

“Slavery and the Building of the All Saints Brick Church at Sunderland Maryland.” (Presentation at All Saints Church, March 17, 2013)

Current popular thinking is that race is an unchanging biological and historical reality. One of my goals tonight is to show how race is a cultural and evolving social category, with fluid and shifting boundaries.

Today, some people are thinking that America is moving **beyond** black and white group boundaries. The election of President Obama, the rise of a black professional middle class, suggests to some we are moving beyond race, becoming the multi-racial society that the Reverend Martin Luther King dreamed about.

Without commenting on the merits of such arguments, I want to place today in perspective by talking briefly about, not **beyond**, but.....

BEFORE RACE---BEFORE THINGS WERE BLACK AND WHITE

The sharp black/white dichotomy, which artificially divides the Calvert County population along racial criteria, was largely non-existent at first in the Maryland colony. It was not part of everyday life in the early colonial era. The race boundary gradually developed over the course of several generations when indentured servitude died out as a source of field labor and lifelong slavery replaced it.

I shall try to illustrate this point in several ways: (1) how religion rather than race was the important basis of group membership in the first 40 years of the Maryland colony; (2) how race gradually came to be a marker of social standing by the political actions of a small minority who passed laws declaring slavery to be legal; (3) how frequently white women and black men engaged in consensual sex, producing a new type of person—the mulatto—a person that became a major legal issue in the Maryland colony.

Race as a social concept was an invention of a powerful planter class and their political representatives. It was invented to stabilize a labor system that was immensely profitable to plantation owners, a small group that owned large amounts of land. Race became socially important only after religious differences between European and African populations were lessened by the work of Anglican ministers in converting Africans to the values of Christianity. Because the wealth

of land owners rested upon controlling the labor of others, the landowners had to convince themselves and others that it was within the realm of Christian justice to enslave other human beings according to the color of their skin, by claiming that the social arrangements from which they profited were natural, moral, and reflected God's will. Their torturous reasoning can be traced in the laws they enacted that helped create the social inequities that continue to afflict us to this day.

FROM SERVITUDE TO SLAVERY

During the early history of the Maryland colony, say up to the founding of the Anglican parishes in 1692, most common laborers, black and white, were indentured servants who were not owned and not legally bound to lifelong service. What was owned was not the person but his or her contract or indenture, and the working person became free when the obligations of the contract were fulfilled.

As we saw last time, both white and black indentured servants moved to freedom at the end of their contracts. Most historians estimate that indentured servants outnumbered slaves by 4 to 1 around 1650. BUT, by the early 1700s, that ratio was reversed, with 4 slaves for every 1 indentured servant.

It is quite likely that there were, in this early period up to 1650, more people of African descent who had worked through their indenture contracts and became free persons of color, than there were slaves of African descent. Also, it is important to note that many slaves in this early period were Native Americans captured in war – slaves were not exclusively people of African descent.

However, slavery as lifelong service became legally defined in 1664 to apply to imported African and other (e.g. Native American) slaves. Here the law attempted to clarify the master -- servant relationship by creating the legal status of a slave as property, something that could be owned and sold. It is important to note here that slavery means a person could be bought and sold, not a contract, as in the case of the system of indentures. So in the years leading up to the founding of All Saints parish and the building of the first All Saints log church, the people who lived here were becoming organized around the idea that race was a defining characteristic of the role people played in the parish.

By 1700 there had been increasing imports of blacks directly from Africa to fill the expanding work to be done. A slave was considered a wise “capital investment” but only if the slave population could be effectively controlled. Enslaved Africans were forced into lives not of their own making, and suffered deep longing for their homelands and lost families.

The relationship between master and slave was one of continual tension with the subservience of slaves demanded and reinforced by consistent, often harsh discipline. Slavery was hardly a pretty sight and took a toll on both master and slave. While there were no major slave revolts in Maryland, constant fear on the part of whites was a feature of daily life, not knowing where or when their slaves might rise up in protest. Whites attempted to regulate the slave population by outlawing assemblies on Sunday when the slaves tried to gather and worship amongst themselves. Indeed, Colonial law asserted that there could be no church services without a white pastor present. Beyond whipping and other physical punishments for failing to work diligently, there were also instances of violence against slave transgressions that served to intimidate and control the slave population from making any challenges to white domination.

