

Borders

Ona Judge's Quest for Freedom

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GEO 478/678 Spatial Storytelling
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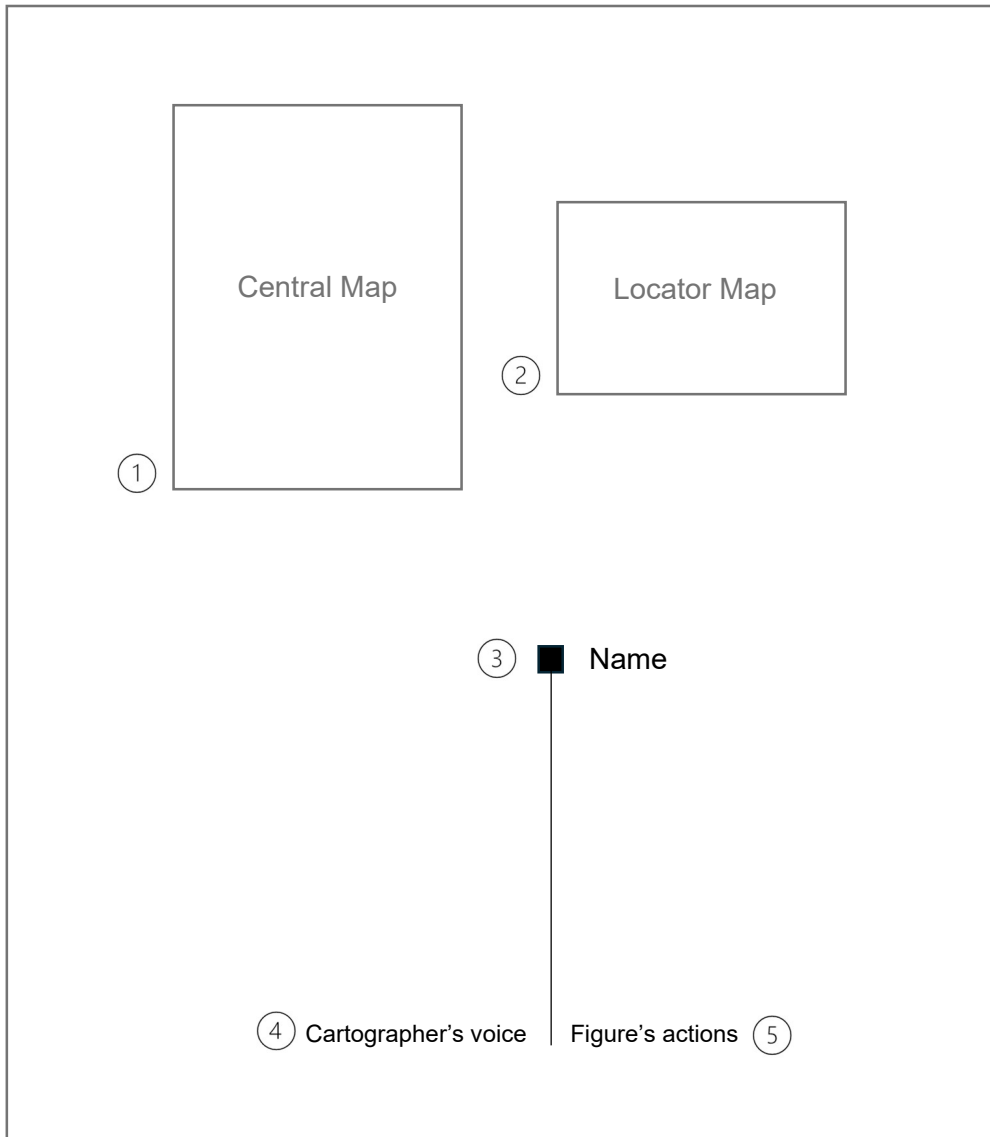
Introduction

Ona Judge, an enslaved woman who was controlled by George and Martha Washington, is a seminal figure in American history. In 1796, Judge slipped out of the president's house in Philadelphia to begin a new life of freedom. This mapping project shows the borders she crossed from Mount Vernon, where she was born enslaved; then to New York and Philadelphia, the new federal capitals of the United States where she continued to serve Martha; and finally, to Portsmouth to begin a life of relative freedom after hiding in Philadelphia and then clandestinely sailing North to New Hampshire.

