

# Captain John Smith And American Identity: Evolutions Of Constructed Narratives And Myths In The 20th And 21st Centuries

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CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH AND AMERICAN IDENTITY: EVOLUTIONS OF  
CONSTRUCTED NARRATIVES AND MYTHS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Historical narratives and anecdotes concerning Captain John Smith have been told and retold throughout the entire history the United States of America, and they have proved to be sacred, influential, and contested elements in the construction of the individual, sectional, regional, and national identity of many. In this thesis, I first outline some of the history of how narratives and discourses surrounding Captain John Smith were directly connected with the identity of many Americans during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially Virginians and Southerners. Then I outline how these narratives and discourses from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have continued and evolved in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in American scholarship and popular culture. I demonstrate how Captain John Smith went from being used as a symbol for regional and sectional identity to a symbol for broader national American identity, and how he has anachronistically come to be considered an American. I then show how Captain John Smith has continued to be constructed, to a seemingly larger degree than previous centuries, as a hero of almost mythic proportions. Finally I demonstrate how this constructed American hero is used as a posterchild for various interest groups and ideologies in order to legitimize the places of certain discourses and behavior within constructed and contested American identities.

I dedicate this thesis to the family and friends who have supported me the most during the writing process: my parents, Deborah and Steven Corbett, my grandparents, Betsy and Norman Triznadel, my wife, Michelle Corbett, one of my best friends, Rustin Lloyd, my advisor, Dr. Daniel Murphree, and two very supportive professors, Dr. Michael Hammond and Dr. Amelia Lyons. You have all made a personal impact on my life, so I personally dedicate this work to you.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context .....	2
CHAPTER 2: JOHN SMITH AS AMERICAN.....	13
Crafting an Image: John Smith’s Colorful Life.....	13
Creating an “American” Image .....	19
CHAPTER 3: JOHN SMITH AS HERO.....	34
The Scholar’s Hero: Lemay’s John Smith.....	36
The Popular Culture Hero: Multi-media’s John Smith .....	44
CHAPTER 4: JOHN SMITH AS POSTERCHILD.....	62
Captain John Smith as Multiculturalist .....	62
Captain John Smith as Christian.....	68
Captain John Smith as Environmentalist.....	77
CONCLUSION.....	82
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	84

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

For over four hundred years, the stories of Captain John Smith have continuously been retold, repackaged, celebrated, condemned, analyzed, and memorialized. Numerous historians have debated, critiqued, defended, and reframed the narratives concerning the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century explorer and soldier. The continual evolution of these narratives can be traced throughout the past four centuries, specifically in regards to the narratives' intimate ties to American identity. As will be shown, Smith has been turned into a nationalistic hero who came to symbolize, shape, and reflect the identity of many Americans, past and present.

Work has already been done by several recent historians to reveal how Smith became a historical hero for many living in North America during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This thesis seeks to build off of this work by examining the uses, evolution, and influence of the narratives and discourses concerning Smith in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In this introduction, a brief summary of how the narratives of Smith have been used and influenced by 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans will be provided, in order to contrast with and better explain 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century portrayals, discourses, and uses of the historical image of Smith. Various political, cultural, national, regional, and social factors that influenced the evolution of the narratives and discourses surrounding Smith during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries will be examined in the introduction to give context. These include the formulation of national identity, competing state identities and origin narratives, Romanticism and hero worship, the Civil War and Northern and Southern divisions, and Southern identity. In the chapters to follow, the political, cultural, national, regional, and social factors that have influenced the



evolution of the narratives and discourses surrounding Smith during in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries will be addressed, including divisions between conservative and liberal interest groups, attempts to establish America's origins as either religious or secular, discourses of Anglo-Saxon white superiority, male superiority, Capitalism, self-sufficiency, individualism, multiculturalism, Islamophobia, and environmentalism.

### Context

The birth of a new American nation required early Americans to establish a new historical identity, and it gave them a desire to both discover their historical antecedents and establish the roles various individuals played in the genesis of their new collective existence. While a common political identity and common history were being formulated, early American politicians and historians sought to legitimize their states' proper places in their young nation's past and origin.<sup>1</sup> Desires to formulate and define national, sectional, and state identity brought forth several divisions during both the 18<sup>th</sup>, and, especially, the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries of American history, and thus, the narratives used to legitimize and define identity often became battlegrounds for competing discourses.

In order to formulate an American identity and collective history after the American Revolution, 18<sup>th</sup> century Americans began to "scan the colonial past in search of figures like Pocahontas and Smith who could be rewarded retroactively for their proto-nationalist

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Shaffer, "John Daly Burk's "History of Virginia" and the Development of American National History," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 77, No. 3 (July 1969), 336.

sentiments.”<sup>2</sup> Foundational events and legacies preceding the birth of the United States also needed to be found and drawn upon. The founding of Jamestown was one of the ideal choices, for it was the first permanent English colony in the New World, and thus its founding was the event Americans could point to as the beginning of a long chain of events that led to the creation of an independent nation. Since Smith was seen as vital to the success and survival of Jamestown, he became an American hero shortly after the birth of the new American nation.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous examples of how important Smith was to the history and identity of early Americans can be found, including within the biography of George Washington written by Chief Justice John Marshall following the first president’s death in 1799. Marshall declared that “a narrative of the principal events preceding our revolutionary war” was needed in order to form a complete history of Washington and the American people.<sup>4</sup> Several of those “principal events” were the exploits of Smith during his time in the New World. According to the research of Robert S. Tilton, it was rare, during the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to find a reference to the colonial past that was not made to fit into a framework of national prehistory in order to show how the colonial event was preparatory to the founding of the nation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Tilton, *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>4</sup> John Marshall, *The Life of George Washington* (New York: Wise, 1925), vol. 1, vii. (originally published in 1804).

<sup>5</sup> Tilton, 48.

The construction of national identity was tied directly to early Americans' construction of state identity, particularly for Virginians. Virginia laid claim to the earliest successful English settlement, and also to the fact that the state produced many of America's most distinguished leaders and patriots, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Patrick Henry, and George Mason. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, honoring recently deceased heroes like Washington was accompanied by celebrations commemorating earlier "American" heroes such as John Smith.<sup>6</sup> While 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans included Smith in the pantheon of early founders to celebrate, early founders, such as Thomas Jefferson, also expressed their appreciation for stories of Smith.<sup>7</sup>

Simultaneous to the exaltation of Smith and Jamestown and the weaving of their narratives into national identity were the New Englanders' celebrations of early Puritans. New Englanders saw the Puritans as being the ones who had laid the moral and intellectual groundwork for the Revolution.<sup>8</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Massachusetts would celebrate "Pilgrim Day," in which they revered Plymouth and constructed their own origin narratives concerning the Pilgrims. Virginians, likewise, held "Jamestown Jubilees" during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where they would feature eloquent speakers emphasizing patriotic themes, theatrical performances, dinners, balls, and poetic tributes to heroes such as Smith and Pocahontas.<sup>9</sup> The Jubilees revolved around how Jamestown was the first English settlement of the United States, how

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<sup>6</sup> Tilton, 37.

<sup>7</sup> John Davis, *The First Settlers of Virginia: An Historical Novel* (New York: I. Riley and Co. by Southwick & Hardcastle, 1805), ix.

<sup>8</sup> Tilton, 37.

<sup>9</sup> David James Kiracofe, "The Jamestown Jubilees: 'State Patriotism' and Virginia Identity in the Early Nineteenth Century," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 110, No. 1 (2002), 35.

the first American legislative body was formed in 1619 at Jamestown, and how many other “firsts” occurred in Virginia, giving the Virginian celebrators much to build their collective state and regional identity around. An account of the first Jamestown Jubilee in 1807 states that it was a celebration of the “cradle of our nation,” and that, when celebrating the founding of Jamestown, “it is impossible to contemplate this event without feelings of reverence and sublimity. Nothing in ancient story furnishes any parallel at once to the humility and the grandeur of this incident.”<sup>10</sup>

Any celebration of Jamestown necessarily included a celebration of Smith. This was partially due to the fact that Smith was seen as the savior of Jamestown, due to beliefs that he had been a strong leader who dealt wisely with the Indians, motivated the colonists to grow food instead of look for gold, forced a “no work, no eat” policy, explored and mapped much of the surrounding area, and created a diplomatic relationship with the Indians through a relationship with Pocahontas. Beliefs that Jamestown was successful due to the love Pocahontas had for Smith can be found before the existence of the United States. For instance, in a 1755 issue of *London Magazine*, the following is declared:

Pocahontas easily prevailed with her father and her countrymen to allow her to indulge her passion for the captain, by often visiting the fort, and always accompanying her visits with a fresh supply of provisions: therefore it may justly be said, that the success of our first settlement in America, was chiefly owing to the love this girl had conceived for Capt. Smith.<sup>11</sup>

Many early Americans, especially Virginians, viewed Smith as a hero who not only saved Jamestown but also played a vital role in the existence of the new American nation.

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<sup>10</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Late Jubilee at Jamestown.* (Petersburg: Wm. F. M’Laughlin and J. O’Connor, Norfolk, 1807), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Isaac and Edward Kimber, *London Magazine* (August, 1755) Found in *The General Index as to Twenty-seven Volumes of the London Magazine, from 1732 to 1758 Inclusive*, Volume 24, *New York Public Library*, digitized 2007, 355.

Edmund Randolph said, around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “Let the Virginia patriot rather ascribe the preservation of Smith to that chain of grand events of which the settlement of Virginia was destined to be the foremost link, and which finally issued in the birth of our American Republic.”<sup>12</sup>

Jamestown and Plymouth, while both being seen as important to the early formulation of the United States of America, were each respectively preferred over the other by different residents holding sectional loyalties. State and regional identity influenced the formulations of national identity. Since Jamestown has the obvious advantage of having been established before Plymouth, those who wished to elevate Plymouth over Jamestown often argued that moral foundations were derived from Plymouth. Over time, as emphasis on state identity gave way to the emphasis on a cohesive national identity, the debate over Jamestown versus Plymouth evolved into a battle between the religious and secular. Those wishing to demonstrate a Christian and religious foundation for the genesis of the United States sought to elevate Plymouth over Jamestown, since Plymouth was established by religious Pilgrims whose primary purpose for colonization was allegedly for the sake of religious liberty. Jamestown, on the other hand, was cited by some as having more secular reasons for early colonization, such as entrepreneurship. Discourses of religion and capitalism would both harmonize, and at times, compete, as the historiography of Jamestown and the origin of the United States evolved during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The beginning of the United States of America also coincided with the rise of Romanticism, which influenced Americans’ attitude towards art and life. Genuine

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<sup>12</sup> Edmund Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Arthur H. Shaffer (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press for Virginia Historical Society, 1970), 25. (Originally written c. 1809-13)

antiquarianism, pride in liberty, and sentimental glances into the past existed side by side, with each state attempting to find their roots in an American, rather than a European, past. Smith and the romanticized story of his rescue by Pocahontas were perfectly suited to arouse pride and sentiment in early Americans influenced by Romanticism.<sup>13</sup> The rescue story of Smith by Pocahontas goes generally as follows. Smith was exploring the Chickahominy River with a crew of men, when he, an Indian guide, and two other colonists took a canoe into shallower water. While Smith was deep in the wilderness, the men he left behind on the barge disobeyed his orders to stay aboard and were killed by Indians on the shore. Smith, meanwhile, was also attacked by Indians. While his two English companions were killed, Smith used the Indian guide as a shield and defended himself against the attacking Indians. Eventually getting stuck in a bog, Smith was captured and brought before Opechancanough, brother of Powhatan. After being moved around from village to village, Smith eventually was brought before Powhatan, who offered to provide Jamestown provisions and protection if they relocated and acknowledged Powhatan as their ruler. Smith refused, and Powhatan allegedly ordered his execution. “At the minute of my execution,” Smith later wrote to England’s Queen Anne, “she [Pocahontas] hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine; and not only that, but so prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to Jamestown.”<sup>14</sup>

While there is insufficient evidence to proclaim that there existed an actual romantic relationship between John Smith and Pocahontas, Tilton suggests that sectional partisanship during the 19<sup>th</sup> century caused Southern, and specifically Virginian, Americans to present the

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in Jefferson’s Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 314.

<sup>14</sup> John Smith, *The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (London, 1624), 121.

relationship between Smith and Pocahontas as romantic in order to suggest that southern culture was the result of contributions from two races, thus separating southern culture from northern culture.<sup>15</sup> Despite fears and prejudices surrounding miscegenation, the construction of southern aristocracy often included, as a key component, hereditary blood from the noble, Indian princess. This became especially true during and around the Civil War, when Southerners sought to establish a separate, Confederate nation based partially on perceived racial differences between themselves and citizens of the Union. Since Northern writers could not dispute the fact that Pocahontas' descendants were conspicuous members of Southern society, they focused on attacking the character and veracity of Smith and the Rescue story. Both Northern and Southern writers used the flexible narratives concerning Smith to fit their own differing and often antagonistic purposes.<sup>16</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, political and sectional divides arose between the North and South for many reasons, but one of the foundational divisions was fostered from climate and geographical differences. The South was greatly inclined towards a more agricultural way of life, while the North's economy relied more on commerce. This difference was closely tied to the political divisions between the Federalists and Jeffersonians. Jeffersonians sought an agricultural-based economy, desired more power for the states, opposed the U.S. Bank, and had a greater power base in the South. Federalists wanted an industrial-based economy, more power for the central government, supported the bank, and had a greater power base in the North. Due to sectional divisions, which were intimately tied to political divisions, along with the association of Smith with Southern identity, politicians

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<sup>15</sup> Tilton, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 149.

and historians found themselves either attacking and defaming the character of Smith or praising and defending him, depending on where their sectional loyalties resided.

As historian Laura Polanyi Striker pointed out, “Smith, once scorned as a fellow without gentle birth, now ironically became the symbol of Southern honor. Northern historians attacked him as a way of undermining the South’s symbol of itself.”<sup>17</sup> As part of anti-Southern propaganda, Henry Adams, a grandson of John Quincy Adams, great grandson of John Adams, and a Northern Federalist, worked to discredit the veracity of Smith.<sup>18</sup> In a letter to his friend, John Gorham Palfrey, Henry Adams revealed that his attempts to defame Smith were meant to be “a rear attack on the Virginia aristocracy, which will be utterly graveled by it if it is successful.”<sup>19</sup> Southern historians, such as William Wirt Henry, grandson of Patrick Henry, refuted Adams’ attacks on Smith, motivated to defend his local hero and founding father and Southern honor and identity. Wirt Henry responded to the “great injustice done to our Virginia hero”<sup>20</sup> in several works, including “A Defense of Captain John

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<sup>17</sup> Laura Polanyi Striker and Bradford Smith, “The Rehabilitation of Captain John Smith,” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (November 1962), 480-1.

<sup>18</sup> For examples, see Henry Adams’ “Captain John Smith,” *North American Review*, CIV (January, 1867), 1-30, and, “Captain John Smith.” *Chapters of Erie and Other Essays*. Boston, 1871. 192-224.

<sup>19</sup> “Henry Adams’ Letter to John Gorham Palfrey, 23 October 1861,” found in *Henry Adams and His Friends*, ed. Harold Dead Cater (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), 15.

<sup>20</sup> William Wirt Henry, “Reply to Mr. Neill’s Account of Captain John Smith: Showing the Great Injustice Done to Our Virginia Hero,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, July 18, 1877.