The full story of the Parish unfortunately requires that we go back in history to establish some foundational matters.

As we know, Maryland was a colony of England, under a proprietor grant to the Calvert family. To understand the history of that English colony and the religious traditions that underlie All Saints Parish, we begin with a comparison of England to two other colonial powers in the New World, Spain and Portugal. Both of these rivals to England were consistently Roman Catholic in religious tradition and, most importantly, much closer to Africa geographically. Unlike the island nation of England which was comparatively isolated from contact with Africa, both Spain and Portugal had longstanding, indeed, centuries old contacts with people of African descent, who at one time conquered them and by virtue of past experience they came to recognize Africans as fellow human beings who had the misfortune of being conquered, but not having a different essential nature. Of course they recognized differences of color but did not tend to assign a cultural meaning to

such differences. Phrased differently, skin color was not a distinguishing characteristic or marker of a boundary that justified less than humane or Christian treatment of another group of people to the Spanish and Portuguese.

England's attitude towards slavery was more complex and changed as its perceived need to generate economic growth in its colonies grew more pressing. English common law prohibited slavery within its boundaries. England fantasized itself as a special place, not unlike Camelot, a special place with air so pure that, as a classic refrain goes....here I quote...

*Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free;
They touch our country, and their shackles fall.*

Such sentiment served as a rationale for freeing slaves brought to England from the colonies and freedom was often granted by the courts as long as the person in question remained in England. What was happening in English Colonies overseas, well, that was another matter.

The Parish System

When the parish system was founded in 1692, there were two parishes and 6 political divisions called Hundreds in the current Calvert County. A hundred is a unit that sometimes refers to a subpopulation capable of supplying 100 fighting men to a local militia, or, more frequently, a subunit containing 100 households.

In Calvert County, there were 4 hundreds in Christ church parish in the southern part of the country and 2 in All Saints Parish, in the northern part of the county. All Saints northern boundary was with Ann Arundel County, from Lyons creek on the river side down to Hunting Creek, and on the bay side, from Herring Creek down to Parkers Creek. Compared to Christ church parish, All Saints was the larger parish geographically, but smaller in population in the early years, having 2 compared to 4 hundreds.

The first church in All Saints Parish was erected in 1693 shortly after the parish system was created. Church was important part of community life in English tradition, most of the members of the parish had been born in England and were

familiar with the Church of England....and the people in All Saints Parish proceeded almost immediately to erect a log church after the act of establishment provided economic support for a parish church.

The church was the central place for people to gather as a community. It was here that a highly dispersed population during the week could come together.

Beyond the obvious ritual functions of the worship service and attendant traditional rites such as baptism, weddings, and funerals, the absence of other means of communication meant that Sunday was the day in which news was spread in the parish, both news of what was happening in the outside world, but also things going on within the parish. The Church of England was the most important institution in early colonial life.

As a key institution, Churches were places from which social and governmental control emanated. Once the Church of England became the established church, the separation of church and state, as we know it today, was not present. Although each county had a civil government headed by a sheriff, the parish vestry and its rector were important components of the regulation of community life.

To illustrate,

Each county was authorized by the General Assembly to provide for a jail and other instruments of social control, such as a whipping post, pillories or stocks, and a dunking stool. (I don't know if Calvert County ever had a dunking stool to punish those who gossiped too much, but the practice of dragging people in the water behind boats was often used where no dunking stool was available.)

Although I can find no record of these devices being present at All Saints, they were often placed near Churches in the colonial era. The Vestry records of St. James Parish to our North contains multiple payments of tobacco for the building of stocks at the church. My best guess is that some of these devices were present on church grounds, perhaps up where the labyrinth resides today ☺

The Vestry had considerable authority in the area of public manners and morals. Its main tasks were to attempt to control illicit sex, that is cohabitation without benefit of marriage, and punish blasphemy, swearing and excessive drinking.

