

Questions

1. What are Penn's arguments in favor of religious liberty?
2. Why does the document refer to "the rights of the free-born subjects of England"?

15. Nathaniel Bacon on Bacon's Rebellion (1676)

Source: Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. I (1894), pp. 55-61.

The largest popular revolt in the early English colonies was Bacon's Rebellion, which occurred in Virginia in 1676. For thirty years, Governor William Berkeley had run a corrupt regime in alliance with an inner circle of tobacco planters, while heavy taxes reduced the prospects of small farmers. His refusal to allow white settlement in areas reserved for Indians angered colonists who saw landownership as central to freedom.

After a minor confrontation between Indians and settlers on Virginia's western frontier, settlers demanded that the governor authorize the extermination or removal of the colony's Indians to open more land for whites. Berkeley refused. An uprising began that quickly grew into a full-fledged rebellion. The leader, Nathaniel Bacon, was himself a wealthy and ambitious planter. But his call for the removal of all Indians from the colony, a reduction of taxes, and an end to rule by "grantees" rapidly gained support from small farmers, landless men, indentured servants, and even some slaves. Bacon's "manifesto," which follows, outlined the rebels' complaints against the governor and the colony's "protected and darling Indians." The uprising failed. But the frightened authorities reduced taxes and adopted a more aggressive Indian policy, opening western areas to small farmers. They also accelerated the shift from indentured white labor to African slaves.

IF VIRTUE BE a sin, if piety be guilt, all the principles of morality, goodness and justice be perverted, we must confess that those who are now called rebels may be in danger of those high imputations. Those loud and several bulls would affright innocents and render the defence of our brethren and the inquiry into our sad and heavy oppressions, treason. But if there be, as sure there is, a just God to appeal to; if religion and justice be a sanctuary here; if to plead the cause of the oppressed; if sincerely to aim at his Majesty's honour and the public good without any reservation or by interest; if to stand in the gap after so much blood of our dear brethren bought and sold; if after the loss of a great part of his Majesty's colony deserted and dispeopled, freely with our lives and estates to endeavour to save the remainders be treason; God Almighty judge and let guilty die. But since we cannot in our hearts find one single spot of rebellion or treason, or that we have in any manner aimed at the subverting the settled government or attempting of the person of any either magistrate or private man, notwithstanding the several reproaches and threats of some who for sinister ends were disaffected to us and censured our innocent and honest designs, and since all people in all places where we have yet been can attest our civil, quiet, peaceable behaviour far different from that of rebellion and tumultuous persons, let truth be bold and all the world know the real foundations of pretended guilt.

We appeal to the country itself what and of what nature their oppressions have been, or by what cabal and mystery the designs of many of those whom we call great men have been transacted and carried on; but let us trace these men in authority and favour to whose hands the dispensation of the country's wealth has been committed. Let us observe the sudden rise of their estates [compared] with the quality in which they first entered this country, or the reputation they have held here amongst wise and discerning men. And let us see whether their extractions and education have not been vile, and by what pretence of learning and virtue they could so soon [come] into employments of so great trust and consequence. Let us consider their sudden advancement and let us also consider whether

any public work for our safety and defence or for the advancement and propagation of trade, liberal arts, or sciences is here extant in any way adequate to our vast charge. Now let us compare these things together and see what sponges have sucked up the public treasure, and whether it has not been privately contrived away by unworthy favourites and juggling parasites whose tottering fortunes have been repaired and supported at the public charge. Now if it be so, judge what greater guilt can be than to offer to pry into these and to unriddle the mysterious wiles of a powerful cabal; let all people judge what can be of more dangerous import than to suspect the so long safe proceedings of some of our grandees, and whether people may with safety open their eyes in so nice a concern.

Another main article of our guilt is our open and manifest aversion of all, not only the foreign but the protected and darling Indians. This, we are informed, is rebellion of a deep dye for that both the governor and council are . . . bound to defend the queen and the Appamatocks with their blood. Now, whereas we do declare and can prove that they have been for these many years enemies to the king and country, robbers and thieves and invaders of his Majesty's right and our interest and estates, but yet have by persons in authority been defended and protected even against his Majesty's loyal subjects, and that in so high a nature that even the complaints and oaths of his Majesty's most loyal subjects in a lawful manner professed by them against those barbarous outlaws, have been by the right honourable governor rejected and the delinquents from his presence dismissed, not only with pardon and indemnity, but with all encouragement and favour; their firearms so destructful to us and by our laws prohibited, commanded to be restored them, and open declaration before witness made that they must have ammunition, although directly contrary to our law. Now what greater guilt can be than to oppose and endeavour the destruction of these honest, quiet neighbours of ours?