Smith,”<sup>21</sup> and “The Settlement at Jamestown, with Particular Reference to the Late Attacks Upon Captain John Smith, Pocahontas, and John Rolfe.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, American narratives and uses of Smith have been influenced by events such as the Revolution and Civil War, by sectional divisions, political divisions, and competition between American origin narratives, such as Jamestown and Plymouth. Consideration and analysis of the ever-evolving presentation and role of Smith narratives within American culture can be extended beyond the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By looking at the plethora of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century portrayals of Smith, one can observe how recent events, developments, discourses, interests, and divisions have continued to influence the purposes and narratives of Smith, as well as see how American identity is reflected in and shaped by the use of Smith as an American hero. After the Civil War and Reconstruction era, Americans began to put less emphasis on state or regional identity and more into national identity. Alongside these changes, written works on Smith began to emphasize less his Virginian and Southern connections and instead focus more on how he was simply an American. In addition, divisions in America became less about sectional differences and more about political, ideological, and cultural divisions. This thesis will show how 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century works have continued to shape Smith into an American hero, an American prototype, and an American founding father. Built off of perceptions and constructions that emerged in earlier American history, more recent narratives contain both similar elements and deviating evolutions compared to the narratives constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a result of

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<sup>21</sup> William Wirt Henry, "A Defense of Captain John Smith." *Magazine of American History* Vol. 25 (1891): 300-13.

<sup>22</sup> William Wirt Henry, "The Settlement at Jamestown, with Particular Reference to the Late Attacks Upon Captain John Smith, Pocahontas, and John Rolfe," *Proceedings of the Virginia Historical Society* (February 24, 1882): 10-63.

shaping Smith into such important, influential, and foundational roles in American history, memory, culture, and identity, the discourses perpetuated by such narratives can be seen to have been influenced by the diverse events, mindsets, interests, politics, divisions, and self-perceptions of America and Americans. This includes conservative and liberal interest groups, religious and secular advocates, propagations of the concept of multiculturalism, as well as discourses supporting Anglo-Saxon white superiority, male superiority, environmentalism, and Islamophobia. Building off of and contrasting with the established analysis of the perceptions, uses, and forms of Smith narratives during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, this thesis will focus on the evolution of the narratives of Smith into the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this evolution evidence exists for both a continuation and deviation from discourses and narratives originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Such deviations include a national consensus of viewing Smith as an American hero, as opposed to the man being merely a sectional and regional hero; anachronistically constructing Smith's character to reflect modern mores and ideologies; and a greater diversity of mediums to spread portrayals of Smith throughout popular culture.

Chapter one will look at the construction and evolution of Smith as an American and as an American founding father. Chapter two will look at the ways Smith has been, and continues to be, viewed and portrayed as a hero, which include hagiographic writing, contradicting primary evidence, and demonizing or minimizing individuals in Smith's life in order to create contrast. Chapter three will demonstrate how Smith has been used by various groups, such as multiculturalists, Christians, and environmentalists, in order to bolster their positions and beliefs. Together, these chapters reveal how Smith has been constructed as an American founder, a hero, and as a proponent for various ideals and interests. All of these

dynamics are interrelated. Smith would not be constructed as a hero if he was not seen as American, and he would not be seen as American if he were not seen as a hero. Likewise, interest groups would not attempt to construct Smith as a reflection of their ideologies if he was not seen as an American hero.

This thesis will look at the discourses propagated by all mediums that provide the continual retellings and presentations of Smith in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Sources to be analyzed include scholarly monographs, textbooks, historical fiction, academic and popular articles, movies, cartoons, video games, blogs, monuments, and coins. By analyzing the continual evolution of the perceptions and uses of Smith, specifically within the framework of how he is related to American identity, one will see how the narratives of Smith have continued to be political, cultural, and social battlegrounds on which the discourses of various ideas and interest groups vie for power over defining American identity. Instead of attempting to establish how Smith *should* be portrayed, viewed, and used, this thesis seeks to show how Smith *was* and *is* portrayed, viewed, and used, and *why* and *how* these actions, attitudes, and viewpoints have changed or remained constant over time.

## CHAPTER 2: JOHN SMITH AS AMERICAN

Captain John Smith has come to be seen as a prototypical American by many, which is curious considering how little time Smith actually spent in the New World. The following is a summary of Smith's life, comprised of events and descriptions that his writings and the majority of historians' retellings most often include. Some events have been deemed too outlandish for some historians to take at face value, especially considering that they are sometimes based solely on Smith's own words. Other historians insist that his writings have never been proven false and that corroborations for many of his stories can be found. The purpose of this thesis is not to specifically argue for either side of this debate but instead show how significant the debate itself has been to ongoing perceptions of Smith as an American and a hero.

### Crafting an Image: John Smith's Colorful Life

Smith was born of humble beginnings in 1580 to a yeoman farmer in Lincolnshire, England, where he was baptized at Saint Helena's Church. He attended local grammar schools growing up, but at age 13, not wanting to become a farmer like his father, Smith attempted to run away to become a sailor. His father stopped him and forced the boy to work as an apprentice to a local merchant. When Smith was 16, his father died, leaving him land, but Smith decided to pursue the adventure he craved, so he left Lincolnshire and fought as a mercenary for Dutch independence from Spanish King Philip. After four years of this, Smith returned to England briefly, where he received an education in the art of war before joining a merchant ship bound for the Mediterranean.

As he was sailing from France to Italy, Smith, a Protestant, found himself aboard a ship full of Roman Catholics. When severe storms threatened the ship, some superstitious passengers blamed Smith for their predicament and threw him overboard. Smith managed to swim through the stormy waves to a nearby island, where another ship waiting out the storm offered to take him aboard. Once on its way with the new passenger, the ship was attacked by a Venetian vessel. Smith and his new companions fought back successfully, and they ended up boarding and plundering the Venetian ship, resulting in a profitable turn of events for Smith.

Smith then joined an alliance of Christian Europeans in their fight against the Muslim Ottoman Turks during the Long War, a border conflict over Balkan territories. He impressed his superiors early on in this conflict with various ideas and strategies, including a communication network of torches, deceiving his enemies by hanging burning cords emulating the firing of muskets in order to make the army appear larger, and making bombs from large pots filled with gunpowder, pitch, turpentine, and musket balls.

Amidst the battles, a Turkish commander challenged the Christians to send out a champion to fight him in one-on-one combat. Smith accepted the challenge and the two charged each other on horseback with their lances. After successfully impaling and killing the commander, Smith beheaded the man and took his trophy back to camp. The next day, a Turkish friend of the defeated commander challenged Smith to another duel. After their lances had shattered on each other's shields, Smith drew his pistol and knocked his challenger off his horse with one shot. Then Smith took his sword and added another head to his trophy collection. Full of adrenaline and pride, Smith then challenged anyone from the Turkish army to fight him. The Turks sent out a strong warrior, who would temporarily humble Smith. The

two exchanged pistols shots, but they both missed, so they turned to their battle-axes. Smith received a blow that caused him to be disarmed, and, as he dodged more blows from the seemingly superior warrior, most onlookers doubted Smith would survive. Young Smith, however, unsheathed his sword and managed to pierce the warrior through, and, of course, beheaded him. Twenty-two year old Smith was awarded promotion to Captain, a horse, sword, and gilded belt, and the Prince of Transylvania gave Smith a coat of arms depicting three decapitated Turkish heads.

The Captain's luck soon changed when, after a devastating battle, Smith found himself gravely wounded and lying on a battlefield surrounded by thousands of mangled bodies. Pillagers found him and sold him at a slave market on the Danube River. Chained up, with his hair and beard shaved, Smith was forced to march hundreds of miles until he eventually ended up the possession of a Turkish noble named Tymor Bashaw, who owned hundreds of slaves and treated them poorly. One day, out in the threshing field, Tymor started beating Smith, and Smith managed to smash Tymor's head with a threshing bat. Disguising himself in the noble's clothes, Smith took a horse and traveled for weeks in hostile territory, hiding the iron ring around his neck that would identify him as a slave. Smith eventually procured passage with a French ship headed to England, helping battle two Spanish ships along the voyage before reaching his destination.

Having had enough adventures in in the Old World, Smith set his sights on joining an expedition to the New World. Smith signed up with the Virginia Company of London to attempt the founding of a colony in America, and he set sail with 105 colonists and 39 crewmen in three ships on December 20, 1606. During the voyage, Smith was accused of plotting mutiny and was chained up and almost hanged. When the colonists landed, they

opened a box from the Virginia Company that held the names of seven men who had been chosen to serve on a leading council for Jamestown. The names on the list included Christopher Newport, Edward Maria Wingfield, Bartholomew Gosnold, John Ratcliffe, John Martin, George Kendall, and, to the dismay of some of the nobles, John Smith. Due to his rank as Captain, previous exploits, and involvement in the planning of the expedition, the Virginia Company saw Smith as worthy of serving on the council. Due to his lack of expected respect for nobility, the gentlemen that sailed with Smith were displeased with the Company's choice but were forced to watch Smith released from his imprisonment and allowed to work.

Smith ended up leading a few men to explore the Chickahominy River, and when the river became too shallow for their boat, Smith disembarked and took with him two crewmen and an Indian guide who had been hired to assist with the explorations.<sup>23</sup> He ordered the rest of his men to stay on the boat, but they disobeyed and ended up being attacked and killed by Pamunkey Indians, a tribe that was part of the Powhatan Confederacy. Smith and the men with him were also ambushed. The Captain grabbed the Indian guide and used the man as a shield as he shot back at his attackers with his pistol. While fighting off his attackers, Smith fell into a swamp, surrendered, and was taken to Opechancanough, Powhatan's brother. Smith used his wits, story-telling, and compass to beguile the Indians, who eventually took him to Chief Powhatan, the powerful paramount chief of a confederation encompassing at least 30 tribes of Algonquian-speaking Indians. Smith was treated well, and then he and Powhatan exchanged stories. After some time had passed, Powhatan suddenly ordered that Smith should be executed, but before this could take place, Pocahontas threw herself on the

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Maria Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia," Edited by Charles Deane (Boston: 1860), 31.

captive and begged her father to spare Smith's life. Her father consented and agreed to let Smith return back to Jamestown, stating that as long as Smith sent back some cannons and a grindstone, Smith would be considered a son and a chief.

After having been gone for almost a month,<sup>24</sup> Smith returned to the colony with Native Americans bearing gifts, finding that only 40 colonists were still alive. Some were planning on sailing back to England, but Smith stopped them, wanting to keep Jamestown preserved. Even after Jamestown accidentally burned to the ground in 1608, due to carelessness, the colonists were able to survive and rebuild, with the help of gifts from Powhatan. Smith urged the colonists to focus on producing food instead of searching for gold, despite the wishes of the Virginia Company. Shortly thereafter, Smith was stung by a stingray's poisonous tail, and, though his fellow colonists thought that Smith might have died, Smith recovered and killed and ate the stingray that had injured him.

Eventually Smith was elected as president of the colony, after which he declared that those who did not work would not eat. He ruled very strictly, and he had several violent encounters with surrounding Native Americans. In 1609, the gunpowder bag attached to Smith's side caught a spark and ignited. The resulting explosion injured Smith to the degree where he had to sail back to England to get treatment. He wrote several books in England and, after recovering, was also able to sail to northeastern America to explore and make maps in 1614. It was on this voyage that Smith gave New England and Plymouth their names. Smith attempted to sail back to Virginia, but he was denied permission by the Virginia Company of London.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 32.



In 1615, Smith attempted to return to Plymouth again, but storms and pirates ruined the voyage. In his first outing that year, storms nearly destroyed the ship Smith was sailing on. Then, in a second attempt, Smith and his men were ambushed by French pirates who were taking advantage of the increased traffic between Europe and the Americas. Smith and his men were held captive by French pirates, but were eventually told that they would be released. Wanting to return to England instead of continuing to America, Smith's men mutinied and took their ship back to England, leaving Smith with the French pirates. Smith continued writing and helped the French pirates fight the Spanish, but he was never granted a fair share or his release. The French captains threatened to send Smith to prison unless he signed a paper declaring that the French ship was innocent of piracy. Instead of doing as they wished, Smith escaped the ship during a stormy night on a small lifeboat.

Back in England, Smith attempted to return to the New World, but he was continually denied the opportunity. Sir Francis Bacon, who served as attorney general and Lord Chancellor of England and who is best known for his contributions to the scientific method, declined Smith a sponsorship. The London Council found it too expensive to send more troops to Jamestown, even though it had just lost hundreds of colonists due to Native American attacks, and the Pilgrims did not want John Smith to accompany them to Plymouth, although they did take his books and maps with them. Smith stayed in England and continued writing and publishing about his exploits and the New World, until he died in 1631.

### Creating an “American” Image

As shown above, Smith spent very little of his life in America. He was born in England, died in England, and spent only a few years in America, nearly 170 years prior to the American Revolutionary War. Yet, despite these facts, he has come to be described by many as, not only an American, but an American hero, an American founding father, and the American who gave birth to the American Dream. The poet Stephen Vincent Benet reflects this sentiment, when he said of Smith in 1943, “He is one of the first Americans we know, and we can claim him, though not by bond of birth, for we’ve always bred chimeras.”<sup>25</sup>

The term “American” can and does mean different things to different people. While “American” can refer to a native or inhabitant of North or South America, it should be noted that the sources provided in this thesis almost exclusively define the term “American” to mean that which is of, relating to, or characteristic of the United States or its inhabitants. A few sources addressed below deal with the differing definitions and uses of the term “American,” but most who use it to describe Captain John Smith are using the term to refer to the United States of America.

“American” is an adjective that seeks to categorize and define individuals, areas, methods, cultures, etc., at the exclusion of that which is deemed non-American. This category was extended by many, far outside the limitations of the existence of the United States, back to the early 1600s to encompass Smith. This process can be seen as necessary for those who wish to define what American means today by looking to those seen as progenitors of the

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Vincent Benet, *Western Star* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1943), 72.

characteristics and ideals of America. It should be disclosed that I do not assume there is one set definition for what it means to be American, but instead, I am merely seeking to show the varying definitions of what it means to be American provided within different portrayals and narratives of Captain John Smith.

Historian David James Kiracofe contends that, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jamestown, being the oldest permanent English settlement in the New World, was commonly perceived as ultimately leading to the United States and the birth of the American experience.<sup>26</sup> No other figure, according to Kiracofe, was more closely linked to the founding of Jamestown by 19<sup>th</sup> century celebrators than was John Smith.<sup>27</sup> Associating John Smith with the eventual birth of the United States of America, and viewing him as a hero and a progenitor of America and American characteristics did not just take place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it has proliferated during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as well, leading many modern Americans to view Smith as one of the first Americans responsible for giving birth to the American dream and being an American founding father.

The past century in American historical scholarship, literature, and popular culture have produced numerous portrayals of Smith, all contributing to the ever-evolving perceptions and image of the man especially in regards to bolstering his image as an American and as a founding father. Randolph G. Adams, in his article, “Notes on the Engraved Portraits of Captain John Smith,” which was published in 1941, states the general assumption that Smith not only belongs in American history, but that he is a vital part of it. “Few characters in American history,” Adams wrote, “have such a perennial appeal as does

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<sup>26</sup> Kiracofe, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 47.

