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An Assessment of Parliament's View of the Jamestown Settlement in 1652 – 45 Years After the Initial Establishment

By Austin Valentine Jr.

In April of 1606, King James I of England granted a charter for a settlement in the new world to an organization known as the Virginia Company of London. On December 20th of that same year, three ships carrying 105 men and boys set sail for the new world. On April 26th of 1607 the small fleet landed in what is now known as Virginia. There they established a small colony on the banks of the James river called Jamestown, named after their king James I (The Jamestown Chronicles 2007).

The colony initially had a rough start, plagued by a number of issues such as native attacks, disease, and starvation. However, by 1619 they were fully established and formed the first legislative assembly in North America. From that point forward the colony began its road toward an independent form of government (The Jamestown Chronicles 2007).

Some twenty years later, by the end of the 1640's, the mother country had become entangled in a civil war, which followed the beheading of King Charles I. It was during this period when the colonists of Virginia, who felt they had been loyal to the English crown, were now being forced into what was known as a Commonwealth government (The Jamestown Chronicles 2007). England felt as if the Jamestown colony had forgotten how they became a settlement and who aided in this venture.

This change occurred on March 12th of 1652, when Sir William Berkeley of Virginia agreed to set terms of capitulation between the Virginia Colony and the English government. In these terms, Virginia agreed to cease support of the Stuart royal family, take up the status of a

royal colony, and honor the wishes of the crown. This new reorganization was known as the Treaty of Jamestown.

This action came after a series of trade embargos and navel blockades imposed by Parliament to cut into Virginia's economic growth, thus illustrating both parliament's reach and Navel strength during this period (Pestana 2018). With such an illustration of political power by England, one must ask themselves if this show of force was substantiated by fear or necessity to prove that England was a global power?

One can argue that England's ruling class was simply flexing their muscles to the world through its powerful navy. This navel superiority is best substantiated in a December 1652 order by parliament to fund the royal Navy and its sailors. It was written "—what sums of money shall be requested to be paid or assigned for carrying on the Service of the Navy, to issue their Warrants from time to time unto the Treasurers by the several public Receipts, out of which any Moneys already owed shall be appointed by Parliament for the use of the Navy, to pay unto the Treasurer of the Navy the sums to be certified (British Library 1652, Doc: Z2001252761)."

This illustrates how important England's Navel superiority was to Parliament during this period. Such Navel superiority made England feel they could force any colony, including Jamestown, into submission with little or no effort. Therefore, one can understand Sir William Berkeley's eagerness during the Treaty of Jamestown.

Another unique aspect of England's show of force comes from their belief that God had propelled them to such greatness. "—Gods assistance with the Forces and Armes we have already, and such aid and supplies as probably may come from his Majesty and allies abroad (British Library 1652, Doc:Z000767453). " Thus, implying that their status as a global power has

been ordained by the power of God. This ideology is best demonstrated during the period of civil unrest by a single comment about those who would take a position against England's wishes.

"The Ministers do thunder Hell and Damnation against those in Edenburgh who accept charge of office (British Library 1652, Doc: Z2000757457)." Such statements as this seems to imply that the people also view the king as having a God-like status.

These statements suggest that England felt as if they were a supreme force that could not be beaten. In essence they possessed the will of God, and such could not be toppled by any foe or foreign government. However, one could also argue that despite England's power some in Parliament still possessed a fear of England taking a backseat to other countries like Spain and France through territorial expansion.

Such a view could be argued by early 1560's writings. In such writings Parliament appears to be afraid of losing its grip as a global power, particularly in the New World. It is written that there are conflicts in liberty and that "— freedom is a Virgin that everyone seeks to deflower, and like a Virgin it must be kept free from mixture with any other form (British Library 1652, Doc: Z2000767410)." The document containing this statement goes on to imply that once one has tasted the sweetness of freedom, they are forever affected.

This along with early documents make multiple references about the Virginia colonies and their growth, convey that Parliament felt they may possibly lose their influence in the New World. However, after the Treaty of Jamestown, Parliament began to feel the colonials have now "—turned to the good of the Publik (British Library 1652, Doc: Z2000767465)." This is most likely backed by England's belief in their strong Navy and their ability to enforce their will upon the colonists.

Early 17th century English writings suggest that England did possess a military and political strength that was unmatched as well as ordained by the power of God. Therefore, they felt their victories and defeats were the result of God's will. Such solidifies the fact that England's ruling class felt they were a global power and supreme to other countries around the world. Yet, they still illustrated in their writings a fear of losing this power and control by allowing the citizens of their territories to taste freedom from English rule and the long arm of Parliament. Such a show of strength as well as doubt leaves room for both political and religious interpretation in England, implying that England's Parliamentary ruling class did possess a superiority that was clouded by fear.

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