THE DEMAND FOR SLAVE LABOR IN COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA

BY DAROLD D. WAX

"You can have no idea of the plague we have with servants on this side of the water," Alexander Mackraby wrote from Philadelphia in 1769. "If you bring over a good one he is spoilt in a month. Those born in the country are insolent and extravagant. The imported Dutch are to the last degree ignorant and awkward. The Irish (upon which establishment my gentleman is) are generally thieves, and particularly drunkards; and the negroes stupid and sulky, and stink damnable. We have tried them all round, and this is the sum total of my observations, 'the devil take the hindmost.'" Had many Pennsylvanians shared Mackraby's view of the Negro, the demand for slave labor might have been nonexistent. Pennsylvania's labor requirements, however, were not of such a nature as to be easily fulfilled. The diversified economy and the rapid pace of economic growth together insured a continuing demand for laborers with differing skills.

Possessed of excellent soil, Pennsylvania was noted for its agricultural productivity, which was among the highest in the English North American colonies. With an abundance of agricultural produce, thick forests, and the Delaware River and its tributaries, Philadelphia's rise as a leading colonial seaport followed naturally as did the development of a shipping industry. Many of the vessels involved in Philadelphia's carrying trade were also constructed in that city. Thus, there was a demand not only for seamen to man the ships, but for laborers, skilled and unskilled, to

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1 Alexander Mackraby to his brother, December 2, 1769, in The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XI (1887), 492.
work in the shipbuilding industry. The iron industry helped to make Pennsylvania an important industrial center. A bloomery forge had been established some forty miles from Philadelphia in 1716, and in later years others were built at such sites as Green Lane, Durham, New Pine, Mount Joy, and Pottsgrove. During the colonial period iron manufacture continued as Pennsylvania's chief heavy industry, although the manufacturing process was used in the production of numerous other goods, including bricks and candles.  

Agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing combined to contribute to the appearance of an urban economy at Philadelphia. Serving as the commercial capital of the Delaware region, Philadelphia boasted a sophisticated citizenry whose needs were multifarious. Whereas the Tidewater planters farther south were compelled to send to England for their fine luxuries and even some of their basic necessities, residents of Philadelphia had at their service skilled craftsmen of all types. Some of the finest cabinetmakers and silversmiths in all colonial America, for example, could be found in Philadelphia.  

Pennsylvania's economy clearly was among the most diversified in the New World, and the Negro slave—brought from the West Indies, the southern continental colonies, and, later, from Africa—was introduced to a society organized economically along lines different from anything that was part of his previous experience. Pennsylvania's maturing economy determined the form which the Negro's labor would take, while at the same time it imposed limitations on the extent to which that source of labor could be utilized.

Land acquisitions in the seventeenth century were large by any standards, and particularly by contemporary English standards. Early arrivals in Pennsylvania wrote of acquiring "1000 or 2000 Acres of land in this Country."  


century included many plots of 1,000 acres and some were as large as 5,000 acres. Few of these early sales were smaller than 100 acres in size. As immigrants poured into the colony, however, land values rose and the large estates of the previous era were divided and sold. Holdings encompassing thousands of acres were not unknown in the frontier regions in later years, but in the eastern areas a growing population placed a high premium on land that in the end led to the breakup of large estates. The pattern of landholding that developed in colonial Pennsylvania directly influenced the organization of agricultural labor and was a significant factor affecting the utilization of Negro slaves.

Since farming in Pennsylvania was on a small scale, individual labor requirements did not greatly exceed that which the farm owner and his family could themselves provide. Nothing similar to the plantation system characteristic of the colonies to the south ever developed, and the farmer did not organize his labor into large work gangs. A servant or hired hand worked side by side with his master in the fields; when the day’s work ended he might even seek rest and nourishment in his master’s own living quarters. It was rare for a Pennsylvania farmer to own more than four Negroes, the usual pattern being to keep no more than one or perhaps two slaves. Often a slave family composed of a man, a woman, and children, would be used on a farm. Henry Dexter, for example, owner in 1738 of 170 acres of land near

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6 “An Account of Lands & Lots Sold in the Province of Pensilvania by Edwd Shippen Saml. Carpenter Richd. Hill Isaac Norris & James Logan or Some Three of them by Vertue of certain Powers granted to them by the Proprietary & Trustees of the said Province,” Pennsylvania Land Grants, 1681-1806, Penn Manuscripts, IX, HSP.

