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Colonial South Carolina and the Caribbean Connection

Jack P. Greene*

Within the leavings of the Hispanic and Portuguese American Empires during the first half of the seventeenth century, English adventurers established viable settlements in four separate areas: the Chesapeake, Bermuda, New England, and Barbados. Notwithstanding the fact that they all shared a common English heritage, no two of the new societies that emerged out of these settlements were alike, and three of them—those in the Chesapeake, New England, and Barbados—became what some cultural geographers refer to as culture hearths. That is, they became sites for the creation of powerful local cultures, including social institutions and ways of manipulating a particular kind of environment, that proved to be remarkably capable of recreation and, with appropriate modifications, transferable to other areas in the Anglo-American world.

Historians have long been familiar with the processes by which the tobacco and mixed farming culture of Virginia spread north into Maryland, Delaware, and parts of Pennsylvania and south into North Carolina and by which the mixed-farming and fishing culture of Puritan Massachusetts Bay extended itself into offshoot societies in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Haven, New Hampshire, Long Island, New Jersey, and Maine. Until recently, they have paid far less attention to the equally fecund staple agricultural culture of Barbados.

During the last half of the seventeenth century, the culture first articulated in Barbados slowly spread to the nearby Leeward Islands in the eastern Caribbean and, after its capture from the Spaniards in 1655, to the large island of Jamaica in the central Caribbean. After 1750, a variant strain of that culture, developed—within the English-world, in the Leeward Island colonies of St. Kitts, Antigua, Nevis, and Montserrat—found a congenial setting in the new British West Indian island colonies of the Virgin Islands, Grenada, St. Vincent, Dominica, and Tobago.

As most South Carolinians familiar with their early history will know, however, the extension of Barbadian culture went beyond the West Indies to the North American mainland. Established in 1670 with some small settlements near the confluence of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, South Carolina and the Lower South culture that developed out of those small beginnings and gradually spread north to the Cape Fear region of North Carolina and south into Georgia and

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East and West Florida, was as much the offspring of Barbados as was Jamaica or the other English Caribbean colonies.

Although scholars have long appreciated the role of Barbados in the origins of the Lower South, the sudden and artificial separation of the North American continental colonies from the West Indian colonies as a result of the American Revolution and the simultaneous incorporation of South Carolina and Georgia into the larger American culture of the United States have tended to focus attention away from the continuing vibrancy of South Carolina's Caribbean connection throughout the colonial period. The same developments have also tended to obscure the related fact that, for much of its colonial existence, South Carolina exhibited socio-economic and cultural patterns that, in many important respects, corresponded more closely to those in the Caribbean colonies than to those in the mainland colonies to the north. Though it is still far from complete, new work over the past fifteen years on the social history of Britain's early modern colonies now makes it more possible than ever before to analyze the developmental parallels and contrasts among the several colonies that trace their origins in some major part to the Barbados culture hearth.

This essay will explore three themes: first, South Carolina's Caribbean roots; second, its continuing connection with the Caribbean colonies during the colonial period; and third, the developmental parallels between it and the other colonies—the Leeward Islands and Jamaica—that emerged out of the Barbadian culture hearth during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

II

Why Barbados became a base and a prototype for the establishment of so many other colonies in the Caribbean and in the Lower South can only be explained by an examination of its early history. For ten years after its initial settlement in 1627, Barbados, like earlier English colonies in Virginia and Bermuda, concentrated very largely on tobacco culture, though it also began producing considerable quantities of cotton and indigo during the late 1630s. From the beginning, Barbados was a reasonably successful producer of staples for the English market, and this success drew large numbers of English immigrants to it and set off a feverish rush for land that, within a decade, had resulted in the occupation of virtually all of the arable land both in Barbados, which covered an area of only 166 square miles

and in the nearby Leeward Islands, all four of which covered an area of only 251 square miles.¹

As had been the case in early Virginia, the entire society was organized for profit. A few people from English gentry and commercial families, mostly younger sons, came to make their fortunes, but most immigrants were single male dependent indentured servants imported to labor in the cultivation and processing of tobacco, cotton, and indigo. Every bit as competitive, exploitative, and materialistic as early Virginia, Barbados experienced a rapid concentration of wealth, as the society polarized into small groups of proprietors and a mass of dependent indentured servants or mobile free laborers. Paying but scant attention to religion or other social and cultural institutions, Barbados and the Leeward Islands were notorious for their riotous and abandoned styles of life, while high mortality among new immigrants and the imbalance of women in the population contributed to the slow process of family development.²

Most of these early tendencies were even further enhanced by the gradual substitution of sugar for minor staple cultivation beginning in Barbados in the mid-1640s and gradually extending to the Leeward Islands and Jamaica in subsequent decades. This capital and labor intensive crop led to the further concentration of property into the hands of the few people who could command the capital to purchase the labor and equipment necessary to produce sugar competitively. At the same time they were amassing larger and larger estates for themselves, these plantation owners were replacing white servants and free white laborers with African slaves, who seem to have been both a more economical and a more reliable source of labor. Like their counterparts in Virginia, Barbadian planters had, from the beginning of settlement, shown no reluctance to treat white servant labor as a disposable commodity, and the wholesale importation of African slaves into Barbados and the Leeward Islands represented both a logical extension of that impulse and the first large-scale use of slavery and non-European labor in any of the English colonies.

