

Bacon's Rebellion Discussion Questions

A New Beginning

1. Nathaniel Bacon was sent to Virginia in hopes he might improve. Do you think can a person change? Why or why not?
2. What do you think Elizabeth Bacon means when she says young Nathaniel Bacon thought he was above the company he found in the colony?
3. If you were one of the large planters in Virginia and not a member of the Council, how would you feel about Nathaniel Bacon's appointment to the Council?
4. Do you think that the fact that Nathaniel Bacon was related to Berkeley's wife had anything to do with his appointment?
5. Can you think of any circumstances that would allow for the requirements for a position to be changed by the Governor? What would be acceptable in your opinion? What would be considered unacceptable?

1646 Treaty with the Powhatans

1. The Powhatans live in isolated areas segregated from the English. Should they be paying tribute to the Governor for protection?
2. Should the Susquenahannock chiefs have been allowed to leave the meeting alive?

Indian Troubles Increase

1. Should the Governor have allowed Chicheley to pursue the Susquehannocks even though they wanted to make peace?
2. Did the Governor's overall actions show more concern for the welfare of the Indians than for the English settlers as Mrs. Grindon and Mrs. Haviland claimed?
3. Should Nathaniel Bacon have been given his commission to attack the Pamunky Indians? Why or Why not?

New Elections

1. Were Bacon's actions in disobeying the Governor's orders an act of treason? Should Nathaniel Bacon have attacked both friendly and hostile Indians?
2. Bacon thought the government was ineffective at protecting the English people against the hostile attacks. Do you think he had the right to disobey the Governor?

Reclaiming Position on the Council

1. If Bacon was a legally elected a House of Burgesses member from his county, should he have been arrested when he came to town?
2. Why do you think Governor Berkeley called for free elections to the House of Burgesses when he had not done so in fifteen years?

Confrontation Over the Commission

1. Were Bacon and his followers justified in the way they acquired the commission to fight the Indians?
2. Was Berkeley justified in not wanting to grant the commission?

Difficult Times

1. If you were a small planter, would you support the governor's plan to build forts, raising your taxes, or would you have supported Bacon who wanted to hunt down the Indians with a mobile army of local militia?
2. Which "Indian Policy " would be more effective: Berkeley's plan to use friendly Indians as allies or Bacon's policy of attacking all Indians as enemies?

Capturing Women as Tactics of War

1. Why might families be divided in times of war?
2. Was Bacon right to use the wives of "loyalists" as a shield against Berkeley's cannon, or do you think he was wrong? Why or why not?
3. Did Elizabeth Bacon feel as if Nathaniel the younger was her son? How do you think she felt about him after the rebellion?

Jamestown Burns

1. Were Bacon and his followers justified in burning Jamestown to the ground so Berkeley and his forces could not return and use it as a base again, or was destroying the capital and the church an unnecessary act of arson?

Nathaniel Bacon's Death

1. Was it fair to expect the loyalists not to loot the property of rebels when the rebels had been looting loyalist property for many months?
2. Was Berkeley right to have tried the captured rebels in a military court where they had none of the ordinary rights of an English subject?
3. Was the rebellion a war and the captured rebels prisoners of war who deserved to be tried in a military court?

The Aftermath

1. Based on the testimony of Elizabeth Bacon, which side do you support in this disagreement and conflict: Nathaniel Bacon the younger or Governor Sir William Berkeley? Why?
2. Do you think Elizabeth Bacon presented a biased or unbiased account of what happened? Why or why not?
3. Can you only rely on one historical account or document to get a clear understanding of past events? Why or why not?
4. Could the colonists in Virginia have solved their problems in a different way, instead of burning Jamestown?
5. Once the rebellion was ended, did Berkeley go too far in dealing with the rebels? Why or why not?

6. When else in American history were citizens faced with the pivotal choice of revolution or resolution?