

Counties and Commonalties:

New Perspectives on Bacon's Rebellion

University of Georgia Research Colloquium

April 28, 2004

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Work (very much) in progress
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In 1801 Rufus King, American minister plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James, purchased from a London bookseller a manuscript entitled “The Beginning, Progress and Conclusion of Bacon’s Rebellion.” The manuscript’s author identified himself only by the initials “T.M.” On his return to America King sent the manuscript to Thomas Jefferson, noting slyly that this detailed eye-witness account differed “from that of our historians in some important circumstances.” He hoped that Jefferson might be “gratified” to read it and asked whether Jefferson could identify its author, known only by the pseudonym “T.M.” Jefferson did indeed read the manuscript carefully and recognizing its significance, made a copy for his catspaw, the Irish born journalist John Daly Burk, who was currently engaged in writing a History of Virginia. However the arrival of the manuscript placed Jefferson in something of a quandary, as King may well have intended. For Jefferson the significance of the “transaction” that occurred in Virginia 1676 lay in the fact that “it was the only rebellion or insurrection” in the colony “before the American revolution.”¹ This fact encouraged Jefferson, as it has encouraged some more recent historians, to seek links and parallels between events in 1676 and 1776.² As a democrat and, perhaps more importantly, as a Virginian, Jefferson sought to interpret Bacon’s Rebellion as a strike against the arbitrary exercise of power. T.M.’s account offers only limited support for this analysis and so, while noting that it

¹ Rufus King to Thomas Jefferson, December 20, 1803, Jefferson to King, February 17, 1804 in Thomas Jefferson Papers, series 1 General Correspondence, Library of Congress. T. M.’s account is reproduced in Charles M. Andrews, ed., *Narratives of the Insurrections 1675 – 1690* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1915), 9-42. In 1799 Jefferson had boasted to James Thomson Callendar of Virginia’s remarkable “submission” to the rule of law, citing Bacon’s Rebellion as the sole instance of organized opposition prior to the Revolution, Jefferson to Callendar, September 6, 1799, Thomas Jefferson Papers, series 9, Collected Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

² See for example, Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker *Torchbearer of the Revolution: The Story of Bacon’s Rebellion and Its Leader* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1965); Stephen Saunders Webb, *1676. The End of American Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

challenged the “impressions” that remained in his mind from dimly remembered histories of Virginia, and reluctantly admitting that it was “impossible to refuse assent” to the “candor and simplicity” of T.M.’s “story,” Jefferson nonetheless concluded that neither the “course nor the cause” of Bacon’s Rebellion had yet been understood. Over two hundred years later Edmund S. Morgan, the most judicious modern interpreter of Bacon’s Rebellion, similarly concluded that Bacon’s Rebellion had many causes but no Cause.³

It is a brave man who attempts to find in events a meaning that eluded Thomas Jefferson and Edmund Morgan. Nevertheless in this paper, which focuses primarily on Bacon and his supporters, I want to argue that the vainglorious “hare-brained atheist” and his close advisors did espouse a positive Cause in 1676. Bacon and many of his followers did not wish simply or exclusively to restock Virginia’s existing political system with more sympathetic or charismatic leaders, or to purge its legal code of obnoxious legislation. They did not see smiting the Indian enemy as an end in itself. I want to use this paper to suggest instead, in the spirit of Bart Kosko’s *Fuzzy Thinking: The New Science of Fuzzy Logic*,⁴ that at least one side in America’s first civil war was motivated to take up arms in 1676 in pursuit of a multivalent, contradictory and yet ultimately coherent political agenda that was attractive precisely because it was...“fuzzy.” The first half of my paper introduces a concept that might have motivated Bacon and his followers, traces its use in documents produced during and after the rebellion, and asks whether such usage delineates the larger Cause of securing that independence instantiated in the term “commonalty.” The second half of the paper presents a brief prosopography of a particular group of Baconites, asking whether their background and outlook supports

³ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975).

⁴ Published by Hyperion Press, New York, 1993

my contention that what most rebels sought was a local autonomy fuzzily akin to notions of commonalty. My search for this body of ideas begins, appropriately enough perhaps, in a swamp.

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On or about September 2 1676, John Coode, a member of Maryland's House of Delegates who had been sent to inquire into Virginia's rebellion, met the man with whom it was synonymous, Nathaniel Bacon. The meeting took place somewhere in the Great Dragon Swamp, where Bacon was pursuing a campaign against the Pamunkey Indians. Although the rest of Virginia was suffering a drought, which many Virginians attributed to Indian witchcraft, it was raining in the swamp. Bacon would die of dysentery within six weeks. Bacon began their conversation by asking Coode whether he thought that, by adopting the same tactics of ambush and retreat the Indians currently employed against the colonists, his 500 Baconites would be able to hold off the 2,000 redcoats rumored to be on their way to Virginia. Coode thought not because "the principal men of the country dislike the manner of your proceedings against the Indians and would certainly side with the redcoats." Bacon disputed this. Coode replied, "Sir, you speak as though you desire a total defection from His Majesty and our native country." Bacon smiled and said "Why, have not many Princes lost their dominions?" Coode now put it to Bacon that "I conceive...[your] followers do not think themselves engaged against the King's authority but against the Indians." Bacon replied: "But I think otherwise; and am confident of it, that it is in the mind of this Country, and of Maryland & Carolina also, to cast off their

Governors [.] And the Governors of Carolina have taken no notice of the people, nor the people of them [for] a long time and the people are resolved to own their Governor no farther; and if we cannot prevail by our arms at least to make our conditions for peace; *or obtain the privilege to elect our Governors*, we may retire to Roanoke.” Bacon then “fell into a discourse” on the desirability of establishing a place of refuge or a plantation on a great river in Carolina.⁵

Seventeenth-century Englishman had a word to describe that implicitly independent polity which resulted from exercising the privilege to elect Governors: the word was commonalty (sometimes rendered “commonaltie”). Since “commonalty” is a term that abuts much better known terms of art – for example, commonwealth, Independence and country ideology – some further introduction and definition is in order. Significantly “commonalty” as used to describe “a self-governing commonwealth, a republic, a democracy” was a term that emerged and died in the seventeenth century and seems to have been inspired in part by American structures.⁶ It built upon and expanded two established usages of “commonalty”: the first to describe collectively the common

⁵ [John Coode] The Full Substance of a Discourse Nathaniel Bacon Deceased proposed to me on or about the 2nd of September Last, Coventry Papers LXXVII, fol. 347-8 [emphasis added]. Within a week of their arrival, the Royal Commissioners informed Sir Henry Coventry that Virginians were so sullen that there was a real danger that they might make “away to other parts.” Moryson and Berry to Coventry, February 10, 1677, Coventry Papers LXXVII, fol. 389. Reviewing the veracity of Coode’s account Stephen Saunders Webb concludes, “It seems...that Coode fairly described his discussion with Bacon about the external aspects of the Virginian revolution against English authority.” Stephen Saunders Webb, *1676. The End of American Independence*, (1984. rev. ed. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 79-80. For a discussion of Coode’s career, see David W. Jordan, “John Coode, Perennial Rebel,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 70 (1975), 9-31. On allegations of Indian witchcraft, see Mathew’s Narrative in Andrews, *Narratives*, 38.

⁶ Indeed it seems from a keyword search of the digital edition of Evans *American Bibliography* that the variant meanings of commonalty -- the common people or the common people as a estate of the realm – also disappeared from American usage after Bacon’s Rebellion.

people; the second, more analytical, to describe the common people acting as an estate of the realm through their elected representatives. The editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* trace the first use of the new seventeenth-century understanding of commonalty (as a term describing an independent polity) to Edward Grimestone's 1604 English translation of Jose De Acosta's *The Naturall and Moral History of the Indies*: "Many nations of the Indies have not endured any Kings...but live in commonalities, creating and appointing Captains and Princes for certain occasions only."⁷ The *OED*'s second citation is to John Milton's *The Ready and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660) where Milton argues that a commonwealth could be best and soonest obtained... "if every county were made a kind of subordinate Commonalty or Commonwealth."⁸ We might add a highly significant third example to this list, Article XIII of the Orders and Constitution of the Virginia Company of London, which stated: "The Treasurer and Company, being a body and commonaltie perpetual, shall have one fair and common seal, to be kept by the Treasurer."⁹

The Virginia Company of London used the neologism "commonaltie" to describe itself advisedly. Just as the discovery of the Americas revealed novel forms of government among indigenous peoples (such as the practice of appointing princes for certain occasions only), so establishing permanent colonies in the new world raised the question of how they should be governed. English imperial theory, such as it was, largely

⁷ Clements R. Markham, ed., *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies, by Father Joseph De Acosta*, Publications of the Hakluyt Society, First series, vols. 60, 61, (1880), 61: 410. De Acosta's discussion of this point associates such temporary Kingship with the access of reason.

⁸ In *The Works of John Milton*, John Mitford ed., (London and Boston, 1851), V: 420-55. Milton's pamphlet can also be read on Early English Books Online.

