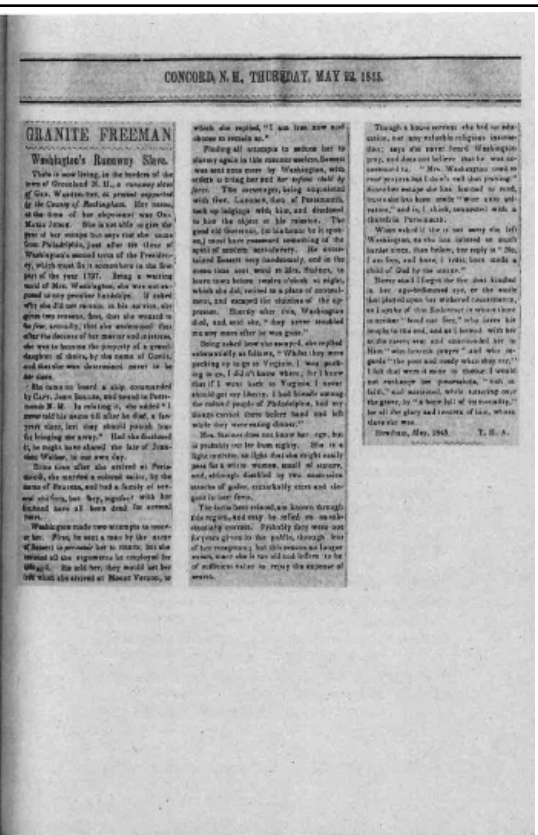
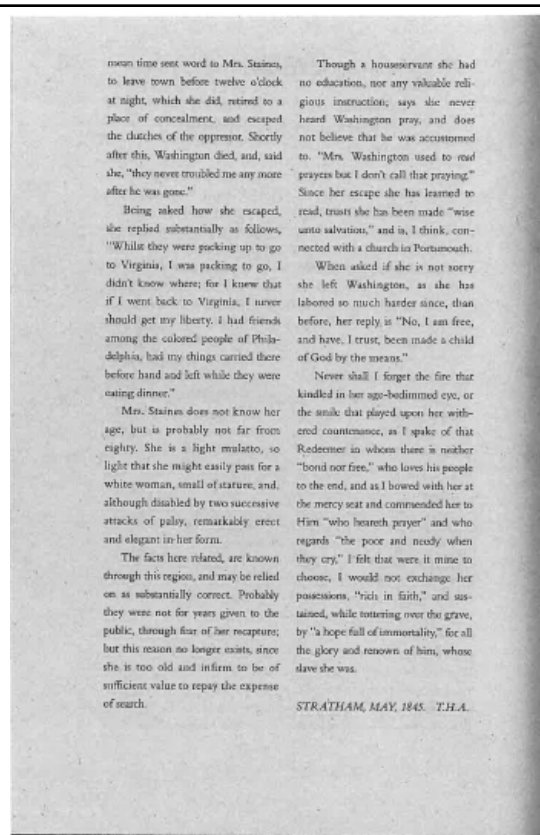


African and African American Experience from East to West: Slavery in Precolonial Africa to the New Republic in the United States

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Excerpt #2 Ona Judge Interview in the *Granite Freeman*



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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.