

THE "BARBAROUS MASSACRE" RECONSIDERED: THE POWHATAN UPRISING OF 1622 AND THE HISTORIANS

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The Powhatan Uprising of March 22, 1621/22, was the single most significant event of Anglo-Indian relations in Virginia. An early example of a native culture's rebellion against intruding European civilization, the uprising climaxed a mere decade and a half of intercultural contact. Its impact upon trans-Atlantic ideology and policy was impressive: it brought to an end the first (forty year) phase of British imperialism accelerated Virginia's unique course of development, and hastened the doom of an American Indian empire with vast potential.

The 1622 uprising is an authentic historical watershed, but it is an event so familiar that historians have rarely seen the necessity for detailed analysis. No sizable scholarly account of the uprising has ever been published. Because of this serious historiographical neglect and because of the mushrooming interest in both Native-American studies and colonial Chesapeake history, a monograph focusing upon events of 1622 and set within the context of British imperialism is needed to fill an interpretative void.

This study, in its present form, could not have been written a few years ago. The 1960's and 1970's produced the relevant interpretations and the reawakened consciousness requisite for a revision of Virginia's early history written from an intercultural perspective. In the past decade, respected historians of colonial

America have retold the English story,¹ while ethnohistorians and anthropologists continue to research and analyze various aspects of the Powhatan past.²

However, concerning the 1622 uprising itself, the historiography remains notably shallow and deficient. After three and a half centuries of myopic and mythopoeic Anglo-American historical interpretation, the important details of the uprising--causation, timing, rationale, and ramifications--still languish in the shadows of factual obscurity. Although there are no books, essays, or even dissertations devoted to the topic, any new interpretation of the uprising must be

¹Especially relevant and important have been the contributions of Philip L. Barbour: *The Three Worlds of Captain John Smith* (Boston, 1964); ed., *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter, 1606-1609*, Hakluyt Society, 2d Ser., CXXXVI-CXXXVII, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1968); *Pocahontas and Her World* (Boston, 1969); and the new edition of the works of Capt. John Smith, now in progress; and of Edmund S. Morgan: *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975).

²Significant is the work of Christian F. Feest, a Viennese anthropologist: "Powhatan: A Study in Political Organization," in *Wiener Völkerkundlicher Mitteilungen*, VII (1966), pp. 69-83; "Virginia Indian Miscellany," 2 parts, in *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, XX (1966), pp. 1-7, XXII (1967), pp. 5-25; and "Seventeenth Century Virginia Algonquian Population Estimates," Archaeological Society of Virginia, *Quarterly Bulletin*, XXVIII (1973), pp. 66-79. Also relevant is Lewis R. Binford, "Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Investigation of Cultural Diversity and Progressive Development among Aboriginal Cultures of Coastal Virginia and North Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., Anthropology, Univ. of Michigan, 1964), and Douglas H. Ubelaker, *Reconstruction of Demographic Profiles from Ossuary Skeletal Samples: A Case Study from the Tidewater Potomac*, Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, No. 18 (Washington, 1974).

aggressively revisionist in order to correct the many error-ridden, prejudicial, short, and superficial treatments of the past. Even more recent appraisals of the uprising, although disburdened of passion and anti-Indian bias, have done an inadequate job of explaining events. Historians who have "interpreted" the Powhatan Uprising in the past two decades still view that event in terms of simplistic monocausality or vague multicausality.

It is not radical to insist that the historian answer at least two basic questions in explaining an historical event:

- (1) What were the preconditions (the results of long-range causes) that set the stage for the reaction to precipitants (immediate causes)?
- (2) What were the precipitants that indicate why something happened when it did?³

As fundamentally obvious as these two points may seem, no historian ever has linked the preconditions growing out of fifteen years of Anglo-Powhatan relations with the timing of the uprising in March, 1622. Nor has anyone isolated or differentiated the factors which assured periods of peaceful relations or those which triggered full-scale warfare during the decade and a half prior to the uprising.

Before discussing the historiography of the Powhatan Uprising of 1622, however, an important "revisionist" position should be taken on the problem of terminology. The word "massacre," as in the "Great Massacre of March 22, 1621/22," will not be used in this study, contrary to its traditional, almost universal acceptance. Derived from the old French word, *macecler* (to butcher), "massacre" refers to the indiscriminate slaughter of persons on a large scale for reasons of revenge or plunder. Although this definition accurately describes what the Powhatans did in 1622, the word "massacre" should be replaced for two reasons.

³See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis* (New York, 1969), p. 298.

Due to the prejudicial misuse of the term "massacre" by past historians, volatile connotations remain that should not be permitted in this era of white sensitivity and Indian sensitivity to the Native-Americans' heritage. As one historian explained, a "... fight became a battle when the white man won, a *massacre* when the Indians prevailed."⁴ Secondly, there is a better, more accurate term for describing events of 1622--"uprising." Denoting revolution and the rebellion against oppression, "uprising" is a valid and functional substitute for "massacre." The Powhatans in 1622 were considered under the dominion of King James I, and the massive, surprise attack they launched on March 22, 1621/22, was actually the first blow in a decade-long revolutionary war designed to rid their land of the hated aliens. Engaged in a desperate, patriotic struggle for cultural survival, the Powhatans were regarded by English contemporaries as "rebels of the South Colony."⁵ Thus, "uprising" has validity in the historical context, a fact recognized by scholars

⁴Wesley Frank Craven, *White, Red, and Black: The Seventeenth Century Virginian* (Charlottesville, Va., 1971), p. 51; emphasis added. White historians have to be extremely sensitive to the Native-American's search for his past. In a recent book review, it was mentioned how the Nez Perce tribe was indignant about whites referring to 19th century cavalry "skirmishes" with their ancestors, engagements that they considered full-fledged "battles." Wilcomb E. Washburn's review of *Noon Nee-Me-Poo (We, the Nez Perces): Culture and History of the Nez Perces* (Lapwei, Idaho, 1973), in *Idaho Yesterdays*, XVIII (1974), pp. 30-31.

⁵John Pory to Sir Francis Wyatt, governor of Virginia, autumn 1622, in Sydney V. James, Jr., ed., *Three Visitors to Early Plymouth* (Plimoth Plantation, Mass., 1963), p. 18.

of Native-American history, who pioneered the use of the term in their writings.⁶

All interpretations of the 1622 uprising can be traced to two contemporary English sources: Edward Waterhouse's polemical *Declaration of the State of the Colony and . . . a Relation of the Barbarous Massacre* (London, 1622), the "official view" of the Virginia Company of London,⁷ and Captain John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Islands* (London, 1624), Book IV.⁸

Waterhouse provided most of the "factual details" of the uprising--many of which cannot be proved or disproved--and printed the only list of those who were killed on March 22, 1621/22.⁹ Judging by the historiographical reliance placed upon Waterhouse, his account is the single most important source concerning the uprising.

The *Relation of the Barbarous Massacre* identified the "true cause" of the uprising as the "instigation of

⁶William T. Hagan, *American Indians*, Chicago History of American Civilization (Chicago, 1961), p. 9; Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian* (New York, 1972), p. 175. Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975) referred to the 1622 attack as a "rebellion" (p. 56, 164), "rising" (p. 55), and an "uprising" (p. 77). "Uprising" will be the term used throughout this study.

⁷Published in August, 1622, Waterhouse's account was company sponsored and presented the best side of things to the public. A usable reprint is most conveniently found in Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1906-1935), III, pp. 541-71.

⁸Available in many facsimile editions, the standard modern reprint is still Edward Arber and A. G. Bradley, eds., *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1910).

⁹See Waterhouse, *Relation of the Massacre*.

the Divell (enemy to theire [the Indians'] salvation) and the dayly feare that possesse them, that in time we by our growing continually upon them, would dispossesse them of this Country."¹⁰ Waterhouse, of course, was not objective in his presentation. He made no attempt to consider preconditions or to explain the timing of the attack, and he actually suppressed information in his possession in order to remove any hint of English culpability in provoking Indian actions.¹¹ By emphasizing the treachery and barbarity of the "perfidious and inhumane" Powhatans,¹² by interpreting the 1622 attack as inexplicable and without reasonable provocation, and by couching causality in terms of territorial-spatial issues, Waterhouse's *Relation* established the parameters and the biases that historians have adhered to for three and a half centuries.

Captain John Smith drew extensively from Waterhouse's account, but he added new details that make his interpretation of 1622 the most satisfactory because of its originality, plausibility, and sense of balance. Although hatred of Indians and desire for revenge were ever present in Smith's account, he nevertheless realized that a precipitant--an act of English provocation--brought on the March attack. Smith linked the timing of the uprising with the murder by the English of a mysterious and respected Powhatan leader, Nemattanew, only two weeks before.¹³ Smith's interpretation of Nemattanew's death as the "Prologue to this Tragedy"--and the event that prompted Powhatan revenge--was a significant corrective to Waterhouse's distorted

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹See J. Frederick Fausz and Jon Kukla, "A Letter of Advice to the Governor of Virginia, 1624," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXIV (1977), pp. 108-09, 109n.

¹²Waterhouse, *Relation of the Massacre*, pp. 18-22.

¹³Smith, *Generall Historie*, p. 144. Smith spelled the name "Nemattanow," but most versions of it indicated an "-ew" end sound. See Fausz and Kukla, "Letter of Advice," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIV (1977), pp. 108-109n.

perspective. Smith accepted Waterhouse's conspiracy theory concerning pre-1622 Powhatan plots against the English, but he disagreed with the interpretative importance assigned to the "Divell" or territorial issues.¹⁴ For the pragmatic captain, the Powhatans " . . . did not kill the English because they were Christians, but for their weapons and commodities, that were rare novelties."¹⁵

Only one year after the *Generall Historie* was published, the Reverend Samuel Purchas brought out his *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes* in which he presented his own views of the recent Indian uprising.¹⁶ The leading ideologue of English imperialism after Hakluyt, Purchas relied heavily on both Waterhouse and Smith and developed a patchwork synthesis. Plagiarizing much of Waterhouse's account, Purchas inserted Smith's details about Nemattanew's death and realized its importance for explaining the Powhatans' precisely timed revenge.¹⁷ In fact, Purchas went beyond the *Generall Historie* and described Nemattanew's murder as the "Cause of the Massacre," although in another location he mentioned the "instigation of the Divell" and land dispossession as possible causes.¹⁸

Since Waterhouse, Smith, and Purchase were writing about current events, they lacked objectivity and a sense of historical perspective. This explains why all three had an ill-defined and ambiguous view of preconditions and precipitant causes. For the historian, these three contemporary observers are important for

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁵Capt. John Smith, *New England Trials* (London, 1622), in Arber and Bradley, eds., *Travels and Works*, I, p. 262.

¹⁶4 vols. (London, 1625). The best modern reprint is in 20 vols. (Glasgow, 1905-1907). The uprising is discussed in Vol. XIX.

¹⁷Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, XIX, pp. 168-69.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 164.

the factual details they provided, but it is interesting to note how often scholars have accepted and perpetuated the anti-Indian biases of 1622-1625.¹⁹

Later commentators on the uprising of 1622 based their accounts on the triumvirate of Waterhouse, Smith, and Purchas, but often, in a fit of originality, they would add "factual" details that helped create, over time, a unique, mythopoeic American interpretation.²⁰ Early in the eighteenth century, Robert Beverley, belonging to the planter class that had profited in a Virginia freed of an Indian menace, wrote " . . . the earliest work which attempt[ed] a comprehensive description of the colony's past history."²¹ Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia* (London, 1705) viewed Indians in a less passionate, more paternalistic light than had the earlier authors,²² but his narrative revealed a chauvinistic, colonial Virginia bias. According to Beverley, prior to 1622 Englishmen treated the Powhatans with a kindness--indeed, with "Freedom and Friendship"--unknown in Jamestown's early days.²³ But this congeniality

¹⁹The post-uprising English revenge literature is not discussed here as these writings are not critical to the present topic.

²⁰Over the centuries, Virginia's native-son historians have embellished the story with such "facts" as: the uprising occurred on Good Friday, 1622; John Rolfe was killed in the attack; and that up to 400 or more Englishmen were slain. These gratuitous details are never attributed to a source, but rather have attained their own validity by repeated telling.

²¹Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, Louis B. Wright, ed. (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1947), editor's introduction, p. xiii.

²²Gary B. Nash, "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), p. 223.

²³Beverley, *History*, Wright, ed., p. 51.

exposed the defenselessness of the colonists and gave the natives the "Occasion to think more contemptibly of them."²⁴ Nemattanew's death " . . . was reckon'd all the Provocation given . . . to act this bloody Tragedy, and to . . . engage in so horrid Villainy all the Kings and Nations bordering upon the English Settlements."²⁵ The Powhatans had plotted a "Hellish Contrivance"--the annihilation of all the English--"according to their cruel Way of leaving none behind to bear Resentment."²⁶ Beverley stressed the precipitant cause of the uprising and ignored the important preconditions, but at least he, unlike many later writers, provided a rational explanation for why the Powhatans had attacked when they did.²⁷

Four decades after the publication of Beverley's *History*, another son of the Old Dominion, the Reverend William Stith, published his *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia* (Williamsburg, 1747). Stith was quite passionate and prejudiced in his account of the "cruel and bloody Massacre," an event "most memorable in our Annals."²⁸ The connection between Nemattanew's death and the timing of the uprising was implied, but never directly stated by Stith. He also implies that the Powhatan overlord, Opechancanough, had formulated his conspiracy for annihilation long in advance.²⁹ The period of peace immediately preceding the uprising, Stith explained, was intended for the Powhatans' benefit, allowing them a "Taste of Civil Life" and protecting them from an "English War" that could have easily exterminated them. Thus it was that the unsuspecting, trusting, and kindly Englishmen fell "by the Hands of a perfidious, naked,

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 54-56. Almost alone among twentieth century scholars, Philip Barbour interpreted Nemattanew's death as precipitating the uprising. However well he understood the timing of the event, Barbour made no attempt to investigate the important preconditions. *Pocahontas*, pp. 205-06.

²⁸Stith, *History*, p. 208.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 209.

and dastardly People, . . . Blood-hounds" all.³⁰ The myth of English innocence and Indian treachery was still thriving 125 years after Waterhouse.

In the next century, another noteworthy Virginia historian, Charles Campbell, interpreted the 1622 uprising for the "sophisticated" readers of 1860. Campbell's *History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* mentioned Nemattanew ("wild, untutored savage!"), but his death was only vaguely related to the timing of the March attack.³¹ In almost all other respects, Campbell merely paraphrased Waterhouse's version of events, retaining of course the flavor of post-1622 English hatreds.³²

Campbell's perspective on the Powhatans could have benefited from the more enlightened views of Henry R. Schoolcraft, who completed his six-volume classic, *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, in 1857.³³ Schoolcraft was

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 210, 211. See Nash, "Image of the Indian," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), p. 224.

³¹Campbell, *History*, pp. 160, 161.

³²Campbell wrote: "The red men of Virginia were driven back, like hunted wolves, from their ancient haunts. While their fate cannot fail to excite commiseration, . . . the perpetual possession of this country by the aborigines would have been *incompatible with the designs of Providence* in promoting the welfare of mankind. . . . The unrelenting hostility of the savages, their perfidy and vindictive implacability, made sanguinary measures necessary." *Ibid.*, p. 167; emphasis added.

³³(Philadelphia, 1851-1857). These volumes were reprinted at different times with altered titles. The quote is from Vol. VI: *Archives of Aboriginal Knowledge* . . . (Philadelphia, 1860). For an analysis of Schoolcraft's interpretations, see Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Baltimore, 1967 [orig. publ. 1953]), pp. 120-28.

sympathetic to the Powhatans, portraying Opechancanough as a wise and courageous leader, with a "head whose anatomy would have honored Solon." Opechancanough, always the "unflinching enemy of the colony," became "inflexibly bent on preventing the progress of the Saxon race" as early as 1618.³⁴ His plot to root out the English was, according to Schoolcraft, more interrupted than furthered by the "striking incident" of Nemattanew's murder in early March, 1622. Even though the timing of the uprising and the various preconditions went unanalyzed by Schoolcraft, the Powhatans were viewed more as efficient strategists than as treacherous murderers. Stripped of much of the inflammatory rhetoric that Waterhouse had employed, Schoolcraft's account conveyed a sense of Indian pride and cultural aspiration, and the rebels of 1622 were treated as protagonists acting to better their condition.³⁵

