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Lost Memories, Lost Colonies

by

Emma C Smith

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

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ABSTRACT

The Roanoke Colony was the first English colony in America. The colonists were abandoned by the Governor shortly after the colony was established. In public memory, the fate of the colony is highly debated and has since become an American founding myth. As a result of the contested fate, the story of Roanoke has since become a blank slate upon which other legends can evolve. These legends become a window for historians into the insecurities of those who created them. This paper discusses why the English wanted to establish a colony, the popularization of Pocahontas, the history of marriages between Europeans and Native Americans in America, *The Lost Colony* play by Paul Green, and recent popular culture pieces that mention Roanoke. Each part of the evolution of this story holds meaning about the time in which it originated. Roanoke simply serves as the vessel through which we come to understandings about public memory and the history of mixed marriages in America.

Keywords: Lost Colony, Roanoke, memory, Native Americans, Outer Banks, marriage

DEDICATION

To my roommate, Caroline, who experienced almost as much stress as I did over the last couple years because of this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Joseph Peterson, who swept in and supported me when my original advisor moved away from the University. I would never have completed this paper without his encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Bradley Phillis for believing in my ability to write a quality paper while learning how to be the best teacher I could. His steadfast insistence that I would succeed helped me overcome many bouts of writer's block. Finally, I would like to thank the Honors College for funding my undergraduate experience and their help with my research process.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Lost Colony has a kind of inexorable pull, like a black hole, [...] You may think you are immune, but if you get too close to it, it sucks you in. You have to run up to the edge and veer off. Or else *you* get lost.”¹ This quotation, spoken by Chapel Hill professor Brent Lane to journalist Andrew Lawler, properly encompasses the history and legend of the Roanoke Colony. The mystery draws one in and encourages curiosity, which borders on obsession. Over the course of time, historians and creative minds alike have searched for the missing colonists, but along the way they might have gotten lost themselves. This phenomenon is the primary topic of this paper. There are many stories that can find their roots in the Roanoke Colony, but it is far more interesting to read between the lines and discover what they reveal about their time of origin. To trace the evolution of the Lost Colony, this paper must begin with the facts of the case. The evolution of the myth has taken many hundreds of years, as the event itself took place in the late 1500s. After years of trying to convince Queen Elizabeth, Sir Walter Raleigh finally received permission to establish a colony in the New World. In 1587, he sent Governor John White to accompany the colonists on this exciting new venture. Included among the women aboard was White’s daughter, Eleanor Dare. Raleigh hired Simon Fernandes to take the colony to Chesapeake Bay; however, Fernandes had other plans. Upon landing at the Outer Banks Fernandes abandoned the colonists on Roanoke Island, sailed directly to the Bahamas, and betrayed the English to the Spanish. But the colonists were resilient. They build Fort Raleigh on Roanoke Island. Eleanor Dare gave birth to Virginia Dare, the first English person to be born in America. Governor White returned to England on one of their other ships to get more supplies,

¹ Andrew Lawler, *The Secret Token: Myth, Obsession, and the Search for the Lost Colony of Roanoke* (New York: Anchor Books, 2018), 11.

but once he got back to England disaster struck. The Spanish attacked the English, and the Queen refused to allow any ships to leave England. White was not able to return to his colony, or his daughter and granddaughter, until 1591. When he did return to Roanoke Island, he found the fort in ruins. There was no sign as to where his family had gone except for three letters carved into a tree: CRO.

This is the myth of the Lost Colony. Sometime in the final years of the 1580s they disappeared without a trace, leaving only pain and mystery behind. Yet, American society cannot accept this to be true and so people come to search for the missing colony without ever considering that the colony might have never been lost. There have been historians who may have solved this mystery already. The most notable is historian David Beers Quinn, who wrote multiple books on the Roanoke Colony such as *Set Fair to Roanoke; The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyage to North America; The First Colonists: Documents on the Planting of the First English Settlements in North America 1585-1590*; and *The Lost Colonists: Their Fortune and Probable Fate*.² Some other notable historians on the subject are Helen C. Roundtree and Samuel A. Ashe. Roundtree focused on the Powhatan tribe, but makes a case for Roanoke, in her book *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians through Four Centuries*.³ Ashe was an earlier historian who wrote two volumes simply titled *History of North Carolina*.⁴

² David Beers Quinn, *Set Fair to Roanoke*, n.d.; David Beers Quinn, *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyage to North America*, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1955); David Beers Quinn and Alison M. Quinn, *The First Colonists: Documents on the Planting of the First English Settlements in North America 1584-1590* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1982); David Beers Quinn, *The Lost Colonists: Their Fortune and Probable Fate* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1984).

³ Helen C. Roundtree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

⁴ Samuel A'Court Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, 2 vols. (Greensboro: Charles L. Van Noppen, 1925).

Quinn is the most profound of the previously describes works, as he did the most research and writing on the subject.

However, the previous books focus on the truth of the matter. While important, that is not the focus of this paper. Arguably, The more interesting part of the Roanoke story is how public memory has affected it. In the academic world, David Beers Quinn might be a household name connected to Roanoke. The public eye is much different, and the story of Roanoke might be more connected to *American Horror Story*. The only thing we can count on for certain is that the story that lives in public memory has changed over time: “Memory is related to the objective notion of ‘history’ but is often a selectively embellished or mythologized version of events, people, and places that serves social or political ends.”⁵ Each slightly different story of Roanoke reveals the social or political anxieties of its time. The evolution of the story is a trail of breadcrumbs that lead us through time, showing us the changing environment of America along the way.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with the late 1500s themselves, as we can see the rising tensions between England and Spain through the justifications for a hypothetical colony, entitled “A Discourse Concerning Western Planting.”⁶ Richard Hakluyt was the author of this document, and had profound political influence in England. The second chapter explores the popularization of Pocahontas’s story in the 1600s, in which we can see how people were afraid of Englishmen abandoning their culture in favor of the native one. Even though Pocahontas was not involved in the Roanoke Colony, her story and its evolution reveal how the English might have responded to

⁵ Kenneth E. Foote and Maoz Azaryahu, “Toward a Geography of Memory: Geographical Dimensions of Public Memory and Commemoration,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 35, no. 1 (Summer) (2007): 125–44, 126.

⁶ Richard Hakluyt, “A Discourse Concerning Western Planting” (National Humanities Center, 1584), <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/exploration/text5/hakluyt.pdf>.

the Roanoke fate. The latter part of the second chapter veers away from Roanoke, in favor of exploring English attitudes towards Native Americans in a martial context. In the 1800s two marriages between Cherokee men and white women disturbed New England, showing us the attitudes about intermarriage and Native Americans that can be applied to the evolution of the Roanoke myth. The third chapter is devoted exclusively to the very influential play, *The Lost Colony*, by Paul Green. This play is crucial to the current memory of Roanoke because it brings the story into a more public eye. In many ways, *The Lost Colony* is about 1587 but in many other ways it speaks for the 1930s and the Great Depression. The final chapter deals with how story has evolved into something else entirely in the 21st century. *American Horror Story* and the Roanoke Zombie Theory exemplify our fears of things we cannot understand or reason with, or of the unknown. The whole of this paper is designed to “run up to the edge and veer off,”⁷ and to experiment with how myths and legends can teach us about the people who wrote them.

⁷ Lawler, *The Secret Token*, 11.

THE ROANOKE VOYAGES

English-Spanish Aggression

To fully understand the Roanoke Voyages, one must understand the relationship between England and Spain in the late 1500s. The entire story is underscored by rising tensions and competition between the two countries and their cultures. The New World was a minor theatre for the Anglo-Spanish War; however, the war had a major impact on the race for colonization and the fate of the colony. The Roanoke Voyages can, and should, be studied through the lens of English-Spanish aggression.

The “Spanish Black Legend” is a familiar phrase accompanied by images of the brutal Spanish Conquistadors. The narrative is embedded in popular works such as *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.⁸ Spain had been part of a century long mission to “retake” territory from the Muslim Moors—a mission dubbed the *Reconquista*, or the Iberian Crusades. In 1492 at Granada, the Spanish armies defeated the Moors.⁹ Catholic Spain was trying to continue the success of its *Reconquista* with ventures into the world, all for the glory of God. However, its actions were seen by the rest of Europe as the opposite of glorious. Protestant England was especially appalled and used the opportunity to mount a propaganda war against Spain and Catholicism that grew to be known as the Black Legend.

Spain’s continuation led it to be the front runners in the race to settle the New World. The Spanish claimed the continent of North America and expected that claim to be honored by the

⁸ Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, 1997.

⁹ Floor van Alphen and Brady Wagoner, “Reconstructing the ‘Reconquista’: Students’ Negotiation of a Spanish Master Narrative,” *SAGE Journals*, Memory Studies, August 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211033325>.

other European nations. However, a French group attempted to settle in Florida and met a gruesome fate.

Stalked by a Spanish convoy, they [The French Settlement] launched a preemptive attack, which failed. The Spanish subsequently attacked their fort, sparing only the women and children and a few who claimed to be Catholic. Pieces of the French leader's beard and skin were sent to Spain's new king, Phillip II, as proof of the massacre, news of which stunned Europe, given that the two nations were not at war. The message was clear: trespassers on this North American territory, claimed by Spain, faced annihilation.¹⁰

This instance is a perfect example of why the Spanish Colonialization period came to be seen as incredibly violent. However, since the Conquistadors considered themselves to be good Catholics, they spared the lives of the women and children. They also spared those who claimed to be Catholic because their primary mission in the New World was to advance the Catholic faith. The Spaniards also extended this harsh treatment to the Natives.

The Spanish treatment of the Natives is where most of the infamous Black Legend originates. Their abominable actions shocked the European nations. The following is a quotation by Scott Dawson, author of *The Lost Colony and Hatteras Island*, and its importance is two-fold. While he describes important and violent events, he fully participates in perpetrating "The Black Legend" with how he phrases the information:

The Spanish had in fact fed babies to hunting dogs and hanged people thirteen at a time in a misguided effort to honor the apostles and Jesus. They also burned Natives alive and shoved stakes down their throats, cut open pregnant women with swords and drowned children. Christopher Columbus himself even wrote a letter to King Ferdinand of Spain describing how he purchased Native girls to use as sex slaves and how girls as young as nine and ten were in high demand.¹¹

¹⁰ Andrew Lawler, *The Secret Token: Myth, Obsession, and the Search for the Lost Colony of Roanoke* (New York: Anchor Books, 2018), p 21.

¹¹ Scott Dawson, *The Lost Colony and Hatteras Island* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2020), p 27.

Unfortunately, the described actions were true. However, Dawson's harsh language and word choice continue to turn the Spanish Black Legend into propaganda even in 2020. The difference is who the propaganda is targeting. In England, it was to say that the Spanish were bad, but the English wouldn't be like them. In 2020, it is to say that the colonialists were bad, but modern Americans don't have to be like them. Protestant England looked on as the Spanish ravaged the New World and wrote about it, setting the tone for this period of history and modern culture. Though the acts speak for themselves, there is also an underlying tone of frustration at how the Spanish dedicate and act out their faith. The phrase, "misguided effort to honor the apostles and Jesus," stands out against the list of violent acts.¹² This phrase is key in turning these events into historical and modern propaganda.

Though much of the angry literature concerning New World Spanish atrocities was written by the English, there is one famous Spanish monk who spoke out against the violence that he witnessed. Bartholomew de las Casas published a letter to the king describing the brutal treatment of Natives and asked the king to stop giving out permissions to settle the Americas.¹³ In his letter, las Casas describes in detail the atrocities committed by the Spanish Conquistadors that he had traveled with. He argues that this effort to colonize the New World was not being done in a good Catholic way. The natives were innocent, and while he wanted to bring them the Gospel, he did not trust the soldiers that he was sent with to be good Catholics. He felt convicted to write this letter because the king was continuing to hand out permissions to Spanish Conquistadors, despite the conflict within the Church on the subject. Las Casas became one of

¹² Dawson, *Hatteras Island*, 27.

¹³ Bartholomew las Casas, "A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies," 1552 1542.

the most influential writers of his time as his letter spread past Spain. One of his readers, Richard Hakluyt, used las Casas's letter to argue for the "Elizabethan model for Colonization."

