



The three European nations dominant in colonizing North America were Spain, France, and Great Britain. The first successful English settlement in the New World was Jamestown (aka Fort James), founded by the London Company in present-day Virginia, nearly a century after Spain had established its foothold across the Atlantic. Jamestown's survival would not become solidified until almost two decades later. The challenge resulted largely due to the poor location choice for settlement. The area was low and swampy, subject to outbreaks of malaria; surrounded by dense woods, making it difficult to cultivate; and bordered powerful Indian tribes, initially friendly but nevertheless a potential threat due to culture vastly foreign to that of white Europeans. Another contributing factor was the assemblage of settlers. Most were somewhat well-to-do, unaccustomed and unwilling to perform the manual labor necessary to establish a prosperous colony. [During Jamestown's first 17 years of existence, an influx of some 10,000 settlers arrived, continuously bolstering the colony. In 1624, the Jamestown population was only 1,275.](#) Of the 144 men who departed England to found Jamestown, only 104 survived the voyage. Within the first year, just 38 remained. In the spring of 1609, another 600 Englishmen arrived. What was ahead for them was nothing short of horrific. Neighboring Indians, originally friendly but now aggravated by actions of the earlier settlers, initiated what is known as the "starving time." After killing livestock and destroying crops, the Indians essentially held the settlers captive within their own palisades. Only 60 emaciated men emerged from the harrowing winter ordeal (one desperate settler killed his wife and survived on her remains). After 1612, the cultivation of tobacco (encouraged by John Rolfe) and establishment of the supportive "headright system" a few years later would put Jamestown on the path to eventual survival.