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# History Influencing History: Changing Perceptions of the Starving Time at Jamestown

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History Influencing History: Changing Perceptions of the Starving Time at Jamestown

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History from  
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by

Kelsey Fenske

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The Starving Time is a fascinating period in American history, and the subject of substantial research for over a century. This paper closely examines twenty-four scholarly works that attempt to understand this period and place it in its proper context. The widespread fascination with the Starving Time stems from Jamestown's importance in the history of the United States as the first permanent English settlement in America. Upon first glance, famine is not something that is usually associated with success, though. So it is intriguing that many Americans accept that the early years of what would become the United States were unstable and that desperate settlers resorted to eating each other in order to survive. Cannibalism and "the birthplace of Democracy" seem at odds with one another, since the Indians were seen as the "savages," not the English colonists.

While historians agree on the basic facts of the Starving Time, its main cause remains disputed. Significant influences on these interpretations are the life experiences of the historians, projecting their feelings and emotions on the past and, thus, changing the story. Scholars were influenced by contemporary events, advances in technology, and global trends, forming ideological groups and reflecting the tenor of their times on this field of scholarship, particularly near the 350<sup>th</sup> and 400<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of Jamestown's establishment, when public demand for new interpretations of Jamestown was at its highest.

Scholars on this subject can be divided into five distinct ideological, or "blame," groups, including condemnation of the Colonial government at Jamestown and the Virginia Company leadership in England. In contrast, some historians criticized the colonists in general, and others attributed the famine to the Indians and a lack of supplies (yes, each historian blames both factors), and nature. In addition to these groups, there are

those who write about the history of Jamestown who fail to mention the Starving Time at all.

Understanding the factors that influenced these historians required both a close reading of their works in relation to the extant accounts they drew from and a detailed examination of their personal histories, looking for any experiences that were extraordinary or especially impactful to each scholar. Many Jamestown historians wrote their works in anticipation of Jamestown milestones, such as the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jamestown's founding and the discovery of the James Fort. The result is a concentration of writings around 1957 and 2007 with only a small collection of scholarship at other points in history, leaving many of these historians and archaeologists with common world events and economic factors affecting their writing.

What I attempt to do is much more than a historiography. I aim to show that specific factors affected individual ideological groups, and while many experienced the same events, other factors played a role in shaping their ideas. As history is often told through the lens with which it is observed, no one writes without bias. The purpose of this paper is to look at why scholars of the Starving Time ignored facts and, at times, scientific evidence, choosing to elevate one cause for the famine over others. How some scholars fail to address certain contributing factors to the Starving Time, despite evidence of these factors being clear in extant accounts and scientific findings, is as fascinating as those they discuss at great length.

The study that follows builds on previous studies that discuss the effects of life experiences on historians' writings. In *The Historian Behind the History: Conversations with Southern Historians*, Bever et. al. discussed the lasting impacts of certain historians'

life events on their publications. Specifically, interviews were conducted with well-known historians, highlighting how their struggles and triumphs influenced their ideas about southern history. Through a series of interviews, the historians admitted that modern events influenced their scholarship, whether or not they realized it at the time.

For example, when discussing his inspiration for his works, J. Mills Thornton III, stated:

I know that it was my discovery in the ninth grade that Alabama had its own history that could be studied from a scholarly and intellectual perspective, that it was not just a set of stories told by my grandmother, but this was something serious scholars wanted to investigate and understand, that gave me intellectual permission to try to understand it myself... Alabama's history was always in some sense also my family's history. Both families came to Alabama near the beginning of statehood and, in fact, even during the Territorial Period many of them were coming. So I always did have that sense of the interweaving of events in my own background with the history around me.<sup>1</sup>

His family's history in Alabama intrigued Thornton, pushing him to utilize personal influences to make sense of Civil Rights Movement and the Antebellum South.

Thornton's interview is just one instance within this book of personal and political events influencing historical analyses.

Similarly, Marc Ferro's book *The Use and Abuse of History: Or How the Past is Taught to Children* focused on the impact of elementary education on historical perception. The way history is taught to children affects how people look at historical events as adults and historians. How we look at other people, ourselves, and the world around us is as much a product of our education as our wisdom. Ferro stated this perfectly, "It has the quality of reflecting moving images from the past, for it is not simply that this past is different for everyone, but that everybody's memory changes with

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1. Joseph W. Pearson "Making Sense of Patterns: A Conversation with J. Mills Thornton III," in *The Historian Behind the History: Conversations with Southern Historians* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 106-107.

time, and that these images alter as knowledge and ideologies develop and as a function of history changes within society.”<sup>2</sup> How historians look at events changes based on new experiences and new memories formed; that is, new memories affect how we look at old memories and life experiences. Farro’s argument is that, in varying what is taught in classrooms and how it is relayed to children, the education system affects how children look at history, themselves, and other people. In many ways, this repeats itself at all education levels.

These books are only two examples of a substantial scholarship that has looked at the impact of outside events on historical perspective. While none of them examine the effects of modern events on perceptions of the Starving Time, they provide valuable insight into how previous scholars have analyzed other scholarship and its influences, and they demonstrate the pitfalls and achievements of deep historiography. Analyzing the impact of current events on scholarly work can lead to speculation without proper research, but ideas supported by current events or personal experiences can illuminate patterns of thought among scholars. Looking at the context within which scholars are writing about history provides insight into the field of history making and teaching and is thus important to the study of history.

### **The Starving Time**

It first seems prudent to discuss the Starving Time, fleshing out the key elements from the extant accounts and scientific findings. The Starving Time occurred in the winter of 1609 and 1610, leaving only a few survivors from the hundreds that had

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2. Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History: Or How the Past is Taught to Children* (New York: Routledge, 2003), ix.

previously inhabited the little colony.<sup>3</sup> As dictated by the colony's charter, the Virginia Company supplied the colony's food and materials; the settlement was intended to generate a profit and collect natural resources; it was not originally intended to be a permanent English outpost. Even though the Company supplied most goods and food to the colony, agriculture was necessary in order to supplement their supplies, although ultimately it was not enough to sustain the colony.<sup>4</sup>

George Percy's *Trewe Relacyon*, written during the Starving Time, discussed the settler's deteriorating relationship with the Indians. The English colonists angered the Indians time and time again, which, Percy claimed, led the Indians to attack James Fort repeatedly during the winter of 1609. In addition to the attacks, the Indians refused to trade with the colonists, cutting them off from potential food and supplies.<sup>5</sup> No trading, no safe passage, and only a limited food supply left the colonists in a highly compromised position.

Nature also played a role in Jamestown's struggles. While it is important to note that the timing and amount of supplies were dictated by the charter of the colony, neither the Virginia Company nor the Jamestown government could predict nature's influence. A storm delayed and destroyed much of the supply fleet off the coast of Bermuda, which

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3. George Percy, *A Trewe Relacyon of the Pcedeinges and Ocurrentes of Momente wch have hapned in Virginia from the Tyme of Sr Thomas Gates was shippwrackte upon the Bermudes ano 1609 untill my deupture out of the Country wch was in ano Dñi 1612*, Virtual Jamestown, accessed April 6, 2016, <http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/winter07/A%20Trewe%20Relation.pdf>, 7-9. And John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia: the Fourth Booke*, (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2003), 295-297.

4. Percy, *A Trewe Relacyon*, 7-9.

5. Ibid.

had intended to arrive in late summer or early fall.<sup>6</sup> The growth of crops in Virginia, both in Indian fields and in the plots at Jamestown, were similarly affected by unpredictable weather. Percy's account of Jamestown, along with other extant sources, confirmed these natural occurrences and sometimes outlined the consequences.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Percy mentioned that the Indians would not trade with the colonists because they had no food to give.<sup>8</sup> Being accustomed to the Virginia climate and soil, the Indians were familiar with cultivating crops, and, due to the Indians' lack of food, it would be difficult to exclude this factor from consideration, placing complete blame on colonist incompetence. The most likely explanation for the Indians' lack of food is an uncharacteristic change in the weather.<sup>9</sup> Extant accounts also discussed the storm, which delayed the supply ships from England.<sup>10</sup> None of these events were preventable, and none by themselves could have caused such a devastating famine. Together, they caused many Englishmen to starve, demonstrating that the Starving Time is the result of several compounding factors and not of a single, dominant one.

The extant accounts of the Starving Time are not without their own biases, which no good scholar can ignore. John Smith's account was written after he returned to

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6. W.C. *A Plaine Description of the Barmudas, Now Called Sommer Ilands. With the manner of their discoverie Anno 1609, by the shipwrack and admirable deliverance of Sir Thomas Gates, and Sir George Sommers, wherein are truly set for the commodities and profits of that Rich, Pleasant, and Healthfull Countrie* (London: W. Stansby, 1613).

7. Percy, *A Trewe Relacyon*, 5-8

8. Ibid.

9. David W. Stahle, Malcolm K. Cleaveland, Dennis B. Blanton, Matthew D. Therrell, and David A. Gay, "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," in *Science* 280 (1998): 564-567. One of the worst droughts in Virginia's history was transpiring at the same time as the Starving Time, demonstrating that nature affected agriculture at Jamestown.

10. W.C., *A Plaine Description of the Barmudas*.



England; he left Jamestown permanently in the Fall of 1609, right before the Starving Time, due to an injury.<sup>11</sup> His narrative of the famine cannot be taken as comprehensive or wholly accurate, since he was not there to witness it in its entirety, and most of what he wrote probably came from exaggerated reports from Jamestown colonists, Virginia Company records and notices (already skewed for marketing purposes), and inferences based on his own experiences in Jamestown and desire to market a popular publication. For example, Smith praised his own prowess, claiming that the colonists “all found the losse of Captaine Smith, yea his greatest maligners could now curse his losse.”<sup>12</sup> This boastful comment is one of many that demonstrate his bloated ego. Despite these problems, the source is useful because it gives scholars an idea of what at least one contemporary Englishmen thought of the Starving Time.

Unlike Smith’s account, George Percy’s narrative documented the Starving Time in great detail from first-hand experiences, and archeological evidence supports many of his claims—including cannibalism.<sup>13</sup> Percy was in charge of the colony in Smith’s absence, prior to the governor’s arrival, and he witnessed what transpired in the fort. He believed that most colonies experienced famines as a result of adjusting to new surroundings and even quoted many colonies and settlements where famines had recently occurred.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Percy condemned the Indians’ hostility and the lack of supplies

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11. Smith, *The Generall Historie*. Published in 1624, well after his return to England in 1609.

12. Ibid, 295.

13. Percy, *A Trewe Relacyon*, 7.

14. Ibid., 1-2.

within the fort as other key factors that caused the Starving Time.<sup>15</sup> While he did discuss many horrific occurrences, such as cannibalism and the consumption of horses and domestic animals, George Percy mentioned these occurrences alongside seemingly trivial events, such as trips to other outposts and tales of the colonists eating their boots for nutrition.<sup>16</sup> As scholars, we should be cautious about this source as well, because it has a public audience; as leader of the colony, he may have tried to downplay the famine in order to seem like a stronger leader, or he may have over exaggerated the event as a means to obtain aid for the colony or seem like a hero. Ongoing archaeology at the fort site proved many of Percy's claims of starvation and cannibalism, regardless of his literary intentions. Despite their flaws, Percy and Smith's accounts provide insight into contemporary perceptions of the famine, which make them invaluable to any researcher. The sections that follow discuss each of the twenty-four works and the ideological groups and sub-groups they fall within, with suggested outside influences for each author's publication.

