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Conference Report: Slavery in Early South Carolina

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The Institute of Southern Studies (ISS) at the University of South Carolina recently hosted a conference entitled "Slavery in Early South Carolina". The participants were almost all historians, but included an archaeologist and a couple of folklorists.

The conference started with silver jubilee recognition of Peter Wood's *Black Majority*, published 25 years ago. Philip Morgan's new book *Slave Counterpoint* was also discussed. Morgan compares the Tidewater and Lowcountry plantation systems, economies, and societies.

Later the first day, papers were presented by Leland Ferguson and Mary Gavin on aspects of the convergence of the various cultures present in colonial South Carolina. Ferguson's paper presented some of his changing ideas about the functions of colonoware bowls, while Gavin's paper focused on African-American medicinal healing. Another session discussed the "voices of slavery" which presented how slave narratives of events were presented by the planter class to the larger community. Papers were presented by Vin Carretta and Robert Olwell.

The morning on the second day started with a session entitled "Making a Slave Society". Cara Anzilotti presented a paper on white women and slave ownership, Gary Hewitt on pro- and anti-slavery in early South Carolina, and Jennifer Morgan on reproducing slavery in colonial South Carolina. One of my favorite sessions was entitled "Labor in the Lowcountry" which discussed the knowledge system of rice agriculture in West Africa and in South Carolina. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, Judith Carney was only able to deliver about two thirds of her paper on the subject. Max Edelson's paper was entitled "'The Planter Stock': Employing Slave Labor in the Colonial Lowcountry." Of particular interest was his idea that planters were constantly trying and constantly failing to replace the task system with a system of gang labor since it did not fit well with agricultural staples other than rice. Virginia Jelatis also presented her dissertation research on the culture of indigo and how it interfaced with rice agriculture grown on the same plantation.

The afternoon session was devoted to the Revolutionary Period and beyond with presentations by Stan Deaton, Daniel Littlefield, and James McMillin. Deaton's paper was on slavery and white anxiety in post-Revolutionary South Carolina, Littlefield's paper was entitled "Henry Laurens, the Revolutionary Generation, and Slavery", and McMillan discussed the African-American "Ellis Island" of South Carolina - Sullivan's Island.

Unfortunately, the conference was not well-advertised. Similar conferences have been sponsored by ISS during Black History month in the past, and those who may be interested should get on their mailing list. Contact ISS by phone at (803) 777-2341, or by mail: The Institute for Southern Studies, Gambrell Hall, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208.