

BACON'S REBELLION (1676). This Virginia uprising, beginning with vigilante actions by frontier residents who opposed Governor William Berkeley's Indian policy, quickly escalated into a struggle that left Berkeley disgraced and the colony tightly in the grip of the Stuart monarchs. The leader, twenty-nine-year-old Nathaniel Bacon, a well-born English immigrant with substantial property holdings and close ties to Berkeley, mobilized disgruntled frontier planters, small property holders, white servants, and African slaves against both Indians and the governor.

Although granted a council seat by Berkeley, Bacon shared his wealthy neighbors' conviction that the governor's policies left them vulnerable to Indian attack and excluded from the Indian [fur trade](#). The large planters' discontents, worsened by falling tobacco prices, might have remained confined to name-calling, lawsuits, and duels had not the small property holders also decried Berkeley's alleged failure to protect them from Indians. Under Bacon's leadership, a frontier force disobeyed Berkeley's orders and in April 1676 brutally attacked a nearby settlement of peaceful Susquehannock Indians.

Under challenge, Berkeley called the first election in fifteen years. Bacon won election to the burgesses, Virginia's upper house, but was arrested when he tried to take his seat. Soon released and commissioned by Berkeley to fight Indians, he rallied a force of some thirteen hundred men for more attacks that killed hundreds of Indians along the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. When Berkeley reversed himself and declared Bacon a traitor, Bacon's army marched on [Jamestown](#), the capital, which they burned on 19 September. As Berkeley raised his own force, the conflict became colonywide, with combatants gutting their opponents' houses and seizing their property.

Bacon's followers complained of overtaxation, political exclusion, religious persecution, and economic restrictions. A handful of influential white women supported Bacon's cause, as did many servants and some four hundred slaves who, promised their freedom by the rebels, were the last to surrender to Berkeley's troops. With Bacon's death from dysentery on 26 October and the arrival of a royal commission to investigate the rebellion, the uprising dissipated, leaving Virginia under tighter royal control and in the grip of a conservative reaction that restricted both the public influence of white women and the de facto freedom of enslaved people. Although scholars continue to debate the significance of this short-lived rebellion, there is agreement that this upheaval came just as Virginia fully embraced slavery. Thus might the political wounds left by Bacon's Rebellion have been partially healed, inadvertently or intentionally, by the racial imperatives of [slavery](#).

Bibliography

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