

La'Deja Williams

We Are History

The year is 1700. A large wooden structure floats atop a vast expanse of water, transporting the craft to it's destination ahead. A large terrain of land appears out of the hazed air as it draws nearer. Ahead lies an area of coastal plain decorated with greenery, mountainous structures, and thin streams of water. As the vessel finally meets land, bodies climb down the rough ramp, one after another. Hundreds of bodies. Some different from the others. The fair-toned bodies come first, wearing fancy clothing with prided hearts and their heads held high. Behind them, then, comes another group of bodies. Bodies the shade of the sky when the moon falls. Bodies only seen in regions foreign and far. Bodies that are chained, exhausted, and wounded. Enslaved bodies. Bodies that look like my own. These special bodies were put on this land against their will and as time went on, they began to populate it more and more. By 1708, our bodies took up majority of the population. We had no choice but to make a life for ourselves here, and that's what we did. Black bodies became the primary sources of wealth throughout the state, and helped to further develop the state of South Carolina into what it is today.

The impact that African Americans have had on the history of South Carolina is one so large, that it cannot be ignored. We weren't just slaves: we were cultivators, innovators, and producers of wealth to this region. We built houses for ourselves and others, we gardened, we harvested; we did it all. The SC economy benefited greatly from slave labor on plantations since it was heavily based upon agriculture and much of the labor done their was farm work. South Carolina became the wealthiest colony of British North America in 1775 because of the labor done by enslaved African Americans. Amongst those enslaved were the Gullah Geechee people. They were descendents of Africans enslaved on plantations of the lower Atlantic Coast and originated in Charleston, SC. They are known to have preserved more of their cultural heritage than any other African-American community in the U.S.

African Americans faced very heavy racial abuse and maltreatment as the decades went by. So much so that in the 1920s, they began to flee the South and travel North. Economic opportunities were better in the North but alongside that, racial violence and discrimination was less severe. The world watched as these black bodies migrated together again, this time searching for freedom instead of losing it.

It's so important to learn about the contributions of African Americans to South Carolina because for so long, we were the history. To undermine and diminish that would be doing a massive disservice to those who played a role in the growth of the state. South Carolina history is South Carolina history because of black history, and that's why it's so necessary to know it.