

Jamestown – a civilization that changed history

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The year was 1578. Walter Raleigh peered out the window of the Queen's chamber.

He was here to discuss vital matters, but the queen was stubborn with her decision. Time was ticking. He would have to try one last time to persuade the queen into setting up colonies in the New World, or else dire consequences could possibly follow. "Your highness. The colonies are perfect to enrich our royal treasury. We can send merchants to settle over there.

Then, they can send back a set amount of gold annually to us. Besides, it can be used as a base to attack Spain. We all know that if we get brutally defeated like last time by the Spanish army, we will be in huge trouble." "All right. I give you permission to establish colonies. You shall leave within a week's time," the Queen commanded.

Within months, Walter Raleigh had crossed the Atlantic. He planted a flag on a peninsula. "Jamestown," he called the new land. Little did he know that even centuries later, the name would continue to ring in the ears of Americans. (Pobst 3-5) Why? What is so special about Jamestown? From the creation of the excellent government commonly known as the House of Burgesses to the creation of tobacco plantations in colonial America to the creation of ideas about slavery, the development of Jamestown proved to be one of the most influential events in history, affecting society in social, political, and economical aspects.

To begin with, Virginia had a government. However, this government did more than just make laws. It was a major cause of colonies' will to self-

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govern; a will which, with the aid of Virginia's government, continually expanded into the culminating point – the Revolutionary War. This government was none other than Virginia's House of Burgesses.

Nevertheless, what exactly was the House of Burgesses, and how did it become such an influential figure through the course of history? Virginia was governed by two parts of government; The Governor's Council and The House of Burgesses. The Governor's Council, led by a governor appointed by a king, was a group of members handpicked by the governor himself.

They were the Supreme authority in the colony. As you know, the other part was the House of Burgesses itself. Virginia's House was the first democratic form of government in the New World. It was also the first government in which settlers were allowed to elect their leaders, who then created laws. ("Colonial Virginia Terms") Their legacy began right from the start when they had inspired other colonies, such as Pennsylvania, to self-govern, and sustained into the Stamp Act in 1765.

During the act, Patrick Henry, a highly influential figure in the House of Burgesses, created seven resolutions, or laws, including that no one was allowed to be taxed by anyone except those who they elected to represent them, and that colonists have the same rights as those living in England. Nonetheless, the Governor did not approve of this idea one bit, and dissolved the House of Burgesses. Other colonies, however, received the message, and did not delay in boycotting and incessantly chanting, "No taxation without representation," until the Stamp Act was repealed in 1766. Although the House of Burgesses was dissolved, in 1774, the members gathered in secret at Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, VA. In this meeting known as the First

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Virginia Convention, it was decided that representatives from all thirteen colonies should meet to decide what to do with Britain.

Before long, the Continental Congress was established. It was this very group which formed militias, successfully led the Revolutionary War, and allowed America to enjoy true freedom for the first time. Equally significant, the Virginia Convention also wrote their own Declaration of Rights and a Constitution. This was later used as a model when Thomas Jefferson wrote America's Declaration of Independence. (Pobst 98-105) It was thanks to this model that colonists could cherish natural rights including life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. All the same, the House of Burgesses made a law that once again changed the course of history.

However, it would be illogical to describe this law before first understanding the impact of tobacco on society. A vital crop, tobacco soon became a colossal part of Virginia's economy, as it was a profitable cash crop that led to another business; slave trade. It was also the reason Virginia continued to thrive after an unimaginably rocky start. It all began in 1587, when Governor White sent 144 settlers in three ships to send back valuable goods to England. They settled on a peninsula in Jamestown that was believed to be easily defendable. At first, the amicable Wingina tribe, who provided the settlers with ample food, warmly welcomed them.

Yet, the colonists kept asking for more and more! Ultimately, wanting to conserve food for their families, the Wingina refused to provide any more food. Settlers were forced to move south after killing two Wingina tribesmen in their fury, which reeled up a war. (Pobst 9-12) Later on, in May 13, 1607,

104 male settlers, led by John Smith, established the first permanent settlement in Jamestown. As usual, they had conflicts with the local Indian tribe, the powerful Powhatan Confederacy. Eventually, after all conflicts were settled, a new conflict aroused. In May 1609, 500 colonists were sent to Jamestown.

Unfortunately, John Smith was forced to return to England after being injured in a gunpowder explosion. John Rolfe took over, and immediately attempted to force the Pamunkey Indians to bargain with the Powhatan for food. Instead, he was tortured to death. (Shifflett) The following winter was the worst period in Jamestown history. Known as the Starving Time, only 60 of 500 people survived after being forced to consume rats, dogs, and even human corpses. Ultimately, light shone on Jamestown, as John Rolfe found a crop that could be grown easily; tobacco.

Gratuitous for being saved, settlers went “ tobacco crazy”, planting tobacco everywhere. (Bower and Lobdell 29, 45) Soon, tobacco became a major part of Virginia’s economy. In addition to serving as the currency of Virginia, tobacco could be sold at high prices in England. However, tobacco demanded numerous workers in order to properly thrive. At first, colonists tried to enslave Native Americans, but they either ran away or died of English diseases. Later, indentured servants were utilized.

