

The Denmark Vesey Conspiracy



ABOUT THE READING Denmark Vesey was a free African American carpenter living in Charleston, South Carolina. He was an outspoken man who often quoted from the Bible in arguing against slavery—a practice that made the white population of Charleston increasingly uneasy. In 1822 an informant tipped off local authorities that Vesey was planning a slave rebellion. Arrests and trials came swiftly, and 37 people were executed.



As you read think about how the white population of Charleston reacted to the idea of a slave rebellion.

The Confession of Monday Gell

Monday Gell was accused of plotting with Vesey. After his arrest, Gell confessed his involvement. Much of the evidence used to convict Vesey came from Gell's confession.

I come out as a man who knows he is about to die—some time after Christmas Vesey passed my door, he called in said to me, that he was trying to gather the blacks to try and see if anything could be done to overcome the whites; he asked me to join; I asked him his plan and his numbers. . . When I went into Vesey's I met Ned Bennett, Peter Poyas, and Frank Ferguson, and Adam, and Gullah Jack, they were consulting about the plan; Frank told Vesey on Saturday 15th he would go and bring down the people and lodge them near town in the woods; the plan was to arm themselves by breaking open the stores. . . . One evening, [two men]

Source: *Slave Insurrections: Selected Documents, reprinted in 1970 by the Negro Universities Press, A Division of Greenwood Press, Inc., Connecticut.*

The Denmark Vesey Conspiracy, *continued*

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brought to my shop a keg, and asked me to let it stay there till they sent for it; I said yes, but did not know the contents; the next evening Gullah Jack came and took away the keg, . . . since I have been in prison I learnt that the keg contained powder. Albert Inglis came to me and asked if I knew any thing about it; I said yes. He asked me if I had joined; I said yes. . . Previous to the 16th, Albert said to me quit the business, I told him I was too far into it, so I must stick to it.

Gell is referring to a barrel of gunpowder the conspirators planned to use during the rebellion.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What two things did the conspirators think they needed to accomplish for the rebellion to succeed?

2. Why did Gell reject Albert Inglis’s advice?

The Sentence of Gullah Jack

Gullah Jack Pritchard was an East African priest who was accused of telling potential conspirators that his magic would protect them from slaveholder’s bullets. The judge at his trial focused on Gullah Jack’s claims of supernatural powers in sentencing him to death. Gullah Jack was hanged a few days after Vesey’s execution.

9th July, 1922—Jack, a slave belonging to Paul Pritchard, commonly called GULLAH JACK, . . . was brought up, and sentence pronounced by L. H. KENNEDY, Presiding Magistrate.

VOCABULARY

mummary a false, deceptive show or ceremony
specters ghosts
conjured called
consigned sent

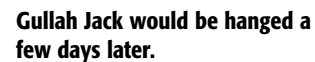
JACK PRITCHARD—The Court, after deliberately considering all the circumstances of your case, are perfectly satisfied of your guilt. In the prosecu-

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tion of your wicked designs, you were not satisfied with resorting to natural and ordinary means, but endeavored to enlist on your behalf, all the powers of darkness, and employed for that purpose, the most disgusting **mummery** and superstition. You represented yourself as invulnerable; that you could neither be taken nor destroyed and that all who fought under your banners would be invincible. . . Your boasted Charms have not preserved yourself, and of course could not protect others. . . The airy **specters, conjured** by you, have been chased away by the special light of Truth, and you stand exposed, the miserable and deluded victim of offended Justice. Your days are literally numbered. You will shortly be **consigned** to the cold and silent grave, and all the Posers of Darkness cannot rescue you from your approaching Fate! Let me then conjure you to devote the remnant of your miserable existence, in fleeing from the “wrath to come.” This can only be done by a full disclosure of the truth. The Court are willing to afford you all the aid in their power, and to permit any Minister of the Gospel, whom you may select to have free access to you. To him you may unburden your guilty conscience.



Gullah Jack would be hanged a few days later.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What does the judge suggest that Gullah Jack do before his execution?

2. Why do you think the judge seems so offended by Gullah Jack’s supposed magic?

MAKE A COMPARISON

1. What information in each of the two passages suggests Gullah Jack's role in the conspiracy?

2. What activities described in both passages suggest why local officials reacted so swiftly to the news of the conspiracy?
