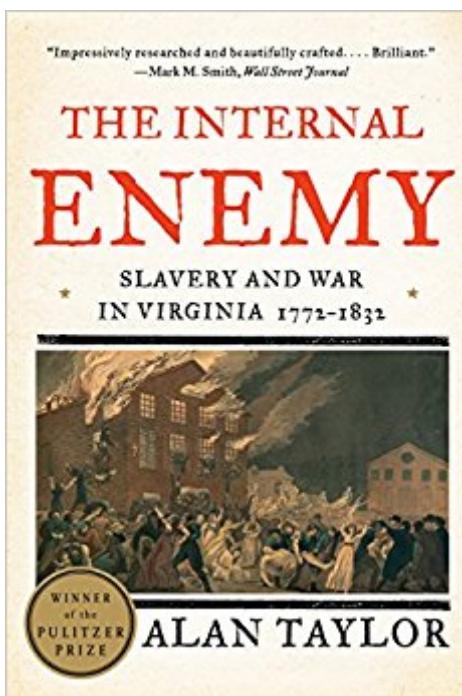


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# The Internal Enemy: Slavery And War In Virginia, 1772-1832: Slavery And War In Virginia, 1772–1832



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for History "Impressively researched and beautifully crafted." A brilliant account of slavery in Virginia during and after the Revolution." — Mark M. Smith, *Wall Street Journal* Frederick Douglass recalled that slaves living along Chesapeake Bay longingly viewed sailing ships as "freedom's swift-winged angels." In 1813 those angels appeared in the bay as British warships coming to punish the Americans for declaring war on the empire. Over many nights, hundreds of slaves paddled out to the warships seeking protection for their families from the ravages of slavery. The runaways pressured the British admirals into becoming liberators. As guides, pilots, sailors, and marines, the former slaves used their intimate knowledge of the countryside to transform the war. They enabled the British to escalate their onshore attacks and to capture and burn Washington, D.C. Tidewater masters had long dreaded their slaves as "an internal enemy." By mobilizing that enemy, the war ignited the deepest fears of Chesapeake slaveholders. It also alienated Virginians from a national government that had neglected their defense. Instead they turned south, their interests aligning more and more with their section. In 1820 Thomas Jefferson observed of sectionalism: "Like a firebell in the night [it] awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once the knell of the union." The notes of alarm in Jefferson's comment speak of the fear aroused by the recent crisis over slavery in his home state. His vision of a cataclysm to come proved prescient. Jefferson's startling observation registered a turn in the nation's course, a pivot from the national purpose of the founding toward the threat of disunion. Drawn from new sources, Alan Taylor's riveting narrative re-creates the events that inspired black Virginians, haunted slaveholders, and set the nation on a new and dangerous course.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Alan Taylor is an exceptional story teller. This is a meticulously researched, beautifully written account of the little-known details in the nation's history of the crucial role that Black Virginians played in the War of 1812. Around this theme, with Taylor's wonderfully detailed and precise writing style, he creates an intricate tapestry of historical facts and events that bring to life a vital picture of the conflicted political atmosphere of Virginia and beyond, the day to day operations of the powerful leaders, and the intertwining of their lives with the status and existence of their slaves. The book was mesmerizing and I couldn't put it down.

This brilliantly researched history tells the true story of the War of 1812, and the heroism of former enslaved men. African Americans in the thousands liberated themselves, and worked to liberate their families and friends through military service as Colonial Marines in the British services. The book also shows the lengths to which American slavers and leaders sought to malign the heroism of those marines and the honour of the British who fulfilled their commitments as liberators after the war.

How slavery evolved in early America is a story that is not often - or well - told. This book focuses on slavery in Virginia during 1772-1832 and speaks to the daily lives of slaves as well as their masters. It talks about the changing plantation economy during the period, the expansion westward from the coast, the freedom offered by the British during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, and changing inheritance laws and how all of these events impacted slave families. Prominent Virginians such as Jefferson, Randolph, Carter, and Madison are portrayed as real people - not icons; the book delves into their often contradictory and changing positions towards slavery during the period. I lived in Virginia for over 20 years and therefore am familiar with many of the people and places

referred to in this book. It will make my next trip to VA's historical areas that much more interesting because I now have this book's perspective as context.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this book. After finishing it, I am pleased to report that it is an amazing study which actually has deep things to say about the experience of slavery. This is not an agenda or ideological book. This book is not grinding axes of left wing moral indignation or right wing apologetics about slavery, which are tiresomely the norm these days. This is a work of scholarship which tells the history of coastal Virginia primarily during the war of 1812. As another reviewer wisely observed, it is a local story but global in its final meaning. The war of 1812 was a disaster for Virginia. The British Navy had her way within the inlets and coasts of Virginia. The British allowed runaway slaves to come to their ships and eventually some of those slaves were formed into military units. British raiding parties burned houses and villages. Washington DC was one of the those towns burned. In the midst of this was all the complexities and conflicting feelings of slaves and masters. When you have finished this book you will have learned things you never knew about the war of 1812 and you will be filled with insights about the human tragedy of slavery in America. I cannot recommend this book enough. It is that good.

When I bought this book, subtitled *Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832*, I expected a more thorough examination of the revolutionary war period through the end of the century. This scholarly and accessible study is substantially weighted to the decade leading up to the War of 1812 and the years of that war. Taylor follows certain individuals and families in his work, persons who left valuable documentary troves and whose lives/fortunes were illustrative of hundreds of Virginia large landowners. His identification of individual slaves and the dynamics of their persistence in living for independence, as well as his lucid descriptions of the economics of slavery and the ghastly treatment of slaves, reminds us (if we have become inured) of the complexity and intractability of this fork of the original American sin.

Everyone in America should read this book. It gives a perspective on the founding Fathers and origins of our nation not taught in school. It shows the background on so many of today's issues. It reads almost like a novel.

Good history writing. It makes America's fatal flaw, an over-long tolerance of human bondage, very real and specific, while appearing to just be about a little-studied war in 1812-14. And you find out

why the British army managed to burn down the White House and eat President Madison's dinner as he fled.

If you believe that history is the sum total of the actions of all the participants (no matter how low the level) then you will love this book with all its interesting, often overlooked, stories. If, on the other hand you prefer more insight into the leaders (political, economic, and military) and their interactions and battles, then you can still appreciate this book. The War of 1812 (about which the book is focused) is generally believed to have accomplished nothing of substance for either side (although it did serve to enhance a certain form of patriotism in the United States and resentment in Canada). The stories of how a few thousand slaves obtained their freedom (no more than a few dozen at a time, and owing to the peculiar situation in Tidewater Virginia), and sometimes prospered for it, are quite interesting in themselves, even though those individual stories do not add much to the buildup to the US Civil War.

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