6

Virginia

1570–1650

Pocahontas intercedes to save Captain John Smith from execution within the council house of her father, the paramount chief Powhatan, who looms large in the right background. Pocahontas probably played a scripted part in an adoption ceremony that Smith misunderstood. From John Smith, Generall Historie of Virginia *(London, 1624).*

DURING THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, Spanish and French mariners explored the long coast north of Florida and south of Acadia (Nova Scotia) but deemed the temperate region of little value for colonies: too cool for tropical crops but too warm for the best furs. Foiled in Florida during the 1560s, the French thereafter kept to the north, exploiting the fish and furs of Acadia and Canada. After retaking Florida, the Spanish established undermanned missions as far north as Chesapeake Bay (in present Virginia), but native resistance compelled their retreat in 1572. Thereafter, the Spanish concluded that Florida adequately protected the precious heartland of their empire to the south in Mexico and the Caribbean.

Neglected by the Spanish and French, the mid-Atlantic seaboard remained open to English colonization during the 1580s. Previously, English mariners had explored the frigid waters and barren coasts north of Labrador, in a vain search for gold and the Northwest Passage to China. More successfully, fishermen from southwestern England seasonally exploited the abundant cod in the waters around Newfoundland. But English leaders considered Newfoundland too cold and barren for year-round inhabitation by colonists. Moreover, during the mid-sixteenth century, the English were preoccupied with the conquest and colonization of Ireland.

Later in the century, success in Ireland emboldened English leaders to extend their colonial ambitions across the Atlantic to the region they called Virginia, named in honor of their queen, Elizabeth I, a supposed virgin. Between 1580 and 1620 the English applied the name to the entire mid-Atlantic coast between Florida and Acadia. Initially, the English colonizers pursued get-rich-quick schemes: a search for gold mines on land and for Spanish treasure ships by sea. When those schemes proved expensive and deadly failures, the colonizers gradually turned to the slower and more laborious development of plantations. In 1616, the colonists belatedly discovered their prime commodity in tobacco, which permitted an explosive growth in population, territory, and wealth. That expansion escalated to a crisis of confrontation between the English colonists and the Algonquian Indians, who defended their lands and culture against the intruders.

PROMOTERS

Possessed of a relatively small and poor realm, the English queen lacked the means to finance and govern an overseas colony, especially after a full-scale war erupted with Spain in 1585. Obliged to play defense in the nearby Netherlands and English Channel, the English crown lacked the men and ships for risky ventures far from home. Instead, following French and Spanish precedent, the crown subcontracted colonization by issuing licenses and monopolies to private adventurers, who assumed the risks in speculative pursuit of profits.

Because sober merchants wisely sought safer investments in trade routes closer to home, the earliest English colonial promoters were dreamers and gamblers driven by their visionary imagination. The prime movers were politically well-connected gentlemen from the southwestern counties of England, where ambitious people looked westward toward Ireland and beyond for opportunities. Known as the "West Country men," the promoters included Sir Francis Drake, Sir Richard Grenville, Sir John Hawkins, Sir Walter Ralegh, and Sir Humphrey Gilbert. In London, they retained as publicists two cousins both named Richard Hakluyt, the elder a prominent lawyer and the younger a clergyman.

Zealous English patriots and devout Protestants, the West Country men yearned to advance their fortunes and consolidate their political influence at the royal court. In addition to leading the English conquest of Ireland, the West Country men designed the English assault on the Spanish empire, for they regarded colonial trade as the key to imperial power. Ralegh preached, "That hee that commaunds the sea, commaunds the trade, and hee that is Lord of the Trade of the world is lord of the wealth of the worlde." The elder Hakluyt succinctly summarized their goals: "1. To plant Christian religion. 2. To trafficke. 3. To conquer."

In wooing investors and the crown, the West Country promoters also addressed a pervasive anxiety over the proliferation of poverty, vagrancy, and crime in sixteenth-century England. They pitched a radical program of overseas colonization by appealing to a conservative fear that the hierarchical society of England was eroding. In their view, England needed to expand outward lest it collapse from within.

Sixteenth-century England concentrated wealth and power at the narrow top of the steep social pyramid, in the hands of a monarch, an aristocracy, and a lesser aristocracy known as the gentry. Less than 5 percent of the population, the elite displayed their wealth and power in elaborate city palaces, great country estates, silk clothing, gilded carriages, and numerous servants. Below them on the social scale lived the common people, about 95 percent of the population. A diverse lot, those with some property ranged from a few wealthy urban merchants to the far more numerous "middling sort of people": a mix of farmers, artisans, and shopkeepers. But most commoners lacked property and belonged to "the lower sort": a combination of the working poor (rural peasants and urban laborers) and beggars without work. In years of reduced trade and poor harvests, displaced peasants and unemployed laborers swelled the ranks of the starving. Claiming a monopoly on honor and power, the elite with great property ruled the majority with little or none. In 1565, Sir Thomas Smith noted the obvious: "Day labourers have no voice nor authority in our commonwealth, and no account is made of them but only to be ruled."

The executive power belonged to the monarch, ordinarily a king, but sometimes, for want of a male heir, a queen, as in the late sixteenth century.

