

# *A Day in the Life*

EPISODE FIVE:  
ANNE SPARKS'S DAY



Lesson Plans and Resources

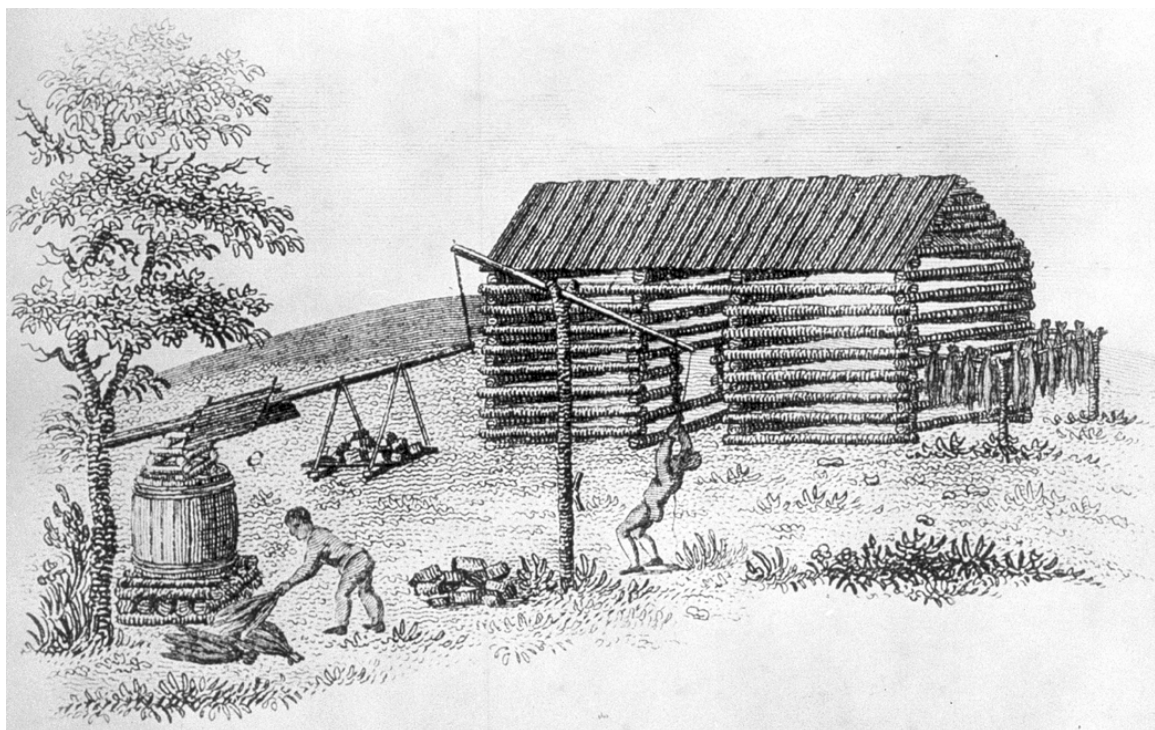
*Colonial Williamsburg*

## *Episode Synopsis*

Meet Anne Sparks and her family. Anne, a free black woman, lives in Williamsburg with her husband, Jonathan, and three children, Sally, John, and Freddy. In eighteenth-century Virginia, the status of the mother (free or enslaved) established the condition of the children. Because Anne is free, her children are free. As we learn during this episode, however, the free black community had close ties to enslaved African-Virginians. Many free blacks had friends and relatives who were enslaved.

The Sparks family lives in a small rented building. The home they make here is typical of living conditions for small farmers and working-class families, black and white alike. To survive, every family member contributes. Jonathan is a carter. He hires out his horse, cart, and labor to move goods and materials. Anne is a seamstress. Her fine needlework is sought by several in Williamsburg, including Margaret Hunter, a milliner with a prominent shop on Duke of Gloucester Street.

Students may be surprised that Anne is educated. She quickly adds up the figures when Margaret Hunter asks for the cost of making shirts. Like all business people, Anne needed to understand basic reading, writing, and arithmetic to be successful. Anne also provides for the education of her children. They attend Mrs. Wager's Bray School. The Bray Associates, a religious benevolent association in England, sponsored this school for the education of free black and enslaved children. There were no laws against educating blacks in eighteenth-century Virginia. It was not until the nineteenth century that whites, frightened by slave revolts and rebellions, passed laws prohibiting the education of blacks.



