


ESSAYS

The making of "New England" ushered in a new world along the east coast of North America. New people, new beliefs, new social structures, new languages, and new materials from Europe were matched by new social relations, political dynamics, alliances, and discords. How did people of the age experience it? Was successful English colonization inevitable, surprising, or a fluke of history? These two essays examine how different groups made and reacted to those changes. In the first, James H. Merrell argues that a "new world" was created for Indians when they encountered Europeans and Africans in the Carolinas and Virginia. Merrell stresses that the vast changes that contact brought about created a new order not unlike that encountered by the Europeans and Africans who crossed the ocean. While Merrell emphasizes the abundant newness of changes, Rachel B. Herrmann looks at the dynamic role of supposed scarcity in colonial Virginia. Analyzing discussions of food and cannibalism before, during, and after the so-called Starving Time of early Jamestown, Herrmann suggests that reports of scarcity and laziness were reworked into a founding myth of and advertisement for British immigration to the new world: that hard work would lead to plenty of food.

The Indians' New World

JAMES H. MERRELL

In August 1608 John Smith and his band of explorers captured an Indian named Amoroleck during a skirmish along the Rappahannock River. Asked why his men—a hunting party from towns upstream—had attacked the English, Amoroleck replied that they had heard the strangers "were a people come from under the world, to take their world from them." Smith's prisoner grasped a simple yet important truth that students of colonial America have overlooked: after 1492 native Americans lived in a world every bit as new as that confronting transplanted Africans or Europeans.

The failure to explore the Indians' new world helps explain why, despite many excellent studies of the native American past, colonial history often remains "a history of those men and women—English, European, and African—who transformed America from a geographical expression into a new nation." One reason Indians generally are left out may be the apparent inability to fit them into the new world theme, a theme that exerts a powerful hold on our historical imagination and runs throughout our efforts to interpret American development.... [S]cholars have analyzed encounters between peoples from the Old World and conditions in the New, studying the complex interplay between European or African cultural patterns and the American environment. Indians

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crossed no ocean, peopled no faraway land. It might seem logical to exclude them.

The natives' segregation persists, in no small degree, because historians still tend to think only of the new world as the New World, a geographic entity bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the one side and the Pacific on the other. Recent research suggests that process was as important as place. Many settlers in New England recreated familiar forms with such success that they did not really face an alien environment until long after their arrival. Africans, on the other hand, were struck by the shock of the new at the moment of their enslavement, well before they stepped on board ship or set foot on American soil. If the Atlantic was not a barrier between one world and another, if what happened to people was more a matter of subtle cultural processes than mere physical displacements, perhaps we should set aside the maps and think instead of a "world" as the physical and cultural milieu demanding basic changes in ways of life. Considered in these terms, the experience of natives was more closely akin to that of immigrants and slaves, and the idea of an encounter between worlds can—indeed, must—include the aboriginal inhabitants of America.

For American Indians a new order arrived in three distinct yet overlapping stages. First, alien microbes killed vast numbers of natives, sometimes before the victims had seen a white or black face. Next came traders who exchanged European technology for Indian products and brought natives into the developing world market. In time traders gave way to settlers eager to develop the land according to their own lights. These three intrusions combined to transform native existence, disrupting established cultural habits and requiring creative responses to drastically altered conditions. Like their new neighbors, then, Indians were forced to blend old and new in ways that would permit them to survive in the present without forsaking their past. By the close of the colonial era, native Americans as well as whites and blacks had created new societies, each similar to, yet very different from, its parent culture.

The range of native societies produced by this mingling of ingredients probably exceeded the variety of social forms Europeans and Africans developed. Rather than survey the broad spectrum of Indian adaptations, this [essay] considers in some depth the response of natives in one area, the southern piedmont.... Avoiding extinction and eschewing retreat, the Indians of the piedmont have been in continuous contact with the invaders from across the sea almost since the beginning of the colonial period....

... [T]hese groups [the piedmont peoples] shared a single history once Europeans and Africans arrived on the scene. Drawn together by their cultural affinities and their common plight, after 1700 they migrated to the Catawba Nation, a cluster of villages along the border between the Carolinas that became the focus of native life in the region. Tracing the experience of these upland communities both before and after they joined the Catawbas can illustrate the consequences of contact and illuminate the process by which natives learned to survive in their own new world.

For centuries, ancestors of the Catawbas had lived astride important aboriginal trade routes and straddled the boundary between two cultural traditions, a position that involved them in a far-flung network of contacts and affected everything from potting techniques to burial practices. Nonetheless, Africans and Europeans were utterly unlike any earlier foreign visitors to the piedmont. Their arrival meant more than merely another encounter with outsiders; it marked an important turning point in Indian history. Once these newcomers disembarked and began to feel their way across the continent, they forever altered the course and pace of native development.

Bacteria brought the most profound disturbances to upcountry villages. When Hernando de Soto led the first Europeans into the area in 1540, he found large towns already "grown up in grass" because "there had been a pest in the land" two years before, a malady probably brought inland by natives who had visited distant Spanish posts. The sources are silent about other "pests" over the next century, but soon after the English began colonizing Carolina in 1670 the disease pattern became all too clear. Major epidemics struck the region at least once every generation—in 1698, 1718, 1738, and 1759—and a variety of less virulent illnesses almost never left native settlements.