¹F.C. Innes, "The Pre-Sugar Era of European Settlement in Barbados," *Journal of Caribbean History* I (1970): 1-22; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, 1972), pp. 46-59, and "Experiments Holy and Unholy, 1630-1," in K.R. Andrews, N.P. Canny, and P.E.H. Hair, eds., *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America 1480-1650* (Detroit, 1979), pp. 272-75; Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: Economic History of the British West Indies 1623-1775* (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 75-96, 123; Richard Pares, *Merchants and Planters* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 1-25.

²Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 263-334; Babette M. Levy, "Early Puritanism in the Southern and Island Colonies," *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* LXX (1961): 278-307.

By the early 1650s, as a result of the sugar revolution, Barbados had achieved a population density greater than any comparable area in the English-speaking world, except London. But the introduction of black slaves into Barbados contributed to a rapid decline of white population, as many whites migrated to other colonies where there were greater opportunities to acquire land or returned to England. From a high of about 30,000 in 1650, the number of whites fell to about 20,000 in 1680 and 15,500 in 1700. Despite the fall in numbers of white settlers, Barbados, in 1670, was certainly, as Richard S. Dunn has written, "the richest, most highly developed, most populous, and most congested English colony in America, with a thriving sugar industry and 50,000 inhabitants, including 30,000 Negroes."

As Barbados and its neighboring colonies in the Leeward Islands became more black and the concentration on sugar production became ever more intensive, profits soared and wealth accumulation among the possessing classes was phenomenal. By 1660, the wealth of Barbados, the earliest and best developed of the island colonies, exceeded that of any other contemporary English overseas possession. But the rapid rise of a wealthy and conspicuous elite did not immediately give either much cohesion or stability to Barbadian society. Indeed, many of those wealthy few proprietors who could afford it began to flee the tropical sugar factories they had established for the more settled and, especially after 1680, healthier world of England.³

That the socio-economic model first successfully articulated in Barbados with its exploitative and materialistic orientation, concentration on sugar production, a slave-powered plantation system, a highly stratified social structure, great disparities in wealth and styles of life, a high ratio of blacks to whites, little attention to the development of family life and other traditional social institutions and cultural amenities, high levels of absenteeism among the wealthy, a rapid turnover among the elite, and heavy mortality—that Barbadian cultural system also came to characterize the four neighboring Lee-

³Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York, 1972), pp. 165-305; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 59-83, 117-26, 188-264, "Experiments Holy and Unholy," pp. 285-89, and "The English Sugar Islands and the Founding of South Carolina," this *Magazine* LXXII (1971): 82; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 128-40; Hilary McD. Beckles, "Rebels and Reactionaries: The Political Response of White Labourers to Planter-Class Hegemony in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," *Journal of Caribbean History* XV (1981): 1-19, and "The Economic Origins of Black Slavery in the British West Indies, 1640-1680: A Tentative Analysis of the Barbados Model," *Journal of Caribbean History* XVI (1982): 36-56; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 151-53.

ward Island colonies is scarcely surprising. In part because of the concentration of capital and labor in Barbados and in part because rivalries with the Dutch and French prevented English settlers from securing uncontested control over most of them until 1713, however, the Leeward Island colonies developed far more slowly than did Barbados and never attracted such a large white immigration. By the 1720s and 1730s, however, they had successfully emulated the experience of Barbados in the previous century.⁴

But the Barbadian model also proved capable of transfer beyond the Lesser Antilles in the eastern Caribbean to much larger physical entities in Jamaica and South Carolina. Settled by the English in the second half of the seventeenth century, these two colonies, like the Leeward Islands, also developed far more slowly than Barbados. But they eventually became highly successful plantation colonies on the Barbadian model. Indeed, by the mid-eighteenth century, they had become two of the three wealthiest and economically most important British-American colonies, with only Virginia—and not even Barbados—approaching them in this regard.

Continuously occupied by Spaniards since the early sixteenth century, Jamaica, prior to the English conquest in 1655, had been primarily a producer of livestock and minor staples, especially cocoa, and had never been an important part of the Hispanic American empire. With 4,411 square miles of territory, more than twenty-six and a half times that of Barbados and approximately the same size as the area that would later comprise the South Carolina lowcountry, Jamaica was first settled by disbanded English soldiers and the flow of excess population from England's eastern Caribbean colonies. This flow included many planters who, having made considerable fortunes in Barbados or the Leeward Islands, migrated with their slaves to Jamaica, where they hoped to establish a new, and infinitely more expandable, sugar colony that would have land enough to enable them to provide for their younger sons. This migration began in earnest in 1664 when one of Jamaica's first governors, Sir Thomas Modyford, and some 700 other Barbadian planters arrived in the colony with their slaves.

