

## DOCUMENT SET 2

## Trying Times at Jamestown: The Early Months of the First Permanent English Colony

A generation after the failure of Roanoke Island, the English established a permanent colony in the New World. The colony had a difficult beginning, barely surviving its early years. One hundred forty-four men commanded by Captain Christopher Newport departed England for Virginia in December 1606. One hundred four completed the crossing, reaching the Virginia capes in late April of the next year. A few weeks later, Jamestown was under way, the colonists having located fifty miles up the James River. In June, Captain Newport left for England to replenish supplies and secure more settlers. When he returned in January 1608, only 38 of the colonists were still living. In six short months, more than half had perished, and many of the survivors wanted to return home. *Why?*

The following documents, which recount the Jamestown experience during these early months, help answer the question. Included are selections from George Percy's *Observations* (1607) and John Smith's *General History* (1624). Both men made the initial trip to Jamestown, witnessed events during the critical months, and functioned as important leaders in the colony. Smith was a member of the governing council, presiding as president from September 1608 to September 1609. When the council was first created, however, he was excluded by other members; and in early 1608, Smith was nearly condemned to die by council members who alleged he was responsible for the death

of two men. Although a controversial figure during the early years, many historians accept Smith's personal account of his own central role in the colony's survival. Smith justified dictatorial methods as necessary to obtain provisions from the Indians and to organize and motivate the colonists to work.

Percy faced similar problems as council president from September 1609 to May 1610, during the horrible "starving time" described in your textbook, a period when the population dwindled from some 500 to fewer than 100, and again from March to May of 1611. The writings of these two leaders are among the most important sources available concerning England's first permanent colony in the New World. Compare their observations with your textbook's account of Virginia's origins.

These documents reveal more than the details of the settlers' struggle for survival. They also provide information and insight into the early social and political history of Jamestown. As you study them, determine how the colony's inhabitants worked, lived, governed themselves, and adjusted to an alien environment. Be aware of Smith's and Percy's personal reasons for recounting the story of early Jamestown. Make a judgment about their reliability as sources of information on the true character of Virginia society. Finally, use these accounts as resources in developing an explanation for the acute hardship of the colony's early years.

## Questions for Analysis

1. What provisions were made for governance in the Jamestown colony? What problems of governance emerged? How were they resolved?
2. Drawing on the evidence in the documents, explain why the Jamestown colonists had such a difficult time in the colony's first seven months. What problems in addition to leadership difficulties confronted them? How did they attempt to deal with these challenges?
3. How did John Smith and George Percy account for the Jamestown colony's survival, despite the problems? What is your evaluation of Smith and Percy as witnesses? Were they in agreement on the "facts"? Explain.
4. What personal experiences did John Smith have en route to the New World and during the first seven months of the colony's existence? According to his account, what role did he play in the colony's early history? Evaluate the accuracy of his narrative. What factors influenced Smith's portrayal of events?
5. In what ways did the Native Americans and the colonists interact? Describe and account for the attitude of the colonists toward the Indians. Speculate on the Indians' attitude toward the colonists, using evidence from the documents to support your views. What were the implications of these contacts for the future?

6. Paraphrase the last paragraph of the John Smith selection. What is the meaning of Smith's observation? Why did he conclude with this remark? What is its significance for an understanding of the company's and the colony's internal politics?
7. What do the 1625 population statistics reveal about the quality of life in early Virginia? How do these data illuminate the facts of life in the first stage of colonization?

## 1. George Percy's Observations on Jamestown's Early Months, 1607

... The sixth of August [1607], there died *John Asbie*, of the bloudie Flixie.

The ninth day, died *George Flowre*, of the swelling.

The tenth day, died *William Bruster* Gentleman, of a wound giuen by the Sauages, and was buried the eleuenth day.

The fourteenth day, *Ierome Alikock*, Ancient [*i.e. Ensign*], died of a wound. The same day, *Francis Midwinter* [died], [and] *Edward Moris* Corporall died suddenly.