## *Free Blacks in Virginia 1619–1790*



During the first half of the seventeenth century, the number of Africans brought into Virginia numbered no more than three hundred. Historians are uncertain about their status. They may have been considered indentured servants, not slaves. If so, early African arrivals were a temporary labor force working like the large numbers of indentured servants coming into Virginia. These Africans were not yet defined as chattel property or as a permanent, hereditary labor force—conditions that would soon mark one as enslaved. At the end of the indentured

contract, the servant was released and often provided with land to make a living. Many African-born indentured families settled on Virginia's Eastern Shore, where they prospered as yeomen farmers. Some, like the Johnson family, came to own more than 250 acres of land and had a number of indentured servants of their own.

A temporary labor force was not considered the most cost-effective method of cultivating tobacco. Slavery was already being used effectively in the sugarcane fields of the West Indies and in the shipbuilding regions of coastal New England. During the 1660s, Virginia made a conscious effort to define and legalize its own system of enslavement, and people of African descent were singled out for this status.

Free blacks in Virginia suddenly found themselves exceptions to the rule. The slave trade increased rapidly during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. By 1700, an estimated 12,000 slaves and 350 free blacks lived in Virginia. It was generally assumed that all people of African descent were slaves unless they could prove otherwise.

Further restrictions against the liberty of free blacks ensued. Free blacks were taxed more harshly than whites. A tax, or tithe, on a person's labor was assessed for all men over the age of sixteen and for all black women over sixteen. White women over sixteen were not considered part of the labor force and were not taxed. Free blacks who could not pay debts faced the possibility of being hired out to the county or parish as slave labor. Free blacks were not allowed to vote or participate in any government activities. Although their right to property ownership was not inhibited, employment was generally limited to menial labor and a few skilled trades. Without the right to testify against whites in court, freedom was further restricted, thus relegating the free person's status to something between that of a slave and that of a citizen of Virginia.

In addition to African-born Virginians who were never enslaved, there were also slaves who obtained their freedom, either for themselves or their offspring. Throughout the two centuries of legalized slavery in Virginia, there were four primary ways to obtain freedom—matriarchal lineage, **manumission**, meritorious service, and purchasing one's freedom. In 1662, Virginia passed legislation stating that the status of the child reflected that of the mother, which allowed male landowners to father children with slave women without fear of those children ever becoming heirs to their estates.

If the mother were enslaved, the child would be enslaved, and because slaves could not own property, they also could not be heirs.

Of course, the law cut both ways; hence, the child of an enslaved father and a white mother would not be considered a slave. But the child was not exactly free. As a punishment for the crime of miscegenation (made illegal in Virginia by 1700), the child was indentured until the age of thirty-one. By 1765, the length of indenture had decreased to twenty-one years for men and eighteen for women.

Until the Revolution, the free black population in Virginia grew slowly. Virginia planters were wary of a free black presence among their slaves. Concerns that free blacks might attempt to stir up resistance to bondage within the slave community led to legislation restricting manumissions, or the freeing of a slave, and laws requiring those manumitted to leave the colony within six months to a year. Freeing a slave for meritorious service usually meant that the slave had saved either the life of the owner or his family or had provided information about a possible uprising. Occasionally, a skilled slave such as a carpenter or blacksmith saved enough money to purchase his freedom. To literally buy himself, a slave would often have to save for decades before earning enough for freedom. A number of slaves obtained their freedom through these methods, but it must be remembered that the ex-slave's family generally remained in bondage.

For the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, the free black population in Virginia hovered around 1 percent of the total black population. Even by the end of the Revolutionary War, St. George Tucker estimated that there was a slave population of nearly a quarter-million but no more than 2,800 free people of color. The war offered another avenue for freedom — **emancipation**. While manumission was considered a private matter of the owner, emancipation was freedom granted by the government. In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, issued an emancipation proclamation freeing all slaves in service to rebels who would fight for the British. Thousands did, and thousands eventually obtained their freedom, albeit outside the United States.

Slaves and free blacks fought on both sides during the Revolution. Many fought bravely, and some were recognized for their valor. Rhode Island purchased the freedom of hundreds of slaves so they could fight in the Continental Army. After the war, a number of planters demanded that the Continental Army return their "property." Others took the spirit of liberty to heart and manumitted slaves who fought in the war. Virginia's manumission restrictions enacted in the early eighteenth century were lifted after 1782, and the free black population increased rapidly. According to the 1790 census, Virginia's free black population grew sixfold in eight years, with nearly 13,000 free people of color residing in the Old Dominion.



