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*1900-2000*

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in honor of their generous and longstanding support of  
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# THE SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

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## CONTENTS

- Three Articles from a Century of Excellence: The Best of  
*The South Carolina Historical Magazine***  
by Orville Vernon Burton 182
- Slave Demography in the Lowcountry, 1670-1740: From  
Frontier Society to Plantation Regime**  
*Volume 96 (October 1995)*  
by Russell R. Menard 190
- Community Evolution and Race Relations in Reconstruction  
Charleston, South Carolina**  
*Volume 95 (January 1994)*  
by Bernard E. Powers, Jr. 214
- The Devaluation of the Vote: Legislative Apportionment  
and Inequality in South Carolina, 1890-1962**  
*Volume 97 (July 1996)*  
by Bryant Simon 234
- Book Reviews 253**
- Recently Processed Manuscripts 264**
- Memorials 268**

# SLAVE DEMOGRAPHY IN THE LOWCOUNTRY, 1670-1740: FROM FRONTIER SOCIETY TO PLANTATION REGIME

RUSSELL R. MENARD\*

IN THE MAJOR PLANTATION REGIONS OF THE AMERICAS, AS Philip Curtin has observed of the sugar-producing colonies, "demographic history tended to fall into a regular pattern over time."<sup>1</sup> That pattern reflected differences between newly arrived African slaves and their American-born offspring. African immigrants were predominantly male and they suffered high rates of morbidity and mortality when introduced to a new and volatile colonial disease environment. The few women among them, furthermore, were often well into their childbearing years when they crossed the Atlantic; furthermore, frequent illness and prolonged lactation may have lowered their fertility. Those women thus had too few children to offset the impact of the male surplus and high mortality on the rate of reproductive increase. American-born slaves, by contrast, possessed a more balanced sex ratio, suffered lower (although often still frightful) death rates and began having children at earlier ages and, perhaps (if less often ill and less committed to lengthy breast feeding), at higher age-specific rates.

The changing balance of Africans and natives thus dictated the reproductive performance of the population. Early in the history of plantation regimes, following the introduction of new staple crops when output expanded rapidly, each region relied heavily on new workers from Africa. The resulting high ratio of immigrants to natives produced a surplus of deaths over births. This, in turn, led to continued high rates of immigration both to make up the deficit and to provide the booming export sector with more workers. Eventually, however, as regions approached full production, the need for new workers diminished, the proportion of native-born blacks rose, the ratio of deaths to births fell, and the slave population began to grow

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\*Professor of history, University of Minnesota. Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the Colonial History Workshop, University of Minnesota, and to the April 1989 conference at the University of Maryland, "Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life." Research support was provided by the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute for Southern Studies at the University of South Carolina.

<sup>1</sup>Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 29

history over time, displays an extraordinary mastery of the secondary literature, and anticipates the discipline's turn toward cultural history.<sup>14</sup> In the same issue Lacy K. Ford redeems the usually maligned John C. Calhoun in "Recovering the Republic: Calhoun, South Carolina, and the Concurrent Majority."<sup>15</sup> Ford's essays are characteristically felicitous, tightly written, well-argued, highly original, and important; Lacy Ford's articles are so good that I was highly tempted to choose three of his!<sup>16</sup> Then I also love the Moltke-Hansen article. Well, best leave the three selections already chosen or I will be worrying about that Tiger again.

*The South Carolina Historical Magazine* is committed to presenting information and analysis on the full range of South Carolina history. History as a discipline has expanded in ways unforeseen by the earliest issues of the *SCHM*, and the *Magazine* reflects the major historical currents; much good history has been done. Nevertheless, looking over the essays for the last one hundred years, I have found an emphasis on earlier time periods and on history of the lowcountry. More studies of the upcountry are needed. Moreover despite the rich history of interaction among Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans, there is not much published on Native Americans. More work is needed on the other ethnic groups in South Carolina as well. Moreover, while there are essays on women and gender issues, the new millennium should invite many more. Keith Jenkins has recently argued that to learn from history is to learn from stories the historians chose to tell.<sup>17</sup> More minorities and women scholars need to write on South Carolina history. We need to understand the Age of Segregation, the civil rights struggle and its consequences. We need stories from different perspectives, we may have actually heard the story before, but we might not have heard all the details, yet. As South Carolina moves into a new multicultural age, with new ethnic and regional group dynamics, we can learn from past mistakes but also from times when South Carolina strove for its better angels to overcome those devils.

A review of the last century of articles published in this *Magazine* bears out that we must heed Jack Burden's warning in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*: "how if you could not accept the past and its burden there was no future, for without one there cannot be the other, and how if you could accept the past you might hope for the future, for only out of the past can you make the future."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>*SCHM*, 89 (July 1988), 160-182.

<sup>15</sup>*SCHM*, 89 (July 1988), 146-159.

<sup>16</sup>*SCHM*, 95 (July 1994), 198-224 and *SCHM*, 98 (October 1997), 328-348.

<sup>17</sup>Keith Jenkins, *Why History: Ethics and Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>18</sup>Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Janovitch, Inc., 1974, orig. publd. 1946), 435.

through reproduction.<sup>2</sup>

While this model is compelling and well-established in the literature, several mysteries remain. Not the least of these concerns the demography of slavery at the beginning of the process, when the plantation system was first articulated. In particular, the model fails to address regions that became slave societies (or at least had sizeable slave populations) before they built plantation regimes. South Carolina is a case in point, for it acquired a substantial slave labor force in the seventeenth century, when the economy turned on farm building, subsistence agriculture, and the production of provisions and wood products for sale in the sugar islands. During these years most planters ran small units worked by themselves or with the help of a few servants and slaves. What was the composition of the slave population in the early years of the lowcountry frontier? Did Carolina blacks achieve reproductive increase before the export-boom of the early eighteenth century swelled the proportion of Africans among them? How did the composition of the population and its reproductive rate change as the emerging gentry built their great plantations?

While the focus of this essay is on African Americans as a population, the topic has implications that extend beyond technical questions in demography to issues of labor, culture, and identity. Demography—the vital rates and population structures slaves endured and created—formed fundamental parameters which set limits and opened possibilities for the way slaves lived and worked. This is especially true of reproduction, crucial to creating kin networks, building relationships of trust and affection, making communities and achieving solidarity, learning and articulating a new Afro-Carolinian culture. I do not mean to assert a naive demographic determinism: population processes were part of an interactive system and wereshaped by slave work routines and by the way slaves viewed themselves and understood their world. Nevertheless, demography is a useful point of entry into slave life, particularly during the early years of lowcountry settlement. It asks precise questions, it facilitates comparison over time and with other slave regimes, and it makes good use of the thin and seemingly intractable evidence now available. It is a promising way to begin the task of reconstructing the world slaves made.

