African and African Experience from East to West: Slavery in Precolonial Africa to the New Republic in the United States

1619 Education Network

Unit by Fort Worth Educators, part of the 2021 cohort of *The 1619 Project* Education Network

Excerpt #2 Ona Judge Interview in the Granite Freeman

TRANSCRIPT mean time sent word to Mrs. Staines, Though a houseservant she had CONCORD, N. H., THURRDAY, MAY 82, 1845. to leave town before twelve o'clock no education, nor any valuable reliat night, which she did, retired to a gious instruction; says she never CONCORD, N.H., THURSDAY, MAY 22, 1848 place of concealment, and escaped heard Washington pray, and does Washington's Runaway Slave. GRANITE FREEMAN the dutches of the oppressor. Shortly not believe that he was accustomed after this, Washington died, and, said to. "Mrs. Washington used to read Washington's Runnway Slave. There is now living, in the borders of it, he might have shared the fate of she, "they never troubled me any more" prayers but I don't call that praying." the town of Greenland N.H., a new- Jonathan Walker, in our own day. after he was gone." Since her escape she has learned to away slave of GEN WASHINGTON, Some time after she arrived at Being taked how she escaped, read, trusts she has been made "wise at present supported by the County of . Portsmouth, she married a colored she replied substantially as follows, unto salvation," and is, I think, con-Rackhylasse. Her name, at the time of sailor, by the name of STAINES, and "Whilst they were packing up to go nected with a church in Portsmouth. her element was ONA MARIA had a family of several children, but to Virginia, I was packing to go, I When asked if she is not sorry JUDGE. She is not able to give the they, together with her husband have didn't know where; for I knew that she left Washington, as she has year of her escape but says that she all been dead for several years. if I went back to Virginia, I survey labored so much harder since, than come from Philadelphia, just after the Washington made two attempts should get my liberty. I had friends before, her reply is "No, I am free, dose of Washington's second term to recover her. First, he sent a man among the colored people of Phila- and have, I trust, been made a child of the Presidency, which must fix it by the name of Bassett to persente delphis, had my things carried there of God by the means." somewhere in the first part of the year her to return; but she resisted all the before hand and left while they were Never shall I forget the fire that 1797. Being a waiting maid of Mrs. arguments he employed for this end. eating dinner." kindled in her age-bedimmed eye, or Washington, she was not exposed. He told her, they would set her free Mrs. Staines does not know her the smile that played upon her withto any peculiar hardships. If asked when she arrived at Mount Vernon, age, but is probably not far from ered countenance, as I spake of that why she did not remain in his ser- to which she replied, "I am free now eighty. She is a light mulatto, so Redeemer in whom there is neither vice, she gives two reasons, first, that and choose to remain so." light that she might easily pass for a "bond nor free," who loves his people she wanted to be free, secondly, that Finding all attempts to seduce white woman, small of stature, and, to the end, and as I bowed with her at she understood that after the decease her to slavery again in this manner although disabled by two successive the mercy seat and commended her to of her matter and mistress, she was useless, Bassett was sent once more attacks of palsy, remarkably erect. Him "who heareth prayer" and who to become the property of a grand- by Washington, with orders to bring and elegant in-her form. regards "the poor and needy when daughter of theirs, by the name of her and her infant child by force. The The facts here related, are known they cry," I felt that were it mine to Custis, and that she was determined messenger, being acquainted with through this region, and may be relied thoose, I would not exchange her never to be Aeralave. GOV. LANGDON, then of Portson as substantially correct. Probably possessions, "rich in faith," and sus-She came on board a ship com- mouth, took up lodgings with him, they were not for years given to the tained, while tottering over the grave, manded by CAPT. JOHN BOLLES, and disclosed to him the object of his public, through fear of her recapture; by "a hope full of immortality," for all and bound to Poetsmouth N.H. In mission. The good old Governor, to but this reason no longer exists, since the glory and renown of him, whose relating it, she added "I never told his his honor be it spoken," must have she is too old and infirm to be of slave she was. name till after he died, a few years possessed something of the spirit of sufficient value to repay the expense since, lest they should punish him for modern anti-dayery. He entertained STRATHAM, MAY, 1845. T.H.A. bringing me away." Had she disclosed Bassett very handsomely, and in the

