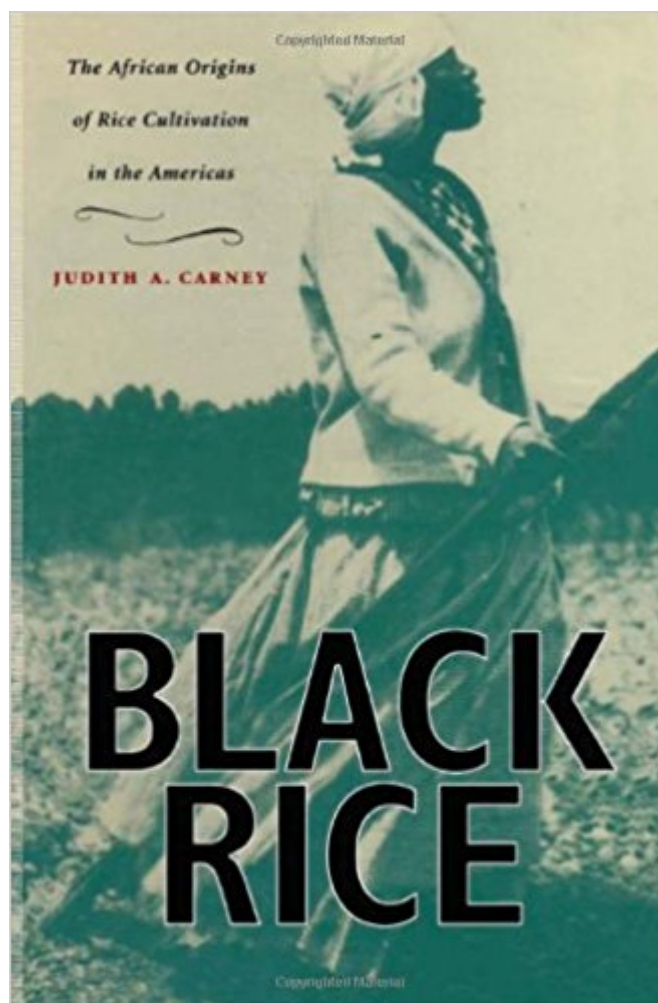


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# Black Rice: The African Origins Of Rice Cultivation In The Americas



## Synopsis

Few Americans identify slavery with the cultivation of rice, yet rice was a major plantation crop during the first three centuries of settlement in the Americas. Rice accompanied African slaves across the Middle Passage throughout the New World to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the southern United States. By the middle of the eighteenth century, rice plantations in South Carolina and the black slaves who worked them had created one of the most profitable economies in the world. *Black Rice* tells the story of the true provenance of rice in the Americas. It establishes, through agricultural and historical evidence, the vital significance of rice in West African society for a millennium before Europeans arrived and the slave trade began. The standard belief that Europeans introduced rice to West Africa and then brought the knowledge of its cultivation to the Americas is a fundamental fallacy, one which succeeds in effacing the origins of the crop and the role of Africans and African-American slaves in transferring the seed, the cultivation skills, and the cultural practices necessary for establishing it in the New World. In this vivid interpretation of rice and slaves in the Atlantic world, Judith Carney reveals how racism has shaped our historical memory and neglected this critical African contribution to the making of the Americas.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

From Bondage to Freedom "Among the longstanding themes in African-American history is the debate over cultural survival and acculturation," observes UCLA geography professor Judith A. Carney in the introduction to *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Contrary to common belief, she explains, rice was not brought by Europeans to the Americas by

way of Asia, but rather was introduced here by Africans and cultivated by African-American slaves, particularly in South Carolina, where rice crops proved to be one of the most profitable plantation-based economies. Though this is a scholarly work, Carney's clear, uncluttered prose invites a wider readership. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Exploring crops, landscapes and agricultural practices in Africa and America, [Carney] demonstrates the critical role Africans played in the creation of the system of rice production that provided the foundation of Carolina's wealth | This detailed study of historical botany, technological adaptation and agricultural diffusion adds depth to our understanding of slavery and makes a compelling case for the agency of slaves in the creation of the South's economy and culture. (Drew Gilpin Faust New York Times Book Review 2001-04-22) Judith A. Carney's Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas | describes how the South Carolina rice industry was built not only on slave labor but on the agricultural and technological knowledge brought over by the Africans | [It] changes our understanding of the black contribution to American life. (Barry Gewen New York Times Book Review 2005-06-05) Black Rice sets out to discredit for good an old Southern recipe for history that depicts slaves as mere laborers who dumbly performed work their masters conceived. Carney tells it the other way around. After years visiting West African rice fields, then digging in archives on both sides of the Atlantic, she has emerged with evidence that early slave traders sought and seized Africans who had the abilities to grow a specific African rice | Black Rice might be called an agricultural detective story. The historical crime—and that's clearly how Carney sees it—is the relative lack of attention given to African rice. (Allan M. Jalon Los Angeles Times 2001-08-20) Contrary to common belief, [Carney] explains, rice was not brought by Europeans to the Americas by way of Asia, but rather was introduced here by Africans and cultivated by African-American slaves, particularly in South Carolina, where rice crops proved to be one of the most profitable plantation-based economies. Though this is a scholarly work, Carney's clear, uncluttered prose invites a wider readership. (Publishers Weekly 2001-02-19) Black Rice is an original, knowledgeable, exciting, and important addition to the literature of the making and remaking of the Atlantic world. Judith Carney demonstrates how the trans-Atlantic transfer of rice cultivation marked not simply the movement of an important crop across the Atlantic, but also the relocation of an entire culture. (Ira Berlin, author of Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America) Among the very finest examples of what African Diaspora Studies should be: multidisciplinary, multilingual, broad in

