



# Powhatan, Chief of the Powhatan Confederacy

## To Captain John Smith

Jamestown, Virginia  
1609

*The first colonists in Jamestown, Virginia, arrived from England in 1607. Building homes and finding food in the New World was difficult, and those who survived the first winters owed their lives to the help they received from the many tribes of the Powhatan Confederacy. However, the settlers took lands for their own use that the Indians considered theirs, and disputes arose over the trading of food and weapons. Chief Wahunsonacock (called Powhatan by the colonists), the father of Pocahontas, warned Captain John Smith against abusing the Indians' friendship.*

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I am now grown old, and must soon die; and the succession must descend, in order, to my brothers, Opitchapan, Opekanough, and Catataugh, and then to my two sisters, and their two daughters. I wish their experience was equal to mine; and that your love to us might not be less than ours to you.

Why should you take by force that from us which you can have by love? Why should you destroy us, who have provided you with food? What can you get by war? We can hide our provisions, and fly into the woods; and then you must consequently famish by wronging your friends. What is the cause of your jealousy? You see us unarmed, and willing to supply your wants, if you will come in a friendly manner, and not with swords and guns, as to invade an enemy.

I am not so simple, as not to know it is better to eat good meat, lie well, and sleep quietly with my women and children; to laugh and be merry with the English; and, being their friend, to have copper, hatchets, and whatever else I want,

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than to fly from all, to lie cold in the woods, feed upon acorns, roots, and such trash, and to be so hunted, that I cannot rest, eat, or sleep. In such circumstances, my men must watch, and if a twig should but break, all would cry out, "Here comes Captain Smith"; and so, in this miserable manner, to end my miserable life; and, Captain Smith, this might be soon your fate too, through your rashness and unadvisedness.

I, therefore, exhort you to peaceable councils; and, above all, I insist that the guns and swords, the cause of all our jealousy and uneasiness, be removed and sent away.