Plantation Paranoia: Tracing the Roots of Colonial Identity in South Carolina

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In Search of Identity

The articulation of a sense of self is one of the driving forces in social formation. For a historian to understand a given society, he or she must first develop an understanding of that society's collective sense of self-awareness. This identity is inextricably linked to perception, both of one's self and of one's environment. Perception very rarely, if ever, mirrors reality. Yet perception informs reality because individuals and groups base their actions on their perception. In essence, they act in accordance with their own established identity.

Colonial America provides a unique laboratory for the study of the development and evolution of group identity. Unlike the European societies from which they emerged, American colonial societies have identifiable beginnings that are well documented in the historical record. Through an analysis of this documentary record, the historian can identify the ways in which colonists acquired coherent identities as peoples and societies knitted together by a series of common aspirations and shared experiences in a time-specific and place-specific situation. Any corporate identity, by nature, must be stereotypical. However, recognition of this sense of self-awareness is important, for this identity is the only collective articulation of self-definition and thereby central to an understanding of the foundations of these new societies.1

This essay traces the roots of colonial identity in South Carolina during the Proprietary and Royal periods, roughly from the founding of the colony to the American Revolution. Being chiefly concerned with identity,
the essay does not provide a thorough interpretation of social, political, and economic events in the colony's colonial period. Instead, it places these items in the context of a developing sense of self. This work relies heavily on the contemporary documentary record and, by necessity, is essentially an examination of white male identity. This gender and race exclusion certainly merits explanation. There are few extant accounts written by females. Similarly, writings by blacks in the period are basically non-existent. However, if such writings existed, they would be unnecessary for this study because the black population did not have an internal role in the formation of a colonial identity in South Carolina. Instead, the black majority served as a critical external agent acting upon the identity formation process of whites.

Jack Greene describes three sequential and generally distinguishable phases in the process of identity formation in colonial British plantation America:

During the first phase, characteristics of place usually assumed primacy. That is, settlers and their sponsors tended to identify their society in terms of the nature and potentialities of the place in which they lived. During a second phase, they tended to define themselves more in terms of how they were actually organizing their social and cultural landscapes and the extent to which those landscapes did - or did not - conform to inherited notions and standards of how such landscapes should be organized. Finally, during a third phase, they gave increasing emphasis to their predominant characteristics as
people and to the common experiences shared by themselves and their ancestors. In its process of identity formation, South Carolina experienced these three phases, but they were not truly sequential. In order to deal with local potentialities of place, the dominating feature of the first phase, the colonists not only had to cope with the natural environment but with the existing human environment as well. Thus, they had to come to grips with the existence of the neighboring indigenous populations in addition to the presence of the French, Spanish, and, most importantly, the black slave. Even as the identity formation process moved into the second and third stages, the South Carolinians never were able to escape the human element involved in organizing and securing the landscape.

A New Eden

The European powers opened the New World within an Edenic mythology. The Europeans believed that somewhere in the West there was a paradise, a new Eden. The strangeness of the Americas fueled this notion of an undiscovered promised land, and certainly the chaos, melancholy, and weariness of the European situation made the possibility of another Garden more realistic and more desirable.

The English were slow to show an interest in the New World and its possibilities for settlement. In 1497, John Cabot visited the New World, giving the English a claim to some of its land. However, the English
accomplished little more in this area for more than a half-century. The Crown was trying to establish some stability in the wake of the War of the Roses, and the rest of Europe demanded more attention than an unknown body of land in another hemisphere. Additionally, Spain, the most powerful of the European nations in this era, controlled the portions of the New World that seemed most promising.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, English attitudes concerning the New World began to shift. Expansionists like Sir Walter Raleigh and Richard Haklyut recognized that England's survival in world politics depended on establishing a foothold in the New World. These promoters of foreign settlement increasingly looked south in search of a strategic location that could provide a safe haven for military expeditions that sought to interrupt Spanish commerce and communication. Some of these promoters recognized and emphasized the economic possibilities of New World settlement. In the 1570's and 1580's, numerous promotional volumes encouraged settlement for the purpose of personal and imperial economic gain. Clearly, the New Eden and a brand of English mercantilism would go hand in hand. One widely read work, merchant John Frampton's translation of Spaniard Nicholas Monardes' *Joyfull Newes Out Of The New Founde Worlde*, promised the public that all the ills of mankind could be cured through American settlement and that the warmer regions of the South were the most productive in the New World, much like paradise, being full of all the good things that existed before the fall of man in the Garden. Thomas Hariot put this notion into more commercial terms in his popular work, *A*
brief and true report of the new found land of Virginia (1588). He asserted that

such commodities there alreadie found or to be raised, which will not onely serue the ordinary turnes of you which are and shall bee the planters and inhabitants, but such an ouerplus sufficiently to bee yelded, or by men of skill to bee prouided, as by wasy of trafficke and exchaunge with our owne nation of England, will enrich you selues the prouiders, those that shall deal with you, the enterprisers in general, and greatly profit our owne countrey men, to supply them with most things which heretofore they haue bene faine to prouide, either of strangers or of our enemies: which commodities for distinction sake, I call Merchantable.  

The English had enjoyed surprising success in their eastern trade, but this success led to a severe capital shortage. The need for an imperial commodities source was critical, and the Americas were the logical starting point.

