Pocahontas and Jamestown’s Legacies

Our Own Lesson in Nation Building
Through a decade’s trial and error, Jamestown’s ordinary settlers and their backers in England figured out what it would take to make an English colony work. This was an enormous accomplishment achieved in a very short period of time, a breakthrough that none of the other contemporaneous ventures was able to make.

From *The Jamestowne Project*,
by Professor Karen Ordahl Kupperman

It was the model for self-sufficiency and local governance that was then used at Plymouth and to create the British Empire.
Jamestown’s Lasting Effect

Most accounts cover only the beginning of Jamestown’s story: the seventeen years following the 1607 landing.

The earliest colonists’ consequential actions helped to shape the building of our nation.

Jamestown’s founding has a deeper meaning than merely being one of our national origins.
Jamestown Offers Our Own Lesson In Nation Building

• Nation building is the evolution or imposition of new or changing forms of government
• Often a tortuous, violent and agonizing process
• Unclear as to where, when and how it will end and, especially, what the form of government will be
• Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa fit this definition
• Can our own nation building experience offer any guidance for what to expect from those events?
Landing at Jamestown

- In May 1607, The Virginia Company of London landed 104 men and boys landed on a marshy James River peninsula to found Jamestown.
- Drought, disease, famine and strife challenged the fledgling colony.
Arriving Among the Powhatan Federation
Who was John Smith?

From Life ca. 1616

Disney’s John Smith
So, who was Pocahontas?
The Real Pocahontas

- Born ca. 1597
- Mother unknown
- Strong personality/precocious
- Pocahontas: childhood nickname
Jamestown's Nadir

Wreck of the Sea Venture; 1609

Starving Times: 1609-10
First Anglo-Powhatan War: 1609-14

- Began with departure of John Smith and loss of leadership
- Powhatan isolates James Fort; reducing settlers to starvation
- The Starving Times: 60 of 240 survived winter 1609/10
- Both sides may have seen themselves in a holy war
Population of Jamestown

Jamestown 1607-10
Rescue and Salvation

- Sea Venture survivors, arrive spring 1610
- Fleet under new Governor arrives with more settlers and supplies
- Jamestown is rebuilt
- Anglo-Powhatan War continues
Pocahontas Is Kidnapped

- In April, 1613, Captain Samuel Argall convinced a local chief to help him kidnap Pocahontas
- Governor Dale sought to use Pocahontas to win concessions from her father
- Negotiations stalled, until, in March 1614, a peaceful confrontation ended the war on a note of anticlimax
Pocahontas/Rolfe Wedding in 1614 Brings Peace

Site of the Wedding

Reenactment for 400th Anniversary
Spawning Economic Viability and a Legacy

- Rolfe (probably together with Pocahontas) developed a hybrid from West Indian tobacco and the native variety
- Produced a new and what soon became a wildly popular Virginia blend
- Established the tobacco industry as Jamestown’s economic salvation
Pocahontas in London
1616: The Beginning of Our Nation Building

Our nation building began within ten years of the first settlers’ landing at Jamestown.

In 1616, the Virginia Company made land grants to its investors in lieu of a dividend that it was unable to pay from profits.

Headrights system also begins, granting land to settlers.

In 1623 – only sixteen years after the first Jamestown settlers had arrived – the Company converted all landholdings to private ownership.
Political and Economic Seeds are Also Sown In Jamestown

- A new legal code based on English common law
- First elected representative legislature in the New World
- Beginning of its self-governance 1619
- Universal suffrage
- Common citizen’s right to own private property
Another, Less Happy, Legacy

- Late August 1619 "20. and odd Negroes" were landed
- Lifetime servitude was not recognized in English or Virginia law at that time.
- Virginia's first muster, or census in 1620, listed 892 Europeans, 4 Indians and 32 Africans
- The 1625 muster lists 23 Africans and 1 Indian, along with the 1,232 population of Europeans
Virginia Company began to send marriageable women to Jamestown to help create families in 1619-20
Virginia Company’s Charters: 1620

- Virginia Company sponsored the Mayflower venture to found a colony in “Northern Virginia” in 1620

- Destination was Virginia, but ended up at Cape Cod

- Used John Smith’s directions for the successful founding of a colony
Tobacco Takes Economic Root

- Settlers began growing tobacco everywhere
- Tobacco became currency
- In 1620, the free enterprise system began
Cheap Labor: 
Indentured Servants

• Who were they?
• How many?
• Why did they come?
Where Did They Come From?