This work owes a debt to Erica Armstrong Dunbar's *Never Caught: The Washington's Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, One Judge*. The quotes noted below come from Dunbar's 2017 monograph.

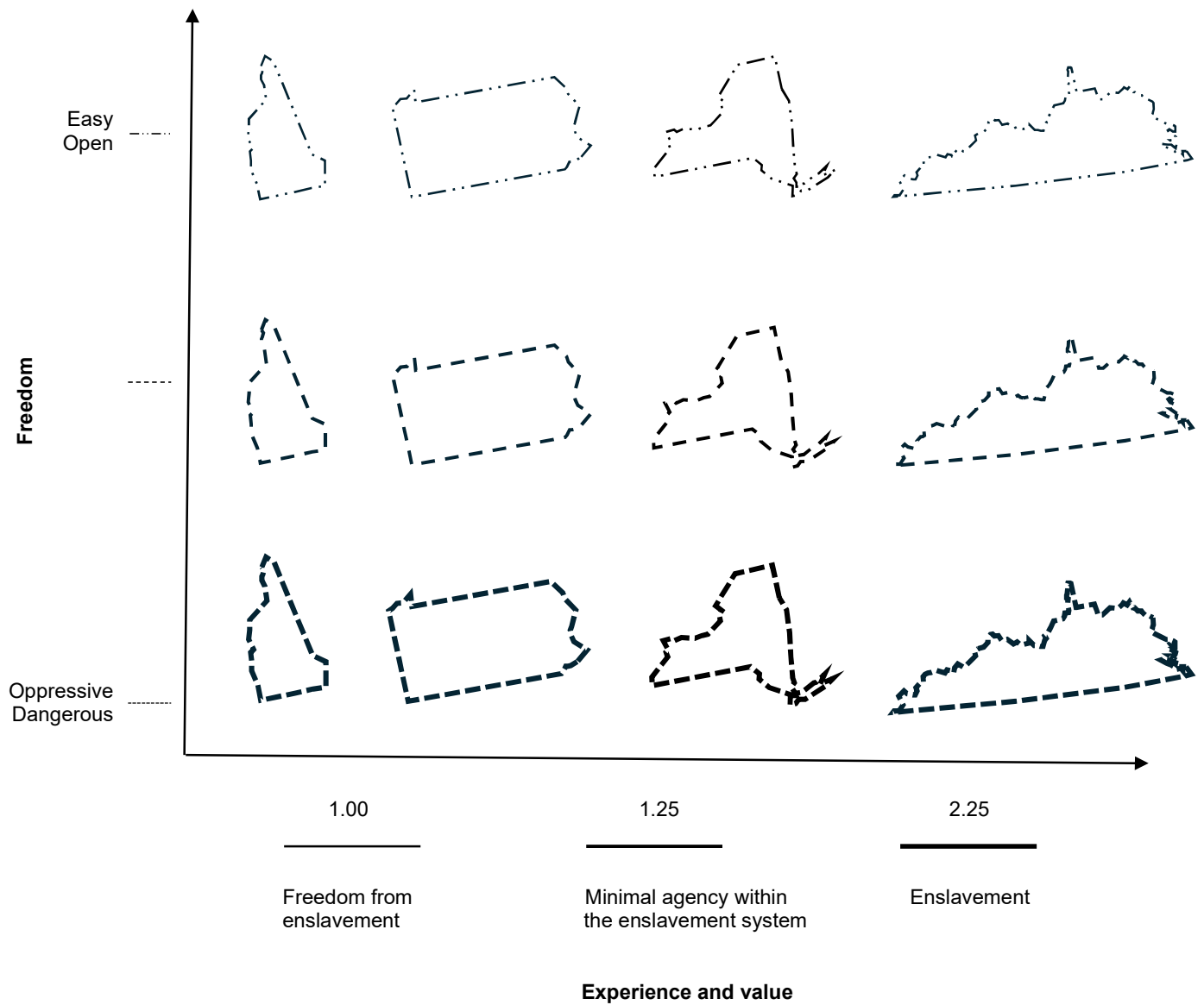
Positionality

As a second-year Ph.D. student specializing in Early American History, my reflexivity centers on acknowledging the advantages associated with my identity. As a white male, educated in traditional, privileged institutions, and having worked in powerful governmental and criminal justice organizations, I am acutely aware of the position of power I occupy. These experiences afford me certain advantages within academia, necessitating a critical examination of potential biases in my research and interactions. Recognizing the historical inequities embedded in the narratives I engage with; I am committed to amplifying marginalized voices and challenging traditional perspectives. My aim is to contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of early American history, leveraging my position to foster dialogue and promote diversity within the academic realm.



