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Sir William Berkeley's *Discourse and View of Virginia*: A Note on Its Authorship

Warren M. Billings

Sir William Berkeley (1605–1677), long-time governor of Virginia is known to history mainly for his part in Bacon's Rebellion, an episode that forever stained an otherwise noteworthy reputation. Of a West Country family, he took degrees at the University of Oxford before making a tour of the Continent and finding a place at the court of Charles I. He remained a courtier until lack of advancement led him to seek a fresh start somewhere else, and he used his connections to win appointment as governor of Virginia in 1641. Save for the eight years of the Interregnum (1652–1660), he was Virginia's leading politician and planter throughout the three decades he lived in the colony. Foremost among his landholdings was Green Spring plantation, the site of his private residence. Eventually he turned the house into the largest of early Anglo-American stately mansions, whereas he used the acreage to conduct numerous agricultural trials as he searched for marketable substitutes for tobacco. Twice married, his second wife was the redoubtable Frances Culpeper Stephens Berkeley (1635–1695?), who dominated his last years as governor. Disagreements between the aging Berkeley and Nathaniel Bacon, his cousin by marriage, over Indian policy ripened into Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, which ruined him politically. He returned to England in 1677 to defend himself and died in disgrace far from the place he called home. More Virginian than cavalier, his like as governor would not be seen in the Old Dominion ever again.¹

A gifted man, deeply inclined to the betterment of his adopted homeland, Berkeley devoted much of his life there to diversifying its economy. He successfully produced various exotic staples—silk, potash, wine, rice, flax, dye stuffs, cit-

rus fruits—as substitutes for tobacco, and he pushed his fellow Virginians to emulate him. Likewise, he sought the backing of the crown, and at the behest of the General Assembly, he

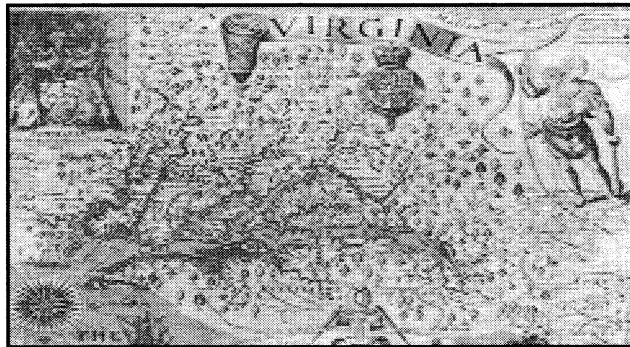
returned to England in 1661 to lobby for his schemes. While in London, he wrote *A Discourse and View of Virginia*, which is one of his few surviving printed works.²

The *Discourse* is an elegantly crafted brief. It distills ideas that Berkeley derived from a lifetime of study as well as from his practical experience of agricultural experimentation at Green Spring. Cast in a rhetorical tone

reminiscent of his play-writing days at court during the 1630s, he aimed the *Discourse* at Charles II and his advisers. He expected them to accept his theories and to sanction his schemes for transforming the colony's economy. The pamphlet achieved its desired effect, at least to the extent that the crown paid lip service to his arguments when it prepared Berkeley's instructions of 12 September 1662. Accordingly, the document stands as one of the governor's significant policy statements.³

Although Berkeley drafted the *Discourse* in England, the assignment of an exact date for when he composed it presents a small riddle. As is true of other conundrums that crop up among Berkeley's extant papers, a solution to this particular puzzle is hampered by severely limited evidence. This much seems indisputable, however. Two queries from the Council for Foreign Plantations, an advisory panel to the king that included Sir William, inspired the governor to take up his pen in support of his cause.⁴

The first interrogatory took form in a circular letter of enquiry, which the council posted to all colonial governors-general on 18 February 1660/61. Berkeley's copy sought specific information about Virginia that might aid the council in formulating colonial policies. It reached Berkeley that June, just as he was about to sail for England, and it went unanswered. He received a second quizzing shortly after his arrival in London. On 5 August 1661, he attended his first meeting of the Council for Foreign Plantations. Much of the



Map of Virginia, 1624

Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C.

