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# A Sequence of Unfortunate Events: Why the Lost Colony Collapsed

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### A Sequence of Unfortunate Events: Why the Lost Colony Collapsed

In October of 1492, Columbus saw the Caribbean Islands for the first time, and the era of colonization by European powers began. Spain in particular began to spread its influence over this New World. Through the expeditions of conquistadors such as Francisco Pizarro and Hernán Cortés, Spain soon controlled a large empire, greatly increasing the homeland's wealth. Not to be outdone, England joined the race to claim the Americas. However, their progress was slow and difficult rather than quick and sweeping. England's dreams of empire had to endure much disappointment before success was realized with the founding of Jamestown in 1608. The Roanoke Colonies, which were established in 1584 and 1587, both failed miserably. The inhabitants of the first returned to England after experiencing the New World for just one year, while the second colony simply, and mysteriously, vanished. The inexplicable disappearance of the Second Roanoke Colony, also known as the Lost Colony, has been the subject of much contemplation throughout history. While the fate of these colonists remains a mystery, the reasons for the settlement's failure do not. The failure of the Second Roanoke Colony was largely due to John White's inability to resupply the colony quickly and its unfortunate location near Algonquians whom the previous Roanoke colony had alienated.

When England began to colonize, Queen Elizabeth lacked the funds to take on such a large enterprise. Her solution was to turn colonization into a personal business, and consequently gave land grants to the wealthy favorites of her court. They organized and funded such establishments in the new world. One of her favorites was Sir Walter Raleigh, and, in 1584,

Queen Elizabeth I granted him rights to any land in the New World “not actually possessed of any Christian Prince, nor inhabited by Christian People.”<sup>1</sup> Realistically, this meant that he could claim any land in the New World not already controlled by another European country.

Accordingly, Raleigh sent an exploratory expedition headed by Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe to the New World. Landing on the Outer Banks of present day North Carolina in the summer of 1584, these Englishmen met the local Native Americans, part of the Algonquian speaking peoples, and then returned to England with a report full of optimism.<sup>2</sup>

The first Roanoke Colony was planted on Roanoke Island in the spring of 1585 and was lead by Ralph Lane.<sup>3</sup> Of the 107 colonists who came, sixty were soldiers.<sup>4</sup> Raleigh had three main goals for his colony. Primarily, he wanted profit for himself and the crown.<sup>5</sup> This goal was to be obtained by selling goods found in the New World and by privateering nearby Spanish ships, using the colony as an English base. He also hoped to further the English empire, partially in order to oust the Spanish from the Americas. Finally, he wanted to Christianize the Native Americans. However, to achieve these goals, it was necessary for the English to be on good terms with the local Algonquians.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Raleigh explicitly ordered for the colonists to treat the Native Americans well, warning them of harsh punishments, such as seven months of imprisonment, slavery, or twenty lashes, for defying these orders.<sup>7</sup> After a single, long year on

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, “Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh: 1584,” The Avalon Project, Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/16th\\_century/raleigh.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/16th_century/raleigh.asp).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent’s Hand: Roanoke’s Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Oberg, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Oberg, 68.

<sup>5</sup> The crown received one fifth of all the money earned from colonial enterprises.

<sup>6</sup> Algonquian generally refers to all the groups of Native Americans who lived along the Atlantic coast from Maine to the Carolinas. They all spoke similar languages and had similar cultures. However, in this paper, Algonquian refers to the groups in the immediate area surrounding Roanoke Island.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent’s Hand: Roanoke’s Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 37.

Roanoke, in the summer of 1586, the English left the island.<sup>8</sup> Despite Raleigh's orders, they had acted with extreme violence towards the natives, one of the many actions that greatly upset the Algonquians. The most devastating of these actions in terms of their effect on the Lost Colony are discussed later in this paper. Surrounded by angry neighbors and with very little food left, the colonists sailed for their homeland in the company of Sir Francis Drake. However, the hope of an English colony in the area remained.

