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Planters, Merchants, and Revolution: Lobbying Power and the Economic Origins of
Independence in South Carolina

by

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Abstract

The origins of the American Revolution in South Carolina derived from politico-economic factors. Most prominent among those factors was the lobbying power that elite South Carolinians sought within a new confederation. The ruling class of the province looked to the British Caribbean and perceived an immense lobbying power that resulted from the strong economies of sugar islands such as Jamaica. South Carolina simply could not match this power because of the disparate economies. Islands of the British Caribbean enjoyed tremendous clout in shaping imperial policy because of the revenue raised by sugar exports. On the mainland, however, South Carolina enjoyed one of the stronger economies, second only to the Chesapeake region. By uniting into a confederation of the other mainland colonies, whether independence was declared or not, elite South Carolinians could claim primary politico-economic status over other political units. This leap in status would result in heightened lobbying power for the province within the new confederation. All of this points to the fact that the origins of the Revolution within South Carolina were material, not ideological, and were driven by the interests of the merchants and planters, who comprised the ruling class of the colony.

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Introduction

By 1775, though independence had not officially been declared, the American Revolution had arrived in South Carolina. In September of that year, the last royal governor of the colony, William Campbell, fled under pressure from the independence movement. Even before that, however, royal governance had virtually collapsed, as a revolutionary legislative body known as the Provincial Congress constituted the only effective government in the southern province. South Carolina remained divided, as a significant number of loyalists remained in the backcountry and smaller numbers could still be found even in Charleston. The lowcountry and the colony's capital, however, were constituted predominantly by patriots, and these were the regions in which power was concentrated. Thus, although debates over the imperial crisis continued in the Charleston newspapers, rebellion and independence were virtually inevitable by early-1775 in South Carolina and several other British North American colonies.¹

South Carolina and the other rebelling mainland colonies, however, only constituted roughly half of the British colonies in the Americas. Jamaica, and many other islands in the British Caribbean, remained even more divided over how to respond to Parliamentary taxation and the broader imperial crisis. The Jamaica House of Assembly proclaimed its support for British North America's resistance to parliamentary

¹ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 226.

encroachment.² That body argued that the North American colonies “were a part of the *English* people, in every respect equal to them, and possessed of every right and privilege...which the people of *England* were possessed of.”³ Though Jamaica made public proclamations of support, the sugar colony did not involve itself in the Revolution. Why, then, did Jamaica and the other colonies in the British West Indies show some support for the North American rebellion, but stop short of joining the war effort? What were the distinctions between South Carolina and Jamaica that caused the former to rebel and the latter to abstain? Does a comparison between South Carolina and the Caribbean, and Jamaica in particular, reveal an economic, political, ideological, social, or cultural answer to these questions?

To address the inquiries that emerge from a comparative approach to the Revolution in South Carolina, one can look to an agreement struck in the First Continental Congress in late-1774. In order to prove its worth to the imperial center and seek redress for its grievances, this association agreed to stop the exportation of goods from the mainland colonies to Britain. Four of the five South Carolina delegates, however, threatened to walk out on the Congress because of this agreement unless the main staple of the colony, rice, was exempt from the boycott.⁴ The reason behind this threat was the fact that the delegation held the notion that non-exportation would make their constituency suffer disproportionately. Eventually, the Carolina delegation achieved

² Richard B. Sheridan, “The Jamaican Slave Insurrection Scare of 1776 and the American Revolution,” *The Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 3 (1976): 290.

³ Matthew Mulcahy, *Hubs of Empire: The Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 207.

⁴ The delegates from South Carolina were Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Lynch, Henry Middleton, Edward Rutledge, and John Rutledge. Of these five, Gadsden was the only one that did not threaten to walk out of the Congress.

an important victory, as a compromise was reached in which permission was given to export rice to Great Britain.⁵

The successful lobbying effort in the First Continental Congress actually reveals the purpose behind South Carolina's participation in the independence movement. Throughout the eighteenth century, and especially in the 1760s and 1770s, South Carolina's lobbying efforts within the British empire were perennially frustrated. As the imperial crisis unfolded after the Seven Years' War, merchants and planters from the Carolina lowcountry found that their secondary *economic* status in relation to the sugar colonies such as Jamaica reduced the colony's *political* importance. While the West Indies lobby exercised substantial power largely because of Jamaica's revenue-generating ability for the empire, South Carolina, despite its strong economy, found itself more politically isolated. In the early-1770s, however, the South Carolina ruling class perceived an opportunity to achieve Jamaica's politico-economic status within a new confederation of states. The immediate lobbying efforts in the Continental Congress on behalf of the planter and merchant communities demonstrated South Carolina's newfound and recognized leverage within the new union of colonies. Thus, with the decision to push for the exception for rice, the political class of South Carolinians on the eve of the Revolution showed that independence within the province was guided by the interests of the merchants and planters. The economic status of Carolina within the Continental Congress gave it more political power. Scrutinizing the colony's push for independence in contrast to the loyalty of the British Caribbean points to the practical and material origins of the American Revolution in South Carolina.

⁵ Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1983), 314-316.

The major historiographical debate on the origins of the American Revolution centers on this question of whether independence was sought for ideological or material considerations. Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood provided some of the most recognizable arguments in favor of the ideological origins. They agreed that political ideology in the British North American colonies after the English Civil War engendered opposition to Parliamentary policies after the Seven Years' War.⁶ Scholars such as Gary Nash and Woody Holton, on the other hand, have argued that independence stemmed from material circumstances, such as the presence of non-elite populations and elite anxiety because of those populations.⁷ These arguments, however, have tended to focus on the Revolution outside of South Carolina. This assessment seeks to demonstrate the material origins of independence *within* the southern colony.

In order to establish the material origins of independence in South Carolina, one must first understand the economic circumstances of the colony within the imperial context. This paper will show that the southern colony maintained a very strong economy, especially in relation to the other British mainland colonies. This factor provided the South Carolina delegation to the Continental Congress with the confidence to push for the rice exception. However, as will be shown, the colony's financial contributions in relation to the British Caribbean in general, and Jamaica in particular, were virtually insignificant because of the revenue generated by sugar. The paper will

⁶ For arguments in favor of the ideological origins of the Revolution, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967) and Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

⁷ For arguments in favor of the material origins of the Revolution, see Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2005) and Wood Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

then present the argument that the economic discrepancies between South Carolina and the British Caribbean led to substantial disparities in political power. Especially after the Seven Years' War, the British Caribbean wielded a notable and somewhat surprising amount of power at the imperial level through lobbying efforts. South Carolina lobbying efforts, on the other hand, faced consistent failure or only limited success. Finally, this paper will show that the origins of the independence movement in the colony were driven by the interests of the planters and merchants in the lowcountry. These points will establish the fact that the initial purpose behind South Carolina's participation in the Revolution derived from an interest to place the colony in a more powerful politico-economic position within a confederation. The lowcountry ruling class essentially desired the same influence enjoyed by Jamaican planters.