Jamaica soon rivaled Barbados in riches. But in the early decades its wealth came more from the activities of its freebooting buccaneers, who used its strategic position in the central Caribbean to tap the vast wealth of the Hispanic American empire. Through a combination of trade and raids, they converted their Jamaica base at Port Royal into the richest spot in English America. Primarily because it did not for

⁴Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 148-207.

many decades have access to a plentiful slave supply, however, Jamaica was slow to develop as a sugar-producing staple colony. Following the example of the Spaniards, all of whom had fled the colony within three or four years after the English conquest, leaving their large stocks of cattle behind, many of Jamaica's new proprietors raised cattle and other livestock for food consumption in Jamaica and elsewhere in the Caribbean, while others produced minor staples, including cocoa, indigo, and provisions. Not until the beginning of the eighteenth century did Jamaica export as much sugar as tiny Barbados.⁵

No less than the Leeward Islands and Jamaica, South Carolina also represented a successful extension of the Barbados culture hearth. As more and more of its arable land was converted to sugar and foodstuffs and other supplies had to be imported from elsewhere, Barbadian leaders began to look to the unoccupied portions of the southeastern mainland of North America as a potential site for new settlements that would be able to supply the provisions and other necessities required to sustain the island's sugar economy. With approval of the Lords Proprietors to whom, following his Restoration to the English throne in 1660, Charles II had granted authority to colonize Carolina and the Bahamas, a group of Barbadians, including the same Sir Thomas Modyford who settled in Jamaica in 1664, had unsuccessfully sought to establish settlements at Cape Fear and Port Royal in the mid-1660s.

As several historians have recently emphasized, Barbadians also played an extensive role in the first successful settlement in 1670. Almost half of the whites and considerably more than half of the blacks who came to the new settlement during the first two years were from Barbados, and this distribution continued for at least two decades. The most thorough and authoritative study we have of the origins of the 1,343 white settlers who immigrated to South Carolina between 1670 and 1690 indicates that more than 54 percent were probably from Barbados. They included people from all social classes. The great majority were from the small planter and freeman classes of families, a small planter owning at least ten acres but fewer than twenty slaves and a freeman owning less than ten acres. Some of these simply sold out and used the proceeds to transport themselves and their families and slaves to Carolina, while others came as indentured servants.

⁵Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 149-87; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 92-96, 208-16; Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Rutherford, N.J., 1969), pp. 15-69.

But South Carolina's Barbadian immigrants also included a few members of the island's elite. According to Dunn, representatives of eighteen of those 175 big Barbadian sugar planting families which had at least sixty slaves apiece, "held the best land, sold the most sugar, and monopolized the chief offices on the island" obtained land in South Carolina. Not all of these families actually settled in the colony. But a significant number, including, among the earlier immigrants, Edward and Arthur Middleton, James Colleton, and Robert and Thomas Gibbes, did. Further research by Richard Waterhouse has shown that, in addition, "representatives of as many as thirty-three 'middling' [Barbadian] planter families settled in Carolina between 1670 and 1690," middling planters being those who owned between twenty and fifty-nine slaves. Finally, a number of Barbadian merchants acquired land in South Carolina. Although many of them used agents to manage their plantations, several, including John Ladson, Benjamin Quelch, and Bernard Schenckings actually moved to the colony.

Not only did these Barbadians bring "energy, experience, and wealth" to South Carolina. They also brought the social and cultural system that had been so fully articulated in the island over the previous four decades. The only mainland English colony that began its existence with a preference for African slave labor and a significant number of African slaves among its original settlers, South Carolina early revealed that strong commercial, materialistic, and exploitative mentality that had found such a ready field for action in the Caribbean. For at least a generation, the colony functioned effectively as its West Indian proponents had initially intended, as an adjunct to the Barbadian economy. South Carolina developed a vigorous grazing economy that in size rivaled that of Jamaica, and, in return for sugar products and black slaves, it sent large quantities of beef, pork, corn, lumber, naval stores, and Indian slaves to Barbados, the Leeward Islands, and Jamaica.

Even in its earliest days, however, the South Carolina economy was never wholly dependent on trade to the Caribbean. Provisioning privateers and pirates and, even more important, trading with the large number of Indians residing in the southeastern part of the North American continent for great quantities of deerskins for export to England were also lucrative activities. No less than early Barbadians, however, early South Carolinians were avid in their search for a profitable agricultural staple that would do for their colony what sugar had done for Barbados. Early experiments with tobacco and indigo were reasonably successful, but it was not until the successful experimentation with rice in the 1690s that the colony's planters found a

staple that was sufficiently profitable to provide the basis for a viable plantation system on the Barbadian model. Over the next three decades, rice, naval stores, provisions, and deerskins brought in the capital necessary to acquire the almost wholly African slave labor force that helped to give South Carolina such a close resemblance to its West Indian progenitors. Already by 1710 there were more blacks than whites in South Carolina. By 1720, blacks outnumbered whites by almost two to one, a far higher ratio than would ever be exhibited by any other English mainland colony.⁶

III

If, especially in recent decades, historians have tended to emphasize the extent to which, "more than any mainland colony," South Carolina's "roots and early commercial ties stretched toward Barbados and other islands of the English Caribbean," they have paid far less attention to the continuing vitality of that connection. Within the early modern British Empire, such connections were maintained through flows of people, goods, and ideas along the major arteries of trade. Of these various flows, that of people probably dropped to quite low levels during the eighteenth century. A small number of wealthy planters and merchants fled the island colonies throughout the eighteenth century. Though most of them went to Britain or to one of the more northerly colonies, especially Rhode Island and New York, a few came to South Carolina. The families of Rawlins Lowndes, which came from St. Kitts in 1730, and Eliza Lucas Pinckney, which came from Antigua in 1738, are conspicuous examples.⁷