MULATTOS

The Vestry was also responsible to deciding the fate of white women who had illicit sex with black men and produced a child, then called a mulatto. The Vestry could offer the woman and child for sale to an interested buyer for a fixed period of servitude, usually 5 to 7 years for the woman and for the child its first 21 years if the parents were legally married and 30 years if the parents were unmarried. Interestingly, the money from such sales went to the parish church for the Vestry use as it saw fit.

Sometimes a mulatto child could be assigned to be a servant to the rector of a parish. Indeed, the second rector of All Saints, Thomas Cockshutt, who served from 1697 until 1722 held, at the time of his death, the indentures of two mulattos, identified as assets of his estate; a woman named Elizabeth who had 13 years yet to serve valued at 20 pounds and an unnamed man having three years to serve valued at 12 pounds.

Which brings me to my promise to talk a little bit about sex in this second talk.

INTERACIAL SEX

Prior to 1660, there was little or no attempt to legally regulate interracial sex. The fact that it became an issue that prompted attempts at legal control is interwoven with attempts to make race the salient factor in the social life of the Colony.

Early on, the issue of sex between a European and an African person was constructed around religious differences, not race differences. Early attitudes and initial attempts to legally control what we today would call interracial sex were more an attempt to limit so called “intimate” contact between Christians and non-Christians, the behavior was a violation of religious precepts, not a violation of racial boundaries. Notice the language the Maryland assembly used to condemn interracial marriages describing the marriages reflecting mainly “the Satisfaction of their Lascivious and Lustful desires, and to the disgrace not only of the English but also of many other Christian nations.”

During the early colonial era, interracial cohabitation and marriage was a fairly common among white and black indentured servants and slaves, as their daily lives and struggles were quite similar. They worked side-by-side from dawn until dusk.

They resided together in the same dwellings, and they spent what little leisure time they had with one another. However, as it became clear that the importing of slaves would be essential to the production of tobacco, the main source and measure of wealth, laws were constructed to draw increasingly sharp lines between whites and blacks. Large plantations devoted to tobacco production needed a cheap, stable labor source and, when not enough indentured servants could be recruited, slaves became the main source of labor that produced the wealth of the Maryland colony.

A 1664 law that legalized slavery in the Maryland colony not only specified that any Negro ‘hereafter’ imported into the province shall be a servant for life, but that also any children born of a slave shall be a servant for life.

But most of the 1664 law concerned the freeborn English woman who “forgetful of her free condition and to the disgrace of our nation, do marry Negro slaves” and produce children.

The law specified that any freeborn woman who “shall marry any slave from and after the last day of this present Assembly shall serve the master of that slave for as long as the husband lives.” And all the children of such freeborn women so married would be slaves as their fathers were.

Count inventories of the Maryland Colony document the punishment of many white women between the years of 1680 to 1700 and my examination of the St James Parish Vestry records reveals numerous cases around the early 1700s. And there is no doubt that such punishment occurred in All Saints Parish, as noted in the case of the mulatto indentured servants, assigned to Rector Cockshutt mentioned above.

It is instructive to note that there was a considerable amount of interracial sex in the Colony and, I should guess, All Saints Parish as well. While our conventional image is one of white slave owners coercively taking advantage of black slave women, a common theme depicted in the movies such as ROOTS, there was probably as much or more consensual sex between white women and black men. Indeed, the regulation of the behavior of white women because they were contributing greatly to the increasing number of mulatto births, was a major concern of the General Assembly.

Most of those children identified as mulattos were the progeny of a black man and white women. And, since the mother was a free white person, the child was also born into freedom, a presence which disrupted the emerging sharp black vs. white divide. When the reverse pattern occurred, that is a black women and a white man produced a child, that child was typically identified as a Negro and a slave, not a mulatto and free.

After 1690, Maryland colonial law began to address the complexities introduced by the increasing number of mulatto children.

In 1691 legislation invoked severe penalties for free white women who bore a mulatto child. She was fined 15 lbs. sterling and, if she couldn't pay as was usually the case, she was sentenced to be sold for a 5 year term as a servant. Indentured white women had an additional five years added to their term of service.