7 Tax returns for Philadelphia County, 1767, suggest that slave ownership was closely related to wealth and size of landholdings. There were exceptions to this pattern, but clearly the farmers with the largest holdings made the greatest use of Negro slave labor. In 1767 Philadelphia County included the most urbanized portion of the colony, and its landholdings were representative in size of the older areas. See the discussion in Darold D. Wax, “The Negro Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1962, pp. 141-143, based upon the Philadelphia County Tax Record, 1767, University of Pennsylvania Library.

8 Such a master-slave relationship was common in the more northern colonies. Sarah Kemble Knight, traveling through Connecticut in 1704, noted that farmers suffered “too great familiarity” from their Negro slaves, “permitting ym [Negros] to sit at Table and eat with them (as they say to save time), and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand.” Sarah Kemble Knight, The Journal of Madame Knight (New York: P. Smith, 1935), p. 38.
Philadelphia, held "two Negroe Men and one Woman, and sundry Boys and Girls." Near the middle of the eighteenth century Mary Ball kept a Negro man and woman on her farm in the Northern Liberties. Although Negro slaves were not used in large numbers in farming activities, agriculture probably employed more slaves than any other segment of the colony's economy.

The manufacturing enterprises carried out in Pennsylvania did not exclude the Negro slave; this was especially true in the manufacture of iron. Israel Acrelius visited Pennsylvania about 1750 and, after viewing some of the iron works, wrote that the "laborers are generally composed partly of negroes (slaves), partly of servants from Germany or Ireland bought for a term of years." There had been reliance on slave labor years before, for in 1727 the ironmasters had petitioned the Assembly urging a reduction of the duty on imported Negroes. William Mayberry, operator of Mayberry's forge in Philadelphia County, employed eight slaves in 1764—four men, two boys, and two girls. A Negro man named Dick was offered for hire in 1769, his owner declaring that he had been brought up in a forge for making bar iron, and for many years had been hired out to Morris, Shrelte & Co. at their forge. In 1776 Robert McCorley sold a number of slaves formerly employed at Bennett's Iron Works, among them a hammerman, a refiner, and an attendant.

Many Negro slaves were employed in commerce, serving as sailors on board their masters' vessels. Robert Ellis's Cojoe was a sailor on the ship Catherine, receiving for his labor £4 per month. Although trained as a seaman, Cojoe was regarded as "a Young able fellow fitt for any Business." Whenever Cojoe sailed, Ellis was careful to insure him as well as the cargo and vessel, usually asking that Cojoe be insured for between £40 and £50 sterling. More than his services while at sea, Cojoe sometimes purchased goods for Ellis in other ports. A correspondent at Lewes was once told to "Order my Negroe Cojoe to get me them trees that I Spoke of for he is to Come up in the Sloop [Charm-

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9 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 26-November 2, 1738, March 22, 1748.
11 *Pennsylvania Archives*, Eighth Series, III, 1846.
There can be little doubt that this Negro seaman served Ellis well. Other Negro sailors were equally skilled at their calling. Thomas Riche in 1760 owned a colored sailor named Warrick, whom he believed both a "good fellow" and a "good seaman."

Some merchants and ship captains seem to have preferred Negro sailors to their white counterparts. In 1751 Captain Richard Jeffery wished to purchase some "likely Negroe men" to serve aboard the Duke of Bedford. Several years later Thomas Willing instructed his partner, then in Jamaica, to "buy me a good Negroe Sailor or two."

Negro slaves frequently contributed to the shipping industry not by providing the manpower on the vessels, but by assisting in their construction. Sailmaking, for example, was a trade which commonly employed slaves. When William Chancellor died in 1743 he left behind three Negro men, all trained as "good Sailmakers." Some years later a master leaving his business offered to sell four Negro men who were "brought up to the sail-making trade; they have been from 9 to 12 years at said trade, [and] can work well." John Malcolme, also a Philadelphia sailmaker, in 1767 owned five Negro slaves who assisted him in his work.

