



The First Emancipator: Slavery, Religion, and the Quiet Revolution of Robert Carter

Andrew Levy

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“[Andrew Levy] brings a literary sensibility to the study of history, and has written a richly complex book, one that transcends Carter’s story to consider larger questions of individual morality and national memory.”
–*The New York Times Book Review*

In 1791, Robert Carter III, a pillar of Virginia’s Colonial aristocracy, broke with his peers by arranging the freedom of his nearly five hundred slaves. It would be the largest single act of liberation in the history of American slavery before the Emancipation Proclamation. Despite this courageous move—or perhaps because of it—Carter’s name has all but vanished from the annals of American history. In this haunting, brilliantly original work, Andrew Levy explores the confluence of circumstance, conviction, war, and emotion that led to Carter’s extraordinary act.

As Levy points out, Carter was not the only humane master, nor the sole partisan of emancipation, in that freedom-loving age. So why did he dare to do what other visionary slave owners only dreamed of? In answering this question, Levy reveals the unspoken passions that divided Carter from others of his class, and the religious conversion that enabled him to see his black slaves in a new light. Drawing on years of painstaking research and written with grace and fire, *The First Emancipator* is an astonishing, challenging, and ultimately inspiring book.

“A vivid narrative of the future emancipator’s evolution.”
–*The Washington Post Book World*

“Highly recommended . . . a truly remarkable story about an eccentric American hero and visionary . . . should be standard reading for anyone with an interest in American history.”
–*Library Journal* (starred review)

“Absorbing. . . Well researched and thoroughly fascinating, this forgotten history will appeal to readers interested in the complexities of American slavery.”
–*Booklist* (starred review)

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