

## Sickness and Oppression: The Charleston Experience

By Heather Coo

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Although the city of Charleston, South Carolina conjures up images of a society bathed in polite manners, hospitality, and relaxation, the city's history is stained with sickness, cruelty, and inequality. Originally named Charles Towne, the seaport-city of Charleston lies on the coast of South Carolina and was founded in 1670 with the idea of profit in mind.<sup>1</sup> It is situated on a narrow, low-lying peninsula between the Ashley and Cooper rivers.<sup>2</sup> The city's landlocked harbor once prospered as the commercial and shipping center for the regions' rice, indigo, and cotton plantations; this feature simultaneously made it a major port for slave trade until slave importation was abolished in 1808.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the climate and topography of Charleston was the source for various deadly illnesses; but, despite its many flaws, the city was a prime location for those looking to gain prosperity, financed by the cash-crop industry. Between 1815 and 1816, James Carr, the owner of a shipping business with roots in Bangor, Maine, sailed from Maine to Charleston and documented his trip for his wife back home.<sup>4</sup> In his journal, Carr described the inhabitants of Charleston, the region's agricultural system, slavery practices, and the health troubles lurking within society.<sup>5</sup> Because James Carr was from the North, his account

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<sup>1</sup> "Plantation Life," *Discover Charleston* [on-line]; available from <http://www.discovercharleston.com/plantations/>; Internet; accessed 05 March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Charleston (city, South Carolina)," *Encarta Online Encyclopedia* [on-line]; available from [http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761554001/Charleston\\_\(city\\_South\\_Carolina\).html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761554001/Charleston_(city_South_Carolina).html); Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "James Carr Journal," *Teaching American History in South Carolina* [on-line]; available from <http://www.teachingushistory.org/CarrJour.htm>; Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>5</sup> "Carr, James, 1777-1818," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* [on-line]; available from

of the Southern way of life was both illuminating and extremely valuable. It gave an outsider's point-of-view of Charleston at that time and, through its detailed and descriptive wording, revealed a wide array of information in only thirteen hand-written pages. James painted a vivid picture of disease and slavery, which once dominated Charleston's society. Carr depicted disease through an overall sickly description of Charleston and a discussion of quarantine laws, common-held beliefs related to disease transmission, pestilent insects such as mosquitoes and cockroaches, poor sanitation in congruence with unpaved streets, the practice of wealthy individuals fleeing the city during ill months, and the innate immunity to disease African-American slaves appeared to possess. In addition, slavery was a major theme throughout Carr's journal and can be viewed in his remarks concerning the superiority of plantation owners, the factors associated with slave ownership, including slave markets and the cost of maintaining workers, the popularity of cotton and rice cultivation, the various occupations held by African Americans, the tyranny-inflicted to hold control over slaves, and the working songs sung by slaves as well as the instruments that accompanied them.

Charleston experienced disease long before the journal was written, which casts a shadow over the city's history as well as James Carr's journal, "...the country is not so pleasant as ours—you may live easier and become richer at the hazard of your health..."<sup>6</sup> While Charleston's climate is generally mild and pleasant throughout the year, its hot and humid summers once made it the perfect breeding ground for swamp-born illnesses like malaria and yellow fever.<sup>7</sup> Although not expressed directly in Carr's journal, research shows malaria and

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<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/guidedisplay.pl?index=C000176>; Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, J., "Stranger's fever in Charleston, South Carolina: a mistaken diagnosis," 37 (2007): 273-76 [journal online]; available from [http://www.rcpe.ac.uk/journal/issue/journal\\_37\\_3/Cohen.pdf](http://www.rcpe.ac.uk/journal/issue/journal_37_3/Cohen.pdf); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

yellow fever were remarkably overwhelming and the source of great alarm in the city. Both sicknesses, as with other diseases, became increasingly apparent in the South between 1800 and 1880, especially during warm seasons.<sup>8</sup> Despite their prevalence, physicians frequently misdiagnosed the true cause of these infections. Yellow fever, in particular, was considered to be the most dramatic disease during this time because it tended to infect entire communities instantly and cause death just as rapidly. Cases that occurred in the summer were almost always fatal, while those that occurred during rest of the year tended to be milder, possibly allowing the infected to survive and gain immunity from the sickness. Still, many victims of yellow fever experienced a violent and painful death. Symptoms like chills, fever, headache, back pain, and jaundice gave way to liver failure and hemorrhaging from the gums, nose, and stomach. This internal bleeding prompted black vomit, signaling that death was just around the corner.<sup>9</sup> Malaria symptoms tended to be slightly milder and flu-like; however, certain strains resulted in organ damage and death.<sup>10</sup>

Malaria and yellow fever were huge problems during the early 1800s, which resulted in attempts to stifle their spread. Charleston residents and incoming boat passengers and crew members were greatly affected by quarantine laws, which were implemented to hinder the extent of disease: "...the quarantine laws of the city require all vessels to report themselves at this port

