

Bacon's Rebellion

Reinventing Virginia for the 21st Century

Nathaniel Bacon Vindicated, Gov. Berkeley Shamed

Posted on [September 4, 2007](#) | [14 Comments](#)



As all good readers of the *Bacon's Rebellion* blog know, Nathaniel Bacon, instigator of Virginia's first rebellion against the English crown and inspiration for 21st-century Virginia rebels against outmoded institutions, was a genuine hero. Representing the common man against the minions of the monarch, he championed the rights of free-born Englishmen in 1676, long before anyone had articulated the principles enumerated in the Declaration of Independence.

In recent years, the rise of politically correct thinking has been unkind to Nathaniel Bacon. Historians and commentators, many of whom spread their heinous ideas on the Web, observe that Bacon organized the frontiersmen to fight Indians, and take it upon the word of his enemies that he massacred a tribe of friendlies. Thus, Bacon stands in a long line of Europeans, from the Spanish overthrow of the Aztecs and Incas to the murderers at Wounded Knee, for the indiscriminate genocide of native Americans.

Now comes a much-needed revision to the revision, and it comes at the hands of Richard L. Thornton, a Muscogee Indian, who has intensively researched the largely ignored colonial-era history of native Indians of the Southeastern United States. In his essay published here, "[Berkeley the Butcher](#)," Thornton makes a persuasive case that Gov. William Berkeley was the bad guy, thus, by implication, salvaging Bacon's reputation.

Berkeley, Thornton reminds us, was a zealous partisan of the Stuart kings. Appointed as royal Governor of Virginia in 1642, he returned to England to fight on the side of the monarchs during the English Civil War. He returned to Virginia, where he suppressed the Openchoncanough Indian Uprising, was deposed by Oliver Cromwell, and then reappointed Governor in 1660. Less known to Virginians, Berkeley also was named one of eight Lord Proprietors of the Colony of Carolina, which consisted of what is now North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. As Thornton notes, "The Royal Proprietors planned to become unimaginably wealthy by subdividing and selling their eight 'duchies' into feudal estates with titled nobility."

In 1660, Berkeley pushed laws through the Virginia assembly that officially recognized the institution of race-based slavery, and codified laws removing any legal rights from slaves. Up to that time, Native American and African slaves were theoretically bond-servants. After that time, they were chattel for life. Nice guy, that Berkeley.

As it so happened, Berkeley had a personal interest in the enslavement of native Americans. Thornton writes that Berkeley armed the Rickohocken tribe, located in western Virginia, with firearms and sent bands of warriors southward "to capture slaves for Virginia's tobacco plantations." These Indians, whom history came to know as the Cherokee, he theorizes, plundered far and wide, largely depopulating the Carolinas of the native tribes. This genocide against native Americans was committed by other native Americans — with the aid and complicity of Gov. Berkeley.

How does this relate to Nathaniel Bacon? Writes Thornton: "It is theorized that one of the primary reasons that Berkeley refused in 1675 to authorize large-scale resistance to Indian raids on the Virginia frontier, was his long-time business relationship with the three branches of the Rickohockens." In other words, Berkeley was trying to protect his buddies who were conducting slave-trading raids in the Carolinas! Whether you accept this theory or not, you should read Thornton's essay for a glimpse into a fascinating and little-known era of Virginia history.

(*Photo credit of Gov. Berkeley*: Wikipedia. C'mon, just look at the guy. Velvet jacket, flouncy shirt, curly wig... Who're you going to believe

— him or Nathaniel Bacon?)

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14 RESPONSES TO NATHANIEL BACON VINDICATED, GOV. BERKELEY SHAMED

James Atticus Bowden | [September 5, 2007 at 2:48 am](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



I’d like to read this. I question how much influence the Governor of Virginia had over the Cherokee. So, I’d like to read about it.

Reading a book now about Powhatan’s confederacy doesn’t suggest much is plausible.

