



Barbadosed

Africans and Irish in Barbados

During the 1600's, African slaves and Irish natives shared a common fate on the island of Barbados. Slaves first arrived on the island in the 1620's with the first white settlers and continued to be brought there as the need for labor created a new market for the international slave trade. By 1645, the black population on the island was 5680, and by 1667, there were over 40,000 slaves on the island. In the early years of the colony's growth, Barbados also became a destination for military prisoners and Irish natives. Oliver Cromwell "barbadosed" Irish who refused to clear off their land and allowed other Irish to be kidnaped from the streets of Ireland and transported to Barbados. Those who were barbadosed were sold as slaves or indentured servants, to British planters. They lived in slave conditions and had no control over the number of years they had to serve. The number of Barbadosed Irish is not known and estimates vary widely, from a high of 60,000 to a low of 12,000.

Both groups suffered in harsh conditions and joined together to revolt against British settlers.

The colony had its own set of problems, including raids by Spanish and French pirates, and turbulent weather that decimated crops and precipitated African and Irish slave revolts. Slave revolts often coincided with raids or uncontrollable weather when slave owners were distracted and sent slaves to other settlers or towns for help. The ability to move about gave slaves an opportunity to pass on information to other rebels. The rebellions increased the fear of white slave owners and added to the image of Irish natives as wild savages.

The enslavement of Africans in Barbados continued until 1834 when slaves were emancipated, and then apprenticed for a period of four years. By then the kidnaped Irish had disappeared into history and the census of the 1880's did not identify any Barbadians as Irish. What did remain was a small population of poor whites, often called 'redlegs', who may be the descendants of the Barbadosed Irish.

For further reading:

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O'Callaghan, S. *To Hell or Barbados*. Brandon Books Pub. Ltd., 2001

Vaughan, A. *Roots of American Racism*. Oxford University Press. 1995.