

Bacon's Rebellion

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Introduction

The historical event discussed in this paper is Bacon's rebellion. Bacon's rebellion was an uprising in colonial Virginia in North America that took place in 1676. The rebellion was considered first in history. It was among the first uprising against British authority by the colony and it was the first event that Blacks and Whites, rich and poor, grouped together under one cause. The rebellion was led by Nathaniel Bacon, an Englishman who had recently settled in the Virginia Colony.

The historical account discussed mainly base on the accounts of U.S history described in a book by James A. Henretta and company.

Background

Nathaniel Bacon He had extreme animosity towards Indians-hostile and friendly alike- and developed a worldview that all Indians must be wiped out in Virginia. Nathaniel Bacon was a wealthy 29 year old painter. He was a council at the governor's office. He rose up as a leader of a group of freeholders (men who own lands and all immovable structures attached to the lands), who wanted to drive-out all the Indians in Virginia. In 1674, these freeholders demanded that Indians should leave treaty protected lands or be killed. This group targeted all Indians, whether friendly or not, thus they are actually starting all out war against Indians. Hostility between Indians and the Free Holders broke out when Doeg Indians raided the farm of one of the Free Holders and stole a number of pigs. The raid was said to be a retaliatory attack by the Indians against the Free Holder because he did not pay them trade goods. Neighbors came to the rescue and fought back (Henretta, Edwards & Self, 2012).

William Berkeley, then governor of the Virginia colony, did not like the idea of fighting friendly Indians. The governor knew that a war against all Indians would cause a

great toll to the colony; the colony has no capabilities to fight all Indians. A war might drive the colony to extinction. There are also personal reasons for this, he had a fur trade and a war with the Indians will decimate his business. So he advocated for a policy of containment of the friendly Indian tribe. Berkeley proposed building numerous defensive forts along the frontier. People living in the frontier dislike the idea because it is too expensive. Majority of the Virginians became suspicious of the proposal. They believed that it was a strategy to raise tax. Bacon who was a council at Berkeley office applied for a commission (authority to lead soldiers). Berkeley refused to sanction the war against the Indians and turned down a request by Bacon to lead soldiers. He also distrusts Bacon. He suspect that Bacon wanted to spark trouble among the settlers who were already dissatisfied with the governor's rule (Eric, 2009).

Bacon, who was disappointed by the governor, went into a group of farmers who were planning to form a raiding party against the Indians. Bacon arrived with an enormous amount of liquor. He distributed the liquor and for this he was elected the leader. He accused Berkeley of corruption and told his men (around 500) that they must defend themselves against the Indians (Kennedy, 2005).

The Rebellion

By the declaring the commission as void, Berkeley actually instigated the rebellion. Bacon, felt betrayed and declared independence of the people of Virginia. The reasons for independence were unfair taxes, corruption, and failure to protect settlers from Indian attacks. Bacon was able to unite the people. Black men, rich men, poor men and slaves banded together to free the people. Bacon headed back to Jamestown and managed to subdue the governor's forces. They succeeded in taking over Jamestown. The governor fled together with his supporters. He returned again with soldiers of his own but was still overpowered by

the rebels. Bacon and his men doubted their ability to hold Jamestown for extended period decided to burn the villages instead.

Upon the height of victory, Bacon died of dysentery. John Ingram took leadership but many followers drifted away after Bacon's death. The rebellion collapsed and Berkeley succeeded in taking over again. He seized property of the rebel and hanged 23 men. He was later recalled in England and was relieved of his duty. The ruling class was already afraid to take control of the colony because of the fear of another rebellion and civil war. The rebellion allowed the ruling class to witness the unification of rich and poor for the common cause. In order to prevent unification, Berkeley was sent back to England and the ruling class took step to restore rights of the colonials.

Conclusion

Bacon's Rebellion was a harbinger of the future movement of the North American colonies for independence. The Bacon's rebellion was first in history. It was the first rebellion against an authority appointed by the King of England and it was the first instance that black and white, free and slaves, rich and poor got united for a common cause. Bacon obviously was a racist; the Indians problem could have been solved through diplomacy. Berkeley, on the other hand obviously was a corrupt official. Nobody was in the right during this rebellion.

References

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