In 1705 legislation became even more severe regarding mulatto children and specified that the children of free white women who had mixed race parentage would be consigned to spend their first 30 years as an indentured servant to the local parish. That is in all likelihood how Reverend Cockshutt of All Saints Parish obtained his two mulatto servants.

DID SLAVES HELP BUILD THE BRICK CHURCH?

It is clear that the labor of slaves produced the tobacco crops on which the wealth of the parish was based. Thus, there is no doubt that slavery was central to the capacity of the parish to erect the current brick structure.

On the question of whether slaves took part in the actual physical construction of the building, I believe the answer is clearly yes, but I have not yet found any direct local evidence of that fact. I think the answer is yes because we know that other major brick building projects in the Chesapeake colonies involved slave labor: Jefferson's Monticello, most buildings in Williamsburg, Virginia, and later, the WHITE HOUSE also all involved the use of slaves at various parts of construction.

Additional evidence supporting the proposition that slave labor was important in building the brick church at All Saints, comes from the more complete Vestry records of our adjacent parish to the north, St. James. It is clear that when builders were contracted to build a church at St. James, the Vestry agreed to supply “a

complete parcel of men to be ready to work when required.” While this might mean a number of church member volunteers, it is not likely.

Some specific records strongly suggesting that slaves were used on a variety of church projects are found in the funds dispersed by the St. James Vestry....records that read, “200 lbs. of tobacco paid to William Lock, Esquire for causing two horse blocks to be made”.....”1820 lbs. to Thomas Tench, Esquire for nails and his servants courting of 8,000 feet of planks for use in the church” “200 lbs. to Stephan Freeland for laborers work done”.....These records do not give names to those doing the work but it is difficult to imagine them being other than slaves of members of the parish.

In the case of the All Saints brick church, we know there were two named builders Thomas Cleland and Thomas Heathman, but there is no record what must have been a sizable labor force to make the bricks, transport them, and at a minimum assist the bricklayers and/or do the actual laying of the bricks under the builder’s supervision. Looking at it from a practical standpoint, one cannot imagine a skilled bricklayer working at heights, climbing up and down a ladder to fetch bricks from the ground and carrying them up a ladder to be put into place with mortar. Many many people other than the two named builders must have played roles in the construction process. My best guess is that Cleland and Heathman were not slave owners as they were not major land owners, and probably did not have the resources to transport and feed the work force necessary to erect such a large building.

These considerations are highly suggestive that local slaves played a role in the construction of All Saints but are admittedly not definitive.

Church Size

All Saints, a 60 feet by 50 feet two level structure, was very large for its day. Compared to most of other parish churches built in the 17th century it is distinguished by its larger capacity (e.g., the sheer number of people it could hold) and also is unique by containing two full-length balconies. These features speak to the prosperity of the landowners in the Parish and also the large number of slaves that needed to be accommodated.

In 1844, the fourth Bishop of the Maryland diocese visited All Saints; he estimated the church's capacity at 500. My own estimate comes out about 100 less for today's configuration of pews and benches ... My estimate uses a figure for one seat -- 18 inches wide -- the standard for most major airlines in coach class, and suggests that each of the balconies could seat 90 persons, making for a total of 180 on the second floor. My estimate for the main floor is somewhat higher, a figure of 225, making a total capacity of 405.

We don't know what the original configuration was, but probably there was much less obesity in those days and more people could fit into a given space, so maybe the good bishop's estimate of 500 was right. ☺

THE BALCONIES

As a dramatic component of the basic design or architecture of the building, balconies were erected to provide space for slaves and poor whites who could not afford to rent/purchase a pew on the main floor. The balconies at All Saints are probably the largest for any Maryland church built in the Colonial Era that still stands today.

The creation of the balconies clearly reflected the attempt to segregate congregants by race and class. They allowed for the separation of a rich landowning class or others of means, from slaves and from whites or free blacks with lesser resources. Thus, a definite race and class system is reflected in the basic architecture of the church structure. Balconies permitted the attendance of all variety of persons at the same worship service. In smaller churches, a common practice was to "segregate by time of service", with whites attending morning services, with an afternoon service for the 'colored' communicants.