Indians were not the only inhabitants of colonial America living—and dying—in a new disease environment. The swamps and lowlands of the Chesapeake were a deathtrap for Europeans, and sickness obliged colonists to discard or rearrange many of the social forms brought from England. Among native peoples long isolated from the rest of the world and therefore lacking immunity to pathogens introduced by the intruders, the devastation was even more severe....

Survivors of these horrors were thrust into a situation no less alien than what European immigrants and African slaves found. The collected wisdom of generations could vanish in a matter of days if sickness struck older members of a community who kept sacred traditions and taught special skills. When many of the elders succumbed at once, the deep pools of collective memory grew shallow, and some dried up altogether. In 1710, Indians near Charleston told a settler that "they have forgot most of their traditions since the Establishment of this Colony, they keep their Festivals and can tell but little of the reasons: their Old Men are dead." Impoverishment of a rich cultural heritage followed the spread of disease. Nearly a century later, a South Carolinian exaggerated but captured the general trend when he noted that Catawbas "have forgotten their ancient rites, ceremonies, and manufactures."

The same diseases that robbed a piedmont town of some of its most precious resources also stripped it of the population necessary to maintain an independent existence. In order to survive, groups were compelled to construct new societies from the splintered remnants of the old. The result was a kaleidoscopic array of migrations from ancient territories and mergers with nearby peoples. While such behavior was not unheard of in aboriginal times, population levels fell so precipitously after contact that survivors endured disruptions unlike anything previously known....

No mere catalog of migrations and mergers can begin to convey how profoundly unsettling this experience was for those swept up in it. While upcountry Indians did not sail away to some distant land, they, too, were among the uprooted, leaving their ancestral homes to try to make a new life elsewhere. A village and its surrounding territory were important elements of personal and collective identity, physical links in a chain binding a group to its past and making a locality sacred....

The toll could be physical as well as spiritual, for even the most uneventful of moves interrupted the established cycle of subsistence. Belongings had to be packed and unpacked, dwellings constructed, palisades raised. Once migrants had completed the business of settling in, the still more arduous task of exploiting new terrain awaited them. Living in one place year after year endowed a people with intimate knowledge of the area. The richest soils, the best hunting grounds, the choicest sites for gathering nuts or berries—none could be learned without years of experience, tested by time and passed down from one generation to the next. Small wonder that Carolina Indians worried about being “driven to some unknown Country, to live, hunt, and get our Bread in.”

Some displaced groups tried to leave “unknown Country” behind and make their way back home. In 1716 Enos asked Virginia’s permission to settle at “Enoe Town” on the North Carolina frontier, their location in Lawson’s day. Seventeen years later William Byrd II came upon an abandoned Cheraw village on a tributary of the upper Roanoke River and remarked how “it must have been a great misfortune to them to be obliged to abandon so beautiful a dwelling.” The Indians apparently agreed: in 1717 the Virginia Council received “Divers applications” from the Cheraws (now living along the Pee Dee River) “for Liberty to Seat themselves on the head of Roanoke River.” Few natives managed to return permanently to their homelands. But their efforts to retrace their steps hint at a profound sense of loss and testify to the powerful hold of ancient sites.

Compounding the trauma of leaving familiar territories was the necessity of abandoning customary relationships. Casting their lot with others traditionally considered foreign compelled Indians to rearrange basic ways of ordering their existence. Despite frequent contacts among peoples, native life had always centered in kin and town. The consequences of this deep-seated localism were evident even to a newcomer like John Lawson, who in 1701 found striking differences in language, dress, and physical appearance among Carolina Indians living only a few miles apart. Rules governing behavior also drew sharp distinctions between outsiders and one’s own “Country-Folks.” Indians were “very kind, and charitable to one another,” Lawson reported, “but more especially to those of their own Nation.” A visitor desiring a liaison with a local woman was required to approach her relatives and the village headman. On the other hand, “if it be an *Indian* of their own Town or Neighbourhood, that wants a Mistress, he comes to none but the Girl.” Lawson seemed unperturbed by this barrier until he discovered that a “Thief [is] held in Disgrace, that steals from any of his Country-Folks,” “but to steal from the *English* [or any other foreigners] they reckon no Harm.”

Communities unable to continue on their own had to revise these rules and reweave the social fabric into new designs. What language would be spoken? How would fields be laid out, hunting territories divided, houses built? How would decisions be reached, offenders punished, ceremonies performed? When Lawson remarked that “now adays” the Indians must seek mates “amongst Strangers,” he unwittingly characterized life in native Carolina. Those who managed to withstand the ravages of disease had to redefine the meaning of the term *stranger* and transform outsiders into insiders....

Muskets and kettles came to the piedmont more slowly than smallpox and measles. Spanish explorers distributed a few gifts to local headmen, but inhabitants of the interior did not enjoy their first real taste of the fruits of European technology until Englishmen began venturing inland after 1650. Indians these traders met in upcountry towns were glad to barter for the more efficient tools, more lethal weapons, and more durable clothing that colonists offered. Spurred on by eager natives, men from Virginia and Carolina quickly flooded the region with the material trappings of European culture. In 1701 John Lawson considered the Wateree Chickanees “very poor in *English Effects*” because a few of them lacked muskets.

