Aims: SWBAT explain the cause and effect of Bacon’s Rebellion on American society

DO NOW

EXPERT DEFINITION
Open fighting against authority (such as one’s government)

YOUR DEFINITION

CONCEPT
REBELLION

SYNONYMS/RELATED WORDS
Conflict

MASTERY SENTENCE
TOGETHER

INDEPENDENT

PICTURE
Vocabulary:
Poor British people who wanted to come to the New World made a deal in exchange for free passage, they would agree to work for free, for usually seven years. These people were thus **indentured servants**.

**Bacon’s Rebellion: Introduction**
In 1676, Nathaniel Bacon, an aristocrat from the upper classes of the Virginia Colony, led a group of poor laborers (mostly white indentured servants) in a rebellion against the wealthy land-owning elites.

As the rebellion grew, more and more laborers (both white and black) joined the uprising. These poor workers from the lower classes of society were angry that most of the colony's economic resources and the seats of government were held by a small number of wealthy planters.

These poor workers joined forces and united in their common struggles as poor people. Class, rather than race, formed the basis for this alliance.

Bacon suddenly died of a disease and the rebellion quickly died out shortly thereafter. Even though the rebellion died out, the alliance between poor whites and poor blacks frightened the rich upper class.

The landowning elite switched from a reliance on indentured servants to almost completely using enslaved black labor as a way of uniting all white people to avoid future class conflict.

In doing so, the landowning elite equated whiteness with the ability to own property and therefore freedom, while blackness was reduced to the status of property and therefore slavery.

Slave codes wrote into law the distinctions between whiteness and blackness as they removed many of the rights enslaved peoples had previously.

The idea of race allowed poor whites to take comfort in their whiteness because despite how poor they were, they would always be above black slaves in the social hierarchy.

1. Why did Bacon’s Rebellion scare the ruling class?
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2. This fear quickened the switch from ____________________________________________ to ____________________________________________

3. After Bacon’s Rebellion freedom and equality were defined in terms of ___________ rather than ____________.

4. Whiteness = _________________  Blackness = _________________
Bacon’s Rebellion: Points of View

“[We must defend ourselves] against all Indians in general, for that they were all enemies.” This was the unequivocal view of Nathaniel Bacon, a young, wealthy Englishman who had recently settled in the colony of Virginia. The opinion that all Indians were enemies was also shared by many other Virginians, especially those who lived in the interior. It was not the view, however, of the governor of the colony, William Berkeley.

1. What was Nathaniel Bacon’s view of the Native Americans?
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Berkeley was not opposed to fighting Indians who were considered enemies, but attacking friendly Indians, he though, could lead to what everyone wanted to avoid: a war with “all the Indians against us.” Berkeley also did not trust Bacon’s intentions, believing that the upstart’s true aim was to stir up trouble among the colonists, who were already discontent with the colony’s government.

2. What was Governor Berkeley’s opinion of the Native Americans?
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Bacon attracted a large following who, like him, wanted to kill or drive out every Indian in Virginia. In 1675, when Berkeley denied Bacon a commission (permission to lead soldiers), Bacon took it upon himself to lead his followers in a crusade against the “enemy.” They marched to a fort held by a friendly tribe, the Occaneechees, and convinced them to capture warriors from an unfriendly tribe. The Occaneechees returned with captives. They then turned on their allies and opened fire.

3. How did Bacon turn against the Occaneechees tribe?
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Berkeley declared Bacon a rebel and charged him with treason. Just to be safe, the next time Bacon returned to Jamestown, he brought along fifty armed men. Bacon was still arrested, but Berkeley pardoned [excused] him instead of sentencing him to death, the usual punishment for treason.

Still without the commission he felt he deserved, Bacon returned to Jamestown later the same month, but this time accompanied by five hundred men. Berkeley was forced to give
Bacon the commission, only to later declare that it was void [cancelled]. Bacon, in the meantime, had continued his fight against the Indians. When he learned of the Governor’s declaration he headed back to Jamestown. The governor immediately fled, along with a few of his supporters, to Virginia’s eastern shore.

