

Were women essential to Bacon's rebellion?

Examine the documents below. Then consider the question above.

Document A	
Who is the author of this document and is he credible? Why?	
What does the author think of Bacon? Record three descriptive words that the author used.	
According to this document, is Bacon a revolutionary or a traitor?	
Write a quote from the document to support your above claim.	
Document B	
Who is the author of this document and is he credible? Why?	
What does the author think of Bacon? Record three descriptive words that the author used.	
According to this document, is Bacon a revolutionary or a traitor?	
Write a quote from the document to support your above claim.	
Document C	
Who is the author of this document and is he credible? Why?	



What does the author think of Bacon? Record three descriptive words that the author used.	
According to this document, is Bacon a revolutionary or a traitor?	
Write a quote from the document to support your above claim.	
Document D	
Who is the author of this document and is he credible? Why?	
What does the author think of Bacon? Record three descriptive words that the author used.	
According to this document, is Bacon a revolutionary or a traitor?	
Write a quote from the document to support your above claim.	
Document E	
Who is the author of this document and is he credible? Why?	
What does the author think of Bacon? Record three descriptive words that the author used.	



According to this document, is Bacon a revolutionary or a traitor?	
Write a quote from the document to support your above claim.	
Document F	
Of the previous documents, how many mentioned women?	
Who is the author of this document and is she credible? Why?	
How central were women in the conflict? Provide examples.	
Why do you think they were excluded from previous accounts?	
According to this document, is Bacon a revolutionary or a traitor?	

Questions for Analysis

1. In your opinion, is Nathaniel Bacon a revolutionary or a traitor?
2. Were women central to his strategy?

Write your answer on a separate piece of paper.



Document A: Robert Beverley on Bacon's Rebellion

A primary source account of Bacon's Rebellion by Robert Beverley in 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.

As soon as General Bacon had marched to such a convenient distance from Jamestown that the assembly thought they might deliberate with safety, the governor, by their advice, issued a proclamation of rebellion against him, commanding his followers to surrender him, and forthwith disperse themselves, giving orders at the same time for raising the militia of the country against him.

The people being much exasperated, and General Bacon by his address and eloquence having gained an absolute dominion over their hearts, they unanimously resolved that not a hair of his head should be touched, much less that they should surrender him as a rebel. Therefore they kept to their arms, and instead of proceeding against the Indians they marched back to Jamestown, directing their fury against such of their friends and countrymen as should dare to oppose them. . . .

It pleased God, after some months' confusion, to put an end to their misfortunes, as well as to Bacon's designs, by his natural death. He died at Dr. Green's in Gloucester county. But where he was buried was never yet discovered, though afterward there was great inquiry made, with design expose his bones to public infamy.

...The malcontents being thus disunited by the loss of their general, in whom they all confided, they began to squabble among themselves, and every man's business was, how to make the best terms he could for himself.

Lieutenant General Ingram and Major General Walklate, surrendered, condition of pardon for themselves and their followers though they were both forced to submit to an incapacity of bearing office in that country for the future.

Peace being thus restored, Sir William Berkeley returned to his former seat of government, and every man to his several habitation. . . .

*Beverly, Robert. "An Account of Bacon's Rebellion." Digital History. Last modified 1704.
https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3998.*



Document B: The Declaration of the People.

Below is the complaint written by Nathaniel Bacon to the Governor. Bacon quickly took the position that he truly represented the people. His signature, "General by Consent of the People," is an interesting commentary, and his Declaration in the Name of the People lays the blame for Virginia's failures directly upon the Governor, "who hath traiterously . . . inlured his Majesties interest here. . . ." Historians have debated whether Bacon did, in fact, have the backing of the rank and file in Virginia. Those who argue that he did note the 600 men who rallied to his cause, of whom some seventy were black. Those who argue against Bacon note that he issued the Declaration without consulting others, and that he assumed the title of "General by Consent of the People."