⁹ "Orders and Constitutions Partly Collected Out of His Majesty's Letters Patent" in [Council for Virginia] *A Declaration of the State of the Colony and Affairs in Virginia* (1620), 4.

ducked this issue. Summarizing English justifications for colonization Anthony Pagden concludes: “Confusedly at first and then with religious and invariably self-righteous zeal, they abandoned the vision of El Dorado and Spanish-style kingdoms overseas for that of ‘colonies’ and ‘plantations;’ places that is, which would be sources not of human or mineral but of agricultural and commercial wealth.”¹⁰ In this conception, trade rather than written constitutions or legislative assemblies would harmonize relations between colony and metropole and the internal governance of the colonies themselves was a matter of secondary concern. However even imagining Virginia as a glorified trading post that could be governed by the *Laws Divine Moral and Martial* and had no need of a body such as the House of Burgesses played into a fundamental conflict within Stuart political culture. By insisting, as of divine right, on initiating imposts and taxes independent of Parliament James I threatened the material interests of the Virginia Company of London and its investors, leading the company to insist that it was a self-governing “commonaltie” and prominent figures within it, notably Sir Edwin Sandys, to denounce royal prerogatives in terms that stopped just short of republicanism. Equally, it was the Virginia Company’s insistence on acting as a commonalty led James I to view it as a “seditious parliament.” When a scheme to re-charter a Virginia Company was mooted in the late 1620s Governor Sir John Harvey opposed it on the grounds that “corporations” were inherently antithetical to monarchical government.¹¹

¹⁰Anthony Pagden, “The Struggle for Legitimacy and the Image of Empire in the Atlantic to c. 1700,” in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Origins of Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 34-54, at 36. See also Bruce Macleod, *The Geography of Empire in English Literature, 1580 – 1745*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹¹ For an overview of the conflict between King and Parliament over the right to initiate duties and imposts see, Maija Jansson, *Proceedings in Parliament 1614 (House of Commons)*, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988), xii-xxxvi. On May 21 1614 Sir Edwin Sandys delivered a remarkable speech in the House of Commons in which he maintained that the origin of every monarchy lay in election, that the people

Moreover in its promotional literature, and under the administration of Sir Edwin Sandys, the earl of Southampton and John Ferrar, the Virginia Company of London claimed to be embarked on something greater than the planting of trading posts in the Chesapeake. Implicit in the evolutionary metaphors used to describe the “ends” of colonization in Virginia was an assumption that the colony would necessarily manifest forms of independence in the future. For example, in 1609 William Crashaw urged the colonists on with the argument that Rome had once been poor and despised and yet from a “base beginning” had “grown to be mistress of the world.” In the same year Daniel Price softened this prophecy of Virginian nationalism with the argument that the “Virginia Country may in time prove to us the farm of Britain, as Sicily was to Rome, or the garden of the world, as was Thessaly.” Within a generation Virginia’s putative Sicilians were demanding the right to trade with Dutch rather than farm for Britain on disadvantageous terms. In the 1630s Governor Sir John Harvey argued that Virginia had actually become “like another Sicily to Rome, the granary of all his Majesty’s colonies” but Harvey was of course deposed by a council that grew more tobacco than corn and sought to service His Majesty’s colonies on their own terms.¹² Harvey was reinstated in

consented to respect the King’s authority on the understanding that there were reciprocal obligations which neither King nor people could violate, and that a king who attempted to rule by any other title, for example conquest, might be dethroned. See, Jansson, *Proceedings*, 307-17. The vast and contentious historiography on constitutional issues in early seventeenth century England is reviewed combatively in J. H. Hexter, “The Early Stuarts and Parliament: Old Hat and the *Nouvelle Vague*,” *Parliamentary History* I (1982): 181-215. The phrase “seditious parliament” was suggested to James I by Spanish ambassador Gondomar see, P[eter] Peckard, *Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Nicholas Ferrar* (Cambridge, 1790), 115. “Considerations against a New Virginia Company,” 1630?, attributed to Sir John Harvey, *VMHB* VIII (1901), 40-3.

¹² William Crashaw, “A Sermon Preached in London before the right honourable the Lord Lawarre, Lord Governour and Captaine Generall of Virginea, and other his Maiesties Councell for that Kingdome, and the rest of the adventurers in that plantation,” in Alexander Brown, *The Genesis of the United States* 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1890), 1: 360-75. Price and Harvey cited in Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind*

turn by a monarch determined to assert that he alone, not some colonial commonalty, had the right to appoint Virginia's governors.

Those Englishmen and Virginians who viewed "commonalty" as a form of polity to be avoided, realized the implications of colonial evolution, but could hope only to limit the expansion of colonial autonomy. In 1623, for example, Captain John Bargrave hawked around England's corridors of power a comprehensive attack on social mobility and political self-assertion in Virginia. Bargrave believed that Virginia's governors had encouraged "popular government" at the expense of monarchy and that extreme liberty was worse than extreme liberty. Yet this implacable opponent of the pretensions of Virginia's emerging grandees recognized a measure of American independence even as he sought to limit its menace to the Crown through a carefully calibrated commonalty inspired by Mediterranean trading states. Bargrave proposed that Virginia be governed by a Council of Union bound by oath to unite Virginia with the Crown. To prevent a future Massaniello or Bacon from seizing control of this body, it in turn would be governed in monthly rotation by a triumvirate selected from a restricted pool of trustworthy great planters. Bargrave appealed to classical antiquity in support of this proposal, while elsewhere commending King Alfred for dividing England into shires, hundreds and tythings and suggesting Virginia could best defend itself from Indian attack by a series of "military intendancies" based on analogous units of local government.¹³ (This proposal

and the Classical Tradition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 29.

¹³ Captain John Bargrave to Lord Middlesex, June 10, 1623 in "Lord Sackville's Papers Respecting Virginia, 1613-21," *American Historical Review* 27 (1922), 508-9; [Captain John Bargrave] "A Forme of Polisie to Plante and Governe Many Families in Virginae," in Arthur Percival Newton, ed., "A New Plan to Govern Virginia" *American Historical Review* 19 (1914), 559-578. Bargrave explained the composition and purpose of the Council in a sidebar: "The grounds and reasons of this several councils why we make three presidents of this Syncretisme or council of union, and why they take their courses by changes according to these letters set down are these. Genoa has three presidents, so

sought to head off “bottom up” retaliation against Indian attacks such as that proposed by William Capps in 1623 and any number of Baconites in 1676).¹⁴ During the Interregnum Virginians, or rather their Burgesses, did in fact appoint their own governors. The last person so chosen was Sir William Berkeley in 1659. Even Berkeley, no friend of republics, commonwealths or commonalties, could hope only to limit the power of the lower house. Virginia’s counties possessed opportunities for independent self-expression mainly denied the English burghers of Kent or Cornwall. Then again, Virginia’s governors possessed powers that the Lord Lieutenants of Kent or Cornwall did not. The colonies were supposed to be subordinate: the tail not the dog, the child not the parent, the grain-producing colony not the imperial city. On the other hand, in order to add value to the imperial portfolio they had to be allowed a measure of independence. An expanded American understanding of “commonalty” began to grow in this nexus of constitutional improvisation.

In summary, Englishmen and Virginians did not wait until the 1760s to begin a debate about the nature of the colonial relationship or the balance between self-expression and obedience within it. Even a brief survey of the literature in which Englishmen and Virginians discussed the current and future relationship between the

likewise had Marcelles [Marseilles?] which is commended by Cicero to be the best commonwealth that was in his time in the world. We nominate them monthly because offices of great power amongst equals must not continue long, and the shorter they are the less they may enterprise against the state.” *ibid.*, 567-8. On King Alfred see, *ibid.*, 578. His proposal to create military intendancies by “tribe” was made to Middlesex see, “Lord Sackville’s Papers,” 512. On tribes and hundreds see, Eric Gethyn-Jones, *George Thorpe and the Berkeley Company. A Gloucestershire Enterprise in Virginia* (Gloucester, England: Alan Sutton, 1982).

¹⁴ In 1623 “ancient planter” William Capps asked for a commission to lead twenty men against the Indians and make them “weary for their lives.” He was refused and in a high dudgeon announced his intention to grow just enough tobacco as was necessary to secure passage back to England; William Capps to Dr. Thomas Wynston, March or April, 1623, in Kingsbury, ed., *Records of the Virginia Company* 4:37-9

colony and the metropole throws up themes and questions that seventeenth-century usage of “commonalty” sought to define and engage. Moreover, by coining and employing the term, even if only as a near synonym for “commonwealth,” Englishmen and Virginians spoke to issues and relationships that were intractable and necessarily “fuzzy”. In the fall and winter of 1676-7 the Crown clarified these issues by proclaiming Nathaniel Bacon an unalloyed rebel and making perfectly clear that he, and his followers, could not claim privileges such as that of electing their own Governors while at the same time claiming to be loyal subjects of the Crown who desired union not independence. But Bacon and many Virginians, even after the rebellion, “thought otherwise.” Were they inspired by the ideas and assumptions bound up in the concept of “commonaltie” as defined by Milton? The best way of getting these questions is to look at a relatively neglected source, petitions of grievance filed by Virginians in the spring of 1677.

