century, however, positive portrayals such as those offered by Anna Gomersall in

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[95] David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. by Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 301-2.
[96] Quoted in Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 276. From Patrick Colquhoun, Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire (1814), 49.
[97] Hunt, Middling Sort, 211.
[98] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 277.

Eleonora (1789) and The Disappointed Heir (1796) became more common.[99] The gentry

were often cast as snobbish elitists and useless contributors to society, as seen in Samuel

Foote's play The Minor (1773), in which a merchant class uncle, Sir Richard Wealthy,

suggested to his landed nephew, Sir George Wealthy, that he marry a merchant's

daughter. Sir Richard explained how the "fruits of honest industry" derived from his

merchant activity has "preserv'd your lazy, beggarly nobility," to which Sir George

replied "better our name had perish'd! insupportable! soap-boiler, uncle!"[100] Incensed at

his nephew's arrogance, Sir Richard replied, "traduce a trader, in a country of commerce!

It is treason against the community." James Raven has summarized the competing

portrayals of the commercial class by stating that "a balance between hostile and

encouraging responses to commercial achievement was maintained, more or less, over

two centuries of imaginative literature."[101]

The gentry throughout the eighteenth century found themselves in a battle, both

psychological and real, against the commercial interests for social supremacy, and landed

gentlemen realized that they had to either adapt to trade as a partial vocation or protect

their position through legislation. Many landed gentlemen, such as Henry Curwen

mentioned above, chose to adapt to the changing economy and invest in business

ventures. Canals and mining operations were particularly popular forms of business

association for landed men since both involved making a profit from land.[102] Examples of

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[99] James Raven, Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 9, 112-37.
[100] Ibid., 111.
[101] Ibid., 8.
[102] Hunt, Middling Sort, 209.

such investment included the Duke of Bridgewater, who built a canal in 1761 to move coal from his mines in Worsley; Sir Nigel Greasley in 1775, whose canal stretched from Staffordshire to Newcastle-under-Lyme and similarly transported coal; and Lord Stanhope, who together with Lord Sheffield invested in the Bude canal in southern England.[103] Not all gentry investment, of course, succeeded, as was the case with the Woodgate family of Kent, who were forced to sell their estate in Summerhill after a failed investment in a bank in Tonbridge in 1812.[104] Despite these cases, however, those landed gentlemen who understood that their futures rested in commercial investment usually chose to participate in business through passive investments. In the Stone's estimation, "they managed to have the best of all worlds: the profits of the entrepreneur and the prestige of the aristocrat."[105]

When the landed gentry chose to fight the rising commercial environment of eighteenth-century England, they used their most lethal weapon--the legal system. The Speenhamland revisions to the poor laws, passed in 1795, set a minimum wage for workers that was tied to the price of corn. If earnings fell below the minimum, they were supplemented by poor rates. The Speenhamland System in effect limited the wage paid to workers by the landed class. Thus the landed elites could artificially retain more income. The policy resulted in an increasing gap between the wealthy and the destitute. Even more beneficial to the landed interests were the Corn Laws, which limited the importation of grain and provided a literal monopoly for domestic agricultural products. The Corn Laws

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[103] Mingay, English Landed Society, 198-99.
[104] Ibid., 101.

essentially subsidized landed gentlemen.[106] Similarly, the movement towards enclosure of

public lands directly fattened the landowner's pocketbook. The rapid expansion of

enclosure laws between 1750 and 1800 can be attributed to the landed gentry's

acceptance of a capitalistic application to farming, a departure from the belief that

community farms produced better English citizens. Parliamentary acts also protected the

gentry's social position.[107] The Qualifications Act of 1710 directly countered the push by

commercial men to gain membership in Parliament by setting minimum levels of rental

income for MPs, thus excluding men of modest commercial wealth who could afford only

small country estates that produced little rental income.

The landed gentry's fight to keep both their social dominance and their role as

leisured gentlemen and paternal lawmakers suffered its biggest setback in 1832 with the

passage of the Parliamentary Reform Act. The new law allowed a role in government to a

larger segment of the population and led to the repeal of the Qualifications Act in 1838,

thus eliminating the financial hurdle for men to sit in Parliament. In 1846 Parliament

abolished the Corn Laws, opening British markets to foreign imports and ending the

landowner's revenue subsidy. Astute and adaptable gentlemen survived, while those

landowners that clung to traditional thinking saw their estates diminish.[108] The growth of

urban centers, the technological advances in industrialization, and the progression of

commercial wealth ultimately reduced the importance of land ownership. As profits

through business and trade became tied to the betterment of the nation, society began to

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[105] Stone and Stone, An Open Elite? 190.
[106] Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, 104-08.

view commercial men as patriotic, while the docile and unproductive landowner became an anachronism associated more with the British idea of the immoral and unprincipled French. "The public spirit of persons in the middling ranks of this kingdom, and the depravity and selfishness of those in the higher class, was never more remarkable than in the present," remarked an MP from York in 1753.[109] Tocqueville noticed the change in English society and in the economy during his visit in 1833, stating that the democratic principle had defeated the aristocratic.[110] Eventually the prejudice held by the gentry against the idea of profit through trade and business diminished, although the stigma of commercial activity as an ungentlemanly endeavor lingered into the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the growth and acceptance of commercialism within English society forever altered the relationship between the class of men whose livelihoods were based on soil and those who made their living in trade and business.

An English Gentleman's Character

An eighteenth-century landed gentleman was easily discernable by the extent of his land holdings, the degree of income and wealth, the superiority of his education, or the purity of his vocation. He was not as easily separated from aspiring gentlemen-- especially a wealthy commercial man or a successful freeholder--when measured by personal characteristics, meaning the virtues expected by his peers and by society as a

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[107] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 102.
[108] Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, 80.
[109] Colley, Britons, 90-97. Quote on page 92.
[110] Alexis de Tocqueville, Memoirs on Pauperism, intro. by Gertrude Himmelfarb, trans. by Seymour Drescher (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 12.

whole. This section will focus on the expected personal attributes of the landed gentleman, in particular his virtues such as honor, morality, courtesies, hospitalities, and manners.

Honor and virtue were the most important personal traits that an eighteenth-century English gentleman could possess. While the two traits were interrelated, they had specific meanings and applications within the gentleman's world. Honor, in this context, meant a man's reputation, his good name and public veneration. Virtue referred more to specific traits and actions such as morality, courage, valor, and virility. A man who exhibited dishonesty, cowardice, or rude public behavior, found that he no longer received the courtesies shared between gentlemen nor was given the deference reserved for gentlemen by the lower ranks of society--he had lost his honor. Peacham wrote in the mid-seventeenth century that honor was the reward for virtuous action and disgrace was the punishment for wickedness. A man could gain nobility through honor, and lose nobility through dishonor.[111] Defoe wrote that without virtue, "strictly speaking a man can not be truly noble or compleately a gentleman," and strongly recommended that a gentleman "guard his virtue with the uttmost caution and care; and that he never thinks it below him to be esteemed as a man of modesty, sobriety and temperance, nor a man of religion too."[112]

Honor governed all actions of a true gentleman, for it was only through honor that a man kept his name in good standing, especially among the men of his class. The

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[111] Peacham, Compleat Gentleman, 3-9.
[112] Defoe, Compleat English Gentleman, 234-36.

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opinions of the lower ranks of society were not a serious concern to most gentlemen.

Archdeacon William Paley makes this point clear in his 1785 work Moral and Political

Philosophy:

> The law of Honour is a system of rules constructed by people of fashion, and calculated to facilitate their intercourse with one another; and for no other purpose . . . this law only prescribes and regulates the duties betwixt equals; omitting such as relate to the Supreme Being, as well as those which we owe to our inferiors. For which reason, profaneness, neglect of public worship or private devotion, cruelty to servants, rigorous treatment of tenants or other dependents, want of charity to the poor, injuries done to tradesmen by insolvency or delay of payment, with numberless examples of the same kind, are accounted no breaches of honour; because a man is not a less agreeable companion for these vices, nor the worse to deal with, in those concerns which are usually transacted between one gentleman and another.[113]

A gentleman's need to uphold his honor and reputation preceded kindness or even the

law, as seen in the case of Edward Littleton. Littleton had introduced a couple who had

subsequently married. When the man breached his marriage contract, Littleton publicly

whipped him, for the man's infidelities reflected poorly on Littleton's good name. The

man subsequently sued Littleton and won. Even though Littleton's actions may seem

severe and the law sided with the beaten man, Littleton's only concern was for his honor

and reputation within his social class.[114]

The eighteenth-century English gentleman would go to excessive lengths to

defend his honor, risking even his life in a sword or pistol duel to protect his name. The

duel had been used for centuries to determine a man's bravery and honor. In the ancient

world the duel was used to settle wartime disputes (champions would be chosen to battle

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[113] Quoted in Clark, English Society, 115.
[114] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 22-23.

in order to limit casualties). Jousting between knights in the Middle Ages was nothing more than extravagant duels, and when such individual battles became regulated, sanctioned public events, they evolved into what V. G. Kiernan calls the "duel of honor." These feudal versions of the duel were the predecessors of the semi-regulated eighteenth-century duel, where unofficial "seconds" were almost always in attendance to regulate the activities.[115] The duel survived into the nineteenth century only because of its strong link to honor. The British Code of Duel, published in 1824, states unequivocally that "honour is a principle generated by virtue, as demonstrated in useful and agreeable services to a community . . . hence the influence under which the duel still prevails against every discouragement, and will in all probability continue to prevail till the dissolution of the present society." The same book makes it clear that "if . . . a gentleman evade a justifiable call, he thus necessarily puts himself without the pale of honor, and a notification of the fact to honourable society produces his expulsion from it."[116] The duel was not only a test of bravery but also a way to reclaim honor where a man felt it had been lost. An article in the June 7, 1709 edition of The Tatler discusses a situation where an "honest country gentleman had the misfortune to fall into company with two or three men of honour" and had been "very ill treated." One of the men realized that his actions the night before could be construed as ungentlemanly and dispatched a note stating he was prepared to give the man "satisfaction." The country gentleman thought it odd that the man was prepared to go to such extremes to prove himself a gentleman: "This is fine doing, last night he sent me

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[115] V. G. Kiernan, The Duel in European History; Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19-45. Kiernan discusses at length the history of duelling from the Romans through

away cursedly out of humor, and this morning he fancies it would be satisfaction to be run through the body."[117]

Personal honor always stood at the center of a duel between gentlemen, whether the duel itself was conducted publicly or privately. Lord Talbott and John Wilkes, both well known in the mid eighteenth century, dueled almost entirely in private in early October, 1762, after corresponding for over a month about where and how to meet in private. A tract written by Wilkes several weeks earlier had offended Talbot and he challenged Wilkes to duel, whereupon Wilkes wrote to Talbot that he would meet him in Bagshot without his servant "from the fear of any of the parties being known."[118] Talbot replied that his servant would attend him "as going alone would give room for suspicion."[119] Once they met, according to a letter from Wilkes to Earl Temple later that evening, they dined together like proper gentlemen and argued about when the duel should occur--Wilkes wished to wait until morning, but Talbot wanted to "finish the business immediately" and where to stage the fight (Wilkes suggested they duel behind closed doors for privacy, while Talbot insisted they go to the garden). They agreed upon the garden, had their assistants charge the pistols, marched off eight feet, turned and shot. According to Wilke's letter, "both fires were in very exact time, but neither took effect"

the sixteenth century throughout Europe in the first two chapters of his study.
[116] Clark, English Society, 111.
[117] Richard Steele, "On Duelling," The Tatler, No. 25 (June 7, 1709), in A. Chalmers, The British Essayists with Prefaces, Historical and Biographical, Vol 1. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856), 277-281.
[118] John Wilkes to Colonel Berkeley (attendant for Lord Talbot), September 30, 1762, in James P. Gilchrist, A Brief Display of The Origin and History of Ordeals; Trials by Battle; Courts of Chivalry or Honour; and the Decision of Private Quarrels by Single Combat: Also, A Chronological Register of the Principal Duels Fought From the Accession of His Late Majesty to the Present Time (London: W. Bulmer and W. Nichol, 1821), 66-67.
[119] N. Berkeley to J. Wilkes, September 30, 1762, in Gilchrist, Brief Display, 67.

whereupon both men complimented each other for their bravery and went back to the inn "to drink a bottle of claret together, which we did with great humour and laugh."[120] Both men escaped the duel unscathed, but the important point is that their honor remained intact. Talbot had defended his good name by making the challenge, and Wilkes displayed honor in his acceptance, whereby both men could then boast of how they settled their differences in an honorable fashion. It is obvious that neither man wanted to injure the other, and that the act of dueling in this case was as much for the gentlemanly theater than for any true revenge. Similar high profile duels were fought by William Pitt against George Tierney in May 1798 (pistols were fired twice "without effect" and "the business was ended with perfect honour to both parties"), and by Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Canning in September 1809 (Canning received a non-lethal wound to his left thigh).

Contrary to Wilkes' and Talbot's public dispute and well-planned private duel, many challenges arose from insignificant arguments that in many cases only marginally damaged a man's honor. Dudley Ryder casually recalled a duel between John Tyssen and Mr. Henley, who "was in drink" and challenged Tyssen in a coffeehouse after the two men had verbally quarreled. The men "drew their swords and fought," but the intercession of another man "prevented them from doing one another any harm."[121] Many of the 172 chronicled duels that took place between 1763 and 1821 that are compiled in J.P. Gilchrist's <u>A Brief Display of The Origin and History of Ordeals</u> (1821) are the result of minor character infractions, political arguments, or centered on the defense or winning

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[120] Wilkes to Earl Temple, October 5, 1762, in Gilchrist, <u>Brief Display</u>, 68-76.

over of a woman. Typical of the shorter entries is the following account of a duel on

April 2, 1818:

> A dispute arose respecting a lady, at Covent Garden theatre, on Monday night, between Captain N. of the royal navy, and lieutenant L. of a foot regiment. A meeting was appointed at Chalk Farm, at six o'clock on Tuesday morning. The parties, with their seconds, attended; the ground was measured, eight paces being the distance fixed. The parties fired together by signal, but both shots proved harmless: they fired again, when Lieutenant L.'s ball grazed Captain N.'s head, but fortunately did not seriously injure him. By the interposition of the seconds, an amicable adjustment of the affair took place, and the parties left the grounds friends.[122]

Another entry dated January 13, 1777 described how two men fought over the "character

of a lady" and concluded that if others had not interceded, "the death of one of the parties

would have certainly ensued." The last sentence noted that one of the duelists married the

lady in question the following Saturday.[123]

In most cases the duels chronicled by Gilchrist ended, like the one recounted

above, with the parties surviving and reconciling on friendly terms, while others were

clearly the result of deep hatred. A duel fought in January 1786 resulted in one of the

antagonists being shot in the arm. The final sentence informs the reader that "Mr.

Mollison's arm has since been amputated, and both the gentlemen are now perfectly

reconciled, and as good as friends as ever."[124] In another case in April 1818, the two

duelists were future brothers-in-law and, after one was "wounded slightly in the body . . .

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[121] Dudley Ryder, Thursday, December 29, 1715. The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716, ed. W. Matthews (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1939), 157.
[122] Gilchrist, Brief Display, no. 106, 270.
[123] Ibid., no. 19, 109.
[124] Ibid., no. 42, 141.

they parted good friends."[125] On the other hand, a duel between William Hunter and David Mitchell, which had its origins in a dispute in July 1802, simmered until August 9, 1802, when "Mitchell attacked Hunter in the street with a large bludgeon." A duel between the two ensued, whereupon Hunter was killed.[126] Despite the motivation of results, honor or "satisfaction" in the words of many duelists, remained the driving force behind dueling. A duel between Lord Macartney and Major General Stewart on June 8, 1786 illustrated the need for the satisfaction of honor. After expressing concern over Macartney's shortsightedness and warning him that his gun was not cocked, the duel proceeded, whereupon Macartney was wounded. Stewart, feeling such an unworthy opponent had slighted his honor, announced "this is no satisfaction," and demanded the two duel again under better circumstances, to which Macartney replied "if that be the case, we had better proceed now. I am here in consequence of a [message] from General Stewart, who called upon me to give him satisfaction in my private capacity. . .the General may proceed as he thinks fit."[127] Both men left the scene, and it is unknown whether the two clashed again, but the point is clear--Stewart wanted complete satisfaction that his honor stood unscathed.

Dueling among gentlemen also illustrates the required trait of bravery among gentlemen, for many duels resulted in death. Of the 172 duels listed by Gilchrest, 69 ended with the death of one or both participants, and another 15 involved serious injury without disclosing the final status of the injured party. If we assume Gilchrist's work is an

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[125] Ibid., no. 107, 271.
[126] Ibid., no. 77, 191-192.

adequate sample, and further assume that the outcome of half of the 15 inconclusive duels produced a fatality, it can be concluded that roughly 44% of the duels in England in the eighteenth century ended in death. In other words, an eighteenth-century gentleman preparing to duel had just under a 50% chance that he or his opponent would die. The number of fatal duels is likely higher when one considers the many unrecorded duels among both gentry and non-gentry men. Men outside the gentry desired the honor that came with dueling but were not bound by the rules of the gentleman. Fistfights and knife dueling (termed "chivy duelling") were common among the lower ranks of society throughout the eighteenth century.[128] Whereas many of the recorded duels among nobles and gentry were fought to protect reputations, arguments among the ruder classes were probably also grounded in truer personal disdain that resulted in more vengeful deaths. In other words, despite the many entries in Gilchrist's work that end with the duelists walking away with their honor intact, dueling was generally a dangerous and often deadly affair.