Captain John Smith. It would hardly be proper to produce a text book without reference to him, and literally thousands such elementary American histories have reproduced his portrait.”<sup>28</sup>

Indeed one would now be hard pressed to find a textbook or volume of American history that not only lacks stories of Smith, but also does not imply that Smith was crucial to the creation of the United States of America. For instance, *The Complete Book of U.S. History*, published in 2001, states that, in 1607, Virginia became the first English colony in America, and that by 1732, the colonies numbered thirteen, which we know soon united to become the United States.<sup>29</sup> The textbook also states that one man and one crop were what helped Jamestown, the first settlement of the first colony that led to the United States, succeed. The crop was tobacco, and the man was Captain John Smith.<sup>30</sup>

Another American history textbook, *A History of the United States: Inventing America*, published in 2003, cites Jamestown as being the place of origin for Virginia and the United States, and it attributes the success of Jamestown and the survival of its settlers to Smith. The textbook connects the settlers’ good relations and learning from the Indians, as well as the colonists’ work ethic, to the efforts and abilities of Smith, claiming that his actions “lowered the death rate substantially.”<sup>31</sup> A plethora of other American history textbooks and

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<sup>28</sup> Randolph G. Adams, “Notes on the Engraved Portraits of Captain John Smith,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Second Series, Vol. 21, No. 1 (January 1941), 27.

<sup>29</sup> American Education Publishing, *The Complete Book of U.S. History* (Columbus: School Specialty Publishing, 2001), 54.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> Pauline Maier, Merritt Roe Smith, Alexander Keyssar, & Daniel J. Kevles, *A History of the United States: Inventing America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 56.

volumes contain similar inclusions and treatments of Smith when explaining the history of the United States.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to perceiving Smith as vital to the existence of America's first colony, many historians in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries associate Smith with the ideals and self-perceptions currently held by Americans, among them being the idea of a self-made man, America being a land of opportunity, and the importance of and emphasis on the individual. In 1959, Edwin C. Rozwenc described a Smith that was not only brave and adventurous, in his article "Captain John Smith's Image of America," but also a self-made man with a "magnificent dream of America's possibilities."<sup>33</sup> What Smith allegedly saw in America, according to Rozwenc, is very close to the present ideals that many Americans now revere. Rozwenc wrote that for Smith, "America was a land of opportunity, where men of enterprise might create a flourishing social order. The idea of America that is revealed in other portions of Smith's writing is filled with expectations of great opportunity for the individual."<sup>34</sup> To Rozwenc, John Smith was an American historian who expressed "the meaning of events in the origins of American experience."<sup>35</sup> He concludes his article by stating that John Smith's writings are now "an important part of the deeper cultural consciousness which has sustained this perennial faith in the promise of American life."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Examples include E. Benjamin Andrews' *History of the United States, Vol. I* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 115; *U.S. History Sourcebook* (Palo Alto, CA: CK-12, 2012), 13; John Bach McMaster's *A Brief History of the United States* (New York: American Book Company, 1907), 50.

<sup>33</sup> Edwin C. Rozwenc, "Captain John Smith's Image of America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 16, No. 1 (January 1959), 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

John Lankford, in 1967, continued the discourse that Smith possessed a noble vision for America in his book, *Captain John Smith's America*. He argued that adopting a critical view of Smith that casts doubt on his veracity is “a sad mistake, for Smith was one of the first Englishmen to see America as more than a get-rich-quick scheme.”<sup>37</sup> Lankford declared that Smith was one of the first to fall in love with America and see its potential. “Beyond the forests and Indian fields, Smith envisioned growing towns and cities and thriving trade and commerce. To him, America was the setting for a new civilization.”<sup>38</sup>

While there existed a general consensus among many historians that Smith held unique visions and views of America, some 20<sup>th</sup> century historians made even bolder claims about the man. In 1967, historian Everett H. Emerson wrote that “Captain John Smith is both the first American hero and the first American writer.”<sup>39</sup> Emerson describes this American hero as self-reliant, tough, and a leader of men, which is important, because modern day America would expect nothing less of its first hero. By citing and quoting Edwin Rozwenc’s assertions described above, Emerson clearly built off of previous historians that implied Smith was an American.<sup>40</sup> Also like Rozwenc, almost all the sources that Emerson cites are Smith’s own writings. There existed during this time in the historiography of Smith the general consensus that, if Smith said it, it was probably true.

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<sup>37</sup> John Lankford, *Captain John Smith's America* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), viii.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Everett H. Emerson, “Captain John Smith, Autobiographer,” *Early American Literature Newsletter*. Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1967), 18.

<sup>40</sup> See Emerson’s “Captain John Smith as Editor: The Generall Historie,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 75, No. 2 (April 1967), 143-156.

This unwavering trust is partially due to the work of Laura Polyani Strike, who disputed Lewis Kropf, who had attempted to prove that Smith was inaccurate and a liar. Kropf, a Hungarian historian, attempted to cast major doubt on the veracity of Smith's accounts before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1898, he made the following claim:

I have ransacked Hungarian sources and at the beginning of 1890 contributed a short series of articles to the *London Notes and Queries* (7<sup>th</sup> Ser., Vol. IX) in which I adduced more than ample evidence to prove that Captain Smith's exploits in Hungary, Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia as related by himself in the *True Travels and Adventures* are worthless and pseudo-historical romance....<sup>41</sup>

While some American historians disagreed with Kropf's conclusions, they lacked access to the Hungarian sources and the proficiency to analyze them. Striker, who immigrated to the United States from eastern Europe, published several arguments against Kropf's claims concerning Smith. Striker countered the claims of inaccuracies given by Kropf by delving into the esoteric Hungarian sources that were out of the reach of American historians.<sup>42</sup> This historiographical battle emboldened later historians, including Emerson and J.A. Leo Lemay, who pointed to Kropf and Striker's clash as being a shining example of how Smith's accounts should be trusted and not doubted.

In 1975, Alden T. Vaughan published the book, *American Genesis: Captain John Smith and the Founding of Virginia*. Vaughan addressed the argument of whether Smith should be included in a list of Americans, considering how Smith was born in England, died in England, and spent most of his life outside of America. Vaughan stated that Smith's

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<sup>41</sup> Lewis L. Kropf, "Communication," *American Historical Review*, III, (July 1898), 737.

<sup>42</sup> Examples of Laura Polanyi Striker's defenses of Smith include: "Captain John Smith's Hungary and Transylvania," in Bradford Smith's *Captain John Smith: His Life and Legend* (Philadelphia, 1953), 311-342; "The Hungarian Historian, Lewis L. Kropf, on Captain John Smith's *True Travels*: A Reappraisal," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXVI (January 1958), 22-43; and "Hungary's Role in the Life of Captain John Smith," *True Hungary*, No. 2-3 (1957).

credentials as an American are impressive, and he also provided a list of all of Smith's accomplishments.<sup>43</sup> Vaughan's book attempted to trace "the transformation of the errant dream of a soldier of fortune into an early American social order."<sup>44</sup> *American Genesis* portrayed Smith as an almost flawless hero, claiming, for instance, that Smith "ruled the colony almost singlehandedly."<sup>45</sup> Vaughan concluded his book by suggesting that Smith, "a hero of his adopted country," became the prototype of America itself.<sup>46</sup>

J.A. Leo Lemay's book, *The American Dream of Captain John Smith*, published in 1991, is another example of popular works on Smith that bolstered such American discourses. Lemay begins his book by declaring that Smith "fully formed an American dream."<sup>47</sup> He claims that Smith was unique and contrasts him with other writers about America who viewed the country in terms of England and the English. "He was the first person to hope and to believe that America would become a great empire."<sup>48</sup> Lemay believes that Smith transcended viewing America through an English lens, that a transformation from an Englishman to an American occurred, and that Smith could see that "America provided the opportunity for an individual's standing in society to be determined by hard work and achievement rather than social position."<sup>49</sup> Here one can see the continual association of

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<sup>43</sup> Alden T. Vaughan, *American Genesis, Captain John Smith and the Founding of Virginia* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1975), viii.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>47</sup> J.A. Leo Lemay, *The American Dream of Captain John Smith* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



Smith with a specific framework for what an ideal American should be, including self-determinism and a strong work ethic.

According to Lemay, Smith's autobiography, *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith*, is the "first American success story, describing the individual's rise from servitude and obscurity to fame and authority."<sup>50</sup> Throughout the book, Lemay describes Smith as the ideal American, possessing in pure form the characteristics and traits that Lemay believes should be greatly admired and respected. He says that Smith "valued individuals for their hard work and personal achievements, not for their social standing," that Smith viewed America as a place for personal transformation, and that Smith's writings became the first major vision of the American Dream.<sup>51</sup> Lemay attaches various American ideals, such as democracy and patriotism, to the character of Smith. "He was the only democratically elected governor of colonial Virginia," Lemay states. "His vision of the transforming experience of America made him the first person to celebrate the American, for the American, Smith believed, should be a new and different kind of person."<sup>52</sup> The ideals of Smith, Lemay asserts, reflect his self-made character. According to *The American Dream of Captain John Smith*, the idea of American identity was first praised by Smith, who "thoroughly identified with America."<sup>53</sup> Lemay also states that Smith envisioned America as an empire of the future that offered an individual the opportunity to re-create himself.<sup>54</sup> "It is

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 198.

Captain John Smith,” Lemay concludes his book, “who founded the American belief in the common man and who devoted his life to the greatest American Dream – the secular, unselfish, idealistic faith in a better way of life for the ordinary person.”<sup>55</sup>

Lemay’s scholarship represents a quintessential example of hagiographic portrayals of Smith that anachronistically constructs the man as a reflection and progenitor of American ideals and identity. While based off of previous narratives and perceptions of Smith as an American hero, Lemay’s work reveals emboldened and explicit claims concerning Smith’s ties to American identity, and it also reveals how portrayals of Smith have evolved to specifically cater to modern sensibilities and interests. While Smith has always been held by many as a hero to identify with, the man was often viewed as a Virginian or Southern hero during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Scholarship and portrayals such as Lemay’s reflect how Smith has become a national American hero that can represent the American Dream for all Americans, despite their region or state of residence.

Additionally, as mentioned in the introduction, Americans in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries often competed, as Virginians vs. New Englanders, Southerners vs. Northerners, or Jeffersonians vs. Federalists, over the nation’s cultural identity.<sup>56</sup> This often played out as competing definitions for the origin story of America, mainly through the divide between celebrating either Jamestown or Plymouth as the “better” founding colony. Narratives concerning Smith were either hagiographic, in order to elevate the Southern Virginian, or caustic and skeptical, in order to diminish the man in contrast to alternative narratives concerning Plymouth’s role in founding America. Again, an evolution can be seen in 20<sup>th</sup> and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>56</sup> Kiracofe, 43.

21<sup>st</sup> century narratives, showing that Jamestown and Smith are often unquestioningly considered the American origin story. One example is Tony Williams' book, *The Jamestown Experiment: The Remarkable Story of the Enterprising Colony and the Unexpected Results that Shaped America*, published in 2011, which purports that Smith and Jamestown are where one should look for the birthplace of the American Dream and the shaping of America. The book starts out by declaring, "The American Dream was built along the banks of the James River in Virginia."<sup>57</sup> Williams goes on to explain that the first permanent English settlement is where "the creation of the American character"<sup>58</sup> took place, and that Smith helped initiate the plan to colonize Virginia and shape the course that the settlement of Virginia would take.<sup>59</sup> The cover of *The Jamestown Experiment* displays a quote from American history professor Burton Folsom, who says, "*The Jamestown Experiment* is a thoughtful book and I recommend it to readers interested in how America became America."

These discourses extend beyond academic books and textbooks into popular culture. In 2006, Rosalyn Schanzer published a children's book entitled, *John Smith Escapes Again!* The book, published by *National Geographic* is fully illustrated, aimed at younger audiences, and in it, the author strove to be "as accurate as possible."<sup>60</sup> Listed in her bibliography is J.A. Leo Lemay's *The American Dream of Captain John Smith*, and Schanzer clearly builds off of his scholarship. She starts her book by asserting that Smith was "America's first genuine

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<sup>57</sup> Tony Williams, *The Jamestown Experiment: The Remarkable Story of the Enterprising Colony and the Unexpected Results that Shaped America* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2011), xi.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Rosalyn Schanzer, *John Smith Escapes Again!* (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 2006), 63.

superstar.”<sup>61</sup> She reaffirms Lemay’s perspective by stating that Smith’s books “gave birth to the Great American Dream.”<sup>62</sup> Continuing, Schanzer bestows upon Smith the title of one of America’s greatest heroes, and she lists some of the reasons why she believes it to be true.

Jamestown, England’s first permanent colony in America, would never have survived without him. He was a great leader: tough, honest, brave, practical, and fair. He respected the Indians and never tried to destroy them the way so many Europeans did. He worked hard and would go to any length to be sure that everyone had enough to eat. But most important of all, John Smith loved America and all its possibilities.<sup>63</sup>

Also in 2006, Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler published, *Captain John Smith:*

*Jamestown and the Birth of the American Dream.* The book highlights Smith’s “heroic deeds,” “hairbreadth escapes,” and “suffering and glory.” Using other primary sources alongside Smith’s writings, coupled with a handful of secondary sources, the Hooblers reaffirm the historiographical notion that Smith possessed a vision for America, and they also argue that he was a vital catalyst for the America we have today. They claim that Smith had a dream that a new kind of society would arise where anyone, no matter their position, could prosper and grow rich if they worked hard.

The authors purport that Smith’s dream inspired millions, even if they never knew his name, and that Smith’s character, determination, and ambition had propelled him to the top of society. “It was a powerful thought,” the Hooblers write, “one that had as much to do with

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 63.

creating the country we have today as anything Smith did to keep Jamestown alive. Smith founded more than a colony. He gave birth to the American dream.”<sup>64</sup>

David A. Price, author of *Love & Hate in Jamestown: John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Start of a New Nation*, wrote an article for *Britannica Blog* entitled, “The Real John Smith, Remembering Our ‘First President.’” In this article, he describes Smith as “one of America’s first presidents.”<sup>65</sup> This is in keeping with the stretching of the categorization and label “American” to reach far before 1776 back to the 1607 English colonization endeavors. It shows that many do not simply view certain Englishmen, such as Smith, as antecedents to Americans, but as Americans themselves, and, in the case of David Price’s Smith, an American that deserves the same title as the forty-four official presidents of the United States.

Many other books and articles have been recently published centering on the idea that America, American identity, and American characteristics find their genesis in Jamestown, and thus often, Captain John Smith.<sup>66</sup> A 2007 online article in *Time* magazine says, “Tough, romantic and arrogant, Smith was the original American rebel, which is much of the reason he looms so large in both the making of American mythology and the making of American history.”<sup>67</sup> A plethora of both professional and amateur blogs also cite Smith as an American,

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<sup>64</sup> Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, *Captain John Smith: Jamestown and the Birth of the American Dream* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006), 249.

<sup>65</sup> David A. Price, “The Real John Smith: Remembering Our ‘First President.’” *Britannica Blog*, September 10, 2008 (accessed December 6, 2012).

<sup>66</sup> For example, Bob Deans’ *The River Where America Began: A Journey Along the James* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Bob Deans, “Captain John Smith,” *Time Magazine U.S.* (April 26, 2007), 1.

including the first American hero,<sup>68</sup> the embodiment of the American pioneering spirit,<sup>69</sup> and the best founding father of the United States.<sup>70</sup>

As can be seen, there exists a large consensus among academic and popular culture publications that Smith was an American. There are, however, voices that question such sentiments. While Kropf challenged perceptions of Smith in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a more recent and evolved challenge to Smith comes from Jill Lepore, Professor of American History at Harvard University. In 2007, she wrote an article entitled, “Our Town: Four Centuries On, the Battles Over John Smith and Jamestown Still Rage,” which challenged the notion that America began with Jamestown and Smith. “That 1607 is being fêted as America's birthday seems, at first, absurd. Really, what's to celebrate? The English were far from being the earliest Europeans to settle on land that would one day become the United States. The Spanish settled at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565; by 1608 they were building Santa Fe.”<sup>71</sup>

Lepore describes how Yale historian Edmund Morgan sees Jamestown as having been a fiasco and a failure, and she also recognizes how others in the past have called for focus to be taken off of Jamestown and placed onto the Plymouth colony in 1620, because the Pilgrims were allegedly much better role models than those in Jamestown. Lepore writes that both sides are deficient.