The process of grievance gathering began in February 1677 when Sir John Berry, Herbert Jeffreys and Francis Morison – commissioners appointed by the Crown to investigate the causes of Bacon’s Rebellion – ordered the Burgesses to instruct duly authorized officials in each of Virginia’s counties to collect statements of the population’s grievances and promised Virginians that they could air their concerns without fear of reprisal.¹⁵ All of Virginia’s counties save apparently two – Middlesex and Northumberland – took this opportunity to comment critically on the state of Virginia and explain why some or all of their countrymen had supported Nathaniel Bacon. On Virginia’s southside, Nansemond and Isle of Wight counties submitted a series of competing statements, “respectable” inhabitants disavowing the grievances submitted by

¹⁵ Bland Manuscripts, Misc., [Microfilm, Library of Virginia], Reel 71, 213-4; Moryson and Berry to Sir Henry Coventry, February 2, 1677, Coventry Papers, LXXVII, fol.366.

their neighbors. Cittenbourne parish within Rappahannock county and Blissland parish within New Kent County submitted petitions of their own distinct from that of their host counties. Some grievances, typically those submitted by the rich tidewater tobacco counties, were signed only by elected officials,¹⁶ while others, typically those submitted by counties in the south and west, were signed by scores of male inhabitants including men who used a mark to identify themselves. This reflects the fact that some counties, Charles City for example, called special meetings to discuss and/or draft their response to the commissioners, while in other locales grandees wrote up what they considered to be an appropriate response, this happened in Westmoreland. The commissioners made brief, often salty comments on individual petitions before forwarding the material to London with an accompanying report.¹⁷ Thus in the aftermath of America's first civil war, Virginians participated in one of the largest canvasses of political opinion ever conducted in the Anglophone world. No comparable exercise would be attempted in America until 1778-9 when Massachusetts towns were invited to submit a line-item commentary on the commonwealth's first constitution.

The post-rebellion process of grievance gathering is colonial America's nearest equivalent to the Putney debates. The commissioners were after all asking Virginians to do something to which they were unaccustomed, that is to explain themselves and their past actions without reference to the politics of personality. The whole exercise was predicated on the assumption that the rebellion must have causes deeper than the intense

¹⁶ Though in some cases even these alluded to a process of discussion. York county's petition was signed by five officeholders "with the general consent of the inhabitants of York County," *Grievances of York County with Comments from the Commissioners*, C.O. 1/39, 241.

¹⁷ For the final report see, C.O 5/1371, reprinted in *VMHB IV* (1896), 119-54 and Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 99-142 .

personal enmities that informed unsolicited papers the commissioners began receiving on their arrival. But even as the “official” grievances came in, the commissioners were informing London that Virginians’ complaints were “like to come within a very narrow compass” and were in general “trivial.”¹⁸ It is hard to judge from some of the grievances why Virginians would have sided with *either* Bacon *or* Berkeley – some counties gave the impression that both men were alien to them. The county petitions also often convey special pleading. For example York county took this opportunity to argue that, since Jamestown had been burnt to the ground, a new seat of government should be established within its boundaries at Middle Plantation. The Commissioners likened this proposal to the county of Middlesex in England petitioning that London should have been rebuilt on Highgate Hill following the Great Fire.¹⁹ For these reasons historians, with the exception of Stephen Saunders Webb, have paid little attention to the petitions; have not closely examined how they engage with statements issued in Bacon’s name during the rebellion; and, in consequence, have missed their central point -- that the persistent and (to a modern eye) alienating localism conveyed in the petitions amounts in fact to a Cause.²⁰

At this point I need to introduce some examples of the kind of language under investigation. On July 30, 1676 Bacon issued “A Declaration of the People Against Sir William Berkeley” over the signature “Nathaniel Bacon, General by consent of the people”. The main purpose of the Declaration was to brand Sir William Berkeley and twenty other “wicked and pernicious counselors and confederates” as men who had

¹⁸ Commissioners to Sir Henry Coventry, March 29, 1677, Coventry Papers LXXVIII, fol. 21-22; Commissioners to Sir Joseph Williamson, March 29, 1677, C.O. 1/39, 182v.

¹⁹ Grievances of York County with Comments from the Commissioners, C.O. 1/39, 240, 242.

²⁰ Stephen Saunders Webb describes the petitions as “a unique record of seventeenth-century American expectations, oligarchical oppressions, and imperial possibilities,” Webb, *1676*, 13.

“injured” His Majesty’s interest in Virginia while at the same time acting “against the commonalty in these our civil commotions.” More specifically Berkeley and his confederates were charged with “having upon specious pretexts of public works raised great unjust taxes upon the commonalty for the advance of private favourites and other sinister ends.” Berkeley and his cabal were given four days to turn themselves in. Thereafter they would be considered “traitors to the people” and their persons and estates, along with those of any man who attempted to aid or shelter them, would be liable to seizure. “This,” the Declaration stated (in language eerily reminiscent of a later Declaration) “we the commons of Virginia do declare, desiring a firm union among ourselves that we may jointly and with one accord defend ourselves against the common enemy [.]”²¹ At roughly the same time a letter presumed to be have written by Bacon dismissed the possibility that the “common people” of Virginia could receive redress through the existing political structure in Virginia and asked his English correspondent to consider “the nature and quality of the men in power, not only the sponges of the commonalty as to their education, extraction and learning [but also?] as to reputation of honor and honesty.”²² The first of three petitions submitted by Nansemond county after

²¹ “A Declaration of the People...” British Library, Egerton Mss. 2395, fol. 548; and variant copy “A Declaration of the people of Virginia, British Library, Add. Mss. 4159, fol. 177.

²² “A Copy of a Letter Supposed to be Bacon’s” n.d., Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 442. This letter is also significant because it calls into question Wilcomb Washburn’s conclusion that Nathaniel Bacon was solely responsible for writing the Declaration of the People and the “Manifesto.” See Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1957), 70-71. The undated and unsigned letter rehearses arguments made elsewhere, and uses imagery (for example “sponges”) also present in documents attributed to Bacon. However its rhetorical tone is far more reasonable and its arguments are expressed more coherently than any document customarily attributed to Bacon. Bacon was an educated man and may well have been the master of more than one rhetorical style. However the difference in tone, between the letter on the one hand, and the “Declaration” and “Manifesto” on the other; the use of the second person plural voice in the Declaration and the Manifesto; and the self-interested testimony of at least one

the rebellion argued that the “rising” in that part of Virginia was occasioned by “grievous taxations” that threatened the “utter ruin of us the poor commonalty.”²³ And a final example, the inhabitants of Henrico county, arguing that their county was dominated by men of consanguinity, demanded that no county tax or levy be raised without “at least six of the commonalty” being witness to the discussion. The commissioners noted that the likely consequence of meeting this demand would be that no levies would ever be raised, but thought it “reasonable” that levies be made in open court.²⁴

In these examples “commonalty” is being used to describe the common people as an estate of the realm with a right to be represented in the counsels of state. Bacon’s “Declaration,” for example, alleges that by advancing favorites Berkeley had oppressed the commonalty by rendering their representation in the House of Burgesses meaningless. The inhabitants of Henrico county claimed in their grievance that the commonalty had what amounted to a right to be represented when local taxes were levied. But at the same time such usage pushed established meanings toward new conclusions. For example, throughout the 1670s Virginia had battled to overturn Restoration era grants of land in the northern neck by seeking a charter granting the colony the rights of an English corporation. The colony succeeded in obtaining a draft charter in the spring of 1676 – only for Bacon’s rebellion to intervene and derail the

contemporary (Col. Edward Hill) to the effect that Bacon’s speeches and proclamations were written for him by Thomas Blayton, suggest that the rebels’ key documents may have emerged from a collaborative process of composition and cannot readily be dismissed as the ramblings of one unrepresentative individual. See “The Defense of Colonel Edward Hill,” *VMHB* 3 (1895), 249; Daphne Gentry, “Thomas Blayton,” *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*. Blayton was known to contemporaries as Bacon’s “great engine” and Gentry concludes that Thomas Blayton “probably drafted parts of one or both of the declarations” *ibid*.

²³ Copy of Nansmund’s First Grievances made by Samuel Wiseman,” C.O. 1/39 fol. 246.

²⁴ Grievances of Henrico County with Commentary from the Commissioners, March 20, 1677, C.O. 1/39, Item 5, fol. 239.

process. The draft charter stated in the name of Charles II: we “do make ordain and constitute the Governor, Council and commonalty of Virginia now and for the time being one body politique and corporate in deed and in name.” Commonalty here again refers to the people of Virginia as an estate of the realm properly represented by elected officials but the charter’s language implicitly alluded to Virginia’s status as a quasi-independent “commonaltie” akin to the Virginia Company of London. Henrico county’s grievance sought to give substance to this allusion. Where the draft charter’s discussion of taxation stated “no manner of impositions or taxes shall be laid or imposed upon the inhabitants or proprietors of Virginia but by the common consent of Governor, Council and Burgesses” – in other words taxation was a matter not for the actual commonalty but for their elected representatives in consultation with Governor and Council – the inhabitants of Henrico demanded that six actual members of the commonalty, fresh off the farm, should assent to county levies.²⁵ This was closer to John Milton’s vision of a commonalty of independent English shires than it was to established constitutional thought on the right of representation under a monarchy.

