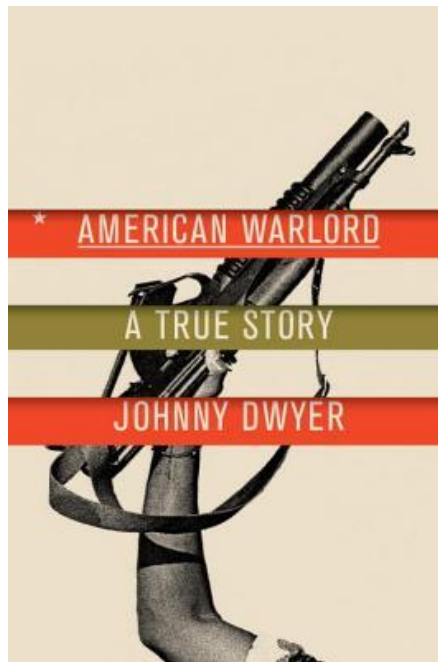




American Warlord: A True Story

Johnny Dwyer

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Chucky Taylor is the American son of the infamous African dictator Charles Taylor.

Raised by his mother in the Florida suburbs, at the age of 17 he followed his father to Liberia, where he ended up leading a murderous militia. Chucky is now in a federal penitentiary, the only American ever convicted of torture.

This shocking and essential work of reportage tells his tragic and terrifying story for the first time.

American Warlord: A True Story Details

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From Reader Review American Warlord: A True Story for online ebook

Carol says

Grim story of an American teenager who joins his father -- a brutal dictator -- in Liberia. The dictator's son became the head of a violent militia group ostensibly designed for his father's security. After the dictator was ousted, his son eventually returned to the United States, only to become the first US citizen prosecuted under a post-9/11 antiterror statute. Sobering, with glimpses of shocking violence in a lawless country.

Bob H says

This is an important work of reporting, on an important moment in war-crimes law: the torture and war-crimes charges resulting from the recent conflict in Liberia. The book sketches the history of that unhappy place, and its unique ties to the US, from the 19th Century on. Thus it brings the reader to the 1990s presidency of Charles Taylor, Sr., who would become the first African head of state tried for crimes against humanity; he came to power in a time of violent revolution and would wage ongoing war in Liberia and two neighboring countries. Thus we come to the main character, Charles "Chucky" Taylor, Jr., a young American citizen who would rejoin his father -- and his father's government -- after a troubled American upbringing.

The narrative from then on is Chucky's participation, and orchestration, of some of the vilest torture, murder and warfare in a Liberia already steeped in years of civil war. The stories -- often particular individuals instead of numberless victims -- is the sort of detail, cruel detail, that would come up in trial, and the stories are first shocking, then numbing in their endlessness. It helps to know how he could pass from a somewhat-sordid American background to leading a murder squad, and then escape Liberia after his father's downfall thinking the US might serve as a haven.

Chucky is important in that as an American citizen, he would end up on trial in a US Federal court -- and he would be the first (and so far only) US citizen tried and convicted on the Federal statute on torture, section 2340 of Title 18, US Code. Against the background of official "enhanced interrogation" elsewhere -- and the author does draw parallels in summing up -- this is a useful source for those interested in this case's legal implications. It's also a concise if dreadful human story. For those unfamiliar with Liberia's unique history, this book is a useful primer -- others have called Chucky's story a "heart of darkness" progress and it's an apt comparison.

Strong recommendation for those interested in current African history, current US policy, international humanitarian law or US legal history. It reads like crime reporting somewhat but it's still of value.

bakr says

A detailed and harrowing story of Liberia at the turn of the century

Dwyer provides a vivid and detailed account of the Liberian conflicts of the 20th and 21st century that cannot be found anywhere else. I came upon this book in 2018 during personal research on African conflicts. The histories of these conflicts are almost always told with detachment from the people and the subjects,

which is enhanced by the at times alien differences between American and African cultures. Dwyer went far out of his way and comfort zone in order to bring a complete a story on Chucky Taylor's life, and it must be commended.

Easy to read and it's compelling characters and structure make this book a must read for anyone looking for more information on one of the most underreported conflicts in modern human history.