Places of Origin of Chesapeake Indentured Servants
The End of the Beginning

- By 1622, major dissatisfaction among many important London backers
- March 1622, Powhatan surprise attack throughout the colony shattered the eight-year peace
- Almost a third of the settlers dead were killed
- The Second Anglo-Powhatan War began and went on until 1632
- A realization that less than one of six had survived of about 7,000 of those who had emigrated
Royal inquiry led to the revocation of the Company’s charter and its dissolution in 1624.

The Company’s investors’ loss estimated at over £200,000 (the 2013 equivalent of over $55,000,000).

James I died in March 1625 without resolving the colony’s status

Charles I, made Virginia a crown province.
Meanwhile, Back In Virginia…

Charles I let Jamestown’s legal and administrative status stay in limbo for another decade and a half.

The Assembly took its own initiative to fill the political vacuum created by the monarch's inaction.
Jamestown After 1624: Learning to Self Govern

“[It] was in the decades after 1624 that the social, political, and economic implications of those [earlier] developments played out, and Virginia became a place quite unlike anything the [colony’s] backers envisioned, even in their wildest dreams.”

- Professor Warren M. Billings
England Becomes Preoccupied

• In 1629, the Crown and Parliament soon began their two decades of political and, finally, bloody struggles.

• Evolved into the English Civil Wars.

• The Jamestown colonists had to learn to innovate during years of benign neglect of Virginia by England’s rulers.
The Emergence of Local Governance

- Local governing bodies (that became counties)
- Adapted the English county court system, which evolved into a major feature of our American jurisprudence structure
- Geographical legislative representation
Colonial Expansion After 1624

- Jamestown remained the colonial capital after 1624
- More tobacco plantations owned by increasingly wealthy settler families
- The agrarian form of Virginia’s economy did not foster the growth of towns and cities, as in New England
Tobacco Trade Expands

Active trade relations with other colonies, as well as England and Europe

By 1640, London was importing nearly a million and a half pounds of tobacco annually from Virginia
The Colony Grows

Population of Jamestown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Reason for Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1607</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>First arrivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1608</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>New arrivals</td>
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<td>Summer 1609</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>Death from disease</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1609</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>New Arrivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1609</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Indian attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1610</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>“Starving time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1610</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>New arrivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1610</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Disease; Indian attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late March 1611</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Departures; Indian attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late May 1611</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>New arrivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1611</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>New arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1611</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Indian attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>1615</td>
<td>400</td>
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<tr>
<td>1622</td>
<td>1,240</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1625</td>
<td>1,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>1632</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1634</td>
<td>5,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1644</td>
<td>8,000</td>
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1639: An Affirmation of Rights

- Charles I legitimated the elected representative legislative body
- Confirmed the colonists’ property rights.
- A real estate industry is created.
In addition, by 1639, Virginia-born councilors had also exerted their influence to oust an unpopular governor, which “opened the door to the rise of the colony’s ruling classes.”
The Fulcrum of Our Nation Building

- Charles I appointed Sir William Berkeley as governor in 1641.
- One of Virginia’s most controversial figures.
- Governed Virginia from 1640s into 1670s.
- The Assembly was maturing into a miniature parliament
- Political power was divided between the provincial [i.e., colonial] and the county governments
Another Legacy: Indian Policies

- Final Major Attack by Powhatans in 1644
- 500 settlers killed
- The Third Anglo-Powhatan War was over by 1646
- Treaty established 1st Indian Reservations
Two More Legacies

Civilian control of the militias or military

An elected Speaker of the House
England Becomes More Preoccupied

- At the same time, English history was taking a turn that would greatly affect Jamestown.