The philosophers of Elizabeth's rule, Hakluyt among them, argued that the Spanish failure at colonization was due to their violent treatment of the Native Americans.¹⁴ The Elizabethan model focused on trade, assimilation, and positive relationships. Hakluyt gives the following as a reason to put forth a colony in his *Discourse Concerning Western Planting*:

So many and so monstrous have been the Spanish cruelties, such strange slaughters and murders of those peaceable, lowly, mild, and gentle people together with the spoils of towns, provinces, and kingdoms which have been most ungodly perpetrated in the West Indies . . . I leave it to the deep consideration of the wise, what great matters may be brought about by our nation if her majesty . . . would put in a foot in that enterprise, and assist the revolted Indians . . . after one or two years planting there, and growing into acquaintance and familiarity.¹⁵

In this argument, Hakluyt references the cruelties of Spain and uses it to urge the Queen to place a foothold in the New World. He describes how that colony should function with the phrase, "growing into acquaintance and familiarity," to show the Elizabethan model.¹⁶ His language indicates his belief that the English colonists would help to save the struggling Natives from the Spanish. He describes the Natives as "peaceable, lowly, mild, and gentle," to present them as defenseless and speak to the idea that the English could save those less fortunate than themselves.¹⁷ The Natives have endured "ungodly" treatment at the hands of the Spanish, which

¹⁴ Dawson, *Hatteras Island*, p 27.

¹⁵ Hakluyt, "Western Planing."

¹⁶ Hakluyt, *Western Planting*.

¹⁷ Hakluyt, *Western Planting*.

is a sentiment that demands a response from a Protestant Queen on the brink of war with a Catholic King.¹⁸ He also states in another reason:

Then it is necessary for the salvation of those poor people who have sat so long in darkness and in the shadow of death that preachers should be sent unto them: But by whom should these preachers be sent? By them no doubt who have taken upon them the protection and defense of the Christian faith: now the Kings and Queens of England... they are not only charged to maintain and patronize the faith of Christ, but also to enlarge and advance the same. . . . [plant] one or two colonies of our nation upon that firm [land], where they may remain in safety, and first learn the language of the people near adjoining (the gift of tongues being now taken away) and by little and little acquaint themselves with their manner and... distill into their purged minds the sweet and lively lines of the gospel: Otherwise for preachers to run unto them rashly without some such preparation for their safety, it were nothing else but to run to their apparent and certain destruction, as it happened to those Spanish friars that before any planting without strength and company landed in Florida, where they were miserably massacred by the Savages...¹⁹

Hakluyt argues that the Natives have been surrounded by suffering and death and are in dire need of salvation. Just as before, he speaks to the emotional side of England with the line, “now the Kings and Queens of England have the name of defenders of the faith.”²⁰ He argues that a defender of the faith is supposed to maintain the level of faith and evangelize. Here, Hakluyt would agree with the Spanish intentions to advance their faith in the Americas. He makes the point that the Spanish friars began their missions without a firm standing in the Americas, and therefore they were driven out by the Natives. He concludes that the English need to form one or two stable colonies, learn the languages of the land, and then spread the Gospel. He believes that this method, the Elizabethan model, would be far more effective than the Spanish Black Legend. When talking about languages, he adds, “the gift of tongues being now taken away.”²¹ This is a reference to how, in the Bible, the disciples are given a gift of tongues. This allowed the disciples

¹⁸ Hakluyt, *Western Planting*.

¹⁹ Hakluyt, *Western Planting*.

²⁰ Hakluyt, *Western Planting*.

²¹ Hakluyt, *Western Planting*.

to travel the world and speak in the native languages to spread the Gospel more effectively.²² His subtle reference to the disciples is an attempt to speak to the teaching that, as disciples of Jesus themselves, the English had a responsibility to teach the Gospel. Hakluyt was simply providing an effective way of doing it.

The last argument Hakluyt made ties into English-Spanish tensions more than the others. It is the pinnacle of his reasoning, and the reasons that follow fall under the same sort of thinking. Hakluyt played England's tension with Spain against her and pointed out that a colony in America would be a more than effective tool to weaken Spain. He states:

...the Spaniard [King] pierced the Indies and planted here and there very thinly and slenderly without having the Indian multitude in subjection... so as in truth the Spaniard is very weak there... If you touch him in the Indies, you touch the apple of his eye, for take away his treasure... his old bands of soldiers will soon be dissolved, his purposes defeated, his power and strength diminished, his pride abated, and his tyranny utterly suppressed.²³

Hakluyt is essentially telling Queen Elizabeth that the best way to weaken Spain for any potential war would be to start colonies in America. Since America is so far away from Spain, the Spanish colonies are not as strong. They cannot receive supplies or reinforcements as quickly as a force that was based in Spain. That means that the English could easily conquer a Spanish colony. The loss of colonies in America would also cripple Spain's economy, as the crown received a substantial amount of money from the raw materials taken from America. Without as much money, Spain would struggle in a potential war. Hakluyt also points out that King Philip II prizes his holdings in America, and if England were to take them away it would hurt him personally. Therefore, the best strategy for the English would be to strike in America. This is the

²² Acts 2:3-11 NRSV-CI

²³ Hakluyt, *Western Planting*.

beginning of why and how Roanoke came to be. The primary goal of England establishing itself in America was to thwart the Spanish Empire, which is important to remember when recounting the founding of Roanoke.

Bound for Roanoke

In 1584, Sir Walter Raleigh received Queen Elizabeth's blessing to voyage to the New World. He sent Captains Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe on the ships the *Admiral* and the *Roebuck* to search for possible locations for privateer bases and useful resources. Amadas and Barlowe reached the Outer Banks of North Carolina on July 4, 1584; this was the first of five voyages to the Outer Banks. Outer Banks native and historian Scott Dawson has spent the last ten years studying these two men's maps, charts, and writings. In his book, *The Lost Colony and Hatteras Island*, he argues that Amadas and Barlowe must have landed on Croatoan Island, which is now known as Hatteras. Amadas and Barlowe kept detailed reports and descriptions of their movements in the Outer Banks, though they misnamed some locations, which has led to some confusion regarding their movements. Through careful consideration and geographical evidence, Dawson concludes that the first landing occurred at Croatoan.²⁴

Figure 1: Map of Outer Banks including labels for “Roanoke Colony,” “Croatoan,” (here labeled “Croatan”) and “Hatteras Island.”

²⁴ Dawson, *Hatteras Island*, p 31-34.



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Amadas and Barlowe then traveled up the sound to Roanoke Island. In accordance with the Elizabethan Model, they built relationships with many different native tribes and then returned to England. Though we cannot assume that every interaction was peaceful, Amadas and Barlowe focus on the allies made and resources found. The focus of their findings shows how important the success of the Elizabethan Model was to England’s goal. When they returned, they brought examples of the resources they found. They also brought with them two natives known as Manteo and Wanchese. The English used the men as models for how Natives dressed and

²⁵ *The Lost Colony of Roanoke* (American Geographical Society, n.d.), <https://ubique.americangeo.org/map-of-the-week/map-of-the-week-the-lost-colony-of-roanoke/>.

acted in America, and they were described as “lusty fellows.”²⁶ This description shows the beginning of a general disregard for Natives’ humanity.

Due to the success of Amadas and Barlowe, the Queen approved a second voyage. Sir Richard Grenville and Ralph Lane left for North Carolina in 1585 and returned in 1586. These two men and another, anonymous man are the authors of the voyage via the *Tiger*. Manteo and Wanchese were also aboard the ships headed for the Outer Banks. A storm separated the fleet of vessels, and the *Tiger* was the last to arrive. When it did, Grenville found 32 English men living with the Croatoan people in Barlowe’s abandoned base camp. Unfortunately, upon arrival, the *Tiger* grounded itself on a sand bar, and it lost much of its cargo. Grenville left 105 soldiers and Lane ashore while he continued to loot Spanish ships to make up for the lost goods. According to Dawson, Ralph Lane was “a ruthless, harsh commander who should never have been in charge.”²⁷ His overreactions to misunderstandings, language barriers, and cultural divides destroyed the English and the Natives' relationships, especially with the Secotan tribe. The tensions reached a peak when Ralph Lane and his soldiers killed the chief Wingina and put to rest any hopes of peaceful relations with the Secotan. Around the same time, Sir Francis Drake arrived at Croatoan, intending to resupply and relay soldiers back to England. A storm forced Lane and his men to return with Drake to England, where he had to explain his violent behavior and failed voyage.²⁸

Not long after Lane’s unknown departure, Grenville returned to Roanoke with more supplies for the soldiers. Finding no one guarding the English position on the island, he left fifteen men and supplies on the island. He continued privateering, blissfully unaware of the

²⁶ Dawson, *Hatteras Island*, p 37.

²⁷ Dawson, *Hatteras Island*, p 41.

²⁸ Dawson, *Hatteras Island*.

disastrous situation those men faced as the Secotan took the opportunity to seek revenge for the death of Wingina. They killed two of Grenville's men and drove the rest from the island. If historians were to ever refer to a Roanoke Colony as "lost," it would be this third voyage. The men who escaped from the Secotan tribe were never found and vanished without a trace. The fourth voyage was vastly different. It was the first intended to establish a permanent settlement and therefore included women and children. Captained by reformed, Portuguese pirate Simão Fernandes, the ship departed from England in 1587 for the Chesapeake Bay.

Fernandes was chosen as captain because he was familiar with the area from both his pirating and voyaging days.²⁹ The colonists were planning on stopping at Roanoke to pick up Grenville's fifteen men and then continue; however, once the colonists went ashore to find their missing comrades, Fernandes informed them that he would not be taking them to Chesapeake. It was hurricane season in the Outer Banks, and Fernandes was unwilling to further risk his life and ship. Perhaps if they had chosen a captain who had a less troubled past, or one more committed to the good of home and country, the colonists would have made it to Chesapeake. Instead, the Portuguese pirate's actions finished setting the stage for the Roanoke Colony's plans to come crashing down.³⁰ The relationships between the English and Spanish bled into Portuguese relationships, which shows how important the upstaging the Spanish in the New World continued to be.

Fernandes left the colonists on Roanoke to navigate the existing turbulent relationship with the Secotan tribe. Ralph Lane had murdered the Secotan chief only one year earlier, and the tribe was still deeply angry at the English. Though Lane had not accompanied the fourth voyage,

²⁹ Lawler, *The Secret Token*, p 28.

³⁰ Lawler, *The Secret Token*, p 89.

the Natives associated all English people with Lane and his men. The Secotan would prove to be a persistent enemy to the colony.³¹ Governor John White also left with Fernandes to procure supplies from England. While he was gone, the Anglo-Spanish War escalated, and Queen Elizabeth did not allow any ships to leave England unless they were to fight the Spanish. In 1590, White finally reached the shores of the Outer Banks once again in the fifth voyage. When he and his crew arrived at Roanoke, they experienced many hardships due to the harsh summer weather. The storms in the Outer Banks are fed by the nearby Gulf Stream, so the currents and winds can be ferocious and unpredictable. They lost seven men, including their captain, trying to cross the bar to go ashore.³²

Once they finally reached Roanoke, they found the settlement disassembled. Myth says that the settlement was “abandoned,” or “found in ruins.” However, the clearest description of the colony’s state is that it was taken down and transported elsewhere. The colonists did not relocate in haste. Furthermore, they had time to carefully remove the bark from a tree and carve in the name of their destination clearly. Of this discovery, White writes, “one of the chief trees or posts at the right side of the entrance had the bark taken off, and 5 foot from the ground in fair capitoll letters was graven CROATOAN without any cross or sign of distress.”³³ The men headed towards Croatoan but hit a storm that blew them out to sea and damaged their ship. Reeling from the loss of the captain and damage to the ship, White feared a mutiny. They returned to England without ever reaching the island, and White was resigned to never see his family again. However, he wrote in a letter to the Queen’s historian, “I greatly joyed that I had found a certain token of their safe being at Croatoan, which is the place where Manteo was born and the savages

³¹ Dawson, *Hatteras Island* p 51.

³² Lawler, *The Secret Token*, p 100.

³³ Qtd. In Dawson, *Hatteras Island*, p 61.

of that island our friends.”³⁴ The misfortunes that White endured in his attempts to return to his family never swayed the steadfast man, who insisted that they were safe on Croatoan.³⁵

Though there is clear evidence in Governor White’s writings and logical conclusion, the location of his family has become contested over the years. There is constant competition between different archeological sites, each claiming that they have found the famed Lost Colony. This is the point where reality and myth diverge. History was not kind to the colonists and erased their fate, leaving a blank canvas of possibilities. Mysterious endings allow people to make up their own stories, which often betray their beliefs and fears. The fate of the Lost Colony is interesting, but more interesting are the stories of the people that felt drawn to it and created endings of their own.

