

Bacon's Rebellion Documents

Document A: Timothy Breen on the relationship between black slaves and white indentured servants

Q: Given that there is a situation of black and white indentured servants, how did they begin to interact or deal with one another? Is there any sense of a commonality that crosses over differences of race or ethnicity?

A: There are many ways that human beings divide themselves up. Class is one, [and] gender, race, ethnicity. There's a number of ways that people divide themselves up. And in early Virginia, race was a category that people recognized. Black people recognized difference, and sometimes, I would even argue, celebrated difference. But in this highly competitive, depressingly abusive world, poorer whites and poorer blacks -- people who were marginalized in this system of dependent labor -- oftentimes reached out to each other in ways that suggest that, at least in the first 50 or 60 years of Virginia, ...people of African background and English background were able to work together in ways that, again, in later period of American history, were impossible.

Document B: Margaret Washington on Virginians' concerns about white and black servants

Given the conditions and the sense of isolation in a colony like Virginia, was there a real concern around this emerging class of white and black workers who begin to become a threat? Do you feel that that has anything to do with why it begins to start shifting towards an enslaved class?

A: You can't discount the notion that black and white servants and slaves were going to unite over their common oppression. We have evidence of them running away together. We have evidence of them rising against their masters together. They lived together. They slept together. So yes, there was a possibility of a lower class surge against the elites. So that's a very important consideration for the Virginians, in terms of wanting to create one kind of labor force.

Document C: Governor William Berkeley, 19 May 1676 The declaration and Remonstrance of Sir William Berkeley his most sacred Majesty's Governor and Captain General of Virginia

Showeth That about the year 1660 Col. Mathews the then Governor dyed and then in consideration of the service I had done the Country, in defending them from, and destroying great numbers of the Indians, without the loss of three men, in all the time that war lasted, and in contemplation of the equal and uncorrupt Justice I had distributed to all men, Not only the Assembly but the unanimous votes of all the Country, concurred to make me Governor in a time, when if the Rebels in England had prevailed, I had certainly dyed for accepting it, 'twas Gentlemen an unfortunate Love, showed to me, for to show myself grateful for this, I was willing to accept of this Government again, when by my gracious Kings favor I might have had other places much more profitable, and less toilsome then this hath been.

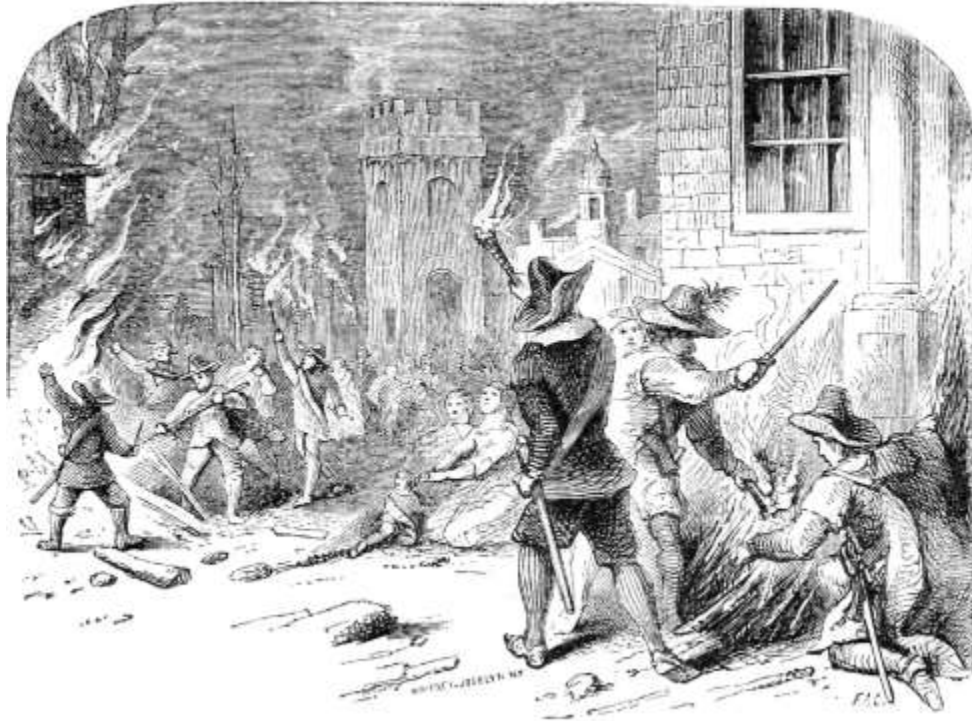
Now after all this, if Mr. Bacon can show one precedent or example where such actions in any Nation what ever, was approved of, I will mediate with the King and you for a pardon, and excuse for him, but I can show him an hundred examples where brave and great men have been putt to death for gaining Victories against the Command of their Superiors.

