



Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America

Douglas R. Egerton

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In *Death or Liberty*, Douglas R. Egerton offers a sweeping chronicle of African American history stretching from Britain's 1763 victory in the Seven Years' War to the election of slaveholder Thomas Jefferson as president in 1800. While American slavery is usually identified with antebellum cotton plantations, Egerton shows that on the eve of the Revolution it encompassed everything from wading in the South Carolina rice fields to carting goods around Manhattan to serving the households of Boston's elite. More important, he recaptures the drama of slaves, freed blacks, and white reformers fighting to make the young nation fulfill its republican slogans. Although this struggle often unfolded in the corridors of power, Egerton pays special attention to what black Americans did for themselves in these decades, and his narrative brims with compelling portraits of forgotten African American activists and rebels, who battled huge odds and succeeded in finding liberty--if never equality--only in northern states. Egerton concludes that despite the real possibility of peaceful, if gradual, emancipation, the Founders ultimately lacked the courage to end slavery.

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