Sailmaking, while not highly skilled labor, did call for special training. Many other residents of Pennsylvania purchased Negro slaves and trained them as assistants in their trade or calling. Recipients of specialized training, these Negroes became expert craftsmen and masters of their trade; they included, in the better known occupations, bakers, masons, carpenters, shoemakers, butchers, tailors, and millers. In 1741 Thomas Rogers, a shoemaker, owned a Negro boy about eighteen who could "make 6 or 7 pairs of Shoes a Week." In 1767 Philadelphia artisans owned slaves trained as hatters, skinners, brushmakers, sugar boilers,
Still other tasks were performed by Negro slaves which, although less common, testify to the wide variety of uses of slave labor. Slaves trained as plasterers and painters were not unknown. The widow Linton, residing in Chestnut Street, owned a Negro who was a collar and harnessmaker. Another slave, owned by William Peters, was a skilled stonemason. Thomas Hart believed that both of his slaves had successfully mastered their trades: one was a "good mason," the other a "good chocolate grinder." Robert Warren owned a Negro man in 1751 who was an accomplished fiddler available for hire. Perhaps among the most skilled slaves were those trained as goldsmiths and silversmiths, of whom there were more than a few in the Philadelphia area.

With the exception of agriculture, which employed slaves as farm laborers, probably more slaves fell into the broad category of household servants than into any other single classification. In 1722 Governor William Keith expressed the belief that Pennsylvania did not have many slaves, "except a few Household Servants in the City of Philadelphia." Philadelphia families were inclined to keep Negro women, and in some cases, men, in the capacity of housekeepers and cooks. The specific tasks performed were washing, ironing, tending children, and waiting table for the master's family. If a slave woman could handle these tasks satisfactorily, and could also excel in some special endeavor, say, needlework, she was well suited to the needs of many Philadelphia families. Thus one such family owned a Negro woman who could "wash and iron very well, cook Victuals, sew, spin on the Linen Wheel, milk Cows, and do all Sorts of House-Work very well." Many young female slaves were trained to understand "any sort of Household work." In 1737 Dudley Crofts owned a young Negress.

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37 Ibid., passim; American Weekly Mercury, December 17, 1741. Two important discussions of Negro craftsmen in colonial America are Marcus Wilson Jernegan, Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1607-1783; Studies of the Economic, Educational, and Social Significance of Slaves, Servants, Apprentices, and Poor Folk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), chapter one, and Leonard P. Stravisky, "Negro Craftsmanship in Early America," American Historical Review, LIV (1949), 315-325.

38 Pennsylvania Gazette, July 28, 1743, January 19, July 26, 1750, February 26, November 14, 1751, July 15, 1752.

39 William Keith to the Board of Trade, December 18, 1722, Board of Trade Papers, Proprieties, 1697-1776, Vol. II (1720-1727), R. 42, HSP.
who “works very well with a Needle.” When George Miller left
the joiner’s trade in 1738, he advertised the sale of “several Negro
Women who can both Wash and Sew, very fit for Family Business.”
Francis Palmer’s Negro woman could do all sorts of housework,
“Such as Washing, Ironing, and is a very good Cook.” Negro men
were used less frequently as household servants, although a few
were noted for their excellent cooking.20

The type of Negro slave desired varied with the task to be
performed. A buyer seeking labor for the iron industry would
have in mind a Negro with qualities different from the slave
bought to serve as housekeeper and maid. The ironmaster would
prefer a male Negro of “uncommon strength” who was capable
of working at a “laborious Trade,” while the householder would
no doubt select a young Negress with some experience in house-
hold work.21