Chapter 1: Historiography

Several prominent historians over the past century have attempted to discover the origins of the American Revolution by explaining why the colonies in the British Caribbean did not rebel, but as T. R. Clayton somewhat harshly put it in 1986, “existing studies of Caribbean responses [to the Revolution] remain either inadequate or inaccurate.”⁸ While this assessment has been somewhat addressed in the past two decades, Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy was correct in his assertion that this comparative approach to understanding the Revolution has still not been adequately utilized. He argued that, as of 2000, “the British West Indies have received scant attention in the historical literature on the American Revolution.”⁹ Considering that this contention still remains true, especially for historians of the United States, this essay seeks to address the frequent omission while also recognizing and building off of the important historiographical contributions of those historians who have given attention to the Caribbean.¹⁰

In the early-twentieth century, historians of the imperial school tended to focus on the divergent economies of the British North American and Caribbean colonies. Frank

⁸ T. R. Clayton, “Sophistry, Security, and Socio-Political Structures in the American Revolution; or, Why Jamaica did not Rebel,” *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 2 (1986): 320.

⁹ Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), xii-xiii.

¹⁰ This essay predominately utilizes the American historiography on why the mainland revolted while the British Caribbean did not. Several scholars of the Caribbean, however, have also asked the same comparative questions. See Richard B. Sheridan’s 1974 book, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*, in which he argues that the economic success of the British Caribbean led to the immense power of the region within the empire, which isolated British North America.

Wesley Pitman argued that the economic power of the British Caribbean, especially Jamaica, gave those colonies a significant advantage over the mainland colonies as far as political power within the empire. This politico-economic advantage, for Pitman, explained why the British Caribbean did not rebel, while the mainland colonies did.¹¹ Charles McLean Andrews made a similar argument when he noted that the economic imperatives behind territorial expansion after the Seven Years' War can explain the divergent paths in the imperial crisis.¹² Even though this purely economic argument was a staple of the early-twentieth century, its cogency continues to be respected to the present-day. Clayton, in fact, included this assessment in his argument by stating that, for the mainland colonies, "independence was conceivable strategically and...advantageous economically, socially or politically" while Jamaicans perceived little opportunity in rebellion.¹³ This essay essentially utilizes this comparative economic approach to the Revolution and applies it specifically to South Carolina in order to show the material origins of independence in the colony.

Since the early-twentieth century, historians have generally maintained some economic focus in order to explain the disparate paths between the British colonies in the American Revolution, but have begun to include many social and cultural factors that may have influenced the divergent paths as well. Selwyn Carrington, a Caribbean historian, along with Jack Greene and O'Shaughnessy, put great emphasis on the close cultural ties between the British Caribbean and the imperial center, as opposed to those

¹¹ Frank Wesley Pitman, "The Peace of Paris and the Politics of Sugar," in *The American Revolution and the West Indies*, ed. Charles W. Toth (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1975), 15. Hereafter cited as *The American Revolution*.

¹² Charles M. Andrews, "Yankees and Creoles vs. England," in *The American Revolution*, 40-42.

¹³ Clayton, 321.

ties between the mainland colonies and Britain.¹⁴ While this theory might work well for some of the mainland colonies, it cannot explain why South Carolina rebelled when Jamaica did not. This is because of the very significant cultural ties between lowcountry Carolinians and Britain. Through deliberate policy and social construction, the ruling class of Charleston made “the town [seem] to travelers like a miniature London in the new world.”¹⁵ Despite the diverse population in the province, the colonists within the ruling class were largely successful in emulating the society and culture of the British.¹⁶ The close social and cultural ties between South Carolina and Great Britain, therefore, demonstrate the limitations to this interpretation of the origins of the Revolution.

The same historians mentioned above also pointed to the idea that deeper cultural connections between the British Caribbean and the mother country were the result of significant economic *dependence* on the imperial center.¹⁷ The problem with this argument can be shown through an examination of the assertions made by historians of the imperial school. The economic power of the of the sugar islands led to significant politico-economic leverage in imperial politics, which will be discussed later. The power that colonies such as Jamaica wielded as a result of this economic factor suggests a relationship of *interdependence* between the Caribbean peripheries and the imperial center. While this assessment upsets the notion of dependence that is justifiably but uncritically accepted, Parliamentary policies certainly demonstrated interdependence.

¹⁴ O’Shaughnessy, 3-34.

¹⁵ Tobias, Thomas J. (Thomas Jefferson), 1906-1970, Thomas J. Tobias papers, ca. 1716-1968, (1106.00), box 11/420, folder 1, South Carolina Historical Society, hereafter cited as Tobias Papers. These papers were comprised of the research notes by Thomas Tobias (1906-1970) for an unfinished book on South Carolina trade and Charleston shipping that he was writing in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹⁶ Edgar, 201-203.

¹⁷ O’Shaughnessy, xv.

The mainland colonies, even South Carolina, simply did not have the economic power to create interdependence in the way that Jamaica did.

The most widely accepted historiographical answer to the question about the discrepancy in response to the Revolution deals with the large slave majority in the sugar colonies such as Jamaica. Since the 1970s, historians have frequently focused on the demographics of the mainland and Caribbean colonies and argued that islands like Jamaica did not get involved in the independence movement because of the large slave population. Robert Wells, Carrington, Greene, and O'Shaughnessy have all emphasized this explanation. O'Shaughnessy, for example, posited the view that the overwhelming slave majority in many Caribbean islands "made the white colonists militarily dependent on Britain and was a critical factor in ensuring the loyalty of whites during the American Revolution."¹⁸ This assertion, however, fails to take into consideration the demographics of South Carolina. On the eve of the Revolution, the enslaved population in South Carolina stood at roughly sixty percent of the total population.¹⁹ Though it is true that slaves in Jamaica comprised a higher percentage of the population than in South Carolina, the percentage of the slave population in the Carolina lowcountry tended to be far higher than sixty percent.²⁰ In many of the lowcountry parishes, where virtually all of the power in the colony was concentrated, enslaved individuals made up roughly eighty percent of the total population.²¹ At the end of the Seven Years' War, the white population of the lowcountry parish of St. John's Berkeley stood at only about seven

¹⁸ Ibid. 34.

¹⁹ Edgar, 78.

²⁰ It has been estimated that the ratio of slaves to whites in Jamaica stood at 10 or 11 to 1; see "Slavery in Colonial North America, 1600-1850" at arcofhistory.org.

