

Nat turner's bloody rebellion: freedom out of oppression or mad-man gone astray?

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Nat Turner: Hero or Maniac?

In 1831, a man by the name of Nat Turner led a rebellion of black slaves through the south, indiscriminately slaughtering white, slave-owning families. It can be said that he undoubtedly, and perhaps unrightfully, killed the innocent—children of these families that took no part in slave-ownership. Though he did take these innocent souls, was it not for the liberty of the innocents among his own people? A people that were enslaved for none other than the color of their skin. Nat Turner is seen by some as a hero for the revolt he led for his people and seen by others still as a crazed killer who took the lives of the innocent.

To identify Nat Turner as a hero, one must take a step back and try to imagine his reasoning for what he did. It is hard to call one who murders children a hero, but it's also hard to call slave-owners innocent victims of a madman's massacre. Nat Turner and his army massacred several families, which is viewed as maniacal to the white people of the area and to those that saw Nat and his people as less than the whites. But to say that his efforts were unjustified would be, in some part, incorrect. Perhaps Nat was following the example of race-based violence, cruelty, and discrimination that he had seen used against his own people by the very whites he killed. To be raised in violence and to be exposed one's entire life to cruelty based on the color of one's skin could drive anyone to murder. Nat had seen his people killed, tortured, and punished on the basis of their skin color, regardless of their age or sex. It is not unreasonable to believe that murder so normalized could lead a man to kill for the liberty of his people. When

taking into perspective that his own people had been murdered around him his entire existence, perhaps it is perfectly justified for him to have killed those that held his people captive.

On the other hand, to say that Nat was innocent would be wrong, as well. No matter the reasoning for it, it is difficult to reason anyone killing children. These children that had nothing to do, at their age, with slavery, slave-holding, or the torture that enslaved blacks experienced were mercilessly killed alongside those that were guilty. In this sense, it is hard to say that Nat isn't simply stooping to the level of the white people that had hurt him and his own people. To kill a child, regardless of their race, is wrong. It is difficult to justify the merciless slaughter of these children. To understand the pain and heartbreak of losing one's own people and to turn and do it to other's seems a monstrous deed. Perhaps these children would have grown to follow those that had raised them and would own and abuse slaves like the generations before them. However, it is also possible that these children could have grown up wiser than their parents and may have seen the mistakes of their own race. It is possible that these children could have become allies to the cause; allies that, in this time, would be listened to and validated far more than their dark brethren of the cause. It is uncertain what these children would have done for, or against, the issue of slavery. With this idea in mind, the possibility lies that Nat Turner could have hurt his own long-running cause. With his revolt, Nat placed in the heads of the white people of 1831 that blacks were, in some way, inhuman and evil. The whites of this era saw a slave that killed innocent children—babies even—and saw this as an act of pure malice. Putting these opinions in the heads of those

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that had the ability to free Nat and his people may have put the cause a step back. While he gave his own people the idea to take their freedom, his rebellion caused those in power to hold on even tighter to the power they held over their slaves.

Nat Turner was both a hero and a villain. He unjustly murdered children that, for all was known, could have grown to help the cause (or grown to hurt it, of course). But he murdered them, and their guilty, wrong-doing parents in the name of liberty for his own people that had been unjustly murdered and poorly treated for decades. Nat Turner sparked a fire in the hearts of many in both good and bad ways and remains both a martyr and a maniac to black and white people alike.