South Carolina's history as an English colony began with the settlement of Charleston in 1670. The English attempted to settle in northern Carolina (part of present day North Carolina) in 1584, but the Roanoke Island colony mysteriously disappeared. Following this failure, the English focused their attention further north to Virginia and New England and much further south to the Caribbean. However, the other European powers did not abandon the area. Spain tried to plant several settlements in the vicinity of Port Royal (near present-day Beaufort), only to withdraw for
one reason or another each time. The French attempted to settle in the same area twice, once in 1562 and again in 1566, only to be destroyed by a combination of nature and Spanish aggression.  

Following mainland successes in Virginia and Massachusetts, the English Crown was willing to try again at settling Carolina in 1629. On October 30, 1629, Charles I granted a charter to Sir Robert Heath. However, no colony resulted from this charter. In 1663, Charles II revoked the Heath charter, granting the area under the original charter to the Lords Proprietors of Carolina. In 1665, the Crown issued a second charter with a greater land area than the first. From this charter emerged the Proprietary colony of Carolina which later became the Royal colonies of North and South Carolina.

Goals and Expectations

The goals and expectations of the colonists in South Carolina played a critical role in the identity formation process. In the case of South Carolina, the goals of the earlier settlers contributed significantly to the long term development of the colony and, thus, deserve extra attention. Of special importance are the goals of the Lords Proprietors who through their leadership during the early years of the colony did more to help in the formation of a South Carolina identity than did any other individual or group in the colony's history.
Almost immediately after receiving the Crown's grant, the Lords Proprietors were contacted by a group of Barbadian planters interested in establishing a settlement in Carolina. During the written exchange with these planters, the proprietors provided the first indication of their goals and expectations:

We conceive it will be advantageous to the King, his people, and more particularly to your Islanders to go on with the settlement, where the air is, we are informed, wondrous healthy and temperate, the land proper to bear such commodities as are not yet produced in the other plantations and such as the nation spends in great quantities, as wine, oil, currants, raisins, silks, &c. . . . by means wherof the money of the nation that goes our for these things will be kept in the King's Dominions, and the planting part of the people will employ their time in planting those commodities that will not injure nor overthrow the other plantations. 9

Their intent was clear. The proprietors hoped to establish a plantation colony that would take its place in and contribute to the mercantile system by providing agricultural staples not produced anywhere else in the English empire. The Barbadians proceeded with their settlement which failed, but they maintained the optimism of the proprietors.

[Carolina] both for navigation and plantation, exceed all places that we know in possession of our nation in the West Indies and we do assure ourselves that a colony of English here planted with a moderate support in their infant tendency would in a
very short time improve themselves to a perfect commonwealth
enjoying a self-sufficiency of all the principal necessities to life,
and abounding with a great variety of superfluity for the
invitation of foreign commerce and trade.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1669, the Lords Proprietors launched a settlement effort from the
mother country. Before the first wave of emigrants departed, Lord Ashley
presented the Fundamental Constitutions which he had co-written with his
secretary John Locke. These Constitutions represented the proprietors'
attempt to fully control the political, economic, and social organization of the
new colony. The document was a formula for the creation of a mercantile
plantation society dominated by a landed aristocracy.\textsuperscript{11} The system of land
distribution provided for in the Constitutions assured that the "nobles" would
own two-fifths of the land in each county. The document called for counties
to be divided into forty 12,000 acre plots. Eight of the plots in each county
were to be owned by the proprietors (one plot each in every county). One
resident, a landgrave, was to hold four plots, and two residents, called
cassiques, were to have two plots each. The remaining twenty-four plots
were to be divided among the "people" who received a headright grant
according to the number of persons under their care. The Constitutions did
not create a glass ceiling, for they encouraged expansion by providing for
further grants of land with the addition of children, servants, or slaves, and
they guaranteed barony status for those who could acquire at least 3,000
acres of land through grant or sale. The land was rent free for ten years and
then was subject to an annual quit rent payable to the proprietors. Lord
Ashley had experience in colonial matters, having been involved in colonial
administration in London for a number of years, and he was aware of the importance of providing for a labor force in Carolina. To that end, he and Locke made black slavery a fundamental part of the society's organization. It is important to note that these Fundamental Constitutions were never legally implemented because they were never approved by the provincial legislative group in Carolina. However, they provide a clear indication of the proprietors' intent; they were, in fact, the model used by the Lords Proprietors in their governance of the colony during the Proprietary period.

The instructions given to Joseph West, the commander of the initial settlement voyage, further indicate their emphasis on the establishment of a plantation economy. The proprietors instructed West to sail to Barbados where he was to take on additional colonists and a variety of seeds and vines. The gentlemen requested regular accounts of "how much land you have fallen, what you have planted, and how every specie thrives . . . ." Clearly the colony was not making the progress desired by the proprietors, for in 1674, the eight removed Governor John Yeamans and replaced him with West. Accompanying the orders was this warning: "And therefore, if you intend to have supplies for the future, you will do well to consider how you will pay us, in what commodities you can best do it, and how the trade of these commodities you can produce may be so managed as to turn to account." The Barbadians who landed with the first group of settlers in 1670 were only a portion of the many who migrated from the West Indian island to South Carolina in the colony's early years. Before the establishment of the proprietary colony in 1670, several groups of Barbadian planters, like the
ones mentioned earlier, attempted to establish roots in the region of Carolina. Some were able to subsist for several months while others landed and, for one reason or another, returned as soon as possible. When the colonization efforts in the area received the financial backing of the proprietors in 1669-70, the luck of the Barbadians wishing to settle on the mainland changed substantially. One should not underestimate the influence of this group in the development of South Carolina as a colony and in the formation of its colonial identity. 

