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EXCERPTS

### The hidden story of Native tribes who outsmarted Bacon's Rebellion

...Bacon's Rebellion has gone through many reinterpretations over the centuries. It was long idealized as another Virginia "first," anticipating the American Revolution by exactly 100 years. A marble plaque behind the speaker's rostrum in the Virginia House of Delegates proclaims honor to "the memory of Nathaniel Bacon ... A great Patriot leader of the Virginia People who died while defending their rights."

Today, scholars take a different view of Bacon and the movement he led, which resulted in the burning of the Colonial capital at Jamestown and a harsher turn in Virginia's approach to not only Native Americans, but slavery.

"In this day and age, two things really pop out," said James Rice, a historian at Tufts University who wrote the book "Tales from a Revolution" about Bacon's Rebellion. "One, he's this populist leader who blows past established norms and has some success ... by sort of doubling down on the things that made him unacceptable to the existing political leadership."

And the other, Rice said: "the power of rumor and misinformation."

Historians generally agree on the outlines of Bacon's Rebellion: In the summer of 1676, settlers in the colonies of both Virginia and Maryland were frenzied with suspicion over Indigenous tribes — partly because of a terrible mistake.

A group of English militiamen had slaughtered more than a dozen Native villagers along the Potomac River the year before in retribution for the killing of a farmworker. But they got the wrong people. Those killed were Susquehannocks, allies of the royal government, and had nothing to do with the farmer's death.

That touched off a cycle of back-and-forth revenge — Native people would attack a family on the frontier; settlers would hunt down more Natives — until a group of Virginians decided the only answer was to get rid of all the tribes by mass relocation, enslavement or death.

They rallied behind charismatic newcomer Nathaniel Bacon, who had been sent to the colonies by his father to escape prosecution for defrauding a legal client in England. He arrived with enough wealth to become instantly prominent and enough arrogance to cause trouble.

“He was young, bold, active, of an inviting aspect and powerful elocution — in a word, he was every way qualified to head a giddy and unthinking multitude,” Robert Beverley wrote in 1705 in the first history of Virginia published by a colonist.

Gov. William Berkeley and the House of Burgesses in Jamestown responded to the settlers’ concerns by approving a plan to build forts at the heads of Virginia’s major rivers, near the frontier of westward expansion. But Bacon and his group said that was a waste of taxpayer money. They had guns and they wanted to use them.

The Baconites were inflamed with fear. Some believed that Berkeley, who had made treaties with the Pamunkey and other coastal Virginia clans to help boost trade, was in cahoots with the Native people. A **rumor** spread that 10,000 warriors had massed in the west and were poised to invade.

None of that was true. But as anger escalated, Berkeley wound up fleeing to the Eastern Shore. Bacon and his men set off in search of Native Americans.

The Native people saw what was coming and disappeared...

It would be wrong to use the words “flee” or “retreat” to describe what the Native Americans did, Wright said.

“They had a planned movement of their people into an area that they could protect, an area that would feed their people, and an area that would frustrate the hell out of anybody that was coming in to try to find them,” he said. “So for almost two months, the brilliance of the tribe, the successful tactics of the war and their discipline kept the tribes going. And to me, it’s a consequential tactical and operational victory for the tribes that is not being recognized in American history.”

That’s one way the events of Bacon’s Rebellion anticipated the American Revolution: George Washington, who was well-versed in Native warfare tactics, adopted a similar strategy of evasion and persistence to outlast the British Army.

In October 1676, Bacon died of a disease much like typhus...

Berkeley returned to rebuild Jamestown, though the capital would shift to Williamsburg in 1699.

**“After Bacon’s Rebellion, Virginia governors were really reluctant to go against this virulent, anti-Native sentiment among White Virginians,” Rice said. “What they were asking for was really just a broad, aggressive anti-Native policy wiping Native people off the face of whatever patch of Earth Virginia planters wanted.”**

Enslavement of Native people surged; whole tribes were sometimes sold to plantations in the West Indies. By the early 1700s, Virginia's Indigenous population was decimated.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/09/20/bacons-rebellion-virginia-native-americans-dragon-run/?utm\\_campaign=wp\\_todays\\_headlines&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl\\_headlines&carta-url=https%3A%2F%2Fs2.washingtonpost.com%2Fcar-ln-tr%2F3f0e801%2F66ee9953e1878f5a37ee5632%2F5988690a9bbc0f6826f3096e%2F21%2F65%2F66ee9953e1878f5a37ee5632](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/09/20/bacons-rebellion-virginia-native-americans-dragon-run/?utm_campaign=wp_todays_headlines&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_headlines&carta-url=https%3A%2F%2Fs2.washingtonpost.com%2Fcar-ln-tr%2F3f0e801%2F66ee9953e1878f5a37ee5632%2F5988690a9bbc0f6826f3096e%2F21%2F65%2F66ee9953e1878f5a37ee5632)