### **Lack of Colonial Leadership**

Starving Time scholarship evolved tremendously throughout the last century; scholars illuminated different perspectives on old ideas, whether in light of new research or by reinterpreting old sources. Many scholars placed blame with the colonial leadership, either holding Smith or Percy responsible for the famine. Within this category of scholarship, there are four sub-groups: those praising Smith's leadership skills, blaming his departure for the events that followed; those condemning him for his political

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15. Ibid., 2-7.

16. Ibid., 6-8.

ambitions and his poor leadership skills, which subsequently led to the horrors of the Starving Time; scholars who criticized Percy, claiming that his lack of organization and leadership resulted in suffering and loss of life; and those who generally blamed poor colonial leadership without indicting Smith or Percy specifically. Economics played a large role in how scholars viewed the Starving Time. When Americans held a specific person responsible for an economic crisis, scholars blamed either Percy or Smith for the Starving Time, but when Americans condemned the government as a system for the economic crisis, scholars tended to criticize all of Jamestown's leaders. Scholars' perceptions of the Starving Time reflected their perceptions of current events, often perceiving the same modern issue in different ways.

Despite the fact that their scholarship spanned many years, several authors drew a causal relationship between John Smith's departure from Jamestown and the beginning of the Starving Time. Scholars put too much stock in Smith's account of Jamestown; one person's departure did not cause the colony to starve. Instead of considering the many instances of corrupt or absent leadership at Jamestown, some researchers chose to glorify the man who glorified himself. They chose to believe that Smith was the only saving grace of the colony and that if he had remained in Virginia, the colony would never have experienced the Starving Time. But, why? What is it about these authors that pushed them to hold Smith's account in such high regard? Does it have more to do with their own past, or does this claim simply fit best with their overall argument?

In *History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* (1860), Charles Campbell claimed that the Jamestown colony's poor leadership after Smith's departure

caused many to starve, thus insinuating that Smith would have handled the situation better had he stayed in the colony. Campbell stated:

Provisions growing scarce, West and Ratcliffe embarked in small vessels to procure corn. Ratcliffe, inveigled by Powhatan, was slain with thirty of his companions...The loss of Captain Smith was soon felt by the colonists: they were now continually exposed to the arrow and the tomahawk; the common store was consumed by the commanders and the savages...and within six months after Smith's departure the number of English in Virginia was reduced from five hundred to sixty men, women and children.<sup>17</sup>

According to Campbell, Smith was a militant, organized leader who did his best to prevent major catastrophe. With his departure, Percy became leader of the colony and struggled to maintain order; the stores depleted and people died at an alarming rate. Campbell's narrative paints a tragic picture of Jamestown—Smith, the hero, was wounded and sadly departed, leaving an unorganized imbecile in his place, causing many to die of hunger.

Campbell's tragic past and his trust of Smith's narrative may account for this overly Romantic perspective. He privileged John Smith's writings on Jamestown over any other, believing the story of a man who was entirely absent for the Starving Time. Comparing Smith's accounts to Virginia Company records and Percy's account would have given his argument more credibility. In addition to his use of Smith, Campbell's own life events may have played a role in shaping his perspective on the Starving Time. Following the death of his wife, Campbell abandoned his newborn son, giving up his custody until a later date.<sup>18</sup> It is reasonable to presume that Campbell felt empathy for Smith. Looking at the lives of these two men, who wrote their works with potential

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17. Charles Campbell, *History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1860), 93.

18. "Campbell, Charles (1807-1876)," College of William and Mary, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://scdb.swem.wm.edu/?p=collections/controlcard&id=6806>.

regrets still fresh in their minds, it should be debated whether Campbell identified with Smith—both abandoned people dear to them in order to heal their psychological wounds. Campbell’s potential regret at leaving his son likely influenced his interpretation of Smith’s actions. He saw Jamestown’s history through the lens of his own life experiences.

Edward M. Riley and Charles E. Hatch, Jr. shared this perspective on John Smith and Jamestown over eighty years later in their book *Jamestowne in the Words of Contemporaries* (1944). In their introduction to the Starving Time and George Percy’s account, Riley and Hatch more blatantly stated what Campbell alluded to, pronouncing that Smith’s departure caused the Starving Time. They explained, “Smith was injured in a gunpowder explosion and in the fall of 1609 returned to England. In the absence of his capable hand, in the winter of 1609-1610, hunger and disease almost strangled this the first permanent English settlement in America.”<sup>19</sup> These editors explicitly believed that, had Smith been at Jamestown during that winter, the colonists would not have starved. They downplay Percy and Smith’s descriptions of Indian attacks, lack of supplies, disease, and the Indians’ own lack of crops which made this period increasingly difficult. Despite listing many of these factors in their book, though, Riley and Hatch believe their hero would have saved the day.<sup>20</sup>

At the time they were editing this book, World War II was in full force, leaving the European landscape and economy devastated, in addition to affecting American

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19. Edward M. Riley and Charles E. Hatch, Jr., eds., *Jamestowne in the Words of Contemporaries* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), 5.

20. Riley and Hatch, Jr., *Jamestowne in the Words of Contemporaries*, 6. They quoted Percy’s narrative about the Indian siege, demonstrating that anyone who left the Fort to find food would be killed by the Indians.

forces and industry. Born in 1913, Hatch was a teenager during the Great Depression, a period that left no American unscathed. While little is known about Riley's personal history, based on the time of publication and working under the assumption that Riley was at least twenty years old during the writing process, he was alive for the Depression and was generally impacted like his fellow editor. When writing about the Starving Time at Jamestown, the struggles of this period, whether personal or witnessed in the publications of that day, would have influenced his understanding of the plight of the colonists. Many Americans blamed Herbert Hoover for the Depression, specifically for not doing enough to help the poor and growing middle class overcome their struggles, and were angry at Calvin Coolidge for abandoning the country by deciding not to run for re-election.<sup>21</sup> In the same way Coolidge was derided for leaving office, Hatch and Riley criticized Smith's departure from Jamestown. While Riley and Hatch lived in a different era than Campbell, and had different life experiences, and despite accessible primary documents that allowed for alternative explanations, all three came to the same conclusion: had a strong and capable leader not abandoned his charge, this all may have been avoided.

Agreeing with his earlier counterparts but adding a unique spin, Arthur L. Waldo attributed the famine to the departures of both Smith and the Polish laborers in Jamestown. This is hardly surprising, though, as his entire book focused on the first Poles in America and their influence on the colonial world, almost exclusively utilizing colonist

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21. "The Great Depression," PBS, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/dustbowl-great-depression/> . and "Calvin Coolidge," The White House, accessed March 28, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/1600/presidents/calvincoolidge>.

Zbigniew Stefanski's account.<sup>22</sup> Even more blatantly than Riley and Hatch, Waldo claimed that Jamestown was stronger with Smith and the Poles than it was after their departure. He wrote, "Smith and his loyal group of Poles left the English well-stocked and prepared to continue their lives in the James River colony," and continues, quoting one of Stefanski's fellow Poles, "Without Smith and the Poles in Jamestown, ruin came swiftly, and there was no hand strong enough to stay it."<sup>23</sup> Waldo clearly believed that the laboring Poles were the key to a thriving Jamestown, so much so that he rarely referenced any other extant accounts to back up his claims.

As a proud Polish immigrant, who arrived in America in 1913, Waldo had a vested interest in the successes of Jamestown's Polish colonists as precedent for his country's contributions (and legitimacy) as citizens. His passion for Polish promotion survives in the fifty Polish plays he wrote between 1921 and 1932, capturing Polish experiences in America and around the world.<sup>24</sup> Waldo's experiences in the Polish Army also heavily influenced his perspective on Jamestown. Fighting in both the Polish-Bolshevik War and battles after the German invasion of Poland, Waldo experienced both victory and crushing defeat, with this defeat resulting in the German occupation of Poland.<sup>25</sup> Before the Germans invaded Poland, both Britain and France had agreed to come to Poland's aid, in the event of an invasion or skirmish with Germany. During the

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22. There are no copies of Stefanski's narrative in English, nor were there any in Polish that were accessible before this paper's due date.

23. Arthur L. Waldo, *True Heroes of Jamestown* (Miami, FL: Miami Book MFG., Co., 1977), 131-132.

24. "Arthur Leonard Waldo," Poles in America Foundation, accessed March 28, 2016, [http://www.poles.org/db/w\\_names/Waldo\\_AL/Waldo\\_AL.html](http://www.poles.org/db/w_names/Waldo_AL/Waldo_AL.html).

25. "Arthur Leonard Waldo."

battles, to prevent German occupation after the invasion, British and French combat on the Western front ended earlier than expected, leaving Warsaw vulnerable and leading to Poland's occupation.<sup>26</sup> Writing about the Poles at Jamestown after these events, it is clear that Waldo wanted to demonstrate the strength and perseverance of the Poles, in light of their struggles to maintain control of their country. Waldo claimed that Smith's departure from Jamestown led to the Starving Time, an interpretation that could parallel how many Poles blamed the German occupation of Poland on the surrender of British and French troops. It seems that Waldo was projecting his frustration with the French and British onto the Starving Time, while also insinuating that Jamestown colonists needed the Poles to survive.

In 2011, Virginia Bernhard wrote in depth about the Starving Time, using more than just Smith's and Percy's accounts. Bernhard included new archaeological evidence in addition to less popular extant sources. Contradicting her earlier article,<sup>27</sup> but agreeing with Campbell, Bernhard claimed that Smith would have prevented the devastating loss of life caused by the famine. She said, "If John Smith had not been wounded and had stayed in Virginia, hundreds of lives might have been saved."<sup>28</sup> Bernhard argued that Smith's injury forced him to leave the colony in incapable hands, dooming the colony to

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26. Bradley Lightbody, "Invasion of Poland," BBC, last updated March 30, 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/invasion\\_poland\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/invasion_poland_01.shtml).

27. Virginia Bernhard, "'Men, Women, and Children' at Jamestown: Population and Gender in Early Virginia, 1607-1610," *The Journal of Southern History* 58 (1992): 600. Her first essay is discussed in more detail later in this paper, but her earlier essay condemned Smith for his excessive political ambition while her book praised his heroism, showing the disparity between her two accounts and making Bernhard a perfect example of how modern events influenced her writing.