Agnes Leland Baldwin's listing of the colonists coming to South Carolina between 1670 and 1680 reveals that more than half of those to which she could assign places of origin came from Barbados or other English Caribbean islands. A possibly more reliable study covering the first twenty years of the colony demonstrates that 712 of the 1,343 whites who immigrated to South Carolina came from the Barbados. These individuals were people from all social classes who financed their journey to the mainland in a variety of ways. However, the vast majority were from the small planter and freeman planter class. This does not mean that large Barbadian planters did not migrate north to Carolina or at least obtain land there. Richard Waterhouse's work indicates that representatives from thirty-three middling planter families settled in Carolina between 1670 and 1690. For the same period, according to Richard Dunn, representatives of eighteen of the largest 175 planter families in Barbados acquired land in South Carolina. Four men from these big planter families became governors in South Carolina between 1670 and 1737. Of the twenty-three governors in
this period, seven had Barbadian backgrounds and four more came from other Caribbean islands.\textsuperscript{18}

The sheer number of Barbadian immigrants was impressive, but more important were the goals of these immigrants and how these contributed to the colony's identity. In many ways, their expectations were the same as the English. They wanted to find financial success, and they believed that the way to that success was through the development of a staple crop plantation economy rooted in a mercantile system. This was what the Barbadians knew; this was the system they had lived and worked under for forty years of Barbadian settlement. Barbados was an extremely wealthy place in the seventeenth century, a place where sugar seemed to flow freely at the expense of a bound African labor force. However, by 1670, all of the land on the island was tied up in ownership, and the best land was part of the largest plantations. Younger sons had no room of their own, and those new to the island had no place to begin.\textsuperscript{19} The logical move for these men was to South Carolina, where a group of Englishmen had committed themselves to the establishment of a plantation economy and where observers had said the riches awaited through agriculture.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Coming to Terms with Carolina}

The early settlers brought lofty goals and high expectations into Carolina. Many of the initial immigrants had colonial experience, and all eight Lords Proprietors had been involved in previous colonization activities
of one kind or another. One, John Berkeley, had even been a colonial governor in Virginia. The group was confident that they could use the lessons of previous English colonial efforts and create the ideal plantation society, one with a land-based aristocracy supported by the production of one or more staple crops.

Previously, Europeans had occupied the land included in the grant, and they had reported on its qualities heavily. However, these reports often embellished the true nature of the conditions there. The proprietors hoped to produce commodities not available within the English empire, many of which had proved successful in Mediterranean or semi-tropical locations. Unfortunately, the Carolina climate and soil was unable to support such endeavors. The Carolina climate was fairly temperate but subject to seasonal extremes, such as oppressively hot periods in the summer and occasional severe frosts in the late fall, winter, and early spring. The land presented a much larger problem; it was terribly inconsistent. Soil and terrain patterns in Carolina could be divided into three general groups. The first, the good land, was generally located in close proximity to rivers and had deep, moist soil. However, this land was subject to frequent "inundations such a depth of prolific manner" due to the extensive system of streams, low islands, and marshes. Furthermore, this land was generally heavily covered with trees. The second type of land was "of most use," not being subject to inundation and having adequate soil. The final type of land was "a light sterile sand, productive of little else but pine trees."21

Another serious problem for the early Carolinians involved the social and political organization sought by the proprietors. The highly ordered
method of land distribution assumed that the land would be uniform in layout. The fact that it was not created considerable confusion, especially when questions of water frontage arose. Additionally, the settlers complained that the proprietors and noblemen held too much of the good land. This problem prompted Edward Randolph, collector of customs for the Crown, to report during his visit in 1699 that "There are few settled inhabitants in this Province; the Lords have taken up vast tracts of land for their own use . . . where land is commodious for settlement, which prevents peopleing the place, and makes them less capable to preserve themselves."22

The first thirty years of settlement failed to bring the realization of the early settlers' and proprietors' goal of developing a staple crop plantation economy. However, by 1699, change was on the horizon. Randolph noted in the same report that "great improvement" had been made in the colony, for "they have now found out the true way of raising and husking rice." He also believed Carolina to be "the only place" in the colonies for the consistent production of tar and pitch. The South Carolinians were persistent, and their patience paid dividends. They recognized the ineffectiveness of their original plans, made the necessary alterations, and used the environment to their advantage.

By 1715, rice was a viable export commodity, and for the next seventy years, Europeans regarded the South Carolina variety as the world's best.23 Rice cultivation was well-suited for Carolina's "best" land because it could withstand, in fact thrive in, wet environments.24 Additionally, black slavery, already solidly institutionalized in the province, provided the necessary labor needed to perform the back-breaking work involved in
cultivation. In fact, many of the African slaves possessed a more than adequate understanding of rice growing techniques. No other English subjects produced rice for export. Thus, the South Carolinians had the market cornered, and they pursued that market's expansion with a dogged persistence. Not content with the existing landscape, albeit effective, the planters used the latest in technology to reshape much of the land. They reclaimed swamp and marshlands, built dams and levies for protection from excessive moisture during the planting season, and established reservoirs that provided a flood source, if necessary, during the growing period. The South Carolina rice trade substantially affected the Crown's economic position in international trade and vaulted the province to a position of commercial prominence.\textsuperscript{25}