Attempts to extinguish dueling as a vehicle by which to settle disputes began in earnest in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, resulting in a decline in dueling through the first half of the nineteenth century.[129] Proponents of more civilized methods of dispute resolution argued that it was not civil or moral for a gentleman to conduct himself in such crude events. Writers such as Richard Sheridan (1775) satirized the braggadocios gentleman in novels, painting portraits such as the country landowner Bob Acres, who

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[127] Ibid., no. 43, 142-45.
[128] Kiernan, Duel in European History, 134.

felt obligated to uphold the code of the duel but when faced with the prospect of personal battle felt his courage "oozing away."[130] Morally the church condemned duelling even while the courts allowed, up through 1827, a plea of clergy in manslaughter cases pertaining to duels of passion (as opposed to pre-arranged duels). In cases where the duelist set a time and place, the winner of a fatal duel usually faced a charge of murder.[131] Gilchrist compiled his work to point out the inconsistencies of the duel in civilized society, stating clearly his desire "to mark the imbecility and inconsistency of man in one of the principal features of his individual and collective character," hoping he could "rejoice in sweetening the full cup of sorrows, which the operation of an evil custom has presented to the lips of too many at a very early period in life."[132] Still, it was almost impossible for a man to ignore a personal challenge, for many men preferred an honorable death to a lifetime spent in the shadow of a cowardly reputation. A writer in 1817 states that laws, whether moral or mortal, cannot abolish dueling, for "it is a principle inherent in the breast of man, when he is aggrieved, to seek redress in the most summary way, regardless of danger."[133]

Dueling was also attacked on legal grounds. Granville Sharpe complained that there existed no legal grounds for allowing dueling, writing in 1773 that "the indulgence allowed by the courts to voluntary manslaughter in rencounters, and in sudden affrays and duels, is indiscriminate, and without foundation in law," and concluded that "impunity in

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[129] Clark, English Society, 115-17.
[130] Kiernan, Duel in European History, 171. See also Corfield, "The Rivals," 15.
[131] Clark, English Society, 111-12.
[132] Gilchrist, Brief Display, 3-4.

such cases of voluntary manslaughter is one of the principal causes of the continuance

and present increase of the base and disgraceful practice of duelling."[134] Gilchrist stressed

the illegality of dueling, writing that "there is nothing honourable which is contradictory

to the law of our country, or to the acknowledged laws of nature and nations."[135] The

problem with both Sharpe and Gilchrist's arguments was simply that the code of honor in

most instances superseded the law. In many fatal duels the victor either fled to safety (the

seconds would cover for both participants if the duel was honorable) or, if captured, was

often found innocent by reason of self-defense. In the case of Ensign De Betton, who

fatally wounded Captain Boardman in Barbados on March 4, 1811, "the survivor

immediately escaped from the island."[136] A duel in April 1803 between Captain

Macnamara and Lieutenant-Colonel Montgomery that began as a quarrel regarding their

dogs resulted in Montgomery's death. Macnamara was found 'not guilty' by a jury even

after the judge had instructed that "from the pressure of the evidence, and the prisoner's

own admission, the jury must find a verdict of manslaughter."[137] The Edinburgh Review

in 1814 confirmed the inconsistencies in the law regarding dueling versus the realities of

the courtroom: "no instance is known of the law being executed against any person for

being engaged in a duel, fought in what is called a fair manner."[138]

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[133] Clark, English Society, 111. From A. Bosquett, The Young Man of Honour's vade-Mecum, being a Salutary Treatise on Duelling (London: 1817), 16-17.
[134] Clark, English Society, 112.
[135] Gilchrist, Brief Display, 51-52.
[136] Ibid., no. 94, 240.
[137] Ibid., no. 79, 195-99.
[138] Clark, English Society, 112.

The practice of dueling began a steady descent from roughly 1825 to 1850, and was rarely used thereafter. The decline of dueling can be attributed to a number of changes within English society, all of which can be directly or indirectly tied to the continuing commercial evolution of the economy and of society. The sport of boxing, for example, grew in popularity among all social orders, providing both an acceptable mode for the upper class to defend honor and a less deadly alternative to dueling for settling middle and lower class disputes.[139] The establishment of the anti-dueling association in 1843, which recruited respected men to act as arbitrators in disputes, played a large role in ending the custom of dueling.[140] Augmenting the work of the anti-dueling association were stronger libel and slander laws that allowed a man to take his dispute to a fair court as opposed to the dueling grounds at Hyde Park or Chalk Field. Still another argument for why dueling ceased within English society centers on England's relative peace between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the beginning of the Crimean War, a period stretching from 1815 and 1854. The lack of large-scale military action allowed the concept of the civil gentleman to separate from the more militaristic gentleman of the eighteenth century.[141] The true motivation for the downfall of dueling, however, can be tied to the growth of the commercial class and the rejection of the laws and customs of the eighteenth-century ruling class. In short, men of commerce saw dueling as another excess of the upper class.[142] Middle-class periodicals such as Punch satirized the

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[139] Kiernan, Duel in European History, 213-14.
[140] Kiernan, Duel in European History, 216.
[141] Clark, English Society, 115-17
[142] Kiernan, Duel in European History, 214-15.

gentleman who dueled to defend his honor, painting them as fools and barbarians.[143] J. C.

D. Clark states that the collapse of the ruling elite in the 1830s led to the view that

dueling, like most aspects of the ancient landed class, was immoral, corrupt, and not

consistent with commerce and Christianity. Just as the passage of the Parliamentary

Reform Act in 1832, the abolition of the Qualifications Act in 1838 and the repeal of the

corn laws in 1846 signaled setbacks in the power of the traditional ruling elite, dueling

was simply another needless vestige of the ruling gentry that drifted into obscurity.

While duels posed the greatest test of an eighteenth-century gentleman's

character, a less severe but far more frequent test of his character and qualifications as a

gentleman were his everyday attributes such as manners, courtesies, and how he lived his

life. Richard Braithwait wrote in the mid-seventeenth century that certain attributes

should come naturally to the landed gentleman, including "munificence" (his hospitable

and generous nature), "mildness" (he should be compassionate, modest, and exercise

humility), and "fortitude" (he must be brave yet even tempered).[144] A gentleman's

manners were especially important, since this was the easiest gentry trait for the lower

ranks to emulate. Manners could distinguish between a true gentleman and a rogue

gentleman. "The world is grown to such a pass," warned a 1789 play entitled The Man of

Enterprise, "that it requires some judgement to distinguish real gentility from the herd of

its servile imitators." The Laughing Philosopher in 1777 cautiously explained that

gentlemen should take care to set good examples for the period's youth: "It is virtue

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[143] Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 278.
[144] Braithwait, English Gentleman, 53-73.

joined to the most refined manners which constitutes the gentleman. The young men of this age entirely mistake the character: they emptily think, that it consists of flutter, dress, and grimace, or riding a horse full gallop through the streets to pay morning visits . . . but it is honour, godlike honour, that stamps alone the heavenly character."[145] Joseph Addison pointed out in a July 1711 piece in The Spectator that manners and politeness were practiced much more strenuously in the country than in cities, writing that "a polite country squire shall make you as many bows in half an hour, as would serve a courtier for a week," and chastising urban men for using "the most coarse uncivilized words in our language . . . in such a manner as a clown would blush to hear."[146] The same concern that Addison expressed for the decline in the manners of urban gentlemen, who were more likely to have a commercial class background, is behind the call of poet and playwright John Brown for a return to the fundamentals of feudal chivalry and loyalty. Brown expressed concern in 1756 that Britain's gentry had been corrupted by "vain, luxurious, and selfish effeminacy," and thus setting a poor example for society as a whole.[147]

The fear that manners and morals had disintegrated within the upper ranks of society was a major impetus behind the appearance of courtesy books in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and conduct books in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Courtesy books focused on how one should properly behave in public, especially in social situations, and were seen by many moralists as focusing too much on social polish and not enough on moral behavior. Lord Chesterfield's Letters to

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[145] Quoted in Corfield, "The Rivals," 17-18. From C. Shillito, The Man of Enterprise: A Farce (Colchester: 1789), 11.

his Son was one of the most influential courtesy books. In this collection of letters written by Chesterfield to his son between 1747 and 1751, the father advises his son to exhibit "engaging, insinuating, shining manners; a distinguished politeness, an almost irresistible address; a superior gracefulness in all you say and do."[148] Letters to His Son can be considered the last in a string of courtesy books that included H. Peacham's The Compleat Gentleman, R. Braithwaite's The English Gentleman, Adam Petrie's Rules of Good Deportment of Good Breeding (1720), and F. Nivelon's The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior (1737). Conduct books focused less on social graces and emphasized proper moral and appropriate management and administration of a gentleman's life. Among the popular conduct books were T. Gisborne's An Enquiry into the Duties of Men, published between 1794 and 1811, and H. Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, which was published in many editions from 1773 to 1851.[149]

How a gentleman behaved in public illustrated his public honor and to an extent his moral reputation. A gentleman should be honest and fair, especially to his fellow gentlemen, but also to those below his rank in order to demonstrate the paternalism that brought him deference from his social underlings. Landowners were expected to levy fair grain prices or serve in unpaid posts during wartime, and to exercise generosity and charity to all members of society.[150] "The appellation of a gentleman," wrote Richard Steele in 1710, "is never to be affixed to a man's circumstances, but to his behavior in

[146] Addison, The Spectator, no. 119 (July 17, 1711) in G. W. Greene, ed., vol. 1, The Spectator 316-20.
[147] Corfield, "The Rivals," 11.
[148] Clark, English Society , 101.
[149] Marjorie Morgan, Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774-1858 (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994), 8-18.

them."[151] Steele summarized the qualities of a gentleman in an April, 1713 article in The Guardian:

> When I consider the frame and mind peculiar to a gentleman, I suppose it graced with all the dignity and elevation of spirit that human nature is capable of. To this I would have joined a clear understanding, a reason free from prejudice, a steady judgement and an extensive knowledge. When I think of the heart of a gentleman, I imagine it firm and intrepid, void of all inordinate passions and full of tenderness, compassion and benevolence. When I view the fine gentleman with regard to his manners, methinks I see him modest without bashfulness, frank and affable without impertinence, obliging and complaisant without servility, cheerful and in good humour without noise . . . A finished gentleman is perhaps the most uncommon of all the great characters in life.[152]

As Steele acknowledged, even the most refined, elegant and courteous gentleman found it difficult to live up to every quality of his lofty model. An obituary in the Ipswich Journal in 1788 more accurately reflects how most gentlemen conducted themselves: "His morals were rather of the relaxed kind, but as his gratifications were always manly, and even benevolent, they may certainly be excused in these licencious times. His great wealth was acquired more by management than dishonour; and employed in promoting conviviality, and supporting indigence."[153]

Patriotism was also an essential part of a gentleman's morality. Courage in battle was, of course, the most explicit way for a gentleman to show his patriotism, but there were alternative methods by which a gentleman could publicly appear patriotic. Collecting and displaying paintings of British officers bravely dying in battle, for instance, allowed a man to express patriotism, especially during and after the Napoleonic

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[150] Stone and Stone, An Open Elite? 412-14.
[151] Quoted in Corfield, "The Rivals," 13.
[152] Steele, The Guardian, No. 34 (April 20, 1713), in The Guardian; A Periodical Paper vol. 1, 170.
[153] Quoted in Mingay, English Landed Society, 217.

Wars. Benjamin West's painting "The Death of General Wolfe," first exhibited in 1771, started the trend of gentry ownership of patriotic prints. Fox hunting also became an extension of patriotism, especially after 1815, for it provided a picture of the gallant gentleman riding through the country. "The same men who will ride straight across a country at a gallop, taking their fences generally as they come," said Waterloo veteran Lord Seaton, "will be likely to do anything or everything which may be required of them in action, be it the leading of a Calvary charge, the mounting of a rampart or breach, or . . . storming of a battery." Touring Britain, as opposed to taking the grand tour of Europe, became associated with patriotism after the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.[154] Such acts of subtle patriotism provided the gentry with powerful ammunition against those who portrayed them as idle, immoral and unproductive drains on society.

Despite gentry attempts to present a positive image to society, vices still abounded and continued to tarnish the reputation of the upper ranks. Drinking had long been an accepted vice among the upper ranks, yet while some could remember when "all the decent people in Litchfield got drunk every night, and were not the worse thought of," drinking to excess declined throughout the eighteenth century.[155] Gambling and gaming were especially popular in the early half of the century. Gentlemen would gather in clubs such as Brook's or White's along St. James Street in London to eat, drink, gossip, and play Faro or Maceo. Such activity, while seeming rather innocent, was slowly viewed with concern in the early to mid-eighteenth century, sparking The Connoissuer in 1754 to

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[154] Colley, Britons, 172-80. Quote from William Leeke, The History of Lord Seaton's Regiment at the Battle of Waterloo, vol. 1, (1866), 197.

state that "gaming is now become rather the business than the amusement of our persons of quality, and that they are more concerned about the transactions at the two clubs at White's than the proceedings of both houses of Parliament."[156] Such urban idleness drew the ire of hard working commercial men, raising questions concerning the gentry's contribution to the national wealth and character. The patrician class's penchant for expensive clothes and excesses such as personal hairdressers drew comparisons to the indolent and corrupt ruling class of France. The idle gentry, who spent the day playing cards and drinking French wine in gentleman's clubs, were sharply contrasted publicly with the industrious trading and commercial class.[157] Such criticisms went to the heart of the ruling gentry's morality and patriotism. Meanwhile the country gentleman was attacked for his lack of culture and sophistication and for his rural lifestyle that centered on the elite sport of hunting.[158] Examples such as that of the Earl of Berkeley, who had seduced a 17-year-old daughter of a tradesman and had seven children by her before making her his countess, certainly did not help the moral reputation of the landed gentry.[159] While every societal class has good and bad examples of moral and civil behavior, the vices of the gentry were becoming magnified within the increasingly industrial and commercial English society. Gambling, drinking, and moral misconduct damaged the gentry's role as societal leaders for the lower ranks, which increasingly viewed the industrious commercial class as better role models.

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[155] Mingay, English Landed Society, 145-46.
[156] Clark, English Society, 107-8
[157] Colley, Britons, 85-90. See also Hunt, Middling Sort, 56.
[158] Corfield, "The Rivals," 16-17.
[159] Mingay, English Landed Society, 146.

To repair their deteriorating reputation, the landed gentry forfeited some civic

positions to ambitious commercial men and stressed community roles that painted them

as benevolent and unselfish. The gentry had long been the arbitrators in community

squabbles and peacekeepers between various groups, which came with the paternalistic

nature of their position. But paternalism also served to protect the aristocracy and the

ruling order that included the gentry. In short, the gentry kept social unrest in check. As

the century progressed, however, gentry men found themselves trapped between their

need to appease the mob by supporting their demands, and their increasing acceptance of

commercial activity. Early in the eighteenth century, for example, a region's leading

gentleman usually supported rioting mobs against middlemen (known as engrossers) who

bought in bulk and resold for a profit, to show solidarity with the people. In the late

eighteenth century this trend had reversed, and the gentry often sided with the engrossers

against the mob. The result of this predicament was the marked decrease in the number of

local political positions filled by gentry men, who were happy to vacate such positions to

local men of commerce, who saw them as plums of their rising status. Philanthropic

activities such as hospital associations, anti-crime organizations, and urban improvement

commissions were ways that the landed gentleman could continue his social leadership

role without the stigma of choosing against the masses and the commercial class.[160] The

Society for relieving Distressed Housekeepers, the English Society for Promoting

Protestant Schools, and the British Society for Rewarding Servants were but a few among

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[160] Hay and Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society, 31-34; 110-12; 146-47; 193.

numerous such charitable societies designed to help the more unfortunate in society.[161]

The success of commercial men in creating public institutions provided another strong

motivation for landed gentlemen to participate more directly in public charity. Thomas

Coram, the son of a mariner who worked at sea as a boy, established the London's

Foundling Hospital for homeless children in 1740. Jonas Hanway, who earned a living as

an exporter, started the Marine Society in the 1750s to provide food, clothing and jobs for

pauper children. As with other aspects of their traditional roles within society, the gentry

saw the commercial ranks usurping their position as governors of political and social and

institutions.[162]

A gentleman's style of living also publicly defined his image at the top of

society. A gentleman dressed better than the lower classes, had grander houses decorated

with the best art and books, and was always a gracious and entertaining host. In the first

half of the eighteenth century a gentleman could usually be detected by the sword he

carried on his side, worn both for style and for dueling. The practice died out in mid-

century when carrying pistols became popular.[163] A September 1, 1713 article in The

Guardian was devoted to the importance of proper dress, stating: "Dress is grown of

universal use in the conduct of life. Civilities and respect are only paid to appearance. It is

a varnish that gives lustre to every action, a *passe-par-tout* that introduces us into all

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[161] Betsy Rogers, Cloak of Charity: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Philanthropy (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1949), 6-7.

[162] Ibid., 21-62. Rogers provides full biographies and histories of Coram and Hanway, as well as other eighteenth-century philanthropists such as Hannah More, John Howard, and Robert Raikes. See also Colley, Britons, 56-60 on Coram.

[163] Clark, English Society, 114.

polite assemblies, and the only certain method of making most of the youth of our nation conspicuous."[164]

Gentry homes also reflected the style and extravagant taste of their owners. Typical gentry country homes contained 8 to 12 rooms within the main house (excluding attics or basements), but some homes had upwards of 30 to 50 rooms. The gardens around the estate were usually immaculately groomed, and the wealthiest landowners built lakes, small zoos, riding and walking trails, and even reconstructed ruins. It was fashionable too for the gentleman to pay close attention to the architecture of a new home. One landed man stipulated that he have "morning sun come into my study and dressing room . . . it is so refreshing and reviving that I cannot help coveting it and therefore desire that there be two windows." Such homes were filled with the finest accoutrements-- tapestries from Brussels, carpets from Turkey, silk from India and linens from Holland were common. The walls of gentry homes were covered with French and Italian works, as well as the most popular British artwork, while the libraries housed works ranging from Greek and Roman classics to the latest novels from Defoe and Fielding. Since there were no national art galleries until 1824 and only circulating libraries in most communities, the homes of the gentry became de-facto state institutions for the arts. "The Stafford, Marlborough, and Grovesnor collections of pictures; the Spencer, Marlborough, Devonshire, Bridgewater and Devonshire libraries are national treasures," wrote Egerton Brydges in Collin's Peerage.[165] Expansive country homes required equally expansive

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[164] Gay, The Guardian, No. 149 (September 1, 1713), in The Guardian; A Periodical Paper vol. 3, 122-29.
[165] Mingay, English Landed Society, 210-17; 143-145. Colley, Britons, 173-176. Quote on 177.

staffs--a butler, a groom, a coachman, a gardener, a housekeeper, a cook, a nurse, and several maids were typically found in the great estates of the upper ranks.[166] How a gentleman lived his life, the elegance in which he surrounded himself, and the smartness with which he carried himself, was of such importance that one man saw fit to tell the world upon his tombstone that he had a "splendid and ever-abounding style of living."[167]

The elegance, good taste, and generosity displayed by a gentleman was the most public defining quality of the upper ranks, but also the most easily emulated by social interlopers. No man was easily accepted as a member of the gentry based solely on his actions and manners alone, yet without them even the wealthiest gentleman would lose some of the luster of his reputation. The finest of gentlemen, those that left no doubt as to their social dominance, displayed all of the qualities necessary to be a gentleman--a fine education, proper leisured living coupled with an important government position, the basic personal qualities of honor and virtue, and finally the style of living that those in the middle and lower orders expected from their social superiors.