The Second Roanoke Colony landed on Roanoke Island in May of 1587. John White, one of the colonists in the First Roanoke Colony and governor-to-be of the new colony, was the driving force behind the venture. White wanted this colony to have some distinct differences from the previous. Instead of soldiers inhabiting the settlement, White brought over fourteen families, mainly farmers and artisans, including his own daughter's.<sup>9</sup> As an agricultural community, it was once again vital for these 117 colonists to befriend the local Algonquians.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the colonists had planned to settle in the Chesapeake region. However, the captain of the ship which brought them over, Simon Fernandes, refused to take the colonists. He instead left them on Roanoke Island, asserting that the summer was too far spent and he would not take anyone any further.<sup>11</sup> Begrudgingly, White agreed, and he began to set up the colony where the old one had been burned down, presumably by the Algonquians. White's next move was to rebuild old alliances with the Algonquians. Although most of his efforts were in vain, White did

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<sup>8</sup> Oberg, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Oberg, 113.

<sup>10</sup> Oberg, 129.

<sup>11</sup> According to David Beer Quinn in *Set Fair for Roanoke*, it is unclear as to exactly why Fernandes decided to do this. One reason may have been to spite White, whom he greatly disliked. He may have also thought that Roanoke was safer than the Chesapeake, since he ran into hostile Native Americans while exploring the Chesapeake in 1584 as a part of the exploratory expedition under Philip Armadas. However, altruism seems unlikely due to Fernandes's great dislike of White. The final possibility is that Fernandes convinced the sailors that if they continued, there would not be enough time for privateering on the return journey. However, this too does not quite make sense because the ships stayed near Roanoke so long that they had little time for privateering anyway. Overall, Fernandes' reasoning for going no further, changing the original plan, is unclear.

manage to revitalize an alliance with the nearby Croatoans.<sup>12</sup> On August 22, 1587, the colonists demanded that White return to England to deal with supply shortages resulting from the inability to obtain livestock and other supplies in the Caribbean, as they had originally intended.<sup>13</sup> White was chosen as the colony's advocate in England for several reasons. White knew the area from his time there in the First Colony, and he had immediate family, his daughter and a granddaughter, in the current colony.<sup>14</sup> Speed in the venture was of great importance, and having family in the colony provided great incentive for a rapid return. After some convincing, White agreed and set sail for England.<sup>15</sup>

The colonists' timing for such a voyage could not have been worse. At this time in history, England had bigger problems than a small, unstable colony needing supplies. Just as the Second Roanoke Colony was founded, Queen Elizabeth I's controversy with Spain came to a head. In addition to competing with Spain's success in the New World, friction between Elizabeth and King Philip II of Spain arose due to religion. Elizabeth, and therefore England, was decidedly Anglican, while Philip controlled the most powerful Catholic country in Europe. The Pope and some of his subjects even claimed that it was his divine duty to eradicate heresy, especially in England. Despite everything, neither Elizabeth nor Philip truly wanted war. The late sixteenth century was a time of change, revolt, and revolution. Both monarchs were busy enough simply stopping revolts in their own lands without the complications of urging revolt in another country. Also, Elizabeth was Philip's sister-in-law, though this had little impact on either

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<sup>12</sup> Croatoans were Algonquians who lived on Croatoan Island, next to Roanoke Island.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Roanoke's Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 123.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> According to his journal of the 1587 voyages, White initially refused to make this trip for the colonists. He felt that abandoning the colony he had worked so hard to start would reflect poorly on himself. Additionally, White considered his presence necessary for making the colony successful. However, his biggest concern was that his belongings would be stolen while he was gone. He only agreed to go once the colonists presented him with an official document pledging to protect his belongings.

monarch's decisions regarding the situation. Because of their reluctance to engage in open warfare, both monarchs took small actions that, while antagonizing the other, did not require full blown assault as recourse.<sup>16</sup> When Elizabeth discovered an assassination plot on her life planned by Alonzo de Bazam, the Marques de Santa Cruz, who hoped to insert the Catholic Mary Stuart in the Queen's place, Elizabeth responded by executing Mary. She also sent Francis Drake, one of her more successful privateers, to sack the Spanish cities of St. Domingo and Carthagena.<sup>17</sup> Soon after this, both monarchs began the long process of peace negotiations. However, their efforts failed, and in 1588, Philip finally sent his armada of 132 ships to destroy the English navy.<sup>18</sup> Understandably, Queen Elizabeth and the English were not overly sympathetic to John White when he arrived in England to advocate for a tiny colony when the homeland was in danger. Although Spanish invasion was not the only cause of White's delay, it did greatly contribute to his delay.