But the fact was that few of the island colonies had an exportable population in the eighteenth century. Neither the Leeward Island

⁶South Carolina's early development, including its relations with Barbados and the Leeward Islands, may be followed in John P. Thomas, Jr., "The Barbadians in Early South Carolina," this *Magazine* XXXI (1930): 75-92; M. Eugene Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina, 1663-1763* (Chapel Hill, 1966), pp. 1-100; Dunn, "English Sugar Islands and the Founding of South Carolina," pp. 81-93; Richard Waterhouse, "England, the Caribbean, and the Settlement of Carolina," *Journal of American Studies* IX (1975): 259-81; Converse D. Clowse, *Economic Beginnings in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia, 1971); Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), pp. 3-194; Clarence L. Ver Steeg, *Origins of a Southern Mosaic: Studies of Early Carolina and Georgia* (Athens, 1975), pp. 103-32; Philip M. Brown, "Early Indian Trade in the Development of South Carolina: Politics, Economics, and Social Mobility during the Proprietary Period, 1670-1719," this *Magazine* LXXVI (1975): 118-28.

⁷Wood, *Black Majority*, p. 55; Elise Pinckney, *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762* (Chapel Hill, 1972), pp. xv-xxvi.

colonies nor Jamaica ever seem to have had more than a few whites to spare, while Barbados experienced a reversal in its long-term decline of white population after 1710. Perhaps the result of improving health conditions, the number of whites in Barbados rose by almost 50 percent from a low of 13,000 in 1710 to around 18,500 in 1773. Although it had a rising, rather than a falling, white population, Barbados probably sent few of its whites to other colonies after 1710. With regard to the black population, all of the West Indian colonies, including Barbados, experienced high slave mortality of from 2 percent to 6 percent annually throughout the eighteenth century and had to maintain imports at that level just to keep the slave population from declining in absolute numbers.⁸

Although the stream of immigrants from the West Indies to South Carolina all but dried up in the eighteenth century, the flow of goods remained strong. In addition to small quantities of wine, limes, lime juice, cocoa, coffee, and sugar, South Carolina imported directly from the West Indies between 70 percent and 85 percent of the roughly 1,000 hogsheads each of sugar and molasses and 4,000 hogsheads of rum it consumed each year. Down through the 1730s, Barbados was the primary source of these sugar products, but both the Leeward Islands and Jamaica surpassed Barbados in the 1750s and 1760s.

In return, South Carolina shipped a variety of products to all of the West Indian colonies. Exports of naval stores were high early in the century but diminished over time; beef and pork, corn and peas, and leather remained fairly steady over the whole period, with Jamaica, Barbados, and the Leeward Islands continuing to be the leading importers of each down into the 1760s. Exports of lumber, barrel staves, and shingles increased dramatically after 1750, with Jamaica usually taking the largest quantities followed by Barbados, Antigua, and St. Kitts. To the West Indies, as to Europe, South Carolina's leading export was rice. The island colonies took about 10 percent of South Carolina's total rice exports in 1717-20 and around 20 percent in the 1760s. Barbados was the largest market through the 1730s, but it had fallen to third place behind Jamaica and the Leeward Islands by the late 1750s.

Altogether, in most years during the eighteenth century, about a fourth to a third of the total tonnage entering Charleston came from or via the West Indies, while between 15 percent to 25 percent of the ships cleared from Charleston traded to the West Indies. This disparity

⁸McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, pp. 153-54; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 123, 502-6; Robert V. Wells, *The Population of the British Colonies in America before 1776: A Survey of Census Data* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 194-251.

can be partly explained by contemporary shipping routes. Prevailing wind patterns dictated that many vessels from Britain came via the West Indies, while return voyages usually proceeded directly back to Britain. Although more ships entered Charleston from the West Indies than returned, by the 1760s, nearly forty ships based in the West Indies annually cleared the port of Charleston with return cargoes of rice and other commodities for Jamaica, Barbados, the Leeward Islands, and the Bahamas.⁹

This steady flow of goods back and forth between South Carolina and the West Indies brought news, ideas, even architectural innovations. The published business correspondence of Robert Pringle and Henry Laurens contain frequent correspondence with trading partners in Bridgetown, Barbados, and elsewhere in the West Indies, and the *South Carolina Gazette* often reprinted items from island newspapers, and vice versa. Especially interesting to South Carolina readers was news of the frequent slave uprisings in Jamaica and other sugar islands. As a recent architectural historian has shown, the verandah or front porch, first developed in the West Indies, appeared almost simultaneously about 1735 in most of the North American colonies engaged in the West Indian trade, including South Carolina.

IV

For South Carolina, these continuing connections were made more palpable by the obvious similarities between its own social development and that of the major West Indian colonies of Barbados, the Leeward Islands, and Jamaica. During the eighteenth century, however, no two of these products of the Barbados culture hearth followed precisely the same culture.

