Twitter Thread by Robert



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If Augustus Caesar truly "found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble" then Sir William Berkeley may rightly be called the Virginian Caesar. He found us on the verge of economic ruin, torn apart by political, social and religious strife. He left us a nation.

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Early on in his governorship Sir William succeeded in breaking the power of the warlords, something attempted and miserably failed at by previous governors.
https://t.co/lbhuW0WoSG

> Early on the Virginia colony was naught but several isolated plantations dotted along the James River. They operated autonomously outside of the governor's control and, using their indentured servants as private armies, often raided one another. This was our Warlord Era. pic.twitter.com/sgDIRSnjza
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> — Robert (@rfhirst) October 18, 2022

He then set about constructing a new elite for Virginia. Sir William was himself the younger son of an ancient and gentle family, a devout Anglican and a staunch monarchist. Those Sir William recruited would nearly all be exactly as he was in birth and beliefs.

Much of the elite migration to Virginia occured during the 1650s when the Puritans gained the upper hand in England with "Virginia [being] the only city of refuge left in His Majesty's Dominions, in those times, for distressed cavaliers" as one writer put it.

As a result of Sir William's recruitment the first Madison, Mason, Lee and Washington arrived in Virginia, families which would birth important figures later on. One Samuel Filmer also arrived, son of Sir Robert Filmer who wrote the famous royalist treatise "Patriarcha".

In total 72 families came and formed the new elite, awarded the title of the "Founding Families of Virginia", with 25 of them forming a higher aristocracy that monopolized two-thirds of Virginia's powerful Royal Council as well as much of the land.

Unlike other colonies the distribution of wealth in Virginia was very unequal and society was highly stratified. By 1670 in Surry County, the most egalitarian in Virginia, 60% of the workforce owned no land while 8% of the County's population owned the vast majority.

Despite what today would be called an "oppressive society" the new elite proved benevolent in their rule, taking an honest interest in the well-being of their people and (generally) acting as good, moral role models for them to follow, as was observed even a century later.

As concerns the people, Sir William and his new allies worked hard and diligently to solve the issues plaguing them through demographic adjustment. William, the great law-giver, wrote and enacted many new laws to build a society that was the expression of his own values.

Nonconformist preaching was forbidden, baptism in the Anglican church was required by law and Quaker meetings were prohibited. As a consequence, Puritans who had earlier moved to Virginia as well as Quakers began to leave in large numbers, mainly to Maryland and beyond.

Other undesirables such as debtors and homeless people were driven out by Virginia's cavaliers, often fleeing south to the Carolinas. Governor Thomas Culpeper who followed Berkeley remarked in 1681, "Carolina alwayes was and is the sinke of America, the Refuge of our Renagadoes."

To replace those driven out Sir William made careful selection. Though 75% still came over as indentured servants, he cut the number of lowlifes and recruited migrants who were lower middle class and in good moral standing, most often from the southwest of England.

The Virginia accent is itself a product of several rural dialects from England's south and west mixing together and being left on their own to grow. Local variations disappeared like the strong Somerset "z" and the dropped "h" of Sussex speech but common elements survived.

Virginian architecture was likewise derived from the same region, modified to suit American conditions. The finest example of this was Sir William Berkeley's Green Spring, a great house which found its prototype in the south of England.

Another tradition brought over was the great love of hunting which Virginians took further. Down through the time of Thomas Jefferson "sport" meant blood sports with all others - and especially those played with balls - being held in extreme contempt and harshly mocked.

In accordance with New World conditions we developed here a strong martial culture, seen in part above and also in the naming of children. Males were named after, and expected to live up to, great warriors and kings - William, Robert, George, Edward.

The eldest sons and daughters were named for grandparents as opposed to parents as was the case in New England.
(I was named in line with this tradition of ours. My two grandfathers are Robert and Floyd, thus I am Robert-Floyd)

There was another big difference with New England. Virginians rejected the Puritan's nuclear family which was bound by a contractual marriage. "Patriarch" was a familiar term and "family" was everyone under his protection, the family being wholly indissoluble.

All this, it should be circled back on, was the result of Sir William's careful curation of immigrants, his management of residents and his ability to mold Old World traditions to fit New World conditions.

This is not an exhaustive exposition of everything that could be touched on but I think it sufficient to say that had it not been for Sir William Berkeley's titanic exertion of will our unity would not have come about and the roots of our culture would not have been planted.

Truly, Sir William found us a disparate band of tyrants and left us a unified people, a nation.
He found us of brick and left us of marble.