

## *An Account of the Negro Insurrection in South Carolina (1739)*

*The largest slave uprising in Britain's mainland North American colonies was the Stono Rebellion (spelled "Stonehow" in the account excerpted below), which took place in South Carolina in 1739. The insurgents hoped to escape south, through the newly founded British colony of Georgia, to St. Augustine, a Spanish fort in Florida. Though quickly suppressed, the uprising led South Carolina's government to impose new restrictions on both enslaved and free blacks, which remained in effect through the American Civil War, over a century later.*

*The account of the Stono Rebellion reproduced here was written within a month of the events, though it's unclear by whom—possibly James Oglethorpe, governor of Georgia, who helped put down the uprising. The account identifies the uprising's leaders as being from "Angola," where the author says there were many African Catholics. The author appears to have in mind the kingdom of Kongo, in western central Africa, where, due to Portuguese influence, Catholicism had been established for 200 years. Potentially, the insurgents' Catholicism could have strengthened their solidarity with Britain's imperial rival, Spain. One modern theory speculates that the insurgents timed their uprising, launched on the weekend of September 8-9, to coincide with the Catholic feast day celebrating the birth of the Virgin Mary, on September 8.*

Sometime since, there was a proclamation published at Augustine in which the king of Spain (then at peace with Great Britain) promised protection and freedom to all Negro slaves that would resort thither. Certain Negroes belonging to Captain Davis escaped to Augustine and were received there. [...] Of this other Negroes having notice, as it is believed, from the Spanish emissaries, four or five who were cattle-hunters and knew the woods, some of whom belonged to Captain MacPherson, ran away with his horses, wounded his son, and killed another man. These marched for Georgia and were pursued, but the rangers being then newly reduced, the country people could not overtake them [...] They reached Augustine, one only being killed and another wounded by the Indians in their flight. They were received there with great honors; one of them had a commission given to him and a coat faced with velvet.

Amongst the Negro slaves there are a people brought from the kingdom of Angola in Africa; many of these speak Portuguese (which language is as near Spanish as Scotch is to English) by reason that the Portuguese have considerable settlement, and the Jesuits have a mission and school, in that kingdom, and many thousands of the Negroes there profess the Roman Catholic religion. Several Spaniards, upon diverse pretenses, have for some time past been strolling about Carolina; two of them, who will give no account of themselves, have been taken up and committed to jail in Georgia. The good reception of the Negroes at Augustine was spread about; several attempted to escape to the Spaniards and were taken; one of them was hanged at Charles Town. [...]

On the 9th day of September last, being Sunday, which is the day the planters allow them to work for themselves, some Angola Negroes assembled, to the number of twenty; and one who was called Jemmy was their captain. They surprised a warehouse belonging to Mr. Hutchenson at a place called Stonehow; they there killed Mr. Robert Bathurst and Mr. Gibbs, plundered the house, and took a pretty many small arms and powder, which were there for sale. Next they

plundered and burned Mr. Godfrey's house and killed him, his daughter, and son. They then turned back and marched southward along Pons Pons, which is the road through Georgia to Augustine. They passed Mr. Wallace's tavern towards daybreak and said they would not hurt him, for he was a good man and kind to his slaves; but they broke open and plundered Mr. Lemy's house and killed him, his wife, and child. They marched on towards Mr. Rose's, resolving to kill him, but he was saved by a Negro who, having hid him, went out and pacified the others.

Several Negroes joined them; they, calling out "Liberty," marched on with colors displayed and two drums beating, pursuing all the white people they met with and killing man, woman, and child when they should come up to them. Colonel Bull, lieutenant governor of South Carolina, who was then riding along the road, discovered them, was pursued, and with much difficulty escaped and raised the country. They burned Colonel Hext's house and killed his overseer and his wife. They then burned Mr. Spyre's house, then Mr. Sacheverell's, and then Mr. Nash's house, all lying upon the Pons Pons Road, and killed all the white people they found in them. Mr. Bullock got off, but they burned his house.

By this time many of them were drunk with the rum they had taken in the houses. They increased every minute by new Negroes coming to them, so that they were above sixty, some say a hundred; on which they halted in a field and set to dancing, singing, and beating drums to draw more Negroes to them, thinking they were now victorious over the whole province, having marched ten miles and burned all before them without opposition.

But the militia being raised, the planters with great briskness pursued them and, when they came up, dismounting, charged them on foot. The Negroes were soon routed, though they behaved boldly, several being killed on the spot. Many ran back to their plantations, thinking they had not been missed, but they were there taken and shot. Such as were taken in the field also were, after being examined, shot on the spot. And this is to be said to the honor of the Carolina planters: that notwithstanding the provocation they had received from so many murders, they did not torture one Negro, but only put them to an easy death. All [who] proved to be forced, and were not concerned in the murders and burnings, were pardoned. And this sudden courage in the field, and the humanity afterwards, hath had so good an effect that there hath been no farther attempt, and the very spirit of revolt seems over. About 30 escaped from the fight, of which ten marched about 30 miles southward and, being overtaken by the planters on horseback, fought stoutly for some time and were all killed on the spot. The rest are yet untaken. In the whole action, about 40 Negroes and 20 whites were killed.

The lieutenant governor sent an account of this to General Oglethorpe, who met the advices on his return from the Indian nation. He immediately ordered a troop of rangers to be ranged, to patrol through Georgia; placed some men in the garrison at Palichocolas, which was before abandoned and near which the Negroes formerly passed, being the only place where horses can come to swim over the River Savannah for near 100 miles; ordered out the Indians in pursuit and a detachment of the garrison at Port Royal to assist the planters on any occasion; and published a proclamation ordering all the constables, etc., of Georgia to pursue and seize all Negroes, with a reward for any that should be taken. It is hoped these measures will prevent any Negroes from getting down to the Spaniards.

**Source:** Allen D. Candler, comp., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, vol. 22, part 2 (Atlanta: Chas. P. Byrd, 1913), 232-236, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433082125778>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

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**See also:**

John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1991): 1101-1113.

Mark M. Smith, "Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion," *Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 3 (August 2001): 513-534.



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