As declining soil fertility and higher processing costs required more and more capital and labor to yield ever-diminishing rates of return, Barbados continued its inexorable movement toward "a capital-intensive, power-intensive system of agriculture conducted on a sustain-yield basis." But the drive toward intensive sugar monoculture and many of the tendencies associated with that drive either lost vigor or changed in character between 1700 and 1775. By the 1730s, Barbados exhibited an actual turning away from sugar to livestock, and the movement towards property consolidation had leveled off by 1750, with roughly a third of the proprietors owning somewhat more

⁹The figures are derived from Converse D. Clowse, *Measuring Charleston's Overseas Commerce, 1717-1767: Statistics from the Port's Naval Lists* (Washington, D.C., 1981).

than half of the estates and sugar mills. By mid-century, the colony, once again exhibiting a spirit of innovation of the kind it had demonstrated a century earlier during the sugar revolution, was responding to its increasingly unfavorable place in the Atlantic sugar market by successfully developing methods to produce more sugar by-products, methods that yielded almost 50 percent more rum than the British West Indian average.

Despite these innovations, neither the size of estates nor the rate of profit was high enough to support much absenteeism among the large planter families, who exhibited a persistence and a commitment to the colony that defied the stereotype of early modern West Indian planter society. Nor were more than 20 percent to 25 percent of the island's whites members of the large estate owning class. About a quarter belonged to an intermediate class of officeholders, small merchants, professionals, estate managers, and small estate owners who produced cotton and foodstuffs on less than 100 acres. The rest consisted of a numerous class of poor whites, families with ten acres or less who lived largely on the margins of the plantation system, many in considerable poverty. After 1710, all classes of whites in Barbados enjoyed more favorable health conditions than did settlers elsewhere in the Caribbean, on the southern North American mainland, or even in continental cities such as Boston and Philadelphia.

Along with the steady growth in white population between 1710 and 1775, the slave population continued to rise, increasing by nearly three-fourths over the same period to over 68,500. Slave imports remained fairly high, but they accounted for a declining proportion of the slave population. With falling profits, planters found it more economical to provide better diet and health care in an effort to breed slaves locally and so save the costs of high annual replacements. Better living conditions and a growing ratio of seasoned creoles to the total number of slaves combined to lower annual mortality rates among Barbadian slaves from about 6 percent during the first quarter of the century to 3.8 percent during the third quarter. The ratio of blacks to whites levelled off at around four to one between 1750 and 1780.¹⁰

¹⁰Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 124-47; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, pp. 165-66; Karl Watson, *The Civilised Island Barbados: A Social History 1750-1816* (Bridgetown, 1979), pp. 30-125; Wells, *Population of the British Colonies*, pp. 236-51; Gary A. Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700* (New York, 1984), pp. 181-94; Hilary Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados: The Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1838* (Bridgetown, 1984), pp. 52-85.

By contrast, the Leeward Islands showed no tendency to turn away from the drive toward sugar monoculture and no reversal in the decline of white settlers. In Nevis and Montserrat, the smallest of those islands, there was a steady loss of whites from the 1670s to a low point in 1745, followed by a slight rise over the next decade and a continuing downward trend thereafter. In St. Kitts and Antigua, which developed later, white population continued to climb into the 1720s and then dropped slowly thereafter.

Because the black populations tripled in all four islands between 1710 and 1780 and a substantial number of proprietors were absentees, perhaps as many as half in St. Kitts, the ratio of blacks to whites was much higher than in Barbados—15 to 1 in Antigua, 12 to 1 in St. Kitts, 11 to 1 in Nevis, and 7.5 to 1 in Montserrat. The result was that all four of the Leeward Islands were little more than a congeries of sugar factories with large concentrations of black slaves and quite small white populations that consisted of little more than a handful of white settler families, a few plantation managers, and a small intermediate class of merchants, lawyers, and doctors. The Leeward Islands thus represented an extreme version of the Barbadian model that perhaps more closely resembled a nineteenth-century industrial enterprise than the settler societies developing elsewhere in British America. Far more than Barbados, they were being transformed by the 1770s from colonies of settlement to colonies of exploitation with the impoverished cultural and political life usually associated with colonies of that category. The new colonies begun by the British in the West Indies after 1750 all tended to follow the Leeward Island example.¹¹

Despite many similarities, Jamaica diverged considerably from the patterns exhibited by the smaller islands. Its sugar industry continued to grow slowly during the first four decades of the eighteenth century because of a variety of factors, including the secular decline of the British sugar market, the engrossment of some of the best sugar lands by large landholders who did not have the labor to exploit them, an inadequate slave supply, and the fierce opposition of the Maroons, bands of runaway slaves who lived in the inaccessible interior and terrorized outlying areas of the colony, especially between 1725 and 1739.

After the cessation of hostilities with the Maroons in 1739 and in response to a rising sugar market, Jamaica experienced spectacular

¹¹Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 148-207; Wells, *Population of the British Colonies*, pp. 207-36; Margaret Deane Rouse-Jones, "St. Kitts, 1713-1763: A Study of the Development of a Plantation Society" (Ph.D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1977).

economic growth from 1740 to 1775. The number of slaves and sugar estates doubled. By 1775, Jamaica was exporting ten times as many sugar products as Barbados and had three times as many slaves. Over the same period, the aggregate value of the colony's economy increased almost five times, from just over £3.5 million to over £15.1 million. It was far and away Britain's most valuable American colony. Its net worth per free white person was an astonishing £1,200 in 1775, more than nine times that found in the richest continental colonies in the upper and lower South.

