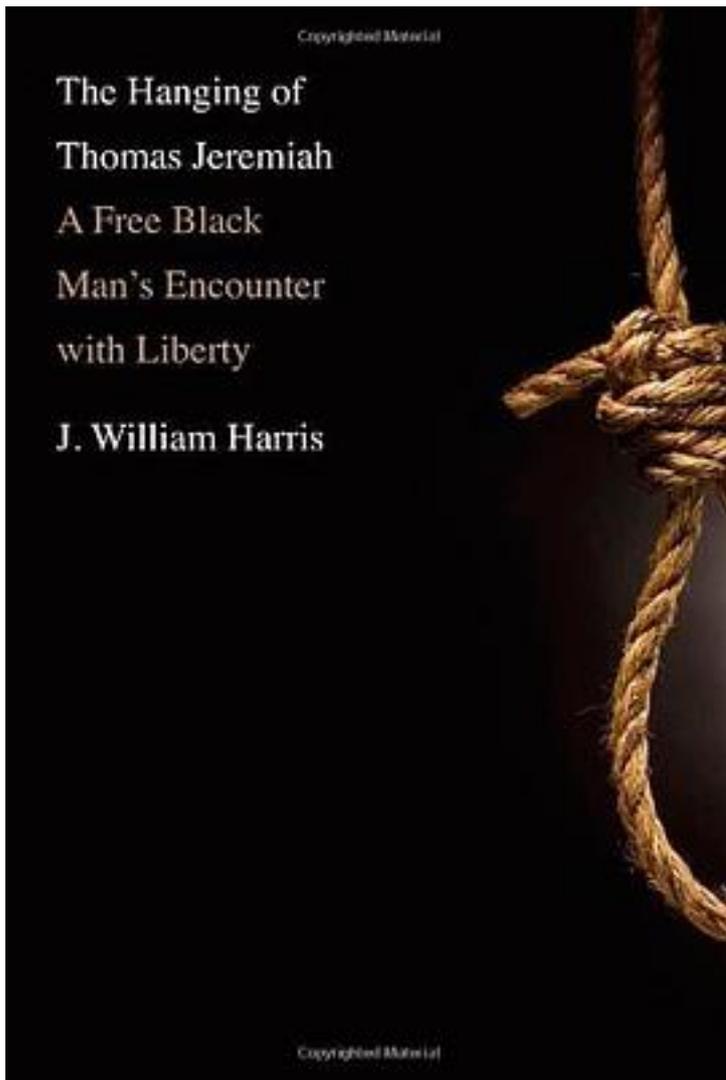


The Hanging of Thomas Jeremiah



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In 1775, Thomas Jeremiah was one of fewer than 500 'Free Negroes' in South Carolina and, with an estimated worth of GBP 1000 (about \$200,000), possibly the richest person of African descent in British North America. A slave owner himself, Jeremiah was falsely accused by whites - who resented his success as a Charleston harbour pilot - of sowing insurrection among slaves at the behest of the British. Chief among the accusers was Henry Laurens, Charleston's leading patriot, a slave owner and former slave trader, who would later become the president of the Continental Congress. Lord William Campbell, royal governor of the colony, who passionately believed the accusation was unjust, tried to save Jeremiah's life but failed. Though a free man, Jeremiah was tried in a slave court and sentenced to death. In August, 1775, he was hanged and his body burned. J. William Harris tells Jeremiah's story in full for the first time, illuminating the contradiction between a nation that would be born in a struggle for freedom and yet deny it, often violently, to others.

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