Edward Randolph's proclamation concerning the potential of South Carolina tar and pitch came in only the second year of the commodities' wide-scale production.\textsuperscript{26} Twenty-three years later, in 1722, South Carolina exported annually 60,000 to 70,00 barrels of the commodities, making the colony the largest single exporter of tar and pitch in the English world.\textsuperscript{27} The season for making tar and pitch in South Carolina exceeded that in Virginia and in the northern mainland colonies by two months. As a result of its productivity, South Carolina supported the maintenance on large portions of His Majesty's navy and the English fleet while greatly reducing the amount of naval stores imported from the North Seas states.\textsuperscript{28} Planters carried out tar and pitch production with chattel slave labor on the third grade of Carolina land, "pine barren land" only able to support the growth of
trees; therefore, rice cultivation and tar and pitch production did not represent competing interests.29

In rice and in tar and pitch, South Carolina colonists found staple commodities to carry them through the larger part of the eighteenth century. In indigo, they found a staple to help close the colonial period and carry them into a new era. Indigo had been cultivated in the first years of the colony with only limited commercial success. Late in the 1730's Eliza Lucus, upon the request of her father, began to experiment with a different West Indian strain of indigo. In 1744, she produced her first successful crop.30 With a lower weight-to-price ratio, indigo proved an effective alternative to rice during times of economic difficulty; thus, its cultivation spread quickly to other plantations. Figures from the early 1750's show indigo exports in the area of 60,000 pounds annually. Ten years later that figure had grown to almost 500,000, and by 1775, South Carolina exported roughly 1,200,000 pounds of indigo annually.31 London's only other sources of good dye were the French islands, so once again, a South Carolina product met a English mercantile need.

These three staples brought riches to the South Carolina, but the plantation economy was considerably diverse after 1700. An analysis of the reports of two governors, Nathaniel Johnson and James Glen in 1708 and 1751 respectively, reveals that the products of trade were virtually the same in the two years. However, the volume of goods and the destinations of the shipments were substantially different. By 1750, over 3,000,000 acres of land had been cleared or were already under cultivation. Nearly 500 ships arrived in Charleston, making the Cooper River seem at times like "a kind of
founding market place." South Carolina had come of age. The province was, as originally intended, a booming plantation society supported by staple crops and their export abroad.

Plantation Economy and Cultural Developments

A particular set of social developments accompanied the rise of the plantation economy in South Carolina. Commercial success promoted an economy of abundance, an abundance of both wealth and leisure time. As a result of these developments, people began to characterize themselves with elements that were not associated with the natural landscape.

Social life in South Carolina revolved around Charleston. In fact, some argued that Charleston contained the only real "society" in the colony. As Charleston and the lowcountry went, so went South Carolina. By the end of the colonial period, Charleston had taken its place among America's great cities. In his *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia*, Alexander Hewat provides his interpretation of town life and society in the 1760's:

With respect to the towns in Carolina, none of them, excepting Charleston, merit the smallest notice. Beaufort, Puryburgh, Jacksonburgh, Dorchester, Camden, and Georgetown, all are inconsiderable villages, having in each no more than twenty, thirty, or at most, forty dwelling houses. But Charleston, the capital of the Province, may be ranked with the first cities of
British America, and yearly advances in size, riches, and population.  

The successful plantation economy brought enormous amounts of wealth to the colonists. On the eve of the American Revolution, the mean total wealth per "probate-type" wealth holder in Charleston was £2,337.7 sterling, far outstripping any other equivalent figures in the English world. James Glen noted in 1751 that there were some houses in the town valued at more than £1,200 sterling and that "as they [the people of the town] thrive they delight to have good things from England. There is scarce a tolerable house in Charles Town which has not a chaise or a chair belonging to it."

The city's wealth and the attitude that accompanied such wealth amazed and occasionally appalled visitors to Charleston. George Whitefield wrote in his journal during a 1740 visit, "I question whether the Court-End of London could exceed them in affected finery, gaity of dress," and an unknown gentleman traveller in 1774 noted that "several carry their luxury so far as to have carriages, horses, coachmen, and all imported from England." Thomas Griffiths said of the Charleston merchants in 1768, "they are arrived to a great highth of pride: they certainly do and can afford to live very well . . . ." This high living concerned Philadelphia merchant William Pollard:

This is a very gay place and the people in business live in too high a manner, in my opinion. Some of their side tables are furnished in such a manner as wou'd disgrace a nobleman's dining room. I sometimes see a gentleman with a sword by his
side who will sell me a single pair of gloves or a quarter of a yard of linen.  

The benefits of the expansion of the plantation economy were not limited to Charleston and the lowcountry. In his 1808 *History of South Carolina*, David Ramsay describes the upward mobility of the pre-Revolutionary backcountry planters, many of whom started from "bare creation. . . . From such humble beginnings hundreds of families in Carolina have gradually raised to easy circumstances."  

The economy of abundance prompted the growth of what could be termed a "high culture" in the colony. Those who did not have concerns of subsistence could focus many of their energies on more leisurely pursuits. Charleston residents established a local theater and regularly sponsored musical performances in the homes of the elite. Dancing assemblies popped up all over the colony, and the many horse races rivaled those famous in the Chesapeake for their gambling, competitive spirit, and elite spectator appeal. Women and men formed associations and societies dedicated to one thing or another and met regularly to discuss issues of concern. The education of young men became a priority. In 1712, the Free School Act established schools in Charleston and St. Helena Parish. Another act in 1724 created a school in Dorchester, and in 1755, the Winyaw Indigo Society entered "into a voluntary society for founding and erecting a free school at Georgetown."  

