The session will start shortly. Please note:

- Your video and audio will automatically turn off.
- You can participate through the Q&A function.
- If you have technical difficulties, please email firstfriday@gilderlehrman.org so we can assist you.
Gilder Lehrman Staff

Panelists

• Sandy Trenholm – Collection Director
• Nancy Hayward – Former Director of Educational Outreach at George Washington’s Mount Vernon
• Jeanette Providence – Educator at Grant Union High School in Sacramento, California
• Darnell Abraham – George Washington in HAMILTON

Support

• Allison Kraft – Assistant Curator
During the Session

- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature, which is at the bottom of your screen.
- Viewing in full screen is recommended to see the presenters and the presentation at the same time.

For Security

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.
Recommended Reading

The Only Unavoidable Subject of Regret: George Washington, Slavery, and the Enslaved Community at Mount Vernon.
By Mary V. Thompson

Never Caught: The Washingtons’ Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge
By Erica Armstrong Dunbar

Never Caught, The Story of Ona Judge
Young Readers Edition
By Erica Armstrong Dunbar
After the Revolutionary War, 500,000 people (one-fifth of the US population) lived in bondage.

Some people began to realize that the ideals of freedom were in conflict with the institution of slavery.

Our featured letter shows George Washington struggling with this conflict.
What Words do We Associate with George Washington?

- Founding Father
- President
- Tall
- Farmer
- Intelligent
- Leadership
- General
- Brave
- Slave Owner
Depiction of Life at Mount Vernon

George Washington Becomes a Slave Owner

- Became a slaveholder at age 11
  - Inherited 10 enslaved people from his father’s estate
- 317 enslaved people lived at Mount Vernon when Washington died.
  - 124 people belonged to George Washington.
  - 153 people were “dower slaves” that belonged to the estate of Martha Washington’s first husband, Daniel Custis.
  - 40 people were leased from Penelope French.
Slavery at Mount Vernon

- He was a businessman.
  - Economics drove his decisions.
- He relentlessly searched for people who escaped bondage.
- He was strict and had a temper.
- He authorized the use of physical punishment.
- While president, he sent enslaved people back to Virginia every six months to prevent them from earning their freedom under Pennsylvania law.
Many enslaved people at Mount Vernon could:
- Read and write
- Run errands in town
- Earn their own money

Enslaved people were paid to work on “holydays.”

Washington lent guns to enslaved people so they could hunt.

Billy Lee was sent to Philadelphia to see a doctor.

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Washington’s Changing Beliefs

- Washington came to believe that slavery was wrong and should be abolished.

**Economics:**
- Exposure to the successful use of wage labor
- Saw slavery as a drain on his finances

**Morality:**
- Conflicted with the ideals of the Revolution
- Friendships with abolitionists

Land is worth more in Pennsylvania and Maryland than Virginia because of immigration and because “there are Laws here for the gradual abolition of Slavery, which neither of the two states above mentioned have, at present, but which nothing is more certain than that they must have, & at a period not remote.” George Washington, 1796
Mercer owes Washington money.

Washington owes two debts that he is anxious to pay off.

Mercer wants to repay Washington in either “military certificates” or enslaved people.
“Your favor of the 20th. ulto. did not reach me till about the first inst. – It found me in a fever, from which I am now but sufficiently recovered to attend to business. – I mention this to shew that I had it not in my power to give an answer to your propositions sooner.”

Ulte = last month
Inst (Instant) = this month

Translation: Sorry I didn’t write back sooner. Been sick.
The Debt

“It is owing to Govr. Clinton of New York, who was so obliging as to borrow, & become my security for £2500 to answer some calls of mine. This sum was to be returned in twelve months from the conclusion of the Peace. For the remains of it, about Eight hundred pounds York Cy. I am now paying an interest of Seven pr Ct.”

- Borrowed £2500 pounds from George Clinton
- Money was due back within 12 months after the “conclusion of Peace.”
- The loan has 7% interest.
- Three years later, Washington still owes Clinton £800.

£2,500 in 1786 = £ 325,800 today ($425,000)
“I never mean (unless some particular circumstances should compel me to it) to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by [inserted: The Legislature by] which slavery in this Country may be abolished by slow, sure, & imperceptible degrees.”
“But there are two debts which press hard upon me. One of which, if there is no other resource, I must sell land or negroes to discharge.”
What Happened Next

- Washington accepted 200 pounds and military certificates to repay the debt.
- Did he purchase more people?
- Did he free his enslaved people?
In 1782, the Virginia General Assembly passed “An Act to Authorize the Manumission of Slaves.” This allowed slaveholders to free people.

- Manumission - a slaveholder voluntarily frees his enslaved people
- Emancipation - the government frees the enslaved people
Washington’s Will

- Washington freed the people *he owned* upon the death of his wife, Martha.
- William Lee was freed immediately upon Washington’s death and given a thirty dollar annuity.
- Enslaved people didn’t have to leave the estate.
- The estate provided support for people who were too old, ill, or too young to support themselves.
Q&A

Why?

How?

Who?

Did you know?
Study the Founding Era with EduHam Online
Upcoming Programs

- **Inside the Vault**, Friday, August 21 at 2 pm ET (11 am PT)
  - Featuring an Eleanor Roosevelt letter about the four basic rights of all Americans.

- **History Camp: History’s Treasures**
  - Students in grades 3-8 can discover the hidden secrets in primary sources.

- **Book Breaks**, August 9 at 2 pm ET (11 am PT)

- Visit [gilderlehrman.org](http://gilderlehrman.org) for free resources for students, teachers, families, and history enthusiasts of all ages.