V. Riot, Rebellion, and Revolt

The seventeenth century saw the establishment and solidification of the British North American colonies, but this process did not occur peacefully. English settlements on the continent were rocked by explosions of violence, including the Pequot War, the Mystic massacre, King Philip's War, the Susquehannock War, Bacon's Rebellion, and the Pueblo Revolt.

In May 1637, an armed contingent of English Puritans from Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, and Connecticut colonies trekked into Indian country in territory claimed by New England. Referring to themselves as the "Sword of the Lord," this military force intended to attack "that insolent and barbarous Nation, called the Pequots." In the resulting violence, Puritans put the Mystic community to the torch, beginning with the north and south ends of the town. As Pequot men, women, and children tried to escape the blaze, other soldiers waited with swords and guns. One commander estimated that of the "four hundred souls in this Fort . . . not above five of them escaped out of our hands," although another counted near "six or seven hundred" dead. In a span of less than two months, the English Puritans boasted that the Pequot "were drove out of their country, and slain by the sword, to the number of fifteen hundred."[20]

The foundations of the war lay within the rivalry between the Pequot, the Narragansett, and the Mohegan, who battled for control of the fur and wampum trades in the northeast. This rivalry eventually forced the English and Dutch to choose sides. The war remained a conflict of Native interests and initiative, especially as the Mohegan hedged their bets on the English and reaped the rewards that came with displacing the Pequot.

Victory over the Pequot not only provided security and stability for the English colonies but also propelled the Mohegan to new heights of political and economic influence as the primary power in New England. Ironically, history seemingly repeated itself later in the century as the Mohegan, desperate for a remedy to their diminishing strength, joined the Wampanoag war against the Puritans. This produced a more violent conflict in 1675 known as King Philip's War, bringing a decisive end to Indian power in New England.

In the winter of 1675, the body of John Sassamon, a Christian, Harvard-educated Wampanoag, was found under the ice of a nearby pond. A fellow Christian Indian informed English authorities that three warriors under the local sachem named Metacom, known to the English as King Philip, had killed Sassamon, who had previously accused

Metacom of planning an offensive against the English. The three alleged killers appeared before the Plymouth court in June 1675. They were found guilty of murder and executed. Several weeks later, a group of Wampanoags killed nine English colonists in the town of Swansea.

Metacom—like most other New England sachems—had entered into covenants of "submission" to various colonies, viewing the arrangements as relationships of protection and reciprocity rather than subjugation. Indians and English lived, traded, worshipped, and arbitrated disputes in close proximity before 1675, but the execution of three of Metacom's men at the hands of Plymouth Colony epitomized what many Indians viewed as the growing inequality of that relationship. The Wampanoags who attacked Swansea may have sought to restore balance, or to retaliate for the recent executions. Neither they nor anyone else sought to engulf all of New England in war, but that is precisely what happened. Authorities in Plymouth sprang into action, enlisting help from the neighboring colonies of Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Metacom and his followers eluded colonial forces in the summer of 1675, striking more Plymouth towns as they moved northwest. Some groups joined his forces, while others remained neutral or supported the English. The war badly divided some Indian communities. Metacom himself had little control over events as panic and violence spread throughout New England in the autumn of 1675. English mistrust of neutral Indians, sometimes accompanied by demands that they surrender their weapons, pushed many into open war. By the end of 1675, most of the Indians of present-day western and central Massachusetts had entered the war, laying waste to nearby English towns like Deerfield, Hadley, and Brookfield. Hapless colonial forces, spurning the military assistance of Indian allies such as the Mohegans, proved unable to locate more mobile Native communities or intercept Indian attacks.

The English compounded their problems by attacking the powerful and neutral Narragansett of Rhode Island in December 1675. In an action called the Great Swamp Fight, 1,000 Englishmen put the main Narragansett village to the torch, gunning down as many as 1,000 Narragansett men, women, and children as they fled the maelstrom. The surviving Narragansett joined the Indians already fighting the English. Between February and April 1676, Native forces devastated a succession of English towns closer and closer to Boston.

