THE YEAR 2007 marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia, by a group of settlers from England. In Virginia, they encountered Native American tribes of the Chesapeake Bay region. By 1619, the first Africans arrived on Virginia shores.

This year, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival explores the ways in which these cultures put into motion ideas of democracy and diversity, which helped define Virginia’s culture and that of the United States through four centuries of conflict and cooperation. To help tell the story, delegations from Kent County, England, and West Africa have joined Virginians from all corners of the commonwealth, including descendants of the Virginia tribes. They represent the present-day cultural traditions of the roots groups.

As you listen to historic ballads, smell English hops, join a Virginia tribal dance, or learn how to cook a West African peanut dish, consider how the three roots groups came together with later immigrants to form a vibrant new culture that is still, to this day, transforming and recombining before our eyes.