

Parker. In an unsigned letter to the *Whig*, the attorney wrote that some of these documents contained hieroglyphical characters, "conveying no definite meaning," while others had strange numerological calculations, "6,000, 30,000, 80,000 &c." On each paper were drawings of the crucifix and the sun, and the characters on the oldest document "appear to have been traced with blood." This was enough to send shivers down the strongest spines, and few whites who scrutinized Nat's papers could doubt his religious obsessions. But the documents revealed little about the revolt itself. One contained the names of some nineteen blacks—were these all that had been initially involved? Or had the uprising been part of a larger, more demonic plot against Virginia whites! The public demanded some answers, cried one Jerusalem resident, so that safeguards could be taken against similar outbreaks in the future.²³

It was Wednesday, August 31. In a climate of profound disquiet, a Court of Oyer and Terminer convened in Jerusalem to try some forty-nine imprisoned Negroes on various charges of conspiracy, insurrection, and treason. There was to be no jury trial, though. A Court of Oyer and Terminer, which had jurisdiction over capital offenses among slaves, consisted of several justices who were appointed by the governor and his council and who themselves decided on the guilt or innocence of the accused. But excitement was so high in Jerusalem "that were the justices to pronounce a slave innocent," declared a group of responsible citizens, "we fear a mob would be the consequence." The court was worried, too, and persuaded Eppes to deploy an armed force about the jail to prevent a lynching. For the justices, all leading citizens of the county, the slave trials would demonstrate the integrity of their system, proving that in Virginia even mutinous slaves got a fair trial, that in all the heat and hysteria of the moment, the law would prevail in Southampton County.

Governor Floyd, too, was concerned about the trials.

He understood only too well that his political future was at stake in how he dealt with them: he must prevent drumhead justice, but he must make certain that the guilty were punished. Accordingly Floyd sent explicit instructions to all county courts that planned to try suspected Negroes, directing that legal procedures be followed to the letter and that transcripts of all trials be authenticated by the sheriff and sent to him personally.

As the Jerusalem court came to order that Wednesday, the sheriff escorted eight slaves before the grim-faced judges, to be arraigned and tried. Observing all the judicial niceties, the court appointed a lawyer for each slave at a recompense of \$10 per case. Three Jerusalem attorneys—William C. Parker, Thomas R. Gray, and James French—were to defend all the blacks tried in Jerusalem. Though Parker was a slaveholder himself and had commanded a party of volunteers during the rebellion, he was determined that the captured blacks should receive fair treatment. Nothing is known about French, but Gray was about sixty years old, had a childless wife around forty or so, and owned some seventeen slaves. All three men appear to have been liberal lawyers by Southern white standards, for they risked social ostracism in defending rebellious slaves—something not even the money they earned could entirely assuage.

As the trials progressed, it became evident that the most effective brake on summary justice was financial considerations. After all, the state of Virginia had to pay for all blacks consigned to the gallows, and if the judges resorted to mass hangings the cost would have been astronomical. But even so, the trials were hardly the picture of even-handed justice, for the judges convicted several blacks on highly questionable grounds. For example, the court found the three teenage Francis slaves guilty of conspiracy and insurrection, though all available evidence indicated that the insurgents had forced the boys along against their will and had guarded them with guns. Though the boys received

death sentences, Floyd evidently commuted them to transportation outside the United States. Moreover, the judges convicted several slaves simply for talking rebellious, for saying they would help General Nat kill white folks if he came their way. One of the defense lawyers was dismayed about this and warned that if the court condemned blacks merely for belligerent remarks, there would be no end to the hanging.

Meanwhile angry crowds moiled in the street outside—and once actually threatened to break into the jail and murder the slaves being held there. But Attorney Parker pleaded with the whites to give the Negroes a fair trial. To guard against lynch law on the one hand and further slave troubles on the other, Parker helped organize a company of Southampton volunteers and became their captain. They would wear dark gray uniforms trimmed with black braid and would drill until they were “No 1” in Virginia.

On Saturday, September 3, Sam, Hark, and Nelson all came to trial in a heavily guarded courthouse. Still suffering from his wounds, Hark had appeared in court once already, as a defense witness in Moses Barrow’s trial. In it, Hark stated that Moses had joined the insurgents voluntarily and was with them at Blunt’s plantation. Drawing on other slave testimony for the prosecution, the judges had found Moses guilty and sentenced him to hang. And now it was Hark’s turn. Defended by William Parker, he pleaded not guilty to his charges, then watched in silence as prosecuting attorney Meriwether B. Broadnax summoned witnesses against him—first Levi Waller and then Thomas Ridley, who had interrogated Hark after his capture. To nobody’s surprise, the judges found him guilty, sentenced him to death, and instructed the state to pay the Travis estate the sum of \$450. By day’s end, the court had also convicted Sam Francis, Nelson Williams, Yellow Davy Waller, and the other Nat, all of whom would hang with Hark on September 9.

On Saturday evening, Postmaster Thomas Trezevant summarized the progress of the trials in a letter to the

Richmond *Whig*. Despite all the wild reports circulating in Virginia, Trezevant insisted that there was “no good testimony as yet to induce a belief that the conspiracy was a general one.” The Southampton court had now tried fourteen Negroes and found thirteen guilty; thirty-five still awaited prosecution. The following day Trezevant added a postscript. “Sunday evening 3 o’clock—Nothing more today. *We commence hanging tomorrow.*”²⁴

As the trials went on in Southampton, whites across Virginia were still reeling with shock and disbelief. For Nat’s rebellion was an eruption of black fury that rocked Virginia’s white community to its foundations and sent concussions throughout all of Dixie. How, whites cried, could such racial violence happen in “civilized and virtuous” Virginia, where happy darkies and affectionate masters were supposed to love one another in idyllic harmony? And if it could happen in Virginia, what would stop the contagion from spreading across the “genteel” South from Wilmington to Charleston? In one desperate blow, Nat Turner had smashed the prevailing stereotype of master-slave relations in the Old South, forcing whites to confront a grim and dreaded reality—that all was not sweetness and sunshine in their slave world, that their own Nats and Harks might be capable of hatred and rebellion. And so whites stood face to face with their worst nightmares—their pretenses were gone for now—and from all directions there were voices of despair in the wind.

“We may shut our eyes and avert our faces, if we please,” cried a South Carolinian when he heard the news, “but there it is, the dark and growing evil at our doors; and meet the question we must, at no distant day. . . . What is to be done? Oh! my God, I do not know, but something must be done.”

“I view the condition of the Southern states as one of the most unenviable that can be conceived,” lamented a North Carolina woman. “To be necessarily surrounded by those in whom we cannot permit ourselves

to feel confidence, to know that unremitted vigilance is our only safeguard, & that sooner or later we or our descendants will become the certain victims of a band of lawless wretches, who will deem murder & outrage just retribution, is deplorable in the extreme. . . . Mr. L. regrets holding so much property here, & if not actually tied down to the place, would gladly remove to the North."

Declared a niece of George Washington: "It is like a smothered volcano—we know not when, or where, the flame will burst forth, but we know that death in the most horrid form threatens us. Some have died, others have become deranged from apprehension, since the South Hampton affair."²⁵

Monstrous rumors fed on such fears. For weeks after the insurrection, reports of additional uprisings swept over the South, and scores of communities from Virginia to Mississippi convulsed in hysteria. In Alabama, frightened whites insisted that "the infection is pretty general with the negroes" and that bellicose Indians were plotting with them. In South Carolina, government and press alike tried to censor the news from South Hampton, but word filtered down anyway, causing even greater consternation than the slave disturbances of the 1820s. Charleston was in such a panic about Nat Turner that the legislature approved a special cavalry force to protect the city. While no insurrections flared up in South Carolina, Governor James Hamilton suggested that the Southern states adopt joint measures to maintain internal security.²⁶

The hysteria was worse in North Carolina, in the northeastern tier of counties along the Virginia border. The area crawled with rumors—of slave plots in Franklin County, of sinister movements on the big plantations along the Roanoke River. At Murfreesboro, where over a thousand refugees had gathered, armed men milled about in noisy confusion, and one reported that "tranquility cannot be soon restored." Another citizen wrote Governor Stokes that the militia should be deployed in every imperiled county, to march about

with muskets loaded and swords drawn. North Carolina's slaves "must be convinced that they must and will be soon destroyed if their conduct makes it the least necessary."

In September, new alarms pummeled upper North Carolina. A man from Murfreesboro, having attended a slave trial in Virginia's Sussex County, reported back that the South Hampton insurgents had expected armed slave resistance "from distant neighborhoods," including the large plantations on the Roanoke. Yes, the fellow cried, testimony in the Sussex trial "proved" that a concerted uprising was to have taken place in Virginia and upper North Carolina, where Negro preachers had been spreading the disaffection, and that "dire and extensive would have been the slaughter but for a mistake in the day of commencement." The plan, the man said, called for the larger rebellion to begin on the last Sunday in August. But he contended that the South Hampton rebels mistook August 21 as the target Sunday, all the while their North Carolina allies were waiting for August 28!

Though no such plan had existed, the report traumatized whites in the northeastern tier of counties, especially in neighborhoods with heavy slave concentrations. Couriers rode for Raleigh to beg for muskets and ammunition. Militia outfits mustered along the Roanoke, chased after imaginary insurgents, and shot, axed, imprisoned, and hanged still more innocent blacks. Phantom slave columns marched out of the Dismal Swamp, only to vanish when militia units rushed out to fight them.²⁷

In mid-September came the most shattering alarm of all: couriers reported that a full-scale rebellion had blazed up southeastern North Carolina, in Duplin and Sampson counties. Desperate messages claimed that slave insurgents had already massacred seventeen whites and were now attacking contiguous counties. Such communiqués were completely false, but frantic whites were now reacting to their own shadows. Militia commanders alerted their troops and sent off exagger-

ated reports to the governor, which gathered additional frills as express riders bore them to the capital. Meanwhile, mass hysteria gripped the town of Wilmington down near the Atlantic Ocean. Rumors flew that a slave army—maybe led by Nat Turner himself—had been seen moving out of Sampson and Duplin counties and was punching its way toward Wilmington. With church bells clanging, city officials declared martial law. Newspapers fanned the flames with sensational news of butchery and looting. Women and children locked themselves in churches and the bank. Armed horsemen clattered through the streets, and infantry units threw up barricades on the roads and byways.

But no slave army appeared. Out of blind vengeance, whites turned on the local Negro population and “by flogging and menaces” forced five hapless blacks into confessing that, yes, they were to meet insurgents from Sampson County and help murder all white men, women, and children in Wilmington. A court tried and convicted all five Negroes and had them shot and buried on Gallows Hill. For good measure, the court sent six additional blacks to the gallows; and a mob lynched four others as “a measure indispensable to the safety of the community.”

Raleigh too was in turmoil, as a succession of express riders burst into the city with doomsday reports: slave rebels had allegedly set much of eastern North Carolina afire, had burned Wilmington, slaughtered half its population, and were moving “in large numbers” toward the capital itself, “murdering all before them” and committing “horrid butcheries.” Raleigh newspapers added to the tumult by publishing these stories under lurid headlines. With whites swarming into town from outlying farms and plantations, Raleigh’s militia dug in and the capital put itself “in a state of preparation for war.”

In all the excitement, a few people managed to keep their heads. On September 16 the Raleigh *Star* corrected its initial reports and denied the disturbing news now “circulating through the country.” A few days

later the Raleigh *Register* admitted that its own account of insurrections in North Carolina had been “highly exaggerated.” The storm had passed now, the paper declared, so that it was possible to ascertain the truth. While slaves in the southeastern part of the state had undoubtedly “talked about insurrection,” none in fact had transpired.²⁸

Over in the governor’s mansion, Stokes sorted through all the high-decibel reports he’d received and reached the same verdict as the *Register*. “I have no doubt,” he wrote Governor Hamilton of South Carolina, “but the news of the Virginia insurrection prompted the restless and unruly slaves, in a few instances to make a similar attempt in this State.” Yet no “overt” rebellions had broken out anywhere in North Carolina, nor had anything like a concerted plot actually been uncovered. Stokes conceded that unbridled terror had seized whites in the eastern black belt and that “among the negroes condemned and executed, some, who were innocent, have suffered.” Nevertheless, the governor considered the danger far from over. Later he advised the legislature that it was impossible to conceal from the world, and “needless to disguise from ourselves,” the fact that the slaves had become increasingly discontented and ungovernable. He blamed Negro unrest on “fanatics of their own complexion and other incendiaries” and insisted that North Carolina strengthen its military forces, so as “to guard against these evils, which in all probability will continue. . . .”²⁹

If North Carolina was contending against phantom insurrectionaries, so was embattled Virginia. Even after General Eppes announced that Nat’s rebellion had ended, accounts of collateral uprisings and pleas for help swept into Richmond from every direction—from Northampton, Amherst, Prince Edward, Westmoreland, Prince George, and King and Queen counties, from Leesburg, Danville, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, Culpeper Courthouse, and dozens of other communities. All across the state whites formed patrols and vigilance committees, seized suspicious Negroes, fired off

shotguns, and clamored for muskets from Richmond. In Charlottesville, students at the University of Virginia organized a volunteer outfit and prepared to engage any insurgents who came their way. In Bowling Green, whites insisted that their slaves had known about Nat Turner *before* he rebelled, and that black preachers would lead a mass revolt here on October 1. At Madison Courthouse an artillery company of "picked and chosen men" was ready "for any alarming circumstances." Rumors shook Stafford County that slaves in the stone quarries had risen. From Chesterfield came anguished cries for protection against "an enemy that is restless in their disposition and savage in their nature." Never had Virginians been so frightened. "These insurrections have alarmed my wife so as really to endanger her health," said one man, "and I have not slept without anxiety in three months. Our nights are sometimes spent in listening to noises. A corn song, or a hog call, has often been the subject of nervous terror, and a cat, in the dining room, will banish sleep for the night. There has been and there still is a *panic* in all the country."