4. What are two causes of Bacon’s Rebellion?

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Each leader tried to gain support. Each promised freedom to slaves and servants who would join their cause. But Bacon’s following was much greater than Berkeley’s. In September of 1676, Bacon and his men set Jamestown on fire.

The Rebellion ended after British authorities sent a royal force to assist in quelling [stopping] the uprising and arresting scores of committed rebels, white and black. When Bacon suddenly died in October, Bacon’s Rebellion fizzled out.

Bacon’s Rebellion demonstrated that poor whites and poor blacks could be united in a cause. This was a great fear to the ruling class – what would prevent the poor from uniting to fight them? This fear hastened [quickened] the transition to racial slavery.

5. How did each ruler attempt to gain support for their cause?

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6. What did Bacon’s Rebellion demonstrate? Why did this scare the wealthy Virginia colonists?

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Race: Before and After Bacon’s Rebellion

Blacks  Poor Whites  Rich Whites
BACON'S REBELLION & AMERICAN SLAVERY
The key event in the emergence of black peoples as the majority of laborers in the English colonies was the rebellion led by Nathaniel Bacon in 1676.

Bacon was an English aristocrat who had recently migrated to Virginia. The immediate cause of Bacon's rebellion was a disagreement between him and the colony’s royal governor William Berkley over Indian policy. Bacon wanted to kill or drive out all the Indians from Virginia while Berkley wanted to prevent a war. Bacon's followers were mainly white indentured servants and former indentured servants who disliked and resented the control exercised by the tobacco planting elite over the colony’s resources and government. The rebellion also attracted black indentured servants and slaves as well. Bacon's Rebellion demonstrated that poor whites and poor blacks could be united in a cause. This was a great fear of the ruling class -- what would prevent the poor from uniting to fight them? This fear quickened the transition from indentured servitude to racial slavery.

Bacon's appeal to enslaved blacks to join his cause struck fear into the hearts of wealthy planters. His actions looked to them as a biracial alliance of the lower classes against the propertied elite. By switching from indentured white servants to an enslaved black labor force that would never become free or control firearms, the wealthy planters hoped to avoid class conflict among white people. Over the next 25 years, planters switched almost completely to enslaved Africans in hopes of uniting all whites into a race-based alliance between the wealthy planters and poorer whites. Increasingly thereafter, white Americans perceived that both their freedom from class conflict and their prosperity rested on denying freedom to black Americans.

Historians view Bacon's Rebellion as a major turning point in the history of slavery in that white southerners thereafter defined freedom and equality in terms of race rather than class. To be free and white was the promise of American equality, and all whites thereafter shared a common bond in their whiteness that surpassed any class differences.

QUESTIONS:
1. Why did Bacon begin his rebellion?
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2. Why were most of Bacon’s followers indentured or formerly indentured servants? What did their class status have to do with their motivation to join in the rebellion?
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1 Aristocrat: a member of the highest social class in a country.
2 Elite: a small group of people within a larger group who have more power, social standing and wealth than the rest of the group.
3. Why did Bacon’s Rebellion frighten the ruling elite?

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4. What racial alliance did the ruling elite want? Why?

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5. What racial alliance did the ruling elite not want? Why?

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6. How did Bacon’s rebellion motivate the switch from indentured servitude to racial slavery?

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7. After Bacon’s Rebellion, what were the effects on American ideas about race and class?

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Maryland, 1664
That whatsoever free-born [English] woman shall intermarry with any slave. . . shall serve the master of such slave during the life of her husband; and that all the issue of such free-born women, so married shall be slaves as their fathers were.

CHALLENGE: How does this Maryland law support the new concept of whiteness that emerged after Bacon’s Rebellion?

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Name ___________________________ Date: _______________ Homeroom: _______________

**EXIT TICKET**

_____ / 5 Mastered/Passing/Not Mastered

1. How is Bacon’s Rebellion an example of both unity and disunity amongst colonists?
   
   A. Virginian colonists, both male and female, fought together against African slaves.  
   B. African slaves and Native Americans in Virginia revolted against their white masters. 
   C. White colonists and blacks in Virginia fought together against the Native Americans. 
   D. White colonists and Native Americans fought together to repress a slave revolt.

2. What was one cause of Bacon’s Rebellion?

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3. What was one effect of Bacon’s Rebellion?

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