



## Savage Kingdom: Virginia and The Founding of English America (Text Only)

*Benjamin Woolley*

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**Savage Kingdom: Virginia and The Founding of English America (Text Only)** Benjamin Woolley Brilliantly framed narrative fascinating. . . . A well-told story.' -Kirkus Review Four centuries ago, and fourteen years before the Mayflower, a group of men "led by a one-armed ex-pirate, an epileptic aristocrat, a reprobate cleric, and a government spy" left London aboard a fleet of three ships to start a new life in America. They arrived in Virginia in the spring of 1607 and set about trying to create a settlement on a tiny island in the James River. Despite their shortcomings, and against the odds, they built Jamestown, a ramshackle outpost that laid the foundations of the British Empire and the United States of America. Drawing on new discoveries, neglected sources, and manuscript collections scattered across the world, Savage Kingdom challenges the textbook image of Jamestown as a mere money-making venture. It reveals a reckless, daring enterprise led by outcasts of the Old World who found themselves interlopers in a new one. It charts their journey into a beautiful landscape and a sophisticated culture that they found both ravishing and alien, which they yearned to possess but threatened to destroy. An intimate story in an epic setting, Benjamin Woolley shows how the land of Pocahontas came to be drawn into a new global order, reaching from London to the Orinoco Delta, from the warring kingdoms of Angola to the slave markets of Mexico, from the gates of the Ottoman Empire to the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

## Savage Kingdom: Virginia and The Founding of English America (Text Only) Details

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## From Reader Review Savage Kingdom: Virginia and The Founding of English America (Text Only) for online ebook

### Jeff Ford says

For such a serious book, *Savage Kingdom* was an easy read and kept my interest. Nothing about Robert Ford unfortunately.

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### Taylor says

*Savage Kingdom* is not dry, like so many history books. Instead, littered with primary-source material that gives us an incredible window into the late 16th and early 17th centuries, it reads like a gripping story, and is a detailed play-by-play of the establishment of the State of Virginia. Who knew American history could make for an edge-of-your-seat read? (Maybe you did, but a childhood of mind-numbing U.S. history books had me thinking otherwise.)

It is easy, in learning history, to see only large-scale cause-and-effect — e.g., “Marie and Louis lived lavish lives and poured enormous amounts of money into decor and war, the Crown went bankrupt, the people were unfairly taxed; therefore, starving and impoverished, they became an angry mob, executed Marie and Louis, and initiated the French Revolution.” In reality, this view is too narrow; history is a confluence of events, and every detail plays a role — the whispered gossip, the words and works of the artists and critics, the legislative habits that become difficult to break. Woolley takes those details into account in *Savage Kingdom*, which gives us a look at events around the globe at the time of Jamestown’s inception. Above all, *Savage Kingdom* is a fascinating glimpse into life and politics in the early 1600s, particularly for English explorers and Spanish conquistadors, colonial settlers, British investors, and the indigenous peoples of the East Coast.

America has a long history of drawing the oddballs and outcasts, and of their persistence toward the goal of achieving social and economic mobility through hard work (“the American dream”), and this tradition began many years before the Mayflower landed in Plymouth. The settlers of Jamestown faced stunning adversities — often catalyzed by their own penchant for evil and destruction — but against all odds, managed to conquer them, just as they did the Powhatan’s land. When I started the book, it was with respect for my country but disgust for the behavior of its pioneers; having finished it, my feelings toward the Virginia venture are now as varied as the opinions of all those involved. It is clear than astounding amount of effort went into researching and writing this book, and it earns **4 out of 5 tobacco plants** from me.

I believe that a book should challenge readers and push us outside our comfort zones to expand our world views. You can definitely expect this book to challenge you. It challenged me to empathize with the settlers of Virginia. The atrocities committed during America’s founding years is the stuff of nightmares, so I was also challenged to push myself through some of the more grotesque occurrences — it never grew boring, but it did occasionally become nauseating and stressful. It is a story that needs to be told, but I’m skeptical of the idea that the gory details need to be explicitly shared. That is absolutely a matter of opinion, and I can see and understand the other perspectives: that it wouldn’t be an authentic account otherwise, that to omit the injustices done would be a further injustice, that summarizing what occurred as opposed to laying it all out in detail opens the door to alterations of history. I absolutely respect those views, but it is nonetheless the gory details that prevent me from giving the book full marks.

**Content Advisory:** Several disturbing instances of torture and murder are described, which may be upsetting

to some readers. The archaic language of Woolley's primary sources is quoted very often, and Woolley's own writing, while eloquent, may be equally difficult for a younger reader. Therefore, I give *Savage Kingdom* an **R rating** and would advise an educator to read it herself before recommending it to a young person, to ensure that young person has the maturity level necessary to appreciate it. And make sure that young person knows how to use a dictionary.

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### **Christine says**

Many facts were previously not known as related here, by the words of true man English captains, colonial administrators and many others. While times were very difficult for the colonists and many died, their brutal, arrogant and selfish characters seem to have led them, the colony, and many who depended on them, into ill-advised and greedy webs of their own making. Mainly, their own attitudes about work, and the station of many of them being too good to do a sufficient amount of manual labor to keep themselves or their families alive. Many also refused to acknowledge the wisdom and advises of Native Americans even regarding food and safety from other warrior Inc tribes. It was very frustrating likewise to see how regularly the Europeans used and abused the good graces and treaties with the Indian, which they never intended to keep, even before the ink was dry on them.

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### **Kayla says**

So glad I found this book! I had just returned from a trip from Virginia and have always been interested in the states history.

I love how the author wrote detailed history about the crew and the myths and culture of the local Native tribes. The accounts were greatly detailed so I could picture the entire scene in my mind. Details such as how the people looked, the way the land looked, the smells, the sounds, weather, etc.

As an American, it's important to read up on our country's history BEFORE the revolution and this is a good book that shows just how wild, rich and unexplored our land was. I also liked that the account included some of the history of other explorers such as the Vikings and Celts that had explored a part of the US and Canada way before 1492. It shows there is still a bunch of history about our country we still have little information about.

Of course, it was fun reading about Captain John Smith and Princess Pocahontas, however, as the book explains, they were only two people out of many who were important to the survival of Jamestown. If you like fast paced history books, this is a good one.

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### **Paul says**

An excellent overview of not only the privations and struggles of the Jamestown settlement, but the machinations in the wider world that had a direct bearing on its viability. I was surprised at the level of intrigue both within the company on the ground, and within the leadership in London. The frequency that members of the initial group are imprisoned, or threatened with execution (including Captain John Smith) was eye opening.

It was also amazing to find the ambivalence that the venture espoused within the corridors of power. Since it violated Spain's claim to the Americas, the English government was eager to disavow any support for it and ensure that the Spanish could destroy the colony without fear of reprisals or protests. Apparently the

continued maintenance of St. Augustine in Florida, was a direct result of the presence of the British in Jamestown. The Spanish would otherwise have abandoned this garrison.

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## James says

There were some things that surprised me in this book

1. The Jamestown settlers lived in squalid conditions for many years
2. The natives were pretty brutal (skinning people alive, etc)
3. The official rules for the Virginia Company were to treat the Indians well, pay them well for everything, set up schools to teach the Indians how to integrate with European society and Christianize them
4. Not everyone in a colony thinks or behaves as instructed
5. Lots of infighting in the colony - who is really in charge

Also, as I have reflected in other times, throughout the course of history, when a strong party meets a weak party, it almost always goes poorly for the strong party. For many years, that meant the Europeans were treated savagely, and after the Europeans were stronger, the Indians were treated poorly. Misunderstandings and conflict inevitably creep up over the decades. It is better to be the stronger party, and then decide to treat the weak party with magnanimity. It is not good to be the weak party and hope for kindness.

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## Jason says

With the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first colonists and founding of the first permanent British settlement in present day America, there have been a slew of books and reexaminations of the settlement. Wooley, a popular writer and broadcaster in Great Britain has contributed to this review of the Jamestown by presenting a popular history from the British viewpoint, that examines the founding of Jamestown from the perspective that tries to place Jamestown in the perspective of the new House of Stuart monarchy, a Britain with a shaken economy, and the race to make a claim in North America to compete with the Spanish Empire. Along the way, the Powhatan native tribe Chesapeake Bay have their motivations and civilization examined as this strongest of the east coast tribes.

The strongest parts of this book involve the examination of the relationship between the first settlers and the Powhatan Indians, the exploration of the Chesapeake for the first time by Europeans by Captain John Smith and why Jamestown was so important to the British government. The relationship between the founding of Virginia and the discovery of Bermuda, and why, for a time the Bermuda part of the Virginia colony was much more important economically to Britain is a nice find within a book, and Wooley does his best work of showing human drama with Bermuda.

