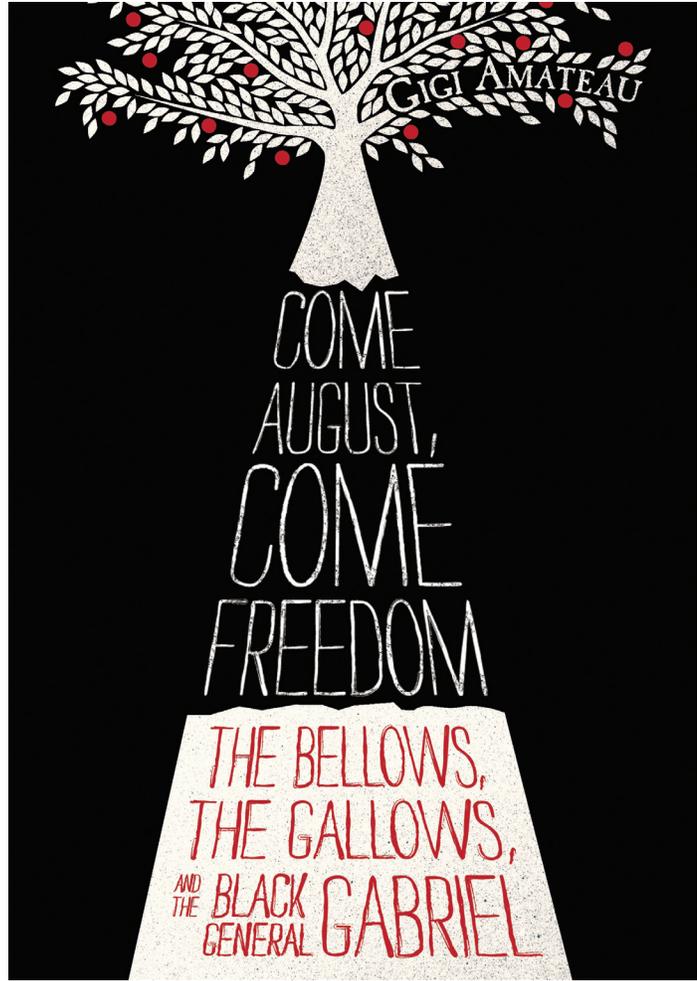


COME AUGUST, COME FREEDOM

THE BELLOWS,
THE GALLOWES, AND THE
BLACK GENERAL GABRIEL

BY GIGI AMATEAU

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Virginians were fighting for their freedom when Gabriel was born in 1776, but they weren't fighting for *his* freedom, or that of any other slave. As he grows into manhood on Brookfield plantation, enduring countless humiliations, punishments, and betrayals, Gabriel becomes more and more determined to fight for his liberty. A blacksmith by trade, he knows that fire changes everything. By 1800 he is ready to lead his people, including the woman he loves, in an armed rebellion for their own freedom.

Based on true events, this powerful novel illuminates a little known corner of American history as it honors the extraordinary will of one man.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Give me liberty or give me death,” Patrick Henry famously said to his fellow Virginians in 1775. Why was it “poisonous talk” (page 29) for a slave to recite those same words a few years later?
2. After his mother is whipped for grieving too hard for her husband, young Gabriel observes that her “whip marks resembled the earth between the tobacco hills, newly tilled and ready for planting” (page 14). What idea is implanted in Gabriel that night? How does it set the course for the rest of his life?
3. Gabriel and Thomas Henry Prosser were “milk brothers,” breast-fed as infants by Gabriel’s mother, and they were almost inseparable as little boys. Why does Mr. Prosser urge Thomas Henry to beat Gabriel? How might Thomas Henry’s life have been different if he had refused?
4. “Negroes that can read and write are dangerous,” says Brookfield’s overseer (page 31). What makes literacy such a threat? How did Gabriel and his father prove the overseer right?
5. Did female slaves on Brookfield lead more difficult lives than male slaves? Compare Gabriel’s life with those of his mother and his wife. What threats did women face? How much control did they have over their own bodies?
6. Blacksmithing is more than just a trade for Gabriel. Why is he so well suited to the work? How does it shape the way he sees the world?
7. “Even the free aren’t free, Little Brother,” Solomon says to Gabriel (page 65). Do you agree? What are the limits of freedom? Is absolute freedom possible? Is it desirable?
8. Discuss Gabriel’s relationship with Jacob Kent. What does he learn from the master blacksmith? When Gabriel forges an especially fine nail one day, why does Jacob say, “You’re scaring me, son,” (page 58)?
9. In what ways did the institution of slavery weaken family life? How did it destroy Gabriel’s family? What obstacles must Gabriel overcome to marry Nanny?
10. “I take seriously my responsibility to provide for the care and protection of all my family here at Brookfield,” Mr. Prosser says to Gabriel (page 112). What does he mean by “family”? How do you think he justified treating some family members differently than others?
11. A woman of great faith, Gabriel’s mother names her son after the archangel revered as God’s messenger. What are the differences between Gabriel’s religious beliefs and those of his mother? In what ways does Gabriel take after his biblical forerunner?
12. Take a closer look at the practice of “hiring out.” Why did the Prosser family regularly hire out Gabriel? What risks did they take in doing so? What did Gabriel gain from the practice? How did it help facilitate his rebellion?

13. Why does Gabriel maul Absalom Johnson? Could he have made his point in some other way?
14. “I see the life I want,” Nanny tells Gabriel (page 88), “but how can it come to be?” What sort of life does Nanny want? How does Gabriel help her reach some of her goals? How does he prevent her from achieving others?
15. Governor Monroe has advance notice that a rebellion is being planned. Why is Gabriel betrayed by fellow slaves? Why does Solomon later inform on his own brother?
16. Although most of this novel is told from Gabriel’s point of view, the text also contains excerpts from real historical documents. Why do you think the author included this material? How does it deepen your understanding of the period?
17. Was Gabriel’s slave rebellion doomed from the start? What were some of the weaknesses of his plan? What advantages did his opponents possess? Why did Gabriel believe he could succeed?
18. James Monroe, the governor of Virginia in 1800, later served as president of the United States. Do you think he could have imagined that an African American would ever be elected to this office in 2008? Would Gabriel be proud of the achievement? Would he be disappointed that it took such a long time?

ABOUT GIGI AMATEAU

A native Mississippian and long-time Virginian, Gigi Amateau is also the author of *A Certain Strain of Peculiar*, a Bank Street College Best Children’s Book of 2010. Her debut novel, *Claiming Georgia Tate*, was selected as a New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age. Gigi Amateau loves reading about the Early Republic era in American History, and this is the first historical fiction she has written. *Come August, Come Freedom* was inspired by the trial documents related to Gabriel’s Insurrection. She lives with her husband and daughter in Richmond.

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