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Transcription of Ona Judge's Interview in the Granite Freeman

"Washington's Runaway Slave"

from The Granite Freeman, Concord, New Hampshire (May 22, 1845); reprinted in Frank W. Miller's Portsmouth New Hampshire Weekly, June 2, 1877, under the title "Washington's Runaway Slave, and How Portsmouth Freed Her." Author: Rev. T.H. Adams

There is now living in the borders of the town of Greenland, N.H., a runaway slave of Gen. Washington, at present supported by the County of Rockingham. Her name at the time of her elopement was ONA MARIA JUDGE. She is not able to give the year of her escape, but says that she came from Philadelphia just after the close of Washington's second term of the Presidency, which must fix it somewhere in the [early?] part of the year 1797.

Being a waiting maid of Mrs. Washington, she was not exposed to any peculiar hardships. If asked why she did not remain in his service, she gives two reasons, first, that she wanted to be free; secondly that she understood that after the decease of her master and mistress, she was to become the property of a grand-daughter of theirs, by name of Custis, and that she was determined never to be her slave.

Being asked how she escaped, she replied substantially as follows, "Whilst they were packing up to go to Virginia, I was packing to go, I didn't know where; for I knew that if I went back to Virginia, I should never get my liberty. I had friends among the colored people of Philadelphia, had my things carried there beforehand, and left Washington's house while they were eating dinner."

She came on board a ship commanded by CAPT. JOHN BOLLES, and bound to Portsmouth, N.H. In relating it, she added, "I never told his name till after he died, a few years since, lest they should punish him for bringing me away."

Washington made two attempts to recover her. First, he sent a man by the name of Bassett to persuade her to return; but she resisted all the arguments he employed for this end. He told her they would set her free when she arrived at Mount Vernon, to which she replied, "I am free now and choose to remain so."

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Finding all attempts to seduce her to slavery again in this manner useless, Bassett was sent once more by

Washington, with orders to bring her and her infant child by force. The messenger, being acquainted with Gov. [then Senator John] Langdon, then of Portsmouth, took up lodgings with him, and disclosed to him the object of his mission.

The good old Governor. (to his honor be it spoken), must have possessed something of the spirit of modern anti-slavery. He entertained Bassett very handsomely, and in the meantime sent word to Mrs. Staines, to leave town before twelve o'clock at night, which she did, retired to a place of concealment, and escaped the clutches of the oppressor.

Shortly after this, Washington died, and, said she, "they never troubled me any more after he was gone."

The facts here related are known through this region, and may be relied on as substantially correct. Probably they were not for years given to the public, through fear of her recapture; but this reason no longer exists, since she is too old and infirm to be of sufficient value to repay the expense of search.

Though a house servant, she had no education, nor any valuable religious instruction; says she never heard Washington pray, and does not believe that he was accustomed to. "Mrs. Washington used to read prayers, but I don't call that praying.["] Since her escape she has learned to read, trusts she has been made "wise unto salvation," and is, I think, connected with a church in Portsmouth.

When asked if she is not sorry she left Washington, as she has labored so much harder since, than before, her reply is, "No, I am free, and have, I trust been made a child of God by the means.["]

Never shall I forget the fire that kindled in her age-bedimmed eye, or the smile that played upon her withered countenance, as I spake of the Redeemer in whom there is neither "bond nor free," bowed with her at the mercy seat and commended her to Him "who heareth prayer" and who regards "the poor and needy when they cry," I felt that were it mine to choose, I would not exchange her possessions, "rich in faith," and sustained, while tottering over the grave, by "a hope full of immortality," for tall the glory and renown of him whose slave she was.