Certain characteristics and qualities do stand out, however, as
desirable in Negro slaves. Young Negroes, called boys and girls
as opposed to men and women, were preferred over older Negroes.
Jonathan Dickinson once said that Pennsylvanians were reluctant
to buy slaves at all, “Except boys or girls.”22 Newspaper advertise-
ments of cargoes of new slaves regularly spoke of “Negro Boys
and Girls,” “likely young Negroes,” and “Young Negro Men and
Women.”23 It is not easy to determine exactly what ages were
taken in distinguishing, say, boys from men; contemporaries dis-
agreed. In any event, it is apparent that most purchasers wished
Negroes to be between the ages of fourteen and twenty. Young
Negroes were more active and better able to master new tasks.
And, of course, these slaves had a longer portion of their lives to
live. In Pennsylvania it was not so important that a slave be
fully grown and able to perform hard labor from the moment he
was purchased; a more prominent consideration was that he be
receptive to training that would fit him for a job involving some
skill. Since the performance of heavy labor was not demanded,
as it was on the plantations in the southern colonies, young

20 Pennsylvania Gazette, April 26-May 3, 1733, June 16-23, June 30-July 7,
September 15-22, 1737, March 30-April 6, 1738, October 4, 1744.
21 Ibid., February 17, 1743.
22 Jonathan Dickinson to his brother, April 30, 1715, Jonathan Dickinson
23 Darold D. Wax, “Negro Imports Into Pennsylvania, 1720-1766,” Penn-
sylvania History, XXXII (1965), 254-287.
Negroes who had not yet reached maturity were quite satisfactory. Moreover, young slaves were more easily acclimated and were less likely to die when diseased. Acting on these considerations, James Claypoole in 1683 requested a Negro boy “between 12 and 20 years.”

Near the middle of the eighteenth century, a Philadelphian wanted to buy a “likely Negroe boy, from 14 to 20 years of age.” Another wanted a Negro who “understands the Coopers and Millers business,” and thought that “A Negroe Lad, not less than 14 years old or more than 24” would be most satisfactory.

As might be expected, requirements were highest for those slaves purchased as household or personal servants. Jonathan Dickinson negotiated with his brother-in-law Isaac Gale in 1719 for the shipment of a slave from Jamaica. Since he wanted a lad who was inclined “to be about ones pson,” Dickinson asked that he be “Tractable and Willing and Affable.” Later he amended this request, stating that the slave should be “a likely sensible Negro Boy yt hath ye English Speech. . . .”

Robert Ellis shipped eighteen barrels of herring valued at £16 4s. to the West Indies in 1740, asking that they be used to purchase “a Cleaver Negro Boy for my Own use, and in Case you Canut gett a Boy, gett a girl if you Can meet with a Likely one.” On another occasion he was more specific; a Barbadian firm was told to lay out part of the proceeds from the sale of fourteen barrels of flour in “a Clever Likely Negroe Boy, from fourteen to Eighteen Year Old, I want one for My own use.”

Thomas Willing’s familiarity with the Pennsylvania Negro trade served him well when he ordered slaves from the islands for his own use: “I want a lively handsome Negroe Boy & Girl for my One [own] Use abt. 12 or 13 years Old & shall be particularly obliged to you for your Choice therein & in Shiping E’m by the first good Conveya. giving the Captain a particular Charge abt. not exposeing them

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24 Claypoole to Edward Claypoole, December 2, 1683, Claypoole Letter Book, 1681-1683.
26 Dickinson to Isaac Gale, June 1, 30, November 14, 1719, Dickinson Letter Book, 1715-1721.
27 Ellis to ?, August 6, 1740, Ellis to Bayley and Bedford, August 7, 1741, Ellis Letter Book, 1736-1748.
to bear the Climate, please to Cloath them wth. some warm Stuffe."25

The characteristics most desired in Negro slaves seem to have been the important eighteenth-century virtues—honesty, sobriety, and diligence. John McCalley, a tailor in Norris' Alley, believed his young Negro well-suited for service in a tavern, since he was both sober and honest. When a Negro lad about eighteen was offered for sale in 1761, his master declared that he "drinks no Spirits of any kind." A farmer who in 1758 wished to buy a Negro man between the ages of twenty and twenty-five was prepared to give a very good price "provided he is an orderly sober Fellow, and can be well recommended." An advertiser in 1760 wanted one or two young Negro men who could be commended for their "Honesty, Sobriety and Diligence." The next year a Negro lad who was honest and industrious and who had a "good Character in General" was sought. In 1764 someone was seeking a healthy Negro man to serve as cook and household servant, and was interested only if the slave could be recommended "for his Honesty, Diligence, Sobriety and Care."26

