

Bound by Contract

Trace how colonial labor needs and laws changed over time.

SS.68.AA.1.3 "Examine the evolution of the labor force in the use of indentured servitude contracts."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show how an indentured servitude contract worked. Circle factors that caused the colonial labor force to change, then number the major changes in time order.

From Indentures to Enslavement

- ① In the early 1600s, English colonies needed workers to grow tobacco, build roads, and clear land. Many poor Europeans could not pay for an Atlantic crossing. An indentured servitude contract offered a trade: a merchant or planter paid the passage, and the migrant promised to work for a set number of years. Contracts often listed duties, length of service, and rules for behavior. At the end, some servants received "freedom dues," such as clothing, tools, or land. Indentured servants were not free during their terms, but their service had a legal end.
- ② During the 1600s, indentured servants made up an important part of the colonial labor force, especially in Chesapeake tobacco regions. Planters preferred this system because it brought workers from Europe without requiring them to buy a person for life. Yet it created problems for wealthy landowners. When terms ended, former servants competed for land and jobs. In 1676, Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia included many frustrated former servants. The rebellion did not instantly end indenture, but it increased elite fears about a large, landless population that had once been bound by contracts.
- ③ By the late 1600s and 1700s, the labor force changed as planters increasingly relied on enslaved Africans and their descendants. Colonial laws made racial slavery lifelong and hereditary, so children of enslaved women could also be enslaved. This system gave owners permanent control over workers, while an indenture eventually expired. More English migrants found opportunities or faced changing conditions in England, reducing the supply of willing servants. Indentured servitude continued in some places, but it became less central in plantation colonies. The change was not inevitable: laws, profits, racism, and decisions by leaders shaped it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What exchange did an indentured servitude contract establish between a migrant and a merchant or planter?

2 Why did wealthy landowners see a problem when indentured servants finished their contracts?

3 State two differences between indentured servitude and racial slavery described in the passage.

4 Explain two reasons planters increasingly relied on enslaved labor in the late 1600s and 1700s.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a three-sentence historical explanation of how and why the colonial labor force changed. Include one detail about early indentured servitude, one problem or turning point, and one reason enslaved labor became more central.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that show how an indentured servitude contract worked. Circle factors that caused the colonial labor force to change, then number the major changes in time order. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What exchange did an indentured servitude contract establish between a migrant and a merchant or planter?	The merchant or planter paid for the migrant's passage, and the migrant agreed to work for a set number of years.
2	Why did wealthy landowners see a problem when indentured servants finished their contracts?	Former servants competed for land and jobs. Landowners also feared a large, landless population, especially after Bacon's Rebellion.
3	State two differences between indentured servitude and racial slavery described in the passage.	Indentured service lasted for a set term and had a legal end. Racial slavery was lifelong and hereditary.
4	Explain two reasons planters increasingly relied on enslaved labor in the late 1600s and 1700s.	Colonial laws made slavery lifelong and hereditary, giving owners permanent control over workers. Also, indentures expired and the supply of willing English servants decreased.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In the early colonies, indenture supplied European workers because planters paid for passages in return for several years of labor. As contracts ended, former servants competed for land and jobs, and Bacon's Rebellion heightened elite fears. Planters increasingly chose racial slavery because colonial laws made it lifelong and hereditary, giving owners permanent control.

Accept equivalent explanations that accurately connect the temporary nature of indentures, the concerns created when terms ended, and the expansion of lifelong hereditary racial slavery. Students should identify causes of change, not claim that indentured servitude disappeared completely.