Richmond too was jittery and full of foreboding, as express riders sped in and out of the city and wagons loaded with muskets, pistols, and swords rumbled away to infected neighborhoods. At the governor's mansion, Floyd and his advisors waded through all the reports of slave disturbances and demands for guns—was Virginia about to be consumed in a racial holocaust?—and cursed the day the militia's weapons had ever been removed to centrally located armories like that in Richmond. With Virginia in chaos, Floyd did all he could to meet the crisis, dispatching arms to distressed communities, sending additional weapons to counties with the heaviest slave populations, keeping the militia on the alert (especially near the coal mines and stone pits where slaves seemed conspicuously rebellious), and advising militia commanders to employ shotguns and bayonets freely against Negro insurgents.³⁰

But the more embellished communiqués the gover-

nor received, the more dubious he became about all the "rumors and surmises" about Virginia's slaves. After all, General Eppes insisted that hostilities had been confined to Southampton and that no widespread plot had been uncovered. And in early September, in the pages of the Richmond *Whig*, John Hampden Pleasants impugned the "false, absurd, and idle rumors" which the Turner revolt had generated and contended that "the truth will turn out to be that the conspiracy was confined to Southampton, and that the idea of its extensiveness originated in the panic which seized upon the South East of Virginia."³¹ So that Floyd himself could form "a just opinion" about the extent of the danger, he instructed militia commanders to furnish proof that slaves had risen in their districts. At the same time, the governor began receiving transcripts of the trials under way in Southampton and several adjacent counties and he pored over these, too, both to commute death sentences (when the court advised it) and to find any evidence of a widescale design. By September 10 Floyd concluded that no further revolts were likely and he wrote Eppes and other militia commanders so. A few days later he confided in his diary that "the slaves are quiet and evince no disposition to rebel," even though he was still receiving almost daily alarms, especially from the Blue Ridge Mountains, and was still sending weapons to the more disturbed communities.

The governor did his best to convince people that "there is no danger," that the slaves "were never more humble and subdued," and that in actual fact no additional insurrections had taken place in Virginia. Thanks to Floyd, Pleasants, and other level-headed men, the hysteria over Nat Turner eventually subsided. But all the work and tension left the governor feeling sickly. He was feverish and thirsty and had a bad taste in his mouth. He did not think his health could ever be restored in Richmond's damp climate. He longed for his home in Montgomery County in the Appalachi-

ans—longed for “my own mountain air” and the peace and tranquility there.

Though the Southampton nightmare seemed at an end, the governor was extremely irritated at what had happened to his state. What really irked him—even more than the false alarms—was the behavior of those “cowards” at Norfolk. Besides losing their reason like almost everybody else, the spineless mayor and his timid advisors had begged federal forces at Fortress Monroe to help suppress the Southampton insurrection. In Floyd’s mind this was unforgivable, and he said as much in letters to the mayor and to a U.S. artillery commander in Norfolk. Did the mayor not understand that his actions could have resulted in calamity had the revolt been general? Since the governor had sent the Norfolk and Portsmouth militia to Southampton, the departure of United States forces—thanks to the mayor’s “alarm” and lack of “reflection”—had left the Norfolk region virtually unguarded. Had the slaves risen there, it could have led to “a serious evil,” inasmuch as the James River area had a large Negro population and a disparity in force. Well, *Floyd* had thought about all this; that is why he had *not* called on United States troops for assistance. He knew they would be needed in eastern Virginia in case of a mass uprising. But there was more to it than that. State rights and state pride were also involved. The governor wanted Virginians to crush the insurrection by themselves, without any help from Andrew Jackson’s federal army. Floyd did not want the national government to do for Virginia what the state could do and must do for itself. Moreover, if the Negroes realized that Virginia had to rely on the national army for defense, would they not conclude that the Old Dominion could not fight its own battles? Well, the governor said, “it is not difficult to perceive the train of thought which would be indulged, should the United States at any future day have to use their forces in the prosecution of a foreign war.”

As the governor fussed about Norfolk and “the cowardly fears of that town,” he worried too about the im-

pect of Nat’s rebellion on Virginia’s commercial credit. It was something he considered “not all pleasant.” For if the insurrection destroyed Virginia’s credit rating, how could she borrow enough money to subsidize the internal improvements Floyd envisioned? And while he brooded about that, he griped about the state constitution, too, which required advice of council for all important executive actions. It was like trying to work with his hands tied. For example, on September 27, the governor received from Southampton the trial records of three condemned slaves. The court recommended mercy for one, but Floyd could not grant it without consent of council—and once again not a single councilman was in town. So the “poor wretch” must lose his life—all because of that abominable constitution.

There were a great many abominations that blustery September. As Floyd scrutinized trial records from southeastern Virginia and rummaged through stacks of reports and communiqués, he decided emphatically that the Nat Turner outbreak was not the work of a solitary fanatic. *Of course* Virginia’s slaves were quiet now. *Of course* there had been no mass revolt. That did not preclude the existence of a conspiracy behind the Southampton inferno, and the governor had a growing suspicion that one did exist. And he kept a special folder, marked “*Free Negroes & Slaves*,” in which he filed away all the evidence he could locate to prove his suppositions. In the folder were letters from Virginia postmasters, private citizens, and militia commanders who blamed all slave disturbances on the Quakers, Yankee vendors, Yankee evangelists, Yankee abolitionists, free Negroes, and black preachers—especially black preachers. “The whole of that massacre in Southampton is the work of these preachers,” Floyd told his diary, and decided that they and all their slave congregations must be suppressed.³²

While the governor collected information about the insurrection, Jerusalem whites had not been idle. Defense

lawyers Parker and Gray had learned something about the revolt from the trials, though much remained unexplained about the motives and objectives of Nat Turner himself. Moreover, certain Jerusalem men—probably Parker and Gray and Postmaster Trezevant—had written unsigned accounts of the uprising for several newspapers. Most of these letters to the editor reflected a growing white consensus that Nat Turner was indeed a religious fanatic, his mind transported beyond all reason by a maniacal religious obsession.

Of the letters, the most illuminating was dated Jerusalem, September 17, and appeared in the *Richmond Whig* a few days later. Internal evidence strongly suggests that William C. Parker was the author. Drawing on evidence gathered from the slave trials and from interviews with black and whites alike, the author contended that unbridled religious revivalism had created a combustible atmosphere which ignited the Turner explosion. While he singled out Negro preachers for special censure, the author blamed white evangelists, too, who punctuated their sermons with a "ranting cant about equality" and who invited black exhorters to retail that doctrine to their congregations. The author insisted that such frenzied religious activities be sharply curtailed lest they cause another slave revolt. As for Nat himself, the author denied that he had ever preached (the author was wrong), arguing that Nat had merely exhorted and sung at Negro meetings. But the author observed that in his immediate neighborhood Nat had acquired "the character of a Prophet" and so his rebellion was indeed "the work of fanaticism"—"to an imagination like Nat's, a mind satisfied of the possibility, of freeing himself and race from bondage; and this by supernatural means." Still, the author noted that a huge majority of Southampton's slaves refused to enlist in Nat's crusade and he praised them for their forbearance. If Nat's grisly deeds repelled the author, so did the butchery of innocent Negroes, and he roundly condemned whites who had perpetrated these atrocities. "Should not the violated

laws of their country call them to a settlement? They must bear in mind that the matter has one day to be adjudicated before an impartial judge." Echoing Eppes, Pleasants, and other Jerusalem letter writers, the author insisted that Nat's rebellion was not the product of a wide slave conspiracy. Yet, the author lamented, "scarcely a mail arrives that does not bring some account of an isolated conviction for insurrection in remote counties thus Spottsylvania, Nansemond, Prince George, &c. Should the views here taken by me, prove that the insurrection was not a general one, and therefore save the life of a human being, I shall be more than compensated for the time consumed, together with the odium called down upon me, by the expression of my opinion." This clearly sounds like William Parker, who had implored whites in Jerusalem to give the slaves a fair trial, helped organize a volunteer company to maintain order there, and risked public odium by defending "niggers" in a court of law. What, then, should whites do to prevent another slave revolt? "The excitement having now subsided, which induced many to think wrong, and prevented many who thought right from stemming the tide, it becomes us as men to return to our duty. Without manifesting a fear of the blacks, by keeping a stationed armed force in any section of our country let us adopt a more efficient plan, by keeping up for some time a regular patrol, always under the command of a discreet person, who will not by indiscriminate punishment, goad these miserable wretches into a state of desperation."³⁸

Meanwhile "the great banditti chief," as newspapers called Nat, was still at large. Parker and other Jerusalem residents thought he had left the state, but Governor Floyd was not so sure. On September 13 he decided to offer a reward for Nat's capture and wrote Eppes for a description. The governor's request fell into the hands of William C. Parker, who set about interviewing "persons acquainted with Nat from his infancy." Parker returned a portrait forthwith. "He is be-

tween 30 & 35 years old—five feet six or 8 inches high—weighs between 150 & 160 rather bright complexion but not a mulatto—broad-shouldered—large flat nose—large eyes—broad flat feet rather knock kneed—walk brisk and active—hair on the top of the head very thin—no beard except on the upper lip and tip of the chin. A scar on one of his temples produced by the kick of a mule—also one on the back of his neck by a bite—a large knot on one of the bones of his right arm near the wrist produced by a blow.”

On September 17 Floyd issued an official proclamation of reward for Nat's capture, quoting Parker's description on the reverse side. The proclamation offered \$500 to anybody who conveyed Nat to the Southampton County jail, and enjoined “the good people of the Commonwealth” to exert all their energies in finding the fugitive, “that he may be dealt with as the law directs.” The proclamation appeared in the press and went out to Virginia postmasters, who tacked it up on doors and tree trunks for whites and blacks alike to see. All told, there was now \$1,100 in various rewards offered for Nat's capture.

By late September a vast dragnet was out for the Prophet, but the man had apparently vanished. Predictably, rumors multiplied that Nat had been found drowned in western Virginia, that he'd been seized in Washington, D.C., that he'd escaped to the West Indies, that he'd been chased “armed to the teeth” into the mud and weeds along the Nottoway River. One report placed him 180 miles west of Southampton, near Fincastle in Botetourt County. “Stop him!” shrieked a Fincastle newspaper. And stories spread through town that Nat had been seen on the open road with a hymn book, believed to be on his way to Ohio.³⁴

The truth was that Nat had never left Southampton County. For six weeks, he hid in his dugout under the fence rails, in a field not far from Cabin Pond. Initially he left the cave only for a few moments at night, to fetch water from a pond nearby. During the days,

aroused whites prowled the traces and woods around him, and Nat lay in his hole scarcely daring to move. But in a few days hunger began to gnaw at him, and he took to venturing out at night to pilfer food from neighboring farms. Occasionally he eavesdropped at some farmhouse, crouched in the shadows below a window, hoping to hear something about Hark, Nelson, and the rest. One night he crept up to Nathaniel Francis's home—a desperate face at the windowpanes. Perhaps he saw lanterns flickering inside, heard Nathaniel and Lavinia, large now with child, talking in the living room around the fireplace. Behind Nat were the slave cabins, but he did not dare go there, for fear that some of the slaves might panic and give him away. An outsider, hunted by a host of armed whites, feeling forsaken by his God and his people, Nat ran away in the night, going to another farm, and another, until at last he returned in despair to his hideout. Never had he felt more alone. As the days passed, autumn leaves swirled against the fence rails. Shivering in his hole, Nat could hear slaves singing in the distance—it was cotton-picking time. October 2 was his birthday. He was thirty-one years old.

One night he wandered through the woods until dawn. Should he leave the county? stay? fight the whites until they killed him? Coming back to his hideout, he saw something move there. A slave? A militiaman? It turned out to be a dog, attracted to some meat Nat had stored away. He chased the animal off.

But a few nights later, as Nat was leaving for another nocturnal walk, the dog returned with a couple of Negroes, who were out hunting. The dog spotted the Prophet and yapped and snarled at him. When he approached, the two Negroes were stunned—could this tattered and dismal creature be Preacher Nat? The Prophet begged them not to betray him, begged them to keep his whereabouts a secret. But they fled, frightened to their bones.

Nat knew they would tell the whites—and they did. The news spread across the county like a timber fire—

the "nigger" was here, right here in Southampton! Within twenty-four hours scores of whites swarmed through the countryside, all hoping to catch Nat and collect those rewards.