But this rapid expansion produced significantly different results from those arising from the similar development of Barbados a century earlier or of the Leeward Islands a half century before. Jamaica never approached becoming a sugar monoculture. Four out of ten slaves were in nonsugar production, and more than half of the plantations were devoted to livestock, provisions, and minor staples. Also, slave mortality was considerably lower than in the Leeward Islands, ranging from 4 percent down to 2 percent annually, the probable result of better dietary standards deriving from the local custom of allowing each slave a small plot of provision ground and one and one-half days per week for his or her own activities. From the produce grown on these provision grounds, Jamaican slaves developed a vigorous internal marketing system. The growing size of the free black and colored population, which exceeded that of Barbados by ten to one, suggests that the slave system in the island, though it was both harsh and given to frequent revolts, was more easily escaped than elsewhere in the British Caribbean. Finally, there was much uncultivated land and considerable land wastage in Jamaica, where the plantation economy was more land-intensive and less labor- and capital-intensive.

Nor did Jamaica experience a loss of white population. Notwithstanding the facts that as high as 30 percent of the sugar plantation may have belonged to absentees by the mid-eighteenth century and that the ratio of blacks to whites climbed steadily from about 6.5 to 1 in 1703 to slightly more than 11 to 1 in 1775, white population increased slowly but steadily from 7,000 in 1703 to 18,000 in 1774. In contrast to that of the Leeward Islands, this population was not limited to a handful of resident managers of large sugar estates and a few professionals and local factors of London merchants. As in Barbados, as many as a fifth of island whites were from large landholding or wealthy and substantial mercantile or professional families, and there were many small planters, estate managers, urban artisans, clerks, and shopkeepers, many of whom lived in Kingston or Spanish Town, respectively Jamaica's chief port and capital. In the mid-1770s, Kingston, by far the largest urban place in the British West Indies,

numbered over 11,000 inhabitants, including 5,000 whites, 1,200 free blacks and mulattoes, and 5,000 slaves.

Unlike the Leeward Islands but like Barbados, Jamaica managed, despite some absenteeism, to sustain a "self-conscious, articulate, cohesive social class of proprietor-administrators" well into the later eighteenth century. Like the large estate owners in Barbados, there were "committed settlers" who, especially after 1750, constructed grand houses in an emergent Jamaican vernacular style; supported an active press; built churches, schools, and hospitals; and exerted political and social control through dynamic and self-conscious local political institutions.¹²

In many ways, South Carolina's eighteenth-century development paralleled that of Jamaica. Its economic welfare was also closely tied to the fortunes of an external market for its principal staple. What sugar was for the West Indian colonies, rice became for South Carolina. Following its emergence in the 1690s, rice production as measured by exports grew steadily during the first three decades of the eighteenth century from 1.5 million pounds in 1710 to nearly 20 million by 1730. By the 1720s, it had become South Carolina's most valuable export, a position it held throughout the colonial period. Between 1730 and 1750, the rice market was erratic, and exports increased slowly, except for a brief period in the late 1730s. But starting in the early 1750s exports once again began to surge steadily upward. In terms of total value, rice, by the early 1770s, ranked fourth among exports from Britain's American colonies behind sugar, tobacco, and wheat.¹³

Like Jamaica, South Carolina never became monocultural, however. Throughout the colonial period, it continued to export most of its earliest products: deerskins, naval stores, lumber and barrel staves, grains, and meat. Beginning in the 1740s, the reintroduction of indigo by Eliza Lucas Pinckney and others and its successful production provided South Carolina with a second highly profitable staple, albeit one whose quality was not sufficiently high to sustain it following the

¹²Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 208-33; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 61; Wells, *Population of the British Colonies*, pp. 194-207; Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford, 1971), pp. xiv, 8-175; Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (3 vols., London, 1774), II, p. 103.

¹³McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, pp. 175-80, 186-87; Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981), pp. 74-114; James M. Clifton, "The Rice Industry in Colonial America," *Agricultural History* LV (1981): 266-83; Henry C. Dethloff, "The Colonial Rice Trade," *Agricultural History* LVI (1982): 231-43; Peter A. Coclanis, "Rice Prices in the 1720s and the Evolution of the South Carolina Economy," *Journal of Southern History* XLVIII (1982): 531-44.

withdrawal of a British bounty after the American Revolution. Around 1770, rice accounted for about 55 percent of the value of all exports, indigo for 20 percent, deerskins, naval stores and lumber products each for between 5 percent and 7 percent, and grain and meat products each for about 2 percent. The diversity of the South Carolina economy is illustrated by Robert M. Weir's calculation that the record rice crop of 1770 was grown by less than 50% of the slave population on no more than 3 percent of the land in private hands, while the largest harvest of indigo was grown by only about 13% of the slaves on less than 0.5 percent of such land.¹⁴

