Mapping Rumors of Nat Turner's Rebellion [1]

On the following pages, you'll read about how North Carolinians responded to Nat Turner's Rebellion. You'll read, first, the memories of an enslaved woman named Harriet Jacobs. Then, you'll read a series of newspaper reports about the uprising and the events that followed. White North Carolinians feared that insurrections [2] would spread into their state, and many believed that they had done so.

How, and why, did those rumors spread? To understand that, it helps to look at a few maps

Locating the events

First, let's locate the major events of Turner's Rebellion and others discussed in this chapter. You can use the Google map for reference as you read further.

Concentration of slavery

Next, consider where slavery was most common in North Carolina. Slavery was not spread evenly throughout the state, or even throughout the eastern part of the state. Considering the "Percent of population enslaved by county" map, why was white hysteria highest where it was?

Where were the roads?

It also helps to see how news traveled in 1831. Although rumors might spread from farm to farm, news would have traveled quickest along major roads. Unfortunately, the roads on the 1821 map aren't shown extending into Virginia; you'll have to compare it with the Google map, above, and click the "zoom in" link for a closer view. Can you trace the path of "news" from Southampton, Virginia, into northeastern North Carolina and to Raleigh?

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antebellum [4]
communication [5]
history [6]
North Carolina [7]
North Carolina History [8]
Page [9]
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This contemporary map shows North Carolina as it was in 1821, including the major roads.

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Links
[1] https://ncpedia.org/anchor/mapping-rumors-nat-turners [2] https://ncpedia.org/glossary/insurrection [3] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/african-american [4] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/antebellum [5] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/communication [6] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/history [7] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/north-carolina-5 [8] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/north-carolina-6 [9] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/page [10] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/slave-0 [11] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/slaveholders [12] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/slavery [13] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/students [14] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/teachers [15] https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/creative-commons [16] https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/anchor-north