28. Virginia Bernhard, *A Tale of Two Colonies: What Really Happened in Virginia and Bermuda* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 99.



face the winter without him. In order to prove this point, she discussed the differences between Smith and Percy by outlining George Percy's inadequacies, even going so far as to contrast Percy's portrait with Smith's portrait.<sup>29</sup>

While she was in the process of writing her book, the United States economy took a drastic turn. The Great Recession of 2008-09 negatively affected most Americans as the housing market crashed, banks began to fail, and many Americans lost their jobs.<sup>30</sup> Occurring at the end of President George W. Bush's final term, many Americans blamed him for not doing enough to prevent the recession. The departure of one leader and the arrival of a new one, during uncertain times with great negativity and poor prospects, accentuated feelings of abandonment, although there was much less glorification of President Bush to compare with the author's elevation of Smith to near mythic status.

Most scholars who asserted that John Smith's abandonment of the colony caused the Starving Time projected their own tragic experiences on the situation preceding the famine at Jamestown. Their own negative feelings for certain people, whether politicians, countries, or even themselves, or their intense feelings of nationalism, all caused by adverse events in their lives, seeped into Jamestown's story, creating a romantic narrative surrounding John Smith and condemning all others.

Using the same extant accounts, a few scholars formed an entirely different opinion. Many historians still blamed Smith for the Starving Time, but they condemned his leadership skills rather than praising them. They claimed that Smith's leadership before the Starving Time left the colony in turmoil, leaving Percy to pick up the broken

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29. Bernhard, *A Tale of Two Colonies*, 101-102.

30. "The Great Recession," Economic Policy Institute, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://stateofworkingamerica.org/great-recession/>.

pieces. They admit that Percy may have failed in this regard, but if Smith had not left Jamestown in such a mess and had been a better leader, Jamestown would have survived in his absence. Like their contemporaries, despite writing years apart, historians projected their own experiences on the Jamestown famine, attempting to make sense of an event in the past through their own experiences in the present.

Published in 1957, Alf J. Mapp, Jr. accused Smith of leaving too much of a mess for Percy to fix. Mapp claimed that Smith should have done more to organize the colony and ensure its success instead of making only small contributions. In his book, Mapp explained, “The energetic foraging of Captain Smith had not always preserved the colonists from famine that left only roots, herbs, acorns, nuts, and berries to nourish their suffering bodies and sustain their feeble lives.”<sup>31</sup> He accused Smith of doing very little to prepare for the winter and supply his people with food; foraging for herbs and berries would not be enough to sustain the people of Jamestown for the entire winter.

Mapp is but one of several historians who witnessed famines during their lifetimes, and I believe it clearly affected their interpretations of the Starving Time. After World War II ended in 1945, the United States set up various programs for foreign economic aid, including the Marshall Plan. Despite the millions of dollars poured into foreign economies, there were many Americans who felt that the United States government did not do enough to help Europe.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that Mapp felt the same

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31. Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *The Virginia Experiment: The Old Dominion's Role in the Making of America (1607-1781)* (Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1957), 24.

32. National Opinion Research Center, “Foreign Affairs Survey,” The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (November 1950), accessed April 10, 2016, USNORC.500292.R10. 42% of those polled believed that Europe would still need aid after the Marshall Plan ended in 1952, when the plan was not extended, this group of people felt that the U.S. government did not do enough to help Europeans.

about John Smith's performance at Jamestown as many Americans felt about the government's actions, pinning their ineffective assistance as a cause for the plight experienced by many European countries.<sup>33</sup> While this certainly is not the first time a country failed to assist their ally and neighbor avoid catastrophe, Mapp's version of the progression of the Starving Time seems too similar to post-war events to wholly ignore—a famine caused by perceived shortage of aid.

In a similar vein, Virginia Bernhard accused John Smith of being too preoccupied with his political success and failing to properly organize and provide for the colony to ensure its future success. In this, her first essay on the subject, she began to look into the population and supplies at Jamestown through the use of other extant accounts as well as new archaeological discoveries. Bernhard stated:

A close reading of extant narratives, combined with some arithmetic and a study of external evidence [archaeology], suggests that population and gender played a crucial role in Virginia's first few years and that a corrected account of the colony's demographics may help to explain some of the puzzles of Virginia's early history. A more precise account of the numbers and genders of the English settlers from 1607 to 1610 makes clear that the reported figures for the starving time cannot be correct and that John Smith's troubles in 1609 were as much to do with food as politics.<sup>34</sup>

She asserted that Smith's opponents at Jamestown were not only angry about the rationing of food and the dwindling stores but about how Smith spent his time. Instead of adding to the food stores, he engaged in political activities, traveling to the Indian

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33. Andre Visson, "Grain Crisis in France: Bread and Confidence," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1947, B4. This article stated, "If France does not get 150 million dollars immediately...she will be unable to feed her population throughout the winter months. The French bread ration, which in April was reduced to 250 grams a day and which had to be cut to 200 grams...in September, cannot be cut further without provoking riots."

34. Bernhard, "'Men, Women, and Children' at Jamestown," 600. This essay was written prior to her book, but is being discussed in association with Mapp due to the similarities in their opinions. Her second book contradicts her convictions in this piece.

villages to improve relations. Bernhard believed that Smith should have done more to ensure the colony had food, and, had he done so, the famine might have been less severe.

In the early 1980s, an economic recession was occurring in the United States due to economic policies aimed at curbing inflation. The recession was the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression and until the Great Recession of 2008, leaving many without jobs and raising the prices of necessary goods.<sup>35</sup> Many Americans blamed the recession on President Ronald Reagan, claiming that his policies were making the recession worse and that the President could do more to help the American people.<sup>36</sup> Bernhard's analysis of the Starving Time demonstrated this discontent with authority—Smith could have done more to ensure Jamestown's prosperity, just like Reagan could have done more to remedy the economic situation. While the recession does not perfectly account for the political aspect of Bernhard's claim, many Americans politicized Reagan's actions and still blame him for current economic problems. Bernhard reflected the politics of the 1980s Recession in her analysis of the Starving Time.

Condemning Smith rather than glorifying him, Bernhard and Mapp held viewpoints that were contradictory of their contemporaries, despite using many of the same sources and writing around the same times. Even similar events were interpreted differently by these scholars. Those who condemned Smith for not doing enough to benefit Jamestown and for his disorganization seem to have been influenced heavily by the economic events occurring around them. It is especially interesting that Bernhard's "'Men, Women, and Children' at Jamestown: Population and Gender in Early Virginia,

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35. "Recession of 1981-82," Federal Reserve, last updated November 22, 2013, <http://www.federalreservehistory.org/Events/DetailView/44>.

36. "Reagan's Recession," Pew Research Center, last updated December 14, 2010, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2010/12/14/reagans-recession/>.

1607-1610” (1992) contradicts her book *A Tale of Two Colonies: What Really Happened in Virginia and Bermuda* (2011), even though economic events influenced her both times. The context of these events and her interpretation of them affected her perception of the Starving Time, resulting in a change in opinion, or at least a change in perspective.

It is clear that modern events influenced scholars writing about the Starving Time, whether they blamed John Smith for abandoning Jamestown or for his actions before leaving. Their analyses reflected modern events, often projecting tragic or adverse events of their own lives onto the events at Jamestown, creating an ideological group that spanned many decades. Discontent with economic policy is one common link between scholars’ writings.

Looking at the Starving Time from an opposing perspective, many scholars focused on Percy’s shortcomings as a leader instead of focusing on Smith’s departure. They believed George Percy was largely to blame for the famine, as it occurred under his supervision. Writing from the 1960s to present day, “Blaming Percy” scholars form a sub-group of authors who blamed the colony’s domestic leadership. Not only did the “Percy” historians write around the same time, but they also shared the viewpoint that Percy’s lack of organization doomed the colony.

In 1960, Richard L. Morton was the first in this sub-group to express this opinion. He gave a very detailed account of the Starving Time, explaining that the lack of strong leadership at Jamestown deepened the growing crisis; the shortage of supplies continued to grow in the face of incompetent leadership, who did nothing to aid the people of Jamestown. Morton explicitly disagreed with his contemporaries who blamed Smith. Morton said:

Had the colonists been directed by a strong and resourceful leader, the winter of 1609-1610 might not have been singled out from several winters of bitter suffering as the “starving time.” Even had Smith remained, there would have been, without doubt, some dissensions and much suffering. But conditions in Virginia under the conscientious but futile direction of President George Percy grew rapidly worse.<sup>37</sup>

Smith’s presence in Jamestown would not have saved the colony, but better leadership during the famine and organized efforts to gather food might have prevented many from dying, or would have lessened the suffering.

As a history professor with a special interest in European History, it at first seems odd that Morton would write several volumes explicitly on Virginia.<sup>38</sup> However, some of Morton’s ancestors were Jamestown colonists, giving him a certain interest and likely a slight bias toward the events at Jamestown.<sup>39</sup> It seems possible that he overlooked the other influences of the Starving Time because he wanted to portray his ancestors in a more positive light, not wanting to accuse them of being lazy (a historiographical trend only beginning to emerge in the 1960s). He also could have been projecting his opinion of the economic situation in Europe onto the Starving Time.<sup>40</sup> After World War II, many Americans felt that it was the duty of the United States to provide economic aid to European countries as several countries lacked the funding and organization to help their

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37. Richard L. Morton, *Colonial Virginia Volume 1: The Tidewater Period 1607-1710* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 25.

38. Richard L. Morton, interview by Rebecca Mitchell, March 23, 1973, session 1, transcript, William and Mary Digital Archive, Swem Library, Williamsburg, VA. In this interview, Morton states that he preferred teaching European history over American history because “I thought European history was the background for all history.”

39. Morton, interview. He had ancestors at both Jamestown and Yorktown with the last names of Martiau and Reade, according to his statements in the interview.

40. Visson, “Grain Crisis in France.”

own people.<sup>41</sup> Europe's lack of funding was causing its people to starve just like the lack of organization was causing food stores to dwindle at Jamestown, forcing its people to go hungry. His life experiences and his family history affected his interpretation of the Starving Time, making him overlook some of the factors other historians more prominently addressed, while privileging those that paralleled events in his own time.

Ivor Noël Hume wrote three publications that discussed the Starving Time, and his second, chronologically, condemned Percy as a poor leader. Hume goes further than some of his contemporaries, writing that Percy's poor leadership caused the disorganization within the colony, resulting in starvation, whereas other scholars limited their critique, writing that Percy himself was absentminded. Hume demonstrated Percy's shortcomings as a leader by comparing him to Captain Davies, who had taken a garrison to Fort Algernon.<sup>42</sup> Hume stated:

...he went downriver to Fort Algernon to find out how his garrison was faring. External evidence suggests that it was now mid-May. To Percy's surprise, he found Captain Davies and his men so well fed that they were feeding crabs to their hogs...In somewhat elliptical language Percy accused Captain Davies of deliberately concealing his supplies from the sufferers at James Towne...Davies's response is lost, but he might well have asked why as the colony's leader Percy had waited until the spring to visit his people at Fort Algernon. Finding them obscenely healthy, however, Percy declared his intent to bring down some of his James Towne survivors to reap the benefits of Davies's prudence.<sup>43</sup>

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41. Roper Organization, "Where Freedom Stands Survey," The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (February 1948), accessed December 6, 2015, USROPER.48FREE.R22C. Of those who supported the Marshall Plan, 33 % favored the plan because it would help the hungry and sick in Europe, while another 31 % believed the plan would make Europe more self-sufficient.