Also like Jamaica, staple agriculture brought South Carolina masses of black slaves, a precarious racial balance in the population, and enormous wealth. The black population rose dramatically from about 2,500 in 1700 to 5,000 in 1710, 39,000 in 1730, and 75,000 in 1770. Before 1720, South Carolina's black population seems to have been able to generate a natural increase. But with the intensification of staple agriculture in the 1720s and 1730s and, probably much more important, the importation of large numbers of new slaves from Africa, it began, like its counterparts in the West Indian colonies, to experience a net annual decrease. Though the slave population seems to have again become self-sustaining after 1750, most of the enormous increase in slaves was, throughout the colonial period, the result of large imports, which, except for the decade of the 1740s, remained high.¹⁵

Though it was greater by far than any other contemporary British continental colony, the ratio of blacks to whites for South Carolina as a whole never approached that in the Caribbean colonies. For most of the period after 1720, it seems to have remained roughly at 2 to 2.5 to 1. But these figures are deceptive. In some lowcountry parishes, the importation of blacks and the emigration of whites had, by the 1750s, raised the ratio as high as nine to one, a figure well beyond that found in Barbados and only slightly below that found in Jamaica. Such a racial distribution indeed made those parts of the lowcountry seem, in

¹⁴G. Terry Sharrer, "The Indigo Bonanza in South Carolina, 1740-1790," *Technology and Culture* XII (1971): 447-55, and "Indigo in Carolina, 1671-1796," this *Magazine* LXXII (1971): 94-103; David L. Coon, "Eliza Pinckney and the Reintroduction of Indigo Culture in South Carolina," this *Magazine* LXXX (1979): 61-76; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 174; Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Millwood, N.Y., 1983), p. 172.

¹⁵Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 131-66; "Estimated Population of the American Colonies: 1610-1780," in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Settlements to Society, 1584-1763: A Documentary History of the American Colonies* (New York, 1966), pp. 238-39.

the words of one contemporary, "more like a Negro country" than a settlement of people of European descent.¹⁶

Because of the proximity of the Spanish in Florida, the French in Louisiana, and many powerful Indian tribes, South Carolina, like the Caribbean colonies, already lived in persistent danger of external attack, and the large disproportion of blacks in the rural rice-growing areas gave the colony, again like those in the Caribbean, a potentially powerful domestic enemy. Based on that of Barbados, South Carolina's slave code was the most draconian on the continent, though some of the harshness that characterized Jamaican slavery may have been mitigated in South Carolina by the task system. Most South Carolina slaves worked not in gangs, like the sugar slaves of the Caribbean or the tobacco slaves of the Chesapeake, but by tasks, an arrangement that permitted the more industrious to grow their own produce and raise their own animals for sale to whites in a domestic marketing system that in its extent and economic importance probably approached that of Jamaica. For whatever reasons, South Carolina, in contrast to seventeenth-century Barbados and to Jamaica throughout the colonial period, both of which were riven by slave revolts, had only one major slave uprising, the Stono Rebellion of 1739. But the specter of slave revolt always lurked in the background. Also like the situation in the Caribbean colonies, South Carolina seems to have had a higher incidence of interracial sexual unions than any other colony on the continent.¹⁷

If staple agriculture and slavery brought South Carolina danger for whites and degradation for blacks, it also, by the middle of the eighteenth century brought whites wealth that, while considerably less than that enjoyed by their counterparts in Jamaica, far exceeded that of any other settler population in British North America. Per capita wealth in the Charleston District of South Carolina in 1774 was an astonishing £2,337.7, more than four times that of people living in

¹⁶Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 131-66.

¹⁷M. Eugene Sirmans, "The Legal Status of the Slave in South Carolina, 1670-1740," *Journal of Southern History* XXVIII (1962): 462-73; Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., XXXIX (1982): 563-99; Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 67-96, 105-79; David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua with Implications of Colonial British America* (Baltimore, 1985); Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados*, pp. 25-51; Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 308-26; Winthrop D. Jordan, "American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of Mulattoes in the British Colonies," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., XIX (1962): 183-200.

the tobacco areas of the Chesapeake and nearly six times greater than that of people living in the towns of New York and Philadelphia.

This wealth enabled South Carolina's richest planters and merchants to live a luxurious life comparable to that of similar groups in seventeenth-century Barbados and eighteenth-century Jamaica. Beginning in the 1740s, members of this group built, usually in the English style but sometimes with some West Indian modifications, several expensive public buildings and many sumptuous private houses. Most wealthy rice planters chose Charleston as the site for their most elegant residence, and, with this large absentee planter class resident for much of the year, Charleston, a city of 11,000 by the 1770s, was a lively cultural center with a library company, concerts, theatre, horse races, and a variety of benevolent organizations, fraternal groups, and social clubs. By the 1770s, some South Carolina families had become sufficiently wealthy that they were even following the example of the West Indians and abandoning the colony altogether. In the early 1770s, as many as fifty absentee South Carolina proprietors were living in London.¹⁸

An important reason why England appealed to both West Indians and South Carolinians was the appalling health conditions that obtained in their home colonies. Life expectancy in South Carolina seems to have been slightly better than that in either Jamaica or the Leeward Islands, both of which were notorious for their high mortality among both whites and blacks. But both Charleston and lowcountry South Carolina suffered from a disease environment that was far more malignant than that of any other British continental colony. Crude death rates recently calculated for Charleston in the 1720s show that they were almost twice as high as those in contemporary Philadelphia or England and Wales.¹⁹

¹⁸Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation To Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1980), p. 357; Richard Waterhouse, "The Development of Elite Culture in the Colonial American South: A Study of Charles Town, 1670-1770," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* XXVIII (1982): 391-404; Lewis P. Frisch, "The Fraternal and Charitable Societies of Colonial South Carolina" (B.A. Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1969); Diane Sydenham, "'Going Home': South Carolinians in England, 1745-1775" (unpublished seminar paper, Johns Hopkins University, 1975).