³⁴ Qtd. In Dawson, *Hatteras Island*, p 62.

³⁵ Lawler, *The Secret Token*, p 183.

INTERMARRIAGE AND NATIVE GENOCIDE

John Lawson's *New Voyage*

Growing up in America, we are barraged by myths of our country's founding. From friendly pilgrims to Pocahontas's love story, they become unbelievable when we grow up. Still, in our heads Pocahontas is a grown woman who threw herself over John Smith when her tribe was about to execute him mid-song.³⁶ When considering these stories of friendly English-Native relations one might think that the English were accepting of intermarriage when the truth is much more complex. The English were okay with intermarriage if it was an English man and a Native woman. The other way around was not acceptable in their eyes, especially if the Native culture was more dominant in the family than the English culture. The Roanoke Colony became lost in history because people were unwilling to discuss the possibility that Englishmen had conformed to Native ways—an attitude that can be seen through the fabrication of the Pocahontas love story and the fate of intermarriages presented in John Demos's *The Heathen School*.³⁷

One hundred years after Governor John White returned to England empty-handed, scientist John Lawson traveled the coast of North Carolina interviewing different Native tribes. He published his findings in his book, *A New Voyage to Carolina*.³⁸ The existence of his book and scientific expedition into Carolina betray that the colony's fate was not unknown. The nature of mystery intrigues humanity; therefore, future explorers would have searched much sooner if the colony's fate had ever been in question. Lawson traveled to different native tribes and took accounts from each for his book. He also traveled to Roanoke and saw the old fort. He then

³⁶ Eric Goldberg and Mike Gabriel, *Pocahontas* (Disney, 1995).

³⁷ John Demos, *The Heathen School* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 2014).

³⁸ John Lawson, "A New Voyage to Carolina" (ebscohost.com, 2020), <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=df016286-aea7-4d3e-a7ae-97ee6815434e%40sessionmgr4006&vid=0&format=EB>.

continued to Hatteras Island, the former Croatoan island whose name lies immortalized in a Roanoke tree. The natives there confirmed that the fort Lawson found on Roanoke was founded by Raleigh. From the Hatteras tribe, he writes,

A farther Confirmation of this [Raleigh's fort on Roanoke] we have from the Hatteras Indians, who either then lived on Ronoak-Island, or much frequented it. These tell us, that several of their Ancestors were white People, and could talk in a Book [read], as we do; the Truth of which is confirm'd by gray Eyes being found frequently amongst these Indians, and no others. They value themselves extremely for their Affinity to the English, and are ready to do them all friendly Offices. It is probable, that this Settlement miscarry'd for want of timely Supplies from England; or thro' the Treachery of the Natives, for we may reasonably suppose that the English were forced to cohabit with them, for Relief and Conversation; and that in process of Time, they conform'd themselves to the Manners of their Indian Relations. And thus we see, how apt Humane Nature is to degenerate.³⁹

Lawson tells the brief history of Sir Walter Raleigh's attempt at a colony without any fanfare or embellishment. He confirms that he visited Roanoke Island and found the remains of a fort there—the same remains that Governor John White had found one hundred years earlier. He lists some miscellaneous things that identify it as an English fort to prove that it was established by Raleigh. After the recount, his story gets a bit more interesting. He visited the Hatteras tribe, and they claimed that their ancestors were English. Due to the frequency of gray eyes among the Hatteras and no other tribes, and their kindness towards Lawson, he concludes that they are telling the truth. However, Lawson does not include quantitative data about the Hatteras Tribe's eye color which leaves room for the possibility of confirmation bias. He records that the Natives were extraordinarily kind to him, which might have coerced him to believe that they are of English descent. To his logic, there would be no other reason for the natives to be that kind to

³⁹ Lawson, "A New Voyage to Carolina."

him based on the early beliefs about how barbaric their culture was. Even as he compliments them “for their Affinity to the English,” and how they “are ready to do them all friendly Offices,” he concludes that it must be because of their English ancestors.⁴⁰ There might have only been a few people with grey eyes, and yet the rest of his bias would make him see it as concrete confirmation of Roanoke’s fate.

Lawson’s word choice betrays his thoughts about the Natives. He says that it is possible that the English were “forced” to move and live with the Hatteras Natives.⁴¹ What he does not say is that he believes the English would never live with the Natives of their own accord. His logic is that the English would only move to the Native establishment if they had no other choice, hence his use of the word “forced.” The last line, “And thus we see, how apt Humane Nature is to degenerate,” shows how he thinks intermarriage would be harmful to the very nature of the English.⁴² The word “degenerate” is very specific in this sentence. It comes from the Latin word *degenere*, which means “a falling off from the generic or natural state.”⁴³ It was first used by Georges-Louis Leclerc in reference to the New World, so it would not be unfathomable that Lawson might use it in reference to the same place. Leclerc believed that America’s climate made the animals, and people, weaker. From there the term evolved into an almost Darwinian social theory. It is the idea that humanity can be corrupted via genetics.⁴⁴ One recent example of this theory is segregation in the early 1900s in the United States. The American South had such intense segregation that white and black people had different water fountains to drink out of. The separate water fountains became so infamous that they eventually developed into a symbol of

⁴⁰ Lawson.

⁴¹ Lawson, “A New Voyage to Carolina.”

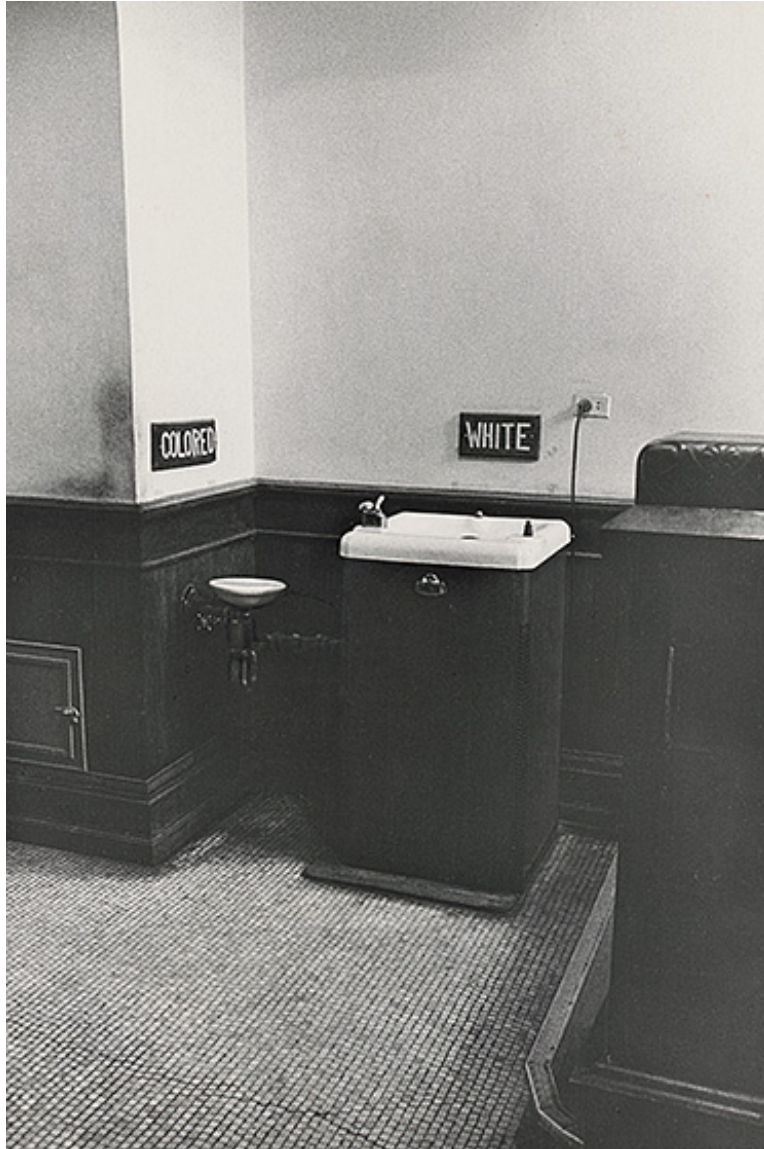
⁴² Lawson, “A New Voyage to Carolina.”

⁴³ Christopher Lawrence, “Degeneration,” *The Lancet* 375, no. 9719 (March 20, 2010): 975.

⁴⁴ Lawrence, “Degeneration.”

segregation and are a very tangible example of how the “degeneration theory” was used in history.⁴⁵

Figure 2. Segregated water fountains in a County Courthouse in Albany, Georgia. 1962.



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⁴⁵ Danny Lyon, “Segregated Drinking Fountains, County Courthouse, Albany, Georgia,” National Gallery of Art, 1962, <https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/civil-rights.html>.

⁴⁶ Lyon, “Segregated Drinking Fountains.”

Lawson uses “degenerate” as descriptive of the state of human nature to convey his deep distaste at the possibility that Englishmen would assimilate to Native culture. He means that intermarriage with the Natives, and assimilating to their culture, would have abased the English colonists because it would have corrupt the white culture. It was not a revolting idea that the Natives Wanchese, Manteo, and even Pocahontas could be brought to England and assimilate into English culture. Lawson’s frustration comes from the idea of an Englishman “[conforming] themselves to the Manners of their Indian Relations.”⁴⁷ His anxiety about a colony abandoning white culture was not born out of irrational fear.

In its early history, Jamestown suffered from its settlers evacuating the struggling colony and “going native.”⁴⁸ As a result, Jamestown’s promotion in England suffered. Englishmen did not want to risk everything to travel to a new place, especially if the people there favored the “barbaric” and “uncivilized” lifestyles of the Natives. In the mid-1600s, many young men left the settlements of Virginia and crossed the Great Dismal Swamp to North Carolina. Many of these men were indentured servants, slaves, and those fleeing from religious persecution. These people were willing to brave the dangers and unpleasantness of the swamp because North Carolina was their only hope of freedom.

The people who settled in North Carolina had very friendly relationships with the Native Americans. A missionary named Reverend Thomas Bray recorded that the area was “people with English, intermixt with the native Indians to a great extent.”⁴⁹ It seemed to be a utopia where peace blossomed, and tolerance between cultures was abundant. However, by the late 1600s the

⁴⁷ Lawson, “A New Voyage to Carolina.”

⁴⁸ Heike Paul, “Pocahontas and the Myth of Transatlantic Love,” in *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*, American Culture Studies (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 89–135, 98.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Noeleen McIlvenna, *A Very Mutinous People: The Struggle for North Carolina, 1660-1713* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 21.

same hierarchical dynamic that held steadfast in Virginia had permeated North Carolina. There evolved a power struggle between the planters who wanted to be like Virginian gentlemen and those who survived with small planting and trade with the natives.⁵⁰ John Lawson might have been writing to those large planters who would tip the balance, arguing that the natives were friendly and therefore easily pushed aside. He also might have been writing a solemn warning to the other side about keeping a respectable distance between English and Native American and avoid “degeneration.”

Pocahontas

To combat the fear of “degeneration,” the phenomenon of settlers “going native” was kept quiet and Pocahontas’s story was popularized. Pocahontas was a small girl who did not speak or read English. Her story was entirely in the hands of the settlers, and therefore a blank canvas to portray their desires and biases. It was “ideologically exploited as it advertised Native American acceptance of the superiority of English culture.”⁵¹ Pocahontas’s love affair with Captain John Smith is one of the most well-known American myths. In 1995, Disney released an animated children’s movie about their alleged relationship that depicts them adventuring through Virginia and her father’s anger at their relationship. Before the movie release, Peggy Lee included an entire verse about it in her hit song, “Fever,” in 1956. She sings: “Captain Smith and Pocahontas/Had a very mad affair/When her daddy tried to kill him/She said, "Daddy, oh, don't you dare"/He gives me fever/With his kisses, fever when he holds me tight/Fever! I'm his missus, daddy, won't you treat him right?”⁵² Her other verse is about the famous *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, which is significant company for Pocahontas. Culturally, it places her

⁵⁰ McIlvanna, *A Very Mutinous People*.

⁵¹ Paul, "Pocahontas," 98.

⁵² Peggy Lee, *Fever*, 1956.

story alongside one of the most popular love stories in the European tradition. It also further promotes the fabricated affair while neglecting the later marriage between Pocahontas and John Rolfe.