Negroes in good health—free from sickness and disease—were naturally in greater demand than were frail and weak slaves. Because Pennsylvanians were concerned about the slave's disease record, they were apt to place a higher value on Negroes born or at least raised in the colonies. Negroes who had lived in the colonies were, in addition, likely to have had some contact with the English language, a knowledge of which enhanced their value. In 1762 John Lukens advertised that he wished to purchase a Negro boy between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, adding that the slave must have had the smallpox and measles, be "this Country born" and have a record of honesty. In a similar vein, Benjamin Jackson and Co. announced that they had immediate need for "a young Negroe man, this Country born, or that came into the Country when a Child, and can be very well recommended; one used to a Mill or Country Work will be most agreeable, and for such a good Price will be given, or good Wages, if to be hired."27 Those who sold slaves often noted that their Negroes

26 Pennsylvania Gazette, July 20, 1758, July 17, 1760, August 13, November 5, 1761, April 21, 1763, March 14, 1764.
27 Ibid., April 29, September 23, 1762.
were well prepared for life in Pennsylvania. Thus a Negro man born in Barbados was offered for sale in 1761, his owner stating that he “has had the Small-pox and Measles, and is seasoned to the Country.” A notice appearing in 1760 offered to sell a male slave about twenty-nine years of age who had been in the province nearly nineteen years and who had had both the smallpox and the measles. A Negro man for sale in 1732 had “been twelve Months in the Country, and speaks English.” Three years later John Breintnal placed on the market a sixteen-year-old Barbadian Negress who “speaks good English.”

It was not always possible for residents of Pennsylvania to purchase what they considered to be prime slaves. New Negroes were susceptible to the white man’s diseases and were ill-prepared for Pennsylvania’s cold climate. They were no more likely than their white masters to possess those sterling attributes which were desired in slaves; like the white man Negroes partook freely of liquor when the opportunity arose, shirked their labor duties, and were sometimes deserving of the appellation dishonest. But even if the Negroes imported into Pennsylvania had been of consistently high quality and eager and willing to work, chances are that residents would have selected an alternative form of labor which was more readily available. This was white indentured and re-

31 Ibid., June 1 to June 8, 1732, April 24 to May 1, 1735, January 17, 1760, September 10, 1761.
32 Pennsylvania shared with other Middle Colonies a common view of prime slaves. A New York merchant wrote that “For this market they must be young, the younger the better if not quite children, those advanced in years will never do I should imagine a Cargo of them none exceeding thirty might turn out at fifty pound a head gross Sales. Males are best.” John Watts to Gedney Clarke, March 30, 1762, Letter Book of John Watts, New York Historical Society Collections, LXI, 31. The slave market in the southern plantation colonies was somewhat different. A Charleston trader writing that “the best Cargoes for our market are those that have most full grown Men, the Men generally bring with us from 3 to £6 Stg. more than Women and 4 or £5 more than what you call Men Boys of 14 to 16 Years of Age.” Henry Laurens to Captain William Jenkinson, August 13, 1755, in Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1930-1935), 1V, 329.
33 Merchants and planters in the Southern and Island colonies frequently shipped northward what they termed “refuse” slaves. Pennsylvania received many of these Negroes, perhaps lame, suffering from disease or disobedient. This problem is discussed in Wax, “The Negro Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania,” pp. 25-29.
SLAVE LABOR IN COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA

Demption labor, known in all the colonies but especially prevalent in colonial Pennsylvania.4

To say that Negro labor was inferior to that of white servants and that the course of economic development in Pennsylvania distinctly favored white servant labor over that of Negro slaves does not seem to provide an entirely satisfactory explanation for the greater use of white servants.5 The Negro, it is true, did lack skills when first transported to the New World. There were few craftsmen in Africa, and a division of labor analogous to that in Europe was unknown. Nevertheless, in Pennsylvania at least, the Negro was trained as a craftsman, and in countless instances acquired industrial skills. With respect to ability to perform, Negro slaves and white servants were in open and direct competition in colonial Pennsylvania; records show that they were called upon to toil at identical tasks. Slave labor was used on the farms, in the nascent manufacturing industries, and in commerce. Similarly, white servants were used in all these sections of the colony's economy. To explain why Pennsylvanians selected white servant labor over that of Negro slaves requires a closer analysis of certain factors affecting the two forms of labor.

