

Topic 2.5

Interactions Between American Indians and Europeans

Fifty-six years after the sailing of the Mayflower, the Pilgrims' children had not only defeated the Pokanokets . . . they had taken conscious, methodical measures to purge the land of its people.

Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*, 2006

Learning Objective: Explain how and why interactions between various European nations and American Indians changed over time.

From the very beginning Europeans saw each other as rivals for power in the Americas. In general, they viewed American Indians as inferior people who could be used as forced labors or pushed off their land, but also as potential allies in conflicts with other Europeans or other American Indians.

In response, Native Americans who survived the devastation of European diseases defended themselves and their cultures. Sometimes various tribes joined together to resist Europeans. Other times, a particular tribe allied with one group of Europeans to fight another or to fight against a traditional tribal rival. For example, in 1626 in southern New York, the Mahican Indians persuaded Dutch settlers to join in an attack on the Mohawk Indians.

Conflict in New England

In the 1640s, the New England colonies faced the constant threat of attack from American Indians, the Dutch, and the French. With England in the midst of a civil war, the colonists expected little assistance.

New England Confederation In 1643, four New England colonies (Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and New Haven) organized for their mutual protection. They formed a military alliance known as the **New England Confederation**. The confederation was directed by a board composed of two representatives from each colony. It had limited powers to act on boundary disputes, the return of runaway servants, and dealings with American Indians.

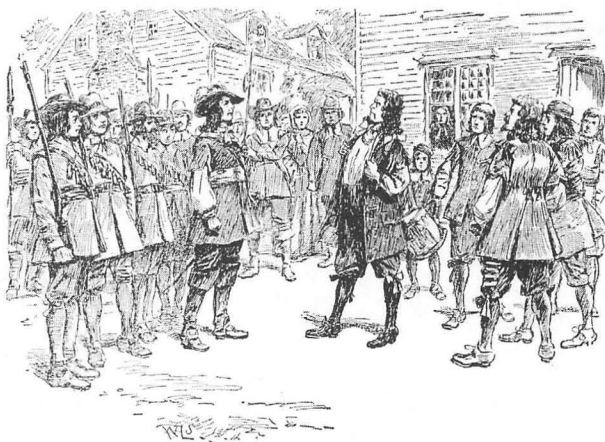
The confederation lasted until 1684, when colonial rivalries and renewed control by the English monarch brought this first experiment in colonial cooperation to an end. Though it lasted only four decades, it established an important precedent for colonies taking unified action for a common purpose.

Metacom's War (King Philip's War) Only a few years before the confederation's demise, it helped the New England colonists win a vicious war. In response to English settlers encroaching on the American Indians' lands, a chief of the **Wampanoag, Metacom**, known to the colonists as King Philip, united many tribes in southern New England. Some tribes, such as the Mohegans and the Pequots, supported the colonists because of their long-standing rivalry with the Wampanoag. The resulting conflict was called Metacom's War (1675–1676). In it, several villages were burned to the ground, hundreds of people were killed, and thousands of people were injured. Eventually, the colonial forces and their Indian allies prevailed, killing Metacom and ending most American Indian resistance in New England.

Conflict in Virginia

Sir William Berkeley, the royal governor of Virginia (1641–1652; 1660–1677), used dictatorial powers to govern on behalf of the large planters. He antagonized small farmers on Virginia's western frontier because he failed to protect them from Indian attacks.

Bacon's Rebellion Nathaniel Bacon, an impoverished gentleman farmer, seized upon the grievances of the western farmers to lead a rebellion against Berkeley's government. Bacon and others resented the control exercised by a few large planters in the Chesapeake area. He raised an army of volunteers and, in 1676, conducted a series of raids and massacres against American Indian villages on the frontier, including some who had friendly relationships with the colonial government. Berkeley's government in Jamestown accused Bacon of rebelling against royal authority. Bacon's army defeated the governor's forces and burned the Jamestown settlement. Soon afterward, Bacon died of dysentery, and the rebel army collapsed. Governor Berkeley suppressed the remnants of the insurrection, executing 23 rebels.



This drawing of Bacon (center, left) confronting Berkeley (center, right) was created for a history textbook written in 1895.

Source: Susan Pendleton Lee, *A School History of the United States* (1895). Wikimedia.org.