<sup>2</sup>The literature on this process is surveyed in John J. McCusker and Russel R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 231-234. For a supportive overview, see Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989). For a more skeptical assessment, see Barry Higman, "Slave Populations of the British Caribbean: Some Nineteenth-Century Variations," in Samuel R. Proctor, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Florida and the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976).

### THE RISE OF SLAVERY IN THE LOWCOUNTRY, AN OVERVIEW

The evidence on slave demography in the Lowcountry is hardly complete. There are no vital registers or detailed census returns, but there are scattered estimates of population size, records of slave imports, and some data on composition from probate inventories, headright records, and crude censuses. All of these must be interpreted cautiously, but taken together they permit a few useful generalizations.

We can start with totals (see Table 1) and describe the processes that made the Lowcountry a slave society. In sharp contrast to the Chesapeake region, where slavery took root late and grew slowly, slaves were a major presence in South Carolina from its founding and their numbers expanded rapidly in the decades following the initial settlement. The thirty blacks in Carolina in 1670 accounted for 15 percent of the population, a share not reached in Maryland and Virginia until the first decade of the eighteenth century. By 1690 slaves were more than 40 percent of Carolina's population, a proportion never reached in the Chesapeake colonies as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Surely by that date, the Carolina lowcountry had become a slave society.

Slavery continued to grow in the early eighteenth century: black and Indian slaves made up 58 percent of the total by 1710, 72 percent by 1740, making the region seem "more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people."<sup>4</sup> The Stono revolt of 1739 joined with a severe depression during King George's War (1739-1748) nearly to eliminate slave imports during the 1740s. In consequence, the black population fell to just over 60 percent of the whole in 1750, still high by mainland standards. That figure, furthermore, includes Charleston, where blacks were only about half the total, and the growing backcountry settlements where slaves were rare. In the lowcountry plantation districts the black population was much larger, perhaps 80 percent of the total.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>On the size of the slave population in the Chesapeake colonies see McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Dyssli to his mother, brothers, and friends in Switzerland, Dec. 3, 1737, in R.W. Kelsey, "Swiss Settlers in South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* (hereafter SCHM) 23 (July 1922), p. 90, as quoted in Peter H. Wood, " 'More Like a Negro Country': Demographic Patterns in Colonial South Carolina, 1700-1749," in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 131-132.

<sup>5</sup>On Stono see Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1974), pp. 308-326. On the depression of the 1740s see Stuart O. Stumpf, "Implications of King George's War for the Charleston Mercantile Community," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (hereafter SCHM) 77 (July 1976), pp. 161-188. For Charleston's black population see Philip D. Morgan, "Black Life in Eighteenth-Century Charleston," *Perspectives in American*

**TABLE 1**  
**Estimated Population of South Carolina, 1670-1775**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Indian Slaves</u>	<u>Total</u>
1670	170	30		200
1680	1,000	200		1,200
1690	2,400	1,500	100	3,900
1700	3,300	2,400	200	5,900
1710	4,200	4,300	1,500	10,000
1720	6,500	9,900	2,000	18,400
1730	10,000	20,000	500	30,500
1740	15,000	39,200		54,200
1750	25,000	40,000		65,000
1760	37,100	57,000		94,100
1770	42,200	82,000		124,200
1775		102,000		

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Series Z16. p. 1168; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, pp. 146-147, 153n, 155. For slightly different estimates see Wood, *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, pp. 38-39. On Indian slavery see William Robert Snell, "Indian Slavery in Colonial South Carolina, 1671-1795" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1972), p. 96.

The rapid Africanization of the Lowcountry reflected a complex interaction between the supply of workers available from various sources and the demand for labor. The process occurred in two stages, the first resembling the rise of slavery in the Chesapeake region, the second similar to its growth in Brazil and the Caribbean. Initially, Carolinians created a mixed work force of unfree laborers by importing blacks from the sugar islands and white indentured servants from both the islands and England. In the 1670s servants were available in sufficient numbers to form the majority of bound laborers, but improved opportunities at home, growing demand for labor in the colonies, and the inability of Carolinians to develop an extensive recruiting network led to a sharp decline in supply and forced lowcountry planters to rely more heavily on West Indian blacks. By the

*History*, N.S., (1984), p. 188. For slavery in the backcountry see Robert L. Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina, 1729-1765* (Kingsport, Tenn.: Southern Publishers, 1940) on the black percentage of the population in the lowcountry plantation district see, for example, George D. Terry, "'Champaign Country': A Social History of an Eighteenth Century Lowcountry Parish in South Carolina, St. Johns Berkeley County" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1981), p. 116.

early 1690s, perhaps earlier, island blacks dominated the lowcountry labor force.<sup>6</sup>

The second stage in the Africanization process was initiated by an impressive boom in the lowcountry export sector that began about 1700. That boom greatly increased demand for labor and set off a scramble to find new workers. The flow of blacks from the islands increased and Carolinians experimented with Indian slavery on a large scale. Growing demand soon strained the capacity of the secondary slave trade with the Caribbean, however, while slaving among the Indians unleashed a storm of violence that threatened the existence of the English settlement and persuaded planters that they had to look elsewhere for workers. They turned in the end, as did all the major American plantation regimes of the early modern era, to the African slave trade, the world's first large-scale international labor market, where workers could be had in seemingly unlimited numbers at competitive prices. By the 1720s Carolina was importing at least 900 slaves each year and the lowcountry workforce was thoroughly Africanized.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE CAROLINA SLAVE POPULATION, 1670-1708

Evidence on the composition of the lowcountry slave population in the seventeenth century is thin and sometimes contradictory. We know that the great majority arrived by way of the sugar islands, but it would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that most were therefore partly Anglicized, seasoned, and experienced plantation workers. Blacks moved to the Lowcountry from the West Indies in three ways, although in what proportions it is difficult to say. Some, perhaps the majority in the 1670s, arrived with masters who had decided to try their luck in Carolina. Such slaves often may have been seasoned and experienced but, given the structure of slave societies in the Caribbean, it seems unlikely that many were Anglicized. Others were purchased from sugar planters in exchange for provisions and timber products. Again it is possible that they were seasoned and experienced, although one imagines that sugar planters were reluctant to part with blacks who had mastered plantation work routines and acquired a rudimentary English. Finally, some slaves were purchased at the great slave auctions in Barbados fresh off the ship, arriving in Carolina as "new negroes" without prior exposure to the Americas or the rigors of plantation discipline.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>This and the following paragraph summarize my essay, "The Africanization of the Lowcountry Labor Force, 1670-1730," in Winthrop D. Jordan and Sheila R. Skemp, eds., *Race and Family in the Colonial South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), pp. 81-108.

