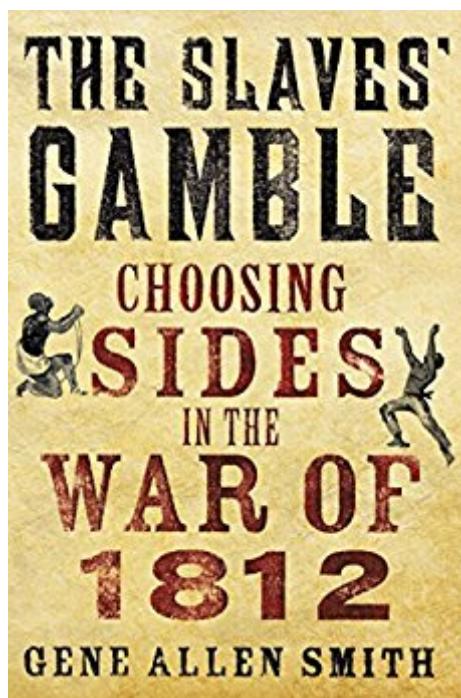


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The Slaves' Gamble: Choosing Sides In The War Of 1812



Synopsis

Images of American slavery conjure up cotton plantations and African American slaves locked in bondage until the Civil War. Yet early on in the nineteenth century the state of slavery was very different, and the political vicissitudes of the young nation offered diverse possibilities to slaves. In the century's first two decades, the nation waged war against Britain, Spain, and various Indian tribes. Slaves played a role in the military operations, and the different sides viewed them as a potential source of manpower. While surprising numbers did assist the Americans, the wars created opportunities for slaves to find freedom among the Redcoats, the Spaniards, or the Indians. Author Gene Smith draws on a decade of original research and his curatorial work at the Fort Worth Museum in this fascinating and original narrative history. The way the young nation responded sealed the fate of slaves for the next half century until the Civil War. This drama sheds light on an extraordinary yet little known chapter in the dark saga of American history.

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Customer Reviews

The title and subtitle of this book are somewhat incorrect. The gamble of choosing sides applied to freemen as well as slaves, and as the author relates, these activities actually started well before the

War of 1812. This is an important book that describes the choices faced by African Americans (when that is they had a choice) as to whether to take up arms or serve in other capacities in the conflicts from early in the seventeenth century up through the War of 1812. Early on, the author shows how not long after the first Europeans arrived in the New World, and not long after they had started bringing in black slaves, those slaves were employed to protect their masters from Native American incursions and attacks by other European nations. As some slaves became freemen, they were also sometimes called upon to serve. Yet many white colonists were against the arming of slaves or even "colored" freemen. The American Revolution made this issue even more critical. Many American leaders were slave holders and resisted any calls to recruit slaves or black freemen, but manpower shortages often forced their hands. Yet after the war, promises of freedom offered for military service were often forgotten and laws passed to restrict black participation in militias or other military areas. As tension mounted between the United States and Great Britain in the early years of the nineteenth century, British and Indian incursions into the Old Northwest states of Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Illinois brought pressure upon the political leaders to once again call upon black slaves and freemen to take up arms to provide defense for these areas.

The war of 1812 is considered much less significant and is not as well taught in schools as the Revolution. In other words this war seems something as an after thought. Dr. Smith brings this part of American history more to light. Dr. Smith is a history professor at Texas Christian University and a history curator at the Fort Worth Museim of Science and History. He was a speaker at this Fort Worth museum, spoke about his book, signed and autographed copies. He has also spoken about other eras in American History at the museum. An interesting fact which I never knew is that many slaves were leaving Canada to go to the northern states where there was no slavery at that time and place. This is one of many interesting facts. White Carolinians used blacks to defeat Native Americans in the past, then provided Indians with ammunition, guns, and ways to capture escaped slaves, thereby turning one disenfranchised group against another. This is another interesting fact of history and well documented. The northern states abolished slavery, the south did not. Slaves fled to the north to get away from slavery. Blacks served in almost all battles. There were black regiments, few gained noteriety, few served as officers. There were free black communities in large cities, run away slaves fled to these cities and also blended into maroon communities, assimilated with Native Americans, enlisted in the British Navy, did many ways to get away from being slaves. Surprisingly the British offered slaves a way to become free by joining up with British forces. Slave owners would lease their slaves to those needing help, then keep the slaves salaries.

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