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A Comparative Analysis of Montpelier's, Monticello's, and Mount Vernon's
Collaborative Effort with their Descendant Communities

Rachel Gregor

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Table of Contents:

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Figures.....	iv
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Montpelier.....	33
Chapter 2: Monticello.....	62
Chapter 3: Mount Vernon.....	89
Chapter 4: Slave Cemeteries.....	120
Conclusion.....	140
Appendix.....	149
Bibliography.....	158

List of Figures:

Figure 1: Clientage Model by Michael Blakey.....	14
Image 1: Portrait of enslaved African American youth.....	33
Image 2: Front view of Montpelier.....	37
Image 3: Bricks on the north side of the home with finger indents.....	39
Image 4: Gilmore Cabin in 2000, prior to restoration.....	50
Image 5: Gilmore Cabin today.....	50
Image 6: An entrance to the “Mere Distinction of Colour” exhibit.....	53
Image 7: Example of the interior of the South Yard.....	55
Image 8: Example of representation of descendant community members.....	55
Image 9: Section of wall in the “Mere Distinction of Colour”.....	57
Image 10: The reconstructed Hemings Cabin.....	62
Image 11: Front of Monticello today.....	65
Figure 2: Floorplans showing the change of Monticello I to Monticello II.....	67
Image 12: Plaque in Jefferson Family Cemetery.....	71
Image 13: Exhibit signage relating to oral history at Monticello.....	74
Image 14: "Indian Hall" at Monticello.....	76
Image 15: Pathway for Mulberry Row.....	78
Image 16: The full room of the Sally Hemings exhibit.....	84
Image 17: The full room of the Sally Hemings exhibit.....	84
Image 18: Grave outlines at Mount Vernon.....	89
Image 19: Example of stone marker of one grave at the slave cemetery.....	89
Image 20: Photo of Mount Vernon Mansion.....	91
Image 21: Oil on canvas painting "The Washington Family, 1789-1796”.....	92
Image 22: Replica Slave Cabin at Mount Vernon.....	105
Image 23: Male slave bunker.....	107
Image 24: Section of exhibit wall.....	113
Image 25: Main portion of exhibit regarding slavery at Mount Vernon.....	113
Figure 3: Survey responses from the descendants of all three institutions.....	117

Image 26: Front gate of Madison Cemetery.....	122
Image 27: Sign marker pointing to cemeteries.....	122
Image 28: Outside gate of Jefferson Family Cemetery.....	123
Image 29: Washington Family new Tomb exterior.....	125
Image 30: Slave cemetery sign, wreath, and slave cemetery in the background.....	128
Image 31: Burial depressions of slave cemetery.....	128
Image 32: Slave cemetery at Monticello in October 2021.....	131
Image 33: Map of slave cemetery graves as presented on signage at the cemetery.....	133
Image 34: Archway to Slave cemetery. Note the outline of slave grave to the left.....	134
Image 35: 1929 cemetery marker.....	135
Image 36: 1983 marker.....	135
Image 37: Map of survey.....	137
Image 38: 2014 Image of excavation.....	137
Figure 4: Proposed model for Rubric Committee Formation.....	148

Abstract:

Historical homes and plantation sites focus interpretation on the life and legacy of the white owners of the property and the architectural and decorative elements of the home. In order to tell the whole-truth history of these sites, there must be an active discussion regarding the lives of the enslaved population, especially since the enslaved individuals were the reason the white owner was able to be successful. While very little written historical records exist for enslaved communities in comparison to those that survive for the white plantation owner, the surviving documentation, when coupled with archaeological evidence and especially the oral history of modern-day descendants, assists in telling the story of enslaved populations. Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Montpelier, all located in Virginia, had various amounts of enslaved individuals and currently have differing means and areas of emphasis when discussing slavery in the context of their site, involving their descendant community in different ways.

This thesis uses primary sources, secondary sources, and observations by the author to discuss how public historians at these three sites present the subject of slavery and its legacies in exhibitions, tours, and programming. It also uses confidential interviews with past and present staff members at these institutions and anonymous survey data collection from descendent communities to examine the collaboration between the descendants and staff at each institution. Chapters one, two, and three each cover an institution: the history of the site; the property's transition from private home to public historical site; the history of the descendant community; and of the collaborative

effort with descendants to create exhibitions and tours. Chapter four discusses the past, present, and future of collaborative effort concerning the archaeological excavations of the slave cemeteries at each site. The conclusion acts as a culmination of this data to present how other institutions might begin working with descendants should they not yet do so.

Introduction:

All historical plantation sites literally and figuratively built upon the backs of the enslaved should allow for the story of those enslaved to be presented instead of being overshadowed by the story of the white individuals who flourished inside the home. Nearly all American Founding Fathers had the means to be successful in their lives due to their enslaved population. However, at the homes of many of these individuals, the true story of the site is sparsely discussed. When these sites enlist the help of modern-day descendants of those once enslaved at these sites, whole-truth history is able to prevail. These descendants make up what is known as the “descendant community” of their site, a term coined by Dr. Michael Blakey as he and other bioarchaeologists worked with modern-day descendants on the New York African American Burial Project.¹

There are many historical homes of United States presidents in Virginia such as George Washington’s Mount Vernon along the Potomac River, Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello located near Charlottesville, and James Madison’s Montpelier in Orange County. These three men had significant numbers of enslaved people working on their property: Washington had over 300 enslaved people working at Mount Vernon at the time of his death in 1799, the year Mount Vernon’s property is staged to visitors; Jefferson had over 400 of his 600 enslaved people at Monticello, near Charlottesville, Virginia, several of whom were his own children; and over 300 enslaved people lived and worked at Montpelier, plantation home of James Madison, creator of the U.S.

¹ Michael L. Blakey, “African Burial Ground Project: Paradigm For Cooperation?,” *Museum International* 62, no. 1-2 (May 2010): pp. 61-68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2010.01716.x>.

Constitution, through the three generations the Madison family owned the property.²

While these men noted some information regarding those they enslaved, it is the oral histories passed through generations of families that tell their stories, and it is the fact that they had enslaved individuals doing their labor that allowed these three men to be featured in history books.

Mount Vernon has been open to the public since the mid-1800s, Monticello the 1920s, and Montpelier since the late 20th century; of these three homes, the opening dates correlate to the level of descendant community engagement – with Mount Vernon having the least and Montpelier having the most. There was a variety of praise and criticism from both staff and descendants from these institutions in terms of structure and amount of descendant community engagement. Overall, more Monticello descendants expressed praise for the work Monticello was doing on their behalf, while Mount Vernon and Montpelier descendants expressed many areas of concern.

This thesis employed a mixed methodology. Much of the information obtained in this thesis was gained through the author's own observations of the sites. Background information on the homes and the men who owned them can be found in numerous places, but the best place to search for information about the history of the site and noticeable involvement of descendants is on each property. Information was also gained in one of two ways: through an anonymous online survey given to descendants of each institution, and through confidential interviews with current or past staff at the homes.³

² These numbers come from the individual sites themselves and are used in online sources published by each institution and signage around the properties.

³ As such all names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

Each institution advertised the contact information for the researcher and informed staff to contact the researcher should they want to participate. Additionally, descendants who wished to provide additional responses were offered the opportunity to follow-up their survey with a confidential interview. The researcher did not directly contact members of staff or descendants for interviews. A total of thirteen people completed an interview. Sixteen descendants completed the online survey. All participants associated with at least one of the three institutions.

Many historical sites are now actively engaging with descendant communities to help inform their education and interpretation. While the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) provided the legal right for Native Americans to have rights over their ancestral remains, most work with descendants originated due to the accumulation of oral histories as there is currently no version of this law for graves of African Americans.⁴ However, not all feel as though the initial forms of “collaboration” were mutual. For example, one person at Montpelier stated that “Montpelier was working with descendants but in a way that’s still labor...[Montpelier] wasn’t doing anything for [descendants.]”⁵ This sentiment could be a possibility for other institutions. A collective unit of descendant engagements must be established. As such, the Montpelier Descendant Committee and the League of Descendants of the Enslaved at Mount Vernon have originated. Prior to the organization of the League of Descendants, both Mount Vernon and Monticello would have descendants act on an advisory group.

⁴ Justin Dunnavant, Delande Justinvil, and Chip Colwell, “Craft an African American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act,” *Nature* 593, no. 7859 (2021): pp. 337-340, <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-01320-4>.

⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

At this point, Monticello does not have an official organization, yet remains unified through Monticello's Getting Word Oral History Project. Those who wish to participate in Getting Word can if they are a documented descendant, an immediate family member of another project participant, be a DNA match with one who has documented connections to an enslaved person at Monticello, or have a credible oral history.⁶ Additionally, there is one group known as the Monticello Community which hopes to "serve as a model of how descendants of a southern U.S. plantation community can find healing and reconciliation for the legacies of enslavement, discrimination, and socio-economic inequity." According to their website, members are those who are descendants of enslaved workers of Monticello, including those enslaved who belonged to "owners and family, long-term guests and distinguished visitors." Those who have a connection to Monticello's oral history or other similar work can also be members.⁷

Of the several generations of slavery – the charter generation, the plantation generation, the revolutionary generation, the migration generation, and the freedom generation – the least information is known about the plantation generation. Very few in this generation escaped slavery; this generation was worked the hardest yet died the earliest, and most were not able to marry or remain with blood kin. A major issue within historical sites is that they may have documents that have a name of an enslaved person listed, but that is the only record that person existed. This is where the collaboration with descendants is so important. One of the ways to include members of the descendent

⁶ You may also participate in *Getting Word* if you have information regarding enslaved life at Monticello. An example of thing would be if your oral history contains information about artisans, freed laborers, or overseers; "Participate in the Getting Word Project," Getting Word Project (Monticello), accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.monticello.org/getting-word/participate>.

⁷ "Monticello Community About Us," Monticello Community, accessed March 3, 2022, <http://www.monticellocommunity.com/about.html>.

community in the narrative is through the contribution of oral histories to the museum.

The records and input from the descendant communities have built both exhibits and historical interpretation at historic homes. Just as many plantation owners only listed the names of their enslaved communities for probate reasons, many members of the enslaved population were not given the means to learn to read and write, or the materials to do so. As such, all that remains of their stories are the words passed down through the generations and any archaeological findings at these properties. Institutions do not often pursue ways to provide interpretation of these individuals as there is much that is unknown. However, one interviewee stated that for their institution, this changed when:

One of the descendants told us we need to stop focusing on what we don't know and focus on what we do. We don't have to know everybody's story from birth to death in order to be able to tell a story. We can look at the people who we maybe see referenced only once in all documentation, but we can tell that story of that person's life at that one point.⁸

Another associate reflected similarly in that “if you are doing the real work, you are listening to the silence in the collection.”⁹

Some historical sites adopt very specific guidelines about who can identify as a descendant community member by requiring genealogical records; other homes take a much broader approach, allowing any African American to consider themselves a descendent community member. At Montpelier, anyone who believes they are a descendant of an enslaved person who lived or visited Montpelier or another site in

⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Orange County, or someone who believes themselves to be a stakeholder of the descendant community, can be considered a Montpelier descendent. Mount Vernon

“[does not] stringently vet people who identify as descendants. We are not interested in gatekeeping that way. Generally, we welcome people who identify as descendants. Generally, there is two different categories: Montpelier uses ‘big D’ and ‘small d’ terminology. [Mount Vernon] doesn’t necessarily use that same terminology but in practice we do have people who can specifically trace their lineage, or believe they are specifically related to a person who was enslaved here in the 18th or 19th century.”¹⁰

In the past, museums and historical homes often neglected to discuss the enslaved population – if anything, these people were referred to as “servants” rather than enslaved individuals.¹¹ Interpreting whole-truth history is so important as it allows people to have a voice that were not previously permitted to have one, nor leave record of existence. Not only did this diminish this aspect of history, but it ignored an entire population of people who lived on these properties. Since studies have found that most Americans trust the history presented by museums and historic sites more than what they may learn in more academic settings,¹² the role of a public historian should be to utilize these public spaces to discuss these more complex issues, despite the possible controversial topics. Further, as aspects of the American classroom become more and more regulated, it is up to the museum to disperse uncensored information.

Despite descendant community engagement expanding outside the field outside the contribution of oral history to interpretation, there is less scholarship on it than that of

¹⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹¹ David L. Butler, “Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South,” *Slavery, Contested Heritage, and Thanatourism*, 2013, pp. 173-186, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203062586-10>.

¹² Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, NY: Columbia U.P., 2000).

slavery interpretation. That being said, there are aspects of descendant community collaboration discussed within chapters of public history scholarship. Similarly, many works of scholarship discuss the evolution and importance of discussing slavery at museum plantation sites. One example is *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, edited by Jessica Foy Donnelly. For example, Eichstedt and Small evaluated 122 museum plantation sites, the majority of which are in Virginia, Louisiana, and Georgia. The authors conclude that of these sites, they generally interpret slavery in one of four categorizations: annihilation and erasure, trivialization, segregation and marginalization, relative incorporation. The appendix of the book contains a list of sites in these states, followed by what the authors categorized the site as: Montpelier provides relative incorporation, Monticello is categorized as “in-between,” and Mount Vernon (or Mt. Vernon as stated in the book) is listed as segregated.¹³ An argument could be made that Mount Vernon is guilty of trivialization as they constantly provide the “happy slave narrative.” All three sites are guilty of some degree of segregation, in that they have separate tours and exhibitions that are slavery focused. Overall, the piece, while extremely well-read and should be a foundation in discussing slavery at historical site, was published 20 years ago and is now outdated and would benefit with a follow-up.

There are other resources for museums wishing to enhance their slavery exhibitions. The American Association for State and Local History created and published a series regarding the interpretation of lesser discussed and more inclusive aspects of American history within historical sites and museums. This series, known as the

¹³ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 274.

“Interpreting History” series, contains nineteen titles as of 2021, three of which thoroughly discuss slavery interpretation: *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* by the Director of the West Baton Rouge Museum Julia Rose, *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites* edited by President of Engaging Places Max van Balgooy, and *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historical Sites* edited by museum professional Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, executive director of the Trading Center on Histories and Legacies of Slavery.¹⁴ It is important to note that while these three titles feature discussion of slavery at historical sites, sometimes featuring Monticello, Mount Vernon, and Montpelier, they do not focus on entirely on descendant community engagement.

A key component of Rose’s chapter on slave history sites is that some sites struggle not in just including aspects of enslaved life in the museum’s narrative, but more so in integrating the history in the current story that is being presented. Rose uses Magnolia Mound Plantation in Louisiana as a case study, noting that it, and several other museums and sites also combat the unwillingness to change direction of interpretation out of loyalty to the original tours, programs, and exhibitions. She concludes that there are, what she calls, the 5Rs that “distinguish history workers’ ambivalence or commitments to interpreting difficult history”: reception, resistance, repetition, reflection, and reconsideration. Rose uses these 5Rs throughout the piece to discuss the lineal, yet

¹⁴ Additionally, there a follow up to *Interpreting Slavery*, specifically called *Interpreting Slavery with Children and Teens and Museums and Historical Sites*, also by Kristin L. Gallas; DeWolf is also a descendant of James DeWolf, a well-known United States slave trader.

possibly unilineal, psychological effects both historians and visitors may go through when navigating more difficult history.¹⁵

Reception is the willingness to learn of a new subject, which can be seen by a visitor entering an exhibit site about slavery. Resistance can be the disbelief at the information that is provided, in the case of this thesis, resistance can be seen by shining a realistic but negative light on a Founding Father. Similarly, repetition is when a visitor revisits information in order to better process the information. This can be seen more visually at exhibitions as visitors return to the same text panel over and over again. Areas of reflection are often needed to give the visitor time to process without distraction. At Montpelier, Mount Vernon, and Monticello, these can be benches outside exhibition space looking over the property; Monticello specifically is including benches in their slave cemetery to provide visitors with this space. Reconsideration is often the final aspect of the 5Rs, in which the visitor has changed their understanding of the subject.

Chapters in both *Interpreting Slavery* and *Interpreting African American History and Culture* specifically reference Monticello, Mount Vernon, and/or Montpelier. In *Interpreting Slavery*, chapter author Linnea Grim focuses on Mount Vernon and Monticello (as well as Gunston Hall in Virginia and Philipsburg Manor in New York), regarding how these sites incorporated slavery into their narrative. The steps in doing this are as follow: “(1) acknowledge the difficulties and importance of the subject; (2) address its emotional impact; (3) find interpretation on both site-specific and contextual scholarships; (4) determine how interpreting slavery meets their mission; (5) craft

¹⁵ Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

thoughtful strategic and interpretive plans (6) build networks of allies; (7) incorporate advisory boards; (8) use external publicity to their best long-term advantage.”¹⁶

Monticello’s Getting Word project is mentioned in this chapter as well, yet that is the only reference to descendants at either Monticello or Mount Vernon in this chapter.

Grim also cites in that chapter Amanda Seymour whose work opens *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historical Sites*. Seymour’s piece focuses on the homes of the first five presidents, thus including Montpelier, Mount Vernon, and Monticello in a similar comparative element. One of her opening statements conveys the importance of talking about others than just the plantation owner:

“There were many other people beside the Founding Fathers who lived on their estates and, by extension, actively and equally sculpted the United States. This large group of people did not have the qualities of the hegemonic trifecta of the wealthy white male (middle- and lower- class people, people of color, and women) and yet shaped history just as much as the Founders. Though since they were (and are) not part of the privileged group, their histories are, as a result, not as privileges, well-preserved, or well-presented at these historical house museums.”

Seymour’s argument focuses on “how historical amnesia and false nostalgia” affect interpretation at these sites, and how inadequate training of staff is one of the culprits of the bias at historical plantations. Several of her observations reiterate those discussed in this thesis, such as Paul Jennings being the only enslaved person discussed on Montpelier’s house tour, almost all interpretation at Mount Vernon being Washington-focused, and the easiness to avoid slavery exhibition at Monticello depending on the tour

¹⁶ Kris Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, eds., *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield; published in cooperation with the Tracing Center of Histories and Legacies of Slavery, 2015).

guide. By neglecting in telling the whole-truth history of these sights with an emphasis on the enslaved community, a visitor's impression of the time period can be highly distorted.