The book is weak by dragging details of the British government out many pages past necessary for the popular reader, especially the American reader who, from the standpoint of 400 years of time will take some effort to dig into the bureaucracy of the that government for a popular history read.

If the general reader is willing to go through the 400 pages of details, at the end, he should find a great explanation for the place of Jamestown in the American, Indian and British story. The book hits its high point with its description of the first Jamestown Assembly, the first such representative government in modern times that was founded as much out of corporate business interests and a leveling out of previous British hierarchies in the American jungle.

For a popular history, Savage Kingdom shows why the British way of colonization - joint stock companies,

authorized but not led by the government with a grass roots organization of the Christian church succeeded in the long run over the government/ military colonization of Latin America.

This is a fine book, but again, the general reader should be warned that it has heavy details of the details of British government among personalities that are often hard to follow.

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## Emily says

The last, the very last, of the Jamestown books I'm reading...

Well, this was a good one to end on. After an odd prologue set in 1907, the 300th anniversary of the Jamestown settlement, the book steps back to 1565 and the early Huguenot attempt to colonize Florida - a direct challenge to Catholic Spain. This book excelled at providing rich context for the Jamestown settlement and the decisions made by those in authority over it. Mr. Woolley wades through an enormous scope of cultural, religious, political, social and economic history across the known world at the time and manages to create a thorough narrative about Jamestown without over-simplifying the complexities involved and (mostly) not overwhelming the reader with detail.

This book provides a comprehensive look at all aspects of the Jamestown experience, from the earlier, unsuccessful English attempts to colonize, to the political intrigues back in London, delving further into the reasons for the Starving Time and including a more extensive consideration of settler/Native American interactions than any of the other books I've read. The settlement at Jamestown is traced from its first conception through the dissolution of the Virginia Company and the takeover by King James, weaving in the Spanish colonization of the New World, Native American culture and politics, and biographical sketches on an astounding number of characters who influenced the colonization of Virginia.

Not light reading, though, and there were definitely some dry stretches; I wouldn't recommend this to a casual reader with a passing interest in Jamestown. And there were a few editing errors - the two maps showing John Smith's path of exploration of the Chesapeake Bay were labeled incorrectly and the Starving Time was once referred to as the winter of 1608/09 instead of 1609/10. But overall, a close and thorough look at how and why Jamestown happened the way it did. Even those who are familiar with this history will learn a great deal.

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## Steve Haywood says

This is a serious (though not academic and boring) history book about England's first colony in America. I deem it to be halfway between a popular history book (such as those by Giles Milton) and an academic book). It tells the story in quite a lot of detail and refers to sources used from time to time (a bibliography and notes section is at the back).[return][return]The story of the Jamestown colony is a fascinating one to me, all the more so because it is the beginning of modern America. This book goes into quite a lot of detail, which I like, but is an exciting and interesting read. For me it was something of a page turner, not dry at all. Reading it in 2007, the book is very topical as it is the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown this year (precisely when I was reading it in fact!).[return][return]I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the early history of America, or just to anyone who likes reading solid, interesting history books.

## **Meghan Helzlsouer says**

Riveting account of the settlement of Jamestown. I read it because I had been frequently watching the Disney movie "Pocahontas" with my two-year-old daughter and wanted to know exactly how much of the movie was not factual. It turns out, a lot! Extremely interesting book; well researched and well presented. Particularly liked the portions about Pocahontas and John Smith, naturally.

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## **Todd Stockslager says**

Narrative historical account of the settling of Jamestown. The writing is fine, and the story interesting. Woolley does a good job documenting the roots of the colony in the political and empirical culture of its time, including the links to the literary "Sirenaicals" who contributed to the founding and popularizing of the "New World" reality and mythology.

The book also traces the roots of the colony in

--the religious wars of the time between Protestants and Catholics,

--the empire-building in Ireland and the Far East, and

--the conflict between Spain and England and Spain's maintenance (or neglect) of its American empire just to the south of Jamestown (which Spain claimed as its own).

All these factors contributed to the fragility and growing pains of the colony, and to its ultimate survival as a cornerstone of the English North American colonies . And the story of Jamestown is one of constant failures and setbacks, leavened with the very occasional success. There are few hints of empirical glory or Manifest Destiny here, just a savage kingdom, as Woolley titles it, populated and probed by ordinary people with at least their share of ordinary flaws.