<sup>7</sup>Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 20-24, 43-47, provides an able summary of the sources of slaves in early Carolina. See also Wood, "The Changing Populations of the Colonial South," in Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley,



**TABLE 2**  
**Distribution of African-American Slaves**  
**in South Carolina Probate Inventories, 1679-1698**

<u>Slaves/</u> <u>Estates</u>	<u>Number</u> <u>Estates</u>	<u>Percent</u> <u>Estates</u>	<u>Cumm.</u> <u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u> <u>Slaves</u>	<u>Percent</u> <u>Slaves</u>	<u>Cumm.</u> <u>Percent</u>
1	7	25	25	7	6	6
2	6	21	46	12	10	16
3-5	7	25	71	25	21	37
6-10	6	21	92	51	42	79
11-15	2	7	100	26	22	100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>			<b>121</b>		

**Slaves/Estates 4.3**

Notes and Sources: Does not include slaves identified as Indians or Mustees. Records of the Secretary of the Province, 1675-1695, 1692-1700, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

Once in the Lowcountry, slaves lived and worked in small groups by the standards of the sugar islands, of later Carolina, or even of the late-seventeenth-century tobacco coast.<sup>8</sup> Twenty-eight post-mortem inventories listing slaves survive for the seventeenth century (Table 2). Only two reported more than ten blacks, while the majority of estates contained five or fewer. This is not to say that there were no large holdings in early Carolina. Sir Nathaniel Johnson, who became governor in 1702, imported more than 100 "Servants & Negroes" to build Silk Hope, his Cooper River plantation, where, a visitor reported, "his family is very large many servants

eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 38-39 (estimates of South Carolina's population by race, 1685-1790) and 46-51 for a summary discussion of these figures. Wood's estimates, while differing slightly from mine, are in the same ballpark. But the early slave trade between the Caribbean and mainland colonies remains inadequately documented and poorly understood. For recent efforts to shed light on this issue see Daniel C. Littlefield, "The Colonial Slave Trade to South Carolina: A Profile," *SCHM* 91 (April 1990), pp. 68-99; Walter Minchinton, "A Comment on 'The Slave Trade to Colonial South Carolina: A Profile,'" *SCHM* 95 (January 1994), pp. 47-57; Littlefield, "Reply," *ibid.*, p. 57. Littlefield and Minchinton look primarily at the period 1717-1767.

<sup>8</sup>For plantation sizes on the sugar islands, the tobacco coast, and later Carolina see Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar, and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1972), pp. 88, 143, 171; Russell R. Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population, 1658-1730: A Demographic Profile of Blacks in Four Counties," *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter *WMQ*), 3rd Ser., 32 (1975), p. 35; and below, Tables 11 and 12.

**TABLE 3**  
**Sex Ratios among Blacks**  
**Brought to South Carolina, 1670-1696**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Number Males</u>	<u>Number Females</u>	<u>Sex Ratio</u>
1670-74	20	5	400.0
1675-79	6	6	100.0
1680-84	14	7	200.0
1685-89	36	9	400.0
1690-94	14	8	175.0
1695-96	41	15	273.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>262.0</b>

Notes and Sources: Sex ratios are written as multiples of 100: Pm/Pf x 100. Alexander S. Salley, ed., *Warrants for Land in South Carolina (1672-1711)*.

and slaves.<sup>9</sup> Most planters owned only a few slaves, however, and most slaves worked on small farms with only a few other blacks.

Evidence on the proportion of males and females in the Carolina slave population is inconsistent. Data on arrivals from headright records indicate a severe imbalance, with males outnumbering females by more than 2.5 to 1 (Table 3).<sup>10</sup> Probate inventories reveal a much more modest male predominance of 1.4 to 1 (Table 4). There are several possible explanations for the discrepancy, including misclassification, small sample size, and higher death rates for males, but there is no compelling reason to assert that one of the distributions more closely approximates reality. The differences between Tables 3 and 4 argue for caution in pushing the analysis of composition further. Nevertheless, the evidence from inventories does indicate that there were few slave children in the Lowcountry and it suggests (although it does not establish) a population unable to reproduce itself, dependent on immigration for continued growth.<sup>11</sup>

At first glance, it might appear that the evidence for the early eighteenth century is firmer and more reliable. In September 1708 the governor and council of the colony reported a count of the inhabitants and described changes that had occurred over the past five years. The passage is worth

<sup>9</sup>A.S. Salley, Jr., ed., *Warrants for Land in South Carolina, 1680-1692* (Columbia: Historical Commission of South Carolina, 1911), p. 215; Samuel Thomas to the Rev. Dr. Woodward, Jan. 29, 1702, "Letters of Rev. Samuel Thomas, 1702-1710," *SCHM* 4 (July 1903), p. 226; Wood, *Black Majority*, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup>Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 25-26, reports similar findings.

<sup>11</sup>On the use of probate inventories to study the composition of the slave population see Menard, "Maryland Slave Population," pp. 29-54.

**TABLE 4**  
**Age and Gender of African-American Slaves**  
**in South Carolina Probate Inventories, 1679-1698**

Boys	16
Girls	9
Children, Sex Unknown	8
<b>Total Children</b>	<b>33</b>
Men	39
Women	30
Adults, Sex Unknown	2
<b>Total Adults</b>	<b>71</b>
Slaves, Unidentified	<u>17</u>
<b>Total Slaves</b>	<b>121</b>
Sex Ratio, Children	177.8
Sex Ratio, Adults	130.0
Sex Ratio, Total	141.0
Children/Adults	46.5
Children/Women*	106.5
Girls^/Women*	41.9

\*Assumes that 1/2 of adults, sex unknown, are women.

^Assumes that 1/2 of children, sex unknown, are girls.

Notes and Sources: All ratios are written as multiples of 100. Does not include slaves indentified as Indians or Mustees. The data are from probate inventories in the Records of the Secretary of the Province, 1675-1695, 1692-1700, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

quoting at length:

The number of the inhabitants in this province of all sorts are computed to be nine thousand five hundred and eighty souls of which there are thirteen [hundred] and sixty freemen, nine hundred free women, sixty white servant men, sixty white servant women, seventeen hundred white free children, eighteen hundred Negro men slaves, eleven hundred Negro women slaves, five hundred Indian men slaves, six hundred Indian women slaves, twelve hundred Negro children slaves, and three hundred Indian children slaves.