However, Schoolcraft's sensitivity to the Powhatan perspective was not adopted by writers later in the nineteenth century. In 1877, the famous historian of colonial Virginia, Edward D. Neill, mentioned the uprising of 1622 in a short essay devoted mainly to the development of the iron industry in the seventeenth century.³⁶ Writing only a year after Custer's defeat, Neill noted how the Powhatans had tricked the trusting Englishmen with pledges of peace and how, ". . . as often since, these professions and confessions were a prelude to treachery and massacre."³⁷

The equally famous antiquarian, Alexander Brown, as late as 1898 relied upon block quotations from Waterhouse to tell the story of the uprising. In his *First Republic in America*,³⁸ Brown interpreted

³⁴Schoolcraft, *Archives of Aboriginal Knowledge*, p. 98.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

³⁶"Massacre at Falling Creek, Virginia, March 22, 1621-22," *The Magazine of American History*, 1 (April, 1877), pp. 222-25.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 224.

³⁸(Boston, 1898).

Nemattanew's death as only incidental to the timing of the attack, an attack that was in the planning stages at least a year before March, 1621/22.³⁹ If Brown saw the "massacre" as the work of a "master mind," it was a mind that he perhaps thought too brilliant for an Indian, for he toyed with the idea that the Spanish may have instigated the uprising.⁴⁰

In general, nineteenth-century writers progressed little beyond Waterhouse and Smith in interpreting the events of 1622. There was almost no attempt to understand the motivation of the Powhatans or to analyze precipitants within the context of preconditions. The death of Nemattanew was linked to the timing of the uprising by most writers, but even that dramatic event was presented in a vacuum, with no emphasis on why it was a significant provocation or on how it related to a possible anti-English conspiracy long before its existence.

Twentieth-century accounts of the 1622 uprising have, in many respects, been as brief, sketchy, and unsystematic as earlier versions, but there has been an evolution in tone from the inflammatory and biased to the more dispassionate interpretations of the past few

³⁹Brown, *First Republic*, pp. 465-66.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 467n. A year before the appearance of Brown's book, Bostonian John Fiske had cautiously analyzed the situation: "Opekankano and his people watched with grave concern the sudden and rapid increase of the white strangers. That they were ready to seize upon an occasion for war is by no means unlikely, and the nature of the event indicates careful preparation." *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1902 [orig. publ. Boston, 1897]), I, pp. 223-24.

years.⁴¹ Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, in 1914, presented an error-ridden and Anglophilic view of the Powhatan Uprising, and as late as 1959 he saw no reason to revise it. In *Virginia under the Stuarts*,⁴² Wertenbaker gave territorial and population pressures as the causes of the "general butchery" in 1622, and he totally neglected precipitants and provocations in explaining the timing of the attack. Apparently he believed it was sufficient to state that a conspiracy was hatched in the "cunning brain" of Opechancanough, "always hostile to the white man."⁴³ Generally, the details and the tone of Wertenbaker's account adhered to that of Waterhouse, except where Wertenbaker committed gratuitous errors of fact.⁴⁴

Charles M. Andrews, the "dean" of American colonial history in his day, twenty years later referred to Wertenbaker's "good account" of the uprising, but he,

⁴¹In the following historiographical interpretation of twentieth-century authors, two works have been omitted that illuminated many aspects of the English experience at Jamestown but that dealt with the uprising only peripherally. Richard Beale Davis' excellent biography, *George Sandy, Poet-Adventurer* (New York and London, 1955), contained the lengthiest modern account of the uprising (Chap. VI, pp. 119-62), but, unfortunately, it consisted of reprinted primary sources with little attempt at analysis. Perry Miller, in a brilliant essay, "Religion and Society in the Early Literature of Virginia," Chap. IV in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), skirted over the uprising itself but provided new insights on the ramifications of that event.