Architecture, however, provides possibly the strongest example of the development of a Carolina high culture, especially that in Charleston. During the first three decades of the eighteenth century, Charleston architectural conventions broke from the medieval mode and
assumed a Renaissance quality. Grid-like street plans, sewage and water systems, and public gardens brought order to the city streets. Residential architecture generally took on a Georgian form, providing more size and a greater openness than previous homes. Most telling was the proliferation and prominence of elaborate public buildings, churches and state buildings, that brought excessive elegance to necessary function. The lament of religious leaders demonstrates some of the negatives involved in this economy of abundance and the formation of a high culture. As early as 1711, ministers deplored the spiritual conditions of the province. In that year, the Reverend Gideon Johnston commented to his English sponsors about an illness that swept through the colony. He wrote, "But I verily think, it is a sort of Plague, a kind of judgement upon this Place for they are a sinful people . . . ." In 1727, the Reverend William Guy of St. Andrews Parish alluded to the late freedom in the passage of time enjoyed by some of his parishioners and remarked that "their sentiments in matters of religion were very unsettled . . . ." As time passed, the criticisms worsened. In 1736, Thomas Thompson of St. Bartholomews Parish wrote the following to the Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel:

I wish I may be able to give a more comfortable and satisfactory account concerning the spiritual state of this parish; for the predominant vice here, as far as I can observe, is . . . excessive love and eager pursuit of the things of this world, as make men wholly unmindful of the concerns of Another, and indifferent about all the means of religious instruction.
George Whitefield echoed these concerns in his journal after a visit to Charleston in 1740. "[I] was grieve to find such little concern in the congregation . . . I seemed to them as one who mocked."46

A Frontier Defensive

The existence of a fairly diversified plantation economy that provided material abundance and strains of high culture did not alter the fact that South Carolina was a frontier society. Throughout the colonial period, the settlers dealt with the problems that commonly confronted those living on the edge of settlement, but the South Carolinians were in a particularly precarious predicament. In addition to dealing with the everyday complications of living in a developing society, the colonists found themselves virtually surrounded by potentially hostile human forces.

Colonial frontier life was truly a life or death situation. The battle began as soon as ships sailing for the New World left port. The Irishman Robert Witherspoon writes of his voyage, "The second day of our sail my grand mother died and was intered in the rigion Ocean which was an affective sight to her offspring."47 Upon arrival, the region's environment was much more demanding than that of the motherland. The harsh summer heat accompanied by the labor often required just to survive threatened all those who did not "season" quickly. That was the fate of Judith Manigault's brother. Apparently, he was quite a strong and handsome man, but he succumbed to a fever "due to hard labor." His sister notes that the whole family had been affected by the land's hardship. She wrote in a letter, "We
have experienced every kind of affliction - disease, pestilence, famine, poverty, hard labor."48 If one survived, the psychological effect could be equally devastating. Witherspoon lamented, "When we arrived and saw nothing but wilderness . . . our spirits quite sunk . . . The wolves began to howl on all sides, we then feared being devoured by wild beasts, and I believe we all sincerely wished ourselves again at Belfast."49 In later years, backcountry settlement helped to alleviate the severity of the wilderness, but the battle for life continued. As Eliza Pinckney noted in 1760 during the Charleston smallpox epidemic, the colony was subject to a variety of sickness.50 Thomas Pratt confirmed this notion, or at least the colonists' belief therein, when, in 1770, he informed Dr. Benjamin Rush of the particularly high concentration of "medical men" in the province.51 Many of these characteristics of hardship were not unique to South Carolina, but the harsh conditions affected South Carolinians, as they affected all colonists, in a very profound way.

The geographic position of South Carolina was unique. The colony rested in what could be considered the most international portion of colonial mainland America. English South Carolina bordered French territory and Indian nations to the west and Spanish possessions to the south. European conflagrations that spread to North America often found easy kindling in this region, as all three principal European North American colonizing powers held an interest there. The native American presence only accelerated the tensions as the Europeans competed for indigenous favor. The South Carolinians were acutely aware of their vulnerability and internalized this weakness to the point of paranoia.
The French proved the least menacing of the groups, but they still created a great deal of anxiety, especially during the early colonial period. Edward Randolph reported in 1699 to the Board of Trade that he found "the Inhabitants greatly alarmed upon the news that the French continue their resolution to make a settling at Messasipi River, from whence they may come over land to the head of the Ashley River without opposition." Governor Robert Johnson echoed this concern twenty years later. In his report to officials in London, he made a plea for assistance in stopping the movement of the French influence in the interior:

These great preparacions of settling the Missisipi cannot but very much alarm all the continents of America and especially Carolina that lies so near them for even in time of peace they underhand incence the Indians against us and encourage them to make inroads upon us to the great damage and hazard of our out most settlements. But [if] there should ever be a warr between the Crowns of France and England this province would fall an easy prey to them. . . . Indeed, they are about makeing another fort among our Indians above one hundred miles nearer us and thus will keep encroaching upon us from time to time if not prevented the manner of which your lordships can best judge it being our of our power to put any stop thereto.53