The freemen of this province by reason of the late sickness brought here from other parts though now very

healthy and small supply from other parts are within these five years last past dec[r]eased about one hundred free women about forty white servants for the aforesaid reasons and having completed their servitude are dec[r]eased fifty white servant women for the same reason thirty white children are increased five hundred Negro men slaves by importation three hundred Negro women slaves two hundred Indian men slaves by reason our late conquest over the French and Spaniards and the success of our forces against the Appalaskye and other Indian engagements are within the five years encreased to the number of four hundred and the Indian women slaves to four hundred and fifty Negroe children to six hundred and Indian children to two hundred.<sup>12</sup>

Table 5 interprets the report in a more concise form.

What should we make of this document? At best it is based on census returns, efforts to enumerate the population in both 1703 and 1708. At worst it represents an informed guess, the collective opinion of experienced men in responsible positions.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, there is little evidence to help us choose between these possibilities and caution is required in interpreting the numbers. The patterns described for the black population in 1708 are plausible. The sex ratio and the ratios of children to adults and children to women are at least within the range reported in material for surrounding decades. What seems suspicious about these data is the pace and pattern of change they describe. The figures show a 37 percent increase in the size of the black population during a period when other evidence (see below, Table 9) suggests that few slaves were imported. They also show that most of the gain occurred among children at a time when we might expect a low birth rate and high childhood mortality. Further, the 1703 "census" describes ratios of children to adults and children to women much lower than those found in the late seventeenth century or in the 1720s (compare Tables 4, 5, and 7). My hunch—and it is only that—is that the 1708 figures are fairly reliable, but that the governor and council erred by underestimating the size of the black population, particularly the number of children, when they tried to project backward to 1703.

<sup>12</sup>Governor and Council of Carolina to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Sept. 17, 1703, CO5 / 1264, p. 82, Public Records Office; H. Roy Merrens, *The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views, 1697-1774* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 30-37.

<sup>13</sup>There is a useful discussion of this issue in Robert V. Wells, *The Population of the British Colonies in America Before 1776: A Survey of Census Data* (Princeton, N.J.: Pinceton University Press, 1975), pp. 166-169.

**TABLE 5**  
**The South Carolina Population in 1703 and 1708**

	<u>1703</u>	<u>1708</u>
Free men	1,460	1,360
Free women	940	900
Free children	1,200	1,700
White servant men	110	60
White servant women	90	60
<b>Total Whites</b>	<b>3,800</b>	<b>4,080</b>
Negro men slaves	1,500	1,800
Negro women slaves	900	1,100
Negro children slaves	600	1,200
<b>Total Negro Slaves</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>4,100</b>
Indian men slaves	100	500
Indian woman slaves	150	600
Indian children slaves	100	300
<b>Total Indian Slaves</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>1,400</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,150</b>	<b>9,580</b>
Adult Sex Ratio, Whites	152.4	147.9
Children/Adults, Whites	46.2	71.4
Children/Women, Whites	116.5	177.1
Adults Sex Ratio, Blacks	166.7	163.6
Children/Adults, Blacks	25.0	41.4
Children/Women, Blacks	66.7	109.1
Adult Sex Ratio, Indians	66.7	83.3
Children/Adults, Indians	40.0	27.3
Children/Women, Indians	66.7	50.0

Notes and Sources: All ratios are written as multiples of 100. Governor and Council of Carolina to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Sept. 17, 1708, CO 5/1264, p. 82, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

## INDIAN SLAVES IN EARLY CAROLINA

One of the distinguishing features of the lowcountry plantation regime apparent in the "censuses" of 1703 and 1708, was the key role played by Native American slaves in the early eighteenth century. While Indian slaves appear in South Carolina as early as 1683, they were rare during the seventeenth century. In 1700 there were roughly 200 enslaved Indians in the Lowcountry, 3 percent of the total population and 7 percent of the unfree work force (Table 1). During the next decade they were the most rapidly growing group in the colony. By 1710 there were 1500 Native American slaves, accounting for 15 percent of the total—roughly the proportion of blacks in Maryland at that time!<sup>14</sup>—and 26 percent of the bound laborers. They continued to increase in the next decade, but much less rapidly. In 1720 there were 2000 Indians, but they made up only 11 percent of the total and 17 percent of the slaves. Thereafter, both their numbers and their share fell sharply: in 1730 there were 500 Indian slaves in South Carolina, less than 2 percent of the total and only 2.4 percent of the unfree workers.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere I have described the boom in the Indian slave trade in the early eighteenth century and its near disappearance in the aftermath of the Yamassee War.<sup>16</sup> Here I want to address a different and less tractable puzzle: the sharp decline in the *recorded* presence of Indian slaves in the Lowcountry after 1720. The dimensions of the problem are quickly established: during the 1710s more than 11 percent of the unfree workers listed in Carolina probate inventories were identified as Indians or Mustees, a share that fell to 6 percent by the early 1720s, 2.5 percent by 1730, and to nearly zero by the 1740s.<sup>17</sup> While the rapid growth of the black population accounts for much of the decline, it does not account for it all. What happened?

Evidence on the composition of the Indian slave population and on the plantations on which they lived and worked provides some clues. It is not

<sup>14</sup>Russell R. Menard, "Five Maryland Census, 1700 to 1712: A Note on the Quality of the Quantities," *WMQ*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 37 (October 1980), p. 624.

<sup>15</sup>Studies of Native American slavery in the Lowcountry include William Robert Snell, "Indian Slavery in Colonial South Carolina, 1671-1795" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1972); John Donald Duncan, "Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina, 1670-1776" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1972); and Almon Wheeler Lauber, *Indian Slavery in Colonial Times within the Present Limits of the United States* (New York: AMS Press, 1913). For additional data on the size of the Indian population, see Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South," *Powhatan's Mantle*, pp. 61-66 and Table 1, pp. 38-39.

