



# Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739 (New Narratives in American History)

By Peter Charles Hoffer

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The story of slavery in the colonial New World is, in part, one of rebellion. In Jamaica, Hispaniola, Dutch Surinam and elsewhere, massive uprisings threatened European rule. But not in British North America. Between the founding of Jamestown in 1607 and the start of the American Revolution in 1775, the colonies experienced only one notable revolt, on South Carolina's Stono River in 1739, and it lasted a single day. Yet, writes Peter Charles Hoffer, as brief as this event was, historians have misunderstood it--and have thus overlooked its deeper significance.

In *Cry Liberty*, Hoffer provides a deeply researched and finely nuanced narrative of the Stono River conflict, offering uncomfortable insights into American slavery. In particular, he draws on new sources to reexamine this one dramatic day. According to conventional wisdom, recently imported African slaves-warriors in spirit and training-learned of an impending war between England and Spain. Seeking freedom from Spanish authorities, the argument runs, they launched a well-planned uprising in order to escape to Florida. But Hoffer has mined legislative and legal records, land surveys, and first-hand accounts to identify precisely where the fighting began, trace the paths taken by rebels and militia, and offer a new explanation of its causes. Far from a noble, well-crafted revolt, he reveals, the slaves were simply breaking into a store to take what they thought was their due, and chance events put them on a path no participant had originally intended. The truth is a far less heroic, but far more of a human tragedy.

Richly researched, crisply told, and unflinchingly honest, this book uncovers the grim truth about the violent wages of slavery and sheds light on why North America had so few slave rebellions.



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#### Review

"This is a smart book--smart because it forces readers to think anew about a topic that is well known to scholars of colonial slavery, the Stono slave rebellion of 1739...Readers will come away with lots to contemplate about the nature of slave resistance in colonial American and about the reading of fragmentary and tantalizing evidence. It is the sort of smart book that students will love." --*The Journal of Southern History*

#### About the Author

Peter Charles Hoffer is Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Georgia. He specializes in early U.S. history and legal history. He is the author of numerous books, including *Past Imperfect; Seven Fires: The Urban Infernos that Reshaped American History; The Brave New World: A History of Early America; and The Supreme Court: An Essential History*.

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