42. Percy, "A Trewe Relacyon."

43. Ivor Noël Hume, *The Virginia Adventure – Roanoke to James Towne: An Archaeological and Historical Odyssey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 261.

Hume argued that while the colonists in James Fort were dying in droves of starvation, their brethren at Fort Algernon were thriving, suggesting that the famine had nothing to do with Smith's departure or with the concurrent drought. According to Hume, Davies was a stronger leader and able to keep those under his care alive and healthy, while Percy was a poor leader who caused the colonists to starve because of his disorganization.

Each of Hume's publications expressed a different opinion. His second publication of the three, written in 1994 after residing in the United States for thirty-six years, paralleled the 1980s economic crisis. President Reagan, taking office in the middle of the economic downturn, implemented economic policies that continued to negatively affect parts of the United States economy. Unemployment rose and many elderly people became homeless.<sup>44</sup> Many Americans despised Reagan because of perceived inaction and the slow pace of the nation's economic recovery. Reagan's failures mirrored Percy's shortcomings; Reagan deepened the existing economic crisis with, what some would call thoughtless plans, much like Percy inherited a food shortage and failed to keep his people alive due to his own poor leadership skills. Hume's ideas were influenced by, and potentially reflected, the economic crisis.

In 2007, Benjamin Woolley wrote about the Starving Time from a nearly identical perspective. Woolley admitted that the Indians were killing some of the colonists, but he blamed Percy for being an unorganized and incompetent leader. Assuming the number of people in Jamestown was correct, Woolley stated:

Thirty-seven men had left the area with Francis West, and the thirty 'unruly youths' had been sent back to London. Around fifty had been lost in the months preceding Percy's presidency as a result of engagements with the Indians, so were not his direct responsibility. Taking these and other losses into account, the total

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44. "The 1982 Recession," PBS, accessed on March 31, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/reagan-recession/>.



under Percy's care during this period has been put at nearer three hundred and thirty. That still suggests the loss of two hundred and seventy men.<sup>45</sup>

While he admitted that certain events were out of Percy's control, Woolley holds him accountable for the deaths that resulted from famine, implying that he, as president of the colony, should have done more. And while he admitted that there were inadequate supplies to sustain the number of people living in the fort, he argued that Percy could have better organized the people and the supplies, either through rationing or splitting them up and moving some to other places (ala Davies). In Woolley's opinion, Percy had more blood on his hands than the Indians because a strong leader would have made more attempts to obtain supplies. Woolley wrote, "Percy's efforts to alleviate the crisis with supplies from the Indians came to nothing. The neighbouring Paspahghans were laying siege to the fort, picking off any who ventured beyond the blockhouse that guarded the island's causeway."<sup>46</sup> While Percy tried to acquire supplies from the Indians, the negotiations did not succeed, nor did the negotiations end the Indian attacks. Woolley believed that George Percy could have done more to negotiate with the Indians and to supplement the Jamestown's dwindling supplies by comparing Percy's actions to those of John Smith. Overall, Percy lacked leadership skills that would have helped many survive the famine and was to blame for their deaths.

Living in England during the publication of this book, one potential influence on Woolley may have been the introduction of the Euro at the turn of the century. The Euro, implemented in 1999 but not physically circulated until 2002, was intended to be more than a common form of currency for the European countries, known commonly as the

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45. Benjamin Woolley, *Savage Kingdom: The True Story of Jamestown, 1607, and the Settlement of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 258-259.

46. Woolley, *Savage Kingdom*, 258.

Eurozone. Those countries in the Eurozone in need of money were encouraged to borrow from other members, in order to prevent economic strife and tie together economic and social interests between nations.<sup>47</sup> Woolley saw the positive strides being made to prevent a collapse of European economies, and when looking at the Starving Time, may have noticed the lack of organization and forethought from Percy. Percy did nothing to prevent his people from dying, starkly contrasting the measures the European Union was taking to prevent another major crisis.

Sharing the same opinion, Lorri Glover and Daniel Blake Smith condemned Percy for his poor leadership of the colony. In their discussion of the Starving Time, Glover and Smith portrayed Percy as incompetent by highlighting his obscene need for fashionable items. As they wrote:

President Percy requested from England—asking his elder brother to cover the expenses—a refined new wardrobe appropriate for his elevated position: five suits, decorated in taffeta, a dozen pairs of new shoes, stockings, and socks, ribbons for shoestrings, six pairs of boots, nine pairs of gloves, twelve shirts from Holland, a dozen handkerchiefs, six nightcaps, six pairs of garters, and a sword ‘hatched with goulde.’<sup>48</sup>

From their perspective, Percy was preoccupied with his new status and the material goods of his station. He was caught up with trying to look like a leader, rather than becoming a

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47. Jason Voss, “European Debt Crisis: Overview, Analysis, and Timeline of Major Events,” CFA Institute, last updated December 14, 2012, <https://blogs.cfainstitute.org/investor/2011/11/21/european-sovereign-debt-crisis-overview-analysis-and-timeline-of-major-events/>. While this source discusses the Debt Crisis, it gives a detailed introduction on the implementation of the Euro. Other sources were wordy and confusing. Also, the Eurozone crisis did not begin until well after Woolley’s book was published, so any optimism he had for European economies was not unfounded; many people looked at the Euro as a positive thing.

48. Lorri Glover and Daniel Blake Smith, *The Shipwreck that Saved Jamestown: The Sea Venture Castaways and the Fate of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2008), 173.

leader who was focused on feeding his people. Glover and Smith further stated their disdain for Percy's lack of leadership:

Insufficient provisions were only half the problem; inadequate leadership in the colony deepened the dilemma... They decided in their wisdom to elect George Percy as president. It was a decision they and the settlers would come to regret... As late as November, Percy had done nothing to prepare for the coming winter. All fourteen of the colony's fishing nets lay useless, having rotted in the water. The harvest, such as it was, had already been consumed.<sup>49</sup>

Percy did not consider the coming winter until it had already begun, leaving him few options to acquire enough supplies for the colonists in James Fort.

In the years before their book was published, the American economy experienced significant uncertainty and stress. The stock market began to drop in 2002, partially as a result of President Bush's policies following the terrorist attacks of 9/11.<sup>50</sup> While the recession was relatively short-lived, many Americans criticized Bush for focusing too much on starting a war to fight terrorism instead of focusing on the declining economy. This criticism of Bush reflects Percy's preoccupation with his status instead of his duties. As President, both had the duty to provide for their people, and Bush was too focused on a war and Percy on wealth to meet the needs of their citizens. Glover and Smith's account of the Starving Time seems to have been shaped by President Bush's preoccupation with the war and his own stature as a world leader, with the short-lived recession as just one example of the negative effects of his obsession.

The writers who blamed the Starving Time on Percy's disorganization and poor leadership were all influenced by modern economic situations. Many appear to have found fault in contemporary leaders, drawing a parallel between them and Percy's record

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49. Glover and Smith, *The Shipwreck that Saved Jamestown*, 172-176.

50. David C. Beckwith, "United States in 2002," accessed April 1, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/place/United-States-Year-In-Review-2002>.

at Jamestown. Their narratives could potentially reflect their opinions on current events as much as the Starving Time.

While many scholars blamed either Percy or Smith for the Starving Time, a handful placed blame generally on the colonial leadership, rather than one person. These writers felt the disorganization of all parties in charge of the Jamestown's government, not just Smith and Percy, caused the famine. The change in leadership from Smith to Percy and the implementation of a new charter, which together caused confusion and divided strategies on how to run the colony, were key elements in each author's narrative.

In 1910, children's author James Otis Kaler wrote a story about a boy who lived at Jamestown during the Starving Time. Richard, the little boy, discussed the atrocities of the famine and eventually escaped to the woods with his dog, who was nearly eaten by the hungry colonists. Through the fictional character of Richard, Kaler expressed his perspective on the Starving Time. Richard stated, "We came to know what starvation meant during that winter...men strove with women and children for food to keep life in their worthless bodies...we were come to that pass where we cared neither for governor or noblemen."<sup>51</sup> Those in charge at Jamestown during the famine did nothing to help others survive, and Kaler made Richard, along with many other colonists at Jamestown, reflect that discontent with the Jamestown government's management. Through Richard, Kaler also insinuated that the nobles and the governor were selfish, hoarding the supplies for themselves, displaying his assessment of the events at Jamestown through a children's story.

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51. James Otis Kaler, "Richard of Jamestown: A Story of the Virginia Colony" (New York: American Book Company, 1910), 158-159.

By the age of thirteen, Kaler was a reporter in Boston covering the battles of the Civil War. He witnessed history first hand and wanted to spread his passion for history to younger generations, leading him to write about 150 children's books throughout the course of his life. He intended for these books to be used in the classroom to educate young children on historical events in a more entertaining way.<sup>52</sup> In order to explain the events of Jamestown, Kaler wrote about what went wrong within the colony, rather than blaming specific people. Children's books are meant to teach broad concepts that can be drawn upon later; filling a book with specific details was not his objective. Rather, he wanted children to relate to Richard's character and understand what the colonists might have experienced.

In addition to writing for a young audience, it seems that Kaler was influenced by the Panic of 1893, which was an economic depression caused by the shortage of gold and the failure of major railroad conglomerates. Many Americans supported silver as an alternative to the gold standard and hoped the American government would step in and help them out of the economic crisis. While the U.S. government attempted a \$7 million bailout of this industry, they did very little else to help American citizens.<sup>53</sup> Americans blamed the government for the lingering crisis. Kaler's disenchantment with the government as a result of the Panic may be reflected in his writing. The leadership en masse was to blame.

Similarly, in 1965, Marshall W. Fishwick placed blame for the famine on multiple leaders at Jamestown, believing that the colony's disorganization and lack of discipline as

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52. "James Otis Kaler (1848-1912)," Town of Winterport, Maine, accessed April 1, 2016, <http://www.winterportmaine.gov/james-otis-kaler.php>.

53. Samuel Rezneck, *Business Depressions and Financial Panics: Essays in American Business and Economic History* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1968), 177-198.

a whole were its biggest problems. In addition, he asserted that newly arrived colonists increased the demand for food, which led to further disorganization. Fishwick stated:

The great number of settlers who had recently arrived imposed an impossible strain on the food supply. Without Smith...discipline broke down...One group of thirty hungry colonists, led by Ratcliffe, was massacred by the Indians while bartering for food. Forced back into the fort, the weakened settlers were struck again and again by crippling and killing diseases.<sup>54</sup>

The previously well-disciplined fort fell into chaos due to the new arrivals and a change in leadership. Despite their attempts to aid the colony, minor leaders at Jamestown, such as John Ratcliffe, only made matters worse; Ratcliffe compounded the growing mortality through his poor bartering skills and lack of foresight. In addition, Fishwick faulted Percy for lacking Smith's attention to discipline, just as Smith was faulted for leaving the colony. Instead of blaming a single person for Jamestown's organization problems, Fishwick held all parties accountable for their actions.