From the beginning, White's mission to gather supplies for the colonists was plagued with problems. Due to injuries the crew suffered soon after White's ship set sail, progress to England was very slow. Two boats had delivered the colonists to Roanoke Island: a flyboat and a larger ship called the *Lion*. Because the flyboat could make better time and because Fernandes, and the *Lion*, planned to go privateering on the return trip, White chose to take the flyboat. Of the eighteen people on this vessel, fifteen were the crew.<sup>19</sup> As soon as the anchor was raised, a

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Philip executed individuals to protect Catholic interests, while Elizabeth put priests to death that taught rebellion in England. Elizabeth encouraged the privateering of Spanish ships in the West Indies and sent support to the Prince of Orange while Philip allowed the Inquisition to kill any English heretics that were caught. James Anthony Froude gives these and other examples in his book, *The Spanish Story of the Armada*.

<sup>17</sup> James Anthony Froude, *The Spanish Story of the Armada: and Other Essays* (1892; Google Books), page 12. [http://books.google.com/books?id=BuMBAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=BuMBAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>18</sup> The National Archives, "Drake and the Spanish Armada," The National Archives, last modified unknown, [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item\\_id=16](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item_id=16).

<sup>19</sup> David Beers Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 292.

bar that ran through the capstan broke, causing two other bars to swing around rapidly. Most of the crew were hit by the bars and greatly injured, making sailing extremely difficult. No longer would the flyboat dare venture towards England on its own, forcing White to follow the *Lion* and travel, at first, at Fernandes' pace. On September 28, just after passing the islands of the Azores, White and the flyboat attempted once more to return more directly to England, leaving the *Lion* behind.<sup>20</sup> However, a storm lasting for six days hit, blowing them so off course that it took thirteen days to recover their original position.<sup>21</sup> They reached Ireland on October 16 with two dead crew members, many sick, and little food. White did not reach Raleigh in England, whom he hoped would help him, until November.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, many things went wrong during this voyage. However, if the crew had not been injured from the outset, the trip might have gone much faster. They would not have needed to tail after the *Lion*, instead of heading straight for England, and might have even missed the storm, saving nineteen days. If all of the crew had started healthy, fewer may have gotten sick along the trip. With more able-bodied men, sailing would have been less difficult, and better progress could have therefore been made. Had they not been so weak, they also would have gone straight to England, rather than stopping in Ireland first. Additionally, they might have had enough food for the voyage if they had traveled more quickly. Plainly, the first source of delay in White's journey was due to the injuries sustained by the crew, causing him to arrive later than planned in England.

The next obstacle White faced was the invasion of the Spanish Armada, which made it very difficult to secure a ship to bring the colonists supplies. Due to increased tension with the Spanish, Queen Elizabeth released a royal order on October 9, 1587 that forbid all vessels from

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<sup>20</sup> Quinn, 293.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ironically, the *Lion* reached England just before White did.

leaving English ports, right before White reached England.<sup>23</sup> However, Raleigh had some wiggle room, and used it to get Grenville, a leader in the First Roanoke Colony, a ship that would set up a base in the Chesapeake, from which they could attack Spanish ships in the Caribbean. White decided to join Grenville only because he needed someone to protect the supplies he brought to the colony, or they might be stolen en route; there were no other available protective escorts. Grenville planned to leave in March of 1588, but after being held up by bad weather, the Queen canceled the voyage. She wanted the ship to help fight the Spanish Armada instead, thereby depriving White of a protective escort. However, he was able to obtain two small ships unfit for such a journey, especially in what had become a maritime warzone, named *Brave* and *Roe*.<sup>24</sup> Despite this, White decided to press on, and on April 22, 1588, he set off for the colony with supplies and food. However, the captains of these ships, Arthur Facy and Pedro Diaz, were more interested in robbing Spanish ships than resupplying the colonists. After a short time, a French ship attacked the *Brave*, killing twenty-three, and wounding most others, including White.<sup>25</sup> Left with just enough food to return England, and abandoned by the *Roe*, which joined the French ship, White was forced to turn back, arriving in England on May 22. At this point, Raleigh was too busy helping prepare defenses for England to help White. All White could do was wait to heal, and then go to London to plead his case. Had the animosity between England and Spain not come to a head in 1587, leading to the invasion of the Spanish Armada in 1588, White would have had much less difficulty finding ships, and better equipped ships, to resupply the colonists simply because there would not have been a royal order to prohibit ships from leaving port.