²¹ Edgar, 260; while the numbers cited from Edgar here are for the year 1790, the demographics did not change much for the lowcountry during those fifteen years.

percent of the total population. While there were just seventy-six free whites in that parish, there were more than one thousand male slaves.²² This means that simple demographics regarding the slave population cannot explain why South Carolina rebelled while Jamaica abstained.

O’Shaughnessy also advanced this demographic argument by stating that slave rebellions were more prevalent in Jamaica than in South Carolina and, therefore, Jamaica encouraged the British military’s assistance on the island.²³ This assertion, again, does not account for certain realities in South Carolina in the 1770s. While Jamaica had to contend with actual rebellions more frequently, the fear of rebellion in South Carolina was just as powerful in shaping actions by the latter’s ruling class. In a grand jury presentment, the complaint was made that “Negros in Charles-Town are become so obscene in their Language, so irregular and disorderly in the Conduct, and so superfluous in the Number: we think it calls for the immediate Attention of the Legislature.”²⁴ Clearly, the fear of slave rebellion as a result of demographics on the eve of the Revolution was circulated throughout any slave-majority province in the Atlantic world. The idea that rebellion by white colonists could lead to slave insurrection did not stop at colonial borders.

Because of the significant problems with the social, cultural, and demographic arguments that have been utilized to explain why many British North American colonies

²² Robert A. Olwell, “‘Domestick Enemies’: Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775-March 1776,” *The Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 1 (1989): 22; in this article, Olwell did extend the material origins thesis into South Carolina, but he focused on slavery alone as opposed to broader politico-economic considerations as this paper attempts.

²³ In the early-1760s, Jamaica had three major slave revolts, while South Carolina had not experienced a major revolt since 1739, see O’Shaughnessy, 38.

²⁴ “The Presentments of the Grand-Jury for the District of Charles-Town,” *The South Carolina Gazette*, October 31, 1774; in addition to this, there are several articles that appear in the Charleston newspapers that reveal apprehension over the liberty of slaves.

rebelled while the British West Indies did not, it seems likely that an economic analysis can be employed to explain this discrepancy. When applied to South Carolina specifically, it becomes clear that such an economic analysis is adequate to explain the origins of the Revolution in that particular colony. Contemporary ideological arguments in favor of the Revolution likely only followed the material realities within the colony.

Chapter 2: South Carolina's Economy within the British Empire

In order to establish the politico-economic origins of the independence movement in South Carolina, as well as to understand why Jamaica did not get involved in that movement, the actual economic situation of South Carolina must be assessed in isolation and in relation to the rest of the mainland colonies and Jamaica. South Carolina held a very strong economic position within the British empire, but it was not the most profitable colony to the mother country. Jamaica and other Caribbean colonies were, by far, the most profitable. Trevor Burnard showed that “white Jamaicans...were the wealthiest citizens of empire in the Americas, with individual wealth and income exceeding by a significant margin those of whites in mainland British America.”²⁵

Jamaica was trailed by the Chesapeake region of Virginia and Maryland. South Carolina followed these colonies, holding the third-most profitable position, although one could make a cogent argument that elite Carolinians had every reason to be confident that they could surpass the Chesapeake region in economic status in a new union that did not include the Caribbean.²⁶ This is crucial to understand because it shows that there was significant opportunity for more political power through a strong economy within a new confederation of independent states. In other words, South Carolina had the ability to become the politico-economic powerhouse, or the new Jamaica, within a different union.

²⁵ T. G. Burnard, “‘Prodigious Riches’: The Wealth of Jamaica before the American Revolution,” *The Economic History Review* 54, no. 3 (2001): 508.

²⁶ Tobias Papers, box 11/420, folder 1.

Merchants and planters within the state, who held a virtual monopoly on political power, recognized this opportunity and acted in their own interest.

A few facts must be established about the economy of South Carolina in isolation from the rest of the colonies of the British empire. Not only was this colony extremely wealthy and one of the top contributors to the imperial economy, but growth throughout the eighteenth century gave Carolinians even more confidence in their economic position.²⁷ The value of Carolina's exports to England over the value of imports from the imperial center provides one measurement of that growth. In the late-1720s, this value was estimated at £130,909, even though South Carolinians, especially in the lowcountry, imported significant amounts of luxury items from Britain in order to emulate English culture and society.²⁸ Throughout the duration of 1730s, this value jumped to £835,941 as the revenue from rice continued to grow.²⁹ During the 1740s and 1750s, however, as the profits from exports in the province began to decline, the entire economy of the colony suffered.³⁰ This is an unsurprising result given the political and economic control that planters and merchants maintained. When those demographics suffered, it was certain that the entire population would suffer as well. Although this downward development would not have produced optimism about the potential to be a politico-economic powerhouse within any confederation of states or colonies, it was only temporary.³¹

²⁷ Edgar, 131-154.

²⁸ Ibid. 201-203; in 1728, the value of imports was £23,254 and the value of exports was £96,055 and in 1729, the value of imports grew to £33,067 and the value of exports declined to £91,175, see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Government Printing Office, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1976): 1176, hereafter cited as *Historical Statistics of the United States*.

²⁹ Ibid., 1176.

³⁰ Ibid., 1176; Tobias Papers, box 11/422, folder 9.

³¹ Tobias Paper, box 11/422, folder 9.

While South Carolina suffered from an economic decline due to falling revenue from rice and indigo for roughly twenty years, growth returned to the colony in the 1760s.³² Although this growth was initially slow, from 1765 to 1775 the value of exports to Great Britain over the value of imports soared to £1,356,985.³³ This substantial growth, along with the established profitability of the colony, evidently gave the ruling classes of planters and merchants confidence in the fact that an independent South Carolina could be the dominant politico-economic power of a new union of states, even if that union included Virginia. The newfound assuredness was manifested in the delegates' threat to walk out on the Continental Congress if the rice exception was not granted.

The confidence that the South Carolina elite enjoyed as a result of the profitability and economic growth of the colony was even more inflated by the fact that the colony possessed, in general, a stronger economy than the other mainland possessions of Britain. One measure of this wealth comes from the total value of exports from the mainland to the imperial center in the years leading up to the Revolution. In 1768, South Carolina made up forty percent of the mainland colonies' exports to Britain. South Carolina's total value of exports to the imperial center in that year stood at £508,108, while the total value for all of the other twelve mainland colonies that would rebel was £1,251,454. Such uneven trade became more balanced as the independence movement gained momentum, but Carolina still enjoyed disproportionate wealth from this intra-imperial trade. In 1772, South Carolina exports to Britain were valued at £876,000, while all of the other mainland colonies' trade together amounted to £4,300,000. Though this was only twenty

³² This figure grew slightly in the 1760s, but the upward trend continued into the 1770s; Tobias Papers, box 11/420, folder 1.

³³ *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 1176.

percent of the total mainland colonies' exports to the imperial center, it still represented a disproportionate number.