E M Risse | [September 5, 2007 at 5:07 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



At 9:48 PM, James Atticus Bowden said...

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JAMES ATTICUS:

I AM NOT SURE WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ, THORNTONS COLUMN OR FURTHER MATERIAL ON WM BERKELEY?

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THORNTON’S COLUMN:

ADDS NEW INSIGHT INTO BACONS REBELLION,

PROVIDES THE RATIONALE FOR A MANY FINDINGS AND ARCHEOLOGY THAT DID NOT SEEM TO MAKE SENSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM.

IT IS NOW UP TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIFFERENT VIEWS TO PUT THEIR CARDS ON THE TABLE.

THE MODELS OF THE URBAN AREAS OF THE SOUTHEASTERN TRIBES THAT HAVE STRONG SIMILARITIES TO THE MAYA AND THIS EXPLANATION OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM IS AS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AS WAS THE ARCHEOLOGY UPON WHICH JANE JACOBS BASED “THE ECONOMY OF ‘CITIES”” OR THE RECENT WORK IN PERU.

EMR

E M Risse | [September 5, 2007 at 5:09 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



Oh yes,

I am also glad that Universtiy of California at Berkeley was named for George Berkeley, not William.

EMR

James Atticus Bowden | [September 5, 2007 at 5:34 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)

EMR: Both



RThorntonAIA | [September 5, 2007 at 9:30 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



My primary focus on the Berkeley the Butcher article was correcting the misconceptions of our colonial history and not a political statement. However, after reading your excellent comments on the blog, I realize that much of what us “free-thinkers” disparage in our current society has very ancient roots. The British cut a very evil deal with some Virginia Indians. Even in those times, their PR machine was so well-tuned that they were able to cover up their actions for over 300 years, even going to the extent to renaming the Indian villians twice, so few people would make the connection. The word Cherokee is actually derived from a Creek word which means “a splinter group who moved away from the main town.”

What goes around, comes around. Since the opening of the cassino in Cherokee, NC the Russian Mafia has steadily taken over the reservation’s economy. Most of the owners, employees and managers of the retail stores and restaurants on the reservation are either Russian, Polish, Brazilian or Ukrainian.

I was in a large, successful barbecue restaurant on the reservation about a month ago. It had been a favorite dining spot for over 20 years, but now was in a new building under new management. The only Cherokee employee was a teenage boy washing dishes. A Cherokee friend, who formerly worked there, told me later that the first thing that the new Russian owners did was fire the Native employees, and replaced them with young Slavs. The new foreign employees somehow were all able to obtain green cards as guest student workers, even though some had worked there continuously for 2 years and none of the workers were attending college.

Obviously, someone is getting beads and trinkets to look the other way.

E M Risse | [September 6, 2007 at 1:28 am](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



Back from today, to 300 years ago and then to the 1800s:

James Atticus Bowden wonders if Wm Berkeley could “influce” the Cherokee.

It sounds like Wm Berkeley “invented” the Cherokee.

He armed a Rickohocken band (an isolated group of Delaware tribe Algonquias who were forced south by the Iroquois, named them Westo and sent them south to wipe out the rebounding Muskogean farmers / urban villigers so that the Prorietors of Carolina could sell land for slave supported plantations on the coastal plains and have a friendly tribe with which to trade pelts and protect them from attack from the vast unknown to the west.

If you are familiar with the village and community building that was akin to the Maya culture in the Southeast when the Spanish first traveled through, you can see how all this makes more sense than current ortodoxy.

What is striking is that conventional wisdom has been used to justify a hammering of the bad, bad Spaniards for what they did in Peru, Mexico and the Yucatan and at the same time white washing what the English did on the Atlantic Coast.

Takes you back to the sick feeling one gets from first learning of the treatment of Chief Joseph, of Wounded Knee and other sordid stories about the way the West was really “won.”

Closer to home, it puts Bacon’s Current Rebellion into sharp focus.