Pocahontas has been used throughout American history to show how Native Americans could be assimilated into English culture: “she became the centerpiece of a foundational myth [...] that is heavily invested in ideologies of US-American nation-building and identity politics.”⁵³ In the myth, Pocahontas chose her white love interest over her people and tribe. She ends up traveling to England, having a son with John Rolfe, and being baptized. This is significant because it shows how the 17th and 18th century colonists wanted to show that the Natives would be welcomed into English culture. The perspective and focus of the story show the perspective that there was a point in early American history where things might have been different, “if Natives had only followed the path Pocahontas had chosen: conversion and intermarriage.”⁵⁴ She is elevated onto a pedestal of “what could have been” while the survivors of the Roanoke Colony sank into a mysterious, cautionary tale. Viewed this way, the story of Pocahontas becomes an implicit apology for native genocide; she is used as evidence that if the natives had assimilated, they might not have perished.

Indeed, Early Americans believed that peace between colonist and native could be achieved through intermarriage and native assimilation. President Thomas Jefferson said: “The day will soon come when you will unite yourselves with us, join in our great councils, and form a people with us, and we shall all be Americans; you will mix with us by marriage; your blood

⁵³ Paul, “Pocahontas,” 90.

⁵⁴ Paul, “Pocahontas and Transatlantic Love,” 97.

will run in our veins and will spread with us over this great continent.”⁵⁵ At first glance, his statement seems full of hope for the fate of the Natives; however, he clearly shows a bias. He wanted the Natives to join the Americans. Their blood will run in American veins, not the other way around. He unabashedly believed that the colonists would continue to spread across the continent and eventually control all the land. This belief made its way into legislation even as it evolved and complicated itself. In the late 1780s, Secretary Knox offered rewards to white men who were willing to marry Native women. He also offered rewards for the reverse but specified that it was “only for white women who had ‘strayed from virtuous paths’; these—if no others—might reasonably take Indian husbands.”⁵⁶ Evidently, it was okay for a white man of merit to marry a Native woman, but not for a Native man to marry a reputable white woman. Even in a marriage between a white man and native woman, there is some taboo.

The second half of Pocahontas’s story is a marriage to colonist John Rolfe. The marriage is very rarely portrayed in depictions of Pocahontas’s life. Plays like *The Indian Princess, or, La Belle Sauvage*, that do mention her marriage to Rolfe “[leave] the marriage unconsummated.”⁵⁷ Although this cannot be true due to the existence of their son, it holds the same attitude that Rolfe himself had about the marriage. He wrote a letter explaining the marriage to Jamestown Governor Sir Thomas Dale. He acknowledges that “fellow colonists . . . would see him as indulging ‘a hungry [sexual] appetite, to gorge myself with incontinency.’”⁵⁸ In the letter, “Rolfe avowed his ‘settled and long continued affection’ for the princess, and his strong wish to

⁵⁵ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 134; Horsman, “The Indian Policy of an ‘Empire for Liberty,’” 50; William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), 33; Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 223.

⁵⁶ Demos, *The Heathen School*, 135.

⁵⁷ Paul, “Pocahontas and Transatlantic Love,” 104.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 129; Lyon G. Tyler, “Letter of John Rolfe to Sir Thomas Dale,” in *Narratives of Early Virginia* (New York, 1907), 239–44.

‘endeavor to make her a Christian.’ She, for her part, evinced both ‘great appearance of love to me... [and] the desire to be taught and instructed in the knowledge of God.’”⁵⁹ Rolfe wanted to make sure that no one could accuse him of giving in to a physical attraction to the Native woman. It seems that while physical attraction to the Native peoples was comprehensible to the English, pursuing that attraction was seen as barbaric. Rolfe claimed that his intentions were purely emotional and religious, which was much purer than the physical aspect in their eyes. Even with this hurdle in their relationship, the marriage between a white man and native woman was acceptable to the English because of her assimilation and baptism. Unlike the potential mixed marriages of the Roanoke Colonists, Pocahontas gave up her culture. At the end of it all, it is still seen as Rolfe evangelizing Pocahontas whereas the Roanoke Colonists were corrupted by Native culture.

The Heathen School

As if to test this promise of peace embodied in Pocahontas’s tale and Jefferson’s statement, the Foreign Mission School opened its doors in Cornwall, Connecticut in 1817.⁶⁰ The school’s mission was to provide a “seminary for the education of heathen youth,” but ended up providing two young Natives with wives.⁶¹ It was founded to welcome Natives from all over North America to teach them English, various academic subjects, and Christianity. The school endured the observations of many skeptics, which put these scholars in a very public view. John Demos aptly describes one incident in his book devoted to the subject, *The Heathen School*.⁶² The scholars were tested in front of an audience that included clergy and some women from the

⁵⁹ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 129; Tyler, “Letter of John Rolfe.”

⁶⁰ Demos, *The Heathen School*, 66.

⁶¹ Demos, *The Heathen School*, 66.

⁶² Demos, *The Heathen School*.

town: “There is something unwittingly ironic, and prophetic, about the wording there [in the report]—ladies who have taken an interest in these youths—given all that would follow.”⁶³ At the beginning it looked like the school was an incredible success. The Natives were converted, literate, charming, and civilized in every sense of the English definition. However, the school soon met its downfall in the attitude towards intermarriages between Native men and white women. Two marriages resulted from the connections made at the Foreign Mission School: John Ridge to Sarah Bird Northrup, and Elias Boudinot to Harriet Gold. Both engagements caused uproar in the small town of Cornwall, Connecticut. Both marriages ended with horrific assassinations of the men by their own Nation.

The first union was that of John Ridge to Sarah Bird Northrup. John Ridge was descended from prominent Cherokee chiefs. His father was an exceptional man by the terms of the Cherokee and the English. He served his nation, and then married and settled down to become a farmer. He even served in the U.S. Army, after which he would always be known as Major Ridge. John was taught by various missionaries and establishments in his childhood; the different tutors were separated by his bouts of sickness. Despite his poor health, Major Ridge insisted that John be sent to the Foreign Mission School to finish his schooling. He progressed rapidly but soon fell sick again and began his stay in Steward Northrup’s house. This is where he met Sarah Northrup. Sarah helped her mother attend to John, and they fell in love. Both admitted it to Sarah’s mother, who “saw there was trouble in the camp.”⁶⁴ She sent John away, but despite all the objections from their families John and Sarah eventually married.

⁶³ Demos, *The Heathen School*, 78.

⁶⁴ Demos, *The Heathen School*, 150.

The ceremony passed with little disruption. Completely contrasting that, the town atmosphere following the ceremony was a maelstrom. The gossip spread as people claimed things such as: “the wedding had been performed in secret so as to deceive the public,” and “foreign scholars... have... been seen to walk arm in arm... [with] both married and unmarried ladies’ from the town.”⁶⁵ John and Sarah were forced to leave town, but wherever they went they were met with crowds of angry people. Though the marriage had not been a secret, the rumor shows the bias of New England towards white people versus Native Americans. People assumed that for the ceremony to take place, it would have had to be a secret. The “honorable” white people of New England would not have allowed it had it been known to them.

John published a piece in the missionary press that fully encompasses the attitudes he faced: “The Indian, he wrote, is ‘almost considered accursed... frowned upon by the meanest peasant’ and compared unfavorably to ‘the scum of the earth.’ No matter how well educated, how ‘modest and polite... his conduct... yet he is an Indian, and the most stupid and illiterate white man will disdain and triumph over [him].’”⁶⁶ The passage suggests two things: John’s despair and developing jadedness, and the deep-set racism against Natives in the United States. John was a scholar of merit. He was well educated and conducted himself in the manner of a proper Englishman. This passage could have very well been written about his own life, and the white men in his life that triumph over him. The second thing the passage highlights is the attitude towards Natives. The Mission School was founded to “civilize” the Natives and allow them to assimilate into society. However, when John was ready to do just that in the form of marrying Sarah the white population realized that they did not want to live as equals with

⁶⁵ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 154; *American Eagle*, 1824.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 152; John Ridge, *The Christian Herald*, vol. 10 (1823), 48.

Natives. John, though more educated and proper than most white men in New England by their own standards, experiences a large amount of prejudice once he voices his love for Sarah. One can only imagine the anger that the same people might have had towards the Roanoke Colonists, who willingly married "uneducated" and unbaptized natives.

The Boudinots Lead Us Back to Pocahontas

The second marriage from the Foreign Mission School was between Elias Boudinot and Harriet Gold. While John and Sarah experienced backlash after their wedding, Elias and Harriet experienced it before the fact. Elias received many anonymous letters threatening his life.

Reverend Daniel Buttrick, a friend of Elias, was blunt about his disbelief at the violent threats.

He wrote that:

Even the heathen world blushes, and humanity sickens at the thought... The tomahawk, and scalping knife, or the more polished weapons of civilized butchery, will be raised against him! The hand of the assassinating murderer, upheld by ministers, and Christians, and the gathering mob, will take away his life! All will unite in the clamorous cry, 'Let him be put to death!'... Where [else]... can such unfeeling barbarity be found?⁶⁷

Even though Buttrick is defending Elias against white violence, he still uses Native American culture as the peak example of barbarism. His last sentence, "Where [else]... can such unfeeling barbarity be found," shows that he thinks the threats from Connecticut could only have feasibly come from Native American culture. He uses the widely accepted belief of Native barbarity to further illustrate his astonishment at the violence of white America. Buttrick is trying to portray that if even "the heathen world" is sickened by the thought of violence against Elias, then New England must have sunk very low indeed. Furthermore, with the phrase, "the more polished weapons of civilized butchery," he implies that the English are just as brutal as the Natives. He

⁶⁷ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 190; Daniel Buttrick, "Rev. Daniel Buttrick to Jeremiah Evarts," September 17, 1825, ABC 18.3.1 (1st series), vol. 4, no. 18.

subtly suggests that the English weapons are just as barbaric even though they might be a little more shiny.

Another friend of Elias, David Brown, was more passive about the incidents:

One, from Connecticut, declared that “if he should come to Cornwall after his intended wife, half the state would rise against him”; another stated simply, “his life would be in danger.” The effigy burnings had been taken by Cherokees as “an expression of abhorrence to the Indian character.” Yet, as Brown noted, many white men “have married Cherokee ladies without censure... so how can it be thought wicked for us to marry among them, especially is some of our white sisters are pleased with such connections?”⁶⁸

Brown’s letter is reserved, but it touches on a couple of important themes. One might think half the state fighting Elias is an exaggeration; however, it clearly illustrates the rage that people felt at the prospect of another mixed marriage. This threat of violence affects not only the young couple, but the relationship between the Mission School and the Cherokee Nation. As a result of the events from Elias’s stay in Cornwall, the Cherokee Nation’s character was being attacked. The threat of violence slowly escalated the tensions between white America and Native Americans. The ending of this story is more commonly known in public memory: the Trail of Tears. The second thing Brown scratches the surface of in his letter is the gender discrepancy in mixed marriages. He asks, “how can it be wicked?”⁶⁹ If white men have married native women, why is there such disgust at the union of a native man and white woman?

Colonial Americas were very controlling of their white women, while allowing white men to get away with virtually anything. This struggle between the Native American husbands and white New England shows that “to colonial leaders, defiant women personified the social

⁶⁸ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 190; David Brown, “David Brown to Jeremiah Evarts,” September 29, 1825, ABC 18.3.1 (1st series), vol. 5 (part 2), no. 285.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Demos, *The Heathen School*, 190; Brown, “David Brown to Jeremiah Evarts.”

disorder they deplored in a colony they were still trying to control.”⁷⁰ This was the exact opposite of the Native American attitude towards women who wanted to marry outside their culture. It was actually encouraged because then the man would be linked to the Native American Nation that he married into, and he could trade or benefit from the relationship.⁷¹

Figure 3. Painting, “Baptism of Pocahontas.” Displayed in U.S. Capitol Rotunda.



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In talking about marriage between the English and Native cultures, the conversation returns to Pocahontas. The above painting is an famous portrayal of Pocahontas’s life, which John Gadsby Chapman painted in 1840. To this day, it resides in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol

⁷⁰ Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 13.

⁷¹ Fischer, *Suspect Relations*, 70-74.