We can see a similarly expansive view of the rights of individual counties in the grievances’ discussion of Virginia’s “Indian problem.” An obvious tactic for Virginians who wished to explain away their participation in a rebellion against crown authority was to claim that they were so fearful of an Indian attack that they were willing to befriend any enemy of their Indian enemy – even a man like Nathaniel Bacon. The inhabitants of Charles City county played this card, informing the commissioners that in the spring of 1676, fearing an attack by a general combination of Indians gathered not fifty miles

²⁵ “The Arrested Charter of 1676” *Tyler’s Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 2 (1920-21), 289-92; Grievances of Henrico County with Commentary from the Commissioners, March 20, 1677, C.O. 1/39, Item 5, fol. 239.

distant, men had “drawne together inwards to secure our wives and children, whose daily cries made our lives uncomfortable” and that the “laws of God and nature” had justified them in taking up arms to defend “our wives, children and this his Majesty’s country against the Indians.”²⁶ But in addition to discussing the prior threat posed by Virginia’s Indians, the grievances also convey a surprisingly broad spectrum of attitudes toward the continued existence of Indians within their colony. None of these attitudes was particularly pleasant. Although many petitions, by claiming that Virginians had been “seduced” into following Bacon, suggested they had made a mistake, no county apologized for following Bacon into a war of extermination. Nevertheless, this spectrum of opinion shows the extent to which Virginia’s counties used the “Indian problem” to fashion an active assertion of county autonomy.

One pole in the spectrum of attitudes toward Indians expressed in the post-rebellion grievances was defined by the “poor but loyal” petitioners of Isle of Wight County who unequivocally stated: “we desire that there may be a perpetual war with the Indians that we may once have done with them.”²⁷ This formulation was unusually blunt. Although Henrico and Nansemond counties also called for a war of extermination in each of these petitions such a war was presented as a last resort rather than an end in itself. Even within Isle of Wight and Nansemond counties a war of extermination commanded only limited support. In both counties the demand was dropped from those petitions filed by “respectable” citizens who wished to disassociate themselves from the grievances filed by their lesser neighbors.²⁸ And although the royal commissioners took the

²⁶ Charles City County Grievances, *VMHB* III (1895), 139, 140.

²⁷ Grievances of Isle of Wight County, *VMHB* II (1894-5), 388.

²⁸ Copy of Nansemond’s First Grievances taken by Samuel Wiseman, C.O. 1/39, fol. 246-9 at 246. The inhabitants of Henrico county, who had not so long before elected Nathaniel Bacon to the House of Burgesses, also came close to replicating the Isle of

petitioners of Isle of Wight and Henrico to mean that they wanted to wage war against every Indian left alive on the continent there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that what white inhabitants in the south and west of Virginia, chief among them Bacon himself, wanted was direct access to trade with native groups over the mountains that Powhatan Indians were unwilling or unable to provide. They wanted to kill some Indians to trade with others.²⁹ At the other end of the spectrum, and in an equally isolated region of Virginia, the inhabitants of Westmoreland county asked that “peace be made with the Indians,” Doegs excluded, to the “best and most advantage.”³⁰ Most of the grievances envisaged a future in which Virginians would live somewhere between a condition of lasting peace and perpetual war with their Indian neighbors. The inhabitants of Lancaster requested that any Indians left alive in Virginia be disarmed and that trade with them be totally prohibited.³¹ Over on the eastern shore the freemen of Northampton county asked that Indians be “obliged to kill a certain number of wolves yearly, having a daily opportunity by ranging the woods,” a position which presumably entailed allowing them freedom of movement and access to weapons.³² The inhabitants of Cittenbourne Parish, Rappahannock County, were similarly willing to allow their Indian neighbors freedom of movement, provided the colony maintained a task force that could seek out and destroy

Wight’s call for a “final solution” to the Indian problem: “it is our desire and request that the war against all Indians in general be forthwith prosecuted.” However this request was at odds with their very first grievance, a complaint against the monopolies in the trade with Indians; Henrico County Grievances, C.O. 1/39, 238.

²⁹ See Frederic W. Gleach, *Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

³⁰ Grievances of Westmoreland County, March 19, 1677, C.O. 1/39, fol. 212.

³¹ Surry County Grievances, *VMHB* II (1894-5), 173; James City County Grievances, nineteenth grievance, C.O. 1/39, fol. 194-5; Lancaster County Grievances, C.O. 1/39, fourth grievance, fol. 217.

³² Northampton County Grievances, *VMHB*, II (1894-5), 291.

murderous or treacherous Indians.³³ In contrast the inhabitants of James City county were willing to accept peace with the Indians only if Indians were confined to “their own,” strictly defined, lands and required to carry badges or other identifying devices whenever they visited English plantations.³⁴ Finally, at least one county, Lower Norfolk, had nothing to say whatsoever about Indians. Instead, in a stunning piece of *chutzpah* (which the Commissioners condemned as “wholly mutinous”) Lower Norfolk used its petition of grievance to demand the right to transport tobacco to any English colony without paying duty.

In summary what emerges from the grievances is a desire to *dominate* Indians rather than simply exterminate them: dominate them by putting them to useful work (possibly within the confines of slavery); by trading with them on terms set by the English (i.e. no trade in guns and ammunition); and also, at the very least, by controlling the terms on which they could enter English habitations. Different counties envisaged different futures within this framework of domination. Exterminating all Indians would have required a coordination between counties that they were unwilling to provide, while at the same time creating winners and losers. Isle of Wight or Henrico might gain access to the Tuscarora trade but Northampton would lose its wolf killers. The post-rebellion grievances capture Virginians arguing for Indian policy to be a matter of local arrangements. If the men of New Kent county wanted to smite the Powhatan why shouldn't they, even if such action produced retaliation against the householders of Gloucester? The orientation of Virginians' discussion of the Indian problem was

³³ Grievances of Cittenbourne Parish, Rappahannock County, C.O. 1/39, fol. 202.

³⁴ James City Grievances, n.d., C.O. 1/39, fol 194-5.

unremittingly local. Bacon and his followers found Berkeley's "darling Indians" contemptible largely because they lived under colonial not county authority.

The variety of proposals to "deal with" the Indians cannot be attributed to the counties telling the Commissioners what they thought would meet with approval, (although the Commissioners did in fact sympathize with some themes that emerged in the petitions).³⁵ There were some aspects of Virginians' attitudes towards Indians that challenged not only colonial but also imperial authority – and challenged it at least as directly as the political demands the commissioners affected to find so trivial. Chief among these was the question of whether and when Indians should be enslaved. Nathaniel Bacon owned both native American and African slaves.³⁶ He flaunted Indian captives taken in his campaigns on the assumption, which seems to have been correct, that this display would increase his standing among the commonalty. Enslaving Indians was as popular as exterminating them. But engaging in Indian war in pursuit of this objective put Virginians on a collision course with Crown authority. In 1677, in response to Surry County's demand that Indians taken in the late war be enslaved, the commissioners commented that they would instead be returned as mark of His Majesty's

³⁵ The commissioners found Berkeley's policy of licensing trade a "real grievance" and a "great occasion" of the war (not, note, the Rebellion); Commissioners response to Henrico County, C.O. 1/39, fol. 239. The Commissioners also criticized Berkeley's "dilatatory" proceedings against the Susquehannock

³⁶ Bacon owned 5 African and 6 Indian slaves see, Richard S. Dunn, "Masters, Servants, and Slaves in the Colonial Chesapeake and Caribbean," in David B. Quinn, ed., *Early Maryland in a Wider World* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 242-66 at 250. The enslavement of Indians, as opposed to their conversion, had been at issue in Virginia since at least Captain John Smith's proposal that the first colonists should have "forced the treacherous and rebellious infidels to all manner of drudgery work and slavery for them, themselves living like soldiers upon the fruits of their labours." Smith cited in April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 16.

favor.³⁷ The inhabitants of James City county were denied the opportunity to defray costs by selling Indian captives into slavery because the Commissioners ordered the captives' release. What is so striking about both demands is that inhabitants of Surry and James City seem to have regarded the captives as "their" Indians, persons who belonged not to their host nation, not to the Crown, not to their individual captors and not to the colony of Virginia. In the Surry and James City grievances, and more generally in the spectrum of attitudes toward Indians revealed in the grievances, we begin to see a localism that collapses the distinction between political rebellion and Indian war.