In the fifth chapter of *Interpreting Slavery*, Dina Bailey and Richard Cooper do discuss the importance of involving a community, mentioning that members of said community could be descendants of enslaved people or the plantation owners themselves. The advice in this chapter is simply “best practices for the interpretation of slavery require that institutions make community involvement essential to their operations” before providing the caveat that plans are dependent on the situations of the institution.¹⁷

As museums and historical sites begin to present stories about others whose names are commonly discussed in public education, they open discussions with a wider group of individuals. This allows for a deeper and more meaningful relationship between the sites and their stakeholders, and allows the sites to gain more information than what was previously known due to oral histories being passed down from the families of the enslaved population. However, there can be clashing between those from these sites who are looking to answer historical questions, and those within the descendant communities who wish to have the sole right in determining the disposition of their ancestral remains. These debates often happen in reference to the discovery of slave cemeteries, where historians and archaeologists are eager to answer questions about the burial process of the enslaved community. Many of the descendants wish for the souls of their ancestors to stay at rest, as they were often worked to death. Historians wish to have answers not only about the individual enslaved persons, but also the culture as it was lived on the

¹⁷ Gallas and DeWolf Perry, eds., *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic*, 69.

plantation and how it related to the places from which the enslaved persons were brought to the Americas.

This thesis assesses not only the pros and cons of the approach taken at Montpelier, Monticello, and Mount Vernon in regard to exhibiting the subject of slavery and collaborating with descendant communities, but also provides a recommendation for utilizing the landscape to further educate visitors about the lives of the enslaved community. Space and place have different roles on these plantation sites: owners and overseers controlled the space, yet the enslaved communities were able to create a place for themselves. Additionally, space, place, and time also affect visitation to these sites and is reflective of their previous efforts in presenting the subject of slavery and in engaging with their descendants: “[Montpelier] is very young. You could tour Mount Vernon before the Civil War, and Monticello is approaching its 200th anniversary.”¹⁸ One interviewee notes that “What visitors come in with and what they hear in the national media will affect their perception about what we’re doing.”¹⁹ Charlottesville, which is about an hour from Orange, has been the site of multiple white supremacist rallies and public disputes over Confederate monuments that have impacted visitation at both Montpelier and Monticello. Montpelier’s award-winning exhibit, *Mere Distinction of Colour*, emphasizes the continuing areas of racial injustice in the United States:

About a month after the opening of *Mere Distinction of Colour*, is when the Klan rally happened in Charlottesville. Then a month after that, was the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville as well, where Heather Heyer was murdered by Neo-Nazis. This was all coincidental. None of these rallies were planned when *Mere Distinction* opened, or even the election

¹⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

of Donald Trump – it wasn't 'Let's create this exhibit because Trump was elected.' These things were already in the works.²⁰

Like Mount Vernon's *Lives Bound Together* exhibit and Monticello's *Monticello as an Experiment*, exhibits that highlight the lives of the enslaved, it is easy for a visitor to neglect entering the *Mere Distinction of Colour*. Additionally, there are events that these institutions host, such as Juneteenth celebrations at all three sites or Montpelier's archaeological Expedition Programs, that guests and descendants often are unable to or choose not to attend. As one interviewee stated: "There's a sort of pendulum: there will be a huge push to talk about slavery but then people get sick of it and now there's wishes to not talk about [slavery] as much...it's important to remember and talk about."²¹

Further, it should become standard practice that all historical homes, regardless of stature, that relied on the labor of enslaved individuals, do not hide this information from the public or present this information in a way that alters the reality of slavery. In the past, historical sites would use terms such as "servant" or "help" instead of "slave" to present the role more as a willing job than instead as a forced lifestyle of brutalization. Many smaller plantation sites do not often inform visitors about information in regard to the enslaved presence on the property. This could be due to budgetary issues and lack of resources available to find and note the names of previous enslaved individuals. Guided tours at homes, even those of Mount Vernon, Montpelier, and Monticello, should include substantial information about daily life of enslaved individuals. Other museums around the country have created partnerships to document and interpret the lives of not only the

²⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

enslaved population on the site, but also the African Americans during and after the Civil War through means of public history.

One interviewee stated that “some sites will engage descendants to gather information and stories, but that relationship is momentary.”²² Michael Blakey uses the following clientage model of public engagement to discuss the “the standards of professional conduct (evidential fact must be adhered to), ethical obligations to descendant communities, and contracted business agreements” that one must understand and follow when there is collaboration between the archaeologists and descendants. Within this model, the descendant community is the ethical client, as they have “rights to some version of informed consent over the disposition of their ancestral remains and arguably even over the interpretation of their histories.” The business client is the institution in question, and the profession would be general “professional standards.”²³ This model displays the collaborative flow between an institution and their descendants.



Figure 1: Clientage Model by Michael Blakey. Figure from “Archaeology under the Blinding Light of Race.”

²² Confidential interview, February 2022.

²³ Michael L. Blakey, “Archaeology under the Blinding Light of Race,” *Current Anthropology* 61, no. S22 (January 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1086/710357>.

The Rubric

As more and more institutions seek answers from the descendant community, further discussions should explore how public historians and archaeologists focusing on the gaining and spreading of knowledge can work with descendant community members who focus on family and heritage. While it is improbable to make a standard on how these two groups should work together as every institution is different, there are still commonalities that can inform basic guidelines to assist the development of formal partnerships between public historians and the descendant communities as they attempt this public history project. To establish these guidelines and measure a partnership's success, Montpelier created a rubric in collaboration with the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, and with other historic homes – such as Monticello and Mount Vernon – entitled *Engaging Descendant Communities in the Interpretation of Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (hereafter referred to as the “Rubric”). This rubric acknowledges the importance of centering the Black descendent community in reshaping the traditional, white-authored history of plantation sites and discusses ways to involve the descendent community in future interpretations.

The Rubric is an interdisciplinary tool that was created in partnership between James Madison's Montpelier and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund in 2018 by 49 professionals.²⁴ These professionals included curators, educators, activists, and members of six descendant

²⁴ National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, and James Madison's Montpelier. “Engaging Descendant Communities in the Interpretation of Slavery at Museums and Historical Sites: A Rubric of Best Practices Established by the National Summit on Teaching Slavery,” February 2018. <https://montpelier-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/Interpreting%20Slavery%2011-12-19.pdf>.

communities, some of whom are individuals that represent Monticello and Mount Vernon. To one associate of Montpelier,

to use the Rubric, we need to evaluate all of our actions: research, interpretation, and *governance*. And that's the key part to using the Rubric- how all those points work together. With working with the Descendant Community to do research...well that research won't ever see the light of day publicly without having the governance.²⁵

The Rubric focuses on three categories: Multi-Disciplinary Research, Relationship Building, and Interpretation. Structural parity is discussed primarily when discussing the category of Relationship Building as parity allows for descendant communities to be represented equally throughout the site, from visitors, volunteers, and staff to board members. A Montpelier representative said that:

The Rubric is a great evaluation tool. But in the last two years it has been used as an example of not how to progress a network together, but as justification to demand things from the institution that weren't meant to be obtained in that way. It's great when the underrepresented find their power, but the Rubric is a guideline, not a blueprint. Once things are mandated, the creative process stops.²⁶

As this quote suggests, there is a disconnect regarding shared authority. As institutions work with the public to create a whole-truth narrative, a partnership is formed, resulting in the desire for equal stakes in the institution. This partnership and its collaborative effort require its own system of checks and balances. Despite the areas of success with the Rubric, there is also an area in which it has failed: there is not a way to acknowledge and hold Rubric users accountable. When asked what staff at Montpelier

²⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

would change about the Rubric, there were two common themes: case studies would need to be presented with the Rubric, and that the Rubric should be adopted at the board level.

According to the Rubric, “achieving structural parity ensures that descendants are represented—and empowered—at every level of the organization, from the board to the volunteers.”²⁷ As stated earlier, as of 2021, the Montpelier Descendant Committee was voted to be an equal co-steward with the Montpelier Foundation by the Board. This vote for structural parity was seen to assist Montpelier in following guidelines established in the Rubric. An associate with Montpelier discussed this shift toward parity as such:

The Board of the Montpelier Foundation has resolved to establish a relationship with the Descendant Committee -we had a 25-year relationship with descendants but not necessarily the Descendant Committee – to share power at the board level with this group and therefore all descendants. The Descendant Committee would make recommendations to the governance committee regarding individual descendants to become board members.²⁸

Later, this same representative stated:

The process has been difficult and has been misunderstood by many. The outcome has been tricky because some people have made some steps more difficult than it needs to be. We’re onto the next step but we have gotten some push back.²⁹

A representative at Montpelier stated, “the MDC has been trying to get the Board to use the rubric since June 2020 and the board has resisted.” Another Montpelier associate said that “the Board had a backlash against the Rubric and therefore we are not using the Rubric.” Similar views are had by the descendant community with one descendant stating, “The future looks bleak in reaching our goal of parity...the push-back

²⁷ The Rubric, 9.

²⁸ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

²⁹ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

against equal representation on the board is extraordinary.” Feelings of frustration are felt by many as one interviewee stated:

The Co-Stewardship is exciting and good, and I feel sometimes hopeful and sometimes angry. But [how it is being gained] is terrible...I wish that the National Trust would step in. I wish they would do more. I want them to take control since they own it.³⁰

An ongoing situation is going on at Montpelier: not even a full year since the Montpelier Foundation announced in June of 2021 a vote for shared authority equally with Montpelier’s descendant community, a vote occurred March 25th, 2022 to strip that power. According to the Washington Post article published the day after the vote, executive director of James Monroe’s Highland, Sara Bon Harper stated “she has watched from afar as Montpelier has struggled to live up to its own example,” a theme that is echoed by many in the article.³¹

To the knowledge of several Montpelier staff, there is no way of knowing how many institutions are using the Rubric or have looked to it for guidance. As such, it is imperative that Montpelier and the National Trust create some sort of committee to not only track who uses and when the Rubric is being used, but also consider creating a type of accreditation to ensure the Rubric is being used to its full effect. By its very name, a rubric is used to rate and grade or measure something. When asked if it is known how many institutions use the Rubric, one representative stated, “I know others have looked to it. But it would be interesting to see how others have used and internalized the Rubric

³⁰ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

³¹ Gregory S. Schneider, “James Madison's Montpelier strips power from enslaved descendants group,” *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/03/25/james-madison-montpelier-enslaved-vote/?fbclid=IwAR0b1XfmlPbEFwDv-VtpUzUT95zblhuO_Rr_OHsTyYW8tyzoliVLkX0fR6c

since its publication.”³² Montpelier staff believes that the Rubric is being used by other institutions, stating that they “still have colleagues at other institutions reach out asking how we interpret the lives of the enslaved community. [Several of these sites] are taking the first steps in discussing enslaved people at their sites. They are seeing areas in their tour scripts that are problematic.”³³

Representatives at Mount Vernon and Monticello had mentioned they have utilized or at least heard of the Rubric. Mount Vernon staff recounts that they have had meetings in which they have “printed out the Rubric and went through it...in general [interviewee] feels that the spirit of the Rubric is alive within the people who are doing this work. [Interviewee is not entirely sure] to the extent to which we are literally looking at each point and thinking about it.”³⁴ Something that they deem should be remembered though is that:

Change does happen very slowly. If you look at the actual Rubric categories, you can feel like you are the lowest in every single thing, which can be discouraging. But these things do take time...change is happening, just very incrementally. It can be difficult in knowing there is so much work you have to do but you also have to look behind you and see how far you’ve come.³⁵

Several associates of Monticello and Montpelier spoke highly of the Rubric, but also discussed its pitfalls. One interviewee stated that they felt the main issue with the Rubric started in its creation in terms of recruiting contributors:

It was very exclusive for no reason. It didn’t do a good job of including other sites which had worked with descendants...it didn’t pay attention to

³² Confidential interview, February 2022.

³³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

sites in North Carolina that have been doing work with descendant communities since the 1970s. Maybe [these sites in North Carolina] don't have an organized descendant community or maybe they don't have the same sort of structure, or aren't privately owned sites or sites of presidential homes, but Somerset was the first place where a descendant was the director of the site.³⁶

However, the Rubric may need amendments, as noted by one interviewee:

From the time the Rubric was completed, there has been a larger awakening by regular Americans about the discussions of race. It would be interesting to see if anything as a result of these more recent discussions could change how we format the Rubric or what is discussed in the Rubric.³⁷

Overall, "the Rubric was not completed by the need of self-promotion but instead of reconciliation and that this should be the future for cultural institutions."³⁸

Cemeteries, Archaeology, and Interpretation

Another component of interpretation to examine is the slave cemeteries, each of which has undergone varying degrees of research and excavation. Many of these cemeteries have only just recently been discovered, mostly due to technological advancements in archaeological phase one surveys.³⁹ Conversations with descendants have occurred to various degrees at these three homes, and some explorations have been undertaken in these cemeteries with the permission of the descendant communities.

³⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁹ Phase one surveys involve locating and mapping the extent of a site, which is done through manners such as historical document research, pedestrian survey, ground penetrating radar, and shovel test surveys.

Mount Vernon and Monticello have had graves exposed and minor archaeology done to collect historical data, yet Montpelier has done little in terms of archaeology outside of pedestrian surveys, mostly due to the concerns voiced by the descendant communities. A consensus of all three institutions among their descendant communities is that in the bare minimum, preservation of the landscape of the cemetery should occur.

The relationship between white professionals at historical sites and descendant communities is often very rocky due to many negative previous interactions. If historians pressure descendant communities on issues related to their deceased ancestors buried on the property, especially in the instance when the staff at these institutions are predominately white and are pressuring Black descendants, this insensitivity can create a deeper rift between the two parties. Professionals often insist that information unearthed figuratively and actually in the cemeteries may bridge gaps in the historical record, allowing for more information to become known about the enslaved population, thus benefiting both historians and descendants. As those enslaved at these plantation homes were rarely given a voice during their lifetime, there is much historical information that could be gained by examining their graves and what remains of their material culture. In terms of artifacts, even if an object is on display in a white plantation owner's private space, one can be certain that a member of the enslaved community *did* interact with it, just perhaps not in the sense one would think. The fancy linens on Washington's bed, the porcelain dishes that Jefferson ate from, and the glass bowls Dolley Madison served ice cream from were all handled and cleaned by enslaved people. The very buildings that these individuals, their families, and their guests slept in were the buildings built by hand by the enslaved. The mere presence of these objects may be the only lasting objects of

some of these individuals' existence. However, many descendants respectfully prefer for the deceased to rest in peace after a lifetime of hard labor and exploitation over the desire of those currently living to uncover this information through slave cemetery excavations.

Many staff members at these institutions expressed being treated poorly by visitors. In more than one interview, conversations turned to how the archaeologists, while working to uncover information about slavery, encountered visitors who would do at least one of three things: accuse staff of being disrespectful to human remains when excavating in the slave cemeteries, assert that slavery was "not that bad," or ask the archaeologists and field school students if they were "the slaves" of the plantation. Similarly, there were multiple interviewees who recalled instances where costumed interpreters, mostly people of color and/or women, felt threatened by visitors. In regard to all of these examples, several of the affected parties were members of the descendant community working with these institutions.

Historical Views on Slavery

Few primary sources from the 1800s of the enslaved population are available in comparison to the records that remain about the white family. There are sources from Madison, Jefferson, and Washington discussing the enslaved individuals on the property as well as their views on slavery. One of Madison's most famous quotes, "We have seen the mere distinction of colour made in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man" was spoken at the Constitutional Convention. This is where the exhibition on enslaved life at Montpelier, *The Mere Distinction of Colour*, received its name. Washington was quite vocal about

ending the institution of slavery and was the only Founding Father to free all of his enslaved people he owned which he did in his will (note that this did not include his wife's slaves from her first marriage). However, Washington and his wife did go through many trials in order to recover a run-away slave of theirs, a woman name Ona Judge. Washington was quoted describing "the ingratitude of the girl, who was brought up and treated more like a child than a Servant." The Monticello website has a wide variety of online quotes from Jefferson discussing his views on the subject. The webpage lists that Jefferson believed slavery to be a "moral depravity" and a "hideous blot" on the nation, leading visitors to believe Jefferson was not an advocate for slavery. However, while this list of sources does include excerpts of Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia from 1782, including the quote of Jefferson stating, "I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."⁴⁰ An additional quote from Jefferson discovered in a letter to John Wayles Epps, his nephew and former son-in-law, in 1820 discussed how he felt females were much more important in comparison to men:

I know no error more consuming to an estate than that of stocking farms with men almost exclusively. I consider a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man of the farm. What she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labors disappear in mere consumption.⁴¹

While "descendant community" refers to that of the descendants of enslaved persons who worked on these properties, there is a different form of descendant that must

⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. London: Stockdale, 1787.

⁴¹ Thomas Jefferson. *From Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Epps, 30 June 1820*.

be discussed: mixed-race descendants of the white enslaver himself. There are claims that Washington, Jefferson, and Madison all had sexual relations and children with enslaved women. Of the three men, only Jefferson is known to have any acknowledged biological children: six with his wife, Martha Wayles, and six with Sally Hemings, his enslaved chambermaid.⁴² Neither Washington nor Madison had biological children with their wives although Martha Washington and Dolley Madison both had children by their first husbands. Yet there are descendant community members whose family histories state they are descendants of Madison or Washington.