For haveing upon specious pretences of publiqe works raised greate unjust taxes upon the Comonality for the advancement of private favorites and other sinister ends, but noe visible effects in any measure adequate, For not haveing dureing this long time of his Gouvernement in any measure advanced this hopefull Colony either by fortificacons Townes or Trade.

For haveing wronged his Majesties prerogative and interest, by assumeing Monopoly of the Beaver trade, and for haveing in that unjust gaine betrayed and sold his Majesties Country and the lives of his loyall subjects, to the barbarous heathen.

For haveing, protected, favoured, and Imboldned the Indians against his Majesties loyall subjects, never contriveing, requireing, or appointing any due or proper meanes of satisfaction for their many Invasions, robbories, and murthers comitted upon us.

... Of this and the aforesaid Articles we accuse Sir William Berkeley as guilty of each and every one of the same... And we doe further declare these the ensuing persons in this list, to have beene his wicked and pernicious councellours Confederates, aiders, and assisters against the Comonality in these our Civill comotions.

And we doe further demand that the said Sir William Berkeley with all the persons in this list be forthwith delivered up or surrender themselves within fower days after the notice hereof, Or otherwise we declare as followeth.

That in whatsoever place, howse, or ship, any of the said persons shall reside, be hidd, or protected, we declaire the owners, Masters or Inhabitants of the said places, to be confederates and trayters to the people.

Nathaniel Bacon

Generall by Consent of the people

Bacon, Nathaniel. "Declaration of Nathaniel Bacon in the Name of the People of Virginia, July 30, 1676," Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 4th ser., 1871, vol. 9: 184-87. Retrieved from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5800>.



Document C: The declaration and Remonstrance of Sir William Berkeley his most sacred Majesties Governor and Captain Generall of Virginia

The below document is written by Governor William Berkeley. When Bacon's Rebellion erupted with surprising and stunning swiftness, William Berkeley had been governor of Virginia for more than thirty years. During the early years of his administration, Berkeley was considered a stalwart and reliable friend of the planters. Through the years he introduced more rigidity in the use of power while, at the same time, aging deprived him of a recognition of the economic, political, and social transition that Virginia, as well as other settled colonies, was undergoing. Berkeley saw Bacon's action as a direct challenge to his own authority - which it was. Bacon, in the governor's opinion, was guilty of treason.

I would have preserved those Indians that I knew were howerly att our mercy, to have beene our spyes and intelligence, to finde out our bloody enimies, but as soone as I had the least intelligence that they alsoe were trecherous enimies, I gave out Commissions to distroy them all as the Commissions themselves will speake itt.

To conclude, I have don what was possible both to friend and enemy, have granted Mr. Bacon three pardons, which he hath scornefully rejected, suppoaseing himselfe stronger to subvert then I and you to maineteyne the Laws, by which onely and Gods assisting grace and mercy, all men mwt hope for peace and safety. I will add noe more though much more is still remaineing to Justifie me and condemne Mr. Bacon, but to desier that this declaration may be read in every County Court in the Country, and that a Court be presently called to doe itt, before the Assembly meet, That your approbation or dissattisfaction of this declaration may be knowne to all the Country, and the Kings Councill to whose most revered Judgments itt is submitted, Given the xxixth day of May, a happy day in the xxvthith yeare of his most sacred Majesties Reigne, Charles the second, who God grant long and prosperously to Reigne, and lett all his good subjects say Amen.

Berkeley, William. "The Declaration and Remonstrance of Sir William Berkeley his most sacred Majesties Governor and Captain Generall of Virginia." University of Gronigen. Last modified May 19, 1676. Retrieved from <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1651-1700/governor-william-berkeley-on-bacons-rebellion-19-may-1676.php>.



Document D: Historians from PBS

"[We must defend ourselves] against all Indians in general, for that they were all Enemies." This was the unequivocal view of Nathaniel Bacon, a young, wealthy Englishman who had recently settled in the backcountry of Virginia. The opinion that all Indians were enemies was also shared by a many other Virginians, especially those who lived in the interior. It was not the view, however, of the governor of the colony, William Berkeley.

