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The Confessions Of Nat Turner: The Leader Of The Late Insurrections In Southampton, Va. . .



The Confessions of Nat Turner

THE LEADER OF THE
LATE INSURRECTIONS IN
SOUTHAMPTON, VA. . .

NAT TURNER



Synopsis

The late insurrection in Southampton has greatly excited the public mind, and led to a thousand idle, exaggerated and mischievous reports. It is the first instance in our history of an open rebellion of the slaves, and attended with such atrocious circumstances of cruelty and destruction, as could not fail to leave a deep impression, not only upon the minds of the community where this fearful tragedy was wrought, but throughout every portion of our country, in which this population is to be found. Public curiosity has been on the stretch to understand the origin and progress of this dreadful conspiracy, and the motives which influences its diabolical actors. The insurgent slaves had all been destroyed, or apprehended, tried and executed, (with the exception of the leader,) without revealing anything at all satisfactory, as to the motives which governed them, or the means by which they expected to accomplish their object. Everything connected with this sad affair was wrapt in mystery, until Nat Turner, the leader of this ferocious band, whose name has resounded throughout our widely extended empire, was captured. This "great Bandit" was taken by a single individual, in a cave near the residence of his late owner, on Sunday, the thirtieth of October, without attempting to make the slightest resistance, and on the following day safely lodged in the jail of the County. His captor was Benjamin Phipps, armed with a shot gun well charged. Nat's only weapon was a small light sword which he immediately surrendered, and begged that his life might be spared. Since his confinement, by permission of the Jailor, I have had ready access to him, and finding that he was willing to make a full and free confession of the origin, progress and consummation of the insurrectory movements of the slaves of which he was the contriver and head; I determined for the gratification of public curiosity to commit his statements to writing, and publish them, with little or no variation, from his own words. That this is a faithful record of his confessions, the annexed certificate of the County Court of Southampton, will attest. They certainly bear one stamp of truth and sincerity. He makes no attempt (as all the other insurgents who were examined did,) to exculpate himself, but frankly acknowledges his full participation in all the guilt of the transaction. He was not only the contriver of the conspiracy, but gave the first blow towards its execution. It will thus appear, that whilst every thing upon the surface of society wore a calm and peaceful aspect; whilst not one note of preparation was heard to warn the devoted inhabitants of woe and death, a gloomy fanatic was revolving in the recesses of his own dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind, schemes of indiscriminate massacre to the whites. Schemes too fearfully executed as far as his fiendish band proceeded in their desolating march. No cry for mercy penetrated their flinty bosoms. No acts of remembered kindness made the least impression upon these remorseless murderers. Men, women and children, from hoary age to helpless infancy were involved in the same cruel fate. Never did a

band of savages do their work of death more unsparingly. Apprehension for their own personal safety seems to have been the only principle of restraint in the whole course of their bloody proceedings. And it is not the least remarkable feature in this horrid transaction, that a band actuated by such hellish purposes, should have resisted so feebly, when met by the whites in arms. Desperation alone, one would think, might have led to greater efforts. More than twenty of them attacked Dr. Blunt's house on Tuesday morning, a little before day-break, defended by two men and three boys. They fled precipitately at the first fire; and their future plans of mischief, were entirely disconcerted and broken up. Escaping thence, each individual sought his own safety either in concealment, or by returning home, with the hope...

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Customer Reviews

I had heard of the slave rebellions before the American Civil War in the first half of the 1800s however this was the first record of one that I have read. This is the actual historical document by Thomas Gray who interviewed Nat Turner in his jail cell before Turner was executed. The document is short and was an easy read on my Kindle app for Android. It seems to be a terse narrative sticking to factual events with very little commentary or explanation from Turner. However Gray who documented the conversation has a few things to say about the events. Turner's backstory is interesting providing a snapshot of an intelligent, literate and thoughtful man who felt compelled to his violent actions. I was reminded of other historical figures who felt driven, almost divinely inspired to some action. Some of the commentary from Gray seems to be slanted towards portraying Turner as crazy. However I wonder if at least part of the romantic portrayal, romance as in the Arthurian

legends or Joan of Arc or other fantastical narratives, is a product of Gray and his perspective. During the events there are several times when slaves of the households attacked by Turner and his mob, whose size seemed to grow and shrink during the events, assisted their owners against Turner, assisted Turner's group in some small way, or just stayed out of the way. I use the word mob as that seems to be the best choice. Several times during the narrative Turner mentions attempts to organize the mob in the face of white resistance, attempts which did not go well. I wonder if the whites had had some military training or other organized violence training which the slaves did not have.

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