It is important to first discuss the history between Thomas Jefferson and the enslaved Hemings family, as this relationship is featured in great detail throughout Monticello. Additionally, the research that went into establishing the narrative that Jefferson did father the children of Sally Hemings has been referenced time and time again as descendants at other institutions came forward. The first known enslaved person by the name of Hemings was Elizabeth “Betty” Hemings. She was born the daughter of an unnamed African woman and a white man known as Captain Hemings. Betty had at least 12 children between four partners, one of whom was John Wayles.⁴³ John and Betty had six children together: Robert, James, Thenia, Critta, Peter, and Sarah “Sally” Hemings. John Wayles was also the father to Martha Wayles, the first and only wife of

⁴² Only two daughters of Martha’s children survived to adulthood. Only one of these two women survived past the age of 25. However, with Sally Hemings, the two had at least six children, four of which survived to adulthood: Beverly, Harriett, Madison, and Eston. See Annette Gordon Reed, *The Hemings Family of Monticello*.

⁴³ First, Elizabeth and an unnamed enslaved man had four children together. Her last partner was also an unnamed enslaved man, and their union resulted in a child named Lucy Hemings who lived to only be nine years old. Elizabeth’s third partner was an Irish workman named Joseph Neilson, and the two had a child named John Hemmings. John spelt his name as “Hemmings” as did several others in the Hemings family. Betty died at Monticello in 1807.

Thomas Jefferson, making Sally and Martha half-sisters.⁴⁴ Upon the death of John Wayles, all property was inherited by Jefferson through Martha, including Betty and her children. Several of the Hemings children were those who ran the shops and worked in the house rather than in the field; the other children of Betty were also favored by Jefferson. According to historian Annette Gordon-Reed,

[T]his set of children represented a further blurring of racial lines, moving branches of the Hemings family tree farther away from the African woman who was by law the reason for their enslavement, toward the Englishman who was the source of their last name. With three white grandparents and one black grandparent, these children were by the racial classification of the day ‘mulattoes,’ Virginia laws making no distinction between various gradation of racial mixture.⁴⁵

After the death of Martha Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson left for Europe, accompanied by his daughter, also named Martha; Sally’s brother James also went to France to expand his cooking skills. After the death of his youngest daughter, Jefferson requested his other surviving child, seven year old Mary, also known as Maria, come to France. Maria was accompanied by her nursemaid, Sally Hemings, who was around the age of 14. While in France, a country that had outlawed slavery, the Hemings siblings faced a dilemma: to return enslaved to Virginia or be free in France.⁴⁶ According to Sally’s son, Madison Hemings,

⁴⁴ There were no portraits of either women ever done, and very little written description of them either. Isaac Granger Jefferson, an enslaved blacksmith at Monticello, wrote in 1847, “Sally might near white...Sally was very handsome, long straight hair down her back,” and Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Jefferson’s grandson, wrote in ci. 1851 that Sally was “light colored and decidedly good looking...” This information came from signage at Monticello in *The Life of Sally Hemings: An Exhibit*, seen at Monticello in November of 2021.

⁴⁵ Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2008), 80-81.

⁴⁶ James would be freed after teaching another enslaved individual, his brother, Peter, how to cook. James was given his freedom in 1793, leave Monticello in 1796, and committed suicide in 1801.

[D]uring that time my mother became Mr. Jefferson's concubine, and when he was called back home she was *enceinte* by him. He desired to bring my mother back to Virginia with him, but she demerged she was just beginning to understand the French language well, and in France she was free while, while if she returned to Virginia she would be re-enslaved. So she refused to return with him. To induce her to do so he promised her extraordinary privileges, and made a solemn pledge that her children would be freed at the age of 21 years. In consequences of his promises, on which she implicitly relied, she returned with him to Virginia.⁴⁷

Madison Hemings also stated in the same source that he and his siblings “were the only children of [Jefferson's] by a slave woman” indicating that the only known children of Jefferson's were those mothered by Martha Jefferson and those of Sally Hemings.⁴⁸

When the Jeffersons and the Hemings returned to Virginia in 1789, Sally was 16 years old and pregnant, heading to Monticello to receive “extraordinary privileges.”⁴⁹ Their first child was born in 1780 and did not survive.⁵⁰ The affair was first discussed in an 1802 paper: “It is well known that the man, whom it delighteth the people to honor, keeps, and for many years has kept, as his concubine, one of his slaves. Her name is Sally.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Madison Hemings, “Life Among the Lowly,” *Pike County Republicans*, Ohio, March 13, 1873.

⁴⁸ Madison Hemings, “Life Among the Lowly”; The 1995 movie *Jefferson in Paris* was the first film portrayal of Sally Hemings. There are mixed reviews of the film as it came out in a time in which the claims of a Hemings-Jefferson relationship were highly contested. Further, the movie is also classified as a romance, both due to Jefferson's relationship in the movie to Hemings and to Maria Cosway, a married artist and musician who was a close friend to Jefferson while he was in France. There are letters between the two that contain romantic content, yet it is believed that as Martha Jefferson had wished for Jefferson to not remarry after her death, and as Coswell was married, there is no known confirming information regarding a relationship. The possibility of a relationship is not discussed much at Monticello; that of Jefferson and Sally is, but it is not spoken of in a romantic context.

⁴⁹ These privileges meant that Sally was not to work in the fields, would do light work around Monticello, including sewing, and cared for her children and Jefferson's chamber.

⁵⁰ The oral history of the descendants of Thomas C. Woodson (1790-1879) claim that he is the first-born child of Jefferson and Sally, yet this has not been verified.

⁵¹ *Richmond Recorder*, Sept 1, 1802, cited in Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*, 323.

Of the 600 people Jefferson enslaved, he freed ten people, eight of whom had the last names “Hemings;” three were Sally’s siblings, and four were the surviving children of Sally.⁵² In 1830, Sally was “given her time” by Martha Jefferson Randolph. Sally, Madison, and Eston are listed as free white people in the census, yet in an 1831 state census, Sally is described as a free mulatto.⁵³ She lived with her sons in Charlottesville until she died in 1835. There is no known record recalling the location of her grave.⁵⁴

Many people did not agree with scholars like Fawne Brodie (*Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, 1974) or Annette Gordon-Reed (*Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*, 1997), who claimed Jefferson to be the father of Sally’s children through historical evidence. Soon after Gordon-Reed’s book was published, the claim was backed by modern science. In 1998, there was a study that compared the Y-DNA of a descendant of Eston Hemings Jefferson and the Y-DNA of a white descendant of Jefferson’s. Similarly, they tested the Y-DNA of the Hemings descendant against that of a Dabney Carr descendant; Carr was a friend, schoolmate, and brother-in-law of Jefferson. Many of Jefferson’s white descendants claimed that Carr or his children were the father of Sally’s children, not Jefferson:

⁵² Sally’s brothers Robert and James were freed during Jefferson’s life. James, son of Sally’s sister Critta, left with Jefferson’s consent. Burwell Colbert and Joseph Fossett were also freed, and were descendants of Betty Hemings. Beverly and Harriet were permitted to leave Monticello in 1822 and Madison and Eston were freed in Jefferson’s will in 1826. Sally’s brothers, Robert, James, and John, were also freed.

⁵³ Annette Gordon-Reed notes “According to Madison Hemings, Dolly Madison suggested that he be named after her husband, promising his mother a present if she did...Dolley evidently made a comment – “if it is a boy name him after my husband and I’ll give you a gift” when Sally Hemings was pregnant. Hemings recounted this event not for any evident pride in the name James Madison but because it was an instance in which his and his mother’s relationship to Jefferson, Madison’s closest friend, was acknowledged. Sally was poorly treated anyway - a thing not easily forgotten by her son. “Dolley reneged on her promise even though she knew that Hemings had named her little boy Madison.”; Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 589.

⁵⁴ Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 209.

Although Eston's descendants believe that Thomas Jefferson was Eston's father, most Jefferson scholars give more credence to the oral tradition of the descendants of Martha Jefferson Randolph, the president's daughter. They believe that Sally Hemings' later children, including Eston, were fathered by either Samuel or Peter Carr, sons of Jefferson's sister, which would explain their resemblance to the president.⁵⁵

The Y-chromosome was used in analysis as it gets passed from father to son and remains unchanged unless a random mutation occurs. This analysis can determine male-line relations. When examining the DNA of Eston Hemings Jefferson, researchers compared:

five male-line descendants of two sons of the president's paternal uncle, Field Jefferson; five male-line descendants of two sons of Thomas Woodson; one male-line descendant of Eston Hemings Jefferson; and three male-line descendants of three sons of John Carr, grandfather of Samuel and Peter Carr.⁵⁶ No Y-chromosome data were available from male-line descendants of President Thomas Jefferson because he had no surviving sons.⁵⁷

There was a rare haplotype found on the loci of Field Jefferson's descendants that was also present on the loci of the Eston Hemings Jefferson's descendant. This haplotype was not present on a Y-chromosome of those others tested. The final verdict from the study was that it is more than likely when combined with historical evidence that Jefferson did father Eston Heming Jefferson. It is possible that a male descendant of Field Jefferson could have fathered Eston Hemings Jefferson, yet due to lack of historical evidence, it is much less likely.⁵⁸ Presently, Monticello affirms all information above.

⁵⁵ Eugene A. Foster et al., "Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child," *Nature News* (Nature Publishing Group, November 5, 1998), <https://www.nature.com/articles/23835>.

⁵⁶ See footnote 25 about Thomas Woodson.

⁵⁷ Eugene A. Foster et al., "Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child."

⁵⁸ Eugene A. Foster et al., "Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child."

As for James Madison, Bettye Kears published a book in 2020 called *The Other Madisons: The Lost History of a President's Black Family*.⁵⁹ Her family's oral history states that she is a descendant of an enslaved cook at Montpelier, Coreen, and James Madison. The oral history states that Coreen and James had a son together named Jim, who later had a son named Emanuel Madison. Testing was done on the Y-chromosome DNA of Kears's male cousins but only found markers commonly seen in West African gene clusters. Further, Kears compared her own DNA with the DNA of Conny Graft, a distant relative of Madison's youngest sister, Sarah Catlett Madison. There were no matches in their DNA. While Montpelier does not necessarily include this story in exhibition space as of 2021, they do honor and respect the oral histories by members of the descendant community. Coreen's name is included in Montpelier's Naming Project, a program that discusses the history of individuals enslaved at Montpelier. While originally Monticello did not believe the Hemings descendants about their lineage, a representative of Montpelier stated in regard to Kears's book, "we always accepted it – we've talked about it all along," despite the negative results of the DNA testing.⁶⁰

Unlike Monticello and Montpelier, there is more push back at Mount Vernon regarding some oral history aspects from descendants. Modern day descendants of West Ford claim he is the son of George Washington:

West Ford, per our oral history, is the son of George Washington...in 2000, we brought in documentation that we felt was relevant to our history. At the end of that said meeting, there was a press conference and they did state that we are of Washington descent, however, they don't want to say it was of George. Which we understand: until DNA is done,

⁵⁹ Bettye Kears, *The Other Madisons: The Lost History of a President's Black Family* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books ; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021).

⁶⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

it's up in the air. We did ask for DNA testing. At that time, they were not willing to provide that testing. Rolling forward, I asked again last year and I am waiting to hear if they want to do DNA...we want to pursue that because it won't ever be put to rest until we do DNA testing...we won't test unless we are 100% sure we have Washington's DNA.⁶¹

Much information regarding the life of West Ford is present in *I Cannot Tell a Lie: The True Story of George Washington's African American Descendants* by Linda Allen Bryant published in 2004. The book is presented as a fictionalized biography due to the lack of scientific backing to support the family's oral history.⁶²

West Ford was the son of Venus, an enslaved woman owned by Washington's older brother, John Augustine Washington. Ford was a tradesmen, as well as the main guardian to Washington's Tomb at Mount Vernon. Freed in 1821, Ford's likeness was sketched - now in Mount Vernon's collection - which was something that was usually reserved for members of wealthy white society. According to Mount Vernon's website,

Some of Ford's descendants maintain that George Washington was Ford's father, but West Ford was born at Bushfield plantation between March 3, 1783 and June 22, 1784. Since George Washington was not in Virginia between November 1781, following the victory at Yorktown, and his return to Mount Vernon on Christmas Eve of 1783, at the end of the American Revolution, he was not in proximity to Venus and did not father West Ford.⁶³

Bushrod Washington inherited West Ford from his father, and later inherited Mount Vernon after George Washington's death. Ford is also known for establishing

⁶¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

⁶² Linda Allen Bryant, *I Cannot Tell a Lie: The True Story of George Washington's African American Descendants* (New York, New York: iUniverse Star, 2004).

⁶³ "West Ford," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/west-ford/>.

Gum Springs Farm, a historic area for the Black community.⁶⁴ Upon Ford's illness and death, he was taken to Mount Vernon by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the organization who has restored Mount Vernon and continues to care for it today. They acknowledge that West Ford assisted in Mount Vernon's restoration. Controversy surrounds if West Ford was placed in the old tomb of the Washington Family when he passed, rather than the slave cemetery.

Conclusion:

Washington, Jefferson, and Madison greatly influenced the concept of freedom in the United States but they and many others who fought for freedom also owned individuals. Enslavers often did not provide individuals in the enslaved population surnames thus denying these individuals personhood. For some, even the first names of those enslaved at these sites are unknown, and much of their most basic information was never recorded, including birth and death dates. One interviewee explained how disturbed they were by seeing the life of one enslaved individual forever being noted simply as "Baby Girl."⁶⁵ Another descendant stated,

Luckily, in my family we have a story. When I was walking around the slave cemetery and seeing all the small coffins [in the outline], there were a lot of children in that cemetery that died. They have no story. We don't know all of their histories. They are lost forever. I am one of the lucky ones. I can understand my ancestors. But what about all the other ones that

⁶⁴ Ford was freed by the Washington Family in 1806 and was granted 160-acres which Ford sold. The profits made due to this sale was used to purchase 214 acres of land near Mount Vernon which Ford named Gum Springs in 1833. Many freed African Americans settled in and near Gum Springs. According to the Gum Springs website, one-fifth of modern-day residents are descendants from the original families.

⁶⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

died there that have no history?⁶⁶

The enslaved individuals of all generations built relationships, had religious beliefs, and created communities even if they were not recognized by society. They left a legacy of food, music, beliefs, and language for the modern population. Plantation homes often neglect telling or acknowledging the lives of enslaved people or the fact that American presidents owned, beat, and had relations with those they enslaved. For descendants, telling the story of their ancestors ensures that their lives are not forgotten and that they continue to work for racial equality. American history cannot be studied without the understanding of slavery in the United States, and most of that understanding comes from the knowledge and collaborative effort of the descendant community.

⁶⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Chapter 1:

Montpelier



Image 1: Portrait of enslaved African American youth created out of archaeologically excavated brick fragments found in the South Yard at Montpelier. Portrait is in a building in the South Yard. (Photo by Rachel Gregor.)

Although all men are born free, and all nations might be so, yet, too true is it that slavery has been the general lot of the human race. Ignorant, they have been cheated; asleep, they have been surprised; divided, the yoke has been forced upon them. But what is the lesson?... Conclude that the people ought to be enlightened to be awakened; to be united, that after establishing a government they should watch over it. — James Madison⁶⁷

⁶⁷ James Madison, "Who Are the Best Keepers of the People's Liberties?," in *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison 1829-1836*, vol. IV (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1865), p. 483.

Known as the Father of the Constitution, James Madison was one of the many Founding Fathers whose wealth derived from the labor of enslaved individuals at his family's plantation, Montpelier. Like other men of his status, he gained several of those he enslaved from his father before him, as well as inherited the family homestead. Both the property and the population of enslaved individuals grew and fell in the many years the three generations of Madisons owned the plantation known as Montpelier. Much documentation about the life of both the Madisons and those whom they owned did not survive after Madison's death, as many of his personal letters and documents were destroyed.⁶⁸ The property is now owned and operated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation which works with the Montpelier Foundation to interpret the lives of all those who lived at Montpelier. Montpelier is visited less than Monticello or Mount Vernon; one representative believes this to be because "Madison is not one of the 'greats.' He's largely in the shadow of others."⁶⁹ It is also likely that the location of rural Orange County is less of a tourist destination than urban Arlington (Mount Vernon) or suburban Albemarle (Monticello) counties.

Montpelier sponsors descendant-focused events and collaborated with the Black community in Orange even before the *Mere Distinction of Colour* opened and the Rubric was created. Juneteenth, a date of African American independence, became a national holiday when United States President Joe Biden signed a bill into law in 2021. However, Montpelier has been celebrating Juneteenth on the property since 2016. The Orange County African American Historical Society (OCAAHS), and The Arts Center in Orange

⁶⁸ *The Fredericksburg News*, November 22, 1855.

⁶⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

(ACO) had been celebrating Juneteenth in various locations in Orange County since 2006. OCAAHS was founded by Rebecca Gilmore Coleman and Carolyn French, the mother of James French, chair of the board of the Montpelier Descendants Committee. After working together with Dr. Matt Reeves, Montpelier's Director of Archaeology, on her great-grandfather's cabin, Coleman and Reeves proposed that Montpelier work with OCAAHS and ACO to annually host Juneteenth at Montpelier. This site was the first and only presidential home in Virginia to host it until Mount Vernon followed in 2021.⁷⁰ Despite many areas of progress and despite allowing the descendants to have a more diverse set of voices, Montpelier as a whole has multiple areas of disconnect between the Foundation, the staff, and the descendant community.

Montpelier overlooks the Blue Ridge Mountains and is surrounded by heavily wooded forests.⁷¹ Many enslaved individuals came to the property prior to even the Madison family themselves, and many enslaved continued to live on property until after the Civil War.⁷² The Montpelier Foundation does use all aspects of its property to acknowledge the history of the site and the lives that were lived upon it, including a nearby cabin of a freedman and a 1910s segregated train depot.⁷³ Out of the three institutions in questions, Montpelier is intentional in depicting slavery and racism not only during the Madison era, but also in history up until the modern day.

⁷⁰ "A Festival of Freedom." James Madison's Montpelier. Accessed October 14, 2021. <https://www.montpelier.org/learn/juneteenth>

⁷¹ See Appendix One for a map of the property.

⁷² Matthew Gantert Hyland, "Montpelier: The history of a house, 1723-1998" (2004). Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects. Paper 1539623438.