Berkeley was not opposed to fighting Indians who were considered enemies, but attacking friendly Indians, he thought, could lead to what everyone wanted to avoid: a war with "all the Indians against us." Berkeley also didn't trust Bacon's intentions, believing that the upstart's true aim was to stir up trouble among settlers, who were already discontent with the colony's government.

Bacon attracted a large following who, like him, wanted to kill or drive out every Indian in Virginia. In 1675, when Berkeley denied Bacon a commission (the authority to lead soldiers), Bacon took it upon himself to lead his followers in a crusade against the "enemy."

Berkeley declared Bacon a rebel and charged him with treason. Just to be safe, the next time Bacon returned to Jamestown, he brought along fifty armed men. Bacon was still arrested, but Berkeley pardoned him instead of sentencing him to death, the usual punishment for treason.

Still without the commission he felt he deserved, Bacon returned to Jamestown later the same month, but this time accompanied by five hundred men. Berkeley was forced to give Bacon the commission, only to later declare that it was void.

Each leader tried to muster support. Each promised freedom to slaves and servants who would join their cause. But Bacon's following was much greater than Berkeley's. In September of 1676, Bacon and his men set Jamestown on fire.

The rebellion ended after British authorities sent a royal force to assist in quelling the uprising and arresting scores of committed rebels, white and black. When Bacon suddenly died in October, probably of dysentery, Bacon's Rebellion fizzled out.

Bacon's Rebellion demonstrated that poor whites and poor blacks could be united in a cause. This was a great fear of the ruling class -- what would prevent the poor from uniting to fight them? This fear hastened the transition to racial slavery.

Public Broadcasting Company. "Bacon's Rebellion." Public Broadcasting Company. Last modified October 16, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p274.html> .



Document E: Historian Howard Zinn

Bacon's Rebellion began with conflict over how to deal with the Indians, who were close by, on the western frontier, constantly threatening. Whites who had been ignored when huge land grants around Jamestown were given away had gone west to find land, and there they encountered Indians. Were those frontier Virginians resentful that the politicians and landed aristocrats who controlled the colony's government in Jamestown first pushed them westward into Indian territory, and then seemed indecisive in fighting the Indians? That might explain the character of their rebellion, not easily classifiable as either anti-aristocrat or anti-Indian, because it was both.

And the governor, William Berkeley, and his Jamestown crowd—were they more conciliatory to the Indians (they wooed certain of them as spies and allies) now that they had monopolized the land in the East, could use frontier whites as a buffer, and needed peace? The desperation of the government in suppressing the rebellion seemed to have a double motive: developing an Indian policy which would divide Indians in order to control.. and teaching the poor whites of Virginia that rebellion did not pay—by a show of superior force, by calling for troops from England itself, by mass hanging.

Violence had escalated on the frontier before the rebellion. Some Doeg Indians took a few hogs to redress a debt, and whites, retrieving the hogs, murdered two Indians. The Doegs then sent out a war party to kill a white herdsman, after which a white militia company killed twenty-four Indians. This led to a series of Indian raids, with the Indians, outnumbered, turning to guerrilla warfare. The House of Burgesses in Jamestown declared war on the Indians, but proposed to exempt those Indians who cooperated. This seemed to anger the frontier people, who wanted total war but also resented the high taxes assessed to pay for the war.

Times were hard in 1676. Governor Berkeley, in his seventies, tired of holding office, wrote wearily about his situation: "How miserable that man is that Governes a People where six parts of seaven at least are Poore Endebted Discontented and Armed." His phrase "six parts of seaven" suggests the existence of an upper class not so impoverished.

