

Library of Virginia



Gov. William Berkeley

Sir William Berkeley

Governor of Virginia, 1641-1652, 1660-1677

A DISCOURSE AND VIEW OF VIRGINIA

1663 EXCERPTS

Before I enter into the consideration of the advantages this Kingdom of *England* has by the Plantation in *Virginia*, I think it necessary to make a short description of the Situation of it, as to the *Climate*; and then tell what natural helps it has to make it a glorious and flourishing Country: And when this Discourse shall produce a concession of the natural advantages it has above all other His Majesty's Plantations, I shall lay down the Causes, both intrinsic and accidental, why it has not in all this supposed long tract of time produced those rich and staple Commodities, which I shall in this Discourse affirm it is capable of. . . .

It must be confessed, that *Barbados* sends a better commodity [sugar] into *England* than *Virginia* yet does; but withall it must be acknowledged that one Ship from *Virginia* brings more Money to the Crown than five Ships of the same burthen [ship's carrying capacity] do from the *Barbados*. But had we ability or skill to set forward those staple commodities I mentioned, of Silk, Flax, Hemp, Pitch, Pot-ashes, and Iron, a few years would make us able to send more Ships laden with these, than now the *Barbados* do with Sugar.

Amongst many other weighty Reasons, why *Virginia* has not all this while made any progression into staple Commodities, this is the chief. That our Governors by reason of the corruption of those times they lived in, laid the Foundation of our wealth and industry on the vices of men; for about the time of our first seating of the Country, did this vicious habit of taking *Tobacco* possess the English Nation, and from them has diffused itself into most parts of the World; this I say being brought to us from *Spain* at great prices, made our Governor suppose great wealth might be raised to particulars by this universal vice, and indeed for many years they were not deceived,



Sanson, map of North America, *Amérique septentrionale*, 1650, detail; English colonies of Virginia and Barbados marked.

Excerpted, some spelling and punctuation modernized, and images added by the National Humanities Center, 2006: www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm. Full text of Berkeley's (pronounced bark-lee) Discourse at Virtual Jamestown at etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/jamestown-browsmod?id=J1003. Portrait of Gov. William Berkeley by Harriotte L. T. Montague after original by Sir Peter Lely (courtesy Library of Virginia). Complete image credits at www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm.



Early English tobacconist advertisements

“fix their hopes only on this vicious weed of Tobacco”

till that increasing in numbers, and many other Plantations following the same design, at last brought it as now it is to that lowness of price, that the Customs doubles the first purchase; that is, the Merchant buys it for one penny the pound, and we pay two pence for the Custom of that which they are not pleased to take from us.

This was the first and fundamental hindrance that made the Planters neglect all other accessions to wealth and happiness, and fix their hopes only on this vicious weed of *Tobacco*, which at length has brought them to that extremity that they can neither handsomely subsist with it, nor without it.

Another hindrance has been, that there was never yet any public encouragement to assist the Planters in those more chargeable undertakings, as Iron-Mines and Shipping.

Another impediment, and an important one too has been the dismembering of the Colony, by giving away and erecting diverse Principalities out of it, as *Maryland* to my Lord *Baltimore*, and part of *Florida* to my Lord of *Arundell*, these Grants will in the next Age be found more disadvantageous to the Crown than is perceptible in this; and therefore I shall not touch it (uncommanded) as to the politic part of it, but as to the Economic. I shall affirm that we can never make Laws for the erecting Staple Commodities, and setting a stop to our unlimited planting of *Tobacco*, whilst these Governments are distinct and independent, for on frequent trials when we begin to make provisions for these, our people fly to *Maryland*, and by this means heighten our public charges, and weaken our defenses against our perpetual enemies the *Indians*. . . .