Further, the value of exports from the mainland colonies to southern Europe, Africa, the West Indies, and Great Britain also reveals the strength of South Carolina's economy in relation to the rest of British North America. In 1769, only the Chesapeake surpassed Carolina in the total value of exports to these destinations, as this figure for Maryland and Virginia stood at £991,402. South Carolina distantly trailed the Chesapeake with a total export value of £569,585. That figure, however, surpassed the total value of exports from all of the New England colonies combined. It also exceeded the value of exports from the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania combined.³⁴ This lopsided figure explains the confidence of the merchants, planters, and delegates of South Carolina in the agreements in the Continental Congress of 1774.³⁵

The profitability of South Carolina in comparison to the rest of British North America can also be seen through the wealth of individual Carolinians. Of the ten richest colonists in Britain's mainland possessions, nine of those were South Carolinians.³⁶ Further, all nine of those men were residents of lowcountry parishes. This is significant because that is the region in which power was concentrated. Of those lowcountry parishes, Charleston District was, by far, the wealthiest of all other counties or parishes in British North America. In 1774, private wealth within the Charleston District was estimated at £2,338. The next wealthiest county in British North America was Anne

³⁴ *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 1179.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Edgar, 153.

Arundel County, Maryland. The private wealth within that county was estimated at just £660, or just over twenty-eight percent of the private wealth in Charleston District.³⁷

The wealth of Charleston was significant for another reason aside from where power was concentrated in South Carolina and all of British North America. Though the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland were more profitable to the mother country because of the value of tobacco exports, neither of these colonies had a city that was comparable to Charleston. The presence of a wealthy city such as Charleston would have made Carolinians even more confident in the possibility of becoming an economic, political, and social center of a new confederation. In addition to this, and despite the higher overall profitability of the Chesapeake colonies, the value of South Carolina's exports did occasionally surpass even that of the tobacco-producing economies. This trend was short-lived, but it began in the late-1760s, right as the local disputes over imperial power intensified. By the early-1770s, the value of exports from the Chesapeake again surpassed that of the South Carolina lowcountry, but this close competition apparently influenced the confidence of the South Carolina delegation in negotiations in the First Continental Congress.³⁸

One consequence of the strong economy in South Carolina, along with the significant economic growth and the colony's position in relation to other British North American holdings, was a drastic increase in the importation of enslaved Africans. From 1761 to 1775, when the value of rice and indigo exports grew alongside the revolutionary fervor, more than 64,000 Africans were forcibly brought into the colony through

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Tobias Papers, box 11/420, folder 1.

Charleston.³⁹ Although lowcountry Carolinians were among the wealthiest in British North America, this drastic importation created a substantial amount of debt to British merchants. The imperial regulations that planters and merchants perceived as too harsh and counterproductive likely produced doubt that planters would be able to repay these debts. In all probability, as other scholars have argued about different colonies, this created a sense of economic urgency within South Carolina and produced a practical, economic response, which was to seek independence.⁴⁰

Though South Carolina was perennially able to compete with the most profitable of the British North American colonies, and surpass the vast majority of them, this was not the case at all in relation to Jamaica. According to O’Shaughnessy, Jamaica and several other Caribbean islands “received special consideration from the imperial government because they were regarded as a major source of national wealth in Britain.”⁴¹ Some contemporaries even estimated that Jamaica’s wealth was so great that the combination of rice and tobacco colonies produced only two-thirds of the wealth that Jamaica produced.⁴² Though Jamaica was a dependency of Great Britain, the economic relationship between the center and periphery would be better characterized as interdependent because of the contributions from the sugar island.⁴³

³⁹ Voyages Database, 2010, *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* <http://www.slavevoyages.org> (accessed April 9, 2017).

⁴⁰ For increased importation of slaves, see Tobias Papers, box 11/420, folder 1; for the argument about the potential for debt to produce revolution, see T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); for the perception of harsh regulations, see Tobias Papers, box 11/420, folder 1.

⁴¹ O’Shaughnessy, xi-xii.

⁴² Clayton, 322.

⁴³ Although O’Shaughnessy highlighted the dependence of Jamaica, the Peace Treaty of 1763 showed a relationship of interdependence; in *Sugar and Slavery*, Sheridan presented the argument that the wealth of the British empire was actually dependent on the sugar plantations in the Caribbean.

The economy of Jamaica already provided significant revenue for Britain before the Seven Years' War, but it grew even more rapidly after the war.⁴⁴ This was the scenario in South Carolina as well, but not on the same scale. South Carolina already could not compete with Jamaica's economy before 1763, but this was especially true in the interwar period. Considering that Jamaica was already "the premier British colony...strategically, economically, and politically," the continued growth provided no incentive for the colony to rebel.⁴⁵

As O'Shaughnessy correctly noted, "the plantocracy [of Jamaica and the entire British West Indies] were primarily interested in their own hegemony."⁴⁶ The same was true for the plantocracy of South Carolina. The divergent response between South Carolina and Jamaica to the imperial crisis in 1775 resulted from how each plantocracy could protect, or achieve, hegemony. Jamaica already possessed tremendous political clout within the empire due to its inordinate economic power. Because of this, there was no need for Jamaica to climb up the politico-economic ladder within the British empire. South Carolina, on the other hand, enjoyed a strong and growing economy, but the ruling classes within the state still perceived an opportunity to become the dominant politico-economic power within a new confederation. Essentially, South Carolina's participation in, and Jamaica's abstention from, the Revolution can both be explained through economic power and hegemony.

⁴⁴ O'Shaughnessy, 93.

⁴⁵ Clayton, 322.

⁴⁶ O'Shaughnessy, 194.

Chapter 3: South Carolina's Lobby in Imperial Context

The economic factors translated into direct imperial policy through the lobbying efforts of both the mainland and Caribbean colonies. Given the profitability of Britain's Caribbean possessions, especially Jamaica, compared to most of the mainland, it is unsurprising that the former would hold tremendous political clout in the imperial center. What is more noteworthy, however, is how much power the West India lobby wielded in shaping imperial policy in general. After Britain's victory in the Seven Years' War, geographic expansion was inevitable. The only question was where expansion should take place. Most of the population in Britain saw the answer to this question in the French Caribbean islands that had been captured during the war. On the other hand, some preferred to retain Canada, which had also been captured by Britain. Considering the profitability of Jamaica, the solution seemed obvious: give Canada back to the French and retain the captured possessions in the French West Indies, such as Martinique and Guadeloupe, in order to expand revenue from the sugar colonies. Though this seemed to be the obvious answer, the House of Commons voted overwhelmingly to retain Canada and give the Caribbean islands back to the French. The treaty that finalized this transfer was met with harsh resistance by the British people.⁴⁷