The Indians on the western frontier presented a greater and longer lasting concern for the South Carolina settlers. James Glen wrote in 1763 that "the concerns of this country are so closely connected and interwoven with Indian affairs, and not only a great branch of our trade, but even the
safety of this Province, do so much depend on our continuing in friendship with the Indians." Upon first arriving in Carolina in 1670, the settlers heard tales of a cannibalistic tribe to the north. The tales proved false, but they certainly heightened the colonists' tensions and created an added sense of suspicion. Unlike the French, the Indians were not at a distance. Robert Witherspoon recalled that "when they came to hunt in the spring they were in great numbers in all places, like the Egyptian locust." English officials were aware of their tenuous relationship with the natives and, with care, sought to maintain a comfortable friendship with them. The Indian skin and fur trade sustained the colonies through the early lean years and continued to expand after 1700, considerably supplementing crop cultivation. By 1708, the colony's trade with the natives had extended beyond 300 miles from Charleston, and by 1715, 28,000 Indians traded for over 10,000 sterling yearly with 200 English Indian traders. However, 1715 represented a critical turning point in colony-Indian relations. The natives grew weary of dishonest English traders and abusive trading practices and "most of them rose in rebellion and murdered the said traders and severall of the planters and their families that lay most exposed to them." The Yamassee War that ensued brought 10,000 Indians to arms and resulted in the deaths of 400 South Carolinians. By year's end, the colonists had subdued the uprising, but isolated attacks on outlaying plantations continued. In 1717, in a petition to the Crown, the colonial assembly wrote

Out of extreme grief we are under to see our country still harassed and our fellow subjects killed and carried away by our
savage Indian enemies . . . our Indians continue committing so many hostilities, and infesting our settlements and plantations to such a degree, that not only those estates which were deserted at the breaking out of war cannot be resettled, but others are daily likewise thrown up to the mercy of the enemy.

Matters improved gradually throughout the 1720's, but, as a result of the war, South Carolina lost probably half of its Indian trading partners to the French and Spanish, naturally making those tribes more hostile to the English. The English focused their attention on the huge Cherokee nation that dominated the mountains to the west. In order to secure stability, the colonists executed two substantial treaties with the Cherokee which provided a shaky peace and a flimsy alliance that lasted only until the American Revolution.

The documentary record demonstrates that the South Carolinians were most openly concerned about the Spanish presence in the area. Nathaniel Johnson wrote, "St. Augustine, a Spanish garrison begin planted to the southward of us about a hundred leagues, makes Carolina a frontier to all the English settlements on the maine." In 1670, parts of South Carolina were legally in Spanish Florida, but the Spaniards raised no initial opposition to the settlement at Charleston. However, they flatly rejected English settlement further south. On August 17, 1686, the Spanish attacked a settlement of Scottish Dissenters near Port Royal. The 100 invaders burned the little town, murdered one, kidnapped thirteen slaves, and cleared the houses of all their goods. They threatened to destroy the town built upon
the Ashley and Cooper Rivers [Charleston], claiming the whole region as their own. In 1702, the English conducted a poorly executed invasion of St. Augustine. They suffered only two casualties but gained little during a lengthy siege. The colonists believed the men at St. Augustine to be "very raw, lazy fellows . . . bandits banished from New Spain for crimes committed there." They were dangerous, not because of what they could do, but because of what they prompted others to do. Governor Robert Johnson's concerned statement in his report to English officials in London adequately expressed the South Carolina mood.

The Spaniards at St. Augustine haveing encouraged the Indians under their government to come and murder and plunder his Majesties subjects in Carolina and themselves harbouring rebels, fellons, debtors, servants and Negro slaves, putting this government under a necessity of keeping a force and some thousand pounds yearly charged to guard the frontiers, even in time of peace, there is an absolute necessity for us to expell them out of St. Augustine.

The War for Spanish Succession provided the colonists with reasonable justification for action, so they launched an expedition prepared to destroy St. Augustine and eliminate the Spanish presence from Florida. The expedition failed miserably and was "particular ruinous" to South Carolina, leaving the province in a worse situation than it had been before the attempt. This failure prompted the colonists to examine their relations with the Spanish in greater detail, but the analysis only fueled the hatred.
With indignation we looked at St. Augustine. . . . That den of thieves and ruffians! Receptacle of debtors, servants, and slaves! Bane of industry and society! and revolved in our minds all the injuries this province had received from thence ever since first settlement. 69

The Spanish simply would not relent. An account at mid-century reveals that the Spanish continued their covert war-like ways even in times of peace. But one thing more I have to tell you, which is of great consequence to the province. And that is, that the Spaniards, at St. Augustine, who during the war, seduced and encouraged our negroes (or slaves) to desert from this province, and gave them freedom, continue that practice, now in peace, not withstanding all the remonstrances mad on that subject. And there is hardly a week but a dozen of them go off at a time in canoes. 70

The activities of the French, Indian, and Spanish greatly alarmed the colonists, but the force most feared by South Carolinians came from within. South Carolina was the only region in mainland North America to ever have a slave majority. 71 Institutionalized from the very beginning, chattel slavery was central to the development of the plantation economy. However, its existence created an intense sense of paranoia among the white minority. George Milligen-Johnston wrote that "they [slaves] are in this climate necessary, but very dangerous domestics, their number so much exceeding the whites . . . . [they] quickly become more formidable enemies than
Indians can ever be, as they speak our language, and would never be at a loss for intelligence."72

The South Carolinians had good reason to be concerned. Hidden in the historical record are numerous accounts of slave conspiracies that never materialized. In 1721, an official report to the Crown indicated that "black slaves . . . have lately attempted and were very near succeeding in a new revolution, which would probably have been attended by the utter extirpation of your majesty's subjects in this province."73 A minister in Goose Creek Parish in 1724 believed certain "Christian slaves" to be responsible for "secret poisonings and bloody insurrection."74 In 1730, a letter printed in the Boston Weekly News-Letter provided an account of a "bloody tragedy which was to have been executed . . . by the negroes, who had conspired to Rise and destroy us, and had almost bro't it to pass."75 In response to these incidents and to a Spanish edict granting freedom to any slave reaching St. Augustine, the South Carolina authorities stepped up their patrols and passed a series of statutes regulating slave management on the plantations.76 The rash of slave attempts at insurrection reached a boiling point in September 1739 when a number of slaves gathered at Stono, roughly twenty miles south of Charleston. Historian Peter Wood provides an excellent account of this, the only large-scale slave revolt in mainland colonial history:

