

Bacon's Rebellion

Bacon's Rebellion

With the establishment of Carolina the initial settlement of the Southern colonies, Georgia excepted, had been completed. As the southward extensions of English imperialism clashed with Spain's outer defenses in Florida to bring into the story new diversities of interest and geography, life in the older provinces took on a new complexity. It is also necessary to take notice of new problems in the white man's relations with the Indian. This leads the way for Bacon's Rebellion, a popular uprising in Virginia which many have seen as a forerunner of the American Revolution, and that it falls on a revolution in England to which the leaders of our own Revolution repeatedly refer to.

When observing Bacon's Rebellion, there can be no simple answer found for this complex problem. In actuality, there were several causes that lead up to the rebellion. The ill temper of an old man who had outlived his usefulness, the attitude of a young man whose career suggests more of spirit than of balance, an accumulation of economic and political grievances, and a tragic inability to cope with the fundamental problem of Indian relations. Most agree that the trouble really began with a dispute over Indian policy.

The people tried many things to stop the rebellion from coming about. They tried to make policies to make peace with the Indians, but they all failed.

One policy originated in the peace treaty of 1646, which separated the Indians from the white men. No Indian could enter the area without risk of death. In return, the Indians received exclusive rights to the land and hunting North of the York, except where the English already had land grants established. That still did not fix the problem. The problem then became that there was contrasting social and economic systems, in attempting to live with each other. They then tried to draw lines between the two communities, but that proved hopeless.

Nathaniel Bacon had lived in Virginia for less than two years when he took up the role as popular protest. He himself was identified with the ruling oligarchy by birth. He was labeled by many as the "spoiled child of a wealthy English squire." While living in England, he took studies from all around the world, which polished his education. He was studying to become a squire. His seemingly right marriage to a neighboring squire's daughter took a turn for the worst when his wife was disinherited. Shortly after this is when Bacon moved to Virginia. His father promised him a better life there. As he settled down, every indication that must have suggested that while he had lost the privileged position of a squire in England, he would soon gain its equivalent in Virginia. In the spring of 1676 the Indians killed his overseer.

This scared the people, for they feared for their lives. They gathered to in Charles City County to consider action for the security of their lives. They turned to Bacon because he was a natural leader. They described him as young, impetuous, eloquent, and one moreover, who enjoyed the prestige of a seat on the governor's council. The action decided was an expedition against the

Indians. Bacon first moved into New Kent County in search of volunteers to go on this expedition. Bacon wanted action taken against the Pamunkeys, who were regarded as traitors to the Susquehannocks, but by Berkeley as valued allies of the English. When the Pamunkeys withdrew in spite of this threat, Berkeley proclaimed Bacon's action rebellious. Berkeley tried to offer pardon if they would lay down their arms, but they refused and Bacon led his followers into the forest. The governor tried to stall Bacon several times, but it was to no avail. He even told his wife that he intended to hang her husband. Bacon said that he was doing what Berkeley should have done a long time ago.

Bacon was gaining support, which made the governor have to put in a bid for popular support also. He then issued writs for a newly elected Assembly. Soon after that Bacon emerged from the forest with news that he had killed Indians. Bacon became known as the Indian fighter. Two days later, Bacon made his formal surrender to the governor and council in keeping with all tradition requirements by a show of humility, a confession of guilt, and a plea for pardon. The governor granted the pardon and Bacon was given his seat back on council. This was a clever strategy by Bacon, because it kept him out of the House of Burgesses.

As a result, there were laws made in 1676, called Bacon's Laws. They stated that no person native of Virginia could any longer hold public office until he had been there for three years. It also stated that no person guilty of any "notorious crime" should be allowed to hold office. There were also acts passed that repealed the statute of 1670 restricting the privilege to freeholders or visible

with desperate courage of men of irrevocably committed, the key men were run down and hanged by late January.

The effect of Bacon's effort undoubtedly is to be followed in the warning given to those who held office in Virginia. If he did not succeed in destroying the special privilege of a governing class, he succeeded in underscoring for a group to which he himself holds the responsibility, which properly goes with privilege. The name Bacon was celebrated in verse and song down through the years. He tried to correct abuses in a system of government from which the nation of many great leaders such as Jefferson or Washington would draw advantage.

Bacon's place in history is a significant one. He stood for all things for which Jefferson stood a hundred years later and fought for things Jefferson would fight for. Hot-headed and impetuous, a man who appears to have been carried further than wanted by his emotions, Bacon was moved primarily by resentment. Every part of Bacon's rebellion was significant. All the things he did were for the better, and paved the way for the future.