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<sup>68</sup> Jackie Tremblay, “John Smith Praised as First American Hero,” *The Post and Courier* (February 12, 2006), 4E.

<sup>69</sup> Jennifer L. Larson, “John Smith: A Literary Pioneer,” *Documenting the American South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> John Sutton, “Captain John Smith,” *Williamsburg Private Tours*.  
<http://www.williamsburgprivatetours.com/CAPTAIN%20JOHN%20SMITH.htm> (accessed November 17, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Jill Lepore, “Our Town: Four Centuries On, the Battles Over John Smith and Jamestown Still Rage,” *The New Yorker* (April 2, 2007), 41.

Hence the American dream: arrive empty-handed, work hard, and get rich. Just as cockeyed, anachronistic, and overblown is a debunking tradition that damns Jamestown as the birthplace of the American nightmare: with corporate funding from wealthy investors (the Virginia Company), steal somebody else's land (the Powhatan's) and reap huge profits by planting and harvesting an addictive drug (tobacco, whose sales were responsible for the boom), while exploiting your labor force (indigent Britons and, after 1619, Africans). American dream or American nightmare, the bare facts about Jamestown have been dressed up and pressed into the service of either of these narratives.<sup>72</sup>

When asking the question of what it means to be an American, it is possible to further distinguish the various discourses and narratives surrounding Smith as an American as stemming from either patriotism or nationalism. In an article by Qiong Li and Marilyn B. Brewer, a framework for distinguishing these two traits is given.

Because nationalism and patriotism share the feature of positive ingroup evaluation and pride, they are positively correlated both conceptually and empirically. The difference between the constructs lies in their relationship to intergroup attitudes. Patriotism is compatible with internationalist values and cooperation, but nationalism is negatively correlated with internationalism and positively related to militarism. Internally, patriotism may also be compatible with liberalism and tolerance for diversity, but nationalism is more likely to be associated with authoritarian values and intolerance.<sup>73</sup>

By looking at the various narratives of Smith during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, one can observe varying degrees of either patriotism or nationalism permeating the portrayals. Some emphasize liberalism, tolerance, and multiculturalism within the constructed character of Smith, while others emphasize an authoritarian and militaristic Smith. As Li and Brewer point out, these disparaging concepts are often be mixed.

As two different sides of the same coin, it is possible that “love of nation” can be associated with benign patriotic attitudes under some circumstances or with more

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>73</sup> Qiong Li and Marilyn B. Brewer, “What Does It Mean to Be an American? Patriotism, Nationalism, and American Identity After 9/11,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (October 2004), 728.

malign nationalistic attitudes in other circumstances, within the same individual. Which conceptualization of national identity is activated may vary as a function of the perceived intergroup context, the salience of different national symbols, or the behavior of national leaders.<sup>74</sup>

Despite differing opinions and discourses, there has formed throughout the past 400 years the popular narrative of Smith as an American. The consensus between many, and the divisions amongst others, can both illuminate places where the narratives of Smith connect with American identity. Those wishing to influence the construction and perception of American identity can do so with either their adherence or divergence from the discourse that Smith was an American founding father. The next chapter will focus on how Smith has been constructed as a hero, which directly relates to him being perceived as an American. By portraying Smith as an American hero, the narratives of Smith can be seen to purport specific discourses pertaining to what an ideal American should be and what the ideal characteristics, values, and ideals of America are.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



### CHAPTER 3: JOHN SMITH AS HERO

Since the creation of the United States of America, Captain John Smith has been viewed as a hero.<sup>75</sup> Noah Webster provides an example of early Americans adulating Smith in his *The Little Readers Assistant*, which was published in 1791.

What a hero was Captain Smith! How many Turks and Indians did he slay! How often was he upon the brink of death, and how bravely did he encounter every danger. Such a man affords a noble example for all to follow, when they resolve to be good and brave.<sup>76</sup>

With the start of a new nation, early Americans began to scan their colonial past for figures like Smith, who could be integrated into a larger national narrative that would give a sense of identity and past to the new nation.<sup>77</sup> Political orators, historians, and letter writers “began to find in Captain John Smith heroic traits which seemed to them characteristically American: indomitable courage, self-reliance, resourcefulness, and faith in the future of the new land.”<sup>78</sup> Early Virginians also elevated Smith because they saw him as the founder of the oldest and largest State in the Union, a worthy forerunner of Washington and Jefferson, and also a chivalrous knight errant who served as the perfect prototype for the Virginia gentleman.<sup>79</sup>

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Americans felt the need to find a respected and appealing history from their brief and seemingly unromantic past, and they perceived that Europeans

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<sup>75</sup> Tilton, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Noah Webster, *The Little Readers Assistant* (Hartford), 1791. Found in Myra Jehlen’s *The English Literatures of America: 1500-1800* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 798.

<sup>77</sup> See Tilton, 33.

<sup>78</sup> Jay B. Hubbell, “The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 1957), 275.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

viewed America's past as plebian and commonplace. "Who reads an American book?" scornfully asked Sydney Smith in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1820. In attempts to achieve national greatness and meet the expectations held at that time, American writers and historians focused on producing important national literature. Stories of Smith, and especially the romanticizing of the Smith-Pocahontas story, drew the attention of poets, playwrights, and novelists.<sup>80</sup>

The development of early narratives of Smith, and how they were drawn upon for the sake of identity and culture, were similar to how ancient Greeks and Romans created and used mythology. William Free correlated Greco-Roman mythology and how many late 18<sup>th</sup> century Americans viewed the development of their national history. "Classical literature was the inevitable model...an American *Aeneid*, the ideal."<sup>81</sup> Those that were creating a national history for the United States "believed that one of their most important tasks was to write an American epic in the spirit of the *Aeneid* which would both catalogue the events that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, were seen as important to the founding of America and identify the spirit behind those events."<sup>82</sup> The association of Smith and Greek myth can be directly seen in the example of Joel Barlow, who, in 1807, drew similarities between the relationship of Smith and Pocahontas and the relationship of the hero Jason and Medea.<sup>83</sup> Another example is provided by Samuel Lorenzo Knapp, who referred to Smith as the "Aeneas of the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>81</sup> William J. Free, *The Columbian Magazine and American Literary Nationalism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 139-40.

<sup>82</sup> Tilton, 49.

<sup>83</sup> Joel Barlow, *The Columbiad*, vol. 2, 1807. Found in *The Works of Joel Barlow* (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970), 539-40.

New World.”<sup>84</sup> As will be shown, viewing Smith as a hero equal to the mythic proportions of a Greek hero has proliferated and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### The Scholar’s Hero: Lemay’s John Smith

An example of admiring portrayals of an ideal Smith can be found in *Fearless Captain: The Adventures of Captain John Smith*, written by Aleck Loker in 2006. This book outlines John Smith’s heroics, achievements, and national importance. He is described as having “cunning intellect,”<sup>85</sup> and a man that “functioned remarkably well in every foreign society he encountered.”<sup>86</sup> Smith “exhibited a high sense of honor, incredible fortitude, bravery, and a clear focus on his goals.”<sup>87</sup> According to the author, while he also provided invaluable works for future ethnographers, historians, and anthropologists, “John Smith contributed much more to America. His strong personality, his determination, and his skill in dealing with foreign cultures provided the bond that held together England’s first permanent settlement in America.”<sup>88</sup> Such admiration can find academic and scholarly citations, from historians such as Dr. J.A. Leo Lemay.

Dr. Lemay, who served as a professor at the University of Delaware, published several books and articles on Smith, and his scholarship represents a clear example of hagiographic

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<sup>84</sup> Samuel Lorenzo Knapp, *Lectures on American Literature* (New York: Elam and Bliss, 1829) found in *American Cultural History, 1607-1829*, ed. Richard Beale Davis and Ben Harris McClary (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1961), 145.

<sup>85</sup> Aleck Loker, *Fearless Captain: The Adventures of John Smith*, (Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds Publishing, 2006), 48.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

portrayals of Smith in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lemay should receive significant consideration when gauging the current state of prominent discourses concerning Smith for several reasons. His work is published by university presses, thus giving his books the status of scholarly work, and he has become very prominent amongst both academic and popular circles. Lemay is cited, quoted, and relied heavily upon by many who portray Smith in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Considering how Lemay's work is often seen in the bibliography of many other works, his work can thus be seen as foundational to popular discourses, beliefs, and strands of thought concerning Smith and his attributes.

According to Lemay, "Captain John Smith fulfilled the heroic roles of both the European Renaissance and the American frontiersman," and that "no Englishman among his contemporaries...achieved the triumphs in deed or battle of the indomitable Captain John Smith."<sup>89</sup> Lemay recounts common narratives of Smith, viewing the man's life and deeds as bordering the supernatural. When Smith killed his slave master and escaped, he emerged "almost miraculously in Christian Europe."<sup>90</sup> After being captured by Indians, Lemay says that Smith saved his own life with a "shamanistic display of a compass" and later arrived at Jamestown "again almost miraculously." Lemay concluded that "Smith's life seemed charmed – and his ideas proved indestructible."<sup>91</sup> Smith rose in rank in his regiment through "his extraordinary feats," according to Lemay, and that the adventurer "became Christendom's most renowned warrior" due to his successive single tournaments against three

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<sup>89</sup> Lemay, 4.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

Turkish champions.<sup>92</sup> Lemay continually reiterates that “no other Elizabethan or Jacobean soldier...achieved the deeds of Captain John Smith.”<sup>93</sup>

Despite the glorification of Smith’s violent military career, Lemay portrays Smith as later becoming disillusioned with warfare.

When the idealistic Smith thoroughly knew the devastation and pillage of the soldier and sailor, he found them disgusting. The realities of warfare belied the chivalric ideals that led Smith to his European adventures. Fame gained by plunder and death became infamy. The twenty-four-year-old Smith had learned to despise the actuality of warfare. He abandoned his early dreams, gave up his sinecure of three hundred ducats a year at the Hungarian court, and turned his back on glory bestowed on him as a famous Transylvanian army officer. Returning to England, he chose future adventures as a colonist.<sup>94</sup>

Painting Smith as not only a hero of strength and power, but as also possessing moral and noble features that transcended his combat prowess, Lemay describes Smith as respecting “courage and perseverance, fair-dealing and a kindly humanity, hard work, learning, and all skills, generosity and objectivity.”<sup>95</sup> According to Lemay, “Smith was not only the greatest colonist and explorer of early America, he was also its greatest visionary.”<sup>96</sup>

“Smith had more adventures than any other colonial writer,” Lemay wrote. “And what person among the later heroes had as many hairbreadth escapes from dangers and from death?”<sup>97</sup> Lemay does not cast doubt or skepticism on the tales of Smith, but instead, adds to the glorification. He also bestows more praise and titles to Smith in a variety of other areas.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 67.

“In an age before anthropology, Smith was the best ethnologist of his time. Just as no other American of his day had more adventures than Smith, so too no other American gave so many, or such detailed, exotic descriptions of Indian life and culture.”<sup>98</sup>

While some have criticized Smith’s writing as being full of exaggerations and aggrandizements, Lemay describes Smith as a realist,<sup>99</sup> asserts “he did not brag,”<sup>100</sup> and states that honesty was a commendable quality to Smith.<sup>101</sup> Smith could not stand a braggart, according to Lemay. “Smith had the good qualities that he respected in others, and he was himself the most courageous, industrious, persevering, skilled, benevolent, and humane person in early Virginia. He had not in him the stuff of which braggarts are made.”<sup>102</sup> Lemay repeats this assertion over and over, explicitly confirming, “Smith never bragged about his incredible feats.”<sup>103</sup> According to Lemay, Smith “combined practicality with visionary ideals. Though he appealed to honor, virtue, fame, and magnanimity, and though he envisioned a better social world in America, he tempered these ideals with common sense and brusque practicality....”<sup>104</sup> Lemay sees Smith as being vital to the success and character of the United States, and he even portrays Smith as having a degree of self-awareness concerning his alleged vital importance. “For Smith,” Lemay states, “the study of history confirmed his

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 84.

experience and his belief that the greatest achievements of all past empires finally depended upon the efforts of striving, aspiring, young individuals...like himself.”<sup>105</sup> Seeing Smith as benevolent, amazingly considerate, and nearly universally competent, Lemay’s portrayal of Smith can justifiably be categorized as hagiographic. His book, published by a university press, represents a quintessential example of how Smith has come to be portrayed as a hero by Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Historian Richard Slotkin points out that “the most potent recurring hero-figures in our mythologies are men in whom contradictory identities find expression: the white man with a knowledge of the Indians, the outlaw who makes himself an agent of justice or even of the law.”<sup>106</sup> This propensity can be seen in the hero-worship and heroic portrayals of Smith. Lemay demonstrates an example of finding and celebrating contradictory identities in the hero of Smith, when he argued that Smith was “practical yet idealistic, studious and learned as well as a man of action, a social visionary as well as a pragmatist, and a kindly humanitarian as well as a disciplined soldier and forceful leader.”<sup>107</sup> Lemay, and his contemporaries such as Emerson, Bradford Smith, Vaughan, and Schanzer, also find in Smith a man born of low status, who ends up being revered and elevated; a man constantly rebelling against his superiors, who also enforces harsh and strict leadership upon others; a man who heroically slays countless foes, who also values human life and is repulsed by war; and a man who dominates, outsmarts, and outfights Native Americans, who also is seen as a fair, kind,

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Slotkin, “Myth and the Production of History,” in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 86.

<sup>107</sup> Lemay, 100.

diplomatic multiculturalist. The contradictions within the character(s) and portrayals of Smith provide a constructed cohesion with which the reader, viewer, or listener can selectively highlight whichever exemplary trait is most convenient.

### The Child's Hero: Schanzer's John Smith

The constructing of Smith as a hero of mythic, but allegedly historically true, proportions finds an unapologetically blatant example in the previously mentioned book, *John Smith Escapes Again!*, written by Rosalyn Schanzer, and aimed at children. While admitting that the courageous and cunning Smith has been made into legend, Schanzer writes, “the real story might surprise you, it’s even more exciting!”<sup>108</sup> Schanzer describes Smith as a man of many talents, “from building North America’s first English settlement to mapping new lands and fighting major battles, John Smith never said no to a challenge.”<sup>109</sup> According to the author, Smith was “the greatest escape artist of his time...he freed himself from pirates, slavery, ambushes by Indians, and much more.”<sup>110</sup>

Schanzer begins her book by acknowledging that most people who have heard of Smith associate him with Pocahontas. “But did you know that John Smith was America’s first genuine superstar? At one time or another, this swashbuckling Englishman was a heroic warrior who won battles against impossible odds, a daring world explorer, a president, a mapmaker, a peacekeeper, and the author whose books jumpstarted the Great American

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<sup>108</sup> Schanzer, Cover jacket.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.



