

Barbados, by the late 1660's, was the wealthiest colony in English America fueled by the production of sugar - a tremendously lucrative crop. One French visitor reported that the sugar industry had created a planter class "so rich that they all lived like princes". The sad reality was that for every wealthy planter, countless African slaves were used to produce that "princely" existence. This rather sudden boom of "sugar wealth" altered the society and economy of Barbados, and the island's new culture became the standard for the other English possessions in the West Indies and the mainland colony of South Carolina. Thus, Barbados became the cultural hearth of the English new world.

The resulting wealth of the sugar industry brought a population boom as people flocked to Barbados, an island 1/5 the size of present day Charleston, to make their fortune. By 1670, Barbados' population was estimated at 60,000 inhabitants with approximately sixty percent being African slaves. Precious cultivatable land was scarce and plantation owners began to seek land in America

During this same period King Charles II granted the Province of Carolina to eight Lord Proprietors; the Earl of Clarendon, the Duke of Albemarle, Lord Craven, Lord Berkeley, Lord Ashley Cooper, Sir George Carteret, Sir William Berkeley and Sir John Colleton. Captain William Hilton led an exploration of the new colony and groups such as the "Barbadian Society of Gentleman Adventurers" sent their own expeditions to the Carolinas on behalf of the Lord Proprietors.

As a result, Charles Towne was established in 1670 on what came to be called the Ashley River and many Barbadians began to migrate to the settlement. Over the next three years well over half of the white settlers and enslaved Africans arriving in South Carolina came from Barbados. The Barbadians brought with them a successful colonial model that shaped the social and economic future of South Carolina for centuries to come.

The political influence of the Barbadians is evidenced in the political structure as well as the leadership that emerged from the island - seven of the first twenty-one governors were either Barbadian or had Barbadian ties. The Barbadians also had an enormous economic influence on the new colony. Their experience and capital, complimented by their entrepreneurial spirit, made the plantation system a reality. However cotton and rice, not sugar, ultimately surfaced as the major cash crops of South Carolina.

Over three centuries later "The Connection" still exists. The threads of West African and Caribbean influences are woven into the tapestry that is the culture of South Carolina. These influences are present in sometimes faint ways such as in our wonderfully rich foodways, our art, and our music; and, sometimes in very prominent ways such as the inspiring Gullah culture and tradition of the Carolina Lowcountry.