



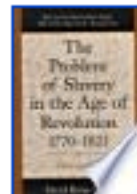

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attention to the execution, often without a trial, of hundreds of blacks accused of conspiracy or rebellion; and looked upon such figures as Nat Turner as pathological killers.

Few writers noted that in 1777 the famous Samuel Johnson lifted his glass in Oxford and toasted: "Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies!"¹ And as early as 1760 a British writer who called himself "Philmore" set forth the moral justification for such slave violence:

And so all the black men now in our plantations, who are by unjust force deprived of their liberty, and held in slavery, as they have none upon earth to appeal to, may lawfully repel that force with force, and to recover their liberty, destroy their oppressors: and not only so, but it is the duty of others, white as well as blacks, to assist those miserable creatures, if they can, in their attempts to deliver themselves out of slavery, and to rescue them out of the hands of their cruel tyrants.²

This form of argument resembled the "give me liberty or give me death" philosophy that undergirded the American Revolution. And for most African

Americans as well as for modern progressive white historians, evidence of resistance of all kinds has seemed extremely important in counteracting the older traditional white view that African American slaves passively accepted their plight and were even loyal and dutiful to their owners (as they were instructed to be by the epistles of Peter and Paul in the New Testament).³