

The War of 1622

Secondary Source

Powhatan died in 1618 and his half-brother Opechancanough [O pech un KAN O] became the leader of the Indian confederation. While Powhatan was alive Opechancanough objected to the way he dealt with the English. Although he still distrusted the English, Opechancanough assured the settlers that he had no desire to make war on them. Between 1618 and 1622 he watched as more and more settlers came to Virginia. They cleared forest lands where Native Americans hunted to plant tobacco. They constructed villages and began to push the Indians to the west.

In 1622, four years after Powhatan's death, Opechancanough decided he had to stop the English. He knew that the English had been well supplied over the years and had guns and ammunition. He knew that his forces were no match in open war with the English. Therefore he decided to strike without warning. His plans were so secret that the English were caught by complete surprise. One Christian Indian had told officials in Jamestown of Opechancanough's plans but they did not believe that the Indians would dare attack them. On March 22 the Indians attacked killing about 350 settlers in and around Jamestown.



The 1622 Massacre in Virginia

This engraving shows defenseless men, women, and children being murdered. Although the English had guns, none are in evidence in the de Bry engraving. De Bry was not a witness to the Indian attack and created the engraving from accounts that were published in Europe.

In Theodor de Bry, *America* (Frankfurt, 1628) Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-5306

The attack killed one out of every three English settlers. Several colonial leaders said the attack would never have happened if they had treated the Indians with fairness. Colonist Edward Waterhouse and others, including Captain John Smith who was in England when the attack occurred, argued that the attack was good for the colony since now they could destroy the Indians and take their land.

After the attack Opechancanough was captured during a peace conference but managed to escape. Although there was no peace agreement and no major attacks, fighting took place from time to time. The attack on Jamestown had been so effective that it took about 20 years for the colony to recover.

In 1644 Opechancanough struck again. This time the old chief had to be carried into battle on a litter. During the attack 300 colonists were killed. Opechancanough was taken prisoner and shot by one of his guards in Jamestown. The Powhatans gave up the struggle and moved west. By 1669 there were only about 2,000 of the 20,000 Indians who had lived in the region at the time the English arrived.

The Barbarous Massacre

by Edward Waterhouse (London, 1622)

Primary Source²

...Thus have you scene the particulars of this massacre...wherein treachery and cruelty have done their worst to us, or rather to themselves; for whose understanding is so shallow, as not to perceive that this must needs be for the good of the Plantation...

Because our hands which before were tied with gentleness and fair usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Savages... So that we, who hitherto have had possession of no more ground than their waste, ...now by right of War, and the law of Nations, invade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us; whereby we shall enjoy their cultivated places...Now their cleared grounds in all their villages...shall be inhabited by us....

...Victory of them may be gained many ways; by force, by surprise, by famine in burning their corn, by destroying and burning their Boats, Canoes, and Houses, breaking their fishing Wares, by assailing them in their hunting, where by they get the greatest part of their sustenance in Winter, by pursuing and chasing them with our horses, and blood-Hounds to draw after them...and tear them...

Because the Indians who before were used as friends may now most justly be compelled to servitude and drudgery, and supply the room of men... [who] may employ themselves more entirely in their Arts and Occupations... while the Savages perform their inferior works...

Contemporary English

The treachery and cruelty of the massacre of 1622 has helped us more than the Indians. They are so simple minded that they do not understand that their attack was actually good for us.

Now we no longer have to deal with them in peace. Since they double-crossed us with their surprise attack, we are now free to go to war and destroy them. Because they made war on us we are at liberty to take their good land. Their cleared land in all their villages can be ours to farm.

We can defeat them with our greater force and by surprise attacks. We can cause them to starve by burning their villages and their corn. We can prevent them from fishing by burning their canoes and destroying their fishing equipment. We can keep them from getting the food they need in the winter by chasing them with our horses. We can send our blood-hounds after them and tear them apart.

When the Indians pretended to be our friends we could not make war on them. Now that they made war on us we can force them into slavery and make them do the work we do not enjoy. This will give us more time to enjoy life.

²Source: "How the Massacre Was Good For the Plantation," Library of Congress, *American Memory*
<<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/timeline/colonial/indians/good.html>>