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<sup>23</sup> David Beers Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 298.

<sup>24</sup> Quinn, 302.

<sup>25</sup> Quinn, 305. White was shot twice in the head and once in the buttock, as well as once with a pike.



Additionally, Raleigh would not have been so preoccupied with the defenses, and could have given more attention to the colony.

Even after the battle with the Spanish Armada, it was difficult for White to acquire a supply ship for the colonists. Although the English had won, many of the English were unsettled from the battle, and the ban on private ships leaving the ports remained active through 1589. Furthermore, White was unwilling to resupply the colonists unless he had a ship to protect the supply boat after his experience with the *Brave*. Also, Raleigh became caught up in commitments in Ireland at this time, once again unable to help White obtain a supply ship. Together, these circumstances made resupplying the colonists all but impossible.

In the end, White was forced to return to Roanoke Island on a privateering ship. Through debts owed to Raleigh, he obtained the *Moonlight* to resupply the colonists and hired the *Hopewell* to protect it.<sup>26</sup> However, the *Hopewell*, with White aboard, ended up sailing for Roanoke before the *Moonlight* anyway. The *Moonlight* sailed a few months later and rejoined the *Hopewell* at Hispanola. After much privateering in the Caribbean, which also slowed the speed of travel, the ships finally reached Roanoke Island. White arrived in August of 1590, far too late for resupply efforts to be of any use. The settlement, briefly explored, had clearly been abandoned. The only clue as to where the colonists had gone was the inscription “CRO” carved into a tree.<sup>27</sup> According to White, this was a code revealing the colonists’ location should they need to leave the initial settlement while he was in England. He interpreted the inscription to refer to the Croatoans, with whom the colonists had been friendly with when White left. However, the *Hopewell*’s captain insisted that they return to the Caribbean to, ironically,

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<sup>26</sup> David Beers Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 317.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent’s Hand: Roanoke’s Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 125.

resupply. Only then would he allow White to return and look for the colonists on Croatoan Island. Yet, the ships did not end up returning, Croatoan Island was not searched, and the whereabouts of the colonists remains a mystery.

Injury, storms, Spanish invasion, privateering, and Raleigh's conflicts of interest all played a role in slowing John White in his efforts to resupply the colonists. The food, plant stocks, and seeds he failed to bring were extremely important for the survival of the colony, and White's inability to produce results was, therefore, quite detrimental. In the official document the colonists presented to White to first convince him to return to England to gather supplies, they stated that they were sending White for "the present and speedied supplie of certain our knwoen, and apparent lackes, and needs, most requisite and necessarie for the good and happpie planting of us."<sup>28</sup> By describing "speedied supplie" as both "requisite" and "necessarie," the colonists implied how important they felt it was to get supplies. Because they did not stop in the Caribbean for food, plants, and other provisions, the colonists were not prepared for the coming spring. They had intended on being an agricultural community, so unless they received supplies from England by the spring planting season, the colonists would have to ask the Algonquians for food. The taking of Algonquian corn had been one of the most unpopular characteristics of the first colony. With already hostile neighbors, the colonist cannot have been eager to ask their one ally for food. Therefore, if White did not return by the spring of 1588, whatever supplies White brought would no longer play a role in whether or not the colony survived. The colonists asserted in the same document that White "both can best, and will labour, and take paines in that behalf for us all."<sup>29</sup> The colonists sent White as their advocate because they felt he would do the best

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<sup>28</sup> John White, "From *Fourth Virginia Voyage: 1587*," in *Captain John Smith: Writings with Other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement of America*, ed. James Horn (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2007), 871.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

job; he had knowledge of the area and great incentive to return. If anyone could get the job done, White could. His failure indicates that no one could have successfully resupplied the colony.