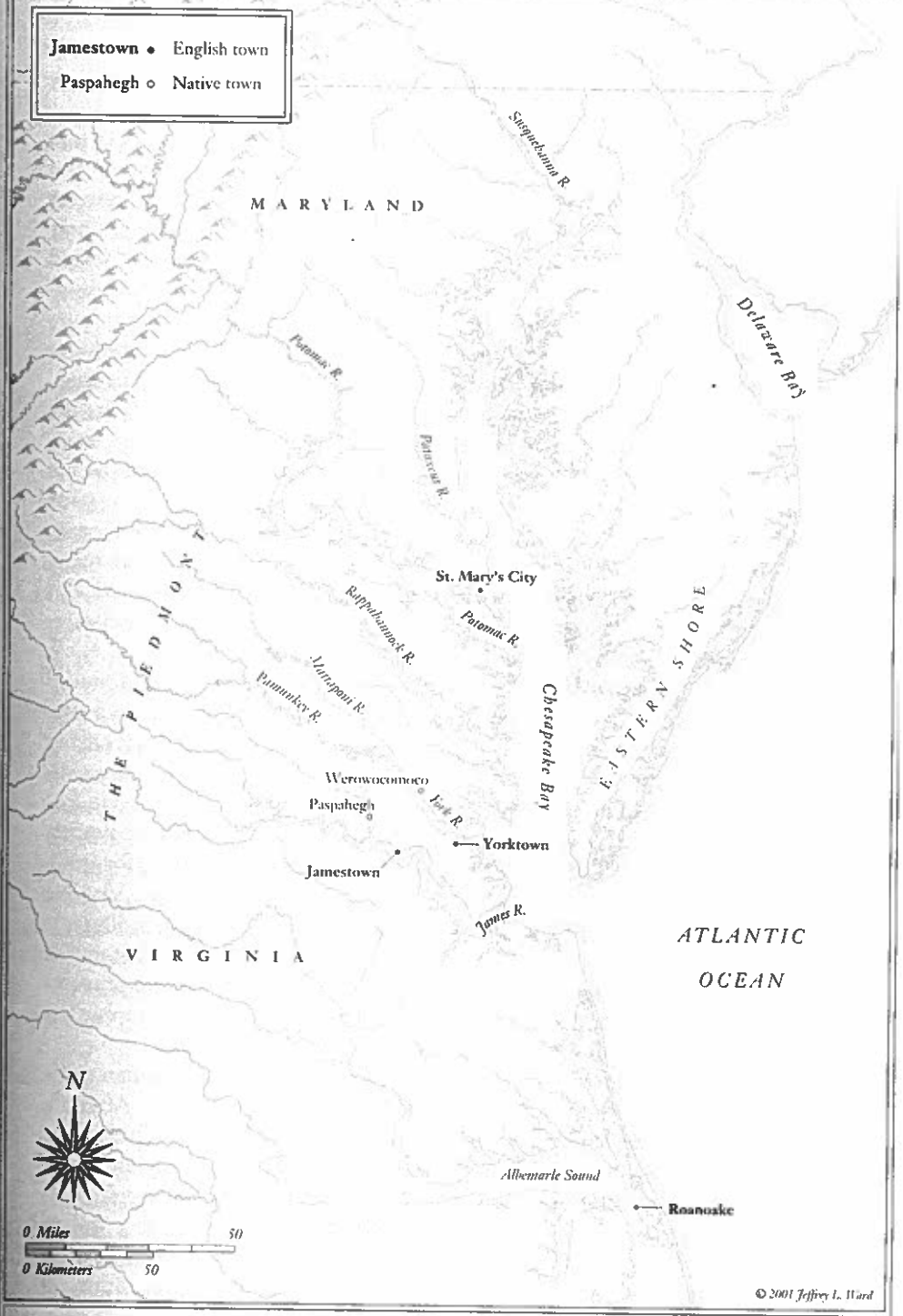
The realm included the distinct kingdoms of England, Wales, and Ireland and, after 1603, Scotland as well. As the wealthiest and most populous kingdom, England dominated the whole, from the capital in London. Unlike the authoritarian kings of France and Spain, Queen Elizabeth had to share national power with the aristocracy and gentry, who composed the bicameral national legislature known as Parliament. By birthright, the aristocracy filled the House of Lords, while the gentry dominated the House of Commons by winning elections to represent an electorate of the middling sort of men. Only about 25 percent of the adult men owned enough property to qualify for the vote—and only for one house of Parliament. Of course, the structure of power also disenfranchised all women. Although a narrow system of government by our standards, the English constitution was extraordinarily open and libertarian when compared with the absolute monarchies then developing in the rest of Europe. Consequently, it mattered greatly to the later political culture of the United States that England, rather than Spain or France, eventually dominated colonization north of Florida.

During the later sixteenth century, the English "lower sort" grew in number and deteriorated in circumstances. Economic growth failed to keep pace with a population that surged from about three million in 1500 to four million in 1600 and five million by 1650. At the same time, the kingdom's leading manufacturing sector, the cloth trade, stagnated as English makers lost market share on the European continent. In 1618, Robert Reyce remarked, "Where the clothiers do dwell or have dwelt, there are found the greatest number of the poor."

Most English folk, perhaps 80 percent, lived in country villages and tended livestock or cultivated grains. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the rural people suffered increasing displacement and unemployment as their aristocratic landlords adopted a program known as enclosure. Meant to increase profits by rationalizing estates, enclosure fenced in large tracts of land and fenced out most of their former inhabitants. On enclosed estates, flocks of sheep, teams of hired laborers, and a few tenants replaced a larger number of peasant smallholders. The landlords also enclosed common lands formerly used by the peasants to pasture livestock and to gather fuel, herbs, roots, fish, and rabbits. In the long term, the enclosure movement increased agricultural productivity and national wealth. In the short term, enclosure rendered redundant, homeless, and miserable thousands of peasants and laborers. Probably about half the rural peasantry lost their lands between 1530 and 1630.

Known as "sturdy beggars" (to distinguish them from the traditional sort of paupers crippled by some injury or ailment), the evicted and unemployed joined the swelling ranks of vagrants who roamed the land in search of work and charity. As a last resort, they stole, which brought growing numbers to the gallows, for theft was a capital crime. The new poor gravitated from the rural villages to the market towns and seaport cities, especially London,

— THE CHESAPEAKE, C. 1640 —



which grew from 120,000 people in 1550 to 200,000 in 1600 and 375,000 in 1650. A sprawling and frightening metropolis, London became notorious for filth, poverty, plagues, fires, crime, and executions. A city of extremes, London also hosted an expanding commerce manifest on the riverside docks, as well as displays of aristocratic splendor and power at the royal court.

The growing numbers of unemployed and underemployed reduced the wages that employers had to pay. The growing population also bid up the costs of food and housing. The double squeeze cut real wages in half between 1500 and 1650, depressing the already bleak living conditions of the poor. Growing numbers depended upon public relief funded by "poor rates" levied on propertied people. Although inadequate to provide even a basic subsistence to the numerous poor, the rates seemed oppressive to taxpayers.