Just as Kaler aspired to educate children through history's lessons, Fishwick spread his love of the past and the humanities through his work as a professor at multiple universities. The recipient of eight Fulbright awards, and a member of the American Historical Association, he was dedicated to educating students, challenging them to confront established concepts with new interpretations. In a memorial, Fishwick's colleague Ray Brown wrote:

Though he was well trained in American studies, his energy and exploring mind drove him to question conventional tenets. In viewing human societies of the past and present he felt sure that the steady current of the solid ground of the humanities needed to be better understood and appreciated.<sup>55</sup>

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54. Marshall W. Fishwick, *Jamestown: First English Colony* (New York: American Heritage, Inc., 1965), 83.

55. Ray B. Brown, "In Memoriam: Marshall Fishwick (1923-2006)," American Historical Association, published January 2007, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/in-memoriam-marshall-fishwick>.

Fishwick dedicated his career to educating others and much of the purpose of his book was to challenge people's perceptions of the Starving Time. Looking at the extant sources from a different perspective than some of his peers, he concluded that the collective disorganization of Jamestown's leaders was the cause of the Starving Time.

In April of 1960, a few years prior to Fishwick's book, a recession struck the American economy. High inflation, unemployment, and a poor Gross National Product (GNP) caused many businesses to decline. Eisenhower, President at the start of the recession, did little to aid the American economy. Instead, his successor, John F. Kennedy, inherited a receding economy and disorganized government. In his first month in office, Kennedy increased government spending to correct a faltering GNP and helped the American economy emerge from the recession.<sup>56</sup> The change in leadership lengthened the recession, causing disorganization that frustrated the American people, although it was ultimately successful. Fishwick's commentary on the Starving Time seems to have been influenced by this crisis—the changes in leadership prolonging the issues, causing strife, but ultimately ended through organized and proactive leadership. Kennedy's economic policies ended the Recession of 1960, and Thomas West's arrival at Jamestown led to reorganization and the end of the Starving Time. The parallels between these two events are too remarkable to ignore, suggesting Fishwick's narrative was influenced by modern economic events in addition to the extant accounts.

Both Fishwick and Kaler intended to educate their readers, but were also influenced by current economic crises. They condemned the poor leadership of the colonial government, believing that more than one person should be held responsible for

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56. "Recession 101: A Quick Lesson in Economics and History," ING, accessed April 3, 2016, [http://www.fgcu.edu/HR/files/3013471\\_X\\_G\\_Recession\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.fgcu.edu/HR/files/3013471_X_G_Recession_FINAL.pdf).

the disorganization of the colony. The Panic of 1893 seems to have influenced Kaler's perspective, even as he wrote for children. The American government's preoccupation with bailing out big industry resulted in chaos, as many Americans were in need of aid to survive the recession, just as Jamestown's government was undisciplined and failed to focus on the survival of its people. Similarly, Fishwick seems to have been influenced by an economic crisis, namely the Recession of the 1960s, and inspired to educate his students and have them challenge the established paradigms interpreting Jamestown.

Historians living through periods economic crisis tended to blame the mismanagement of the colonial leadership for the Starving Time. Opinions praising successful leaders corresponded to strong presidencies, while those condemning weak leaders corresponded to weak or ineffective presidencies. Historians who lived through crises that spanned multiple presidential administrations were more likely to assign blame collectively than individually. Perceptions of the Starving Time reflected each scholar's perception of current events.

### **Laziness of the Jamestown Colonists**

While many historians found fault in the actions of Jamestown's leaders, some scholars criticized the colonists themselves, believing that the people of Jamestown did not do enough to ensure their own survival. To these writers, the English and colonial governments were limited in how much they could provide for the people; it was up to the colonists to feed themselves and fight for their own survival. The emphasis on the colonists' laziness defined this group, along with an immense faith in both Smith's and



Ralph Hamor's accounts.<sup>57</sup> Ulterior motives to these publications also separated this ideological group from others—writers in this group wrote with other goals in mind than just describing the Starving Time. Henry Chandlee Forman focused on the architecture of Jamestown, with a brief overview of Jamestown's history. Jim Pearson and Bryna Watkins sought to show the importance primary source analysis to elementary school children.

Henry Chandlee Forman, an architect and historian,<sup>58</sup> wrote about the Starving Time in 1938 as a short historical introduction to his architectural history of Jamestown. While this was only a minor portion of his book, Forman expressed the same opinion that Smith and Hamor did: the colonists were at fault. He chastised the settlers for their laziness and for not following the directions of their leaders. In short, if they had listened to the advice given to them by the Virginia Company, they would have survived. The colonists were supposed to “seek sunny sites because the sun was the first cause ‘under God’ of health and riches” and “find sites of dry and wholesome earth, with fresh water supplies.”<sup>59</sup> Surviving primary documents and archaeology reveal that neither of these things happened; if they had, there would have been fewer casualties during the Starving Time because they would have been in an area more suitable for human sustainability—good land for farming and clean water to drink. Forman argued that the colonists were

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57. Ralph Hamor wrote *A True Discourse on the Present State of Virginia* in 1614, detailing his time in the colony since 1609. He mentioned the Starving Time and claimed that the starving colonists refused to do work within the fort and outside its walls. They would rather entertain themselves with games, such as bowling, than fight for their own survival.

58. “Henry Chandlee Forman,” last modified in 2007, <http://digital.lib.umd.edu/archivesum/actions.DisplayEADAAbstract.do?source=/MdU.ead.histms.0207.xml>.

59. Henry Chandlee Forman, *Jamestown and St. Mary's: Buried Cities of Romance*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 44.

too lazy to follow the instructions given to them by the Virginia Company, quoting Hamor's account, and had they obeyed the Company's instructions, they surely would have survived.

Forman did not challenge Hamor's or Smith's accounts because his goal was not to provide an analytical perspective of Jamestown's events, and as a result, he took their accounts as fact, ignoring any bias. He adopted their perspective in his short discussion of the Starving Time to provide background to his readers, choosing to focus more on the architecture of the settlement. His scope, therefore, was purposefully narrow, and he missed key elements that caused the Starving Time. But his monolithic approach to understanding Jamestown's settlers would influence his interpretation of their architecture. The off-hand and perhaps unfair characterization fed into a greater narrative trend in the mid-to-late-twentieth century that other authors promoted, specifically with the reference to their "bowling in the streetes" rather than maintaining the health and welfare of their community.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly choosing to focus on teaching a skill as opposed to generating a thoughtful analysis, Jim Pearson and Bryna Watkins's purpose was to create a teaching guide for grades five to eight. In their guide, they provide Smith's account as the document for students to analyze, and they quote his account throughout the teacher's sections of the guide. Pearson and Watkins shared Smith's perspective on the Starving Time, believing that the colonists were too lazy to fight for their own survival. While they also mention some faults of the colonial leaders, they emphasized the colonists' participation in their own suffering. In their overview of Jamestown's history, they stated:

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60. Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia* (London: Beale and Welby, 1615), 26.

The curious mix of settlers, with notions of colonization unsuitable for the land...meant that for many years Jamestown's survival was extremely precarious. Unwilling to farm or do the other mundane physical tasks essential to survival, these soldiers of fortune relied on England and the Indians for food.<sup>61</sup>

Jamestown's gentlemen refused to partake in manual labor, as it would not have been their duty back in England, while the other colonists were simply too lazy to fight for their survival. According to Pearson and Watkins, echoing Smith's sentiments, the gentlemen's privilege made them lazy and made other colonists ambivalent to the duties of survival, further exacerbating the supply shortages and causing the Starving Time. The colonists were the most responsible when it came to the famine—they did nothing to ensure their own survival.

The guide consisted mostly of primary documents from key events at Jamestown, with some broad concepts and facts to aid the teachers in creating a lesson based on the primary documents provided.<sup>62</sup> In the teacher's instructions, Pearson and Watkins state the purpose of their guide, "To study historical documents in order to experience history as a dynamic discipline which studies, interprets, and debates the meaning of human artifacts and, through those, humanity's collective past."<sup>63</sup> They do not want to tell the children what to think; the purpose of the *Unit of Study* was to allow students to analyze the primary documents for themselves and develop their own opinions. While they had no intention of creating a detailed analysis of Jamestown or the Starving Time, but rather creating a way for others to do so, they inevitably displayed their opinions on the famine

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61. Jim Pearson and Bryna Watkins, "Early Jamestown: A Unit of Study for Grades 5-8" (San Francisco: University of California, 1991), 12.

62. Pearson and Watkins, "Early Jamestown," 31-36.

63. Ibid., 10.

by refusing to question Smith's account. Since Smith criticized the colonists for their elitist attitudes and their lack of work ethic, Pearson and Watkins did the same.

Whether analyzing Jamestown's architecture or providing students with a hands-on learning experience, the scholars' ideas in this group seemed to have been governed more by the scopes of their publications than by world events or economic crises, rendering further analysis unnecessary, since analytical discussions of the Starving Time were not integral to their broader topics. The lack of analysis and discussion led to Smith's account becoming fact for these writers and their audiences; the Starving Time served as an informational tidbit, left poorly understood and potentially problematic when not seen as the complex and transformative event that it was.<sup>64</sup>

### **Indian Hostility and Lack of Supplies**

Although many scholars found fault in either the colonists or the colonial government, some scholars took a completely different perspective on Jamestown's famine. The earliest two discussed in this section drew from their experiences in World War II, while the others responded to new archaeological discoveries. Regardless of what influenced their perspectives, they all believed that both Indian hostility and a shortage of supplies exacerbated Jamestown's organizational problems and prevented the colonists from contributing to their own survival. It was nearly impossible for colonists to hunt or

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64. Just as these scholars did not write in-depth analyses of the Starving Time, many scholars writing about Jamestown did not even mention the Starving Time because it was not important to the scope of their publications. Karen Ordahl Kupperman's essay "A Continent Revealed: Assimilation of the Shape and Possibilities of North America's East coast, 1524-1610," was one such publication. She had even written about the Starving Time in two previous publications, both mentioned in this paper. In this essay, the Starving Time was not within the scope of her paper, as she focused most of her attention on the earlier French and Spanish colonies on the East Coast. Many other writers chose to leave out discussions of the Starving Time because it did not promote their topics.

gather food while the Indians attacked the James Fort, and the shortage of supplies made it impossible for the colonists to eat within the Fort. Scholars in this group claimed that this paradox was the true cause of the Starving Time, as no access to food will cause starvation.