Yet, lack of supplies alone did not cause the colony's failure. Many other colonies begun by the English encountered similar shortages, such as Jamestown.<sup>30</sup> However, the Second Roanoke Colony differed in that the settlement was surrounded by extremely hostile Native Americans. These various Algonquian peoples had only one other primary experience with Englishmen: the First Roanoke Colony. Had this 1585 colony not made such a bad, indelible impression, perhaps the Lost Colonists would have had Algonquian support, and would have not disappeared.

One way the first colony alienated the local Native Americans was through depopulation from disease. As with the Spanish and the English colonies to come, European contact with Native Americans inevitably produced devastating impacts on the Algonquian's population. These natives lived in small villages that, while separate, worked closely with each other in trade and warfare. In attempting to forge alliances, stimulate trade, and simply understand their neighbors, the English visited many of these villages. One man that went on many of these excursions was Thomas Hariot. He had also come on the 1584 exploratory expedition, and was one of the biggest promoters of preserving friendly relations with the Native Americans. In his *Brief and True Report of the New Found Land Virginia*, which he wrote while a part of the first colony, Hariot stated that after the English visited a village, "the people began to die very fast, and many in short space; in some towns about twentie, in some fourtie, in some sixtie, and in one

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<sup>30</sup> Jamestown had severe food shortages from 1609 to 1610. This period is known as the Starving Time.

six score, which in truth was very many in respect to their numbers.”<sup>31</sup> Clearly the disease brought from Europe was extremely contagious and detrimental to the Native Americans, destroying the better part of many villages. While the English did not get sick, they also could not identify the disease. Today, scholars believe it was most likely some form of influenza, which can have a 75 to 100% fatality rate.<sup>32</sup> At first, the Algonquians responded by converting to Christianity, believing that the God of the English kept the colonists healthy. However, when conversion failed to produce results, Wingina, the leader of the Algonquian villages closest to the colonists, decided that the best way to stop the disease was to end Native American contact with the English.<sup>33</sup> Although the colonists had not intended to kill off their neighbors with disease, doing so caused Wingina and his people to distance themselves from the English, the source of their misery.

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<sup>31</sup> David Beers Quinn, ed., *The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590*, vol. 1 of *Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), 378.

<sup>32</sup> Peter B Mires, “Contact and Contagion: The Roanoke Colony and Influenza,” *Historical Archaeology* 28, no. 3 (1994): 34, <http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/25616316>.

Earlier scholars, such as David B Quinn, believed that the disease was not influenza, but either measles or smallpox, as stated in *The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590*. However, measles is unlikely because Thomas Hariot, Ralph Lane, and John White, all well-educated men, should have been able to identify it. Measles was present in Europe by at least 1347, so it would have been a disease all of them were well acquainted with according to Peter B. Mires in his article, “Contact and Contagion: The Roanoke Colony and Influenza.” However, when Hariot described the disease in his *Brief and True Report of the New Found Land Virginia*, he does not mention any visible symptoms. Also, measles does not have as high of a mortality rate as described by Hariot. Similarly, all of the colonists would have been familiar with smallpox, and could have easily diagnosed it. However, Hariot not only does not diagnose it in his *Brief and True Report of the New Found Land Virginia*, he describes the disease as a “rare and strange accident” indicating that he did not know what the disease was. The Native Americans had never seen the disease before either.

Many factors point to the mystery disease being influenza. Influenza is transmitted person to person, and only the villages visited by the English got sick. Furthermore, it spreads and kills quickly, especially in communities, with no outward symptoms such as rashes, pox, or vomiting, which are present in many other European diseases. Also, the outbreaks occurred in the fall and winter of 1585-1586, and influenza spreads and kills more easily as the weather gets cooler. In addition to this, it is quite possible that the colonists picked up the virus when they passed through the Caribbean for supplies on the way to Roanoke Island. Influenza was a problem in the Caribbean during the 1580's, and the colonists could have easily carried it to the Native Americans unintentionally.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Roanoke's Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 92.