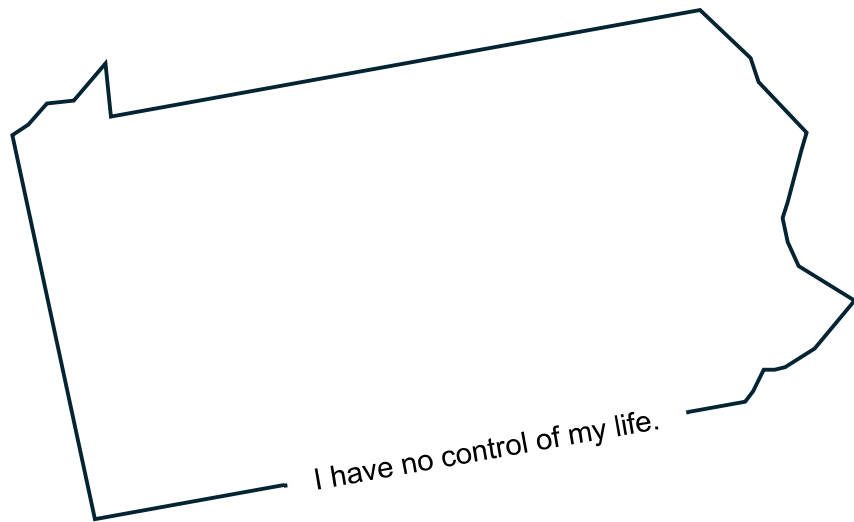
Techniques Layout

The layout's focus is its central map and border (1). Viewers are invited to also look at the locator map (2) for context. The lower panel provides the figure's name (3). Cameron L. Kline is the cartographer and his voice is on the left (4) and the figure's actions (5) are on the right. Since Judge was enslaved, she never left a written record of her own.



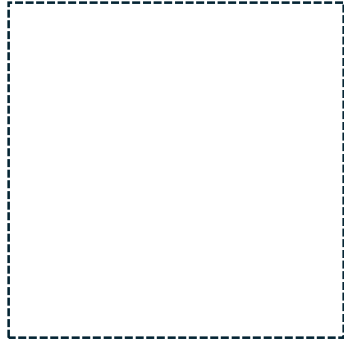
Techniques
Symbolization

Symbolization has been applied to New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, New York, and Virginia. The heavier the line, the more oppression the figures experienced. And the denser the dash, the more difficult it was for the figure to navigate enslaved and non-enslaved spaces.



Techniques
Experiential label

When applied, labels have been added to represent a figure's experience or perspective.



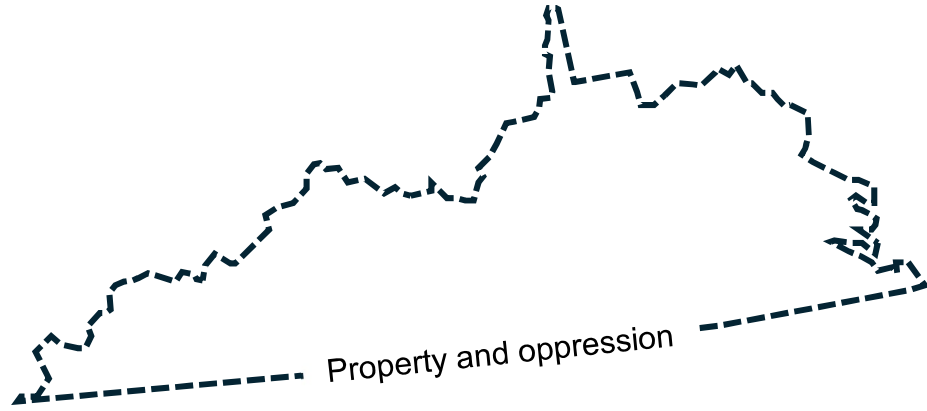
Techniques

Unknown borders

Scholars do not know all of Judge's or Allen's movements because they kept their allies a secret.