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<sup>8</sup> "The Landscape of Disease: Swamps and Medical Discourse in the American Southeast 1800-1880," *Access My Library* [on-line]; available from [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-4463562\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-4463562_ITM); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> "What is Malaria?" *Yahoo Health* [on-line]; available from <http://health.yahoo.com/infectiousdisease-overview/what-is-malaria/healthwise--hw119121.html>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2009.

during the summer...”<sup>11</sup> Morris, Folly, and Sullivan’s Islands, all of which are located at the mouth of Charleston Harbor, served as isolation areas for the sick.<sup>12</sup> In the Eighteenth Century, Sullivan’s Island was home to “pest houses,” built as quarantine stations to hold both free people and slaves entering Charleston who were thought to harbor disease.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the pest houses were destroyed in 1799 and Sullivan’s Island became a summer haven for wealthy Charleston residents escaping disease during the summer months.<sup>14</sup> Both Folly and Morris Island were presumably used as quarantine islands during the 1700s and 1800s.<sup>15</sup> Some believe ships entering Charleston harbor would drop off sick and dying individuals on Folly Island to avoid being quarantined.<sup>16</sup> Around the same time, boats were also forced to unload their sick travelers and crew members at Morris Island before being allowed into Charleston Harbor. Its large population of the ill and dying even caused Morris Island to adopt the name “Coffin Island” in 1749.<sup>17</sup> While quarantine laws, described in the journal, attempted to stifle the spread of potentially fatal illness, death and sickness remained a substantial aspect of Charleston’s culture.

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<sup>11</sup> “James Carr Journal.”

<sup>12</sup> “Historical Summary,” *Sullivan’s Island Historical and Architectural Inventory* (1987): 1-8 [on-line]; available from <http://www.sullivansisland-sc.com/Files/Historic%20Preservation/Historical%20Summary.pdf>; Internet; accessed 05 March 2009.;

“History,” *Educator’s Guide to Folly Island* [on-line]; available from <http://oceanica.cofc.edu/An%20Educator's%20Guide%20to%20Folly%20Beach/guide/FBHistory.htm>; Internet; accessed 06 March 09.

<sup>13</sup> “Historical Summary.”

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “History.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

While many expired as a result of these ailments, an accurate understanding of disease transmission was nonexistent in society throughout much of the 1800s; this lack of understanding is clearly demonstrated in James Carr's journal,

...the days are hot, the nights oppressive, the evenings & morning pernicious—the nights debilitate—the morning is dead and stagnant charged with foul vapor & fog from low land & stagnant water to breathe this is to inhale fever ague...<sup>18</sup>

Doctors believed disease-causing decay thrived in moist locations with dense foliage, strong winds, and temperatures exceeding sixty degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, the city of Charleston and its sweltering marshes were the perfect breeding ground for disease. At this time, doctors thought diseases such as malaria and yellow fever were spread by breathing in spores and poisons formed by the decay of animals and vegetation; this is reflected in the words “inhale fever ague” in Carr's statement.<sup>20</sup> These vapors would apparently rise up out of the soil and water and would travel by wind, mist, or fog to cities where inhabitants would inhale or absorb them through their skin.<sup>21</sup> In order to prevent epidemics, this idea even led to the destruction of many Sothern swamplands between 1800 and 1880.<sup>22</sup> Physicians at this time did not have the appropriate technology to accurately diagnose and trace the source of serious illnesses. Contemporary theories actually stifled their attempts to distinguish between the many diseases circulating around the South, including malaria, cholera, and yellow fever, which consequently resulted in inadequate treatment.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “James Carr Journal.”

<sup>19</sup> “The Landscape of Disease: Swamps and Medical Discourse in the American Southeast 1800-1880.”

<sup>20</sup> “James Carr Journal.”;  
“The Landscape of Disease: Swamps and Medical Discourse in the American Southeast 1800-1880.”

<sup>21</sup> “The Landscape of Disease: Swamps and Medical Discourse in the American Southeast 1800-1880.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Several circumstances in Charleston can be pinpointed as alternate sources of illness. Insects, unsanitary conditions, and the sultry climate that gave Charleston its character contributed to the formation of a diseased society. Concerning pests, the mosquito prevailed as a genuine transmitter; apparently, James Carr confronted these insects often: "...winged insects as well as offensive to the eye as the ear & feeling, among them the mosquito will come first in rank..."<sup>24</sup> "Mosquito" is a common name for about 2,000 species of two winged insects.<sup>25</sup> For those who lived and worked on or near swamps and marshes, mosquitoes were a common nuisance as well as an avenue for infection. While the male mosquitoes feed on nectar and water, females prefer to indulge in warm blood.<sup>26</sup> Many inject infectious microorganisms and transmit diseases quite common during the 1700s and 1800s.<sup>27</sup> The type of mosquito that causes malaria is the female *Anopheles* mosquito.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, yellow fever is passed on by the bite of the female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which breeds in stagnant water near human habitations.<sup>29</sup> The damp and hot climate of Charleston during the spring and summer months creates conditions in which mosquitoes thrive.<sup>30</sup> This correlates with James Carr's experience of confronting both an atmosphere ripe with this insect as well as an overall unhealthy society.

