

## BOOK REVIEWS

*J*ames Rice. *Tales from a Revolution: Bacon's Rebellion and the Transformation of Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Pp. xx, 243. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. Cloth, \$24.95.

James Rice's goal in this new history of Bacon's Rebellion, published as part of Oxford's New Narratives in American History series, is to tell a good story. "My starting point was not the scholarly imperative to develop a thesis," he writes, "but rather something akin to the novelist's imperative to develop a plot" (208). He succeeds admirably, producing a narrative that is brisk, engaging, and clear—a signal achievement for an event that has often been depicted as a chaotic mess. His incisive commentary also opens up fresh possibilities for the study of war and rebellion in the seventeenth-century South.

The narrative follows a path that readers of Edmund S. Morgan's work *American Slavery, American Freedom* will find familiar. Beginning with frontier skirmishes between English

militias and Susquehannock Indians in 1675, it proceeds through several stages: Nathaniel Bacon's mobilization of extralegal volunteers, Governor Berkeley's denunciation of these rebels, and the outbreak of full-scale civil war. Rice summarizes important background information in expository asides, which connect his narrative to the broader social, economic, political, and diplomatic questions of the day. He places particular emphasis on the class conflict between wealthy planters and poor settlers, as well as the increasingly precarious position of Native Americans in the Chesapeake. But Rice focuses on the storytelling, moving rapidly through the unfolding events. As might be expected from the author of *Nature and History in the Potomac Country*, he excels at setting scenes through responsible and effective uses of historical imagination, including evocative details about space, place, and sensory experience.

As he develops his plot, Rice allows the larger thesis to emerge from the narrative. His argument, clearly articulated in the afterword, is that Bacon's Rebellion served as the first act in a longer drama that did not reach its climax until the Glorious Revolution. Successive crises between 1675 and 1689 were fueled by the same underlying factors, which Rice refers to as unresolved "dilemmas" that produced "dramatic tension" (211). Restive colonists in Virginia and Maryland faced one dilemma, struggling to assert their rights as Englishmen in an increasingly repressive regime controlled by wealthy oligarchs. Native Americans faced another dilemma, struggling to survive English territorial expansion and the escalating violence of the Indian slave trade. Colonial leaders attempted to strike a balance between the demands of their English subjects and their Indian allies, but ultimately found this to be impossible. For example, Berkeley's efforts to protect friendly Indians—who, suspiciously enough, were his partners in the growing fur and slave trades—sparked rumors that the government was secretly allied to hostile Indians. Fearing a conspiracy between oligarchs and Indians, many Virginians resorted to militant defiance and open rebellion.

Berkeley's forces crushed the rebellion in early 1677, but Rice asserts that their military victory did nothing to resolve the underlying dilemmas. Thus, "Bacon's followers laid down their arms but did not abandon the struggle" (137). "Baconist" discontent erupted periodically in such events as Josias Fendall's abortive uprising in 1681, the tobacco-cutting riots in 1682, and Coode's Rebellion in 1689. As anti-Catholicism intensified throughout the English world, it became embroidered into Bacon's charges of government conspiracies. When William of Orange deposed James II, Baconists

elaborated a grand conspiracy theory that linked Maryland's proprietary government to French absolutism and hostile Indians. The colonial dilemmas resolved only after "Bacon's heirs" and the Glorious Revolution removed Catholics from power and inaugurated a new generation of governors who took a hardline stance against Indians. In the long run, wealthy and poor Englishmen healed their class division by crafting a new social order based on white supremacy and the permanent subjugation of African slaves.

Rice's narrative makes several important interventions in the historiography of Bacon's Rebellion. In particular, he highlights the central roles played by Native Americans, widens the geographical scope to include Maryland, and treats seriously the pervasive discourses of conspiracy. The constraints of good narrative, however, prevent him from performing the deep analysis that these insights deserve. For example, he perceptively points out that "what was really at stake" in Bacon's Rebellion "was the future of the Indian nations across a vast arc of territory from New York to Carolina" (65). But the flow of the story does not allow him to pause and reflect on the implications of this observation for a historiography that continues to treat the event as a civil war among Englishmen.

Rice has nonetheless given us a very good book. He provides a coherent synthesis of the scholarship on this tumultuous period, integrating his narrative of rebellion and revolution into larger narratives of provincial and imperial transformation. For this reason alone, *Tales from a Revolution* should become the standard text on Bacon's Rebellion in the classroom. Rice has breathed new life into old historiographical controversies and indicated several promising avenues for future investigations. In that sense, this is just the beginning of a new historiography of Bacon's Rebellion.

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Sally McMurry and Nancy Van Dolsen, eds. *Architecture and Landscape of the Pennsylvania Germans, 1720–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Pp. xiv, 250. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$49.95.

Originating with the Vernacular Architecture Forum's 2004 meeting and its study tours into Pennsylvania's Lancaster, Berks, Lebanon, and Cumberland