

Notes on “Persons of a Mean and Vile Condition”
Zinn Ch.3

- Stress of Violence on Virginia frontier before Bacon’s Rebellion. Whites who had capital owned seaboard. Those with headrights or land claims were left to contend with Native Tribes (Powhatan). Land owners fueled the animosity in order to redirect class animosity.
- Nathaneal Bacon came from the Indentured Class and was seeking his own headright, but denied by treaty between Governor Berkeley and Powhatan. Dissenting against establishment was elected to House of Burgesses where he won popularity by calling for the attack of the tribes on the frontier.
- Bacon was arrested for his rebellion of the military, but released with an apology, when his militia responded by attacking Jamestown and burning the fort.
- Raising resentment against the rich and hatred of the Indians, Bacon created a Populist following. They protested Virginia Land Co. monopoly of the Beaver trade, unfair taxes and political favoritism and Bacon took militia into his own hands and raided Pamunkey slaughtering men, women and children.
- The following fall, after mutiny even among his own militia, Bacon fell sick and died. He was 29. One contemporary commented that he died from “swarms of Vermyn that bred in his body.”
 - Bacon is dead, and I’m sad at heart
That lice and flux should take the hangman’s part
- Berkeley admitted that the attraction of Bacon was his idea of “leveling.”
- Indentured servants became half of the colonial period at time of Rebellion.
- England was happy to be rid of these debtors, thieves, riff-raff and downtrodden landless people.
- 80% of this class died in servitude, returned to England, or became part of the poor white dissenters of the frontier.
- The distinction between rich and poor became very sharp.
- Democracy of town halls only allowed land owning aristocrats interested in controlling the natives and dissenting poor. They had sole voting rights as land was required to vote. In Boston, the richest of all regions, 29% of the town were landless men.
- Strikes by these workers increased in frequency among coopers, butchers, bakers, and other landless artisans...as well as sailors, particularly in Boston demolishing public squares as well as homes of the landed. Rioting became a common form of protest.
- A series of Empire wars (Queen Anne’s early 1700s, King George’s in the 1730s, French and Indian/Seven Years war in 1750s-1763) meant higher taxes, inflation, unemployment and poverty.
- Natives were not accepted, or considered for labor and were a constant threat on the frontier.
- Rich Whites and companies were concerned also with slave revolts that seemed to erupt with greater frequency and violence.

- The question of the established Power... How do we control the animosities of Poor whites, Indians and slaves? If they all realized they wanted basically the same thing they would be a formidable force threatening their authority.
- Whites running to join native tribes became more of a phenomenon. If captured and given the chance to return to white society, they almost never chose to return to white society. Putting the poor whites as a buffer to the “hostiles” on the frontier could have an opposite effect.
- Slave escaping plantations in the south ran for southern Georgia and Florida to join the Seminoles, Cherokee and Creek tribes.
- The white aristocracy therefore became vigilant and created policies to enhance any resentment between the three threatening societies, “to make Indians and negroes a cheque upon each other lest by their vastly superior numbers we should be crushed by one or the other.” (Carolina aristocracy) Governor Lyttleton of South Carolina spoke “It has always been the policy of this government to create an aversion in them {Indians} to the negroes.”
- Thus southern militias used blacks to find Indians on the frontier.
- Mulatto children were considered automatically illegitimate to keep the races from commingling. Thus racism became a taught policy.
- Middle class small farmers and city artisans were promoted to create a bond between landed and poorer whites, and the system of indentured servitude quickly disappeared, thus alienating the negro and Indians, and enraged whites like Bacon and Thomas Hellier. This bought loyalty and directed the hatred away from class conflicts enough to keep the three groups apart.