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<sup>24</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>25</sup> "Mosquito," *Encarta Online Encyclopedia* [on-line]; available from [http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761560686/Mosquito.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761560686/Mosquito.html); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> "Malaria-Cause," *Yahoo Health* [on-line]; available from <http://health.yahoo.com/infectiousdisease-causes/malaria-cause/healthwise-htw119142.html>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2009.

<sup>29</sup> "Yellow Fever," *Yahoo Education* [on-line]; available from <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/encyclopedia/entry/51548>; Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>30</sup> "The Landscape of Disease: Swamps and Medical Discourse in the American Southeast 1800-1880."

While the female mosquito was the actual source of disease, many other factors contributed to poor health. This included one of the most common insects in Charleston, the American Cockroach, also observed by James Carr,

...I believe I have omitted to mention my aversion, the large winged cockroach, with many other legged & winged insects as well as offensive to the eye as the ear...<sup>31</sup>

The American Cockroach, affectionately known as the Palmetto Bug in many Southern states, is typically 1-1/2 inches long and has a shiny reddish to dark-brown exoskeleton with a yellow margin directly behind its head.<sup>32</sup> Palmetto Bugs have wings and will occasionally fly; however, they are awkward fliers and prefer to run when disturbed. These cockroaches usually live in moist, humid environments and tend to reside outdoors during times of warm weather, traveling inside during winter months to seek moisture and warmth. Palmetto Bugs can sometimes carry infectious bacteria on their bodies and in their gut, which can be transferred to food and other items they come in contact with. They are also known to cause food poisoning, dysentery, and diarrhea in humans.<sup>33</sup> When combined with a compromised immune system from fighting other infirmities, the possible sicknesses passed to humans via the American Cockroaches, viewed by Carr, surely amplified the threat of death within society.

In addition, cleanliness and poor sanitation were detrimental realities of Charleston at this time. A major contributing factor was Charleston's unpaved streets. According to Carr, bricks covered the sidewalks and sand covered the roadways,

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<sup>31</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>32</sup> Perrot, Rachael C., and Dini M. Miller, "American Cockroach," *Virginia Cooperative Extension* [on-line]; available from <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/entomology/444-288/444-288.html>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

...the sidewalks are covered with brick or stone flagging, narrow, in bad order & broken by cellar doors, the streets are not paved, very sandy & when it is dry which is very often the case they are excessively dusty, to such a degree as to be almost insufferable...<sup>34</sup>

Much like other cities, Charleston did not begin to pave its streets until the year 1800.<sup>35</sup> For example, New York began paving in 1700, yet it had muddy and dusty streets as late as 1850.<sup>36</sup> Because of this, it is reasonable to suggest Charleston may have fallen behind in its paving efforts as well. The sand described in Carr's statement quickly drained water during wet seasons, which cobblestones were apparently incapable of doing; however, once the sand became saturated, vehicles with narrow wheels were apt to become stuck in the resulting mud.<sup>37</sup> In addition to unpaved roadways, research shows the wharves and docks were overwhelmed with animal and human waste.<sup>38</sup> The united circumstances of an inhospitable climate, high tides, disease, poor sanitation, and unpaved streets, depicted by Carr throughout the journal, made Charleston a breeding ground for contagion and hardship.

Although many sicknesses were considered to be "swamp-born illnesses," the filth located throughout the city forced the wealthy to relocate to outlying islands, and sometimes other states. Wealthy individuals had the luxury of fleeing Charleston during peak disease seasons. Those with the means to do so retreated to cooler, more welcoming climates, as depicted by James Carr,

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<sup>34</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>35</sup> Shields, David S., "Mean Streets, Mannered Streets: Charleston," *Common-Place* [on-line]; available from <http://www.common-place.org/col-03/no-04/charelston/>; Internet; accessed 05 March 2009.

<sup>36</sup> "Paving," *Answers.com* [on-line]; available from <http://www.answers.com/topic/paving>; Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Shields, "Mean Streets, Mannered Streets: Charleston."

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, "Stranger's fever in Charleston, South Carolina: a mistaken diagnosis."