In addition to disease, the local Algonquians were alienated by the English invasion of their food supply, primarily corn. Corn was the staple crop of the peoples in this region, and they generally farmed only as much as they required. However, Wingina wanted the colonists as allies in order to trade and use them as weapons against his enemies. Therefore, when the colonists asked for food, he provided. When the English had initially set off for Roanoke Island, they had a lot of foodstuffs. However, as their main supply ship, the *Tyger*, attempted to navigate the islands around Roanoke, it ran aground. Only with the help of all six other ships that came with were they able to safely beach the *Tyger*, and prevent the incident from killing anyone. Unfortunately, the damaged ship allowed saltwater to reach a majority of their provisions, destroying the bulk of the food. Hariot reported that this left the colonists without food for twenty days.<sup>34</sup> Even when the colonists had settled on Roanoke Island, they had little interest in farming, preferring to take food from Wingina's village, Dasemunkepeuc. This is understandable since half of the colonists were soldiers and the others were mainly from urban, upper-class backgrounds. The loss of supplies from when the *Tyger* ran aground only sped up the inevitability of colonists asking the natives for food rather than making their own. However, as the year progressed, the stresses on the food supply became increasingly difficult to manage. During the winter, Wingina's people could grow no more food, and therefore found it difficult to share what they possessed and feed their own village. Additionally, the summer of 1585 was plagued with drought, causing the people of Dasemunkepeuc to have less corn than usual.<sup>35</sup> Hariot depicts this fear Native Americans had of running out of food when he states that "a time also when their corne began to wither by reason of a drought...many would come to vs and

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<sup>34</sup> Oberg, 79.

<sup>35</sup> Oberg, 76.

desire vs to pray to our God of England, that he would preserve their corn."<sup>36</sup> Clearly Wingina and his people feared food shortages if they were desperate enough to hope the God of their new allies would bring rain, since their own rituals had failed. However, English prayers did not help, and food shortages became another factor in the Algonquians' decision to turn their backs on the English. The fear of the English taking their corn was also present in the Lost Colony, as shown when John White recorded that the Croatoans required assurances that the new colonists would "not to gather or spill any of their corn, for that they had but little" before agreeing to be the colonists' allies.<sup>37</sup> It is quite likely that one reason the other locals avoided alliances with the colonists was fear of the plunder of their sustenance.

Although disease and taking Algonquian corn both played a role in increasing the Native Americans' dislike for the First Roanoke Colony, Wingina's murder was the final straw. It became clear soon after the colonists' arrival, that despite Raleigh's order to treat the Native Americans well, the colonists had no problem acting violently towards them. Just a few days after the English arrived in the area close to Roanoke Island, Amadas led a group of men to the village of Aquascogoc, and burnt it to the ground when the inhabitants would not return a cup Amadas accused them of stealing.<sup>38</sup> The scorched earth tactics employed were completely new to the Algonquians. Therefore, Wingina remained cautious in his alliance with the English, aware that their wrath could easily turn on his own people if he did not remain vigilant. In the spring of 1586, relations between Governor Lane and Wingina broke down. Wingina "warned" Lane of a force close to 6000 Native Americans from an area further inland preparing to attack the

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<sup>36</sup> David Beers Quinn, ed., *The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590*, vol. 1 of *Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), 377.