This localism was apparent from the start of the Indian war, in for example, "The Humble Appeal of the Volunteers to all well-minded and charitable Men." This document is unsigned and not dated. I take it to have been written in April, May, or June of 1676 by Bacon or a member of his inner circle. The appeal asserts repeatedly that fighting Indians did not imply a rejection of royal authority. For example "we humbly appeal whether our general avertions to Indians...be not a clear evidence of our well wishes to the flourishing state of this His Majesty's colony." The volunteers asked whether they could show any greater loyalty to the King, or charity to our country, than by "redeeming" Virginia through a "necessary defensive war." However the Appeal also asked "Whether volunteers that fight for their own lives *and liberties* with their own arms and provisions, will not be better supplied and fitted for war, than they who are raised at the countries charge."³⁸ The reference here to liberties is striking. What liberties could be defended or attained through a necessary defensive war with the Indians? The broadest view of this question was taken by those indentured servants and African slaves who

³⁷ Commissioners response to Surry County, C.O. 1/39, fol. 210

³⁸ "The Humble Appeal..." British Library, Egerton Mss. 2395, fol. 544 [emphasis added].

fought on both sides because they had been promised freedom. The Baconian householder, on the evidence of the post-rebellion grievances at least, tended to view the liberties that could be secured through a necessary defensive war in the negative sense. That is, the man with a wife and children to maintain would achieve through such a war freedom from both Indian attack and the injurious taxation necessary to build forts and maintain a militia. In the positive sense of liberty the Volunteers seem to have been alluding, at the very least, to the freedom to choose their own commanders. This was a liberty the inhabitants of Henrico county demanded after the rebellion. The commissioners described this as “mutinous” and liable to produce any number of future Bacons.³⁹ But the main liberty that the process of raising a volunteer army encouraged was the freedom to pursue local interests. Bacon’s strike force was not in fact better supplied than any that could have been raised at the country’s charge because Virginians contributed when their locality was threatened and withheld supplies and support when it was not. Both Bacon and Berkeley found it extremely difficult to persuade members of Virginia’s commonalty to campaign against Indians or white traitors outside the boundaries of their own county. In the irony of ironies, after Bacon’s death his force split into local autonomous units some of which actually began erecting forts. It is this localism that any general argument about the character of the rebellion must address.

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What were the cultural and social factors that pushed at least some of the inhabitants of Virginia’s counties to drive a quasi-constitutional usage of “commonalty”

³⁹ Commissioners’ response to Henrico County, C.O. 1/39, fol. 239

(the common people acting through representation as an estate of the realm) toward John Milton's ideological definition of a "commonaltie" as a self-governing republic or commonwealth? In this section I want to use cultural concerns to introduce social realities. Historians are reluctant to vest the origins of rebellions in social psychology, and with good reason, but the use of "commonalty" in documents produced by Bacon's circle as well as in the post-rebellion grievances represents the tip of an iceberg of resentment that had real causal force in post-Restoration Virginia.

In an English context the "commonalty" originally referred to a body of Englishmen currently in, or little removed from, the status of a peasantry. However, and here I'm relying on the work of Dave Rollison,⁴⁰ in English usage the rump of population, the commonalty, was also on occasion presumed to embody and transmit an aboriginal sense of Englishness dating back at least to Saxon times (i.e. its separation from the refinement of the Anglo-Norman ascendancy is what made the commonalty common). Ultimately it was the common people of England's various regions that produced such crucial manifestations of Englishness as the common law and the English language. Rollison exemplifies this latter point by reference to William Tyndale's obsessive interest in collecting phrases and proverbs current in Gloucestershire. (Nathaniel Bacon's tutor John Ray had similar interests and published in 1673 *A Collection of Proverbs*.) Being a champion exponent of vernacular English did not imply any commitment to championing the rights of the poor, but it did suggest a certain grudging recognition of their humanity. In any event, when Englishmen used the term "commonalty" they referred to a group of people who, however dim and brutish, had

⁴⁰ David Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society. Gloucestershire 1500 – 1800*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992)

something to say that, properly translated as it were by representation, deserved an airing in the councils of state. The royal commissioners sent to Virginia occasionally recognized this, for example annotating Surry County's argument that had been ordered to aid Bacon with the comment "we humbly desire [this] be read in their own words."⁴¹

Given this, Virginian usage of "commonalty" or even the "common people" directly confronted the class prejudice implicit in Berkeley's governance of the colony. Long before the rebellion, in his *Discourse and View of Virginia* (1663), Berkeley accepted that Virginia largely deserved its reputation as a place peopled by the least and vilest Englishmen. Picturing himself as a latter day Romulus, he consoled himself with the thought "Was not Rome built thus?"⁴² When Berkeley declared Bacon a rebel on May 10 1676 he described Bacon's followers as "rude, dissolute and tumultuous felons."⁴³ By July he was comparing the threat posed to the colony by the Indians to that of Bacon's pernicious followers.⁴⁴ Berkeley loyalist Nicholas Spenser made the same comparison, noting that Bacon had been strengthened by the rabble "of which sort this country chiefly consists, we serving but [as] a sink to drain England of her filth and scum." Spenser could only hope that the better sort of that "trash" that had first set Bacon up would now pull him down.⁴⁵ Berkeley loyalist Colonel Edward Hill expressed his contempt for the idea that the commonalty of Charles City county had any kind of right to criticize their representatives by serving a dinner at which the county's petition of grievance was

⁴¹ Commentary on Surry County Grievances, C.O. 1/ 39, fol. 210.

⁴² [Berkeley] "A Discourse and View of Virginia," British Library, Egerton Mss. 2395, 355.

⁴³ Sir William Berkeley's Declaration, May 10, 1676, Egerton 2395, fol. 539.

⁴⁴ Berkeley to Sir Henry Coventry, British Library, Add. Mss. 25120, fol. 82-3.

⁴⁵ Spenser to Sir Henry Coventry, August 6, 1676, Coventry Papers LXXVII, fol. 170; Spenser to "your Lordships," August 7? 1676, *ibid.*, fol. 169.

discovered under a meat pie. Hill dismissed his accusers as “that hydra the vulgar.”⁴⁶ In fact it is only when they were the victims of Indian attacks that the poor white inhabitants of Virginia were described in documents produced by Berkeley and his circle in elevated terms – that term being “the English” as distinct from the Indians. Virginia’s Indian fighters sought to exploit this opening. “The Virginians Plea” a petition to the Crown written before mid-June 1676, argued that Bacon’s followers possessed “English blood” and therefore accounted it more honorable to seek out and destroy Indians than to be “sneakingly” murdered by them in their beds.⁴⁷ Such language was self-serving, but it also alluded to an English understanding of English national character that Berkeley and his circle believed inappropriate in the Virginian context. In summary, one reason why a war of extermination against Indians was popular with poor and middling whites was that through it they might earn a measure of respect otherwise denied them by their Governor. However, when push came to shove, relatively few Virginians left their wives and children to take up arms against Indians. Invocations of “English blood” or the “commonalty” couched in the voice of a man with a wife, children and homestead to protect addressed primarily internal political concerns.

The poor, free, white population of Virginia was not a peasantry, white indentured servants were not serfs, and the colony did not possess a hereditary aristocracy. The men who identified themselves to the Commissioners as the “commonalty” of Nansemond county for example were taxpayers, and they paid their taxes and levies by the poll, as individuals: hence the attraction for them of a term like

⁴⁶ “Defense of Col. Edward Hill,” *VMHB* III (1895), 239.

⁴⁷ The Virginians’ Plea for Opposing the Indians without the Governour’s Order,” n.d. British Library, Egerton Mss. 2395, fol. 545. This was received in September 1676 and sent as an enclosure in a letter from Nathaniel Bacon to his father Thomas. See, Coventry Papers LXXVII, fol. 224.

“commonalty” and the tendency, implicit in their usage of it, to picture themselves as “citizens” rather than as “subjects.” Moreover as the ratio of men to women in the white population moved closer to parity, tax-payers were increasingly likely to be married. Men and women came to marriage through a variety of routes, not all of which supported citizenship claims. It is also true that a growing scarcity of land heightened the political significance of the householding commonalty by making it harder for a man who acquired a wife to become an independent householder. Nevertheless, “little commonwealths” of family units of production were a more common sight in post-Restoration Virginia than they had been in 1630s and 1640s.⁴⁸ This change helped produce another. From 1662 white women, whether indentured or not, were considered tithable if they worked in the fields, not tithable if they worked in and around the household.⁴⁹ Men who had retained or obtained a wife and land began to appropriate a distinctive and (in the Virginian context) novel political identity that informs the statements and petitions issued during and after the rebellion. For example, the author of “Considerations Upon the Present Troubles in Virginia” stated “The great oppression the people complain of is the great taxes levied on them...and the unequal way of raising them by the poll so that a poor man that hath nothing to maintain himself, wife and child pays as much for his levies as he that hath 2,000 acres of land.”⁵⁰ Calls for an immediate war against the Indians were justified by reference to need to secure women, children and property from attack. After the rebellion several counties, among them Warwick, used their petitions to call for poll taxes to be replaced by taxes on estates and especially on

⁴⁸ See Anthony Parent, *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 37 and passim.

⁴⁹ Hening, *Statutes at Large*, II: 173

⁵⁰ Considerations Upon the Present Troubles in Virginia, April 28, 1676, C.O. 1/36 fol. 113.

land. (The Commissioners commented that Warwick's request would never be granted by Virginia's "landed men," "since the usage has always been taxes by the poll.")⁵¹ The first petition of grievance submitted from Isle of Wight county stated:

Whereas there are some great persons both in honor and rich in estate who have several ways of gain and profit who are exempted from paying levies[,] and the poorest inhabitants are compelled to pay the greatest taxes which we are burdened with, having a hogshead or two of tobacco to pay for rent and nearly two hundred yearly for rent and near two hundred yearly for levies having a wife and 2 or 3 children to maintain," [they asked] "whether our taxes are not the greater by such favor and privileges granted them, which we desire to be eased of or they pay the taxes as well as we, they having no necessity for being so exempted."⁵²

By claiming equality with men "great persons both in honor and rich estate" the "poor" but "loyal" inhabitants of Isle of Wight confronted the class prejudice implicit in Berkeley's governance of the colony. Such language also made the self-styled "man with a wife and kid to protect" the NASCAR Dad of post-Restoration era Virginian politics – a figure courted by both Berkeley and Berkeley's opponents. During the rebellion such men, and their wives, did in fact split their allegiances between Bacon and Berkeley.⁵³

⁵¹ Grievances of Warwick county and Commissioners' comments, April 28, 1677, C.O. 1/39, fol. 221. Isle of Wight county, which unlike Warwick had no obvious shortage of land within its boundaries made the same demand: "we desire that every man may be taxed according to the tracts of land they hold." C.O. 1/39, fol. 230-1.