Lastly my most assured friends I would have preserved those Indians that I knew were [utterly] at our mercy, to have been our spies and intelligence, to find out our bloody enemies, but as soon as I had the least intelligence that they also were treacherous enemies, I gave out Commissions to destroy them all as the Commissions themselves will speak it.

Document D: Bacon's Rebellion: The Declaration (1676) By: Nathaniel Bacon

1. For having, upon specious pretenses of public works, raised great unjust taxes upon the commonalty for the advancement of private favorites and other sinister ends, but no visible effects in any measure adequate; for not having, during this long time of his government, in any measure advanced this hopeful colony either by fortifications, towns, or trade.
2. For having abused and rendered contemptible the magistrates of justice by advancing to places of judicature scandalous and ignorant favorites.
3. For having wronged his Majesty's prerogative and interest by assuming monopoly of the beaver trade and for having in it unjust gain betrayed and sold his Majesty's country and the lives of his loyal subjects to the barbarous heathen.
4. For having protected, favored, and emboldened the Indians against his Majesty's loyal subjects, never contriving, requiring, or appointing any due or proper means of satisfaction for their many invasions, robberies, and murders committed upon us.
5. For having, when the army of English was just upon the track of those Indians, who now in all places burn, spoil, murder and when we might with ease have destroyed them who then were in open hostility, for then having expressly countermanded and sent back our army by passing his word for the peaceable demeanor of the said Indians, who immediately prosecuted their evil intentions, committing horrid murders and robberies in all places, being protected by the said engagement and word past of him the said Sir William Berkeley, having ruined and laid desolate a great part of his Majesty's country, and have now drawn themselves into such obscure and remote places and are by their success so emboldened and confirmed by their confederacy so strengthened that the cries of blood are in all places, and the terror and consternation of the people so great, are now become not only difficult but a very formidable enemy who might at first with ease have been destroyed.
6. And lately, when, upon the loud outcries of blood, the assembly had, with all care, raised and framed an army for the preventing of further mischief and safeguard of this his Majesty's colony.
7. For having, with only the privacy of some few favorites without acquainting the people, only by the alteration of a figure, forged a commission, by we know not what hand, not only without but even against the consent of the people, for the raising and effecting civil war and destruction, which being happily and without bloodshed prevented; for having the second time attempted the same, thereby calling down our forces from the defense of the frontiers and most weakly exposed places.
8. For the prevention of civil mischief and ruin amongst ourselves while the barbarous enemy in all places did invade, murder, and spoil us, his Majesty's most faithful subjects

Document E: Drawing of Bacon's Army burning Jamestown



Document F: Robert Beverley on Bacon's Rebellion 1704

Four things may be reckoned to have been the main ingredients towards this intestine commotion, viz., First, The extreme low price of tobacco, and the ill usage of the planters in the exchange of goods for it, which the country, with all their earnest endeavors, could not remedy. Secondly, The splitting the colony into proprietaries, contrary to the original charters; and the extravagant taxes they were forced to undergo, to relieve themselves from those grants. Thirdly, The heavy restraints and burdens laid upon their trade by act of Parliament in England. Fourthly, The disturbance given by the Indians. Of all which in their order.