



The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America

Terri L. Snyder

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The history of slavery in early America is a history of suicide. On ships crossing the Atlantic, enslaved men and women refused to eat or leaped into the ocean. They strangled or hanged themselves. They tore open their own throats. In America, they jumped into rivers or out of windows, or even ran into burning buildings. Faced with the reality of enslavement, countless Africans chose death instead.

In *The Power to Die*, Terri L. Snyder excavates the history of slave suicide, returning it to its central place in early American history. How did people—traders, plantation owners, and, most importantly, enslaved men and women themselves—view and understand these deaths, and how did they affect understandings of the institution of slavery then and now? Snyder draws on ships' logs, surgeons' journals, judicial and legislative records, newspaper accounts, abolitionist propaganda and slave narratives, and many other sources to build a grim picture of slavery's toll and detail the ways in which suicide exposed the contradictions of slavery, serving as a powerful indictment that resonated throughout the Anglo-Atlantic world and continues to speak to historians today.

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