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day's session concerned Virginia, with the result that his colleagues asked him "to bring in to [them] on this day fortnight in writing [an] Accompt of Virginia . . . in relation to the severall Paragraphs" of the February letter.⁵

There is no record that Berkeley presented such an "Accompt" when the council reconvened on the nineteenth of August. Minutes from subsequent meetings are also silent, which eliminated those proceedings as a potential source of clues. Berkeley's remaining correspondence also proves useless because it contains neither letters nor ancillary papers that might furnish telltale hints. His drafts of the *Discourse* are gone too, as is his finished holographic version. All of which means that determining a probable time of authorship must derive solely from the three extant witnesses to the *Discourse*—a seventeenth-century manuscript, a seventeenth-century printing, and a twentieth-century facsimile.

As for the manuscript, it belongs to the British Library and now resides among the Egerton collection of papers that relate to the colonies.⁶ Significantly, Thomas Povey once owned those documents. Povey (fl. 1650s–1670s), like Berkeley, was a member of the Council for Foreign Plantations as well as a prime advocate of the crown's evolving commercial system. He served the parliamentary regime in a variety of capacities during the Interregnum before he became treasurer for the household of James, duke of York, in 1660. Highly regarded as an authority on colonial matters, he had a hand in the creation of the navigation system. One of his daughters later married Giles Bland, who became an enemy of Berkeley's and a leader in Bacon's Rebellion.⁷

That Povey possessed the manuscript establishes it as being contemporaneous to the period when Berkeley was in England. Its physical characteristics are also instructive. Done in a graceful scribal hand, the text is written on eleven leaves of substantial, high quality white paper. Margins ruled in red ink bound the wording. Sitting above the text on leaf 1 is the title, in large letters, which reads "A DISCOURSE/ And View of./ Virginia." The majuscules "A" and "D" are generously decorated with oval swirls and other ornamental flourishes. A similar treatment is accorded the "B" in the word "Before" of the opening sentence and the "F" in "Finis." on the final leaf.⁸

Overall, the look of the entire manuscript is that of a careful, superior workmanship. That attribute suggests three possibilities. Berkeley had the manuscript prepared as a record copy for the Council for Foreign Plantations, he intended it as a souvenir for Povey, or it was the source text for the printed pamphlet.

Witnesses to that printing are exceedingly rare. Only seven have been located. Two are in England, at the British Library and the Library of Christ Church College, Oxford,

while Trinity College Library in Dublin holds another. The remaining four are in the United States. One belongs to the John Work Garrett Collection in the Milton S. Eisenhower Library at the Johns Hopkins University, another is at Princeton University, the Huntington Library owns the third, and the Virginia Historical Society holds the fourth. Small quartos, all seven are encased in bindings that date later than the seventeenth century. Each pamphlet is printed on half a dozen leaves of paper, for a total of twelve pages of text. The title sits just beneath the page number "(1)." and says "A/ DISCOURSE/ And View of/ VIRGINIA.," and it is set in large type. A factotum circumscribes the "B" in "Before" in the opening sentence. It is ornamented with a combination of fleur-de-lis, thistles, and flemish scrolls. There are no publication data nor any attributions as to author or printer.⁹

Marginal notes on the manuscript and two of the pamphlets, those at the British Library and the Garrett Collection, establish early 1662 as the probable time of printing. Written across the upper left corner of the first leaf of the manuscript is the statement, "Treatise of Sr. Wm. Berkley in Print 1662." A notation "By the famous Sir William Berckley 1662" appears under the word "VIRGINIA" on page 1 of the British Library printed witness. The identity of the authors of those remarks and the time of their writing are not known. That uncertainty raises questions about the authenticity of the messages. However, their validity gains credence from an inscription on the Garrett Collection copy, which states, "Given me by Sr. Wm. Berkeley Gov [of] Virginia Febr. 5. 1661 [i.e., 1662]. Anglesey."¹⁰

"Anglesey" was Arthur Annesley (1614–1686), 1st earl of Anglesey, a member of both the Privy Council and the Council for Foreign Plantations. His signature and his inscription in one of the pamphlets establishes for a certainty that the *Discourse* existed in print no later than 5 February 1661/62. Anglesey's written testimony is significant for another reason. It argues that Berkeley directed the *Discourse* at a limited readership. His audience consisted of the architects of Stuart colonial policy, the councilors for foreign plantations, the councilors for trade, the privy councilors and the king, not the literate British public at large. That being so, the conclusion that Berkeley ordered just enough copies, plus a few extras, to distribute to those individuals and a few others seems self-evident.

