

## SLAVE REVOLTS AND REBELLIONS


Throughout the history of slavery in America, there were many Slave revolts and rebellions. Most of these accounts were kept secret. After the Civil War, historians were able to document several of these violent outbreaks. Below are some of the most famous revolts and rebellions.

### **GABRIEL PROSSER**

In August of 1800 a slave named Gabriel Prosser, set out to free himself and about another 1,000 slaves. His plan was to first kill most of the white residents on and around his plantation and then take over the town of Richmond, Virginia. A sudden bad thunderstorm caused the slave revolters to disband. Three other slaves revealed the plot to the authorities. Gabriel Prosser and thirty-six of the slaves were identified, tried, and executed. The article below is a copy of an extract from an old African American calendar which also tells the story.

**GABRIEL PROSSER**  
Slave Insurrectionist  
1775?-1800

Gabriel Prosser was born around 1775, and was a coachman belonging to Thomas Prosser of Henrico County, Virginia. Hating slavery, Prosser planned a revolt for the end of August 1800, to take place in and around Richmond, which had some 32,000 slaves and only 8,000 whites. Not only was the site well planned, but also the time of year, because there would be plenty of food for his followers, thus sparing any shortage of supplies. With the plans laid, a violent rainstorm occurred the night of the revolt, causing many of the slaves not to show. In addition to the storm, the plot was betrayed by a pair of house slaves who were sympathetic to their master. Soon word swept through Richmond and martial law was declared. Slaves found to be associated with the revolt were hung, until it was realized that nearly the entire slave population would be eliminated. Prosser was later captured and interrogated by the governor to divulge information about his plans and implicate others. Refusing to give any information, Gabriel Prosser was hanged on this day in 1800.



## DENMARK VESEY

In 1800, Denmark Vesey had become a freed slave. He was so disturbed by the practice of slavery that he wanted to destroy all evidence of its existence. He wanted to begin a full-scale war against those who owned slaves. He wanted to raise an army consisting of slaves and abolitionists. His first step was to kill white slave owners in the city of Charleston, South Carolina. In 1822, after several years of planning, Vesey's idea to attack and "liberate" the city was revealed. A forced confession led to Vesey and several of his co-conspirators' being arrested. All of them were tried and hung. South Carolina then passed laws to bar free Blacks from entering the state as a consequence of Denmark Vesey's alleged plot.

### DENMARK VESEY

Slave Insurrectionist  
1767-1822

Denmark Vesey was born in 1767, in Charleston, South Carolina, as a slave to Captain Vesey. He sailed for 20 years with his master to the Virgin Islands and Haiti. After winning a \$1,500 lottery, Vesey purchased his freedom for \$600. A religious man, Vesey soon became minister of a Methodist church in Charleston. It was through his church that he began to recruit supporters for his planned slave revolt on Charleston. With the plan set to go into operation on the second Sunday in July 1822, Vesey's plan was revealed by a slave who alerted white authorities. Reacting quickly, hundreds of Blacks were rounded up, including Vesey, who was captured after a two day search. Unable to deny his intent to overthrow the city during his trial, Vesey was hanged on this day in 1822.



## NAT TURNER

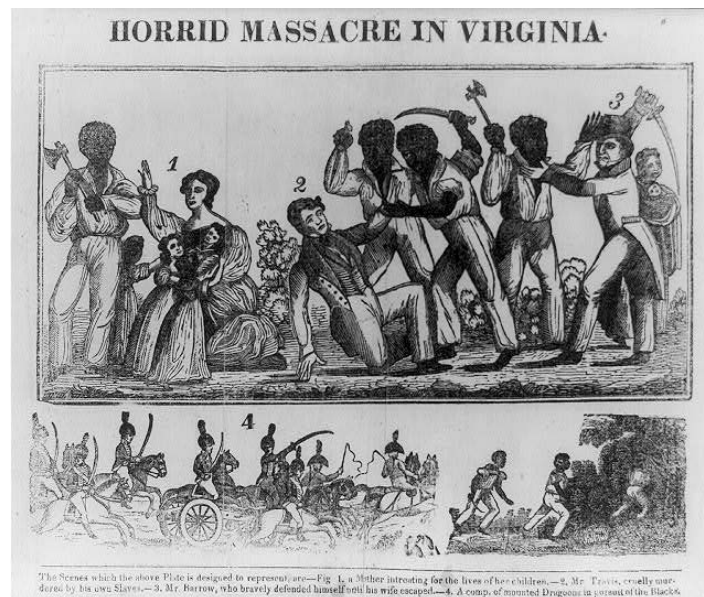
Nat Turner was a 31 year old preacher to the slaves devised a plan of "terror and devastation." He lived on a plantation in Southampton County in Virginia. His organized revolt became America's most famous and violent act involving slave resistance.