Slower to arrive, trade goods were also less obvious agents of change. The Indians’ ability to absorb foreign artifacts into established modes of existence hid the revolutionary consequences of trade for some time. Natives leaped the technological gulf with ease in part because they were discriminating shoppers. If hoes were too small, beads too large, or cloth the wrong color, Indian traders refused them. Items they did select fit smoothly into existing ways. Waxhaws tied horse bells around their ankles at ceremonial dances, and some of the traditional stone pipes passed among the spectators at these dances had been shaped by metal files. Those who could not afford a European weapon fashioned arrows from broken glass. Those who could went to great lengths to “set [a new musket] streight, sometimes shooting away above 100 Loads of Ammunition, before they bring the Gun to shoot according to their Mind.”

Not every piece of merchandise hauled into the upcountry on a trader’s packhorse could be “set streight” so easily. Liquor, for example, proved both impossible to resist and extraordinarily destructive. Indians “have no Power to refrain this Enemy,” Lawson observed, “though sensible how many of them (are by it) hurry’d into the other World before their Time.” And yet even here, natives aware of the risks sought to control alcohol by incorporating it into their ceremonial life as a device for achieving a different level of consciousness. Their consumption was usually restricted to men, who “go as solemnly about it, as if it were part of their Religion,” preferring to drink only at night and only in quantities sufficient to stupefy them. When ritual could not confine liquor to safe channels, Indians went still further and excused the excesses of overindulgence by refusing to hold an intoxicated person responsible for his actions. “They never call any Man to account for what he did, when he was drunk,” wrote Lawson, “but say, it was the Drink that caused his Misbehaviour, therefore he ought to be forgiven.”

Working to absorb even the most dangerous commodities acquired from their new neighbors, aboriginal inhabitants of the uplands, like African slaves in the lowlands, made themselves at home in a different technological environment. Indians became convinced that "Guns, and Ammunition, besides a great many other Necessaries, ... are helpful to Man" and eagerly searched for the key that would unlock the secret of their production. At first many were confident that the "*Quera*, or good spirit," would teach them to make these commodities "when that good Spirit sees fit." Later they decided to help their deity along by approaching the colonists. In 1757, Catawbas asked Gov. Arthur Dobbs of North Carolina "to send us Smiths and other Tradesmen to teach our Children."

It was not the new products themselves but the Indians' failure to learn the mysteries of manufacture from either Dobbs or the *Quera* that marked the real revolution wrought by trade. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, everyone in eastern North America—masters and slaves, farmers near the coast and Indians near the mountains—became producers of raw materials for foreign markets and found themselves caught up in an international economic network....

By forcing Indians to look beyond their own territories for certain indispensable products, Anglo-American traders inserted new variables into the aboriginal equation of exchange. Colonists sought two commodities from Indians—human beings and deerskins—and both undermined established relationships among native groups. While the demand for slaves encouraged piedmont peoples to expand their traditional warfare, the demand for peltry may have fostered conflicts over hunting territories. Those who did not fight each other for slaves or deerskins fought each other for the European products these could bring. As firearms, cloth, and other items became increasingly important to native existence, competition replaced comity at the foundation of trade encounters as villages scrambled for the cargoes of merchandise....

... The mask [of the natives' control of their own destiny] came off when, in 1715, the traders—and the trade goods—suddenly disappeared during the Yamassee War.

The conflict's origins lay in a growing colonial awareness of the Indians' need for regular supplies of European merchandise. In 1701 Lawson pronounced the Santees "very tractable" because of their close connections with South Carolina. Eight years later he was convinced that the colonial officials in Charleston "are absolute Masters over the *Indians* ... within the Circle of their Trade." Carolina traders who shared this conviction quite naturally felt less and less constrained to obey native rules governing proper behavior. Abuses against Indians mounted until some men were literally getting away with murder. When repeated appeals to colonial officials failed, natives throughout Carolina began to consider war. Persuaded by Yamassee ambassadors that the conspiracy was widespread and convinced by years of ruthless commercial competition between Virginia and Carolina that an attack on one colony would not affect relations with the other, in the spring of 1715 Catawbas and their neighbors joined the invasion of South Carolina.

The decision to fight was disastrous. Colonists everywhere shut off the flow of goods to the interior, and after some initial successes Carolina's native enemies soon plumbed the depths of their dependence. In a matter of months, refugees holed up in Charleston noticed that "the Indians want ammunition and are not able to mend their Arms." The peace negotiations that ensued revealed a desperate thirst for fresh supplies of European wares. Ambassadors from piedmont towns invariably spoke in a single breath of restoring "a Peace and a free Trade," and one delegation even admitted that its people "cannot live without the assistance of the English." ...

By the end of the colonial period delicate negotiations across cultural boundaries were as familiar to Catawbas as the strouds they wore and the muskets they carried. But no matter how shrewdly the headmen loosened provincial purse strings to extract vital merchandise, they could not escape the simple fact that they no longer held the purse containing everything needed for their daily existence. In the space of a century the Indians had become thoroughly embedded in an alien economy, denizens of a new material world. The ancient self-sufficiency was only a dim memory in the minds of the Nation's elders.

