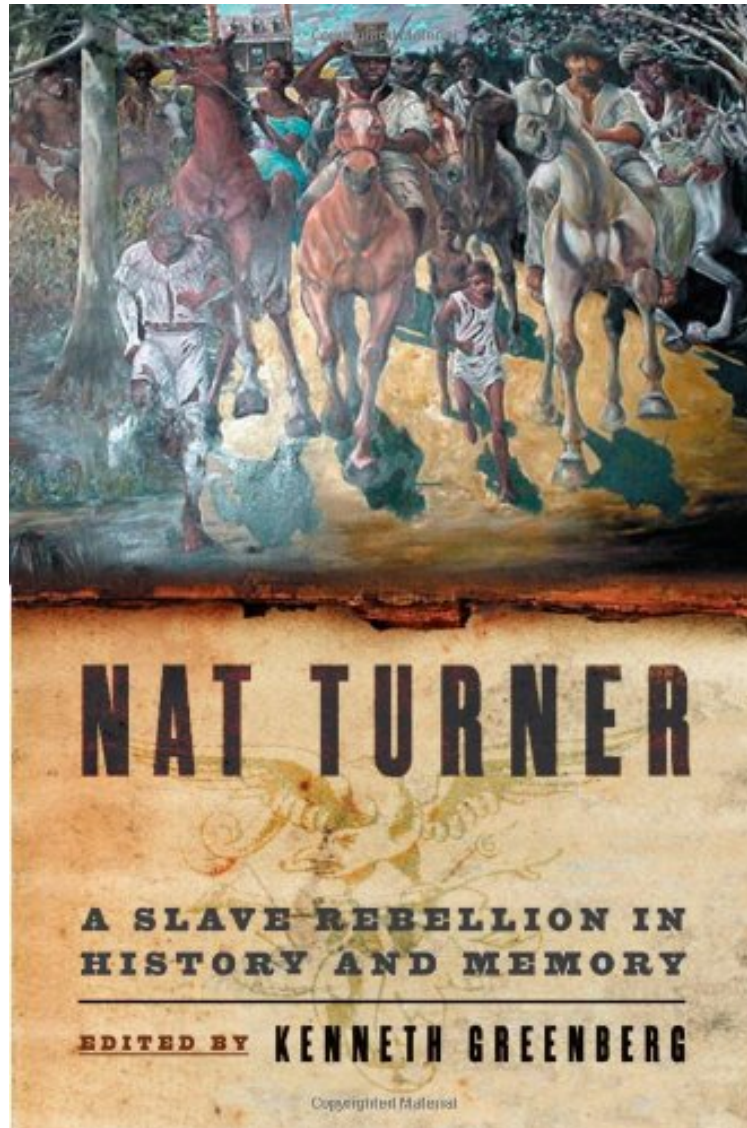


(Download pdf ebook) Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory

Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory

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Nat Turner's name rings through American history with a force all its own. Leader of the most important slave rebellion on these shores, variously viewed as a murderer of unarmed women and children, an inspired religious leader, a fanatic--this puzzling figure represents all the terrible complexities of American slavery. And yet we do not know what he looked like, where he is buried, or even whether Nat Turner was his real name. In *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, Kenneth S. Greenberg gathers twelve distinguished scholars to offer provocative new insight into the man, his rebellion, and his time, and his place in history. The historians here explore Turner's slave community, discussing the support for his uprising as well as the religious and literary context of his movement. They examine the place of women in his insurrection, and its far-reaching consequences (including an extraordinary 1832 Virginia debate about ridding the state of slavery). Here are discussions of Turner's religious visions--the instructions he received from God to kill all of his white oppressors. Louis Masur places him against the backdrop of the nation's sectional crisis, and Douglas Egerton puts his revolt in the context of rebellions across the Americas. We trace Turner's passage through American memory through fascinating interviews with William Styron on his landmark novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, and with Dr. Alvin Poussaint, one of the "ten black writers" of the 1960s who bitterly attacked Styron's vision of Turner. Finally, we follow Nat Turner into the world of Hollywood. Nat Turner has always been controversial, an emblem of the searing wound of slavery in American life. This book offers a clear-eyed look at one of the best known and least understood figures in our history.