In fact, there was such a class already developed in Virginia. Bacon himself came from this class, had a good bit of land, and was probably more enthusiastic about killing Indians than about redressing the grievances of the poor. But he became a symbol of mass resentment against the Virginia establishment, and was elected in the spring of 1676 to the House of Burgesses. When he insisted on organizing armed detachments to fight the Indians, outside official control, Berkeley proclaimed him a rebel and had him captured, whereupon two thousand Virginians marched into Jamestown to support him. Berkeley let Bacon go, in return for an apology, but Bacon went off, gathered his militia, and began raiding the Indians.

Bacon's "Declaration of the People" of July 1676 shows a mixture of populist resentment against the rich and frontier hatred of the Indians. It indicted the Berkeley administration for unjust taxes, for putting favorites in high positions, for monopolizing the beaver trade, and for not protecting the western farmers from the Indians. Then Bacon went out to attack the friendly Pamunkey Indians, killing eight, taking others prisoner, plundering their possessions.

There is evidence that the rank and file of both Bacon's rebel army and Berkeley's official army were not as enthusiastic as their leaders. There were mass desertions on



both sides, according to Washburn. In the fall, Bacon, aged twenty-nine, fell sick and died, because of, as a contemporary put it, "swarmes of Vermyn that bred in his body."

The rebellion didn't last long after that.

It was a complex chain of oppression in Virginia. The Indians were plundered by white frontiersmen, who were taxed and controlled by the Jamestown elite. And the whole colony was being exploited by England, which bought the colonists' tobacco at prices it dictated and made 100,000 pounds a year for the King.

From the testimony of the governor himself, the rebellion against him had the overwhelming support of the Virginia population. A member of his Council reported that the defection was "almost general" and laid it to "the Lewd dispositions of some Persons of desperate Fortunes" who had "the Vaine hopes of takeing the Countrey wholley out of his Majesty's handes into their owne." Another member of the Governor's Council, Richard Lee, noted that Bacon's Rebellion had started over Indian policy. But the "zealous inclination of the multitude" to support Bacon was due, he said, to ... equalizing the wealth.

Zinn, Howard. A People's History of the United States. Harper Collins Publishing: New York, NY, 1999.



Document F: America's Women

Although women were prohibited from voting or holding office, in the south they did play an active part in the Roth politics of early colonial life. The most dramatic example was Bacons rebellion in 1676. The uprising began with a split between the people who lived on the Virginia frontier and the ruling oligarchy headquartered in Jamestown, led by the governor William Berkeley. But the 1670s almost everything about Virginia society has been rigged in favor of the wealthy. The frontier farmers were paying enormous taxes, and getting almost nothing in return because the money quickly went to the hands of the few politically connected families. The rebels, who came to include a number of black Virginians, we're generally the more sympathetic figures in this conflict -- unless you happen to be an Indian. One of the frontier families most bitter complaints was that the governor, who's been engaged and profitable for trade with the local tribes, did not share their enthusiasm for a genocidal war against the natives.

The frontier wives, who were frequently left alone in the remote homesteads, for the most outspoken members of the kill Dash the Dash Indians fraction. When Nathaniel bacon began rebellion and it overthrowing Berkeley's government, the women spread the word about his victories and about the governors unwillingness to defend the colonial households. Mrs. Haviland was a particularly "excellent divulger of news" who directed her friends to go "Up and downe the Country has Bacon's Emissary to Carry his declarations and papers." Women also seemed to have taken part in the councils of war and strategy planning. Sarah Drummond, the wife of one of Bacons advisers, was a landowner in her own right and an important member of the leader ship. When the rebels' resolve seem to flag, she picked up a twig and snapped it into. "I fear the power of England no more than a broken straw," she said stoutly. Governor Berkeley's particular bete noire was Sarah Grendon, who he described as the "1st encourager in Sutter on of the ignorant vulture." In the great 17th century Virginia tradition, Mrs. Grendon was already on her third husband when the rebellion broke out. Both of her first two husbands left generous gifts, and she was probably a fairly wealthy woman. The governor never forgot her offenses, and when the rebellion failed, Mrs. Grendon was the only woman he refused to pardon.

