

John Rolfe (1585–1622), one of the first British colonists in Jamestown, Virginia, perfected a mild strain of tobacco that proved so popular among European consumers that by the 1620s, tobacco became Jamestown's primary export. This letter was recorded in Captain John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia* (Doc. 1.12).

. . . [A]n industrious man not other ways employed, may well tend four acres of corn, and 1,000 plants of tobacco, and where they say an acre will yield but three or four barrels, we have ordinarily four or five, but of new ground six, seven, and eight, and a barrel of peas and beans, which we esteem as good as two of corn, . . . so that one man may provide corn for five [people], and apparel for two [people] by the profit of his tobacco . . . had we but carpenters to build and make carts and ploughs, and skillful men that know how to use them, and train up our cattle to draw them, . . . yet our want of experience brings but little to perfection but planting tobacco, and yet of that many are so covetous to have much, they make little good. . . .

John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia* (London: Printed by I. Dawson and I. Haviland for Michael Sparkes, 1632), 125–126, transcribed into modern English by Jason Stacy.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

Identify: According to Rolfe, what economic advantages and social problems did tobacco pose for the colony?

Analyze: Rolfe wanted "skillful men" who could grow corn and wheat and build carts and ploughs. What does Rolfe's vision of ideal colonists tell us about the reality of the colonists who settled there?

Evaluate: Compare this document to Samuel de Champlain's description of the French fur trade (Doc. 2.1). What were some similarities and some differences between these French and English enterprises?