The increased poverty, vagrancy, and crime profoundly alarmed the propertied, who dreaded an imminent collapse into violent anarchy. The middling sort especially felt aggrieved by both the increased thefts and the tax burden of assisting the poor. Indeed, the regressive system of taxation especially pinched those most fearful of falling themselves into the desperate ranks of the beggars. Dreading upheaval, the propertied longed for a stable society in which everyone had a master to direct labor and supervise morals. Acting on that longing, Parliament authorized local authorities to whip, brand, and even hang vagrants who returned where they were unwanted. But ousting vagrants and executing thieves did little to ease the sources of discontent and anxiety.

Addressing propertied Englishmen, the colonial promoters announced that they had an easy solution for England's social woes: exported to a new colony in Virginia, the idle and larcenous poor could be put to work raising commodities for transport to, and sale in, England. By producing commodities that could not be raised at home, colonial plantations could improve England's balance of trade with other nations. For want of their own colonies, the English depended upon the Spanish and Portuguese empires for gold, silver, and high-value tropical produce, including sugar and dyes. Virginia plantations promised to improve the nation's terms of trade by providing import substitutes. Moreover, as a new market for English manufactures, a colony promised relief to the depressed cloth industry. In sum, the promoters offered a neat package that would simultaneously control and employ the poor while generating new wealth and power for the realm.

But the West Country promoters also had to allay fears that Indian resistance would frustrate the colonial ventures, ruining their investors. After all, in 1571 an Indian uprising had destroyed the Spanish mission at Chesapeake Bay. Dwelling upon the Black Legend that the Spanish were uniquely brutal colonizers, the promoters insisted that the Indians of Virginia would welcome the English as their liberators. The promoters promised to woo Indian submission by applying the "faire and loving meanes suting to our English Natures." The colonists would offer "to cover their naked miserie, with civill

use of foode, and cloathing, and to traine them by gentle meanes, to those manuall artes and skill, which they so much affect, and doe admire to see in us." The promoters could not conceive that the native peoples might prefer no colonial masters and no new system of labor. Satisfied with their own ways, the Indians wished little change, except to procure by trade the metals and cloths of the Europeans.

The sixteenth-century conquest of Ireland contradicted the English pretensions to "faire and loving meanes" as colonizers. Indeed, the illusions of the English lowered their threshold for brutal violence when frustrated. Convinced of their own benign intentions and superior civilization, the English regarded Irish resistance as rank ingratitude by stubborn barbarians. One West Country leader concluded that "nothing but fear and force can teach duty and obedience to such rebellious people." Treating the Irish as treacherous beasts, the English waged a war of terror and intimidation, executing prisoners by the hundred, including women and children. The English commander Sir Humphrey Gilbert decorated the path leading to his tent with human heads. His publicist boasted that the scene brought "greate terrour to the people when they saw the heads of their dead fathers, brothers, children, kinsfolke, and friends, lye on the grounde before their faces, as they came to speak with the colonel." Dispossessing many of the Irish, the victors obtained great estates that they colonized with Protestant settlers from England and Scotland.

Contrary to the Black Legend, the English treated the Irish no better than the Spanish treated the Guanche, and they offered no prospect of fairer play for the Indians of Virginia. Indeed, the conquest and colonization of Ireland served as the English school for overseas empire, the English equivalent of the Spanish invasion of the Canaries. In Ireland, the English developed both the techniques and the rhetoric of colonial conquest. In Ireland, the English learned to consider resisting peoples as dirty, lazy, treacherous, murderous, and pagan savages, little if any better than wild animals, and to treat them accordingly. In Virginia, the English employed the same language and meted out the same treatment whenever Indians violated the initial role cast for them: grateful innocents eager to submit to their superior benefactors. Unwilling to play along, Indians faced the formidable fury of their uninvited guests.

ROANOKE

In 1585, Sir Walter Ralegh sent about one hundred colonists, all of them men, across the Atlantic to settle on Roanoke, a small island on the North Carolina coast (then part of "Virginia"). Buffered by dangerous shoals and long sandbanks, the location promised obscurity from Spanish discovery and attack, but the colonists paid a high price for this measure of security. The

shoals and sands made it difficult for English ships to land supplies or to load commodities, and the sandy, infertile soil produced scanty crops. The poor location virtually doomed Roanoke to failure.

The island's paltry potential for agriculture did not initially bother the colonists, who expected to be fed by the local Algonquian Indians. Commanded by Ralph Lane, a hardened veteran of the grim war in Ireland, the colonists behaved no better than conquistadores. Initially hospitable, the Indians ran out of patience as the English persisted through the winter, demanding ever more maize while the native supply ran perilously low. In the early spring of 1586, the local chieftain, Wingina, refused to provide any more food. In a sudden surprise attack, Lane killed Wingina and his deputy chiefs. Meant to secure maize by terrifying the survivors, Lane's atrocities instead put the Indians to flight, blighting prospects for a new crop to feed the improvident colonists. The starving colonists eagerly abandoned Roanoke later that spring, when English ships stopped by en route home from raiding the Spanish Caribbean.

Trying again in 1587, Sir Walter Ralegh and his associates dispatched a second set of colonists with a new civilian leader named John White. The ninety-four colonists included seventeen women and nine children: the first English families to settle in the Americas. Ralegh and White planned to locate the colony at Chesapeake Bay, to the north, where the land was more fertile and the natives less alienated. But the impatient mariners dumped the colonists at Roanoke before hastening on to the Caribbean to attack Spanish ships.

Seeking supplies and reinforcements, White soon returned home, where he had to linger while the struggle against the Spanish Armada preoccupied English shipping during 1588 and 1589. At last, in August 1590, White returned to Roanoke with a relief expedition to find the settlement mysteriously abandoned with no signs of attack by either the Indians or the Spanish. The lone clue was carved into a tree—the word "Croatoan," the name of a nearby island. But the fearful and impatient English mariners refused to venture through the dangerously shallow waters to Croatoan to investigate. Sailing away in pursuit of Spanish treasure ships, the mariners abandoned any surviving colonists to their still mysterious fate.

After retreating to Croatoan and failing to contact a passing ship, the surviving colonists probably headed north to Chesapeake Bay to execute their original plan. They apparently found haven in an Indian village. In 1607, when English colonists reached Chesapeake Bay, some Indians reported that white people had recently lived nearby as refugees in a native village. Unfortunately, the village had run afoul of a powerful chieftain, Powhatan, who killed all the refugees.