The Baconites did not discriminate much between the sexes, either in their leadership or when they were on the attack. Landowners loyal to the governor left their wives behind to guard their states under the theory that a ladies sex would be her best protection against Raiders. But the rebels readily took the houses and beat the wise just as they would have the men. When Bacon stormed Jamestown, he sent his troops to round up the wives of the most prominent local men, including one of his own relatives. To buy time for the rebels to strengthen their position, Bacon placed of the women along top of a small fortification he had constructed, to stop the government authorities from rushing the encampment. "The poor Gentlewoman were mightily astonished at this project; neither were their husbands void of amusements... This action was a method in war, that they were not well acquainted with... not before they could com to purse their enemy sides, they must be obliged to dart their weapons through their wives brest," wrote one analyst. The government forces held their fire.

The female captives went down in history as the "white aprons," and although the later became the stars of some very melodramatic Victorian fiction, in reality their role, and that of most other loyalist wives, was essentially passive. The governor's wife,



lady Francis Berkeley, was a very active exception. So Williams critics claimed his much younger spouse had tormented him with her sexual demands, forcing him to raise money to buy her luxuries to make up for his inadequacies and dad. That's sort of theory had been popular throughout history when men try to explain the political activities of strong women. But whatever their private relationship, it was clear that during the uprising sir William was an increasingly tired old man, while Francis had the energy for an army. She fled to London when the rebellion began in lobbied vigorously at court to gain support for her husband's faction she returns seemingly triumphant, in the company of one of the Royal commissioners and a thousand troops. But once order was restored -- a challenge made much simpler by Bacons death -- Lady Berkeley responded bitterly to efforts by the kings representatives to limit her husbands authority. She may have been particularly angry when the commissioners refused to see the female rebels as anything more than hapless housewife just let astray. To show her displeasure, she arranged to have the local hangman drive the commissioners carriage, creating an enormous scandal. Windsor William died in 1677, his wife inherited all his states and went on to beat Temperance Flowerdew's record by marrying three governors.

After Bacon's defeat, governor Berkeley's partisans rode through the farms of their former enemies, evicting families and confiscating everything they owned. Sarah Grendon somehow managed to persuade her alone in return for whatever goods they could carry off. But she was eventually charged with treason, a capital crime. Her husband, Thomas, acting on her behalf, approach the role commissioners and petition them to try her themselves rather than leaving her to the mercy of the Berkeley regime. Mrs. Grendon then admitted that "being an Ignorant woman" she had spoken "some foolish and indiscreete words reflecting upon the sloe prosecution of the Indian warr," and she said she was "most heartily sorrowful for the same." The commissioners dismissed the charges. Thomas grendon died several years later, leaving her yet another large bequest and Sarah went on to marry a fourth husband.

Sarah Drummond's husband was hung as a traitor a his estate confiscated. But like Mrs. grendon, she successfully took refuge in her identity as a powerless woman. She humbly beg the government to restore their property less her "five poor children" starve. She also began lobbying London, and her protests reached as far as King Charles II, Who not only granted her petition but also condemned governor Berkeley and put a halt to the wave of reprisals. "As I live, the old fool has put to death more people in that naked country than I did in England for the murder of my father," the King said angrily. Lydia Chisman, another leading Baconite, took a different approach. When governor Berkeley asked Edmond Chisman why he had supported the rebels, his wife stepped up "and tould his honor that it was her provocations that made her Husband joyne the Cause that Bacon contended for," wrote a witness. Mrs. Chisholm added that "if he had not bin influenc'd by her instigations, he'd never don that which he had don." On bended knees, she begged Berkeley to pardon Edmond and hang her instead. The governor, who had referred to Mrs. Chisman as a "whore" during the trial, was unmoved. Edmund Chisman was condemned to hang, though he died in prison before the sentence could be carried out. Lydia, who was not charged, it was later able to regain her husband's estate. And she married again.

Collins, Gail. America's Women. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004. p.11-15.