The reason behind the unpopular decision to retain Canada at the expense of the possessions of the French West Indies lay in the powerful British Caribbean lobby, led

⁴⁷ Pitman in *The American Revolution*, 13-14.

predominately by Jamaican planters. The excessively high prices of sugar kept Jamaican planters at the top of the economic hierarchy within the British peripheries. To add more sugar-producing colonies would be good for consumers within the empire, especially those in British North America, but it would lead to a decline in prices. This would make profits for Jamaican planters decrease slightly. Retention of Canada, however, would assist Jamaican planters by providing a new market for sugar. The power of the British West India lobby, bolstered by the large number of absentee planters from Jamaica in Britain, demonstrated Parliament's subservience "to the powerful planting class of Great Britain" as that class gained disproportionate representation.⁴⁸ One observer noted that "the Sugar Islands have gained a preference inconsistent with the true interest of their mother country."⁴⁹ O'Shaughnessy has shown that the Society of the West India Merchants, one of the lobbying mechanisms of the British Caribbean, wanted only to consider "the interests of the sugar colonies" and, through their success, "contributed to the fatal isolation of the North American lobby in Britain."⁵⁰ This meant that lobbying within the British empire was a zero-sum game in which the mainland colonies were losing because of the revenue generated by the sugar-producing colonies.

The relative weakness of the North American lobby served as a cause for all of the rebelling colonies to declare independence. In discussing the economics of the independence movement in Boston, Richard Pares argued that "the preference for the West Indians over the North Americans which the imperial Parliament showed...in its

⁴⁸ Ibid. 15-17; Clayton, 322.

⁴⁹ Pitman in *The American Revolution*, 19.

⁵⁰ O'Shaughnessy, 129.

legislation may have predisposed” the mainland colonies to revolution.⁵¹ This was certainly the case in South Carolina. Not only was this shown through the exception for rice that was made at the Continental Congress, but a certain jealousy can be perceived on the part of Carolinians toward all West India islands that enjoyed the benefits of the powerful lobby. In *The South Carolina Gazette*, one of the patriot-newspapers in the colony, a report noted that the inhabitants of St. Croix were likely to be “soon...relieved from the heavy tax lately laid on them by their King.”⁵² While the readers of the paper would have seen this as a victory for liberty, the merchants and planters would have been envious of the power of the Caribbean lobby that was made possible by the profits of Jamaica. The effective lobbying power that resulted from the high economic status of the region represented a coveted position for the ruling class of South Carolina. Through the frustrations of South Carolina’s lobbying effort, and initial lobbying success in the new confederation of rebelling colonies, it becomes clear that Carolinians’ decision to rebel came as a result of a desired politico-economic status.

It is worth noting that the colonists in South Carolina, especially those in the ruling class, recognized the difficulty in lobbying for mainland interests. In *The South Carolina Gazette*, an anonymous contributor and supporter of the independence movement from London noted the improbability of successful lobbying efforts for the North American colonies by arguing that the “tyrannical power” of the British ministers would only be militated against “if the colonies are steadfast [sic]...and neither import

⁵¹ Richard Pares, “Boston to Barbados: The Economics of Interdependence,” in *The American Revolution*, 55.

⁵² “New-York, December 5,” *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 2, 1775.

[from] or export” to Britain for one year.⁵³ While the Caribbean planters and merchants were able to maintain an effective lobby simply by bringing in wealth to the empire, the perception of this contributor and many South Carolinians was that success could only be achieved through extreme economic measures such as a complete ban on imports from and exports to the metropolis. Lobbying and negotiating would no longer suffice because of the profitability of the competition.

The view that lobbying efforts were insufficient by early-1775 was echoed even more directly by another anonymous commentator from London in the patriot-leaning newspaper. This observer noted that “the *Pennsylvania* instructions to their deputies” proposed that “a *memorial or remittance* [sic] should be presented to” the British government. The commentator was critical of these instructions because the united colonies had already unsuccessfully attempted this method. By 1775, he argued that “it is now too late for negotiation [sic], nor can it issue any good to the American cause. Vigorous measures alone can be successful.”⁵⁴ Thus, for South Carolinians at the time, clear frustration had mounted over the inability to lobby effectively. While Jamaicans and colonists from other sugar colonies could rely on their politico-economic status, Carolinians could only hope to be successful in achieving redress by taking “vigorous [economic] measures.”

Before proceeding to show continued limitations in South Carolina’s lobbying effort, it should be recognized that the ineffective lobby was not a result of an ineffective agent. Charles Garth, the colonial agent who represented South Carolina’s merchant and

⁵³ “Extract of a Letter from London, Dated October 4,” *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 2, 1775.

⁵⁴ “Extract of a Letter from London, dated October 3 by a Gentleman of the First Character,” *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 2, 1775.

planter interests in London from the 1760s up to the Revolution, was quite popular among the colony's ruling class and, presumably, among the general population as well. As early as 1763, Garth supported the "liberty to export Rice directly to the African and all the West India islands," which certainly made him friends to the planters and merchants in the colony given the fact that rice could generally only be exported to Great Britain.⁵⁵ In his efforts to achieve this "liberty" for the wealthiest of Carolinians, it was noted by the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly and contributors to *The South Carolina Gazette* that Garth was "indefatigable in the pursuit of every object that can be of public benefit to this province."⁵⁶ Such support for Garth lasted throughout his tenure as Carolina's agent. Further, this support lasted throughout continued frustrations in his lobbying efforts, as this kind of public lauding persisted through the 1770s. It is only reasonable to assume, therefore, that South Carolina's frustrations with lobbying attempts were the result of a lack of economic leverage. For the ruling class of the South Carolina lowcountry, there was simply nothing that Charles Garth could do in order to prevent the "cruel Neglect" of the British ministers.⁵⁷

Despite the stated confidence in Garth's abilities and efforts, this colonial agent himself even showed significant doubts in his capability of lobbying successfully on the part of South Carolina planters and merchants. In the late-1760s, the imperial crisis manifested itself within South Carolina through a dispute between lowcountry merchants and Daniel Moore, a tax collector for the Crown. Merchants in the province took offence at Moore's placement of restrictions and fees on internal and coastal trade. They, along

⁵⁵ *The South Carolina Gazette*, February 18, 1763.

⁵⁶ *The South Carolina Gazette*, June 11, 1763; *Ibid.* March 8, 1773.

