

## **Appropriations of the “The Lost Colony:” Narratives of Failure and Self-Exoneration**

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To understand why the colony in Jamestown, Virginia is usually described as the first *permanent* English settlement in North America, one must look 150 miles south of the Virginia coastal region to a place called Roanoke in what today is North Carolina. The story of the settlement on Roanoke Island in the late sixteenth century, a project initiated by Sir Walter Raleigh, is not exactly a *foundational* story as it is a story about a settlement project that utterly *failed* – at least according to the standards of European privateering and colonizing missions in the new world at the time. And yet, the story of the “lost colony” is a “first” in many ways and it is interesting and important exactly *because* it is connected to failure, mystery, and erasure and continues to be a haunting presence in the cultural imaginary. In my talk I will revisit the known history of the “lost colony” along with some of the controversies and conjectures it has produced. Next to pointing to discourses of symbolic commemoration through the centuries and their gender- and race-specific inflections in the US imaginary, my focus will be on two “lost colony”-narratives in particular: first, the indigenous appropriation of the tale on the part of the Lumbee, a local tribe, who have created their own version of the history of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century settlement that turns a narrative of failure into one of cohabitation and hybridity; second, the white lost colony-discourse that links the “lost colony” to self-exonerating narratives of the “lost cause” in a specific brand of Southern, post-civil war memorial culture, producing radical ideological offshoots in contemporary right-wing propaganda.