

South carolina and the caribbean connection

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To most, South Carolina is simply just one of the United States, 50 states, and originally was on the thirteen original colonies that declared independence from the British Crown. However, this plot of land, which extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Appalachian Mountains, from the Savannah River to the sea, contains a rich historical pass of slavery, trade, cultivation and foreign influence which molded the beginnings of what we Americans know as South Carolina today. Today, South Carolina is ranked thirty-ninths for the total median income out of all fifty states, but in the early part of the 18th century was the most affluent colony.

What made South Carolina so successful? Slavery and the West Indies. The West Indies shaped the early colony of South Carolina, whether it was everyday cultural patterns of the colonists and slaves or their socio-economic status, strong ties and resemblances are seen with the Caribbean's citizen's and economy. Slavery played a large role in South Carolina society, the most influential members of society owned and used slaves, and the overall economic status was based off of that slave work.

In South Carolina, slaves from both India and Africa were used, however, the more dominant slave race was definitely those of African decent. They were believed to possess specific qualities such as familiarity with rice cultivation, which became the staple crop of South Carolina. They also had lived in malicious climates for centuries, and had developed the immunity of malaria. These distinctive skills and strengths suited them in Carolina lowlands, contributing greatly to their positive effect on the South Carolina colony.

Peter Wood, American historian and author of *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, concisely <https://assignbuster.com/south-carolina-and-the-caribbean-connection/>

sums up the role slaves played in South Carolina when he states “ Negroes Played a significant and often determinative part in the evolution of the colony” (Wood, XVII). The following paragraphs explore South Carolina from the 1670’s to the 1740’s and examine the elements of Caribbean influence seen throughout its early history and the developmental parallels between other Caribbean colonies.

In 1670 on the British island of Barbados, there were serious overpopulation problems, these problems eventually led to the colonization of South Carolina. Barbados was first settled in 1627, and for the following decade followed the economic pattern of the other British colonies, Bermuda and Virginia, by producing tobacco. By the end of the 1630’s Barbados had established itself as a successful producer for the English market, resulting in the high demand for Barbados land, as inhabitants covered all arable land on the island.

It was in the mid-1640’s that the true staple crop of Barbados was introduced, sugar. The sugar revolution not only brought an abundance of wealth to Barbados but “ By the early 1650’s... Barbados had achieved a population density greater than any comparable area in the English-speaking world” (Greene, 195). Sugar production required intensive labor, and as labor needs increased, so did the use of the more economical and reliable source of labor - African slaves. Barbados exemplified the first large-scale use of slavery and non-European labor of any English colony.

The island was “ the richest, most highly developed, most populous and most congested English colony in America... with 50, 000 inhabitants, including 30, 000 negroes,” unfortunately Barbados was just 166 sq, miles

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(Journal Of Caribbean History XVI, 1982). With such overpopulation, a substantial emigration began to occur. This exodus from Barbados made-up the wave of colonists of all socioeconomic statuses that traveled to the Carolinas. In 1663 King Charles II granted the land of the Carolinas to eight nobles, also know as the Lords Proprietor, to build the Carolina Colony.

These proprietors were extremely commercial, as they wished to gain quick profits in this new colony. All of the initial eight proprietors had ties with the Caribbean and Slavery. It is evident that even the earliest settlers European settlers were all connected by a past of slavery, furthermore, they also shared the same vision that Barbados “ could provide seasoned settlers from a short distance at a minimal cost” (Wood, 15). However their attempt to establish settlements failed. The first successful settlement came in late march of 1670 when the Carolina, under captain Henry Brayne, reached the Carolinas at Seewee Bay.

They set up a community at a location on the west bank of a nearby river now know as the Ashley. By the end of May the colonists from the wrecked Albermarle and estranged Port Royal reached this site. All three ships had come from Barbados. Barbadians played a large role in this first successful settlement. In the first two years, almost half of the whites and more than half of the blacks who settled in Carolina were from Barbados. Between the years of 1670-1690, 54% of the white settlers who immigrated to South Carolina came from Barbados. (Green, 197).

