

Nat Turner Timeline

1619 – Arrival of first African slaves to the British colony of Virginia.

1800 – A planned uprising among slaves in Richmond, Virginia, led by Gabriel Prosser, was stopped before it could take place. The individuals involved were executed.

October 2, 1800 – Nat Turner was born in Southampton County, Virginia.

1822 – Authorities in Charleston, South Carolina executed members of a group led by former slave Denmark Vesey who were planning a slave uprising.

Early 1820s – According to Turner, he received the first in a series of visions.

1822 – Nat Turner was sold to Thomas Moore.

1828 – Thomas Moore died and Turner was inherited by his son, Putnam Moore.

1830 – Turner was sent to the home of Joseph Travis, after Travis married Putnam's mother.

August 22, 1831 - Turner and a group of slaves initiated an armed uprising against the white slaveholders of Southampton County, Virginia.

August 23, 1831 – Turner's group scattered after killing approximately 55 white men, women, and children. Turner went into hiding and state officials issued a reward for his capture.

October 30, 1831 - After 70 days in hiding, Turner was captured and imprisoned in the Southampton County jail in Jerusalem, Virginia to await trial.

November 1-4, 1831 – Local lawyer and slaveholder Thomas R. Gray visited and questioned Turner. He compiled *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which was published following Turner's trial.

November 5, 1831 - At his trial, Turner was found guilty of insurgency and sentenced to death.

November 11, 1831 – Turner was hung at noon.

March 15, 1832 – The legislature of Virginia passed a new law that placed further restrictions on the rights of free black citizens and slaves.

Document A: *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Modified)

Lawyer Thomas R. Gray visited Nat Turner in jail on October 30, 1831. Based on his conversations with Turner, Gray wrote this document for Turner's trial.

Thomas R. Gray: The public has tried to understand the origin of this dreadful conspiracy, and the motives which influenced its **diabolical** actors. . . . Everything connected with this sad affair was wrapped in mystery, until Nat Turner the leader of this ferocious band was captured. . . . I decided to commit his statements to writing, and publish them, with little or no change, from his own words.

Nathaniel Turner: My mother and others said I surely would be a **prophet**, as the Lord had shown me things that had happened before my birth. And my father and mother said I was intended for some great purpose. . . . My grandmother, who was very religious; my master, who belonged to the church; and other religious persons, . . . noticed my unique manners and my uncommon intelligence and remarked that I would never be of any service to any one as a slave.

Thomas R. Gray: Nat Turner is a complete **fanatic**. . . . He possesses an uncommon share of intelligence, with a mind capable of attaining anything, but it is warped and **perverted** by the influence of early experiences. . . . The calm, deliberate composure with which he spoke of his actions . . . the expression of his **fiend**-like face when excited by enthusiasm, still bearing the stains of the blood of helpless innocence; I looked at him, and my blood **curdled** in my veins.

Source: *Thomas Gray, The Confessions of Nat Turner: The Leader of the Late Insurrections in Southampton, Va. As Fully and Voluntarily Made to Thomas R. Gray, in the Prison Where He Was Confined, November 5, 1831.*

Vocabulary

diabolical: evil, devilish

prophet: a person considered to be a messenger of God

perverted: corrupted

fanatic: a person with an extreme dedication to a belief

fiend: an evil spirit or demon

curdle: to go bad or spoil

Document B: *The Richmond Enquirer* (Modified)

The following is an excerpt from a letter written to the editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*.

We have, as yet, had no sufficient reason to believe that there was a “concert or general plan” among the Blacks. I have no doubt, however, that the subject has been pretty generally discussed among them, and the minds of many cooperated in the design. . . .

I am led to believe from all that I can learn that Nat Turner has been revolving this plan of mischief and disruption, for years. Pretending to be **divinely** inspired, more than four years ago, he announced to the Blacks, that he should baptize himself on a particular day, and that while in the water, a dove would be seen to descend from Heaven and perch on his head, thus **endeavoring** to collect a great crowd . . . This assembly was prevented; but he, in company with a white man, did actually baptize himself. From that day until the awful tragedy of the 22d, he has used every means in his power, to acquire control over the minds of the slaves. A dreamer of dreams and a would-be Prophet, he used all the **arts** familiar to such pretenders, to deceive, **delude**, and **overawe** their minds.

Source: *Friend of the editor. "The Southampton Tragedy."* The *Richmond Enquirer*, 27 September 1831. Written in Southampton, Virginia.

Vocabulary

divinely: related to God

endeavoring: trying

arts: tricks

delude: deceive

overawe: overwhelm

Document C: An Address to the Slaves of the United States (Modified)

The following is an excerpt of a speech delivered by the African American abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet at the National Negro Convention in Buffalo, New York. The convention drew 70 delegates, including abolitionist leaders like Frederick Douglass.

The time has come when you must act for yourselves. . . . You can do the work of **emancipation** better than any others. . . . However much you and all of us may desire it, there is not much hope of **redemption** without the shedding of blood. If you must bleed, let it all come at once . . .

The patriotic Nathaniel Turner . . . was driven to desperation by wrong and injustice. . . . his name has been recorded on the list of **infamy**, but future generations will remember him among the noble and brave. . . .

Those who have fallen in freedom's conflict, their memories will be cherished in all future generations; those who are living, their names are surrounded by a halo of glory. . . .

Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die freemen than live to be slaves. Remember that you are FOUR MILLION!

It is in your power to so torment the God cursed slaveholders that they will be glad to let you go free.

Let your motto be resistance! Resistance! RESISTANCE! No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance.

Source: Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States," 1843.

Vocabulary

emancipation: freedom from slavery infamy: to be known for evil
redemption: to be saved

Guiding Questions

Document A

1. (Sourcing) Who wrote this document? How might the author's background influence the content of the document?

When and where was it published?

What kind of document is it?

2. (Close reading) According to this document, how did Turner describe himself?

3. (Close reading) How did the author describe Turner?

4. How do the two descriptions differ?

What might have caused the difference in the descriptions?

5. How trustworthy is this source? Explain your reasoning.

6. Based on this document, how would you characterize Turner?

Document B

1. (Sourcing) Who wrote this document? How might the author's background influence the content of the document?

When and where was it published?

What kind of document is it?

2. Who was the author's intended audience?

How do you know this?

How might the audience have affected the tone and content of the article?

3. (Close reading) According to the author of this article, what kind of person was Nat Turner?

4. (Contextualization) Think about when this article was written: How might its publication date affect how the author represented Turner? Refer to your timeline if necessary.

5. How trustworthy is this source? Explain.

6. Based on this document, how would you characterize Turner?

Document C

1. (Sourcing) Who wrote this document?

How long after the Turner rebellion was this document written?

2. (Sourcing) Who was the author addressing? How might the audience have affected the tone and content of the speech?

3. (Close reading) According to the author of this speech, what kind of person was Nat Turner?

4. (Contextualization) How might the time and place in which this document was written influence how the author represented Turner?

5. How trustworthy is this description of Turner?

6. Based on this document, how would you characterize Turner?