

# Insurrections in North Carolina?

From the *Raleigh Register*, 15 September 1831, and the *North Carolina Star* (Raleigh), 15 September 1831 and 22 September 1831.

## As you read...

The reports on this page were published by two Raleigh newspapers, the *Register* and the *North Carolina Star*, three to four weeks after Nat Turner's Rebellion. The newspapers reported first that the slave insurrection had spread to North Carolina, and then that no violence had actually taken place — but the second report came only after a number of innocent blacks had been killed.

1. The rumors of insurrection and the news that no violence had taken place were printed a week apart. What effect might this delay have had on white readers?
2. What were the different methods used by white people in North Carolina and Virginia to put a stop to the revolt and to prevent blacks from committing acts of violence against slaveholders?
3. Why would the government want to put a stop to vigilante styles of punishment?
4. If it was true that a slave confessed that other enslaved people had conspired to murder slave holders, what would motivate him to make this confession? Do you think the information he gave was reliable? Do you think that the newspaper printed his confession accurately?
5. If no insurrection actually took place, why would the newspaper publish the details of the supposed plot? What effect could publishing the details of a supposed conspiracy have on white North Carolinians?
6. What language did the newspaper editors use to describe black people? White people? Acts of violence committed by black people? Acts of violence committed by white people?
7. In what ways would these stories provide white people assurances? In what ways did these stories spread fear? Do you think the newspaper acted responsibly in reporting this non-event?
8. What do these newspaper stories reveal about the anxieties white people felt about slavery? What evidence is there that they were constantly fearful of the potential uprisings of enslaved people? What evidence is there that they took the system of slavery for granted?

## [*Raleigh Register*, September 15]

Another Insurrection! For the last twenty-four hours, this City has been in a state of considerable excitement, in consequence of the reception of intelligence, from such a source as leaves no doubt of its truth, that the Slaves of Duplin and Samson Counties, in this State, have risen in rebellion against the Whites, and have committed many horrid butcheries. Some accounts include New Hanover and Bladen also, but the probability as to

these is not so strong. We are, as yet, entirely in the dark as to the number of the insurgents, the extent of their murders, the names of their victims, or the ultimate destination. Our town however has been put in a state of complete defense, for the purpose either of suppressing disturbances at home or of meeting danger from abroad.

At a meeting of the citizens — held at the Court House, on Tuesday afternoon, a Senior Volunteer Association was formed, composed altogether of individuals exempt from military duty, the command of which was assigned to Thomas G. Scott, Eq. Other measures of defence were also adopted, calculated to add to the security of our citizens. An express having arrived from Johnston County, requesting a supply of ammunition, the Commissioners of the City had a meeting and immediately ordered a full supply of powder, lead, and flints to be dispatched to Smithfield, where it is understood, that the Militia of the County are embodied.

The most recent account states the number of families murdered at — seventeen! We are in momentary expectation of particulars.

### [*North Carolina Star*, September 15]

The Edenton Gazette states, upon information received from an undoubted source, that there have been killed in Southampton county upwards of one hundred negroes, consequent upon the late insurrection in that county. Fourteen of the thoughtless, savage wretches have been tried, of whom, thirteen were convicted, and are to be hung during the present week — there are thirty more now in the jail at Jerusalem yet to be tried, besides others in jail at Bellfield.

We understand that about twenty-one negroes have been committed to jail in Edenton, on a charge of having been concerned in concerting a project of rebellion. A slave has also been arrested and imprisoned in Duplin county, upon a similar allegation. He had communicated his knowledge of the scheme in agitation to a free man of color, who gave immediate information to the whites. Serious reports in relation to a revolt of the slaves in Wilmington and Sampson county, reached this city, by the way of Smithfield, on Monday night and Tuesday morning last. On Tuesday evening, certain intelligence from various sources reached us of an insurrection having occurred on Sunday night last in a part of Sampson and Duplin counties. Its extent or the damage done is unknown to us. But, as the militia have been called out in the adjacent counties, we flatter ourselves that it will be speedily suppressed, and that the deluded wretches who are concerned in the diabolical attempt will be made to suffer severely for their temerity...

The miserable deluded and fiendish band in Southampton have paid dearly for their stupidity and atrocious wickedness; and such will inevitably be the fate of all who may ever be so silly and depraved as to imitate their example. But there are some, it seems, reckless enough to attempt it. Vigilance, therefore, becomes necessary for perfect security.