Another main article of our guilt is our design not only to ruin and extirpate all Indians in general, but all manner of trade and

commerce with them. Judge who can be innocent that strike at this tender eye of interest: since the right honourable the governor hath been pleased by his commission to warrant this trade, who dare oppose it, or opposing it can be innocent? Although plantations be deserted, the blood of our dear brethren spilled; on all sides our complaints; continually murder upon murder renewed upon us; who may or dare think of the general subversion of all manner of trade and commerce with our enemies who can or dare impeach any of . . . traders at the heads of the rivers, if contrary to the wholesome provision made by laws for the country's safety; they dare continue their illegal practises and dare asperse the right honourable governor's wisdom and justice so highly to pretend to have his warrant to break that law which himself made; who dare say that these men at the heads of the rivers buy and sell our blood, and do still, notwithstanding the late act made to the contrary, admit Indians painted and continue to commerce; although these things can be proved, yet who dare be so guilty as to do it? . . .

. . .

THE DECLARATION OF THE PEOPLE

For having upon specious pretences of public works, raised unjust taxes upon the commonalty for the advancement of private favourites and other sinister ends, but no visible effects in any measure adequate.

For not having during the long time of his government in any measure advanced this hopeful colony, either by fortification, towns or trade.

For having abused and rendered contemptible the majesty of justice, of advancing to places of judicature scandalous and ignorant favourites.

For having wronged his Majesty's prerogative and interest by assuming the monopoly of the beaver trade.

By having in that unjust gain bartered and sold his Majesty's country and the lives of his loyal subjects to the barbarous heathen.

For having protected, favoured and emboldened the Indians against his Majesty's most loyal subjects, never contriving, requiring, or appointing any due or proper means of satisfaction for their many invasions, murders, and robberies committed upon us.

...

For having the second time attempted the same thereby calling down our forces from the defence of the frontiers, and most weak exposed places, for the prevention of civil mischief and ruin amongst ourselves, whilst the barbarous enemy in all places did invade, murder, and spoil us, his Majesty's most faithful subjects.

Of these, the aforesaid articles, we accuse Sir William Berkeley, as guilty of each and every one of the same, and as one who has traitorously attempted, violated and injured his Majesty's interest here, by the loss of a great part of his colony, and many of his faithful and loyal subjects by him betrayed, and in a barbarous and shameful manner exposed to the incursions and murders of the heathen.

And we do further demand, that the said Sir William Berkeley... be forthwith delivered up... within four days after the notice hereof, or otherwise we declare as followeth: that in whatsoever house, place, or ship [he] shall reside, be hid, or protected, we do declare that the owners, masters, or inhabitants of the said places, to be confederates and traitors to the people, and the estates of them, as also of all the aforesaid persons, to be confiscated. This we, the commons of Virginia, do declare desiring a prime union amongst ourselves, that we may jointly, and with one accord defend ourselves against the common enemy.

NATH BACON, Gen'l.

By the Consent of the People.

Questions

1. What are the rebels' main complaints against the government of Virginia?
2. Do Bacon and his followers envision any place for Indians in Virginia society?

16. Letter by an Immigrant to Pennsylvania (1769)

Source: Johannes Hänner: "Letter by an Immigrant to Pennsylvania, 1769," Unpublished Documents on Emigration from the Archives of Switzerland, Albert B. Faust, Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblätter, Vols. 18-19, pp. 37-39. Translation by Volker Berghahn. Reprinted by permission of Volker Berghahn.

Germans, 110,000 in all, formed the largest group of newcomers to the British colonies in the eighteenth century. The desire for religious freedom inspired many migrants, but the primary motivation for emigration was economic. German areas of Europe were plagued by persistent agricultural crises. Families found it increasingly difficult to acquire land.

Most German newcomers settled in frontier areas—rural New York, western Pennsylvania, and the southern backcountry—where they formed tightly knit farming communities in which German for many years remained the dominant language. The letter below, by a German-speaking emigrant from Switzerland to Pennsylvania, illustrates the response of many immigrants to life in America. "We have a free country," he wrote to his relatives at home, singling out ample employment opportunities, low taxes, plentiful food, and abundant land as reasons for coming to America.