Negro slaves did have some definite advantages over white indentured servants. A Negro, once purchased, was by law a slave for life; his master retained absolute dominance over his body as long as the slave lived. When purchasing a white servant the master acquired no authoritarian rights which were unlimited in time; the purchaser did obtain these rights circumscribed by a given number of years. After completing his period of servitude,


5 Herrick argues that Negro slaves lacked the ability to perform the tasks demanded by Pennsylvania's economic development: "The 'docility' of the Negro might make him more useful as a servile laborer under certain conditions and while performing certain sorts of labor, but as climatic conditions in Pennsylvania were not favorable to him, so the form of labor demanded was not such as docility could satisfy. The diversified production and industry which prevailed in Pennsylvania required a higher order of labor than that of slaves"; also "Free laborers were not available for the early industrial development of Pennsylvania; on the other hand, slaves were unsuited for the colony's labor requirements. Thus, white servitude had a large influence in establishing industry in Pennsylvania . . . the absence of skill in industry was one of the weaknesses of slave labor:" Ibid., pp. 25, 76.
a servant was granted his freedom and thereafter was answerable to no man. While this was a redeeming feature from the servant’s point of view, it could render him less attractive in the eyes of a buyer. Employers might be unwilling to train a servant only to lose his labor just at the moment when his new skills were becoming fully developed. Moreover, there was some gamble about the prospects for the labor market when an employer bought a white servant rather than a Negro slave, for he was assuming other laborers would be available in the future. With a Negro slave, however, a master was provided with a permanent laborer and could be secure in his knowledge that his work would not go undone. Joseph White, who lived just outside Philadelphia in 1767, was well aware of the insecurity attending use of white servant labor. From a friend he sought information about a large cargo of Dutch servants supposed to have reached Philadelphia, because, as he explained: “My Man James is free and tho he is with me yet he discovers a Disposition not to Stay long: That I have no body to depend on thats able to go on with my Work which is got behind thro much Sickness not Only in my Self and family but among the Day Labourers so that there is Scarce any to be got that can hold to do a days work.”

In general, slaves were less likely than white servants to become runaways. This is not to say that Negroes never elected to break for freedom, for there is ample testimony that slaves sometimes rebelled against their life of perpetual servitude. John Harris believed that his Negro man had “gone of[f] from me in Order to Join ye French & Indians.” Many years before Negro Jack had run away from his master in Chester County. Announcing a reward for his return, an advertisement noted that he spoke “but indifferent English, and had on when he went away a ozen-burg Shirt, a pair of strip’d home-spun Breeches, a strip’d ticking Wastecost, an old dimity Coat of his Master’s with Buttons of Horse-teeth set in Brass, and Cloth Sleeves, a Felt Hat almost new.” Where Negro Jack intended to go, the advertisement does not say. But one thing is clear: wherever he went in the English

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36 Joseph White to John Pemberton, October 13, 1767, Cox, Parrish, Wharton Papers, XII, HSP.
37 Edward Shippen to Joseph Shippen, June 19, 1756, Shippen Papers, American Philosophical Society.
38 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 13-20, 1730.
colonies, his skin color would remind others of his proper station in life and would make his reenslavement a simple matter.

The white servant, on the other hand, wore no recognizable badge of servitude and his flight for freedom was more likely to succeed. Spurred on by the opportunities awaiting the free man, opportunities in the form of land and financial independence, the white servant often reneged on the indenture which bound him to his master. This tendency to become a runaway rendered the white servant a less desirable laborer.

