

shipping and marketing of all colonial goods. It also specified certain "enumerated commodities" that the colonies could send only to England or other British ports, a list that included sugar, tobacco, cotton, ginger, and indigo (a blue dye). In 1663 Parliament added another regulation: the Staple Act gave Britain a virtual monopoly on the sale of European manufactured goods to Americans by stipulating that most imports going to the colonies had to pass through England. In 1673 a third Navigation Act levied duties on the coastal trade of the American colonies and provided for customs officials to collect imposts and enforce commercial regulations. Parliament later made minor modifications in the Navigation Acts, adding rice and naval stores (masts, pitch, tar, and turpentine) to the category of enumerated commodities in 1704 and 1705, prohibiting the colonies from exporting certain textiles by the Wool Act of 1699 and exporting hats by the Hat Act of 1732, and offering bounties and eliminating duties to encourage the colonial production of indigo and pig and bar iron. All of these regulations were designed to ensure that England—and no foreign nations or their merchants—would profit from all colonial production and trade.



### CHESAPEAKE SOCIETY IN CRISIS

The turmoil of England's revolution had little lasting effect on Virginia and Maryland. The long decades of neglect only confirmed Chesapeake inhabitants in their inclination to act with considerable independence from their homeland. It was the measures instituted by Restoration kings Charles II and James II and their Parliaments that had a more dramatic impact on colonials. Accustomed to conducting their affairs as they pleased—and they were often pleased to trade with the Dutch—Chesapeake planters chafed under the new restrictions that limited their commerce to England. What was worse, the curtailing of colonial freedom after 1660 coincided with a downturn in colonial fortunes. In the effort to consolidate its empire, England inadvertently deepened the economic and social difficulties of Chesapeake society.

#### The Conditions of Unrest

Even before the passage of the Navigation Acts, the Chesapeake colonies had been headed for trouble. The problem began when inhabitants had started to live longer. More servants survived their terms of service, set up as independent tobacco planters, and competed with established growers for land and a share of the profits. More planters meant more production, and overproduction sent the price of tobacco plummeting, especially between 1660 and 1680. With the cost of land rising and the price of tobacco falling, opportunities for newly freed servants diminished sharply after the middle decades of the seventeenth century, especially in Virginia. To maintain their advantage, the biggest planters bought up all of the prime property along the coast. The scarcity of land forced freed servants to become tenants or to settle on unclaimed land in the interior. Either way, these poorer men lost. Depending on bigger planters for land and credit made the small farmers vulnerable to debt; moving to the frontier made them vulnerable to Indian attack.

Indian fighting: he took up the cause of his poorer neighbors on the frontier against their common enemy, the governor. Bacon also received support from other monied, ambitious immigrants who resented being excluded from Berkeley's circle of power and patronage.

In the summer of 1676 Bacon appeared in Jamestown with a body of armed men and extracted from the assembly an authorization to kill Indians. While Bacon carried out that grisly business, indiscriminately slaughtering friendly as well as hostile tribes, Berkeley rallied his supporters and declared him a rebel. Bacon retaliated by turning his forces against those led by the governor. Both sides sought allies by offering freedom to servants and slaves willing to join their ranks. Many were willing: for months the partisans of Bacon and Berkeley plundered one another's plantations. In September 1676 Bacon reduced Jamestown itself to a mound of ashes. It was only his death from dysentery a month later that snuffed out the rebellion. Berkeley, with the belated assistance of 1000 soldiers from England, finally reimposed order.

On the heels of the civil war in Virginia, political upheaval engulfed Maryland. The extraordinary powers of that colony's proprietors, the Calvert family, had from the first created consternation among settlers. And after 1660, against a background of deepening economic depression, antagonisms intensified. A growing number of substantial Maryland planters, like some of Bacon's followers, resented their exclusion from political power and privilege. The Calvert family and their favorites, like Berkeley's circle in Virginia, monopolized political offices. Maryland's small farmers, like Virginia's, suffered from taxes and customs duties that siphoned off their profits and from new laws that whittled away their political privileges. They too wanted a less expensive and more representative government. Compounding the tensions in Maryland were religious enmities: the Calverts and their friends were Catholic, but many of the colony's inhabitants, including its most successful planters, were Protestants.

