

Hubs of Empire: The Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean. By Matthew Mulcahy. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 244 pages. \$49.95 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

Mathew Mulcahy is not a novice to the field of Caribbean studies. In his first book, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783*, he successfully argued not only that natural disaster played an intrinsic role in shaping colonial life, but also that West Indian storms must be looked at in the context of British Atlantic settlement. Maintaining this broad perspective, in *Hubs of Empire: The Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean* the author argues that British colonies in Barbados, Jamaica, Antigua, and nearby islands should be studied in conjunction with the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. Mulcahy holds that, economically, socially, and architecturally, the island colonies had much more in common with these far-flung coastal settlements than with those that were closer geographically. The author supports his thesis by examining several major points, particularly demography, agriculture, indentured servitude and slavery, and creolization.

Because it seemingly addresses familiar ground, those readers already familiar with Caribbean or Atlantic history might assume that *Hubs of Empire* is a rehash of previous scholarship. After all, even a simple walking tour of Charleston makes West Indian influence on the city apparent. Likewise, the transplantation of African slavery from the Antilles is hardly a mystery among scholars of the early Americas. To dismiss Mulcahy's work out of hand, however, would be a mistake. First, Mulcahy places his work in the broader Atlantic literature, addressing previous scholarship on the Caribbean and Lowcountry without losing his own voice. Indeed, drawing from many sources to give a vivid mental picture of this region, one of the author's strengths is his ability to synthesize mainstream and less well-known works. Second, Mulcahy's writing style is crisp and clean, and he draws the reader easily from one section of the book to the next.

The study begins by examining the geology and landscapes of the Antilles. The section that follows, on Native Americans of the Greater Caribbean, at first seems too brief, but in retrospect it is a fair, albeit concise, analysis. Mortality figures are particularly well-drawn, reflecting catastrophic population decline after colonization. Comparisons with Lowcountry Indians are a bit forced, but this is understandable given that the book's thesis compares British colonies, rather than Indian tribes. As with so much of the book, there is a wealth of material on these nations Mulcahy does not have time to address. Nevertheless, his succinct overview is balanced and appropriate, and his notes offer excellent suggestions for further reading.

Turning to Barbados Mulcahy hits his stride, continuing Jack Greene's argument that the island served as "cultural hearth" for the Caribbean and, eventually, the Lowcountry. Patterns established on Barbados would spread to other British colonies in the Antilles, particularly after the introduction of sugar and the consequent skyrocketing of wealth. Native American populations plummeted due to disease and enslavement; indentured servants, and then slaves were brought to work the land; and the island was quickly deforested. Enormous wealth flowed into the hands of planters

and the British treasury. Barbadian society was comprised of a handful of wealthy families, who usually intermarried to preserve wealth, a larger but less influential middle class, and a huge but relatively powerless slave class that was constantly replenished with fresh African imports. With many arrivals leapfrogging from Barbados, colonials would recreate these conditions on every island they settled. True, there were some differences from colony to colony. Antigua was a small, dry island, whereas Jamaica was a comparatively immense landmass large enough to support slaves, planters, a middle class, and several maroon communities. Nevertheless, like flames carried from the Barbadian hearth, the cultural and economic template established on Barbados would reappear in every colony. Indeed, Mulcahy argues that this happened in South Carolina.

South Carolina has sometimes been referred to as “the colony of a colony” and Mulcahy supports this argument via his examination of settlers’ origins, their architecture, and the society they established. Just as Barbadians carried their culture and worldview to the mainland, so their Carolinian descendants would convey this framework into the Georgia Lowcountry. True, Georgia and South Carolina differed from the Caribbean in their economies; in the colony’s early years the deerskin and Indian slave trades were vital, and due to the climate rice would emerge as the primary crop. However, Mulcahy argues that similarities overshadow differences, particularly extreme planter wealth and attendant huge slave populations.

Hubs of Empire ends on a strong note. After spending most of the book establishing links between Caribbean islands and the mainland, Mulcahy then examines why the Antilles and the Lowcountry went their separate ways during the Revolution. Reasons cited include Caribbean planters who could afford to move back to England and thus maintain their sense of “English” identity; sugar planters who relied on British markets, whereas rice planters did not; and mainlanders and islanders who held contrasting attitudes in regard to the Stamp Act. Lastly, islanders were vastly outnumbered by their slaves and thus always looked to the British military for protection. Lowcountry Carolinians were also outnumbered, but the ever-increasing white settlement in the Backcountry offered protection both against Indian attacks and slave revolts.

Overall, Matthew Mulcahy argues successfully that economic, social, and demographic similarities between the Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean should encourage us to examine them as a region. His book is not likely to change the perspective of scholars already interested in the area, but it certainly deepens one’s understanding of this part of the world and they will very likely find themselves agreeing with his conclusions and appreciating his interpretation. Those who have never pondered links between the Caribbean and Lowcountry will learn much from *Hubs of Empire*. Undergraduates and nonexperts will find this an accessible and enlightening work that offers many suggestions for continued reading. For experts and nonexperts alike, the combined force of Mulcahy’s breadth of perspective, skillful use of sources, and strong writing style make this an eminently readable book.

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