## LESSON

*Matthew Ashby, Free Man***INTRODUCTION**

In eighteenth-century Virginia, most free blacks and free people of mixed racial heritage were born free due to the legal status of their mothers. Those who were born into slavery could be freed only through a process called manumission, which required an owner to petition the Governor's Council for permission to free a slave. Matthew Ashby, a free man of mixed racial background, was among several people of color who approached the council with such a request for themselves or for others.

**OBJECTIVES**

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to

1. identify significant facts and events from the life of Matthew Ashby,
2. understand how the status of a black person or a person of mixed racial heritage was determined during the eighteenth century,
3. interpret Virginia laws regarding the status of blacks and people of mixed racial heritage during the eighteenth century,
4. analyze primary source materials,
5. identify items listed in a primary document and classify them according to their uses in the eighteenth century,
6. demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of all of the preceding objectives by playing a game.

**STANDARDS OF LEARNING**

This lesson meets the National Standards of Learning in the areas of historical research, comprehension, interpretation, and analysis.

**MATERIALS**

Biographical Sketch of Patrick Henry  
 Biographical Sketch of Matthew Ashby  
 Additional Information about Matthew Ashby  
 Matthew Ashby Jackpot Game  
 Graphic Organizer 1 – Biographical Comparison of Patrick Henry and Matthew Ashby  
 Graphic Organizer 2 – Items from Matthew Ashby's **Inventory**  
 Primary Source Document 1 – Petition for Manumission  
 Primary Source Document 2 – Will of Matthew Ashby  
 Primary Source Document 3 – Inventory of Matthew Ashby's Estate  
 Virginia Statutes Pertaining to Race, Slave Status, Tithables, and Manumission

**SETTING THE STAGE**

1. Ask the students if they know who Patrick Henry was. Have the students give as many details as they can about his life. Next, ask the students if they know who Matthew Ashby was. Explain that Matthew Ashby lived during the same time as Patrick Henry and that they both lived in Virginia. Ask the students why they think little or nothing is known about Matthew Ashby.

2. Give the students a copy of the biographical sketches of Patrick Henry and Matthew Ashby. Without any discussion, have the students fill in the first two columns of Graphic Organizer 1—Biographical Comparison of Patrick Henry and Matthew Ashby.
3. Lead a class discussion about the information the students have gathered using questions such as:
  - What type of information do you know about Patrick Henry that you do not know about Matthew Ashby?
  - Why do you suppose so many details are available about Patrick Henry?
  - Who was Matthew Ashby and what details do you know about his life?
4. Have the students compare the two biographies point by point, making inferences about why we do not have certain information for Matthew Ashby, for instance, birth date—no record was made of Ashby’s birth. (Note: Matthew Ashby probably was not baptized. Church records were the only official birth records in the eighteenth century.)
5. Discuss students’ inferences and ask them to come to conclusions about why so little is known about the Matthew Ashbys of the eighteenth century. The following questions might be used in your discussion:
  - Who kept records during the eighteenth century?
  - Do you think there would be more information available about a white man of the same financial status during this period?
  - Why or why not?

## STRATEGY

1. Give the students copies of Additional Information about Matthew Ashby. Have them read this second sketch to gain additional information about the life of Matthew Ashby and to answer the following questions. (You may wish to have students write out the answers or simply take notes.)
  - Why was Matthew Ashby a free man even though his father was a black man?
  - Why, and for how long, was Matthew Ashby an indentured servant?
  - What was the condition (free or enslaved) of Matthew Ashby’s children, John and Mary? Why was this their status?
  - How were the children’s status and that of their mother changed?

Suggestion: The preceding questions could be made into a worksheet or be written on the board.
2. Discuss the answers to the preceding questions to lead into the next activity.
3. Divide the class into collaborative groups. Give each group a copy of Primary Source Document 1—Petition for Manumission, and the Virginia Statutes Pertaining to Race, Slave Status, Tithables, and Manumission. Have members of the groups read these primary sources and highlight material that affected Matthew Ashby and/or members of his family. Groups should be prepared to discuss what affect each of their highlighted items had on these individuals. (Some definitions from the glossary should be provided for this activity.)  
Suggestion: Each group could be called on to read an example it has highlighted and explain its significance.
4. Distribute a copy of Primary Source Document 2—Will of Matthew Ashby, and Primary Source Document 3—Inventory of Matthew Ashby’s Estate, to each group. Have students read the will and inventory and then classify the items listed in the inventory on Graphic Organizer 2. (Applicable definitions from the glossary should be provided.) Be sure to point out the lack of uniform spelling, particularly in the inventory. Students may have to check a dictionary to determine the modern spellings of a few words and the definitions.