⁷² John Gadsby Chapman, “Baptism of Pocahontas,” Architect of the Capitol, 1840, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/baptism-pocahontas>.

building. It is called, “Baptism of Pocahontas.” Pocahontas kneels in a white dress, drawing the eye toward her and making her the focus of the painting. Her husband, John Rolfe, stands behind her in support. Pocahontas’s dress is a stark contrast from the clothing of her native family behind her. She is much more covered, signifying her assimilation into English and Christian culture. Her family is still dressed in Native cultural clothing, and they are painted in poses signifying disagreement or despair. Two are on the ground and are slouched over, as if her decision is literally weighing them down. One, dressed more splendidly than the others, is turned away from her. The English people in the painting all face towards her in positions of support, or at least curiosity. Some of them also hold weapons, as if ready to fight back the savage natives if they tried to interfere. It was painted only two years after the infamous Trail of Tears and two decades after the two mixed marriages.⁷³

Could Chapman have been using this opportunity to direct America’s attention back to one of its founding myths? Using Pocahontas’s conversion story helped to smooth over “going native” and to perpetrate white superiority in the early 1600s, and it could have worked again. Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, sending the natives—including the Ridges and the Boudinots—away to Oklahoma. As Brown wrote in his letter, the marriages of native men to white women were unacceptable to white America. They were sent out of sight and out of mind. Instead, America would once more bring forth the age-old myth and much more acceptable version of a mixed marriage. Pocahontas assimilated to English culture and therefore the marriage was not “wicked.”

⁷³ Andrew Jackson, “Indian Removal Act: Primary Documents in American History,” May 28, 1830, <https://guides.loc.gov/indian-removal-act>.

Considering Pocahontas's conversion myth and the backlash from two, very public, mixed marriages in Cornwall, Massachusetts, it is plausible that the fate of the Roanoke Colony was left alone. Settlers in Jamestown went to live with the natives there, which was propagandistically overshadowed by Pocahontas's fake romance and very real baptism. Two centuries later, two mixed marriages caused a hurricane of rage in New England. They were legislatively sent into exile with their Nation to Oklahoma, and Pocahontas's mythical story was brought back into the spotlight. If the colonists from Roanoke really did go to live with the Croatoan tribe, like both Governor John White and the 1701 Hatteras tribe claim, it was better for that history to remain lost. In 1701 John Lawson was simply disgusted by the possibility. A century later, two couples were threatened with violence for the same possibility. The Native culture was barbaric, and it was more comfortable and acceptable to focus on the historic conversion of America's forever sweetheart, Pocahontas. As a result of racism against the Native Americans, in 1930 the Roanoke Colony was a perfectly blank slate to paint upon.

“THE LOST COLONY”

1930 and Paul Green

The attempt at a Roanoke Colony was an important plot point in America’s founding story. Like most underlying causes, the Roanoke Voyages were born from the spirit of competition and pride. England wanted to be better than Spain. English leaders wanted to eradicate the Spanish foothold in the New World. Once the colony failed, it developed into an embarrassing blot on England’s success story. The colony was abandoned, its inhabitants turned native. By the 1700s, the idea of degeneration and racism had firmly taken root in America. In the 1800s there were more examples of how the United States did not care for mixed marriages with Native Americans. If the Roanoke settlers had assimilated, that history was suppressed while Pocahontas’s baptism was championed. All these events escalated into the faded canvas of 1930, when Paul Green would conclude the erasure. His *The Lost Colony* would be the nail in the coffin for Roanoke’s forgotten fate, which leads to the mysterious myth that circulates in public memory now and allows for countless conspiracies and legends to unfold unabated.

Nearly three hundred and forty years after the Roanoke Voyages, the United States of America sank into the Great Depression. Like everywhere else, the Outer Banks was struggling. To combat the financial hardships, locals attempted to promote the Roanoke Voyages by commissioning playwright Paul Green to write a pageant about the events. Green was an established and popular playwright. He felt very moved by the events at Roanoke but opposed the idea of a play, having dabbled in writing about Virginia Dare in college. The Chapel Hill alum had already wrestled with, “this dream of a play which would tell fittingly the romantic

Roanoke Island story.”⁷⁴ Green was born on March 17, 1894, in Lillington, North Carolina. He was diagnosed with osteomyelitis as a child but overcame the illness. He then worked and saved up enough money to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which is where he would spend the remainder of his life. He served during World War I in a multitude of roles, most notably as second lieutenant with the Chief of Engineers at Paris. There he learned enough about engineering to understand the value of a good stage and how to write stage directions. His play, *In Abraham’s Bosom*⁷⁵, received the Pulitzer Award for drama in May 1927. By the time Roanoke reappeared on Green’s horizon, he was famous and renowned in his work.⁷⁶

The Lost Colony production was inspired by the then recent sensational *Passion* pageant in Oberammergau, Germany⁷⁷. *The Passion* is performed every tenth year and was seen by W. O. Saunders, who then brought the idea to Paul Green. Today, *The Passion* advertises its history on the website in the same way as *The Lost Colony*. The story says that in 1633, a deadly disease swept through the small town of Oberammergau, Germany. The residents prayed that God would save them from the disease. After that, the mortality rates decreased and in their gratitude the residents made a vow that they would perform *The Passion* every ten years. They have stuck to that vow, even now as they sell tickets for the 2022 performance.⁷⁸ Intentional or not, *The Passion* has put Oberammergau on the map. Though most would not recognize the name the same way as “Paris” or “Rome,” Oberammergau is not lost among the many cities of the world. Furthermore, people travel from all over the world to see this play every ten years. People need

⁷⁴ Agatha Boyd Adams and Richard Walser, *Paul Green of Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), p 75.

⁷⁵ Laurence G. Avery, “A Paul Green Reader” (ebscohost.com, 2020), <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=88792346-907d-46d0-b80e-28438c468a20%40sessionmgr103&vid=0&format=EB>.

⁷⁶ Adams and Walser, *Paul Green of Chapel Hill*.

⁷⁷ “Passion 2022,” *Passion 2022*, n.d., <https://www.passionsspiele-oberammergau.de/en/home>.

⁷⁸ “Passion 2022.”

food, transportation, and a place to stay. This brings a substantial economic boost to the Oberammergau economy once a decade. Saunders saw this play, and everything that it had done for the little German town. From his experience was born a fantastic vision of an all-immersive, outdoor drama about Roanoke Island.

Figure 4. Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany.



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Saunders’s idea involved plans to “move a tribe of Indians down on Roanoke Island, let them carry on farming, raise tobacco, set their fishing weirs, just the way they did at the time Sir Walter Raleigh sent his colony over. We could have every man on the island grow a beard and

⁷⁹ Kim Foley Mackinnon, “A Passion Play for the Ages,” January 30, 2020, <https://magazine.northeast.aaa.com/magazine/travel/a-passion-play-for-the-ages/>.

the people could wear the dress of three centuries ago.”⁸⁰ Saunders and Green settled from this ambitious vision to just a small outdoor performance. They pitched the idea to a courthouse full of people, which, unbeknownst to them, included Senator Josiah William Bailey and Congressman Lindsay Warren. In one of Green’s descriptions of the writing process he recalls this moment:

Now Senator Bailey got up, strode down the aisle and delivered a speech that soon had everybody eager for activity. He made it quite clear to us that Roanoke Island was the true inspiration for Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*. And then he quotes several parts of the play in a voice that sent the chills running up and down our backs.

“When Shakespeare wrote ‘Come unto these yellow sands,’ he said, ‘he had in mind the sands of Roanoke Island. No doubt about it. The tragedy of the lost colony that happened on this island inspired the pen of the immortal Shakespeare to write one his finest and most imaginative plays. This is a sacred spot here. Let us put on a drama, our drama, here at this patriotic shrine where those brave pioneers lived, struggled, suffered, and died. Yes, let us tell their story to the world.’”⁸¹

It cannot be contested that Senator Bailey’s support and speech was one of the events that propelled the drama into a reality. However, it is almost a foreshadowing of the legacy that awaited *The Lost Colony*. What evidence did this man have of Shakespeare’s muse? Shakespeare never revealed his inspiration for *The Tempest*, leaving it open to interpretation and evolution.⁸² Senator Bailey demonstrated what happens to blank canvases as he painted his own story upon it. To get *The Lost Colony* off the ground, and bring tourists to the struggling Outer Banks, he told a fantastic story. It inspired those around him to help bring to life a drama that celebrated patriotism and heritage during a time when people were devoid of hope. His speech and his

⁸⁰ Paul Green and Laurence G. Avery, *The Lost Colony: A Symphonic Drama of American History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p 149.

⁸¹ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, p 150.

⁸² Since then, historians have argued that *The Tempest* was based on William Strachey’s *True Repertory of the Wrack*; Caro Pirri, “Unsettling The Tempest,” *The University of Chicago Press Journals* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 77–99.

revision of *The Tempest* betray his fears that without it, Roanoke Island will wither into a forgotten piece of a bigger, struggling nation. It has an element of foreshadowing to it because, almost one hundred years later, *The Lost Colony* and its vague ending is itself used as a blank canvas. With the support of Senator Bailey and Congressman Warren, the process for writing a drama began. However, the Depression worsened and it seemed that hope was lost as writing slowed to a halt.

The Great Depression in 1932 is historically responsible for the emphasis on the 1587 colony instead of the 1584 discovery. Initially, Green had a commission to write a play commemorating the 350th anniversary of the 1584 expedition with Captains Amadas and Barlowe. Had the money promised to this celebration not dried up due to the deepening Depression, Paul Green's drama would have looked much different, and the public memory of these voyages would have drastically changed.⁸³ Hope returned in 1933 with the election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his famous New Deal programs. In 1935 the Federal Theatre Project was created as part of the Works Progress Administration. These programs provided the funds—and even the actors—needed for Paul Green's vision to get off the ground.⁸⁴ Plans for the 350th celebration resumed, but the emphasis was different. Since the 350th anniversary of the 1584 discovery had passed, they decided on 1587 and the birth of Virginia Dare, the first English child born in America. Green had some room for creative liberties since no detailed records of the events and plot points of the 1587 voyage exist. Instead of a purely

⁸³ Thomas E. Shields, “‘Into the Vast Unknown’? The Changing Ending of Paul Green’s ‘The Lost Colony’ ” (University of North Carolina Press, 2018),

https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&u=mag_u_usm&id=GALE%7CA547373656&v=2.1&it=r.

⁸⁴ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*.

historical pageant, which the 1584 celebration might have called for, Green wrote a literary drama.⁸⁵

The Tempest and The Passion

In claiming Roanoke as Shakespeare's muse for *The Tempest*, Senator Bailey made a bold but almost unarguable statement. The Roanoke theory cannot be proven right, but it cannot be proven wrong. The early historians believed that *The Tempest* was based on William Strachey's *True Repertory of the Wrack*. Strachey wrote this first-hand account about the wreck of the *Sea Venture*, which got caught in a hurricane in the Bermuda Islands in 1609. Later, historians shifted the inspiration to a more hypothetical New World setting. These historians have seen "in Prospero's subjugation of the island's native inhabitants a fable for imperial conquest."⁸⁶ Literary critics and historians have pointed out many parallels between imperial colonialism and the plot of *The Tempest* since it was first performed in the early 1600s.

To bring this idea even further, Caro Pirri argues that *The Tempest* was inspired by all the failed colonies. She uses the word "unsettled" to describe the early American colonies that failed, such as Roanoke, Plymouth, and early Jamestown. Pirri argues that the play was written in a time "characterized by failure, capsize, and colonial collapse."⁸⁷ Therefore, it cannot be taken out of context from the unsettled colonies of the New World. *The Tempest* may not have been inspired by Roanoke; but it does carry the same theme. It is just another story of a failed venture, unplaced people, and a colony that refused to exist. Green honors Senator Bailey's claim in a very small but interesting way. In Act One, Scene Three a young William Shakespeare

⁸⁵ Shields, "Into the Vast Unknown."

⁸⁶ Caro Pirri, "Unsettling The Tempest," *The University of Chicago Press Journals* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 77–99, 77.

⁸⁷ Pirri, "Unsettling," 79.

approaches Sir Walter Raleigh asking to sail to Virginia. Raleigh refuses, instead promising to write a letter to a wealthy friend on Shakespeare's behalf. The Historian, a major character throughout the play, says, "So Shakespeare did not go to Roanoke Island, but that his imagination traveled to the new land is shown in some of his plays of later years."⁸⁸ This small nod to Senator Bailey's convincing speech is immortalized in the script of *The Lost Colony*.