The fifteenth day, their died *Edward Browne* and *Stephen Galthorpe*.

The sixteenth day, their died *Thomas Gower* Gentleman.

The seuenteenth day, their died *Thomas Mounslie*.

The eighteenth day, there died *Robert Pennington*, and *John Martine* Gentlemen.

The nineteenth day, died *Drue Piggase* Gentleman.

The two and twentieth day of August [1607], there died Captaine *Bartholomew Gosnold*, one of our Councill: he was honourably buried, hauing all the Ordnance in the Fort shot off, with many vollies of small shot.

After Captaine *Gosnold*'s death, the Councill could hardly agree by the dissention of Captaine *Kendall*; which [*who*] afterwards was committed about hainous matters which was proued against him.

The foure and twentieth day, died *Edward Harrington* and *George Walker*; and were buried the same day.

The sixe and twentieth day, died *Kenelme Throgmortine*.

The seuen and twentieth day, died *William Roads*.

The eight and twentieth day, died *Thomas Stoodie*, Cape Merchant.

The fourth day of September [1607], died *Thomas Iacob* Sergeant.

The fift day, there died *Benjamin Beast*.

Our men were destroyed with cruell diseases, as Swellings, Flixes, Burning Feuers, and by warres; and some departed suddenly: but for the most part, they died of meere famine.

There were neuer *Englishmen* left in a forreigne Countrey in such miserie as wee were in this new discouered *Virginia*. Wee watched euery three nights, lying on the bare cold ground, what weather soeuer came; [and] warded all the next day: which brought our men to bee most feeble wretches. Our food was but a small Can of Barlie sod[den] in water, to fuee men a day. Our drinke, cold water taken out of the Riuer; which was, at a floud, verie salt; at a low tide, full of slime and filth: which was the destruction of many of our men.

Thus we liued for the space of fuee months [*August 1607–8 Jan. 1608*] in this miserable distresse, not hauing fuee able men to man our Bulwarkes vpon any occasion. If it had not pleased God to haue put a terrour in the Sauages hearts, we had all perished by those vild and cruell Pagans, being in that weake estate as we were; our men night and day groaning in euery corner of the Fort most pittifull to heare. If there were any conscience in men, it would make their harts to bleed to heare the pitifull murmurings and out-cries of our sick men without reliefe, euery night and day, for the space of sixe weekes [*8 Aug.–19 Sept. 1607*]: some departing out of the World, many times three or foure in a night; in the morning, their bodies [being] trailed out of their Cabines like Dogges, to be buried. In this sort, did I see the mortallitie of diuers of our people.

It pleased God, after a while, to send those people which were our mortall enemies, to releue vs with victuals, as Bread, Corne, Fish, and Flesh in great plentie; which was the setting vp of our feeble men:

otherwise wee had all perished. Also we were frequented by diuers Kings in the Countrie, bringing vs store of prouision to our great comfort.

The eleuenth day [of September, 1607], there was certaine Articles laid against Master Wingfield which was then President: thereupon he was not only displaced out of his President ship, but also from being of the Councill. Afterwards Captain John Ratcliffe was chosen President.

## 2. John Smith's Impressions of the Jamestown Experience, 1607

. . . Captaine Bartholomew Gosnoll, one of the first movers of this plantation, having many yeares solicited many of his friends, but found small assistants; at last prevailed with some Gentlemen, as Captaine John Smith, Master Edward-maria Wingfield, Master Robert Hunt, and diuers others, who depended a yeare vpon his proiects, but nothing could be effected, till by their great charge and industrie, it came to be apprehended by certaine of the Nobilitie, Gentry, and Marchants, so that his Maiestie by his letters patents [10 April 1606], gaue commission for establishing Councils, to direct here; and to governe, and to execute there. To effect this, was spent another yeare, and by that, three ships were provided, one of 100 Tuns, another of 40. and a Pinnace of 20. The transportation of the company was committed to Captaine Christopher Newport, a Marriner well practised for the Westerne parts of America. But their orders for government were put in a box, not to be opened, nor the governours knowne vntill they arrived in Virginia.