<sup>16</sup>Menard, "Africanization of the Lowcountry Labor Force," pp. 98-101.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 108, reports the proportion of Indian slaves to 1730. More than 2400 slaves appeared in probate inventories taken from July 1743 through June 1745; only fifteen were identified as Indians or Mustees. Inventories, 1739-1744, 1744-1746, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia (hereafter SCDAH).

clear that Indian slaves were any less successful at reproduction than blacks, although the literature on Native American demography following the European invasion suggests such an hypothesis.<sup>18</sup> Ratios of children to adults among Indians were lower than those for blacks according to the "census" of 1708 (Table 5), but higher in probate inventories (Tables 6 and 7). Where the population structures of the two groups diverged most sharply is in their adult sex ratios: women predominated among Indians (because so many men were killed by slave raiders?), men among blacks, creating the potential for considerable cross-group marriage.<sup>19</sup> Further, most Indians lived with only a few other Native Americans on plantations with large numbers of blacks. The 126 Indian slaves in Table 6 were scattered among forty-six plantations, less than three per estate; those forty-six plantations were also home to an average of twenty-four blacks. The outcome is clear in the proportion of slaves identified as mustees: in the 1710s none of the Indian slaves were called mustees by the estate appraisors, but 20 percent were so described in the early 1720s, half in the 1730s.

Does this mean that Indian slaves were simply overwhelmed by the growing number of Africans, that Indians lost their sense of themselves as unique individuals with distinct origins? From the perspective of masters that was apparently the case. When the Indian slave trade functioned at full force, there were distinct markets in Native Americans and Africans and masters were clearly conscious of the differences between Indians and blacks among their slaves. But when that trade collapsed, the separate Indian slave market disappeared and masters quickly lost interest in such distinctions. Did the slaves? We can only wonder.

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE CAROLINA SLAVE POPULATION, 1720-1740

There is little systematic evidence on the composition of the black population for the 1710s, but for the 1720s probate inventories and a parish census yield considerable detail. Table 7 describes the age and gender of blacks who appear in inventories taken from 1721 to 1724. It suggests little change from 1708, despite the substantial rise in slave imports in the intervening years. The adult sex ratio was stable, as men continued to outnumber women by roughly 1.6 to 1. Children remained a relatively small proportion of the total, although their share increased slightly. A census for St. George Dorchester Parish taken by the Rev. Francis Varnod in 1726 reports child/adult and child/woman ratios nearly identical to those from

<sup>18</sup>Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) provides an able summary of that literature.

<sup>19</sup>Snell, "Indian Slavery in Colonial South Carolina," pp. 130-132, provides additional data on the age and gender of Indian slaves listed in probate inventories.

**TABLE 6**  
**Age and Gender of Indian and Mustee Slaves**  
**in South Carolina Probate Inventories,**  
**1711-1718, 1721-1724, 1730, 1733-1735**

Boys	27
Girls	18
Children, Sex Unknown	13
<b>Total Children</b>	<b>58</b>
Men	28
Women	40
<b>Total Adults</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Total Slaves</b>	<b>126</b>
Sex Ratio, Children	150.0
Sex Ratio, Adults	70.0
<b>Sex Ratio, Total</b>	<b>94.8</b>
Children/Adults	85.3
Children/Women	145.0
Girls*/Women	61.2

\*Assumes that 1/2 of all children, sex unknown, are girls

Notes and Sources: All ratios are written as multiples of 100. Records of the Secretary of the Province, 1711-1719, 1714-1717, 1721-1722, 1722-1726; Wills, Inventories & Miscellaneous Records, 1722-1724, 1724-1725, 1729-1731; Miscellaneous Records, Inventories, 1732-1736, all at South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

inventories, but shows a much lower adult sex ratio with men outnumbering women by only 1.3 to 1.<sup>20</sup>

The contrast between the adult sex ratio from the St. George Dorchester Parish census and probate inventories deserves further comment. It could be that the contrast reflects differences between the living and the decedent populations. If adult sex ratios varied with the number of slaves per estate and estates of a certain size were over-represented in probate documents, the contrast could be dismissed as an artifact of the records. The first

<sup>20</sup>The parish census is printed in Frank J. Klingberg, *An Appraisal of the Negro in Colonial South Carolina: A Study in Americanization* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1941). Wood offers a careful analysis in *Black Majority*, pp. 156-166.



**TABLE 7**  
**Age and Gender of African-American Slaves**  
**in South Carolina Probate Inventories, 1721-1724**

Boys	141
Girls	96
Children, Sex Unknown	74
<b>Total Children</b>	<b>311</b>
Men	410
Women	247
Adults, Sex Unknown	0
<b>Total Adults</b>	<b>657</b>
Old Men	24
Old Women	19
<b>Total Old Slaves</b>	<b>43</b>
Unidentified	220
<b>Total Slaves</b>	<b>1,231</b>
Sex Ratio, Children	146.9
Sex Ratio, Adults	166.0
Sex Ratio, Total	158.8
Children/Adults	47.3
Children/Women	125.9
Girls*/Women	53.8

\*Assumes that 1/2 of all children, sex unknown, are girls.

Notes and Sources: All ratios are written as multiples of 100. Does not include slaves identified as Indians or Mustees. Records of the Secretary of the Province, 1721-1722, 1722-1726; Wills, Inventories & Miscellaneous Records, 1722-1724, 1724-1725, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

segment of this hypothesis holds: sex ratios were highest on large plantations in both distributions. The second segment does not: the distributions of plantation sizes were the same in the two populations (Table 8). The overall sex ratio among adult slaves was lower in St. George's than among slaves owned by decedents because it was lower across all categories of plantation size, but especially on estates with ten-to-fifty blacks. Apparently, the difference is a real one, a product of regional variations in the structure of

**TABLE 8**  
**Adult Sex Ratios and Plantation Sizes in Early Carolina**

**St. George Dorchester Parish, 1726 Probate Inventories, 1721-24**

#Slaves	<u>Estates</u>		<u>Sex Ratio</u>	<u>Estates</u>		<u>Sex Ratio</u>
	#	%		#	%	
1-9	54	62	132	54	63	142
10-49	26	30	110	25	29	165
50+	7	8	155	7	8	188
Total	87	100	129	86	100	166

Notes and Sources: All ratios written as multiples of 100. Frank J. Klingberg, *An Appraisal of the Negro in Colonial South Carolina: A Study in Americanization*, pp. 58-60; Records of the Secretary of the Province, 1721-1722, 1722-1726; Wills, Inventories & Miscellaneous Records, 1722-1724, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

the lowcountry slave population.<sup>21</sup>

The two decades following 1720 witnessed a major boom in slave imports. Charlestown imported just under 800 slaves per year between 1720 and 1724, more than 1300 in the late 1720s, 1700 annually in the early 1730s, and more than 2600 annually in the late 1730s (Table 9). Unfortunately, there is little direct evidence on the characteristics of these new arrivals. Slaves reaching the West Indies and Virginia were predominantly male and overwhelmingly adult, but the data show considerable variation by region and over time. On the great majority of slave ships, sex ratios varied from a low of 130 males per 100 females to more than 200, while the share of children ranged from less than 10 percent to more than a quarter.<sup>22</sup> Certainty is impossible, but there is reason to think that Carolina slave imports fell near the upper end of the distribution on both scales; that is, slavers who worked the Lowcountry probably brought cargoes with, on average, a

<sup>21</sup>While it is possible that the sex ratio differences reflect different classification procedures, particularly the use of a lower age break to distinguish children and adults in the census, if that were the case the adult/child ratio in St. George's would be much higher than that in probate records.