The play's other inspiration, *The Passion*, does not live on in the script but in the overall plot of the play. A common claim is that all stories are simply veiled resurrection stories.⁸⁹ This could not be more true about *The Lost Colony*, a play that was inspired by a painstakingly accurate representation of the Passion of Christ. The first Act is when Sir Walter Raleigh is organizing the affair, whereas in Act Two the colonists endure the pain and suffering brought by their situation. If *The Lost Colony* is just a Passion story, then the colonists are certainly a Christ figure. Sir Walter Raleigh could be seen as a "God" figure, as he is the one who asked and sent the colonists to suffer for the good of England. In Act Two, Scene Four we see a very specific example of how the colony can be seen as a suffering Christ figure. Queen Elizabeth refuses to part with the ships that would mean survival for Roanoke. Governor White says to Raleigh, "This means the end of the colony. It will die."⁹⁰ Raleigh responds, "As many of us shall—that England may live."⁹¹ In the Christian Gospel, Jesus Christ was sent to suffer and die for the redemption and spiritual life of humanity. In *The Lost Colony*, the colonists would be forced to sacrifice themselves for the sake of England's victory over Spain.

⁸⁸ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 55.

⁸⁹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series; 17 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949).

⁹⁰ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 105.

⁹¹ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 105.

In the first part of Act Two, the colonists spend a lot of their time praying. This could be seen as the “Agony in the Garden” section, where the colonists pray to be delivered from the fate that Raleigh had sent them to endure. They pray that God will keep them safe, then they pray that Governor White will come back and take them away.⁹² In Matthew’s account of the Christian Gospel, Jesus prayed “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”⁹³ Throughout the second act there are these same themes: “Merciful God, save us!”⁹⁴ Finally, we come to the crucifixion and resurrection points in the story. They both come in the final scene of the play. It is winter, and the colonists anxiously await deliverance via Governor White and Sir Walter Raleigh. They are unaware of the war with Spain and are close to death. The colonists succumb to their grief and give in to the crucifixion of their hope. It is the lowest point of the play. Quickly following this moment, Captain John Borden joins them all together and gives them a new hope. The colonists will venture into the unknown, down to Croatoan, to try and survive. Borden resurrects their hope by exclaiming, “Let the wilderness drive us forth as wanderers across the earth, scatter our broken bones upon there sands, it shall not kill the purpose that brought us here!”⁹⁵ The colonists, in the face of death, overcome and continue.

Summary and Analysis of *The Lost Colony*

The Lost Colony is made up of two acts, each including 6 scenes. Act One focuses on the process for getting the colony approved, while Act Two is where the characters are in America. Act One’s scenes take place as follows: prologue, An Indian village on Roanoke Island (summer

⁹² Green and Avery.

⁹³ NRSV-CI Matthew 26:39

⁹⁴ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 121.

⁹⁵ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 135.

1584), a tavern yard in London (some weeks later), Queen Elizabeth's Garden in London (same day), King Wingina's village on Roanoke Island (summer 1586), and a wharf in England (Plymouth, spring 1587). It speeds through three years of events: from Sir Walter Raleigh begging for a charter, to Amadas and Barlowe, and finally the preparations for the fourth voyage. Act One faithfully sets the scene for the suffering and redemption of Act Two as the settlers anticipate the dangers of Roanoke.⁹⁶

Act Two gets a little more intense and the scenes include: Roanoke Island (summer 1587), a room in the Queen's palace (England, fall 1587), Roanoke Island (fall 1588), and then again in the winter of 1588. Act One's very purpose is to set the themes and introduce the characters for Act Two. The Roanoke Colony is Sir Walter Raleigh's dream. It is almost ironic because it could be thought of as the first "American Dream." In the 1930s, the "American Dream" was a family and a white picket fence. It is interesting that this idea is present in literature written during the Great Depression, because that was a period where Americans were struggling to achieve it. It is almost like Paul Green was writing an inspirational story to his fellow Americans. They would get through this period of heartache, because the very first settlement in America struggled but they persevered.

The ending of *The Lost Colony* speaks most clearly to the Americans in the 1930s. Captain Borden calls to his men, "We'll never yield! We'll carry on the fight!"⁹⁷ Later on in this same scene he says, "And down the centuries that wait ahead they'll be some whisper of our name, some mention and devotion to the dream that brought us here. And now into the hand of God we commend us. Amen."⁹⁸ Green is calling out to his countrymen to never stop the fight.

⁹⁶ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*.

⁹⁷ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 132.

⁹⁸ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 135.

His words betray the insecurity that no one would remember the struggles of the Great Depression. In the form of Captain Borden's comforting words to his colony, Green comforts his audience in the same way. It is almost as if he is telling them that one day, future generations will tell of the struggles that people went through in the Great Depression. Suffering is not a foreign thing to Americans. We have been suffering since the beginning, so we can suffer again.

There is also a religious aspect to Green's play. Throughout the second act, the characters face the challenges and place their trust in God. Every scene in Roanoke opens with a different prayer. The climax takes place during Christmas. Right before chaos lets loose, Eleanor Dare reads this passage:

The Lord is my light and my salvation—
Whom shall I fear?
[...]
For in the time of trouble
He shall hide me in his pavilion,
[...]
Hearken unto my voice, Oh Lord,
When I cry unto thee.
Have mercy upon me and hear me!
Oh, hide not thy face from me,
Nor cast thy servant away in displeasure.⁹⁹

The passage is broken up by various colonists crying out in pain, fear, or hunger. As Eleanor nears the end of the passage, the cries get louder. The expressions of pain are a stark dissonance with her words of comfort and show that even as they worship God the colonists are losing hope. The specific passage expresses the colonists' desires to be relieved of their suffering. They feel as though they cry out and are ignored. Struggling and suffering are a timeless thing. Eleanor

⁹⁹ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*, 120.

reads this passage to her fellow colonists to comfort them, but she also reads this passage to her 1930s audience. They are meant to find solace in the timeless words of a woman long dead.

Revisions of Memory

Throughout his life, Paul Green made four revisions to *The Lost Colony*. The changes mostly pertained to the narrative character, dubbed “the Historian.” The purpose of the Historian was to narrate from the sidelines, separated from the action and dialogue of the play. It is interesting that Green dubbed this character, “The Historian,” because it is often thought that historians only tell the objective truth. Green may have been trying to bring historical legitimacy into his work of fiction. He filled in the gaps where the visuals, dialogue, and music failed to articulate the nuances of what was occurring. His most crucial part is his monologue at the end. This is where Green made the most influential changes. Here there are four different ending monologues, some more similar than others:

1937:

And so the Lost Colony made ready to leave the fort, driving themselves on with their last gasp of energy and strength. As had been agreed with Governor White for such an emergency, they carved the name of their new habitation “Croatoan” on a post at the right side of the entrance in fair capital letters. They left this sign behind even at the risk of making their new home known to their enemies the Spaniards. In the cold hours before dawn the colonists began their march into the unknown wilderness.¹⁰⁰

1946, where everything is the same except for an added last line:

In the cold hours before dawn the colonists began their march into the unknown wilderness—out of our sight forever... But from our memory they have not passed.¹⁰¹

1954, which is entirely different. This is also the last time Green changed the ending:

¹⁰⁰ Shields, "Into the Vast Unknown."

¹⁰¹ Shields, "Into the Vast Unknown."

And so the colony made ready to leave the fort, driving themselves on with their last gasp of energy and strength. And even the rebellious ones shared in the tragedy of their going. In the cold hours before dawn they began their march into the vast unknown.¹⁰²

The removal of the Historian's explanation of where the colonists were going and how they stuck to their agreement with Governor White was a pivotal moment for Roanoke's public memory. Up until 1954, Green made it apparent to the audience that the colonists precisely knew where they were going and had a pre-existing plan on how to inform White of that destination. After the 1954 changes, vagueness and misunderstanding took root. Croatoan is mentioned only twice in passing, during a scene saturated with cacophony of yelling, voices, and opinions. While the scene is well written and adequately portrays the panic and confusion that the colonists must have felt, it cannot be expected of the audience to understand from two minuscule lines that the colonists intended to move to Croatoan. In the original ending, the Historian says, "As had been agreed with Governor White for such an emergency, they carved the name of their new habitation "Croatoan" on a post at the right side of the entrance in fair capital letters."¹⁰³ This straightforward sentence was a critical piece of information that helped to clarify an already ambiguous ending during the final monologue.

It is clear from reading the script that Green never meant the ending to be as lost as his colony, but rather that it was lost in translation. The actors mention the name, but not enough for it to be memorable because they say it in conjunction with "the wilderness" and "the unknown." Besides, Green's play stops here. He does not cover White's return and discovery of the abandoned colony in 1590. He doesn't mention how confident White was of his family's survival and continued existence on Croatoan. If he had included these, maybe Roanoke's public

¹⁰² Shields, "Into the Vast Unknown."

¹⁰³ Shields.

memory would be different. Even so, his play was inspired by fiction and remained fiction. It is not entirely factual and cannot be relied upon for a true historical account. No matter how much research he did into the Roanoke Voyages, he was still influenced by the struggles of his own time and so he wrote a play that was centered on enduring through a challenge. Literature such as a play memorialize events in a very unique way, therefore Paul Green's interpretation became the most well-known and the one that everyone else based their interpretations upon.

ROANOKE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Growth of *The Lost Colony*

Inspecting the evolution of the Lost Colony myth inevitably brings us to the 21st century. The twists that the story has endured in this era cannot be ignored, even if we are a bit too close to truly see the entire picture. The Lost Colony myth has been reanimated and changed so many times, it is almost unrecognizable. Yet, the bones of the story are still there. It still reveals the minds and hearts of those who continue to bring it back to life.

If you go to the Outer Banks today, you will be travelling to Dare County. You might stay at Croatoan Woods, a resort on the islands. If you wanted to see *The Lost Colony*, you will have to go to the little town of Manteo. Before the play, you might eat at Lost Colony Brewery and Café. These are just a few examples of how the Outer Banks area has used the legend to name and market itself. The Outer Banks tourist economy is not the only community to embrace and recreate the history of the Roanoke Colony. Since the details of the colony's venture have been lost, it has become known as a mystery. And mystery brings in historians, amateurs, and hobbyists to try and "find the truth." In doing so, they contribute to its journey through time as they project their own fears upon it. By even searching for a truth, they acknowledge their belief—or insecurity—that they are being lied to. Though other motivations may take precedence, there is certainly an element of skepticism present in the search. Their different discoveries present us with windows into their lives and the times that they live in.

In 1937, the Waterside Theatre had 2,500 seats. If *The Lost Colony* were to sell 2,000 tickets every night during its season, that would mean that 144,000 would have attended the play in one summer. Now, the Waterside has 1,600 seats. If they were to sell 1,000 tickets every night

during its season, 72,000 people would see the play in one season.¹⁰⁴ The Roanoke Island Historical Association has been running the play for 83 years, though they canceled the 83rd season because of the Coronavirus Pandemic. It is safe to say that *The Lost Colony* has been a significant hit and has a wide outreach. As advertised on its website, it is the “#1 OBX Attraction.”¹⁰⁵ However, the play is not only a major tourism draw for the Outer Banks. The locals also find joy in the celebration of the history of their home. Many locals have made a tradition of attending the play every summer during its less busy season, which usually turns out to be close to the opening night.¹⁰⁶ As a result of the large impact that the play has had, it has been complicit in the spreading of misinformation and erasure of Native Americans from the story.

In looking at the impact of *The Lost Colony* and its memory, one must consider recent events. The year 2020 was hectic to say the absolute least. It was the first time the production of *The Lost Colony* was cancelled since World War II, which allowed for a more in-depth look at the state of the production.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, America was erupting into racially tense chaos. Anywhere from 15 million to 26 million people were protesting in Black Lives Matter movements across the country to advocate for change in American Police Systems.¹⁰⁸ The United States is not even past the centennial anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.’s death, the most well-known advocate for the end to segregation. America was crying out for justice and

¹⁰⁴ Green and Avery, *The Lost Colony*.

¹⁰⁵ “The Lost Colony - #1 OBX Attraction,” The Lost Colony, n.d., <https://www.thelostcolony.org>.

¹⁰⁶ Molly Harrison, “Wow! The Lost Colony Has Upped Its Game,” Blog, Outer Banks thisweek.com, June 16, 2021, <https://outerbanksthisweek.com/blog/wow-lost-colony-has-upped-its-game>.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Jurkowitz, “‘The Lost Colony’ to Cast 20 Native Americans,” *CoastalReview.Org*, April 13, 2021, <https://coastalreview.org/2021/04/the-lost-colony-to-cast-20-native-americans/>.

