

Because most plantations were largely self-sufficient, large urban centers were unnecessary in the South. The port city of Charles Town (later called Charleston) in South Carolina was an early exception.

The Planter Class The owners of the plantations were considered the **elite** of this society. In the early colonies, this class was drawn from the noble families of the south and west of England.

The planter class was relatively small compared to the rest of the population. However, they soon gained control of political and economic power in the South. A foreign traveler in the South commented that the planters “think and act precisely as do the nobility in other countries.”

The planters formed the highest level of a class system that included large numbers of poor freemen, indentured servants, and slaves. The social system in the South was dramatically different from New England, where numerous middle-class families had settled. In the South, tension between social groups led to a major conflict in the late 17th century.

Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 The desire for land and wealth had drawn settlers to America, so it is not surprising that many of the early conflicts in the

South were over land. By the 1670s many indentured servants had completed their service and demanded land. Because the wealthy planters controlled the Tidewater region, these poorer freemen were forced into the western frontier, where they battled Native Americans for land.

Nathaniel Bacon and a group of landless frontier settlers were already angry with Virginia Governor William Berkeley. They complained about high taxes and Governor Berkeley’s favoritism toward large plantation owners. Bacon demanded that Berkeley help defend frontier settlements against Native Americans. Berkeley’s refusal of Bacon’s demand sparked **Bacon’s Rebellion** in 1676.

Bacon entered Jamestown, took control of the House of Burgesses, and burned Jamestown to the ground. However, Bacon’s sudden illness and death ended the rebellion. Berkeley hanged 23 of Bacon’s followers. Angered by Berkeley’s actions, King Charles II recalled the governor to England. Afterwards, the House of Burgesses passed laws to prevent a royal governor from assuming such power again. The burgesses had taken an important step against tyranny.

▲ **COMPARE AND CONTRAST** Explain what tensions developed between Tidewater and frontier settlers.

Jamestown: N. Bacon,
1676 by Howard Pyle

