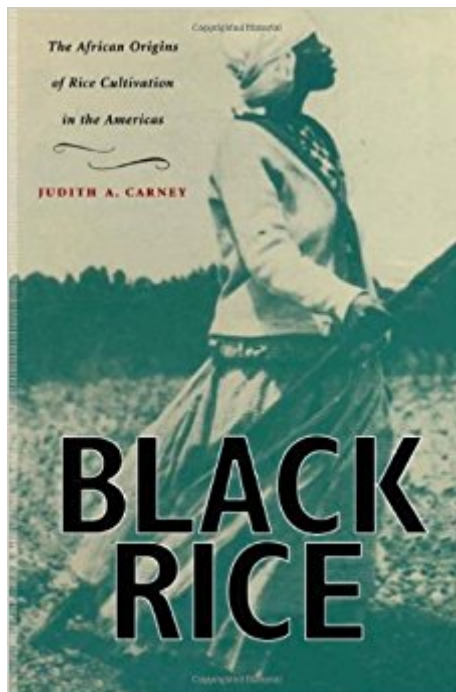


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Black Rice



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.

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Customer Reviews

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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