EMR

Jim Bacon | [September 6, 2007 at 10:59 am](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



Ed, two questions:



First, what were the characteristics of villages and communities akin to Mayan culture that you speak of?

Second, How does that fit with Richard's interpretation of events?

E M Risse | [September 6, 2007 at 5:58 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



Jim:

When I traveled in the South in the 60s and 70s while an Army officer and a Planned New Community professional I covered a lot of territory.

Then and since I have seen reference to "mound builders" and "advanced civilizations" that caught my eye because of interest in the Myan influnce on Frank Lloyd Wright.

Then there is the Lewis and Clark information on the indian cultures along the Missouri River.

It never fit into what read on Native American culture. (As you know our home in Montana was between the Blackfeet and the Flathead reservations, went to college in a place where Lewis and Clark and Cheif Joseph both passed through, etc.)

When we started working on the organic structure of human settlement patterns one model that was of interest was the family / extended family / clan / band / tribe / nation model that you hear about in Native American culture.

What Richard Thornton writes about is, as some one calls it "spot on" with respect to what I have observed.

Thornton's work — the first item when you GOOGLE him — ties the Mayan and the mound builders together.

EMR

E M Risse | [September 7, 2007 at 5:01 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



More on Jim Bacon's questions:

The Atlas of World Archaeology is 208 pages but only devotes 2 to "North American Mound Builders" in the Rise of Civilizations section.

The map suggests that most of the activity was in the upper Mississippi, lower Missouri and lower Ohio valleys.

Cahokia was an urban settlement of 30,000 people.

The area of Richard Thornton's work — the southeast — is shown but there are not a lot of sites highlighted.

He is doing a model of Ocmulgee (shown on the map in the Atlas) but many other sites exist and he has done models of several in which the Mayan influnce is clear.

The southeastern sites were subject to European impact (obliteration and confusion) much earlier than the sites farther west.

That is why Thornton's work is so important.

Very few American Indians (the Blackfeet and the Flatheads among them) still live in the area they occupied in 1492.

As Thornton’s column suggests it was a crapshoot which tribes survived into the late 20th century and thus gained political swat — if you can call what they have “political swat.”

What we have east of the Appalachians is a very clouded picture of what was here before 1500 or 1607.

Thornton provides new information to help answer these questions and put Nat Bacon back into persective.

As noted in the last post what really interests me is the urban physical, social and economic structure that existed among the farmers and urban villigers, not what one sees in Hollywood movies or conventional wisdom museum diaramas (sp?).

EMR

RThorntonAIA | [September 7, 2007 at 5:04 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



To answer your question Jim – the Mayas and the Muskogeans had equivalent names for all public officials. On paper, the political structure of two cultures were quite similar. For example, both cultures called their highest leaders, Great Suns, and both cultures called their three classes of priests, Keepers. However, the Mayas (with the exception of the city of Chichen Itza) were polytheistic oligarchies, while the Muskogeans were monotheistic and had two chamber representative governments with a symbolic “royal” head of state. Chichen Itza had a system of government like the Muskogeans, but was polytheistic.

Berkeley’s planned creation of a feudal, plantation-based society was in complete conflict with the economic traditions of the Muskogean agricultural societies. Among the Muskogeans, cultivated land was owned in common by the women of the town, and administered by elected female clan officials. Women could even be elected to be the Great Sun or CEO of the entire town. The agricultural lands were surveyed out into rectangular tracts, which were assigned to each household. All tracts were cultivated together by teams of workers led by a middle level official labeled an “Orato” or facilitator. However, each household harvested and consumed the produce from their assigned tract individually. So this tradition was not quite the same thing as a commune or kibutz.

Agricultural land could not be sold without the approval of all the women in the town – the property owners. Therefore, British planters would have probably been able to obtain prime bottomlands only by military force or by total “ethnic cleansing.”

PS – I am learning a lot by reading the other articles!