Dream of a better life for ordinary people.”<sup>111</sup> It is clear from the beginning of the book that the author intends to glorify Smith as much as possible, building off of previous hagiographic works concerning the man. Schanzer compiles anecdotes featuring Smith, beyond all odds, escaping death, capture, and slavery. When describing his military exploits in Europe, she writes that “John’s bravery and brilliant tactics had made him a superstar in the Austrian army....”<sup>112</sup>

While Schanzer highlights how Smith often risked his life in battle, or devoted his time and energy into hard and risky work in order to save and benefit the lives of others, she also glorifies the story when Smith uses an Indian guide as a human shield after being ambushed by a band of Indian warriors.<sup>113</sup> The devaluing of Native Americans compared to elevation of English settlers that Smith and his fellow colonists often committed is not criticized or contextualized, but instead, Schanzer’s portrayal of Smith’s stories are seemingly complicit in such discourses.

When Smith was captured by Indians, he “fearlessly and with great dignity” beguiled the Indians and saved himself.<sup>114</sup> When retelling the story of Pocahontas covering Smith’s head after the explorer was condemned to die, Schanzer says, “He [Smith] had escaped from death once again!”<sup>115</sup> No credit is given to Pocahontas for her role in saving Smith. Schanzer concludes her book saying Smith’s final escape was an escape from obscurity, which he

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 40.

accomplished through his “wonderful” books. “And so it was that his books gave birth to the Great American Dream of a better life on these shores. His ideas have made him a hero to this very day.”<sup>116</sup> Schanzer further elaborates on Smith as a hero at the end of her book.

And why is John Smith one of America’s greatest heroes? There are plenty of reasons. Jamestown, England’s first permanent colony in America, would never have survived without him. He was a great leader: tough, honest, brave, practical, and fair. He respected the Indians and never tried to destroy them the way so many Europeans did. He worked hard and would go to any length to be sure that everyone had enough to eat. But most important of all, John Smith loved America and all its possibilities. He spent most of his life trying to make this beautiful world into a place where class rank didn’t matter and where anyone willing to work hard could become a success. That sounds like a hero to me.<sup>117</sup>

In the concluding pages of her book, there is a short note from Schanzer, where she addresses the fact that Smith’s writings, and thus her book, since it is “closely based on John Smith’s own writings,” come from a “Western European, Protestant point of view” that “didn’t always present a well-rounded view of his Catholic, Turkic, Indian, or other opponents.” Despite this self-awareness, Schanzer does not try to contextualize her stories or illustrations for her young audience, and instead, she defends Smith and her choice by saying of the Catholics, Turks, and Indians, “They were his enemies even when he respected them, and if any of them were telling the story, you can bet they would be the good guys, and John and the English would be the bad guys.”<sup>118</sup> One could interpret this as a self-aware admission of knowingly choosing subjective, hagiographic discourses that elevate Smith above what primary documents and contextualization would reveal, and also knowingly propagating an uncontextualized, narrow view of those that were not Western European Protestants.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 63.

Schanzer, however, claims that she researched hundreds of sources to ensure that her illustrations “would be as accurate as possible.”<sup>119</sup> What is noteworthy about her illustrations, is that, while the Indians, Turks, Catholics, Frenchmen, Pirates, and Englishmen that opposed Smith are drawn with angry, upset, or fearful faces, Smith is usually smiling confidently, and often laughing at others. Not only do his smiles lack fear and express that he is having fun being nearly invincible, but Schanzer’s illustrated Smith, numerous times throughout the book, actually looks right at the reader, winking to him or her. This book, which presents itself as based on extensive research and claims to be as accurate as possible, at the same time seemingly admits to blatantly taking an uncontextualized slant. Its publication by *National Geographic*, an influential press respected by many Americans is also notable. Overall, Schanzer’s work represents another prime example of how portrayals of Smith have evolved into uncritical hagiography that construct him as a hero of mythic proportions.

### The Popular Culture Hero: Multi-media’s John Smith

Popular culture is one of the greatest links between Smith and American identity, for it reveals both how our perception shapes our understanding of the past and how our constructed narratives of the past shape our understanding of ourselves, especially our identity as Americans. Jason Dittmer provides a citation in his article, “Captain America’s Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics,” discussing the boundaries that makeup a nation’s identity.

Boundaries penetrate the society in numerous practices and discourses through which the territory exists and achieves institutionalized meanings. Hence, it is political, economic, cultural, governmental and other practices, and the associated meanings,

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 63.

that make a territory and concomitantly territorialize everyday life. These elements become part of daily life through spatial socialization, the process by which people are socialized as members of territorial groups.<sup>120</sup>

Dittmer asserts that one of the ways symbolic meaning associated with said boundaries materializes is “through the production and consumption of popular culture, which leads to the internalization of the mythic and symbolic aspects of national identities.”<sup>121</sup>

Popular culture, Dittmer explains, “is one of the ways in which people come to understand their position both within a larger collective identity and within an even broader geopolitical narrative, or script.”<sup>122</sup>

While Dittmer considers the fictional character of Captain America to be an example of popular culture’s process in connecting the political projects of American nationalism, internal order, and foreign policy with the scale of the individual, the same could, and should, be applied to the historical character of Captain John Smith, who has also come to embody American character, and thus, can be considered one of the “other territorial symbols from popular culture.”<sup>123</sup> Both of these captains’ characters can be seen to “embody American identity, presenting for the readers a hero both of and for the nation.”<sup>124</sup>

When such narratives and discourses are targeted at younger audiences, the effect is heightened because the young audiences are “at the developmental moment when sociospatial

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<sup>120</sup> Anssi Paasi, “Territory,” in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. J. Agnew K. Mitchell and G. O. Tuathail (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2003), 113.

<sup>121</sup> Jason Dittmer, “Captain America’s Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (September 2005), 626.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 627.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

frameworks are being formulated.”<sup>125</sup> Indeed, younger audiences are not only establishing the foundations for their developing beliefs and worldviews, but they are also easily able to associate themselves with protagonists of narratives with their imagination, and often unquestioningly accept hero-worship and exaggerated tales. Publications intended for a young audience, like *National Geographic’s John Smith Escapes Again!*, can be found in abundance across various media, including books, movies, cartoons, video games, activity books, and websites.

Historical fiction works aimed at children, such as *Surviving Jamestown: The Adventures of Young Sam Collier*, published in 2001, and *Blood on the River: Jamestown 1607*, published in 2006, are examples of portrayals of Smith which paint him as a heroic role model. These books are written from the perspective of Sam Collier, a young page of Smith, who looks up to Smith as a role model. A page was a young male servant who was seen as an apprentice to the man he was serving. Both books can be seen to reflect Dittmer’s assertions that heroes and symbols help shape, especially for young audiences, the boundaries, character, and scripts of American identity and nationalism.

Throughout *Blood on the River*, author Elisa Carbone portrays Smith as being firm, full of integrity, possessing a sense of justice and honor, a proponent of equality, level-headed, and a leader. Smith continually teaches, mentors, and cares for young Collier, making Smith not only a hero, but also a paternalistic father figure. Like many other narratives of Smith, while the Captain is portrayed as the hero, Edward Maria Wingfield is portrayed as his arch-nemesis. Wingfield was one of the biggest financial backers of the Virginia Company Charter of 1606, and he served as the first president of Jamestown,

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 628.

beginning in May 13, 1607. In Carbone's portrayal, Wingfield, unlike Smith, is a liar, quick to anger, violent, and believes that gentlemen are far superior to lowly commoners.

Throughout *Blood on the River*, Collier continually notices and wonders how Smith is so calm and levelheaded, even when he is locked up and will potentially be hanged.<sup>126</sup> Even when things seemed out of control, Collier saw that Smith was always in control.<sup>127</sup> Smith is described heroically and stoically throughout the book. "His back is straight, his chest puffed out. He does not look afraid, only determined."<sup>128</sup> Collier expresses that he is "impressed with Captain Smith's knowledge,"<sup>129</sup> and after hearing about all of Smith's accomplishments, Collier thinks to himself, "No wonder Captain Smith is unafraid of these pale, weak gentlemen and their threats. If he wants to, he will kill them with his bare hands."<sup>130</sup>

The author of the book indirectly addresses the accusations that Smith made up the story of Pocahontas saving him. In the book, after Smith tells the colonists of how Pocahontas rescued him from death, one of the colonists accuses Smith of making it up.

Captain Smith is on his feet in a second. He catches Henry [the accuser] up by the front of his shirt. "That little girl has more courage than you will ever have. And don't you *ever* call me a liar again."  
Henry cowers. "Yes, sir."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Elisa Carbone, *Blood on the River: Jamestown 1607* (New York: Penguin Young Readers Group, 2006), 27.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Almost all of the other colonists in the book are also admirers and followers of Smith. Reverend Hunt, the minister at Jamestown, gives counsel to Collier, using Smith as the role model to follow.

“You must learn from what you see around you,” he says. “Learn from Captain Smith – President Smith. Do you know why he is well liked as president while President Wingfield and President Ratcliffe were not?”

I know the answer because I have already thought about it. “It is because Captain Smith cares about all of us,” I say. “The other leaders cared only for their own comfort and their own gain, and for the gain of a few of their friends.”<sup>132</sup>

Throughout the book, Collier is mentored and trained by Smith, and the young boy’s life is saved countless times either because of Smith directly or because of the training and wisdom Smith imparted to him. Collier grows to greatly admire the man, and he describes when he has to say goodbye to Smith, “He reaches out his hand to shake mine – as if I am his equal. As if I am a man. His hand is leathery and calloused from the hard work he has done here.”<sup>133</sup>

Gail Langer Karwoski’s book, *Surviving Jamestown: The Adventures of Young Sam Collier*, also emphasizes a paternal and mentoring characterization of Smith.<sup>134</sup> She also has Smith address the accusations that he made up tales by having him impart to Collier the advice not to believe every tale he is told and that he “learned it was wiser to see a thing with

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>134</sup> Gail Langer Karwoski, *Surviving Jamestown: The Adventures of Young Sam Collier* (Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, LTD., 2001), 2.

my own eyes rather than believe the tales that men tell.”<sup>135</sup> The author then describes how Smith’s stories were not only fascinating but that, “every word of them was true!”<sup>136</sup>

Karwoski interestingly fills in Collier’s unknown background by making it exactly the same as Smith’s. Collier, according to the author, was the firstborn to a lower class farmer, and was to inherit his father’s farm, but instead chose a life of adventure over the life of a farmer. The author even has Collier’s birthplace be the same as Smith’s: Lincolnshire. In the book, Smith comments how similar he thinks Collier was to him, when he was his age.<sup>137</sup> This helps encourage the young readers, who are learning the story through Collier’s point of view, to identify themselves with Smith.

Similar to other portrayals, Wingfield is depicted in this book as an extremely arrogant, rude, foolish, and selfish person, who puts the colony in danger and often yells at Collier and Smith.<sup>138</sup> Wingfield and Smith are also contrasted by the way they treat their pages. While Smith is protective, invested, and patient, Wingfield impatiently abuses his page.<sup>139</sup> Additionally, Karwoski describes how prepared and brave Smith was when the colonists were attacked, always portraying him as the brave hero.<sup>140</sup>

The book ends with Collier saying farewell to Smith, and it reveals just how important the young boy was to Smith. “Smith reached for Sam’s hand. ‘You’re as near to a son as I

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 46.



will ever have, Samuel Collier, and Jamestown is the greatest achievement of my life. But the future belongs to you.”<sup>141</sup> Karwoski reveals how important Smith was to Collier. “Sam clasped John Smith’s hands. He wanted to thank him, to tell him how much he had learned from him. But he didn’t know how to explain what he was feeling. Instead, he said, ‘I won’t forget you. Whenever I think about coming to Virginia to plant this colony, I’ll remember John Smith.’”<sup>142</sup>

Another venue for discourses concerning Smith to reach audiences, particularly young audiences, is video games. Games such as Sid Meier’s *Civilization IV: Colonization*, released in 2008, features “Founding Fathers” that can help a player win the game, and among these “Founding Fathers” is Smith. The game provides a description of Smith, stating, “His bold efforts for the good of the settlement won him a permanent seat at the table of colonial heroes.”<sup>143</sup> Another video game, *Jamestown: The Lost Colony*, released in 2011, features the colonization of Mars in the 1600’s, mixing 17<sup>th</sup> century history with futuristic technology. While the player fights the Spanish and Martians, the clouds break and a heroic Smith is seen descending on a space vehicle, waving his hat in the air.<sup>144</sup> *National Geographic Kids*, in conjunction with Schanzer’s book, *John Smith Escapes Again!*, has a web-based game for children called, “On the Trail of Captain John Smith: A Jamestown Adventure,” in which children can interactively experience the adventures and activities experienced by Smith. During the game, players have the choice to either do what Smith would do, or what those

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> *Sid Meier’s Civilization IV: Colonization*. 2K Games, 2008.

<sup>144</sup> *Jamestown: The Legend of the Lost Colony*. Final Form Games, 2011.

who disagree with Smith would do. The “correct” answer is always, of course, what Smith would do.<sup>145</sup>

While the construction of a hero often involves portraying an individual with strength, prowess, charisma, skills, the ability to overcome life-threatening situations, virtues, and a meaningful impact on others, it is also very common for a hero to be portrayed as romantic, desirable, and even sexually appealing. Love stories and romantic admirers are often seen as essentials when constructing an ideal hero. The narratives concerning Smith have often utilized, over the past few centuries, methods of romanticizing and sexualizing Smith, especially through the rise of the mythical romantic relationship between Smith and Pocahontas.

While the majority of scholarly works admit that there is little to no evidence that a romantic relationship between twenty-six-year-old Captain John Smith and ten-year-old Pocahontas existed, many popular culture representations of Smith in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century have focused and expanded on the alleged romance. While weak conjectures concerning a romantic or sexual relationship between Smith and Pocahontas can be extrapolated from primary sources, the undeniable fact of the ages of the two individuals would unavoidably give such a relationship the label of pedophilia in today’s American society. Despite this, Americans and popular culture celebrate and elaborate on this alleged relationship via movies, like Disney’s *Pocahontas*, songs, books, and paintings. Such romanticized portrayals are seen as based on actual historical events, and, if they are historically accurate, then American popular culture is celebrating pedophilia. The cognitive dissonance that this produces has led

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<sup>145</sup> “On the Trail of Captain John Smith: A Jamestown Adventure,” National Geographic. 2006. <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/games/interactiveadventures/john-smith/> (accessed October 9, 2012).

to a transformation of the narratives concerning Smith and Pocahontas, specifically in the altering of Pocahontas' age. The mythologizing of the stories of Smith arises in order to construct the ideal heroic figure, who is both desirable and guiltless of currently repulsive acts such as pedophilia.

A book published in 1943, *Great Smith*, by Edison Marshall, serves as an explicit example of the sexualization of Smith. The cover depicts a topless, muscled Smith, with blond hair and tan skin, entering the room of a Turkish princess. The back cover of the book features various illustrations, including Smith being amorous with an English woman, a topless Pocahontas, Smith as a swashbuckling sailor, and Smith dressed in full chivalric armor. The back also promises “the story of a fabulous soldier of fortune” which includes “blood-rousing adventure” and “magnificent, lusty love-making.”<sup>146</sup>

An original copy of this book, which was made under wartime conditions in compliance with government regulations for the conservation of paper and other essential materials, contains a note from the author at the beginning.<sup>147</sup> This note is meant as a moving, patriotic message, encouraging and praising America and American soldiers fighting Germany and Japan. Marshall provides his readers, who are enduring a war, a hero in the form of Smith.