Suggestion: Once groups have finalized their results, students should transfer their classifications to poster paper so they can be displayed for comparison.

5. The final discussion of the will and inventory might include the following questions:
  - What items from the inventory might have been considered **luxury** items for a person of Matthew Ashby's status and time?
  - Considering Matthew Ashby's status, were there any items in the inventory that you would not expect to find? What were those items and why did you consider them unlikely?
  - By examining the items listed as job-related, what conclusions could you draw about how members of the Ashby family may have made their living?
6. Tell students they will now have an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned by playing a game somewhat like *Jeopardy!* See the directions for the Matthew Ashby Jackpot Game.

## *Biographical Sketch of Patrick Henry*

<i>Date of Birth:</i>	May 29, 1736
<i>Place of Birth:</i>	Hanover County, Virginia
<i>Date of Death:</i>	June 6, 1799
<i>Place of Death:</i>	Red Hill Plantation, Virginia
<i>Parents:</i>	John and Sara Winston Henry
<i>Education:</i>	Educated by his father (including reading Latin). Studied law on his own.
<i>Occupation:</i>	Lawyer. Set up private practice in Hanover Courthouse, Virginia, in 1760.
<i>Offices Held:</i>	Delegate, Virginia House of Burgesses, 1765–1775 Member, Virginia Committee of Correspondence, 1773 Delegate, Virginia Convention, 1776 Governor of Virginia, 1776–1779, 1784–1786 Delegate, Virginia Constitution Ratification Convention, 1788
<i>Place of Residence:</i>	Red Hill Plantation, Virginia
<i>Spouses:</i>	First wife was Sara Shelton. Second wife was Dorothea Dandridge.

## *Biographical Sketch of Matthew Ashby*

<i>Date of Birth:</i>	Unknown (by 1727)
<i>Place of Birth:</i>	Unknown (in or near Williamsburg, Virginia)
<i>Date of Death:</i>	April 12, 1771
<i>Place of Death:</i>	Williamsburg, Virginia
<i>Parents:</i>	Mother was Mary Ashby, a white servant woman indentured to James Shields; father was an unknown African-American
<i>Education:</i>	Unknown
<i>Occupation:</i>	Carter; also did odd jobs
<i>Place of Residence:</i>	Unknown (in or near Williamsburg, Virginia)
<i>Spouse:</i>	Ann
<i>Miscellaneous:</i>	When Matthew and Ann's two children, John and Mary, were born, they were considered slaves based on their mother's status as a slave.

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## *Additional Information about Matthew Ashby*

Matthew Ashby, a free man of mixed racial heritage, worked as a **carter** and did odd jobs around Williamsburg. Although his father was black, Matthew Ashby remained free because his mother was a white indentured servant and a mother's status determined that of her child. Matthew was indentured until he turned 31, as the law required of children born to indentured servant women, and then he became free. He married Ann Ashby, a slave of bricklayer Samuel Spurr. Their two children, John and Mary, attended the Bray School. Over the years, Matthew Ashby amassed enough money to buy his wife and children from Samuel Spurr for £150. Then, on November 27, 1769, he successfully petitioned the Governor's Council for permission to free them.

Matthew Ashby died in 1771. He left a sizable estate that included fashionable luxury items such as a silver watch and a tea board. The number of items in his will related to laundering suggests that Ann was a laundress. Shortly after Matthew's death, Ann married George Jones, but that marriage was unhappy and did not last long.

# *Matthew Ashby Jackpot Game Instructions*

## DIRECTIONS

1. Make a transparency of the Matthew Ashby Jackpot to project against a screen. Use small pieces of index cards to cover each answer block until it is chosen by a player.
2. This game can be played by teams or individuals. If played by teams, a spokesperson should be chosen to give the group's answer.
3. Explain to the students that the game is to be played much as *Jeopardy!* is played.
  - a. A student (or team spokesperson) will select a category and a value.
  - b. The answer will be revealed by removing the strip of index card from that space.
  - c. The student who raises his or her hand first will be called on to give the appropriate question. If the reply is not in question form or is incorrect, another individual will be called on to answer.
  - d. The individual or team giving the correct question will be awarded the points assigned.
  - e. Points can be totaled to a certain number, or the game can be played for a certain time period to determine who wins.