Barbadians from many varying social classes came to Carolina within the first two decades, ten percent (18/ 175) of Barbados elite sugar planting families obtained land in South Carolina. Thirty three mid-tier planting

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families, and a number of Barbadian merchants also acquired land in South Carolina. (Green, 197-198) The importance of the Barbadians immigration is noted in a Letter of Lord Ashley, to Yeamons (Whos this?) stating “ I am glad to hear soe many considerable men come from Barbadoes for wee find by deare Experience that noe other are able to make a Plantation... the rest serve onely to full up Numbers. (Coll. , V, 361) The staggering numbers of Barbadians amongst the original settlers begin to represent why the Caribbean had such a strong influence on South Carolina. It is evident that these immigrants were substantial men, looking for new land to take advantage of their expertise, providing a place to bolster and resemble the Barbadian economy. For many, South Carolina was not a place where these Barbadians wanted to start a new life, they were not in search of new culture, legislation, and economy, and instead they brought theirs with them. Slavery completely encompassed Barbadian culture and economy.

A slave society is defined as a society dominated by slavery, as Barbados was. Barbados was the first English colony to introduce large-scale slavery, and received much success in this venture. In Woods, Black Majority he states South Carolina, more so than any mainland colony, “ roots of settlement and early commercial ties stretched toward Barbados and the other islands of the English Caribbean... English colonists from the West Indies who were economically unable to bring negroes with them at least brought along the social aspiration of slave ownership” (Wood, 55).

Barbadians did not just bring energy, experience and wealth, but most importantly; they brought the cultural shaping and economy boosting, concept of slavery to South Carolina. South Carolina was the only mainland

English colony to begin its existence with a preference of African slave labor and a significant number of slaves as original settlers. The first documented Negro arrival in the colony came from Capt. Brayne when he reported on August 23, 1670 " one lust negro man 3. ristian servants and a oversear" (Waring, pp, 24-25) Three more slaves arrived several weeks later, and in September 1670 the first negroes recorded by name, John Sr. , Elizabeth, and John Jr. , arrived in South Carolina. with the ' First Fleet' of settlers. Moreover, reports have shown immigrations of ' able-bodied' men which were most likely referring to slaves. More negroes continued to arrive in South Carolina, " between one fourth and one thirds of the colony's newcomers were negroes" (Wood, 25). South Carolina was a slave society from the very beginning.

In a deposition on August 1, 1671, just a year after the first settlers arrived by the Ashley river, an Indian messenger reported on the South Carolina colony " that the settlement grows, that the castle is getting bigger [and] that many Negroes have come to work" (Childs, pp. 132-135) Slaves became the backbone of South Carolina; they were what kept the settlement from collapsing. John Yeamons Jr, the lieutenant governor and one of the original men who tried to establish the Carolina colony addressed the king stating " the settlements have beene made and upheld by Negroes and without contant supplies of them cannot subsist. (Salley, 67) There was an exponential increase in the amount of Negros from the late seventeenth century into the first part of the eighteenth century in South Carolina. The Black population in South Carolina went from about 2, 500 in 1700 to 5, 000 in 1710 to a staggering 39, 000 in 1730's. For the first 25 years, South

Carolina relied on Barbados for slaves until they black population was reproducing enough to become self-reliant. This reliance “ served to strengthen the existing ties to the sugar island and these bonds- helped predispose would-be planters in the mainland colony to black labor” (Wood, 46).

Wood’s statement shows that this South Caroline culture was based around black-labor, and that inhabitants were ‘ pre-disposed’ to use Black labor. The interest and abundance of black labor is evident from the 1670’s through 1740, these slaves shaped the economy and social hierarchy, but also displayed problems and resistance to the white slave owners. One of the main aspects of Carolina society that slavery and the West Indies influenced was the economy. From the start South Carolina exemplified “ strong commercial, materialistic and exploitative mentality” that was standard in the Caribbean culture (Greene, 198).

South Carolinians were avid in their search for a profitable agricultural staple, one that could do for South Carolina what sugar did for Barbados. Interest in Carolina settlement stemmed from Barbadians hopes for developing an economy that would benefit their own. While trying to find this staple agricultural product, South Carolina resorted to the raising of livestock. There was a strong demand for livestock in Barbados and other Caribbean islands, the English King confirms this point stating that “ Barbados and ye rest of ye caribee islands...have not food to fill their bellies. (Harlow, 283) From the earliest years, Carolina provided the island with food for the labor force, wood for caneboiling, and staves for the shipment of molasses sugar. By 1678, Barbados was shipping ten thousand pounds of

sugar to Carolina and paying good prices for the livestock. The sale of livestock to the Caribbean gave South Carolina the wealth to build more convenient houses and to purchase more negro- slaves. Responsibility for caring for the livestock fell on the slaves. Slaves would build the " cowpen, attend the calves and guard the grazing at night.

