

Nat Turner Slave Rebellion - I

**Lead:** In August 1831 the southside Virginia county of Southhampton was convulsed by the deadliest slave rebellion in North American history. One of roots of the rebellion was southern white ambivalence about slavery.

**Intro. :** *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

**Content:** Despite the growing economic dependence upon slave labor in the American south after the Revolution, there was powerful ambivalence among many Southerners about the institution of slavery. It mocked the philosophical foundation of the republic itself, violating the principles animating the Declaration of Independence. Many religious groups were increasingly vocal about the immorality of slavery. Quakers, anti-slavery Baptists, and before 1800, Methodists vigorously denounced the practice and encouraged slave owners to manumit their slaves. In the north, slavery was gradually eliminated by custom, sentiment and legal prohibition, so that the south became increasingly isolated in the national debate.

Southerners, however, were not about to give up their slaves. Slaves were good economic investments and they represented a significant portion of the assets of southern whites whether wealthy or of middling means. Slaves were a status symbol in the South and slavery was an established mechanism of social control over a huge population of Africans and their descendents, confirming as well the racial and cultural supremacy of the white race.

In the face of such resistance, even the Methodists were forced to tone down their criticism and accommodate themselves to the reality of slavery. Nevertheless, many southerners, even slaveholders were conflicted, uncomfortable even embarrassed with the institution they embraced. Thomas Jefferson was perhaps the most prominent of the conflicted, another was Benjamin Turner, a plantation owner in southside Virginia. His slave, Nat Turner would lead the greatest slave rebellion in U.S. History. Next time: the mystic.

At the University of Richmon1, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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