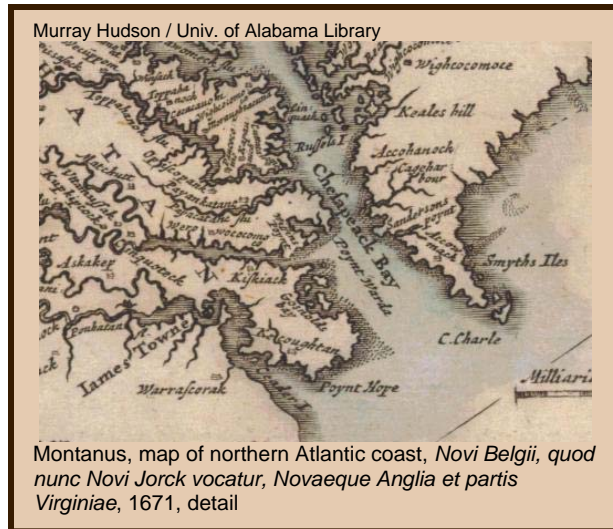
Another great impediment has been, the confining the Planter to Trade only with the English, this no good Subject or Englishman will oppose, if it be found either beneficial to the Crown or our Mother-Nation; but if it shall appear that neither of these are advantaged by it, then we cannot but resent, that forty thousand people should be impoverished to enrich little more than forty Merchants, who being the only buyers of our *Tobacco* give us

what they please for it, and after it is here, sell it how they please. . . .

On the whole matter, let it be considered, whether or no the English Plantations are not proportioned in a short time to supply us with all those Commodities, which now we have at great charge and hazard from *Turkey, Persia, Germany, Poland, and Russia*: the Wines, Oils, and Fruits of *France and Spain*, our distance will ever hinder us from introducing at the same rates we have it now from them. . . .

To conclude and animate the care, providence and indulgence the Nation ought to have of foreign Plantations [colonies] let these few considerations be duly poised.

First, it is not yet forty years when there was not one *Englishman* in any Plantation of *America*, save only four or five hundred left in 1622, after the Massacre in *Virginia*; and now there is in the *West Indies* at least three hundred thousand *English*, and of *English* extraction.



Secondly, if we examine the Customs [tariffs], we shall find the fourth part of them arise from the Plantations in *America*. This is a wealth our fathers never knew, and in humane probability will increase on us every year.

Thirdly, those commodities we were wont to purchase at great rates and hazards, we now purchase at half the usual prices. Nor is this all, but we buy them with our own Manufactures, which here at home employ thousands of poor people.

Fourthly, when in the past Ages to disburden the Kingdom of indigent younger Brothers, whom the peculiar policy of this Nation condemned to poverty or War, we were forced to undertake the assistance of Rebels, which God of late has revenged on our

own bowels; now there can be no necessity of that sin or misery, for a small sum of money will enable a younger Brother to erect a flourishing Family in a new World; and add more Strength, Wealth, and Honor to his Native Country than thousands did before, that died forgotten and unrewarded in an unjust War.¹ I should now have ended, but that I think it is expected from me, who have lived twenty years in *America*, that I should declare the power, interest, and wealth we have by our Plantations in the *West Indies*.

To do this, I shall first propose to the consideration of the Reader, the few years we have had any footing in *America*, the eldest Plantation, *Virginia* excepted, not exceeding forty years, and yet so many difficulties happily overcome. Our numbers there are now at least two hundred thousand English, and if (as in humane probability they will) our numbers double but every twenty years, in one Age more how great will our power, strength, and reputation be in this new Western World?

Secondly, let it be considered what sums of Money was in the last Age exhausted from us for Sugar, Cotton, Drugs, Dyings, and *Tobacco*, and how easily now we supply ourselves with these, and also bring home enough to balance many other [unclear: foreign?] necessities.

Thirdly, let us contemplate the respect we have from most of the Princes and States of *Europe*, but our power and strength in *America*; the *Dutch* I know would not willingly quit their interest in the *Indies* for ten Millions of Money; yet all they have there is in the King's power, when any just occasion shall provoke his displeasure.

The *French*, it is true, have not many considerable places there: But yet the *Indies*, as they term it, are of so Friand agust,² that they would not willingly quit their holds in it, not their pretensions to it.

But the *Spainards*, whose interest is greatest, is most jealous of our power there, and we most formidable to him by it. . . .

For though *Virginia* yet only produceth *Tobacco* as to the main of her Traffic, yet it has produced Silk, Flax, Hemp, Iron, Rice, Pitch, Tar, which are Commodities more lasting and necessary then Sugar or Indigo can be: and as our Numbers increase, so will our Wealth, when our industry and assistance shall equal theirs, which is clean contrary with them, who are already forced to expend one fifth part of their Merchandise to provide Victuals for themselves and Servants. But the best resolution of this will be that, being both of one Nation, we bless God that has made us so instrumental to the Wealth and Glory of it.

FINIS

¹ English Civil War of the mid 1600s.

² perhaps "Friande agust," a noble delicacy (friande: sweet almond cake).