⁵² John Bennett Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight County Virginia*, (1938. Reprint Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1973), 151, 154.

⁵³ On women's involvement in Bacon's Rebellion see, Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 159-67.

Thus although the language of commonalty took force from class-based resentments, its usage ultimately took inspiration from an ideological source or sources other than unambiguous “class struggle.” Precisely because not all smallholders supported Bacon (and not all indentured servants either) the stance adopted by the Isle of Wight petitioners reflects the interplay of both material and intellectual considerations. In the close prosopographical analysis that follows I want to suggest that the themes of the rhetoric under discussion were ultimately the product of particular and varied orientations toward places and localities.

On March 5 1677 the Burgesses received a statement of twenty-six grievances written on behalf of “the poor yet His Majesty’s most loyal subjects of Isle of Wight County.”⁵⁴ This document claimed that “we rose” “with intents to have our taxes lowered...not in any ways of rebellion against our most Dread Sovereign Lord, the King.” It highlighted the county’s isolation. Bacon was “a person whom we knew not nor...heard of” until he levied 57 men from the county. Berkeley “went away and all the great men, whither we know not and left us as sheep without a shepherd at the mercy of the heathen, yet under the command of Nathaniel Bacon.” The petitioners rehearsed bluntly grievances that are particularly suggestive of Causes: for example, the 13th grievance – “Also we desire that there may be a continual war with the Indians that we may have once done with them;” 14th – “We desire that we may have liberty to choose our vestries once in three years and that there may be no member of the Court therein;” and 16th – “Also we desire that every man may be taxed according to the tracts of land

⁵⁴Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 150-58; or, more accessible, *VMHB II* (1894-5), 380-92.

they hold.”⁵⁵ The 25th grievance, already quoted, asked that great men pay the same taxes as the poor, or poor men receive the exemptions offered great men.

Seven signatures were attached to the document and someone, probably Samuel Wiseman, clerk of the House, annotated the list with brief character sketches:

Richard Penny⁵⁶ – a very busy man in these times

John Marshall

Richard Sharpe

Richard Jordan, Snr., -- one of Bacons’ representatives

Edward Miller – a harmless poor man

John Davis – his mark – one that hath binn in arms

Anthony Fulgham – A busy person that brought this paper to the rest to subscribe which was written by Marshall’s servant at the desire of the subscribers thereof.

The document organized by Fulgham attracted a swift response, the first element of which was a petition of rebuttal signed by seventy-one “Divers of His Majesty’s Loyal Subjects in the Upper Parish of Isle of Wight County.” This stated “many of the honest, loyal and best affected people of the said county besides your petitioners were never made privy to the said writing [i.e. the petition organized by Fulgham] nor the matter therein contained.” “Conceiving the same not to be framed and composed in that humble

⁵⁵ Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 151, 154.

⁵⁶ Penny signed the grievances, the subsequent confession made in open court, and numerous other legal transactions, with a mark.

manner and nature as it ought to be” the signatories asked that they not be presumed to have participated in the Fulgham petition.⁵⁷ Their purpose in writing was to secure:

a protection against the said writing, or Pretended Grievances, and the composers thereof, most of them being active and solicitous instruments in the late Rebellion against...[King and Berkeley]...who...rather go about to justify themselves, in their late traitorous actions than in humble manner, as they ought to do beg his majesty’s pardon....And whereas your honours [i.e Berry, Jeffreys and Morison] do command to make known what may be the chief grievances occasioning the late tumults, we humbly conceive and believe it will so appear to your honours that envy, emulation, malice and ignorance were the chief causes thereof.⁵⁸

On March 16, 1677, John Marshall, whose servant had apparently written up the petition of the poor but loyal organized by Anthony Fulgham, begged on his knees for forgiveness from the Isle of Wight county court for the great contempt expressed, scandal caused, and obloquy incurred by his “rash” allegations to the royal commissioners. On March 27, 1677, Marshall, his co-signatories, plus two other men, Ambrose Bennett and James Bagnall, acknowledged in court that the paper they had signed was “false and scandalous” and that they could prove no portion of it. They undertook to never again “be guilty of the like mutinous and rebellious practices.”⁵⁹

Both the Fulgham petition and that written on behalf of the Upper Parish were designed to secure their subscribers from further punishment. Given the known attitude

⁵⁷ Reproduced in Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 158-161.

⁵⁸ Boddie, *Seventeenth-Century Isle of Wight*, 159-60.

⁵⁹ IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. I, 1662-1715, 351.

of the Commissioners, each petition must have been carefully considered. Both groups of petitioners apparently contained active followers of Bacon as well as more passive supporters of “change.” Both petitions included the signatures of men who were functionally illiterate. Neither petition group expressed much affection for the pre-rebellion regime of Sir William Berkeley, both preferring instead to stress their enduring loyalty to the Crown. The Fulgham group expressed, especially in their 25th grievance, a desire to be understood as speaking on behalf of the poor. Those who signed the second petition on behalf of the Upper Parish, dismissed the Fulgham petition as the product of “envy, emulation, malice and ignorance” and pictured themselves as representing the most honest, loyal and well-affected inhabitants -- even if some of them had “deviated” during the rebellion and in its aftermath. The two groups framed their key differences around local issues of wealth and honesty. Honesty was an issue because legitimacy was at issue in Isle of Wight county: as the punishment meted out to John Marshall suggests. The key figure in the larger Upper Parish group of petitioners was Col. Joseph Bridger, the *caudillo* of Isle of Wight county, and a man named as a malefactor in both the Fulgham grievances and Bacon’s “Manifesto.” Bridger’s influence was enough to ensure that the Upper Parish group ultimately won the tussle over legitimacy in Isle of Wight.

What life experiences and interests inspired these men to contrast themselves? In the interests of brevity I want to concentrate on the Fulgham group, and investigate its claim to be speaking on behalf of poor yet loyal residents of Isle of Wight. What kind of men were they? What motivated them and to what did they aspire? What did it mean to be poor yet loyal in southside Virginia?

Richard Penny (“a very busy man in these times”) owned land enough to bequeath, on his death in 1693, to his son-in-law Robert Marshall “that land known as Penny’s Point where Robert Marshall has a house” and to his eldest son, William Penny, “the rest of my land.” The remainder of Penny’s bequests to his sons, daughters and grandchildren consisted of household items – pewterware, a feather bed, “my great bible” – and livestock.⁶⁰ Although he was at best semi-literate, Penny was retained as the attorney of James Easton, “citizen and goldsmith of Bristol [England].”⁶¹ Penny and John Marshall were linked by marriage. John Marshall’s will, proved June 9, 1688,⁶² left to his eldest son Humphrey⁶³ the 700 acre “plantation” where “he now lives,” to his youngest son Robert (William Penny’s son-in-law) some other land near the “long swamp”⁶⁴ and to his wife sundry household goods and a herd of hogs. Richard Sharpe died apparently living on land leased from the estate of Arthur Smith. His bequests were modest, a silver

⁶⁰ Will proved June 9, 1694, IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc. Vol. 2, 1661-1719, 344-5.

⁶¹ Easton’s son retained Penny’s services following the death of his father James in 1666. IOW Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc. Vol. I, 1662-1715, 23-4, 83. There is, in modern Bristol, an entire district of the city known as Easton.

⁶² Will proved June 9, 1688, IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc. Vol. 2 1661-1719, 279.

⁶³ This plantation was situated on a tract awarded Marshall for the importation of 14 servants. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers. Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1992), 476; Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 233. John Marshall’s nearest neighbor would have been Anthony Fulgham. [See below]. John Marshall’s son Humphrey died in 1711. He bequeathed 2 male slaves, Will and Peter, a slave boy named Dick, a slave woman named Marrian, an Indian woman named Moll plus one other unnamed Indian woman; IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc. Vol. 2, 1661-1719, 533-4. The plantation where Humphrey Marshall resided seems to have been that bequeathed him by John Marshall. It is unlikely that all, or even any, of these slaves lived on John Marshall’s plantation in 1676, but Humphrey’s purchases may reveal something of John’s attitude toward slavery.