The English colonial promoters had insisted that the diverse attractions of colonization would all work together in perfect harmony. In fact, Roanoke demonstrated that the distracting pursuit of immediate wealth worked

against the laborious and patient development of a plantation colony. Why cultivate corn when an overland exploration might yield a gold mine or sea raiding might capture Spanish bullion? Eager to search for Spanish ships, the English mariners dumped colonists and their supplies with an indecent, wasteful haste, or they bypassed Roanoke altogether. The poor location reinforced their aversion, for mariners dreaded the shoal waters and adverse winds as a graveyard for ships and sailors. For months on end, the colonists lacked supplies from and contact with England. Naturally, they begged to be taken away on the rare occasions when ships did happen by.

POWHATAN

In 1607 the English tried again, this time at Chesapeake Bay, which offered better harbors, navigable rivers, and a more fertile land. About two hundred miles long and twenty wide, the bay was a complex system of waterways, an environmental meeting place of tidewater estuaries and freshwater rivers that abounded in fish, shellfish, edible plants, and game animals. On the western shore, four major rivers, with many tributaries, flowed from northwest to southeast into the bay, dividing the land into a series of long, fertile peninsulas. From south to north, the English called these wide, deep, and muddy rivers the James, York, Rappahannock, and Potomac. The rivers offered ready navigation about one hundred miles upstream until interrupted by waterfalls, where the coastal plain gave way to the rolling hills of the Piedmont.

The broad coastal plain sustained about 24,000 Indians divided into thirty tribes but united by an Algonquian language and the rule of a paramount chief named Powhatan. They lived by a mix of horticulture, fishing, hunting, and gathering. During the winter, the natives dwelled in many villages consisting of one to two hundred inhabitants, occupying twenty to thirty houses. In the spring, they dispersed into still smaller and scattered encampments to fish and gather shellfish and aquatic tubers from the rivers, marshes, and bay. During the summer they returned to their village to cultivate fields of beans, maize, and squashes. In the fall, they scattered again to hunt for waterfowl in the wetlands and for deer in the broad forest of immense deciduous trees, while the women and children gathered edible nuts, roots, and berries. Employing dugout canoes paddled or poled by hand, the natives exploited the river system to conduct a small-scale but long-distance trade with the Indians of the interior, exchanging maize and seashells for the freshwater pearls and copper of the hinterland.

Because this mobile way of life generated a scant surplus, the Virginia natives annually experienced lean periods, especially in the late spring and early summer after exhausting the previous year's harvest. Living close to the bone, the Indians had precious little to tide them over in case of some

unanticipated shortfall like an infestation of worms in the corn or the arrival of hungry and well-armed colonists.

The Indians' seasonal mobility discouraged the accumulation of property beyond seashell jewelry and wood and stone tools. They lived in simple but ingenious lodges constructed by placing mats and bark over an oval framework of poles set atop an earthen floor. Smoke from the central hearth escaped through a hole at the top. Quick to build and easy to take down, these lodges facilitated mobility. Expressing both admiration and discomfort, the English colonist Captain John Smith described the tight and crowded lodges as "warme as stoves, but very smoaky." Smith found none of the furniture of an English house—no tables, chairs, or chests—only raised wooden platforms for beds made of animal pelts. Neither house nor furnishings provided opportunities for the conspicuous consumption that helped determine status in England.

In contrast to the occupational specialization and class stratification in England, the Virginia Indians divided tasks almost exclusively along gender lines. Women cultivated crops, gathered nuts and fruits, and tended the village or camp, putting up the lodges and preparing the skins to make clothing. Men hunted, fished, cleared land for crops, and made dugout canoes. The only specialists were a few shamans. Set apart by their supernatural knowledge, they combined the roles of healer, conjurer, and priest. The shamans tended temples, constructed like regular houses, but substantially larger—twenty feet wide and one hundred long—and elaborately decorated with carved wooden corner posts. The temples housed the bundled bones of dead chiefs, the tribute paid to the living chief, and a wooden statue representing an especially powerful and vengeful spirit known as Okeus. Polytheistic and pragmatic, the Virginia Indians especially honored Okeus to disarm his formidable capacity to inflict harm.

Their ruler, Powhatan, led the largest and most powerful chiefdom that the English found along the Atlantic seaboard during the seventeenth century. In his sixties in 1607, Powhatan impressed the English colonists with his powerful build, dignified demeanor, and "subtle understanding." During the late sixteenth century he inherited power over six tribes, which he increased to thirty through a shrewd combination of diplomacy, intimidation, and war. This was not quite a Mississippian chiefdom, for his people built no pyramids and lived in relatively small towns, but Powhatan exercised a power of life and death over his people and received their public obeisance. From his especially large lodge in the village of Werowocomoco on the York River, Powhatan displayed a large entourage of servants, forty bodyguards, and one hundred wives, all supported from the tribute in maize and deerskins collected from the subordinated villages. A council of veteran warriors and shamans advised the paramount chief.

Unlike a nation-state, which relies upon bureaucratic institutions and a national identity to maintain obedience and collect taxes, a paramount chiefdom was an elaborate kinship network that gathered and redistributed tribute. Sometimes Powhatan retained and adopted the village chiefs he defeated and subordinated, taking their daughters as wives. Other chiefs he replaced with blood relatives: sons, brothers, and occasionally his sisters. Consequently, his polygamy united his chiefdom in two ways, by taking the wives of subordinated chiefs into his own family and by producing numerous children to direct other villages. Powhatan usually left the subordinate chiefs alone to govern their villages, as long as they paid their tribute and cooperated with his war parties. Powhatan employed the tribute to stage feasts, to sustain the shamans, to support his wives, to reward his warriors, and to trade with outsiders.

In addition to cycling tribute through his hands to dependents, Powhatan united his chiefdom by channeling outward the energy of warriors, discouraging the fighting that had previously divided the coastal tribes. Every winter Powhatan organized large-scale hunts in the Piedmont to procure deer and to provoke the hinterland peoples, Siouan-speakers known as the Monacan and Manahoac. These regular clashes unified his own warriors and distracted them from reviving old feuds between the Algonquian villages.