¹⁰⁸ Larry Buchanan, Quoc Trung Bul, and Jugal K. Patel, “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>.

racial equality, so it is not surprising that a petition called “Stop Performing Racist, Redface Performances of ‘The Lost Colony’ in Manteo, NC,” became popular around that same time.¹⁰⁹ The petition was started by Adam Griffin, who also included other historical dramas in the criticism.¹¹⁰

Kevin Bradley, the chairman of the Roanoke Island Historical Association, took the criticism in stride and started to work towards substantial change. Bradley stated, “A lot of people say he [Adam Griffin] called us out. I don’t think so. I really think he called us in.”¹¹¹ This sentiment perfectly reflects the attitude of 2020 America. “Calling in” is a new term, mainly introduced by New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In March of 2019, she tweeted, “the most productive end goal when we see it is to educate and heal. It’s the difference btwn [between] “calling in” before “calling out.” “Calling out” is one of the measures of last resort, not 1st or 2nd resort. We do it when repeated attempts to “call in” are disrespected or ignored.”¹¹² Bradley believes that the petition was an efficient and respectful way to hold him and his organization accountable, which is uniquely a 21st century sentiment.

Kevin Bradley and the Roanoke Island Historical Association has been working to make the play more accurate and informative, as well as add important Native elements into the plot. There will now be ongoing collaboration with members of the Lumbee Tribe in North Carolina to make sure that Native American elements of the play are more accurate and respectful.¹¹³ This

¹⁰⁹ Jurkowitz, “‘The Lost Colony’ to Cast 20 Native Americans.”

¹¹⁰ Adam Griffin, “Stop Performing Racist, Redface Performances of ‘The Lost Colony’ in Manteo, NC,” change.org, n.d., <https://www.change.org/p/pnc-bank-stop-performing-the-lost-colony-in-manteo-nc>.

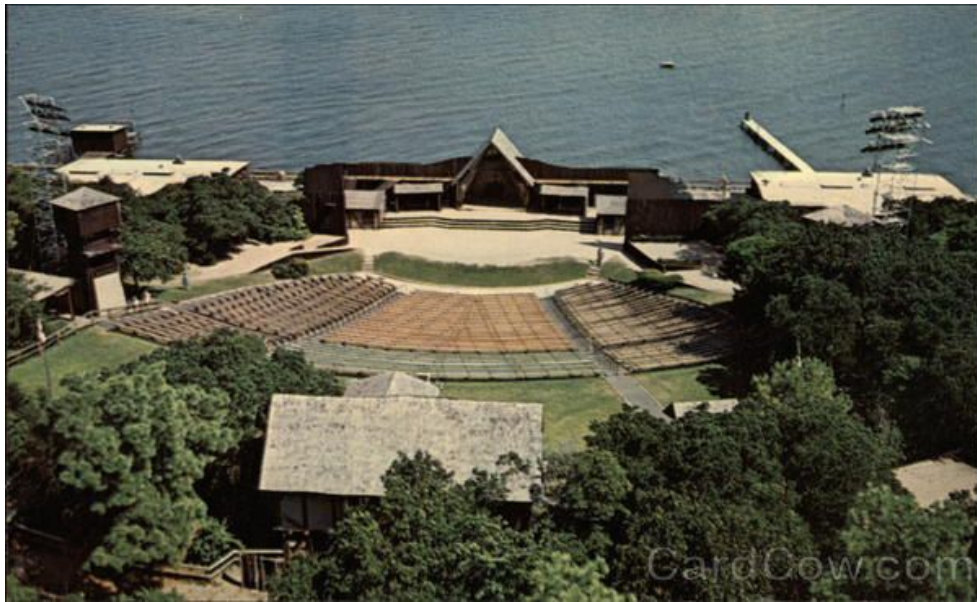
¹¹¹ Jurkowitz, “‘The Lost Colony’ to Cast 20 Native Americans.”

¹¹² Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, tweet, March 5, 2019, <https://twitter.com/AOC/status/1102925532604391425>.

¹¹³ Jurkowitz, “‘The Lost Colony’ to Cast 20 Native Americans.”

is a crucial step to correcting the erasure of Native impact on the Roanoke colonists and addressing the concerns of the petition.

Figure 5: Waterside Theatre on Roanoke Island, North Carolina. Where *The Lost Colony* is performed every summer.



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There have been multiple recent excavations that support the Roanoke Island Historical Association's attempts to commemorate and teach the historical significance of the Roanoke Colony. Andrew Lawler has been the leading journalist reporting on the recent discoveries. He is the author of *The Secret Token: Myth, Obsession, and the Search for the Lost Colony of Roanoke*.¹¹⁵ In 2015 he excitedly published an article with National Geographic entitled "We Finally Have Clues to How the Lost Roanoke Colony Vanished,"¹¹⁶ followed by the

¹¹⁴ *Lost Colony Amphitheatre Roanoke Island, NC*, n.d., n.d., https://www.cardcow.com/images/set354/card00094_fr.jpg.

¹¹⁵ Lawler, *The Secret Token*.

¹¹⁶ Andrew Lawler, "We Finally Have Clues to How the Lost Raonoke Colony Vanished," *National Geographic*, August 7, 2015, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/08/150807-lost-colony-roanoke-hatteras-outer-banks-archaeology/>.

disappointing 2017 Smithsonian article “The Mystery of Roanoke Endures Yet Another Cruel Twist.”¹¹⁷ Scott Dawson, a native of Hatteras Island, has been working under the direction of Dr. Mark Horton for the last ten years. He has recently published a book on his findings on Hatteras, *The Lost Colony and Hatteras Island*.¹¹⁸ He details the archeological dig results, which included some Native artifacts mixed in with English artifacts. Chapter 16, entitled “Survivors’ Camp,” is the most significant. Dr. Horton and Dawson discovered what could be a fort, built possibly by Roanoke's survivors, on National Park Service land on Hatteras Island. This possible fort could be the final missing piece that would change the tone of Paul Green’s ending once and for all.

Roanoke’s Voyage from History to Conspiracy Theory

Our obsession with finding the truth behind this “mystery” reveals a sentiment that reaches back to our founding moments. Conspiracy theorizing has been an essential part of American identity from the start. With almost no evidence, writers filled the period before 1776 with literature warning the colonists about King George III’s scheme to completely take over the colonies. As Joseph E. Uscinski and Joseph M. Parent said in their book *American Conspiracy Theories*, “This ferment culminated in the Declaration of Independence, the original American conspiracy theory.”¹¹⁹ Later, they go on to say, “There is no need to litigate the American Revolution—it has more than legitimated itself and its results have been immense and largely happy. But it is curious and consequential that the justification for independence was a shaky conspiracy theory.”¹²⁰ Going forward, the colonists initially created a system of government that did not really have power to do anything. The Articles of Confederation were abandoned in 1787

¹¹⁷ Andrew Lawler, “The Mystery of Roanoke Endures Yet Another Cruel Twist,” *Smithsonian*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/mystery-roanoke-endures-yet-another-cruel-twist-180962837/>.

¹¹⁸ Dawson, *Hatteras Island*.

¹¹⁹ Joseph E. Uscinski and Joseph M. Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

¹²⁰ Uscinski and Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories*, 3.

in favor for the Constitution. However, the Constitution still had some built-in indicators of skepticism for authority. The checks and balances system that America still uses was designed so that no one person would have too much power.

Later in American history, the spread of a fake news story influenced public opinion so severely that we went to war over it. In February of 1898, the *USS Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor. Several journals and newspapers published stories about the event, and blamed it on Spain. This exacerbated American opinion toward the Spanish, and America declared war in 1898.¹²¹ It was never proven that the attack came from the Spanish, meaning that America declared war over a conspiracy theory. The outcome of this widespread rumor is considered an important moment in U.S. History, but it also shows how rumors and lies have been an integral part of American society. This is now taught in US History classes as an example of “yellow journalism,” or publishing stories based on your own opinion to influence the public. The Mississippi Department of Education included the *USS Maine* in their standard US.4.1: “Investigate causes of the Spanish-American War, including: yellow journalism, the sinking of the Battleship *USS Maine*, and economic interest in Cuba.”¹²² Furthermore, “Reading Like a Historian” from Stanford University has lesson materials for use on the explosion of the *USS Maine*, yellow journalism, and the Spanish-American War.¹²³ This event is commonly considered to be an example of rumor mongers in American society and their influence on American History.

¹²¹ “Today in History - February 15,” Library of Congress, n.d., <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/february-15/>.

¹²² Mississippi Department of Education, *2018 Mississippi College- and Career- Readiness Standards for the Social Studies*, n.d., www.mdek12.org/ESE.

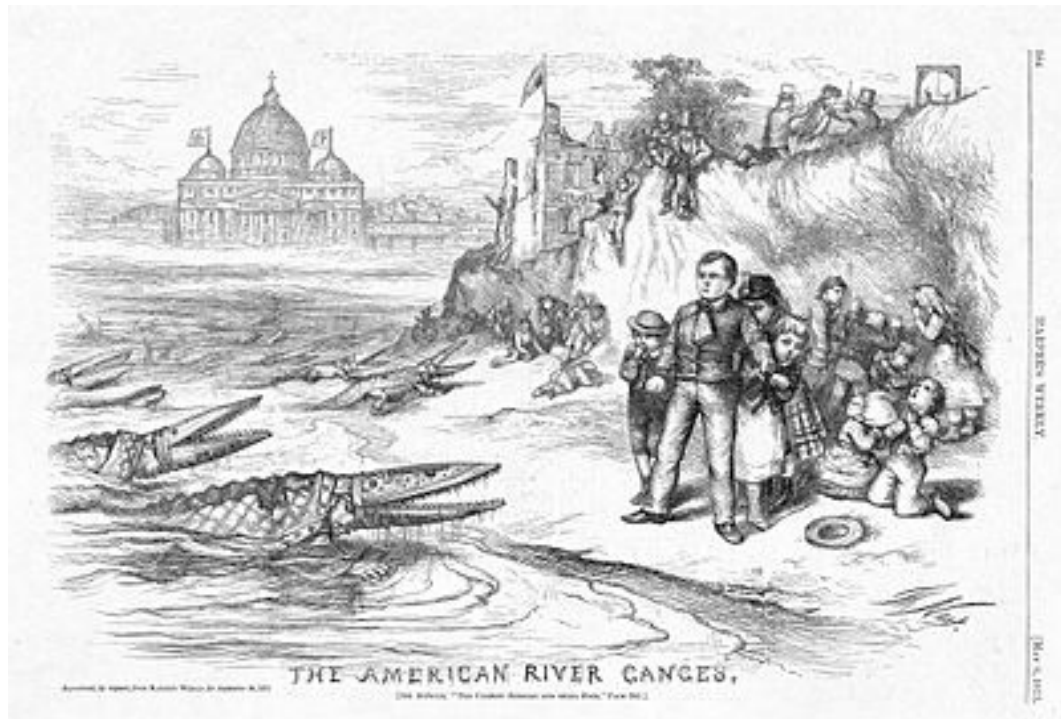
¹²³ “Maine Explosion,” Reading Like a Historian, n.d., <https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/maine-explosion>.

Another example of widespread rumors and mistrust in American society would be the immigration boom in the 19th century. There was a very anti-Catholic sentiment in America during this time, which played out very publically in the 1928 Presidential Election.¹²⁴ Al Smith was running for president against Herbert Hoover. However, Smith was Catholic during a time when there was “a stereotypical and widely held belief among the people who were native to America that Roman Catholics were a type of combatant group acting on behalf of the Pope in Rome, with the intention of trying to extend Papal rule and Church authority to America.”¹²⁵ Many believed that, if elected, Smith would obey the Pope and not the American people. As a result of his religious affiliation, Smith lost the election. This was not an isolated event of anti-Catholicism. Famous political cartoonist Thomas Nast produced one of the most infamous anti-Catholic images of this period.

Figure 6: “The American River Ganges” by political cartoonist Thomas Nast

¹²⁴ Michael Rooney, “Anti-Catholicism v. Al Smith: An Analysis of Anti-Catholicism in the 1928 Presidential Election,” *Verbum* 9, no. 1 (December 2011).

¹²⁵ Rooney.



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The cartoon depicts Catholic bishops as alligators that are attacking the American public school system. Their mitres are drawn with sharp teeth as the bishops crawl out of the water. In the background, one bishop has made his way all the way on shore. His mitre is drawn more open, as if he is attacking the children and teachers on shore. St Peter's Basilica shines in the background as all characters approach a more run-down looking building on the cliff. The cartoon shows the anxiety that Catholic immigrants would corrupt their children and ruin their schools. The KKK also published anti-Catholic messaging, especially during their resurgence in the 1920s.¹²⁷ These are examples of how people made assumptions about Catholic immigrants that influenced their decisions. These theories about Al Smith and the public school system were widespread, but backed with little evidence. Yet, they influenced American opinions and decisions.