In Charles E. Hatch, Jr.'s second book on the subject, he discussed how the late arrival of the third supply decreased the amount of supplies coming into the colony—a prolonged voyage forced the sailors to utilize Jamestown's supplies in order to survive. This depletion of Jamestown's supplies put the colony at a major disadvantage going into the winter. In addition, Hatch argued that the Indians' siege of the fort sequestered the colonists, restricting them from hunting and gathering more food. Hatch said:

There was the matter of the third supply which arrived in such poor condition very late in the season...Then, too, the Indians knew of conditions at Jamestown, for they actually kept scouts in the fort much of the time...In the winter of 1609-10, they [Indians] had a good opportunity to make him [white man] suffer, and throughout this period the Indians were openly hostile...All through that winter it was dangerous to be alone far from the fort. Not having sufficient stores set aside, not able to deal with the natives, and without the use of the resources of the countryside, there is small wonder that conditions became serious, even desperate, for the settlers.<sup>65</sup>

Because the Indians killed many colonists who left the fort, it was not safe for people to leave and collect supplies, giving the people of Jamestown no choice but to cope with what little supplies remained in the fort. Hatch believed that an organized government at Jamestown and hardworking colonists might not have made much of a difference, as the Indians still would have been attacking colonists and supplies would have been severely depleted. Without these two elements, the Starving Time would not have been nearly as devastating.

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65. Charles E. Hatch, Jr., *Jamestown, Virginia: the Townsite and Its Story* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1957), 13.

Similarly, Ivor Noël Hume related the Indians' hostility to the devastation of the famine in his first publication, chronologically. Hume stated:

Although the infant settlement had endured many privations, the winter of 1609-10 exceeded all the horrors that had gone before. An accumulation of increased Indian hostility, disease, and almost non-existent food supply whittled the colonists' numbers down from five hundred to as few as sixty.<sup>66</sup>

In his explanation of the Starving Time, he cited that the Indians' hostility toward the colonists prevented them from leaving the fort to bolster their supplies, sequestering them in a fort rampant with disease. He never mentioned Jamestown's leadership or the English leaders, demonstrating that his later publications broke with his original viewpoint and that current events seem to have affected his analysis.

Hatch, writing *Jamestown, Virginia: The Townsite and Its Story* (1957) thirteen years after his previous one, and Hume, writing *Here Lies Virginia: An Archaeologist's View of Colonial Life and History* (1963) thirty-one years prior to his next, each took a completely different perspective from their other scholarship due to their shared experiences in World War II.<sup>67</sup> Instead of blaming the Starving Time on Smith's departure from Jamestown as he previously had, Hatch seemed to be reacting to the famine that occurred in Europe after the Second World War. Hatch let go of his previous assumptions about the causes of the Starving Time because of modern events, connecting them to Jamestown's history. Likewise, Hume's first book claimed that the Indians' hostility was instrumental in the downfall of the colony, while his later books place more

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66. Ivor Noël Hume, *Here Lies Virginia: An Archaeologist's View of Colonial Life and History* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 44.

67. "Charles E. Hatch, Jr." U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, accessed April 11, 2016, [https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&cat=GP23&tf=F&sc=24994,24995,24996,24998,24997,24993,24981,24983&bc=,sl,fd&txt\\_24994=33860096&op\\_24994=0&nfo\\_24994=V,8,1900&txt\\_24995=Charles+E.+Hatch%2C+Jr.&op\\_24995=0&nfo\\_24995=V,24,1900&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=4310560](https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&cat=GP23&tf=F&sc=24994,24995,24996,24998,24997,24993,24981,24983&bc=,sl,fd&txt_24994=33860096&op_24994=0&nfo_24994=V,8,1900&txt_24995=Charles+E.+Hatch%2C+Jr.&op_24995=0&nfo_24995=V,24,1900&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=4310560).

emphasis on the shortcomings of the Jamestown government and the Virginia Company, respectively. Both these authors seem to have been influenced by the Second World War, as both of them fought in the war and their accounts parallel the conditions after the war. After World War II, Europe lay in ruins, and many of its countries lacked the resources to help their people survive. Not surprisingly, there was a famine in Europe following the war. European governments attempted to help their people survive by supplying civilians with rations, but rations were “pointless” because the stores’ shelves were empty.<sup>68</sup> The war had caused much destruction, which in turn led to the depletion of food and supplies, just as the Indian hostility led colonists to consume the supply stores more quickly and prevented them from seeking their own means of survival. Hatch and Hume had witnessed this first hand, and they applied that experience to the famine at Jamestown, noticing the parallels between the two situations.

Sharing a viewpoint with Hatch and Hume, James Horn discussed the consequences of the Indians’ hostility on Jamestown, claiming that, while the colonists provoked the Indian attack, it prevented them from leaving the fort and supplementing their supply stores. This problem exacerbated the shortage of supplies and caused many colonists to starve. He wrote:

English aggression in stealing corn, attacking villagers, and burning their houses led to swift revenge by Indian warriors, forcing the settlers to return to the ill-provisioned Jamestown after sustaining heavy losses. Having confined the English to the fort, and deciding against a frontal assault, Wahunsonacock’s warriors sealed off the island in an attempt to starve the English into submission. During the siege of Jamestown from November 1609 to May 1610 about half the

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68. “After WWII, Europe was a ‘Savage Continent’ of Devastation” last modified July 29, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/07/24/204538728/after-wwii-europe-was-a-savage-continent-of-devastation>. See Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II*, (London: Picador, 2013).

garrison died of disease and malnutrition, were killed as they tried to escape or were slain after putting ‘themselves into the Indians hands, though our enemies.’<sup>69</sup>

He did not discuss the poor leadership at Jamestown or the colonists’ laziness. Instead, Horn demonstrated that the Indians’ aggression toward the colonists made it dangerous for them to leave the fort in search of food. The colonists were forced to rely solely on their dwindling supplies because of the siege. The further depletion of supplies, as a result of their confinement, caused the colonists to starve. He also argued that the famine was not the only factor that caused death at Jamestown, showing that the resurgence in this ideology was a result of new archaeological discoveries at the turn of the century that proved the complexity of the Starving Time.

Horn acted as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation for many years, in addition to holding multiple positions at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.<sup>70</sup> Working so closely with archaeology, his opinions were shaped by the artifacts and evidence that were being unearthed at Jamestown. The trash deposits that were discovered prior to his essay convinced him that the Indian siege must have been bad if colonists were forced to eat their own horses and dogs. The discovery of dog bones in a trash pit also supported Percy and Smith’s claims that colonists had to resort to eating whatever they could find, and by association, supporting

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69. James Horn, “The Conquest of Eden: Possession and Dominion in Early Virginia,” in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, eds. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 44.

70. “James Horn,” Organization of American Historians, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.oah.org/lectures/lecturers/view/1369>.



the claim that the siege prevented colonists from leaving the fort.<sup>71</sup> The archaeological evidence lent credence to extant accounts and gave scholars a new perspective on Jamestown's events.

William M. Kelso also highlighted the influence of the Indians' hostility on the Starving Time. Like Horn, he believed that the danger that resulted from the Indians' siege of the fort prevented the colonists from gathering more supplies. Had there not also been a shortage of supplies due to the wreck on Bermuda, many colonists might have been spared. Kelso wrote:

The 1609-10 winter that followed became known as the "starving time." A flotilla of supply ships under the newly appointed lieutenant governor Sir Thomas Gates was shipwrecked in Bermuda. Indians besieged the fort. The colonists' livestock was quickly eaten, including the horses, and some of their weapons were traded away for Indian corn. Only sixty of the 215 left at Jamestown survived.<sup>72</sup>

Ships carrying many of Jamestown's supplies wrecked off the coast of Bermuda, leaving supplies low at Jamestown. Adding this on top of the Indians' siege of the fort, the colonists were limited in what they could do to ensure their survival—seeking supplies outside the fort was just as deadly as remaining in the fort with no supplies. As the director of archaeology at the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) and the director of the Jamestown Rediscovery Project,<sup>73</sup> Kelso paid close attention to archaeological discoveries that had occurred around the turn of the century.

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71. "Dog Bones," Jamestown Rediscovery, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://historicjamestowne.org/selected-artifacts/dog-bones/>.

72. William M. Kelso, *Jamestown: The Buried Truth* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 20.

73. David C. Hayes, "William M. Kelso-American Archaeologist," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified December 11, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/William-M-Kelso>. He also held other archaeology positions, such as: the Commissioner of archaeology for the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, and Research Archaeologist and Director of Archaeology at Monticello.

These had a profound influence on Kelso's perspective, since the remainder of his book consists of archaeological findings, using them to reconstruct historical events. He explained the Starving Time through trash deposits and burial sites, using archaeological evidence to support extant accounts.<sup>74</sup>

A year after Kelso's book, Karen Ordahl Kupperman expressed a similar opinion on the cause of the Starving Time. She also added that the drought and hard winters did not help the colonists' plight. Her viewpoint demonstrated a coming shift in ideology due to scientific discoveries revealing much about Jamestown's past. Kupperman stated:

Continuing drought conditions combined with hard winters meant that pressure on food supplies and native polities was increasing while the colonists'...ability to feed themselves seemed to decline...the colonists were tearing boards of abandoned houses and ripping up palisades for firewood rather than go "into the woods a stone's cast off." Such behavior was not as bizarre as it sounds in the prevailing guerrilla warfare conditions: "It is true the Indian killed as fast without, if our men stirred but beyond the bounds of the blockhouse, as famine and pestilence did within." From inside the fort, the men knew that the "watching, subtle, and offended Indian" waited for them to die.<sup>75</sup>

She demonstrated the desperation of the colonists by relating their attempts to create fires without access to the forest, highlighting the fear the colonists felt toward the Indians during their attack. Without access to the forest and the fort's surrounding areas, the colonists had no way to survive, given the dwindling supplies within the fort. Asserting that the Indians' siege of the fort and the lack of supplies were two of the biggest factors leading to the Starving Time, she also claimed that a drought at Jamestown added to the problems that caused the famine.

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74. Kelso, *Buried Truth*, 89,125-168. Evidence of dog bones and horse bones found in trash deposits dated to the Starving Time supported Percy and Smith's accounts of the famine and demonstrated the desperation of the colonists in face of Indian hostility and dwindling supplies.

75. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 251, 254. She cites Percy many times throughout her book, demonstrating her trust in his account as a result of the archaeological findings that supported his claims.

Kupperman's perspective represented the beginning of a shift in historical consensus. Not only was she affected by new archaeological discoveries, as exhibited by her faith in Percy's account,<sup>76</sup> but she was also influenced by recent scientific findings. Archaeology supported many of Percy's observations, creating a resurgence of scholarship that accepted his claim that Indian aggression and lack of supplies caused many to die at Jamestown. In 1998, nine years before Kupperman's book was published, a comprehensive study of tree rings from Jamestown's trees emerged, demonstrating that a drought was in fact occurring before and during the Starving Time.<sup>77</sup> This scientific study demonstrated that there were natural causes to the Starving Time in addition to the direct consequences of unorganized leadership and Indian hostility. Scientific discoveries added another dimension to Jamestown's troubles and demonstrated that Jamestown's struggle was not the result of one factor but the intersection of many factors.