<sup>22</sup>David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 93-114, explores the sources of those variations while providing a summary of the characteristics of slaves delivered by the Royal African Company. For additional evidence see Allan Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People: Black Population Growth in the Chesapeake Colonies, 1700-1790," *Southern Studies* 16 (1977), pp. 398-399, Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978); and David Geggus, "The Demographic Composition of the French Slave Trade," (unpubl. paper, 1988).

**TABLE 9**  
**Charlestown Slave Imports, 1706-1740**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Slaves</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Slaves</u>
1706	24	1724	800
1707	22	1725	439
1708	53	1726	1,751
1709	107	1727	1,794
1710	131	1728	1,201
1711	170	1729	1,499
1712	76	1730	941
1713	159	1731	1,766
1714	419	1732	1,199
1715	81	1733	2,792
1716	67	1734	1,805
1717	619	1735	2,907
1718	566	1736	3,526
1719	541	1737	2,246
1720	601	1738	2,508
1721	1,739	1739	2,017
1722	323	1740	740
1723	463	Total	34,518

Sources: Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, p. 151; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Series Z 155*, p. 1173. For 16 of the years, Wood and W. Robert Higgins (who compiled the series for *Historical Statistics*) reported different figures. In each case I used the higher number, reflecting my sense that these data understate the true volume of slave imports. Using the lower figure in each instance of disagreement yields a total of 27,115

relatively high sex ratio and a relatively large proportion of children.<sup>23</sup> At any rate, the arrival of so many Africans changed the composition of South Carolina's black population in predictable ways. Philip Morgan's analysis of probate inventories shows an upward drift in the adult sex ratio to a high of 178 in the late 1730s combined with a steady decline in the ratio of children to women, which fell by about 15 percent in those years.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the changes brought by the sharp rise of African imports after 1720, perhaps the most striking point about the composition of the lowcountry slave population as frontier society became plantation regime is its stability. The sex ratio was severely imbalanced throughout the period, while the proportion of children was consistently low. True, the proportion of women shrank in the 1730s, but the change was modest—on the order of percent—perhaps too modest to be noticed by contemporaries. True, the share of children in the population fell in the 1730s, but it did not fall below that reported in the seventeenth century. The rise of the plantation system transformed lowcountry Carolina, but it had only a minor impact on one basic demographic configuration—the distribution of slaves by age and gender.

<sup>23</sup>For evidence of the high sex ratio see the advice on the characteristics of the ideal slave cargo offered by two of Charlestown's leading merchants, both of whom suggest a male surplus of 2 to 1. Robert Pringle to Edward Pare, May 5, 1744, in Walter B. Edgar, ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), Vol. 2, p. 684; Henry Laurens to Smith and Clifton, July 17, 1755, in Philip M. Hamer et al., eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968- ), Vol. 1, p. 295. Note also the upward drift in the sex ratio among inventoried slaves discussed at the end of this paragraph. For evidence of the high proportion of children note that 13 percent of the slaves delivered at Charlestown in the late 1730s were under ten years old, a figure near the middle of the range for the percentage of boys and girls delivered by the Royal African Company, which counted males below age sixteen and females under fifteen as children. Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 340-341; Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*, pp. 94-96. Eight shipments containing 692 slaves sold or described by Henry Laurens between 1731 and 1764, while showing considerable variation from cargo to cargo, contained a high proportion of both males and children in the aggregate: 291 men, 133 women, 151 boys, and 117 girls. Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1935), Vol. 4, pp. 306-308; *Laurens Papers*, Vol. 1, pp. 315, 326; Vol. 2, p. 258; Vol. 4, pp. 256, 341, 412. While the evidence all seems to point in the same direction, it is hardly conclusive and some scholars argue that the sex ratio among slaves brought to South Carolina was more balanced than that among those brought to the Caribbean. Daniel C. Littlefield, "Plantation, Paternalism, and Profitability: Factors Affecting African Demography in the old British Empire," *Journal of Southern History* 47 (May 1981), pp. 167-182.

<sup>24</sup>Philip D. Morgan, "The Development of Slave Culture in Eighteenth-Century Plantation America" (Ph.D. dissertation, University College, London, 1977), Ch. 4.

### THE DYNAMICS OF GROWTH

What can these scanty data tell us about reproduction among slaves early in the eighteenth century, when the lowcountry plantation regime took shape? Peter Wood has offered a compelling hypothesis. Relying chiefly on a comparison of population sizes with slave import figures, Wood located a major change in the reproductive performance of blacks about 1720. Between 1708 and 1721, he concludes, the black population grew at a very rapid rate through reproduction. Thereafter, demographic conditions deteriorated, a function of the intensification of plantation agriculture associated with the emergence of rice as the region's major staple export, and a population that had been reproducing at a rapid rate began to suffer a sizeable surplus of deaths over births. That situation persisted for roughly thirty years, until, about mid-century, "the South Carolina slave population ... regained the positive rate of natural increase" it had achieved before 1720.<sup>25</sup>

Is Wood correct? His method and evidence merit careful review. The method is straightforward. Given population size at the beginning and end of a period and the number of slaves imported in the intervening years, Wood estimated the population at the end of the period in the absence of immigration by subtracting the number of migrants. It was then a simple matter to calculate a rate of change attributable to reproduction. Table 10 applies Wood's method to the evidence for the years 1708 to 1775. The results show clearly that his argument is consistent with the data on slave imports and the size of the black population: lowcountry blacks reproduced at 4.4 percent per year in the 1710s,<sup>26</sup> a handsome performance by any standard, but the rate turned negative in the 1720s, deteriorated further in the 1730s, recovered in the 1740s, and became positive again (although it remained well below its level in the 1710s) after 1750. Is Wood's method adequate to the task? Is the evidence reliable?

