

## 'Discovery myth' credits England, but what about the Indians?

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Stephen Adkins, chief of the Chickahominy Indian tribe, is a member of the Jamestown 400th Commemoration Commission.

Stephen Adkins, chief of the Chickahominy Indian tribe and a history buff, was enjoying a Times-Dispatch article about the town of Smithfield last month.

He was, he said, until he got to this phrase: "The area, discovered by Captain John Smith and other early settlers . . ."

Adkins smiled yesterday but only slightly, recalling his reaction. "I said, 'man, not again.'"

But it is always thus.

America's Indians, who discovered this land and much of America long before any Europeans arrived, never seem to get credit, either in the history books or in modern accounts.

How do others discover a land if you're already there?

Adkins calls the version we all learn in school "the discovery myth."

He talked about it Wednesday to a group of journalists who cover the General Assembly and during a conversation yesterday in his office at the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management, where he is chief deputy director.

Adkins, 61, is low-key and easygoing in conversation. But he admitted yesterday, "This discovery thing, it bugs the hell out of me."

There is some irony here.

Adkins is a member of the Jamestown 400th Commemoration Commission, which is overseeing and promoting next year's anniversary of the 1607 founding of Jamestown.

Isn't he being a traitor to his people?

"[Jamestown] marks the beginning of the diminution of our culture," Adkins agreed. Indeed, within a century, 90 percent of Virginia's Indians would be gone.

Thus, many Indians initially wanted no part of the 400th anniversary.

They have come around.

The founding of the first permanent English settlement, Adkins explained, "represents the start of the greatest nation of Earth." Moreover, Indians were important in the very survival of the settlement in the early days.

"I do view this as a world stage" to tell that story, he said.

One of the first things Adkins did was help change the event's official title from "celebration" to "commemoration."

He's also had a hand in such Jamestown events as the heralded "Virginia Indians: 400 Years of Survival" conference two months ago in Williamsburg. Next July, there will be an Intertribal Cultural Festival in Hampton.

In talks, he fights for the elimination of words like "savages" and "massacre" when a straightforward reading of events puts less blame on indigenous Indians than on the intruders.

The Europeans simply took land, which Indians had always shared, he said. "It was not a sense of land ownership [Indians had] but land access."

Adkins also got a fuller explanation added to National Geographic's video, "John Smith's Voyage of Discovery," which recounts Smith's exploration of the Chesapeake Bay. "I said this was a good video," he said. "It just starts on page two."

Adkins says it's time for news reports to acknowledge the Indian role. He says it's time to teach history more fully.

Or at least back it up a page.

Visit <http://charlescity.org/chickahominy.php>, <http://VirginiaIndians.pwnet.org>, or [www.jamestown2007.org](http://www.jamestown2007.org) for more.