While the book portrays Smith as a cool, keen adventurer and fighter, what stands out in this particular portrayal is the sexualization of Smith. The book is full of his charm and suaveness, as he interacts with several different women over the course of his exploits. One scene, for example, features Lady Tragabigzanda, a Turkish woman who owned Smith as a

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<sup>146</sup> Edison Marshall, *Great Smith* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1943), back cover.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

slave, inspecting Smith's body. She admires Smith's physical attributes one by one, has him undress, and ultimately makes love to him.<sup>148</sup>

While not as sexually explicit as *Great Smith*, the MGM Studios' movie, *Captain John Smith and Pocahontas*, released in 1953, centered on the romance between Smith and Pocahontas. Played by Anthony Dexter, this Smith comes upon a naked Pocahontas swimming in a lake. While she swims away, Smith finds her later and attempts to woo her with his charm. She runs away, but her attraction to him becomes evident when he is captured by Indians, condemned to be executed, and then rescued by Pocahontas. Throughout the film, even after they are married, Pocahontas is shown longing for Smith, who is often too preoccupied with saving the colony or looking for more adventures to give her enough attention, but when Pocahontas gets upset with Smith, he charms her into docile submission by embracing and kissing her.<sup>149</sup>

The movie also serves as another example of portraying Smith as the near-flawless hero type. This is done not only by depicting Smith as a fearless, calm, powerful, honest, trustworthy, humorous, and dependable leader, warrior, and savior, but also by showing Smith winning the girl, who falls head over heels for him. Smith's heroism is also demonstrated by contrasting him with what every hero needs: a villain.

Akin to previously mentioned works, *Captain John Smith and Pocahontas* vilifies Edward Wingfield. The movie begins with Wingfield talking with his fellow colonists about finding gold in the New World. When one of the colonists speaks up and complains that Wingfield had no right to lock up Smith for insubordination, saying, "No one has done more

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>149</sup> *Captain John Smith and Pocahontas*. DVD. Directed by Lew Landers. MGM, 1953.

for Jamestown than Captain John Smith,” Wingfield expresses his hatred for Smith, and threatens that he may have Smith hanged. Meanwhile in his cell, Smith pretends to hang himself in order to get the guards to open his cell door. When they do, Smith incapacitates them and escapes. Jumping off the ship and swimming back to shore, Smith makes his way to the Jamestown settlement, but on his way, he runs into a band of Indians planning to attack Jamestown. Smith kills one of the Indians, and then warns Jamestown of the attack. With Smith leading their defenses, much to the chagrin of Wingfield, the colonists manage to repulse the Indian attack.<sup>150</sup>

While Smith makes peace with the Indians, through his wooing and marriage of Pocahontas, teaches and guides the colonists to grow crops and become self-sustaining, Wingfield only wants to find gold. In order to achieve his greedy ambitions, Wingfield realizes that if he finds gold, it will merely be taken by the Virginia Company, so he must ensure that Jamestown fails, so that a new company, headed by him, can take over the land. Wingfield resorts to stealing guns from Jamestown’s armory, arming violent Indians bent on overrunning the colony, murdering fellow Englishmen, framing others for his own deeds, and helping the Indians attack Jamestown. The movie climaxes with Smith dueling Wingfield in the armory full of gunpowder. After vanquishing Wingfield, a flame hits the gunpowder kegs, resulting in Smith leaping out of an exploding building, leaving Wingfield inside to be consumed.<sup>151</sup>

This movie, along with many other narratives of Smith in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, display the popular structure and categorization of the common mythical retelling of the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

stories of Smith through the use of three roles: the hero, the girl the hero gets, and the villain the hero vanquishes. These roles are filled by Smith, Pocahontas, and Wingfield respectively. There is a lack of historical documentation that would support such romanticized narratives, and there also exists historical documentation that either subtracts, casts doubt on, or directly contradicts such tales. Despite these facts that reveal that no such romance or marriage existed between Smith and Pocahontas, which would now be considered pedophilia, romantic narratives proliferate. In addition, despite documentation that can humanize, contextualize, or correct the demonization of Wingfield, narratives portraying him as a despicable arch-nemesis to Smith also thrive.

The movie *Pocahontas: the Legend*, released by Goodtimes Entertainment in 1995, serves as another example of popular culture's constructed mythology portraying Smith as an outstanding hero through fabrications and directly contradicting historical documentation. Smith is played by Miles O'Keefe, a tall and muscular individual with long flowing hair and a movie-star appearance. Smith stands out, look-wise and dress-wise, from the other colonists.<sup>152</sup>

O'Keefe's Smith is very cheerful, whimsical, and humorous, often displaying a playful devil-may-care attitude towards the colonists and Indians alike. As he plays pranks or acts silly for the entertainment of others, Pocahontas watches from a field and laughs admiringly. The two then run into each other in a field, and they both smile broadly and introduce themselves. "You are very beautiful," Smith says to Pocahontas. "You are very funny," Pocahontas replies. The film is full of Smith and Pocahontas flirting with their eyes,

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<sup>152</sup> *Pocahontas: The Legend*. DVD. Directed by Daniele J. Suissa. Goodtimes Entertainment, 1995.

which turns to them caressing and kissing each other, and ultimately to implied sexual relations in a scene where they are both lying naked together wrapped up in a fur blanket. There are several scenes full of sexual tension, and Smith is nearly naked in all of them, wearing only a skimpy loincloth. Pocahontas rubs mud all over his body, the two splash and play together in the water, and they kiss and caress repeatedly.<sup>153</sup>

In addition to constructing a sexual and romantic relationship between an idealized Smith and Pocahontas, the movie also focuses on contrasting a heroic, noble, and compassionate Smith with a selfish, evil, violent Wingfield. Wingfield is constantly being rude and cruel to the other colonists and Indians, and also to Smith. At the beginning of the movie, Wingfield accuses Smith of trying to kill him, and Smith responds that if he had tried to kill him, Wingfield would, by now, be giving the sharks indigestion. When their ship reaches the shore, Smith joyously runs across the beach and rolls in the sand, while Wingfield is carried by four other colonists on an elevated chair, as if he was royalty. Smith sees an eagle fly overhead, and he notes that it is a good and welcoming sign, but when Wingfield sees it, he takes his rifle and shoots it out of the sky, angering the nearby Native Americans who witnessed it. A Native American runs to recover the fallen eagle's body, in order to give it respect, but Wingfield stops him and aims his gun at the Indian. Smith tells Wingfield to stop, because there are Natives surrounding them, but Wingfield does not care. "Are you trying to get us killed?" Smith asks Wingfield, who responds, "It's a thought." Wingfield decides to let the Native take the eagle, and then he turns to threaten Smith. The two draw

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

their swords, but Captain Newport intervenes before they can fight. Smith later pulls a prank on Wingfield, which the entire colony finds humorous.<sup>154</sup>

The other colonists are depicted as not being fond of Wingfield, who yells at them to look for gold, even though they are certain no gold is to be found nearby. Wingfield also yells at and abuses the sick, who need medicine. Before leaving to obtain medicine from the Native Americans, Smith witnesses Wingfield's cruelty towards the sick and punches him. Newport again has to intervene to prevent escalation. While Smith is shown finding medicine and making peace with the Native Americans, Wingfield is seen abusing others, sabotaging efforts of peace, and leading violent Indians against the colonists. The movie climaxes with the hero Smith dueling the villain Wingfield to the death, which has no historical validity.<sup>155</sup> By portraying Smith's appearance, actions, and character as heroic and appealing, by constructing a sexual and romantic relationship with the beautiful Indian princess, and by contrasting Smith with an evil, unlikable arch-nemesis, this movie exemplifies how modern retellings of the roots of America have been mythologized, specifically in constructing Smith as a hero.

Probably the most popular and well known retelling of Smith and Pocahontas in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries is *Disney's Pocahontas*, which was released in 1995. The Smith depicted in this animated movie is tall, well-built, has perfect blonde hair and bright blue eyes, and looks similar to a Ken doll, the male-equivalent of a Barbie doll. Voiced by Mel Gibson, Disney's Smith is constructed into an ideal heroic and attractive figure, which looks nothing like the historical Smith. Pocahontas is portrayed as an ideally Barbie doll-shaped

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.



figure, who falls in love with Smith. She is also presented as being older than the historically prepubescent Pocahontas.<sup>156</sup>

The movie starts out in England, where the colonists excitedly discuss how the great Smith is joining them on their journey. Smith stylishly boards the ship, not by the wooden plank connecting the ship to the shore, but by leaping onto a cannon that is being swung aboard via a pulley. During the voyage across the Atlantic, a terrible storm besieges the ship, and Thomas, one of the colonists, falls overboard and sinks deep into the dark, tumultuous waters. Smith grabs onto some rope and dives off of the ship and saves Thomas with little difficulty.<sup>157</sup>

In Disney's *Pocahontas*, Smith is provided a villain, but instead of Wingfield being his nemesis, it is Governor John Ratcliffe who is vilified. Ratcliffe, who became the second president of Jamestown, is depicted as a fat, prudish, smug, devious man, who only wants "those witless peasants" to find gold for him, and he constantly fantasizes about being rich and powerful. Ratcliffe's laziness and greedy desires are contrasted with Smith's noble and adventurous efforts to explore and face danger alone to ensure the safety of the colony.<sup>158</sup>

The film centers on Pocahontas and Smith becoming attracted to each other and forming a romantic relationship. Pocahontas takes Smith to see the wise old tree, who describes Smith as having "a good soul. And he's handsome too!" Smith and Pocahontas kiss and caress during the movie, and after Smith is wrongfully accused in the death of an

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<sup>156</sup> *Pocahontas*, DVD. Directed by Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg. *Disney*, 1995.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

Indian and sentenced to be executed, Pocahontas throws herself onto Smith and declares, “I love him!”<sup>159</sup>

After seeing how his daughter was willing to give up her life for the man, Powhatan agrees to release Smith, but directly afterwards, Ratcliffe and a large group of armed colonists show up to make war on the “savages.” Smith explains that the Indians do not want to fight, and the colonists believe him. Ratcliffe, on the other hand, refuses to listen to Smith, and he grabs a gun and shoots at Powhatan. Smith sacrificially leaps in front of Powhatan and takes the bullet, gravely wounding himself. This act of self-sacrifice by Smith, in order to save the Indian chief that had just recently ordered his death, created a bond between the natives and colonists, ensuring peace and prosperity for Jamestown.<sup>160</sup> By completely disregarding historical evidence, Disney created an extremely popular retelling of Smith that portrays him as a romantic and heroic savior of both the English colony and Powhatan himself. Here Smith has not only been constructed as a hero, but he has also been turned into a loveable and popular Disney character.

The narrative that Smith and Pocahontas were romantically involved, and even married, was, and is, spread not only through literature and film but also through song. In 1958, Peggy Lee recorded “Fever,” featuring lyrics about Smith and Pocahontas.<sup>161</sup>

Captain Smith and Pocahontas  
Had a very mad affair  
When her daddy tried to kill him  
She said, “Daddy, oh don’t you dare.”

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ivan Santiago-Mercado, “Peggy Lee Bio-Discography and Videography: Observations About the Song ‘Fever,’” August, 2011. <http://www.peggyleediscography.com> (accessed October 11, 2012).

He gives me fever  
With his kisses  
Fever when he holds me tight  
Fever, I'm his Mrs.  
Daddy won't you treat him right?

The song was so popular, that some considered it to be the hit that propelled Peggy Lee into stardom. This was untrue, considering she had already become a nationally known artist who had tunes selling in the millions. "Fever" was featured on many top Billboards charts, helped garner Peggy Lee Grammy nominations, and, in 1998, the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. After Peggy Lee released her extremely popular version of "Fever," numerous covers of the song appeared in a variety of musical fields, including teenage pop and lounge, both in the United States and internationally in Sweden, Brazil, Germany, France, and Finland.<sup>162</sup>

The song, featuring the lyrics about Smith and Pocahontas' "mad affair," has been covered by numerous other popular artists, including Elvis Presley, Madonna, Beyoncé, and Ruth Brown.<sup>163</sup> Madonna released a music video for the song, premiering on MTV in 1993, and she also performed it live on *Saturday Night Live*, the same year. It is safe to say that these lyrics have been heard by millions and have contributed to the propagation of the myth of Smith's romance with Pocahontas, reaffirming the myths spread through movies and books.

Despite the existence of contradictory evidence, the narratives of Smith created during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have largely become mythologized, exaggerated, and hagiographic, although all share the commonality of constructing Smith as an ideal, larger than life hero.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

Discussing the stories surrounding Smith, especially ones concerning the romance between Smith and Pocahontas, Jay. B. Hubbell makes an observation concerning Americans and myth-making.

Americans are perhaps as much given to myth-making as other peoples; but our early history is better documented than that of older nations, and the disposition to idealize the past has been held in check by literary debunkers, historians, and teachers of history in school and college. Most of the great literary legends of the world developed, like the greatest of them all, the story of Troy, in those credulous dark ages when there were no printing presses and no historians except the poets.<sup>164</sup>

Hubbell believes that printing presses and documentation have made it more difficult for myth-making to thrive in America, specifically concerning the Smith and Pocahontas stories, but considering the proliferation of the narratives, partially outlined above, since the time Hubbell made this observation in 1957, the existence of print and documentation have not proven to be hindrances. In contrast, the ability to support a segment of one's myth easily through printed, available documentation may actually strengthen and give power to such constructed narratives.

Bradford Smith, discussing how stories of Smith have turned into legend, wrote that the stories are “neither fiction nor fact. It is history interpreted through the emotion of those who receive it, it is history somewhat simplified but essentially true. It is our good fortune to possess a folk myth which corresponds with the facts, to be able to believe a story which not only should have been, but was.”<sup>165</sup> Here we see the obfuscation and blurring of the lines between fact and fiction, and even though the stories may not be true, it not only does not bother historians like Bradford Smith, but it gives rise to a narrative that is celebrated for being “essentially true.”

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<sup>164</sup> Hubbell, 278.

<sup>165</sup> Bradford Smith, “Captain John Smith: His Life and Legend.” (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1953), 282.

## CHAPTER 4: JOHN SMITH AS POSTERCHILD

Constructed as both an American and a hero, Captain John Smith has become a role model, a founding father, and a historical champion for various ideals and interests. Many seeking to legitimize certain agendas, characteristics, or beliefs as part of their perceived American identity look to their constructed images of Smith, who, as one of the earliest heroic American founders, embodies and exemplifies specific American identities. Historian Orrin Klapp points out that, “hero worship in America expresses our characteristics values. It reveals not only the traits we admire but also our fields of interest...and acts as a social and political force.”<sup>166</sup> With the belief that Jamestown is an origin story of America, and that Smith was the hero of Jamestown and a founding father, Smith has become a poster child for various interest groups who seek to bolster their assertions that their philosophies represent how a true American should behave and think. This chapter will focus on three select frameworks that have been anachronistically superimposed onto the character of Smith in order to find an early American founding hero that many can point to as a legitimizing source for their specific version of American identity, worldviews, and ideals. These three concepts will be multiculturalism, Christianity, and environmentalism.

### Captain John Smith as Multiculturalist

As quoted earlier, Noah Webster celebrated Smith in 1791 by saying, “What a hero was Captain Smith! How many Turks and Indians did he slay!”<sup>167</sup> Two centuries later, most Americans do not celebrate, at least not explicitly, the slaying of Native Americans, but

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<sup>166</sup> Orrin E. Klapp, “Hero Worship in America,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (February 1949), 62.