On the 19 of December, 1606. we set sayle from Blackwall, but by vnprosperous winds, were kept six weekes in the sight of England; all which time, Master Hunt our Preacher, was so weake and sicke, that few expected his recovery. . . .

We watered at the Canaries, we traded with the Salvages at *Dominica*; three weekes we spent in refreshing our selues amongst these west-India Isles; in *Gwardalupa* we found a bath so hot, as in it we boyled Porck as well as over the fire. And at a little Isle called *Monica*, we tooke from the bushes with our hands, neare two hogsheds full of Birds in three or foure houres. In *Mevis*, *Mona*, and the Virgin Isles, we spent some time; where, with a lothsome beast like a Crocodil, called a Gwayn [*Iguana*], Tortoises, Pellicans, Parrots, and fishes, we daily feasted.

Gone from thence in search of Virginia, the company was not a little discomforted, seeing the Marri-

The eighteenth day [of September], died one *Ellis Kinistone*, which was starued [frozen] to death with cold. The same day at night, died one *Richard Simmons*.

The nineteenth day [of September], there died one *Thomas Mouton*. . . .

ners had 3 dayes passed their reckoning and found no land; so that Captaine Rat[c]liffe (Captaine of the Pinnace) rather desired to beare vp the helme to returne for England, then make further search. But God the guider of all good actions, forcing them by an extreame storme to hull at night, did driue them by his providence to their desired Port, beyond all their expectations; for never any of them had seene that coast.

The first land they made they called *Cape Henry*; where thirtie of them recreating themselues on shore, were assaulted by fiue Salvages, who hurt two of the English very dangerously.

That night was the box opened, and the orders read, in which Bartholomew Gosnoll, John Smith, Edward Wingfield, Christopher Newport, John Rat[c]liffe, John Martin, and George Kendall, were named to be the Councill, and to choose a President amongst them for a yeare, who with the Councill should governe. Matters of moment were to be examined by a Iury, but determined by the maior part of the Councill, in which the President had two voyces.

Vntill the 13 of May [1607] they sought a place to plant in; then the Councill was sworne, Master Wingfield was chosen President, and an Oration made, why Captaine Smith was not admitted of the Councill as the rest.

Now falleth every man to worke, the Councill contriue the Fort, the rest cut downe trees to make place to pitch their Tents; some provide clabord to relade the ships, some make gardens, some nets, &c. The Salvages often visited vs kindly. The Presidents overweening ieaalousie would admit no exercise at armes, or fortification but the boughs of trees cast together in the forme of a halfe moone by the extraordinary paines and diligence of Captaine Kendall.

Newport, Smith, and twentie others, were sent to discover the head of the river: by diuers small habita-

tions they passed. . . . The people in all parts kindly intreated them, till being returned within twentie myles of *Iames* towne, they gaue iust cause of ieaousie: but had God not blessed the discoverers otherwise then those at the Fort, there had then beene an end of that plantation; for at the Fort, where they arrived the next day, they found 17 men hurt, and a boy slaine by the Salvages, and had it not chanced a crosse barre shot from the Ships strooke downe a bough from a tree amongst them, that caused them to retire, our men had all beene slaine, being securely all at worke, and their armes in dry fats.

Herevpon the President was contented the Fort should be pallisadoed, the Ordnance mounted, his men armed and exercised: for many were the assaults, and ambuscadoes of the Salvages, and our men by their disorderly stragling were often hurt, when the Salvages by the nimblenesse of their heeles well escaped.

What toyle we had, with so small a power to guard our workemen adayes, watch all night, resist our enemies, and effect our businesse, to relade the ships, cut downe trees, and prepare the ground to plant our Corne, &c, I referre to the Readers consideration.