⁵⁷ "To the Honourable WILLIAM BULL," *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 30, 1775.

with Garth, argued that these revenue-generating practices had not been imposed before the Seven Years' War and would only lead to illegal trade because of the "intolerable burthen intended to be laid upon this inland Trade."⁵⁸ Although imperial disputes in Jamaica unfolded on the provincial level in a similar manner, Jamaican planters in the House of Assembly were able to take a recalcitrant stance against the imperial center.⁵⁹ For the South Carolina agent, however, doubts immediately arose about his ability to deal with Moore. Garth informed the Committee of Correspondence that "Mr. Moore's appointment being from the Treasury" would make it difficult to argue against him.⁶⁰ He stated that, since the complaint was "against a considerable Officer of Revenue to be examin'd & enquire'd into by Officers of the Revenue [he] was aware of the Danger of advancing anything not maintainable."⁶¹ This kind of timidity was absent in Jamaica when dealing with imperial disputes at the provincial level. The reason behind this discrepancy is the fact that Jamaican planters enjoyed far more leverage in dealing with the imperial center than even the profitable colony of South Carolina.

The timidity and frustration of Garth was further demonstrated as the 1770s progressed and the imperial crisis moved deeper into government institutions. In the early-1770s, the imperial crisis was expressed through local clashes between the Commons House, represented predominately by Speaker Rawlins Lowndes, and the

⁵⁸ Charles Garth to Mark Robinson, November 1767, Garth, Charles, ca. 1734-1784, Committee of Correspondence papers, 1765-1779 (1034.00) South Carolina Historical Society, hereafter cited as Committee of Correspondence papers; see also Charles Garth's Memorial to the Board of Treasury, 1766-1767.

⁵⁹ O'Shaughnessy referred to the Jamaican Assembly as "intractable" because of its ability to win power struggles against the imperial government, see O'Shaughnessy, 111-115.

⁶⁰ The Committee of Correspondence was an organization that functioned to represent the trade interests of South Carolina.

⁶¹ Garth to the Committee of Correspondence, January 27, 1768, Committee of Correspondence papers.

Royal Governor, Lord Charles Montagu. The issue, as Garth expressed it, was Montagu's abuse of his power through his attempted disallowance of provincial legislation to create money bills and, more importantly, Montagu's dissolution of the assembly on several occasions.⁶² The ultimate goal of Garth and the Committee of Correspondence was to seek Montagu's recall because of this perceived violation of the law. Despite these issues, South Carolina's agent was unable to achieve the governor's recall. Instead, Carolinians had to wait for Montagu's willing resignation. Although he resigned in 1773, in the midst of this crisis, it had nothing to do with the lobbying efforts of South Carolina.⁶³ In other words, while Jamaican planters seemed to be calling the shots at the imperial level, South Carolinians had difficulty in doing the same within their own borders, at least in their perception.

While the examples of the parochial disputes of the late-1760s and early-1770s demonstrated a complete inability to lobby effectively, it would be unreasonable to assume that South Carolina's lobbying efforts were *always* unsuccessful. Throughout the imperial crisis, up to independence, Garth and the South Carolina merchants and planters whose interests he represented did occasionally achieve success. The examples of their success, however, also underscore the severe limitations that they faced in their lobbying efforts. Early in the colony's history, Parliament enacted legislation to reduce rice production and, in 1705, the British ministers put rice on an enumerated list of goods that could only be exported to the mother country. From there, it would be re-exported to wherever the market dictated. The revenue generated by rice, however, was high enough

⁶² Garth to Rawlins Lowndes, February 4, 1773, Committee of Correspondence papers.

⁶³ Garth to the Committee of Correspondence, May 20, 1773, Committee of Correspondence papers; see also Charles Montagu to Barnard Elliot, May 1, 1773, Baker Family, Baker Family papers, 1683-ca. 1935 (1138.00) South Carolina Historical Society.

to grant some political leverage to the South Carolina planters and merchants throughout the eighteenth century. The legislation that limited the production and exportation of rice was somewhat relaxed in 1730, when Parliament allowed the staple to be shipped directly to Portugal. These may not have been substantial advances for planters and merchants in the province, but it did demonstrate some lobbying power that came from the economic strength of rice. More significant gains were made after the Seven Years' War.⁶⁴

After victory over the French and Spanish in 1763, Parliament "granted special concessions to South Carolina's rice trade."⁶⁵ In 1773, Garth was able to procure a "Suspension of the Duty on Rice," increasing the profits for planters and merchants in the colony.⁶⁶ The very next year, Parliament granted concessions to Carolina planters that allowed them to send the crop directly to states "southward of Cape Finisterre and likewise to the southward of Georgia in America."⁶⁷ While this certainly demonstrated a success for South Carolina planters and merchants, in practice, it meant very little. Even though Parliament granted that special status to rice, the vast majority of the staple was still sent to Great Britain. In fact, the amount of rice exported from South Carolina to all other places aside from the imperial center still did not equal the amount exported directly to Britain.⁶⁸ This meant that South Carolina could not enjoy the politico-economic leverage that Jamaica received as a result of the profitability of sugar. Although sugar was also controlled by mercantilist policies, enforcement of the Navigation Acts

⁶⁴ Edgar, 138; 150.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 209.

⁶⁶ Committee of Correspondence to Garth, April 1773, Committee of Correspondence papers.

⁶⁷ Garth to Committee of Correspondence, April 30, 1774 and Garth to Committee of Correspondence, March 11, 1774, Committee of Correspondence papers.

⁶⁸ Tobias Papers, box 11/420, folder 13.

served to increase the profits of sugar planters, showing the preferential treatment granted to Jamaica and other Caribbean colonies.

In addition to the perceptible limitations on the lobbying efforts that can be shown through the status granted to rice planters and merchants, it is also possible to see the limitations that South Carolina faced by noting how many different elements were required to achieve success. These limitations can be seen even in 1765, after the Seven Years' War somewhat elevated the power of planters and merchants in South Carolina. In a letter to the Committee of Correspondence, Garth informed the merchants of the colony that a "Committee of Merchants...have been established [in Britain] in behalf of America" and that this committee "wrote to the Manufacturing Boroughs representing the distressed State of their Friends in America & the great Decay in Consequence thereof to the Trade & Commerce of Great Britain & her Colonies." The members of this committee, according to Garth, attempted to use their "Influence with their Respective Representatives...[to] recommend to their Consideration the probable decline there will be in the American Trade."⁶⁹ If one considers South Carolina in isolation, or only in relation to the mainland colonies that rebelled against the Crown, Garth's statements seem neither surprising nor noteworthy. Considering the colony in relation to Jamaica and the other profitable islands in the British Caribbean, on the other hand, adds another dimension to Garth's letter. This was just two years after the Caribbean lobby, represented in part by the absentee planters from Jamaica in Britain, was able to carry the Treaty of Paris of 1763 through the House of Commons with the provision that Canada would remain with the British empire and the Caribbean colonies of France would be

⁶⁹ Garth to Committee of Correspondence, December 23, 1765, Committee of Correspondence papers.

returned to that imperial power. In other words, while Jamaica was able to make policy at the imperial level through its lobby alone, South Carolina had to rely on a committee of merchants in Britain, the manufacturing boroughs of the mother country, and representatives in Parliament. All of these necessary elements point to the fact that South Carolina faced extreme limitations in their lobbying efforts.

