

# **The English literature of colonization (**

## **1. The literature of exploration**

- First written manifestations: chronicles of travellers and early colonizers
- *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588), by Thomas Harriot
- *A True Relation of Virginia* (1608), *A Map of Virginia* (1612) and *The General History of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles* (1624), by John Smith

# Characteristics

- Geographical accounts of the new found lands
- The intention was to inform readers about the colonial enterprise in the New World.
- Virginia was their first destination, and profit was their main motivation.
- Chronicles have historical interest. They provide data about the history of colonisation

- Early chronicles relate facts such as...
- 1605: first abortive attempt to establish an English settlement (in what is now Maine)
- 1607: first permanent English settlement, called **Jamestown**, Virginia, founded by the London Company.
- The settlers chose a location close to the water, hoping to establish a thriving community.



# JAMESTOWN

- Disaster dogged the first Virginians for 20 years (starvation, plagues, diseases, quarrels with the Indians...). By the end of 1607 only 38 men survived of the hundred who had landed

- **On colonial chronicles:**
- Many were not objective
- Accounts used the language of European conventions, in particular the idyllic vision of America as unspoiled wilderness
- Major images from classical sources and Renaissance literature: America as Arcadia, as bountiful natural, and from the Bible: America as the Garden of Eden

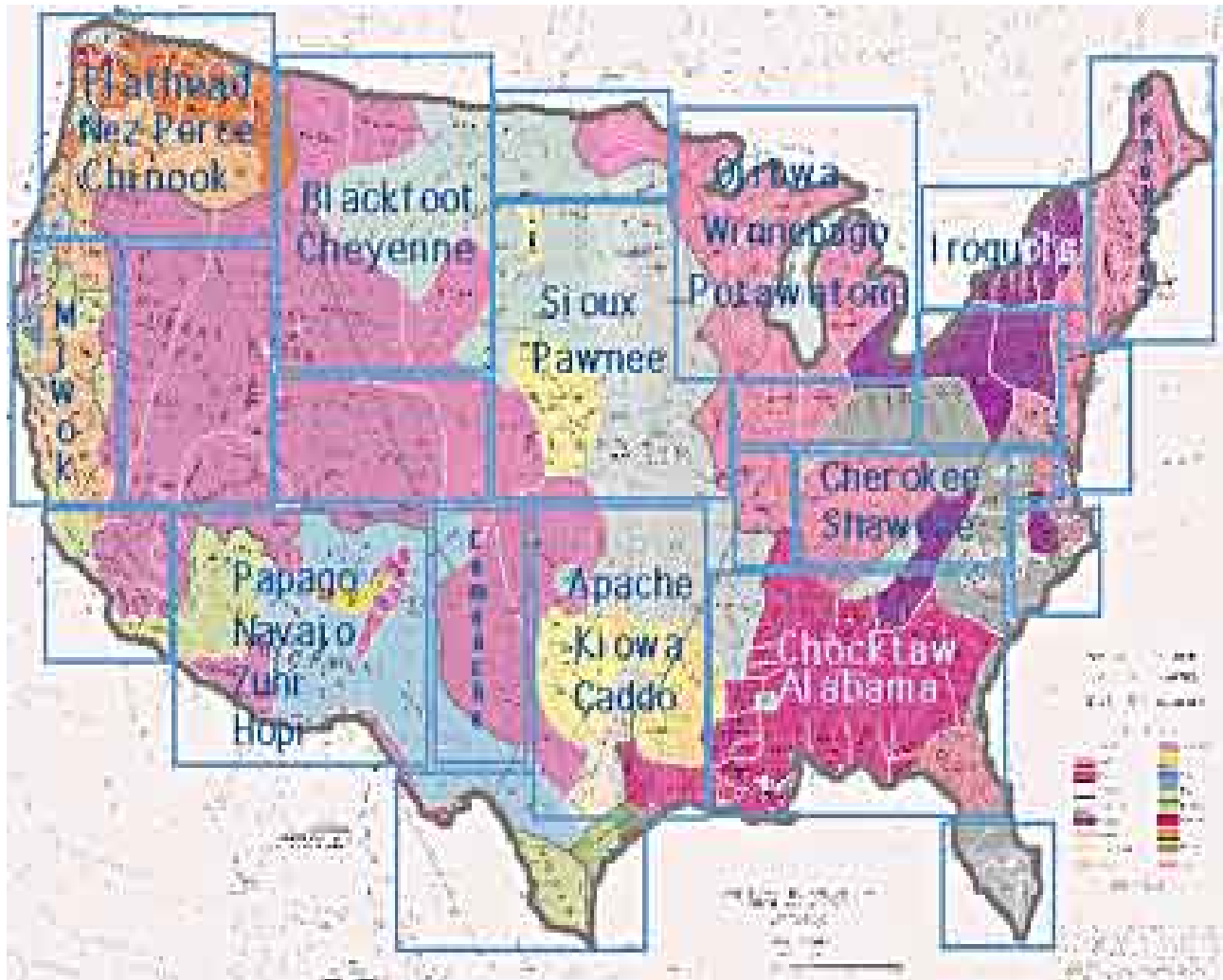
- An exception: Captain John Smith did not exaggerate the possibilities for wealth
- His motto was “work or starve” (only the hard-working would survive and succeed)
- Otherwise, he stretched the truth of his stories
- His tale about his relationship with the Indian princess Pocahontas is the most famous one





