

On May 13, 1607, 104 English men and boys waded ashore here. They then proceeded to decimate a native population that had lived in utter equanimity prior to their arrival, and would eventually import a slave-labor force to rape the continent of its natural resources, all for the ugly motivation of profit. At least that's the central theme of the exhibits marking the 400th anniversary of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America. There's no denying that those elements are part of the Jamestown story. But Jamestown contributed much more. It gave us three of our most important founding principles: private-property rights, representative government and civilian control of the military. Jamestown also was a strictly for-profit venture. Its eventual success laid the foundation for our capitalist, entrepreneurial culture, a development that cannot be understated.

Unfortunately, capitalism and the rule of law are given but a polite nod here. The overarching storyline is that Jamestown brought together three peoples from three different continents -- the English, the Native Americans and the Africans -- into a new multicultural society and all that it entails. Moving onto 1607, we're told the usual tale of how the English struggled to survive. They battled disease, starvation and the sometimes not-so-friendly Indians.

The myth about Capt. John Smith and Pocahontas is dispelled. As best we can tell, she may -- or may not -- have helped Smith persuade her father, Chief Powhatan, not to slaughter the English. And there never was any romance between them. She actually married colonist John Rolfe, had a son, and traveled to England to recruit other colonists. While there, she became ill, died and is buried in Gravesend.

It was a hardscrabble life. The business venture struggled to turn a profit. The settlers, who had left high unemployment and little opportunity in England to make their fortunes in a new world, failed at almost every turn. There were abundant natural resources for timber and glass making, but they were doomed by the high cost of shipping the finished goods back to England. It wasn't until Rolfe experimented with growing tobacco in 1613 that the financial fortunes of the company took a turn for the better. In 1616, the colony exported just 2,000 pounds of tobacco. By 1620, the figure had increased 20-fold to 40,000 pounds. "No other commodity but tobacco in the colony," wrote Gov. John Harvey in 1630, reflecting the singular focus.

As tobacco soared, so, too, did the English and slave populations. By 1670, there were roughly 48,000 settlers and 2,000 African slaves here. Conversely, the native population steadily dwindled, mostly due to disease and outmigration. In 1607, there were an estimated 15,000 Indians living nearby. By 1670, their population had declined to just 3,000.

Again, these exhibits tell this story well, but they are focused too much on the social and cultural intermingling's of the three peoples here and the alleged injustices committed

by the English. *Far more important are the principles and practices that came out of the founding of Jamestown, namely industry and trade.*

There's more than exhibit halls at Jamestown Settlement. Replicas of the three ships that brought the English here in 1607 are moored on the river. There's a replica of the fort, as well. It's here because until about a decade ago most believed that the site of the original fort was in the middle of the James River. An excavation in preparation for this year's anniversary uncovered the original fort, still on dry land.

Historic Jamestowne is on nearby Jamestown Island. A few of the original buildings and the fort walls have been reconstructed from archaeological and archival evidence. But for the most part this is an active archaeological site, which makes it all the more interesting.

In short, these 17th-century collections are impressive, especially some of the artifacts found in the past decade. It's the context in which they're displayed and the story of Jamestown that's told that is disappointing.

But not all has changed. After being preached to for three hours about the many misdeeds of the rampaging English, visitors are funneled out through an expansive gift shop. On sale there is every knickknack imaginable, emblazoned with the Jamestown logo. There's even a "Jamestowne Survivor" game.

If that's not a testament to the fact that *capitalism is the enduring legacy of Jamestown*, I don't know what is.

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