⁷³ This also includes experimental archaeology done on the north-west side of the property involving Civil War encampments.

The stories of those enslaved on site are left to be told by their descendants and by the archaeological and historical records. The members of the Montpelier descendant community, which is headed by the Montpelier Descendant Committee, are often consulted in creating interpretation regarding the lives of those previously enslaved on property. Previously, areas of engagement with descendant community members were selective, according to one interviewee:

Some of the staff members had relationships with specific descendants to be called on to give their opinion, to give input...[in this] it actually didn't represent the descendant *community*. [NAME REDACTED] is not the only descendant. There are other people who have ideas. If you talk to three [descendants], you're not actually talking to the descendant community.⁷⁴

According to several past and current associates of Montpelier and according to several descendants, Montpelier has much work to do to give a voice to those of color. Progress has already been made but it continued to be an uphill battle to follow-through with both their actions as a major institution and through their interpretation.

A very common area of concern by Montpelier representatives relates to the lack of ethnic diversity among the institutional staff. One representative stated that: "right now the only person of color on our staff is an intern. It is shocking, awful, and unacceptable. In my time there, we only had 4 or 5 people of color on staff. Our staff is ridiculously non-diverse for what we are committed to."⁷⁵ Another associate stated that, "Descendant community engagement and the interpretation of slavery at Montpelier should involve people of color. I find it disheartening that our story - our ancestors' stories - are always

⁷⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

⁷⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

being told by people who have no idea of the causes and impact of slavery on black families.”⁷⁶ The lack of diversity on staff remains a constant concern to many, especially in regard to creating interpretation. As one interviewee stated that their “staff is 99% white. None of us have descended from the enslaved community who worked there. Why would we not include members of the descendant community in these discussions and these decisions?”⁷⁷ Finally, the most common discussion regarding descendant collaboration at Montpelier is simply that “Staff and descendants seem to work together but the current board is less than responsive.”⁷⁸ In comparison, a staff member shared:

“Our five-year plan is based on people, place, and purpose. A visitor emailed us and said ‘How amazing the staff is at Montpelier, how amazing the Foundation Board is to prioritize the balance telling of history to give credit where Madison was able to move the world, and to give voice to the enslaved for their rightful place in history. I am a better American today than before I came.’”



Image 2: Front view of Montpelier. Photo from Montpelier Digital Montpelier Project.

History of the Property – Madison Era

Madison family members owned the property since 1723. Madison ordered several phases of expansion to the mansion, which was completed by enslaved

⁷⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

⁷⁷ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

⁷⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

individuals and other craftsmen. As many as 100 additional enslaved people worked the plantation's fields and occupied cabins in its outlying quarters. Following his presidency, James Madison and his wife, Dolley, retired to Montpelier in 1817. Upon Madison's death in 1836, the property was left to Dolley, who sold it a few years later. By then, 36 enslaved individuals remained on property, all of whom were left to Dolley, with certain stipulations left by Madison in his will: "none of them should be sold without his or her consent or in the case of their misbehaviour; except that infant children may be sold with their Parent who consents for them to be sold with him or her, and who consents to be sold."⁷⁹ Despite these stipulations, Dolley sold the enslaved individuals without their consent, beginning when Dolley sold Montpelier in 1844. An unknown number of Madison's enslaved individuals remained at Montpelier, and several accompanied Dolley to Washington D.C.. Upon Dolley's death, those whom she enslaved went to her son, Madison's step-son, John Payne.⁸⁰ Payne declared in his will to emancipate the few remaining enslaved, yet it is uncertain how many achieved freedom as it is believed the majority were sold in order to settle the remainder of his gambling debts. Slavery continued at Montpelier following the Madison Era, ending only after the Civil War.

While many visitors are drawn in to see the home of a United States President, there is much more to Montpelier than just the Madisons and their legacy. One interviewee stated not all visitors value the site's Black history: "It always baffles me that when people come to a former plantation and they get bothered by the fact that they're

⁷⁹ James Madison. *Copy of James Madison's Will*. 1835.

⁸⁰ Dolley Madison. *Will of Dolley P. Madison*. July 9, 1849.

hearing about enslaved people - like you're coming to a plantation.”⁸¹ If one were to closely examine the bricks used in the house construction and the additional expansions, one would see fingerprints of the enslaved people who created the bricks. These bricks would most likely have been created by enslaved children as seen by the small size of the prints. These fingerprints and other material remains discovered through archaeology are all that the enslaved were able to leave. Even in the modern day, the mansion known as Montpelier is able to be viewed because of the work the enslaved individuals had done to construct the home as dictated by Madison. Yet, to the average visitor the home is seen as that of Madison rather than a lasting reminder of those enslaved by him.



Image 3: Bricks on the north side of the home with finger indents. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and The Montpelier Foundation

Montpelier was in the possession of several different individuals after the Madison Era until it was owned by William DuPont and later his daughter, Marion

⁸¹ Confidential Interview, February 2022. In total, the Madison family had enslaved over 300 people at Montpelier over the 121 years they held the property. Cite your secondary sources.

DuPont Scott.⁸² Aside from the Madisons, the DuPonts owned Montpelier longer than any other tenants, controlling the site for 82 years. Under their ownership, the property underwent several renovations that disturbed the home and the surrounding landscape. Following Scott's death in 1983, Montpelier became a property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1984, and the Trust was also left with \$10 million dollars to assist with the property's maintenance.⁸³

The Montpelier Foundation and the National Trust created a co-stewardship of the property in 2000.⁸⁴ The National Trust worked to revert the home to the Madison Era while also paying tribute to Marion DuPont Scott in the visitor center and by continuing events she had created on property in her lifetime. The renovation of the home took place from 2003 and 2008, returning the home to its 1820 design.⁸⁵ The Montpelier Foundation, formed in 1998, has had control of the property as interpretive staff has made exhibits for both the Madisons and those previously enslaved on property, created programs about the Constitution, and worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to restore the entirety of the property to reflect the Madison Era.⁸⁶

⁸² According to the Montpelier website, there were several different owners of the property following the Madisons: Henry W. Moncure (1844-1848), Benjamin Thorton (1848-1854), William H. Macfarland (1854-1855), Alfred V. Scott (1855-1857), Thomas J. Carson and Frank Carson (1857-1881), Louis F. Detrick and William L. Bradley (1881-1900) and Charles King Lennig (1900), William DuPont then Marion DuPont Scott (1901-1983).

⁸³ Marjorie Hunter, "James Madison's Montpelier to become museum." *Gainesville Sun*, November 18, 1984.

⁸⁴ According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, co-stewardship sites have three legal documents that included a cooperative agreement, a lease, and a loan agreement. These documents allow for the partner to change the site as they operate it, and display pieces of the collection. As of 2015, there were ten sites that were operated under the co-stewardship model with the National Trust.

⁸⁵ Lisa Provence, "Madison for Resident: Montpelier Gets Extreme Makeover." *The Hook*, September 11, 2008. <http://www.readthehook.com/82653/cover-madison-resident-montpelier-gets-extreme-makeover>.

⁸⁶ Note that there is a rotating exhibit space for temporary exhibitions in the visitor center. The exhibit on display in 2021 was "Mysteries of Montpelier" which demonstrated how museum curators at Montpelier had used archaeological, archival, and testimonial evidence to tell the story of those who lived at

Over time Montpelier's mission statement has changed as it should. Previous undated examples include: "Our mission is to inspire continuing public engagement with American constitutional self-government by bringing to life the home and contributions of James and Dolley Madison" and, a much longer 2011 version of:

The Montpelier Foundation preserves the legacy of James Madison, his family, and Montpelier's plantation community, and seeks to inspire an understanding and commitment to the ideals of the Constitution as the first successful form of self-governance to secure liberty for its citizens. The Foundation's mission is founded on the fact that the Constitution is a landmark in the history of mankind's quest to achieve freedom. James Madison, the individual most responsible for the Constitution, provided both the innovative ideas central to its success and the leadership that brought about its creation and ratification.⁸⁷

Beginning in 2019, Montpelier began to acknowledge its enslaved population by describing itself as "A memorial to James Madison and the Enslaved Community, a museum of American history, and a center for constitutional education that engages the public with the enduring legacy of Madison's most powerful idea: government by the people" as well as stating, "the lifelong home of James Madison, Father of the Constitution and Architect of the Bill of Rights, Montpelier's mission is to communicate Madison's role in creating our modern, democratic government."⁸⁸ Of the three sites – Monticello, Mount Vernon, and Montpelier – Montpelier is the only site to include the enslaved community within its mission statement.

Montpelier. As it was temporarily closed for much of 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not featured in this thesis.

⁸⁷ Max A van Balgooy, "Montpelier Adopts New and Improved Mission Statement," *Engaging Places*, December 3, 2011, <https://engagingplaces.net/2011/12/05/montpelier-adopts-new-and-improved-mission-statement/>.

⁸⁸ "James Madison's Montpelier," accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www.montpelier.org/about>.

The Descendant Community

For well over a decade, Montpelier has attempted to present a more complete history, involving the story of all those who lived on the property regardless of race. When anthropologist Dr. Iris Ford visited the grounds of Montpelier in 2007, she asked “Where are my people? You spent \$24 million on the Madisons, and all my people get are dead grass and railroad ties?”⁸⁹ This, along with a story of how Rebecca Gilmore Coleman approached Montpelier about the history of her ancestor’s cabin across the road from Montpelier, serves as the origin story at Montpelier about how the descendants got involved in interpretation. As powerful as those stories are, one interviewee felt Montpelier could do better in describing how descendants are integrating Black history into the site and how Montpelier and descendants collaborate.

I am happy [Montpelier] heard descendant voices, but the [current interpretation] ignores the fact that Carolyn French and Rebecca Gilmore Coleman completely organized a society to do Black History in Orange. Those stories don’t get told...Rebecca is a community organizer. The French family is a powerhouse of Black History activism. Dr. Iris Ford – this is her life, this is her work. Dr. Michael Blakey coined the term ‘descendant community.’ [All of these people] are amazing and the story that is told for them is ‘railroad ties’ or ‘Rebecca marched up to the doors.’ It’s frustrating that the people who are involved and the families that are involved in this aren’t being taken seriously in this way.⁹⁰

At Montpelier, any African American who, through DNA or oral histories, can trace their ancestry to an enslaved person that lived at or worked at Montpelier or in Orange County is a member of the Montpelier descendant community. Many members of

⁸⁹ “A More Complete American Story,” James Madison's Montpelier, accessed October 18, 2021.

⁹⁰ Interviewee was referencing a piece done by Cheryl LaRoche and Michael Blakey, *Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground.*; Confidential Interview, February 2022.

the descendant community identify with ancestors who worked at other plantations in or near Orange County, as many of these enslaved could have been related by either blood or marriage to those at Montpelier. Montpelier's Vice President for Museum Programs Elizabeth Chew explained,

When the Madisons were at Montpelier, their enslaved workers had connections across Orange County and beyond. Many Montpelier slaves had husbands, or wives and children, on other plantations. By adopting a broad definition of who identifies as a member of our Descendant Community, we honor the web of connections radiating from Montpelier.⁹¹

Individuals may also count themselves as a descendant community member should they have a strong tie to the community. According to one interviewee:

There were individuals [from the descendant community] that wanted to be part of what was happening at Montpelier but didn't trust who we [Montpelier staff] were. That was when it was clear that the descendants needed to form their own body – their own organization – to have an institutional basis to represent themselves.⁹²

Out of the Montpelier descendant community came the Montpelier Descendant Committee (MDC), advised by Dr. Michael Blakey and Dr. Iris Ford. The Descendant Committee is an independent 501c3 organization.⁹³ As of 2021, the Montpelier Descendant Committee was voted to be an equal co-steward with the Montpelier Foundation. This is the first time that descendants of those enslaved have shared power

⁹¹ "A More Complete American Story," James Madison's Montpelier, accessed October 18, 2021.

⁹² Confidential interview, February 2022.

⁹³ Recently, the MDC was awarded a 2021 African American Cultural Heritage Action fund grant by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The grant will assist the MDC in researching and interpreting their project known as The Arc of Enslaved Communities. The Arc project is led by the descendant community to create a national trail to be administered by the National Park Service once approved by Congress. This trail runs from Fredericksburg, Virginia to Richmond, Virginia, forming an arc that extends to the Blue Ridge Mountains, covering 850 square miles of land that once was populated by enslaved communities.

with a historic home's board.⁹⁴ This vote allowed MDC members to nominate half of Montpelier's Board. This does not mean those nominated have to be descendant community members. As of November 16, 2021, the Montpelier Foundation announced that four new members were added to the Board – two were nominated by the MDC and two were not. Three of the four were descendants. According to the Chairman of the Board of the Montpelier Foundation Board,

When Descendants are represented through this type of structural change, our Foundation will offer a prominent, new model of public engagement for museums and historic sites nationwide. Montpelier will be a place where a more complete story can be told, in equal partnership and full collaboration with Descendants.⁹⁵

Despite the public's interpretation of the positive work happening with descendants and Montpelier, several responses from staff and descendants show various areas of animosity. When asked if there are any reasons why a descendant community member might be unhappy with the partnership, associates at Montpelier stated, "there were no issues prior to 2020 and now it's heartbreaking," and that "We once had a beautiful model partnership between the staff and the descendants. But for some reason, the top leadership did not recognize this partnership, causing a rocky road. But I am optimistic about us figuring it out – we cannot let it all go."⁹⁶

Sadly, it seems this partnership may be ending. As of March 25th, 2022, the Montpelier Foundation voted to strip the power of the Descendant Committee. Several

⁹⁴ This vote has had much push back according to several interviewees. A descendant noted in their survey that "The Montpelier Foundation put out a misleading press statement regarding parity."

⁹⁵ "Montpelier Elects New Board Members," Explore History At Our House, November 17, 2021, https://www.montpelier.org/learn/boardvote_2021.

⁹⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

descendants and board members were interviewed for the Washington Post article, as well as several staff members, 40 of which “wrote an unsigned resolution urging the board not to approve the change.” According to said article, the National Trust reached out to the Foundation chairman, Gene Hickok, asking the board to not go back on their word to share power, while descendant and board member James French, son of Carolyn French, stated that the Foundation “were essentially calling us outside agitators, instead of the descendants of the people buried in the fields.” French also stated that the adversity between the Foundation and the MDC stated first when Hickok became the Foundation’s chairman in 2019 and Roy Young became president in 2020, and when the Foundation rejected edits made by the MDC in a statement to be published by Montpelier after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police. Vice President Elizabeth Chew reported to the Washington Post that ““staff members have since 2020 been threatened with termination for contacting colleagues and friends in the descendants' community.””⁹⁷

Representatives at other institutions commented on the situation, stating that Montpelier is struggling “to live up to its own example,” yet the Foundation believes this vote acts as a reset to better build the relationship between the two groups, and the MDC views this vote as a way for the Foundation to control the descendant community. According to the article, Hickok stated “that the change is not an effort to back away from the commitment to fully represent descendants on the board...Instead...the board has found the committee difficult to work with and wants the ability to choose descendant members from a wider pool.”

⁹⁷ Schneider, “James Madison’s Montpelier Strips Power.”

A few weeks later, on April 18th, it was announced that four staff members were fired and two placed on suspension. Of those six staff members, three made up the archaeology department. One of those fired was Dr. Matt Reeves, who is quoted later in this paper for his work done at Montpelier and his work with descendants, stated to the Washington Post, “To fire me today shows they [the Montpelier Foundation] have no interest in moving forward with this work to tell whole-truth history... They are looking to cleanse Montpelier of anything that goes beyond their message, or any narrative that critiques Madison.” Reeves had worked for Montpelier for 23 years and was terminated via email.⁹⁸ A press release from the Foundation said that Montpelier “had become untenable and toxic, aggravated by misleading public statements made by the MDC and by bias demonstrated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Work was not getting done. Projects were being halted. Montpelier’s leadership could not allow that to continue,” and claimed that reasons for the firing could be traced to 18 months prior.⁹⁹

Later that same week on April 21st, the Foundation released another statement saying that they have asked the MDC to submit a list of 15 nominations and the Foundation would choose 9 of them to add to the Board. With the three MDC-endorsed members already on staff, that would mean the Board would be made of 12 MDC-endorsed members, 12 Board-appointed members, and one member on behalf of the National Trust. Half of the nine members would join the Board at the beginning of July

⁹⁸ Gregory S. Schneider and DeNeen L. Brown, “Montpelier Staffers Say They Were Fired for Backing Descendants Group,” The Washington Post (WP Company, April 18, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/04/18/james-madison-montpelier-descendants-slavery/>.

⁹⁹ “Parity with Descendants of Enslaved Persons on the Board of Directors,” James Madison’s Montpelier, April 19, 2022, <https://www.montpelier.org/learn/parity-descendants-enslaved-persons>.

and the other half at the beginning of October, hoping to keep the entrances and exits of Board members staggered.¹⁰⁰ However, this would keep the Board Board-appointed dominant over the descendants for 3 extra months. This remains an evolving situation that has received much media attention; as of April 23rd, 2022, a change.org petition has accumulated over 10,400 signatures showing support to the descendant community and their partnership with the full-time staff.¹⁰¹

Tours and Exhibitions

Efforts to incorporate the history of enslaved people into the Montpelier mansion tour have been contested. In regard to revised interpretation at these sites and visitor engagement, one associate stated that, “Negative comments are few and far between. Largely, our audience is receptive to hearing this more complete story.”¹⁰² Another associate stated:

In the past, Americans were taught the ‘great white man’ story so when they come to tour Montpelier, they’re coming to hear about James Madison, the president, the father of the constitution. Thankfully I think most of our audiences are intellectually curious enough that when they’re presented with a narrative that doesn’t fit with what they received and are willing to kind of hear it and hear us out and our story that we’re trying to

¹⁰⁰ “Montpelier Committed to 50% Descendant Parity on Board,” James Madison’s Montpelier, April 21, 2022, <https://www.montpelier.org/learn/montpelier-committed-parity>.