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[166] Mingay, English Landed Society, 230.
[167] Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 43.

CHAPTER 4

The Origins and Qualities of the Eighteenth-Century Southern Gentleman

The gentry of tidewater Virginia in many ways evolved like their brethren in England, yet several fundamental differences are evident between the two forms of landed upper society. This chapter will focus on the origins and characteristics of the Virginia gentry, specifically their beliefs regarding education, vocation, and personal attributes, and compare these beliefs to the eighteenth-century English gentleman. I will also examine in this chapter the development of class-consciousness in Virginia and how the southern gentleman's ideas about social classes affected the way his society developed and how he lived his life. While some of the salient points of this chapter do apply in a larger and general sense to the American South overall, it is necessary to focus primarily on the gentlemen of the Virginia tidewater, since this was the cradle of the southern landowning gentry. My analysis will address historical controversies regarding the type of men that migrated to Virginia, and how the literal creation of a society out of the virtual wilderness of seventeenth-century Virginia shaped their class-consciousness.

Unlike the eighteenth-century English gentleman, a gentleman of the American South did not have a long native parochial history by which to define himself nor to help form his concepts of social classes. Only thirty-five years separated the founding of Jamestown (1607) from the appointment of the colony's most active governor, Sir William Berkeley (1642). The European population of Virginia at the beginning of

Berkeley's tenure stood at an estimated 8,000 people. By 1676, when Berkeley left

Virginia, European migration to Virginia totaled approximately 55,000, swelling the

white population of Virginia to around 60,000 people. At the dawn of the eighteenth

century, European migration totaled some 80,000, meaning Virginia's white population

stood at near 100,000 persons. It is estimated that another 40,000 persons resided in

nearby Maryland.[1] Throughout the eighteenth century the South continued its rapid

expansion and development, adding immigrants from northern England, Scotland,

Ireland, and across Europe to its western and southern regions. Thousands of other men,

women, and children were forcibly brought to the South from Africa to work on the

plantations. The rapid growth of the South, in other words, meant that its society and its

social structure, like its cities and farms, developed within a state of dynamic creation.

Most early English immigrants to Virginia came from the southern and eastern

regions of England, and naturally they brought with them class ideals formed in their

native land.[2] Nonetheless, their experience in Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, and

Georgia influenced the development of class-consciousness in the American South from

the beginning of Jamestown through the eighteenth century. Captain John Smith, upon

viewing the thirty-three gentlemen among the initial 120 men, wrote that they were more

likely "to spoil a commonwealth than to begin or maintain one." Despite the gentle

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[1] Russell R. Menard, "British Migration to the Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century," in
Colonial Chesapeake Society, ed. L. G. Carr, P. D. Morgan and J. B. Russo (Chapel Hill: University of
North Carolina Press, 1988), 100-101. See also David Hackett Fischer, Albion's Seed; Four British
Folkways in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; Oxford University Press paperback
1991), 226.
[2] Fischer, Albion's Seed, 236-46.

background of these men, under Smith's leadership they soon realized that they must either work to improve conditions or die because of them. Smith eventually admitted that these gentlemen were not as worthless as he first imagined.[3] These very early Virginia gentlemen, who came with attending footmen and servants, most likely had not pictured manual labor as part of their new roles as colonial gentry. While later seventeenth-century emigrants who founded Virginia's great planter dynasties (William Randolph, Nathaniel Bacon, William Byrd, William Fitzhugh, John Carter, and Richard Lee to name a few) showed little bias against, and in many cases great talent for, commercial activity, they likely still brought with them ingrained English concepts of social orders. The class concepts and social ideals of the southern gentleman, then, began with the intrinsic class-consciousness he brought with him, and continued to be shaped by his new environment, resulting in an altered gentleman ideal in Virginia by the late seventeenth century.

Since the people who populated the southern American colonies brought with them ingrained concepts of class distinctions, it is crucial to this study to examine what types of people populated the southern colonies and what social beliefs they brought with them. I will first focus on this question by looking at the origins and social make-up of the European emigrants that came to the South, along with the historical arguments surrounding this problem. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the characteristics that developed within the American southern gentry during the eighteenth century (also referred to as the planter class). The format will follow that of the previous chapter: first

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[3] Philip Alexander Bruce, <u>Social Life in the Seventeenth Century: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Higher Planter Class, Together with a Description of the Habits, Customs, and Diversions of the People</u>, 2nd ed.

the educational expectations and opportunities of the southern gentleman will be

explored, followed by an investigation of the acceptable vocations and personal attributes

of the southern gentleman.

Before discussing the development of class concepts in the southern colonies and

states, it is important to define what is meant by the South. The term the American South

is somewhat misleading. Historian David Smiley wrote that a student of the region should

ask not what the South is, but why the ideal of the South has become accepted as

axiomatic among Americans.[4] To some degree Smiley's statement applies to this work—I

am seeking answers to how the South developed its unique character and how those who

built its cities and plantations defined the region. The problem in historically defining the

South, or any region of America in the eighteenth century, is that it existed as a work in

process, thus any one snapshot at any given time does not fully describe the region. The

focus of this chapter will lie primarily on Virginia, since along its riverbanks lived the

earliest and most developed society through the end of the eighteenth century. The

plantation and the culture that it spawned are especially important to this study since it

was the plantation that most resembled the estates of the country gentlemen in England.

The plantation also distinctly set the southerner apart from the settlers of the mid-Atlantic

and New England colonies. In the words of Sheldon Van Auken, "the plantation is

central to any understanding of the South."[5]

(Lynchburg, VA: J.P. Bell Company, Inc., 1927), 28-29.

[4] David L. Smiley, "Quest for a Central Theme," in Major Problems in the History of the American South, Volume I: The Old South, ed. Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), 9-21.

[5] Ibid., 14.

Origins of the Virginia Settlers

The backgrounds and ancestry of the men who established Virginia's planter class has inspired much debate among historians. The particular question that divides scholars is, simply put; did the men who established Virginia's leading planter families derive from England's landed gentry, or did they actually hail from families of commercial and professional backgrounds? The history of Colonial Virginia begins with first-hand accounts from Captain John Smith and Sir William Berkeley. Smith's various writings encompass his time in Jamestown (1607 to 1609) and general histories after his return to England in 1615. Berkeley defended the many attributes and virtues of Virginia in <u>A Discourse and View of Virginia,</u> written in 1663 as an instructional piece for the new English government. Both authors offer interesting insight into life in seventeenth-century Virginia but shed little light on the men who populated the colony, short of Smith's complaint that the so-called gentlemen in early Jamestown "would rather starve and rot with idleness, then be perswaded to do any thing for their owne reliefe" and Berkeley's mention of the "good families" who were already in Virginia.[6] Records from the ships that carried Virginia's future population throughout the century are helpful, but as will be discussed, they suffer from vague and missing information. The topic is rarely touched upon in eighteenth-century histories, the most complete of which are Robert Beverley's <u>The History and Present State of Virginia</u> (1705) and Hugh Jones' <u>The Present State of</u>

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[6]Captain John Smith, "A True Relation," in <u>Narratives of Early Virginia 1606-1625</u>, ed. Lyon Gardiner Tyler (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1907), 37. Sir William Berkeley, <u>A Discourse and View of Virginia</u> (London: 1663; reprint, Norwalk, CT: William H. Smith, Jr., 1914), 3.

<u>Virginia</u> (1724). Diaries of the great planter families such as the Byrds, the Carters, and the Fitzhughes provide much information as to daily life, but little as to ancestry.

The history of Virginia's landed class is tied to the belief that under Berkeley's regime a large number of "cavaliers" migrated to the region after the English Civil War. The term "cavalier" referred to the supporters of Charles I, the Stuart monarch who was executed in 1649. The popular view of seventeenth-century Virginia is that a great many of these cavaliers fled England after 1642 (when the Civil wars in England began) and established large plantations in Virginia, thus forming the foundation for the planter class. Historian Philip Bruce stated in 1907 that Berkeley "encouraged the cavaliers to come over in numbers" between 1642 and 1676 and placed them in high government positions, a viewpoint supported by the modern historian David Hackett Fischer.[7] The popular history of Virginia, therefore, centered on the idea that the planter gentry were descendents of English nobility. Within this version of Virginia history the term 'cavalier' evolved from a political label to a social designation meaning a man of noble blood.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries historians began to seriously challenge the popular history of Virginia by questioning the pedigree of Virginias' founding families. John Fiske's <u>Old Virginia and her Neighbours</u> (1899) is a two-volume general history in which the author does not outwardly attack the backgrounds of Virginia's original planter elites but subtly raises doubts about their validity. Fiske first dismisses the notion that the term cavalier was a social class designation, then lauds the

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[7]Fischer, <u>Albion's Seed</u>, 212.

importance of a middle class and of commercial interests, questions the existence of a

true English upper caste, and finally claims that the nature of England's government and

economy created a "circulation of gentle blood."[8] Bruce countered Fiske's initial attack

on the popular view in his 1907 work Social Life in Virginia in the Seventeenth Century.

Bruce detailed the backgrounds of many of seventeenth-century Virginia's leading

families, concluding that even men who appear to be of merchant background can,

because of the practice of primogeniture, trace their families to landed wealth.[9] In 1910

Thomas J. Wertenbaker openly attacked the aristocratic origins of Virginia's planter class

in his book Patrician and Plebeian in Virginia. Wertenbaker put forth a strong argument

that the great planter families of Virginia sprang not from the English nobility but rather

were descendents of English trading and mercantile families. Wertenbaker cites many

examples provided by Bruce to defend his thesis. Bruce sought to bolster his arguments

with a second edition of his work in 1927, and Wertenbaker countered with a second

edition to his original book in 1959. Later twentieth-century historians have continued to

support, to some degree, the more liberal interpretation set forth by Wertenbaker,

including Wesley Frank Craven, Carl Bridenbaugh, James Horn, and Russell R.

Menard.[10] Other historians have supported Bruce's more traditional view, including

Bernard Bailyn and David Hackett Fischer.[11]

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[8]John Fiske, Old Virginia and Her Neighbours, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 2: 14.

[9]Bruce, Social Life in Virginia, 77.

[10] Wesley Frank Craven, Dissolution of the Virginia Company; The Failure of a Colonial Experiment (New York: 1932), 97-104; Carl Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1952; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981),1-54; James Horn, "Servant Emigration to the Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century" in The Chesapeake in the

Two factors lie behind the debate on the ancestry of Virginia's elite class. The first and most obvious complication is the poor records of the time. The second problem in defining the background of Virginia's gentry is the evolving meaning of the title of "gentleman." As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, class distinctions in England were under assault both by the growing number of wealthy commercial and professional men in society, and as a result of the overall urbanization of England through the seventeenth century. These socio-economic and demographic changes further muddled the already unclear division between true landed gentry and the "new wealth" of the commercial class, thus obfuscating the true background of a man such as George Fletcher, who came to Virginia in 1652 and is listed as the brother of James Fletcher, "gent, of Eltham, Kent" but who shows his occupation in 1647 as "of London, merchant."[12] It is likely that the merchant Fletcher stepped onto the shores of Virginia with dreams of becoming a wealthy planter and a country gentleman. Similarly, John Dinwiddie, who lived in King County, Virginia, until his death in 1762, lists his father's occupation as 'merchant', yet his

Seventeenth Century, eds. T. W. Tate and D. L. Ammerman (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 51-95; Menard, "British Migration to the Chesapeake Colonies, 99-132.

[11] Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," in Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History, ed. James Morton Smith (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 90-115; Fischer, Albion's Seed, 207-46. An excellent historiography of Colonial Virginia is found in Thad W. Tate, "The Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake and its Modern Historians," T. W. Tate and D. L. Ammerman, eds., The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979). For a brief discussion on the historiography of the argument surrounding the ancestry of Virginia's planter elite, see Fischer, Albion's Seed, 225 (footnote).

[12] W. G. Stanard, Some Emigrants to Virginia: Memoranda in Regard to Several Hundred Emigrants to Virginia During the Colonial Period Whose Parentage is Shown or Former Residence Indicated by Authentic Records, 2nd Ed., (Richmond: The Bell Book and Stationary Co., 1915), 35.

brother Robert rose to be Governor of Virginia.[13] We could suppose that John fancied

himself a gentleman, yet genealogically he was but the son of a Glasgow shopkeeper.

The English practice of primogeniture further complicated the question of the

social origins of the founding families of Virginia. Primogeniture called for a fairly

specific blueprint for the sons of an English gentleman--the oldest inherited the estate, the

second son went into the clergy, military, or professions, and the third and fourth sons

were often left to pursue commercial interests. Many of the men who came to Virginia in

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were likely third and fourth sons of English

gentry, and it was likely many had been apprenticed in commercial trades. Are these men

to be categorized as English gentry (which would be correct if labeled based on

genealogy) or as commercial-class men (which is proper if occupation is the

determinant)? Bruce calls these men "reckless and young fops" who were "men of good

family who had circumnavigated all the vices of the town, but in whom, in spite of waste

or loss of fortune a gay and adventurous spirit still survived." Even though John Smith

complained of such men, Lord De la Warr (who served as the first Governor of Virginia

in 1609) wrote to the London Company that these men bring a "force of knowledge, the

exercise of counsel, and the operation and power of his best breeding."[14] Such men,

charged Thomas Wertenbaker in 1910, often married beneath the class of their fathers

and "formed a link binding the nobility to the commons of the country."[15] John Fiske

noted that, below the first son, who inherited the family's peerage and thus the right to sit

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[13]Ibid, 30.
[14]Bruce, Social Life in the Seventeenth Century, 30-31.

in Parliament, "all the other members of the family are commoners, though some may be addressed by courtesy titles."[16] The inexactness in labeling and categorizing men into specific social groupings, especially in light of relatively sparse and vague records, fueled the debate among historians of the true genteel nature of the seventeenth-century emigrations to Virginia.

The debate over the true backgrounds of the major planter families of Virginia center on two periods of migration--the initial migrations between the founding of Jamestown in 1607 and the fall of Charles I in 1649, and the so-called cavalier migration during Cromwell's rule from 1649 to 1658 and through the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. Bruce provided a detailed analysis of many of the emigrants of the initial migrations, claiming that "even during the earliest years of its settlement Virginia was regarded with extraordinary interest by members of the most influential social classes in England."[17] Bruce tediously described the background of numerous men who migrated to Virginia throughout the century, and he clearly believes that many men of noble background came to Virginia. Bruce cites 33 gentlemen out of 120 in the first supply in 1608, 29 gentlemen of 70 men in the second supply and only " a larger number" of younger sons of genteel families in the third supply. Among the 325 men who signed the charter of 1612, Bruce counts 25 peers, 111 knights, 66 esquires, and 20 gentlemen.[18] Bruce tends, however, to count most any man with ties to landed gentry as a member of

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[15] Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian in Virginia, or the Origin and Development of the Social Classes of the Old Dominion (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959), 4.
[16] Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 13-14.
[17] Bruce, Social Life in the Seventeenth Century, 27.
[18] Ibid., 27-30

the elite classes, and he is often vague in his analysis. Typical of his entries is the following:

> A considerable number of the leading families of Virginia in the seventeenth century were directly descended from Englishmen who were distinguished in the professions, but who, in most cases, can be traced back to the landed gentry. William Fitzhugh, who accumulated a large estate, left a long series of interesting letters, and founded a representative family, was the son of a lawyer in practice at Bedford. As his brother, Henry Fitzhugh, enjoyed considerable interest at court, it is probable that the family connection possessed social and political influence.[19]

Bruce harbors a noticeable bias toward the romantic notion that the Virginia planters descended from noble stock, as evidenced in his dedication of the book to his father and uncle, who are "representatives of all that was loftiest and noblest in the life and character of the great Southern landholders and slaveholders of the past."

Bruce's conclusions also ignore the tremendous death rate in the early Virginia colonies. It is estimated that approximately 1,000 people immigrated to Virginia each year between 1625 and 1640, which means the population of Virginia should have increased by about 15,000. Records show, however, an increase in population of only some 7,000 persons during this time, translating into an annual death rate of over 45% of the new population . Actual accounts, such as Samuel Maverick, who returned to New England from Virginia in 1635 and stated that 1,800 had perished in the Virginia colonies during the preceding year, confirm this high estimated death rate. In the words of Edmund Morgan, "the rich lands of the tidewater were empty not simply for lack of immigrants

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[19] Ibid., 67.

but because the men who did come to settle on them died so fast."[20] If landed gentlemen did come to Virginia in the early to mid-seventeenth century, therefore, it is likely that only about half survived.

