**INDENTURED SERVITUDE IN NORTH AMERICA**

Directions: Read **Why Did They Come?** and the case studies. After reading the case studies, identify some potential costs and benefits associated with the decision to become an indentured servant.

**Why Did They Come?**

Workers were scarce in both England and North America.Workers were more scarce in the colonies,however. How could people sell their labor where it would have the greatest value? The indentured servant market arose to solve this problem. Immigrants to the North American colonies were often people who could not afford passage. Many came as indentured servants. They signed contracts that provided them passage in exchange for their promise to work for an employer in North America.

The risks were great. Conditions on the voyage were often difficult. Sickness and death were common. Sometimes, people lacked complete information about what life was really like in North America. Yet many people chose to go. Why?

In order to discover why people chose to become indentured servants, you will examine some information about the people themselves.

**Case Studies**

Patrick McHugh believed there was little for him to do in Ormskirk, England. He had lost his farm. His only work was intermittent farm work lasting a few weeks at one time. He had no money. His parents were aged and poor. One market day in the village, he heard men talking about opportunities to work in a tobacco-growing colony. The work was difficult — clearing land.

The indenture would last for four years.

*What were the costs?*

*What were the benefits?*

William Heaton felt he had been cheated out of his share of the family estate. His father had been a merchant of moderate means living in Southport, England. William’s father had died. His mother, who remarried a man of less wealth, moved to Liverpool. Having little money left, William’s mother gave him 12 shillings and told him that was all she could do for him. He set out for London and soon spent nearly all his money. In the spring of 1725, he stood outside the Royal Exchange and read the notices about opportunities in America. In a few minutes he was approached by a man who offered to buy him a mug of beer while they discussed signing a contract to go to work in Philadelphia. The agent thought that a man of William’s background should be able to sign on with an artisan — perhaps a watchmaker.

*What were the costs?*

*What were the benefits?*

Mary Morgan lived in a small village outside of Norwich, a town east of London. Not much is known about her. She was an orphan. Her uncle, a farmer, took care of her until she reached age 14. She knew she had always been a burden for the family of eight children. There were few young men in the village, and she had no prospects for marriage. One day, while walking in Norwich’s town center, she was told by an agent of a shipowner about a Puritan family in Massachusetts that wanted an indentured servant to sew, spin, knit and do other household chores. Room and board were to be provided for five years, at which point she would be released from the contract.

*What were the costs?*

*What were the benefits?*

Tom Holyfield was a thief. His life began well enough. He grew up on a farm outside Blackpool, England. As the youngest male in the family, Tom stood no chance to inherit the farm. He was apprenticed at age 13 to a cooper — a maker of barrels. He worked for room and board on the promise that he would be trained as a cooper. But Tom grew impatient and fell in with a gang of thieves. It wasn’t long before he and his friends were caught. Found guilty of a felony, Tom could be hanged — or he could accept a contract to work in the tobacco-growing colonies.

*What were the costs?*

*What were the benefits?*

In 1750, Christian Mueller was a teacher and an organist by trade. He had read pamphlets about America. Pennsylvania was described as a land of opportunity: “He who goes there as a servant, becomes a lord; as a maid becomes a gracious lady; as a peasant, a nobleman; as a commoner, as a craftsman, a baron.” Christian left his wife and child, traveled down the Rhine River, and signed on board a ship headed for America. The agent agreed to pay for his passage and promised that his skills would be welcomed in North America. Christian planned to send for his family after his four-year indenture.

*What were the costs?*

*What were the benefits?*