¹²⁶ Thomas Nast, "The American River Ganges" (Harper's Weekly, September 1871).

¹²⁷ Rooney, "Anti-Catholicism v. Al Smith: An Analysis of Anti-Catholicism in the 1928 Presidential Election."

One final example of when paranoia and conspiracy took over American society is the Red Scare and McCarthyism. During the Cold War, people were so scared of being infiltrated by communists. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy started a witch hunt by claiming that he had a list of known communists. He had no such list, and accused people at random. After the Red Scare was over, his name was used as a noun.¹²⁸ The definition of “McCarthyism” is “the practice of publicizing accusations of political disloyalty or subversion with insufficient regard to evidence” or “the use of unfair investigatory or accusatory methods in order to suppress opposition.”¹²⁹ People that McCarthy accused were ostracized, lost their jobs, and were ejected from society. Many of these people were not communists, and therefore their exile was based on a rumor. This famous point in U.S. History was also immortalized by the controversial essay, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” by Richard Hofstadter.¹³⁰ The essay contains the very essence of McCarthyism. Hofstadter explains how paranoia and conspiracies can be used to attack certain groups of people with little to no evidence. He also gives examples of how this tactic has been used throughout history.

Other examples of common American conspiracy theories include the JFK assassination, the moon landing, and “Area 51.” Many Americans think that the CIA killed JFK, that the American moon landing was faked, and that there is a secret government facility that houses aliens called Area 51. These all seem rather bizarre, and yet some of the American population truly believes these things. Considering this history of distrust and skepticism, it makes sense

¹²⁸ “McCarthyism / The ‘Red Scare,’” Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, n.d., <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/mccarthyism-red-scare>.

¹²⁹ “McCarthyism,” The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, n.d., <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=McCarthyism&submit.x=29&submit.y=25>.

¹³⁰ Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 1964, <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>.

that America would relentlessly seek the truth of what is considered “the oldest mystery of America.” The Roanoke Colony is the first conspiracy theory.

In an age where science can explain all of the natural things in the world, humanity cannot help but turn to the supernatural. While the ending of *The Lost Colony* clearly states the leaders' intentions, it leaves a sense of mystery that is used by conspiracy theorists and academics alike. One outspoken group of conspiracy theorists is the Zombie Research Society, which claims that the Roanoke Colony is an instance of a, “sudden, undead plague.”¹³¹ The Society warns that, “there could be something sinister still in the ground on Roanoke Island, waiting to be released into a modern population that is more advanced, more connected, but just as unprepared as ever.”¹³² They base their warning on the findings of Lawrence Stager, an archeologist from Harvard . Supposedly, he unearthed signs of cannibalism at the Roanoke site. Unfortunately, the article about the Zombie Colonists at Roanoke fails to cite where they found this information. Stager famously devoted his studies to the Canaanites, Phoenicians, Philistines, and Israelites' archeological findings.¹³³ There is no evidence that Stager ever excavated at Roanoke, but that does not stop self-proclaimed historians from connecting his name to Roanoke and the zombie theory. The lack of outspoken truth gives room for enthusiasts to twist the story to fit their own beliefs.

While this is a bizzare and obviously false theory, it is important to understanding the 21st century. As previously stated, this thesis does not explore what happened to the colonists. It

¹³¹ “ZOMBIE COLONY OF ROANOKE,” *Zombie Research Society* (blog), October 22, 2009, <https://zombieresearchsociety.com/archives/2190>.

¹³² “Zombie Colony.”

¹³³ Sam Roberts, “Lawrence Stager, Creative Biblical Archaeologist, Dies at 74,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/02/nyregion/lawrence-stager-creative-biblical-archaeologist-dies-at-74.html>.

explores how the different theories can be used to understand those who thought of them. We all know zombies are not a real threat, so we must look at it as a metaphor: “Zombies are the perfect avatar for the twenty-first-century threat environment: they are not well understood by serious analysts, they possess protean capabilities, and the challenges they pose to states are very, very grave.”¹³⁴ The very wording of the Zombie Research Society’s warning betrays their fear. They say that our society is “more connected.”¹³⁵ Presumably, this connection would be our downfall in a zombie apocalypse. In fact, it was our downfall in the COVID-19 pandemic. A society that is as connected as we are can be scary for some, which is the fear projected by the Zombie Research Society. Connected means lots of people, movement, and information. Zombies represent these fears and more, as Daniel W. Drezner points out in his article “Metaphor of the Living Dead.”¹³⁶ He says that “Much like pandemics or financial crises, it is impossible to negotiate with the living dead. Similar to online or offline terrorism, it seems like just a small outbreak of flesh-eating ghouls can wreak massive carnage. And a mob of reanimated, ravenous corpses is as inexorable a force as climate change.”¹³⁷

Roanoke has made a reappearance in other ways in the 21st century. It has been the platform for many works of fiction. The most notable example of a recent adaptation is the popular show *American Horror Story* and its season six series “My Roanoke Nightmare.” The writers of *American Horror Story* took advantage of the blank slate ending that Green wrote and created their own sinister ending for the colonists. Their story looked much different from the primary sources:

¹³⁴ Daniel W. Drezner, “Metaphor of the Living Dead,” *The John Hopkins University Press*, *Horrors*, 81, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 825–49, 829.

¹³⁵ “Zombie Colony.”

¹³⁶ Drezner, “Metaphor of the Living Dead.”

¹³⁷ Drezner, “Metaphor of the Living Dead,” 828.

It became known as the ghost colony because the spirits remained. They haunted the native tribes living in the surrounding areas, killing indiscriminately. The elder knew he had to act. He cast a banishment curse. First he collected the personal belongings of all the dead colonists. Then they burned them. The ghosts appeared, summoned by their talismans. But before the spirits could cause them any more harm, the elder completed the curse that would banish the ghosts forever. By uttering a single word. The same word found carved on a post at the abandoned colony. ‘Croatoan.’¹³⁸

This quote is taken directly from the fictional show, but the danger comes from unclear disclaimers. If an overzealous fan digs into this story, he or she might find that it lines up well. Natives in the area were dying, seemingly at random. However, what a fan might see as proof of the supernatural a historian would recognize as disease. Thomas Harriot, an English scientist fluent in Algonquian, confirmed that in less than a month, shortly after the English fleet left, the European diseases had already spread like wildfire. The Carolina Algonquian’s immune systems and medicines were completely unequipped for foreign diseases, and many died. Lawler writes that, “They presumed—correctly—that the English could kill ‘by shooting invisible bullets into them.’”¹³⁹ The part in the show concerning burning the colonists’ possessions can be attributed to Governor White’s journal. He recorded that when he left, he had buried a box of his personal belongings; when he came back, he found it destroyed. The writers of *American Horror Story* certainly did their research when they sought to make the natural into supernatural, but they neglected to share that true story out of context of the show. This can be dangerous to the memory of events because the unexplained is much more memorable than the explanation. It allows people to spread misinformation, which affects public memory.

¹³⁸ Eliana Dockterman, “How Season 6’s Mystery Brings ‘American Horror Story’ Full Circle,” *TIME Magazine*, September 15, 2016, <https://time.com/4495264/american-horror-story-season-six-roanoke/>.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Lawler, *The Secret Token*, 65; Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, 1588, 29.

In the writers and viewers of *American Horror Story*, we see a fear of the paranormal. Maybe deeper than that, a fear of imprisonment or nothing after death. The Roanoke colonists continue to haunt the colony after death, their souls imprisoned on earth. This fear is fairly common, which is why people tend to be religious or “spiritual.” It is terrifying to think that after death there is nothing. It is humanity’s big unanswered question: what happens after you die? *My Roanoke Nightmare* explores a possibility that your soul persists on earth, doomed to never rest until the end of time. This is arguably more terrifying than nothing after death. Furthermore, it is a terrifying prospect for the living. To think that your home, which should be a safe space, can be invaded by those to whom you pose no threat is one of the scariest parts about being alive. *American Horror Story* is just one franchise, to which there are many seasons, that explore paranormal activity. The Roanoke Colony might be America’s great unsolved mystery, but the mystery of death belongs to the world.

Though clearly false and dramatized, the “My Roanoke Nightmare” narrative further influences people to attribute more mystery to Roanoke than can be academically supported. Even in 2016, when fans and critics published articles about the season and the story behind it, the information was not quite right and obviously not fully researched. Though White has written that he found the Roanoke fort dismantled and transported, the story goes that, “When he returned four years later he found the Roanoke fort in ruins, the colonists all gone. Carved on a tree was the word ‘Croatoan,’ the name of a friendly Indian tribe living down the coast. But searchers were never able to find Virginia Dare or the other settlers.”¹⁴⁰ What this story fails to say is deafening. The article does not explain White’s unwavering certainty that the colonists were on Croatoan, nor does it detail the tragedies that kept White and his men from ever reaching

¹⁴⁰ “The TIME Vault,” *TIME Magazine*, September 1, 1930, <https://time.com/vault/issue/1930-09-01/page/19/>.

the island and confirming their assimilation there. It does not cover the records from John Lawson's book *A New Voyage to Carolina* where he discovered natives on Croatoan—by then called Hatteras—with grey eyes and ancestors that talked, dressed, and read like Englishmen. The article's lack of detail leaves room for inaccuracies to form, which then snowballs into “America's first unsolved mystery,” which then deteriorates into “lost” instead of “emigrated.”

The public is convinced that the colony is lost, with some dramatic cover-up or conspiracy theory, because the answer they have been given is too simple. After years of conspiracy theories it is hard to believe that the colonists simply married natives and no one wanted to talk about it. The 21st century is characterized by the rise of apocalyptic science fiction. Zombie movies and horror shows take something so far out there and make it real and relatable to us. Maybe in a society that is so connected by social media and the internet, we see too much human horror in our daily lives. Every day there is some new tragedy happening in the world that is completely out of our control. By reading about the Roanoke Zombie Theory or watching *American Horror Story*, people are turning their attention away from the true horrors of humanity and focusing on things that could not possibly be real. It is very possible to fear the real trials on Earth, but it is also exhausting, and they can infiltrate every part of your life. Therefore, it is much easier to take that fear and replace it with a fear of zombies.

Conclusion

Maybe the Roanoke Colony has an “inexorable pull” because the story has never really been about the Roanoke Colony.¹⁴¹ People get lost in its great depths searching blindly for a lesson because there is no lesson really there. The Roanoke Colony, from its very origin through

¹⁴¹ Andrew Lawler, *The Secret Token: Myth, Obsession, and the Search for the Lost Colony of Roanoke* (New York: Anchor Books, 2018), 11.

to present time, can only be understood through the lens of something else. The “truth” that historians, hobbyists, amateurs, and conspiracy theorists are searching for can only be found in the insights that Roanoke reveals about other things. It has no answers for itself. We cannot understand why England sent a colony to America in the first place if we do not first learn about the relationship between the English and the Spanish at that time. The short references to Roanoke’s fate in the 1700s can only make sense if you first study the attitude towards mixed marriages. Paul Green may have memorialized the Lost Colony in his play, but the themes speak more to the Great Depression era than they do Colonial America. Finally, the 21st century’s interest in the paranormal—zombies and ghosts—show more of the fears in 2020 than of anything else.

The confusion about the story doesn’t mean that Roanoke is devoid of any meaning. In fact, it means that it contains a kind of Rosetta Stone that is far more insightful than any omnipotent truth we might find. To study history is to study humanity, and all of its achievements and shortcomings. It gives us an opportunity to learn how to empathize and expand our capacity for compassion. As the story of Roanoke unfolded and changed through history, we can come to an understanding that it is told from the eyes of humans. Nothing about it can be emphatically true, so we cannot begin to look at it in that way. Instead, we must take Professor Brent Lane’s advice and “run up to the edge and veer off.”¹⁴² Not so that we don’t get lost, but so that we can dive into each rabbit hole path it presents and follow it to answers.

In another way, the Roanoke Colony holds up a mirror to its investigator. Which rabbit hole will you find most interesting? There are many to fall into: archeological discoveries, paranormal theories, primary source analysis, and Native American studies. I would even argue

¹⁴² Lawler, *The Secret Token*, 11.

that the figures in the story that you find the most annoying, intriguing, or relatable reveal boundless realities about yourself. The archeologists might finally come to a solid conclusion about where the colony disappeared to, but people will never stop making up stories and conspiracy theories about it. After all, it has a pull, and some people just like to get lost.

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