<sup>37</sup> John White, "From Fourth Virginia Voyage: 1587," in *Captain John Smith: Writings with Other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement of America*, ed. James Horn (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2007), 866.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Roanoke's Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 65.

colonists.<sup>39</sup> When Lane and his men went to fight them, no such force was found. Lane then went in search of precious metals, was attacked, and many of his men were killed. By the time Lane returned to Roanoke Island, he was in desperate need of food, and he no longer saw Wingina as a friend, but as an enemy. Soon after this, Wingina attempted to end contact with the English, deciding that what he had hoped to gain from the colonists, such as guns and other technology, came at too high a cost for his people. In doing this, Wingina took one of the few actions he could to oust the English. Algonquian weapons and warriors were no match for English guns, but Wingina could still starve the colonists. Cut off from the main food supply and paranoid that Wingina was secretly planning to attack, Lane decided to strike Dasemunkepeuc before Wingina's "plans" could unfold. Not suspecting treachery, Wingina allowed the group with Lane to enter the village, only to have the villagers attacked and Wingina himself beheaded. Soon after this incident, Lane and the colonists joined Sir Francis Drake and returned to England, leaving a few men behind in the rush to leave.

Wingina had been a well-loved leader. He led not by force, but by the respect of his people.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, his death would not have been simply political, but personal to the Algonquian community. Between the influenza and this attack, most of his people were dead, leaving those who still lived bitter and even more wary of the English. Therefore, it is not surprising that when the Second Roanoke Colony began, the Algonquians still living in Dasemunkepeuc actively desired the demise of the English. This was demonstrated in the murder of George Howe, a member of the Second Roanoke Colony, on July 8, 1587.<sup>41</sup> While Howe was out catching crabs, completely unarmed and alone, he was shot by sixteen arrows and his skull

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<sup>39</sup> Oberg, 82.

<sup>40</sup> Oberg, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Oberg, 115.

was bashed in.<sup>42</sup> Although it may not have been Wingina's people who did this, they had the greatest motivation for revenge and lived the closest to Roanoke Island. In addition, those living in Dasemunkepeuc fled soon after the incident, implying that they feared English retaliation. By murdering Wingina, the first colony committed a crime beyond redemption and destroyed any hope of alliance between the Lost Colony and most of its neighbors. Even the Algonquian villages that were not hurt would have heard about the murder, giving them good reason to stay away when the English returned.

It is clear that the local Algonquians had many reasons to want nothing to do with the English after dealing with the colonists under Ralph Lane. The effects of this alienation had a huge impact on the Second Roanoke Colony. Some of their neighbors sought open revenge, as exemplified by George Howe, while most just wanted to be left alone. Only the Croatoans agreed to associate with the colonists. This was extremely detrimental for the colony because part of the colonists' plan for survival was to establish trade with the natives. Yet, this alone did not cause their demise. Had the colonists brought enough supplies, trade would not have been nearly as vital. However, the colonists were low on supplies, and John White was unable to bring them what was needed in order to plant in the spring. This made the lack of friendly neighbors a death sentence for the colony. Neither White's inability to resupply them or hostile neighbors alone could have made the colony fail for sure, but together, these things made the colony's demise quite unsurprising.

Other, less likely, theories on the cause of the Lost Colony's destruction have also been put forward. Some argue that White's relief mission did not greatly influence the colony's end. The colony was already abandoned when Spanish ships, captained by Vicente González, found

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



its remains in June of 1588.<sup>43</sup> However, it is clear from the document the colonists gave White to convince him obtain supplies that the colonists needed supplies by spring in order to have “good and happie planting.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, White’s inability to resupply the colonists before spring was of great consequence. Summer, when González found the abandoned colony, was already too late. Another theory is that drought caused the colony’s failure. Scientific evidence, gathered by looking at the width of moisture sensitive tree rings in that area shows that there was a severe drought from 1587-1589 in all of the southeastern United States. It was especially severe in the tidewater region, near Roanoke Island.<sup>45</sup> However, the colonists arrived on Roanoke Island on July 22, 1587, after the time they would have needed to plant crops. This indicates that they had no plans to farm in the summer of 1587, so drought would not have influenced them. With few to no supplies to plant in the spring of 1588, drought, again, would not have been of much consequence to the colonists. Still another theory states that the Spanish slaughtered the colonists. While Spain and England were at war during this period, and although Spanish sailors unsuccessfully searched for an English base in the area in 1585, the colony, already abandoned, was not found until 1588.<sup>46</sup> Even then, it was only found by accident. Additionally, there is no record of the Spanish conquering a colony in Virginia in 1588. This reveals that by this time, King Philip was more concerned with naval battles in Europe than a potential English base in the Americas. Because finding the colony was clearly not a priority, it seems unlikely that the

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<sup>43</sup> David Beers Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 309.