Garth himself even recognized the limitations of his abilities to negotiate on behalf of any of the mainland colonies. He did not, however, blame this inability solely on a weaker politico-economic position in comparison to the British Caribbean. Instead, he attributed the lack of success to the violence that had broken out in much of British North America, including South Carolina. In 1765, Garth believed “that the present Ministry wou’d have urged no great difficulty to a proposal for a Repeal of the Stamp Act, had the Execution of it not been obstructed in the manner mention’d in the Accounts that have already been sent home.”⁷⁰ In this account, he was informing the merchants of South Carolina that, if not for the violence that surrounded the attempted execution of the Stamp Act, the tax would have been repealed much more easily. Two years later, this sentiment was expressed again as Garth relayed a message in which he feared that he would “encounter...some prejudices [in his lobbying efforts] that may have been entertain’d in Consequence of Accounts transmitted of a Riot in order to prevent...[the] Seizure of a Schooner.”⁷¹ Garth was, in all likelihood, partially correct in stating that the violence made his job more difficult. He failed to remember, however, that much of that difficulty in representing the interests of South Carolina had been present throughout the

⁷⁰ Garth to Committee of Correspondence, December 23, 1765, Committee of Correspondence papers.

⁷¹ Garth to Committee of Correspondence, November 25, 1767, Committee of Correspondence papers.

eighteenth century without riots. This perennial difficulty was the result of a weaker political position that followed a lower economic status. Even though South Carolina was a profitable colony, it was not as profitable as Jamaica, which inherently made the Caribbean lobby more powerful.

When South Carolina joined the confederation of states that stood against revenue-raising efforts by Parliament, many of those limitations in lobbying vanished. When John Rutledge pushed the First Continental Congress to exempt the Carolina lowcountry staple from the list of goods that would not be exported to Britain, the newfound lobbying power of South Carolina was manifested. Clearly, the action to join the resistance immediately put the province in a much higher politico-economic status than it had enjoyed in the past.⁷² This measure was met with harsh resistance from many South Carolinians who felt that rice planters and merchants were displaying a self-interest that was counterproductive to liberty and the public good.⁷³ The resistance within South Carolina, however, did not matter to the ruling class of the province. The new lobbying power that followed a leap in politico-economic status gave the planter and merchant classes such leverage within the new confederation that it was not necessary to have such support on this issue.

⁷² Walter Edgar, ed. Inez Watson, research consultant, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1974-1992), 579, hereafter cited as *Biographical Directory*.

⁷³ "Mr. Timothy, Please to insert the following QUERIES in your Gazette, and let us hope for an Answer from THOSE who are able," *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 2, 1775.

Chapter 4: A Planter/Merchant Revolution

If it is true that the frustrations in lobbying and the desire for a heightened politico-economic status provided the sufficient conditions for the independence of South Carolina, then it follows that the Revolution in the province should be considered a merchant/planter revolt. This means that it is essential to show that the leaders of the independence movement were not attempting to protect the liberties of the general population. Instead, it must be demonstrated that these leaders had the narrow objective of protecting the interests of the merchants and planters in the colony. While this is the argument presented here, it is not to suggest that the majority of the white population in South Carolina was duped into supporting independence. In fact, many white inhabitants supported the Patriot movement *because* the planters and merchants would benefit from it. Many in the colony understood that when the prices of rice fell, and the planters and merchants suffered because of such a price depression, virtually everybody suffered.⁷⁴ Thus, when Henry Laurens noted in 1774 that “so great a Majority as two thirds at least of the midle [sic] and lower Classes of people wish Success to our Cause,” he was likely close to the truth.⁷⁵ In other words, when the ruling class of the province made claims to represent the “divers [sic] inhabitants of the Province of South Carolina,” it utilized a rhetorical strategy, as well as a half-truth, in its assertion of diversity.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 46.

⁷⁵ Henry Laurens to Ralph Izard, September 20, 1774, in *The Papers of Henry Laurens: Vol. 9: April 19, 1773-December 12, 1774*, George C. Rogers, Jr. and David R. Chesnut, eds. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press), hereafter cited as *The Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁷⁶ Chares Garth Memorial, November 1767, Committee of Correspondence papers.

In order to demonstrate that the origins of the Revolution in South Carolina lay in the planter/merchant community, one need only look at the membership of the Committee of Correspondence. Though it had the purpose of representing the interests of the province in general, virtually every member was either a merchant or a planter, if not both. Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Lynch, Miles Brewton, Roger Smith, Thomas Loughton Smith, and John Edwards either adopted both of those roles or had considerable ties to both communities.⁷⁷ All of the other members generally had significant ties to one community or the other. Further, John Rutledge, who was a member of the committee with considerable land holdings, was the member of the First Continental Congress who “convinced the Congress to exempt rice from the boycott list, an important exemption for South Carolina merchants.”⁷⁸ Such a committee would clearly be lobbying on behalf of the major merchants and planters in South Carolina and, after all, the imperial disputes were generally channeled through this organization.

In addition to the membership of the committee, the merchant/planter interests that fueled the Revolution in the province can be demonstrated through Garth’s lobbying efforts, as well as his recognition that he represented the merchant and planter communities. In 1765, he explicitly stated that his goal was “to lay before His Grace the Nature of the Difference between the Merchants of Charles Town and the Collector,” Daniel Moore.⁷⁹ He made this statement again two years later when he noted, implicitly this time, that “the Causes of the Difference between the Merchants & the Collector”

⁷⁷ *Biographical Directory*, 260, 420, 214-215, 96, 644, 635.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 579.

⁷⁹ Garth to Committee of Correspondence, December 10, 1765, Committee of Correspondence papers.

were the reasons behind the disputes in the province.⁸⁰ Furthermore, practically all of the complaints that Garth made to the Crown and the Board of Treasury dealt with trade and its impact on the merchants of the lowcountry. Of course, assisting the planter/merchant communities could have a major impact on the other populations of the state, but that does not change the fact that the independence movement in South Carolina began as a movement to benefit the planters and merchants, or the ruling classes. Garth's statements, as well as the membership of the Committee of Correspondence, demonstrate this fact beyond any doubt.