Turner was a religious fanatic who had a belief that he was the "chosen one" to free himself and all of the other slaves in his community. On August 21, 1831, Nat Turner and six other slaves went on a rampage and killing spree. They first killed Turner's plantation master and his family.

As news of Turner's revolt quickly spread, more slaves rebelled and joined in his plight. Nat Turner and his followers killed total of 60 white slave owners, their wives and children.

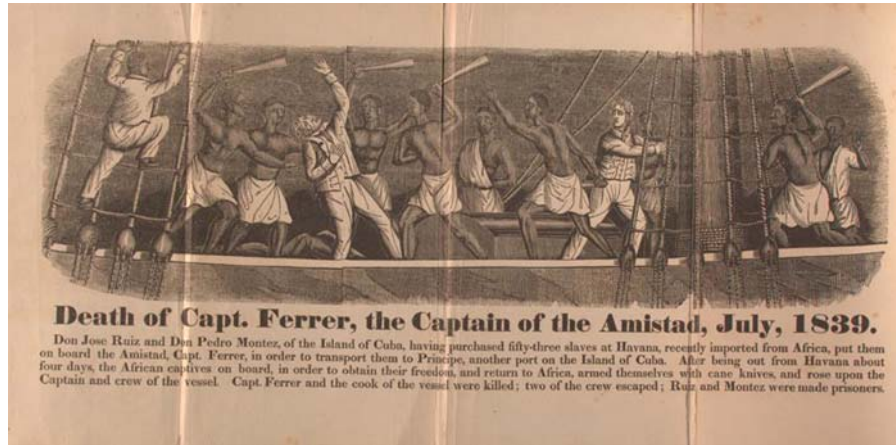
Federal and Virginia state troopers were called out to put down the rebellion caused by this band of roving slaves. Most of Turner's accomplices were killed by the troopers. Other slaves not connected to the rebellion were also killed. By the time the confrontations had finished, there were over 100 slaves killed.

Nat Turner escaped. He hid out in the local swamps for three months until he was finally captured by the authorities. After he was captured he was put on trial, found guilty of murder and promptly executed on October 30, 1831.



Copy of newspaper report on Nat Turner's Revolt

## THE AMISTAD INSURRECTION (MUTINY)



In 1839, The *La Amistad*, a Spanish slave ship, was carrying a cargo of 53 captive slaves (49 men, 1 young girl, and 3 children), all previously taken from the African country of Sierra Leone. They belonged to the Mende village in this region of West Africa. The insurrection started when the ship was taking the slaves from Cuba to a slave market in South America. *La Amistad* was sailing in the Caribbean when Singbe, a 25 year old African, later given the Spanish name Joseph Cinque, was able to free himself and the other captives from their chains. During the dark night, they went on deck and killed the captain and his cook. Two other crew members were saved. They were instructed by Cinque to turn the ship back toward Africa. Instead of going toward Africa, the ship was steered to the shores of Montauk, Long Island. Here the ship docked for food and water. It was noticed by the American navel ship, *U.S.S. Washington*. The captain, Richard Meade, ordered the ship to dock over at New London, Connecticut on August 27, 1839. The ship did not dock at the closes port, being New York as slavery was illegal in the state. Connecticut still had not abolished slavery at that time.

The Amistad Insurrection brought the issue of slavery to the attention of many more free Americans. A trial was to take place in Connecticut. The abolitionists were looking for evidence of cruelty and the evil profiteering involved in slavery. They wanted to use this case to finally abolish slavery in America.

An 18 month legal battle ensued, and the black Africans did not seem to have a chance of gaining their release. They had been accused of murder and mutiny aboard the ship. The intention was to try them in a court of Law and send them back to slavery in Cuba. Both the Cubans and the Spanish government were diplomatically trying to force President Martin Van Buren to put aside any conflicts that existed between America and Spain, and send these "murderous Africans" back to the slave port in Cuba. The technicality was that Spanish law "had by 1817 prohibited the importation of slaves into any of its territory, including the colony of Cuba."

*La Amistad* escalated into one of America's most fascinating court cases. Attorney Roger Sherman Baldwin of New Haven, Connecticut was able to find a translator of the Mende language. He was then able to document Cinque's and the other slaves' journey. They told a story that began with their capture in Africa and then being put into the hold of the Portuguese Slave ship, the *Tecora*. They were then sent via the middle passage to Cuba. After a short stay in Cuba they were then loaded into the hold of *La Amistad* for the second party of their journey. It was now that the mutiny took place.

