

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

On Life in Jamestown

The harsh realities of life in Virginia shattered the dreams of the colonists who left England in search of a better life. No one seemed to have been prepared to survive in Jamestown, much less to prosper.

As you read the passages below, keep in mind the dreams and expectations of the first English settlers who arrived in America.

DREAMS OF RICHES

Drama, poetry, and literature in the early 1600s portrayed Virginia as a land of beauty and wealth. The following description of Virginia is from Eastward Ho!, a popular play in London.

I tell thee golde is more plentifull there than copper is with us. . . . Why man all their dripping pans and their chamber pottes are pure golde . . . and as for rubies and diamonds, they goe forth on holy dayes and gather 'hem by the seashore to hang on their children's coates and sticke in their cappes.

BOUNTIFUL LAND

In 1609, the London Company published a pamphlet promoting Virginia as a good investment and place to colonize.

There are valleys and plains streaming with sweet springs, like veins in a natural body. There are hills and mountains making a sensible proffer of hidden treasure, never yet searched. The land is full of minerals and plenty of woods, of which we have a lack in England. There are growing goodly oaks and elms, beech and birch, spruce, walnut, cedar and fir trees in great abundance. The soil is strong and lusty of its own nature. . . . It yields also resin, turpentine, pitch and tar, sassafras, mulberry trees and silk worms, many skins and rich furs, many sweet woods and dyers' woods and other costly dyes, plenty of sturgeon, timber for shipping, mast, plant and deal, soap ashes, caviar, and what else we know not yet, because our days are young. . . .

Our land [England] abounds with swarms of idle persons, which having no means of labor to relieve their misery, do likewise swarm in lewd and naughty practises, so that if we seek not some ways for their foreign employment, we must shortly provide more prisons and corrections for their bad conditions. . . .

Be they never so poor, so they be honest, and painful, the place shall make them rich: all kinds of artificers we must first employ, as carpenters, shipwrights, masons, sawyers, bricklayers, ploughmen, sowers, planters, fishermen, coopers, smiths, metalmen, tailors, turners, and such like, to make and fit all necessaries for comfort and use of the colony. For such as have no trades, if they be industrious, they shall have employment enough.

