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COLONIAL AMERICA

A Very Short Introduction

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By 1700 the West Indian colonies featured a small but rich planter elite, a marginal population of poor whites, a great majority of

black slaves, and a few defiant *Maroons*. The population grew only by a massive importation of new slaves. Between 1640 and 1700, the English West Indies acquired about 260,000 slaves, but only 100,000 of them were still alive in 1700. Although an economic success, the West Indies was a demographic failure that manifested a society in consuming pursuit of profit and with a callous disregard for life.

Some white emigrants sought new lands on the southern mainland of North America. In 1670 three ships from Barbados bore 200 colonists north to the mouth of the Ashley River, where they founded Charles Town (later changed to "Charleston"), which became the seaport and capital of the new colony of Carolina and which included present-day North and South Carolina and Georgia. The founders named the town and colony to honor King Charles II. The eight official owners, known as the Lords Proprietor, were aristocrats who remained in England, entrusting the colonization to Barbadians. The abundant lands of Carolina appealed to the crowded discontent and frustrated ambitions of West Indian white men.

The new colony boldly defied Spanish claims to that coast—signifying the new English confidence in their emerging imperial power as the Spanish grew weaker. Early in the seventeenth century, the English had felt obliged to hide their Jamestown colony up a distant river, but in 1670 the English defiantly planted Charles Town near the coast on the very margins of Florida.

To secure Carolina from Spanish attack, the Lords Proprietor needed to attract many colonists. To entice newcomers, the Lords promised religious toleration; political representation in an assembly with control over public taxation and expenditures; and generous grants of land, generally 150 acres for each member of a free white family. The incentives worked. From 200 colonists in 1670, South Carolina grew to about 6,600 in 1700 (3,800 white

and 2,800 black). The new colony became more than a match for the 1,500 Spanish in Florida.

During the late seventeenth century, Carolina offered the frontier combination of opportunity and danger that had been lost in Barbados as it became more crowded and developed. In Carolina, the male servant who survived his term received the customary "freedom dues"—a set of clothes, a barrel of corn, an axe, and a hoe—from his master and a land grant from the Lords Proprietor.

In addition to common settlers, the colony attracted great planters with the capital and the slaves to speed development. To encourage them, the Lords Proprietor allowed a master to claim a full 150-acre headright for each slave imported. From the West Indies, the wealthiest of the new colonists settled on Goose Creek near Charles Town. Known as the "Goose Creek Men," they dominated the assembly and council of Carolina. They conducted politics in the Barbadian style, characterized by the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest and the ruthless exploitation of others. Arrogant and Anglican, the Goose Creek Men stifled the policy of religious toleration in 1702 by reserving political offices for Anglicans and by requiring all planters to pay taxes to that church. During the 1720s, the Goose Creek Men defied the Lords Proprietor to transform Carolina into a royal colony with a governor appointed by the Crown.

As a plantation colony in a frontier setting, the Carolinians needed to dominate both enslaved Africans and defiant Indians, lest they combine to merge slave rebellion with frontier war. The colonists sought to pit the Africans against the Indians, the better to exploit both. In their treaties with native peoples, the colonists insisted upon the return of all fugitives as the price of peace and trade. As a further incentive, Carolina paid bounties to Indians who captured and returned runaways, at the rate of one gun and three blankets for each.

Carolina's early leaders concluded that the key to managing the local Indians was to offer them guns and ammunition in trade for their deerskins and captives. Far from undermining colonial security, the gun trade rendered the natives dependent upon weapons that they could neither make nor repair. If deprived of ammunition, the natives would suffer in their hunting and fall prey to slave-raiding by better-armed Indians more favored by a colonial supplier. And thanks to the superiority of British manufactures and shipping, the Carolina trader enjoyed the advantages of both quality and quantity in his competition with the French and the Spanish.

By pushing the gun and slave trade and building a network of native allies, the Carolinians secured their own frontier and wreaked havoc on the more distant Indians affiliated with the Spanish and French. The raids spread death and destruction hundreds of miles beyond Carolina, west to the Mississippi and south into Florida. The traders preferred women and children as captives, deeming them more adaptable to a new life as slaves. Indian men tended to die resisting attacks, or they were executed upon surrender. The Carolinians employed some captives on their own plantations, which in 1708 held 1,400 native as well as 2,900 African slaves. But native captives might escape into the nearby forest, so the Carolinians exported most of them to the West Indies in exchange for Africans.

The Carolina traders especially encouraged their Indian allies to attack the Spanish missions in Florida, where the poorly armed and conveniently clustered Guale, Timucua, and Apalachee proved easy pickings. During the 1680s, Savannah, Creek, and Yamasee raiders destroyed the Guale missions along the coast of Georgia. Between 1704 and 1706 the raiders destroyed another thirty-two native villages and their missions, inflicting horrific casualties and enslaving thousands. Most of the captured Spanish priests were tortured to death, and their churches went up in flames. Florida's Indian population collapsed from about 16,000 in 1685 to 3,700

in 1715, and the missions shrank to a few in the immediate vicinity and partial security of San Agustín. The Carolina gun and slave trade had triumphed over the Spanish mission system as an instrument of colonial power. Without the missions, Spanish Florida became a hollow shell, while English Carolina became the leading regional power.