

## Simon P. Newman. *Freedom Seekers: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration London*

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Slavery was not just something that happened “over there” in the colonies. Studies asserting the presence of enslaved people in London often focus primarily on the eighteenth century, but *Freedom Seekers: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration London* makes it clear that slavery was already part of London society by the mid-seventeenth century. In this thoroughly researched and highly readable book, Simon Newman locates, imagines, and assesses the place of runaway slaves, whom he refers to as freedom seekers, and their place “in the larger history of racial slavery in the British Atlantic World” (xxv). Newman brings together multiple historiographies that do not traditionally overlap: Restoration London, race, slavery, Black Britain, the public sphere, print culture, empire, and the Atlantic World. The result is a study of the escape attempts and lives of enslaved people who worked in the various maritime, business, and administrative networks that supported the burgeoning English/British Empire.

*Freedom Seekers* is structured upon the genre of the runaway slave notice and more than 200 advertisements for freedom seekers in London during the Restoration period. Newman’s deep contextualization of the ads and the historical era provides insight into the different ways in which Londoners were connected to the enslavement of African and South Asian peoples. He finds the origins of the genre of the runaway notice in London newspapers, where the first runaway advertisements appeared in the 1650s, decades before the first such ads in the colonies. Newman argues that “Racial slavery was being created simultaneously in London and in the colonies” (xxvii). He uses the London ads to highlight the role of enslavers in commodifying, depersonalizing, and racializing freedom seekers.

*Freedom Seekers* is divided into three sections. The first section provides a rich description of Restoration London. Readers get a sense of the Black community in the seventeenth century: where people lived, whom they married, and where they were baptized and buried. Newman describes print media, coffee shops, and the Royal Exchange as vital for both news transmission and the conduct of business. The Exchange and coffee shops were sites in which servants and enslaved people were present and could be returned if they absconded and were recaptured. Newman asserts that, “enslavers developed and perfected the runaway slave advertisement, making use of the new medium of newspapers to assert their control of those who sought freedom” (37). Extrapolating from the short descriptions in the ads alongside other sources, he imagines the freedom seekers as embodied people: whom they worked for, their tasks, what they might have been thinking, and how they made their escape. He traces the development of the language used to describe African and South Asian runaways compared to that of other runaways such as white servants, sailors, and even animals. We see the “linguistic imprecision around race” (63) in the ads, as “black” could refer to both Africans and South Asians, and whiteness could be a marker of status rather than skin color.

The second section is the heart of the book. Twelve short chapters reveal the variety of enslaved individuals in the London newspapers. Each starts with an ad for a freedom seeker and features others with a similar theme, such as those for boys, women and girls, South Asians, and sailors. Enslaved liveried servants, such as those in the chapter with Pompey,

were forced to wear a silver or brass collar, as if they were a favorite dog. These collars could include an inscription of who claimed ownership of them. The chapters reveal the ways in which merchants, ship captains, colonial planters, printers, government officials, and aristocrats “were all to varying degrees engaged in the creation of both the transatlantic slave trade and colonial plantation slavery” (xxvi). Newman notes that the average age of freedom seekers was nineteen or younger and male, demonstrating that children and teenagers were more valued as personal servants and maids; young boys commonly worked as pages. In contrast, colonial planters desired adult men who could work long hours in the fields. A chart allows the reader to compare demographics of freedom seekers in different locations (59). Newman insightfully and imaginatively tells the stories of people who have otherwise been lost to history.


In the last section, Newman turns to the colonial context, pointing to his earlier work on runaway slaves and labor in the British American colonies. He discusses the first runaway slave advertisements in the colonies (in Boston), which coincided with the founding of the first newspapers. Printers were often trained in London and papers from Europe were read in the colonies, providing models for runaway ads, which were “virtually indistinguishable” from those in London newspapers (212). The runaway ads and London newspapers thus link metropole and peripheries through print culture. Newman also has a chapter devoted to law and punishment of freedom seekers. He notes how the enslaved were controlled and punished through colonial legislation, but it leaves one to wonder what punishments were inflicted upon freedom seekers who were returned in London. Newman notes that Samuel Pepys placed one of his enslaved servants, Sambo, onboard a vessel bound for the Caribbean, but we see nothing about other repercussions for absconding, such as whipping.

*Freedom Seekers* is an important book for scholars of early modern England and slavery. It links England with its colonies and various practices of slave holding in tangible ways earlier than most studies and contributes to debates on the development of racialized language and laws in the seventeenth century. For people studying slavery and working with runaway notices, it is a study on how to give back the “full humanity” of the enslaved and “to imagine the people behind the text” (xxv). The book’s publication in open access and a highly affordable paperback edition will surely aid in its wide dissemination.

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## David Ney. *The Quest to Save the Old Testament: Mathematics, Hieroglyphics, and Providence in Enlightenment England*

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David Ney’s *The Quest to Save the Old Testament* is a welcome reassessment of an important group of eighteenth-century British theologians, the Hutchinsonians. (Their name derives from their ties to the self-taught natural philosopher and Hebraist, John Hutchinson,