Colonial Virginia, 1607-1720

Topics of Discussion

I. Virginia Company of London: Jamestown
II. John Smith and the Pocahontas Story
III. Fiasco; Reorganization; Royalization
IV. Sir William Berkeley and his Virginia Elite
V. The Mid-17th Century Social Order
VI. Bacon’s Rebellion (1676)
VII. The Move to Slavery
VIII. Political development, 1680-1720
Colonial Virginia, 1607-1720

Virginia Company of London: Jamestown

A. 1606: VA Company of London received charter from James I (r. 1603-1625)

B. May 1607: Susan Constant, Godspeed, Discovery arrive in Virginia

C. 105 settlers select site for Jamestown

D. Encounter Powhatan Confederacy
POWHATAN held this state & fashion when Capt. Smith was delivered to him prisoner, 1607.
Colonial Virginia, 1607-1720

Virginia Company of London: Jamestown

E. Plant experimental crops; malaria; starvation

F. January 1608: only 38 of 105 settlers alive

G. New Arrivals: No preparations in place
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John Smith and the Pocahontas Story

Emergence of John Smith (1580-1631)


- Smith claimed that he went to sea at 16. He was shipwrecked in the Mediterranean, fought in Transylvania, was captured by the Turks, enslaved in Tartary, and escaped to travel across Russia and Europe back to England by 1604.

- 1606-07: Smith traveled to Jamestown on first voyage

- 1608: Smith traveled through Virginia and mapped it.

- Smith elected president of council in September 1608

  strict discipline: "He who does not work, will not eat."

- Smith injured and returns to England 1609.
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John Smith and the Pocahontas Story

The Traditional Pocahontas Story

- December 1607: while seeking food along the Chickahominy River, Smith was captured by Opechancanough and taken to meet Powhatan at Werowocomoco, the chief village of the Confederacy.

- Pocahontas story: “At the minute of my execution, she hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine; and not only that, but so prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to Jamestown.”
POWHATAN held this state & fashion when Capt. Smith was delivered to him prisoner, 1607.
Colonial Virginia, 1607-1720

John Smith and the Pocahontas Story

First Problem with the Pocahontas story

Does NOT appear in Smith’s first three accounts of VA

- A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Hath Happned in Virginia . . . (1608)

- A Map of Virginia (1612)

- The Proceedings of the English Colony in Virginia (1612)
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John Smith and the Pocahontas Story

Second Problem with the Pocahontas story

Initially appeared in print in Smith’s *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles* . . . (1624)

AFTER Pocahontas had married John Rolfe (1614), traveled to England (1616-17), and become a celebrity

Jan 1617: Pocahontas before King at Whitehall Palace.

March 1617: She died in England (pneumonia or tb)

THEN, Smith’s *General History* is published in 1624

Claims to have written about Pocahontas in a letter to Queen Anne (1616), but original has never been found.
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John Smith and the Pocahontas Story

Third Problem with the Pocahontas story

Smith was a notorious braggart, and it was common for people to adopt the stories of others at the time.

One such story: Spaniard Juan Ortiz and maiden Ulele

1528: Indians captured Ortiz and 3 others searching for missing explorer Panfilio de Narvaez near Tampa Bay.

Indian chief had a score to settle with the Spanish because Narvaez cut off his nose and killed his mother

Ortiz to be roasted alive, but Ulele saved him.

Story published in English in 1605.
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John Smith and the Pocahontas Story

Fourth Problem with the Pocahontas story

Smith’s engraver definitely copied earlier works on Virginia for his General History (1624).

Most obvious example: visual depiction of events.

On the same page as the Pocahontas story, we find a creative reproduction of John White’s depiction of a fertility festival.