Equipped with guns, the band moved on to the house of Mr. Godfrey, which they plundered and burned, killing the owner and his sons and daughter. They then turned southward along the main road to Georgia and St. Augustine and reached
Wallace's Tavern before dawn. The innkeeper was spared, "for he was a good man and kind to his slaves," but a neighbor, Mr. Lemy, was killed with his wife and child and his house was sacked. "They burn't Colonel Hext's house and killed his Overseer and his Wife. They then burnt M Sprye's house, then M Sacheverell's, and then M Nash's house, all lying upon Pons Pons Road, and killed all the white People they found in them.

Others were joining them voluntary, and as the numbers grew, confidence rose and discipline diminished. Two drums appeared; a standard was raised; and there were shouts of "Liberty" from the marchers. The few Whites whom they encountered were pursued and killed. 77

A militia force crossed the rebels and successfully engaged them, bringing an end to their destruction, but the colonist were severely frightened. The Stono Rebellion was no random act of violence. At least initially, the revolt was rational and well-organized. To counter any future insurrections, the assembly moved quickly in enacting a new slave code. The Slave Code of 1740 was unique in that it placed additional restrictions on both slave activities and their treatment by owners. The act clearly legally deemed slaves chattel for the first time in South Carolina, but the legislation also demanded kind treatment of the slaves by requiring owners to restrict the slaves' working hours, to minimize corporal punishment, to stand accountable for injury done to slaves, and to properly feed and cloth the slaves. 78 The remainder of the colonial period saw only isolated incidents of slave violence, but the South Carolinians never forgot Stono.
Plantations on the Defensive

Returning to Jack Greene's model for identity development in plantation societies helps to bring the roots of South Carolina's colonial identity into better focus. The founding of the colony and the attempts to realize the initial specific lofty goals and high expectations of those involved in South Carolina colonization fit squarely in the first developmental stage. The recognition that something must be done differently, the experimentation in varied sorts of commodity production, the discovery of staple agricultural products, and the development of a plantation economy based on these products represented phase two of South Carolina's identity development. The third phase involved the South Carolinians' development of an understanding of themselves in terms outside the agricultural realm. They began to view themselves as elements in, even products of, a distinctive culture. Yet they were never able to escape, at any level of development, the human aspect of the landscape associated with phase one. Throughout the colonial period, the South Carolinians felt as if they dangled on the edge of the abyss. They were constantly threatened and continually harassed, both physically and emotionally. Certainly, much of the emotional trauma was self-inflicted but profound nonetheless. The uniqueness of South Carolina's colonial sense of self was that it formed around a dynamic plantation economy and subsequent plantation culture that was inextricably linked, in fact, dependent on the stability of the frontier situation, a situation that to the South Carolinians seemed beyond their control.
## Selected Data on Colonial South Carolina

### Table 1. South Carolina Rice Exports and Annual Compound Growth Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Annual Average Export (lbs.)</th>
<th>Annual Compound Growth Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1698-1702</td>
<td>268,602</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1708-1713</td>
<td>1,763,790</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1718-1722</td>
<td>6,227,918</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1728-1732</td>
<td>16,905,652</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1738-1742</td>
<td>30,547,455</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1748-1752</td>
<td>30,285,618</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1758-1762</td>
<td>30,903,255</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1768-1772</td>
<td>66,327,975</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 2. Rice Exports by Destination 1730-1739

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Total Exports (barrels)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>83,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibraltar</td>
<td>958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>9,500 (1738-39 only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British mainland and colonies</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland, Hamburg, Brenen, Sweden, and Denmark</td>
<td>372,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>499,525</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Median Personal Wealth of White Inventoried Decedents 1722-1762.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Median Wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1722-26</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>£1070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1727-31</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>1610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1732-36</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>1425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1737-41</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1742-46</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1747-51</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1752-56</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>2230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757-62</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>2160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4. Estimated Black and White Populations 1700-1770

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White Population (est.)</th>
<th>Black Population (est.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>3,260</td>
<td>2,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1710</td>
<td>5,115</td>
<td>5,768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1720</td>
<td>6,525</td>
<td>11,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>39,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>36,740</td>
<td>53,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>49,066</td>
<td>75,178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5. Populations of Native American, 1715

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Warrior Population</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>11,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallibooses</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>2,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creek</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>2,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chichesaw</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>1,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abikaw</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>1,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catawba</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>1,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamassee</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>1,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 smaller groups</td>
<td>1,259</td>
<td>5,404</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

2 Ibid. 217.
4 Thomas Hariot, A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia, as quoted in Wright, 23.
5 Charleston is the port city’s modern spelling, and the one adopted after its incorporation in 1783. Originally, the name was Charles Town and later became Charlestown. Some references to Charles Towne can be found, and these seem to be an alternative spelling of the original. For the sake of uniformity, Charleston will be used in this essay unless directly quoted from the documentary record.
7 The eight Lords Proprietors were Edward, Earl of Clarendon, George, Duke of Albermarle, William, Earl of Craven, John Lord Berkeley, Anthony Lord Ashley, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir George Carteret, Knight and Vice Chancellor of the Household, Sir John Colleton, Knight, and Sir William Berkeley, Knight.
8 The Heath Patent can be found in a variety of documentary collections including William L. Saunders, ed., The Colonial Records of North Carolina, 10 vol. (Raleigh: P.M. Hale, 1890), I, 20-33. The Second Charter is also in a number of collections including B.R. Carroll, ed., Historical Collections of South Carolina, 2 vol. (New York: Harper, 1836), II, 38-57.
10 Testimony by six of Robert Sandford’s crew after an expedition along the South Carolina coast, Shaftesbury Papers 82.
11 Fundamental Constitutions for the Government of Carolina, Shaftesbury Papers 93-117.
12 This matter is addressed particularly in section 101 of the Fundamental Constitutions, Shaftesbury Papers 115.