Lacking property to plunder, the Indians primarily fought for scalps or captives, both to boost their own honor and to degrade that of their enemies. The English captain John Smith observed, "They seldome make warre for landes or goodes, but for women and Children, and principally for revendge, so vindicative and jelous they be, to be made a derision of, and to be insulted upon by an enemy." Although chronic, Algonquian warfare killed relatively few people by English standards. The natives waged short raids intended to kill a few warriors, take some captives, and humiliate a rival, then beat a hasty retreat homeward to celebrate.

Lacking state institutions and professional armies, the Indians could not sustain protracted and distant campaigns like those of the English in Ireland. To conquer a land, Europeans fought for years and even decades, with the massacre of entire villages and cities a standard technique meant to intimidate others into surrender. In Virginia, veteran English commanders initially felt contemptuous of the Indian way of war as cowardly and ineffective. In turn, the English mode of total war introduced by the colonists shocked the Indians of Virginia as pointless and wasteful.

ENCOUNTER

Initially, the Powhatan Indians regarded the English colonists with considerable ambivalence. On the one hand, the natives were intrigued by the technology of the visitors, especially their metal tools and weapons, which were far sharper, stronger, and more durable than stone implements. Rather than fight such dangerous people, perhaps they could be turned to advantage,

co-opted as allies for use against the Monacan and Manahoac. On the other hand, the Algonquians had learned to distrust Europeans from their previous abusive visits in ships. Putting into Chesapeake Bay to procure fresh water and firewood and to trade for deerskins and maize, Spanish and English mariners sometimes kidnapped or killed natives. Apart from the metal goods and firearms, the Indians saw little in European culture that appealed to them.

The challenge confronting Powhatan and his people in 1607 was to turn the English newcomers to advantage. Instead of trying to crush the newcomers and risk heavy casualties, Powhatan hoped to contain them, subject them to his power, enlist them as subordinate allies against his own enemies, and secure through trade their metals, including weapons. Unable to predict the future, the Algonquians did not know that the initial few colonists were the opening wedge for thousands to follow, bent upon transforming the land and destroying the Indian world.

For their part, the ethnocentric English were poorly prepared to understand and accept a culture so different from their own. Coming from a more property-ridden and laborious culture, the English considered the Indians lazy and benighted. In 1612, William Simmonds lamented that in Virginia "we found only an idle, improvident, scattered people, ignorant of the knowledge of gold, or silver, or any commodities; and careless of anything but [living] from hand to mouth." Because the English expected men to cultivate crops and women to tend permanent homes, they regarded the native women as drudges and the men as lazy exploiters. Because the English encased themselves in heavy clothing, they defined as savage any people as scantily clad as the Indians. Because the English worshiped a single omnipotent God, they disdained the native pantheism as paganism at best and devil-worship at worst.

The colonial leaders also suspected that their own laborers hated civilized discipline and longed to run away to join the Indians to live in greater ease and equality. Experienced in the Irish conquest, the colonial promoter Sir William Herbert warned:

> Colonies degenerate assuredly when the colonists imitate and embrace the habits, customs, and practices of the natives. There is no better way to remedy this evil than to do away with and destroy completely the habits and practices of the natives.

The colonizers felt obliged to subvert the native culture and transform the Indians into lower-sort English men and women—lest the lower-sort colonists turn Indian and turn against the colony.

Initially, the colonists sought not to exterminate the Indians but, instead, to assimilate them as menials. In 1612 the secretary for the Virginia colony explained that the proper Indian policy was "by degrees [to] chaung their barbarous natures, make them ashamed the sooner of their savadge nakednes, informe them of the true god, and of the waie to their salvation, and fynally teach them obedience to the king's Majestie and to his Governours in those parts." But the Algonquians recoiled in horror at the prospect of adopting a European way of life that would obligate their men to forsake war and, instead, adopt the female role of agricultural laborer.

Unlike the Spanish in Florida and the French in Canada, the English sent no missionaries to convert the Indians of Virginia. More thoroughly commercial, the English meant to Christianize the Indians by first absorbing them as economic subordinates. Indian laborers could then be indoctrinated in Protestant Christianity by the regular church services of the colonists. In 1619, Virginia promoters concisely bundled their motives as "to settle and plant our men and diverse other inhabitants there, to the honour of Almighty God, the enlarging of Christian religion, and to the augmentation and revenue of the general plantation in that country, and the particular good and profit of ourselves." English colonizers had a peculiar confidence that their economic self-interest served God.

Of course, by subordinating and converting the Indians, the Virginia promoters meant to free up most of their lands for the settlement of English plantations. In a 1609 sermon blessing the Virginia colony, the Reverend Robert Gray asked a pointed question: "The first objection is, by what right or warrant we can enter into the land of these Savages, take away their rightful inheritance from them, and plant ourselves in their places, being unwronged or unprovoked by them." He answered, to the complete satisfaction of the promoters, that savages had no right to keep any land that they did not exploit to its fullest potential. The colonizers refused to see that the Indians did occupy, use, and shape their land. Overlooking the many native villages and extensive fields of maize, Captain John Smith described Virginia as "overgrowne with trees and weedes, being a plaine wildernes as God first made it." The English insisted that God required them to improve the wilderness into productive farmland, subduing the Indians in the process.

Indeed, the English held that their changes would benefit the Indians, who had, therefore, no right to resist. A promoter predicted, "Our intrusion into their possession shall tend to their great good, and no way to their hurt, unlesse as unbridled beastes, they procure it to themselves." Indians who resisted the bridle of English rule could expect to be treated like wild and dangerous beasts. In Virginia as in Ireland, the colonial leaders sustained an overwhelming sense of cultural superiority that was impervious to the mounting evidence of their own follies in a land long mastered by the Indians.

JAMESTOWN

In 1604 a peace treaty with Spain reduced (but did not eliminate) the danger of Spanish attack on a new colony. Peace also freed up capital, shipping, and

sailors previously employed in attacking the Spanish. No longer able to invest in privateers, the great merchants and lawyers of London took a new interest in colonizing Virginia. They supplanted the West Country men (including Ralegh), who had lost their influence at the royal court, after the new king, James I, succeeded Queen Elizabeth in 1603. In 1606, London investors incorporated the Virginia Company and King James granted them a charter to colonize and govern Virginia.

