

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: FELONIOUS WOMEN & FAMILIAL BONDS: CONVICT  
TRANSPORTATION TO THE MARYLAND COLONY

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This study examines the state sponsored penal transportation of early eighteenth-century British women, from prison incarceration and judicial conviction to forced emigration to the Maryland colony. Sold as chattel for seven to fourteen years, convict women navigated colonial spaces in hitherto unexamined ways. In this study, gender, race, and class are employed as primary tools of analysis in order to more fully understand these forgotten historical actors.

Of the more than 50,000 convicts transported to America from 1718 to 1783, approximately 80% debarked in the Chesapeake and approximately 30% were women. The creation of a dataset consisting of 968 women transported to Maryland between 1718 and 1739 helped to facilitate this in-depth study. Data was collected through the examination of eighteenth-century primary source documents, including court transcriptions, prison records, shipping manifests, colonial port records, and merchant correspondence.

Focusing on women and privileging their experiences as valid sites of knowledge creation reveals a more nuanced understanding of convict transportation. Far from being monochromatic subjects, convict women led complex lives before becoming ensnared by an inhumane judicial

process. A study of their familial relationships in Britain shows clearly that many were married, separated, or widowed. Many were mothers of living children, and/or provided support for parents and siblings. Consequently, their abrupt removal had a rippling effect on their communities. In Maryland, their lives were complicated by numerous restrictions imposed upon their physical bodies. Some women escaped by running away, while others formed intimate relationships with male laborers and gave birth to illegitimate children. Deviations from colonial social norms earned substantial and severe punishments, consequently the service periods of rebellious convict women often extended well beyond their original bond terms.

This study treats convicted transported women as experientially separate from all other colonial immigrant labor groups, even as they inhabited the same social, legal, and economic landscapes as other laborers and colonists. The category “convict” has been traditionally studied as stereotypically male, or was either absent from colonial historiography altogether, or incorrectly subsumed within the category of indentured servant. In this study, transported convicts are more correctly termed “convict bondservants,” a distinct category which identifies individuals who were forcibly relocated to the colonies and forcibly sold as chattel laborers for seven to fourteen years, without formal indenture agreements or the legal rights and protections afforded to indentured servants.