

Denmark Vesey Biography

Denmark Vesey

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Denmark Vesey Biography.....	1
Contents.....	2
Biography.....	3

Biography

Denmark Vesey (1767-1822), an African American who fought to liberate his people from slavery, planned an abortive slave insurrection.

Denmark Vesey, whose original name was Telemarque, was born in West Africa. As a youth, he was captured, sold as a slave, and brought to America. In 1781 he came to the attention of a slaver, Capt. Vesey, who was "struck with the beauty, alertness, and intelligence" of the boy. Vesey, a resident of Charleston, S.C., acquired the boy. The captain had "no occasion to repent" his purchase of Denmark, who "proved for 20 years a most faithful slave."

In 1800 Vesey won a \$1,500 lottery prize, with which he purchased his freedom and opened a carpentry shop. Soon this highly skilled artisan became "distinguished for [his] great strength and activity. Among his color he was always looked up to with awe and respect" by both black and white Americans. He acquired property and became prosperous.

Nevertheless, Vesey was not content with his relatively successful life. He hated slavery and slaveholders. This brilliant man versed himself in all the available antislavery arguments and spoke out against the abuse and exploitation of his own people. Believing in equality for everyone and vowing never to rest until his people were free, he became the political provocateur, agitating and moving his brethren to resist their enslavement.

Selecting a cadre of exceptional lieutenants, Vesey began organizing the black community in and around Charleston to revolt. He developed a very sophisticated scheme to carry out his plan. The conspiracy included over 9,000 slaves and "free" blacks in Charleston and on the neighboring plantations.

The revolt, which was scheduled to occur on July 14, 1822, was betrayed before it could be put into effect. As rumors of the plot spread, Charleston was thrown into a panic. Leaders of the plot were rounded up. Vesey and 46 other were condemned, and even four whites were implicated in the revolt. On June 23 Vesey was hanged on the gallows for plotting to overthrow slavery.

After careful examination of the historical record, the judgment of Sterling Stuckey remains valid: "Vesey's example must be regarded as one of the most courageous ever to threaten the racist foundations of America.... He stands today, as he stood yesterday ... as an awesome projection of the possibilities for militant action on the part of a people who have for centuries been made to bow down in fear."