

CHAPTER 5

MORE LIKE A NEGRO COUNTRY

- A. Introduction. South Carolina was the only English colony that recognized African slavery from its founding. Blacks from the West Indies were transported to the colony during the first year of its existence. As the plantation economy developed, more and more blacks, primarily from Africa, were imported until early in the 18th century a majority of South Carolinians were black. The impact of black Carolinians upon the development of the colony and later the state is one of the major themes of South Carolina history.
- B. The early years.
1. For the first 25 years, almost all slaves were imported from the West Indies.
 2. Initially, blacks were pioneers in the wilderness and worked side by side with their masters in fields and served in the militia.
- C. The development of the plantation economy.
1. The early market for slaves was in cattle ranching.
 2. Later, they were used in gathering naval stores.
 3. With the introduction of rice, the plantation as an agricultural unit began to evolve.
 4. Some 80% of the investment needed for developing a plantation was the cost of slaves.
 5. Agricultural prosperity increased demand for slave imports.
- D. The making of the black majority.
1. At beginning of 18th century, the population of colony was roughly 55% white and 45% black.
 2. By 1710, these ratios had reversed.
 3. By 1720, blacks outnumbered whites roughly 2-1, a ratio that continued to hold throughout the colonial period.
 4. Almost all black Carolinians lived in the lowcountry before the American Revolution where population ratios in some parishes were 8 or 9-1 black.
 5. The presence of so many blacks led one colonial visitor to remark that "South Carolina was more like a Negro Country" than any other English

mainland colony – and thus, more like the English colonies in the West Indies.

E. The South Carolina slave trade

1. The increase in South Carolina's colonial slave population was due almost entirely to importation rather than natural reproduction.
2. Local merchants handled slave cargoes for English slave dealers; it was a profitable business.
3. The process began in Africa where young men and women were either purchased or captured.
4. Then came the horror of the middle passage where hundreds of slaves were jammed into the holds of ships.
5. Upon arrival in South Carolina, they were sold at public auction.
- *6. **Some 40% of all slaves brought into the 13 colonies between 1700 and 1775 came through the port of Charleston.**

F. Blacks and Whites in South Carolina

1. From the first days of settlement, there was a master/slave relationship – the idea had been brought from Barbados.
2. As blacks increased in numbers, so did restrictions.
3. South Carolina's first slave code, based upon a Barbadian statute, was passed in 1690.
4. Africans reacted to slavery through individual acts of resistance and by developing their own language, Gullah.
5. The Stono Rebellion in 1739 was the only slave rebellion in colonial South Carolina. It occurred more than 25 years after a rebellion in New York, the first slave rebellion in the 13 colonies.
6. Whites reacted to the Stono rebellion by enacting a number of laws to control the slave population and to redress the population imbalance.
 - a. The Slave Code of 1740, with some later modifications, governed the status of black Carolinians until 1865.
 - b. Patrol laws required white males to patrol country roads at night and arrest any black traveling without a pass.
 - c. Prohibitive import taxes were enacted in the 1740's and in the 1760's to discourage slave imports.
 - d. The Township System and the Bounty Act were designed to encourage white immigration.

G. Impact of black Carolinians on white Carolinians

1. Rice culture was the basis of many family fortunes.
2. Black speech patterns influenced whites and African and Gullah words such as cooter, bubba, and goober became a part of white Carolinians' vocabulary.
3. Traditional South Carolina foods such as bennie seed cookies, okra and tomato soup, and fried chicken are of African origin.

H. Summary. From the position of the 20th century, the institution of African slavery is condemned as evil. In the context of the 17th and 18th centuries it was not. In studying South Carolina history – or any history for that matter – it is important to try to understand the people and events of history in their proper context. Black Carolinians, although enslaved, had a tremendous impact on the cultural, economic, political, and social development of colonial South Carolina. This impact was made not only through positive contributions, but also through the reaction of the white minority to the presence of the black majority.

I. Readings

1. Edgar, South Carolina: A History, Chapter 5
2. Dunn, Sugar and Slaves, pp. 188-334
3. Gordon, Sketches of Negro Life, pp. 1-54
4. Horne, South Carolina, 128-134
5. Jones, South Carolina, pp. 147-148, 157-171, 215-219
6. Joyner, Down By the Riverside, pp. 196-224
7. Littlefield, Rice and Slaves, pp. 8-55
8. Wood, Black Majority
9. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint