

Primary Source: Reporting on Nat Turner: The North Carolina Star, Sept. 1 ^[1]

This article was published in the North Carolina Star, a Raleigh newspaper, ten days after Nat Turner began his attacks. In the days after the attacks, no one was entirely sure what had happened. Rumors swirled, and many of those rumors were reported as fact in newspapers. The rumors added to white peoples' fears that the insurrection would spread — with disastrous consequences for black people who fell under their suspicion.

As you read this and the reports on the following pages, think about how they were put together, and about how some of the rumors reported might have gotten started.

From the Richmond Enquirer of August 26th

A letter was received on Tuesday morning from Col. Trezvant, who lives at Jerusalem, in the county of Southampton; stating that an "[insurrection](#)" ^[2] had broken out among the blacks -- that several white families had been destroyed; that arms and ammunition were wanting in Southampton, and that a considerable military force might be required to subdue the disturbers....

Another [express](#) on the same evening from the Mayor of Petersburg, requested the Governor to Send over arms -- which were accordingly dispatched.

No *authentic* accounts have been received of the character of this unexpected transaction -- of the number of blacks collected, of their designs, of the mischief they have done; whether they are the [mere runaways](#) who have broken out from the Swamps, or how many slaves of the neighboring plantations have joined -- whether they have got together for mere [rapine](#) ^[3] and robbery, or for what. But that these [wretches](#) ^[4] will [rue](#) ^[5] the day on which they broke loose upon the neighboring population, is most certain. A terrible [retribution](#) ^[6] will fall upon their heads. Dearly will they pay for their misdeeds.

Later -- We have later accounts, but they are still rumors, still deficient in authenticity. It is said that the leader of the blacks has been shot at the bridge at Jerusalem -- that about 20 negroes were on their march to their rendezvous, and attacked by whites -- 6 killed and several prisoners taken.

It is said that there had been a [skirmish](#) ^[7] between the largest body of blacks, and some few militia -- that the negroes had fled into a wood -- and the writer of the letter, who gives this account, believes that as soon as the troops are up, they would be completely surrounded and cut off. As [ample](#) ^[8] retribution will be their lot for the blood which they had shed. Rumor had stated the number of their victims as high as 70 or 80, perhaps more -- but such stories are always *greatly exaggerated*. We have no doubt it is in the present instance.

One of the last expresses states, that most, if not all the blacks were runaways, who had broken out of the Swamps, to rob and to mischief -- that few, if any, of the plantation hands, had helped them -- and in one case, he heard of a master of one of the estates turning out with his slaves, to meet a party coming to attack him -- that two of the [assailants](#) ^[9] had been killed, a third wounded, and the rest ran off. He heard of several others being killed. But it is extremely difficult to get at the truth in all such cases.

The Governor received a letter by this express yesterday morning, from Gen. Eppes. Gen. Eepes believes that in a day or two all will be tranquil, that no more troops will be necessary, and perhaps those in service may be [discharged](#) ^[10], thou there was a party near Southampton [Court](#) ^[11] House, and a small one near Bell field -- that things took well.

Late account -- An express arrival last night, little before 10 o'clock, with [Court](#) ^[11] dispatches from Petersburg for the Governor. One of the letters is from Capt. D. H. Branch. He informs that a letter had been received from Jerusalem, written on Wednesday. The writer is said to be an intelligent and respectable man. He states, that he had seen the bodies of all, or most of the whites who had been murdered in that neighborhood, amounting to about 40 -- most of them *women and children!* That a skirmish had taken place on Tuesday between the whites and the blacks in the quarter, amounting to about 40 -- in which no loss was sustained by the whites, and several of the blacks killed, and 6 or 8 of them taken prisoners, and thrown in jail. Capt. B. understands, that the blacks are in two or three detachments -- that they have [perpetrated](#) ^[12] in all about 60 murders; that they have lost a considerable part of their force; that their spirits are broken, that their object seems now to be to [skulk](#) ^[13] and that they have lost all further intention of committing further [depredations](#) ^[14]. He is of opinion, from what he understands, that no more troops will be required to repress them; there being a [sufficient](#) ^[15] number to effect that object.

The Express who brought the letter from Petersburg understands that the Richmond Dragoons arrived in Southampton on Wednesday night. The story of the leader being shot down near Jerusalem, is said to be contradicted. It is suggested that he is a negro from North Carolina, and his name has been quoted, we know not on what authority, to be that of Nathaniel Turner.

It is supposed that most of these [marauders](#) ^[16] and murderers were runaway negroes, who had broken in upon the white population for robbery and other mischief. There is no appearance of concert among the slaves, nothing that can deserve the name of insurrection, which it was originally [denominated](#) ^[17]. There is some story of a few white faces being seen, or supposed to be seen, among them. No particular account has been received of the detachment near Belfield; though there were numerous of some of them having been cut or shot down. The number of the bandits had been probably much magnified; if it be true that only forty were engaged in the skirmish near Jerusalem.

There is no doubt that any further danger from them is by this time over, and that they will dearly rue the day when they ever dared to break in upon the peace of the country; and to shed the blood of any one; particularly the women and children.

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