The care and maintenance of the livestock was no easy task, had it not been for the use of slaves such a project would have been extremely difficult. The early livestock economy also benefited the growth of South Carolina because " The New Settlers can be furnish'd with Stocks of Cattle and Corn" (Salley, 291). The link with the Caribbean islands and the reliance on slaves, molded the early economy of South Carolina, however, grazing was just the initial stage in the colony's economic growth, it wasn't until the 1690s that South Carolina found its key to economic success; rice.

Author of Black Majority, Peter Wood, described the importance of rice best when stating, " No development had greater impact upon the course of South Carolina history than the successful introduction of rice" (Wood, 35). Rice was the agricultural staple that the colonial planters could use to provide the basis for a viable plantation system based off the Barbadian model. Like sugar for Barbados, rice propelled South Carolina toward becoming one of the richest North American colonies, and " Charleston, its capital, one of wealthiest and most fashionable cities in early America"(Yale).

Although Slaves played a role in the grazing economy, their involvement in rice cultivation was staggering in comparison. It is no coincidence that following the introduction of rice production the slave population skyrocketed, soon passing the colonist population. This black majority was

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unprecedented in the England's North American colonies. African Slaves were needed for rice to be successful a successful crop, because planters and plantations owners were unfamiliar with the cultivation of rice. Slaves were the only settlers who had experience and were accustomed to growing rice.

They were used to the climate and could work efficiently in the hot Carolina weather, had great physical strength, and were immune to malaria. While not every African slave had come from a African rice field, there still hundred of black immigrants " more familiar with the planting, hoeing, processing and cooking of rice than were the European settlers who purchased them" (Wood, 61). Slaves were responsible for all stages of cultivation, from seeding in spring, hoeing in the summer, to making baskets in October when the grain was fanned.

All these skills were adopted from Africa, and the slaves did not alter their annual routine, no matter which side of the Atlantic they were working. To the English, rice was the staple they had been seeking for years, and the Africans were its most logical cultivators and processors. African Slaves were the largest factor for the wealth of South Carolina, at this point in South Carolina history, it is clear that this colony can be characterized as a slave society.

Barbados was the largest market for South Carolinas rice throughout the 1730s, in total, " the Island colonies took about 10 percent of South Carolinas total rice exports in 1717-1720. Nearly forty ships annually from the West Indies would arrive in Charleston with return cargoes of rice and other commodities for Jamaica, Barbados, the Leeward Islands and the <https://assignbuster.com/south-carolina-and-the-caribbean-connection/>

Bahamas. A fourth to a third of the total tonnage came from the West Indies, and about 15 percent to 25 percent of the ships leaving Charlestown traded to the West Indies" (Greene, 199-200).

The Caribbean not only provided South Carolina with a trade resource, but the model of a plantation society. This steady link between South Carolina and the West Indies, along with the use of slaves, not only shaped the economy but the social aspects of culture as well. Slaves in particular played a large part in the social culture of South Carolina. When settlers first came to the southern wilderness, there were no aspects of social hierarchy. Owning slaves soon became what Englishmen used to establish status distinctions in the mainland (Wood, 46).

Slaves were associated with wealth and class amongst this early society. Slaves also provided cultural advancements, more specifically the Gullah. Language was an extraordinary barrier in South Carolina; Gullah became the main form of communication and expression of people across different backgrounds. Even today, Gullah has direct ties and patterns with Black English (Wood, 191). Although slaves were at first looked upon as possessions, the normal appeal of a possession did not correlate to a positive outlook on slaves by the whites. The Reverend Francis Le Jau strove to teach religion amongst South Carolinians.