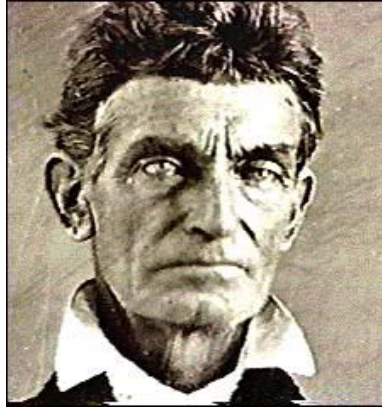
The highest point of the Amistad incident came when the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, and former U.S. President John Quincy Adams, at 73 and nearly blind, was persuaded into fighting the case. Adams was allowed to take the stand. He then gave 8 1/2 hours of shrewd testimony that eventually won an acquittal of the trial.

Part of his testimony included the statement that: "**They were illegally enslaved, their papers were forged and they were never Spanish speaking Cuban slaves.**"

The verdict released Cinque and the 35 surviving Mende Africans. Before leaving Connecticut, Cinque, with his interpreter, spoke at several abolitionists' meetings. The money that was raised from these events and a large donation received from the Congregational Church of Farmington Connecticut helped the Africans pay for their voyage back to Sierra Leone in November, 1841.

## JOHN BROWN AND THE RAID ON HARPER'S FERRY

In 1859, John Brown, a rigid white abolitionist from Kansas took his campaign and belief about slavery and tried to resolve the issue by the use of violence. He believed that violence could be used as he had read many biblical scriptures in the Old and New Testaments of the *Holy Bible*. He was convinced that where it was written that "Without blood there is no remission of sins" he could execute his violent acts and be innocent for his actions in a court of law. The Holy Bible could justify his killings.



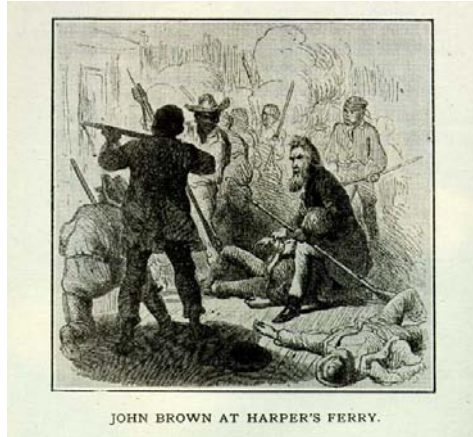
John Brown

His plan was to first attack the Federal Armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. He was going to steal all of the ammunition and weapons and then go on a rampage across the surrounding areas. Anyone who stood in his way and did not allow him to free the slaves would be killed.

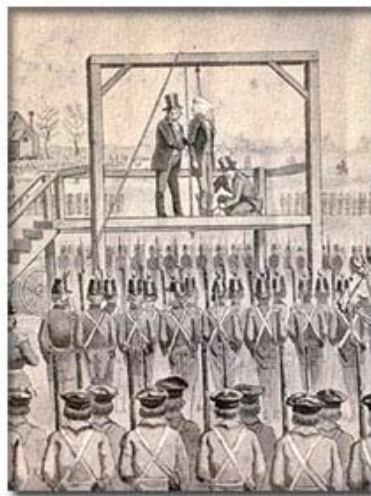
October 17, 1859 twenty-two men, led by John Brown, cut the telegraph wires so no one could signal for help and then broke into the armory. News of the break-in did reach Colonel Robert E. Lee (who later became Confederate General Lee) who was stationed in a nearby garrison. He was summoned to the armory with his troops to engage with the abolitionists.

The raiders held out for a day and a half. Lee's troops finally stormed the armory, and ten of Brown's men were killed. Two of John Brown's sons died in the attack along with four out of the five black volunteers who took part in the raid (Shields Green, Lewis Leary, John Copeland, Dangerfield Newby).

By a miracle, the last black volunteer, Osborne Anderson, escaped. He would later join the Union Army and fight in the Civil War (1861-1865). In addition to Anderson, four other white raiders also escaped.



John Brown and six others were captured by Lee and his men. They were taken into custody and then tried in a local court of Law. The verdict was handed down that John Brown was guilty and he was subsequently hung on December 2, 1859.



John Brown's hanging.

John Brown's hanging made him become a martyr for the Abolitionist's cause. During the time of the raid he had grown a long beard; which led to him being called the "Moses" of the Abolitionist Movement. A hymn was written about his death and his burial. "John Brown's Body" was later used as a song of freedom for the African American soldiers fighting on the side of the Union during the Civil War.