

Jamestown: why did so many colonists die? essay sample

[Government](#), [Colonialism](#)



Jamestown is most well known for being the oldest permanent English colony in America. Even though it was a thriving colony, it was not always this way. The Jamestown colony was extremely unsuccessful for several reasons, including their ignorance about colonization, lack of essential survival skills, and its constantly decaying relationship with the Natives.

Jamestown was the first permanent colony set up by the British, so, as imagined, they were not accustomed to the difficulties of colonization. The English settled near the ocean, which allowed for easy transportation but the fresh drinking water often was mixed with the salty ocean water, becoming unsafe for human consumption. According to document A, this brackish water, when ingested, would lead to dehydration. When dehydrated, the colonists would drink even more of the polluted water, leading to further dehydration and eventually diseases such as dysentery and giardia.

In Document C, it states that thirty-nine of the 104 original colonists were sailors. If the English were more experienced, they would have had people that were skilled in another trade instead of being solely a sailor. Once the boat arrived at North America, the sailors would be virtually useless. If the sailors had another talent, they would still be useful at the colony. This would have been a much more efficient way to start up Jamestown.

Another extremely foolish factor was that settlers would dump their waste into the river. Most rivers would not cause a problem, but since Jamestown was so close to the ocean, at high tide, the waste would be washed back in, causing extremely unclean drinking water, which led to disease.

The English colonists also lacked a lot of crucial survival skills, which attributed to the failure of the colony. There were far too many gentlemen on both the original voyage and the First Resupply. Gentlemen were wealthy men who were not accustomed to manual labor and were virtually untrained in any skill whatsoever. They were not able to provide anything for the colony, except money, which was only useful when over in England.

Along with too many gentlemen, there were far too few apothecaries. Apothecaries provided medicine for illnesses. There was only one present on both the original voyage and the First Resupply together. This should have been one of the most common professions because there were countless unknown diseases that the settlers would be extremely susceptible to.

Several other professions were not present in as high enough numbers as they should have been. These include laborers, carpenters, and blacksmiths. Of the 110 present on the original voyage, there were only twelve laborers, four carpenters, and a sole blacksmith. These are three of the most important occupations needed to build a new colony. After all, 17 men cannot possibly be held responsible for housing 110 people. Even with adequate resources, the time requirement would simply be too high.

The Natives and the English were extremely different types of people, and the Natives caused the English serious problems. Several attacks were launched on the English. These attacks were harsh and took their toll on the English. In fall 1609 alone, over 100 colonists were killed.

Leader Wahunsunacock of the Powhatan people reversed a treaty with the English, killed negotiating teams, and cut off food supply. As stated in Document E, without the negotiating teams and food supply, the colonists had no way of trading with the Powhatan. With no way of trading for food, Jamestown was falling into the worst time of its history, the “ Starving Time”.

This “ Starving Time” was brutal on the colonists. Dr. Hentze writes that the Third Resupply was expected to arrive soon, but since it did not arrive and since there was no way to trade with the Natives for food, the population drastically dropped from 500 down to about forty. The “ Starving Time” was incredibly harsh for the English. To make matters worse for the colonists, this was during wintertime, which only increased the effects of the “ Starving Time”.

Without assistance from the Natives and the Third Resupply, Jamestown quickly turned in to a disaster. While the British already had problems involving colonization ignorance, lack of essential skills, and problems with the Natives, the “ Starving Time” was what caused the most drastic effects on the first permanent English colony, Jamestown.