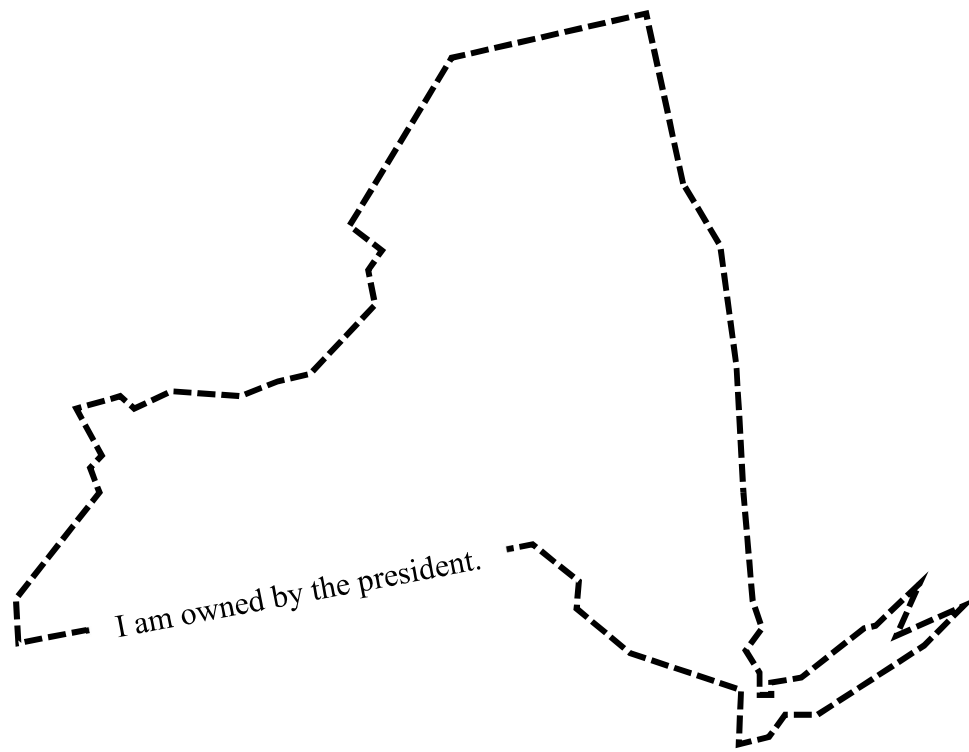
For example, after Judge escaped from the president's house in Philadelphia, she hid for an unknown period of time in a location she never revealed. Scholars believe Allen arranged for her to live with a member of Philadelphia's free, Black community near the Delaware River waterfront.

Individual Maps
Ona Judge



■ Ona Judge

Ona's mother was named Betty, she born around 1738, and was a dower enslaved woman. Her surname was Judge. Andrew, her father, was a white, indentured Englishman who abandoned Betty and his other children.

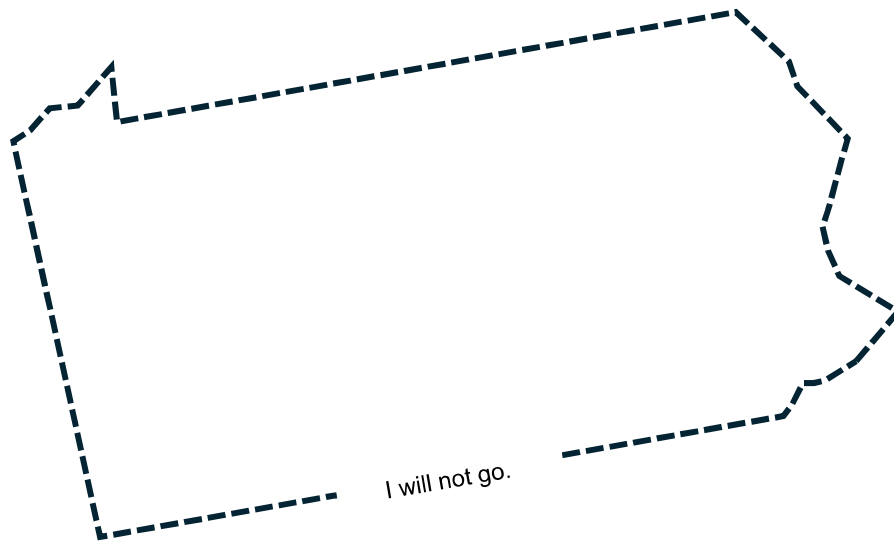


Ona Judge

On April 30, 1789, at Federal Hall in New York City, Washington took the presidential oath of office.