In all the tumult, Nat abandoned his hideout and ran through the woods and swamps, pursued "almost incessantly." Twice, three times, he tried to leave Southampton, but the county was cordoned off with horseback patrols. Hiding by day and moving by night, he circled Cabin Pond like a human satellite, with bloodhounds yowling in the distance. By now he was so desolate that he thought about surrendering. Why run any more? What was the use? Once he got within two miles of Jerusalem, only to change his mind and return to the Travis neighborhood. For several days he hid at some of the very farms his insurgents had attacked back in August. At last he came back to the Francis place and concealed himself in a fodder stack in a field. He could not run any longer. Hungry and hopeless, he decided to give himself up to Nathaniel Francis. He'd known Nathaniel all his life, had played with him when they were boys, had called him Nathaniel without the "Mr." and lived with his sister for nine years. Surely Nathaniel would not torture him, but would treat him like a prisoner of war.

On October 27, or 28, Nathaniel came riding by to inspect his fodder stacks. He was armed with a shotgun. To his astonishment, Nat—at least it looked like Nat—stepped out from one of the stacks. He was smiling. He was also carrying a sword. At once Nathaniel opened fire, and Nat staggered back with his hat blown off his head. Miraculously, he was not hurt, but Francis was loading up again, so Nat grabbed his hat and ran for his life.

Within the hour some fifty whites were in pursuit, but the Prophet eluded them, moving away from the fields in a zigzag course. At length, two miles northwest of Francis's farm, he dug another cave under the top of a fallen tree and scrambled inside. Around noon on Sunday, October 30, a patrol crashed through the

forest where Nat was hiding. After the whites had gone, the Prophet tried to improve his camouflage, rearranging the brush and tree limbs. Then he stuck his head out to have a look around . . . *no!* There stood a white man, aiming a shotgun straight at him. As in a dream, the man ordered Nat to give up or get his brains blown out. Since the shotgun was "well charged," Nat had no choice but to throw down his sword. And so his odyssey ended as it had begun, on Sunday—the Lord's Sabbath—a mile and a half from the Travis house.

Nat's captor turned out to be one Benjamin Phipps, a poor farmer who lived nearby and who'd come through the woods on his way to a neighbor's place, only to stumble on Nat quite by accident. There Phipps was, resting under a tree before continuing his journey, when who should pop out of a fallen tree—pop right out of the ground itself—but the most wanted "nigger" in all Virginia, with over a thousand dollars on his head. After Phipps had captured Nat and tied his hands, the white man fired his shotgun in the air and yelled in ecstasy. At last his neighbors came up and helped him shove the Prophet through the woods to Peter Edwards's plantation. There was a great clamor in the yard as whites and slaves alike crowded around the insurgent leader. They could only have been shocked at what they saw, for Nat was ragged and emaciated, "a mere scarecrow."⁸⁵

Yet he held his head high. No matter how forlorn he had been as a fugitive, he now faced his enemies with a fierce pride. Soon a hundred people had congregated at the Edwards place, the men whooping and firing their guns overhead, the women inching up, like moths drawn to fire, to get a closer look at the notorious black prophet. By now riders were on their way to Jerusalem with the joyous news, and throughout the backwoods church bells were tolling. From Jerusalem couriers would carry the news up to Petersburg and Richmond, a happy Governor Floyd would issue an official proclamation, and newspapers all over the South

would soon be blazing, "THE BANDIT TAKEN," "NAT TURNER SURELY IS CAPTURED."

Meanwhile a retinue of armed whites marched Nat down to Cross Keys, exhibiting him at farms and plantations along the way. But the crowds became increasingly menacing, as jubilation gave way to resentment and hatred. Lynch-mob voices cried for Nat's head. Men shook their fists and women screamed at him; boys ran up, spit in his face, ran off. Perhaps to appease their furious neighbors, Nat's guards gave him a public whipping. Through it all Nat "just grinned," a white man reported, and refused to repent. To save his life, the guards barricaded him in a farmhouse for the night.

The next day—Monday, October 31—Nat and his escort set out on the road to Jerusalem, on a slow, cold journey through a sea of hostile whites. At last, at 1:15 that afternoon, Nat marched across the main bridge into Jerusalem, still holding his head up, still wearing his shell-torn hat. Again, a mob thronged the streets as Nat struggled by. A visitor from Petersburg thought Jerusalem whites showed remarkable forbearance in not lynching "the wretch" on the spot. An extra guard muscled through the crowds and somehow got Nat inside the courthouse without injury.³⁶

Nat now stood before a couple of court justices—James Trezevant and James W. Parker—who desired to question the prisoner without pressure or promises. Nat confronted the judges and said he was ready and willing to talk. As the interrogation began, at last about two hours, all the whites in the courtroom listened intently, hoping to find out more about this mysterious and prodigious black man who had so profoundly altered their lives. Among the observers were Postmaster Trezevant, taking notes for the Norfolk *American Beacon*, and two other Jerusalem men who would write unsigned communiqués for the Richmond *Enquirer* and the Richmond *Whig*. All three correspondents thought Nat "a shrewd, intelligent fellow" and the writer for the *Enquirer* was especially impressed with

the Prophet's eyes: "They are very long, deeply seated in his head and have rather a sinister expression."

As the interrogation progressed, Nat spoke with unflinching candor. He stated emphatically that *he* had instigated and directed the slaughter of all those white people, though he had killed only Margaret Whitehead. He declared that the idea of insurrection had been evolving in his mind for several years, and he went on to recount the signs he'd seen in the heavens, the miracles and revelations the Spirit had shown him. He warned the judges that "I am in particular favor with heaven," insisting that God had given him extraordinary powers over the weather and the seasons, that "by the efficacy of prayer" he could cause raging thunderstorms or searing droughts. In addition, he could heal disease "by the imposition of his hands." In fact, he had once cured a comrade "in that manner."

Nat then described "the signed omens" by which Jehovah had commanded him to undertake his mission of death against the whites. In response to questions about the extent of the conspiracy, the Prophet denied that anybody besides himself and five or six others had known about his plot. His original target date was July 4, 1831, but he admitted that he "dreaded to commence." Then came the day of the black sun, which convinced him that God wanted him to move. He then imparted his plan to his closest lieutenants, "all of whom seemed prepared with ready minds and hands to engage in it." In shocking detail, he told how they assassinated the Travis family with axes. Initially they resorted to "indiscriminate massacre" in order to strike terror and alarm, but had they gained a foothold, Nat explained, "women and children would afterwards have been spared, and men too who ceased to resist."

During the interrogation, the *Enquirer* correspondent pressed Nat as to precisely how his so-called "signs" had figured in the insurrection, but Nat seemed vague about this, the correspondent said, and tended to "mystify" everything. When asked whether he'd done wrong in committing insurrection, Nat shook his head without

hesitation. No, he had not done wrong. Even though he'd failed, even though he may have been deceived, he believed even now that he was right. And if he could do it all over again, he asserted, "he must necessarily act in the same way."

The whites listened to all this with mixed emotions. While Justice James Trezevant considered Nat's presentation "a medley of incoherent and confused opinions about his communication with God," Postmaster Trezevant thought Nat answered "every question clearly and distinctly, and without confusion or prevarication." They all agreed, however, that Nat labored under "as perfect a state of fanatical delusion as ever wretched man suffered."

After the interrogation, Postmaster Trezevant hurried off to prepare his account for the *American Beacon*. In it, he contended that Nat acknowledged himself "a coward," admitted that he had "done wrong," and advised all other Negroes "not to follow his example." Nat, of course, had said nothing of the kind. Trezevant was resorting to sheer propaganda, both to reassure white readers and to discourage any blacks who might see the postmaster's report.

For his part, the *Enquirer* correspondent wanted more facts about Nat Turner and his insurrection, because he believed all Virginia was anxious to know exactly why and how the thing had happened. And in his report to the *Enquirer*, the man admitted that he had hoped to provide "a detailed confession," but he understood that another gentleman was to record one "verbatim from Nat's own lips, with a view of gratifying public curiosity; I will not therefore forestall him." The gentleman mentioned was defense attorney Thomas R. Gray.

With Nat's trial set for November 5, armed guards conveyed him through the turbulent streets and locked him up in the condemned hole of the county jail. Here Nat found several of his free black followers—among them Barry Newsom and Thomas Haithcock—all bound over to the Superior Court for trial. From them

Nat finally learned what had happened to his lieutenants. Hark, Nelson, and Sam had been hanged. Henry had been beheaded at or near Cross Keys. Hesitant Jack Reese had been sentenced to hang, but evidently the governor had commuted the sentence to transportation. Several others had also been hanged, including the other Nat, Yellow Davy Waller, Dred Francis, and Moses and Lucy Barrow. Convicted for trying to "detain" Mary Barrow, Lucy was the only female executed for the insurrection.

After the jailer had secured Nat with manacles and chains, to make certain he could not escape, a white man asked what had happened to all the money Nat had stolen from butchered whites. Nat retorted that he had taken exactly 75 cents. Then he turned to one of the free Negroes. "You know money was not my object."⁸⁷

Sometime on Tuesday, November 1, the jailor unlocked Nat's cell and an elderly white man entered with paper and pen. It was cold and musty in the condemned hole, where Nat lay on a pine board "clothed in rags and covered with chains." Nat recognized the man as Thomas Gray, knew he had defended some of the other insurgents. Gray and the jailor were chums, so that the attorney had ready access to the prisoners. Gray assured Nat that neither the sheriff nor the court had sent him, that he was acting entirely on his own. Like Parker and several other Jerusalem men, who may in fact have cooperated with him, Gray thought that public curiosity was "much on the stretch" to know the reason for the insurrection. For Southampton, whites simply could not fathom why their slaves would revolt, why they would perpetrate such a "fiendish" and "atrocious" slaughter. In Gray's opinion, the slave trials thus far had revealed little satisfactory evidence about motives and objectives. In truth, the entire affair was still "wrapt in mystery." So what Gray wanted from Nat was this: he wanted to take down and publish a full confession that would tell the public the facts

about the insurrection, thus setting to rest all the "thousand idle, exaggerated and mischievous reports" that had rocked Virginia and all the rest of Dixie. What Gray had in mind were the wild rumors about concerted revolts in Virginia and North Carolina—rumors that had resulted in the deaths of many innocent Negroes. And many more were apt to perish unless Nat gave a statement about the exact nature and extent of the insurrection.

Evidently Nat trusted Gray and said he was willing to talk. And why shouldn't he? Though Nat never said so, this would be his last opportunity to strike back at the slave world he hated, to flay it with verbal brilliance and religious prophecy (was not exhortation his forte?). Indeed, a published confession would ensure Nat a kind of immortality; it would recount his extraordinary life in his own words and on his own terms; it would explain to posterity how he, the Negro slave called Nat Turner, had been the sole contriver of what Gray called "the first instance in our history of an open rebellion of the slaves," one so destructive it had shaken Southerners everywhere. Clearly a man with Nat's sense of destiny would not pass up a chance like this, so, yes, he would give the man a confession.

With Gray writing as rapidly as he could, Nat began. "SIR, You have asked me to give a history of the motives which induced me to undertake the late insurrection, as you call it—To do so I must go back to the days of my infancy, and even before I was born. . . ." Nat described his precociousness on Benjamin Turner's place—his powers of recollection, the ease with which he learned to read and write, the eminence he attained among slaves and whites alike. He told how his family, his master, and white men of the gospel had praised him for his brilliance and hinted that he was too intelligent to remain a slave . . . how the Spirit had spoken to him . . . and how in man's estate he had become a leader of his people and a prophet of Almighty God, ordained for a special destiny. He related carefully now how his visions, miracles, and revelations had led

him to rebellion . . . how God had thundered in the heavens and announced to him that "the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first."

"Do you not find yourself mistaken now?" Gray interrupted.

Nat replied testily, "Was not Christ crucified?"

He explained that by signs in the heavens God had commanded him to rise "and slay my enemies with their own weapons." Then he embarked on a graphic, chilling account of the entire insurrection that was bound to awe readers for generations to come. As he had done in court on Monday, Nat insisted that the revolt was local in origin. When Gray questioned him about the reported uprising in North Carolina at about the same time, Nat denied any knowledge of it. But he warned that other slaves could well have seen visions and signs in the skies and acted as he had done. By the end of the confession, Nat was in high spirits, fiercely unrepentant and entirely "willing to suffer the fate that awaits me."

Nat talked for two days. On the third day Gray put him through a rigorous cross-examination and found his statement truthful and sincere, "corroborated by every circumstance coming within my own knowledge or the confession of others whom had been either killed or executed."

Frankly Gray was impressed with this Negro man "whose name has resounded throughout our widely extended empire." If Nat was under ordinary height, he was nevertheless "strong and active, having the true negro face, every feature of which is strongly marked." Though Gray also judged Nat "a complete fanatic," he emphatically denied that Nat was ignorant or a coward. On the contrary, in native intelligence and quickness of perception Nat was surpassed by few men Gray had ever seen. And Nat could be intimidating. When, in a

burst of enthusiasm, he spoke of the killings and raised his manacled hands toward heaven, "I looked on him," Gray said. "and my blood curdled in my veins."⁸⁸

Since then, some critics have questioned the authenticity of the confessions to Gray, inasmuch as the latter was a white slaveholder and whatever Nat said was obviously filtered through his senses. Others have disparaged the document because Gray's motives seem suspect: here was a chance to get a dramatic story that would become a best seller and make Gray a lot of money. So how can it be the truth? Other critics have accused Gray of inventing a white myth about Nat as a ghoulish maniac, driven to insurrection by his religious phobias and fixations, and so a freak, an aberration whose likes would never appear in the South again. To these critics, then, the confession is unalloyed white propaganda, fabricated by Gray to ease Southern fears.⁸⁹

When the document is viewed in historical context, these arguments seem unfair. The fact is that the confessions are very close to what Nat had already said in his October 31 court interrogation. And most details in the statement, as Gray said, can be corroborated by the slave trial records and by contemporary newspaper accounts, including the unsigned letters from Jerusalem (publishing anonymous communiqués was a common practice in those days). In the published *Confessions*, which appeared later in 1831, some remarks attributed to Nat were clearly Gray's—such as the assertions that whites arrived at Parker's cornfield in time "to arrest the progress of these barbarous villains" and that "we found no more victims to gratify our thirst for blood." But in most particulars—especially those on Nat's background, religious visions, and the revolt itself—the confessions seem an authentic and reliable document.⁴⁰

In significant ways, instead of assuaging white fears, the confessions could only have heightened them. Gray did not censor Nat's description of his own intelligence or of the black rage that attended the killings. If Post-

master Trezevant, for the benefit of his readers, belittled Nat as an apologetic coward, Gray did not mince his words about Nat's courage, ferocity, and single-mindedness.