Six weekes being spent in this manner, Captaine Newport (who was hired onely for our transportation) was to returne with the ships.

Now Captaine Smith, who all this time from their departure from the Canaries was restrained as a prisoner vpon the scandalous suggestions of some of the chiefe (envying his repute) who fained he intended to vsurpe the government, murder the Councill, and make himselfe King, that his confederats were dispersed in all the three ships, and that diuers of his confederats that revealed it, would affirme it; for this he was committed as a prisoner.

Thirteene weekes [24 Mar.—10 June 1607], he remained thus suspected, and by that time the ships should returne they pretended out of their commiserations, to referre him to the Councill in England to receiue a check, rather than by particulating his designs [to] make him so odious to the world, as to touch his life, or vtterly overthrow his reputation. But he so much scorned their charitie, and publicly defied the vttermost of their crueltie; he wisely prevented their policies, though he could not suppress their envies; yet so well he demeaned himselfe in this businesse, as all the company did see his innocency, and his adversaries malice, and those suborned to accuse him, accused his accusers of subornation; many vntruthes were alledged against him; but being so apparently disproved, begat a generall hatred in the hearts of the company against such vniust Commanders, that the President [Wingfield] was adiudged

to giue him 200*l.*; so that all he had was seized vpon, in part of satisfaction, which Smith presently returned to the Store for the generall vse of the Colony.

Many were the mischiefes that daily sprung from their ignorant (yet ambitious) spirits; but the good Doctrine and exhortation of our Preacher Master Hunt reconciled them, and caused Captaine Smith to be admitted of the Councel [20 June, or rather on 10 June].

The next day all receiued the Communion, the day following [June 22] the Salvages voluntarily desired peace, and Captaine Newport returned for England with newes; leaving in Virginia 100. the 15 [or rather 22] of Iune 1607. . . .

Being thus left to our fortunes, it fortunated that within ten dayes scarce ten amongst vs could either goe, or well stand, such extreame weaknes and sicknes oppressed vs. And thereat none need marvaile, if they consider the cause and reason, which was this.

Whilst the ships stayed, our allowance was somewhat bettered, by a daily proportion of Bisket, which the sailers would pilfer to sell, giue, or exchange with vs, for money, Saxefras, furses, or loue. But when they departed, there remained neither taverne, beere house, nor place of reliefe, but the common Kettell. Had we beene as free from all sinnes as gluttony, and drunkennesse, we might haue beene canonized for Saints; But our President [Wingfield] would never haue beene admitted, for ingrossing to his private [*i.e.*, his own use], Oatmeale, Sacke, Oyle, *Aquavitæ*, Beefe, Egges, or what not, but the Kettell; that indeed he allowed equally to be distributed, and that was halfe a pint of wheat, and as much barley boyled with water for a man a day, and this having fryed some 26. weekes [Dec. 1606—June 1607] in the ships hold, contained as many wormes as graines; so that we might truly call it rather so much bran then corne, our drinke was water, our lodgings Castles in the ayre.

With this lodging and dyet, our extreame toile in bearing and planting Pallisadoes, so strained and bruised vs, and our continuall labour in the extremitie of the heat had so weakned vs, as were cause sufficient to haue made vs as miserable in our natiue COUNTRY, or any other place in the world.

From May, to September [1607], those that escaped, liued vpon Sturgeon, and Sea-crabs, fiftie in this time we buried, the rest seeing the Presidents proiects to escape these miseries in our Pinnace by flight (who all this time had neither felt want nor sicknes) so moved our dead spirits, as we deposed him [10 Sept. 1607]; and established Ratcliffe in his place, (Gosnoll being dead [22 Aug. 1607]) Kendall deposed [? Sept. 1607]. Smith newly recovered, Martin and Ratcliffe was by his care preserved and re-