There is little to object to in the method, although one could pursue refinements. Wood assumed that births and deaths among immigrants were equal and made no allowance for the movement of blacks into and out

<sup>25</sup>Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 142-166; Wood, "'More Like a Negro Country'," pp. 132-145 (quotation at p. 145). Wood's argument has gained wide acceptance among historians. See, for examples, Morgan, "Development of Slave Culture," Ch. 4; Daniel C. Littlefield, *Race and Slavery: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), pp. 57-49; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 182; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 143.

<sup>26</sup>Wood reports a rate of 5.6 percent, but he included only blacks in his estimate of the population of 1708 and all slaves in 1720. *Black Majority*, p. 145. Since Indians accounted for 25 percent of the slaves in 1708 and 17 percent in 1720, this inflated the estimated rate of reproduction.

**TABLE 10**  
**Estimated Rate of Reproductive Increase**  
**Among Carolina Blacks, 1708-1775**

	<u>Total Blk.</u> <u>Pop. 1708</u>	<u>Total Blk.</u> <u>Pop. 1775</u>	<u>Blk.</u> <u>Imms.</u>	<u>Repro. Rates</u> <u>(Wood)</u>	<u>Repro. Rates</u> <u>(Kulikoff)</u>
1708-20	4,100	9,900	2,989	4.4%	4.6%
1720-30	9,900	20,000	10,610	-0.5%	0.1%
1730-40	20,000	39,200	21,707	-1.3%	-0.7%
1740-50	39,200	40,000	1,563	-0.2%	-0.2%
1750-60	40,000	57,000	16,497	0.1%	0.3%
1760-70	57,000	82,000	21,840	0.5%	0.7%
1770-75	82,000	104,000	18,866	0.8%	1.0%

Note: The figures in the first column report the total black population at the beginning of the period, while those in the second list the population at the end. The third column lists the total number of black immigrants during the period. The reproductive increase rates reported in the fourth column assume, following Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, p. 145, an equal number of births and deaths among the arriving slaves. Those in the final column assume that the migrant population declined at a rate of 1.5% per year, the mid-point of the range suggested by Allan Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People: Black Population Growth in the Chesapeake Colonies, 1700-1790," *Southern Studies* 16 (1977), p. 401.

Sources: Tables 1 and 9, above; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Series Z 155, p. 1173; Philip D. Morgan, "Black Society in the Lowcountry, 1760-1810" in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, p. 89.

of South Carolina by land, assuring, in effect, that such movement balanced each other. It is possible to incorporate other, more complex assumptions regarding those variables into the method, but in the absence of firm data on which to build estimates it is not clear that such refinements would improve on Wood's simplifying approach. I have, however, introduced one change. Wood's assumption that births and deaths were equal among newly arriving Africans seems overly optimistic. The last column in Table 10 assumes that African immigrants experienced a net natural decline of 1.5 percent a year. This has the effect of raising all the estimated rates of reproduction but it does not alter the pattern of change over time.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>The rate is the midpoint of the range suggested by Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," p. 401. Philip D. Morgan, "Black Society in the Lowcountry, 1760-1871," in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), p. 89, reports much

If the method is adequate, what of the evidence? The population estimates seem reliable. That for 1708 at best comes from a census return, at worst from the considered opinion of responsible officials; with one exception, the remainder are based on tax returns and represent careful attempts to enumerate the population. The exception is the 1730 estimate, a shaky number derived by interpolation. However, it is not critical for this purpose: substantial changes in either direction would affect the timing of changes in the estimated reproduction rate without altering the pattern over the long term. The evidence on slave imports also seems reliable, at least for most years from 1717 on, for those data are drawn from naval officer shipping lists, tax records, and newspaper reports. For the years before 1717, however, their quality is uncertain: they first appear in a report published by a legislative committee in 1737, but we do not know how or where the committee obtained them.<sup>28</sup> Wood's method and evidence yield a reliable description of the course of reproductive increase in the years following 1720. What about the earlier period?

One way to approach the problem is to explore the implications of Wood's results for birth and death rates and for the composition of the population and then to check those for plausibility and against other evidence. While the absence of an age distribution makes it difficult to set limits within which birth and death rates must have fallen,<sup>29</sup> simply raising the issue introduces doubts about the high rate of natural increase generated by Wood's procedure: to achieve a growth rate of 4.6 percent, birth and death rates must show a spread of 46 per 1000 (80 and 34, respectively, for example), and the possibilities strike me as implausibly high or low. Reflection on the composition of the population points in a similar direction: a growth rate of 4.6 percent in the twelve years following 1708 implies a child/adult ratio in 1720 substantially higher than that appearing in probate inventories of the early 1720s. In sum, it would seem more reasonable to

higher annual rates of natural increase. However, Morgan assigned a higher rate of decline to immigrants by assuming that they died at rates suggested in Kulikoff's article but that they did not have any children. And he calculated the annual rate of natural increase by dividing the percentage gain over a decade by ten.

<sup>28</sup>*Report of the Committee of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina on the State of the Paper Currency of the Said Province* (London: Thomas Wood, 1737). The text of the report, but not the table, appears in J.H. Easterby, ed., *The Journal of the Commons House Assembly, November 10, 1736-June 7, 1739* (Columbia, S.C.: Historical Commission of South Carolina, 1951), pp. 291-320. A nearly identical table with some supplementary comments, was printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 25 (1755), p. 344.

<sup>29</sup>There is a useful discussion of this problem in Jack E. Eblen, "On the Natural Increase of Slave Populations: The Example of the Cuban Black Population, 1775-1900," in Engerman and Genovese, *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere*, pp. 211-247.

assume a major undercounting of slave imports in the years before 1717 than to conclude that the black population sustained a reproductive growth rate of 4.6 percent per year in the early-eighteenth century.

If Wood's estimate of reproduction among blacks before 1720 is too high, how substantial an adjustment in import figures is needed to bring that rate into line with other evidence? A precise answer is impossible, but it is useful in this context to consider the obstacles to reproductive increase among slaves in frontier Carolina. Those obstacles were formidable. The sex ratio was severely imbalanced, while small units and low settlement densities further restricted opportunities for stable unions. Death rates were also high, although exactly how high is unknown. Contemporary observers leave the impression that the lowcountry disease environment was more severe than that along the tobacco coast: certainly it is not unreasonable to assume childhood mortality rates in the neighborhood of 50 percent or that a large share of those who survived childhood died in their prime.<sup>30</sup> By the eve of independence some of those obstacles—sex ratios, unit sizes, and settlement densities if not mortality—were much reduced. If we assume that the slave population grew as rapidly between 1708 and 1720 as in the early 1770s, the number of migrants in the early period must be increased by about 80 percent; if that population just held its own through reproduction, the number of migrants must be doubled.