Those who have retreated to this spot to escape disease have frequently come very near falling victims to the elements they have fled to for the preservation...<sup>39</sup>

In this statement, Carr is referring specifically to Sullivan's Island, located at the mouth of Charleston Harbor.<sup>40</sup> Simply moving away from marsh areas was not enough; heading away from the Port of Charleston to the open air of Sullivan's Island proved to be one of the only escapes during diseased months.<sup>41</sup> In its early years, during the sixteenth century, Sullivan's Island served an important role in coastal defense.<sup>42</sup> However, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the island became associated with death and disease. Its location made it the ideal spot for quarantine stations to hold individuals entering Charleston Harbor in the 1700s.<sup>43</sup> Later, in the nineteenth century, it became a summer haven for wealthy residents escaping the disease-filled summer months of Charleston. At the time this journal entry was written, despite its reputation for stormy weather, Sullivan's Island had recently become a summer destination spot for wealthy planters and their families.<sup>44</sup> Residents did not erect magnificent homes, as their status may have implied,

...with a number of slight built houses generally on piles drive in the sand for the accommodations of the citizens during the summer months where they retire to enjoy the sea breezes during the warm season...<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>40</sup> "Historical Summary."

<sup>41</sup> Cohen, "Stranger's fever in Charleston, South Carolina: a mistaken diagnosis."

<sup>42</sup> "Historical Summary."

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> "Historic Context Statement," *A Preservation Plan for Charleston, South Carolina* (2008): 198-208 [on-line]; available from <http://www.charlestoncity.info/shared/docs/0/08-historic%20resource%20surveys.pdf>; Internet; accessed 05 March 2009.

<sup>45</sup> "James Carr Journal."

Instead, those fleeing disease lived in almost uninhabitable shacks that shuddered in every storm.<sup>46</sup> It was not until 1819, after the journal was written, that an actual house had to be erected for an individual to claim land on Sullivan's Island.<sup>47</sup> While the wealthy retreated to safety during harsh months, many individuals such as slaves, merchants, traders, small farmers, and sailors were left behind to keep society running, hopefully avoiding infection along the way.

Unlike the remainder of society, African Americans were thought to have an innate immunity to sicknesses plaguing Charleston. According to James Carr, it was thought that only they and alligators could survive in the areas that bred illness,

...there is not question that the cotton, sugar & rice plantations of the south are highly profitable—on the latter however none but Alligators & negroes can live...<sup>48</sup>

A sickle cell genetic trait provided many slaves with protection from malaria.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, those who survived yellow fever had a lifelong immunity to the disease.<sup>50</sup> African Americans seemed to be unusually resistant to ailments in the eyes of white onlookers.<sup>51</sup> Despite this advantage, the mortality of slaves working in rice fields was extremely high.<sup>52</sup> This was because slaves often endured hot and moist weather while standing mid-leg deep in muddy marsh water.<sup>53</sup> In the early 1800s, up to a third of Lowcountry slaves died within a year of their

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<sup>46</sup> "Historical Summary."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>49</sup> West, Jean M, "Rice and Slavery: A Fatal Gold Seede," *Slavery in America* [on-line]; available from [http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs\\_es\\_rice.htm](http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs_es_rice.htm); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Cohen, "Stranger's fever in Charleston, South Carolina: a mistaken diagnosis."

<sup>52</sup> West, "Rice and Slavery: A Fatal Gold Seede."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

arrival.<sup>54</sup> Some slaves were indeed immune to certain deadly diseases, but many were not.

While planters lived elsewhere in the summer to escape the heat, slaves were left behind to tend the land, leaving them susceptible to illness.<sup>55</sup> When slaves did succumb to disease or ill health, fellow workers would have to wait until night to bury them to avoid disrupting the day's work.<sup>56</sup> According to the journal and additional investigation, African Americans were, yet again, being dehumanized by both the medical community and the remainder of the population. Rich planters and slave owners ignored the possibility that slaves could contract diseases, such as malaria and yellow fever, and forced them to work regardless of the risks involved.

Racism, status, and wealth greatly divided Southern society and built the social ladder within Charleston. Plantation masters were acknowledged as the economic, social, cultural, and political elite of the South.<sup>57</sup> This is reflected in the words of James Carr,

In this quarter the planters are considered the lords of the land & rank in the first class—look on men of business with a degree of self superiority...<sup>58</sup>

The success of plantation owners rested in their economic advantages, family connections, and ownership of slaves.<sup>59</sup> Not only were slaves considered a monetary necessity, they were a symbol of wealth and nobility. In fact, when assessing a planter's standing, acreage and money were overlooked and attention was focused directly on the number of slaves they owned. Slaves

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Trinkley, Michael, "South Carolina-African Americans-Hunger and Other Hardships," *SCIway.net* [on-line]; available from <http://www.sciway.net/afam/slavery/food.html>; Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Murrin, John M., Paul E. Johnson, James M. McPherson, Alice Fahs, Gary Gerstle, Emily S. Rosenberg, and Norman L. Rosenberg, "The Old South, 1790-1850," In *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People*, 5th ed. Vol. 1. (Thomson Learning, Inc., 2008), 353.

