



The Slaves' Gamble: Choosing Sides in the War of 1812

Gene Allen Smith

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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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