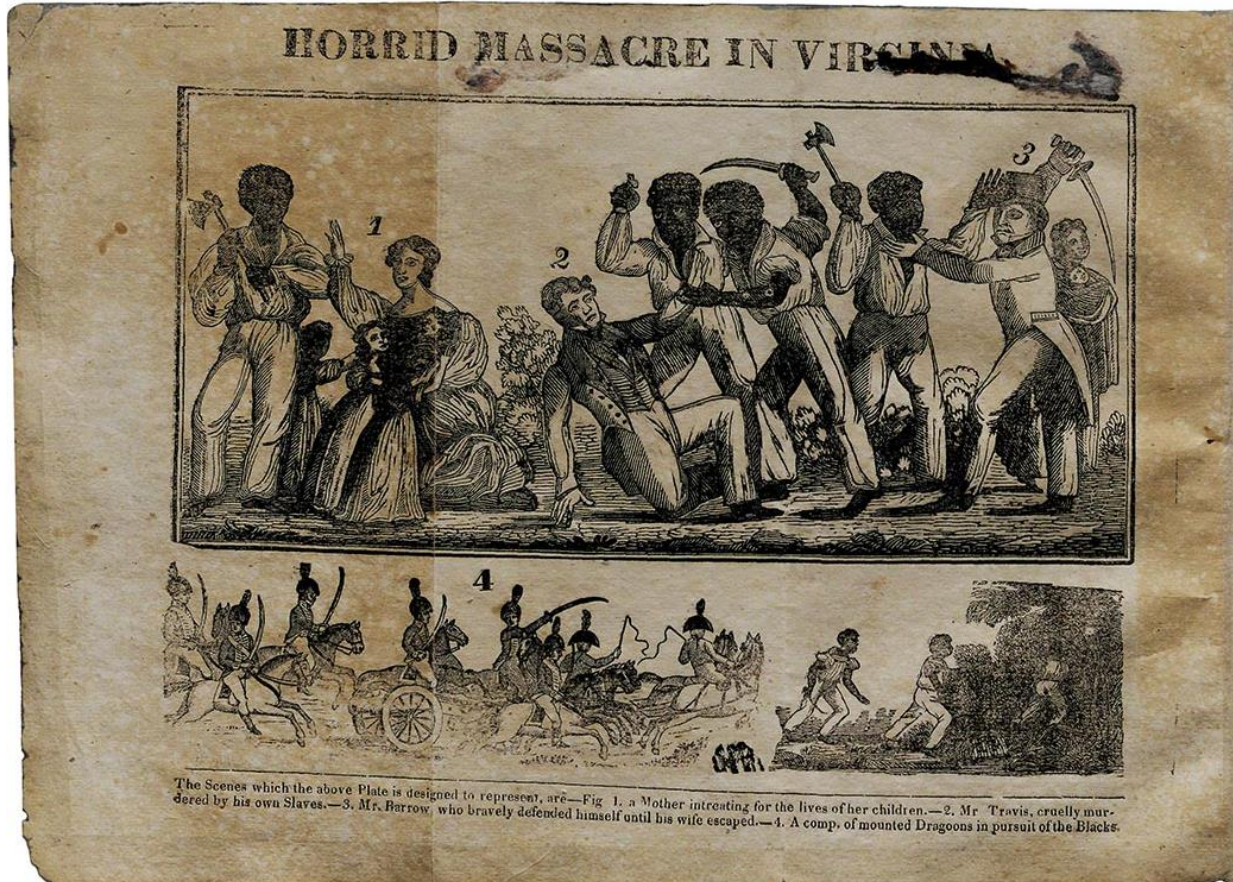


# Nat Turner's Rebellion

## Introduction

In the early hours of August 22, 1831, a slave named Nat Turner led more than fifty followers in a bloody revolt in Southampton, Virginia, killing nearly 60 white people, mostly women and children. The local authorities stopped the uprising by dawn the next day. They captured or killed most of the insurgents, although Turner himself managed to avoid capture for sixty days.



"The Horrid Massacre in Virginia" from the *Authentic and Impartial Narrative of the Tragical Scene Which Was Witnessed in Southampton County on Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August Last*, by Samuel Warner (New York, 1831). (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC04548)

Even though Turner and his followers had been stopped, panic spread across the region. In the days following the attack, 3000 soldiers, militia men, and vigilantes killed more than one hundred suspected rebels. In a letter written a month later from North Carolina, Nelson Allyn described the retaliation against African Americans:

The insurrection of the blacks have made greate disturbance here every man is armd with a gun by his bed nights and in the field at work a greate many of the blacks have been shot there heads taken of stuck on poles at the forkes of rodes some been hung, some awaiting there trial in several countys, 6 in this county I

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expect to see them stretch their trial next week there is no danger of their rising again here.

Nineteen of the thirty who had been arrested were convicted and executed. The rest, along with 300 free blacks from Southampton County, agreed to be exiled to Liberia in Africa. Turner was hanged on November 11, 1831.

Nat Turner's rebellion led to the passage of a series of new laws. The Virginia legislature actually debated ending slavery, but chose instead to impose additional restrictions and harsher penalties on the activities of both enslaved and free African Americans. Other slave states followed suit, restricting the rights of free and enslaved blacks to gather in groups, travel, preach, and learn to read and write.

### Questions for Discussion

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1. How much time passed between Nat Turner's Rebellion and the writing of this letter? How might this have an effect on the tone of the letter?
2. What major piece of news is provided in the letter?
3. Do the punishments appear to be just? Why or why not?
4. What is the tone of the last few lines? How does that compare to the previous lines in the letter?

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### Transcript

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Nelson Allyn to his brother, Joseph Allyn II, September 25, 1831. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC05655)

Gates Sep the 25 — 1831

Dear

Brother being separated by distance knowing that you would be desiros of hearing from me I now sat down to let you know that I am well, and, enjoying good health, as good as when I left home we had a good journey down no accidents on the way I hope to here that you are all well to home should like to here from Mother and the rest of the famaly I have nothing in particular to write you, the insurrection of the blacks have made greate disturbance here every man is armd with a gun by his bed nights and in the field at work a greate many of the blacks have been shot. there heads taken of stuck on poles at the forkes of rodes some been hung, some awaiting there trial in several countys, 6 in this county I expect to see them strecht ther trial nex week there is no danger of their rising again here.

I have got a good place to board nice friendly people as I wish to live with Mr Pierce is about fifty miles from me write to me about the busness there. you and phebe write me a long letter dont write so short as I shall tell [I] Amelia to write My love to you all

Nelson Allyn

## Nat Turner's Rebellion

Image

Gates Sep the 25 - 1831

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Nelson Allyn to his brother Joseph Allyn II, September 25, 1831. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC05655)