When Gray called Nat "a gloomy fanatic," he was merely repeating what Parker, Pleasants, and many other whites had long since decided. Like them, Gray had to believe that the insurrection sprang from religious fanaticism, which had bewildered and deranged Nat's mind and had led him and his "band of savages" to commit atrocities beyond the capacity of ordinary slaves. Whites like Gray could not blame the rebellion on their own slave system—they were too much a part of it to do that. And anyway, in their view Nat was a fanatic. In recounting his heavenly visions and in describing how God had called him to revolt, Nat was inviting skeptical whites to draw their own conclusions.

On November 5, the day of Nat's trial, a large and boisterous crowd gathered in Jerusalem. Fearing that Nat might be lynched, the sheriff recruited additional deputies to escort the Prophet from the jail over to the courthouse. As the deputies guarded the doors, Nat's trial opened, with Meriwether B. Broadnax as prosecuting attorney and Jeremiah Cobb as the presiding judge. An eminent citizen of the county, Cobb had a large family and possessed an impressive home and some thirty-two slaves. Present with Cobb were James Trezevant, James W. Parker, and several other justices.

Pounding his gavel, Cobb brought the court officially to order, appointed William C. Parker as Nat's counsel, and had the clerk read the charges. "Nat alias Nat Turner a negro man slave the property of Putnam Moore an infant" is "charged with conspiring to rebel and making insurrection."

Levi Waller was the first witness for the prosecution. Waller testified that he saw the insurgents murder several members of his family. Nat, whom Waller "knew very well," was clearly in command and forced the more reluctant rebels to mount up and ride with

him. Trezevant next took the witness stand and repeated what Nat had said in his interrogation on October 31. Trezevant added, referring to the confessions Nat had given to Gray, that the accused had furnished "a long account of the motives which led him finally to commence the bloody scene." Thereupon the clerk read the confessions before the court, and Nat "acknowledged the same to be full, free and voluntary."

Parker had no witnesses or evidence to introduce in Nat's behalf—his conviction was a foregone conclusion—and the attorney submitted his case without argument. Nat, however, pleaded not guilty because he did not feel so. Judge Cobb, speaking for a unanimous court, pronounced Nat guilty as charged and asked if he had anything to say before sentencing. "Nothing but what I've said before," Nat replied.

It was therefore the order of the court, Cobb intoned, that Nat be returned to jail, where he was to remain until Friday, November 11, when, between the hours of ten in the forenoon and four in the afternoon, the sheriff was to escort the prisoner to the usual place of execution and hang him by the neck until he was dead. The judge then valued Nat at \$375, which the state was to pay the Putnam Moore estate. With that, Cobb pounded his gavel and the court proceeded to another trial unrelated to the insurrection.

Around noon on November 11, the sheriff took Nat out to a field just northeast of Jerusalem and led him to a gnarled old tree which served as Southampton's gallows. Since a public hanging was a form of entertainment in those days, an immense crowd had gathered in the field to witness the spectacle. The sheriff gestured at the people and agreed to let Nat say something if he wanted. But Nat rejected the offer. "I'm ready," he told the man in a firm voice. As the sheriff placed the noose about his neck, Nat waited under the tree in composed and resolute silence, staring out across the congregation and into the distant skies beyond. In a moment the whites pulled Nat up with a jerk, but his body already seemed uninhabited—"Not a limb nor a

muscle was observed to move," reported an eyewitness, as the Prophet hung there as still as stone. Afterward the authorities gave his body to surgeons for dissection. "They skinned it," according to William Sidney Drewry, "and made grease of the flesh."⁴¹

Nat was not the last Negro tried for the Southampton insurrection. On November 21, the court convicted Benjamin Blunt for complicity and he too was hanged. In 1832, the Southampton Superior Court witnessed the prosecution of four free Negroes charged with conspiracy and insurrection, found Barry Newsom guilty, and sentenced him to the gallows. In all, some fifty blacks stood trial in Southampton's courts, and twenty-one—including Nat Turner—were hanged. At the recommendation of the court, Governor Floyd apparently commuted the death sentences of ten other convicted slaves and ordered them transported—presumably out of the United States. At the same time, there were additional slave trials in several other counties in Virginia and North Carolina, resulting in twenty or thirty more executions. All told, Nat Turner's rebellion cost the lives of approximately sixty whites and more than two hundred Negroes.

As it turned out, several insurgents managed to avoid arrest and never came to trial. Whites suspected a few other blacks of collaboration and sold them off to Georgia. Also sold to slave traders were Nat's wife and daughter—though what happened to them after they left Southampton is not known. According to black tradition, one of Nat's sons remained in the county. And another, it was said, eventually found his way to the free state of Ohio.⁴²

Part Four

LEGACY

The consequences of Nat Turner's insurrection did not end with public hangings in Virginia and North Carolina. For Southern whites the uprising seemed a monstrous climax to a whole decade of ominous events, a decade of abominable tariffs and economic panics, of obstreperous antislavery activities, and of growing slave unrest and insurrection plots, beginning with the Denmark Vesey conspiracy in 1822 and culminating now in the most lethal slave rebellion Southerners had ever known. Desperately needing to blame somebody for Nat Turner besides themselves, Southern whites inevitably linked the revolt to a sinister Northern abolitionist plot to destroy their cherished way of life. Southern zealots declared that the antislavery movement, gathering momentum throughout the 1820s, had now burst into a full-blown crusade against the South. In January, 1831, William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knapp had started publishing the *Liberator* in Boston, demanding in bold, strident editorials that the slaves be immediately and unconditionally emancipated. In a stunning display of moral indignation, Garrison said things most Southerners could not bear to hear. He upbraided slaveowners as unregenerate sinners of the most despicable sort. He insisted that Negroes deserved "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" just like white people. He asserted that slavery violated the sacred

ideals of the Declaration of Independence, made a mockery of Christianity, and exposed this hypocritical Republic to the severest judgments of Heaven. And while he pronounced his a pacifist crusade, Garrison warned that if Southerners did not eradicate slavery at once, then the blacks would fight for their freedom. "Woe," he had written in the very first issue of the *Liberator*, "if it comes with storm, and blood, and fire."

And now storm, blood, and fire had broken out in Virginia, and Southerners seized on the *Liberator* and held Garrison and his abolitionist cohorts responsible. Never mind that no evidence existed that Nat Turner had ever heard of Garrison. Never mind that no copies of his paper had been found anywhere in Southampton County. Southerners pointed out that about eight months after the appearance of the *Liberator* Nat Turner had embarked on his bloody venture—something Southern politicians, editors, and postmasters refused to accept as mere coincidence. They charged that Garrison and Knapp were behind the rebellion, that their "licentious," "traitorous," and "incendiary" rhetoric had incited Nat to violence. "These manifestoes of *Insurrection!*" howled one Virginia postmaster, who forwarded several confiscated issues of the *Liberator* to Floyd in Richmond. "These men do not conceal their intentions," the governor roared in reply, "but urge our negroes and mulattoes, slaves and free to the indiscriminate massacre of all white people."¹

Shocked at such treachery, Floyd filed the issues of the *Liberator* in his "conspiracy" folder, along with a number of other antislavery documents allegedly found circulating in Virginia and sent to his office. There were copies of Walker's *Appeal* and Shadrack Bassett's "African Hymn." There were issues of *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, published by the Quaker Benjamin Lundy. There was a copy of the *African Sentinel and Journal of Liberty*, put out by free Negroes in Albany, New York, with a quotation from Jefferson on its masthead: "I tremble for my country when I think

that God is just, and that his justice cannot sleep forever!" And there were anonymous letters from the North which claimed that paramilitary operations were under way there, that bands of blacks and whites were "planning the massacre of the white people of the Southern states by the blacks." One letter, signed "Nero" of Boston and addressed to the Jerusalem postmaster, contended that Southampton whites got what they deserved and announced that not even "Your Nats and Harks" knew how widespread resistance to slavery really was.

For Floyd, these documents were both incriminating and profoundly revealing. Equally illuminating were all the letters falling on his desk about the activities of Northern vendors, free Negroes, and black preachers here in Virginia. And the more Floyd studied these communiqués, the more he compared the *Liberator* with Walker's *Appeal* and Bassett's hymn and the anonymous letters, the more convinced he became that a heinous Yankee conspiracy, with Garrison and Knapp as its "high priests" and Negro preachers as its Virginia agents, lay behind the Southampton uprising and all other slave troubles as well. And in November, in a sizzling letter to Governor Hamilton of South Carolina, Floyd sketched in the lurid details of the plot. "I am fully persuaded" that "the spirit of insubordination which has, and still manifests itself in Virginia, had its origin among, and emanated from, the Yankee population, upon their *first* arrival amongst us, but most especially the Yankee pedlars and traders." In covert, indirect fashion, these agents of revolution had enlisted the help of white evangelists and then embarked on the first step of their sordid plan: they made the blacks religious. They said to slaves that God was no respecter of persons, that the black man was as good as the white man. They said that all men were born free and equal. They said that men cannot serve two masters. They said that white people had rebelled against England to gain their freedom and "so had the blacks a right to do so." Thus, Floyd contended, the preach-

ers—mostly Yankees—worked on our population “day and night” until religion became “the fashion of the times.” Even white females from respectable Virginia families were persuaded that “it was piety to teach negroes to read and write, to the end that they might read the Scriptures.” Many of these ladies became tutors in Negro schools and “pious distributors of tracts” from the New York Tract Society.

“At this point,” Floyd went on, “more active operations commenced.” As Virginia’s magistrates and laws “became more inactive,” the slaves held illegal religious meetings and permissive whites made little attempt to stop them. Then began the efforts of the black preachers, who circulated antislavery pamphlets and papers, read from their pulpits “the incendiary publications of Walker, Garrison and Knapp of Boston,” and led their congregations in singing inflammatory hymns—“we resting in apathetic security until the Southampton affair.”

From all the governor had learned about that affair, he was convinced that every Negro preacher east of the Blue Ridge Mountains was involved “in the secret” and acted on “the plans as published by those Northern presses.” However, the congregations of these preachers “knew nothing of this intended rebellion, except a few leading and intelligent men, who may have been head men in the Church—the *mass* were prepared by making them aspire to an equal station by such conversations as I have related as the first step.”

Once the rebellion succeeded, Floyd had been informed, the insurgents planned to adopt a form of government like that of the white people, “whom they intended to cut off to a man.” The only difference was that “the preachers were to be their Governors, Generals and judges.” Floyd was certain that “Northern incendiaries, tracts, Sunday Schools, religion and reading and writing has accomplished this end.”

In Floyd’s opinion, the situation had become intolerable. And the more he brooded about it, the more he fumed about that Boston “club of villains” and their

wicked designs against his state, the more the governor focused his rage and resentment on one man—William Lloyd Garrison. Yes, Garrison was the chief scoundrel in this abysmal scenario of Yankee intrigue and infiltration—Garrison more than anybody else was to blame for the malicious slaughter of Virginia’s men, women, and children. In righteous indignation, the governor demanded that Garrison be “silenced.” He consulted with a Virginia judge about how “that fiend” might be crushed and punished, and the judge advised that Garrison might be prosecuted under common law. Floyd debated whether to “require” the governor of Massachusetts to have Garrison arrested. By now Floyd was in a tirade. Here Garrison was, a criminal, an agitator. Yet “we are told,” Floyd gesticulated, that there are no laws to punish “Garrison’s offense.” No laws to punish his offense! A man in one state may “plot treason” against another state without fear of prosecution, yet the stricken state may not resist because the United States Constitution does not provide for such resistance. *Damn* these constitutions (the governor was no strict constructionist when it came to suppressing abolitionists). There was a higher law which protected Virginia, Floyd announced, and that was “the law of nature,” which “will not permit men to have their families butchered before their eyes by their slaves and not seek by force to punish those who plan and encourage them to perpetuate these deeds.” He would bring this up in his message to the legislature, for “something must be done and with decision.” He added: “If this is not checked it must lead to a separation of these States.”²

Floyd’s fulminations reveal more about his own anxieties—and those of Southern whites in general—than about the actual nature and influence of the Northern abolitionist movement. For one thing, Garrison and his followers were emphatically opposed to violence and said so repeatedly in the press and on the stump. They intended to overthrow slavery, not by insurrection,

Northern interference, or coercive federal laws, but by converting public opinion and pricking the slaveholder's own conscience—whereupon, in a mighty burst of repentance, Southern whites were supposed to emancipate the slaves themselves.

