

Women had a role in famous slave revolt

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Vanessa Holden of Michigan State University discusses the role of women in Nat Turner's rebellion. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Historian [Vanessa M. Holden](#) addressed people and issues that are often overlooked or ignored when she presented "The Forgotten Women of Nat Turner's Rebellion" on Monday (Feb. 1) in Caroline Richardson Hall on the Tulane University uptown campus. The talk kicked off a spring semester lecture series hosted by the [New Orleans Center for the Gulf South](#), [Newcomb College Institute](#), the [Department of History](#) and the [Amistad Research Center](#) at Tulane.

Holden, an assistant professor at Michigan State University, focused her lecture on little-known information regarding the women of Nat Turner's rebellion, the infamous slave revolt that left more than 50 white slave owners and their families and 200 blacks dead in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831. A slavery historian, Holden studies the experiences and participation of women before, during and after the rebellion. She encouraged the audience to think beyond what they have heard and to take a "step back to think about the ways that resistance and rebellion are constituted in communities."

"Nat Turner is such a provocative historical figure, and he is often what historians gravitate their focus towards," so it almost appears as though women were not involved, Holden said.

She brought to the surface the women who "were just trying to find a sense of stability in the midst of a crisis" and how their anonymity did not equal an absence during the rebellion.

Nina Gonzalez, a first-year Tulane student majoring in history and political science, said that she was “incredibly impressed with the amount of information Dr. Holden was able to dissect and collect from one particular event in history.”

Holden captivated the audience with the notion that although the rebellion took place nearly two centuries ago, remnants of the uprising still exist in Southampton County.

Tulane senior and history major Rachel Seidman expressed, “[I] didn’t really know much about Nat Turner but now that [I do], it is shocking that symbols from such a racist time are still there today.”

“I hope that my continued work on this rebellion, specifically dealing with women and children, will bring to light women’s acts of survival that are not talked about and are just as important as men’s and those we do hear about,” Holden said.

Melissa Felcher is a sophomore studying communication at Tulane University.

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Vanessa Holden