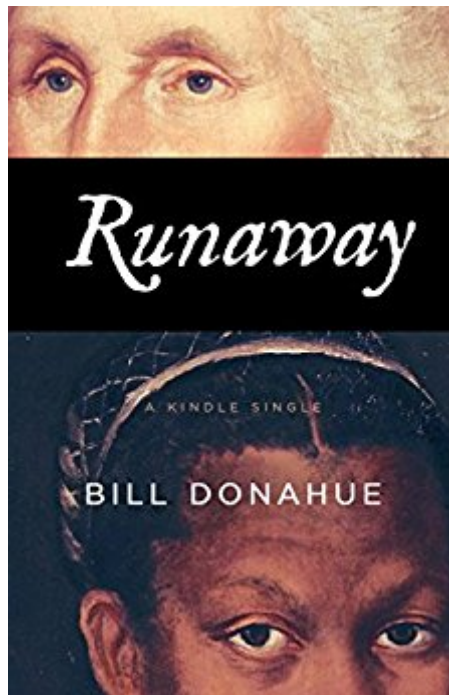




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Runaway: How A Slave Defied America's First President (Kindle Single)



Synopsis

In the mid-1790s, President George Washington had well over 200 black slaves toiling for him in his home and on his sprawling Virginia plantation. Runaway introduces us to the only one of those enchained people to escape and tell her story. Ona Judge was the young personal attendant to Martha Washington. On a spring evening in 1796, she slipped out of the president's home, throwing her master and mistress into a consternation that lingered for years. Why had Ona fled, and where had she gone? Join Harper's and New York Times Magazine contributor Bill Donahue as he traces the flight of America's most intriguing fugitive slave. Journalist Bill Donahue has written for Wired, The New York Times Magazine, Playboy, The Atlantic, Runner's World, The New Yorker, and Harper's. In reporting stories from over 20 countries, he has searched for fallen meteorites in the Sahara Desert, biked the streets of Shanghai, snuck into Manuel Noriega's abandoned beach house in Panama, and taste-tested moonshine in the snowy Caucasus mountains of Georgia. He is the author of The Secret World of Saints, an e-book about the Catholic Church and its saintmaking process, and his work has been reprinted in Best American Sports Writing, A Best American Travel Writing, and many other anthologies. He lives in rural New Hampshire, where he runs the Scriven Arts Colony. Cover Design by Kerry Ellis.

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Customer Reviews

A brave and determined woman's story is told here. In the 21st century is easy to imagine the enormous disparity in power between Ona and the god-general. It is the disparity between the struggling immigrant and the billionaire, the demagogue and ruled, the "religious" fanatics and the girls who would want to go to school. These are stories we all need to hear. George was a hero, but he had serious flaws. Ona was a hero of perhaps even greater bravery. She, and others like her, were equally responsible for founding this nation. She was also responsible for providing the feet-on-the-ground foundation of our moral and ethical ideals. She what she did humbly and because it was the right thing to do.

I read this in one sitting and thoroughly enjoyed it. Bill Donahue brings history to life in the same engaging way as some of my favorite writers: Laura Hillenbrand, Hampton Sides, and Daniel James Brown. This story of a runaway slave whose courage and determination got the best of her owner will make you think twice about George Washington, who opposed slavery in the abstract while keeping more than 200 slaves whom he treated like helpless children. As a founding father, he was a paternalist in the extreme. His incredulity that Ona Judge would run away wearing shoes he had paid for is just one of the story's many gratifying moments. This was the perfect way to kick off the July 4 weekend--rooting for Ona Judge, an unsung hero of America's early years.

Parts of "Runaway: How a Slave Defied America's First President" by Bill Donahue had its boring parts. Still, I will never forget Ona Judge, the runaway slave. And of course, I will always remember George Washington, our first president. The story describes his strengths and weaknesses along with the strengths of her character. Ona Judge was a strong woman. When she finally experienced freedom, she chose it over living in slavery ever again. Although she was the close friend of Martha Washington, George Washington's wife, she still hungered for freedom. Friendship and nothing else comes close to the ability to come and go as you please, in other words, to make decisions for your life is kingpin. Although President Washington was a strong man, he had a weakness in his character. This weakness haunted his mind. Causing him never to grasp fully the importance of freedom not for only himself but for others who did not look like him or own any similarities to him that he could see. Perhaps, he felt that a type of kindness would keep these slaves loyal and desirous of remaining at Mount Vernon. Also, there was his inner feeling that slaves lacked any

intellect. In Bill Donahue's non fiction story, he comes across not as a hardened, bitter man who could not change, but as a man who would rather conform to society's laws. After all, there had always been slaves, why change now? It saddened me to read about his obsessive letters written in order to find Ona Judge and bring her back to the plantation. However, What matters is that Ona Judge gained her freedom and stayed free. It continues to bring pain thinking about presidents and statesmen of our country who owned people as property. There is the desire to glorify their position as leaders. Then, there is the confrontation with their inability to have complete compassion for a race different from themselves.

I enjoyed this brief, but informative story about Martha Washington's runaway slave Ona Judge. The author provided a combination of factual events and respectful speculation on Ona's journey to freedom. As an African American, I always knew that George Washington owned slaves and that there was "more to the story" of his presidency and shallow commitment to abolition. This book helped shed some light on the subject. I plan to have my teenage daughter read this story soon. Thanks Bill!

I wish this was a longer book. Sadly, there's not much recorded about Ona Judge, so this is a very short story. I think that most Americans have an idealistic opinion of George Washington, and Donahue gives us a picture of him that reveals how flawed he was. Yes, he was a great man, but he also tried to circumvent the law when it came to getting back a runaway slave. He treated his slaves kindly, and he thought that the sale of human beings was wrong (so he would not sell his slaves), but neither would he free them.

This book an interesting look into the Washington's, and slavery. While it does not paint Washington in a very positive life it does take slavery head on. Ona was once even portrayed in a movie about Washington. There are a few errors, concerning people and dates. Still it sheds an interesting light on a little known figure in American slavery.

Donahue tells an animated and deeply researched account in this supremely enjoyable book. As if the reader as been allowed a hovering telecamera to pass through the days of Judge, George and Martha Washington, and late 1700s America, we become witness to the kaleidoscope of events that bring this true story into frame.

I marvel at the research that went into writing Ona's story, one of an escaped slave. Except for the oral histories African American families pass down from generation to generation most accounts of non-white lives weren't written or talked about. I grew up in an era when blacks weren't even mentioned in the history books, except for, perhaps a paragraph or two. Thank you for telling such a powerful story.

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