H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Mark M. Smith, ed.** *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005. x + 134 pp. $14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57003-605-7; $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-604-0.

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**Published on** H-South (October, 2006)

**What the Stono Revolt Can Teach Us about History**

On Sunday, September 9, 1739, a group of slaves from the Stono River region of South Carolina killed twenty-one white men, women, and children and destroyed a significant amount of property as they made their way south toward freedom in Spanish Florida. South Carolina's lieutenant governor, William Bull, and four men met the armed slaves on the road and alerted the local militia who engaged the insurgents near the Edisto River that afternoon. The rebel forces fought valiantly, but many were killed in the fight and those who escaped were later captured and executed.

Historians agree on the basic story of the Stono Revolt, but nearly 275 years later the details and meaning of this significant slave rebellion are still debated. Most scholars describe Stono as a pivotal moment in the development of South Carolina's plantation slave system, but some accentuate the African roots of the rebellion while others place it into the context of international politics and slave revolts elsewhere in the western hemisphere. As Mark Smith points out in his comprehensive documentary reader on the Stono Revolt, historians have used the same limited number of primary sources to come to very different conclusions.

*Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* explores this dramatic moment in American history. The book is divided into two parts: the first contains a collection of the major historical documents related to Stono and the second reprints four scholars' interpretations of the event. Each document and article includes a useful preface in which Mark Smith explains its origins, contextualizes it, and raises a series of questions about its uses and interpretation. But rather than providing answers, he instead gives the readers the tools to reach their own conclusions. In the process, Smith transforms a simple documentary reader into a guidebook for how to interpret and write history.

The first section of the reader includes fifteen important historical texts. Smith begins with the only eyewitness account of Stono and other contemporary documents from both public and private records. The South Carolina Slave Code of 1740, for example, reveals the chilling effects that the rebellion had on white South Carolinians' treatment of their slaves. Also included are early historical interpretations of the rebellion written in the late-eighteenth century, as well as two accounts written many years later. Especially interesting is abolitionist Edmond Quincy's work of historical fiction in which he describes the complex motivations of the leader of the Stono rebellion. Smith argues that the account is steeped in historical detail and "helpfully anticipates some findings on the nature and significance of slave revolts offered by modern historians" (p. 35).

The second section of the reader consists of four historians' interpretations of the Stono Revolt. Smith begins with Peter Wood's classic account in which he outlines the historical context in which the rebellion occurred and explains the motivations of the rebels. Wood recognizes Stono as a point of contingency when the form of the South Carolina plantation slave culture was not fully determined. Second is John K. Thornton's interesting argument that the Stono rebels were not Angolans, as the historical record states, but instead were Kongolese Catholics who found strength in their African religious and military heritage. In the third selection, Edward Pearson also recognizes Stono as a pivotal moment in the history of South Carolina slavery. He believes that the revolt occurred during a time in which South Carolinians were in transition from a pastoral to a plantation rice economy. He argues that the Stono rebels were in part revolting against the harsher work regime dictated by rice cultivation and new gender divisions of labor that differed from African norms. The Stono rebels asserted their masculinity as they took up arms against their enslavers. In the final article, Mark Smith integrates the previous scholarship on Stono as he explains what motivated the rebels and why they revolted when they did. He argues

that they employed religious symbols and planned their revolt on the date of the Virgin Mary's nativity, thereby combining their Kongolese Catholic past with their slave present. Smith provides a useful preface to each of the four essays that draws connections between the differing scholarly interpretations. The original footnotes are included with all of the essays, allowing the reader to trace the ways in which the authors both used the primary sources and built upon others' scholarship.

Mark Smith's *Stono* provides interesting insight into one of the most important slave revolts in the history of the American South, but the volume is most valuable in what it teaches its readers about the craft of history. Smith's measured editorial notations gently guide readers and reveal to them how historians interpret evidence and construct arguments. Anyone can learn from reading *Stono*, but this slim volume is an excellent choice for instructors who wish to empower their students to interpret Stono's history for themselves.

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**Citation**: Diane Mutti-Burke. Review of Smith, Mark M., ed., *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt*. H-South, H-Net Reviews. October, 2006.
**URL**: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12418

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