The concern for the merchants specifically was represented by South Carolinians who looked northward to Boston with apprehension. When Parliament closed Boston Harbor to punish the city for destroying the property of the East India Company, many in South Carolina proclaimed "Union with the Inhabitants of our Sister Colonies on the Continent, to avert the Danger impending over American Liberties...by the late...Act of Parliament against Boston."⁸¹ The first signature that appeared on this proclamation was Christopher Gadsden's, a member of the Committee of Correspondence and an extremely influential merchant whose loyalties clearly rested with the planters and other merchants. He had his "entire fortune...invested in his [personal] rice wharf" and "felt that prosperity depended on the well-being of the planters."⁸² Moreover, Gadsden maintained stores in several places in the backcountry of the colony, making him even more concerned with regulations on inland trade.⁸³ Because Parliament could take the same

⁸⁰ Garth to Committee of Correspondence, November 25, 1767.

⁸¹ "Charles-Town, July 12. In Consequences of the Advertisements Lately," *The South Carolina Gazette*, July 11, 1774.

⁸² Tobias Papers, box 11/420, folder 1.

⁸³ Bridenbaugh, 54.

action in Charleston as it had in Boston, Gadsden was particularly concerned and, therefore, took a prominent role in the proclamation to remain united with the other mainland colonies against the measures of the imperial center.

Gadsden, however, was not the only member of the South Carolina ruling class to express concern over the Boston Port Act because of the threat it posed to merchants and planters. Henry Laurens, an even wealthier planter and merchant than Gadsden, also expressed anxiety over the closure of the Boston port. In a letter to Ralph Izard, another prominent planter in the colony, Laurens stated that “New York, Pennsylvania [sic], Maryland, & Virginia have brought the Boston Port Bill home as an injury to themselves.”⁸⁴ Given the political, economic, and social status of Laurens, it seems likely that he mentioned this to Izard because he interpreted the bill as an “injury” to himself as well. Further, given his constant preoccupation with his economic endeavors, his uneasiness regarding the Boston Port Act clearly centered on the fact that it represented a threat to his economic interests.

Izard also exhibited the economic self-interest of the planter/merchant community as the driving force behind the independence movement. Writing to Laurens in 1774, he expressed his hope that there would be “a considerable quantity of cotton planted for me” and that “some white mulberry-trees [could be] planted at Goose Creek,” where his plantation was located.⁸⁵ In this same letter, Izard did discuss the imperial crisis, but the fact that his own planting interests were so much more prominent in his correspondence suggests that the attention of the merchants and planters focused on the welfare of those groups.

⁸⁴ Laurens to Izard, July 5, 1774, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁸⁵ Izard to Laurens, October 18, 1774, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*.

South Carolinians outside of the planter/merchant community even recognized that the imperial crisis in the province was driven by the planters and merchants. While many in Carolina were onboard with the ruling class because of its economic standing, at least some others grew tired of the self-interest that drove the imperial crisis. One contributor to *The South Carolina Gazette; and Country Journal* admonished the ruling class to contribute “freely and largely of your Property, for the Relief of your distressed Brethren” and to avoid “contending for a small Acquisition of Wealth or Property.”⁸⁶ This was an acknowledgement that the imperial crisis in South Carolina was pushed by the self-interest of the planter and merchant classes.

Some Carolinians also demonstrated their knowledge of the planter/merchant revolution by responding directly, and with hostility, to the exception for rice in the non-exportation agreement of the Continental Congress. When news of the rice exception came to South Carolina, one supposed country rice planter published a harsh critique of the delegates. He argued that the “indulgence granted for the Exportation of our *Staple Commodity*...TO Great-Britain, so contrary to the general Spirit of the Association, and to the whole Plan of our commercial Defence [sic]” was disagreeable to liberty and to the purpose of the union of colonies. He went on to rhetorically ask the South Carolina delegates that “even supposing we were not upon a Level, as to the Privilege of Exportation, with some other Colonies, is it the grand struggle now, Whether we shall be upon a *Level*? Or is it, Whether we shall be *free*?”⁸⁷ With this question, the country rice planter was responding to the notion that South Carolina would be disproportionately hurt

⁸⁶ “Mr. Crouch,” *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, June 6, 1775.

⁸⁷ “Mr. Timothy, Please to insert the following Queries in your Gazette,” *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 2, 1775.

by the non-exportation agreement because of how much rice the province sent to Great Britain. This particular contributor, however, still criticized “the Privilege of Exportation” as contrary to the spirit of liberty and recognized that the delegates to the Continental Congress simply utilized a newfound lobbying power that came as a result of the revenue generated by the rice planters. Even though many in the colony accepted the importance of the merchants and planters, some clearly found it distasteful that the delegates were utilizing the new politico-economic status of South Carolina for their own personal advantage. The actions of the delegates, along with the response of some South Carolinians, supports the claim that the Revolution in South Carolina was carried out for the benefit of the planters and merchants.

The interests of the planters and merchants can be further demonstrated by examining the internal politics of South Carolina. The composition of the Provincial Congress, which was praised for its representative capacity, was, in fact, not representative at all. Apportionment in the Congress of 1775 was extremely skewed in favor of the lowcountry. While the lowcountry received 126 representatives in the revolutionary legislative body, the backcountry received less than half, with only sixty-one representatives.⁸⁸ Of course, not all lowcountry representatives maintained close ties to the planter or merchant communities. In addition, some backcountry representatives maintained even closer ties to those communities than their lowcountry counterparts. This, however, was not the norm. The composition of this legislative body demonstrated beyond any doubt that the merchants and planters, especially those involved in the exportation of rice, preserved a near-monopoly on power. This power within the province

⁸⁸ *Biographical Directory*, 151.

led to disproportionate representation in revolutionary ideology. Thus, the Revolution in South Carolina was driven by the politico-economic self-interest of the province's ruling class.

Conclusion

The American Revolution came to South Carolina in the form of a merchant/planter revolt. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s, as tensions mounted because of a frustrated lobbying effort, the ruling class of the province decided that it would be in all South Carolinians' interest to rebel. Whether they were correct about this or not, the majority of the white population went along with the elites because of the impact of the merchant and planter communities on the economic well-being of the colony/state. The politico-economic position of South Carolina in relation to the other British mainland colonies, as opposed to that position in relation to the British Caribbean, was favorable at the very least. This status brought an aggrandized lobbying power to South Carolina that the colony could not enjoy while a part of the British empire. The lobbying effort for the exception for rice at the First Continental Continental Congress demonstrated the fact that the South Carolina ruling class recognized its newfound politico-economic status within the confederation.

This examination of the politico-economic circumstances of South Carolina on the eve of the Revolution shows that the origins of independence, at least for the southern colony, emerged from material, as opposed to ideological, factors. When the historiographical debate on the origins of the Revolution is applied to individual political units, the material influences can prove to outweigh the ideological influences. Further, this paper demonstrates the origins of South Carolina's political tactic of utilizing its economy to gain disproportionate power within unions of states. The threat to

walk out of the Continental Congress by the colony's delegation was just one of many examples that show the use of economic leverage to obtain political power.

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