Throughout the 1990s, many archaeological and scientific discoveries were made, reaffirming old ideas and leading to new multi-dimensional ideas about the Starving Time. Overall, this ideological group occurred in two waves—scholars that were influenced by World War II and scholars that were inspired by the latest discoveries at Jamestown's fort site. It was not that these were new discoveries, rather instead of relying solely on extant accounts, as in the past, archaeological evidence supported the importance of the siege and lack of supplies. Archaeology became more scientific in the 1960s, which led to new ways of collecting archaeological data. In the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a revival of storytelling as a way of understanding artifacts, placing

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76. As demonstrated previously, archaeological discoveries proved much of what Percy claimed to be true about the Starving Time, including cannibalism.

77. Stahle, et. al , "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," 564-567.

these artifacts in the context of their location and a specific hypothesis. Out of this revival came a hybrid of these two types of archaeology, where archaeologists would place the artifacts within the context of history and then use scientific data to help corroborate their claims.<sup>78</sup> Archaeology was evolving and thus influencing the perspectives of Starving Time scholars.

### **Natural Explanations**

While disagreeing on what specifically caused the famine, several scholars agreed that forces in nature were a significant factor causing the famine. Humans may have worsened the situation, but neither the leadership (individually or as a group) nor the colonists as a whole could have prevented the starvation of Jamestown's people; natural explanations for the Starving Time, whether rooted in nature or in psychoanalysis, became more common. Despite the earliest publications of this interpretive group occurring well before the discovery of James Fort and numerous scientific studies on salinity and tree rings, the majority of these nature-focused explanations occurred recently, demonstrating a renewed interest in nature in the latter portion of the twentieth century and challenging the Starving Time paradigm of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1928, J.E. Davis was the first scholar to write about nature's influence on the Starving Time. In his brief overview of this period, he claimed that nature was most at fault, as many natural phenomena struck the fort in rapid sequence and could not be controlled by the colonists. Davis wrote:

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78. Kevin Greene, *Archaeology: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 243-266.

Disasters continued to visit the little Colony. Fire after fire destroyed the flimsy buildings, and in the cold of winter many died of exposure, so that even the palisades were pulled down for firewood. Supplies gave out entirely and the people lived on roots and herbs. The number was reduced from five hundred to sixty in six months.<sup>79</sup>

Nature seemed to be acting in opposition to the Jamestown colonists, particularly in the winter of 1609-10. Because the colonists could not prevent these “disasters” from happening, the cause of the Starving Time seemed to lie in nature. His viewpoint was not significantly influenced by archaeological discoveries, since the fort had not been discovered yet, and other impactful finds not published, until 1996. Davis relied solely on the extant accounts when forming his opinion of the famine, which included sources that were not as well-known, such as William Stith’s *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia*.<sup>80</sup> Combining Stith’s account with Smith’s, Davis seemed to notice the high frequency of disasters occurring at or in relation to Jamestown, such as the supply’s shipwreck off Bermuda, the fires, and the cold winter, which are mentioned in both accounts. He believed these events’ prominence in extant accounts was evidence of their significant role affecting the Starving Time.

Karen Ordahl Kupperman’s first book discussed the role of apathy, as a psychological condition, on the colonists at Jamestown. When forced to witness their fellow colonists starve and eventually die, many settlers lost the will to live. Kupperman argued that this condition caused further malnutrition and the eventual death of many colonists. Kupperman wrote:

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79. J.E. Davis, *Jamestown and Her Neighbors on Virginia’s Historic Peninsula* (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1928), 10.

80. Davis, *Jamestown and Her Neighbors*, V.

Isolation and despair about the future affected many colonists, and this may have intensified the effects of malnutrition to produce the fatal apathy and... apathy produced further malnutrition. This interaction between malnutrition and psychological effects produced fatal withdrawal from life, as can be seen in a fully documented way in the experiences of prisoners of war in twentieth-century examples.<sup>81</sup>

She asserted that apathy manifested itself much like the laziness that many of the extant accounts discussed; malnutrition made the colonists lethargic and weak, forcing many to remain idle. Taking this idea one step further, she suggested that the colonists might not have been lazy but rather physically and psychologically ill.

Psychological studies conducted on prisoners of war after both World War II and the Korean War demonstrated the effects of apathy on the physical health of humans and affected Kupperman's perspective on the Starving Time. She quoted these studies in her essay to prove that apathy could have been a factor at Jamestown. She said:

Clarence L. Anderson, a medical doctor who was himself a prisoner in Korea, gave an extensive interview in which he analyzed the phenomenon [apathy] and its causes. As he described it, and if differences between seventeenth and twentieth-century phrasing are allowed for, this "give-up-itis" begins to sound very much like the "most strange Condition" of the "distracted and forlorn" colonists at Jamestown... Malnutrition was a leading cause of death in the prison camps, but Anderson believed that "almost all cases of malnutrition were aggravated, if not actually caused, by the prisoners' disinclination to eat unfamiliar foods."<sup>82</sup>

Dr. Anderson proved through his studies that apathy could result in malnutrition. Many soldiers lost their will to live because they were forced to watch their brothers in arms die in combat or of camp diseases, causing lethargy and a lack of appetite. New trends in psychology about soldiers in World War II led Kupperman to look at apathy as a factor in

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81. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Apathy and Death in Early Jamestown," in *Journal of American History* 66(1979): 25.

82. Kupperman, "Apathy and Death," 29-30.

the Starving Time. The colonists were not necessarily to blame for the famine; other factors played into their starvation.

The same year James Horn wrote his essay, he also published a book that expanded on his previous ideas and reflected recent scientific discoveries.<sup>83</sup> Diverting blame from the colonists as he had in his essay, Horn claimed that a drought prevented the growth of crops, exacerbating the shortage of supplies, and caused the deadly famine. In addition to the drought, he argued that diseases, brought to Jamestown by the third supply, spread rapidly, increasing the death count and causing a further decrease in supplies. He argued:

Virginia continued in the grip of a severe drought that had led to serious food shortages among the Powhatans as well as the English... The *Diamond* brought the plague with her from England, and pestilence spread rapidly through the settlement as sanitary conditions deteriorated.<sup>84</sup>

The drought prevented the colonists from augmenting their supplies, as there were few crops to harvest. Confined to the fort due to the Indian siege, supplies diminished quickly and diseases brought by the third supply spread fast. Horn's argument demonstrated that the colonists could not have done anything to prevent the famine, as the drought and illness made famine difficult to fight.

Writing the same year as Horn, Robert Appelbaum shared a similar opinion. He argued that America was not as plentiful as the English expected it to be and noted that even the Indians struggled to grow enough crops to support themselves, despite their familiarity with Virginia's climate and soil. Appelbaum noted:

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83. Horn, "The Conquest of Eden." This essay is discussed in the "Indian Hostility and Lack of Supplies" section of this paper.

84. James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 174, 176.

They [the English colonists] expected hunger to be as missing from the Americas as it was from Britain. If anything, they expected more plentiful supplies of foodstuffs in the Americas than at home, such that as many gentle travelers would continue to live as sumptuously as they were accustomed to at home, so members of lower classes would actually improve their standard of living. And instead, again, they found hunger everywhere they went...whether among themselves, struggling to survive, or among the Indians, who prospered, paradoxically, in a condition of perpetual hunger.<sup>85</sup>

The English's expectations of what the New World held were starkly different than reality. They expected to be able to grow food, but Virginia was experiencing a severe drought that even prevented the Indians from successfully feeding their people. Like Horn, the scientific evidence of the drought affected Appelbaum's perspective.

In 1991, a comprehensive study of tree rings in the tidewater region was published. The study indicated that the Starving Time occurred during one of the worst droughts in Virginia history and claimed that a more organized colony still would have struggled to succeed.<sup>86</sup> Horn's perspective of the Starving Time reflected the data in the tree-ring study; the drought made it difficult for the colonists to support themselves and became a leading factor in the cause of the famine. Similarly, Appelbaum alluded to the drought by demonstrating that Virginia's climate destroyed the colonists' expectations regarding the growth of food. His discourse also considered the Indians' lack of food,

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85. Robert Appelbaum, "Hunger in Early Virginia: Indians and English Facing Off Over Excess, Want, and Need," in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, eds. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 215.

86. Stahle, et. al , "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," 566. Tree-ring studies work by comparing the growth ring chronologies of specific types of trees, in this case baldcypresses, to the Palmer hydrological drought index (PHDI). Thinner rings demonstrate slow growth while larger rings indicate normal or extreme growth. The size of the ring reflects the tree's growth pattern. The article states, "Jamestown colonists have been criticized for poor planning, poor support, and a startling indifference to their own subsistence. But the tree-ring reconstruction indicates that even the best planned and supported colony would have been supremely challenged by the climate conditions of..1606-1612."



further emphasizing that nature played a role in the Starving Time, as the Indians were experts at surviving in Virginia and should have been able to provide for themselves. Without the scientific evidence supporting the drought, Horn and Appelbaum may not have expressed the same opinions.

Overall, this group of scholars was affected by scientific discoveries, whether these studies were specifically about Jamestown or were applicable to Jamestown's situation during the Starving Time. Despite the early scholarship claiming a natural explanation, the remaining scholars in this category were clearly influenced by scientific findings. Kupperman cited the psychological study many times throughout her essay, demonstrating its importance to her opinion, while Horn's ideas paralleled those of the tree-ring study, fully relating the effects of the drought on Jamestown. Appelbaum more abstractly discussed Jamestown's problems, claiming that even the Indians were struggling to cultivate their crops and showing that nature must have been a factor in the Starving Time. Science and archaeology were, in themselves, influences on these historians, not only by challenging their understandings of Jamestown but also by providing evidence to back up their ideas.

### **Blaming the Virginia Company of London**

While many scholars condemned the domestic colonial government for its lack of leadership and organization, others held the Virginia Company responsible, claiming that it was the company's duty to send adequate supplies to the colony. Some even asserted that, with the creation of a new charter in 1609, the company officials doomed Jamestown because they changed the structure of the government and appointed a new

governor, who was not present within the colony. This change in Jamestown's organization further complicated daily life for the settlers because it further confused the already unorganized leaders of the colony. Two of the three scholars who blame the Virginia Company, rather than the colonists or Jamestown's government, served in World War II, while the other was a mature adult during that war. This shared experience combined with a shared viewpoint reflects how current events affected scholars' writings.

Carl Bridenbaugh was the first of these historians to blame the Virginia Company for the famine at Jamestown. Writing in 1980, Bridenbaugh condemned the Company for not sending enough supplies to Jamestown. The Company shareholders were in charge of ensuring that the colony had enough supplies to survive, but failed to do so.<sup>87</sup> Whether the voyage took longer than expected, forcing the sailors to dig into the Jamestown's supply, or the Company sent more people to the colony, failing to factor in the added number to the amount of supplies, was not discussed in Bridenbaugh's work, but he was adamant that the Company was to blame. He also claimed that, despite writing a new charter, the Virginia Company officials did very little to organize the colony. The Company's lack of supply shipments and dearth of organization contributed to the famine, nearly wiping out the young colony. Bridenbaugh wrote:

During its entire history, the Virginia Company's officials appear never to have thought it was their duty to see that the colony was properly supplied with food. When Ralph Hamor and Sir Thomas Gates "sailed sadly up the river" to Jamestown in the Spring of 1610, right at the end of the "starving time," they found not more than "three score persons therein, and those scarce able to goe [it] alone, of welnigh six hundred not full ten months before"—a ratio of 1 to 10.<sup>88</sup>

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87. "The Second Charter of Virginia; May 23, 1609," Yale Law School, accessed April 15, 2016, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\\_century/va02.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/va02.asp).