In the spring of 1676, the tide turned. The New England colonies took the advice of men like Benjamin Church, who urged the greater use

of Native allies, including Pequot and Mohegan, to find and fight the mobile warriors. As the Indians were unable to plant crops and forced to live off the land, their will to continue the struggle waned as companies of English and Native allies pursued them. Growing numbers of fighters fled the region, switched sides, or surrendered in the spring and summer. The English sold many of the latter group into slavery. Colonial forces finally caught up with Metacom in August 1676, and the sachem was slain by a Christian Indian fighting with the English.

The war permanently altered the political and demographic landscape of New England. Between eight hundred and one thousand English and at least three thousand Indians perished in the fourteen-month conflict. Thousands of other Indians fled the region or were sold into slavery. In 1670, Native Americans comprised roughly 25 percent of New England's population; a decade later, they made up perhaps 10 percent.[21] The war's brutality also encouraged a growing hatred of all Indians among many New England colonists. Though the fighting ceased in 1676, the bitter legacy of King Philip's War lived on.

Sixteen years later, New England faced a new fear: the supernatural. Beginning in early 1692 and culminating in 1693, Salem Town, Salem Village, Ipswich, and Andover all tried women and men as witches. Paranoia swept through the region, and fourteen women and six men were executed. Five other individuals died in prison. The causes of the trials are numerous and include local rivalries, political turmoil, enduring trauma of war, faulty legal procedure where accusing others became a method of self-defense, or perhaps even low-level environmental contamination. Enduring tensions with Indians framed the events, however, and an Indian or African woman named Tituba enslaved by the local minister was at the center of the tragedy.[22]

Native American communities in Virginia had already been decimated by wars in 1622 and 1644. But a new clash arose in Virginia the same year that New Englanders crushed Metacom's forces. This conflict, known as Bacon's Rebellion, grew out of tensions between Native Americans and English settlers as well as tensions between wealthy English landowners and the poor settlers who continually pushed west into Indian territory.

Bacon's Rebellion began, appropriately enough, with an argument over a pig. In the summer of 1675, a group of Doeg Indians visited Thomas Mathew on his plantation in northern Virginia to collect a debt that he owed them. When Mathew refused to pay, they took some of his

pigs to settle the debt. This "theft" sparked a series of raids and counter-raids. The Susquehannock Indians were caught in the crossfire when the militia mistook them for Doegs, leaving fourteen dead. A similar pattern of escalating violence then repeated: the Susquehannocks retaliated by killing colonists in Virginia and Maryland, and the English marshaled their forces and laid siege to the Susquehannock. The conflict became uglier after the militia executed a delegation of Susquehannock ambassadors under a flag of truce. A few parties of warriors intent on revenge launched raids along the frontier and killed dozens of English colonists.

The sudden and unpredictable violence of the Susquehannock War triggered a political crisis in Virginia. Panicked colonists fled en masse from the vulnerable frontiers, flooding into coastal communities and begging the government for help. But the cautious governor, Sir William Berkeley, did not send an army after the Susquehannock. He worried that a full-scale war would inevitably drag other Indians into the conflict, turning allies into deadly enemies. Berkeley therefore insisted on a defensive strategy centered on a string of new fortifications to protect the frontier and strict instructions not to antagonize friendly Indians. It was a sound military policy but a public relations disaster. Terrified colonists condemned Berkeley. Building contracts for the forts went to Berkeley's wealthy friends, who conveniently decided that their own plantations were the most strategically vital. Colonists denounced the government as a corrupt band of oligarchs more interested in lining their pockets than protecting the people.

By the spring of 1676, a small group of frontier colonists took matters into their own hands. Naming the charismatic young Nathaniel Bacon as their leader, these self-styled "volunteers" proclaimed that they took up arms in defense of their homes and families. They took pains to assure Berkeley that they intended no disloyalty, but Berkeley feared a coup and branded the volunteers as traitors. Berkeley finally mobilized an army—not to pursue Susquehannock, but to crush the colonists' rebellion. His drastic response catapulted a small band of anti-Indian vigilantes into full-fledged rebels whose survival necessitated bringing down the colonial government.