<sup>167</sup> Webster, 798.

instead, give laudation to those who display traits of tolerance, cultural appreciation, and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism includes both toleration and celebration of other cultures and peaceful and respectful coexistence with other cultures and races. Considering his manipulation of the Native Americans, the number of battles and deaths that he was either a participant in or initiator of, and his personal anecdotes concerning the “savages,” including the time he used his Indian guide as a human shield, the historical Smith seemingly falls short of the new social standards of multiculturalism. In response to the possibility that the Native Americans would turn their bows and arrows against him, Smith wrote, “in such wars consist our chiefest pleasure.”<sup>168</sup> There is a lack of primary evidence that supports the belief that Smith possessed a strong aversion to violence against Native Americans, and yet portrayals of Smith as a peaceful, non-violent diplomat persist. *Time* magazine wrote that Smith “was a victim of his time: the pivotal English figure in the first sustained Anglo-American culture clash, the accidental envoy who would cross the Atlantic but never bridge the broader divide between the two very different civilizations on opposite shores.”<sup>169</sup> There can be seen tension between the relative and evolving social moralities of now and the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and there can also be seen a strong desire to anachronistically paint Smith as harmonious to modern day mores and sensitivity.

One example of a work attempting to defend Smith from inklings that he was a racist or mistreated Native Americans is *A Patriot's History of the United States*, published in 2004, which covers “Columbus’s Great Discovery to The War On Terror,” and attempts to defend

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<sup>168</sup> John Smith, *A Map of Virginia and the Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia*, found in E.A. Benians’ *The True Travels, Adventures and Observations of Captain John Smith* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 194.

<sup>169</sup> Deans, 1.

Founders and icons of America from accusations of racism, sexism, bigotry, oppression, imperialism, and insensitivity.<sup>170</sup> Authors Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen admit that Smith organized raids on Indian villages in order to procure food and animals, and that such action garnered long-term retribution from the natives. “But Smith was not anti-Indian per se,” the book continues, “and even proposed a plan of placing white males in Indian villages to intermarry – hardly the suggestion of a racist.”<sup>171</sup> Pardoning negative behavior by highlighting perceived good behavior can be seen as an effort to contextualize Smith and avoid anachronistically judging him with current standards of morality. However these efforts are sometimes taken further by painting Smith as a champion for peaceful tolerance, cultural appreciation, multiculturalism, and even sacrificial love and respect for the Native Americans, despite the unavoidable opposite reality of Smith’s treatment and views of the natives revealed in primary sources.

The movie *Pocahontas: The Legend* highlights the story of Smith exploring the Chickahominy River with a small group of men, including Indian guides. The movie’s depiction of this event differs significantly from Smith’s own account. According to Smith’s primary account, he used an Indian guide as a human shield when attacked by a group of Native Americans. But according to *Pocahontas: The Legend*, Smith surrenders to the ambushing natives in order to prevent violence, and he pleads with his ambushers to take him captive but let his innocent Indian guide free. This is a complete reversal from the Smith of primary sources to a constructed portrayal of Smith that depicts him as one who puts peace and Native Americans above himself. Another example of the movie’s attempt to construct

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<sup>170</sup> Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot’s History of the United States* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), xxi.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Smith as one who reflects the current mores of multiculturalism is seen when Newport gives a toast to the king and Smith responded by toasting to “the people whose land we now share.”<sup>172</sup>

Lemay argues that Smith was “the Indians’ best friend....No other colonial Virginia governor treated the Indians as well as Smith.”<sup>173</sup> Moreover, “Smith tortured no Indians, executed none, and saved Indians when others wanted to slay them....If necessary to survive, he would slay them in battle.” On the other had, according to Lemay, “Indian tribes proved their relative contempt for the life of others. In contrast, Smith prized all human life.”<sup>174</sup> Lemay explains that though Smith described the Indians as “mere Barbarians as wilde as beasts” and “miserable barbarous uncivilized Savages,” he never thought that they were inferior.<sup>175</sup> They were simply at “different stages of socioeconomic, religious, and cultural development.”<sup>176</sup> While Lemay is quick to accuse critics of Smith as having an ahistorical view for labeling Smith and his fellow Englishmen as “invaders,” he does not have a problem with his own ahistorical view of Smith possessing a racial egalitarianism informed by factoring in the socioeconomic status of the Native Americans.

Disney’s *Pocahontas* can also be seen as a celebration of multiculturalism, mainly through transforming Smith into a sensitive, caring, and self-sacrificial individual who ends up, not killing or manipulating the Native Americans, but putting the Native Americans before himself. In this film, Smith’s openness to learn about the Native Americans, his love

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<sup>172</sup> *Pocahontas: The Legend*

<sup>173</sup> Lemay, 116.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Lemay, 119.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*



and affection for Pocahontas, and his sacrificial act of taking a bullet for Powhatan all portray a Smith with multicultural sensibilities. Throughout the film, the romance with Pocahontas is tied with their mutual interests to serve as intermediaries between their peoples.

Dr. Leigh Edwards argues in her article, “The United Colors of ‘Pocahontas’: Synthetic Miscegenation and Disney’s Multiculturalism,” that Disney’s portrayal of Smith and Pocahontas is actually an attempt that “justifies America’s imperial Manifest Destiny enterprise and symbolically expiates America’s guilt about the war upon Native peoples and the continuing attenuation of Native cultures.”<sup>177</sup> She posits that this version of the famous miscegenation story uses racial mixture and multiethnicity to develop its own particular version of multiculturalism. The film, according to Edwards, illustrates how different versions of multiculturalism have been commodified in popular culture, particularly in the not so uncommon practice of viewing a marginal Indian culture assimilate into a dominant Euro-American one. Edwards states that the film “essentially creates a liberal pluralism in which non-white peoples and cultures exhibit only superficial differences while gradually becoming homogenized into an Americanism defined by universalized Western concepts such as individualism and capitalism.”<sup>178</sup> Edwards also views the significant revision Disney made to the story, where Smith rescues Powhatan, as an act of reciprocity between Pocahontas and Smith, between his culture and hers, by showing that Smith was willing to offer the same sacrifice that Pocahontas did. This symbolizes an alleged willingness of each culture to lay

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<sup>177</sup> Leigh H. Edwards, “The United Colors of ‘Pocahontas’: Synthetic Miscegenation and Disney’s Multiculturalism,” *Narrative*, Vol. 7. No. 2. (May 1999), 148.

<sup>178</sup> Edwards, 149.

down their life for peaceful co-existence and racial harmony.<sup>179</sup>

The U.S. government has also contributed to the construction of Smith as a multiculturalist. In 2007, Congress authorized legislation for the U.S. Mint to produce a commemorative coin program that featured two coins celebrating the quadricentennial of the founding of Jamestown. Both coins, one gold and one silver, prominently feature Smith. The silver coin features the “three faces of diversity,”<sup>180</sup> which include Smith, a nameless American Indian, and a nameless African standing side by side. Despite the facts that the Africans that were brought to Jamestown at the time were traded plunder from a slave ship and either treated as slaves or indentured servants,<sup>181</sup> and that the English colonists manipulated and killed many Native Americans, Congress attempted to paint the situation as if a diverse group of equal-treated groups voluntarily worked together to bring about the success of the colony that is seen as leading to the existence and characteristics of America today.

According to the “Jamestown 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Coin Act of 2004,” Congress found that, “the Jamestown Settlement brought people from throughout the Atlantic Basin together to form a society that drew upon the strengths and characteristics of English, European, African, and Native American cultures.”<sup>182</sup> Congress also found that, “the economic, political, religious, and social institutions that developed during the first nine

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<sup>179</sup> Edwards, 158.

<sup>180</sup> “United States Mint Coins Top Three Categories in 2009 COTY awards,” *The United States Mint*, 2009. [http://www.usmint.gov/pressroom/index.cfm?action=press\\_release&ID=995](http://www.usmint.gov/pressroom/index.cfm?action=press_release&ID=995) (accessed January 10, 2013).

<sup>181</sup> “Jamestown Settlement Family Gallery Guide: From Africa to Virginia,” In *Jamestown Settlement*, 7.

<sup>182</sup> “The Jamestown 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Coin Act of 2004,” HOUSE REPORTS: No. 108-472, Pt. 1 (Comm. on Financial Services) and Pt. 2 (Comm. on Ways and Means). CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, 2004.

decades of the existence of Jamestown continue to have profound effects on the United States, particularly in English common law and language, cross cultural relationships, manufacturing, and economic structure and status.”<sup>183</sup>

Described as a depiction of “three cultures that came together,”<sup>184</sup> the coin can be seen as an attempt to construct the past as a multicultural and diverse effort that laid the foundations for the United States today, and it can also be seen that Smith, featured between the nameless African and Native American, is the posterchild that represents the contribution of Anglo-Saxons to the multicultural and diverse initiative that served as a foundation for the United States. Attempts to anachronistically portray Smith as a multiculturalist can often be seen as not necessarily trying to promote actual multiculturalism, but instead, as an attempt to defend America’s past from accusations of falling short of the standards of multiculturalism today. Since Smith is seen as a founding father who was vital to an origin story of America, it is undesirable to view America’s foundation as one lacking in respect, equality, and decency towards non-Anglo Saxons. Thus Smith is depicted as someone other than the person primary documentation depicts.

#### Captain John Smith as Christian

Not only have portrayals of Smith anachronistically superimposed current mores of multiculturalism onto the man, efforts have also been made to construct Smith as a devout Christian, reflecting characteristics of modern Christians, and thus, ultimately revealing Christian foundations and continuity in American society. It is clear that Smith held religious

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> “United States Mint Unveils Jamestown 400th Anniversary Commemorative Designs,” *Historic Jamestown*. <https://www.historicjamestowne.org/news/coins.php> (accessed November 12, 2012).

beliefs, judging by his words at the end of his life, “I comend my soule into the handes of Almightye God my maker hoping through the merittes of Christ Jesus my Redeemer to receive full remission of all my sinnes and to inherit a place in the everlasting kingdome.”<sup>185</sup> But while it is undeniable that Smith, like almost all of his fellow Englishmen, was a Protestant who believed in God, there is little evidence to show that he was very religious, motivated by religious purposes, or that he reflects the viewpoints of modern-day Evangelical Christians. Nevertheless, some still attempt to paint Smith as being a devote Christian that relied on Biblical principles and faith to save Jamestown, and some also use Smith in anti-Muslim arguments partially stemming from post-911 concerns.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, certain historians loosely connected Smith’s belief in God to overall success in his life. An example of this can be seen in the work of William Gilmore Simms, a poet and historian in the American South who wrote *The Life of Captain John Smith, Founder of Virginia* in 1846. The book details the life and exploits of Smith, and it claims that God had directed Smith’s footsteps.<sup>186</sup> In 2007, the Christian publishing company Sprinkle Publications, which sees itself both as a company and ministry<sup>187</sup> reprinted Simms’ book with the following description: “Without John Smith, who believed that God providentially orders history and that his own preservation could only be explained by the divine protection so evident throughout his life, the English colony at Jamestown in Virginia

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<sup>185</sup> Charles Dean, *The Last Will and Testament of Captain John Smith: With Some Additional Memoranda Relating to Him* (Cambridge: Press of John Wilson and Son, 1867), 2.

<sup>186</sup> William Gilmore Simms, *The Life of Captain John Smith, Founder of Virginia* (New York: G.F. Cooledge, 1846), 81.

<sup>187</sup> Lloyd and Jacqueline Sprinkle, “Sprinkle Publications Online Retail Store,” 2007. [www.sprinklepublications.net](http://www.sprinklepublications.net) (November 18, 2012).

would have perished in ignominy and defeat at its very beginning in 1607.”<sup>188</sup> Here we see, both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century, the perception that Smith was divinely favored and assisted by God.

Others construct the discourse that Smith ruled the colony with Biblical principles by highlighting the single example of him alluding to the Biblical proverb, “He who does not work, shall not eat.” *A Patriot’s History of the United States* argues that Smith saved Jamestown thanks to his leadership, discipline, and issuing of “the famous Biblical edict, ‘He who will not work, shall not eat.’”<sup>189</sup> Gary DeMar, in his 2003 book *The Case for America’s Christian Heritage: An Illustrated Journey of How Christianity Built America*, argues that at one point Jamestown had lost sight of God’s Word, but that when John Smith became president, he turned things around. But the only evidence given is Smith’s edict that “he that will not work shall not eat.”<sup>190</sup> DeMar also states concerning the founding of Jamestown, of which Smith’s Biblical leadership is considered pivotal, “There the first seed of English Christianity on the American continent was sown.”<sup>191</sup>

Gail Karwoski’s earlier mentioned book, *Surviving Jamestown: The Adventures of Young Sam Collier*, published in 2001, takes liberties to put religious words in Smith’s mouth. When talking to a Reverend Hunt, Smith says, “I’m convinced you take your orders from a

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<sup>188</sup> William Potter, “Description,” found in William Gilmore Simms’ *Life of Captain John Smith, Founder of Virginia* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2007), back cover.

<sup>189</sup> Schweikart, 17

<sup>190</sup> Gary DeMar, *The Case for America’s Christian Heritage: An Illustrated Journey of How Christianity Built America* (Powder Springs, GA: The American Vision, Inc., 2003), 27.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

higher authority.”<sup>192</sup> Smith also discusses, in Karwoski’s book, how the colony has spiritual needs and the colonists are in need of spiritual guidance.<sup>193</sup> Many of his responses and wording in *Surviving Jamestown*, instead of being based off of wording found in primary documents, are given a religious tone. When an angry Wingfield asks Smith when he became qualified to make decisions for the colony, Smith replies, “Since the Lord gave me a brain to reason with.”<sup>194</sup> Here we see an example of painting Smith speaking in a religious way, not as primary accounts reveal, but as the author prefers to see Smith.

A major motivation for some in constructing Smith as a posterchild for Christianity is to contrast him with Muslims. The basis for this comparison centers on Smith’s battles against Muslim Turkish forces before he sailed to the New World. Specifically, the romanticized anecdote concerning Smith’s duels with three Turkish warriors garners the most attention. The following is a dramatic retelling of a portion of the events given by Francis Lister Hawks, a preacher, politician, and historian from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in his book, *The Adventures of Captain John Smith: The Founder of the Colony of Virginia*.

The trumpets now sounded, and the conflict commenced. It was soon ended; for Smith, with his lance, thrust the Turk through the head, and he fell dead from his horse. Great was the shout of joy now raised by the Christian troops; and loud the lamentations among the Turkish ladies. The conqueror now cut off the head of Turbishaw, and bore it back in triumph among his comrade . . . This defeat was more than the Turks could well bear, and a particular friend of Turbishaw's . . . he sent now a special challenge to Smith, to meet him. The challenge was at once accepted . . . the Turk . . . was easily slain; his head was also taken from his body, and carried

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<sup>192</sup> Karwoski, 11.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 17.

triumphantly to the Christian troops. The triumph of the Christian forces was now great; but Smith's triumph was greater, for he was the special hero of the occasion.<sup>195</sup>

Doug Phillips, columnist for *World Net Daily*, an “independent conservative news network,”<sup>196</sup> and president of *Vision Forum*, an evangelical Christian organization heavily involved in politics, media, and American education, wrote an article about Smith entitled, “Our Most Politically Incorrect Founding Father.” In it, he observes how the monument in Star Island, New Hampshire dedicated to Smith, an American Founding Father, lies in disrepair. The monument was originally built in 1864 by Rev. George Beebe, who was inspired by the local lore that Smith had visited the Isles of Shoals and built a cairn of rocks there.<sup>197</sup> Phillips describes, “But once upon a time, the Smith Monument boasted a magnificent pillar crowned with the severed heads of three Muslim soldiers.”<sup>198</sup> Phillips labels Smith a “Christian warrior,” and claims the “decapitation incident celebrated by the three stone Muslim heads was just one of hundreds of vignettes from the life of a man who, like the Star Island monument itself, represents all that the political correctness police of the 21<sup>st</sup> century find so unacceptable: cool headed, firm resolve and manly confidence in the advance of Christendom.”<sup>199</sup> Phillips continues to construct Smith as an archetypal (and violent) Christian by saying,

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<sup>195</sup> Francis Lister Hawks, *The Adventures of Captain John Smith: The Founder of the Colony of Virginia* (New York: D. Appleton & CO., 1842), 27.