Enslaved individuals who lived in New York City had to hide in plain sight. The city, with its many residents and visitors, presented dangers ranging from enslavers to potential attackers. Ona had to navigate this threatening space nearly every day.

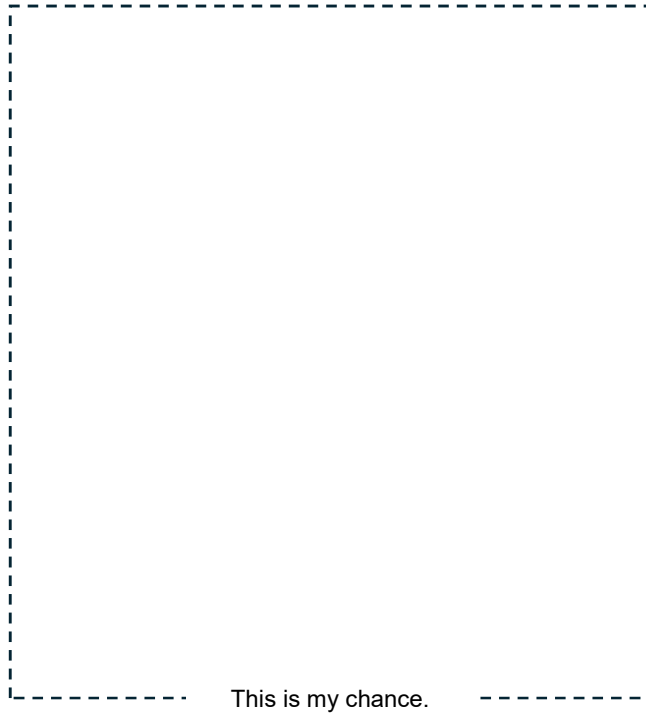
"We can only assume Ona's transition from Mount Vernon to the president's house in New York City was difficult, she left no record. She was thrust into the national spotlight and was charged with caring for Martha Washington and anticipating her every need."



Ona Judge

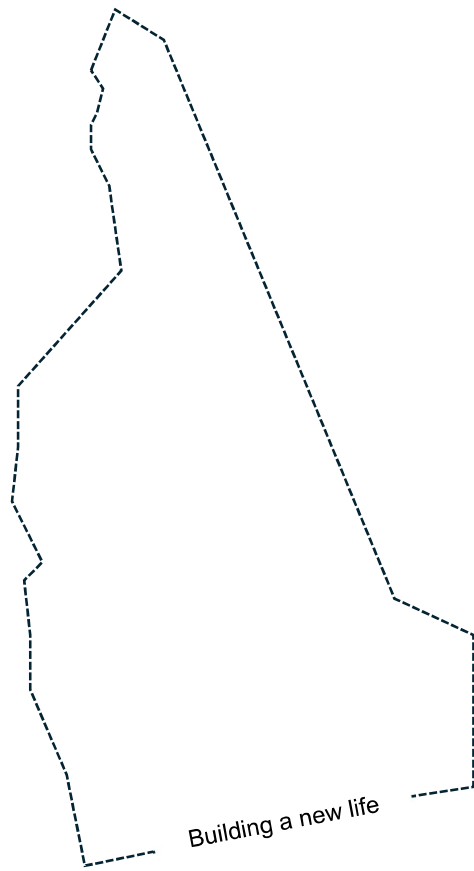
Ona discovered that she was going to be given as a wedding gift to the temperamental, nineteen-year-old Elizabeth Parke Custis, Martha's step-grandchild and her husband who had a less than honorable reputation. Ona knew that the small moments of independence she enjoyed in Philadelphia would be gone forever. She also knew that a lifetime of enslavement and possible sexual assault waited for her if she did not act. Judge still had no control of her life and future. Her service to the Washington's meant nothing to them.

Ona's time and existence were not her own.



■ Ona Judge

On Saturday, May 21, 1796, Judge escaped from the President's house and hid. She probably received support from the city's free black community before sailing to Portsmouth to start a new life.



Ona Judge

"Portsmouth was unlike any place Ona Judge had ever lived. It was small compared to Philadelphia and New York City. She took a job as a laborer, the work was hard, and she was completely alone. In 1797, Judge married John Staines and together they had three children: Nancy Staines, Eliza Staines, and Will Staines. She outlived her entire family."