88. Carl Bridenbaugh, "Chapter IV: Life and Death at Jamestown," in his book *Jamestown: 1544-1699*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 45. The "Virginia Company Officials" referring to the government officials in London who were in charge of the Colony.

Bridenbaugh blamed those in charge of the Virginia Company for the Starving Time because they failed to send enough aid during the colony's time of greatest need.

Officials in London did not pay enough attention to the Jamestown's needs because they were too focused on generating profits and never sent enough material or organizational aid.

Written in 1980, well after World War II, Bridenbaugh's experiences in the war seem to have stuck with him, or rather, the aftermath of the war stuck with him. After the end of the Second World War, Europe lay in pieces economically, politically, and physically. There were virtually no countries untouched by the war. A destroyed Europe caused the powerful, more stable United States to come to Europe's rescue through foreign aid plans, such as the Marshall Plan. The majority of the American populace agreed that America should help put Europe back on its feet after the end of the Second World War. In fact, support for the plan remained high throughout the implementation of the Marshall Plan. At the beginning, 51 percent of the people polled approved of the Marshall Plan.<sup>89</sup> Bridenbaugh, having seen the destruction of the war through his time in the U.S. Navy,<sup>90</sup> seems to have been among those who supported sending aid to Europe. Living in a society where aid was given, it probably seemed wrong to him that the Virginia Company did not send enough supplies to one of its satellites. Since the colony was so dependent on England, by the Charter written by the Company officials, it only

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89. Gallup Organization, "Gallup Poll (AIPO)," The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (October 1947), accessed December 6, 2015, USGALLUP.47-405.QKT08C.

90. Brooke Hindle, "Carl Bridenbaugh," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 104 (1992): 194-195.

seemed just that the stockholders send adequate supplies and aid in the organization, just like the United States was helping a devastated Europe.

Similarly, David Freeman Hawke's analysis of the Starving Time blamed the famine on lack of preparation by the Virginia Company. Instead of blaming the Company for not sending enough supplies, Hawke claimed that the Company officials did not prepare the colonists well enough for what they would face in the Americas. He stated, "First-comers...arrived too weak to hunt...But even those with energy to explore the forests were handicapped; few were familiar with guns...In time the settlers learned how to draw their food from the water, the sky, and the forest."<sup>91</sup> While new research and archaeology has proven much of this to be simply untrue, Hawke believed that the officials in England should have done a better job preparing colonists to live in Virginia. They did not set the colony up to succeed.

While he had no specific background involving World War II, Hawke was a teenager when the time the war began but was well into his 20s by the time the Marshall Plan was implemented. Like Bridenbaugh, he seemed to believe that sending aid to Europe was the right thing to do, as one goal of the Marshall Plan was to prepare Europeans for future success by training them in industry and farming, ensuring them a more prosperous future.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, his claim that the Virginia Company did not prepare the colonists well seemed to be a justifiable reaction to the positive strides the Marshall Plan was making to aid Europe. According to Hawke, the Company did not care enough

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91. David Freeman Hawke, *Everyday Life in Early America*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 74.

92. Thorsten V. Kalijarvi, *Introduction and Chronology of the Marshall Plan From June 5 to November 5, 1947* (Washington: Library of Congress Legislative Reference Service, 1947), 1-3.

about the fate of its colonists, a stark contrast to what had been happening in Europe under the aid of the Marshall Plan.

As more of Jamestown's artifacts were discovered in the fort and historians continued to question original accounts of the Starving Time, scholars increasingly placed the cause of the famine at the feet of the Virginia Company and its demand for profit. Ivor Noël Hume asserted that the Company's demand for trade goods became the main priority after the reorganization of Jamestown's government, which made it difficult for the colonists to focus on their own survival. According to Hume, the settlers were put to work to make a profit for the failing Virginia Company. The Company's stockholders did not know or care about the issues that were occurring at Jamestown, as they were too infatuated with the idea of making money. Hume stated:

The 1607 arrivals numbered 104 or 105 men and boys, half of whom were dead by year's end. Captain Christopher Newport who had commanded the original fleet returned with two ships of supplies early 1608, but soon after he docked the fortified Jamestown caught fire. The conflagration destroyed most of the equipment and possessions already there. Rather than forwarding the settlement's progress, Newport's help focused on picking up the pieces from the charred ruins of the first year's meager accomplishments. Nevertheless, his orders from the Virginia Company of London, the joint-stock enterprise that owned the colony, were to return with saleable commodities that would begin to repay the investors.<sup>93</sup>

Instead of allowing the colonists to replenish what was lost in the fire, the stockholders were too worried about making a profit. Hume highlighted the many duties the Virginia Company forced the colonists to complete, failing to give the colonists time to hunt, fish, or grow their own food. In the eyes of the Company officials, the colonists only duties were to the Company's profit not to their own health.

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93. Ivor Noël Hume, "We are Starved", *1607: Jamestown and the New World*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 68.

As a soldier in the British Army, Hume had a front-row seat to the devastation that occurred in Europe during the war.<sup>94</sup> Like Bridenbaugh and Hawke, Hume seemed to support Marshall Plan aid being given to Europe and compared what was happening in Europe to the events that occurred at Jamestown during the Starving Time, believing that, had the Virginia Company allowed the people of Jamestown to provide for themselves or provided its people with enough food to survive, the Starving Time would not have occurred.

Historians who had lived through or fought in World War II expressed their frustration at the Virginia Company's lack of aid to Jamestown as a stark contrast to the aid that America was sending to Europe. Seeing how successful that plan was, it was hard for these scholars to understand why the Company failed to adequately supply its colonists. In condemning the shortage of aid given by the Virginia Company, scholars expressed their support of foreign aid and set themselves apart from other historians influenced by the Marshall Plan. Where others focused on the shortcomings of the Plan, reflecting these shortcomings on Jamestown, scholars in this group contrasted the positive qualities of the Plan with the shortcomings of the Virginia Company. Condemning officials abroad does not necessarily reflect dissatisfaction with current events but can, and does in this instance, express support for current events and disapproval of those in the past. Living in an "aid society," these scholars found the dearth of aid given to Jamestown troubling.

## **Conclusion**

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94. Ivor Noël Hume and Henry M. Miller, "Ivor Noël Hume: Historical Archaeologist," in *The Public Historian* 33 (2011): 9.

Despite the differences between these groups, each scholar was affected by what was going on around them—whether political or economic circumstances, wars, or new innovations in science. Contemporary events influenced their opinions and interpretations, helping lead to great diversity in the perceived causes of the Starving Time. Whether writers were aware of these influences is less important than our understanding of them. What is most relevant is the fact that there are significant parallels between current events and their ideas behind their interpretations. These patterns can help us better understand how we write history, how our own environment influences our interpretations, and the fluid nature of our own discipline.

In the paragraphs before this, I argued that scholars blaming the colonial leadership were affected by the politics behind economic events of their time, whereas those who blamed the Virginia Company were influenced by the devastation in Europe, the struggle to recover after World War II, and the economic aid plans that transpired after the war. Generally, writers who criticized specific leaders for either abandoning the colony or their unorganized leadership were influenced by their disenchantment with key political figures. On the contrary, scholars who condemned the Virginia Company praised American economic policies, believing that Company officials could have done more to prevent the famine, thus contrasting their positive experiences with the negative experiences at Jamestown, seeing beneficial economic policies as more of a norm than an exception.

Writers who criticized the colonists for their idleness placed immense faith in the extant accounts of individual authors, like Smith and Percy, because further analyses of these accounts were inessential to their broader topics. Targeting specific audiences based

on a more specific topic, these publications were not meant to analyze Jamestown's history, but to discuss new themes, such as architecture, and teach important skills, like how to analyze a historical document. Scholars in this category were providing background information in order to better prepare their audiences for their true focus; these sections were not meant to analyze the Starving Time but present the facts presented in extant accounts. They express identical opinions due to their reliance on extant accounts, merely reflecting the perspectives of Smith and Percy.

Those who believed the Indians' hostility was an important factor in causing the Starving Time can be broken into two distinct groups. The first group, writing in the mid-twentieth century, related the food shortages in Europe after World War II to the famine at Jamestown, demonstrating that hostility prevented both Europeans and Jamestown colonists from providing for themselves. Later scholars were more influenced by archaeological discoveries, such as the discovery of the original fort, trash deposits, and burial sites. These discoveries provided new evidence forcing them to reconsider earlier claims, inspiring them to look at the relationship between the Indian siege and the famine from a different perspective.

Scholars who took more natural approaches to explaining the devastation of the Starving Time were influenced by recent scientific discoveries. The examination of tree-rings confirmed the existence of an unusually harsh drought occurring during the famine, which influenced two of these historians. One was inspired by a psychological study on apathy as a cause of malnutrition, which made this scholar compare the psychological affects of apathy to the laziness discussed in extant accounts. A surge of scientific



discoveries produced both new theories and evidence to explain abnormal phenomena at Jamestown.

It is important to note that nearly all of the scholars who wrote multiple publications about the Starving Time changed their viewpoints, thus providing further proof modern events and ideas were affecting scholarly writing. Hume's life experiences significantly influenced his interpretations, first choosing to blame Percy for his disorganization, then blaming Indian hostility for preventing the colonists from augmenting their supplies, and finally blaming the Virginia Company for not supporting their colony adequately. Aside from Hume, Kupperman, Horn, Bernhard, and Hatch all changed their perspectives based on current events and their changing audiences, demonstrating how recent history affects the past unintentionally.

Oftentimes, historians try to pinpoint a single cause of an event in history, when in reality, such events are the result of an accumulation of factors. The drought prevented the colonists from accumulating enough crops to supplement their dwindling supply, while disease and Indian aggression prevented the hunting of animals and the gathering of other provisions. A more organized government, both abroad and within the colony, might have saved the lives of many colonists. Each of these factors played a crucial role in the devastation of the Starving Time; the famine at Jamestown was the result of many factors and not of a single dominant problem.

When analyzing historical documents, it is important to attempt to look at history from that time forward, instead of looking back at the past knowing how things will turn out. Examining history with an objective lens is difficult to do, as we carry our experiences with us wherever we go and no matter what we do. While this analysis

demonstrates the effects of current events on historian's perceptions of history, the influences in this paper are by no means definitive. Rather, in utilizing historians' personal histories, I have opened the door to understanding their biases, providing a thoughtful and reasonable beginning to a never-ending discussion. As, history shapes our ideas, just as much as our ideas shape history.

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