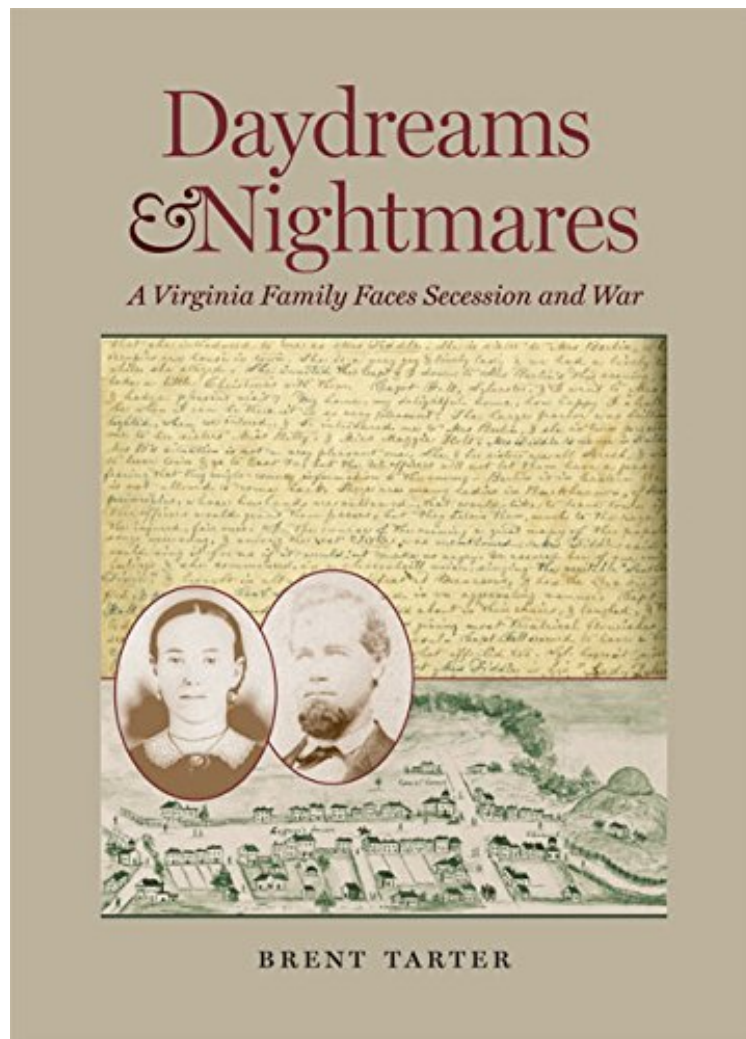


[Mobile book] Daydreams and Nightmares: A Virginia Family Faces Secession and War (A Nation Divided: Studies in the Civil War Era)

## Daydreams and Nightmares: A Virginia Family Faces Secession and War (A Nation Divided: Studies in the Civil War Era)

*Brent Tarter*

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**Brent Tarter : Daydreams and Nightmares: A Virginia Family Faces Secession and War (A Nation Divided: Studies in the Civil War Era)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Daydreams and Nightmares: A Virginia Family Faces Secession and War (A Nation Divided: Studies in the Civil War Era):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Book to Learn About What Occurred Before, During, and