Collectively these data are insufficient to relate the moment of Berkeley's authorship to a precise month, let alone a specific week or day. Nevertheless, they mark the outer boundaries of when Sir William most likely committed his arguments to paper and brought them to print. Accordingly, he composed the *Discourse* after 19 August 1661, and he gave a handwritten version to a printer before 5 February 1661/62.

The question arises as to whether the Povey manuscript was the printer's source text. Although the evidence is far from overwhelming, the possibility cannot be dismissed entirely out of hand. For one thing, the marginal notation on leaf 1, "Treatise of Sr. Wm. Berkley in Print 1662" is in a mid-seventeenth-century hand, which points to the manuscript's likely precedence over the printed pamphlet. For another, a comparison of the printer's adornments of the title and the words "Before" and "Finis" with their manuscript counterparts is suggestive. The printer's ornamentation appears to represent an attempt at replicating the scribe's embellishments. Then there are the results of a comparison between the orthography, capitalization, and punctuation in the two versions. Certain disparities are immediately evident, and they could argue against equating the two witnesses. For example, the scribe wrote "Maryland," but the printer set "Mariland." The scribe also capitalized words that the printer put in lower case, and vice versa. Sometimes the printer added commas, just as he invariably replaced the scribe's terminal colons with periods. He also italicized place and proper names, and he indented paragraphs. Significantly, though, these variations are entirely cosmetic. There is not a single instance where the printer's alterations changed either Berkeley's choice of words, word order, sentence structure, paragraphing, content, or meaning. Thus, the differences may be explained by saying that the printer modified the scribe's usages to accord with his own predilections in typesetting. In a word, then, these data lead to a circumstantial link between the Povey text and the printed pamphlet.

Narrowing the time of Berkeley's composition as being anterior to February 1662 calls into question the reliability of information contained in the twentieth-century facsimile. That reproduction was edited by Thomas R. Stewart and published in 1914 by William H. Smith, Jr.¹¹ of Norwalk, Connecticut. Bound in gray paper, it has a black-bordered title label pasted on the front board. Stewart wrote a four-page foreword as an accompaniment to Berkeley's text, which he replicated from Henry E. Huntington's original. Although the slim volume had a press run of only 250 copies, it immediately became the most numerous, and thus the most accessible, version of the *Discourse*. It is now a rarity in its own right.¹²

Stewart's editorial paraphernalia contain several prominent inaccuracies. The first of these occurs on the flyleaf where Stewart noted that "of the original of this Rare Tract, but TWO copies are known. One reposes in the British Museum, and the other is in a private library. This latter copy was purchased at public auction in March 1913, for \$5,100." In and of itself, that mistake is important because of what it says about Stewart's obvious failure to search out the

other survivors. The bibliographer Donald W. Wing first drew attention to that error half a century ago in the course of compiling the *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British North America and English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641-1700* (New York: The Index Society, 1945-51), though his warning went unheeded by early American scholars.¹³

Stewart used much of the foreword to place the *Discourse* in what he believed was its proper historical context. He suggested Berkeley "must have" written the *Discourse* while he was in England arguing against the imposition of the Navigation Acts. His main concern, however, lay in linking the *Discourse* and Berkeley to Bacon's Rebellion and to the colonists' "desire for self expression, the hardly articulate desire for liberty and freedom, from which a century later, issued the Declaration of Independence." That reading merely echoed stock interpretations of Berkeley that were current in 1914, which again reveals Stewart as not very venturesome or imaginative.¹⁴ A more jarring mistake was Stewart's inclusion of a title page. The two witnesses known to Stewart lacked such an adornment. Moreover, the title was erroneously worded to read "A/ Discourse/ And View of/ VIRGINIA/ By. SIR WILLIAM BERKELEY/ (Governor of Virginia)/ LONDON/ 1663." There is no ready explanation for any of these inventions, except to say that Stewart possessed an unusually creative turn of mind. Unfortunately no one challenged him in the past, and so his conclusions gained credence as the standard bibliographic interpretation of why and when Berkeley wrote the *Discourse*. Stewart's judgments were clearly misplaced. Henceforth, in light of findings presented in this essay, they should be disregarded. They were never credible.