Wertenbaker outwardly opposed Bruce's thesis in Patrician and Plebeian in Virginia, bluntly stating that "three facts may be established beyond controversy, that but few men of high social rank in England established families in Virginia; that the larger part of the aristocracy of the colony came directly from merchant ancestors; that the leading planters of the seventeenth century were mercantile in instinct and unlike the English aristocrat of the same period."[21] Wertenbaker's conclusions are challenged by David Hackett Fischer, who states that certain materials were unavailable to Wertenbaker and that in several instances he wrongly attributes humble origins to men of higher social rank such as William Byrd. Fischer also accuses Wertenbaker of harboring a bias "by reason of his origins." Fischer does not elaborate, but one suspects he is referring to Wertenbaker's background as a journalist and the fact that he obtained his graduate degree later in life. Fischer, however, erred himself in his broad conclusions regarding the aristocratic blood of the great Virginia families, as evidenced by inclusion of Richard Lee, founder of Virginia's dynamic Lee Family, among the cavaliers of noble blood. Fischer states that Richard Lee was a descendent of a landed family from Shropshire, when in fact Paul Nagel disclosed in 1990 that Lee was the son of John and Jane Hancock Lee, both of whom hailed from families involved in the cloth trade in Worcester and Twining,

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[20] Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975; paperback edition 1995), 158-79. Statistics cited on page 159.

respectively.[22] Nagel does not discount the possibility that John and Jane Lee may have had distant ties to the Shropshire Lees, but clearly Richard Lee of Virginia did not have direct blood ties to English gentry.

There is no argument that emigration to Virginia reached a peak during the twenty-year period between 1645 and 1665, more than tripling the population during that time from approximately 8,000 to 30,000.[23] What is in question is the meaning of the term Cavalier. Some writers, such as Mary N. Stanard, believed that Cavalier "means not only a class in society, but also a political party."[24] Like Stanard, Bruce wrote of Cavaliers as a social class. "One cavalier voiced the feelings of his whole class," wrote Bruce, "when he said that 'Virginia was the only city of refuge left in his majesty's dominions in those times for distressed cavaliers.'"[25] Fiske, on the other hand, stated that "the distinction between Cavalier and Roundhead was no more a difference in respect of lineage or social rank than the analogous distinction between Tory and Whig."[26] Wertenbaker agreed with Fiske, saying that "the fact that a man was a Cavalier or Roundhead proved nothing as to his social rank or his lineage."[27] When one speaks of a Cavalier migration, then, is it to mean simply those who supported the Stuart throne or rather exclusively those men hailing from the landed gentry of England? The confusion

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[21]Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian, 2-3.
[22]Fischer, Albion's Seed, 215. Paul C. Nagel, The Lees of Virginia: Seven Generations of an American Family (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.
[23] Fischer, Albion's Seed, 226.
[24] Mary Newton Stanard, Colonial Virginia: Its People and Customs (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1917), 49.
[25] Bruce, Social Life in the Seventeenth Century, 19.
[26]Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 12.
[27]Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian, 3.

arises from the general belief that the landed gentry exclusively supported the Stuarts

which, while generally true, is not absolute. How many men of good social standing,

perhaps a third son of a peer or a first son of a London financier, landed on the shores of

Virginia during Cromwell's reign and have since been included as part of the Cavalier

migration?

The questions surrounding the Cavalier emigration centers on the same basic

question regarding the emigration from 1607 to 1649: how many immigrants to Virginia

during this time were truly men from the landed gentry fleeing the political turbulence in

England? Certainly some immigrants were both royalist supporters and men of great

landed wealth and title, but it is clear that a great many indentured servants and

commoners, who may or may not have traveled to the Chesapeake to escape the political

turbulence in England, came to Virginia after 1649. Robert Beverley, writing in the first

few years of the eighteenth century, mentions that "several" Cavalier families came to

Virginia to avoid persecution, but also lists soil and climate as motivating reasons to

settle in the area after the success of Jamestown.

> But this way of Peopling the Colony was only at first; for after the advantages of
> the Climate, and the fruitfulness of the Soil were well known, and all the dangers
> incident to Infant Settlements were over, People of better Condition retir'd thither
> with their Families, either to increase the Estates they had before, or else to avoid
> being persecuted for their Principles of Religion, or Government.
> Thus, in the time of the Rebellion in England, several good Cavalier Families
> went thither with their Effects, to escape the Tyranny of the Usurper. And so
> again, upon the Restoration, many People of the opposite Party took refuge there,
> to shelter themselves from the King's Resentment. But they had not many of these
> last, because that Country was famous, for holding out the longest for the Royal
> family, of any of the English Dominions; for which reason, the Roundheads went
> for the most part to New-England, as did most of those, that in the Reign of King

Charles II were molested on the account of their Religion, though some of these fell likewise to the share of Virginia.[28]

Beverley's account certainly does not imply that a great Cavalier exodus came to the shores of the Chesapeake after 1649.

John Fiske accepted that a Cavalier migration occurred, but since he did not take the term Cavalier to refer exclusively to landed gentry supporters of the Stuart throne, one cannot say he supported the theory of a massive influx of gentry emigrants. Fiske compares the flight of the Cavaliers to the great migration of the Puritans after Charles I dissolved the Parliament in 1629. "The great Cavalier exodus began with the King's execution in 1649, and probably slackened after 1660," wrote Fiske, and was "a chief cause of the remarkable increase of the white population of Virginia from 15,000 in 1649 to 38,000 in 1670."[29] The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, in its first volume in 1894, took the position that the Cavalier migration was more myth than truth. "If the talk of 'Virginia Cavaliers' indicates an idea that most of the Virginia gentry were descended from men of high rank, who had adhered to the King's side and afterwards emigrated to Virginia, it is assuredly incorrect," the editors bluntly stated. The authors pronounced that "all genealogists having any competent acquaintance with the subject will agree, but few 'scions of great English houses' came to any of the colonies."[30] Thomas Wertenbaker claimed in his 1922 work The Planters of Colonial Virginia that it

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[28] Robert Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 287-88.
[29] Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 16.
[30] Review of Barons of the Potomac and Rappahannock, by Moncure D. Conway, The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 1, no. 3 (Richmond: The Virginia Historical Society, October 1893): 215.

was riches derived from the growing of tobacco that brought most men to Virginia. "Immigration to Virginia continued in unabated volume throughout the Seventeenth century," wrote Wertenbaker, because "the needs of the tobacco plantations were unceasing." Wertenbaker deduced that, based on the list of headrights, approximately 1,500 to 2,000 men immigrated annually to Virginia. Speaking specifically of the period of rebellion in England, Wertenbaker stated:

> Even during the Civil War and Commonwealth periods this average seems to be maintained with surprising consistency. Apparently the only limit which could be set upon it was the available space on board the merchant fleet which each year left England for the Chesapeake Bay. Thus in the year ending May 1635 we find that 2,000 landed in the colony, while in 1674 and again in 1682 the same average was maintained . . . All in all, considerably more than 100,000 persons migrated to the colony in the years that elapsed between the first settlement at Jamestown and the end of the century.[31]

Carl Bridenbaugh supported Wertenbaker's position in 1952, claiming that "the most significant feature of the Chesapeake aristocracy was its middle-class origin" that "never entirely threw off its bourgeois trappings."[32]

Despite the work of the historians above, the true nature of the social make-up of seventeenth-century Virginia is obviously still in question in part because of the unknown origins of most emigrants but also because of the individual interpretations of what constituted a gentleman. If the social designation of gentleman was unclear in England, as shown in the previous chapters, how could it be clear in the colonies of Virginia, where

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[31] Thomas J. Wertenbaker, The Planters of Colonial Virginia (Princeton, 1922; reprint Baltimore: Clearfield Company, Inc., by Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 35-36. Wertenbaker asserts the argument that the growing of tobacco was practiced by all classes in Virginia, and that 90% of the growing of tobacco was done by small farmers.
[32] Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, 12-13.

records were certainly less accurate than in London? What is certain is that some men of true gentry ancestry, and many who had extended or newly acquired ties or claims to gentry, did come to Virginia, and that many more men of humble origin also came, all seeking to escape the political turmoil in England or to simply improve their lives. The Cavalier migration would be more aptly termed the migration of the English Civil War, for one cannot accurately state that every man sought refuge from political or religious persecution. The period in which they migrated, therefore, is the proper designation for the influx of men to Virginia during this period.

To lend some degree of certainty to the background of those men and women who came to Virginia during the entire period of the seventeenth century, an analysis of a significant number of emigration records is necessary. Fortunately, such a record is available in W.G. Stanard's Some Emigrants to Virginia (1915). This compilation lists 778 emigrants with minor annotations for each, some detailed but most very brief. The records show seventeenth and eighteenth century men and women, most of whom came from England, but also lists emigrants from Ireland, Scotland, and parts of Europe. Some of these emigrants returned to their original homes, while most died in Virginia. The annotations are not complete, however, and the majority give no social designation, which are counted here as "no designation." Those records that do list specific occupations such as "fishmonger" or "merchant" or a similar occupation for a father or brother have been tallied as "non-gentry designated." The listings that indicate some type of gentry designation such as "gent." or "Esq.," either for the person listed or for his father, brother, husband, uncle, or other relative, have been counted as "gentry

designated," unless the connection is so tenuous that no designation is more accurate.

Table 1 below illustrates the results of the analysis.

Table 1: Breakdown of Emigration Records by Social Designation[33]

	Not Designated	Non-Gentry Designated	Gentry Designated	Total Records
Total Records	357	261	160	778
Percent of Total	45.89%	33.55%	20.56%	100.00%

If we assume that all of those who did not designate a social origin are non-gentry, the above table shows that 618 of the 778 emigrants, or 79.44%, were commoners, while the remaining 160, or 20.57%, were men of some gentry ancestry. However, such a conclusion is subject to error, since a small portion of the non-designated persons could have some claim to gentry birth but simply failed to list it. Similarly, those who listed some gentry designation are likely to not fall under a strict definition of gentry, especially those shown as third sons of a man designated as a gentleman (which in itself could be an erroneous designation). If the above figures are adjusted for such errors and biases, therefore, a more accurate picture is obtained. Assuming that 20% of those shown with some gentry designation are not actually of noble birth, and 5% of the non-gentry listed are, in fact, gentry, the analysis lends the results shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Breakdown of Emigration Records by Social Designation (Adjusted)[34]

	Not Designated	Non-Gentry Designated	Gentry Designated	Total Records
Total Records	339	293	146	778
Percent of Total	43.57%	37.67%	18.76%	100.00%

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[33]Table compiled from evidence provided in Stanard, <u>Some Emigrants</u>, 7-93.
[34]Ibid,.

The above table illustrates that of the 778 persons in Stanard's study, 663 (81.25%) are of non-gentry status, while 146 (18.75%) were able to claim some true gentry ties.

If we assume that Stanard's sample is indicative of the whole of Virginia's population, it would seem that Virginia did have a greater proportion of persons with genteel origins than did England. According to Gregory King's analysis of household income, which he used to categorize social classes in England in 1688, those who were designated as aristocracy, peers, or gentlemen comprised only 1% of the entire population.[35] This assumption would lend credibility to the romantic view of colonial Virginia history--that it was a land where genteel concepts of social structure dominated. From this conclusion we can therefore make the assumption that the same social constructs of class divisions that existed in England were transplanted in Virginia. How the growth of the South, in its dynamic state, affected these ideas of class-consciousness, and specifically how the development of the Southern Gentleman evolved, will be determined in the coming sections.

A Southern Gentleman's Education

Education, as was shown in Chapter 3, became a tool of social distinction for the English gentry, and emigrants carried this attitude and practice to Virginia. One might conclude that education would have little appeal to a southern gentleman in the eighteenth century, since few schools or libraries existed at the dawn of the century and

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[35] Douglass Hay and Nicholas Rogers, <u>Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

the opportunities for fortune and fame lay not in books but along the banks of the

Chesapeake bay and in the ever expanding western frontiers, but such a conclusion would

be wrong. While the education of those below the upper ranks suffered due to both the

lack of facilities for any broad-based education, combined with an apparent lack of desire

among the gentry to provide any general schooling of the masses, the planter class

displayed both a high level of intelligence and a strong interest in obtaining the finest

possible education for their sons. Proper education became tied to gentility throughout the

eighteenth century and, as in England, stressed social refinement as much as intellectual

learning. William J. Grayson, speaking in the mid-nineteenth century, illustrated the

emphasis on social conduct when he stated that education was important "to improve the

manners, morals, and mind of the student."[36]

Many seventeenth-century Virginia planters had a strong general knowledge

derived from their own education in England. William Byrd II of Westover was sent to

study in England prior to his assumption of the Westover Estate after his father's death in

1705. Byrd reveals in his diaries from the years 1709 to 1712 that most mornings he read

either Hebrew and Greek from such authors as Homer, Cassius, and Anacreon, or more

practical reading, such as the morning of May 10, 1710, when he "rose at 7 o'clock and

read a book about breeding of horses."[37] John Carter, who settled in the Chesapeake

region in 1649, is described by Louis Wright as a distressed royalist who, despite

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[36] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982; Oxford University Press paperback 1983), 92.

[37] The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, eds. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1941). Specific entry on page 173. For information on his life se biographical sections in the introduction, v-xxv.

"shadowy" family connections in England, attained knowledge, wealth, and status as judged by the large library he left to his two sons, John and Robert. Carter's library contained books on religion, medicine, farming, history, and military affairs.[38]

Libraries such as those of John and Robert Carter offer a glimpse into the intellectual worlds of the eighteenth century planters and demonstrate a level and pursuit of knowledge consistent with highly educated men. Fortunately such records are available since most men listed in detail their libraries as part of their estate at death. Ralph Wormley, Richard Lee, and Robert Carter boasted 200 to 300 books in their libraries, and by 1744 William Byrd II of Westover had accumulated over 3,600 books.[39] The libraries of Virginia's gentry offered a wide array of subjects. Guides on manners and conduct, such as Peacham's The Compleat Gentleman, could usually be found alongside Latin and Greek classics by Cicero, Suetonius, Pliny, and Homer. Books on religion, history, and philosophy shared shelves with medical texts and scientific works. Novels, plays, and poetry also existed within the records of the planters' libraries.[40] Such a diversity of works clearly illustrates a high level of education.

Given the high intellect exhibited by the great Virginia planters, it is not surprising that they also showed great concern for the proper education of their sons. The wealthiest planters sometimes sought an education for their sons at England's finest

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[38] Louis B. Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class (Charlottesville: Dominion Books, a Division of The University Press of Virginia, 1964), 235-48.
[39] Wright, First Gentlemen, 122-23.
[40] Ibid., 117-54. Wright provides a tremendous amount of detail regarding the libraries of the wealthiest planters. See also P. A. Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century: An Inquiry into the Religious, Moral and Educational, Legal, Military, and Political Condition of the People Based on Original and Contemporaneous Records, vol. 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 410-41.

grammar schools or private schools. John Carter, for example, made provisions in his will

to send his two oldest sons, John Carter II and Robert Carter, to England for their

education, laying the foundation for Robert "King" Carter to build his family into one of

the largest and most powerful in Virginia. Robert Carter spent six years in English

grammar schools, and in turn made provision for four of his five sons to study in

England.[41] William Byrd in 1689 had sent his young son William, 9 years old, and his

daughter Susan, only 6 at the time, to England under the care of their grandparents, and

had plans to send his youngest girl, Ursula (whom Byrd called "Little Nutty") to England

at age 4, although records show that she did not enroll at Hackney until 1691.[42] The Lees,

the Randolphs, and the Blands are examples of other planter families who sought an

English education for their children. Even modest planters such as Richard Ambler

sometimes sought an education in England for their sons. Ambler realized that an

education was a hallmark of the genteel class. In writing to his sons, Ambler did not

hesitate to remind them of the privilege of their situation and the expense of that

privilege. "I shall think the expense I am at ('tho great) well laid out provided you make

proper use of it and acquire such an Education as may set you above the common level &

drudgery of Life" warned Ambler, reminding his sons that they were "entering into Years

which will enable you to reflect, that many Children capable of learning, are condemn'd

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[41] Louis B. Wright, ed., Letters of Robert Carter, 1720-1727: The Commercial Interests of a Virginia Gentleman (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1940), vii; Louis Morton, Robert Carter of Nomini Hall: A Virginia Tobacco Planter of the Eighteenth Century (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated, 1941), 24.
[42] Stanard, Colonial Virginia, 289-90.

to the necessity of Labouring hard, for want of ability in their Parents to give them an Education."[43]

Despite the superior education available in England, most planters opted for a domestic education for two reasons--safety and cost. Since the planting elite dealt with shipping of goods on a regular basis, they were acutely aware of the dangers intrinsic in the voyage across the Atlantic. The chance that a son would contract disease or perish at sea made an English education a perilous proposition. Of course, there was a good possibility that the voyage to England would proceed smoothly, which would in turn present the certainty of the cost of the education. Schooling in England not only meant the cost of tuition, but also included a significant charge for passage, ongoing living expenses, and provisions for oversight by agents or friends in England, all of which placed the overall expense of an education abroad beyond the reach of most planters.[44] Robert Carter, one of the wealthiest planters in Virginia, complained often of the financial burdens of his sons' education. Between July 1720 and February 1721 Carter wrote five times to the London business agents in charge of his sons' education and well being, and in each he mentions the cost of their schooling. Typical of Carter's references to money is the following:

> You please me very well in the commendable character you give me of my son. 'Tis no small satisfaction to me to have a pennyworth for my penny. To have spent so much money upon a dunce or a blockhead had been most intolerable, and yet, after all, to have a finical inside and not a suitable covering for the outside will make but a schymity[?] gentleman. bad and mean company, to be sure, hath

[43] Daniel Blake Smith, Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 93.
[44] Wright, First Gentlemen, 95, 112-13. See also Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia, 1:316-17.

been the bane of many a young man, but certainly 200 l. per annum is no such scanty allowance to lay him under any such disadvantage. If it be, I shall be at a loss to know how to keep the rest of my family from want.[45]

Carter, being a shrewd businessman, wanted to make sure he got a return on his investment in his son's education, that being a properly educated gentleman.

Most planters sought to avoid both the cost and dangers of an education in England for their sons by employing private tutors. William Fitzhugh, writing to his friend Nicholas Haywood, London merchant, tells of how his plans to send his son to London for schooling changed upon meeting a suitable tutor.