geographic scope, and focused on Africa and Africans as vital, active contributors to the technology and culture of the Americas. (Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, author of *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*) If there were a field of Trans-Atlantic Subaltern Studies, Black Rice would represent both a foundation stone of the edifice and one of its most impressive achievements. (James C. Scott, Yale University) Black Rice is a luminous, brilliant account of innovation, resistance, and identity linking Old and New Worlds. Carney has unearthed a compelling, and hitherto neglected, aspect of Africa's contribution to the agrarian history of the Americas. A magisterial geographical history of the Black Atlantic. (Michael Watts, University of California, Berkeley) An intrepid and observant researcher who links African rice to North and South America in fresh and convincing ways, Judith Carney's work is wide-ranging, provocative, and clear. Black Rice is a wonderfully rich and creative book about an amazing crop and the people who labored to grow it. You will never look at a bowl of rice or the entire Atlantic basin in quite the same way again. (Peter H. Wood, author of *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*) With a fusion of highly original geographic, ethnographic, and historical analysis, Carney powerfully traces the provenance and provisioning of rice in the Americas, the profound role that it played in defining gender roles, and the myriad ways that slave labor altered the once hidden political ecology of rice landscapes. (Karl Zimmerer, author of *Changing Fortunes: Biodiversity and Peasant Livelihood in the Peruvian Andes*)

Not long ago, it was common belief that rice was domesticated in Asia and brought to other parts of the world either by Muslims or European traders. Thus, if rice were cultivated in the Carolinas from the late 17th century on, the presence of that crop was due to some European intervention. Carney explodes this myth. Showing the existence of rice cultivation in West Africa for at least two thousand years and proving that a) the variety of rice plant is not the same as the one in Asia and b) that a vast body of knowledge about rice growing existed in West Africa when the Portuguese first arrived there, she lays firm groundwork on which to build her idea that it was African slaves who taught the English planters in the Carolinas how to grow rice, built all the waterworks and field irrigation systems, passed on knowledge about milling the crop, and cooking the rice as well. She concludes that a whole system of knowledge was transferred from West Africa to North America's southeast coastal swamps (and to Brazil and Suriname too). This knowledge belonged especially to women of certain peoples who lived in the coastal rice growing zones of the area between Senegal and the Ivory Coast (and also in the interior [...] delta area of Mali). It was appropriated, just like the bodies of the slaves, and falsely said to originate with the white planters. How a bunch of ship captains and

slave traders would have time to master the art of rice cultivation and bring it to the Americas was never explained by traditional historians. And the rice paddies of England somehow do not loom large in British legend. Africans---again---were erased from history. Carney has re-written them into the record in a very interesting book. The transfer of rice from Africa resulted in South Carolina being the richest of the colonies; it resulted in a black majority population for some time with the concomitant fear of rebellion among the white slave owners; and just for a short time, it allowed slaves to bargain with their owners to get some free time to attend small gardens of their own. Husking the rice by pounding it, a daily task for West African women, became a day-long, exhausting job for slaves in the Carolinas, part of the reason for the high death rate. In terms of breadth of research and the very topic of research, this is a five star book. There is one fly in the ointment. I think this book could have been cut, or at least, more carefully edited. There is a very large amount of repetition. The same ideas, even the same phrases, appear many times and it becomes tiresome to be told the same thing yet again. Many times I felt like exclaiming, "OK, OK ! I get it." This aside, BLACK RICE is a fine book. If you are interested in American history or African/American connections, if the transfer of agricultural knowledge systems intrigue you, you can't afford to miss it.

Planning to buy another copy of this book to a friend of mine whose family worked on rice plantations. I think he will appreciate the history of how Africans from certain regions were captured and brought here for the sole purpose of cultivating the rice fields. It puts the lie to rest that Africans had no skills when they were enslaved in the Americas.

Excellent, good condition and delivered as promised.

I got this book as reference for a class. After reading it, I have to say..."I love it." Recommended it to my professor at college too.

Very well done.

Part of my collection

Should be taught in school.

Good read

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