## TEACHER ANSWER KEY

### *Personal Life*

- 100 How long was Matthew Ashby an indentured servant?  
 200 What is the single most valuable item in Matthew Ashby's inventory?  
 300 When did Matthew Ashby petition the Governor's Council for the manumission of his wife and children?  
 400 When did Matthew Ashby die?

### *Family*

- 100 Who was Matthew Ashby's wife?  
 200 How much did Matthew Ashby pay to buy his wife and children?  
 300 Who was the bricklayer who owned Ann Ashby and her children?  
 400 Who were the parents of Matthew Ashby?

### *Laws*

- 100 What is the significance of a mother's status?  
 200 What is a mulatto?  
 300 What is the punishment for a white person who marries a mulatto?  
 400 Who are tithables?

### *Vocabulary*

- 100 What is a carter?  
 200 What is an indentured servant?  
 300 What is an inventory?  
 400 What is the Bray School?

## MATTHEW ASHBY JACKPOT GAME

PERSONAL LIFE	FAMILY LIFE	LAWS	VOCABULARY
<b>100</b>  31 years	<b>100</b>  Ann	<b>100</b>  Determines whether her children are free or enslaved	<b>100</b>  One who hauls goods for a living
<b>200</b>  1 Bay Horse	<b>200</b>  150 pounds	<b>200</b>  Any person whose racial background was at least one-quarter black	<b>200</b>  One who is required to work for a master for a specific number of years
<b>300</b>  November 27, 1769	<b>300</b>  Samuel Spurr	<b>300</b>  Six months' imprisonment and a £10 fine	<b>300</b>  An accounting of all personal property on the death of a property owner
<b>400</b>  1771	<b>400</b>  A white indentured servant and a black man	<b>400</b>  A free black's wife and children age 16 or older	<b>400</b>  A charity school for the education of black children

# *Graphic Organizer 1 – Biographical Comparison of Patrick Henry and Matthew Ashby*

	PATRICK HENRY	MATTHEW ASHBY	INFERENCES ABOUT WHY THIS INFORMATION IS NOT KNOWN ABOUT ASHBY
Date of Birth			
Place of Birth			
Parents			
Education			
Occupation			
Offices Held			
Place of Residence			
Spouse			

## *Graphic Organizer 2 – Items from Matthew Ashby’s Inventory*

<b>Personal Items</b>	<b>Furnishings/Furniture</b>	<b>Job-Related Items</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>bed bolster sheets counterpin (counterpane)</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>bedstead rug 6 chairs</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>2 ironing tables 4 tubs 8 pales (pails)</i></p>

**PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT 1—  
PETITION FOR MANUMISSION**

On the Petition of Matthew Ashby, a free Mulatto setting forth that he had two Children by his present Wife Ann Ashby, while she was a Slave to Samuel Spurr, that he bought her and the two Children of the said Spurr for one hundred and fifty pounds, that he has now two children alive by her John and Mary, that she has been a faithful and diligent Wife ever since marriage, and praying that he may be permitted to set her and his Children free; the Board being satisfied therein, were of opinion, that the said Ann, John and Mary were deserving of their freedom, and it was order'd that the said Matthew Ashby have leave to Manumit and set them free.

November 27, 1769

Benjamin J. Hillman, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia* (Richmond, Va., 1966), vol. 6, pp. 334–335.

**PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT 2—  
WILL OF MATTHEW ASHBY**

15 Apr. 1771 IN THE NAME OF GOD Amen. I Matthew Ashby being sick of body but of sound sense & memory do make and ordain this my last will & testament in manner following. I resign my soul to God trusting in the merits & mediation of my dear redeemer Jesus Christ for the pardon of all my sins & as to my worldly goods which it has pleased God to bless me with I give & bequeath the whole after my funeral expences & just debts are paid to my good friend John Blair esqr in trust for the maintenance & support of my loving wife Ann Ashby & for her education & maintenance of my two children John & Mary Ashby in a good christian way with the approbation of my sd trustee to whom I hereby appoint my exr. of this my will. IN WITNESS whereof I hereunto set my hand & seal this 25th day of November 1769 in Williamsburg.