Lasting Problems Though it was short-lived, Bacon's Rebellion, or the Chesapeake Revolution, highlighted long-lasting disputes in Virginia and most of the colonies:

- sharp class differences between the wealthy and landless or poor farmers
- conflict on the frontiers between settlers and American Indians
- colonial resistance to royal control

These problems would continue into the next century, even after conditions in the Chesapeake and other colonies became more stable and prosperous.

Spanish Rule and the Pueblo Revolt

Spain's economic policy for its colonies was based on forcing Native Americans to labor for them through the *encomienda* system (see Topic 1.5). In religion, Spain's Roman Catholic missionaries followed an aggressive, sometimes harsh, program to convert Native Americans to Christianity. The pressure of these efforts led to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Various tribes of Pueblo Indians, including the Hopi and Zuni, united against the Spanish. Hundreds of people died in the fighting, and the Spanish were driven from the area until 1692. However, after the Spanish regained control in 1692, they made some accommodations to the American Indians in the region. By ruling less harshly, the Spanish found greater stability.

REFLECT ON THE LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Explain the nature of the relationship between the Europeans and Native Americans and the reasons it evolved over time.

KEY TERMS BY THEME

Conflict (MIG)

Wampanoag
Metacom
King Philip's War

Authority (PCE)

Sir William Berkeley
Bacon's Rebellion
New England Confederation

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Questions 1–3 refer to the following excerpt.

“These at the heads of James and York rivers . . . grew impatient at the many slaughters of their neighbors and rose for own defense, who choosing Mr. Bacon for their leader, sent oftentimes to the Governor, . . . beseeching a commission to go against the Indians at their own charge; which His Honor as often promised, but did not send. . . .

During these protractions and people often slain, most or all the officers, civil and military, . . . met and concerted together, the danger of going without a commission on the one part and the continual murders of their neighbors on the other part. . . . This day lapsing and no commission come, they marched into the wilderness in quest of these Indians, after whom the Governor sent his proclamation, denouncing all rebels who should not return within a limited day; whereupon those of estates obeyed. But Mr. Bacon, with fifty-seven men, proceeded. . . . They fired and . . . slew 150 Indians.”

Samuel Kercheval, Virginia lawyer,
“On Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia,” 1833

1. Based on this excerpt, what is Samuel Kercheval’s perspective toward Bacon and his followers?
 - (A) They were dangerous men who threatened colonial stability and prosperity.
 - (B) They were frustrated men who were taking action because the government did not.
 - (C) They were allies of the governor who carried out actions that he supported.
 - (D) They were a primarily political movement that wanted Bacon to become governor.
2. Bacon’s Rebellion was initiated by a group of farmers who felt most directly threatened by
 - (A) an increase in royal taxes
 - (B) the power of large planters
 - (C) conflicts with American Indians
 - (D) the growth of the slave trade

3. Which of the following groups led the opposition to Bacon's Rebellion?
- (A) The British Army
 - (B) The House of Burgesses
 - (C) The governor of Virginia
 - (D) The leaders of the Church of England

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTION

Use complete sentences; an outline or bulleted list alone is not acceptable.

1. "As to the natives of this country, I find them entirely savage and wild, strangers to all decency, yea, uncivil and stupid as garden stakes, proficient in all wickedness and ungodliness, devilish men who serve nobody but the devil. . . . They have so much witchcraft, divination, sorcery, and wicked arts that they can hardly be held in by any bands or locks. They are as thievish and treacherous as they are tall, and in cruelty they are altogether inhuman."

Jonas Michaelius, pastor, Dutch Reformed Church,
Letter to Reverend Andrianus Smoutius, 1628

"I confess I think no great good will be done till they [Indians] be more civilized. But why may not God begin with some few to awaken others by degrees? Nor do I expect any great good will be wrought by the English . . . because God is wont ordinarily to convert nations and peoples by some of their own countrymen who are nearest to them and can best speak, and, most of all, pity their brethren."

John Eliot, Puritan, "The Day-Breaking
of the Gospel with the Indians," 1646

Using the excerpts above, answer (a), (b), and (c).

- (a) Briefly describe ONE major difference between Michaelius's and Eliot's views of the Native Americans.
- (b) Briefly describe how ONE historical event or development in the period from 1607 to 1754 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support Michaelius's interpretation.
- (c) Briefly explain how ONE historical event or development in the period from 1607 to 1754 that is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support Eliot's interpretation.