Indentured servants were Europeans or (at first) Africans who were paid for a voyage from England to America. In return, they would have to work for the landlord who paid for the voyage anywhere from five to ten years. Finally, in 1619, the House of Burgesses declared all Africans slaves. Slavery quickly

grew popular. Not only was it cheaper to buy and maintain slaves than indentured servants, but it also helped the economy prosper by offering a new vocation; slave trade.

Slaves were smuggled from Western Africa and brought to Jamestown to be auctioned off. In fact slavery and slave trade was so popular, from 20 slaves in 1619, the amount of slaves quickly leaped to over 250, 000 slaves in 1790. (Bower and Lobdell 68) In short, while rich landowners prospered from growing and selling tobacco, slave traders also flourished through the auctioning of human beings; an overall economic upsurge. While tobacco was a major part of Virginia's economy, it also led to a huge social dilemma about democracy and equality, causing the bloodiest war in U. S.

history. As mentioned before, in 1619, the House of Burgesses passed a law demoting the status of all Africans from indentured servants to slaves for life. This idea stirred up the colonies, as it challenged the idea of everyone enjoying natural rights. Yet, it was commonly accepted at first. Everyone liked the thought of owning servants forever, and not having to pay them. At one point, every single colony had slaves, despite the fact that it was the South that profited more from the new idea.

Even equality leader Thomas Jefferson owned slaves at one point! (Becker) Nonetheless, soon, the Northern Colonies discovered that it was easier and cheaper just to hire servants when needed. Despite the differences in ideas, the North and Southern Colonies managed to live peacefully with each other; that is until after the Revolutionary War. Slavery-related debates rattled and weakened early America's government. Should slaves be represented as

people or property in the House of Representatives? What territories should be free and what territories should be slave? At last, SHOULD SLAVERY BE ABOLISHED? (Irving 340) In the beginning, compromises were enforced. Although they were not completely accepted, it was the only way to keep the country, which they had worked so hard to acquire from Britain, from falling apart. Southerners repeatedly threatened to secede from the Union, as they were apprehensive of economical damage caused by the abolishment of slavery.

(Isn't it ironic that the same people who greatly abetted in the obtainment of the country [House of Burgesses] are now tearing it apart?) Law proposals were often vetoed as there were an equal number of votes for as to against a proposal. Then, the Second Great Awakening took place in the early 1800s. This was a religious awakening that spread the idea (especially throughout Northern Colonies) that everyone should be treated equally, meaning that slavery must be abolished. Thus, slaves were smuggled into Canada by northerners, where they were free to start a new life. The anger of the southerners caused the north to draw up the Dred Scott Decision, which abandoned smuggling slaves and forced northerners to return all slaves to their owners. Still, this law was not properly enforced.

Finally, and ostensibly inevitably, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union in December 1863 after Abraham Lincoln became president, and was shortly followed by a copious number of other states. The Civil War had begun. The bloodiest war in U. S. history, the Civil War was responsible for the death of up to 700, 000 men, and caused brothers, cousins, and family members to fight and even kill each other.

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(Irving 349) Although the war was over, and slavery was permanently abolished, the legacy left by the Civil War continued to linger even today. As Patrick Henry put it, “ I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past.” (qtd. in Bazyar) Inarguably, he was right, as the founding of Jamestown continually impacts how we think, act, and live even today. Today, while being a major part of our economy, tobacco is also one of the leading causes of death in our country. Tobacco is carcinogenic, meaning it can cause cancers, including cardiovascular cancer, lung cancer, laryngeal cancer, and much, much more.

On average, America produces 589 billion cigarettes annually. “ American cancer death [rates are rising] steeply. If the same situation repeats itself, the world cancer rate will undergo an unprecedented rise in the 2020s.” (qtd. in Kittleson) Even today, tobacco has a major impact on our economy. According to the Institute Research Committee, being the second leading producer in tobacco, America makes \$165 million annually with 1, 812, 512 jobs open to the public in the tobacco industry.

There is little wonder why; tobacco is very profitable. It takes seven acres of cotton or 67 acres of soybeans to equal the profit of just one acre of tobacco. (Kittleson) Yet, tobacco also has its benefits. In minimal quantities, tobacco is used as an anesthetic, and is found in herbal medicines. (Charleton) Even though tobacco may not have a completely positive impact, it has left a deep mark in our modern society.

Because of the House of Burgesses, we are a free country today, and are actively abetting other countries when needed, such as Japan relief funds

after the cataclysmic tsunami. Moreover, America is inspiring other countries to become a free democracy that follows equality, such as Libya, Egypt, and Yemen. What more, we have natural rights, such as life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness to enjoy solely because the Declaration of Rights was created centuries ago by the Virginia Convention. Let's not forget the Civil War. Although it caused thousands of deaths, it was the reason that people from different races live in harmony here in America.

Today, no one is ever forced to do the bidding of others without mutual consent. New military strategies were created, such as the Turning Maneuver, in which you attack an army unexpectedly from the side or back. The cause of our use of some technology in abundance today, such as the railroad and hot air balloons, also dated back to the Civil War, where these vehicles were incessantly used for transporting weapons, supplies, food, and militias. (Bates and O'Connor) Hence, from the House of Burgesses to tobacco to slavery, Jamestown has cratered our life, providing us with an extraordinary legacy. Undoubtedly, we can conclude that it is our duty to honor and show reverence to the civilization that totally transformed the way we will think, act, and live today. Citations: Bates, Christopher, and Michael O'Connor.

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