He was part of the newly created Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts. He recounts many obstacles trying to convert the blacks, he acknowledges language barriers but the main problem was the opinion slave masters had of slaves. To really display the social attitude towards slaves in Carolina, Le Jau recalls three quotes from slave masters; Slaves shouldn't

learn prayers because “ knowledge makes them worse”, there is no difference “ between slaves, and free Indians, and beasts,” and lastly one master asked Le Jau “ Is it possible that any of my slaves could go to Heaven, & must I see them there? (Ibid, p16) Although mistreated, slaves were very much apart of everyday life in society. Slavery completely changed the social demographic of South Carolina. By the 1720s, when the Crown assumed control, South Carolina, unlike any other mainland country, was demographically dominated by migrants from West Africa. Not only were the migrants superior in total numbers, but also in the pace of immigration and the rate of their natural increase (Wood, 145-166). The result of this demographic and a constant connection through trade with the Caribbean was a strong public interest in slavery.

Within the text of the South Carolina Gazette, one can analyze the viewpoints of the people in this slave society. The South Carolina Gazette was the state’s first successful newspaper and was printed from 1732 to 1775. The gazette not only displayed information regarding slaves but it often reported news from the West Indies. Slave advertisements and notices were common appearances in the Gazette. Although they were usually short in text, the ads offer large insight into the culture of a slave society. They shed light on what specific characteristics buyers looked for in slaves, such as the age, health, and where these slaves came from.

One such advertisement, in June of 1739, mentions a “ very fine cargo of able-bodied Gambia negroes. ” Another notice in the paper from July 7th 1733 reports a run away slave “ From Dr. Samuel Stevens plantation, A negro man named Pompey, and had on when he went away, a white negro

cloth jacket and breeches, almost worn out, and a blue and white negro cloth cap. Whoever bring the said negro to the plantation aforesaid, shall have reasonable satisfaction from Samuel Stevens. ” These two articles display the perceptions of the Africans.

The first article demonstrates a bias-towards Gambian Africans, this most likely stems from the fact that Gambia is located on the coast of Africa, where rice cultivation larger took place. This ad shows that slaves were often bought for their specific skills, as these slaves would be useful rice cultivation. Moreover, since slaves were bought for specific skills, this confirms the notion that South Carolina was never monoculture. Planters looked for more than just rice-orientated slaves because Carolina was still exporting some of its original products.

The first ad was surrounded by advertisements for consumer goods and tools. This is interesting because it portrays slaves as tools, not human life, and puts them on the same level of consumer goods. The inferiority of slaves is also portrayed in the ad about the runaway slave, as it mentions he was wearing a ‘ negro cloth jacket’, which was worn out, and a ‘ negro cloth cap,’ not only did the negroes wear worn out clothing, but the white master specifically mentions that it is negro clothing which is due to the 1735 act requiring a Negro Dress code, furthering the separation between whites and blacks of this slave society.

Lastly, the fact that a slave is running away shows insight to the tensions in between master and slave in the Carolinas (Wood, 239). While the South Carolina Gazette often portrayed negative opinions of Negroes, it also painted a portrait of problems in slave society. In South Carolina, slavery

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brought degradation for blacks, but also danger for whites. As the black population grew, and they began to show signs of their own culture, the white minority began to feel threatened (Wood, 195). Wood notes that previously slaves were “ taken as an asset, were now viewed in part by whites as a liability” (Wood, 220).

The Slave majority posed possible threats to the minority of whites, first is that it increased the chances of a foreign power to attack, it reduced the colonies defense of such attacks, and also increased the possibility of internal attacks as well. The South Carolina Gazette only printed the concerns of white Carolinians, whom took extreme interest in the published stories about aspects of other slave societies. In particular, many stories were reported of slave uprisings and revolts. One such article in the July 7th 1733 paper, reports of an uprising on The Robert; “ The Robert, Capt.

Hamilton, was lately blown up by the negroes on the Coaft of Guinea. ” These reports were often gruesome, which would cause extreme worry amongst the whites. The January 15, 1732 edition states, “ a Guinea-man belonging to Bristol, rose and destroyed the whole crew, cutting off the Captain’s Head, Legs and Arms. ” Reports from Jamaica appeared in the Gazette from 1732 through 1738, one such story quotes a White Jamaican saying, “ Our Rebellious negroes are so numerous that they attack us everywhere. ” (SCG, May 18 1734).

The South Carolina gazette was only printed once a week and contained only a select few news stories. The fact that the gazette published so many articles involving slave revolts portrayed the fear and anxiety of the white readers. These events held special concern for the whites of South Carolina, <https://assignbuster.com/south-carolina-and-the-caribbean-connection/>

because South Carolina resembled colonial Caribbean powers, especially Jamaica, the one area with the most dramatic reports of slave rebellions. Like South Carolina, Jamaica was heavily involved in production of agricultural staples.

