



Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel (America and the Long 19th Century)

Edlie L. Wong

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Neither Fugitive nor Free draws on the freedom suit as recorded in the press and court documents to offer a critically and historically engaged understanding of the freedom celebrated in the literary and cultural histories of transatlantic abolitionism. Freedom suits involved those enslaved valets, nurses, and maids who accompanied slaveholders onto free soil. Once brought into a free jurisdiction, these attendants became informally free, even if they were taken back to a slave jurisdiction—at least according to abolitionists and the enslaved themselves. In order to secure their freedom formally, slave attendants or others on their behalf had to bring suit in a court of law.

Edlie Wong critically recuperates these cases in an effort to reexamine and redefine the legal construction of freedom, will, and consent. This study places such historically central anti-slavery figures as Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, and William Lloyd Garrison alongside such lesser-known slave plaintiffs as Lucy Ann Delaney, Grace, Catharine Linda, Med, and Harriet Robinson Scott. Situated at the confluence of literary criticism, feminism, and legal history, **Neither Fugitive nor Free** presents the freedom suit as a "new" genre to African American and American literary studies.

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