# The Native Population

- When the Europeans arrived, the land was already inhabited by different tribes
- Native-Americans did not yield easily to the newcomers
- Issues of ownership and land occupation became areas of conflict: agriculture (tobacco) versus hunting
- Native Americans began to fight this encroachment



# The Indians in the Eyes of the Europeans

- Native Americans had a rich oral literature, but no written literature among the more than 500 tribes
- The fact that the native population did not have a system of writing was perceived as a sign of their inferiority
- This reinforced the idea that America was meant for the Europeans

# Images of the native population in the Americas in the 16th century

- Indians perceived as inferior men
- Indians cast in the role of women
- “Indians should honor, obey, fear and love us”  
(Thomas Harriot)

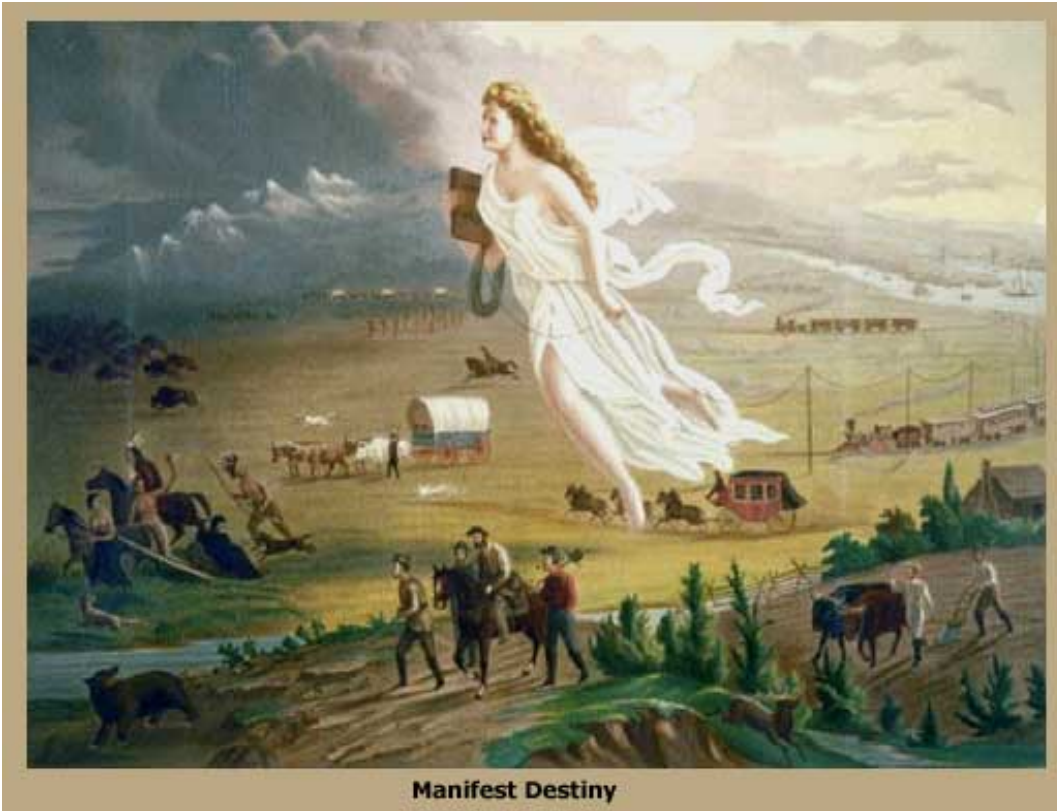
# Images of Native Americans in the 17th century

- In later accounts, the continent is “empty”: Indian presence is ignored, making the natives as only one aspect of the inhuman wilderness
- The myth that America was “empty” has been perpetuated in contemporary cultural histories of USA: Henry Nash Smith’s vision of the West in *Virgin Land* (1979)

# Implications of early images of Native Americans

- The idea of America as “empty” space justified European’s view that God had created America so that Europeans could expand their civilization
- The concept of “Manifest Destiny”, articulated in the 19th century, is crucial in the history of USA

# Manifest Destiny



Manifest Destiny