¹⁹Peter A. Coclanis, "Death in Early Charleston: An Estimate of the Crude Death Rate for the White Population of Charleston, 1722-1732," this *Magazine* LXXXV (1984): 280-91; H. Roy Merrens and George D. Terry, "Dying in Paradise: Malaria, Mortality, and the Perceptual Environment in Colonial South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* L (1984): 533-50.

V

South Carolina had begun in the late seventeenth century as an offshoot of the prolific Barbadian culture hearth; although it lagged somewhat behind, in its subsequent demographic, socio-economic, and cultural development it thus closely paralleled that of Jamaica, Barbados's other principal seventeenth-century colony. Both South Carolina and Jamaica were heavily involved in the production of agricultural staples and both imported extraordinarily high numbers of African slaves that resulted in a population in which the numerical preponderance of blacks was overwhelming. As a result, both had a harsh system of labor discipline and lived in fear of slave revolt. Elites in both colonies enjoyed phenomenal wealth that enabled them to live splendidly in the English manner and to build elaborate public buildings, private houses, and showy cultural institutions, while at least the wealthiest among them even managed altogether to escape the unhealthy disease environment that characterized both colonies.

If, however, the parallels were so striking, how do we explain why in the American Revolution Jamaica stayed within the British Empire, while South Carolina joined the other continental colonies in revolt? This question becomes more salient when we realize that the Jamaican Assembly in 1774 petitioned the Crown endorsing the American arguments against the Coercive Acts and other measures that led directly to the Revolution but indicating that its enormous population of slaves made it too weak to offer any physical resistance.²⁰

We may search for the answers to this puzzle in South Carolina's continental situation or in the many ways it had fallen short of Jamaica in realizing the full potential of the Barbados model in a larger physical setting. South Carolina did not have such a large or disproportionately black and slave population as did Jamaica, it had not had nearly so much overt slave unrest, and it had far less absenteeism and, perhaps, a white settler elite that was considerably more committed to maintaining its ties with the colony. Notwithstanding these important differences, however, South Carolina did have a lot of slaves, and in 1775-76 it was, in fact, nearly paralyzed by the fear that if it carried resistance against Britain too far political chaos and slave revolt might follow.²¹

²⁰Jamaica Assembly's Petition to the King, Dec. 28, 1774, in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives* (Washington, D.C., 1837-53), 4th ser., I, pp. 1072-74; George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica 1729-1783* (London, 1965), pp. 167-91; Richard B. Sheridan, "The Jamaican Slave Insurrection Scare of 1776 and the American Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* LXI (1976): 199-301.

²¹See Robert Olwell, "'Domestick Enemies': Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina" (unpublished seminar paper, Johns Hopkins University, 1985).

John Drayton, one of South Carolina's earliest social analysts, had, perhaps, a better answer to this question. During the twenty years before the Revolution, Drayton observed in his *View of South Carolina*, published in 1802, the wholesale influx of white settlers into the backcountry of South Carolina "added thousands to her domestic strength." That influx, which raised the colony's white population from 25,000 in 1750 to 87,000 in 1780, was by the mid-1770s slowly altering South Carolina's racial composition. Instead of 2 to 1, the proportion of black slaves to white free people was falling to 1.1 to 1, almost to parity. Only with the augmentation of her "domestic strength" in the form of growing numbers of whites, Drayton implied, did South Carolina have the wherewithal even to begin "collecting and preparing against a revolution." Without that vast immigration, Drayton thus suggested, South Carolina would have found it impossible to revolt — for the very same reason that deterred Jamaica. According to Drayton, this was the critical social fact that gave lowcountry South Carolina leaders the nerve to revolt.²²

Of course, it was a social fact that obtained only temporarily. As soon as backcountry planters could secure the capital to buy slaves, they did so, and the successful introduction of cotton culture into the area in the 1780s and 1790s greatly accelerated the process. In a very real sense, the spread of cotton and slavery across the Lower South over the next half century testified to the continuing viability and adaptability of the Barbadian social model.

That model had not, in any case, ever been confined by national boundaries. Already by the late seventeenth century, it was being successfully adapted by the French in the small islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. During the following century, it would be established, again by the French, in the large island colony of St. Domingue. In the nineteenth century, it was extended to the Spanish islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico. In the 1790s, the continuing affinity of lowcountry South Carolina with the West Indies was pointedly underlined by the ease with which the many refugees from the St. Domingue revolt, the only genuine social revolution to take place during the so-called era of democratic revolutions, were first welcomed by and then settled happily into lowcountry society.

²²John Drayton, *View of South Carolina* (Charleston, 1802), pp. 102-03.