¹⁰¹ Schneider, “James Madison’s Montpelier Strips Power.” ; “Support the Montpelier Descendants Committee,” Change.org, March 25, 2022, https://www.change.org/p/support-the-montpelier-descendants-committee?utm_content=cl_sharecopy_32812090_en-US%3A4&recruiter=1258581056&recruited_by_id=220f02d0-ac6b-11ec-ae57-afbaea31dbc1&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&utm_term=share_petition&share_bandit_exp=initial-32812090-en-US.

¹⁰² Confidential interview, February 2022.

tell.¹⁰³

However, that is not always the case. Regarding the revised tours that take place above the heads of those in the *Mere Distinction of Colour* exhibition in the cellar, a representative recalled that:

A woman on a tour stated ‘we’re just getting started and I’m already having slavery shoved down my throat.’ And every other time after that that I mentioned slavery, she turned her back to me.¹⁰⁴

Prior to the pandemic, the standard flow of the house tour at Montpelier can be summarized by one interviewee: “[in] our ‘Signature Tour’ guests met on the big columned portico and went into every single room of James and Dolley Madison’s home.”¹⁰⁵ In the past, very rarely did tour guides discuss slavery outside of Paul Jennings, an enslaved man who worked for Madison at Montpelier and the White House as a domestic servant and body servant. A life-size likeness of him is presented standing near a corner of the dining room containing additional likenesses of the Madisons and their friends as they consume a meal, prompting tour guides to acknowledge him and his story. Aside from Jennings, discussions of enslaved people were rarely incorporated in the house tour.¹⁰⁶ Due to the pandemic, Montpelier adjusted their house tours, allowing for guests to be outside more to mitigate the risk of the virus, while also opening the

¹⁰³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that in a regular year, there are different tours visitors can sign up for outside of the general house tour. There is also a tour about the enslaved community and one about the landscape of the property. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was only one tour offered, a house highlights tour, that limited the amount of time visitors were in the mansion (and also limited the amount of rooms visitors were allowed to walk into within the mansion) but incorporated portions of the landscape tour and the enslaved tour into this tour to keep the guided tour time limit the same. Even with this change in tours, the South Yard, the *Mere Distinction of Colour*, and the Gilmore Cabin were still not presented by a tour guide; Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Researcher’s observation, May-June 2019.

discussion to include more information about the landscape the enslaved population worked in. Only three rooms of the house were being visited in September of 2021.¹⁰⁷ Plans for this new tour model intends to stay.

The Gilmore Cabin and the Train Depot

During the confidential interviews, staff were asked how enslaved people who lived at the site but were not owned by Madison, Jefferson, or Washington are represented in interpretation. A Montpelier associate Montpelier stated that they “enjoy giving tours of post-Madison history sometimes more than the main site as it helps people connect-the-dots between the Founding through the Civil War through Reconstruction to Jim Crow.”¹⁰⁸ There are several ways Montpelier does this in their interpretation, allowing for the subject of racism to be discussed outside of just the Madison era.

Adjacent to Montpelier’s property is the Gilmore property. George Gilmore was born into slavery at Montpelier in 1810, emancipated prior to the 1870s, and deeded the nearby property on which he built a cabin for his family. Gilmore descendants lived on the 16-acre property until the mid-1930s. Gilmore’s great granddaughter, Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, whose father was born at the cabin, was the first to approach Montpelier about preserving the homestead.¹⁰⁹ The reconstruction of this site, finished in 2005, and the preservation of the cabin and the Gilmore family graves were the first major projects at Montpelier that involved the descendant community. The home is key

¹⁰⁷ Researcher’s observation, September 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁰⁹ “Montpelier Descendants’ Project.” Montpelier’s Digital Doorway. Montpelier Foundation, August 11, 2020. <https://digitaldoorway.montpelier.org/project/montpelier-descendants-project/>.

to discussing the legacy of slavery and racism in direct relationship to Montpelier and the United States, and it is also a testament to Montpelier's collaboration with descendants.

The cabin contains several rooms that are furnished in an effort to communicate the poverty experienced by Black people during Reconstruction. It is often the subject of special events and there is a series of explanatory digital blog posts for the site, but it is not often staffed and it is not safely accessible for individuals to walk to it from the visitor center because it is across the state road from the main entrance.¹¹⁰ While the cabin can be seen when driving and when entering the Montpelier visitor's gate, it is only mentioned by those in ticket sales when discussing the extent of the property and when informing visitors of additional activities they can do during their visit.



Image 4, Left: Gilmore Cabin in 2000, prior to restoration. Photo by Debra Mills.

Image 5, Right: Gilmore Cabin today. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

In 1901, William du Pont had a train depot constructed near the property to transfer supplies. At one point the depot also allowed for passengers and had segregated

¹¹⁰ More than likely, the Cabin is not staffed due to lower staff numbers and needing to allocate tour guides for the home tours. Additionally, by previous observation in May, June, and July of 2019 done by the researcher, the Gilmore Cabin is not often visited due as its location is in safe walking distance to the mansion- see Appendix One for a map of Montpelier. The cabin usually has limited hours; due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gilmore Cabin and surrounding property were not open to the public as of September 2021.

waiting areas. The “White” room was 14 by 15.6 feet while the “Colored” room was 9 by 15.6 feet. It is believed that a Black man named Mitchell Jackson took over as depot foreman for the du Ponts when the previous foreman died. Jackson was the son of Allan Jackson, a freedman who settled to the west of Montpelier in 1880. Their descendants continue to be a part of Montpelier’s descendant community according to an interview with a Montpelier associate. Marion du Pont Scott included the train depot in her will to the National Trust and the depot was renovated to a 1910s appearance. The exhibit, which opened in 2010, is known as the *Montpelier Train Depot: In the Time of Segregation* to depict Jim Crow era racial injustices. A Montpelier representative stated, “A lot of American history is glossed over or not discussed at all. The original sites like the Gilmore Cabin or the Train Depot do well to not limit the involvement to the Madison era. They help to present a more inclusive and broader sense of American history.”¹¹¹

However, these two sites receive less visitors than the rest of the property. A Montpelier associate stated that “less than a thousand people would visit the Gilmore Cabin compared to the 60,000 people who visit the main site.”¹¹² The associate also listed some ways in which Montpelier attempted to advertise to visitors see the Cabin and the Depot, yet overall believed that the sites are less visited due to visitors not allotted enough time on their tour to do so. “Even if they see the Gilmore Cabin as they drive in and plan to see it later, they end up cutting it out when they over budget [their time]. Visitation is lower because [these sites] are out of the main area. A visit to Montpelier should include those spaces.”¹¹³ It should be noted that in comparison to Mount Vernon

¹¹¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹¹² Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹¹³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

and Monticello, Montpelier does not have a shuttle service at this time. However, a shuttle service would not ensure visitors choose to visit all sections of a site.

The Mere Distinction of Colour Exhibit and the South Yard

The *Mere Distinction of Colour* exhibit, located in the cellar of the mansion, originated from Dr. Iris Ford's comments following her 2007 tour of the property. While the exhibition discusses the lives of the enslaved both at Montpelier and in the nation as a whole, the exhibition took its name from a quote by James Madison: "We have seen the mere distinction of colour made in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man."¹¹⁴ The exhibition took a decade to plan, opening to a crowd over 800 people on June 4th, 2017. A Montpelier representative stated that the creation of the exhibition driven by the collaboration with the descendant community was "guided by two things: emphasis on the humanity of their ancestors and the emphasis that slavery should not be left in the past."¹¹⁵ "The Descendants were very involved in the *Mere Distinction of Colour*. There were a lot of stakeholder discussions with descendants and having them relate to design ideas."¹¹⁶ One section of the exhibit remains current, including a five-screen film called "Legacies of Slavery." This film examines how modern Americans talk about slavery and racism throughout time, using Montpelier as a case study and drawing on recent moments of

¹¹⁴ Carson Bear, "'The Mere Distinction of Colour': Telling the Story of Slavery at Montpelier: National Trust for Historic Preservation," National Trust for Historic Preservation, November 1, 2017, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/the-mere-distinction-of-colour-tells-story-slavery-montpelier#.YXmY051KhPY>.

¹¹⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹¹⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

American history. Despite the exhibit receiving multiple national awards, one interviewee stated they felt that “after *Mere Distinction* was released – not so much the staff, but the Board and leadership - were ready to move on from the subject of slavery.”¹¹⁷



Image 6: An entrance to the “*Mere Distinction of Colour*” exhibit in the cellar of Montpelier. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

The location of the exhibition is a controversial topic as well. While some may believe that an exhibition located in a basement contains a negative connotation, the placement of this exhibit is intentional: this is the space where many enslaved attended to many of their duties, hidden within the very foundation of the home in which Madison lived. A staff person noted:

Instead of furnishing yet another plantation house kitchen, [Montpelier] wanted to do an exhibition about the institution of slavery. The space that we had was the cellar and the South Yard. There were some descendant consultants and collaborators who were not supportive of having the cellar be that space but others saw it as the space that their ancestors lived and worked.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹¹⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

The exhibit contains things more typically seen in museums: charts, touchscreens, films, and artifacts in cases. As the descendant community had an active role in creating this exhibition, it is inspiring to see a collaboration not only with historians and descendants, but also with the modern day and the past. In a space that had such a presence relating to the enslaved population, it is their modern-day descendants' that used their voices to tell the story of their ancestors. For example, there are standard table-top monitors with narrated recordings about enslaved individuals, but when visitors pick up the hand-held receivers, the voice of a descendant narrates their story. In a space that had such a presence relating to the enslaved population, it is their modern-day descendants' that use their voices to tell the story of their ancestors. The general response of the exhibition has been positive and "revolutionary" according to a Montpelier associate. That associate revealed that about 75% of individuals are moved by the exhibit, but there are some individuals "who feel threatened by American exceptionalism. They see the Founding Fathers as heroes and they don't want to hear anything that changes that idea."¹¹⁹

The exhibit has two distinct halves, one focused on the enslaved at Montpelier and one on the central role of "colour" in defining core systems in the US. In the north cellar, visitors learn about the country's history of slavery, focusing on the economic and political aspects of slavery in general, and the connection between Madison and the U.S. Constitution within the narrative of slavery, allowing for some justification for Madison as an enslaver. The south cellar interprets the experiences of those Madison enslaved. It exposes visitors to raw emotion primarily in a video called "Fate in the Balance." The video tells the story of Ellen Stewart, an enslaved individual who accompanied her

¹¹⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

mother, Sukey, Dolley Madison's ladies maid, to Washington D.C. after James Madison's death. Ellen narrates her life from the death of Madison to her failed escape attempt in 1848. It does not discuss Madison's treatment of his enslaved community, but does expose Dolley as she did not honor her husband's will by selling enslaved individuals without their consent.

The reconstructed South Yard, which contains outdoor structures and dwellings many of Madison's enslaved worked and slept is an extension of the *Mere Distinction of Colour*. The South Yard provides for the enslaved what the mansion does for the Madisons: a representation of their homes and lives. Multiple buildings contain narratives by descendant community members in which they discuss the connections these descendants have made with Montpelier and the stories of their ancestors. Descendants appearing in the exhibit is a new angle, according to a Montpelier representative: "Not only do we use their input and their family oral history, but they appear in the exhibit as well. Not only were they involved in the backend, but they themselves tell their story."¹²⁰



Image 7 and 8: Example of the interior of the South Yard and the representation of descendant community members.
Photos by Rachel Gregor.

¹²⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Like the Gilmore Cabin and *Mere Distinction of Colour*, there are no daily tour guides through the South Yard.¹²¹ Sometimes, tour guides do stay around the mansion after a guided mansion tour to answer questions visitors may have, but usually there is no one around to answer immediate questions about the enslaved exhibits. It is easy to avoid entering *Mere Distinction of Colour* or buildings in the South Yard as it is a self-guided exhibition space. On a recent visit to Montpelier, only four individuals of a mansion tour group of 15 went into the exhibition following the mansion tour.¹²² Those who neglect this area of the property do not fully understand the extent of slavery's role at Montpelier and in the nation in general. Montpelier has been making attempts to continuously have staff available in *Mere Distinction of Colour* and in the South Yard, yet that is not always a possibility as all guide positions at Montpelier currently are only part-time positions.¹²³

Programs and Events

The Naming Project

When examining those living at Montpelier in the 1820s, there were nine white people to over 110 enslaved individuals. Of those nine white individuals, they were all known by name, while several of the enslaved never had their names recorded. Several names were listed once or twice on historical documents, while others, like Paul Jennings for example, have a longer historical record. Decades of research of using any remaining

¹²¹ Similar to that of the Gilmore Cabin, it is more than likely that this area is not staffed due to lower staff numbers and needing to allocate tour guides for the home tours.

¹²² Researcher's observation. October 2021.

¹²³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

documents of the Madisons, from ledgers to mere scraps of papers, have assisted in providing names for some of the many enslaved at Montpelier. The names of these individuals are painted on the walls of the *Mere Distinction of Colour* exhibition, and historians at Montpelier continue to add to digital biographies of these individuals which are made public on the Montpelier website and are highlighted on the social media page associated with Montpelier weekly.¹²⁴

Currently with this project, “involvement with descendants is not real structured yet, but that is going to change due to the memorandum of understanding with the Montpelier Foundation and the Descendant Community.”¹²⁵ According to a representative for Montpelier, there is hope for growth with this project in that they would like to “have some descendant authored essay. [Maybe] reflecting on a theme of the biographies we have accumulated.”¹²⁶



Image 9: Section of wall in the “Mere Distinction of Colour” containing some names of enslaved individuals at Montpelier. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

¹²⁴ “The Naming Project,” Montpelier’s Digital Doorway, October 14, 2021, <https://digitaldoorway.montpelier.org/project/say-their-names/>.

¹²⁵ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

¹²⁶ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

Archaeology

Archaeology has the ability to give people from the past a voice. For the enslaved population, very little textual evidence exists of their lives. Visitors do not often look upon a house as grand as Montpelier and think, “that house was made by enslaved individuals.” Rather, guests see the legacy associated with James Madison.

Archaeological excavations allow historians and archaeologists to glimpse into the past and find things that may not have been worth noting in Madison’s own journals.¹²⁷

Archaeology even assists in better understanding Madison and his family as he had most of his journals destroyed after his death.

Along with the general collaboration the Montpelier Archaeology Department has undertaken with the descendant community, it also has initiated a hands-on collaboration in excavations. In partnership with James Madison University, Montpelier hosts an annual archaeological field school. Additionally, Montpelier has hosted Expedition Program since the 1990s, which runs from one day to one day to several days.¹²⁸ These programs allow members of the public to dig with the archaeologists and learn about both the study of archaeology and the Montpelier property. Every year, there are over a dozen programs of various types to encourage a wide variety of interested members of the public. Participants of all ages can join archaeologists in one of four programs: Location, Excavation, Analysis, or Reconstruction. The Location Program works in collaboration with members of the metal detecting community to assist in finding potential

¹²⁷ Not many of the enslaved population could read and write at the time. However, Madison, who knew seven languages, did encourage several of the enslaved individuals he saw as his property to become literate as this would be useful in getting him reading materials from his library, or writing letters for him.

¹²⁸ The 2020 field school was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several Expedition programs were canceled between 2020 and 2021.

archeological sites. Those interested in field work can participate in the Excavation Program, while those interested in lab work can choose the Analysis Program. The final program, the Reconstruction Program, reconstructs building on the property through archaeological findings. Scholarships are granted to those who identify as members of the descendant community for both the field school and all the Expedition Programs.

By allowing the public interactions on archaeological digs, professionals enable descendants to be the first to touch an object last handled 200 years ago by an enslaved individual, providing a powerful connection to their ancestors through material culture:

[Enslaved people], and the structures they lived and worked in, left a very small paper trail - but the physical remains, the ceramics, bottles, bones, reveal all kinds of information their humanity...At Montpelier, the archaeological record is the primary source for understanding the plantation landscape and, in many cases, the lives of the enslaved.¹²⁹

Dr. Terry Brock, former Senior Research Archaeologist, said “Working side-by-side with the descendants amplifies the material evidence to support our interpretation of the lives of their ancestors” and Dr. Matt Reeves, Director of Archaeology and Landscape Restoration at Montpelier, states that “The [descendant] community guides our interpretive efforts, aids in our understanding of slavery and the African American psyche of the time, and gives a different perspective on the lives of the people we are striving to humanize and understand.” These programs specifically enable descendants to uncover personal items once used by their ancestors.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ “Archaeology for All,” Explore History at Our House, May 18, 2017, <https://www.montpelier.org/learn/unearthing-the-past>.

¹³⁰ Note that as of April 18th, Dr. Reeves was terminated by the Montpelier Foundation. There are many demands for Dr. Reeves and his other co-workers who were terminated by the Foundation to be reinstated; “Archaeology for All,” Explore History at Our House, May 18, 2017.

For those interested in providing archaeological opportunities for descendants at these sites, Dr. Reeves offers a suggestion: he originally stated that when they first started doing LEARN programs, they offered descendants the ability to participate in programs for free with a scholarship. However, he stated:

We didn't have much result from this. When talking with descendants later on about this, they said 'when you presented the idea that we as descendants could come dig at the plantation for free, what it brought to mind was that [that] our ancestors went through that and it didn't work out too well for them.' In so, without direct involvement with descendants, we ended up presenting a program that was by appearances racist. It didn't matter what our intents were – [by] appearance, it was informed by racism and created a real resistance for descendants to take part in this.¹³¹

He also stated what helped them most to get engagements with descendants was:

[T]o partner in a major way with local community institutions in setting up the schedules. Instead of having a program schedule on our time schedule, we paired it with family reunions and events such as the Slave Dwelling Project and what occurred was an outpouring of participation.¹³²

Conclusion

Despite its large amount of work in the field, staff and descendants note Montpelier's area of struggles in their collaborative efforts. One representative stated: "while there is passion from descendants, there are disconnects with individuals that aren't willing to explore better language or engage."¹³³ This associate then stated that there is sometimes a disconnect when white staff are unable to step into the shoes of a descendant to understand their personal feelings regarding aspects of interpretation. It

¹³¹ Preservation Virginia, "Archaeology, Social Relevance, and Community Engagement," YouTube (YouTube, November 29, 2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FI_Yluqscv8.

¹³² The Slave Dwelling Project, founded by descendant Joe McGill, works to identify and preserve slave dwellings. They have worked at both Montpelier and Monticello.

¹³³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

seems that this disconnect had occurred in other situations, too - one interviewee stated during the creation of the Rubric, the bed and breakfast that Montpelier put descendants and locals in was “Confederate themed. [Participants reported] their room had Stonewall Jackson portraits on the wall...Everyone put in that bed and breakfast was a Black person.”¹³⁴ The interviewee stated Montpelier is no longer in association with that inn.

One representative stated that “staff members and descendants worked together and it eventually filtered up to senior leadership, but it never filtered to the Board. We should have made sure the Board, the staff, and the descendants were working together [from the start].”¹³⁵ Another representative echoes this by saying, “We were leaders in the field and we’re losing ground – we’re stalled. We have opportunities to do so much but we are at an impasse.”¹³⁶ Finally, one interviewee believes that:

Montpelier is an interesting place because it has the opportunity to push the boundary...to be more honest. It is not a super popular place [compared to Monticello or Mount Vernon]. It has the opportunity to be a place where people can grapple with hard topics. Montpelier does not have the Ladies Association or the Monticello Foundation. Montpelier doesn’t own the property – it’s owned by the National Trust. It has the ability to do co-stewardship do interesting interpretation but [the Foundation] wants to be like one of the old white boys. They could be like the cool younger sibling to these other plantations and lead the way but [the Foundation] is not. Montpelier should be doing more because it has a unique opportunity to do more.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹³⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹³⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹³⁷ It should be noted that it is owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation while Monticello and Mount Vernon are owned by private entities. Monticello is owned by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc., established in 1923, and Mount Vernon is owned by the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, established in 1853. Both organizations are 501c3 private non-profits; Confidential interview, February 2022.

Chapter 2:
Monticello



*Image 10: The reconstructed Hemings Cabin which serves as the starting point for the Slavery at Monticello Tour. Labeled as recorded by Thomas Jefferson: "Negro Quarter." Inside, the signage says "Not so bad?" before discussing the violence of slavery. The fence behind the cabin would have gone all the way down Mulberry Row, but currently ends closer to this cabin.
Photo by Rachel Gregor.*

The improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by every one, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life...Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; then thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained...many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one of the other race...They seem to require less sleep...they are at least as brave, and more adventuresome...their griefs are transient...I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both in body and mind. -Thomas Jefferson¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Thomas Jefferson. *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1788.

The subject of slavery is featured throughout Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Jefferson was the third U.S. President, an architect, writer of the Declaration of Independence and the *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and founder of the University of Virginia. He was able to accomplish all of these tasks as he was a privileged slave owner.¹³⁹ Jefferson purchased very few enslaved people during his lifetime, acquiring most of his human property through inheritance and natural increase. Jefferson inherited almost 40 enslaved people from his father, Peter Jefferson, and 135 enslaved people from his father-in-law, John Wayles, in 1773.¹⁴⁰ Unlike James Madison, Jefferson kept substantial documentation of the daily operations at Monticello and many records have survived to today, the most helpful of which in discussing slavery is Jefferson's Farm Book documenting the years 1774 through 1824 presently housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society. This book contains the names of the 600 individuals Jefferson owned throughout all of his properties, including Monticello.¹⁴¹ Jefferson referred to the book's entries as "diaries," and the book also contained lists and inventories.¹⁴² These and other sources have been used to shape interpretive new programming.

¹³⁹ Jefferson wrote the epitaph on his own gravestone, including only writer of the Declaration of Independence, writer of the *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and founder of the University of Virginia.

¹⁴⁰ John Wayles purchased the almost 5,000 acre property known as Poplar Forest in 1764. It was not used much as a home, but rather as a site of revenue. When Jefferson and Martha Jefferson received the property in 1773, they do very little with it other than allowed it to continue to make a profit. Jefferson spent much time at Poplar Forest after Martha's death in 1782, using the site as a personal retreat. It was under John Wayles that the property began to utilize slave labor, and all of the enslaved people on the property were left to Jefferson and Martha, including Betty Hemings and her descendants.

¹⁴¹ Jefferson also had property in Bedford and Campbell counties, and his retreat known as Poplar Forest.

¹⁴² "Thomas Jefferson Papers - The Farm Book," Massachusetts Historical Society, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/farm/>.

Monticello is now owned by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, a 501(c)3 corporation, and has been since 1923.¹⁴³ Unlike Montpelier, Monticello does not include discussion of slavery or enslaved persons in their current mission or vision statement - their mission statement focuses on two areas: preservation of Monticello and educating scholars and the public about Thomas Jefferson. Montpelier, Mount Vernon, and Monticello are all National Historic Landmarks, but Monticello is the only U.S. presidential home designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.¹⁴⁴

Monticello has a history of struggling in terms of the integration of Black history due to their wide variety of stakeholders. Noted by both interviewees and author Clint Smith, most of Monticello visitors are white.¹⁴⁵ In comparison to Montpelier, one interviewee stated:

Monticello gets a worse rep[utation] for their interpretation of slavery than they deserve. There are great people there doing incredible work. But they also have the baggage of being the home of Thomas Jefferson. I always felt that at Monticello you've been confined to the Mountain Top while at Montpelier you have access to the larger plantation. It's more visible and more encouraged. [Montpelier] isn't challenged by the larger city [Charlottesville]. In terms of visitation, [Montpelier is] in the middle of nowhere, which is awesome in that we don't have a lot of encroachment and that area of land can be preserved.¹⁴⁶

While at one point Monticello guides would “only occasionally mention ‘servants’ in the tour of the mansion as the story centered on Jefferson and his activities,” Monticello now thoroughly features the lives of enslaved individuals in the home, around the property,

¹⁴³ Both Montpelier and Monticello have had additional research and interpretation space has been provided by donors David M. Rubenstein and Robert H. Smith.

¹⁴⁴ “Mission and Vision Statement,” Monticello, accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson-foundation/mission-and-vision-statement/>.

¹⁴⁵ Smith. “How the Word is Passed,” 9.

¹⁴⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

and in their digital presence.¹⁴⁷ When collaborating with the descendant community, an associate said that there is,

Normally positive [feedback]. [Members of the descendant community] are glad to be involved, not that they aren't critical or say yes to everything – [the descendant community] definitely has opinions...we try to reach out as much as we can. Some of the Levy era descendants of the enslaved community, or local African American people, are a little bit more hesitant sometimes. The Foundation and the perception of our mission...we're not here to glorify Jefferson...I am sure that was true in the past.¹⁴⁸



Image 11: Front of Monticello today. Photo by Rachel Gregor

Rise and Fall of Monticello

Thomas Jefferson's father, Peter Jefferson, was a wealthy man who owned over 7,000 acres of land in Virginia that was cared for by 60 enslaved people. Upon Peter's death in 1757, his property was divided between his sons Thomas and Randolph. It was not until 1768 that Jefferson ordered his portion of the land cleared to make room for Monticello:

¹⁴⁷ James Oliver Horton, and Lois E. Horton, "Chapter 7: Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the Uncomfortable Public Conversation on Slavery," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 138.

¹⁴⁸ The reference to Levy is referring to Uriah and Jefferson Monroe Levy, two owners of Monticello after Jefferson.

Before the home could even be built, enslaved workers had to shave off the top of the mountain in the dead of winter, at a time when there was no mechanical technology to assist them beyond a shovel in their hands...enslaved workers had to dig 65 feet into the earth.¹⁴⁹

The foundation of the home began to be laid in 1769, and Jefferson moved into the South Pavilion in 1770, two years prior to his marriage to Martha Wayles. Much like there were several phases of construction at Montpelier, there were two separate designs of Monticello, both drafted by Jefferson. According to the Monticello website,

Local white masons and their apprentices did the stone and brickwork. Local carpenters, assisted by several Monticello slave carpenters, provided the rough structural woodwork. The fine woodwork (floors, cornices, and other moldings) was the work of several skilled white joiners, hired from as far away as Philadelphia.¹⁵⁰

The first design of the home was completed in 1784, yet the home was constantly under some degree of construction. Jefferson is believed to have said, “Architecture is my delight, and putting up and pulling down, one of my favorite amusements.”¹⁵¹ After serving in France as Secretary of State, Jefferson returned to Monticello in 1796 and began to remodel the home, completing it in 1809.¹⁵² Remaining in the home today are several of Jefferson’s architectural elements which he had designed or included in his home such as the double-acting doors, wine dumbwaiter, alcove beds, and revolving butler door. While some see these as innovations for convenience, they were more so to

¹⁴⁹ Clint Smith, *How the Word Is Passed: A Journey Across the Country That Black America Built* (London: Dialogue Books, 2021), 20-12.

¹⁵⁰ “House FAQs,” Monticello (Thomas Jefferson Foundation), accessed October 27, 2021, <https://www.monticello.org/house-gardens/the-house/house-faqs/>.

¹⁵¹ B. L. Rayner, *Sketches of the Life, Writings, and Opinions of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Francis and Boardman, 1832), 524.

¹⁵² Jefferson signed an act in 1807 to end slave importation. However, Jefferson expected loyalty from his enslaved workforce above all else.

aid in hiding enslaved men and women from view when there were guests in the home. There is no question that Jefferson put extreme thought into the interior and exterior of the home, yet it was the labor of his enslaved for over a span of forty years who built it.

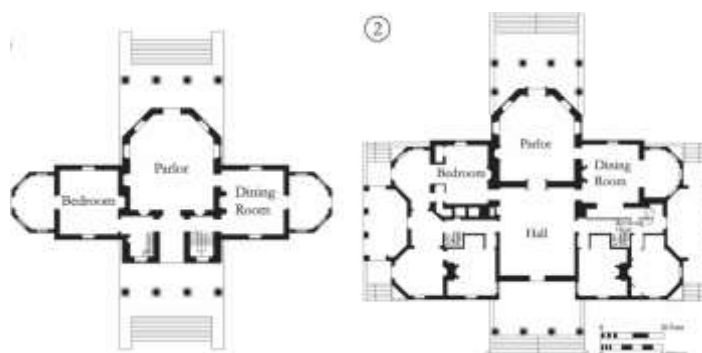


Figure 2: Floorplans showing the change of Monticello I to Monticello II. Figure from Monticello.

Jefferson died at Monticello at the age of 83 on July 4th, 1826, so deeply in debt that most of the enslaved community had to be sold at public auction. His daughter Martha Randolph inherited the property yet could not afford to keep it as, along with Monticello, she also inherited Jefferson's \$107,000 of debt.¹⁵³ She sold the furnishings, farming equipment, and 130 of his enslaved individuals at public auction in 1827:

On the fifteenth of January, at Monticello...the whole of the residue of the personal property of Thomas Jefferson, dec., consisting of 130 valuable negros, stock, crop, &c. household and kitchen furniture. The negros are believed to be the most valuable for their number ever offered at one time in the state of Virginia.¹⁵⁴

The Levy Family and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation

Monticello was not a property many wanted as it is in a remote and mountainous area. It was noted that a few years prior to Jefferson's death, the site had begun to lose its

¹⁵³ "Monticello," Debt, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/debt>.

¹⁵⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, November 3, 1826.

luster as Jefferson's debts could not keep the home under proper maintenance. In 1824, a visitor to Monticello noted that the home was "old and going to decay," with a landscape that was "slovenly," deteriorated further.¹⁵⁵ The surrounding acres were auctioned off separately, drastically cutting from 5,000 acres to 522. Eventually, Monticello was sold in 1834 to Uriah Phillips Levy, the first Jewish commodore in the US Navy.¹⁵⁶ Upon Levy's death in 1862, Monticello was willed to the federal government to become a school for Navy orphans, yet his widow contested the will.¹⁵⁷ During the legal battle, Congress rejected the home as the property was well into Confederate territory at the time. While under the South's control, Monticello was used as a home for wounded soldiers. The Confederacy put Monticello up for auction in 1864, and it was purchased by Benjamin F. Ficklin who paid for it in Confederacy currency. Following the war, Monticello's ownership went back to the Levy family with 47 possible beneficiaries. The overseer originally hired by Uriah Levy had let the home fall into disrepair. His age and the lack of money allotted to him by the Levy family had led him to charge admission prices to visitors, allow pigs and cattle to wander inside the home, and turn a blind eye if visitors were to take some form of souvenir with them. One such visitor reported "the place was

¹⁵⁵ Jack McLaughlin, "Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder" (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011).

¹⁵⁶ While well regarded in Jewish history, Uriah Levy was not a respected in Virginia at the time. Levy did little to preserve Monticello, he was Jewish, he was from the North, and he married his 18 year old niece when he was 61. At the start of the Civil War, 70 year old Levy offered all of his money and his own life directly to President Abraham Lincoln in service of the Union. Levy is known for his role in outlawing flogging in the navy.

¹⁵⁷ Rachel Phillips Levy, mother of Uriah Levy, is buried at Monticello. One can visit her grave located in the remains of a building on Mulberry Row.

once very pretty, but it has gone to ruin now...The parlour retains but little of its former elegance, the ball room...has a thousand names scratched over the walls.”¹⁵⁸

Jefferson Monroe Levy, nephew of Uriah Levy, purchased the home in 1879 with the intent to restore Monticello to its original Jefferson design, including purchasing some of the land around Monticello back.¹⁵⁹ The windows were replaced, the walls were repainted, much of the original furniture was repurchased, and the gardens were restored to that of the Jefferson era. On the Fourth of July, which is not only regarded as America’s Independence Day but also as the date of death for Jefferson, Levy would celebrate at Monticello with refreshments, fireworks, and readings of the Declaration of Independence. In 1897, William Jennings Bryan wrote Levy a public letter proposing that Monticello be purchased by the federal government in which Levy replied that no amount of money could induce him to sell. During Congressional hearings regarding ownership of the property, Levy would respond, “When the White House is for sale, then I will consider an offer for Monticello.”¹⁶⁰ Levy would argue that it was his restoration that saved Monticello. Americans believed that Levy had the right to the private property that he had paid for. In 1914, Bryan, then the secretary of state under Woodrow Wilson, proposed that the home act as a retreat for U.S. presidents. Fearful that Congress could take the property from him, Levy asked for \$500,000 for Monticello, claiming that was half the cost of the home after his renovations.

¹⁵⁸ Melvin I. Urofsky, “The Levy Family and Monticello.” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 78, no. 3 (2002): 395–412. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26440719>.

¹⁵⁹ Jefferson Levy also restored the Town Hall in Charlottesville, which now stands as the Levy Opera House.

¹⁶⁰ It should be noted that at this time, only two American homes were opened to the public as historical sites: George Washington’s Mount Vernon in Virginia and Louisa May Alcott’s Orchard House in Massachusetts.

The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation purchased Monticello in 1923 for \$100,000 in cash and a note of \$400,000.¹⁶¹ In 1950, Monticello underwent a half million-dollar restoration. Unlike that of the duPonts at Montpelier, there was little discussion of the Levy family at Monticello. Many Jewish scholars pressed against the Foundation to include more about the efforts of the Levys rather than just their monetary purchasing prices of the estate. The Levys were in ownership of Monticello longer than Jefferson himself yet received little to no recognition for it.¹⁶² According to Monticello, 90% of Jefferson's Monticello is still present today due to the Levy family.

Monticello Descendants

There are two types of descendants at Monticello: the Black descendant community who trace their ancestry to the enslaved, and the white ones who are descendants of Thomas Jefferson and Martha Wayles Jefferson. In regard to the descendants of Jefferson and Hemings, there remains controversy as to whether or not the two groups are mutually exclusive. At this time, the descendant community is not unified as a group like Montpelier's Descendant Committee. Those lineal descendants of Jefferson and his wife through their legitimate daughters are known as the Monticello Association. The non-profit group was founded in 1913 to "care for, preserve and continue the family graveyard at Monticello."¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ The Thomas Jefferson Foundation was created in New York on April 13, 1923, the 180th anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's birth.

¹⁶² Urofsky, "The Levy Family and Monticello."

¹⁶³ Regular membership requires members to be lineal descendants while an associate membership is allotted to adopted children, stepchildren, and spouses of regular members. This membership is voted



Image 12: Plaque in Jefferson Family Cemetery. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

Jefferson's Black descendants have not been acknowledged by the white ones until recently. In a 2002 memoir, Shannon LaNier recalled meeting Lucian Truscott, a Jefferson-Wayles descendant, on the Oprah Winfrey show in 1998.¹⁶⁴ On the show, LaNier described telling his second-grade class that Jefferson was his ancestor, only to be told by the teacher to "sit down and stop telling lies."¹⁶⁵ When asked why Truscott and other members of the Monticello Association did not want to include Hemings descendants, LaNier believed that it "could mean that their possible icon, Jefferson, was a rapist. And they didn't want that to be their ancestor. They didn't want that to be their hero."¹⁶⁶ One associate of Monticello stated: "For a long time, the white descendants fought acknowledging the Black ones. It was in the 60s and the 70s when the attitude was 'we can't hide it anymore' or 'we'll accept it now.'"¹⁶⁷

through nomination; "About," The Monticello Association, accessed March 16, 2022, <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/about.html>.

¹⁶⁴ Dionne Ford, Jill Strauss, and Lucian K. Truscott, "Forward," in *Slavery's Descendants: Shared Legacies of Race and Reconciliation* (New Brunswick, Camden ; Newark, New Jersey ; London: Rutgers University Press, 2019), p. xi-xv.

¹⁶⁵ Shannon LaNier and Jane Feldman, *Jefferson's Children: The Story of One American Family* (New York, NY: Random House, 2002). 11.