14 "The Appointment of Joseph West as Governor," May, 1674, in Johnson and Sloan, eds., 46-47.


16 Agnes Leland Baldwin, *First Settlers of South Carolina 1670-1680* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969). Baldwin's study is helpful but incomplete. She identifies 684 settlers during the ten year period. She lists 146 as coming from the islands, 134 coming from England, Scotland, or Ireland, 10 coming from the other mainland colonies. To the other 394, she assigns no place of origin.

17 These figures come from a source that is not footnoted in Greene, "Colonial South Carolina and the Caribbean Connection," 186. A small planter is defined in this study as a planter with at least ten acres of land but less than twenty slaves. A freeman planter is defined as a land owner with less than ten acres of land.

18 Richard Waterhouse, "England, the Caribbean, and the Settlement of Carolina," *Journal of American Studies* IX (1975), 259-81. Dunn, 112-116. The middling planter group is defined as those holding between twenty and fifty-nine slaves. The 175 big planter families were those holding at least sixty slaves.

19 Dunn, 112-116. Greene, "Colonial South Carolina and the Caribbean Connection."


21 The information on the natural environment of early South Carolina is taken from Mark Catesby's *Natural History of South Carolina* in H. Roy Merrens, ed., *The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views, 1697-1774* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), 88-109. This account which Catesby completed near the middle of the eighteenth century is highly regarded for its accuracy. Catesby, a particularly acute
scientific observer, made several travels throughout the region from 1731-1747. Well into the nineteenth century, experts regarded his work as the most thorough of its type. For a more recent examination of the colonial landscape and its subsequent changes see Charles F. Kovacik and John J. Winberry, South Carolina: The Making of a Landscape (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 65-85.


24 The evaluative label taken from Catesby.


26 Collinson, in Merrens, 229.

27 Yonge, in Merrens, 69-70.

28 Ibid. 70.

29 The grading of land taken from Catesby.


34 Hewat, Alexander, An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia in Carroll, I, 501.


38 Journal of Thomas Griffiths, in Merrens, 246.

39 Letter from William Pollard, Philadelphia, to Mr. B. Bowers and Mr. J. Bowers, Manchester, in Merrens, 277.


42 Peter Coclanis provides a brief yet magnificent study of the sociology of architecture in colonial Charleston in the introduction to The Shadow of a Dream, 3-11.

43 Letter from Gideon Johnston to his London sponsors, 16 November 1711, in Johnson and Sloan, 75.


45 Letter from Thomas Thompson to Rev. Dr. Humphreys, 1 May 1736, South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine 50 (1949), 178.


47 Robert Witherspoon, "Recollections of a Settler," in Merrens, 124. Robert Witherspoon was in adolescence when his family immigrated to South Carolina in 1735. His account is candid and honest, providing a superb look at the emotional considerations involved in New World settlement.


49 Witherspoon, in Merrens, 126.


51 Letter from Thomas Pratt to Dr. Benjamin Rush, 1770, in Merrens, 272-73.

52 Randolph, in Salley, 206.
53 Robert Johnson, "Governor's Response to a Questionaire," 1719, in Merrens, 64.
54 James Glen, A Description of the Province of South Carolina, 1763, in Carroll, II, 242.
55 Nicholas Carteret, "Relation of Planting at the Ashley River," Shaftesbury Papers, 165-168.
56 Witherspoon, in Merrens, 127.
57 See the Instruction for Indian Traders, Given by the Board of Commissioners, August 3, 1711, in Johnson and Sloan, 94. Lords Proprietors Instructions to Governor Charles Craven, 1712, in Johnson and Sloan, 69-71.
59 Robert Johnson, in Merrens, 59.
60 Letter from Francis Yonge to John Lord Carteret, in Carroll, II, 144-146.
61 Petition of the Carolina Assemblymen, March, 1717, in Johnson and Sloan, 79.
62 Robert Johnson, in Merrens, 59.
64 Nathaniel Johnson, in Merrens, 36.
66 John Oldmixon, British Empire in America, 1708, in Carroll, II, 422-424.
67 Robert Johnson, in Merrens, 62.
68 Ibid 64.
69 South Carolina Commons House of Assembly, Committee to Inquire into the Causes of the Failure of the Expedition Against St. Augustine, in Carroll, II, 359.
71 For the most comprehensive examination of early South Carolina slavery see Peter H. Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York: Knopf, 1974).
73 Representation of the Lords Commissions for Trade and Plantations, to the King, 8 September 1721, in E.B. O'Callaghan, et. al., eds., Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, 15 vol. (Albany, 1855-1883), 5:610.
74 Letter from Richard Ludlam to David Humphreys, 2 July 1724, cited in Frank J. Klingberg, An Appraisal of the Negro in Colonial South Carolina (Washington, 1941), 46.
75 Boston Weekly News-Letter, 22 October 1730. The letter from Charleston was dated 20 August 1730.
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