The Catawba peoples were veterans of countless campaigns against disease and masters of the arts of trade long before the third major element of their new world, white planters, became an integral part of their life. Settlement of the Carolina uplands did not begin until the 1730s, but once underway it spread with frightening speed. In November 1752, concerned Catawbas reminded South Carolina governor James Glen how they had "complained already ... that the White People were settled too near us." Two years later five hundred families lived within thirty miles of the Nation and surveyors were running their lines into the middle of native towns. "[T]hose Indians are now in a fair way to be surrounded by White People," one observer concluded.

Settlers' attitudes were as alarming as their numbers. Unlike traders who profited from them or colonial officials who deployed them as allies, ordinary colonists had little use for Indians. Natives made poor servants and worse slaves; they obstructed settlement; they attracted enemy warriors to the area. Even men who respected Indians and earned a living by trading with them admitted that they made unpleasant neighbors. "We may observe of them as of the fire," wrote the South Carolina trader James Adair after considering the Catawbas' situation on the eve of the American Revolution, "it is safe and useful, cherished at proper distance; but if too near us, it becomes dangerous, and will scorch if not consume us."

A common fondness for alcohol increased the likelihood of intercultural hostilities. Catawba leaders acknowledged that the Indians "get very Drunk with [liquor] this is the Very Cause that they oftentimes Commit those Crimes that is offensive to You and us." Colonists were equally prone to bouts of drunkenness. In the 1760s the itinerant Anglican minister, Charles Woodmason, was shocked to find the citizens of one South Carolina upcountry community "continually drunk." ...

Even when sober, natives and newcomers found many reasons to quarrel. Catawbas were outraged if colonists built farms on the Indians' doorstep or tramped across ancient burial grounds. Planters, ignorant of (or indifferent to) native rules of hospitality, considered Indians who requested food nothing more than beggars and angrily drove them away. Other disputes arose when the Nation's young men went looking for trouble. As hunting, warfare, and other traditional avenues for achieving status narrowed, Catawba youths transferred older patterns of behavior into a new arena by raiding nearby farms and hunting cattle or horses.

Contrasting images of the piedmont landscape quite unintentionally generated still more friction. Colonists determined to tame what they considered a wilderness were in fact erasing a native signature on the land and scrawling their own. Bridges, buildings, fences, roads, crops, and other "improvements" made the area comfortable and familiar to colonists but uncomfortable and unfamiliar to Indians. "The Country side wear[s] a New face," proclaimed Woodmason proudly; to the original inhabitants, it was a grim face indeed. "His Land was spoiled," one Catawba headman told British officials in 1763. "They have spoiled him 100 Miles every way." Under these circumstances, even a settler with no wish to fight Indians met opposition to his fences, his outbuildings, his very presence. Similarly, a Catawba on a routine foray into traditional hunting territories had his weapon destroyed, his goods confiscated, his life threatened by men with different notions of the proper use of the land.

To make matters worse, the importance both cultures attached to personal independence hampered efforts by authorities on either side to resolve conflicts. Piedmont settlers along the border between the Carolinas were "people of desperate fortune," a frightened North Carolina official reported after visiting the area. "[N]o officer of Justice from either Province dare meddle with them." Woodmason, who spent even more time in the region, came to the same conclusion. "We are without any Law, or Order," he complained; the inhabitants' "Impudence is so very high, as to be past bearing." Catawba leaders could have sympathized. Headmen informed colonists that the Nation's people "are oftentimes Cautioned from ... ill Doings altho' to no purpose for we Cannot be present at all times to Look after them." "What they have done I could not prevent," one chief explained....

The Indians would have to find some way to get along with these unpleasant neighbors if the Nation was to survive. As Catawba population fell below five hundred after the smallpox epidemic of 1759 and the number of colonists continued to climb, natives gradually came to recognize the futility of violent resistance. During the last decades of the eighteenth century they drew on years of experience in dealing with Europeans at a distance and sought to overturn the common conviction that Indian neighbors were frightening and useless....

Catawbas took one of the first steps along the road to accommodation in the early 1760s, when they used their influence with colonial officials to acquire a reservation encompassing the heart of their ancient territories. This grant gave the Indians a land base, grounded in Anglo-American law, that prevented

farmers from shouldering them aside. Equally important, Catawbas now had a commodity to exchange with nearby settlers. These men wanted land, the natives had plenty, and shortly before the Revolution the Nation was renting tracts to planters for cash, livestock, and manufactured goods.

Important as it was, land was not the only item Catawbas began trading to their neighbors. Some Indians put their skills as hunters and woodsmen to a different use, picking up stray horses and escaped slaves for a reward. Others bartered their pottery, baskets, and table mats. Still others traveled through the upcountry, demonstrating their prowess with the bow and arrow before appreciative audiences. The exchange of these goods and services for European merchandise marked an important adjustment to the settlers' arrival. In the past, natives had acquired essential items by trading peltry and slaves or requesting gifts from representatives of the Crown. But piedmont planters frowned on hunting and warfare, while provincial authorities—finding Catawbas less useful as the Nation's population declined and the French threat disappeared—discouraged formal visits and handed out fewer presents. Hence the Indians had to develop new avenues of exchange that would enable them to obtain goods in ways less objectionable to their neighbors. Pots, baskets, and acres proved harmless substitutes for earlier methods of earning an income.