¹⁶⁶ *Thomas Jefferson's Descendants Come Together despite Troubled Past*, CBS News (CBS Interactive, 2019), <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/thomas-jeffersons-descendants-come-together-despite-troubled-past/#x>.

¹⁶⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

It seems that the act of balancing white and Black descendants' views on enslaved community programming is still the challenge for Monticell. One interviewee recalled a Monticello associate stating:

‘hold on – you’re giving [descendants] too much, you’re overloading them. We have to structure this in a way that they don’t feel overwhelmed with the amount of questions that we have’...We want to make sure that what we do, they understand and agree with. We don’t want to do anything that [descendants] go ‘why didn’t you ask me?’¹⁶⁸

When asked about the overall feeling of being a part of the descendant community at Monticello, one descendant said, “[Monticello] has embraced us as part of the community...it is an ongoing relationship.”¹⁶⁹ One descendant said how nice it was to get to meet other cousins, and noted that not all descendants are not darker skinned. They then fondly recalled a moment when they, a descendant of Sally Hemings, was in the gift shop with another visitor: “[a conversation] came up somehow [and] she asked me if I was a Hemings-Jefferson descendant. And she touched me! Like she had to touch a Hemings person. Like ‘I get to touch one!’”¹⁷⁰

Getting Word: African American Families of Monticello

As Monticello’s relationship with descendants originated due to work with oral histories beginning in 1993, it seems that in their almost 30 years of working with descendants, Monticello clearly understands that “There is no one descendant opinion. There are groups of individuals. There are many different perspectives and opinions

¹⁶⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁶⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

within that group which is very key when working with a community. Due to Jefferson's Farm Book, it is much easier to identify lineage from Monticello, allowing the *Getting Word Project* to collect over 100 interviews regarding enslaved life and enslaved people at Monticello. This project has allowed for stories regarding those enslaved at Monticello, contributed by over 200 people, to be recorded and preserved for educational purposes as well as to assist other descendants in creating genealogy charts. In his recent bestseller, *How the Word is Passed*, Clint Smith discusses the history of the *Getting Word Project* and the ways in which Monticello uses the information gained from the interviews. When someone comes forward claiming that they are a descendant, "Monticello goes through a series of interviews to trace the person's lineages in order to determine the legitimacy of their claim." He learned this information after speaking with Niya Bates who stated that she used the "oral history interviews as well as her own research to inform the training for the guides, the exhibits, the website, and how Monticello publicly reckons with and talks about its relationship to history."¹⁷¹

In the South Wing, in a room once lived in by an enslaved family, there is now a small exhibit about the *Getting Word Project*. It features primarily six enslaved families: Fossett, Gillette, Granger, Hemings, Hern, and Coleman-Henderson-Shelton. It also is the place that reports that Peter Fossett, Isaac Granger, Sally Cottrell Cole, Robert Hughes, Ann Elizabeth Fossett Isaacs, Henry Martin, and Lucy Cottrell are the only known enslaved individuals at Monticello ever to have an image created in their likeness. This broad and brief exhibit gives a conceptual understanding of slavery at Monticello and the fight for freedom and equality that continues to be challenge to achieve today as told

¹⁷¹ Smith. *How the Word is Passed*. 44.

through the oral histories of the descendant community, specifically through the six families listed above.



Image 13: Exhibit signage relating to oral history at Monticello. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

Several of the oral histories that were recorded through the *Getting Word* project are highlighted in the online exhibition *Paradox of Liberty*. This exhibition was once a traveling exhibition and was shown at the Nation Museum of American History in Washington D.C. in 2012, and then at the Black History Museum and Culture Center of Virginia in Richmond in 2020. The exhibit focuses on six enslaved families of Monticello and their descendants.

In regard to Monticello's interpretation, one interviewee stated they believe that

[Monticello] has done well. We got a head start because of *Getting Word* and we stayed fairly close with the descendant community for the last 30 years. I wouldn't say it was easy, but we had the resources available to develop it. We didn't need to go out and find a lot of descendants – we knew who they were. We stayed in contact with them. There were some slow years. We have had a relatively successful way to ramp up their involvement and get their perspective on interpretation. We're still finding out how to do it. There's a limit to how many questions they want to answer at a time.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Confidential interview, February 2022.

Tours and Exhibitions

House Tour

There are several options of house tours for visitors at Monticello, giving visitors a choice between guided or self-guided tours of the first floor, as well as an option to see the upper two floors for an additional fee. Tours at Monticello are similar to those at Montpelier in that visitors proceed to self-guided exhibitions about the property and slavery. Monticello house tour guides spend approximately an almost equal amount of time on the history of the Jefferson family and of the enslaved population.¹⁷³ The tour also thoroughly discusses the home's unique architectural elements.

An interesting aspect of the house tour that is not as emphasized is the inclusion of yet another type of community: the Native American community. This entry hall of the museum seems like a museum in that there are maps, chain mail, bones of a mastodon, a copy of the Declaration of Independence, elk antlers, portraits, and recreations of what Native American might have been sent with Lewis and Clark during their expedition. The area of this room that contains the Native American objects was known to Jefferson as the "Indian Hall." After his death, the originals of these objects were given to the University of Virginia. The reproductions currently on display were authentically created by descendants of tribes for the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 2013. According to Monticello's website, "The recreated Indian Hall demonstrates that the

¹⁷³ Researcher's observations, November 2021.

Native American art forms encountered by Lewis and Clark and appreciated by Jefferson are still alive today.”¹⁷⁴



Image 14: "Indian Hall" at Monticello. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

The vocal interpretation of slavery inside the house has changed in multiple ways over the last 70 years. Andrew Miles covers the subject of this change in his graduate thesis as he used previous tour scripts from Monticello to examine this evolution of interpretation.¹⁷⁵ The willingness of Monticello to re-examine their interpretations regularly is important in telling a whole-truth narrative, and remains fluid in response to societal changes. Miles notes that the Monticello Foundation first acknowledged “slave life” in their interpretations in the 1980s, yet they referred to enslaved people as servants. In the dining room script, for example, the text reads: “the moveable dumbwaiters [serving tables] were pulled up to the dining room table so that small groups could serve and remove dishes themselves without servants being present.” References to slavery expanded in the 1990s when interpretation on Mulberry Row began and when the

¹⁷⁴ “Monticello.” Indian Hall and Museum. Accessed January 19, 2022.

<https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/indian-hall-and-museum>.

¹⁷⁵ Andrew Miles, ““Without Obscuring Deeper Truths:” Interpreting Slavery and Jefferson at Monticello” (2021). *Masters Theses, 2020-current*. 76.

Education Department at Monticello created a lesson plan about an enslaved individual, Isaac Granger Jefferson. The lesson plan strayed from a Jefferson-focused narrative:

By the end of the decade, the transition to provocative, slavery-focused interpretation had made a significant impact on the site, yet it remained incomplete. The Foundation often supported traditional views on topics with an existing historiography in Jefferson scholarship. Although historiographies of slavery and Early America evolved drastically in the wake of the social history boom, the Foundation committed itself to working within the confines of Jefferson scholars and biographers.

Miles states that this was due to both changing scholarship and changing historical practice. He goes on to state that “up through the 1980s, the Foundation relied on the research of proJefferson scholars like Dumas Malone and Merrill Peterson,” yet in the 1990s, Monticello created an Advisory Committee on African American Interpretation to better examine the subject of slavery at Monticello. Despite this, it was not until Gordon-Reed’s contribution to the historiography that Monticello revised its narration about Jefferson to acknowledge Sally Hemings and her family.¹⁷⁶

Clint Smith stated that, “at the time of my visit of the 89 tour guides only four of them were Black and three of the four were part of an incoming class that had yet to be officially begin their jobs over the past dozen years...there have been about 10 in total” noting a similar diversity issue that Montpelier interviewees found to be a problem.¹⁷⁷ However, at Monticello that was not always the case. As Smith quoted Monticello’s Niya Bates: “In the first 30 years

¹⁷⁶ Miles, ““Without Obscuring Deeper Truths.””

¹⁷⁷ Smith. *How the Word is Passed*. 39.

that Monticello was a museum, most of the guides were...Black men...dressed as enslaved people.”¹⁷⁸

Slavery Tour and Mulberry Row

Included with the tour ticket or property pass, visitors have the opportunity to partake in a 45-minute walking tour with a docent on Mulberry Row.¹⁷⁹ Mulberry Row is named after the row of mulberry trees that Jefferson had planted on the property to define the long line of slave cabins and outbuildings that defined the house quarter. Today, running alongside these trees are reconstructions of only a portion of the workshops and homes of those enslaved who once lived there. One could relate Mulberry Row to the South Yard of Montpelier, however, while the South Yard provides guests with a visual representation of living quarters of the enslaved, Monticello has a stronger focus on the shops that the enslaved would have worked in during the day.



Image 15: Pathway for Mulberry Row. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

¹⁷⁸ Smith. *How the Word is Passed*. 47.

¹⁷⁹ There is also a tour of the gardens that is included in the price of admission, yet it is not ran year-round. Additionally, visitors can purchase a property pass which allows them access to outdoor exhibits, the slavery tour, and the garden tour, but does not allow visitors to enter the house.

The beginning of the Slavery at Monticello Tour is located at a 2014 reconstruction of the Hemmings Cabin.¹⁸⁰ One associate of Monticello commended its role on the site, stating

Before we put the [Hemmings] cabin on the landscape, it was difficult for interpreters to explain what a slave cabin looked like, what the materiality of it all was, what the furnishings inside looked like. It's really allowed them to...focus more on the people. To be able to give the interpreters more time to tell the stories, that's been incredible.¹⁸¹

It is often difficult for historical sites to balance authenticity with reconstructions. As one interviewee put it in relationship to Mulberry Row:

There is one strain of preservation which says you do as little as possible. You don't put reconstructions back because they're conjectural. What [putting reconstructions on Mulberry Row] accomplished was that for many of our visitors, they didn't realize what was there. They didn't feel like we felt the landscape was as valuable as the main house. By putting buildings back on the landscape, you elevate it, you add interest, and you add the ability to interpret it that you wouldn't have had otherwise. Once you put a building that you can explore and experience, it changes the entire dynamic of the space.¹⁸²

Unlike the South Yard at Montpelier, Mulberry Row has only been reconstructed partially. There are markers indicating locations of these missing outbuildings, and sometimes signs describe the purpose of the missing outbuilding, but these signs can be easily overlooked. Additionally, Mulberry Row can be completely avoided if a visitor so chooses. It is easier to catch a return shuttle to the visitor's center instead of walking Mulberry Row, whereas Montpelier visitors have to walk through the South Yard to return to the parking area. A tour guide stated that Monticello deliberately ends the house

¹⁸⁰ An image of this cabin is located at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁸¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁸² Confidential interview, February 2022.

tour near Mulberry Row in order to attempt to get more visitors to interact with the space, yet that is not always the case.

Of the buildings on Mulberry Row that have been reconstructed, some have resulted from descendant community programming. Monticello has invited descendants to come re-daub cabins, similar to the reconstruction programs within Montpelier's L.E.A.R.N. programs. "A descendant of the enslaved community [had said] they felt their history had been wiped off the landscape before [Monticello] put reconstructions back."¹⁸³ Additionally, some descendants spent the night in these cabins with the Slave Dwelling Project, which leads overnight stays at historic sites to raise awareness of and change the narrative about slavery and its legacy. When discussing the projects descendants assisted on, one descendant recalled this program by stating:

I spent the weekend [at Monticello]. The descendants sleep in the cabins...when we go for these weekends, we have a nice dinner and talk about our ancestors...we also get to work on the cabins. Lately, some of the families have helped with the archaeology digs...they had started working on the ancestor's graveyard and we sang songs there and prayed. Now it's sacred. Now [descendants] can go there. Everyone can look at it but descendants can go in and look at the markers.¹⁸⁴

In the future, there is discussion to put up more of the fencing that was on Mulberry Row. "It's not this beautiful landscape. It's this more enclosed [space]." This is very interesting when compared to Montpelier's decision to not replant the trees that would have been in the Grove, located to the right of the home in front of the South Yard. The reasoning is that these trees, like Mulberry Row's fence, were there to block the

¹⁸³ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

¹⁸⁴ Confidential Interview, February 2022.

public's view of enslaved life. Therefore, it is up to the institution to determine if they should display the landscape to the full truth of the historical record, or to combat it by bringing to better view areas of slavery that would have once blended into the landscape.

There is also hope to put more enslaved spaces back on the landscape.¹⁸⁵

Monticello attempts to convey the outside property to Jefferson's Retirement Era, 1809 through 1826. Some buildings that are noted in Jefferson's papers before then would therefore not be reconstructed on Mulberry Row. That being said, all buildings on Mulberry Row have been digitally reconstructed and are available for public view on Monticello's website.¹⁸⁶ One of the reasons to not reconstruct all Mulberry Row homes is as stated by one interviewee,

At the very end, there is the joinery shop. We decided against reconstructing it even though we could do it quite accurately. We liked the fact that it was a ruin. It is at the end of the Slavery at Monticello tour – it helps to show time passing. As a ruin, it was valuable interpretatively.¹⁸⁷

The Life of Sally Hemings

The North and South Wings are located to the back of the mansion, built into the hillside beneath it and connected underneath Monticello through the basement of the house in a space known as the *Crossroads*. The exhibits here are all self-guided. The North Wing contains the icehouse, the North Privy, the tack room, and a place for horses

¹⁸⁵ This cannot be done easily for all buildings, as Rachel Levy's grave, mother of Uriah Levy, sits in the middle of a ruin at Monticello. As it contains human remains, it is much trickier to reconstruct a building around her grave.

¹⁸⁶ "Monticello," Picturing Mulberry Row, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://www.monticello.org/mulberry-row/gallery/picturing-mulberry-row>.

¹⁸⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

and carriages where there is interpretation about Jefferson traveling. The South Wing contains the post-1809 kitchen, the cook's room, a dairy, a smokehouse, the first kitchen which later became the laundry room, and living quarters for enslaved house workers, one of which is now home to the previously mentioned *Getting Word Project* exhibit. It is believed that another one of these living quarters was occupied by Sally Hemings and her children at one point. It is now the site of the *Life of Sally Hemings* exhibit which opened in 2018. This wing is important as it is a surviving space that represents the living and working quarters of several of Jefferson's enslaved population.

The Life of Sally Hemings exhibit begins with exterior signage about the "Jefferson – Hemings Controversy" and offers a brief biography of Sally Hemings.¹⁸⁸ Hemings has been discussed in more modern literature but only sparingly until Gordon-Reed's 1997 book and the DNA analysis. In a 2017 article for the New York Times, Gordon-Reed stated that:

More typically, the scholarship written to disprove [Sally's] connection to Jefferson routinely diminished Hemings's humanity. The arguments that the story couldn't be true because Jefferson would never be involved with 'a slave girl' and that such a person was too low to have influenced Jefferson recurred in various formulations in historical writings over many years, as if the designation 'slave girl' told readers all they needed to know.¹⁸⁹

Now, Sally Hemings and her siblings are some of the most discussed figures at Monticello. According to a 2018 New York Times article, the exhibition is what caused a

¹⁸⁸ There is much information on the website made available for the public. Much of this information is the same as that which is presented on signage on the grounds of Monticello.

¹⁸⁹ Annette Gordon-Reed, "Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson and the Ways We Talk About Our Past," *New York Times*, 2017.

[S]ea [of] change that has taken place at Monticello, as the foundation has increasingly focused on highlighting the stories of Monticello's slaves. The foundation has embarked on a multiyear, \$35 million project aimed at restoring Monticello to the way it looked when Jefferson was alive. It rebuilt a slave cabin and workshops where slaves labored, and has hosted reunions there for the descendants of the enslaved population, including sleepovers. It removed a public bathroom installed in 1940s atop slave quarters.¹⁹⁰

Before one enters the exhibit, which is more of an art installation, there is a sign that indicates the subject matter may “inspire strong emotions.” The sign describes the space believed to have been the living quarters of Hemings and her children as “a dark, windowless room.” Inside are projectors aimed at two walls and in the corner of the room there is a mannequin wearing garments resembling an enslaved women's clothing of the era. There is no voice over narration of the words that reveal themselves on the screen, which would be a problem to those hard of hearing. The video blends visuals with excerpts from Madison Hemings that are used to describe his mother's relationship with Thomas Jefferson. This portion of the exhibit is similar to Montpelier's “Fate in the Balance” video as both videos attempt to bring to life to the narratives of the enslaved, however, the narration, the narrative, and the imagery of “Fate in the Balance” provides much more of an emotional connection through the powerful audio and the narrative.

The core of the *Sally Hemings* exhibit reflected descendants' input:

¹⁹⁰ Farah Stockman, “Monticello Is Done Avoiding Jefferson's Relationship With Sally Hemings,” *New York Times*, 2018.

came about from descendant feedback that they wanted an emotional experience...this idea that you need to work emotion into it was really interesting and it led us to develop the exhibit that is in there now. There is this line you need to trend [sic] in being emotional and also being strictly accurate: not implying emotion, not making stuff up, not taking our best guess, not playing to the crowd. [Its] using the material that you have and displaying it in an impactful way.¹⁹¹



Image 16, left: The full room of the Sally Hemings exhibit. Image 17, right: The full room of the Sally Hemings exhibit. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

The desire to acknowledge and interpret Hemings's quarters is a brand-new change.

According to one interviewee, "Back in the 30s, 40s, 50s, [Sally Hemings' quarters] was paved over to be a tourist restroom. They knew it was there, that's why they paved it over. 'Let's pave over it and not talk about it.'"¹⁹² According to Clint Smith, a guide he conversed with at Monticello thought,

"The majority of people left the plantation changed between the slavery tour and the new Sally Hemings exhibit. Monticello is pushing its visitors to see the more complex and holistic version of Jefferson, however, some visitors thought the museum was trying to be too politically correct, and by portraying Jefferson more holistically, tried to change history. We are telling history by telling the full story, more of the story of everyone who ever lived there, not just certain people who were able to tell the story."¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁹² Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁹³ Smith. *How the Word is Passed*. 32-33.