In December 1606, three vessels left England for Virginia, taking the standard circle route southwest via the trade winds to the Canaries, westward to the West Indies, and then north with the Gulf Stream to Virginia. They reached Chesapeake Bay on April 26, 1607. Seeking some security from Spanish discovery and attack, the colonists ascended the broad James River about sixty miles, to establish their settlement, Jamestown, beside a marsh on the north bank. They named both river and town to flatter their new king. For further protection, the colonists surrounded their wooden shelters with a triangular stockade mounted with cannon at the corners.

The Virginia Company naively instructed the colonial leaders never to allow the Indians to see any English die, lest the natives learn that the colonists were "but common men" rather than immortals. This instruction quickly proved impossible to follow, as the colonists died in droves from disease and hunger. Of the initial 104, only 38 were alive nine months later. Despite shipping hundreds of reinforcements annually, the Virginia Company barely kept ahead of the continuing deaths at Jamestown. In December 1609 there were 220 colonists; after an especially deadly winter, only 60 remained alive by the next spring. One starving colonist killed and ate his wife, for which he was tried, convicted, and burned at the stake. In despair, the survivors abandoned Jamestown, putting off down the river in June 1610. But near the river's mouth they were intercepted by three ships from England bearing 300 new colonists, which compelled the reoccupation of Jamestown, where disease and hunger continued to kill the English by the hundreds. Between 1607 and 1622 the Virginia Company transported some 10,000 people to the colony, but only 20 percent were still alive there in 1622. An English critic belatedly remarked, "Instead of a plantacion, Virginia will shortly get the name of a slaughterhouse."

Jamestown lay beside a broad swamp, which was good for defense against Spanish or Indian attack but bad for the health of the colonists. In the hot and humid summer, the swamp bred millions of mosquitoes, carriers of malaria. In addition, the shallow wells were contaminated by brackish water, exposing the inhabitants to salt poisoning, especially during the summer when the river ran low. The stagnant river waters of summer and early fall also retained the garbage and excrement generated by the colonists, promoting the pathogenic microbes of dysentery and typhoid fever. A colonist recalled, "Our drinke [was] cold water taken out of the River, which was at floud [tide] verie salt[y], at a low tide full of slime and filth, which was the destruction of many of our men." The salt poisoning and the debilitating diseases killed many and often rendered the rest too weak and apathetic to work. Unable to cultivate enough corn in summer, they starved during the winter and spring.

Even when healthy, many colonists refused to work diligently at raising corn to feed themselves. They were an unstable and fractious mix of gentlemen-adventurers in command and poor vagrants rounded up from the streets of London and forcibly sent to Virginia. Neither group had much prior experience with work. In England, birth and wealth had screened the gentlemen from manual labor, while the vagrants, for want of employment, had learned to survive by begging and stealing. The president of the Virginia Company complained of the settlers: "A more damned crew hell never vomited." Unfamiliar with the new territory, they all lacked the Indians' skills at fishing, hunting, and raising maize.

For a time in 1608–9, Captain John Smith commanded the colony and forced the colonists to work six hours a day in the fields. For this he reaped bitter complaints and was hounded from the colony, never to return. It is no coincidence that the great starving winter followed his departure in October 1609. When a new governor arrived in May 1611, he was shocked to find that the colonists again had neglected to plant sufficient crops. Instead, he found them at "their daily and usuall workes, bowling in the streetes."

Rather than cultivate corn, the first colonists preferred to search for precious metals, in emulation of the Spanish conquistadores. Over Captain Smith's protests, the colonists greedily gathered the local mica, persuaded that it was an ore rich in gold. Smith marveled, "There was no talke, no hope, nor worke, but dig gold, wash gold, [and] refine gold." For a time, the colonists worked hard to load a ship with the mica of their golden dreams, which proved worthless upon arrival and examination in England. Arriving with alluring misconceptions of a rich and easy land, the colonists experienced the hard realities as a demoralizing shock from which many never recovered.

VIOLENCE

Preferring to explore for gold, the colonists expected the Indians to feed them. After all, the promoters had promised that the natives would welcome the English with generosity and submission. And what was the purpose of being civilized Christians with superior arms and armor if not to command the weaker heathen peoples of new lands? The colonists did not understand that the local Indians had scant surplus to spare, raising little more than they needed every year. If pressed too hard for food, the Indians lashed out. When seventeen colonists imposed themselves on one village, the natives killed

them, stuffed their dead mouths with maize as a sign of contempt, and left the corpses for their countrymen to discover.

Noting the Spanish success at conquering Indians by capturing their paramount chiefs, the English hoped to trick and seize Powhatan, but he shrewdly declined their invitations to visit Jamestown. Instead of capturing Powhatan, Captain John Smith became his captive after stumbling into an ambush in the woods. Powhatan seized the opportunity ritually to adopt Smith as a subordinate chief. Staged as a mock execution interrupted by Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, the ritual was supposed to render Smith's people tributary. Powhatan misunderstood Smith's gratitude at survival for consent to his terms, and Smith misunderstood the ritual as no more than an execution stopped by Powhatan's chivalrous daughter. Upon his release and return to Jamestown, the obtuse captain resumed bullying the Indians to obtain corn.

Pursuing a policy of containment rather than total war, Powhatan relied upon the tribe closest to Jamestown, the Paspahegh, to observe and harass the colonists. The strategy was more deadly than Powhatan had anticipated, for it kept the colonists in disease-ridden Jamestown and away from healthier and more fertile places at a distance. Meanwhile, Powhatan continued to trade with Jamestown, disingenuously disavowing the attacks as the work of a few malcontents beyond his control.

Frustrated, the English made violent and terrifying examples of resisting Indians. In August 1610, Captain George Percy surprised and attacked a Paspahegh village, killing at least sixty-five inhabitants and destroying with fire their homes and fields of growing corn. Taking prisoner the wife and children of the local chieftain, the colonists headed back to Jamestown by boat. En route, as a sport, they threw the children overboard and shot them in the water as they tried to swim for shore. Back at Jamestown the governor rebuked the captain, not for his brutality, but instead for sparing the woman's life. The governor promptly had her executed, run through with a sword. This raid seems peculiarly perverse as well as ruthless. Why would starving colonists burn a field of growing corn? The colony's leaders believed that they would get far more corn from the other Indians by making one especially horrifying example of those who failed to obey English orders.