The unrest among Maryland planters, both humble and powerful, came to a head in July 1689. John Coode, a former member of the assembly, gathered an army, captured the proprietary governor, seized the Calvert family's plantation, and took the grievances of his Protestant Association to authorities in England. There Coode received a sympathetic hearing; the Calverts' charter was revoked and not restored until 1715, by which time the family had embraced Protestantism.

After 1690 the warring factions within the Chesapeake colonies' elite gradually worked out an accommodation that eased competition among them. The leading planters, newer as well as earlier settlers in Virginia, Protestants as well as Catholics in Maryland, parceled out among themselves the spoils of political office. That more inclusive distribution of power and privilege ensured that no future Nathaniel Bacon or John Coode could mobilize disgruntled elites against the government. The great planter families dominated the assembly and the council of both colonies, and by acting in concert, they managed to curb the power of royal and proprietary governors for decades thereafter.

The greater unity among the Chesapeake's leading families did not redress that region's most fundamental problem. The sharp inequality of white society, a gulf between rich and poor planters etched ever more deeply by the troubled tobacco economy, persisted long after Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia and Coode's Rebellion in Maryland. All that saved white society in the Chesapeake from a renewal of internal crisis was the growth of black slavery.

Freed servants who managed to become small planters or tenants did not enjoy a comfortable livelihood or a secure existence. And after the passage of the Navigation Acts, demands on their slim resources included not only taxes levied by the county government and fees charged by local officials, but also export duties on tobacco collected by England. During the hard times after 1660, many small planters fell deeply into debt to those who had rented them land or advanced them credit, and some were forced back into servitude. By 1676 one-quarter of Virginia's free white men were landless.

An alarming number of former servants were unable to gain a foothold even as tenants. They became the vagabonds of Virginia, young bachelors who owned only the clothes on their backs—and their guns. They roamed from place to place, sometimes squatting on someone else's land, sometimes working as hired hands, sometimes living off whatever game they could shoot or livestock they could steal.

Diminishing opportunity in the 1660s and 1670s provided the tinder for social and political unrest. As the discontent of small planters mounted and the number of young, armed vagabonds multiplied, so did the apprehensions of Virginia's big planters. The assembly of the colony lengthened terms of servitude, hoping to limit the number of servants entering the free population, and curtailed the political rights of landless men, hoping to stifle opposition by depriving them of the vote.

Efforts to repress popular resentment only generated a spate of mutinies among servants and protests over rising taxes among small planters. By the early 1670s the situation had become so explosive that Virginia's royal governor, Sir William Berkeley, feared what might happen if the colony required defense from a European power or the Indians. If he mobilized the militia and marched them off to defend the coastline or the frontier, would Virginia's servants find in the absence of their masters a chance to rebel? Or would the militia—comprised mainly of small planters—turn their guns against the colony's government instead of the enemy? Berkeley's alarm deepened in 1673 when the Dutch, displeased at being excluded from the Chesapeake trade by the Navigation Acts, dispatched four armed vessels to Virginia and set fire to the tobacco fleet:

### Bacon's Rebellion and Coode's Rebellion

Virginia survived the Dutch assault, but Berkeley's apprehensions were realized just three years later: civil war erupted in 1676. What set off the conflict among white Virginians was a renewal of hostilities with red Virginians. After Opechancanough's offensive of the 1640s, the Susquehannocks and several smaller Indian tribes living along the Potomac River had retreated to the northwest. By the 1670s white expansion again threatened these tribes, and they resisted with raids on frontier plantations. Berkeley favored a policy of building forts to contain the Indian threat, but frontier farmers opposed his plan as an expensive and ineffective way to defend their scattered plantations. As they clamored for a punitive expedition against the Indians, Nathaniel Bacon stepped forward to spearhead the bloody reprisals.

Wealthy and well connected, Bacon had arrived recently from England, expecting every consideration—including official permission to trade with the Indians from his frontier plantation. Berkeley, along with a few select friends, already held a monopoly on the Indian trade, and the governor declined to include Bacon. Stung by Berkeley's rebuff, Bacon switched his interests from Indian trading to

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