<sup>196</sup> *World Net Dailey*, [www.wnd.com](http://www.wnd.com) (accessed December 11, 2012).

<sup>197</sup> J. Dennis Robinson, “Our Monuments: John Smith Memorial,” [SeacoastNh.com](http://seacoastnh.com/monuments/smith.html), 1999. <http://seacoastnh.com/monuments/smith.html> (accessed December 11, 2012).

<sup>198</sup> Doug Phillips, “Our Most Politically Incorrect Founding Father,” *World Net Daily* (April, 2007). <http://www.wnd.com/2007/04/41081/> (accessed December 11, 2012).

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

But this man whose motto was *vincere est vivere* (“to conquer is to live”) would prove that faith in God and commitment to biblical principles were the stuff of leadership when it comes to birthing a nation...It was the simple, orthodox, manly faith of this gentleman adventurer for Christ that ultimately made him just the right type of leader Jamestown needed and earned him the name “Founding Father.”<sup>200</sup>

Philips goes on to compare Smith and George Washington, claiming that they both used their office to curb moral evil and to call upon the men of their day to worship God. He also claims that they have both been victims of “character assassination and historical revisionism from individuals who cannot reconcile their hearty manhood with their somewhat private, but nonetheless, orthodox faith in Jesus Christ – a faith that is evidenced in their correspondences, written records and formal acts as military and political leaders of the American people.”<sup>201</sup> Philips states that Smith spoke with reverence of the Lord and that he required that biblical law be honored to bring stability to the colony. “One example was his insistence that ‘if a man does not work, neither shall he eat.’”<sup>202</sup> It should be noted that this “one example” is the only example given of Smith requiring biblical law. Philips attempts to supplement his lack of examples with a couple of short quotations from Smith, including, “God plagued us with such famine and sickness” and “it pleased God to send Captain Nuport.” Grasping to find any reference to God made by Smith, Philips provides little evidence to support his claim that others, but not himself, are guilty of historical revisionism. Philips concludes his article with his recommendation that “on this 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of America’s birth at Jamestown, it is proper that we remember that it was hearty, manly

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.



Christianity that won the day for our ancestors, and only this kind of Christianity will win the day now.”<sup>203</sup>

During the quadricentennial of Jamestown, *Vision Forum* spoke out against the state-sponsored commemoration and held an alternative celebration because, according to Philips, “the official proceedings are mired in political correctness and ignore the hand of God in bringing Christianity into the New World.”<sup>204</sup> At least 3,000 attended the alternative, conservative Christian-based jubilee in 2007.<sup>205</sup>

A recent book entitled *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* edited by John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, contains an essay by Al-Shaikh-Ali entitled “Islamophobic Discourse Masquerading as Art and Literature,” in which the narratives of Captain John Smith are discussed. Al-Shaikh-Ali, who holds a PhD in American Studies, is a founding member of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists, current academic advisor to the International Institute of Islamic Thought, and a research fellow at the University of London, discusses how Smith’s *The True Travels and Adventures of Captain John Smith* “conveyed an Islamophobic message and legacy whose xenophobic content remains influential globally. Today, this xenophobic ideology is continued in popular fiction, films, pictures, and music. Fictitious thrillers and other contemporary literature like the religiously

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Quote found in Bill Georoux’s “An Alternative Jamestown Fete: Christian Group Says It Wants to Shine More Light On Role of God,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 11, 2007.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

based and enormously popular *Left Behind* series are key vehicles whose Islamophobic messages have reached millions of readers.”<sup>206</sup>

Al-Shaikh-Ali argues that Smith’s stereotyping of Muslim Turks as “so villainous, barbaric, and godless that they have to be fought and killed at all costs” could be considered “the first American Islamophobic popular fiction title, whose legacy stalks hundreds of contemporary Islamophobic but popular American works of fiction.”<sup>207</sup> Philip’s portrayals of Smith can be seen as an example of the Islamophobic discourses that Al-Shaikh-Ali outlines, and Philips’ construction of Smith as a symbol of a manly Christian and a Founding Father that helped create a Christian America is intimately tied to his attempts to celebrate Christian violence against Muslims.

Philips’ work has been picked up and reiterated by many, including a blog called “Whole Reason: Practical Theology for Thoughtful People,” which called for a new memorial to Smith that contains “the heads of our enemies enshrined in stone – on pikes.”<sup>208</sup> The blog cites Philips and goes on to claim that “our lack of ability to label evil as evil is foolishness masked as fairness, submission masked as tolerance.”<sup>209</sup> The blog describes Smith as “an ardent and outspoken Christian, statesman, and warrior” whose impressive exploits are shown in the rundown memorial in New Hampshire that was originally “adorned with three severed

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<sup>206</sup> John L. Esposito, “Introduction” in John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, eds., *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxxiii.

<sup>207</sup> Al-Shaikh-Ali, “Islamophobic Discourse Masquerading as Art and Literature,” *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 151.

<sup>208</sup> Whole Reason: Practical Theology for Thoughtful People, “The Disrepair of the Captain John Smith Memorial,” April, 2007. <http://www.wholereason.com/2010/09/the-disrepair-of-the-captain-john-smith-memorial.html> (December 11, 2012).

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

“Turk heads.” In regards to the monument of Smith being restored, the blog conjectures that it probably “won’t have three Muslim heads on top. But maybe it should, to remind the world that Islam has always been an enemy of freedom.”<sup>210</sup>

Another Islamophobic example can be found in a 2010 article for *Renew America* entitled, “American Tolerance May be Our Downfall.” The author, Bonnie Alba, argues that U.S. tolerance of Muslims is dangerous and she evokes Smith to support her beliefs. Alba claims that “for almost 1400 years, Islam’s response to anyone outside of their religion has been killing or enslaving them if they do not convert to their illogical belief system. From Mohammed’s perpetuation of war and murder, the Muslims conquered much of Asia Minor and other nations – all in the name of their war god.”<sup>211</sup> She goes on to say that “the 9/11 War declaration is not the first time Western Civilization has been threatened by Islam. Remember Captain John Smith, one of the founders of Jamestown? What is less known is that in 1600, Smith had joined Austrian forces and fought in the ‘Long War’ against the Muslim Ottoman Turks in Hungary.”<sup>212</sup> Alba goes on to summarize how Smith fought Muslims, and she outlines her beliefs of how dangerous Islam is. She ends her article asking, “Will we accept the presence of even moderate Muslims among us knowing their goal is to conquer and force us all to submit to Allah and live under their Sharia system of law? America is already experiencing such laws played out here. How far will our tolerance

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Barbara Alba, “American Tolerance May be Our Downfall,” *Renew America* (September 2, 2010) <http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/alba/100902> (accessed December 12, 2012).

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

reach?”<sup>213</sup> Here we can see examples of how fear of Muslims, specifically after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., has led to the perception and use of Smith as an exemplary and heroic Christian American whose violence towards Muslims is praised and admired.

#### Captain John Smith as Environmentalist

In addition to Smith being used as a posterchild for multiculturalism, Christianity, and Islamophobic attitudes, Smith has also been constructed by some as an environmentalist. Rozwenc claims that Smith was a man “who felt the power and charm of Nature in the New World.”<sup>214</sup> Smith, according to Rozwenc, was a tireless explorer who contributed much knowledge about America’s natural beauty. “No one can doubt that the natural beauty of the land cast a spell on the Captain.”<sup>215</sup> Others agree with this assessment. “He was the first American environmentalist,” Lemay claims,<sup>216</sup> adding, “showing the sensitivity of a landscape gardener, Smith suggests a scheme for making much of America a preserve.”<sup>217</sup> Lemay goes on to assert that Smith did not want trees to be thoughtlessly cut down, and that he wanted the colonists to carefully plan the landscape’s later appearance and use. In addition, Lemay posits that Smith wished to celebrate the American woods as a natural garden, and that Smith wanted to keep the virgin forest as “a natural preserve for the way

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Rozwenc, 34.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Lemay, 15.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 90.

nature was before the white man came.”<sup>218</sup>

The “Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail” is the first water-based national historic trail in the United States, and it was established in 2006 for conservation purposes and to commemorate Smith’s exploration of the Chesapeake Bay.<sup>219</sup> The Chickahominy Watershed Alliance, a coalition of environmentalists, businesses, and local governments, celebrates Smith, preserving his name and memory alongside their preservation of nature. The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail won federal approval in December and is overseen by the National Park Service. Environmentalists and other supporters pushed for years for the water trail, and they expected to attract history buffs who will follow Smith’s route through the bay and its tributaries.<sup>220</sup>

The Chesapeake Bay Program, partnered with the federal Environmental Protection Agency, seeks to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay Program celebrates Smith as “an English explorer who played a pivotal role in settling America.” As part of its education on the Bay, the Chesapeake Bay Program incorporates narratives and information concerning Smith, and it highlights the differences between how nature, animals, the land, and the water was in Smith’s time and present day, painting his description of the land in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a reminder of the importance of environmentalism.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Richmond Regional Planning District Commission, *Chickahominy River Recreational Access Study* (October 31, 2007), 19.

<sup>220</sup> Chris Guy, “Vienna Embraces John Smith Trail to Tourism,” *Sun Reporter* (June 3, 2007). [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2007-06-03/news/0706030034\\_1\\_fitzhugh-vienna-john-smith](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2007-06-03/news/0706030034_1_fitzhugh-vienna-john-smith) (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>221</sup> “Captain John Smith,” *Chesapeake Bay Program*. <http://www.chesapeakebay.net/discover/bayhistory/johnsmith> (accessed November 14, 2012).

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a non-profit organization devoted to the environmental protection and restoration of the Chesapeake, celebrates and utilizes the character of Smith, more uniquely than other organizations. In 2008, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation launched a faux presidential campaign, backing an actor guised as Smith. “Smith” ran on a platform to clean up the Chesapeake Bay and waterways nationwide. The actor Smith, in full garb and manner, traveled around giving speeches, appearing on local news stations, in television commercials and on *YouTube* videos, and soliciting petition signatures. The Foundation’s Smith said, “My vision is for a clean and restored Chesapeake Bay, with abundant fish, crabs, and oysters, a region with healthy farms and a vibrant seafood economy, just like in the old days.” In small print, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation clarified that it “does not endorse candidates. CBF is running a fictional candidate, Captain John Smith, to elevate the Bay and clean water in the presidential election.”<sup>222</sup>

The widespread internationally released 2005 movie, *The New World*, starring Colin Farrell as Smith, and Christian Bale as John Rolfe, with a budget of about \$30 million, promotes a Smith in tune with the environment. Much of the film, revolving around the love story between Smith and Pocahontas, consists of beautiful, lingering footage of nature. The opening and closing of the film are solely the sights and sounds of pristine American nature. Overlaying shots of nature, Smith’s voice is heard saying, “Here the blessings of the earth are bestowed upon all.”<sup>223</sup> His respect for nature is mixed with his multicultural respect for the Native Americans, constructing an idyllic picture of 17<sup>th</sup> century America through the eyes of

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<sup>222</sup> “John Smith Campaign Update,” *Chesapeake Bay Foundation* (June 24, 2008) [http://cbf.typepad.com/chesapeake\\_bay\\_foundation/john\\_smith\\_for\\_president/](http://cbf.typepad.com/chesapeake_bay_foundation/john_smith_for_president/) (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>223</sup> *The New World*. DVD. Directed by Terrence Malick. *New Line Cinema*, 2005.

Smith. His voice overlays shots of nature and Pocahontas, and he says, “My true light. My America. The fort is not the world. The river leads back there. It leads onward too. Deeper. Into the wild. Start over. Exchange this false life for a true one. Give up the name Smith.”<sup>224</sup> The movie contrasts the English fort, described as “hell,” with the Eden of a simpler life of the Native Americans that idealizes and spiritualizes nature. The film also starts with Pocahontas praying to the Great Spirit of the Earth, and later, when Smith is musing alone in nature, his audible thoughts wonder of a “voice” that he is now compelled by. Many movie critics and reviewers agreed that *The New World* was a “green” film that possessed environmental commentary and messages.<sup>225</sup>

In his study of hero worship in America, Orrin E. Klapp concluded that “hero worship in America expresses our characteristic values. It reveals not only the traits we admire most but also our fields of interest....The hero worship in American society reveals the run of our interest and consequently the fields in which heroes emerge.”<sup>226</sup> As can be seen, Captain John Smith has been used as a poster child to campaign, sometimes literally, for the causes and ideology of environmentalism. He has also been constructed by many to anachronistically reflect multiculturalist sensibilities. For some Christians, Smith is seen as an example of an early Christian hero, who brought Christian principles to the beginnings of America, and who provides an example of a dutiful Christian willing to proudly commit violence against Muslims. These are select examples of how Smith, being constructed as an

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Zachary Rubin, with comments by Jesse Stehouwer and Jeffrey Herrigel, “*The New World* and *Avatar*: How Hollywood Has Gone Green,” *Reel American History*. Leigh University Digital Library. (February 7, 2011) [http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/reels/films/list/0\\_46\\_9\\_95](http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/reels/films/list/0_46_9_95) (accessed March 6, 2013).

<sup>226</sup> Klapp, 62.

American hero, has been used by varying groups and ideologies as a model and poster child for their respective agendas.



## CONCLUSION

Though narratives concerning him have evolved throughout the United States' history, Captain John Smith has always held importance to the identity of many. Virginians, Southerners, Americans, and founding fathers have seen Smith as a vital part of American history and often as an American himself, despite the fact that he only spent a few years in North America approximately 170 years prior to the birth of the United States. Smith eventually even came to be considered an American founding father to many. The current narratives surrounding Smith have retained many of the discourses originating in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries while changing and shifting over time due to evolving and competing national, regional, state, and racial identities. After the Civil War, as sectional differences in the United States receded, Smith came to be seen less as a symbol of Virginia or the South, and more as an archetypal American hero. This shift can be seen in the numerous 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century portrayals of Smith as a national hero, instead of only a regional icon. Through dissemination via scholarly books and articles, historical fiction, movies, cartoons, coins, games, songs, statues, blogs, news articles, and preservations, the stories of Smith have become an amalgamation of historical facts and constructed myths, creating pseudo-historical understandings of the perceived origin story of America. As part of the hagiographic portrayals of Smith as a hero, the alleged romance between Smith and Pocahontas has been widely retold and repackaged, and several contemporaries of Smith have been vilified in order to provide constructed antagonists to contrast with Smith, the shining protagonist. Considering the importance and malleability the historical character of Smith possesses, one can observe how various groups and ideologies construct and utilize their own version of Smith to represent and propagate their interests. Recognizing how Smith has been

constructed as an American, as a hero, and as a poster child provides a basis for gauging the uses, understandings, purposes, and origins of evolving and competing historical narratives, discourses, and identities, particularly in regards to the construction and perception of what it means to be an American in both the past and present.

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