Furthermore, the abolitionist movement was hardly so strong or well organized as Floyd and many other Southerners believed. As it happened, few Northerners—few Bostonians, for that matter—had ever heard of Garrison and his *Liberator* until Southerners raised such a fuss about them. Ironically enough, this dedicated pacifist rocketed to national attention because Southern whites accused him of inciting slave insurrections. Southerners, in short, made his reputation. But even so the circulation of the *Liberator* was never more than a few thousand, if that many; and most Northerners spurned the abolitionist movement itself as sinister and potentially destructive. Since the North was also a white supremacist society, the vast majority of whites there not only discriminated against free Negroes, but were perfectly content to leave slavery alone where it already existed. Many Northerners may have opposed slavery in the abstract, but most rejected actual emancipation—unless accompanied by wholesale colonization—lest abolition result in thousands of Southern blacks stampeding into the free states. In truth, racist feelings were so combustible in the North that ugly anti-abolitionist riots were to explode in various cities there.

Moreover, Northern public opinion was anything but sympathetic to slave resistance and rebellion. Though the Northern press was more concerned with national politics than with the Turner insurrection, many papers did report the news either in brief editorials or in excerpts from Southern journals. Apart from the small abolitionist press, few Northern papers blamed the Turner revolt on the South's own slave system—and those that did were mild in their criticism and generally advocated colonization. Other Northern papers not only castigated the Southampton insurgents, but

promised Northern military assistance if Virginia needed it to suppress rebellions.³

Some Southern editors applauded the Northern reaction, contending that it demonstrated how impotent abolitionism was in the North and how powerful the ties of Union really were. But many other Southerners—perhaps most of them—agreed with Floyd's conspiracy thesis, and out of Dixie came a ground swell of outrage and protest against "the fanatical Garrison" and his abolitionist agents and allies. A Vigilance Association in Columbia, South Carolina, offered a \$1,500 reward for any agitator convicted of distributing the *Liberator* or Walker's *Appeal*. In Raleigh and New Bern, North Carolina, grand juries indicted Garrison for violating a state law against circulating "incendiary" papers like his. The *Free Press* of Tarboro, North Carolina, had no doubt that the *Liberator* could be found among the slaves in every Virginia county and warned its readers: "Keep a sharp look out for the villains" who peddle that paper "and if you catch them, by all that is sacred, you ought to barbecue them." Another paper asserted that it was Garrison who ought to be barbecued. The Washington *National Intelligencer*, Richmond *Enquirer*, and many other Southern sheets demanded that the Boston authorities eliminate the "diabolical" *Liberator* and lock up its bloodthirsty editor. North Carolina even put a price of \$5,000 on Garrison's head. And Georgia subsequently offered the same amount for anybody who would kidnap Garrison and drag him to Georgia for trial. Never mind legal rights and freedom of speech—in Southern eyes Yankee abolitionists didn't deserve any rights. Never mind the warnings of Baltimore's *Niles Register* that Southern whites, in their grasping for scapegoats, were attributing much too much influence to abolitionist literature. Never mind that Garrison, in the pages of the *Liberator*, declared himself "horror-struck" at the Southampton insurrection and hotly denied that he fomented slave rebellions ("Ye patriotic hypocrites! ye fustian declaimers for liberty! ye valiant sticklers for

equal rights among yourselves! Ye accuse the pacific friends of emancipation of instigating the slaves to revolt. . . . The slaves need no incentive at our hands"). No matter what anyone said, anxious Southerners believed what they wanted to believe. From 1831 on, Northern abolitionism and slave rebellion were inextricably associated in the Southern mind.⁴

But if Virginians blamed the Turner revolt on Northern abolitionism, many of them—including Governor Floyd—defended emancipation itself as the only way to prevent further violence. In fact, for several months in late 1831 and early 1832 Virginians engaged in a momentous public debate over the feasibility of manumission. Out in the western part of the state, where antislavery and anti-Negro sentiment had long been smoldering, whites held public rallies in which they openly endorsed emancipation—yes, the liberation of all of Virginia's 470,000 slaves—as the only safeguard in these dangerous times. Whites in the extreme western counties had relatively few slaves anyway. Why should they support a dangerous slave regime that spawned violent "nigger" devils like Nat Turner? They sent a procession of memorials and petitions down to Richmond, demanding that Virginia extirpate the "accursed," "evil" slave system and colonize all blacks at state expense. Only by removing the entire Negro population, the petitions argued, could future rebellions be avoided.

At the same time, whites in the central piedmont and eastern tidewater also held meetings and drafted petitions. A majority of these blamed slave discontent on free Negroes and urged their removal. But opinion varied widely on the emancipation issue. Since the eastern tidewater had the heaviest slave concentrations, whites there generally defended the system, adopting proslavery positions that ranged from moderate to extreme. The tidewater planters, who possessed most of Virginia's wealth, power, and prestige and who dominated state politics, opposed abolition emphatically—and what they feared would amount to a radical recon-

struction of Virginia's economy and social order. Other whites in central and eastern Virginia took a middle position: their petitions conceded that slavery might be an evil, but counseled against precipitous action in dealing with it. Nevertheless they insisted that the state government do something to ensure public safety.

Newspapers also joined in the debate, prompting the Richmond *Whig* to announce that "Nat Turner and the blood of his innocent victims have conquered the silence of fifty years." While many editors raged against manumission, young Pleasants of the *Whig* endorsed gradual emancipation at the very least. He editorialized that Virginia's large planters must understand—as the small slaveowner and the mechanic understood—that slavery was a curse on the state and that it must be expunged. Of course abolition could not be effected overnight; it would take time—a lot of time—before white prejudices could be overcome. Nevertheless, the big planters must eschew self-interest and help rid Virginia of slavery's "crushing and annihilating weight." For the institution emasculated the Old Dominion and the other Southern states as well, leaving them, "an easy conquest at the feet of the North." Pleasants contended that the Northern states were gradually succumbing to abolitionism and predicted that one day they would strike against Southern slavery. So to avoid a sectional collision, Virginia must lead the way and remove the peculiar institution, thus freeing herself from conflicts that otherwise would inevitably come. If Virginia failed to do this, law and constitution would one day be forgotten and antagonisms over slavery would force "the strong hand to govern all," reducing Virginia to "the hewer of wood and the drawer of water" for the stronger Yankee states. In sum, only the blind and tempestuous could fail to foresee the calamities awaiting Virginia should slavery continue.⁵

While the Virginia press haggled over emancipation, Governor Floyd was plotting an executive move against the peculiar institution when the legislature convened

in December. For some time he had desired emancipation and colonization, and now Nat Turner had given him a golden opportunity to strike against slavery, to vanquish what he regarded as a wasteful labor system that impeded Virginia's commercial development. Besides, Floyd wrote in his diary, removing slavery would thwart the abolitionists in the North, would "check the evil" there and disrupt all the intrigues of that dastard Garrison. On November 19 Floyd wrote Governor Hamilton of South Carolina that he favored gradual emancipation and colonization, but admitted that his plan "will of course be tenderly and cautiously managed, and will be urged or delayed as your state and Georgia may be disposed to cooperate." On November 21 Floyd announced to his diary: "Before I leave this Government, I will have contrived to have a law passed gradually abolishing slavery in this state, or at all events to begin the work by prohibiting slavery west of the Blue Ridge Mountains." He would propose some sort of abolition bill in his forthcoming message to the legislature.

But for some reason Floyd changed his mind and offered no emancipation scheme, none at all. For one thing, neither South Carolina nor Georgia—with their large percentage of blacks—would accept manumission on any terms. Also, Floyd was swept up in the national tempest over the tariff and South Carolina's drumbeat threats to nullify, over Jackson's "weak and wicked" administration and belligerent Unionist posturings, and over the upcoming Presidential election. These national issues may have convinced Floyd that the winter of 1831–1832 was not the proper time to push for gradual emancipation. In truth, John C. Calhoun himself may have talked the governor out of any abolition moves. On December 3, just before the legislature was to open, the Vice-President stopped over in Richmond on his way back to the national capital, dined and chatted with Floyd, and told him that South Carolina would nullify the tariff "unless it is greatly modified." Floyd recorded nothing else about their conversations, but

Calhoun undoubtedly explained that South Carolinians too were upset about Nat Turner and blamed abolitionists like Garrison for inciting slave revolts. But Calhoun would never have approved of Floyd's emancipation ideas (and he was Floyd's hero), nor could the Vice-President have been happy about the public debates going on in Virginia. Surely Calhoun argued that the South could best protect its slave system from abolitionist coercion, not through emancipation, but behind a bulwark of state rights and nullification.⁶

Calhoun left for Washington on December 5, and the next day Floyd submitted his message to the legislature. In it, the governor said nothing about emancipation and colonization. He devoted most of the address to the Turner revolt, rehearsing the unsubstantiated charges that it sprang from a conspiracy of Northern "fanatics" and Negro preachers. To prevent any future uprisings, Floyd enjoined the legislature to outlaw these preachers, enact severe punishments against outside agitators, remove the state's free black population, rearm and strengthen the militia no matter what the cost, and create a new and special public guard, to consist of Virginia's best militiamen, which would drill once a month and be prepared to crush slave outbreaks at once. Military supremacy was imperative, Floyd declared, for "all communities are liable to suffer from the dagger of the murderer and midnight assassin," and it behooved all Virginia to guard against them.

Floyd devoted several paragraphs to his economic program, which called for state-subsidized internal improvements designed to make Virginia a magnificent commercial empire. Then he turned to "our FEDERAL RELATIONS" and unleashed a diatribe against federal despotism and the "unconstitutional measures" of the Jackson Administration. In language barbed with Calhounisms, the governor denounced the protective tariff as well as Jackson's proposal to distribute surplus national funds to the states, a proposal Floyd thought would favor states that exported nothing and discriminate against those like Virginia which exported

a great deal. "The Constitution seems about to be merged in the will of an unrestrained majority," Floyd warned. "If the will of that majority is unrestrained, freedom is gone forever." He stoutly defended Calhoun's doctrines. "It is even now strongly insinuated, that the States cannot interpose to arrest an unconstitutional measure: if so, there is already no limit to Federal power, and our short experience has shewn us the utter insufficiency of all restraints upon parchment." If the Virginia legislature, however, took steps to guard against "unjust, oppressive and ruinous" federal measures, Floyd asserted, then "the strong arm of power will never be able to crush the spirit of freedmen, or deter them from exercising their rights and interposing barriers to the progress of usurpation."⁷

And that was that. In January, with Floyd looking on, the legislature plunged into a stormy debate over abolition and colonization, to last for several weeks, as proslavery and antislavery orators openly harangued one another. It was unprecedented in the South, this legislative struggle over manumission, and everybody involved realized what an exceptional event it was. "And what is *more remarkable* in the History of Legislation," observed Thomas Richie of the *Enquirer*, who boldly published the entire debates, is that "we now see the whole subject ripped up and discussed with open doors, and in the presence of a crowded gallery and lobby—Even the press itself hesitates to publish the Debates of the body. All these indeed [are] new in our history. And nothing else could have prompted them, but the bloody massacre in the month of August."

Outside Virginia, though, many Southern whites were appalled at Virginia's experiment in open discussion of abolition. Would this not arouse the slaves and terrify the white community even more? And was Richie not compounding the danger by printing the debates in his paper? In South Carolina, even the Unionists—those opposed to nullification—refused "to comment on a policy so unwise and blended with such madness and fatality." And the nullifiers, of course,

were irate. They demanded that patrols go on the alert and castigated Richie as "the apostate traitor, the recreant and faithless sentinel, the cringing parasite, the hollow-hearted, hypocritical advocate of Southern interests" who "has scattered the firebrands of destruction everywhere in the South." Another Carolinian warned that publication of the debates was "calculated to unsettle everything—the minds of masters and slaves." And the Charleston *Mercury* concluded that "public discussion of such a topic . . . is fraught with evils of the most disastrous kind."

Meanwhile, up in Boston, William Lloyd Garrison followed the Virginia debates with sardonic glee. On January 14, 1821, he published in the *Liberator* a lively and sarcastic parody under the headline, "INCENDIARY SLAVEHOLDERS." "It seems that some of the slaveholders are imitating the example of the 'Incendiary' *Liberator* and actually discoursing about the gradual emancipation of their slaves. Strange that they wish to disturb so *embarrassing* a question! Strange that they pursue a course of conduct so well calculated to make their slaves *uneasy!* Certainly they ought to be indicted forthwith, and a reward of five thousand dollars offered for each of their heads." But "irony aside," Garrison was glad to see Virginians "in some measure brought to a sane state of mind" about slavery, although he considered gradual abolition "a delusion which first blinds and then destroys."