⁴²(Princeton, N.J., 1914; repr. 1959). Quotes are from 2d ed.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 48-51. Wertenbaker's sloppiness is evidenced by his giving "Race" for "Pace" (the Englishman who warned Jamestown, p. 48), and "357" instead of "347" as the Waterhouse death toll (p. 50).

himself, had little to say concerning the "hideous tragedy."⁴⁵ Andrews substituted phraseology for analysis, and "explained" the complex events as: ". . . Indian enmity smoldered, bursting into flame in 1622. . . ." He did imply, however, that the whole ugly affair could have been prevented had not Nemattanew died and Opechancanough succeeded him in 1622.⁴⁶

Another eminent colonial historian, Wesley Frank Craven, has had the good fortune and the good sense to revise his opinions and to tone down his language over the course of three decades. In a 1943 article, "Indian Policy in Early Virginia," Craven was a bit too vehement in discussing "barbarism in its most savage forms," especially since World War II was then giving a terrible new dimension to those words.⁴⁷ Craven provided no explanation of preconditions or precipitants, and the Indian attack happened as suddenly on the printed page as it had in life. However, five years later, in his influential *Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century*, Craven cited the growing numbers of Englishmen as the factor that prompted the uprising.⁴⁸ But once again, the "natives fell upon the unsuspecting colonists with savage brutality," with no explanation as to why March 22, 1621/22, provided the occasion or the opportunity.⁴⁹

It was only in 1971 with the publication of Craven's *White, Red, and Black* that he developed a more balanced

⁴⁵*The Colonial Period of American History*, 4 vols., Vol. I: *The Settlements* (New Haven, 1934), pp. 139, 142n.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴⁷In *WMQ*, 3d Ser., I (1944), pp. 65-82, quote on p. 73.

⁴⁸Vol. I in *The History of the South*, Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, eds. (Baton Rouge, La., 1949).

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 146.

interpretation in keeping with the times.⁵⁰ In this work, Craven called attention to the Powhatan economy and culture and portrayed the Indians' sense of powerlessness as the English crowded them in ways cultural as well as territorial. The uprising, then, "signalled above all . . . the Indian's refusal to adapt."⁵¹

Craven's problems with biased language and insufficient explanations were only representative of the many pitfalls that befell otherwise fine historians when writing about 1622. For instance, Richard Lee Morton's generally excellent *Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1960) did a poor job of interpreting events of 1622 and actually helped perpetuate errors of Virginia's mythological past.⁵² Morton made no effort to explain causation beyond a discussion of Opechancanough's conspiracy. But even here, the "savages (always "savages"!) were "not . . . as bold as they were clever in carrying out their designs. In many cases the mere show of a gun caused them to flee."⁵³

Treacherous if he succeeded and cowardly if he failed, the Indian of America's past was losing ground to the prejudicial pens of historians. And if scholars

⁵⁰James W. Richard Lectures at the Univ. of Virginia (Charlottesville, Va., 1971).

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵²Morton said the uprising occurred on Good Friday, that Rolfe was among the "six Councilors" killed, and that "more than 350 colonists" died, but he did not cite a source that revealed these details. *Colonial Virginia*, pp. 74-75. See the recent work by Virginia-born historian, Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606-1689* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975). Billings made the "Good Friday mistake" and declared that the Powhatans did not take prisoners on the day of the attack--a statement refuted by no less than five contemporary, accessible, documents. (p. 208)

⁵³Morton, *Colonial Virginia*, pp. 74, 76.

could not control themselves, then the popularizers could not have been expected to present balanced appraisals. In 1952, for example, George F. Willison wrote that the Powhatans took a "terrible revenge" in 1622 for "injuries and indignities suffered," but "the Indians had committed numerous outrages, [which] they excused or conveniently forgot."⁵⁴ With florid prose but little analysis, Willison gave credit to Opechancanough for a "diabolically brilliant coup" that had caused "the blood of the English . . . to flow under the flash of knives and the roar of guns."⁵⁵

As this survey demonstrates, the unstated and the overstated have dominated past interpretations of the 1622 uprising. Until recently, the historiography of the subject was rather undeveloped, reflecting the superficial treatments by scholars who thought the topic unworthy of serious inquiry or who were reluctant to investigate the very complex issues they recognized.