Quite apart from its economic benefits, trade had a profound impact on the character of Catawba-settler relations. Through countless repetitions of the same simple procedure at homesteads scattered across the Carolinas, a new form of intercourse arose, based not on suspicion and an expectation of conflict but on trust and a measure of friendship. When a farmer looked out his window and saw Indians approaching, his reaction more commonly became to pick up money or a jug of whiskey rather than a musket or an axe. The natives now appeared, the settler knew, not to plunder or kill but to peddle their wares or collect their rents....

On that August day in 1608 when Amoroleck feared the loss of his world, John Smith assured him that the English "came to them in peace, and to seeke their loves." Event soon proved Amoroleck right and his captor wrong. Over the course of the next three centuries not only Amoroleck and other piedmont Indians but natives throughout North America had their world stolen and another put in its place. Though this occurred at different times and in different ways, no Indians escaped the explosive mixture of deadly bacteria, material riches, and alien peoples that was the invasion of America. Those in the southern piedmont who survived the onslaught were ensconced in their new world by the end of the eighteenth century. Population levels stabilized as the Catawba peoples developed immunities to once lethal diseases. Rents, sales of pottery, and other economic activities proved adequate to support the Nation at a stable (if low) level of material life. Finally, the Indians' image as "inoffensive" neighbors gave them a place in South Carolina society and continues to sustain them today.

Vast differences separated Catawbas and other natives from their colonial contemporaries. Europeans were the colonizers, Africans the enslaved, Indians the dispossessed; from these distinct positions came distinct histories. Yet once

we acknowledge the differences, instructive similarities remain that help to integrate natives more thoroughly into the story of early America. By carving a niche for themselves in response to drastically different conditions, the people who composed the Catawba Nation shared in the most fundamental of American experiences. Like Afro-Americans, these Indians were compelled to accept a subordinate position in American life yet did not altogether lose their cultural integrity. Like settlers of the Chesapeake, aboriginal inhabitants of the uplands adjusted to appalling mortality rates and wrestled with the difficult task of "living with death." Like inhabitants of the Middle Colonies, piedmont groups learned to cope with unprecedented ethnic diversity by balancing the pull of traditional loyalties with the demands of a new social order. Like Puritans in New England, Catawbans found that a new world did not arrive all at once and that localism, self-sufficiency, and the power of old ways were only gradually eroded by conditions in colonial America.

Cannibalism and Abundance in Colonial Jamestown

RACHEL B. HERRMANN

When historians write about early colonial Virginia, they often mention cannibalism to illustrate the severity of the Starving Time during the winter of 1609–10. According to a college-level U.S. history textbook published in 2009, "A few desperate colonists were driven to cannibalism, an ironic situation since early explorers had assumed that only Native Americans would eat human flesh." In his canonical *American Slavery, American Freedom*, Edmund S. Morgan notes that the Starving Time offers "the only authentic examples of cannibalism witnessed in Virginia. One provident man chops up his wife and salts down the pieces. Others dig up graves to eat corpses. By spring only sixty are left alive."...

Historians generally take the case of cannibalism in Jamestown for granted; they usually assume that colonists practiced man-eating during that winter, and then they move ahead quickly to tobacco planting, sometimes pausing to discuss the Powhatan-English wars of the 1610s and 1620s. In fact the existence of cannibalism in Virginia is not easily verifiable. Early writers in colonial Virginia wrote about that winter with varying degrees of horror, remorse, and amusement, and they were influenced as well by their own fluctuating levels of personal interest in the colony's success. For too long historians have taken these writers at their word, without considering their motivations for publication. Cannibalism may or may not have taken place during 1609–10; some evidence exists to suggest that it did, whereas other accounts might be cited to argue that it did not. Ultimately, there is no way to answer this particular question definitively, nor is it the intent of this essay to do so. What historians can do is consider the various accounts together and acknowledge that cannibalism should no longer be stated as a bare fact in the

Excerpt, Rachel B. H. Herrmann, "The 'tragical historie': Cannibalism and Abundance in Colonial Jamestown," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 47–74. Reprinted with permission.

chronology of early Jamestown.... The reports of that fateful winter reinforced—yet also modified—the concept of abundance in America, an idea that became ubiquitous in an emerging American mythology and persisted into the twenty-first century. Before the Starving Time, writers depicted America as an Edenic paradise where food was plentiful and required little labor. But the new, postlapsarian Virginia demanded hard work and perseverance to realize the land's bounty. Thus, in the 1610s and 1620s, colonial leaders enacted new laws about food production and consumption, in part because of the concomitant appearance of Starving Time accounts. Memories of the winter of 1609–10 acted as indispensable cautionary tales that shaped Virginia's future governance as well as settlers' sense of themselves and their colony. Jamestown became America's first real creation myth, which was a mixture of truth and fiction that chronicled Virginia's failures as well as its eventual triumphs. Fears about repeat periods of dearth and starvation created powerful motivations for developing a successful colony that would become the prototype for all other English "projects" in America....