After the Civil War For One Virginia Couple! By KIRK R MARUSAKA As a lifelong Civil War history reader and a former Confederate reenactor who was born in the North, "Daydreams Nightmares" is fantastic to read. This book provides the letters between George Berlin, an attorney, and Susan Holt Berlin, his wife, who lived in the town of Buckhannon, Virginia (later to become part of the state of West Virginia). It shows what they experienced and what their lives were like before, during, and after the Civil War. I learned a great deal about what Virginia white families faced during the Civil War after reading this book. You find out why southerners who did not own slaves were willing to support the Confederate government over the Union federal government. The author of the book explains each letter that is written by George to his wife, Susan, and Susan's letters responding back to her husband. The couple were separated during much of the war and managed to keep in touch despite all of the turmoil. Since our lives are so different in today's culture from George and Susan's lives in the 19th century, the author's explanations help us to understand and reflect upon certain passages. You learn that most Virginians, unlike the people in the rest of the South, were originally reluctant to secede from the Union. George Berlin in a letter discusses what occurred after he was selected as a delegate by his county in Virginia to attend the Virginia Convention of 1861 as an opponent of secession. Berlin later votes to support secession after he is sent to Richmond a second time to attend another convention. Virginia voted to secede after President Abraham Lincoln called up Virginia men to serve in the Union Army in early 1861. Virginia men were reluctant to join the Union Army because they would be forced to take up arms against other Virginians and possibly end up shooting their relatives or their neighbors. If you want to understand about families and relatives being split by their decision on what side to support in the conflict, this book talks about Susan Holt Berlin's siblings and how some of them supported the Union government. By siding with the Confederate government, as George and Susan Berlin decide to do, they ran the risk of having the federal union government confiscate their property. People in entire cities and towns in Virginia were split up over their decision to support the Confederacy or the Union federal government. I was surprised to learn that George and Virginia, despite not owning slaves, did not feel that the worth of African-Americans was anywhere near equal to that of white people. Even if it meant life or death. George Berlin, while on a pre-Civil War boat trip to New Orleans, demonstrates no compassion or feeling when a slave, being transported to another town, falls off the boat and drowns. Neither he nor his wife show no emotion about the incident after he writes to her about it. The racial attitudes of most Southerners were that the lives of African-Americans were not valuable at all as compared to white people. The letters show that George and Susan Berlin, like many southerners, aspired to buy a slave themselves one day. It was considered a way to demonstrate to people in the community that their family was moving up in society. Although this book has some dry reading sections, I would recommend it to any reader or scholar who wants to learn more the dynamics of southern white individuals and families before 1861 and between 1861 to 1865, and what transpired in their lives after the Civil War came to an end. Most Civil War books discuss the battles that took place. However, the real war was what people faced when they had to choose sides in this major conflict. The conflicts and the final ending of the war changed people's lives forever as it for George and Susan Holt Berlin, their children and relatives, in "Daydreams Nightmares."

The decision of the eventual Confederate states to secede from the Union set in motion perhaps the most dramatic chapter in American history, and one that has typically been told on a grand scale. In *Daydreams and Nightmares*, however, historian Brent Tarter shares the story of one Virginia family who found themselves in the middle of the secession debate and saw their world torn apart as the states chose sides and went to war. George Berlin was elected to serve as a delegate to the Virginia Convention of 1861 as an opponent of secession, but he ultimately changed his vote. Later, when defending his decision in a speech in his hometown of Buckhannon, Upshur County, he had to flee for his safety as Union soldiers arrived. Berlin and his wife, Susan Holt Berlin, were separated for extended periods--both during the convention and, later, during the early years of the Civil War. The letters they exchanged tell a harrowing story of uncertainty and bring to life for the modern reader an extended family that encompassed both Confederate and Union sympathizers. This is in part a love story. It is also a story about ordinary people caught up in extraordinary events. Although unique in its vividly evoked details, the Berlins' story is representative of the drama endured by millions of Americans. Composed during the nightmare of civil war, the Berlins' remarkably articulate letters express the dreams of reunion and a secure future felt throughout the entire, severed nation. In this intimate, evocative, and often heartbreaking family story, we see up close the personal costs of our larger national history. *A Nation Divided: Studies in the Civil War*

Beautifully and sensitively written, *Daydreams and Nightmares* takes on a subject of great importance--secession--and does so in a way that foregrounds the enormous personal and political dilemmas that surrounded Virginians' eventual turn to the Confederacy. It is a story of the personal, private side of the secession crisis--a perspective largely overlooked in the traditional accounts that dominate library shelves. (Amy Murrell Taylor, University of Kentucky, author of *The Divided Family in Civil War America*) Tarter has focused on a minor player in the great drama that broke up the Union and tore the state of Virginia apart. But this minor player was situated on the knife-edge of both fractures, and the substantial surviving correspondence between him and his wife breathes life into an interval of

exquisite tension. (Daniel W. Crofts, The College of New Jersey, author of *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis*) Brent Tarter has given us a sad and very human tale of war, separation, and anxiety, followed by an all-too-brief period of happier times.... I suspect readers will feel a sincere debt of gratitude to the skilled historian who has brought their moving story to light. (Civil War Book ) "This compact book is ideal for use in undergraduate courses seeking to examine the process of and the personal consequences of secession for noncombatants in a border state." (Ken Fones-Wolf, West Virginia University *West Virginia History*) In this gracefully written book, Brent Tarter offers a fresh perspective on the Civil War that brings to life how political events reverberated unpredictably in individual lives.... With restraint he deftly fills in gaps in the letters with discussions of the economic, political, and religious context through which the Berlins moved. The result is a concise, lively, and deeply humane portrait of an exceptional but revealing experience of conflict. (*Journal of Southern History*)

About the Author Brent Tarter is a founding editor of the *Library of Virginia's Dictionary of Virginia Biography* and the author of *The Grandees of Government: The Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia* (Virginia).