

Review: Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, *White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain's White Slaves in America*, Mainstream Publishing Co., Edinburgh, UK, 2007

Pages: 320

Mind-Blowing History

There is a reason this kind of book will never be part of Western education curricular; the truth is too inconvenient. The facts are clear that America was built off the backs of *white* convicts, indentured servants, and 'free will' settlers. Yes there were Africans, but these were actually treated better in some cases since their masters understood they were permanent property, whereas the whites were time-limited.

The authors weave in world events as backdrop to the white cargo enterprise with the impression it was wholly driven by greed (gold and silver which never materialised) and politics (to rid England of the dregs of society).

The kidnappings, lack of due process, harsh environment, and high death rates all bring home how terrible the lives of whites were in building the foundations of modern America.

Introduction: In the Shadow of the Myth (pp. 11-19)

Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children were shipped to America and the Caribbean before 1773. Most paid passage by selling their freedom for years, others were exiled for 14 years.

While the Spanish simply extracted gold, the English had to generate wealth from agriculture, specifically tobacco.

"Eventually, a racial wedge was thrust between white and black, leaving blacks officially enslaved and whites apparently upgraded."

In 1618, London began collecting hundreds of slum urchins and shipped them to Virginia. England's richest man orchestrated the expulsions; starving children were to be given a new home and work as planters. Half of them died within a year.

England's jails were to be emptied in America; 70K convicts were shipped out.

Kidnapper gangs roamed the streets and countryside as 'spirits' to find victims.

Between 1620 and 1775, some 300K were shipped out, most under pretence of a free plot of land.

Some of the most abused servants were among the free-willers.

When American independence closed the mainland off as a convict dumping ground, Britain sent them to Australia.

I) A Place for the Unwanted (pp. 21-32)

'Slavery's introduction to the New World took place much as serfdom left the Old: stealthily and hesitantly; it's sly arrival over a few decades hardly noticed.'

Humphrey Gilbert gained permission from Elizabeth to colonise the New World, provided she received 20% of any gold or silver. He reached Newfoundland on his second crossing attempt, but drowned afterwards.

Raleigh Gilbert was then granted the same commission as Humphrey.

In 1596, the Earl of Essex sacked Cadiz, but in 1601 he was executed for plotting against Elizabeth. James I is said to have supported him.

II) The Judge's Dream (pp. 33-46)

Sir John Popham thought to populate America with the dregs of England. James I approved two colonies with the aim of "bringing infidels and savages to human civility, and the mining of gold, silver, and copper."

Secretary of State Robert Cecil helped establish the London and Virginia Companies (the latter became known as the Plymouth Company).

No gold or silver was found, and Popham's colony ended a year after it was established in a cold winter.

III) The Merchant Prince (pp. 47-74)

Fort James was built on the easily defensible island on James River.

The Virginia Company raised £18K to pay for 9 ships and 600 settlers, who set sail from Plymouth in 1609.

In Jamestown capital crimes included murder, sodomy, rape, lese-majesty, blasphemy, and irregular church attendance (twice p.d.).

There was no private property, all was company property.

James I always wore padded doublets as protection against the assassin's knife.

In 1613, John Rolfe, who married Pocahontas, harvested the first Tobacco crop.

IV) Children of the City (pp. 75-87)

The Virginia Company wanted children as tobacco plantation workers, and to promote family life in the colony.

V) The Jagged Edge (pp. 88-97)

"Indenture" derives from *indentere* ("to cut with the teeth"), as represented in a torn contract duplicate wherein each party retained one half.

Terms of 3-11 years' servitude were normal.

VI) 'They Are Not Dogs' (pp. 98-112)

Workers had to "beat at the mortar" – pound soaked corn with a pestle to make daily bread.

Indentured servants came to be seen as mere chattel.

James I withdrew the Victoria Company charter in 1624 and substituted it with royal government.

VII) The People Trade (pp. 113-125)

Plymouth colony was setup in New England in 1620.

Thomas Morton was an Anglican minister, and denounced by Governor William Bradford: “ They set up a May-pole, drinking and dancing about it many days together, inviting the Indian women ... the beastly practices of ye mad Bacchanalians.” [p116]

A study of 5,000 indentured servants across 1670-80 found 1,300 could prove their right to freedom, 241 became landowners, and ~1,250 died in bondage. [p124]

VIII) Spirited Away (pp. 126-136)

By the late 17thC, 10,000 were being spirited away to America.

Spirits used strong-arm accomplices, and targeted the drunk, innocent and gullible into makeshift prisons before they could get them aboard a ship. It was a win-win situation since the government could rid itself of the poor and homeless.

IX) Foreigners in Their Own Land (pp. 137-154)

In the 1640s, Irish Catholics rebelled in Ulster, killing up to 100,000 Protestants. Within months, Cromwell had subdued the island including killing 3,500 at Drogheda. The Irish were to be: starved; banished to the West Indies; or transported to America.

X) Dissent in the North (pp. 155-167)

In 1638, Scottish dissenters banned all Bishops beginning the Bishops' Wars.

Catholics celebrated the first mass at Maryland in 1634.

Sir Thomas Smythe set white slavery in motion. Quaker William Penn received a warrant from Charles II for Pennsylvania.

At the Battle of Worcester in 1651, 8K Scots were captured then sent to the West Indies.

XI) The Planter From Angola (pp. 168-176)

In Virginia by the mid 17thC, 300 of 11,000 people were Africans.

Massachusetts was the first colony to legalise slavery.

Economics drove the shift from indentured time-limited white slavery to permanent black slavery.

XII) 'Barbadosed' (pp. 177-192)

Barbados was a jewel in Britain's crown.

Captain John Powell took control in James I's name in the 1620s. The plan was to make 'kill-devil' rum from sugar cane.

The first English convicts arrived 1642, a 'deferred death sentence'.

An English Mercenary: "This is the dunghill where our England doth cast forth its rubbish. Rogues and whores."

A 1684 census showed 20K whites and 46K blacks, which by 1834 was 15K and 88K respectively.

XIII) The Grandees (pp. 193-203)

XIV) Bacon's Rebellion (pp. 204-212)

Nathaniel Bacon rebelled in 1676 but he shortly died in October.

XV) Queen Anne's Golden Book (pp. 213-225)

XVI) Disunity in the Union (pp. 226-232)

In 1745, Young Pretender Charles Stuart arrived in Scotland to take up a nine-month campaign. He was defeated at Culloden.

XVII) Lost and Found (pp. 233-246)

XVIII) 'His Majesty's Seven-Year Passengers' (pp. 247-270)

Captains were paid £3 per convict head; on board they were chained in messes of six. Dysentery, smallpox, freezing, and typhoid killed one third.

In the 1720s, a healthy woman fetched £10 and a man £13.

Mainland colonies introduced a convict bond of £100 per head in order to slow the export of convicts.

Between 1718 and 1775, 15K Irish convicts were deported.

“The picture of black slaves ... at the bottom ... doe not hold. For a long time, white servants were with them at the bottom and treated with equal inhumanity ... in some cases ... worse than black ... African slaves were better treated ... because they were more valuable, a lifelong property ... Fifty percent of convict servants were dead inside seven years.” [p256-7]

Virginia Gazette, 1751: “Thou art called our Mother Country, but what good mother ever sent thieves and villains to accompany her children, to corrupt some with their infectious vices and murder the rest?” [p267]

XIX) The Last Hurrah (pp. 271-281)

In 1781, the British surrendered at Yorktown.

The 1776 Hulks Act authorised convict lodging in hulks on the River Thames.

In 1787, the First Fleet of 750 convicts set sail for Australia.