When historians mention the Starving Time in Jamestown, they traditionally cite Captain John Smith's and George Percy's familiar accounts of cannibalism during that difficult winter of 1609–10. Three other English narratives survive from the first quarter of the seventeenth century: Thomas Gates's *A True declaration of the estate of the Colonie in Virginia*, the Virginia Assembly's "The Tragical Relation of the Virginia Assembly," and William Strachey's *A True Reportory*. Gates's 1610 refutation of cannibalism published for the Virginia Council came first, preceding the others by fourteen years. Gates became governor of Virginia after Percy's rule, but, delayed by a shipwreck in Bermuda, he did not set foot in the colony until May 1610. He arrived in the colony after the Starving Time when the worst of the winter was over and decided that returning to England was the only way to feed himself, his shipwrecked crew, and the original Jamestown colonists. On June 7, 1610, as the colonists were on their way down the James River, they ran into a longboat belonging to Thomas West's fleet, which had ample new supplies and an influx of men. The colony was saved, and West officially assumed rule of Virginia, leaving Gates free to return in July to England, where he published *A True Declaration*. Since scholars have long acknowledged *A True Declaration's* influence on William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, initially performed in 1611 and finally published in 1623, Gates's account presumably achieved wide circulation by the early 1610s. It would regain attention in 1625, when it was included in William Strachey's *A True Reportory*.

It is illuminating and important to recognize that all five accounts appeared and circulated during 1624–25....

Before the Starving Time of 1609–10, writers portrayed Virginia as a food-filled paradise where people did not have to labor to produce things to eat. That winter marked a turning point at which the characterization of New World abundance shifted from limitless to attainable only via hard work and strict regulations enforcing industrious behavior. The rumors of the Starving Time circulated by the pirates in Thomas Gates's account, by John Smith after his return to

England, and by the Spanish served to increase investors' worries about the colony. These stories provoked changes in laws pertaining to food supply and, consequently, Virginia's security....

Early explorers and writers described the New World as a paradise where food was readily available for virtually no work. These descriptions usually began with a listing of the land's merchantable or edible commodities. As early as the fourteenth century, Sir John Mandeville had promised abundance from new lands, and Richard Hakluyt was the first to do so specifically for English readers. One of the stories he quoted in his 1582 *Divers Voyages* promised spices such as cinnamon, cloves, mace, and nutmeg. The New World, he wrote, was "abounding in hony, venison, wilde foule, forests, [and] woods of all sortes." Abundance became one of the most useful and convincing keywords to describe the Americas.

Later travelers wrote glowing accounts of the country to prove that Virginia was a hospitable, fruitful, and boundless land. Writing in 1589, Arthur Barlowe observed, "The earth bringeth forth all things in abundance, as in the first creation, without toile or labour." Barlowe compared Virginia with the garden in Genesis, where Adam and Eve lived without having to work. He also compared the Virginia coast with other places, arguing, "in all the world the like abundance is not to be founde: and my selfe having seene those partes of Europe that most abound, finde such difference, as were incredible to be written." Virginia was exceptional, paradisaical; Europe offered no comparison with the ease of living in the New World.

Once Englishmen arrived in the Chesapeake, they quickly recited these earlier literary tropes and assumptions. One can almost picture early colonists wandering around the New World coast, putting various items into their mouths and rushing home to write about it. Smith wrote of rivers in the lands around Jamestown "so covered with swans, geese, duckes, and cranes, that we daily feasted with good bread, Virginia pease, pumpions, and putchamins, fish, fowle, and diverse sorts of wild beasts as fat as we could eate them." Smith noted the "great abundance" of birds, as well as numerous types of fish. Agriculture seldom played a role in these early accounts by colonial writers; rather, colonists ambled about, plucking game from the forests and fish from the sea.

Following the Starving Time, perceptions of abundance changed drastically. The early 1610s witnessed a spate of writing that referred to the colony's tribulations and acknowledged that optimistic appraisals of the country had led to disaster. Though some of these writers went so far as to call the Starving Time stories false or slanderous, they all agreed that the tales had injured Virginia's reputation. In 1611 Deputy Governor Thomas Dale, in a letter to Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury, referred to Virginia's early history, noting "some former slaunders yet upon itt (not removed)." In Alexander Whitaker's 1613 *Good Newes from Virginia*, the dedication by William Crashawe—an anti-Catholic preacher and investor in the Virginia Company—ridiculed "these idle and slanderous surmises" as well as "the calumnies and slanders, raised upon our Colonies, and the Countrey it selfe." When men mentioned these slanders, they probably referred to the cannibalism accusations spread by rumormongers. In Crashawe's

opinion these stories were "blown abroad by Papists, Players and such like, till they have filled the vulgar eares." Crashawe, then, attributed the rumors to the Spanish (the Papists) and, it would seem, to early enactments of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in other words, to the literary iteration of the Gates account. In 1615 Ralph Hamor, who sat on the Virginia Council and served as its secretary in 1611, published *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*. He referred to the cannibalism stories by citing the "manifould imputations, & disgraces, which Virginia hath innocently undergon." All these writers observed the damage that rumors of famine and cannibalism had done to the Virginia enterprise. They had their work cut out for them as they sought to turn the tide of public opinion.

