

Stono Rebellion - 1739

Occurred near the Stono River, about 20 miles from Charleston, South Carolina, and was the largest slave revolt in colonial America. Spain was offering freedom to any slave who reached Spanish territory (Florida), so slave escapes had been on the increase in the Carolinas. Plantation owners, fearing future slave revolts, planned to require whites to be armed and more vigilant.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, September 9, 1739, while white families were in church, a slave called "Jemmy" led a group of about 20 slaves & raided a warehouse-like store, Hutchenson's, executing the white owners & placing their victims' heads on the store's front steps for all to see. They then armed themselves with a supply of guns and ammunition. They moved on from one plantation to another, slaughtering whites & burning houses as they went. Men, women, and children were killed.

Some were beheaded, and their heads were left for display. At one tavern, the insurgents spared the life of the innkeeper because he was known to be good to his slaves. At another, a slave hid his master and distracted the insurgents. As the slaves moved southward, more slaves from the plantations joined the rebel force, which continued militarily, displaying a flag and beating a drum yelling 'Liberty.'

Lt. Gov. William Bull, traveling on horseback with four companions, happened upon the rebels about eleven o'clock in the morning. Bull and his companions quickly fled for their safety. They alerted the militia and local planters, who organized men to pursue the slave army.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, they came upon the group of slaves about ten miles to the south. Some slaves are resting. Others were drunk on whiskey they had stolen in the raid.

The slaves fought hard, but the militia won the fight and ended the Stono Rebellion, killing many of the slaves. Slaves who escaped the scene were tracked down for months, and most were apprehended. Those responsible for the revolt were executed. One slave, July, who had saved the lives of his owner and the owner's family, was given his freedom.

Forty-four blacks & twenty-one whites lost their lives as a result of the Stono Rebellion. South Carolina responded to the rebellion by passing stricter slave codes. It forbade them from assembling or being taught to read or write.

1820 – Gabriel Prosser Aug. 30, 1800

Gabriel, commonly called Gabriel Prosser, was an enslaved Black man who, in 1800, planned the first major slave rebellion in U.S. history. The revolt became known as Gabriel's Conspiracy. Although it was unsuccessful, it greatly increased white people's fear of the slave population throughout the South.

Gabriel was born about 1775 near Richmond, Virginia. He was the son of an African-born mother and grew up on the plantation of Thomas H. Prosser. Gabriel worked as a blacksmith and was able to read and write, which was uncommon for an enslaved person at the time. Prosser often hired him out to other plantation owners for his blacksmith skills. As a result, Gabriel became acquainted with various other slave owners and enslaved persons, as well as different areas of the country.

Gabriel was a deeply religious man, strongly influenced by biblical example. The French and American Revolutions had recently taken place, so he was aware of how groups of people working together could bring about liberty. In addition, plantation owners and their slaves fleeing the turmoil in the West Indies brought word of Toussaint Louverture, a former slave fighting for independence in Saint-Domingue (later Haiti).

With the knowledge he had obtained, in the spring and summer of 1800, Gabriel made plans for a slave uprising. He wanted to create an independent Black state in Virginia with himself as leader. His attack centered on Richmond, where he planned to seize the arsenal and take the powder house. He also intended to kill the white merchants and leaders. Gabriel thought that once the revolt began, poor white people would join the rebels.

Spurred on by two liberty-minded French soldiers he met in a tavern, Gabriel began to formulate a plan, enlisting his brother Solomon and another servant on the Prosser plantation in his fight for freedom. Word quickly spread to Richmond, other nearby towns and plantations, and well beyond to Petersburg and Norfolk, via free and enslaved blacks who worked the waterways. Gabriel took a tremendous risk in letting so many black people learn of his plans: It was necessary as a means of attracting supporters, but it also exposed him to the possibility of

Gabriel had an army of about 1,000 enslaved people, though some historians suggest the number was much higher. He and others had recruited the troops from Richmond and the surrounding areas.

On August 30, 1800, Gabriel assembled the army 6 miles outside Richmond. However, a violent rainstorm washed out bridges and inundated roads, postponing the insurrection until the next night.

In the meantime, many of his followers lost faith, and he was betrayed by a slave named Pharoah, who told the authorities about the plot. - who feared retribution if the plot failed. Governor James Monroe ordered the state militia to intervene.

The rebellion was barely underway when the state captured Gabriel and several co-conspirators. More than 25 of them were put on trial, convicted, and sentenced to death. Others were sold to plantation owners outside of Virginia. Gabriel went to the gallows and was executed, alone.

RESULTS: Although it was unsuccessful, it greatly increased white people's fear of the slave population throughout the South.

To prevent future insurrections, lawmakers in Virginia and other states enacted tougher restrictions on both enslaved people and free Blacks. These included restrictions on hiring out, educating, and privately freeing enslaved people.

Nat Turner's Rebellion -1831

In the late summer of 1831, in a remote section of southeastern Virginia. The revolt was led by a remarkable Negro preacher named Nat Turner, an educated slave who felt himself divinely ordained to annihilate all the white people in the region.

Around two in the morning on August 22, 1831, a group of seven slaves emerged from the woods in Southampton County, Virginia, armed with axes, hatchets, and knives. They stopped at a farmhouse, hacked its four white occupants to death, took some firearms, and left—then remembered the family's baby and returned to chop it to pieces as well. The family was Turner's master, wife, and children.

Turner planned to kill the area's main slaveholders and their families, picking up matériel and supporters along the way, and then seize guns and powder from the armory in Jerusalem, the county seat. Ultimately, the group would take refuge in some remote area, perhaps the dense, snake-infested Great Dismal Swamp.

By the end of the next day, the rebels had attacked about 15 homes. The rebels finished their butchery by slaughtering and beheading 10 schoolchildren, bringing the death toll to about 60 whites.

Over the rest of the day, they roved through the sparsely populated countryside but found all routes blocked. They spent the night on a farm whose owners had fled.

Other slaves who had planned to join the rebellion suddenly turned against it after white militia began to attack Turner's men, undoubtedly concluding that he was bound to fail. Most of the rebels were captured quickly, but Turner eluded authorities for more than a month.

By dawn, the insurgent band had dwindled to about 40. --

The next morning Turner's band, only 20 remained. They soon found themselves beset by armed white men at every turn. The group dissolved as some rebels were killed, and others, including Turner, ran away.

In the frenzy that followed, more than a hundred blacks, slave and free, were killed by militia as suspected collaborators. Forty-eight others were eventually tried in court; of these, 28 were convicted, and 18 were hanged.

On Sunday, Oct. 30, a local white man stumbled upon Turner's hideout and seized him. Among this group was Turner, who had been captured after hiding out for two months.

A special Virginia court tried him on Nov. 5 and sentenced him to hang six days later. A barbaric scene followed his execution. Enraged whites took his body, skinned it, distributed parts as souvenirs & rendered his remains into grease.

Citing Turner's intelligence as a major factor in his revolt, several states would pass laws making it illegal to teach blacks to read or write.

Other Southern states passed similar laws. The restrictions worked, as there were no more slave revolts on a scale like Turner's.

Some scholars believe that mental illness may have driven Turner's actions. Others believe Turner was moved by his faith.

FOOTNOTE: The Confessions of Nat Turner is a 1968 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by American writer William Styron.