⁶⁴ The reference to the Long Swamp here leads me to believe that this son was Robert Marshall, William Penny’s son-in-law. The connection revolves around transactions made by Arthur Smith, see Boddie *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 541; Nell Marion Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers* passim.

spoon, pewterware, a spinning wheel, a boar by the name of Nancy [!]⁶⁵ Richard Jordan Snr., a Burgess in the June 1676 assembly was the son of a former Burgess and a kinsman of Col. George Jordan, of Surry, an Attorney General of Virginia. Although not a Quaker himself, Jordan was closely related to prominent southside Quakers. He owned land near Cypress Swamp.⁶⁶ Edward Miller may well have been the “harmless poor man” Samuel Wiseman described. In 1664 Miller managed to buy from William Dawson a plot of land of unknown size in the tract originally patented by Captain John Upton known as Indian Fields. He seems to have been unable to develop this because in 1666 Miller registered in court that he had assigned 250 acres of land due to him for importing five servants to William Cook. In 1671 he sold his land in Indian Fields to Nicholas Smith, J. P. In 1678 the courts registered Robert Kae’s gift of a cow to Marjorie, daughter of Edward Miller. Edward Miller seems to have died intestate.⁶⁷ John Davis is an opaque figure whose name makes him virtually impossible to identify in court records.⁶⁸

Anthony Fulgham, that “busy person,” is, in contrast, easily identifiable as a prominent man in his community. Like the Bridgers, the Fulghams were an armigerous family comfortably situated in England. In 1664 Fulgham’s father, Captain Anthony Fulgham received patent to 1,000 acres in Isle of Wight county due to him for the importation of 20 persons. The following year he was granted a further 1,600 acres for the importation of 30 persons. (This latter grant made the Fulghams John Marshall’s

⁶⁵ Will proved January 15, 1700, IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc. Vol. 2, 1661-1719, 422. (The date of this will suggests I’ve got the wrong Sharp, but the reference to Arthur Smith makes sense in the context of Ambrose Bennett’s affairs as discussed below).

⁶⁶ On the Jordan family see, *VMHB* III (1895-6), 186; IV (1896-7), 3; *WMQ* 1st ser 7 (1899), 231. In 1679 Richard Jordan, Snr., gave over to his son John 100 acres near the swamp; Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 581.

⁶⁷ Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 535, 549, 563, 579.

⁶⁸ It is possible that Davis switched sides. A John Davis was among the signers of the Bridger petition; see Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 158-61.

nearest neighbors).⁶⁹ Isle of Wight county's indefatigable antiquarian John Bennett Boddie suggests, on the basis of a minute examination of the names of those persons transported by Captain Anthony Fulgham, John Marshall and William Boddie, as well as on the proximity of their lands, that Fulgham and Marshall may have been involved in an attempt to transplant or build a community of co-religionists. Captain Anthony Fulgham, Snr. was a Justice in 1665-66. (He sat on the court that recorded Edward Miller's transfer of headrights to William Cook).⁷⁰ He died in 1669.

Anthony Fulgham Snr. left the house and land on which he lived to his son John Fulgham.⁷¹ This sparked an intriguing transaction. On November 3, 1669, John Fulgham, "for diverse good causes and valuable considerations...and also out of brotherly love" acknowledged in open court that it was the "desire" of his late father that his brother Anthony Fulgham [organizer of the petition] "should wholly have and enjoy his Negro woman called Joan after my mother's decease." John therefore renounced all claims to Joan.⁷² Anthony Fulgham Jnr. died in 1678. He introduced his will with a devotional formula -- "I give my soul to God from whom I received it being in sure and certain hopes of a Glorious Resurrection in Jesus Christ my Redeemer" -- that was not commonly used in Isle of Wight county and which lends some further weight to Boddie's theory that the Fulgham-Marshall-Boddie community on the eastern border of the county may have been united by religious affiliation: Fulgham left his goods remaining and

⁶⁹ Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 518, 476 [sic, i.e. the later grant is mentioned first]; Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 257.

⁷⁰ Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 549.

⁷¹ IOW County, Wills, Deeds Etc., Vol. I 1662-1715, 196-7.

⁷² At the same time, and for the same reason, John Fulgham renounced all claims to Joan's child in favor of another brother, Nicholas; IOW Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. I 1662-1715, 197-8.

“crops now made” to his dear mother “for the purchasing of servants or others as she thinks fit.”⁷³ He also left her the time remaining on Richard Simeakikham’s indenture.⁷⁴

Two men, James Bagnall and Ambrose Bennett, did not sign the list of grievances that ended up in the hands of the House of Burgesses but did acknowledge in open court being “subscribers” to it. These two men had something in common: they had both endured a delayed inheritance. James Bagnall’s father Roger, like Anthony Fulgham’s, had served at least one term in the House of Burgesses.⁷⁵ He died in 1646 before James Bagnall had reached an age of majority, leaving to his heir “the plantation I now live in” “when he is of age to enjoy it.”⁷⁶ It appears that Bagnall struggled to improve the plantation bequeathed him because on the eve of Bacon’s Rebellion James Bagnall was involved in a series of transactions with Robert Bracewell, son of the Isle of Wight’s first minister. In 1674 Bagnell sold Bracewell the 100 acre “land and plantation” where he dwelled. However, he reserved to himself “the use and benefit of the said land...for 3 years...[and] liberty to take and carry off the said land the nursery of young trees that is thereon not making any willful waste.”⁷⁷ Bracewell appointed Bagnall his attorney and almost immediately sold the land and orchard to John Pory, Jnr.⁷⁸ Bagnall sought to transplant his young trees to lands in the vicinity of Cypress Swamp. He appears to have died poor but uncommonly well read. An appraisal of his estate makes reference to his

⁷³ IOW County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. 2 1661-1719, 168-9; see also orders from Sir William Berkeley concerning the administration of Anthony Fulgham’s estate, *ibid.*, second pagination, 25.

⁷⁴ If I’ve transcribed Simeakikham’s name accurately it appears he was an Indian servant.

⁷⁵ Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight*, 99.

⁷⁶ Will dated October 19, 1647, IOW County Deeds, Wills, Guardian Accounts Book A 1636-1767, Reel 1, 12-13. Roger Bagnall bequeathed livestock as well as tobacco.

⁷⁷ IOW County, Record of Wills, Deeds Etc., Vol. I 1662-1715, 310-11.

⁷⁸ IOW County, Record of Wills, Deeds Etc., Vol. I 1662-1715, 316.

great Bible and sixty “old books,” as well as a violin, two spinning wheels and a pair of old pistols.⁷⁹

Ambrose Bennett was a neighbor of Richard Penny and James Bagnall. His father, also named Ambrose, was transported to Isle of Wight county by the future governor of Virginia, Richard Bennett [no relation] in or soon before the summer of 1635.⁸⁰ Ambrose Bennett, Snr., was probably a clerk rather than a laboring servant because he almost immediately began claiming headrights in Isle of Wight for transporting servants: 300 acres for 6 persons in 1638; 150 acres for 3 persons in 1639; a patent for 1,150 acres from Governor Wyatt for transporting 23 persons in 1641.⁸¹ He died sometime between 1650 and 1657, and evidently before his son Ambrose had reached an age of majority.⁸² Prior to his death Bennett Snr., appointed William Westuray as Ambrose’s guardian and entrusted Westuray to manage the heir’s estate, which encompassed over one thousand acres of land and included livestock and servants, on Ambrose’s behalf. John Marshall, (one of Ambrose Bennett’s co-subscribers) was among

⁷⁹ Appraisal dated April 2, 1702, IOW County, Record of Wills, Deeds Etc., Vol. 2 1661-1719, 450-1. If Bagnall was not 21 in 1646, then he must have been born after 1625, in which case this appraisal can be taken as referring to “our” James Bagnall.

⁸⁰ Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 23, 66. Richard Bennett, future governor of Virginia, came to Virginia in or about 1628 to take over the management of his uncle Edward Bennett’s Welcome plantation. Edward Bennett was an extremely powerful London merchant, a former auditor of the Virginia Company of London and author of the mercantilist pamphlet *A Treatise in Three Parts* (1623). Richard Bennett became a Burgess from Warrosquyoake (future Isle of Wight) as early as 1629. He eventually patented over 7,000 acres in the county and was responsible for bringing in 600 settlers, many of them Puritans; see, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

⁸¹ Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 82; IOW County Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. I 1662-1715, 205; Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 125.

⁸² An indenture made between Ambrose Bennett, John Moteley and John Turner in “the 25th year of Charles I’s reign” suggests Bennett was still alive in 1650, [even though Charles was beheaded in 1649], IOW Deeds, Wills, Guardians Account Book A 1636-1767, reel 1, 21-23. A grant of land awarded Giles Driver in 1657 establishes the death of Ambrose Bennett, Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 365.

the men who gave security that William Westuray would preserve the estate and manage it in Ambrose Bennett's interest. By the time Ambrose Bennett reached the age of twenty-one William Westuray had died and Bennett's estate was administered by Westuray's widow Elizabeth.⁸³

Although in 1665 Elizabeth Westuray turned over to Bennett "all things" including "horses, mares, cattle, household stuff, housing" and an "orchard"⁸⁴ belonging to his estate she feared lawsuits might arise from actions her former husband was "obliged" to take during the period when Bennett's estate was in his hands. John Marshall and William Andrews, who had offered security that William Westuray would manage Ambrose Bennett's estate in his best interests, also feared lawsuits. Westuray, Marshall and Andrews were able to extract from Bennett a remarkable agreement. Bennett entered into agreement with two neighbours, Arthur Smith and Richard Sharp (the same Sharp who signed the list of Grievances) to pay Elizabeth Westuray 40,000 lbs. of good tobacco and "save" her from "all manner of damage and detriment" that might arise from "the possessing [of] Ambrose Bennett with the estate of his father deceased." Bennett also agreed to pay John Marshall and William Andrews 40,000 lbs. of good tobacco should they become the subject of suits arising from William Westuray's management of the Bennett estate or his actions as Bennett's guardian.⁸⁵ Over the next decade Bennett sold small tracts of land within his estate, presumably in order to meet his obligations to Smith and Sharp. Bennett died in 1680 having named Col. Arthur Smith as

⁸³ Executors Bond received 9 August 1664, IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc. Vol. II 1661- 1719, second pagination 8.