From Publishers Weekly
In August 1831, Nat Turner, a 31-year-old slave claiming divine inspiration, led a band of rebels in the murder of some 60 white men, women and children in Southampton County, Virginia. In a careful investigation of the man and the myth, Greenberg, chair of the history department at Suffolk University and co-writer of a forthcoming documentary on Turner, includes recent and classic essays from 12 scholars, plus transcripts of interviews with novelist William Styron and Alvin Poussaint (*Lay My Burden Down*). Discussions, sometimes heated, range from the role of women in the insurrection to Turner's relationship to the local black community; from his name to his wife, or lack of one; and from the fate of his body to the question of slavery in Virginia and the country. Writes literary scholar Mary Kemp Davis: "The rebellion event invites and resists interpretations at every turn." Historian Herbert Aptheker's 1937 essay asserts that it was only at the moment of Turner's November 11, 1831 execution that Turner began to live. And indeed, he was quickly and posthumously notorious. *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, by Thomas R. Gray, a local attorney who interviewed Turner after he was caught, was immediately scrutinized; critics questioned the work's authenticity, doubting that a slave could speak so elegantly. During the Civil Rights movement, interpretations of Nat Turner continued; William Styron used Gray's work as a source for his novel of the same name, which in turn spawned the critical volume William Styron's *Ten Black Writers Respond*. A film of Styron's book lost steam due to lack of financing and the coordinated opposition activist Louise Meriwether. Greenberg writes that "these events illustrate the deep and bitter divisions that made it virtually impossible for the nation to remember collectively its most important slave rebel during the 1960s, even in fictional Hollywood form." Throughout the years, Turner scholarship has been "messy and confusing," Greenberg says, but he has done a fine job of collecting and introducing it here. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From Library Journal
From the moment of the rebellion he led in 1831 that killed almost 60 whites, terrorized Southampton County, VA, and shook slaveholders everywhere, to the many evocations of him and his bloody course in folklore and literature, various people have sought to capture the enigmatic and elusive Nat Turner for their cause. Finding the "real" Turner has fascinated people from the first interrogations before he was hanged continuing down to this collection of new and previously published essays by 12 scholars in history, literature, and psychology, including an interview with novelist William Styron, whose *The Confessions of Nat Turner* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1968. Edited by Greenberg (history, Suffolk Univ.), this collection is informed by much new work on the context of slave life and rebellion, an understanding of African American folk and literary texts, and improved methods of psychobiography. No single vision of Nat Turner or meaning for his rebellion emerges, but all the essays repay several readings and remind us how central understanding him is to any hope of getting hold of slavery's place in the American mind and conscience. Updating Albert E. Stine's *The Return of Nat Turner*, this is recommended for large history collections and academic libraries. Randall M. Miller, Saint Joseph's Univ., Philadelphia Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. "An illuminating stew of antebellum Southern history, ethnic relations, and contemporary social literature."--Kirkus s
"With the prospects of terror so much on our minds, the publication of this fascinating collection is especially appropriate. Kenneth Greenberg's engrossing introduction and the essays that follow explore from nearly every interpretive angle the dramatic events of Southampton County, Virginia (1831). The authors illustrate how a deep, incandescent loathing of slavery and desire for freedom led the visionary Turner and his slave band to slaughter white civilians, young and old, an effort that prompted equally terroristic vengeance by an outraged, frightened slaveholding population. Moral ambiguities abound, and the reader is compelled to ponder the tragedy of American race relations in a most profound way."--Bertram Wyatt-Brown, University of Florida
Informed by much new work on the context of slave life and

rebellion, an understanding of African American folk and literary texts, and improved methods of psychobiography. No single vision of Nat Turner or meaning for his rebellion emerges, but all the essays repay several readings and remind us how central understanding of him is to any hope of getting hold of slavery's place in the American mind and conscience."--Library Journal

Nat Turner is no longer merely villain or hero in American memory. This splendid collection of scholarly essays and remembrances offers the most thorough understanding we have yet had of this pivotal slave rebel. We can see Turner here from multiple perspectives: historical, moral, psychological, literary, and especially the politics of memory and race."--David W. Blight, Yale University