Finally, the community of citizens held different attitudes toward servants and Negro slaves. Servants were in a temporary state of bondage and in a few years would take their proper places as citizens of the New World. White servants were "like" their masters; their stake in society was considered to be similar to that of their temporary owners. Negro slaves were regarded in a different light: alien to the white man's culture, in every respect, slaves were unwilling intruders relegated to an existence on the fringe of white society. But because servants were part of the community they were expected to share in the burden of protecting it and guaranteeing its continued existence. Not only in Pennsylvania but in all the colonies, white servants were enlisted in the colonial militia and bore arms against the king's enemies. Slaves, in contrast, were not given weapons and were not subject to enlistment in the colonial militia. In time of war, therefore, some masters protested the shortage of labor occasioned by recruiting servants; while others, slaveholders, were rewarded with guaranteed labor services from their black bondsmen.

So far as the purchaser was concerned, the fundamental advantage which Negro labor offered over the labor of white servants was its apparent permanence. White servants who earned their freedom, who ceased to honor their legal indenture, or who were taken up and enlisted as militiamen, threatened their master's need for a constant supply of labor. A master searching for laborers, however, was sure to recognize some very real advantages which servants possessed over Negro slaves. Even in the absence of other considerations, these advantages were important enough that the master would probably purchase servants rather than slaves.

-- See Benjamin Quarles, "The Colonial Militia and Negro Manpower," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLV (1959), 643-652. --
An appealing feature of servant labor was that in relation to slave labor the initial investment was considerably less. It seems fair to say that for most of the eighteenth century servants could be purchased for about one-half the cost of a Negro slave. Perhaps equally important was the ability of white servants to withstand the cold winter climate in Pennsylvania and their greater immunity to the diseases of the white community. One Pennsylvanian remarked that the “English & Welsh thrive in Husbandry,” and later wrote that German servants from the Palatinate were industrious and energetic when they debarked from their Atlantic voyage; they came “all healthy and well.” This was in striking contrast to the condition of most Negro slaves who arrived in Pennsylvania. Even if good quality slaves, they could be expected to go through a period of adjustment which, if complications arose, often led to their deaths. The experience of Jonathan Dickinson was not unusual. In 1715 he made known his need for two Negro house servants, a correspondent at Jamaica being asked to ship “two Young Negro Women not Exceeding fifteen [sic] or Sixteen at most.” This same correspondent was later reminded that the Negroes were “greatly wanted,” while another resident of the island was also informed that Dickinson wished “two Younge Negroe Women when they are to be had.” Dickinson finally received the two Negro slaves, but they died soon after their arrival, during the winter of 1718-1719—“Jon Lewis Sent Us two Negro Women tho proved But Indifferent and Both Dyed this Winter. The Loss of them we Bear Without a further Supply.” Thomas Riche once sent slaves he was trying to sell out of the colony as early as October, believing that the cold endangered their health.

The demand for Negro slave labor in colonial Pennsylvania was restricted, therefore, by a number of factors. The local

See Robert Ellis to Mr. Shaw, September 18, 1736, Ellis Letter Book, 1736-1748; Ellis to Thomas Hughes, April 29, 1735, Miscellaneous Correspondence, Hildeburn Papers, HSP; Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania*, p. 203.


Dickinson to Isaac Gale, May 2, December 13, 1715, June 1, 1719, Dickinson to John Lewis, August 15, 1716, ibid.

Riche to Samuel Cornell, October 11, 1764, Riche Letter Book, II, 1764-1771, HSP.
economy did not call for a steady and growing supply of Negro laborers. Further, though Negro slaves sometimes acquired valuable skills, white servants possessed obvious advantages over slaves when the two competing forms of labor met in the marketplace. Reinforcing what may already have been the buyer's decision to purchase white servant labor rather than the labor of Negro slaves was the fact that Negroes reaching Pennsylvania were so often classified as "refuse" slaves. It should be noted, too, that Pennsylvania was the home of a large and influential Quaker community, which early launched a campaign against the Negro slave trade and the use of slave labor. Inaugurated in the late seventeenth century, this campaign bore fruit during the Revolutionary era when the Assembly enacted legislation abolishing the institution of slavery. The opposition movement, led by the Quakers, was the crowning blow to a demand for slave labor that had never been either urgent or continuing in colonial Pennsylvania.