The colonial leaders applied the same brutal logic to their own colonists, in the conviction that only pain and terror could motivate the poor. Convicting a laborer of stealing two pints of oatmeal to allay his hunger, the leaders had a long needle thrust through his tongue, to keep him from ever eating again. Chained to a tree, the convict slowly starved to death, a vivid and lingering example to terrify his fellow colonists.

The leaders were especially dismayed when several dozen colonists ran away to join the Indians. Evidently disgusted by the hunger, hardships, danger, and brutality of colonial life under domineering leaders, the runaways sought an easier lot among the natives. The Indians killed those who brought

nothing but welcomed those bearing steel weapons, including a few guns. With good cause, the colonial leaders dreaded the slow attrition of colonists and the new strength they gave to the Algonquians. In the spring of 1612, the governor recaptured most of the fugitives and, to deter further runaways, made painful and conspicuous examples of them. The lucky were hanged or shot. The unlucky were burned at the stake or had their backs slowly broken on the wheel.

The simmering conflict between the colonists and the Algonquians remained stalemated until 1613, when the English captured Powhatan's favorite daughter, the teenage Pocahontas. Held in Jamestown and indoctrinated by the English, she accepted Christian conversion, took the name Rebecca, and married a colonist, John Rolfe, in 1614. Weary with war, Powhatan reluctantly made peace with the English. Seizing the promotional opportunity, the Virginia Company brought Rolfe and Pocahontas to England to drum up greater investment and crown support for the colony. Dressed in fine English clothing, the lovely Pocahontas suggested the ease of assimilating the natives, but looks proved deceiving. She died of disease in England in March 1617 at the age of about twenty-one. Powhatan expired a year later, and power passed to his brother Opechancanough, who from long and bitter experience despised the invaders.

TOBACCO

By 1616 the Virginia Company had transported more than seventeen hundred people to the Chesapeake and spent well over £50,000—an immense amount for that century—yet all it had to show for the investment was an unprofitable town of 350 diseased and hungry colonists. The settlers had gathered or made and shipped homeward a variety of commodities—glass, pitch, tar, potash, clapboards, sassafras, and iron—but in London these sold for small prices far below the company's immense costs for shipping people, equipment, and provisions across the Atlantic. Deeply in debt, the Virginia Company teetered toward bankruptcy.

During the later 1610s, however, the company and the colonists made two great adjustments. First, the company gave up trying directly to control the land and the laborers and instead permitted the colonists to own and work land as their private property. Indeed, the company adopted a "headright system" that awarded land freely to men with the means to pay for their own passage (and that of others) across the Atlantic. Such emigrants received fifty acres apiece, and another fifty acres for every servant or relative brought at their own expense. Servants were also entitled to fifty acres each, if and when they survived their terms of indenture—which afforded them new incentive to emigrate. As private property owners, rather than company employees, the colonists showed much greater initiative and effort in cultivating

the corn, squash, and beans that ensured their subsistence. But to prosper, they still needed a commercial crop to market in England.

Led by John Rolfe, the planters learned how to raise tobacco in 1616. A New World plant long cultivated in the West Indies, tobacco had become popular for smoking in much of England and Europe. Ahead of his time, King James fought a losing battle when he denounced smoking as "a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, [and] dangerous to the lungs." Eventually he learned to love the large revenues that the crown derived from taxing tobacco imports. Laden with addictive nicotine, tobacco was an ideal colonial commodity, for consumers would pay high prices to satisfy their craving. Because tobacco plants prefer a long, hot, and humid growing season, the crop thrived in Virginia but not in England, giving the colonial farmers a comparative advantage. Blessed with numerous harbors and an extensive river system, the Chesapeake also welcomed the shipping needed to carry tobacco in bulk across the Atlantic to European consumers. Virginia's tobacco production surged from 200,000 pounds in 1624 to 3,000,000 pounds in 1638, as the Chesapeake outstripped the West Indies to become the principal supplier of tobacco to Europe.

During the 1620s, tobacco sold in England for about five to ten times as much as it cost to produce in the Chesapeake. That meant that if a planter could obtain land and a few laborers and keep them alive and working, he could make more in a year than in a decade spent in England. Tobacco's profits increased the value of indentured servants, which stimulated the flow of emigrants to Virginia. From only 350 in 1616 the colonial population in the Chesapeake surged to about 13,000 by 1650. Increased immigration, rather than natural increase, drove this population growth, for the annual mortality rate remained about 25 percent until mid-century. In 1638, proposed English legislation to limit emigration alarmed the Virginians, who complained that their colony would "in [a] short time melt to nothing for want of supplyes of people."

As tobacco cultivation expanded and the population grew, the planters needed more land, which they obtained at the Indians' expense. The expanding English plantations brought voracious and far-ranging cattle and pigs into the vicinity of Indian villages, with devastating consequences for native cornfields. The Indians also seethed at the contempt the English displayed toward them as supposed "savages." One unusual Virginian, George Thorpe, confessed:

> There is scarce any man amongst us that doth soe much as afforde them a good thought in his hart, and most men with their mouthes give them nothing but maledictions and bitter execrations. . . . If there bee wronge on any side, it is on ours who are not soe charitable to them as Christians ought to bee.

Indeed, the colonial minister, the Reverend Jonas Stockham, denounced the Indians, insisting that "till their Priests and Ancients have their throats cut, there is no hope to bring them to conversion."

For a time, the new paramount chief, Opechancanough, shrewdly kept hidden his bitter resentment. Indeed, he insinuated that he meant to convert to Christianity, and he invited the colonists to spread out and settle on any lands not occupied by Indian villages, lulling their suspicion and encouraging their vulnerable dispersion. On March 22, 1622, in a well-coordinated surprise attack, the Indians destroyed the outlying plantations, killing 347 men, women, and children—nearly a third of the colonists in Virginia. The dead included George Thorpe, perhaps the only colonist with a good word for the Algonquians. The survivors rallied at Jamestown and a few other fortified settlements, while the Indians killed livestock and burned plantations.

After the initial shock and horror, the colonial leaders felt delighted by the opportunity to dispossess and exterminate the Indians. The governor, Sir Francis Wyatt, declared, "Our first worke is expulsion of the Salvages to gain the free range of the countrey for encrease of Cattle, swine &c . . . for it is infinitely better to have no heathen among us, who at best were but thornes in our sides, than to be at peace and league with them." Back in England, Captain John Smith rejoiced at news of the massacre as "good for the plantation because now we have just cause to destroy them by all means possible."

