

*from*  
**THE FIRST CHARTER OF VIRGINIA**  
**1606**

-----*King James I*-----

This charter, issued by King James I of England, granted the Virginia Company of London and the Virginia Company of Plymouth permission to create a colony in America. In granting the charter, the King sought to promote Protestantism and to slow the spread of Spanish settlement in the New World. In addition, the King and the shareholders of the Virginia Companies sought profits from new resources and new trading opportunities.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Motives**

How does the charter reflect the English attitude toward the being claimed in America and toward its inhabitants?

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James, by the grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, etc.: Whereas Our loving and well-disposed subjects, Sir Thomas Gates, and Sir George Somers, Knights, Richard Hackluit, Clerk, Prebendary of Westminster, and Edward-Maria Wingfield, Thomas Hanham, and Raleigh Gilbert, Esquires William Parker, and George Popham, Gentlemen, and diverse others of Our loving subjects, have been humble suitors unto Us, that We would vouchsafe unto them Our license, to make habitation, plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of Our people into that part of America commonly called Virginia, and other parts and territories in America, either appertaining unto Us, or which are not now actually possessed by any Christian prince or people, situate, lying, and being all along the seacoasts, between 34° of northerly latitude from the equinoctial line, and 45° of the same latitude, and in the mainland between the same 34° and 45°, and the islands thereunto adjacent or within 100 miles of the coast thereof:

We, greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their desires...in propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God, and may in time bring the infidels and savages living in those parts to human civility and to a settled and quiet government, do, by these Our letters patent, graciously accept of, and agree to, their humble and well-intended desires.

And do therefore, for Us, Our Heirs, and Successors, grant and agree...that they shall have all the lands, woods, soils, grounds, havens, ports, rivers, mines, minerals, marshes, waters, fishings, commodities, and hereditaments, whatsoever, from the...first seat of their plantation and habitation by the space of 50 miles of

English statute measure, all along the said coast of Virginia and America, toward the west and southwest, as the coast lies, with all the islands within 100 miles directly over against the same seacoast, toward the east and northeast, or toward the north, as the coast lies, together with all the islands within 100 miles, directly over against the said seacoast and also...from the same 50 miles every way on the seacoast, directly into the mainland by the space of 100 English miles, and shall and may inhabit and remain there; and shall and may also build and fortify within any the same for their better safeguard and defense, according to their best discretion and the discretion of the council of that colony, and that no other of our subjects shall be permitted or suffered to plant or inhabit behind, or on the backside of them, toward the mainland, without the express license or consent of the council of the colony, thereunto in writing first had and obtained.

And moreover, We do grant and agree, for Us, Our Heirs, and Successors, that the said several councils...shall and lawfully may...give and take order, to dig, mine, and search for all manner of mines of gold, silver, and copper...and to have and enjoy the gold, silver, and copper, to be gotten thereof, to the use and benefit of the same colonies...yielding therefore to Us, Our Heirs, and Successors, the fifth part only of all the same gold and silver, and the fifteenth part of all the same copper....

And that they shall, or lawfully may, establish and cause to be made a coin, to pass...between the people of those several colonies, for the more ease of trade and bargaining between and among them and the natives....

Also We do, for Us, Our Heirs, and Successors, declare, by these presents, that all and every of the persons being Our subjects, which shall dwell and inhabit within every or any of the said several colonies and plantations, and every of their children, which shall happen to be born within any of the limits and precincts of the said several colonies and plantations, shall have and enjoy all liberties, franchises, and immunities, within any of our other dominions, to all intents and purposes, as if they had been abiding and born, within this Our Realm of England, or any of Our said dominions.

Source: *First Charter of Virginia* by King James I, 1606. Reprinted in *The Annals of America*, vol. I (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1976), pp. 15–17.