Rebellion is nothing new in South Carolina. We've all seen rednecks waving their "rebel" flag, taking pride in the fact that South Carolina went to war with the country as it was moving away from enslaved labor. Throughout American history, South Carolinians have led the fight to preserve and defend slavery, white supremacy, and racial segregation. They pride themselves on the fact that the first shots of the Civil War were fired from Fort Sumter and it is no secret that almost 40% of all enslaved Africans entered North America through Charleston.

What are clearly not lauded as acts of bravery and unyielding principle among this crowd, but are none the less among the most courageous in history, are the acts of rebellion initiated by the enslaved. It is unclear what triggered the Stono Rebellion on that Sunday morning, September 9, 1739 in St. Paul's Parish, less than twenty miles away from Charleston.

Many enslaved were aware that small groups of runaways had made their way from South Carolina to Florida, where their freedom was restored and had been given land by the Spanish. England and Spain were at war, so looking to cause unrest within the English colonies, the Spanish issued a proclamation stating that any slave who deserted to St. Augustine would be given their freedom.

While this certainly had to be tempting, what may have actually sparked the fires of insurrection was the soon-to-be-enacted Security Act.

In mid-August, a Charlestown newspaper announced the Security Act. A response to the white's fears of insurrection may have been the very thing that triggered their worst nightmare. The act required that all white men carry firearms to church on Sundays, a time when whites usually didn't carry weapons and slaves were allowed to work for themselves. Anyone who didn't comply with the new law by September 29 would be subjected to a fine.

Whatever the driving force, whether Security Act or the promise of freedom from the oppression of slavery, early that Sunday morning, about twenty enslaved gathered at the Stono River. They entered Hutchenson's store, a nearby shop that sold firearms and ammunition, armed themselves and killed the two shopkeepers who were manning the store. They walked South, carrying banners, beating drums and shouting "Liberty!" They walked to the house of a Mr. Godfrey and quickly burned it and killed Godfrey and his son and daughter. They continued heading South. The sun still had not risen when they reached Wallace's Tavern. Because the inn keeper was known for being kind to his slaves, his life was spared.

The white inhabitants of the next six or so houses were not so lucky – they were all killed. Master Thomas Rose escaped their wrath as he was successfully hidden by his slaves, and accounts say they forcibly joined the rebellion. Many willingly joined the rebellion and just before noon, the band had grown to number around 50 members. The standard procedure was to kill any whites the group encountered. However one individual, Lieutenant Governor William Bull eluded them and rode to spread the alarm.

Around four that afternoon, the rebels, now close to 100 in count, stopped in a large field just before reaching the Edisto River. They had marched over ten miles and killed between twenty and twenty-five whites. The posse of whites approached the rebels and the band was only able to fire off two shots. The whites returned fire, and by dusk, about thirty of the enslaved were dead and at least thirty had escaped. Most were captured over the next month and killed on site.

That same year there was another uprising in Georgia, and the next year another took place in South Carolina, probably inspired by the Stono Rebellion. Uncomfortable with the increasing numbers of blacks for some time, the white colonists had been working on a Negro Act that would limit the privileges of slaves. This act was quickly finalized and approved after the Stono Rebellion. No longer would slaves be allowed to grow their own food, assemble in groups, earn their own money, or learn to read. Some of these restrictions had been in effect before the Negro Act, but had not been strictly enforced.

The enslaved frequently resorted to insurrection, first in the British colonies and later in the southern United States. At least 250 insurrections have been documented; between 1780 and 1864, ninety-one African-Americans were convicted of insurrection in Virginia alone. Many regard Stono as the first of its kind, but a little known fact is that the first revolt in what became the United States took place over two hundred years earlier in 1526 at a Spanish settlement near the mouth of the Pee Dee River in South Carolina.

The Renaissance & Elizabethan Age of Exploration to the New World was dominated by the Spanish Conquistadors. The success of the Spanish Conquistadors in acquiring monopolies on much of the Eastern spice trade and their expeditions to the New World brought great wealth and power to Spain. The new discoveries made by the Spanish Conquistadors brought untold riches in terms of gold and silver and spices and it also brought power and influence.

Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón was a Spanish conquistador who was sent by the Holy Roman emperor Charles V (King Charles I of Spain) to search for a water route to the Spice Islands (in the Pacific Ocean). While this was an impossible task, he is remembered historically as founder of the doomed colony of San Miguel de Guandape, which holds a notorious place in history as the first colony to harbor and hold African slaves captive in the United States.

In the summer of 1526, he sailed from Haiti with some five hundred Spaniards and one hundred African slaves in tow and landed at the mouth of the Pee Dee River. They were not prepared for the rigors the new land had in store for them. Malaria killed over half of the Spaniards, killing de Ayllón along with them and leaving the remaining colony vulnerable to attacks from disease and raids by the surrounding native people.

In November of that year, the enslaved saw the weakness in the leadership of the colony and waged an uprising. They escaped and found refuge in a nearby Native American camp. This forced the Spanish colonialists to flee after a short period of time. They gave up and went back to Haiti leaving the newly freed slaves as the first permanent inhabitants other than the Native Americans in the United States.

While some regard South Carolina as the birthplace of rebellion and succession from the Union, our heritage of rebellion runs much deeper than the desire to hold humans captive for profit. Indeed we do hold a place in history as bearing witness to the very first documented act of rebellion against the oppressive grips of slavery. For that, we can all be very proud.