Sir, this year I was designed to have sent home my eldest son to School there & did intend to request of your care of him & kindness to him, but accidentally meeting wt. a french Minister, a sober, learned & discreet Gentleman, whom I persuaded to board & tutor him, which he hath undertaken, in whose family there is nothing but french spoken which by a continuall Converse, will make him perfect in that tongue, & he takes a great deal pains & care to teach him Latin, both which go on hitherto very well together, only some books are wanting as the french Rudiments of the latin grammar 3 of them, 3 french common prayer books, a french & latin Dictionary, which I desire you will please to send me.[46]

That both Carter and Fitzhugh placed, or planned to place, their sons education and well being in the hands of London tobacco merchants (who both men likely trusted from their extensive business dealings) points to both the importance of both education and commerce in the lives of the Virginia landed class. Other examples of the use of tutors include George Mason, who employed three Scotsmen at various times to educate his

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[45] Carter to Messrs. Micajah and Richard Perry, 13 July 1720, Letters of Robert Carter, ed. L.B. Wright, 3-4.

[46] Fitzhugh to Nicholas Hayward, July 10, 1690, William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World, 1676-1701: The Fitzhugh Letters and Other Documents, ed. Richard Beale Davis (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 270-271. Davis speculates that the French clergyman was likely The Reverend John Bertrand, who later resided in Lancaster County and was the rector Mary's White Chapel.

sons, recruiting the final two to specifically travel to Virginia to "live in his house and educate the children."[47] Tutors were often brought from England or Scotland or recruited from Northern colleges, as in the case of Philip Vickers Fithian, who upon his graduation from Princeton went to work for Robert Carter in 1773.[48] Tutors could also be found among the ranks of servants or even convicts. Both Sir Charles Burton and Henry Justice, Esq., who came to Virginia in 1722 and 1736 respectively, were highly educated men exiled to America for fairly petty crimes of stealing, and both found employment as tutors.[49]

Planters who could not afford to send their children to England or who could not find a suitable tutor could turn to one of several private schools or academies. Private schools founded by individuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth century included both the Symms school (1642) and the Eaton school (1659) in Elizabeth City, Virginia, Captain Moon's school (1655) and Mr. King's school (1668) in Isle of Wright County, Virginia, the Mattey School (1706) in Williamsburg (founded by Mrs. Mary Whaley and named in honor of her son "Mattey"), and the Royale Free School (1766), also in Willaimsburg.[50] Several of the better eighteenth-century private schools included Donald Robertson's school in King and Queen County, Jonathan Boucher's Port Royal school, or

[47]Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 247-48.
[48] Alan Gallay, ed., Voices of the Old South: Eyewitness Accounts, 1528-1861 (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 98.
[49] Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 248. See also Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, 35.
[50] Stanard, Colonial Virginia, 265-72. Stanard lists other men and women who left funds for the establishment of schools in Virginia in Yorktown, Middlesex, Richmond County, Halifax County, Northampton County, Norfolk, and Williamsburg. See also Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 246.

Samuel Wilson's Somerset Academy in Maryland.[51] The growth of domestic grammar schools in the middle-to-late eighteenth century provided a better option for the education of sons of Virginia planters who did not have the money or inclination to send their sons to England. From 1790 to 1830 some seventy secondary schools came into existence, mostly with the help of religious organizations or through civic endeavors in the larger cities.[52] Still, compared to the northern communities, organized schools in the South remained scattered in number and unpredictable in quality.

Higher education for the children of the Virginia gentry in the eighteenth century consisted of three options; William and Mary College in Virginia, Northern Colleges such as Harvard and Princeton, or passage to England to attend Oxford, Cambridge or King's College, London. Considering the desire of most planters to obtain the best education for their sons, it is not surprising to see among the records from Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh, Middle and Inner Temple, and Kings College names such as Carter, Beverley, Wormley, Corbin, Lee, Fitzhugh, Bland, Burwell, Randolph, and Spotswood, among others. But aside from the families that comprised the highest of Virginia gentry these records reveal a surprisingly low number of graduates with Virginia roots.[53] Most planters, large freeholders, and commercial men in the eighteenth century opted for the more reasonable costs of William and Mary College, which by then had become an established institution. Founded in 1693 via a Royal Charter, William and Mary College quickly became the center of higher learning in Virginia. Some of the most influential

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[51] Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, 35.

planters in Virginia, such as William Byrd and Robert Carter, served on its board.

William and Mary College grew to encompass a grammar school, an Indian school, and a

college, and in the first seventy-five years of the eighteenth century it is estimated that

over 400 students passed through its classrooms.[54]

A strong education clearly became the mark of a gentleman in eighteenth-century

Virginia, a fact shown by the wealth of material on the greatest planters and their

educational interests, and the paucity of material on the educational opportunities of the

lower classes. Education, beyond simple reading, writing, and ciphering, remained within

the private province of the gentry. The connection between property, wealth, and

education is clear in the passage below from Philip Fithian, then a tutor to Robert Carter

of Nomimi Hall, to a Princeton classmate considering employment as a tutor in the South.

Fithian explains how Virginia society differed from that of New Jersey.

> But you will find the tables turned the moment you enter this colony. The very
> slaves, in some families here, could not be bought under 30000£. Such amazing
> property, no matter how deep it is involved, blows up the owners to an
> imagination, which is visible in all, but in various degrees according to their
> respective virtue, that they are exalted as much as Men in worth and precedency,
> as blind fortune has made a difference in their property; excepting always the
> value they put upon posts of honour and mental acquirements--For example, if
> you should travel through this Colony, with a well-confirmed testimonial of your
> having finished with credit a course of studies at Nassau-Hall; you would be rated,
> without any more questions asked, either about your family, your estate, your
> business, or your intention, at 10,000£.[55]

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[52]Richard Beale Davis, Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 1790-1830 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 35.
[53] Stanard, Colonial Virginia, 291-94.
[54] Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, 36.
[55] Fithian to John Peck, August 12, 1774, in Gallay, ed., Voices of the Old South, 100-1.

Fithian, based on his prejudices, expected to find lazy, incompetent planters lacking all refinement, but instead found that the Virginia gentry were industrious, educated, and driven men.

Certainly the men who owned Virginia's great plantations desired the best education for their sons, as almost any educated father would, but they expressed much different attitudes about public schooling for commoners. Sir William Berkeley, for example, believed that formal education, especially at lower levels of society, should be strictly regulated or even avoided. "I thank God there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these [for a] hundred years;" wrote Berkeley in his reply to the Lords of Trade in 1671, "for learning has brought disobedience, and heresy, and sects into the world, and printing had divulged them, and libels against the best government. God keep us from both!"[56] Such beliefs translated into a general public that was marginally literate at best. A study by Philip Bruce revealed that literacy levels among Virginia's gentry approached 100%, while only some 50% of the male property holders below the planter class could write. Laborers and tenant farmers fared worse, displaying literacy levels of around 40%, and only about 25% of indentured servants could sign their names.[57] While Beverley writes in 1705 about attempts to start public school, the first truly encompassing plan for public education in the South did not come until 1779, when Thomas Jefferson proposed his *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*.[58]

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[56] Fischer, Albion's Seed, 347.
[57] Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia, 457-58.
[58] Beverley, Present State of Virginia, 275.

Jefferson's plan called for "beginners' schools" within each county to be overseen by an elected board and staffed with teachers from the laboring classes to teach farming, mechanics, and such subjects that would be useful in daily life. Still, as late as 1824 opponents voiced their concern over plans for public education. John H. Rice, a Presbyterian clergyman, believed a primary school system degraded the hard working commoner by making him claim poverty to get a free education. Jefferson's proposal never became reality and resulted only in some state support for poor students. Without a comprehensive plan, therefore, education at the lower levels of society occurred only through charity schools and religious-backed academies.[59]

As much as some persons may have feared any education of the lower classes, the truth is that broad public education in the South proved impractical through most of the eighteenth century. The rural nature of the South, with large plantations and scattered populations, meant that public education "tended to become an individual rather than a civic enterprise" in the words of Louis B. Wright.[60] Despite the lack of schools for men of modest means, there still existed a strong desire to educate sons and in some cases daughters. Philip Bruce detailed many instances of commoners who make provisions in their will to educate their offspring. George Ashall, for example, who made a living as a tanner, stipulated upon his death in 1667 that thirty hides of land be sold from his estate

[59] Davis, Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 31-32.
[60] Wright, First Gentlemen, 95-96.

to educate his son, and Nicholas Granger desired that a number of cattle be sold to educate his daughter.[61]

As the nineteenth century began it is clear that the South had grown more literate, although most planters, according to Clement Eaton, rarely possessed a knowledge of literature, languages, or much education beyond basic writing and math.[62] The proliferation of newspapers and periodicals throughout the region, especially in Virginia, provides hard evidence of this development. Although the first printing press appeared in Virginia in 1730 (at the shop of William Parks in Williamsburg), it was not until the late years of the eighteenth century and early years of the nineteenth century that weekly or monthly news and general reading forums became prevalent.[63] Richmond had several newspapers in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, among them the Virginia Gazette (published from around 1730 to the beginning of the Revolution), the Argus (1793), the Examiner (1798), the Enquirer (1804) and the Whig (1824), and newspapers could be found in most larger Virginia towns such as Lynchburg, Norfolk, and Petersburg.[64] While there are too many periodicals to discuss in detail (R.B. Davis lists eleven periodicals alone in Virginia between 1790 and 1830), several deserve mention. James Lyon's National Magazine, published in Richmond from 1799 to 1800, published government documents. The American Gleaner: and Virginia Magazine, which

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[61] Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia, 301, 297.
[62] Clement Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 15. Eaton includes statements by Henry Knight, a New Englander traveling in the South in 1824, who stated that most planters did not have a deep knowledge of literature, a modest understanding of Latin and virtually no skill in Greek.
[63] Wright, First Gentlemen, 117.
[64] Davis, Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 74-77.

reminded readers that Virginia was the "Athens of the South," was published from 1807

to around 1826, and included essays, poetry, and memoirs. The Visitor, based in

Richmond, published columns, essays, poetry, and statistics between 1809 and 1810.

Robley Dunglison and George Tucker published the Virginia Literary Museum and

Journal of Belle Lettres, Arts, Sciences, Etc. between 1829 and 1830. One of the longest

running southern periodicals was The Southern Literary Messinger, published from 1834

to 1845, which included articles covering a range of subjects from literature and poetry to

travel dialogues and opinion pieces.[65] In nearby South Carolina The Southern Review

was published from 1828 to 1832.[66]

The South's growing literacy was shown not just by the number of newspapers

and periodicals available to southerners but also in the content of their articles. Literature,

history, poetry, non-fiction, and diverse pieces dealing with science, math, and

geography, and travel could be found in a single edition. A December 1835 article in The

Southern Literary Messenger advocated the establishment of a public education system

like that proposed by Thomas Jefferson, stating that an uneducated populace in a country

with universal male suffrage put property and freedom at risk. The article ended with a

plea to "enlighten people."[67] In another article in February 1838 The Messenger argued

that the desire for education was "a higher glory than the distinction in wealth, power or

arms."[68] Of course, not all articles argued for public education. In an August 1830 article

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[65] Ibid., 262-67.
[66] Ibid, 115, 327.
[67] Lucian Minor, "An Address on Education," The Southern Literary Messenger, 2, no.1 (Dec. 1835): 17-24.
[68] "Discourse on American Literature," The Southern Literary Messenger 4, no. 2 (Feb. 1838): 87.

in <u>The Southern Review</u> the authors, discussing a proposal for public education in a New York periodical, wondered "what ulterior motives" such a plan had, and how children of the lower classes that spend their time "in drunkedness" and "in idleness" could compete with "the children of the most deserving."[69] This article illustrated both the growing level of literacy and the increasing worldliness of the South (shown in the attack on the New York proposals by <u>The Southern Review</u>) but also demonstrated how class concepts regarding education, brought over from England to the South in the mid-seventeenth century, were firmly entrenched in the mid-nineteenth century southern States.

A Southern Gentleman's Vocation

Perhaps more than any other aspect of his life, the acceptable vocations of an eighteenth-century southern gentlemen deviated from the vocational choices of his counterparts in England. In England gentlemen had long believed that managing their estates or serving the throne through military or government positions provided the only proper vocations for men of their rank, a perception challenged only by the pressure from the growing commercial ranks that forced changes in accepted vocations of the gentry. Many successful southern planters still sought and obtained positions in government and in the militia, but their foremost concern was always the operation and business of their plantations, which in turn led to a greater acceptance of commercial activities as a

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[69] Francis Wright and Robert Dale Owen, "Agrarian and Education Systems," <u>The Southern Review</u> 6 (August, 1830): 1-31.

necessary part of their social station.[70] This section of the study at hand will examine the southern planter in traditional vocations as well as the operation of his plantations and the expanding acceptance of trade in his world.

From the founding of Jamestown through the eighteenth century, the men who represented the highest social order expected to carry out the political affairs of the colony. "Nothing could have been more alien to the settlers than the idea that competition for political leadership should be open to all levels of society," wrote historian Bernard Bailyn. Of course, the highest level of society in the South included men of questionable gentle background who worked to build wealth from the southern frontier and "succeeded not because of, but despite, whatever gentility they may have had."[71] Men of wealth and land occupied civil offices locally, such as sheriff and justice of the peace, and higher positions in the Virginia House of Burgesses or the powerful Council of State (the unofficial colonial equivalent of the House of Commons and House of Lords).[72] The importance to the Virginia landed class of holding offices within the Colonial Virginia government is reflected in the records of the period and in the letters, diaries, and biographies of the greatest Virginia planters. A sample of the names that sat either in the colonial Virginia House of Burgesses or on the Council of State (known simply as the Council) includes Digges, Harrison, Page, Custis, Jenings, Carter, Bassett, Byrd, Fitzhugh, Beverley, Wormley, and Lee. William Byrd II, for example, several times between 1709 and 1712, attempted to buy the office of lieutenant governor of Virginia for

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[70] Wright, First Gentlemen, 58-59, 64-69.
[71] Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," 90-115; quoted passages on pages 91 and 95.

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the price of £1,000 from then governor Lord Orkney. Orkney had never moved to Virginia, thus the position sought by Byrd was, by default, the most powerful position in the Colony.[73] Byrd's son, William Byrd III, served in the Virginia House of Burgesses from 1752 to 1754, then on the Council from 1754 until its dissolution during the Revolution.[74]

A very important difference in the southern gentry as compared to the English gentry was their flexible application of the English custom of primogeniture. The vast land holdings of the wealthiest planters allowed them to ignore the custom of leaving the entire estate to the first born son and instead bequeath each son a sizable estate. This practice allowed the largest and most powerful families to establish a number of separate family power centers and exercise a strong hold on political offices for decades. The Lee family, for example, held high political offices for over a century. Richard Lee, who came to Virginia between 1639 and 1640, served in the House of Burgesses, as High Sheriff, as Secretary of State, and on the Council of State during Berkeley's second tenure as Governor.[75] Four of Richard's sons, John, Richard II, William, and Hancock, went on to serve in a variety of public posts throughout the end of the seventeenth century.[76] Thomas Lee, the son of Richard II, became President of the Council of State in 1749 and later was the acting Governor of Virginia. Thomas' fourth son, Richard Henry Lee, not only

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[72] Bruce, Institutional History, 2: 424-26. Wright, First Gentlemen, 52, 65.
[73] Wright and Tinling, eds., Secret Diary of William Byrd, 159. The entry on March 31, 1710 states that Byrd was thwarted by the Duke of Marlborough, who declared that "no one but soldiers should have the government of a plantation." The office went to Alexander Spotswood on July 23, 1710.
[74] Marion Tinling, ed., The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684-1776, vol. 2 (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1977), 604.
[75] Paul C. Nagel, The Lees of Virginia, 10.

represented Virginia at the Continental Congress in 1776, but made the motion (seconded by John Adams) to seek independence from England, and went on to serve as one of the first senators from Virginia.[77] Henry "Light Horse" Lee III, Richard's nephew through his uncle, Henry Lee I (Thomas' brother) and father to Civil War general R.E. Lee, was elected Governor of Virginia in 1791 and later served in the United States Congress until 1801.

The examples of the Byrds and Lees are typical of the leading families of Virginia throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and a similar pattern can be found in the Virginia gentry's role as military leaders. Numerous Virginia planters served as the leaders of their county militias, which existed primarily to protect against Indian attacks.[78] William Fitzhugh held the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1687 when he reported to secretary of State Nicholas Spencer that he would "give notice to the Inhabitants to be upon their guards" when warned by Spencer that the Seneca Indians could be preparing for raids in the Chesapeake region.[79] During the Seven Years War with France William Byrd III commanded Virginia's second regiment in 1758 and assumed command of all of the entire Virginia regiment upon the resignation of George Washington.[80]

Despite their desire to obtain status-enhancing political and military positions, the operation of the plantation remained the first obligation of the planters, particularly in the early eighteenth century, and as such the planters engaged much more willingly in both

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[76] Ibid., 16-20.
[77] Ibid, 3-6.
[78] Wright, First Gentlemen, 65-66.
[79] Fitzhugh to Nicholas Spencer, July 4, 1687, William Fitzhugh and His Chesapeake World, ed. by R.B. Davis, 232-33.

the day-to-day running of their estates and in trade and commerce. In his introduction to the letters of Robert Carter, Louis B. Wright states that "the men who founded the aristocracy of colonial Virginia were working gentlemen, busy with the supervision of their estates and occupied with the commerce which resulted from the sale of plantation products and the importation of manufactured goods from overseas."[81] Wright is correct with regard to the planter in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, but the changing nature of the economy and demographics of the South throughout the later years of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries forced lasting changes on the southern planters by forcing them to expand their activities beyond the planting of tobacco.