Blind or not, Virginia's legislators debated on through January and February, 1832, with antislavery spokesmen belaboring the Turner rebellion and the rampant hysteria that followed and stressing the destructive effects of slave labor. Proslavery orators, on the other hand, dismissed the Turner outbreak as "a petty affair," denied that slavery had caused Virginia's economic troubles, and insisted that property rights be thoroughly safeguarded. In the end, most delegates accepted the proslavery argument that colonization was too costly and too complicated to implement. And since they were not about to manumit the blacks and

leave them as free people in a white man's country, they rejected emancipation. Indeed they went on to revise and implement the slave codes in order to restrict blacks so stringently that they could never again mount a revolt. The revised laws not only strengthened the militia and patrol systems, but virtually stripped free Negroes of human rights (a subsequent enactment prohibited any more from entering Virginia) and all but eliminated slave schools, slave religious meetings, and slave preachers. For Nat Turner had taught white Virginians a hard lesson about what might happen if they gave slaves enough education and religion to think for themselves.⁸

By now Governor Floyd had also capitulated, giving up any plans he might still have entertained about removing slavery from the Old Dominion. In April, 1832, he invited Professor Thomas R. Dew of William and Mary College, "an expert in whom all Virginia reposed the greatest confidence," to analyze the recent debates and publish his conclusions and recommendations. A leading spokesman for the tidewater proslavery forces, Dew happily accepted the job and went on to produce his *Review of the Debate of the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832* (Richmond, 1832), which contained the most comprehensive vindication of slavery to emerge from the South thus far. In the *Review*, Dew mounted an all-out assault on western Virginia's gradual emancipationists, contending that colonization was impossible and that abolition without it was heresy. Negroes, Dew argued, copulated and reproduced so prodigiously that no colonization scheme could ever get rid of them all: as soon as one batch was transported, two other batches would be born. Then Dew got down to vindications. Slavery was *not* an evil as Jefferson's generation had tended to believe, but was a necessary stage of human progress. Moreover, from sheer practical considerations, the institution was an indispensable means of regulating Negroes, who were "not ready" for freedom. Indeed, Negroes were "vastly inferior" to whites and should not be

liberated. The professor hinted that Negroes were innately indolent and that no free black would work unless you made him. But racial arguments aside, Negroes were accustomed to being slaves—had acquired all the habits and outlooks of bondsmen—and whites were used to being masters. Dew insisted that these prejudices had solidified in Virginia and that the state could not legislate such prejudices away.

When Dew's essay came out, Governor Floyd and most other Virginia whites embraced the professor's arguments "as final." If Nat Turner had forced Virginians, however fleetingly, to consider black liberation as a solution to their slave woes, Dew gave them a fund of excuses and rationalizations for their rejection of that possibility. Given their racial fears and attitudes, their investments and status symbols, their whole way of life really, Virginia whites were incapable of ever uprooting slavery by themselves. Small wonder, then, that they closed ranks behind Dew and dug in, inflexibly determined that slavery would remain. Thanks to white intransigence and to those oppressive new codes, Virginia's blacks were more shackled to the rack of slavery than they had ever been.⁹

The years that followed were fateful ones for the South. In 1832 South Carolina fire-eaters triumphed in crucial state elections and went on to nullify the tariff as they had threatened to do. That year Congress had enacted another tariff which removed some of the abominations of 1828, but not enough to mollify the nullification party. In November, 1832, with John Floyd cheering them on in Richmond, South Carolina nullifiers held a convention in Charleston and declared both the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 null and void. Invoking the theory of state sovereignty contained in Calhoun's *Exposition and Protest* and in Jefferson's *Kentucky Resolutions* of 1798, the nullifiers moved to erect a state-rights barricade behind which to protect South Carolina's slave regime from all forms of federal "despotism." But Andrew Jackson would have none of

it; in a ringing manifesto to the people of South Carolina, the President denounced nullification as incompatible with the very concept of Union. But South Carolina flung defiance at Old Hickory, mobilized a volunteer force "to defend the rights and liberties of the State," and raced pell-mell down the road to secession. The President, encouraged by support from all sections of the country (including the South), threatened to hang Calhoun and vowed to hurl an army into South Carolina to enforce the tariff. For a time it looked as though civil war would break out between the federal government and South Carolina. Should that happen, Governor Floyd warned the Virginia House of Delegates, then "the days of this Republic are numbered." Anxious to avoid a bloody showdown, Jackson favored a compromise and so did Congress, which produced a bill calling for the gradual reduction of tariff duties. Congress also enacted a force bill empowering Jackson to use federal troops in the crisis. As it happened, the South Carolina convention accepted the lower tariff and rescinded its nullification ordinance, only to turn around and nullify the Force Act in a show of bluster and pugnacity. South Carolinians thus reasserted the *right* of nullification because they were still obsessed with Northern abolitionism. As Jackson himself predicted, "The next pretext will be the Negro, or slavery question."

In the wake of Nat Turner and the rise of the abolitionists, the other Southern states also expanded their patrol and militia systems and increased the severity of their slave codes to maintain internal security. For the South seemed increasingly beset with provocation and danger. In 1833 Northern abolitionists formed the American Antislavery Society, whose task was to coordinate the activities of all abolitionist groups and organizations and to disseminate books, sermons, and pamphlets in an effort to convert all America to emancipation. At the same time, the British government enacted a gradual abolition law and obstreperous English emancipators came to crusade in the United States as

well. What followed was the Great Southern Reaction of the 1830s and 1840s, a time when the Old South, menaced it seemed by internal slave disaffection and outside abolitionist agitation, became a closed, martial society determined to preserve and perpetuate its slave-based civilization come what may. To prevent any national emancipation law (and to rally proslavery support at home), Southern leaders in Washington sought to squelch antislavery protest and to control and manipulate the federal government itself. In the Southern states postmasters began confiscating abolitionist literature, lest these tracts invite more slaves to violence. And Southern zealots set about suppressing internal dissent as well. Across Dixie vigilance committees seized "abolitionist," "anti-Southern" books and burned them. They expelled from classrooms any teacher suspected of abolitionist tendencies, and ostracized or banished anybody who questioned the peculiar institution. Some states actually passed sedition laws and other restrictive measures which prohibited whites and blacks alike from criticizing slavery. In sum, the Old South became a suspicious and repressive community which made defense of slavery "the *sine qua non* of Southern patriotism."

Because the South seemed more and more a lonely slave outpost surrounded by antislavery enemies, Southern spokesmen in the period of the Great Reaction produced a strident vindication of slavery that went beyond Thomas Dew's celebrated defense. To counter the abolitionist cry that slavery was sinful, Southerners increasingly proclaimed that institution a positive and unequivocal good, condoned by the Bible and ordained by God from the beginning of time. "Negro slavery," asserted James H. Hammond of South Carolina, "is the greatest of all the great blessings which a kind providence has bestowed." John C. Calhoun, having resigned as Vice-President and returned to Washington as a United States Senator, trumpeted the glories of slavery on the floor of the Senate itself. Pronouncing slavery "a good—a positive good,"

he flayed away at Northern abolitionists, warning that the peculiar institution was absolutely essential for race control and that it could not be subverted "without drenching the country in blood, and extirpating one or the other of the races." He went on to justify slavery on broad historical grounds, insisting that "there never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point in fact, live on the labor of the other." Other Southerners, citing contemporary science and anthropology, argued that Negroes were an inferior race and therefore belonged in chains as naturally as cattle in pens. Slavery, Southern whites contended, "civilized" the barbaric African because it taught him a trade and made him productive and obedient. As it turned out, Southerners were doing Negroes a huge Christian favor by enslaving them.

Out of mixed feelings of fear and racial superiority, Southern whites created their own image of the Negro as a submissive, feeble-minded Sambo, that "banjo-twanging, hy-yi-ing happy jack" who abounded in antebellum Southern literature. Yet as Southerners told themselves and the rest of the world that their darkies were too docile and too content ever to turn against their chivalrous masters, they still took every necessary precaution to prevent another insurrection, whether incited by mutinous slaves or infiltrating Yankees. By the 1840s, with its repressive slave controls, police measures, and toughened military forces, the Old South had devised a slave system oppressive enough to make organized rebellion all but impossible."¹⁰

Even so, Southern whites in the antebellum period never forgot Nat Turner and the violence he unleashed in southeastern Virginia. For some whites, such as Nathaniel and Lavinia Francis, the revolt was a cataclysmic occurrence by which to measure time itself. When their baby was born, they recorded in the family Bible that the child arrived "one month and six days after the insurrection."¹¹ The revolt marked Governor Floyd, too, for it turned out to be the most significant event of

his administration. Having failed to remove slavery from Virginia or to guide the Old Dominion into a golden new era of economic enterprise (though the states' economic condition did improve some in the 1830s), Floyd left office in 1834 and retired to Montgomery County, where he suffered a paralytic stroke and died in 1837.

Meanwhile pamphlets about the insurrection had begun to appear, reminding white readers all over again about the grisly details of Nat's work. The first pamphlet, compiled by one Samuel Walker and published in New York in October, 1831, was a long-winded tract culled largely from newspapers.¹² That November a Baltimore printer brought out Gray's *Confessions of Nat Turner*, which sold well enough to merit a second printing in 1832. All told, the *Confessions* sold about forty thousand copies, although some Southern communities appear to have suppressed it, presumably because of its "incendiary" character. (Indeed, Garrison himself remarked that a bounty should be placed on Gray's head, because the *Confessions* might "hasten other insurrections.") The Richmond *Enquirer* praised Gray for producing a graphic and revealing document, but chastised him for its style. "The language is far superior to what Nat Turner could have employed—Portions of it are even eloquently and classically expressed." This attributed to "the Bandit a character for intelligence which he does not deserve, and ought not to have received." But in most other respects the *Enquirer* found the *Confessions* "faithful and true" and thought "it ought to warn Garrison and the other fanatics of the North how they meddle with these wretches."¹³

In truth, fear of such "wretches" haunted Southern whites throughout the rest of the antebellum period. In spite of all their precautions and all their resounding propaganda, they could never escape the possibility that somewhere, maybe even in their own slave quarters, another Nat Turner was plotting to rise up and

slit their throats. His name became for them a symbol of black terror and violent retribution.¹⁴

But for antebellum blacks—and for their descendants—the name of Nat Turner took on a profoundly different connotation. He became a legendary black hero—especially in southeastern Virginia, where blacks enshrined his name in an oral tradition that still flourishes today. They regard Nat's rebellion as the "First War" against slavery and the Civil War as the second. So in death Nat achieved a kind of victory denied him in life—he became a martyred soldier of slave liberation who broke his chains and murdered whites because slavery had murdered Negroes. Nat Turner, said an elderly black man in Southampton County only a few years ago, was "God's man. He was a man for war, and for legal rights, and for freedom."¹⁵

County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 192, 202–203.

21. See Foner, *Nat Turner*, 177.
22. Copy of "African Hymn" in Floyd's Free Negro and Slave Letterbook, Archives of the Virginia State Library; George Cooke to Floyd, September 13, 1831, Virginia Governors' Papers, *ibid.*; N. Sutton to Floyd, September 21, 1831, *ibid.*; "A Friend to the City" to Floyd [November, 1831], *ibid.*; and Richmond *Enquirer*, September 17, 1831.

PART THREE: JUDGMENT DAY

1. My profile of John Floyd is based on Floyd's Diary, entries of March 8, April 29, June 29, August 21, and 22, October 10, November 10 and 21, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd's Message to the Legislature, December 6, 1831, in *Journal of the House of Delegates* (Richmond, 1831), *ibid.* (and printed in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 430–444); Floyd on education and U.S. Senators in Floyd to [?], May 5, 1832, Floyd Papers, Library of Congress; Floyd's defense of nullification in his communication to the Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, December 13, 1832, Virginia Executive Letterbooks, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Charles H. Ambler, *Life and Diary of John Floyd* (Richmond, 1918), 87ff; Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 249–250; W. H. T. Squires, *Through Three Centuries, A Short History of the People of Virginia* (Portsmouth, Va., 1929), containing a portrait of Floyd, 414–419.
2. Quotation ("mean son-of-a-bitch") Styron, *Confessions*, 108, 113; my sketch of Nathaniel and Lavinia Francis is based on U.S. Census Returns for 1830, Southampton County, Virginia; Healey, Family of Samuel and Sally Francis and Family of Nathaniel Francis, typescripts in possession of Gilbert Francis, Boykins, Virginia; portrait of Nathaniel in possession of *ibid.*; Nathaniel Francis's Personal Property Tax Lists for 1828–1931; Southampton County Deed Books, XXI, 495; Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 163 (containing a picture of Lavinia taken from

- Drewry), 410–411; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 43, 46–48; my interview with Gilbert Francis, Boykins, Virginia, July 16, 1973.
3. Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 25–26; Johnson, *Nat Turner Insurrection*, 79.
 4. William Wells Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 23, paints the fictional sketch of Will. Brown's account also includes invented speeches.
 5. My description of the meeting at Cabin Pond draws from Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 310–311; Southampton County slave trials records in *ibid.*, 195–196, 197; Nat's court interrogation of October 31, 1831, as reported in his trial, *ibid.*, 222, and in unsigned letter from Jerusalem, October 31, 1831, in Richmond *Whig*, November 7, 1831, and unsigned letter from Southampton, November 1, 1831, in Richmond *Enquirer*, November 8, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in Richmond *Whig*, September 26, 1831; Pleasants's account in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 31, 1831, in Richmond *Compiler*, September 3, 1831; Norfolk *Herald*, November 4, 1831; and Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 22–23, 25–26, 56, 113. Nat's ultimate objectives may never be known. Afterward, some Jerusalem residents speculated that the insurgents hoped to fight their way to Norfolk, seize a ship, and sail away to Africa (Pleasants's report from Jerusalem, August 25 and 27, 1831, in Richmond *Whig*, August 29, 1831). Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Black Rebellion*, 174, reports that Nat intended to "conquer Southampton County as the white men did in the Revolution, and then retreat, if necessary, to the Dismal Swamp." Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 113, conjectures that Nat desired to capture Southampton County, storm into the Dismal Swamp, and eventually take over the whole state of Virginia, "as the Americans had the British in the Revolutionary War," all to "call the attention of the civilized world to the condition of his race." As I suggest in the text, Nat possibly thought that God would interfere and guide the course and destiny of the rebellion. Pleasants in the *Whig*, September 3, 1831, observed that Nat may have expected divine assistance. Similarly, Henry Tragle, "The

Southampton Slave Revolt," *American History Illustrated*, VI (November, 1971), 8, points out that the lack of preparations suggests that Nat saw himself as an instrument of vengeance in the hands of Jehovah. And that is certainly the spirit Nat conveys in the *Confessions* themselves. Still, his final objectives remain obscure. The author of the unsigned letter of September 17, 1931, correctly states that one of Nat's main goals was to conquer Jerusalem [with its Biblical symbolism?] and massacre the inhabitants, but beyond that "he gave no clue to his design."

6. Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 311; Southampton County slave trial records in *ibid.*, 196, 220; Nat's court interrogation of October 31, 1931, as reported in *ibid.*, 222, and in unsigned letter from Jerusalem, October 31, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, November 7, 1831, and in unsigned letter from Southampton, November 1, 1831, in *Richmond Enquirer*, November 8, 1831; Pleasants's account in *Richmond Whig*, September 3, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *ibid.*, September 26, 1831; and unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 31, in *Richmond Compiler*, September 3, 1831.
7. From the Travis place to Elizabeth Turner's; Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 311-312; Southampton County slave trial records in *ibid.*, 185, 186, 195; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 38-42, 91n.
8. Whitehead massacre: Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 179-182, 185-186, 207; Nat's *Confessions* in *ibid.*, 312, 318; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, September 26, 1831; F. M. Capehart to Benajah Nicholls, August 23-26, 1831, Benajah Nicholls Papers, North Carolina Department of Archives; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection* 42-44. I assume that Hark, as second in command, led the group on foot that attacked the Bryant family. My chronology of the early hours of the revolt differs in some particulars from that in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, xvi-xvii.
9. From the Whitehead place through the attack on Nathaniel Francis's: Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle,

- Southampton Slave Revolt*, 312, 318; Southampton County slave trial records in *ibid.*, 180, 200-201; *Norfolk Herald*, September 3, 1831; Capehart to Nicholls, August 23-26, 1931, Nicholls Papers, North Carolina Department of Archives; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 45-48, 118; Johnson, *Nat Turner Story*, 38, 101.
10. From the Francis place through the rendezvous at the Harris plantation on the Barrow Road: Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 196, 208, 217-218; Nat's *Confessions* in *ibid.*, 312-313, 318; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 24, 1831, in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 30, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, September 26, 1831; Pleasants's account in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 44-45, 50-55.
 11. Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 189-190, 202, 203, 223; James Trezevant's report in Journal of the Virginia Governor's Council, August 23, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library, and described in *Richmond Compiler*, August 24, 1831, and *Richmond Whig*, August 25, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 66, 76, 89.
 12. My profile of Levi Waller is based on U.S. Census Returns for 1830, Southampton County, Virginia; Waller's Personal Property Tax Lists for 1830-1831; and Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection* 56. My account of the killings at Waller's was put together from the Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 178, 194, 198, 218, 221-222; Nat's *Confessions* in *ibid.*, 313, 317-318; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 24, 1831, in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 30, 1831; and Pleasants's report from Jerusalem, August 25 and 27, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, August 29, 1831. My version of the massacre differs somewhat from those in Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 56-59, and in Johnson, *Nat Turner Insurrection*, 93-95.
 13. Unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, September 26, 1831; Drewry *Southampton Insurrection*, 87-88; Levi Waller's petition for compensation (certified by A. P. Peete,

- November 22, 1831, and eyewitnessed by Thos. Porter on the same day) in Papers of the Virginia State Auditor's Office (Item #153, Box #14), Archives of the Virginia State Library.
14. Attacks on Williams and Vaughan homesteads and Nat's behavior on the Barrow Road: Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 313; Southampton County slave trial records in *ibid.*, 193–194, 195; Pleasants's report from Jerusalem, August 25 and 27, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, August 29, 1831; Pleasants's account in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831; and Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 59–62.
 15. From the rendezvous at the Barrow Road-Jerusalem highway intersection to the encampment at Ridley's plantation: Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 178, 183, 194–195, 203–204, 220–221; Nat's *Confessions* in *ibid.*, 313–315; *Richmond Compiler*, August 29, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 31, 1831, in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, September 26, 1831; U.S. Census Returns for 1830, Southampton County, Virginia; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 62–70; and Johnson, *Nat Turner Story*, 82. Contrary to what several writers have said, I could find no evidence that Jerusalem had an arsenal.
 16. Journal of the Virginia Governor's Council, August 23, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd's Diary, August 23, 1831, and Floyd's Message to the Legislature, December 6, 1831, Journal of the House of Delegates, in *ibid.*; Floyd to Brigadier-General Richard Eppes, August 25 and 31, 1831, and Floyd to James H. Gholson, August 14, 1831, Virginia Executive Letterbooks, *ibid.*; *Richmond Compiler*, August 24, 1831; *Richmond Enquirer*, August 26, 1831; *Richmond Whig*, August 25 and 29, 1831; *Peterburg Intelligencer*, August 26, 1831; *Norfolk American Beacon*, August 26, 1831; *Baltimore Niles Register*, August 26, 1831; *Richmond Times*, January 25, 1891; Lester J. Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers, 1821–1935* (New York and London, 1936), 192–194; William "Box" Brown, *Narrative* (Boston, 1849), 37–40; *The Liberator* (Boston), October 1, 1831; Tragle,

- Southampton Slave Revolt*, 16–17, 23; and Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 75–77.
17. Capehart to Nicholls, August 23–26, 1831, Nicholls Papers, North Carolina Department of Archives; John D. Pipkin to Governor Stokes, August 23, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Papers, LXII, *ibid.*; Colonel Charles Spiers to Stokes, August 25, 1831, *ibid.*; Solon Borland to Stokes, September 18, 1831, *ibid.* (see also North Carolina Governors' Letterbooks, 56–57); Order of Hertford County, North Carolina, Court of Pleas, August 1831, *ibid.*; John L. Laughton and E. W. Best to Stokes, August 24, 1831, *ibid.*; Major General M. T. Hawkins to Stokes, August 26, 1831, *ibid.*; Carter Jones to Stokes, August 26, 1831, *ibid.*; *Norfolk Herald*, August 26, 1831, and *Baltimore Niles Register*, September 3, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 58, 75–81.
 18. Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 315; Southampton County slave trial records in *ibid.*, 182, 183, 192; Blunt's remarks to Pleasants, *Richmond Whig*, September 3, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *ibid.*, September 26, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 24, 1831, in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 30, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 31, in *Richmond Compiler*, September 3, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 70–72. The newspaper accounts cited above testified to the loyalty of Blunt's slaves. Significantly, not one of them was ever arrested and tried for participation in the revolt.
 19. Last skirmish at the Harris plantation, scenes at Cross Keys, and Nat in hiding: Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 315; Southampton County slave trial records in *ibid.*, 186–188; Nat's court interrogation on October 31, 1831, as reported in unsigned letter from Jerusalem, October 31, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, November 7, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 48–49, 54, 73, 74, 85.
 20. Troops in Southampton and the end of the revolt: Pleasants's report from Jerusalem, August 25 and 27, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, August 29, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 24, 1831, in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 30, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 27, in *Norfolk American Beacon*,

- August 30, 1831; Benjamin Eppes's letter from Jerusalem, August 24, 1831, in *Richmond Compiler*, August 27, 1831; memorandum of a North Carolina militiaman, August 23, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Papers, XII, North Carolina Department of Archives. Capture and execution of bona fide rebels: Pleasants's report ("high pitch of rage") from Jerusalem, August 25 and 27, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, August 29, 1831, and Pleasants's account in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831; Floyd to Hamilton, November 19, 1831, Floyd Papers, Library of Congress; E. P. Guion to Thomas Ruffin, August 28, 1831, *Papers of Thomas Ruffin* (ed. by J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, 4 vols., Raleigh, N.C., 1918-1920), II, 45; Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 181, 194-195, 196, 203-204, 218, 227; Floyd's Diary, September 1 and 2, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library; *Norfolk American Beacon*, August 29 and 30, September 9, 1831; Eppes's letter from Jerusalem, August 24, 1831, in *Richmond Compiler*, August 27, 1831; Fayetteville (N.C.) *Journal*, August 27, 29, 31, 1831; memorandum of a North Carolina militiaman, North Carolina Governors' Papers, LXII, North Carolina Department of Archives; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 72n, 84-88, 96.
21. Pleasant's report from Jerusalem, August 25 and 27, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, August 29, 1831, and Pleasants's account in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831; *Norfolk American Beacon*, September 6, 1831, as cited in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 400; Cromwell, "Aftermath of Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Journal of Negro History*, V, 212; *Norfolk Herald*, August 26, 1831; *Roanoke Advocate*, October 12, 1831; *North Carolina Journal*, August 27, 1831; Robert Parker to Rebecca Maney, August 29, 1831, as cited in Johnson, *Nat Turner Insurrection*, 113-114; memorandum of a North Carolina militiaman, August 23, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Papers, LXII, North Carolina Department of Archives; Spiers to Stokes, August 25, 1831, *ibid.*; Solon Borland to R. Borland, August 31, 1831, and to Stokes, September 18, 1831, *ibid.*; S. Whitaker to Stokes, August 26, 1831, *ibid.*; Capehart to Nicholls, August 23-26, Nicholls Papers, *ibid.*; Edenton (N.C.) *Gazette*, September 22, 1831;

- Huntsville, Alabama, *Southern Advocate*, October 15, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, September 26, 1831; Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 397; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 85; Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Black Rebellion*, 185-190.
22. Eppes's proclamation of August 28, 1831, in *Lynchburg Virginian*, September 8, 1831; *Richmond Whig*, August 29, 1831; *Norfolk American Beacon*, September 3, 1831; Floyd to Eppes, September 10, 1831, Virginia Governors' Letterbooks, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd's Diary, September 4, 1831, *ibid.*; *Baltimore Niles Register*, September 3, 1831; Jerusalem citizens to Andrew Jackson in Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 84-85; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 24, 1831, in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 30, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, September 24, 1831; and Pleasants's account in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831.
23. Pleasants's report from Jerusalem, August 25 and 27, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, August 29, 1831, and Pleasants's account in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831, unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *ibid.*, September 26, 1831; *Richmond Compiler*, August 27, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, August 31, 1831, in *ibid.*, September 3, 1831; unsigned letters from Jerusalem, August 24 and September 21, 1831, in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 30 and September 27, 1831.
24. Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 173-245, 402 unsigned letter from Jerusalem, September 17, 1831, in *Richmond Whig*, September 26, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem (the author was involved in trying "these scoundrels"), September 4, 1831, in *ibid.*, September 8, 1831; T. Trezevant's letter from Jerusalem ("We commence hanging"), September 3 and 4, 1831, in *ibid.*; William Parker to Bernard Peyton, September 14, 1831, Virginia Governors' Papers, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd's Diary, September 3, 5, 10, and 16, 1831, *ibid.*; Floyd to Eppes, September 6, 1831, Virginia Governors' Letterbooks, *ibid.*; Floyd's instructions to the court clerks in Southampton, Nansemond, Isle of Wight, Sussex, and Prince George coun-

- ties, September 26, 1831, *ibid.*; U.S. Census Returns for 1830, Southampton County, Virginia; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 59, 87–88, 95.
25. Joseph C. Robert, *Road to Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slave Debate of 1832* (Durham, N.C., 1941), 17–18; Rachel Lararuz to Geo. W. Mordecai, October 6, 1831, Pattie Mordecai Papers, North Carolina Department of Archives; Mrs. Lawrence Lewis to Harrison Gray Otis, October 17, 1831, in Samuel Eliot Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis* (2 vols., Boston and New York, 1913), II, 260.
 26. Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 311; Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, 63; Hamilton to Stokes, November 14, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Letterbooks, 70, North Carolina Department of Archives.
 27. Borland to R. Borland, August 31, 1831, and Borland to Stokes, September 18, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Papers, LXII, North Carolina Department of Archives; citizens of Scotland Neck, Halifax County, to Stokes, September 22, 1831, *ibid.*; Ben Watson of Hyde County to Stokes, September 25, 1831, and Thos. Singleton of Hyde County to Stokes, September 21, 1831, *ibid.*; citizens of Louisburg, N.C., to Stokes, September 15, 1831, *ibid.*; J. H. Simms of Halifax County to Stokes, September 16, 1831, *ibid.*; William P. Taylor and others to Stokes, October, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Letterbooks, 63, *ibid.*; Norfolk *American Beacon*, August 27, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 80, 155.
 28. Major-General Nathan B. Whitfield to Stokes, September 12 and 14, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Papers, LXII, North Carolina Department of Archives; Whiliam Blanks and others to Stokes, September 13, 1831, *ibid.*; J. M. Gregory to Stokes, September 17, 1831, and Carter Jones to Stokes, September 17, 1831, *ibid.*; citizens' committee of Wilmington to Stokes, September 14, 1831, *ibid.*; Emma Mordecai to Ellen Mordecai, September 16, 1831, Pattie Mordecai Papers, *ibid.*; Raleigh *Star*, September 15, 16, and 22, 1831; Raleigh *Register*, September 15 and 22, 1831; Baltimore *Niles Register*, September 24, 1831; Robert N. Elliott, "The Nat Turner Insurrection as Reported

