Erica Armstrong Dunbar. *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge.* New York: Atria Books, 2017. Pp. 253. Hardcover $26.00.

In *Never Caught*, Erica Armstrong Dunbar uses the life story of Ona Judge, a slave in the George Washington household during his presidency, to weave a compelling narrative that combines the experiences of enslavement and slave ownership and offers insight into both. Dunbar, Charles and Mary Beard Professor of History at Rutgers, reveals the difficult and pragmatic choices Judge and other African Americans were forced to make, weighing the perils of escape and recapture against the relative safety of stable environments with tolerable owners. Drawing on two interviews Ona Judge gave near the end of her life, the personal correspondence of the Washingtons, newspaper advertisements, legal documents, and the writings of free and enslaved African Americans, Dunbar explores why an enslaved person might choose to endure captivity, and experiences that could trigger the bold decision to flee.

Ona Judge's early years in the Washington household were bearable despite duties that ranged from being Martha's lady's maid and seamstress to caring for the children of the house. Ona's mother, siblings, and extended family were also Washington slaves and these familial ties inspired her to stay close. Dunbar concludes that women at Mount Vernon did not live in fear of sexual violence as so many enslaved women suffered. Moreover, Judge enjoyed a modicum of privilege, and even had permission to go to the theater in Philadelphia from time to time. The tipping point for Judge was Mrs. Washington's decision to "gift her" to her truculent granddaughter, a woman known for her bad temper, upon the occasion of her marriage to Thomas Law. Ona Judge worried that Thomas Law's reputation for womanizing meant her body would be at risk and she had learned that, despite her dutiful service, Mrs. Washington could easily discard her. Her fear and anger catalyzed into resolve and Ona Judge determined she would take her fate into her own hands and flee.

Judge's story interweaves with experiences of other escaped slaves in the decades before the Underground Railroad. Dunbar skillfully describes the different political and cultural forces at

play in Philadelphia, including the complicated emancipation law that freed slaves who had been there for six months. Washington's circumvented the law by quietly rotating his slaves back to Mount Vernon before this period expired. Dunbar examines the perils and challenges that an escaped slave faced, then personalizes the history through Judge's experiences and her responses to Washington's repeated efforts to bring his "property" back into the fold. His efforts culminated in a plot to kidnap Ona, and although she maintained her freedom, she could never feel safe or secure.

This book is gripping reading for both historians and general readers. It makes this important history accessible beyond academia, while still offering a wealth of well-researched details for experts in early American history. *Never Caught* is important for its contextualization of slavery in a very personal way with arguably the greatest icon of American history. Dunbar chooses not to demonize the president, instead portraying him as a flawed human participating in an evil system. Some readers may feel she is too generous in her treatment of Washington and her effort to empathize with his anxiety over the economic "cost" of losing his property, or her effort to understand (although not sympathize) with his paternalistic belief system that left him wondering why a slave would run away from a home where she was "treated well."

If the book has any shortcomings, it is the use of endnotes instead of footnotes. Since Dunbar makes educated guesses about aspects of Ona Judge's journey based on the limitations of her sources, footnoting the evidence would help the reader better understand the boundaries between fact and conjecture. Dunbar strives to make these boundaries clear through her word choice, but the narrative is so captivating that the reader is apt to start blurring the lines in their own interpretation.

America has never really come to terms with the painful subject of slavery; Dunbar delivers a book that can bring any reader into a deeper conversation about this topic and the echoes we feel from it today.

Christopher Empett