Bacon and the rebels stalked the Susquehannock as well as friendly Indians like the Pamunkeys and the Occaneechi. The rebels became convinced that there was a massive Indian conspiracy to destroy the English. Berkeley's stubborn persistence in defending friendly Indians and destroying the Indian-fighting rebels led Bacon to accuse the governor of

conspiring with a "powerful cabal" of elite planters and with "the protected and darling Indians" to slaughter his English enemies.[23]

In the early summer of 1676, Bacon's neighbors elected him their burgess and sent him to Jamestown to confront Berkeley. Though the House of Burgesses enacted pro-rebel reforms like prohibiting the sale of arms to Indians and restoring suffrage rights to landless freemen, Bacon's supporters remained unsatisfied. Berkeley soon had Bacon arrested and forced the rebel leader into the humiliating position of publicly begging forgiveness for his treason. Bacon swallowed this indignity but turned the tables by gathering an army of followers and surrounding the State House, demanding that Berkeley name him the general of Virginia and bless his universal war against Indians. Instead, the seventy-year-old governor stepped onto the field in front of the crowd of angry men, unafraid, and called Bacon a traitor to his face. Then he tore open his shirt and dared Bacon to shoot him in the heart, if he was so intent on overthrowing his government. "Here!" he shouted before the crowd, "shoot me, before God, it is a fair mark. Shoot!" When Bacon hesitated, Berkeley drew his sword and challenged the young man to a duel, knowing that Bacon could neither back down from a challenge without looking like a coward nor kill him without making himself into a villain. Instead, Bacon resorted to bluster and blasphemy. Threatening to slaughter the entire assembly if necessary, he cursed, "God damn my blood, I came for a commission, and a commission I will have before I go."[24] Berkeley stood defiant, but the cowed burgesses finally prevailed upon him to grant Bacon's request. Virginia had its general, and Bacon had his war.

After this dramatic showdown in Jamestown, Bacon's Rebellion quickly spiraled out of control. Berkeley slowly rebuilt his loyalist army, forcing Bacon to divert his attention to the coasts and away from the Indians. But most rebels were more interested in defending their homes and families than in fighting other Englishmen, and they deserted in droves at every rumor of Indian activity. In many places, the "rebellion" was less an organized military campaign than a collection of local grievances and personal rivalries. Both rebels and loyalists smelled the opportunities for plunder, seizing their rivals' estates and confiscating their property.

For a small but vocal minority of rebels, however, the rebellion became an ideological revolution: Sarah Drummond, wife of rebel leader William Drummond, advocated independence from England and the formation of a Virginian Republic, declaring "I fear the power of England no more than a broken straw." Others struggled for a different kind of

independence: white servants and black slaves fought side by side in both armies after promises of freedom for military service. Everyone accused everyone else of treason, rebels and loyalists switched sides depending on which side was winning, and the whole Chesapeake disintegrated into a confused melee of secret plots and grandiose crusades, sordid vendettas and desperate gambits, with Indians and English alike struggling for supremacy and survival. One Virginian summed up the rebellion as "our time of anarchy."[25]

The rebels steadily lost ground and ultimately suffered a crushing defeat. Bacon died of typhus in the autumn of 1676, and his successors surrendered to Berkeley in January 1677. Berkeley summarily tried and executed the rebel leadership in a succession of kangaroo courts-martial. Before long, however, the royal fleet arrived, bearing over one thousand red-coated troops and a royal commission of investigation charged with restoring order to the colony. The commissioners replaced the governor and dispatched Berkeley to London, where he died in disgrace.

But the conclusion of Bacon's Rebellion was uncertain, and the maintenance of order remained precarious for years afterward. The garrison of royal troops discouraged both incursion by hostile Indians and insurrection by discontented colonists, allowing the king to continue profiting from tobacco revenues. The end of armed resistance did not mean a resolution to the underlying tensions destabilizing colonial society. Indians inside Virginia remained an embattled minority, and Indians outside Virginia remained a terrifying threat. Elite planters continued to grow rich by exploiting their indentured servants and marginalizing small farmers. Most Virginians continued to resent their exploitation with a simmering fury. Virginia legislators did recognize the extent of popular hostility toward colonial rule, however, and improved the social and political conditions of poor white Virginians in the years after the rebellion. During the same period, the increasing availability of enslaved workers through the Atlantic slave trade contributed to planters' large-scale adoption of slave labor in the Chesapeake.

