Nathaniel Bacon's Declaration (July 30, 1676)

Nathaniel Bacon was a tobacco farmer from the frontier in western Virginia. He was also a member of a group that appealed to Governor William Berkeley in Jamestown in 1676 to raise an expedition against the Susquehannock Indians, who had been periodically attacking the farmers. Berkeley denied the request and refused to hear the farmers’ grievances.

In response Bacon led a group of 500 farmers first against the native populations in West Virginia and then against the government in Jamestown. Bacon’s men were victorious over both targets, slaughtering numerous Indians and burning Jamestown before British troops could be called in to subdue the rebellion. Before the military could capture Bacon, however, he passed away from illness. This excerpt is from "Declaration of Nathaniel Bacon in the Name of the People of Virginia, July 30, 1676," a list of grievances to King Charles II on behalf of the frontier settlers.

For having, upon specious pretenses of public works, raised great unjust taxes upon the commonalty for the advancement of private favorites and other sinister ends, but no visible effects in any measure adequate; for not having, during this long time of his government, in any measure advanced this hopeful colony either by fortifications, towns, or trade.

For having abused and rendered contemptible the magistrates of justice by advancing to places of judicature scandalous and ignorant favorites.

For having wronged his Majesty's prerogative and interest by assuming monopoly of the beaver trade and for having in it unjust gain betrayed and sold his Majesty's country and the lives of his loyal subjects to the barbarous heathen.

For having protected, favored, and emboldened the Indians against his Majesty's loyal subjects, never contriving, requiring, or appointing any due or proper means of satisfaction for their many invasions, robberies, and murders committed upon us.

For having, when the army of English was just upon the track of those Indians, who now in all places burn, spoil, murder and when we might with ease have destroyed them who then were in open hostility, for then having expressly countermanded and sent back our army by passing his word for the peaceable demeanor of the said Indians, who immediately prosecuted their evil intentions, committing horrid murders and robberies in all places, being protected by the said engagement and word past of him the said Sir William Berkeley, having ruined and laid desolate a great part of his Majesty's country, and have now drawn themselves into such obscure and remote places and are by their success so emboldened and confirmed by their confederacy so strengthened that the cries of blood are in all places, and the terror and consternation of the people so great, are now become not only difficult but a very formidable enemy who might at first with ease have been destroyed.

And lately, when, upon the loud outcries of blood, the assembly had, with all care, raised and framed an army for the preventing of further mischief and safeguard of this his Majesty's colony.

For having, with only the privacy of some few favorites without acquainting the
people, only by the alteration of a figure, forged a commission, by we know not what hand, not only without but even against the consent of the people, for the raising and effecting civil war and destruction, which being happily and without bloodshed prevented; for having the second time attempted the same, thereby calling down our forces from the defense of the frontiers and most weakly exposed places.

For the prevention of civil mischief and ruin amongst ourselves while the barbarous enemy in all places did invade, murder, and spoil us, his Majesty's most faithful subjects.

Of this and the aforesaid articles we accuse Sir William Berkeley as guilty of each and every one of the same, and as one who has traitorously attempted, violated, and injured his Majesty's interest here by a loss of a great part of this his colony and many of his faithful loyal subjects by him betrayed and in a barbarous and shameful manner exposed to the incursions and murder of the heathen. And we do further declare these the ensuing persons in this list to have been his wicked and pernicious councilors, confederates, aiders, and assisters against the commonalty in these our civil commotions.

Sir Henry Chichley
Lt. Col. Christopher Wormeley
Phillip Ludwell
Robt. Beverley
Ri. Lee
Thomas Ballard
William Cole

Richard Whitacre
Nicholas Spencer
Joseph Bridger
William Claiburne, Jr.
Thomas Hawkins
William Sherwood
John Page Clerke

And we do further demand that the said Sir William Berkeley with all the persons in this list be forthwith delivered up or surrender themselves within four days after the notice hereof, or otherwise we declare as follows.

That in whatsoever place, house, or ship, any of the said persons shall reside, be hid, or protected, we declare the owners, masters, or inhabitants of the said places to be confederates and traitors to the people and the estates of them is also of all the aforesaid persons to be confiscated. And this we, the commons of Virginia, do declare, desiring a firm union amongst ourselves that we may jointly and with one accord defend ourselves against the common enemy. And let not the faults of the guilty be the reproach of the innocent, or the faults or crimes of the oppressors divide and separate us who have
suffered by their oppressions.

These are, therefore, in his Majesty's name, to command you forthwith to seize the persons abovementioned as traitors to the King and country and them to bring to Middle Plantation and there to secure them until further order, and, in case of opposition, if you want any further assistance you are forthwith to demand it in the name of the people in all the counties of Virginia.

Nathaniel Bacon

General by Consent of the people.

William Sherwood

**Document Analysis**

What major accusations do Bacon and his followers make against the colonial government of Virginia?

What elements of class conflict (among government, planters, freemen, and indentured servants) can be found in this statement?