There is some direct if inconclusive evidence that the figures of slave imports before 1720 reported in Table 9 undercount the actual number of new arrivals. In their report to the Board of Trade quoted above, the governor and council seem to assert (the phrasing is unclear) that 500 slaves (300 men and 200 women) arrived between 1703 and 1708, an average of 100 per year.<sup>31</sup> Table 9 reports an average of only 33 annually from 1706 to 1708. In 1709, when Table 9 records the arrival of only 107 slaves, there is a report that a single ship "Carried 180" Africans to Carolina.<sup>32</sup> While more evidence would be welcome, surely there is enough to suggest that the usually accepted figures on slaves imported for the years before 1720 understate the level of black immigration.

<sup>30</sup>Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 63-91, provides the best guide to contemporary opinion on lowcountry mortality. See also H. Roy Merrens and George D. Terry, "Dying in Paradise: Malaria, Mortality, and the Perceptual Environment in Colonial South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 50 (November 1984), pp. 533-550, and Peter Coclanis, "Death in Early Charleston: An Estimate of the Crude Death Rate for the White Population of Charleston," *SCHM* 85 (October 1984), pp. 280-291.

<sup>31</sup>See above, p. 288.

<sup>32</sup>Donnan, ed., *Documents*, Vol. 4, p. 255n. Donnan, commenting on the figures on slave imports for 1706 to 1724 reported by the legislature in 1737, noted that "most of our fragmentary evidence goes to show that this list is far from complete." *Ibid.*, p. 256n.



While Wood's description of the demography of slavery before 1720 seems too optimistic, the pattern he identified may stand: reproductive rates among Carolina blacks seem to form a long, shallow "U" with a low in the 1730s. Recent research suggests that the changing proportion of Africans in the population produced that shape. Africans faced especially severe obstacles to reproduction: they were plagued by a new disease environment and a shortage of women, while those females among them were often well-advanced in their childbearing years before beginning reproduction. Their children, by contrast, possessed an equal share of men and women, avoided the destructive shock of moving to an unfamiliar epidemiological system, and began to have children while still young. Thus, as the proportion of Africans rose as South Carolina built its plantation regime with booming slave imports, the reproductive rate declined. The sharp reduction in slave imports in the aftermath of the Stono rebellion transformed the demography of slavery in the Lowcountry by providing a short breathing space during which the proportion of native-born blacks slowly increased. By mid-century that group was large enough to create a reproducing slave population despite the high levels of African immigration during the late colonial period. "Importations" of slaves to South Carolina, Governor James Glen explained in 1754, "are not to supply the place of Negroes worn out with hard work or lost by Mortality which is the case in our Islands where were it not for an annual accretion they could not keep up their stock, but our number encreases even without such yearly supply."<sup>33</sup>

Wood's argument is not merely that the aggregate reproductive rate fell as the proportion of Africans in the population rose. In addition, he seems to suggest, "the general worsening of black living conditions associated with the intensification of staple agriculture" lowered fertility and increased mortality for all slaves, including those born in the colony, "directly involved in the grueling process of rice production."<sup>34</sup> I suspect Wood has exaggerated the impact of rice cultivation and the rise of the plantation regime on the vital rates of native-born blacks. The argument depends heavily on high rates of reproductive increase during the frontier era, but, as we have seen, Wood's reading of slave demography in the early years of lowcountry settlement is too optimistic. Further, some processes associated with the rise of great plantations may have enhanced opportunities for blacks to form stable unions and raise children. Plantation sizes rose sharply during the Carolina export boom. In the seventeenth century, farms with slaves contained an average of just over four blacks and nearly 80 percent of the slaves lived and worked on units with ten or fewer African Americans (Table 2). By the early 1720s, plantations contained an average of fourteen blacks and more than 70 percent lived and worked on estates with more

<sup>33</sup>Glen to Board of Trade, Aug. 26, 1754, in Donnan, *Documents*, Vol. 4, p. 313.

<sup>34</sup>Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 163, 165.

than twenty slaves, figures that reached nineteen and nearly 80 percent by 1730 (Tables 11 and 12). In short, it is likely that Wood's overly optimistic reading of slave demography in the frontier era is matched by an overly pessimistic interpretation of the impact of plantation agriculture or black reproductive prospects.

I do not mean to minimize the difficulties of life on lowcountry plantations or to underestimate the impact of rice culture on slave mortality. Rice was clearly a destructive crop by North American standards. "No work can be imagined more pernicious to health," Alexander Hewatt argued, "than for men to stand in water mid-leg high, and often above it planting and weeding rice." It was a "horrible employment," the author of *American Husbandry* added, "not far short of digging in Potosi."<sup>35</sup> However, the destructive impact of rice culture is evident not in reducing the reproductive performance of native-born slaves as the Lowcountry was transformed from a frontier settlement to a plantation society, but rather in keeping reproductive rates low once that plantation regime was fully developed. As late as the 1830s, when blacks elsewhere in the United States were growing at near Malthusian rates, Samuel Patterson noted that rice planters "never expected that the number of their people should increase—if they could keep up the force—which in many cases they could not do—it was all they hoped."<sup>36</sup> Patterson probably exaggerated: Carolina slaves achieved a surplus of births over deaths in the years after 1750. However, levels of reproduction there remained low, three to four times lower than those registered along the tobacco coast at the time, powerful testimony to the rigors of life on lowcountry rice plantations.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Hewatt, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia* (London: Alexander Donaldson, 1779; repr. Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Co., 1971), Vol. 1, p. 159; Harry J. Carmen, ed., *American Husbandry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 277. See also, for other contemporary assertions of the destructiveness of rice culture, *South-Carolina Gazette*, July 17, 1733, and "Correspondence between Alexander Garden, M.D., and the Royal Society of Arts," *SCHM* 64 (January 1963), pp. 16-17.

<sup>36</sup>Samuel Patterson, June 6, 1832, as quoted in William H. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 33. Twenty-five years later, Robert Russell seconded Patterson's observation, reporting mortality so high that rice planters often were forced to rely on purchases to maintain the size of their work force. Russell, *North America: Its Agriculture and Climate* (Edinburgh: Black, 1857), p. 179. Richard Steckel reports that infant mortality was higher and fertility perhaps lower among slaves in rice plantations than among slaves in the southern United States as a whole. "The Economics of U.S. Slave and Southern White Fertility" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1977), pp. 84-95, 207-219.

<sup>37</sup>Compare Table 10 above to Kuilkoff, "A 'Prolifick' People," p. 393.