⁸⁴ Ambrose Bennett's orchard was evidently a well-known local landmark because it crops up in all manner of court proceedings.

⁸⁵ Agreements recorded April 25, 1665, IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. I 1662-1715, 55-6.

one of his executors (perhaps on the basis of shared religious affiliation).⁸⁶ Bennett's estate contained one slave woman, much livestock, two swarms of bees, a spinning wheel, and bills due Bennett to the value of 7,097 lbs of tobacco.⁸⁷

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This material does not lend itself to any easy or straightforward prosopographic conclusion. The nine men were separated by geography (although significantly they all lived within the county's Lower Parish). Fulgham and (possibly) Marshall lived on the eastern boundary of the county, the rest lived in the vicinity of Cypress Creek and Cypress swamp toward the southern limits of settlement. Miller, Davis and, possibly, Bagnall appear to have been poor men, but Jordan, Fulgham, Marshall, Sharpe, Penny and Bennett were relatively prosperous, owning land, slaves and indentures. All members of the group, with the possible exception of Davis, had had dealings with the court system in the ten years prior to Bacon's Rebellion, but sometimes in cases that would have tended to divide them as individuals rather than unite them as a group. One senses, trawling through the court records, that issues of trust and probity were important to this group – but then it is in the nature of court records to highlight issues of trust or the lack thereof. Fulgham, Bagnall and Bennett, and possibly Marshall and Miller, may have

⁸⁶ Smith's will (1693) begins with the preamble "hoping and steadfastly believing through [Christ's] merit to attain ever lasting salvation, and that I shall be numbered among his chosen," IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. I 1662-1715, 330-32. Ambrose Bennett's commended his "soul into the hands of Almighty God in hopes of a joyful resurrection through Jesus Christ," IOW Records of Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. II 1661-1719, 214-5

⁸⁷ Inventory proved December 9, 1680, IOW Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., Vol. I 1661-1719, 214-5.

shared an outlook shaped by “Puritanism.” Bennett and Bagnall made a particular effort to fulfill, through the planting of orchards and the production of thread, that vision of a Virginia whose inhabitants did something more uplifting than churn out tobacco that was a theme of Sir William Berkeley’s term as governor after the Restoration. The group spent their daily working lives at one remove from the obsessive production of tobacco – but then so too did most other inhabitants of Isle of Wight. “Envy, emulation, malice and ignorance,” do not seem to have motivated this group. Its collective outlook, insofar as it possessed one, was probably shaped by the group’s shared experience of dealing with those once powerful men who were the county’s founding fathers: men like Richard Bennett, Ambrose Bennett Snr., Capt. Anthony Fulgham, Thomas Jordan, Captain John Upton, and Captain Roger Bagnall. (The language of the second grievance, with its metaphor of the shepherdless flock is suggestive here). A collective portrait of this group suggests men who considered themselves to be the backbone of the county, its commonalty and perhaps its conscience; a pool of leadership that, even if ignored at the colonial and county level, deserved at least to be left to order their own affairs in their own parish. This group’s claim to be speaking for the poor but loyal reflected but did not cause its self-assertion. After all Fulgham’s group was not particularly poor and neither was it particularly loyal. Their grievances indicted corruption, accusing Bridger of malfeasance, but I believe Fulgham’s document amounts to something greater than the articulation of a Virginian version of “country ideology.”⁸⁸ Also visible in it, and in other

⁸⁸ For example, the Fulgham group’s 23rd grievances asked where the “great bank of money” that had accrued from fees collected from visiting ships for the defense of the county had gone. Bridger was customs collector for the lower James. At his death in 1686 Bridger owned at least 9,500 acres in Isle of Wight and his house, Whitemarsh, was the largest in the county. He exploited a kin network in the county to establish a profitable trade in wine and general merchandise before moving permanently to Virginia soon after the Restoration. He also served as a Burgess between 1662-70 and on the Council from

documents produced by Bacon and his sympathizers, is a language of equality (men should pay the same taxes or none at all), of independence (vestries should be separated from the courts), and of justice (taxes should be assessed on land. On the evidence of the grievances at least, in other locations the Virginian taxpayer/ householder with a wife and children to support thought some rather similar, and this language sounds a lot like that in which John Milton justified the creation of a commonwealth of self-governing commonalties.

Writing in 1660, Milton argued that “of all governments a Commonwealth aims most to make the people flourishing, virtuous, noble and high spirited.” Monarchs in contrast might aim to make the people well fleeced but “only for their own shearing and the supply of royal prodigality.” Milton offered a nuanced, qualified defense of republicanism. The English had originally covenanted to protect the King’s “person and authority in the preservation of the true religion and our liberties.” When Charles I abused this covenant the result had been civil war and a commonwealth. If Charles II attempted similar abuses then, argued Milton, the advancement “of every person according to his merit” and the continued enjoyment of civil rights would necessitate the creation of Commonalties based on existing English counties. In county towns the nobility and chief gentry might make their own laws and enforce them by their own elected judicatures, so that with “law executed fully and finally in their own counties and precincts, long wished and spoken of, but never yet obtained; they shall have none then to blame but themselves if it be not well administered.”⁸⁹ Thus in Milton’s hands the

1673 -- 1686.

⁸⁹ Milton *The Ready and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660).

county commonaltie was very nearly synonymous with a commonwealth and was the building block of a republic rather than a structural support of monarchy.

The question of whether these ideas had any broader constituency or influence in seventeenth-century England has been the subject of enormous historiographical debate. Alan Everitt has suggested that in the first half of the seventeenth century English counties did in fact function as quasi-autonomous polities. Everitt's study of Kent goes so far as to suggest that its ancient families possessed what amounted to their own ideology. These claims have been vigorously contested, not least by my Oxford colleague Clive Holmes.⁹⁰ I am mindful therefore of the danger of introducing an analysis discredited by historians of England into the literature on Virginia. I'm also aware that Milton's argument had a force and logic that was absent from Virginian usage of commonalty. Milton, by discussing the United Provinces and the city states of ancient Greece, addressed the question of how local polities could be bound into some federal structure. Bacon's Rebellion produced no document of comparable sophistication. On the other hand, perhaps it didn't need to.

What is striking about the Virginian context is how close Virginia already was to meeting Milton's idealized vision of a polity based on county autonomy; and how little identification the inhabitants of Virginia's "stragglng settlements" had with colonial, and in some cases even county government. Grievance after grievance complained of frequent meetings of Virginia's assembly, not only because of their cost but also, I would

⁹⁰ Everitt argues that, "In many respects, despite its ancient centralized government, the England of 1640 resembled a union of partially independent county-states or communities, each with its own distinct ethos and loyalty." See *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion 1640-60*, (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1966), 13; on "Kentish Ideals" see, *ibid.*, 45-55. Clive Holmes, "The Community in Stuart Historiography," *The Journal of British Studies* 2 (1980), 54-73.

argue, because of the perceived irrelevance of colonial government. Bacon's various declarations, and many post-rebellion grievances complained that Berkeley had advanced favorites to positions of power, not only because such action was corrupt, but also I would argue because Virginians preferred to choose their own local leaders. Each county envisaged the terms on which Indians might live with Englishmen differently – a unified colonial policy be damned. County after county complained that the 60 lbs of tobacco collected yearly from each tithable to buy back land in the northern neck had been misspent. But especially in counties in the southern half of the colony, along the James river, the grievances also implied that the levy was essentially unnecessary. From this perspective Virginia was a foreign country, the “good of the colony” could go hang. Lancaster county petitioned that for the “encouragement of trade, wherein the wealth of the...country doth consist” an “assize of meat be established in their county because “the islanders buy great quantities of flour and meat for their slaves.”⁹¹ Never mind the tobacco trade, or the scarcity of flour and meat in the rest of the colony. The perspective of the grievances is unremittingly local – which is surely the main reason why the commissioners described the grievances as being bound by a narrow compass and in general trivial. But they found nothing trivial about Lower Norfolk county's demand that they be allowed to transport their tobacco to any English colony without paying duty. This they described as “wholly mutinous.”

In conclusion I believe that the Cause that Bacon and his followers fought for was independence but not Independence, republicanism rather than Republicanism. This Cause lay at the margins of more established themes and ideas and was a product of the peculiarities of Virginia's development *as a colony*. The appeal of independence couched

⁹¹ Lancaster County Grievances, C.O. 1/39 fol. 217.

in such implicitly republican terms was enhanced rather diminished for Virginians by the fact that it was intrinsically “fuzzy” and could mean different things to different groups of men. However it seems to me that at least some Virginians, typically established smallholders, were ready to *fight for* these ideals, and if that is the case then Bacon’s Rebellion did have a Cause beyond bloodlust, score-settling and an attack on corruption.