The Virginians developed the strategy, practiced in subsequent colonial wars, of waiting until just before corn harvest to attack and destroy the Indian villages and their crops, consigning the natives to a winter and spring of exposure and starvation. In May 1623, when the Indians' hunger was greatest, the English pretended that they were ready to make peace. At the conclusion of the negotiations, the English invited the 250 attending Indians to drink a toast of alcohol. The Indians' share was poisoned. Drugged and incapacitated, the victims were easily finished off by the swords of the vengeful English.

But Opechancanough had not attended the treaty, and he persisted in resistance until 1632, when the English at last offered a real peace. They extorted massive land concessions, which permitted their settlements to spread northward up Chesapeake Bay and the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers. On April 18, 1644, Opechancanough staged a second and even deadlier surprise attack, killing more than four hundred colonists. But this was a smaller proportion of a much larger colonial population, ten thousand, which had come to outnumber the local Indians, who were much diminished by disease and war. English counterattacks destroyed most of the Indian towns along the rivers, dispersing the survivors into the hinterland. In 1646 the English captured Opechancanough, who was about one hundred years old, nearly blind, and so crippled that he had to be carried on a litter. The governor put his trophy prisoner on display in Jamestown, but an angry soldier shot

Opechancanough dead, terminating the paramount chiefdom built by Powhatan.

Disease and war reduced the Virginia Algonquians from 24,000 in 1607 to only 2,000 by 1669. Losing almost all of their lands, the survivors became confined on small reservations, surrounded by colonial settlements. Restricting the surviving Indians as a security risk, Virginia law invited landholders to shoot any native caught trespassing on their plantations. The law showed far less concern for the Indian cornfields invaded by colonial livestock. Beleaguered Indians begged the colonial leaders, "Your Hogs & Cattle injure Us. We Can fly no farther. Let us know where to live & how to be secured for the future from the Hogs & Cattle." Of course, other Indian peoples remained numerous and autonomous to the north, west, and south of the Virginia colony. In particular, the formidable Susquehannock, an Iroquoian people, dwelled north of the Potomac.

While the Indians' presence and power dwindled on the coastal plain, the colonials' numbers and prosperity surged, especially during the 1650s and 1660s as they occupied the fertile lands recently wrested from the natives. Responding to colonial opportunity, emigration from England to the Chesapeake more than doubled from about 8,000 per decade during the 1630s and 1640s to 18,000 per decade during the 1650s and 1660s. The Chesapeake colonial population grew from 13,000 in 1650 to 41,000 in 1670.

The newcomers cleared new fields for expanding crops of tobacco. By the end of the 1660s, the colonists annually shipped ten million pounds of tobacco to England—up from about three million pounds in 1638. The increased production drove down the price of tobacco from about two shillings per pound during the boom years of the 1620s to about two pence per pound in the late 1650s, but most planters continued to profit because they substantially lowered their costs (especially for shipping) and increased the productivity of their labor. The growth in production and productivity rendered tobacco cheaper, opening a much larger market in England.

The Chesapeake tobacco boom came too late to save the teetering Virginia Company from bankruptcy and foreclosure. Already encumbered with debt, the company could not cope with the losses suffered from Opechancanough's destructive first rebellion. In 1624 the impatient crown terminated the company charter, taking control of Virginia as the first royal colony in the new English empire. The crown acted to secure the growing revenue generated by the tobacco trade. Paying an especially heavy tax, tobacco generated 25 percent of the customs revenue collected by the crown in England during the 1660s.

In 1632 the crown set aside about twelve million acres of land at the northern head of Chesapeake Bay as a second colony, named Maryland after the queen of the new monarch, Charles I (son of James). The king gave the new colony to a favorite aristocrat and political ally, Cecilius Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, to own and govern as a "proprietary colony." During

the seventeenth century, the English developed two types of colonial governments: royal and proprietary. Relatively few until the eighteenth century, the royal colonies belonged to the crown. Initially more numerous, the proprietary colonies belonged to private interests.

By owning and governing a colony, Lord Baltimore sought to gain additional wealth and to provide refuge for his fellow Catholics. Harassed in England by the Protestant majority, some Catholics contemplated emigration to an American colony. As a Catholic sympathizer, King Charles I favored Lord Baltimore's plan to demonstrate that a policy of religious toleration could permit Protestants and Catholics to live together in harmony. Tending to his estates and political interest, Lord Baltimore remained in England and entrusted the governorship of Maryland to his younger brother, Leonard Calvert. In 1634 the new governor led two ships laden with colonists, both Protestant and Catholic, across the Atlantic to Chesapeake Bay. On a tributary of the Potomac River, Calvert established the first settlement and colonial capital at St. Mary's City.

Contrary to Lord Baltimore's hopes, relatively few Catholics emigrated to Maryland. Instead, most of his colonists were Protestants, primarily relocating Virginians. Many were especially radical Protestants, known as Puritans and Quakers, wearied by Virginia's sporadic efforts to enforce adherence to the official Church of England. Eager to attract settlers of any Christian faith, the proprietor adopted an especially generous headright system that granted one hundred acres for every adult (free or servant) transported to Maryland, plus fifty acres for every child less than sixteen years old. The recipients paid nothing down and thereafter only a modest annual quitrent of two shillings per hundred acres. As a frontier colony, Maryland offered greater opportunities to ambitious men of modest means than did older, more crowded, and increasingly competitive Virginia. By attracting experienced colonists, Maryland benefited from the expertise garnered by hard trials and many errors in the older colony of Virginia. Suffering fewer and shorter growing pains, Maryland rapidly prospered as a tobacco colony.

After an immense cost in lives—native and colonist—the English had secured a lucrative, dynamic, and expansive base on the North American continent. Their once tenuous beachhead had become two thriving provinces and a dynamo for further expansion. As the West Country promoters had hoped, Virginia and Maryland consumed English manufactures and produced an agricultural staple that replaced an import, improving the nation's balance of trade. And, as the promoters had predicted, the Chesapeake absorbed thousands of poor laborers considered redundant and dangerous in England. From the perspective of the Indians, however, the English had metastasized an especially malignant and voracious tumor that spread with destructive rapidity, imperiling the native world.