

Antebellum Slave Rebellions

Revolts and Confrontations in Antebellum America

One of the haunting images of slavery remains the leather whip cutting into the flesh of a helpless slave. Decades later, many slaves recalled the whip as the most detestable aspect of slavery. Even with the knowledge of the whip and other forms of punishment available to slave masters, some slaves risked everything in protesting their forced servitude. Oftentimes this protest took the form of armed rebellions and other acts of physical confrontations.

The Haitian rebellion in 1792 proved that Black slaves could fight their oppressors with a passion seldom matched anywhere in the world. There were numerous slave rebellions and confrontations in the United States before the Civil War. The most known of these were led by Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner.

Gabriel Prosser

The first planned slave revolt in the South was led by Prosser in August 1800. Encouraged by his belief in Christianity, Prosser recruited thousands of slaves throughout the Richmond, VA, area, and actually amassed a substantial amount of weapons. Even though everything seemed to be in place, a fellow slave betrayed Prosser and his followers – the revolt ended before it started. Although Prosser was hung for daring to take back his freedom, his actions completely terrified whites in Richmond and throughout the South.

Denmark Vesey

Vesey actually enjoyed a degree of autonomy (freedom) on his plantation because he was a skilled artisan and not a field slave. As a result, he eventually

bought his freedom in 1800 and settled down in Charlestown, S.C. as a carpenter. Although he was free, Vesey still hated the fact that so many Blacks suffered as slaves. Like Prosser, Christianity inspired Vesey and he was often seen quoting Old Testament scriptures to Black slaves, particularly those involving the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

Vesey also believed it was his God-inspired mission to lead Black slaves to freedom. Vesey planned to carry out this mission in July, 1822. However, like Prosser, he was betrayed by one of his own before the plot actually materialized and subsequently died at the end of a rope.

Nat Turner

While neither Prosser's nor Vesey's rebellions actually succeeded, Nat Turner, also known as the "Prophet", scared more than a generation of Southerners. Turner claimed to have religious visions as an apocalyptic, Christ-like, deliver and became a leading religious figure among the slaves of Southampton, Virginia. In 1831, Turner and seven others entered the house of his master and killed the entire family, save a lone infant, with hatchets and broadaxes.

After killing more than 50 whites, Turner and his followers hid in the surrounding woods for months before being captured and executed. The fact that Turner succeeded in killing so many while avoiding capture for so long terrified whites throughout the South, and many never lived comfortably with slavery again.

DID NAT TURNER'S REVOLT SUCCEED?

NAT TURNER GOES FROM FARM TO FARM, KILLING WHITES AND ADDING BLACKS TO HIS ARMY. BY NOON ON AUG. 22, 1831, THEY HAVE KILLED 57 PEOPLE WITH AN ARMY OF 60.



TURNER NEVER GETS TO THE TOWN. WHITE FARMERS WITH GUNS BLOCK A BIG BRIDGE INTO TOWN.



THE NEXT DAY, WHITE FARMERS SURPRISE TURNER'S MEN AND KILL MANY OF THEM.



TURNER'S ARMY SCATTERS. HE HIDES IN THE WOODS. FOR WEEKS THE WHITES CANNOT FIND THE LEADER OF THE SLAVE REVOLT.

ON OCT. 30, 1831, A HUNTER ACCIDENTALLY FINDS TURNER.



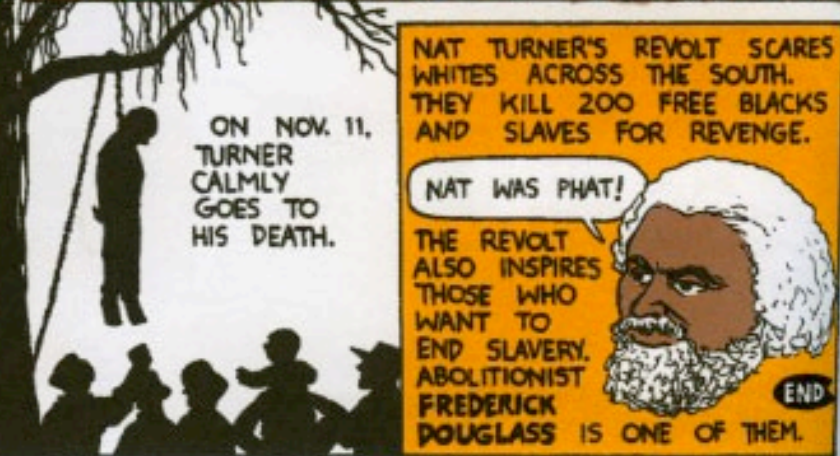
TURNER IS JAILED IN JERUSALEM. A LAWYER INTERVIEWS HIM AND WRITES "THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER." MANY PEOPLE BUY THIS BOOK.

ARE YOU SORRY FOR WHAT YOU DID? YOU WILL BE HANGED FOR IT!



WAS NOT CHRIST CRUCIFIED?

ON NOV. 11, TURNER CALMLY GOES TO HIS DEATH.



NAT TURNER'S REVOLT SCARES WHITES ACROSS THE SOUTH. THEY KILL 200 FREE BLACKS AND SLAVES FOR REVENGE.

NAT WAS PHAT!

THE REVOLT ALSO INSPIRES THOSE WHO WANT TO END SLAVERY. ABOLITIONIST FREDERICK DOUGLASS IS ONE OF THEM.

END

HORRID MASSACRE IN VIRGINIA

Station 5 Image 2



The Scenes which the above Plate is designed to represent, are—Fig. 1. a Mother intreating for the lives of her children,—2. Mr. Travis, cruelly murdered by his own Slaves.—3. Mr. Barrow, who bravely defended himself until his wife escaped.—4. A comp. of mounted Dragoons in pursuit of the Blacks.