The question of the acceptance of trade and commerce by the Chesapeake planters goes to the center of the historical debate regarding the difference in the gentry of Virginia versus England. Thomas Wertenbaker makes the compelling argument that the need for a cheap source of raw materials such as lumber, potash, pig iron, copper, and hemp was the primary motivation for the English colonization of the Chesapeake. Lacking a large labor supply, these endeavors failed in the colonial South. But tobacco, it was soon discovered, grew abundantly and required less labor and thus tobacco became the primary industry between 1650 and 1750 and built Virginia's economy into one of both agriculture and commerce. Instead of being a dependent supplier of raw materials to England, Virginia and Maryland instead became major suppliers of tobacco to a good part

[80] Tinling, ed., Correspondence of the Three William Byrds, 607.
[81] Wright, ed., Letters of Robert Carter, vi.

of the world.[82] That commerce was not a part of England's original plan for Virginia is revealed in Sir William Berkeley's comment describing merchants as "avaricious persons, whose sickle hath bin ere long in our harvest already."[83]

It is obvious that trade and commerce did become a large part of the Virginia planter's world if one looks at the attempts by England to restrict the trade of its colonies. Cromwell tried to limit trade during the Interregnum, and after Charles II reclaimed the throne, he instituted a series of laws, collectively known as the Navigation Acts, aimed at stemming the growing trade and independence of both the New England and southern colonies. The planter and author Robert Beverley recorded these events in his history of Virginia in 1705, pointing out that such laws financially injured the planters by crippling the trading aspect of their livelihood:

> ¶.66.   *Oliver* had no sooner subdued the Plantations; but he began to contrive how to keep them under, that so they might never be able for the Time to come to give him further Trouble. To this End he thought it necessary to break off their Correspondence with all other Nations; thereby to prevent their being furnish'd with Arms, Ammunition, and other Warlike provisions. According to this Design, he contrived a severe Act of Parliament, whereby he prohibited the Plantations from receiving of exporting any *European* Commodities, but what should be carried to them by *English* Men, and in *English* built Ships.

> ¶.84.   Another Misfortune happen'd to the Plantation this Year, which was a new Act of Parliament in *England*, laying a severer Restraint upon their Supplies than formerly. By this Act they could have no Foreign Goods, which were not first landed in *England*, and carried directly thence to the Plantations; the former Restraint of importing them only by *English* Men, in *English* built Shipping, not being thought sufficient.
>   This was a Misfortune that cut with a double Edge; For, First, it reduced their Staple Tobacco to a very low Price, and Secondly, it raised the Value of European Goods, to what the Merchants pleased to put upon them.[84]

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[82] Wertenbaker, <u>Planters of Colonial Virginia</u>, 7-37.
[83] Fischer, <u>Albion's Seed</u>, 366.

In his appeal to the Crown in 1663 Sir William Berkeley defended the Virginia planters with regard to the Navigation Acts, saying that confining planters to trade with only England had been a "great impediment," and that if the laws benefited England or the Colonies then "no good Subject or Englishman will oppose," but that in his view "it shall appear that neither of these are advantaged by it." Berkeley then sharply stated, "we cannot but resent, that forty-thousand people should be impoverish'd to enrich little more than forty Merchants, who being the only buyers of our Tobacco, give us what they please for it."[85]

These events did hurt the financial standing of the planters for the most of the last quarter of the seventeenth century because, as Thomas Wertenbaker pointed out, "the tobacco of the Chesapeake had long since reached a point where it required a world market."[86] Tobacco had grown into an international business, so it is not surprising that planters had little time for leisure and gained first hand knowledge of agriculture, the trade of their crops, banking matters, and even manufacturing, since many plantations resembled small towns, employing blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, tanners, and shoemakers.[87] David Hackett Fischer notes that the historical arguments regarding attitudes toward trade have come full circle, from early historians who argued that planters were hostile toward trade, to historians such as Wertenbaker, Wright, and Bridenbaugh, who argued that planters not only engaged in trade but were primarily

[84] Beverley, History and Present State of Virginia, 64, 70.
[85] Berkeley, Discourse and View of Virginia, 6-7.
[86] Wertenbaker, Planters of Colonial Virginia, 86.
[87] Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, 17; Fischer, Albion's Seed, 365; Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 208.

descended from the English merchant class.[88] Wright lists Thomas and Philip Ludwell,

Nicholas Spencer, Thomas Stegg, William Byrd I, Robert Bolling, Richard Booker, Miles

Cary, and George Brent among those planters with merchant blood.[89] Wertenbaker adds

the names Popleton, Townsend, Bentley, Pearce, Brewer, Piersay, Chew, Menifie,

Mathews, Thoroughgood, Hamor, Allerton, and Fitzhugh to the list of families derived

from non-gentry.[90]

Whether a man sprang from gentry roots or not, it is clear in the writings of two of

the greatest planters that trade and commerce were an inevitable part of plantation life.

William Byrd II, according to his diary, routinely surveyed his extensive holdings,

visiting his plantations thirteen times between February 1709 and June 1711. On the 15th

of May, 1710, Byrd records that he left his home about 7 o'clock to visit his fields but

shortly into his ride, "it rained very hard and I was wet to the skin." In an entry dated

December 20, 1710, Byrd visited his Falling Creek plantation only to find that his

overseer had "spoiled all the tobacco by house burn and carried several things that belong

to me to his house." Byrd fired the man, then "walked to all the plantation on that side of

the river and the tobacco was most it spoiled."[91] Byrd's actions were hardly consistent

with the landed English gentry who employed clerks to collect their rents. Robert Carter,

in his letters from 1720 to 1727, displayed a thorough knowledge of tobacco prices and

international markets. In a letter to Mr. Thomas Evans on July 14, 1720, Carter wrote:

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[88] Fischer, Albion's Seed, 365 (note 3).
[89] Wright, First Gentlemen, 47.
[90] Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian, 12-20.
[91] Wright and Tinling, eds., Secret Diary of William Byrd, 178, 274.

I am in hopes, the spring coming on and the French and Spanish trades being both open, the price of our commodity will not flag. Some people have news that tobacco was raised in Holland two stivers in the pound, and in Glasgow they say 'twas a penny a pound higher than it had been. These things flatter me that my last sales will not be worst than my first.[92]

Carter's letters contained numerous entries regarding payments to his creditors and payments due him, illustrating that he was by no means an idle gentleman.

Tobacco was not the only crop, nor agriculture the only industry, that fattened the accounts of the Virginia gentry. Stabilized prices and a leveling demand for tobacco meant that the plantation owners had to plant different crops or turn to other commercial ventures or suffer the dilapidation of his estate.[93] Successful planters turned to new crops such as corn, wheat, and cotton, and the expansion of manufactured goods like cloth, leather, and metal products for export. Growing families meant more children to support, which in turn meant families needed more reliable sources of income than they could attain from planting tobacco. By 1750 many planters had supplemented or replaced tobacco income with revenue from lumber and iron production, shipbuilding, and indentured slave and convict importation. Robert Carter of Nomini Hall (grandson to Robert "King" Carter of Corotoman) gained an interest in the Baltimore Ironworks through his marriage to Frances Ann Tasker in 1754. Carter, who gained a substantial income from the ironworks, sold iron both to domestic and English buyers from 1770 to 1787, when he sold his position in the ironworks for £20,000. Carter also maintained interests in textile manufacturing, grain mills, and a salt production facility on the

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[92] Carter to Thomas Evans, July 14, 1720, in Wright, ed., Letters of Robert Carter, 24.
[93] Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860, 3-4.

grounds of Nomini Hall.[94] The depletion of the Chesapeake soil by almost a century of

growing and harvesting tobacco, together with the shrinking of estates through more

equal parceling of land among sons, also forced many planter's sons to move west in

search of new economic opportunities.[95] By the nineteenth century the ruin of the tobacco

economy from soil depletion spurred Jefferson to comment that "the impoverishment of

our fields" from excess tobacco farming must change or Virginia's planters would have

no choice but to "run away to Alibama, as so many of our countrymen are doing" and

abandon their country of Virginia.[96]

Ironically, the vast fortunes accumulated by the Virginia planters through both

agriculture and trade created the idea that commercial interests were not becoming to a

gentleman. Henry Laurens, a Charleston, South Carolina planter-merchant and slave

trader, advised two aspiring gentlemen in 1764 to first set themselves up as planters

before entering into trade, for entering into "any retail trade. . . would be mean, would

lessen them in the esteem of people whose respect they must endeavor to attract."[97] Even

within planter families trade gained a reputation as ungentlemanly. Wertenbaker points

out that while the first two William Byrds had an eye for business, the third William Byrd

did little in running the family business, choosing instead to concentrate on a political

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[94] Morton, <u>Robert Carter of Nomini Hall</u>,161-85. On Carter's marriage, see pp. 37.
[95] Lois Green Carr, "Diversification in the Chesapeake; Somerset County, Maryland, in Comparative Perspective" in <u>Colonial Chesapeake Society</u> eds. Lois G. Carr, Philip .D. Morgan and Jean B. Russo (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 353-54. Carr's study is specific to Somerset County, but is pertinent to the entire Chesapeake region, and includes extensive statistical research illustrating the growth of other agricultural products and industries. See also Bridenbaugh, <u>Myths and Realities</u>, 4-5, 10; Smith, <u>Inside the Great House</u>, 119.
[96] Eaton, <u>The Growth of Southern Civilization</u>, 15-16.
[97] Gordon S. Wood, <u>The Radicalism of the American Revolution</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 37.

career and enjoying the vices of wealth in the form of a gambling addiction that almost

lost his Westover plantation.[98] The bias against merchants gained momentum as the

revolutionary years grew near. Many planters felt they were being mistreated by the

merchants in England, prompting Virginian Landon Carter to declare that "merchants

have no gratitude." Planters who had built good relations with English merchants in the

first half of the century now felt the same merchants, who demanded bills be paid, treated

them with little respect and felt that such action called into question the planter's

integrity.[99]

Despite the bias against trade that occurred in the quarter-century before the

American Revolution, the same commercial economic forces that were at work in

England took hold in the South. While some economies of the South, primarily the cotton

plantations of Alabama and Mississippi, maintained their agricultural base the rapid

influx of immigrants and growth of urban centers encouraged commercial activities into

the nineteenth century. Richard Henry Lee in 1777 advised his son William to abandon

his training for the ministry and pursue a career in trade. "Instead of Church," wrote Lee,

"I would now have him as knowing [as much] as possible in Commerce, as well the

theory as the practical art." Upon his son's successful completion of an apprenticeship

with Lee's uncle in France, where he encouraged him to learn French, Lee wrote to his

son that "there is no doubt but on your return to your own Country, you will be so trusted

to conduct the business of foreign Merchants, as to be very useful to them, & profitable to

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[98] Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebian, 137-40.

yourself." Lee understood that commerce, not agriculture, would be how men of the future would prosper.[100]

By the early nineteenth century it is evident that commerce had become intertwined with wealth and prosperity, which could open the door for a man's entry into the realm of the gentleman. America's newly won independence, grounded in a belief that men of all ranks should have more freedom to determine their own destiny, meant a man's financial worth outweighed what he did for a living. Such an attitude is reflected in the memoirs of a lawyer in the July 1835 edition of The Southern Literary Messenger in which the author complains that his success at winning cases, not who he was personally, proved to be more influential in his quest to be accepted within the ranks of the gentry.[101] Periodicals from 1830 and 1840 show that trade was no longer a career meant only for the lower ranks of society. "Commerce is King," proclaimed each issue of J. D. B. DeBow's Commercial Review of the South and West, a periodical published in New Orleans between 1846 and 1880. DeBow obviously targeted readers from the world of commerce (each issue included numerous business articles on topics such as crop yields, import volume, and mineral studies), yet he also included numerous essays and pieces on intellectual subjects such as the arts, politics, geography, and economics, subjects that DeBow knew were not inconsistent with the social rank of his readers. DeBow understood that his audience was more than simple traders and included industrialists and commercial men with a wide range of gentlemanly interests. One article, published in

[99] T. H. Breen, Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 133-42.

February 1846, labeled trade a noble profession that "neither science, nor art, nor any of the institutions of society have anything like the antiquity which of right pertains to this," and called business the "parent of civilization."[102] Of course, DeBow also catered to his audience, meaning he likely wrote such flattering remarks to win over his readership. Still, DeBow's comparison of the commercial aspects of ancient societies of Assyria, Egypt, and Persia with that of the South were not only the bombast of a southern entrepreneur but also truisms that cannot and should not be ignored.[103]

A Southern Gentleman's Character

The southern gentry, as seen in the previous sections, sought to emulate the English gentry with regard to both education and proper vocations but found it difficult to reproduce brick and mortar institutions or import entire economic systems. The southern gentleman found it much easier, however, to adopt the codes of honor and virtue into his southern colonial existence. Honor, valor, defense of one's reputation, duelling, conduct, manners, courtesies, patriotism, morality, culture, and hospitality are all found among the personal characteristics of the southern gentleman, although in varying degrees and in adapted forms from those practiced in England. In general the Virginia planter and the later southern gentleman bent the rules of honesty, strove to reproduce the English grand style of living, and wrestled with the dilemma of his loyalty to England versus America.

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[100] Smith, Inside the Great House, 95.
[101] "Memoirs of an Ambitious Lawyer," The Southern Literary Messenger 1, no.11 (July, 1835): 645-46.
[102] J. B. D. DeBow, "The Origin, Progress, and Influences of Commerce," in Commercial Review of the South and West, ed. By J. B. D. DeBow 1 (Feb., 1846): 97-115. Quote on p. 114. This periodical is generally referred to today as DeBow's Review, which will be used hereafter for short citations.

Honor can be a very ephemeral trait, and as such it is difficult to define in absolute terms. Bertram Wyatt-Brown discussed southern honor in terms of its primal foundations, casting it as an ancient and inborn understanding of right versus wrong that was dictated by nature yet uncontrollable through fate. The parameters under which paternalism and deference (which were closely tied to honor and behavior) operated in the more democratic society of the American South, especially after the Revolutionary War, were inconsistent and contentious when introduced into a system that emphasized individual betterment. "The chief problem," noted Wyatt-Brown, "was the discrepancy between honor as obedience to superior rank and the contrary duty to achieve a place for oneself and family." Wyatt-Brown concluded by stating that "the ethic of honor was designed to prevent unjustified violence, unpredictability, and anarchy," but "occasionally it led to that very nightmare," meaning that the adherence to the principles of primal honor in a more rigid social structure such as in England helped to keep peace among differing social ranks. Primal honor, with its associated traits of paternalism and deference, resulted in class conflict, however, when introduced into the developing society of the South which had no age-old gentry and which promised financial and social rewards for personal ambition.[104]

Wyatt-Brown distinguished honor among all classes from honor among the gentry in the South by pointing out that southern gentility stressed three "graces"--sociability, learning, and piety--that distinguished their social rank. Sociability was particularly

[103] Colonel J. Gadsen, "Commercial Spirit in the South," DeBow's Review, 2 (Sept. 1846): 119-32.
[104] Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 61.

important, as demonstrated by the emphasis on manners and morals in most schools. The gentry of the South fought against the deterioration of their social hierarchy from the forces of democracy and ambition by accentuating their personal honor, especially morals, civility, and manners.[105]

Personal honor in the South, as it did in England, meant principally the good standing of a man's name, but reputation was not inherently tied to defending one's honor through violence. Unlike in England where the act of dueling thrived despite attempts to limit its use, Virginia did not witness many duels in defense of honor, particularly before the Revolution. An 1893 article in The Virginia Magazine stated that from the time of the founding of the Jamestown colony to the eve of the Revolution there was no evidence that a single duel took place in Virginia.[106] Certainly there were duels in the South that went unrecorded, but duelling as a means to settle arguments did not flourish in the South and generally was seen as a dishonorable method of settling disputes. Typical of this attitude was the reaction of the justices of the Lancaster county court, which punished Richard Denham in 1653 for delivering a challenge from his father-in-law, Captain Hackett, to Daniel Fox, a fellow member of the Court. The court held that Denham was a "party in ye crime" with Hackett, whereupon the sheriff, on orders of the Court, delivered a whipping to Denham and promptly arrested Hackett. Another instance in 1684 saw two brothers

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[105] Ibid., 89-90.
[106] The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 1, no. 3 (Richmond: The Virginia Historical Society, January 1894), 347.

draw swords on the floor of the Lower Norfolk courthouse only to be separated before

bloodshed commenced. Both men were arrested and sent to prison.[107]

The apparent lack of duels in colonial Virginia is noted in the works of John

Fiske, Thomas Wertenbaker, and Louis B. Wright.[108] Wertenbaker cites the lack of

duelling among the Virginia planters, especially during a time in which the practice was

routinely used by the English gentry to settle arguments, as evidence that the Virginia

gentry sprang more from the English middle class. "That the custom was not continued in

Virginia," wrote Wertenbaker, "adds convincing testimony to the evidence that the best

class of immigrants to the colony were not members of the English aristocracy."[109]

Wertenbaker lists only two potential duels after 1624 (one of which was the challenge of

Fox by Hackett mentioned above), both of which ended in the arrest of the respective

challenger.[110] A challenge to duel in early Virginia ran counter to the expected conduct of

a true gentleman, and was issued only by the most crass or eccentric members of genteel

society. Colonel Daniel Parke (1669-1710), for example, was generally viewed as a hot

tempered gentleman who possessed "a quick resentment of every the least thing that

looks like an affront or injury." When Parke issued a public challenge to the visiting

Governor of Maryland, his fellow gentlemen were shocked, for it was not proper behavior

for a gentleman to issue a public challenge to a visiting gentleman.[111]

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[107] Bruce, Social Life of Virginia, 250-54.
[108] Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 265; Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian, 76-77; Wright, First Gentlemen, 10.
[109] Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian, 76.
[110] ibid., 76-79.
[111] Fischer, Albion's Seed, 318.

Duelling in the South did become more fashionable in the latter years of the

eighteenth-century according to historian Clement Eaton, but then again decreased in

use.[112] Why the duel never took root in Virginia as a means of dispute resolution is likely

due to a number of factors aside from Wertenbaker's hypothesis that the seeds of the

Virginia gentry came from the English middle class. Demographics, for example,

probably had much to do with the lack of duelling in Virginia. Southern gentlemen did

not live in as compressed surroundings as their English counterparts, and thus did not find

themselves in situations under which arguments could erupt and peer pressure could force

their hands. A man was hard-pressed to spurn a challenge in a tavern filled with social

colleagues and in a society where gossip traveled quickly. Conversely, the isolation of the

plantation and the nature of the southern agrarian society diffused such peer pressure. By

the time southern towns had grown to dot the South in the nineteenth century, genteel

society both in England and in America viewed duelling as a barbaric practice. Duelling

among the lower classes also contributed to the decline of such challenges among the

southern gentry, a condition Gordon S. Wood calls the "spread of egalitarian sentiments."

"When even servants began challenging others to duels," wrote Wood, " many gentlemen

realized that the code of honor had lost its meaning."[113] Society's feelings toward

duelling in the first half of the nineteenth century is reflected in a July 1835 article in The

Southern Literary Messenger in which a young girl mourned the death of her beloved

who, in the heat of the moment, had challenged another man to duel and had promptly

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[112] Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1975),
110, 396-97.

been shot dead.[114] The duel, in other words, produced only sadness and grief and ran counter to the doctrines of a civilized society.

Conduct in dire situations, among peers, and in social situations continued to play a dominant role in the definition of a southern gentleman. Courage, even in light of the scanty use of the duel in Virginia, remained a vital gentry characteristic. The story of the death of the heroic and flamboyant Colonel Daniel Parke best summarizes the southern idea of courage and stoicism. Parke served the throne as governor of Antigua, where he was captured and tortured by rebels and, just before dying, told his tormentors "gentlemen, you have no sense of honor, pray have some of humanity."[115] Many southern gentlemen approached death with the quiet stoicism displayed by of Parke. William Byrd II, who recorded in his diaries mundane details of what he ate and how many pages he read each morning, exhibited no emotion in his entry of October 22, 1720 after a court secretary died in front of him. Byrd wrote simply that the man "was struck with the fit of an apoplexy and died immediately and fell upon me" which "made a great consternation," whereupon Byrd moved on to the details of his lunch.[116]

Honesty represented a bit of a quandary to the southern gentleman, for on one hand gentlemen always were to be honest, particularly to other gentlemen, but in business matters honesty did not always prevail. Planters routinely paid debts with tobacco and did not hesitate to take advantage of price discrepancies, probably because they felt that buyers in London unscrupulously cheated them. Planters were often in debt to London

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[113] Wood, Radicalism of the American Revolution, 345.
[114] "The Duel", The Southern Literary Messenger 1 no. 11 (July 1835): 641-44.

merchants, who most likely sought to keep the planters indebted to them to gain leverage in their financial dealings. Goods shipped by London merchants to New York cost half what the same goods cost that arrived in Norfolk and Williamsburg, a situation that grew worse during the imposition of the Navigation Acts.[117]

Tobacco, as shown in the letters of Robert Carter, was a notoriously uncertain commodity, and planters had no assurances that their shipments would receive a fair price once in England. In one letter to his London agents, Micajah and Richard Perry, Carter acknowledged that "some of my tobacco was not so agreeable as you could wish," then assured them that "the new crop now sent, it please God I live, I will endeavor to be nicer than ever I have been," and added that he hoped "that I may keep pace with that miscellaneous gent, Mr. Pratt, who fluxes me egregiously." Carter likely was referring to William Pratt, another Virginia planter in competition with Carter.[118] In other instances the Virginia gentry were accused of misappropriating funds, avoiding taxes, and using their status to accumulate vast tracts of land unfairly. In 1722 Alexander Spotswood, then governor of Virginia, approved a patent for 40,000 acres to three men who, upon Spotswood's resignation shortly afterward, conveyed the land back to the ex-Governor. The Board of Trade and Plantations reviewed the unscrupulous transaction but, because of Spotswood's high connections and influence, did nothing.[119]

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[115] Wright, First Gentlemen, 91-92. Fischer, Albion's Seed, 318.
[116] Fischer, Albion's Seed, 326-27.
[117] Fiske, Old Virginia, 217-18.
[118] Carter to Micajah and Richard Perry, July 13, 1720, Letters of Robert Carter, ed. by L.B. Wright, 5-6.
[119] Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian, 91-99.

Honesty grew in importance to southern gentlemen in the middle to late

eighteenth century, after the great Virginia planters had amassed most of the prime

farming land along the Chesapeake and made the growing and shipping of tobacco into a

major international industry, which in turn led to more intense regulation by the crown

and later by state and national governments. In some cases honesty in the South exceeded

that expected of the gentlemen of England. At William and Mary College, for example,

students came to feel in the mid-eighteenth century that cheating gravely damaged one's

reputation, and that the use of school monitors or professors to check student cheating

degraded their honor. The students instead took it upon themselves to institute an honor

system whereupon they policed themselves and each other. The William and Mary honor

system, which was codified as College policy in 1819, contrasted sharply to that of

Oxford and Cambridge, where students made sport of trying to outwit the college spies

employed to catch cheaters.[120]

The southern gentleman's personal behavior, morality and manners were always

under the scrutiny of his society, and as such he followed an unwritten code of conduct.

Southern planters were gracious but avoided being the center of attention, well read but

not scholarly, respectful of subordinates but never deferred to them, and generous both in

hospitality and, when proper, with money. The advice given by Colonel Daniel Parke to

his daughter reminding her to remember her social status as a gentlewoman provides a

glimpse of the qualities expected from the gentry.

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[120] Ibid., 100.

> Mind your writing and everything else you have learnt, and do not learn to romp, but behave yourself soberly and like a gentlewomen. Mind reading, and carry yourself so that everybody may respect you. be calm and obliging to all the servants, and when you speak, do it mildly, even to the poorest slave. If any of the servants commit small faults that are of no consequence, do you hide them. If you understand of any great faults they commit, acquaint your mother, but do not aggravate the fault.[121]

The gentry should be well read, as advised by Parke, but exhibiting too much formal education did not become a gentleman. "Becoming a mere scholar," advised George Washington in 1771, was not "a desirable education for a gentleman."[122] Washington showed an early interest in etiquette, penning his "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation" before the age of sixteen. Later in life Washington lamented the declining conduct of many Virginia planters who, in the face of mounting debts, adopted combative and, in his eyes, ungentlemanly business practices.[123]

Sociability and generosity were both hallmarks of the southern gentleman. A gentleman particularly needed to exhibit dancing skills since the activity played a central role in the gentry's social life.[124] William Byrd II wrote often in his diary of his joy of dancing in the early eighteenth century, while an article in the April 1835 edition of The Southern Literary Messenger advocated dancing lessons for boys and labeled bashfulness as "a mark of ill-breeding, or rather no breeding at all."[125] Generosity also marked the

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[121] Wright, First Gentlemen, 80.

[122] Wood, Radicalism of the American Revolution, 198.

[123] Breen, Tobacco Culture, 162.

[124] Wright states that "dancing was the most popular of the social amusements, and to not know how to dance was to display one's lack of good breeding." Wright, First Gentlemen, 82.

[125] Byrd mentions dancing ten times between February and November, 1709, and it is likely that there were numerous times Byrd failed to mention modest dancing such as the entry of May 4, 1709, when he records that he danced a minuet in the afternoon. See Wright and Tinling, eds., Secret Diary of William Byrd II, 1709-1712. M. M. Noah, "A Bashful Gentleman," The Southern Literary Messenger 1, no. 8 (April 1835), 429.

proper conduct of a gentleman. Monsieur Durand, a Frenchman visiting Virginia in 1686, wrote that "the gentlemen called Cavaliers are greatly esteemed and respected, and are very courteous and honorable." Durand noted in his book A Huguenot Exile in Virginia that planters "cordially gave me to eat and to drink of whatever they had, and if I slept in a house where they owned horses, on the morrow some were lent to me to use for the first half of the next day's journey."[126] Generosity also extended, when applicable, to financial matters. In the summer of 1720 Robert Carter, generally noted as a frugal spender and conservative investor, told his agent, William Dawkins, to use his shipment of two hogsheads of tobacco for the purchase of an engraved church plate for his parish, instructing Dawkins that whatever expense not covered by the tobacco "you are to charge to my account."[127]

Southern gentry showed a great concern for morality, which included proper behavior and respect for institutions. Religion played a major role in defining morals. Even after the passage of the Toleration Act by Parliament in 1689, the House of Burgesses took up petitions from various parts of Virginia calling for every citizen to attend on Sunday "some congregation or place or worship" to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath, and approved the levying of fines against adults who failed to attend the church of their choice.[128] Robert Carter displayed great concern that his sons in England have a strong religious education, telling his agent "let others take what courses they please in the bringing up of their posterity, I resolve the principles of our holy religion shall be

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[126] Quoted in Wright, First Gentlemen, 69, 78, from Monsieur Durand, A Huguenot Exile in Virginia, ed. By Gilbert Chinard (New York, 1934), 111.

instilled into mine betimes; as I am of the Church of England way, so I desire they should be."[129] Carter's sentiment was echoed a century later in an address to the students of William and Mary College in which the author stated that "greatness and distinction are a result rather of moral effort than of mental superiority."[130]

A gentleman's morality extended to proper conduct in mixed company. In social situations men afforded women the highest degree of courtesy and deference, despite the occasional sexual discrepancy. A good example of the fine line between morality and lust is provided by William Byrd II who wrote in his diary on November 2, 1709, that he had repeatedly made advances toward another man's wife, making her cry and causing grief to his own wife. "I neglected to say my prayers," wrote Byrd, "which I should not have done, because I ought to beg pardon for the lust I had for another man's wife."[131] Nineteenth century periodicals displayed a continued awareness of a gentleman's behavior before a woman. A man should never "blurt forth his vulgar oaths before a lady" advised The Southern Literary Messenger in 1838, while an 1835 story in the same publication made it clear that, while women were allowed to sleep-in after a late night without concern for their reputation, men were expected to rise at a proper hour regardless of the previous night's revelry.[132] Not surprisingly, morals disappeared when

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[127] Carter to William Dawkins, July 23, 1720, Letters of Robert Carter, 39.
[128] Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia, 1: 34-35.
[129] Carter to William Dawkins, July 14, 1720. Letters of Robert Carter, 25.
[130] Robert Sanders, "Address delivered to the Students of William and Mary College," The Southern Literary Messenger 5, no. 4 (Sept. 1839), 595-97.
[131] Wright and Tinling, eds., The Secret Diary of William Byrd, 1709-1712, 101.
[132] "Dusultory Thoughts in Human Credulity and Versatility," The Southern Literary Messenger 4, no. 5 (May 1838), 287-92. M.M. Noah, "Fashionable Parties and Late Hours," The Southern Literary Messenger 1, no. 7 (March 1835), 357-58.

dealing with women below the upper ranks, especially slaves. Laws passed in 1691 and

1705 punished any intermarriage with black or Indian slaves, and stipulated that the

mothers and children of such mixed blood unions were to themselves become slaves.

Planters who fathered children by slave mistresses were sometimes disciplined through

the church, but generally such matters were overlooked by society.[133]

Nineteenth century periodicals tied honor, conduct, and morality to the betterment

of the country and society as a whole. "Your duty to your country, no matter what may be

your ultimate destiny, remains the same," declared a speaker to the literary society of

Randolph-Macon College in 1839, telling the students "you will keep your eyes steadily

fixed upon her institutions, and will be prepared to stand by them in weal and wo."[134]

Another article, entitled "The Loyalty of Virginia" lambasted a man for slandering

Virginia, warning that a man should never slander his homeland.[135] A military man in an

1848 article in DeBow's Review surprisingly suggested that gentlemen should solve

conflicts through peaceful negotiation rather than violence, the implication being that

peaceful settlements were more genteel.[136] The decline of the Roman Empire was tied to

a lack of morals by an author in an 1838 issue of The Southern Literary Messenger,

saying that they were "invincible while they were virtuous, and only perished when they

had become licentious and corrupt."[137] Another contributor to The Messenger believed

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[133] Fiske, Old Virginia, 202-3.
[134] John Tyler, "An Address," The Southern Literary Messenger 5, no. 4 (Feb. 1839), 20-25.
[135] "Editorial: The Loyalty of Virginia," ibid. 2, no.5 (April 1836), 317.
[136] "The Sword and the Olive Branch," DeBow's Review 6 (Oct./Nov. 1848), 304-10.
[137] "The Influence of Morals," The Southern Literary Journal 4, no. 3 (March 1838) 145-51.

that not just individual commercial success but a strong national economy could be derived only through proper "moral cultivation."[138]

The guidelines of gentlemanly conduct in the eighteenth-century South, like in England, had their basis in the social ties of deference and paternalism. If the gentry fulfilled their role as servants and protectors of society and conducted themselves as the lower ranks expected them to, then the gentry could expect to receive the deference of the lower social orders. Beverley reveals the existence of paternalism in seventeenth and early eighteenth century Virginia in his chapter entitled "Of the other Publick Charitable Works, and particularly, their Provision for the Poor." Beverley specifically cites the building of schools "for the education of children in many parts of the country" and the public and personal care of the sick.

> When it happens, that by Accident of Sickness, any person is disabled from Working, and so is forc't to depend on the alms of the parish, he is then very well provided for; not at the common rate of some Countries, that give but just sufficient, to preserve the poor from perishing: But the unhappy Creature is receiv'd into some charitable Planter's House, where he is at the Publick Charge, boarded very plentifully.[139]

Planters such as Richard Lee, John Moon, Henry King, and Richard Russell helped establish free schools in Virginia before the dawn of the eighteenth century, and there is evidence of many planters such as Landon Carter, Lewis Burwell, William Stark, and Cole Digges who are named as benefactors of public schools in the eighteenth century.[140] The planter class believed that they had an obligation to serve and protect the social order

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[138] Colonel J. Gasden, "The Origin," DeBow's Review 2 (Sept. 1846), 125.
[139] Beverley, Present State of Virginia, 275.
[140] Stanard, Colonial Virginia, 268-70.

that developed in Virginia, a trait seen in George Washington's acceptance of the command of the rag-tag army that he would lead to victory over the British.[141]

Perhaps because of his less than aristocratic background and close ties with trade, the southern gentleman possessed a less aristocratic view towards his society. Richard Beale Davis wrote that the eighteenth-century Virginia gentry was a "ruling class whose political style was one of familiarity with all orders and frequent subservience to the sentiments of the common planters."[142] George Tucker wrote in 1815 that "the rich rode in coaches, or chariots, or on fine horses, but they never failed to pull off their hats to a poor man whom they met, & generally, appear'd to me to shake hands with every man in a Courtyard, or a church-yard, and as far as I could judge the planter who own'd half a dozen negroes, felt himself perfectly upon a level with his rich neighbor that own'd a hundred."[143] Such open mindedness of the gentry won them the deference they desired from the lower ranks. Of course, if the gentry felt their generous nature had been taken advantage of, they were quick to correct the situation. In 1674 James Bullock, a York County tailor, had the audacity to enter his horse in a race against Dr. Mathew Slader for a purse of 2,000 pounds of tobacco. Bullock was promptly fined £100 and chastised for participating in a "sport for gentlemen only."[144] Despite the somewhat different nature of the paternalism-deference relationship in the South, it nonetheless played a similar role as

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[141] Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, 16-17.
[142] Richard Beale Davis, Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 1524.
[143] Breen, Tobacco Culture, 34. Fischer, Albion's Seed, 387.
[144] Wright, First Gentlemen, 59.

in England--it was the subconscious mental condition that held together a wide-ranging

society in an oftentimes harsh and undeveloped environment.

Given that the society of Virginia and the South was literally carved out of a

wilderness, it is perhaps surprising how large a role hospitality, culture, and style of living

played in defining the gentry. The wealthiest planters in colonial Virginia easily could be

detected by their fine imported clothing which included silk stockings, lace ruffles and

embroidered waistcoats.[145] "These Virginians are a very gentle, well-dressed people,"

observed John Bartram in 1737, "and look, perhaps, more at a man's outside than his

inside." As in England, the Virginia gentry displayed their status by wearing swords on

their side, a custom that lasted into the late eighteenth century.[146] Opulence could be

found in the homes of the tidewater planters. The typical plantation may have lacked in

architectural qualities, but compensated for this by its sheer size and accoutrements.

Planter's houses focused on usefulness and entertaining. They were centered around one

main Hall, or "Great Room," used for gathering and dining, and contained numerous

bedrooms or apartments for family and guests.[147] William Fitzhugh's home typifies how

most planters' homes evolved, with wings added on to accommodate both his growing

family and estate.[148] The time and detail involved in building a large plantation house is

illustrated in Fitzhugh's advice to Nicholas Hayward in 1686.

> I shall propose no other than what I would follow my self, that is, if you design
> this land to settle, a child of your own or near kinsman, for whom it is supposed
> you would build a very good house . . .the best methods to be pursued therein is,

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[145] Fiske, Old Virginia, 236. Bruce, The Social Life of Virginia, 168-69.
[146] Breen, Tobacco Culture, 105. Fischer, Albion's Seed, 354-58.
[147] Fiske, Old Virginia, 224-25.
[148] Bruce, The Social Life of Virginia, 161.

to get a Carpenter & Bricklayer Servants. & send them in here to serve 4 or five years, in which time of their Service, they might reasonably build a substantial good house.[149]

The great homes of the wealthiest planters were decorated with every luxury that could be bought and imported to the colonies, including fine china, silver cups, linen and silk sheets, leather chairs, and walnut dining tables.[150]

The attempts to recreate the genteel style of living found in England along the shores of the Chesapeake and the forests of the South highlights the southern gentry's concern for displaying culture and their love of hospitality. Planters taught their children music, sat for portraits, and purchased classic histories and literature for their libraries. The belief that culture, hospitality, and generosity defined the upper class remained through the eighteenth century and spread into other southern regions in the nineteenth century. "The power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art," wrote a contributor to DeBow's Review, can only be appreciated by people of "high cultivation."[151] Southern gentry showed off their cultivation through parties, galas, and casual dinners. William Byrd, in his diary from 1709 to 1712, refers often to entertaining guests at his Westover plantation. Business meetings frequently involved social drinking and dancing, and the owners of neighboring plantations would compete for the company of travelers so they could display their hospitality. "Every planter kept an open house," wrote John Fiske, "and provided for his visitors with unstinted hand."[152] Horse racing and fox hunting, accompanied of course by gambling and drink, occupied a large part of the

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[149] Fitzhugh to Hayward, January 30, 1686/7, Fitzhugh and his Chesapeake World, 202.
[150] Fiske, Old Virginia, 2: 224-28. Bruce, The Social Life of Virginia, 163-65.

planter's social time.[153] A notice in a 1737 paper stated, "we have advice from Hanover County, that on St. Andrew's day there are to be Horse races and several other Diversions, for the entertainment of the Gentlemen and ladies, at the Old Field, near Captain John Bickerton's."[154]

The extent to which the Virginia planter's style of dress, luxury of home, or abundance of hospitality translated into the larger part of society or into other regions of the South cannot be accurately determined, since much more is known of the upper ranks of Virginia society than of the common folk. In the Carolinas and Georgia, much of the same culture that took root along the Chesapeake flourished. Certainly, differences in culture existed among the large planters in the backcountry of western Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee, as evidenced by the gritty nature of men such as Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston. Furthermore, the French influences found in New Orleans likely shaped that society as much as the models provided by the Tidewater gentry. Still, the portrait of the planter gentry, with their large houses and imported clothes, attentively reviewing their ledgers and writing to their agents in London while preparing for a visitor from a neighboring county, or perhaps from England, provides the student of the southern gentleman the most concise and available archetype of the upper ranks of southern society.