It imported extremely high numbers of African slaves which resulted in a black majority, it had a harsh system of labor discipline, the elites were extremely wealthy, and was plagued by a disease filled environment which caused high mortality rates. It is shocking how closely they resembled one another. What's even more surprising is that the whites in Carolina did not learn from the Caribbean mistakes. Carolina experienced patterns of black slave resistance such as running away, poisoning, arson and conspiracy.

From the beginning of its existence, South Carolina was always connected with the Caribbean, a prime example of this connection are South Carolina slave acts. The original slave regulations were borrowed from the Barbados, and they were almost identical. As South Carolina began to establish itself and develop their own acts, the regulations became considerably harsher. Rev. Le Jau, on August 30, 1712, wrote, " There has been a severe act to punish our slaves, lately past in this province.

Runaway slaves are to be Mutilated; and at last put to death if they absent themselves for the fourth time for fourteen days. I have taken the Liberty to say Mutilation and Death too great punishments" (Wood, 138). Many acts and laws were put in place but when a new act was passed in 1734 to extend the extent of the 1720's patrol act, worsened the brutality of slaves. The South Carolinian leaders felt that harsh laws, and publish punishment would

help by making the Slaves more submissive. This concept was extremely false.

Jamaica in the late seventeenth century experienced an onslaught of slave resistance due to extreme cruelty. It was soon realized that strengthened systems, an increase in brutality and punishments provoked, instead of deterred, slave resistance when in 1740 South Carolina was torn by what is know as the Stono Rebellion. A group of slaves, in search for liberation, joined together to rebel against the whites, resulting in the deaths of more than sixty people (Wood, 308). This rebellion opened the eyes of everyone, as it displayed the possible dangers of slaves.

The Stono rebellion holds more significance as “ it can be seen as a turning point in the history of South Carolina’s black population,” never again did a time such severe racial unrest occur (Wood, 308). From its initial settlement in 1670 to the Stono Rebellion in 1740 South Carolina established itself as one of the wealthiest North American colonies. This reign of success would not have been possible without the Caribbean and the development of a slave society. Unlike any other North American colony of its time, South Carolina, displayed a culture that was based around African Slavery.

Early Barbadian settlers, who represented over fifty percent of the early Carolina settlers, brought the concept of slavery to South Carolina. Basing its economy off a profitable agricultural staple, and using slaves whose active involvement “ undertook all the routine activities” on the plantation, South Carolina began to take face of a colonial Caribbean island (Wood, 198). The social demographics of this region displayed a large black majority, almost 9 blacks to every 1 white in areas of the lowlands.

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The economy was sustained by the blacks, the population was majority black, this society was so reliant on the black slaves, even one Swiss newcomer named Samuel Dyssli in 1737 said of Carolina " looks more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people" (Wood, 132). Dyssli observations are far from unordinary, and were not the only of its kind. In South Carolina, whether it was trade, culture, plantation systems, or economics, the Caribbean colonies have influenced it in such a way that it was often referred to as " Carolina in Ye West indies" (Woods, 160).

Dyssli was correct in calling Carolina a negro country, however, so was the English document stating Carolina in ye West Indies, Carolina was molded into the wealthy North American colony it once was, due to the West Indies influence and the advantages of the African slaves. Works Cited Carey, Bev. The Maroon Story: the Authentic and Original History of the Maroons in the History of Jamaica, 1490-1880. Gordon Town, Jamaica: Agouti, 1997. Print. Childs. Colonization. 132-35. Print. " Collections. " Print. Rpt. n South Carolina Historical Society. Vol. V. Charleston: South Carolina Historical Society. 361. Print. Greene, Jack P. " Colonial South Carolina and the Caribbean Connection. " The South Carolina Historical Magazine Oct. 1987: 192-210. Jstor. Web. 20 June 2011. . Harlow, Todd V. " Francis Lord Willoughby. " A History of Barbados, 1625-1685. Oxford: Clarendon, 1926. 283. Print. Jau, Francis Le. The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau, 1706-1717 (University of California Publications in History). Kraus, 1980.

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