However, the 1970's have so far produced several thesis-oriented interpretations that seek to explain the causation of the 1622 uprising. While none of these accounts is large or completely developed, they are more systematic in arrangement and argument and more enlightened in approach and tone than earlier works. And not surprisingly, the two "camps" that developed in the early 1970's--the one emphasizing cultural factors, the other territorial issues--evolved from Waterhouse's original conception of dual causality. Also similar to Waterhouse's approach is the tendency among current scholars to analyze and debate the pre-conditions of the uprising with little or no emphasis placed upon the precipitant cause(s) or on the timing of the attack.

Three modern scholars, Nancy O. Lurie, Gary B. Nash, and Francis Jennings, have determined that land dispossession and territorial pressures in general caused the uprising of 1622. Lurie's path-breaking essay, "Indian

⁵⁴*Behold Virginia: The Fifth Crown* (New York, 1952), p. 233.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 234, 236.

Cultural Adjustment to European Civilization,"⁵⁶ claimed that the Powhatans revolted because their natural resources were increasingly threatened by encroaching tobacco plantations. The "real danger" to the Indians "arose from the inexorable growth of European society in Virginia."⁵⁷ Lurie credited the Powhatans with able planning in the uprising, and she called attention to the unified and efficient fighting organization developed by 1622. However, the death of Nemattanew was not mentioned; no effort was made to explain the crucial question of the timing of the uprising; and even the assumptions about the circumscribed Powhatan environment were not substantiated with evidence.⁵⁸

Gary Nash, in his book, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America* (Englewood Cliffs, 1974), attempted to answer both the questions of causation and timing.⁵⁹ Sensitive to what preceded as well as to what followed the uprising, Nash viewed the growing English population as bringing about a deterioration in Anglo-Indian relations. This "highly combustible atmosphere generated by a half-dozen years of white expansion and pressure on Indian hunting lands was the . . . fundamental cause" of the uprising.⁶⁰ Nash believed that a plot for a coordinated Indian attack was already in existence when the murder of a "greatly respected Indian" (Nemattanew) "ignited the assault."⁶¹ Thus, in a succinct survey, Nash addressed himself to preconditions and the precipitant cause although, like Lurie, his statements about territorial pressures remained unproven.

The land thesis was argued by Francis Jennings in his provocative book, *The Invasion of America: Indians,*

⁵⁶In James Morton Smith, ed., *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1959), pp. 33-60.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 48-51.

⁵⁹(Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974), pp. 60-63.

⁶⁰Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, p. 61.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest (Chapel Hill, 1975). The English, according to Jennings, sought good relations with the Powhatans only when it coincided with their best economic interests, and the Indians became a liability and an obstacle to progress when tobacco production superseded earlier trade relations.⁶² The English population doubled between 1618 and 1622, and "Indian hostility grew" accordingly. "Finally the alarmed Indians rose in a desperate effort to drive away or exterminate the intruders." Thus, Jennings argued, as had Lurie and Nash, that ". . . the contention over the land was exactly what had precipitated the war."⁶³

The land thesis "camp" can be criticized for failing to prove the validity of assumptions about territorial and population pressures--assumptions that must remain only seemingly obvious until the necessary research into the Powhatan ecosystem and English settlement patterns is completed. In addition, Lurie, Nash, and Jennings were interested only in discussing preconditions from 1618 to 1622, and they paid little attention to a direct and discernible precipitant that would have explained the precise timing of the uprising. A true cause of an event should be intimately connected with its timing, and there has never been a convincing account based on the land thesis that could explain why the Powhatans attacked in 1622 and not in 1619, 1620, or 1621. No explanation is offered as to why they struck in the month of March (O.S.)/April (N.S.) and not in July, for instance, or why the uprising occurred in an era of declared peace and overtly amicable relations and not in a period of pronounced hostility and violence.

However, an alternative to the land thesis emerged in three works published in 1975. Representing this "camp" are Wilcomb Washburn, Edmund S. Morgan, and Alden T. Vaughan--respected scholars who interpreted the uprising in a multicausal context of vaguely defined cultural, as well as territorial, factors.

⁶²Jennings, *Invasion*, pp. 77-78.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 78.