<sup>58</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>59</sup> Murrin, "The Old South, 1790-1850," 353.

were a huge determinant of prosperity and class at this time because those who owned them enjoyed a more leisurely life and spent less time outdoors. Southern farmers without slaves tended to have large families in which every member worked outdoors and cultivated the fields; their skin was weathered, cracked and darkened by the sun. Slave-owning planters, on the other hand, boasted smaller families, sent their children to school, and moved their wives indoors; this resulted in whiter, smoother skin, which was an instant sign of privilege.<sup>60</sup> Carr's description of the planters' superiority is an excellent example of the class distinctions in Southern society at this time. Slaves were considered property, countrymen were thought of as poor because they worked their own fields, and planters were above all others because they could afford to implement slave labor. Through their production of cash crops, plantations were a major contributor to Charleston's economy and were a source of fortune and success.<sup>61</sup> However, because Southerners equated wealth, economic security, and power with slaveholding, plantations also perpetuated the cycle of oppression in Charleston.<sup>62</sup> The relatively cheap cost of acquiring and supporting slaves further perpetuated the cycle of forced labor.

Abundant land, fertile soil, adequate rainfall, and long growing seasons were necessary for plantations to survive; however, inexpensive labor, characterized by the use of slaves, was the backbone behind a working plantation.<sup>63</sup> James Carr explains, in great detail, the costs associated with slaves,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> "Plantation Life."

<sup>62</sup> West, Jean M., "King Cotton: The Fiber of Slavery," *Slavery in America* [on-line]; available from [http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs\\_es\\_cotton.htm](http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs_es_cotton.htm); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>63</sup> "The Plantation Way of Life," *Louisiana Studies in Historic Preservation* [on-line]; available from <http://www.laheritage.org/educatorarea/PlantationLife/PLbackground.html>; Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

...each hand would furnish for the market to the amount of \$500, besides raising their own provisions—so that each slave would yield to his master a net income of five hundred. Deducting there from the small expense of his clothing perhaps 20 or 30 dollars per year...<sup>64</sup>

Referred to as “the market” by Carr, slave ownership began with the marketplaces that facilitated their trade.<sup>65</sup> Carr observed slave marts between 1815 and 1816, prior to the opening of Ryan’s Slave Mart in 1856, which later became Charleston’s best-known spot for slave trading.<sup>66</sup> In the 1700s and early 1800s, slaves were auctioned off in open-air markets, usually on street corners, until the 1850s when the city of Charleston required trading to be done indoors.<sup>67</sup> Slave markets in Charleston were a source of unimaginable humiliation and sorrow for African Americans. After enduring suffocation, brutalization, fear, rape, and diseases such as smallpox, scurvy, and dysentery while onboard slave ships heading to Charleston Harbor, African Americans who survived were put on display at public auctions and examined in absurd and degrading ways.<sup>68</sup> Buyers were known to lick the African’s chin to determine their age and taste their sweat to decide if they were healthy, not to mention examining other bodily aspects to assess the slave’s worth and viability.<sup>69</sup> It is clear through the way in which slaves were examined, embarrassed, and separated from their families that many in Charleston’s society viewed slaves the same way in which they regarded cattle and other livestock. Particularly in the eyes of planters and those

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<sup>64</sup> “James Carr Journal.”

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Hicks, Brian, "Old Slave Mart Museum will Reopen Wednesday," *The Post and Courier* [on-line]; available from [http://www.charleston.net/news/2007/oct/30/old\\_slave\\_mart\\_museum\\_will\\_reopen\\_wednes20548/?print](http://www.charleston.net/news/2007/oct/30/old_slave_mart_museum_will_reopen_wednes20548/?print); Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Norris, Tameka, "The History of Slave Trade From Africa to Europe America," *Essortment* [on-line]; available from [http://www.essortment.com/all/historyofslave\\_rmpw.htm](http://www.essortment.com/all/historyofslave_rmpw.htm); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

who contributed to forced labor, slaves were merely an instrument of profit and were unworthy of humane treatment. Whites in society embraced oppression with open arms and shamelessly flaunted this attitude in its outdoor slave markets. The way in which slaves were cared for and treated was even more outrageous, and quite affordable according to James' account.

Many plantation owners provided the bare minimum to slaves in order to keep their profits high. Carr states only twenty or thirty dollars per year was spent to support each slave, an equivalent amount of two-hundred-fifty or three-hundred-fifty dollars today.<sup>70</sup> The meager amount of money provided hardly enough rations to maintain survival. Slave owners also had to provide food, clothing, and shelter for their slaves; however, they typically provided minimal support. A pint of boiled rice, a pint of cornmeal, a couple pounds fat rendered from bacon or butter, and occasional salted meat and fish were a slave's typical daily ration.<sup>71</sup> Still, many survived solely on corn.<sup>72</sup> Some slaves, who completed their tasks early, would fish in nearby water or maintain vegetable gardens furnished with beans or yams for more sustenance.<sup>73</sup> Most plantation owners provided a yearly ration of coarse, heavy cloth to make clothing, a pair of shoes for the winter, and supplied linen pants or skirts and a cap or kerchief in the summer. Still, some slaves had to spin their own clothing. Typically, flimsy wooden frame buildings served as home for families or groups of slaves and were very inexpensive to build. The small amount of money spent to support workers, reported by James Carr, was not nearly enough to truly sustain

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<sup>70</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>71</sup> Vogeler, Ingolf, "Black History and Slavery in Charleston," *University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire* [on-line]; available from <http://www.uwec.edu/Geography/Ivogeler/w188/south/charles/charles1.htm>; Internet; accessed 05 March 2009.;

West, "Rice and Slavery: A Fatal Gold Seede."