Smith has refashioned the event as a “savage dance of triumph” - “Their triumph about him”
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John Smith and the Pocahontas Story

What is the significance of the Pocahontas story?
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Fiasco; Reorganization; Royalization

Jamestown Fiasco (1607-1618)
- John Smith left colony in 1609
- Starving Times, 1609
- First Anglo-Powhatan War (1610-14)
- Explaining the Fiasco

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1607</td>
<td>105, first landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1608</td>
<td>200, from new arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1609</td>
<td>131, death from disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1609</td>
<td>381, from new arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1609</td>
<td>280, death from Indian attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1610</td>
<td>90, &quot;starving time&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1610</td>
<td>375, from new arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1610</td>
<td>250, death from disease and Indian war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late March 1611</td>
<td>152, departures, death from Indian attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early May 1611</td>
<td>482, from new arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1611</td>
<td>752, from new arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1611</td>
<td>600, death from Indian attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1615</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1619</td>
<td>700, approximate</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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Fiasco; Reorganization; Royalization

Reorganization of 1618-1619

1. Headright system

2. House of Burgesses
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Royalization of 1624

- Introduction of tobacco: boomtown
- The Indian Attack of 1622
- In May 1624, James I royalized colony
Virginia 1642 - When William Berkeley arrives

- 8,000 people living in Virginia
- Reputation: “none but those of the meanest quality and corruptest lives went there.”
- Like a modern military outpost or lumber camp
- Its leaders were rough, violent, drinking men.
- The colony was in a state of chronic disorder.
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Sir William Berkeley and Virginia

- Governor William Berkeley’s (1642-1676) transformed the colony of Virginia.

- Population grew from 8,000 to 40,000.

- Virginia developed a coherent social order, a functioning economic system, and a strong sense of its own special folkways.

- Acquired a governing elite which Berkeley described as “men of as good families as any subjects in England.”
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Sir William Berkeley and his Virginia Elite

Berkeley and his Cavalier elite

- Royalist Cavalier elite comes to Virginia

- Who were the Cavaliers?

  1. James I, 1603-1625
  2. Charles I, 1625-1649
  3. Politics: Petition of Rights, 1628
  4. Religion: High Church Anglicans v. Puritans
  5. Eleven Years of Tyranny, 1629-1640
  6. England’s Civil War 1640-1649
  7. Cavaliers and Roundheads
  8. English Commonwealth 1649-1660

- Many Cavaliers came to Virginia
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Sir William Berkeley and his Virginia Elite

Elite Domination
- Political Domination
- Economic Domination
- Cultural Domination
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The Mid-17th Century Social Order

Social Order Based on Tobacco Economy

- Land and Labor were essential commodities

- Structure

Outside: Indians
Second Anglo-Powhatan War (1644-46)
Bottom: Slaves, at most 1,000 in 1660.
Above Slaves: Indentured servants
Top: Elite
Below Elite: Established householders
Middle: Freedmen
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The Mid-17th Century Social Order

The Problems Posed by Freedmen

- Indentured servitude worked: 1607-1640

- After 1640, circumstances changed: little prime land; few freedom dues; Indian frontier

- Freedmen looked very dangerous: young, frustrated, un-married, armed

- Presence of this growing group of freedmen frightened the elite
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Bacon’s Rebellion (1676)

- Freedmen volunteered to fight the Indians
- Governor Berkeley refuses offer
- Nathaniel Bacon leads men anyway - they turn on their rulers
- Largest popular rising in the colonies before the American Revolution.
- Burn Jamestown - 1676
- Rebellion produced no real program of reform
- Ended when Bacon died suddenly
- Life-changing experience for Virginia’s elite.
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The Move to Slavery

- Virginia’s elites turned to African Slavery to replace indentured servitude

- As African slaves entered Virginia, elites created different laws for them

- As the number of slaves increased, the Assembly passed laws that set them apart.

- Slave laws for people without white skin.
  1. No assembly
  2. No weapons
  4. Limitations on punishment of white servants
Freedmen & Elite Come Together

As the number of servants fell off, freedmen became more “respectable.” They grew closer to the elite because both groups were free and white, and both were surrounded by a large number of Africans who were held in bondage.

Political development, 1680-1720

As slavery rose, white Virginians adopted a government in which freedmen had a larger share. In the House of Burgesses, whites developed egalitarian ideas of liberty. Elite Virginians could allow these ideas now because reckless freedmen no longer threatened them. Freedom was for people with white skin.