

Individual Rights and Accusations: Defamation Complaint Against Mary Jennings, 1691

Transcription

Albemarle ss. W[illia]m Wilkis[on] Comepla[n]ing Ag[ains]t William Jennings &

Mary his now wife in an Action of the Cases th[a]t the s[ai]d Mary did

at severall time but more especial in the hearing of severall

p[e]rsons since Septemb[er] last maliciously utter speak & declare

these words or words to the same sense & purport th[a]t the s[ai]d Wilkison

murthereed A woman s[e]r[van]t of Mr. Nehemiah Blackstons of St.

maryes County in maryland & th[a]t the s[ai]d Blackston had sold her

life for two thousand pound of tob[acco] & th[a]t she could hang the s[ai]d

Wilkison w[i]th three wordes speakeing all w[hi]ch words w[i]th many

more she hath speake tends to the defaming and slandering

of the s[ai]d Wilkison in severalls wayes kinds & Respects both in

his way of dealings & other his pr[e]ferm[en]ts w[hi]ch in this County &

other parts of the world as shall be further made apeare in

court for all w[hi]ch the plant[iff] saith he is damnified in his

reputation to the value of five hundred ^pounds ster[lin]g^ thereupoon he bring-

eth this action & Craves Judgm[en]t for his s[ai]d damages w[i]th coost

& he shall pray.

decemb[er] the 23th [16]91 W[illia]m Wilkison

Reflect & Discuss

William Wilkison's disagreement is with Mary, but both Mary and her husband William Jennings are included in this complaint. Why?

Consider why the name of Nehemiah Blackston's servant is not mentioned.

According to Mary, after Wilkison killed the servant, Blackston sold the servants' "life for 2,000 pound of tobacco." What does this mean, and what can it tell us about a servant's status during this time period?

William Wilkison was a member of the colonial governor's council. How could his position have affect the case against the Jennings?

Curious how this case played out? A later document states that "wee finde for the plantif one hundred pounds damages with costs of sute."