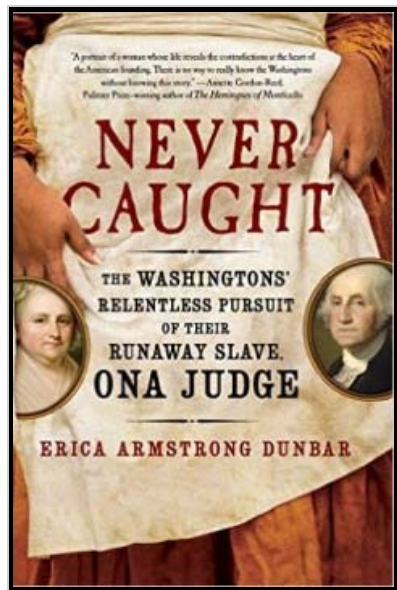


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## Never Caught

The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge

by Erica Armstrong Dunbar

Price: \$26.00(Hardcover)

Published: February 07, 2017

☆☆☆☆☆

Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

**From the Publisher:** A startling and eye-opening look into America's First Family, *Never Caught* is the powerful narrative of Ona Judge, George and Martha Washington's runaway slave who risked it all to escape the nation's capital and reach freedom. When George Washington was elected president, he reluctantly left behind his beloved Mount Vernon to serve in Philadelphia, the temporary seat of the nation's capital, after a brief stay in New York. In setting up his household he took Tobias Lear, his celebrated secretary, and nine slaves, including Ona Judge, about which little has been written. As he grew accustomed to Northern ways, there was one change he couldn't get his arms around: Pennsylvania law required enslaved people be set free after six months of residency in the state. Rather than comply, Washington decided to circumvent the law. Every six months he sent the slaves...

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### About The Author

Erica Armstrong Dunbar

Erica Armstrong Dunbar is the Blue and Gold Professor of Black Studies and History at the University of Delaware. In 2011, Professor Dunbar was appointed the first director of the Program in African American History at the Library Company of Philadelphia. She has been the recipient of Ford, Mellon, and...

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### Release Info

List Price: \$26.00 (Hardcover)

Published: February 07, 2017

Publisher: Atria / 37 INK

Pages: 272

ISBN 10: 1501126393

ISBN 13: 9781501126390

### What We Say

This is the sort of popular history that makes you sit up and say, "I can't believe I never heard about this before!" Just as he was nearing the end of his Presidency, George Washington found himself in a politically awkward, personally angering situation: one of his slaves had run away. Here's the story of Ona Judge, an enslaved woman who took the mighty risk of fleeing the home of the most powerful man in the United States and defiantly said she'd rather die than go back to a life under his thumb. Historian Erica Armstrong Dunbar was lucky that Judge was brave enough to give two interviews to abolitionist newspapers towards the end of her life, providing a rare chance to hear an enslaved woman's point of view.

Combining Judge's personal testimony with the copious letters and personal journals kept by George Washington, Martha and many others, Dunbar is able to flesh out Judge's life and situation more fully than most people who managed to survive the horrors of slavery. She combines specific details with the historical record to show the world Judge lived in, along with the vagaries and psychological terror of life under even a "good" slave owner. Washington most assuredly saw himself that way and simply couldn't understand WHY Judge would be so ungrateful as to flee being his property. Dunbar vividly creates the layered reality of life in America for enslaved people, from Virginia (where Judge is surrounded by mostly black people in chains) to New York and Pennsylvania (where Judge sees free blacks outnumbering slaves at times and where the attitude of whites towards slavery is ever-changing). It's a fascinating story, from the reality of Judge's world to the clueless nature of slave catchers who must negotiate with Judge and are astonished she would talk back or refuse to do as she's told. Negotiate, you say? Yes, because Judge is in Pennsylvania, where abolition is dominating society and simply grabbing her would be politically radioactive. (Not that this stops Washington from violating the very law he enacted -- the vicious Fugitive Slave Act of 1793.) Judge takes the risk of a lifetime and succeeds, but at great personal cost. The ending of her story is poignant and striking, a testament to the yearning for freedom. Dunbar's occasional need for assumption and extrapolation when suggesting the mindset of Judge are modest and convincing. It's an engaging, surprising account that breathes new life into the stock figure of slavery's victims. And it will strike a blow to any still insisting the Founder Fathers were gods among men, not to mention the even less favorable character of our nation's first First Lady. -- Michael Giltz

## What Others Say

"A fascinating and moving account of a courageous and resourceful woman. Beautifully written and utilizing previously untapped sources it sheds new light both on the father of our country and on the intersections of slavery and freedom in the flawed republic he helped to found."

- Eric Foner, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Fiery Trial* and *Gateway to Freedom*

"Totally engrossing and absolutely necessary for understanding the birth of the American Republic, *Never Caught* is richly human history from the vantage point of the enslaved fifth of the early American population. Here is Ona Judge's (successful) quest for freedom, on one side, and, on the other, George and Martha Washington's (vain) use of federal power to try to keep her enslaved." - Nell Irvin Painter, author of *Sojourner Truth, A Life, A Symbol*

"*Never Caught* is the compelling story of Ona Judge Staines, the woman who successfully defied George and Martha Washington in order to live as free woman. With vivid prose and deep sympathy, Dunbar paints a portrait of woman whose life reveals the contradictions at the heart of the American founding: men like Washington fought for...

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