And yes, John Smith and Pocahontas are in the story, as they must be, but neither overvalued at the center nor marginalized as fictional characters. Woolley's research in original sources allows hm to give Smith's accounts the weight they deserve, but no more.

On the down side, the book ends too abruptly. Wooley has just spent the last two chapters describing the political battle in London over the funding and governance of the colony, and the bloody battle in Jamestown when the Native Americans attacked the colony and drove many of the survivors to starvation or abandonment. Then in a handful of pages so brief they seem almost an afterthought, he summarizes the continuation of the colony and sets the stage for the entry of Jamestown into the Colonial era. I realize that is a much longer story that merits and has received book-length treatment of its own, but I hoped that Woolley would provide more of an explanation and account of how those twin battles were resolved and how Jamestown not only survived but thrived into the Colonial era.

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## **Tomerobber says**

This is an audiobook on 11CD's that ran over 14 hrs. And was narrated by David Drummond who did an excellent job with the pronunciation of all the Indian names. I was interested in this topic because I wanted to know more about the Jamestown colony. It was very interesting and filled a gap in my knowledge of that era. The author did a great job of making history much more interesting than anything I ever remember from grammar school. A great listen!!

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### **Sanaya says**

Riveting. The story of Jamestown is a fascinating one, but complicated and in many ways underdocumented. Woolley crafts a book that does justice to the story, the nuances, and the mysteries of Jamestown. He describes Indian and English societies in a way that highlights their similarities, and describes the diplomacy in a way you can sympathize with both. In fact, that's possibly Woolley's greatest accomplishment. There was so much conflict in Jamestown that it would be easy to take sides. It would also be easy to fall into the common rhetoric vilifying or dismissing the colonists and venture. Woolley does none of this. A few people emerge as dislikable, but for the most part you see normal people in a very abnormal situation. This is just an exceptional telling of an incredible history.

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### **Savithny says**

A good, clear, read that really set the foundation of Jamestown in the greater context of English politics for me - and in doing so also set Shakespeare's "The Tempest" in context as well. Many of the other things I've read about the founding of Virginia cover that time entirely from the point of view of those who were there, with relief ships arriving and former settlers departing, never to be heard from again.

That said, it starts strongly and then tapers off into an ending that was less strong and less satisfying. It neither summarizes where the colony stands at the end of the period chosen to cover nor gives a satisfying look forward to how that period builds towards later events.

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### **Vicky Hunt says**

**To sum it up, Woolley covers an ocean between England and Spain, between the Protestant, the Catholics, and the native pagan religions, between generations of ruling monarchs, and between quite literally warring factions of settlers in the Jamestown Fort.**

Things included in the book, which I found fascinating:

1. Name changes of settlers seeking a new life in a new world
2. True events surrounding Pocahontas and other native Americans
3. Details of the geography as the settlers discovered the land
4. What surrounded the English domination of the Irish
5. "How an island of savages became the land of Shakespeare"
6. Who was El Dorado
7. Details of the imprisonments of Sir Walter Raleigh
8. How to weigh smoke from a pipe

9. Questionable activities of Pirates like John Watts
10. How sedition led to the starving times
11. How Phillip of Spain mislaid the Philippines
12. What torture methods worse than the rack of the inquisition could be used on native savages, and repeated on settlers years later in revenge

A Massive Missive, would well describe this thorough analysis of the extensive source documents of note on the early attempts to settle Jamestown in Virginia.

Savage Kingdom is incredibly well researched, and well written. I was at times over inundated with facts, dates, and details, but I found myself time and again wading through them carefully so as not to miss the impact of such a fascinating era of history. I've read a few other works on Jamestown, and visited it myself. So, it was not new territory. But, much that was covered in this book was new, at least in scope.

Expect much detail, if you choose to read this for yourself. But, the ending is a bit anticlimactic. It just sort of ends at the point where the colonists feel like residents of Jamestown, rather than guests, and when they are well established past the starving times, and after the point they are beginning to wipe out the native populations to reach their original goal of founding a profitable colony.

Point of note: I read the Audible version, which was great. But, I recommend getting a print copy, simply because digital copies lack the presumed maps that appear in print editions. Too bad for me, since Google had little to help me with following this account.

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