<sup>72</sup> Davis, Ronald, Ph.D., "Slavery in America: Historical Overview," *Slavery in America* [on-line]; available from [http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs\\_es\\_overview.htm](http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs_es_overview.htm); Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>73</sup> West, "Rice and Slavery: A Fatal Gold Seede."

a human being. Malnutrition and early deaths were a combined result of the slaves' poor diet and the heavy physical labor required of them. Simultaneously, their substandard living quarters were unreliable and prone to fires.<sup>74</sup> Had slave owners contributed the proper amount of money to ensure stability and improved health for slaves, many would not have been able to afford to be part of the institution. Perhaps the implementation of slavery would not have lasted so long, nor thrived as vigorously, had hospitable support been required.

Cotton and rice were a major part of the economy of Charleston, South Carolina, and each played a large role in enhancing the South's dependence on forced servitude,

...The cotton is usually picked in Oct or Nov—depending some on the season, a rainy cold autumn puts it back, as a warm autumn has the contrary effect—rice is harvested in October...<sup>75</sup>

Cotton was widely popular in the Southern states, which was quickly nicknamed the “cotton belt.”<sup>76</sup> In the late Eighteenth Century, Charleston planters grew both Sea Island cotton, mentioned various times throughout the journal, as well as a short-strand variety called Upland cotton.<sup>77</sup> Introduced to the Carolinas in 1790, Sea Island cotton was an experimental strain of cotton described as tall and black seeded with long, silvery fibers.<sup>78</sup> It was an excellent medium for spinning cloth, laces, and other textiles.<sup>79</sup> However, Sea Island cotton required much more specific weather patterns and could not be grown in enough abundance to meet world demand.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> “James Carr Journal.”

<sup>76</sup> Murrin, “The Old South, 1790-1850,” 346.

<sup>77</sup> West, “King Cotton: The Fiber of Slavery.”

<sup>78</sup> “The Stoney-Baynard Ruins,” *Community Services Associates* [on-line]; available from [http://www.csaadimin.com/stoney\\_baynard.htm](http://www.csaadimin.com/stoney_baynard.htm); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

<sup>79</sup> “Historic Context Statement.”

<sup>80</sup> West, “King Cotton: The Fiber of Slavery.”

Upland cotton was much less finicky and grew in a wide range of areas; still, it was difficult to process by hand.<sup>81</sup> The cotton gin, invented in 1793 by Eli Whitney, changed the cotton industry dramatically and was viewed by Carr during his trip,

This appearance is caused by the manner in which it is passed through the ginning machine, in little locks or tufts as it is put in by the fingers each lock separate...<sup>82</sup>

The cotton gin consisted of a wooden roller embedded with wire spikes or teeth fitted into a box.<sup>83</sup> A second cylinder, equipped with brushes, revolved in the opposite direction. When cotton was fed through the machine, the wire teeth pulled the cotton fibers through small slats in a grate, separating the seeds from the fiber. This new device allowed Upland cotton to be cleaned at a fast pace, making it an extremely popular and lucrative crop throughout the southern states.<sup>84</sup> Between 1815 and 1816, cotton was selling for about thirty-two cents per pound. While it was only worth half as much as undamaged Sea Island cotton, workers could clean fifty pounds of Upland cotton per day, making it a profitable endeavor. Cotton exports rose from five million dollars in 1800 to thirty million dollars in 1830. The gin made cotton the great southern cash crop and, simultaneously, breathed new life into slavery and plantation agriculture.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of what their normal occupation was on the plantation, all slaves would be forced into picking cotton when it was time for harvest.<sup>86</sup> The average slave picked roughly one-hundred-

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> West, "King Cotton: The Fiber of Slavery. ";  
"James Carr Journal."

<sup>83</sup> West, "King Cotton: The Fiber of Slavery."

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Murrin, "The Old South, 1790-1850," 346.

<sup>86</sup> West, "King Cotton: The Fiber of Slavery."

twenty pounds of cotton per day, and if they came short, whippings were in order.<sup>87</sup> Cotton was not the only popular cash crop in the early 1800s; rice farming also thrived in Charleston.