- in the North Carolina Press," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXVIII (January, 1961), 1–18.
29. Stokes to Hamilton, November 18, 1831, North Carolina Governors' Letterbooks, 70–71, North Carolina Department of Archives; Stokes's Message to the Legislature, November 22, 1831, *ibid.*, 81–87.
 30. Floyd's Diary, August 25–30, 1831, and *passim*, Archives of the Virginia State Library. Floyd's Governor's Papers abound in distress calls, reports of slave risings, and pleas for help. See for example the letters to him from Colonel Thos. Spencer of King and Queen County, September 24, 1831; from Wm. Christian of Northampton County, September 1, 1831; from A. Dupuy of Prince Edward County, September 19, 1831; from Brigadier-General Benj. Cabell [?] of Danville, September 20, 1831; from Captain Peter Baird of Prince George County, September 11, 1831; from J. Gibson of Culpeper Court House, September 19, 1831; from N. Sutton of Bowling Green, September 21, 1831; from a citizen of Leesburg, September 18, 1831; from David G. Garlands of Amherst County, October 6, 1831; from the citizens of Westmoreland County, October 3, 1831; from Captain Robert Hill of Madison Court House, September 2, 1831; from R. M. Patterson and students of the University of Virginia, November 3, 1831; and from citizens of Chesterfield County [September 1831]. Quotation ("panic in all the country") in a letter a Virginian sent to an Ohio acquaintance, published in the *Cincinnati Journal* and reprinted in the *Liberator*, January 28, 1832. On Floyd's reaction to the distress calls, see *Richmond Enquirer*, September 2, 1831; Floyd's Diary, entries for September and October, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd to Colonel William Christian, September 7, 1831, Virginia Executive Letterbooks; and Floyd to John W. Cole, August 25, 1831, to William H. Broadnax, August 29, 1831, and to Eppes, August 31 and September 6, 1831, *ibid.*
 31. *Richmond Whig*, September 3 and 26, 1831.
 32. Floyd's Diary, September 3, 5, 10, 16, 19, 20, 26, 27, and October 13 and 17, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd to John Crump, September 1, 1831, and Floyd to Colonel J. Holiday, Virginia Ex-

- ecutive Letterbooks, *ibid.*; Floyd to Mayor John E. Holt of Norfolk, August 31, 1831, and to Colonel W. J. Worth of the 2nd U.S. Artillery at Norfolk, September 2, 1831, *ibid.*; and Floyd's Free Negro and Slave Letterbook, *ibid.*
33. Richmond *Whig*, September 26, 1831.
 34. On the rewards for Nat: Floyd to Eppes, September 13, 1831, Virginia Executive Letterbooks, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Parker to Floyd, September 14, 1831, Virginia Executive Communications, *ibid.*; Floyd's proclamation of reward, September 17, 1831, in Richmond *Enquirer*, September 27, 1831, and in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 421-423; Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Black Rebellion*, 202. Rumors of Nat's whereabouts in Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, September 7, 1831; Fincastle *Patriot*, September 30, 1831, as quoted in Richmond *Enquirer*, October 7, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 89.
 35. Nat in hiding: Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 315-316; Nat's court interrogation of October 31, 1831, as reported in unsigned letter from Jerusalem, October 31, 1831, in Richmond *Whig*, November 7, 1831, and in unsigned letter from Southampton, November 1, 1831, in Richmond *Enquirer*, November 8, 1831; *ibid.*, October 25, 1831; letter from Elliot Whitehead of Suffolk in *ibid.*, November 15, 1831; Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Black Rebellion*, 202-206; and Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 90-92. Nat's capture: Nat's *Confessions* in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 303, 316; Richmond *Enquirer*, November 16, 1831; unsigned letter from Southampton, November 1, 1831, in *ibid.*, November 8, 1831; unsigned letter from Jerusalem, October 31, 1831, in Richmond *Whig*, November 7, 1831; Norfolk *Herald*, November 4, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 92-93.
 36. Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 91n, 93-94; ("a mere scarecrow") from Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Black Rebellion*, 205; Richmond *Enquirer*, November 4, 1831; Petersburg *Intelligencer*, November 4, 1831; Norfolk *Herald*, November 4, 1831.
 37. Nat's court interrogation of October 31, 1831, as re-

- ported in his trial, Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 222; in T. Trezevant's letters of October 31 in Norfolk *American Beacon*, November 2, 1831; in unsigned letter from Jerusalem, October 31, 1831, in Richmond *Whig*, November 7, 1831; and in unsigned letter from Southampton, November 1, 1831, in Richmond *Enquirer*, November 8, 1831; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 91, 117.
38. Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 302-321, contains the entire *Confessions*, including Gray's introduction and epilogue.
 39. Among those who have questioned the authenticity of the *Confessions* are Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 403, 409, and Gross and Bender, "History, Politics, and Literature," *American Quarterly*, XXVIII, 487-518.
 40. Foner, *Nat Turner*, 37, also regards the *Confessions* as authentic. One should note, though, that the summary of Nat's trial, which Gray appended to his epilogue, contains a speech by Judge Cobb considerably more dramatic than the prosaic remarks in the actual transcript. I stayed with the prosaic remarks.
 41. Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 221-223, 227, and *ibid.*, 169, 406n; Nat's *Confessions* in *ibid.*, 318; Petersburg *Intelligencer* as quoted in Richmond *Enquirer*, November 22, 1831; Rokela, "A Page in History—One of the Tragedies of the Old Slavery Days," *Godey's Magazine* CXXXVI (March, 1898), 292; and Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 98-102.
 42. Southampton County slave trial records in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 223, 227; Southampton County Superior Court Orders (1832), IV, 21, 28; slave trial records in the Court Order Books of Sussex, Isle of Wight, and Surry counties; Floyd's Diary, September 16, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd to Macon County magistrate, October 13, 1831, Virginia Executive Letterbooks, *ibid.*; M. Daniel of Sussex County to Floyd, September 15, 1831, Virginia Governors' Papers, *ibid.*; Richmond *Whig*, September 19, 1831; Lucy Mae Turner, "Family of Nat Turner," *Negro History Bulletin*, XVIII, 127-132, 155-158; and Tragle's taped interview with Herbert Turner of Boykins, Virginia, May

12, 1969, as cited in *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 13. For descriptions of slave trials and hangings in other counties, see Johnson, *Nat Turner Insurrection*, 127–129, and Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 86–87, 111, 115.

PART FOUR: LEGACY

1. Richmond *Enquirer*, September 27, 1831, Postmaster J. C. Harris of Orange County, Virginia, to Floyd, September 25, 1831, Floyd's Free Negro and Slave Letterbook, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd to Harris, September 27, 1831, Virginia Governors' Letterbooks, *ibid.*; plus sources cited in notes 2 and 4 below.
2. Floyd to Hamilton, Floyd Papers, Library of Congress; Floyd to Eppes, September 6, 1831, Virginia Governors' Papers, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd to Harris, September 27, 1831, Floyd's Free Negro and Slave Letterbook, *ibid.*; Floyd's Diary, September 9 and 27, October 11, 16, 18, and 20, 1831, *ibid.* See the items collected in Floyd's Free Negro and Slave Letterbook, including eleven copies of the *Liberator*, ranging in dates from May 7 to October 15, 1831; Sherlock Gregory of Albany to Postmaster of Chancellorsville, Virginia, September 10, 1831; "Nero" of Boston ("Nero" was evidently black) to the Jerusalem Postmaster [n. d.]; "L. N. Q." of Philadelphia to Floyd, October 15, 1831, and "L. N. Z." of Philadelphia to Floyd, October 24, 1831. On October 20, Floyd answered "L. N. Q." and copied the letter into his Diary on the same day. See also N. Sutton to Floyd, September 21, 1831, Virginia Governors' Papers, *ibid.*; Brigadier-General George Cooke to Floyd, September 13, 1831, *ibid.*; "A Friend to the city" of Richmond to Floyd [November 1831,] *ibid.*
3. For Northern reactions to the rebellion, consult Foner, *Nat Turner*, 75–79; Boston *Statesman* as quoted in the Alexandria, Va., *Gazette*, September, 1831 (and printed in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 88–89); and the *Liberator* (quoting other Northern papers), September 17, and October 1, 1831.
4. See, for example, Richmond *Enquirer*, September 27,

- 1831; New York *Daily Sentinel*, October 11, 1831; Raleigh *Register*, September 16, and 22, October 13, 1831; Baltimore *Niles Register*, October 29, 1831; Fayetteville, N.C., *Carolina Observer*, September 21, 1831; Washington *National Intelligencer* as quoted in *ibid.*, and in Raleigh *Register*, September 22, 1831, and in Raleigh *Star*, September 29, 1831; Mrs. Lewis to Otis, October 17, 1831, in Morison, *Otis*, II, 260; *Liberator*, September 3 and October 1, 1831; Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, 63; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 111; Foner, *Nat Turner*, 7, 87; and Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 152.
5. Cromwell, "Aftermath of Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Journal of Negro History*, 208–234; Richmond *Whig*, September 29, October 13 and 17, November 21, 1831, and January 21, 1832 (containing Pleasants's editorial in favor of gradual abolition); Richmond *Enquirer*, November 11, 1831, and February 4, 1832.
 6. Floyd's Diary, October 10 and 24, November 10, 21, and 28, December 1, 3, 4, 6, and 29, 1831, Archives of the Virginia State Library; Floyd to Hamilton, November 19, 1831, Floyd Papers, Library of Congress; Ambler, *Life and Diary of Floyd*, 91–92.
 7. Floyd's Message to the Legislature, December 6, 1831, in Journal of the House of Delegates, Archives of the Virginia State Library (and printed in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 430–444). On December 31, 1831, Floyd sent to the House of Delegates "all the papers in relation to the insurrection in Southampton," which had been filed together in a special bundle. This mysterious bundle has never been located.
 8. Richmond *Enquirer*, February 4, 1832, and *passim*; Richmond *Whig* (which also published the debates), issues from January through March, 1832, Cromwell, "Aftermath of Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Journal of Negro History*, 208–234; Foner, *Nat Turner*, 99–116; and Robert, *Road to Monticello*. On December 26, before the debate began, Governor Floyd confided in his Diary that a discussion of slavery "must come if I can influence my friends in the Assembly to bring it on. I will not rest until slavery is abolished in Virginia." Yet, from all appearances, he did little if anything to get it abolished. When the debate opened

- Floyd "seemed to function strictly as an observer" (Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 250) and even doubted the wisdom of the debates when they became acrimonious (Diary entries of January 21 and 24, 1832).
9. Ambler, *Life and Diary of Floyd*, 91-92; George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, 1971), 44-46; abridged version of Dew's essay in Harvey Wish (ed.), *Slavery in the South* (New York, 1964), 234-251.
 10. My summary of the Southern reaction derives from many studies, among them, Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, 301-360; Franklin, *Militant South*, 63-95; Clement Eaton, *Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South* (revised and enlarged ed., New York, 1964), 89ff; Lloyd, *Slavery Controversy*, 49ff; William S. Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1935); Fredrickson, *Black Image in the White Mind*, 46-70; Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, 222-248; Sellers, "Travail of Slavery," *Southern as American*, 40-71; W. J. Cash, *Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), Book One; and Eugene D. Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery* (paperback ed., New York, 1967). I am not, of course, contending that the Old South became a monolithic slave dictatorship. On the contrary, there were dissenters in Dixie and liberating cracks in the Southern slave regime down to the Civil War, as scholars like Carl N. Degler and Richard C. Wade have demonstrated. See Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1974), 13-157, and Wade, *Slavery in the Cities* (New York, 1964). Nevertheless, from the point of view of slave discipline and control, the Southern slave system was so repressive that no more rebellions broke out after the 1830s.
 11. My interview with Gilbert Francis, Boykins, Virginia, July 16, 1973.
 12. Warner pamphlet in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 281-300.
 13. Richmond *Enquirer*, December 2, 1831; Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Black Rebellion*, 207; Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 279, 327, 346;

- Foner, *Nat Turner*, 27; Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection* 169n; Gross and Bender, "History, Politics, and Literature," *American Quarterly*, XXIII, 500.
14. Drewry, *Southampton Insurrection*, 179-180; Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," *Black Rebellion*, 214. In a ringing speech during the Virginia slave debates of 1832, James McDowell declared that what distressed Southern whites so was "the suspicion eternally attached to the slave himself, the suspicion that a Nat Turner might be in every family, that the same bloody deed could be acted over at any time and in any place, that the materials for it were spread through the land and always ready for a like explosion. . . ." McDowell's speech in Foner, *Nat Turner*, 112-113. According to Drewry and F. Roy Johnson (*Nat Turner Story*, 214-215), rumors of "nigger uprisings" continued to haunt whites in southeastern Virginia as late as the 1890s.
 15. Percy Claud of Boykins, Virginia, to Henry Tragle, April 24, 1969, in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt*, 13. See also *ibid.*, 12-13, and Johnson, *Nat Turner Story*, 179-213.