Moving toward the BRICK CHURCH

To review, Slavery becomes a matter of law in the 1660s. Black labor gradually replaced white labor. Direct importing of slaves from Africa increased so that by 1700 blacks directly from Africa formed 75% of the slave population. During this time, black males were desired for field labor, males were imported at three to four times more frequently than females.

So, around 1700 shortly after the first log cabin church had been erected in All Saints Parish, there were an increasing number of black slaves in the Parish. My best guess is that people of African descent constituted about 1/5 of the total population.

This largely male slave population lived in isolation, with little contact with black women. With almost no births adding blacks to the population, and fairly high death rates among the early arrivals, the only mechanism of population resupply was importation of more and more slaves. Death rates were high due to general living/working conditions and the fact that people newly arriving from Africa had little immunity to diseases that flourished among the European populations. The history of how Europeans brought new germs to the New World is well documented; having devastating impact on both Native Americans and people imported from Africa. So, from early colonial times through the first quarter of the 18th century, the black population did not increase naturally but was replenished only by continued importing of males for the fieldwork of clearing land and planting crops

Committed to hard outside labor of clearing the forest and planting and harvesting tobacco crops, these field hands were central to the whole production system. Slaves not only removed the trees of a heavily forested area to transform the woods into productive fields where tobacco was produced, but remained near those fields for the labor intensive work involved in planting, weeding, and harvesting the crops. They spent most of their time working on the land and probably did not attend church with any frequency. The male slave population at that time had almost nothing in common with the landowning white population. But they began laying the foundations for the prosperity of the parish and the eventual construction of the brick church.

By the time the brick church was built in 1776, things had changed dramatically.

The population of the Parish had come to be one in which there were more people of African descent than of European descent. Whites were a slight numerical minority, a pattern that continued in Calvert County for the next 100 years and ended only with the victory of the North in the Civil War when many freed slaves departed the State for other places of residence in the North.

By 1776, the task of clearing large areas of land have been accomplished, landowners had managed to build up extensive holdings and, by their success, started in motion patterns that would create some semblance of family life for African Americans, the natural increase of the African American population, and also their increased presence in the life of the church.

To insure a stable source of labor and insulate their estates from fluctuating prices on the international slave trade market, the large landowners began importing more African women as slaves. The sex ratio of the slave population brought to Maryland around 1700 was of the order of 3 or 4 males to every one female. In but 20 to 30 years, the pattern changed in the direction of greater balance. It was only after 1720 that the black population began to increase naturally and, ironically, that development was due to the increasing wealth of white owners of large plantations.

The larger more prosperous manors generated an increased demand for female slaves, both to assist in the expanding amount of domestic work critical in running a large manor household, but also as a means of generating a new generation of slaves by their reproductive work. Plantation owners recognized the value of women slaves. Indeed, Thomas's Jefferson's famous quote crystallizes the slave owner's attitudes that began emerging in the early 1700s. Jefferson reported to his overseer, "I consider a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man of the farm. What she produces is an addition to capital, while his labors disappear in mere consumption." This greater female presence in the black community meant more family formation and the greater production and rearing of children, who, by matter of law, were destined to be slaves as well.

BLACK FAMILIES AND THE CHURCH

My guess is that it was only after more black females were imported, and black families began to be formed with the birth of children, that there was much concern on the part of most whites with incorporating the slave population into the church. Said differently, as long as the slave population was largely adult males directly imported from Africa, there was little concern with their spiritual life. Later, when black women and children were present in increasing numbers, there was more

resemblance between the black and white populations, and more bases for recognizing their common humanity.

There is good reason to think that it was colonial white women that were behind the push towards the inclusion of slaves in the life of the church. White women and black women were in daily interaction around the household. This greater daily proximity and increased frequency of interaction, and also the shared experience of birthing and raising children, likely led to closer inter-race relationships among the women of the plantation. As we know, white women were active in the anti-slavery movement and for both blacks and whites; women tend to run the church even though the titular leaders were more often males.