Rice cultivation was extremely popular among wealthy plantation owners and was expressed by many as dirty, hard, and dangerous work.<sup>88</sup> While James Carr mainly focused on cotton, rice was briefly mentioned as being “harvested in October,” and was regarded as “highly profitable.”<sup>89</sup> This came at the expense of health and safety for African Americans. Because they had to labor in water-laden soil, slaves were left vulnerable to snakes, alligators, mosquitoes, and disease.<sup>90</sup> Among other duties on rice plantations, the slaves’ daily lives included flooding the fields, planting seeds, refreshing stagnant water, and weeding at least a quarter acre of land.<sup>91</sup> After being processed, rice could produce profits of up to twenty-six percent.<sup>92</sup> For this reason, the rice planters in South Carolina were among the richest in the United States.<sup>93</sup> While some African Americans spent their long days in fields, others held more diversified positions.

Although slaves were thought of by many as a form of inexpensive labor to produce cash crops, some held a variety of occupations unrelated to planting and harvesting. Diversified jobs were held by slaves throughout the institution of slavery.<sup>94</sup> James Carr describes these alternate

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> West, "Rice and Slavery: A Fatal Gold Seede."

<sup>89</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>90</sup> West, "Rice and Slavery: A Fatal Gold Seede."

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Murrin, "The Old South, 1790-1850," 346.

<sup>94</sup> "The Aiken-Rhett House-Slavery in Charleston," *Historic Charleston Foundation* [on-line]; available from [http://www.historiccharleston.org/experience/arh/slavery\\_charleston.html](http://www.historiccharleston.org/experience/arh/slavery_charleston.html); Internet; accessed 06 March 2009.

occupations as “common wants” in his journal: “...their slaves are convenient, but they are made too necessary to their common wants.”<sup>95</sup> While Lowcountry planters purchased slaves and used them to cultivate land on their plantations, many slaves were also acquired by city dwellers to perform various tasks.<sup>96</sup> These jobs included working as sailors, blacksmiths, brick masons, carpenters, tailors, shoe-makers boatmen, fishermen, and cabinetmakers.<sup>97</sup> Still, most slaves of the city were domestic servants and worked as laundresses, seamstresses, cooks, gardeners, hostlers, and carriage drivers.<sup>98</sup> Slavery was a major staple in society and spilled over from the Lowcountry to the cities. In the eyes of the North, which James Carr called home, slaves began filling posts the institution of slavery did not originally intend for them occupy. Despite the fact they were still in slavery, this diversification most likely benefitted African Americans because they were able to learn valuable trades other than fieldwork.

Allowing African Americans to occupy such skilled positions shows society did indeed view slaves as human, making the acts of violence inflicted on them all the more evil. Slave masters used many gruesome and tyrannical strategies in order to gain a sense of control over African American slaves, which is portrayed by Carr,

The manners of the people of S. Carolina, like those of all the Southern States—differs from ours as one might expect from persons born & educated with slaves that they are taught to look on as inferior order of beings, and to tyrannize over...<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “James Carr Journal.”

<sup>96</sup> “The Aiken-Rhett House-Slavery in Charleston.”

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> “James Carr Journal.”

Punishment ensued for various reasons, including when slaves committed acts of misconduct or when they did not complete their daily tasks.<sup>100</sup> More often than not, cruel and brutal means were implemented by overseers and drivers in order to assert power over those they felt were less than human. Slaves were subject to verbal rebukes, whippings, kicks to the body, boxing of their ears, confinement in corn cribs or tool sheds, branding on their flesh with hot irons, clipping of their ears, broken legs, severed fingers, slit tongues, and even wearing iron chains and masks for weeks and months at a time.<sup>101</sup> Yet another example of domination inflicted upon slaves was in the form of malnourishment. This is supported by an excerpt from a slave working song, quoted by Carr, which depicts hunger: “Back like a crow bar, belly like a tin pan, huzza my jolly boys, tis grog time a day...”<sup>102</sup> The slaves’ poorly provided rations compacted the hardships of life. In addition to mental and physical anguish, slaves most likely suffered from various vitamin and mineral deficiencies as a consequence of a deprived diet, making their lives even more distressing. Southern society was quite vicious in its handling of slaves. Agony, fear, and starvation appear to be dominant themes of slave life. Those involved in this institution felt African Americans had just as many human qualities as farm animals and treated them accordingly, without any regard for humanity.

While many slaves were ruthlessly controlled by their masters, they maintained a sense of personal freedom while in bondage. One way was through working songs, which were heard by James Carr: “...this appearance with the song of the negroes...”<sup>103</sup> These melodies displayed a facet of the African American culture in Charleston. If dissected, they revealed a multitude of

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<sup>100</sup> Murrin, "The Old South, 1790-1850," 345.

<sup>101</sup> Davis, "Slavery in America: Historical Overview."