Just a few years after Bacon's Rebellion, the Spanish experienced their own tumult in the area of contemporary New Mexico. The Spanish had been maintaining control partly by suppressing Native American beliefs. Friars aggressively enforced Catholic practice, burning native idols and masks and other sacred objects and banishing traditional spiritual practices. In 1680, the Puebloan religious leader Popé, who had been arrested and whipped for "sorcery" five years earlier, led various Puebloan groups

Built sometime between 1000 and 1450 CE, the Taos Pueblo located near modern-day Taos, New Mexico, functioned as a base for the leader Popé during the Pueblo Revolt. Luca Galuzzi (photographer), Taos Pueblo, 2007. Wikimedia. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic.

in rebellion. Several thousand Puebloan warriors razed the Spanish countryside and besieged Santa Fe. They killed four hundred, including twenty-one Franciscan priests, and allowed two thousand other Spaniards and Christian Puebloans to flee. It was perhaps the greatest act of Indian resistance in North American history.

In New Mexico, the Puebloans eradicated all traces of Spanish rule. They destroyed churches and threw themselves into rivers to wash away their Christian baptisms. "The God of the Christians is dead," Popé proclaimed, and the Puebloans resumed traditional spiritual practices.[26] The Spanish were exiled for twelve years. They returned in 1692, weakened, to reconquer New Mexico.

The late seventeenth century was a time of great violence and turmoil. Bacon's Rebellion turned white Virginians against one another, King Philip's War shattered Indian resistance in New England, and the Pueblo Revolt struck a major blow to Spanish power. It would take several more decades before similar patterns erupted in Carolina and Pennsylvania, but the constant advance of European settlements provoked conflict in these areas as well.

In 1715, the Yamasee, Carolina's closest allies and most lucrative trading partners, turned against the colony and nearly destroyed it entirely.

Writing from Carolina to London, the settler George Rodd believed the Yamasee wanted nothing less than "the whole continent and to kill us or chase us all out."[27] The Yamasee would eventually advance within miles of Charles Town.

The Yamasee War's first victims were traders. The governor had dispatched two of the colony's most prominent men to visit and pacify a Yamasee council following rumors of native unrest. The Yamasee quickly proved the fears well founded by killing the emissaries and every English trader they could corral.

The Yamasee, like many other Indians, had come to depend on English courts as much as the flintlock rifles and ammunition that traders offered them for slaves and animal skins. Feuds between English agents in Indian country had crippled the court of trade and shut down all diplomacy, provoking the violent Yamasee reprisal. Most Indian villages in the southeast sent at least a few warriors to join what quickly became a pan-Indian cause against the colony.

Yet Charles Town ultimately survived the onslaught by preserving one crucial alliance with the Cherokee. By 1717, the conflict had largely dried up, and the only remaining menace was roaming Yamasee bands operating from Spanish Florida. Most Indian villages returned to terms with Carolina and resumed trading. The lucrative trade in Indian slaves, however, which had consumed fifty thousand souls in five decades, largely dwindled after the war. The danger was too high for traders, and the colonies discovered even greater profits by importing Africans to work new rice plantations. Herein lies the birth of the Old South, that expanse of plantations that created untold wealth and misery. Indians retained the strongest militaries in the region, but they never again threatened the survival of English colonies.

If a colony existed where peace with Indians might continue, it would be Pennsylvania. At the colony's founding, William Penn created a Quaker religious imperative for the peaceful treatment of Indians. While Penn never doubted that the English would appropriate Native lands, he demanded that his colonists obtain Indian territories through purchase rather than violence. Though Pennsylvanians maintained relatively peaceful relations with Native Americans, increased immigration and booming land speculation increased the demand for land. Coercive and fraudulent methods of negotiation became increasingly prominent. The Walking Purchase of 1737 was emblematic of both colonists' desire for cheap land and the changing relationship between Pennsylvanians and their Native neighbors.