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[151] G. Cook, "Commerce and Fine Arts," <u>DeBow's Review</u>, vol. I (March 1846), 269-75.
[152] Fiske, <u>Old Virginia</u>, 2: 220.
[153] Fischer, <u>Albion's Seed</u>, 360-63.
[154] Fiske, <u>Old Virginia</u>, 2: 240.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The evolution of gentility from the seventeenth century through the mid-nineteenth century in both England and the American South reflect the broad fundamental economic and social changes affecting both societies during the time. In English society a nascent perception of social classes existed based on the parameters of class formation, namely, economics, religion, government, and the social bonds of paternalism and deference. A genteel Englishman in the seventeenth century lived a leisured life through income derived from the rental of his land, belonged to the Anglican church, held positions of power in local and national government, and expected the proper courtesies from and the respect of his social subordinates. The masses comprising the remaining population worked as tenant farmers, merchants, artisans, or laborers, held few if any modest positions in local government, and understood that their community and society overall would be properly cared for by the ruling gentry. From these subconscious mental convictions sprung the idea that men resided within social groupings--the yeoman, the merchant, the laborer, the peasant, and so on. The men who settled in Virginia carried these same social boundaries and beliefs with them.

Technological advancements and the growth of global trade from England to the West Indies to the American colonies to India and throughout Europe created a dynamic within English society that combined many of the various orders of men into a new commercial "class." Some members of this class gained wealth beyond that of the landed

gentry, and naturally sought to gain a share of the power controlled by the gentry. These pressures, in turn, forced changes within the gentry in terms of their education, their prejudices against commercial activity, and the way they conducted themselves in public. These changes are highlighted when compared to the development of the southern gentleman, who hoped to build a similar society along the southern coastline of Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas, and faced not only the same pressures as the English gentleman in terms of the emerging commercial class but also the realities of their surrounding environment.

When the two archetypal forms of the gentleman in each society are compared and contrasted, the differences in their beliefs and practices are brought into sharper focus, as are their reactions to the formation of classes based on the growth of industrialism and trade. English gentility had a more difficult time adapting to the changes within society than did the southern landed class because the traditions and beliefs under assault in England were an essential part of what defined the English gentleman. He fought against these changes while trying to adapt to them, but was ultimately overcome by the magnitude of these new economic forces that he could not understand. The southern gentleman, although imbued with many of the same beliefs of the English gentry, quickly understood that the realities of his environment dictated that he separate his beliefs from his practices and accept many of these social changes.

The early seventeenth-century English gentleman viewed education as necessary only for social polishing. The enrollments of English grammar schools and colleges reflected as many sons of lower orders as sons of peerage and gentry ancestry. By the

mid-eighteenth century the increase in overall literacy and growth of urban populations forced the gentleman to place a greater emphasis on education to survive and get along in the complicated commercial world. Schools and colleges catered to this shift, and focused on shaping boys into good gentlemen as much as they stressed basic education for their students. A fear of educating society's lower orders grew, but the shift toward more wealth and literacy among the commercial class eventually produced a series of laws in the nineteenth century that codified education for the children of all classes.

By the time the population of Virginia had become entrenched in the late seventeenth century the planter class, like the English gentry they emulated, sought a proper education for their sons. Only a handful of grammar schools existed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, however, and William and Mary College offered the only education alternative beyond basic grammar school. Many planters, realizing that they could not risk turning the business of the plantation over to an uneducated son, turned to private tutors, and some sent their children north to such institutions as Harvard and Princeton. The children of the greatest planters families, such as the Fitzhughes, Randolphs, Lees, and Byrds, sent their children to English schools and colleges, but the trip was dangerous and the cost high. Proposals for broader public schooling later in the eighteenth century met resistance in the South, but in general it was understood that education was particularly important in the increasingly democratic society that emerged in America after the victory at Yorktown.

Overall, then, the English gentry, realizing they must gain greater education in their changing society, simply assumed control of the existing schools, while the southern

gentry sought education but found it available only in limited form. Eventually education became available for all social ranks in both societies, but the concept of universal education met more resistance in England than in America (although state funded schools did not exist in the South until after the Civil War, and broad-based education for former slaves was not witnessed until the twentieth century). The desire for education among the upper class of both societies, and the eventual expansion of educational opportunities in both England and the South at all levels of society, were a result of pressures from the growing commercial class and the expansion of global trade that provided the initial basis for the economy of the planter-led South.

The proper vocation for a landed English gentleman centered on supervising his estate to maximize rental income, undertaking civic service through military appointment, and assuming a role in government. These occupations, as the landlord, warrior, and lawmaker, formed the basis of the English gentry's paternalistic relationship with the rest of society. Wealth, of course, was essential to be landed, and up until the eighteenth century wealthy landowners generally passed down estates to their oldest son; thus, there existed a connection between wealth and vocation. This relationship began to change as commercial men gained greater wealth and sought land and, when possible, the purchase of a title. Trade, which had never been considered a gentlemanly vocation, began to produce a level of wealth for commercial men usually associated with the gentry, altering the traditional relationship between wealth and vocation as a defining quality of the gentry. Complicating the situation were the younger sons of the gentry who, because of the principles of primogeniture, were left with little if any of the family

estate and so were forced to enter the professions or trades, yet still sought to retain their positions as gentlemen.

The idea of trade as an acceptable vocation grew and commercial men challenged the landed gentry for social leadership. The betterment of the nation through commerce was contrasted against the idle non-productive landed class. To fight this trend the landed gentry undertook a series of steps ranging from accepting the best of the commercial class to strengthen the gentry (usually through marriage), to becoming directly involved in commercial ventures, especially those tied to land, such as mining and canals. They also fought to retain their wealth and control of society through the passage of a number of laws such as the Qualification Act, the Corn Laws, and a series of Poor Laws. Nonetheless, in the one-hundred years between 1720 and 1820, the number of MPs with commercial backgrounds more than doubled in Parliament, from 11% to 23%. The Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 signaled the beginning of the end of the landed gentry's control of government.

As in England, the founders of Virginia's planter class held most all of the important military and political positions through the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and tended to their estates, but the nature of their interest in land was quite different than that of the English landlord. Rather than gathering rents from tenant farmers, the landed class of the South planted cash crops, mainly tobacco in the tidewater regions of Virginia and Maryland, and rice along the coastal plains of the Carolinas. Because the worth of their plantations was tied to the production, marketing, and exportation of commodities to an overseas market, the southern planters exercised a

much more active hand in the running of their estates than did their English counterparts. In effect, the southern planters were businessmen. The letters of Robert Carter, William Fitzhugh, and William Byrd provide first-hand accounts of the involvement of these men in commercial activities, whether it be keeping track of worldwide production of competing tobacco markets, riding their estates to examine their crops, or haggling with their London agents over the price paid for their shipments. The British government acknowledged the success of the southern planters as businessmen when it passed laws seeking to monopolize their markets by limiting the production and exportation of their commodities. When profits from tobacco fell in the late eighteenth century, the southern planters again showed their business savvy by turning to new manufacturing enterprises. Even though the idea of the landed and idle great plantation owner continued to exist in Virginia and parts of the South throughout the nineteenth century, in practice, trade was viewed as not just acceptable to all men but as one of the strengths of the new country.

Because the wealthiest southern planters were particularly talented at accumulating land in the late seventeenth century, they had a greater capacity to depart from the English practice of primogeniture. While the first son still got the bulk of the estate, the other sons usually received enough to establish their own hegemony over specific regions. The Lees, Carters, and the Byrds are three examples of families that established powerful estates and dominated local politics in several regions of Virginia throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The practice of establishing pockets of family control, when combined with the myth that the great planters hailed from English gentry stock via the cavalier migration between 1649 and 1660, created the idea

of a great southern gentry in the minds of the people of the time and the romantic historians of the period. The reality is that much of the migration during the period of Cromwell's rule in England occurred at the sub-gentry level, and many of the planters who could boast gentry roots were second or third sons of gentry families, or had only tenuous gentry connections through marriage. While certainly the great planters did produce a ruling class, it was far different than that of the landed gentry in England.

When viewed together, the proper vocation for a gentleman in England and in the American South overlaps in the areas of military and government positions. Through these two roles the gentry of both regions maintained the ties of paternalism and deference with their social inferiors. In England, the forces of commercialism strained the relationship of paternalism and deference, pressing the English gentry to try to control the growing power of the commercial class through accepting into their realm the best of the commercial class through marriage and in some cases moving into trade themselves. Southern society escaped the throes of drastic change caused by the growing commercial nature of their environment because trade was an accepted part of being the ruling class. The very nature of a southern ruling class composed of English gentry has limited truth due to the uncertain ancestry of many of the immigrants to Virginia during the English Civil War migration from 1649 to 1660.

Personal characteristics of the English gentry centered on the concepts of honor and virtue. A man's honor meant his reputation, and just as conduct could provide a man with honor, it could also paint a man as dishonorable. Honor was crucial to the social bonds of paternalism and deference, for a man who had no honor would forfeit the

deference of those below him, and in essence lost much of his status as a gentleman. A prevalent method by which an English gentleman gained and kept his honor was through the issuance or acceptance of a duel, which involved providing "satisfaction" that the duel had upheld each participant's honor. The potential for death from dueling (statistics from James Gilchrist's compilation of duels in the seventeenth and eighteenth century show some 44% of duels ended in the death of one or both participants) brought pleas for its banishment form both the church and the law.[1] Dueling finally died out in the mid-nineteenth century, primarily because the immoral and barbaric nature of the practice was inconsistent with the emerging ethics of the commercial class. In short, dueling in most people's mind was a crude and immoral practice of the gentry.

The English gentleman also expressed his social position in the form of manners, morality, patriotism, and style of living, and on these fronts the changing nature of eighteenth-century society again posed challenges to his traditional way of life. The urban commercial class painted country gentlemen as uncultured backwoods simpletons clinging to centuries-old customs, while the urban class fought off attacks upon their loose morals based on their overzealous participation in the vices of gambling and drinking in London's numerous gentlemen's clubs. The landed gentry were portrayed as unpatriotic for their lack of commercial contribution to England's growing economy, an image the gentry countered through collecting patriotic art (usually a dying military leader surrounded by his troops) and stressing domestic touring in place of the traditional tour of Europe. The landed gentry also countered their image as villainous overlords by

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[1] James P. Gilchrist, <u>A Brief Display of the Origins and History of Ordeals</u> (London: W. Bulmer and W.

conceding some local political positions to the ambitious commercial class, essentially giving up part of their paternal role so that the general populace could blame the commercial class for unpopular rulings. Meanwhile, the landed gentry began to actively participate in altruistic endeavors such as founding orphanages and hospitals. Only in the area of their style of living did the English gentry receive little challenge to their traditional way of life, for their gracious dress, grand parties, and expansive estates continued to be a source of social inspiration and civic pride for the masses and a desired acquisition for the aspiring commercial class.

The concept of honor in the South was much like English honor in that it centered on a man's reputation and played a crucial role in the relationship between paternalism and deference. But the acceptance of "primal honor," in the words of Bertram Wyatt-Brown, as a natural force that divided men into ranks and kept social peace was not as easily accepted in the South, where men came seeking financial and social betterment and where society and government encompassed the principles of capitalism and democracy. This is not to say the planter class did not receive the respect of those on their plantations and within their communities, but the southerner was more likely to question his social or political superiors, as witnessed as early as 1676 by Nathaniel Bacon's challenge against the Royal authority of Governor Berkeley. This same political and social environment, together with the realities of the physical complications, was the source for several differences between the southern and English gentleman's personal characteristics. The act of dueling, for example, never flourished in the Virginia, in part, according to Thomas

Nichol, 1821).

Wertenbaker, because the planter class were of limited English gentry ancestry, but also because the physical characteristics of isolated plantation life and the lack of large cities in the South simply did not bring men into contact very often. In place of a strong paternalism and deference relationship and an outward defense of honor through dueling, southern gentlemen stressed sociability, courage, and stoicism. These qualities, again, were the result of their environment, for having visitors at the plantation was a unique and great cause for celebration, while the constant threat of danger from native tribes, rebellious slaves, or disease fostered a cold attitude toward death.

A southern planter exercised fairness and honesty among his friends and colleagues, but these qualities had little place in the business of international trade of tobacco or other exports. The successful southern planter had to be a shrewd negotiator willing to bend the truth to get a fair price for his product, for he was always subject to bad harvests, worldwide fluctuations in the supply or price of his crop, or the unscrupulous dealings of London agents. Outside of business, however, honesty became a hallmark of the southern gentleman, as reflected by the honor system of William and Mary College. Sociability, as mentioned, played a large part in defining the southern gentleman. Sociability included not only hospitality and social skills such as dancing, but also proper moral attributes, including a stress on religion, an emphasis on curbing displays of ego or education in social settings, a familiarity and association with all levels of society, and participation in altruistic endeavors. In a society carved from a wilderness and populated with servile Africans and tribes of Native Americans, southern society lacked much of the aristocratic separation between social ranks. Only in the area of dress,

homes, and culture did the southern gentry continue to emulate their counterparts in England, which is understandable given the absolute lack of any such genteel comforts in early colonial Virginia.

It is likely that the men who came to the shores of Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas brought with them preconceived notions of the proper characteristics of a gentleman based on the model of the English gentleman. Nonetheless, the commercial interests taken up by the southern planters and the nature of their hostile environment re-shaped these genteel concepts and forged altered versions of the ideal personal attributes of a gentleman. Where an English gentleman sought deference through the natural delineation of social orders that had developed through centuries, the southern gentleman gained respect and retained honor through a closer relationship to the lower orders of society and developed a different attitude toward concepts of honesty and personal bravery.

Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries it is clear that the English gentry and the southern planters were under pressure from the growing commercial class of men who sought wealth and power through government. There is ample evidence that the pressures from industrialization took the basic notions of social orders and transformed them into various economic classes. Historians paint this situation in a number of ways. The Marxist model portrays the rising bourgeoisie and working class wrenching power from the hands of an aging ruling order, while others maintain that the traditional gentry co-opted the best of the commercial class to solidify their position. By comparing the English gentry with the southern gentry, a picture

emerges of an English ruling class grappling with how to deal with these new forces in its midst, and of a southern ruling class that, while originally hoping to establish some form of English gentry, adapted better to commercialism simply because their environment forced them to. There was little struggle between classes in the South during this period because of the commercial ancestry of many of the immigrants, the more willing adoption of the ideals of trade and capitalism by its society, and the development of a social system based more on merit than on birth. The English gentry in reality faced the same situation as the southern gentry in that they had to adapt to the new environment to survive, but they failed to realize this. The stubbornness of the English gentry to accept the changes in the English economic and social structure brought on by commercialism is the foundation for the various theories of class conflict that many historians attribute to this period.

What is illustrated in this work is that the English gentry did adapt to their changing economic and political environment, but always with the hope of retaining both their power and their traditional way of life. The English gentry did become more educated, they did take up forms of trade, they did intermarry to bolster their ranks with the best of the commercial class, and they did adapt their personal characteristics when necessary to address the changing opinions of their society. What they did not realize was that there was no stemming the desires of the new commercial class. They simply did not understand the breadth of the changes that had occurred and continued to occur within their economy, which were reflected in the changes in their society. Instead of a class struggle, it is more accurate to view the English gentry as simply overwhelmed by these

changes. Class mobility did occur, driven initially by emulation of the ruling class on the part of the most ambitious commercial men. But emulation implies imitation, the hope that one can someday be like another. At some point, likely near the end of the eighteenth century when industrialization truly began to take root, the commercial class naturally assumed a more dominant role in society and in politics because they had become more powerful than the landed gentry, both monetarily (as it related to the new economy) and in the minds of those within their society (what Harold Perkin called the triumph of the entrepreneurial ideal). The commercial class at that point did not need to imitate the gentry, with the exception of their style of living, because they had eclipsed them. Politically the gentry continued to dominate Parliament, but after 1832 the control became harder to hold, and was eventually lost. The gentry's fear of losing their traditional hold on society made them slow to embrace the economic changes around them, and like a soldier carrying a musket in a war with bombs and tanks, they never understood the forces they were pitted against. To some extent, the gentry could not have lost any Marxist-inspired class conflicts because they were never in the fight.

The natural rise of commercial men in English society is made clearer when one looks at the planter class of the American South. Whether the southern gentry did or did not spring from the English gentry is important in understanding why they more readily adapted to an economic system based on commercial activity. It is difficult, however, to point to this as a singular reason for the South's attitude toward trade, especially in light of the lack of records and the confusion on who was or was not a gentleman in the seventeenth century (a problem compounded by the English practice of primogeniture).

What is more relevant is how these men, whether of trading or gentry ancestry, adapted to their new surroundings. Stripped of the trappings of English society, the southern planter class openly practiced commercialism, as did the settlers of the northern colonies. The open commercialism in America, when combined with anti-trade laws passed by the British government (which in itself reflects the ignorance of the English ruling class to the economic changes surrounding it), fostered the egalitarian society that resulted in a new government founded on principles of capitalism and greater equality among classes. The southern gentry adapted to commercialism, whereas the English gentry simply continued to build up a bulwark against a trend that they could not understand, only to find in the nineteenth century that the trend was a sea of change they could not hold back.

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