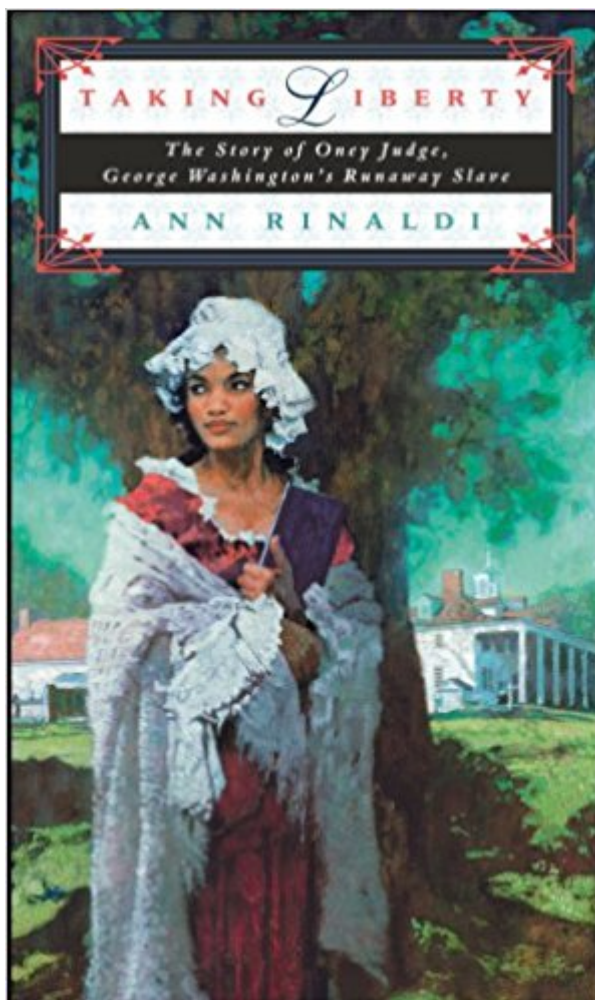


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# Taking Liberty: The Story Of Oney Judge, George Washington's Runaway Slave



## Synopsis

When I was four and my daddy left, I cried, but I understood. He became part of the Gone. The only life Oney Judge has ever known is servitude. As part of the staff of George and Martha Washington, she isn't referred to as a slave. She is a servant -- and a house servant at that, a position of influence and respect on the plantation of Mount Vernon. When she rises to the position of personal servant to Martha Washington, her status among the household staff -- black and white -- is second to none. She is Lady Washington's closest confidante and, for all intents and purposes, a member of the family -- or so she thinks. Slowly, Oney's perception of her life with the Washingtons begins to crack as she realizes the truth: No matter how close she becomes with Lady Washington, no matter what secrets they share, she will never be a member of the family. And regardless of what they call it, it's still slavery and she's still a slave. Oney must make a choice: Does she stay where she is, comfortable, with this family that has loved her and nourished her and owned her since the day she was born? Or does she take liberty -- her life -- into her own hands and, like her father, become one of the Gone? Told with immense power and compassion, *Taking Liberty* is the extraordinary true story of one young woman's struggle to take what is rightfully hers.

## Book Information

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Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > Colonial #1201