Jim Bacon | [September 7, 2007 at 7:14 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



Richard, Very interesting... So, you’re saying that Berkeley had two motives to set the Westo/Cherokee upon the Muskogeans: to generate slaves for Virginia plantations and to clear the land in S.C./Ga. for plantations there.

I knew the Spaniards enslaved a lot of Indians to work their plantations, but most of the Indians died off. Either physically or culturally, they could not survive the rigors of plantation slavery as well as African Americans. Was the same thing true in Virginia? Did Virginia plantations employ significant numbers of Indian slaves? Did they also die in large numbers?

RThorntonAIA | [September 8, 2007 at 4:12 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



More answers to your questions, Jim ...

Yes, I think it is very clear that Gov. Berkeley wanted to depopulate the Southeast. To him, the Cherokees were no problem, since they were mountain hunters, rather than valley farmers.

All of the colonies held substantial numbers of Native American slaves throughout the 1600s and early 1700s. Remember there were Indian slaves involved with the Salem Witchcraft Trials. The Muskogeans had been farmers since around 500 BC, so it is doubtful that farmwork only would have killed them. However, inadequate diets and heartbreak certainly would have taken a large toll. Muskogeans often would commit suicide rather than submit to slavery. We still have that free-spirtied trait, by the

way. Creeks would never make good Nazi’s. LOL

The Kings of Spain officially forbade the enslavement of Indians, but it occurred anyway... intermitently. From the viewpoint of Spanish law, the captives were feudal serfs – peons.

Both England and France were far more involved with Indian slavery than Spain. French soldiers wiped out entire tribes with their slave raids. All of the original levees, canals and terraces in New Orleans were built by Indian slaves.

Virginia Indians backed by the English did the same thing to the Native farmers of the Carolinas, eastern Tennessee and eastern Georgia. The English also “hired” some Creek towns along the Chattahoochee River to raid the Spanish mission Indians on the coast of Georgia and the Florida Panhandle. Estimates run as high as 30,000 for the number of Florida Indians enslaved by the English. In one joint English-Creek raid over 3000 Christian Apalachee Indians were marched back to the slave market in Charleston at one time.

The Apalachee were also Muskogean, but because they were allied to the Spanish, they were considered enemies by the Creeks – who waged a 200 year long war against the Spanish until they were pushed into the walls of St. Augustine. The one million Native inhabitants of Florida had pretty much been annihilated by 1720 – initially by Spanish diseases, weapons and abuse – but ultimately by English slave raids.

It is theorized today, that all of the major Indian tribes of the Southeast were “created” by the slave raid era. Remnant tribes banded together and became allied to which ever European nation seem to give them the most protection from the slave raiders of another European nation. It was not a “pretty picture” during those early days of Virginia’s history.

Richard Thornton

Jim Bacon | [September 8, 2007 at 8:50 pm](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



Richard... Absolutely fascinating. In a previous life, I earned an M.A. in African history, and I spent a lot of time studying the Atlantic slave trade and the impact of the trade on indigenous African societies. We see a lot of the same patterns in Africa – slavers busted up the traditional societies and used the money they gained from selling the slaves to Europeans to buy guns, incorporate female slaves into their kinship structures, and increase their power. Same thing in eastern Africa where it was the Arabs conducting the slave trade. Entire new tribes and political entities arose all across the continent. In all the time I studied African societies, though, I had no idea how similar patterns were replicated in North America.

If you haven’t studied the impact of the slave trade on African societies, you might do some light reading in the subject. The parallels might point you in some new lines of inquiry.

Red Bear | [April 18, 2008 at 2:44 am](#) | [Log in to Reply](#)



Richard, I found your article very informative.

I might now have an ideal why:
-VA will not recognize my Tribe
-Helen Roundtree seems so hell bent on saying that there are ‘NO’ Cherokee’s in VA

The Cherokee People in VA are hated, because we did what William Berkeley told us to do.

Red Bear

Please e-mail.
I need to know more.

