

HIST 5453 – New American Republic

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The Internal Enemy

Response Paper

Within the first five pages of Alan Taylor's *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia 1772-1832*, the first theme of the book stood out so fast that it may just well have slapped me in the face. Those escaping their freedom needed to be cunning. Taylor's description of the runaway slaves in the introduction, specifically page 5, created a clear and intense example of what meticulous planning the runaway slaves had to do to get away from their masters and escape to freedom. The British used the runaway slaves' knowledge of the countryside and hidden trails to their advantage during different conflicts that occurred on the soil of the United States. Taylor discusses this aspect of conflicts on page 74. The former slaves had knowledge that could be useful to the British. At least they could have some sort of equal footing in a battle with the enemy. A pattern started emerging that Taylor describes on page 235. Slaves run away. They contact the British army who lead the charge back to the slaves' family, friends, and comrades, freeing everyone.

Violence is the second theme that was most evident while reading the book. Violence was the way of life in the life of a slave. Taylor states that violence was used as a means for motivation by the overseers and owners of the slaves in hopes to keep slaves' behavior in check.

Some sort of violent punishment took place for even the smallest infractions. However, in some other cases, there was no turning back when large crimes were committed. Taylor discusses this on page 67. He uses the example of the overseers including slaves in the act of punishing an individual. Violence was committed against each other on both ends of the spectrum. On page 80, Taylor gives a specific example of slaves fighting back by murdering a particularly malicious overseer. Four slaves ended up being executed and two others whipped and branded for this act of what some would call delayed self-defense. Violence amongst the white European population occurred during disagreements on how to handle the slave population. Taylor discusses a murder by poison from page 105-106. A prominent white man freed his slaves who stayed on for employment. He even shared his coffee with the staff. His grandnephew did not like his stance on slavery. In turn, the grandnephew poisoned the communal coffee, poisoning three. Two died including the former slave owner.

Survival is a third theme that I picked out while reading *The Internal Enemy*. This theme is overall encompassing throughout the book. A discussion about survival could be as simple as the enslaved trying to survive their brutal living conditions and work each day. But this topic cannot leave out the events of the War of 1812. The British promised African slaves' freedom if they fought for them during the war. Slaves became so desperate for freedom; some may have thought their only survival was to seek refuge on British warships. Taylor goes into detail on page 211 discussing how the British went about recruiting the slave population in the United States for the British side of the War of 1812 after the British realized that they may have access to extra men. If the slaves were already rushing to their warships, why not take advantage to the situation? Taylor continues stating that all ages and genders were recruited on the British side. This was the main campaign during 1814. On page 215, Taylor tells a rough story about Dick

Carter, a slave who had to choose between his master and his wife and children who escaped onto a British barge. Carter did not realize the decision his wife made until the barge she was traveling had already started to depart. He made the decision to flag down the barge and climb aboard to join his family.

Alan Taylor's style of writing differs greatly, in my opinion, to anything else we read so far, with the possible exception of John Ferling. Not only does Taylor's *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia 1772-1832* come across as an easy read, but a fun read as well. I may have found his writing to be an easy and fun read because of the topic. I would say we are back into a more popular history topic. His writing style drew me in and brought very vivid imagery bringing the story to life. I can see this book being used in multiple arenas. *The Internal Enemy* can be used in an African American history class as well as, military/warfare, and Early American history. Surprisingly, I can see this book unconventionally used in sociology or anthropology classes. This book can help understand the psyche and behavior of the slaves fighting for their freedom and how they used the events happening around them to their advantage.