<sup>44</sup> John White, “From *Fourth Virginia Voyage: 1587*,” in *Captain John Smith: Writings with Other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement of America*, ed. James Horn (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2007), 871.

<sup>45</sup> David W. Stahle, Malcolm K. Cleaveland, Dennis B. Blanton, Matthew D. Therrell, and David A. Gay, “The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts,” *Science* 280, no. 5363 (1998): 565, <http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/2895280>.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent’s Hand: Roanoke’s Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 127.

colonists were murdered by Spanish sailors. Overall, these theories are not substantial enough to be the cause of the colony's failure.

Over the years, there have been many theories as to what happened to the colonists. In the early 1700s, William Byrd asserted that the surrounding Native Americans killed the colonists.<sup>47</sup> A. L. Rowse, a twentieth century Elizabethan era historian agreed with Byrd.<sup>48</sup> Their reasoning for this assertion was not explained in the sources examined for this paper. However, the most widely accepted theory is that the colony simply integrated itself into the Croatoan community. As the colonists' last allies, this is possible. It is supported archeologically by the presence of various English artifacts, such as a signet ring similar to those found at Fort Raleigh, on Croatoan Island.<sup>49</sup> However, the presence of such artifacts could just as easily be accounted for through trade between the Native Americans and the colonists. Yet, legend also supports this theory. Some of the descendents of the Croatoans are reported to have blue or grey eyes, indicating European ancestry.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, when John Lawson, an English missionary, visited these descendents in the early 1700s, some did claim to have white ancestors.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the Croatoan village would have been an ideal place for colonists to go while waiting for English supply ships. However, there are some major problems with this theory. To begin, Croatoan Island could not have held 117 additional occupants, and the villagers would not have been able to feed this many newcomers due to the lateness of the season and drought. Also, the English had already promised the Croatoans that they would not eat their corn, making living in such close proximity difficult without breaking their word. It is possible that some went to live with the Croatoans while the rest moved inland. In White's narrative of his 1587 voyages, he states that

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<sup>47</sup> Oberg, 126.

<sup>48</sup> Oberg, 126-127.

<sup>49</sup> Oberg, 129.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Oberg, 130.

“they intended to remove 50. Miles further up into the maine.”<sup>52</sup> However, no evidence of where the other colonists may have gone has been found. In addition, the colonists had, in an attempted attack on Dasemunkepeuc, accidentally killed many Croatoans who were there gathering food. It seems likely that the Croatoans would have been even more wary of working so closely with the colonists, as they would have needed to if the English joined their community, after this incident. While this theory has much support, it also has many discrepancies, and the mystery of what happened to the colonists persists.

While many unfortunate circumstances contributed to failure of the Second Roanoke Colony, John White’s inability to resupply the colonists quickly and the first colony’s total alienation of the surrounding Native Americans were the primary causes of the colony’s collapse. Yet, even after four centuries, little is known about the colony. One reason for this is that the settlement was built close to the shoreline, which has eroded over a quarter mile during the past four hundred years.<sup>53</sup> With these artifacts now buried underwater, corroded, or swept away, it is difficult to expand our existing knowledge of the colony. In addition, the main source about the 1587 colony is John White’s writings. After he left to gather supplies, until his return in 1590, there is no written documentation of the happenings in the colony. One can speculate as to what may have occurred in these intervening years, but there is no way to know what really took place. In the end, the Lost Colony serves as a clear testament to the difficulties faced by both the colonizers and the colonized. The results of similar clashes between the Old and New Worlds can be seen in all of the colonies that followed these first two in Virginia.

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<sup>52</sup> John White, “From *Fourth Virginia Voyage: 1587*,” in *Captain John Smith: Writings with Other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement of America*, ed. James Horn (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2007), 870.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Dolan and Kenton Bosserman, “Shoreline Erosion and the Lost Colony,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62, no. 3 (September 1972): 424, <http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/2562295>.

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