Matt. Ashby  
X  
his mark

York County, Virginia, Records, Wills and Inventories, vol. 22, 1771–1783, pp. 25–26.

**PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT 3—  
INVENTORY OF MATTHEW ASHBY'S ESTATE**

Inventory of the Estate of Matthew Ashby Deceased viz.

1 Bed bolster pair Sheets and Counterpin	£6..0..0
1 Do. Do.	5..0..0
1 Do. Do. and 1 Sheet	3..15..0
1 Do. and Bedstead and Rug	3..0..0
6 old Chairs	0..10//0
1 Round Table	0..10..0
2 Ironing Tables	0..12..6
1 Tea Board	0..5..0
3 Tea spoons and Tongs	0..12..6
1 Chest and 2 Trunks	1..10..0
a parcel of old Books	0..8..0
2 Looking Glasses and 1 Cupboard	0..10..0
1 Silver Watch	3..0..0
parcel old Pewter	2..0..0
5 Iron Potts and 2 Kettles	5..0..0
2 Tea Kettles	0..15..0
1 Marble Morter	0..10..0
1 Iron Do.	0..2..0
1 Skillet	0..5..0
Parcel Tin Ware	0..15..0
4 Tubs and 8 pales	1..0..0
7 Trays	1..5..0
2 Soap Jars	0..15..0
4 Pair flat Irons	0..12..6
1 Spit Grid Iron frying pan Ladle and Skimmer	0..7..6

1 Pint Table	0.2.6
26 Candle Moulds and Frame	2.0.0
5 stone Jars and 7 Juggs	1.10.0
1 Pair Steelyards	0.7.6
4 Saddles	2.10.0
1 Pair Cards and spinning Wheels	0.10.0
2 Chests	0.15.0
1 Pair saddle Bags	0.5.0
Parcel Carpenters Tools	1.10.0
1 Bay Horse	10.0.0
1 Do.	5.0.0
1 Do.	3.0.0
2 Cows 1 Yearling and 1 Calf	10.0.0
Cart Harness for 2 horses	0.15.0
£77..5..0	
147 lb. Bacon @6.D	13.13.6
	£80.18.6

Wm. Pierce

Jonathan Prosser

Cutht. Hubbard

Returned into York County Court the 17th day of June 1771 and Ordered to be recorded.

Examined.

Teste

Tho. Everard Cl. Cur.

York County, Virginia, Records, Wills and Inventories, vol. 22, 1771–1783, pp. 34–36.

**PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT 4—  
VIRGINIA STATUTES PERTAINING TO RACE, SLAVE STATUS,  
TITHABLES, AND MANUMISSION**

*Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.*

And if any woman servant shall have a bastard child by a negro, or mulatto, over and above the years service due to her master or owner, she shall immediately, upon the expiration of her time to her present master or owner, pay down to the church-wardens of the parish wherein such child shall be born, for the use of the said parish, fifteen pounds current money of Virginia, or be by them sold for five years, to the use aforesaid: And if a free christian white woman shall have such a bastard child, by a negro, or mulatto, for every such offence, she shall, within one month after her delivery of such bastard child, pay to the church-wardens for the time being, of the parish wherein such child shall be born, for the use of the said parish fifteen pounds current money of Virginia, or be by them sold for five years to the use aforesaid: And in both the said cases, the church-wardens shall bind the said child to be a servant, until it shall be of thirty one years of age.

*BE it enacted, by the Lieutenant-Governor, Council and Burgesses of this present General Assembly, and it is hereby enacted, by the authority of the same, That all male persons of the age of sixteen years and upwards, and all negroe, mulatto, and Indian women of the same age, except Indians tributary to this government, and all wives of free negroes, mulattos, and Indians, except as before excepted, shall be and are hereby declared to be tithable, and chargeable for defraying the public, county, and parish levies, of this colony and dominion, excepting such only as the county courts, for charitable reasons appearing to them, shall think fit to excuse.*

*BE it enacted by the General Assembly, That every person of whose grandfathers or grandmothers any one is, or shall have been a negro, although all his other progenitors, except that descending from the negro, shall have been white persons, shall be deemed a mulatto; and so every person who shall have one-fourth part or more of negro blood, shall, in like manner, be deemed a mulatto.*

William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All of the Laws of Virginia* (Richmond, Va., 1821), vol. 2, p. 170; vol. 8, p. 453; vol. 6, pp. 40–41; and vol. 12, p. 154.