## [North Carolina Star, September 22]

The following statements, issued at this office, in the form of an extra, on Thursday evening last, contain the only particulars worthy of notice, relative to the defection of the slaves in the lower part of this State, which have reached us since our last publication:

**Negro Conspiracy** — Knowing the deep interest which pervades the community with respect to an insurrection of the blacks reported to have broken out in Sampson and Duplin counties on Sunday night last, we hasten to lay before the public in this extra slip, such intelligence as has reached us since our paper went to press; from which it is gratifying to learn that no overt act of rebellion has taken place, and that the alarming reports now circulating through the country, about the burning of property and massacre of several white families, are entirely erroneous. But while we rejoice to hear that no lives are lost, there should be no relaxation of vigilance and precaution. Although no damage has been done, an extensive plot seems to have been well matured for great mischief, and it may not yet have been traced to its boundaries. Prompt steps for security should, therefore, be everywhere taken steadily preserved in.

The following communication was received at the Executive Office to-day about 12 o'clock.

Clinton, Sampson County, Sept. 13, 1831.

To the Governor of North Carolina,

Sir, — the inhabitants of Sampson have been alarmed with an insurrection of the Negroes. We have ten or fifteen Negroes in Jail, and we have such proof that most of them will be bound over to our Superior Court. We have testimony that will implicate most of the Negroes in the county. We wish you to issue an order to command the Colonel of the county to appoint a guard to guard the Jail until the Negroes shall have their trial. The people of Duplin county have examined ten or fifteen Negroes, and found two guilty, and have put them to death. There never was such excitement in Sampson and Duplin before.

Yours respectfully.

WMN. Blanks

Thomas Bunting.

Two of the gentlemen who went from this place to Clinton on Monday night, have this moment returned, there being no danger, though the existence of the plot is clearly established. We have procured from one of them the following statement, drawn up by himself yesterday at Clinton. It is worthy of entire reliance.

On Sunday the 4th inst. the first information of the contemplated rising of the Blacks, was sent from South Washington. The disclosure was made by a free mulatto man to Mr. Usher of Washington, who sent the information to Mr. Kelly of Duplin. It appears from the mulatto's testimony, that Dave, a slave belonging to Mr. Morissey of Sampson, applied to him to join the conspirators, stated that the negroes in Sampson, Duplin, and New Hanover, were regularly organized and prepared to rise on the 4th October.

Dave was taken up, and on this testimony convicted. After his conviction, he made a confession of the above to his master, and in addition gave the names of the four principal ringleaders in Sampson and Duplin, and several in Wilmington, named several families that they intended to murder. Their object was to march by two routes to Wilmington, spreading destruction and murder on their way. At Wilmington they expected to be reinforced by 2000,

to supply themselves with arms and ammunition and then return. Three of the ringleaders in Duplin have been taken, and Dave and Jim executed. There are 23 negroes in jail in Duplin county, all of them no doubt concerned in the conspiracy. Several have been whipped and some released. In Sampson 25 are in jail, all concerned directly or indirectly in the plot.

The excitement among the people in Sampson is very great, and increasing; they are taking effectual measures to arrest all suspected persons. A very intelligent Negro Preacher named David, was put on his trial to-day and clearly convicted by the testimony of another negro. The people were so much enraged, that they scarcely could be prevented from shooting him on his passage from the C't House to the jail. All the confessions made induce the belief that the conspirators were well organized, and their plans well understood in Duplin, Sampson, Wayne, New Hanover, and Lenoir.

Nothing had transpired to raise even a suspicion that they extended into Cumberland or Bladen, except that Jim confessed that Nat, Col. Wright's negro, (who has been missing since the discovery of the plot,) had gone to Bryant Wright's in the neighborhood of Fayetteville, to raise a company to join the conspirators. The rumours respecting a large force having been seen collected together are unfounded, though there seems no doubt but that the small armed bands have been seen. I cannot believe that any danger is to be apprehended, where the citizens are so constantly on the watch, and pursue such vigorous measures towards the offenders. The militia are assembled in ample force.

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In this lesson plan, students analyze and compare four contemporary newspaper accounts of Nat Turner's Rebellion to identify bias and to try to determine the facts of the event.

### **Reading newspapers: Factual reporting**

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### **Reading newspapers: Editorial and opinion pieces**

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