Notes

1. A more detailed sketch of Berkeley's life and career is Warren M. Billings, "Sir William Berkeley" in *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, eds., John T. Kneebone, J. Jefferson Looney, Brent Tarter, and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 1998), 1:454-58.
2. The governor's efforts at refashioning the economy of the Old Dominion are set forth in Warren M. Billings, "Sir William Berkeley and the Diversification of the Virginia Economy," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 104 (1996): 433-55.
3. The instructions are in Colonial Office Papers, Series 5, volume 1354, fols. 270-78, Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, United Kingdom.
4. Circular letter from the Council for Foreign Plantations, 17 February 1660/61, C.O. 1/14, PRO; commission from Charles II, 12 December 1660, C.O. 1/14, PRO; Charles M. Andrews,

British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675, The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Sciences, ser. 26 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1908), 61-69.

5. Minutes of the Council for Foreign Plantations, 5 August 1661, C.O. 1/14, PRO.

6. The manuscript is in Egerton 2395.

7. Warren M. Billings, "Giles Bland," in *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, ed. Kneebone, et al., 2:7.

8. This description arises from notes I took when I examined the manuscript at the British Library in December 1989. Those notes are in the Berkeley Papers Project archive, which will be deposited at the Library of Virginia once the papers and the biography are in print. A photographic reproduction of the manuscript may be found on Virginia Colonial Records Project Microfilm Reel #545 (Library of Virginia, Richmond).

9. I inspected the British Library witness in December 1989 and made a series of notes about its physical appearance. Among other things, I observed that it had been rebound in 1948. Thereafter I used Donald W. Wing, comp., *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British North America and English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641-1700* (New York: The Index Society, 1945-51), 1:152, to locate four of the six others. Then I corresponded with the rare book librarians at the owning repositories, all of whom sent me de-

tailed information on their examples, including xeroxes of the first pages of each. In the course of these exchanges, I became aware of the existence of the Garrett Collection witness, and I received the same information about it from Judith Gardner-Flynt, the Garrett Librarian. My notes relative to this search, and the pertinent correspondence, are also in the Berkeley Papers Project archive. The Virginia Historical Society acquired its copy some years ago, and I looked at it on one of my trips to Richmond, but it had no identifying marks on it.

10. Judith Gardner-Flint to Warren M. Billings, 3 and 14 August 1990, Berkeley Papers Project archive.

11. Smith (d. 1943) was a rare books expert and dealer who owned a shop in Norwalk from 1907 to 1921, when he removed to New York City and joined Anderson Galleries (*Norwalk Hour*, 29 November 1943, 10). I am indebted to Robert Feikema Karachuk for his assistance in tracking down these details.

12. The facts of publication, and subsequent citations, derive from my copy of the Stewart facsimile. On the source text for the facsimile see Thomas V. Lange to Warren M. Billings, 24 August 1993, Berkeley Papers Project archive.

13. Stewart, ed., *Discourse*, leaf 3; Wing, comp., *Short-Title Catalogue*, 1:152.

14. Stewart, ed., *Discourse*, Foreword; Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, *Virginia Under the Stuarts, 1607-1688* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1914), 115-16.

Springfield, Ill., Sep. 25. 1860
J. M. Brockman, Esq.
Dear Sir
Yours of the 24th inst. is
"the best man" of obtaining a thor-
ough knowledge of the law is an
common. The mode is very simple,
"though laborious, and tedious" - it
is only to get the books, and
read, and study them carefully.
Began with Blackstone's Comment-
aries, and after reading it care-
fully, though say three, later
up Gray's Pleas in Equity, Greenleaf's
Treatise, & Story's Equity, to an
succession - Work, work, work,
to the man, Ahoy -
Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

Autograph Letter Signed
Abraham Lincoln to J.M. Brockman
25 September 1860

Image courtesy of the Henry Horner Lincoln
Collection, Illinois State Historical Library,
Springfield, Illinois