Shannon says

I often had a hard time reading this book, although I should mention that I read this book at night before I went to sleep. I think that the history in this book is fascinating (and sickening), and there were some quite graphic parts where some of the horrors occurring in Libya were described. I am always saddened to learn that, while I've been living my relatively easy life, I have failed to notice the intense struggle of others. This book will make you think about that.

(a)lyss(a) says

This book is really somewhere around 3.5 stars for me.

What's most gripping about this book is how horrifying it is. The idea that someone with such a typical life can turn into something so monstrous. I was also incredibly surprised that considering the breadth of these charges that I'd never heard about about Chucky or any of his exploits before.

I found the rap lyrics for every chapter a bit confusing - it's not clear why they're there until nearly two thirds of the way into the book. Also considering the fact that this was the first example of an American being tried for war crimes I was a little surprised that the last fourth of the book about the charges and trial read more like he said/she said accusations.

Overall it's a very enlightening book that talks about a terrifying history that's otherwise ignored.

Aimee Tarr says

Disappointing

Some of the historical facts are askew. Much like the wars in Liberia- this book was difficult to digest. No head, no tail.

Marie says

3.5

Lisbeth Schilling says

Interesting subject, monotonous writing

It seemed at times that the author couldn't decide if he was writing a biography or a history textbook. Although the subject was catchy for this reader, the continuous introduction of names and facts became monotonous after awhile and detracted from the actual story.

Wendy says

Really interesting reporting about Liberia ex-prez Charles Taylor's American citizen son Chucky, who split time between suburban Florida and war-torn Monrovia getting into some really awful stuff. As the sole individual who's been prosecuted and convicted under 18 USC 2340 for torture (and this during the peak years of fantastic OLC opinions on "enhanced interrogation" not amounting to the kind of torture prohibited under that statute and the international Convention Against Torture it implements), there's no question Chucky did horrible things to people, and the book describes them in plenty of detail. Equally compelling, though, is Chucky's family story, his slow fall from grace (especially the interim year in Trinidad spent recording rap music), and the ICE investigation that ultimately led to Justice in the form of a 97-year prison sentence. The writing is uneven, unfortunately, but the content itself largely makes up for it.

Stephen Curran says

Good book, I got in the dollar store of all places. Story of Chucky Taylor, Charles Taylor of Liberia's son.

Jennifer Kay says

Chucky Taylor's 2008 trial in Miami federal court was a sort of homecoming for a young man whose adolescence in Florida had been like so many others bored with the suburbs and longing for absent fathers.

The surreal journey Taylor took from Florida to Liberia and then back to stand trial for torture is the subject of "American Warlord." Through public records requests, trial transcripts, interviews in the U.S. and Liberia and letters from Taylor himself, journalist Johnny Dwyer tried to piece together what happened to Taylor that made him such a unique catch for U.S. authorities.

Read my complete AP review here: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/15e10f...#>

Ashley says

I won this book from goodreads giveaways.

Fantastic journalistic look into the history of a place I've never heard of - on a civil war I had no knowledge of. I'm very glad I read this book.

Amanda says

I knew nothing really about Charles Taylor and the fight in Liberia/Sierra Leone before reading this book, but finished it shaking my head at the brazen disregard for human life and the utter depravity, poverty, fear and terror the people of those countries had to endure in the five short years that are primarily covered here. The guys' personalities are well drawn though I thought the women were weakly represented and I kept asking myself, why in the world did these women keep connecting themselves with these monsters? Power is a strange thing I suppose. I couldn't tell how much of Chucky's darkness was innate versus an embracing of the environment he found himself in, but either way, it was clear he had no morality. To see it all crumble in the end was somewhat satisfying but incredible to think these things were happening under the noses of (and sometimes right in front of) the rest of the global community.

Tom Buske says

A chilling account of the life of Chucky Taylor, son of Charles Taylor, elected President and brutal dictator of Liberia, who became the first American convicted of torture in a foreign country. If you don't like graphic depictions of brutal and horrific torture and murders, this book is not for you.

Brian says

I received this book as part of a Goodreads giveaway.

I know by entering a giveaway, you are taking your chances. Some books you really enjoy, others not so much. American Warlord falls into the second category for me. The book was well written, but I could not connect with the subject matter.

I think my feelings on this book are best summed up by borrowing some of the author's own words. "This was just a bunch of people who had weapons in a country that nobody cared about."