<sup>102</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

emotions, mental states, working conditions, and life experiences of the un-free. Wherever slaves resided and toiled, working songs followed. Some expressions were brought over from their native lands and were sung to remind slaves of home, while others were instituted by slave masters to raise morale and keep workers moving in coordinated manner.<sup>104</sup> Some harmonies were rooted in Christianity, which many slaves had converted to, while others were non-religious and consisted of field hollers, shouts and moans used to tell folk tales.<sup>105</sup> Though slave songs frequently had religious or story-telling qualities, they were also an opportunity for slaves to make comments about their masters and overseers.<sup>106</sup>

Slaves had to hide their true opinions and could not refer to owners in a literal sense, so they used pleasing images of animals and figures from the Bible along with code words to describe them.<sup>107</sup> Whites listening did not have the slightest idea the true meaning behind these expressions would reveal insults and discontent for those who controlled workers. This is most likely why, in this passage and others, James Carr used various cheerful words to describe the “negro songs” and never mentioned their meaning: “...those double scored are sung more loud & strong, in which the whole gang join with all their force, and generally much glee...”<sup>108</sup> Much like those who actually lived in Charleston, he thought the songs were simply a joyful way for slaves to pass their time. In doing so, many underestimated the slaves’ intelligence and potential.

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<sup>104</sup> Whittaker, Judie, and Sandy Pekar, "African American Work Songs and Hollers," *Center for American Music* [on-line]; available from <http://www.voicesacrosstime.org/come-all-ye/ti/2006/Song%20Activities/0405PekarWhittakerWorkSongs.html>; Internet; accessed 18 March 2009.

<sup>105</sup> Early, Gerald, "Jazz in Time: Slavery," *PBS.org* [on-line]; available from [http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time\\_slavery.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time_slavery.htm); Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>106</sup> "Slave Working Songs," *Colonial Williamsburg* [on-line]; available from <http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/february03/worksongs.cfm>; Internet; accessed 05 March 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> James Carr Journal.”

Carr listened to yet another form of music practiced by slaves. When allowed to do so, slaves often accompanied their working songs with musical instruments.<sup>109</sup>

James encountered slaves using these makeshift instruments while exploring Charleston: "...the martial sound of a musical instrument about 8 feet long made of a bamboo by the negroes resembling in sound the French horn as all together a very pleasing effect..."<sup>110</sup> Slaves were not allowed to bring any personal belongings to the New World.<sup>111</sup> To compensate for this disadvantage, slaves made various other instruments out of bones, bows, bells, and gourds; they even used their own bodies at times to generate sound.<sup>112</sup> In addition, slaves made use of tambourines, washboards, pots, spoons, and other items to create music and contribute to working songs.<sup>113</sup> One of the most popular instruments was the banjo, which they created by cutting the top off a gourd and covering the hole with a pig, goat, or cat skin.<sup>114</sup> The attached neck was usually made out of wood and the strings were composed of horse tails or hemp fibers.<sup>115</sup> Although slaves were essentially stripped of their culture after being forcibly shipped to America, they found ways to retain their heritage. These instruments helped slaves maintain a sense of self and a connection with their past.

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<sup>109</sup> "Work Songs," *All Music* [on-line]; available from <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=77:4340>; Internet; accessed 18 March 2009.

<sup>110</sup> "James Carr Journal."

<sup>111</sup> Fatty, Wassa, "The Historical Legacy of an African Musial Genius (part 2)," *AllGambian.net* [on-line]; available from <http://www.allgambian.net/NewsDetails.aspx?id=124>; Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>112</sup> Davis, "Slavery in America: Historical Overview."

<sup>113</sup> Early, "Jazz in Time: Slavery."

<sup>114</sup> Ruehl, Kim, "Banjo," *About.com* [on-line]; available from <http://folkmusic.about.com/od/glossary/g/banjo.htm>; Internet; accessed 08 March 2009.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

The epidemic of disease and the oppressive implementation of forced servitude have faded into Charleston's history. Still, they remain alive as enduring memories that will never be forgotten. Time has endowed Charleston with equality, health, and vitality, along with bustling shopping centers and waterfront tourist destinations; many of which would see far harsher scenes of slave auction posts and quarantine stations if their grounds could travel back in time. While some historical sites appear far different today in comparison with what James Carr observed in the 1800s, most have been preserved as a legacy of the Old South experience. Many buildings associated with the city's history have been untouched for hundreds of years or renovated to a mirror image of their original integrity and design. Each serves as a reminder of Charleston's past accomplishments, misfortunes, and mistakes. Charleston has grown beyond its once diseased and enslaved character and has emerged as a beautiful representation of our nation's history. In addition, it has set an excellent example for the rest of the country. Rather than merely embracing and preserving only the favorable mementos of history and papering over scenes that are less attractive, the United States must take heed from Charleston and recognize both its successes and faults throughout time. Whether enrobed in positive recollections of fighting for independence or negative memoirs of slavery and disease, society would not be as vibrant as it is today without the colors of its precedent. If the nation is to march triumphantly into the present, it is crucial to assess and learn from the footprints of its past.