The Stono Rebellion: Crash Course Black American History #6

Crash Course: Black American History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=pND-9KhM1Xw
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/pND-9KhM1Xw

===== (00:00) to (02:00) =====

Hi, I'm Clint Smith, and this is Crash Course Black American History.

As we mentioned before, enslaved people resisted their condition in a range of different ways. Often times, those ways were small and personal- slowing down the pace of work, pretending to be sick, purposefully misplacing your tools- things that might slow down the efficiency of the system and give back to the enslaved some small sense of agency.

There were also times when that resistence took on larger, more dramatic forms, like with slave uprisings and rebellions. We should note that notions of what constitutes as a successful versus an unsuccessful rebellion are often subjective, unhelpful, gendered, and can really obfuscate the fact that such a rebellion took place at all. Still, some of these uprisings have taken on noteable historical significance, and today, we're going to talk about one of those, and that's the Stono Rebellion.

theme music plays

Large plantations where Black people outnumbered the white people who enslaved them were not at all uncommon to slavery in the Americas. This was especially true in South Carolina, where the colony was built on the demands of cash crop production.

Raising cash crops like tobacco and rice gave rise to plantations that were designed to grow as much of that valuable crop as possible. And what those plantations needed, more than anything, was labor. The heavy reliance on slavery in the southern colonial economy resulted in a vast expansion of the practice. In South Carolina, the high demand for slave labor led to a Black majority in the colony. And by the year 1740, slavery in the colonies was no longer characterized only by African captives, but had grown to include Black people who were born on American soil. The population of Black people in South Carolina had risen to approximately 40,000, compared to 20,000 white people.

===== (02:00) to (04:00) =====

making Black people about 2/3 of the colony's entire population. Moreover, ships were still bringing large numbers of African captives into South Carolina, adding to the growing enslaved population there.

And as demographics continued to change, white planters began to worry about being so outnumbered, and about the potential for violent resistance. But instead of, I don't know, deciding that slavery was an unethical and morally unsustainable enterprise, they just decided to fight potential fire with fire.

In response to the growing numbers of enslaved Black people in the colony, in August of 1739, South Carolina passed the Security Act, requiring all white men to carry firearms to church each Sunday. Before this act, it wasn't customary for white men in South Carolina to take their weapons to church. And also on Sundays, Black people regularly worked unsupervised. But these planters wanted to be ready at a moment's notice, anywhere they went, to protect themselves from the enslaved people who they were worried might turn on them. But notably, this act was passed before the Stono Rebellion took place, and it wouldn't go into effect for another few weeks. The Stono Rebellion took place in that interim period.

Also heightening the generalized sense of white fear in South Carolina was the Spanish threat brewing in nearby Spanish-controlled Florida. And although they also practiced slavery, the Spanish were intent on disrupting colonial life in the English territory.

So, the Spanish further disrupted the racial dynamics in the English colony by issuing a proclamation that, with only a few stipulations, including converting to Catholicism, Spain would grant freedom to any Black person who could make it to St. Augustine, Florida. Many captives coming to Charlestown, which is present-day Charleston, came from areas in West Central Africa where the Portuguese had spread their language and religious beliefs. And many of them would have been aware of the 1733 offer. A growing Black population, including some African natives not yet fully accustomed to plantation culture, in combination with the Spanish offer, created the perfect storm for the Stono Rebellion to take place.

===== (04:00) to (06:00) =====

This insurrection would become the largest the colony would ever face, and one of the bloodiest in the United States' history. Let's go to the Thought Bubble.

===== Thought Bubble (4:10) =====

The Stono Rebellion, which erupted on Sunday, September 9th, 1739, was led by an enslaved man named Jemmy. Jemmy, and those who fought alongside him, chose Sunday to revolt because they believed that it presented the best conditions to actually pull this thing off, given that all the planters and their families were at church, and the enslaved were working largely unsupervised.

We don't know too much about Jemmy. Historical records suggest that he was from what is now Angola, and many enslaved Africans who came to Carolina from Angola were in fact trained soldiers who had fought in the region's civil war and who had experience with guns. And Jemmy may have been able to read Portuguese and Spanish, which increases the likelihood that he would have heard of the 1733 Spanish Proclamation.

Starting with just 20 enslaved people, Jemmy and the group acquired guns and ammunition by raiding a warehouse, and marched up the Stonover banks carrying banners that plainly read, "Liberty." As they marched south, others, seeing what was happening, dropped their tools and joined the group. By nightfall, the crowd swelled to nearly 100 Black people willing to risk it all for their freedom.

The rebels hoped to make their way to St. Augustine to gain their freedom, but just 10 miles later, when they reached the Edisto River, white colonists overtook them, killing an estimated 30 rebels. While some initially escaped, many were ultimately captured and executed. Others were sold and shipped off to the Caribbean. As for Jemmy, historians aren't really sure what happened to him. He is lost to the missing pages of history. Thanks Thought Bubble.

These attacks weren't haphazard or indiscriminate. Many of the rebels had specific ideas of who they wanted to attack and who they didn't. As a result, some white people were spared along the way.

===== (06:00) to (08:00) =====

===== (08:00) to (10:00) =====

===== (10:00) to (12:00) =====

===== (12:00) to (12:01) =====