Though historians have ascribed early failures in Virginia to any number of factors—exceptionally harsh winters, "unprecedented drought," poor planning with regard to food supplies, disease, or salt poisoning—English observers at the time concluded that the causes of starvation boiled down to laziness, selfishness, and poor governance. As rumors about cannibalism during the winter of 1609–10 reached the metropole, colonial leaders in Jamestown began to fling accusations at each other and at the colonists. Leaders blamed each other for hoarding food. Such criticisms implied that there might have been enough food in Virginia, as Gates had suggested, but that leaders had allotted it unevenly, precipitating a Starving Time severe enough to prompt cannibalism rumors. The problem of greedy leaders went back to the colony's first weeks. Smith did not hesitate to name names, citing President Edward Maria Wingfield as one of the guilty who ate from his private stores of "Oatmeale, Sacke, Oyle, Aquavitæ, Beefe, [and] Egges" while the rank and file starved during some of Smith's earliest days in Virginia. For this reason Smith and other members of the council deposed Wingfield on September 10, 1607, and replaced him with John Ratcliffe. Even these actions, however, did not remedy food problems in a way sufficient to prevent famine in 1609–10.

Critics also decried the laziness of early colonists. In doing so writers implied that the problem was not Virginia but the people living there; in contrast, industrious men would prosper in the New World. Crashawe described the "base and idle lubbers, that come from thence." Hamor suggested that if there had been a famine, it had resulted from indolence. He noted that he would "deterre all lasie, impotent, and ill livers from addressing themselves thither, as being a Country too worthy for them, and altogether disconsonant to their natures." By claiming that only the most hardworking men deserved the New World, such writers reserved Virginia for the virtuous and blamed the earlier misery and death on the failings of indolent and selfish colonists as well as on the inadequate leadership of early governors. These writers argued that it was possible for investors and settlers to recoup their losses and start over; idleness was an easily remedied sin. By leveling these charges, writers suggested that the colony could still have a bright future.

New laws implemented in the second decade of the seventeenth century suggest that stories about cannibalism during the Starving Time functioned as a turning point in how colonists understood foodways in Virginia. In 1612 William Strachey published the *Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall*, a compendium

of regulations for the colony first envisioned by Gates in May 1610, approved by Thomas West in June, and enlarged by Dale in 1611. Significantly, three of the men connected to cannibalism stories during the Starving Time—Gates and Strachey, in refuting rumors, and West, by virtue of having a brother responsible for the storytelling pirates—involved themselves directly in the lawmaking process undertaken to prevent starvation in the future. Even as they denied stories of cannibalism and famine, these men constructed regulations to control food supply and consumption.

Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall contained numerous rules dictating access to and control of food, manifesting a singular preoccupation with such matters. In fact, of the first thirty-seven articles, more than one-quarter dictated how people would eat: seven referred directly to food and three to provisions trading. Punishments for stealing and hoarding food were draconian. One would face execution if caught robbing provisions from the common store, “by water or land, out of boate, house, or knapsack.” Those daring to “spoil and wast or steale the same, or robbe any vineyard, or gather up the grapes, or steale any eares of the come growing” would also “be punished with death.” Laws warned that bakers who employed weights to make their loaves heavier or used less flour or meal (presumably siphoning it off to hoard) would lose their ears for a first offense, be confined for “a yeare [in] the Gallies” for a second, and spend three years in prison for a third. Even colonists who owned their animals had to ask permission from those in charge before butchering them, perhaps to prevent colonists who did not own domesticated animals from killing those belonging to others. Those guilty of this crime “in the Principall” would die; those “in the accessory” would have their hands burned and ears lopped off, and those concealing the aforesaid crime would be whipped....

Not incidental to these rules about food and eating were warnings about gluttony as well as elements that might refer to the cannibalism stories. One of Strachey’s final observations for the common soldier cautioned, “He must not set his minde over-greedily upon his belly, and continuall feeding, but rest himselfe contented with such provisions as may bee conveniently provided, his owne labour purchase, or his meanes reach unto.” Though *Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall* did not explicitly mention cannibalism, it instituted new laws against murder, except in self-defense. Perhaps Dale, Gates, Strachey, and West were thinking back to the case of the wife killer and hoped to forestall such excuses in the future.

At the same time, *Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall* more directly implied that anthropophagy would be punished severely, even in desperate circumstances. Strachey took special care to warn against the especially heinous crime of a man committing murder “to satisfie his owne pleasure and appetite.” By 1612 “appetite” certainly connoted a desire for food, and a meaning propounded as early as 1366 indicated that the desire for food was natural. Lawmakers acknowledged that the need to feed oneself, even in the face of starvation, was a natural desire but indicated that cannibalism was still unacceptable. Given the prevalence of rumors about cannibalism, Strachey’s use of the word appetite must have given men pause; they were not to kill because they were hungry.

Men employing the starvation defense would be punished the same as those who killed in anger. Colonists contemplating such actions would do well to remember that “the life of a souldier, or a laborer, belongs to none to take away, but to the Lord Generall, Liefteutenant General, Marshal, or their deputy or deputies.” One who killed a man to eat him would pay with his life. Colonial leaders may not have been willing to face the issue of cannibalism in overt terms or to answer the question of whether it had actually occurred, but they took extraordinary measures to prevent instances of man-eating in the future. By publishing *Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall* in London, they did more than publicly pronounce new policies; they also offered reassurance....

After the implementation of William Strachey’s *Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall*, post-Starving Time accounts of the colony ensured that cannibalism would remain etched in colonial memory for a long time. These memories served two purposes in the 1610s and 1620s. They allowed colonists to see the Starving Time, even in all its gruesomeness, as a moment when colonists continued to observe English foodways. More importantly, they enabled writers to posit a sense of optimism about the future that, though more measured than Richard Hakluyt’s early accounts, still fostered a sense of unity and possibility regarding the colony’s development.

Memories of the Starving Time explained how colonists understood cannibalism within the cultural context of the Old and New World. Preconceived notions about Indian cannibalism as well as Indian methods of obtaining food shaped these perceptions. Long before English colonization began, fantasies of cannibals infused textual and visual representations of the New World. Travelers coming to America expected to encounter the practice because they had seen cannibals depicted on New World maps and read about cannibals in ancient mythology, in Sir John Mandeville’s writings, and in more recent accounts of Spanish voyages by Christopher Columbus, writer-lawyer Hakluyt, and his cousin, Richard Hakluyt the Younger. Only years before, witch-hunters in Europe—especially in Germany—had accused suspected women of killing and eating babies. But the English were not averse to making use of human bodies for medical purposes. Doctors recorded treatments for epilepsy, vertigo, and other “lunaticisms” that recommended eating dried placenta and powdered human skull, and these medical recipes, or receipts, made their way from pharmacopoeias into contemporary cookbooks. These examples are not to suggest that recipes reflect what everyone was eating or that medicinal cannibalism shocked patients in the same way as Hakluyt’s account of European travelers shamefully admitting they had broiled and eaten meat “of such a mans buttocke”; rather, cannibalism could at times titillate and at other times represent conventional practices.

When the English arrived in Virginia, they were astonished to find that the Powhatans were not man-eaters. Robert Appelbaum has suggested that the English, finding the Indians were not cannibals, claimed cannibalism for themselves. In remembering cannibalism during the Starving Time, George Percy and John Smith portrayed it as a deliberately non-Indian practice that otherwise followed English foodways. Unlike Chesapeake Indians who, according to

incorrect European perceptions, adhered to a fast-and-feast cycle of eating, preferred their food raw, and did not preserve food, Englishmen refused to allow the natural absence of food to determine whether they would be allowed to eat. Once they acquired food, the eaters were restrained in their consumption; in Smith's account, the colonists took the time to prepare the body with roots and herbs, and Percy and Smith recorded the colonists eating only part of the corpses at once. The eaters employed salting to preserve what was left of the bodies, indicating a continuing concern with obtaining food. Such moves implied adherence to English foodways: even when starving, the English stored their food and ate it in moderation, allowing them to survive and maintain their Englishness in the most desperate of circumstances....

Memories of the Starving Time combined with the continued belief that cannibalism had occurred played important roles in creating the colonists' collective sense of themselves as hardworking laborers in the first half of the seventeenth century. Remembering the Starving Time fostered a growing sense of optimism that such tragedy would not occur again. Ralph Hamor asked in 1615, "why should any man (if he be industrious) mistrust starving?" In 1617 John Rolfe observed that the colony was "plentifully stoored with food and other commodities" and wondered incredulously whether it was possibly "the same still it was, when men pined with famyne?" His point was like that of the other writers: Virginia had not changed but its colonists supposedly had.

A quarter century later, cannibalism still lingered in Virginians' memory. In 1650 writer Edward Williams noted that "the incomparable Virgin hath raised her dejected head, cleared her enclouded reputation, and now like the Eldest Daughter of Nature expresseth a priority in her Dowry ... her unwounded wombe full of all those Treasuries which indeere Provinces to respect of glory." He used the metaphor of a woman who had not yet given birth, which drew readers' attention to the potential inherent in Virginia. After a second Starving Time, colonial leaders had fought off rumors of laziness, squashed stories of cannibalism, and instituted stricter laws. And the colony was finally prospering, though from tobacco instead of any sort of food....

Cannibalism captured the early colonial imagination. The reiterations of tales describing cannibalism served as a turning point in Virginia's history. They enabled colonists to shift from envisioning the New World as a place of boundless abundance to one of more realistic and measured possibility. The Starving Time functioned as a fortunate fall that allowed leaders to reassert control over unruly settlers and to impose laws controlling food production, dissemination, and consumption. Tales from the time also dictated refined rules for future English settlement. Men settling in other parts of the New World would take note of Virginians' experiences. Unlike men in Jamestown, Plymouth settlers knew not to permit food hoarding. And though they also experienced a period of dearth, it was shorter than Jamestown's, and no one was accused of eating anyone else. Plymouth colonists agreed before departing England that for seven years "all profits and benefits that are got by trade, traffic, trucking, working, fishing or any other means of any person or persons, remain still in the common stock." After Jamestown future colonists instituted preventative measures to guard

against famine, most likely because accounts of the Starving Time had already served their purpose, warning of dangers involved in settling the New World.

The circulation of Starving Time accounts raised awareness about the possibility of famine and justified stringent measures for preventing repeat occurrences. Once the Starving Time was long enough past, it allowed colonists to reflect on how far they had come. The stories of that winter helped to create one of the first myths in American history: the myth of Jamestown's creation through the absence of food and settlers' efforts to overcome starvation. Whether people believed early colonials practiced cannibalism, the failures of the Starving Time enabled Virginians to realize that they could try again, that future starvation was not inevitable, and that the possibilities for future colonial endeavors were, in fact, abundant.



FURTHER READING

- Elaine G. Breslaw, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (1997).
- Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (2004).
- Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England* (2002).
- Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* (1999).
- Joyce Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (1992).
- Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (1999).
- Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (1981).
- Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985).
- Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (2003).
- Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (1991).

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