inÃ Â Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > African-American

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

In this swiftly paced historical novel, Rinaldi (*Girl in Blue*) chronicles the life of Oney Judge, favorite "servant (they were never called slaves)" to Lady Martha Washington. By Oney's own admission in the prologue, as Lady Washington's "pet," she enjoyed "a life of comparative ease and even luxury." Oney surreptitiously learns to read (and though this violates the law, Lady Washington keeps her secret), wears fine clothes and accompanies the General's family to New York and Philadelphia. Rinaldi seamlessly weaves history and strong characters, from the mansion house to the servants' quarters, to offer a balanced portrait of their complex and contradictory interactions. The author demonstrates why Oney is reluctant to leave her "home" and "family." A free black woman Oney befriends in Philadelphia forewarns, "That's the worst way to be, you know, treated like a daughter.... It's another way of binding you to them." Rinaldi so persuasively portrays Oney's loyalty that when she realizes what the family truly thinks of her, readers may well feel as betrayed as Oney herself does. Some readers will be concerned that Rinaldi continues the use of the historically accurate term "Negroes" in her author's note, but the excerpts included from primary source material, including George Washington's writings, further illuminate the conflicts of the period. This memorable heroine and novel offer a thought-provoking exploration of the courage needed to grasp freedom. Ages 12-up. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 7 Up-Oney Judge was born into servitude, as a slave owned by George and Martha Washington. In spite of her favored status as personal servant to her mistress, Oney chose to run away and, at 24, successfully fled to Portsmouth, NH. This often-riveting novel opens as an elderly Oney is interviewed in 1842 by a reporter. She begins recalling her story as a three-year-old in 1775, her later talent as a highly skilled seamstress, and her place as a well-liked, well-treated companion to Mrs. Washington. Gradually, she recognizes that freedom is more important than security and comfort. Oney's narrative allows her own development to be revealed gradually, to let readers view the emerging nation and other characters from her almost naive point of view. The result is a subtle portrait of early American politics, of George and Martha Washington (and their children and grandchildren) as people and as public figures, while providing a glimpse of 18th-century life. An author's note provides factual information about Oney. Rinaldi also includes excerpts from George Washington's writings about slavery as well as a bibliography and secondary sources. Though fast-paced and readable, the novel remains sometimes troubling. The dialect used for slaves, particularly field hands, is sometimes difficult and may be viewed as clichéd, and the secondary characters are not fully developed. The book remains, however, a readable, seemingly informed novel. Maria B. Salvadore, District of Columbia Public Library Copyright 2003

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This book was assigned as part of a class that I'm currently taking in preparation for attaining my Masters Education Teachers Degree at the Middle School Level. The book was assigned in class to help us as Middle School Teachers to draw our students into the use of books in the classroom to supplement their standard textbook. This particular book was excellent in that the author used its characters to tell a personal story of a young slave girl Oney and weaved it through the relationship she had with her mother, Lady Washington and the institution of slavery during the American Revolutionary period. It also touched on the differences in the institution of slavery on a plantation from the status house servant and individuals that worked in the field. It also showed the dynamics of the personal relationship Oney had with Lady Washington. Overall I think the Middle School student would enjoy this book in that it shows our country during the Revolutionary War period, institution of slavery and through Georges' Washington Presidency. This story is told through Oneys' own eyes. Great read and I would recommend it highly as a part of teaching early slavery during the early period leading up to the Revolutionary War.

This is a well-told story based firmly in historical research (which the author shares in the notes). Ms. Rinaldi took on the very challenging job of dealing with the disturbing content around the history of slavery in the US in a careful and sensitive way. She offers no tidy conclusions, but rather focuses on the complexity of the human interactions. As a teacher, I have some hesitation offering it to my fifth graders because some of the language around the behavior and treatment of slaves may be jarring for them. I would be interested to know how someone whose family experienced these times and events would react to it. On the whole, though, I enjoyed the novel and learned quite a bit.

Great book.

This was a great book that is actually true and suspenseful that kept me on the edge of my seat the whole book

This is a wonderful book!!!!

HAD TO READ FOR SCHOOL. NOT FINISHED YET

The story was too embellished.

This is the only book, other than two children's picture books, to be written about Oney Judge and that in itself makes it a very important publication. But, beyond that, it is very well written, interesting and closely tied to the facts of her life. It is listed as a novel for "young readers" but I think it is a good read for any age (I'm a septuagenarian myself). My only complaint is I wish Ms. Rinaldi had carried the story beyond the escape, but can understand her reasons for not doing so. I highly recommend this book for a person of any age. As a side note, my county library system carries 50 other books written by Ann Rinaldi, but not this one. The neighboring county carries over 20 books by Ann Rinaldi--but not this one. I'm hesitant to even suggest it, but can't but wonder if there is some sort of concerted effort afoot to keep us from learning that the father of our country trafficked in human beings. I spent my adult life teaching high school social studies and never heard of Oney Judge until 15 years after I had retired.

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