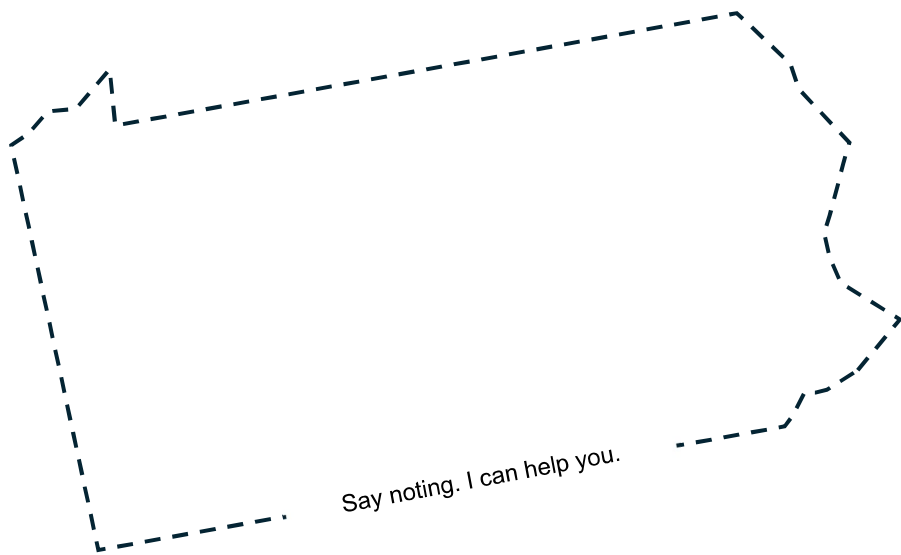
■ Ona Judge

“Her life had been difficult, but for fifty-two years Ona Staines never lost faith in herself. Every day that the fugitive opened her eyes, she knew one thing to be true: she would ‘rather suffer death’ than return to slavery. Ona died on February 25, 1848, in Greenland, NH, she was 75 years old.”

Individual Maps
Richard Allen

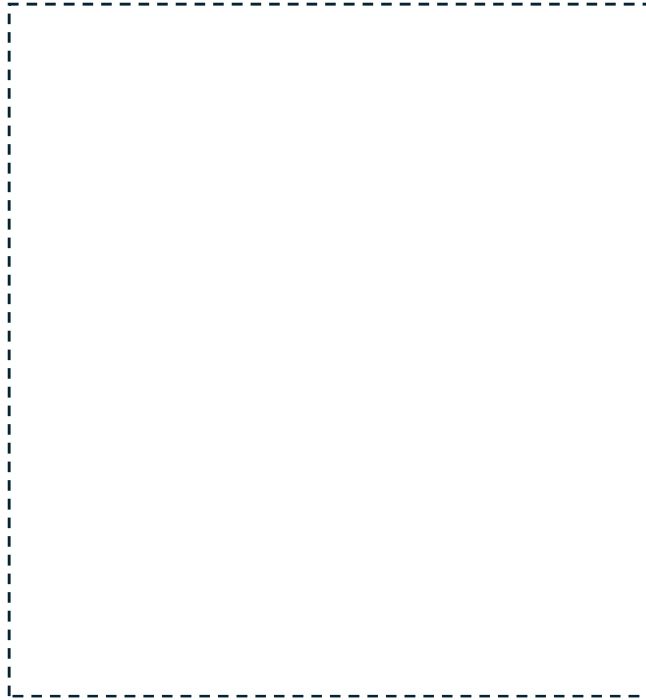
■ Richard Allen

There were individual abolitionist actors of note furthering the cause in Philadelphia. One was the co-founder of the Free African Society and the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Richard Allen, who was a religious leader in Philadelphia's Black community. We are not certain, but he probably aided Ona's escape.



■ Richard Allen

In addition to being the co-founder of the Mother Bethal Baptist Church, Allen was also a chimney sweep. The records kept by Tobias Lear, Washington's private secretary, show that Washington paid a chimney sweep for services at the presidential home before Judge escaped.



■ Richard Allen

On Saturday, May 21, 1796, Judge escaped from the president's house in Philadelphia. We don't know where Allen was or if he actually helped Judge, but it is extremely plausible.

Concluding Remarks

This mapping project was designed to present Ona Judge's quest for freedom within and through borders that were symbolized with different weights and line types. In her case, enslavement and non-enslavement, and celebrate her story outside of George Washington's shadow. Her emotions, thoughts, as best we can reconstruct, power, and life is a testament to her agency, relationships, and movements during one of the most pivotal periods of the early American republic.