- The monarchy and its royalist adherents and the Puritan-led Parliament squared off in 1642 in the English Civil Wars; Berkeley had arrived just before they began.
The Labor Transition

White Indentured Servitude
High Mortality
1607-mid century

Labor System Shift
(Transition) Declining Mortality
circa 1650-1725

Racial Slavery
"Normal" Mortality
1720s -->

Servants begin to survive their term of service
Bacon's Rebellion, 1676
The Interregnum Commences

Charles I beheaded in 1649, and, by 1650, England became a Commonwealth and then a Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell
A New Regime

- Governor Berkeley and the Assembly proclaimed Prince Charles as king
- In 1652, Parliamentary enforcement fleet arrives in Jamestown
- Berkeley surrendered
The Burgesses Dominate

- Vestiges of colonial oversight during the Interregnum
- Virginians were faced with the prospect of absolute self-government
- House of Burgesses dominated the colonial government by electing both governors and councilors
- The Burgesses, anticipating the restoration of the monarchy, elected Berkeley to the governorship on March 3, 1660
- The new Assembly, at the pinnacle of its powers and stature, would sit for fifteen years
Virginia Post Interregnum Population Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1650</td>
<td>18,731</td>
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<tr>
<td>1660</td>
<td>27,020</td>
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<tr>
<td>1670</td>
<td>35,309</td>
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<td>1680</td>
<td>43,596</td>
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<tr>
<td>1690</td>
<td>53,046</td>
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<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>58,560</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Aristocracy Arrives with the Restoration

- Property ownership became a voting qualification in 1670.
- Refugees from Parliamentary persecution create "Tidewater Aristocracy"
- Washington, Randolph, Carter, and Lee families
Another Legacy: Westward Ho

- New opportunities for economic and class betterment unavailable to them in England;
- Others found it too similar to the system they had escaped
- Virginia diaspora
- Our American westward movement
A New Royal Vision

“For ordinary Virginians, hard times started with the restoration of King Charles II in 1660…

“An imperial system grounded in social order, political obedience, military security and the exclusion of the Dutch…

“Achieving the vision meant limiting [Virginia’s new] independence.”

– Professor Warren Billings
Royal Leadership Is Imposed

• Virginia’s self-governance would continue until 1676
• Bacon’s Rebellion, began as a dispute about Indian raids
• Jamestown was burned
• Virginians again had to host a royal military presence
• Berkeley removed after 27 years
Our Initial Era of Nation Building Ends

- Self-governance capacity began to be diminished
- Royal and aristocratic domination of the colony
- Colonial capital was later moved to what would become Williamsburg
- Political distance was immeasurable
- Social, entrepreneurial, political and economic tenets would survive and persist
The Unique Opportunity for Our Nation Building

England’s neglected colonial oversight
Our colonial ancestors first briefly and unconsciously realized the principles of popular sovereignty, discomforting and unrecognized as they were for them
Jamestown’s relevance is as a transformational event
Its most important lesson and legacy are how and why a new people – we Americans – learned to govern ourselves and came to determine our destiny
Looking Beyond the Beginning

Only by looking over Jamestown's nine decades as a colonial seat of government do we see its crucial place in our history, its contributions to our constitutional republic, and how major threads of our political heritage were first spun there to be woven into our national fabric.
Jamestown's Legacies

- The tobacco industry
- A legal code based on English common law
- First elected representative legislature in the New World
- Male universal suffrage
- Common citizen’s right to own private property
- Introduction of African Americans into English America
- John Smith’s suggestions for the founding of a colony
- The free enterprise system.
- Creation of local governing bodies (that became counties)
- County court system as a major feature of our American jurisprudence structure
- Geographical legislative representation
- Real estate industry
- Indian extirpation and reservation policies
- Civilian control of the militias or military.
- Elected Speaker of the House
- Start of the American westward movement
SUGGESTED READING

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