



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Colonial National
Historical Park

P. O. Box 210
Yorktown, VA 23690

757-898-2410 phone
757-898-6346 fax

Colonial National Historical Park News Release

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Contact(s): Mike Byrd
Email: michael_byrd@nps.gov
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Democracy and Diversity: The Origins of Modern America Research and Discovery Center

JAMESTOWN, Va. – On May 14, 1607, three ships, the *Susan Constant*, the *Godspeed*, and the *Discovery*, disembarked 104 English colonists upon the shores of a small peninsula jutting into the James River. It seemed an ideal place. Thirty-six miles inland from the Chesapeake Bay, it would escape notice of Spanish ships along the coast. This settlement would become the first permanent English colony in North America, the first capital of Virginia and the site of the first English representative government in America. It also became the social and political center of the Virginia colony for more than 92 years.

The National Park Service's Centennial celebration in 2016 and the 400th anniversary in 2019 of the first legislative assembly in the Western Hemisphere at Jamestown and the first Africans arrival to the James River colony, represent a major opportunity to showcase the pivotal importance of this region to the origins of modern America.

Organized around the twin themes of Democracy and Diversity, the contemporary relevance of this legacy—in regard to encouraging public reflection about who we are as a people, multiculturalism, and our extended democratic experiment—will be made explicit in initiatives undertaken by Colonial National Historical Park (COLO) and the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation (JRF) in partnership at Historic Jamestowne on Jamestown Island.

Diversity is a seminal marker of American society. Virginia was the first English mainland colony to receive Africans. The arrival of two dozen or so Angolans in early Virginia has been given prominence by historians seeking the origins of slavery and racial discrimination in North America. There is also a focus on the indigenous peoples' story of the region. At Jamestown and throughout the early colony, sustained encounters between Algonquian, Siouan, and Iroquoian peoples with English settlers occurred for the first time. This cultural exchange had a formative influence on the development of early American society. Focusing on the people who lived and labored at Jamestown and the larger region, COLO and the JRF will work with local communities, stakeholders, schools and universities, and interested groups and individuals to highlight the African experience and that of Native Americans in early Virginia.

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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Research, interpretive and archaeological programs will reveal and publicize this uniquely American story that includes distinctive cultures and early encounters of Indian, European, and African peoples within the broader context of cultural interactions around the Atlantic rim. Learning resources, exhibits, online sources, archaeological and anthropological, and interpretive programs will be devoted to Indian and African experiences that explore the diverse origins of our early American society. In future years, the center will include sustainability issues and tackle a most impacting subject: climate change and sea level rise and the effects upon cultural and natural resources of the area.

Specifically, the Research and Discovery Center in Historic Jamestown's Visitor Center will house:

- A "First Africans" project to serve as an educational resource informing the public about the lives of the first Africans in early British America showcasing archaeological investigations on the Island devoted to unearthing the material culture of early Africans in Historic Jamestowne. This will be expanded to include the journey and experiences of Africans from free peoples to indentured servitude, to slavery, and to the role of Africans in the forming of this nation.
- A Virginia Indian Research and Education Portal to advance research and inform the public about Virginia Indians' rich history, cultural heritage, and communities today. This aspect would act as a switchboard for Native American studies and research in the Commonwealth offering internships through Universities and various youth organizations.

Historic Jamestowne is jointly administered by the National Park Service and Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation (on behalf of APVA Preservation Virginia) and preserves the original site of the first permanent English settlement in the New World. For further information, visit www.nps.gov/colo or www.HistoricJamestowne.org or call (757) 898-2410 or (757) 229-4997.

About the National Park Service. More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for America's 407 national parks and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