Vaughan, in *American Genesis: Captain John Smith and the Founding of Virginia* (Boston, 1975), stressed the English attempts after 1619 to supplant Powhatan culture with Anglican religion and European civility ("ethnic arrogance and pious hopes"), but he also noted that land dispossession and the increasing colonial population strained Anglo-Indian relations. It was clear to Vaughan that after fifteen years of enduring English "contempt," the Powhatans' fears and frustrations "burst to the surface in a sudden, brutal massacre."⁶⁴ The uprising was the "inevitable result of white aggression" according to Vaughan,⁶⁵ and for that reason, he was little interested in linking the specific timing of the "frenzied assault" with the long-smouldering Powhatan resentments.⁶⁶

Wilcomb E. Washburn believed that the uprising was not inevitable, but could have been "forestalled" if the English had been less aggressive and demanding in their relations with the Powhatans. In his *Indian in America* (New York, 1975), Washburn flatly declared that conflict over land was not the underlying cause of hostilities (there being land enough for all)--"as long as appropriate procedures were followed in its acquisition."⁶⁷ Rather, it was the Englishmen's basic arrogance and contempt for Indian sovereignty that engendered the Powhatans' "smoldering resentments" and over time made continued acquiescence to colonial presence "unbearable." For Washburn, there was little doubt that Opechancanough's "exasperation at the course of the colonists' unending demands precipitated the

⁶⁴Vaughan, *American Genesis*, pp. 154, 157.

⁶⁵Vaughan, "'Expulsion of the Savages': English Attitudes and the Massacre of 1622," unpublished paper discussed at the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake Conference, Nov. 1-2, 1974, College Park, Md., p. 20.

⁶⁶See the author's review of Vaughan's *American Genesis*, *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXII (1975), p. 636.

⁶⁷Washburn, *Indian in America*, pp. 126-27.

violent reaction of 1622."⁶⁸ However, without an understanding of why March 22, 1621/22, was such an ideal time for staging a "violent reaction," the "exasperation" must remain a nebulous precondition for rebellion and not a direct provocation to it.

In a most important study, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), Edmund S. Morgan more fully discussed the broad and basic conflict of cultures relating to events of 1622 than did either Vaughan or Washburn. Morgan interpreted the uprising in terms of two rather equally weighted factors. He blamed the Virginia Company's efforts after 1618 to construct an "integrated community" based upon the Powhatan adoption of English religion and life-style, and he also cited the simultaneous growth in English population and tobacco plantations. Conflict resulted because the Powhatans "were notoriously proud, their empty lands were not 'unused,'" and the "arrogance of the English" became insufferable.⁶⁹ However, like Vaughan and Washburn, Morgan offered no indication that a precipitant cause was present (or necessary) in bringing about the "dramatic catastrophe" of 1622.⁷⁰

As competent and respected as these scholars might be, any discussion of the uprising that fails to answer, or even consider, the question of what precipitated a concerted and bellicose Powhatan reaction is not very enlightening in a historiographical sense. And to omit even the mention of Nemattanew's critically timed death--an event deemed so overwhelmingly relevant and significant by seventeenth-century commentators--places otherwise attractive hypotheses into doubt and compounds the mystery that shrouded the 1622 uprising. Sound analysis cannot deal with either preconditions or precipitant causes; the total picture must be viewed in focus. Unless we comprehend what specifically

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶⁹Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, pp. 98-99.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 98.

preconditioned the Powhatans' hatred for the English and what specific actions motivated the Powhatans to attack when, where, and in the manner they did, historical interpretation will not have progressed much beyond Waterhouse's perspective of an inexplicable and perfidious Indian betrayal of peaceful and innocent Englishmen.

Although the uprising of 1622 was not the primary research interest of any of the modern historians mentioned, they did use the Powhatan rebellion to enhance or confirm their individual theses on Virginia history. Since none of these scholars admitted that other interpretations might be equally plausible or that more research into the causes of the uprising was desperately needed, they must bear the burden of historiographical criticism. It is precisely this long tradition of the half-developed or the poorly presented interpretation that has prevented the uprising of 1622 from receiving serious, detailed examination in either published or unpublished historical works.