Conclusion

Monticello has done extraordinary work in modifying its interpretation about slavery. According to one associate of Monticello, “We are striving for parity: parity of interpretation with the descendant community as well as Jefferson. They are so intertwined. That is what Monticello can do. That is what makes it unique among historic sites.”¹⁹⁴ The work it has done to continuously emphasize whole truth history with its tours does well to better inform the public about the role enslaved individuals had in creating Monticello and allowing Jefferson the ability and time to establish aspects of the country. While the tours and certain areas of exhibition of Monticello surpass that of Montpelier in discussing the subject of slavery, Montpelier places a greater emphasis on how the descendant community collaboration is what allowed for the whole truth history to be discussed. A common issue at both institutions is that the more common audience that visits these sites, children on school trips and older white individuals, are parties likely to have had censored and distorted information about slavery taught to them in order to avoid adverse reactions. Due to that censored history, it is difficult to discuss with visitors whole-truth history, despite both institutions heavily trying to enforce it. An associate at Monticello stated that they believe

Back in the day [Monticello] didn’t really acknowledge [slavery]. ‘Look at Jefferson’s garden – isn’t it lovely?’ but who planted it? Jefferson didn’t go out there and plant squash on his hands and knees...Some tourists will say that they don’t want to talk about [slavery], but Monticello insists now that they acknowledge [slavery]...I’m sure that is in the last 20 years maybe.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

¹⁹⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Monticello and Montpelier also differ in other ways. For example, there are more physical representations of homes and workplaces of the enslaved at Montpelier than at Monticello. While Monticello's house tour outshines Montpelier's in that it continues to evolve and give much narration of the enslaved life within the home, Montpelier heavily relies on the landscape to continue to lay emphasis on the plantation life in Orange. Montpelier has recreated some sort of structure, whether fully reproduced or they have reproduced the frame, representing at least some of the field quarters. Monticello does provide interpretation from signage and staff to discuss the crops grown in the fields, yet the fields themselves are not represented at Monticello.¹⁹⁶ The lack of representation for field workers, the bulk of the enslaved at Monticello, seems to put emphasis on the house staff, therefore putting emphasis on the home that Jefferson created rather than the plantation that he owned. Jefferson owned roughly eight square miles of land, all of which would have been tended to by the enslaved that worked either with the farm animals or those who worked to gather his tobacco and later wheat.¹⁹⁷ However, Monticello struggles differently than Montpelier in that many other buildings have encroached on Monticello's original acreage.

Additionally, there is concern that visitors would not go into the landscape to visit any outbuildings should some be presented in the field. The Monticello Foundation has stewardship over 2,500 acres of Jefferson's original 5,000. A lot of work archaeologically

¹⁹⁶ Montpelier has not resumed growing crops or fully represents all field quarters either, but they have some structures present that allow visitors to visualize the daily lives of those who worked in the fields.

¹⁹⁷ The land was broken into "quarter farms" that were run by overseers, one of whom was enslaved. There was the home farm on which Monticello sits, and then Tufton farm, Lego farm, and Shadwell farm. Shadwell contained seven 40-acre fields; Tufton contained two sets of land of 150 acres each, and Lego was almost 820 acres that Jefferson purchased in 1873.

has been done at sites 6, 7, and 8 at Monticello, but little interpretation is done at those sites. Shovel test pits (STPs) done at these sites revealed many domestic ceramics and glassware, as well as possible hearth remains, indicating occupation of enslaved peoples. Further, data from Site 6 offers the possibility of shifting landscape situations due to the expansion of growing fields.¹⁹⁸ The STPs results from Sites 7 and 8 include ceramics dated before the American Revolution, likely used by the enslaved people owned by Peter Jefferson.¹⁹⁹ Within these sites is believed to be the house of an overseer. These sites are a part of a survey known as the Monticello Plantation Archaeological Survey, which is attempting to discover all archaeological sites within the 2,500 acres the Monticello Foundation currently owns.²⁰⁰

Whether or not to interpret these outlying sites is a subject of debate at all three plantations. One interviewee drew a comparison between Monticello's field quarter and Mount Vernon's Pioneer Farm. "[The Pioneer farm] gets almost no-one because it's a haul back and forth. [The Pioneer Farm] is tremendous, but no one sees it."²⁰¹ However, many enslaved people were settled at Tuftin, which is visible from the mountain top. Like Montpelier's field quarters, an associate said,

We have talked about doing the outlines of the slave quarters out there so people could see them...[At Menokin] their slave quarter lights up at night. They have the bones and they wrap it in a fabric and they light it so it's a lantern on the landscape...it's very simple, very impactful way to get these buildings back on the landscape without putting stuff back you don't

¹⁹⁸ "Site 6," Monticello, accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/for-scholars/archaeology-daacs/current-research/plantation-survey/site-6/>.

¹⁹⁹ "Sites 7 and 8," Monticello, accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/for-scholars/archaeology-daacs/current-research/plantation-survey/sites-7-and-8/>

²⁰⁰ See Appendix Five; Fraser Neiman, "The Organization of Enslaved Households at Site 6: Clues from Monticello and... Australia?," Monticello, October 25, 2020, <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/blog/enslaved-households-at-site-6-clues-from-monticello-and-australia/>.

²⁰¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

know is accurate or not.²⁰²

Both institutions use their websites to provide information about multiple areas of the property, yet Monticello's plethora of online information does better to constantly give the public interpretation. The online interpretation is often almost identical to the signage around the property, but it also elaborates on several aspects of slavery that provide additional information to visitors both in person and online. The evolution of interpretation provided at Monticello is most prevalently observed by descendants, such as Shannon LaNier: "[F]ifty years ago, when you come to Monticello, they acted like Jefferson built this place by himself and there were no slaves here, and they're now putting context to the content and telling that full story of what happened here. And I think that makes history richer."²⁰³ And Lucian Truscott:

I grew up at a time when you didn't hear the word 'slave' [at Monticello]. You could go on 10 tours over 10 different years and never hear the word 'slave'... Now the tours you take here are complete tours....it was never talked about... that slaves built Monticello, the Capitol, the White House... This country would not exist without slaves and Sally Hemings was one of the founding mothers of this country. I like to think about Thomas Jefferson getting up on the day that he wrote the Declaration of Independence back in 1776. Who made his breakfast? Who came in and shook his shoulder and said, 'Mr. Jefferson, it's time to get up and write the Declaration of Independence.' Slaves did.²⁰⁴

²⁰² This interviewee was referring to Menokin, plantation home of Francis Lightfoot Lee, located in Warsaw, Virginia; Confidential Interview, February 2022.

²⁰³ *Thomas Jefferson's Descendants Come Together*, CBS Interactive.

²⁰⁴ *Thomas Jefferson's Descendants Come Together*, CBS Interactive.

Chapter 3:
Mount Vernon



Image 18, above: Grave outlines at Mount Vernon. Image 19, below: Example of stone marker of one grave at the slave cemetery. Photos by Rachel Gregor.

I never mean (unless some particular circumstance should compel me to it) to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this Country may be abolished by slow, sure, and imperceptible degrees. – George Washington, 1786²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, vol. 4, 2 April 1786–31 January 1787, ed. W. W. Abbott. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995, pp. 243–244.

George Washington, who more than once had records similar to the previous quote discussing his view on the abolishment of slavery, inherited his first ten enslaved individuals when he was only eleven years old. He purchased and rented several throughout his lifetime; 41 were rented by the time of Washington's death. While the first president of the United States understood the hypocrisy of fighting and leading Americans to freedom, many of his soldiers would remain enslaved following the war for independence. Washington was the only Founding Father to free his enslaved population in his will, but only when his own wife died as well. Washington hoped that those who once were enslaved by him be provided for, stating in his will:

...whereas among those who will recieve freedom according to this devise, there may be some, who from old age or bodily infirmities, and others who on account of their infancy, that will be unable to support themselves; it is my Will and desire that all who come under the first & second description shall be comfortably cloathed & fed by my heirs while they live; and that such of the latter description as have no parents living, or if living are unable, or unwilling to provide for them, shall be bound by the Court until they shall arrive at the age of twenty five years; and in cases where no record can be produced, whereby their ages can be ascertained...²⁰⁶

Over the course of Washington's lifetime, over 570 enslaved total individuals worked at Mount Vernon. Only 123 of those enslaved individuals were owned by Washington at the time of his death while the other 150 enslaved individuals at Mount Vernon were owned by Martha, whom she got after the death of her first husband. Martha also received much money and land which soon became Washington's when they married when she was 27 and he was 26. Of those owned by George, Martha freed them

²⁰⁶ *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, vol. 4, 20 April 1799–13 December 1799, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999, pp. 479–511.

a year later in December of 1800 (two years prior to her death in 1802), as it is often believed Martha freed the individuals due to fear for her own life. Despite who legally owned them, the enslaved population at Mount Vernon married and procreated amongst themselves, causing many ties to be severed upon the wishes in Washington's will being executed. The law did not allow Martha or George to free her enslaved individuals as she received them from her first husband who died without a will in place.²⁰⁷ Upon her death, the enslaved were divided amongst her grandchildren. Only one enslaved individual, Washington's valet William Lee, was freed immediately by Washington in his will.



Image 20: Photo of Mount Vernon Mansion. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

Mount Vernon, a stunning estate along the Potomac River in northern Virginia, was a profitable home despite Washington's years of absence during the Revolutionary

²⁰⁷ Martha was granted a dower share of her husband's, Daniel Parke Custis's, wealth. This share entitled her to one-third of his estate, while his oldest son, John Parke Custis, received the other two-thirds. However, John was a minor at the time, meaning Martha would manage the estate in his place. When John died during the Revolutionary War, the property passed to his son, George Washington Parke Custis, who was also a minor. Martha brought many of the enslaved individuals, both hers and those of John's, to Mount Vernon. Washington used much of her trust to buy land and additional enslaved people. If one of Washington's enslaved workers had children with one of Martha's from the trust, the child would be legally owned by whoever owned that child's mother. Most of the enslaved individuals who worked at Mount Vernon were from the Custis estate.

War and during his time as President. The story of those enslaved at Mount Vernon seems to be forever in the shadow of the great man who owned them. One does not feel the spirit of the enslaved at Mount Vernon like one does at Monticello or Montpelier. Visitors may deem Colonial Williamsburg to be a more appropriate comparison, as both Williamsburg and Mount Vernon contain a more “Disney” feel.²⁰⁸ While in reference to Colonial Williamsburg but can also be said regarding historical presidential homes, “the American story had been a story celebrating the success of the colonial upper crust, and, by extension, of wealthy individuals like the Rockefellers who used philanthropy to link their genealogies to the American Founding Fathers” and that they operate “on the border between mass entertainment and mass education.”²⁰⁹ The subject of slavery is not presented in tours, exhibitions, or the landscape at Mount Vernon as it is at Montpelier or Monticello. In his later years, Washington did not hide his enslaved population like Madison, Jefferson, and the current interpretation done at Mount Vernon.



Image 21: Oil on canvas painting "The Washington Family, 1789-1796" by Edward Savage. Portrait is part of the Andrew W. Mellon Collection at the National Gallery of Art. Many group portraits of Washington include enslaved individuals.

²⁰⁸ "Historic Villages Take a Page From Disney," *the Wall Street Journal*, 22 Aug. 1997.

²⁰⁹ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). 5.

Mount Vernon does “invite other interpretations of the space but [it] will never be the historical space that’s interpreting pre-contact to today. We bring forward our more valued asset [information about and directly from George Washington].”²¹⁰ However, one descendant stated that they felt “interpretation is lacking” while another said that “Mount Vernon sees the descendants group as an entity they don’t feel accountable to.”²¹¹ One associate at Mount Vernon discussed both their personal relationship with the descendant community and the relationship between the descendants and the institution:

I found it rewarding to work with descendants and bring their voices forward. It’s always tricky when talking about slavery at an institution like Mount Vernon because there are a lot of stakeholders and the descendants are – in my mind – one of the, if not the, most important stakeholder. But there are a lot of voices at the table. Sometimes there was a negotiation between what the Board, the leadership, the staff, and the descendants wanted. That was challenging to navigate, but it did not make working with descendants any less rewarding. It was really powerful to be able to talk with folks and make them feel like this was one of the, if not the, first time their voices were being incorporated into the narrative. For a long time, we didn’t have a formal mechanism for engaging with descendants.²¹²

History of Mount Vernon

Modern day Mount Vernon sits on 500 of the 8,000 acres of land Washington had upon his death. Washington inherited enslaved workers after the deaths of his brother Lawrence and sister-in-law Anne. Washington had begun remodeling the home in the late 1750s to make the home a two-story building. In the early 1770s, Washington’s enslaved individuals began the second expansion, which resulted in the home containing 21 rooms; Mount Vernon has two more rooms than Montpelier but fourteen less than Monticello.

²¹⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²¹¹ Descendant Community online survey responses, February 2022.

²¹² Confidential interview, February 2022.

Washington was constantly buying property surrounding the Mansion for farming. Due to his wife's trust, he had enough funds to easily buy people and property to expand Mount Vernon. While he once grew tobacco like many others in Virginia, he soon began to grow corn and wheat, which he would have ground at his gristmill.²¹³ These crops did not require as much labor as tobacco, yet Washington did not want to break up any families of enslaved individuals. He stated in a letter in 1786, "It is much against my inclination...to hurt the feelings of those unhappy people by a separation of man and wife, or of families."²¹⁴ In a different letter in 1794, Washington wrote "I am principled [against] selling negros, as you would do cattle in the market."²¹⁵ Instead, he hired indentured servants to teach skills to those enslaved individuals not tending to the crops.

Washington bought many enslaved people prior to the American Revolution. Upon his death in 1799, there were a total of 317 people enslaved at Mount Vernon. Washington owned 124 people, 153 were from the dower agreement, and the remainder were leased. Writings from the time indicate Washington saw his enslaved population as a working one with mutual expectations: while his enslaved had to work, Washington had to care for them. Jefferson described Washington as a "hard master, very severe, a hard husband, a hard father, a hard governor. From his childhood he always ruled and ruled severely. He was first brought up to govern slaves, he then governed an army, then a

²¹³ Visitors are able to visit the reconstructed gristmill, and the reconstruction of Washington's distillery, through their purchased property pass. It requires transportation, either one's own or through the shuttle service, to get there. It is closed for the winter season beginning in October. The researcher visited Mount Vernon in late-November and therefore could not reflect on the interpretation presented at either site.

²¹⁴ *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, vol. 4, 2 April 1786–31 January 1787, ed. W. W. Abbott. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995, pp. 393–395.

²¹⁵ *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 17, 1 October 1794–31 March 1795, ed. David R. Hoth and Carol S. Ebel. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013, pp. 206–207.

nation.”²¹⁶ Comparatively, Washington stated “the unfortunate condition of the persons whose labour in part I employed, has been the only unavoidable subject of regret.”²¹⁷

Past Owners and the Mount Vernon Ladies Association²¹⁸

After Martha Washington’s death, Mount Vernon was left to Bushrod Washington, nephew to George Washington. Bushrod was an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, yet despite this, the lack of debt from the Washington’s, and his efforts in selling some of his own enslaved workers, Bushrod struggled to maintain Mount Vernon financially. The property went through several other Washington descendants, yet none had the finances to keep Mount Vernon from falling into disrepair.²¹⁹ There was hope that the federal government or the Virginia General Assembly may show interest in restoring and preserving the property, yet emphasis was placed on Reconstruction after the Civil War. Unlike the mistreatment Monticello faced during the Civil War, Mount Vernon acted as a neutral zone in which soldiers from both the Union and the Confederacy would have to take off their uniforms and show no allegiance before coming inside.

²¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson, August 10, 1799. *A Dinner at Mount Vernon, From the Unpublished Journal of Joshua Brookes (1773-1859)*.

²¹⁷ Comment by George Washington, recorded by David Humphries, in the latter's biography of Washington, now in the Rosenbach Library in Philadelphia, quoted in Charles C. Wall, "Housing and Family Life of the Mount Vernon Negro," unpublished paper prepared for the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, May 1962, prefatory note.

²¹⁸ "Mount Vernon Ladies' Association," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/mount-vernon-ladies-association/#:~:text=The%20Mount%20Vernon%20Ladies'%20Association,as%20a%20model%20for%20many.>

²¹⁹ No direct descendant of Washington owned Mount Vernon after his death. Washington did have many siblings survive to adulthood. Martha had two children survive from her first marriage whom Washington would assist her in raising. Martha’s only daughter died at Mount Vernon at the age of 16. Her surviving son was John Parke Custis who had seven children before he died at age 26.

In 1858, Mount Vernon transferred ownership from Washington's great-grand nephew, John Augustine Washington III, to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, a group composed entirely of women and organized by Ann Pamela Cunningham. Cunningham purchased Mount Vernon and the surrounding two hundred acres for \$200,000 in December of 1859, and then opened it to the public in 1860. Harrison Howell Dodge became the resident superintendent in 1885. He oversaw Mount Vernon for 52 years and restored much of Mount Vernon, including repurchasing property once owned by Washington and buying artifacts to display. He utilized many of Washington's papers to not only recreate the home, but even installed improvements to the home that Washington planned to complete but never did.

The Mount Vernon Ladies Association still privately owns the property as a non-profit organization. The federal government does not assist in the restoration or maintenance of the home, nor does it assist with any programming. Mount Vernon became a National Historic Landmark in 1960 and joined the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, yet failed to be placed on the list as a World Heritage Site in the 2000s. Mount Vernon not only was the first historic house museum in the United States, but it was also the first plantation museum. From Washington and his lineage, and to the current owners, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, all owners of Mount Vernon have also owned enslaved people.²²⁰

²²⁰ Henry Ford donated a fire truck and advocated for the installation of sprinkler systems for the home. Also, Thomas Edison himself designed and installed the home's first electric system, claiming that his system would be much safer for the home than lamps; "Early History of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed December 6, 2021, <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/mount-vernon-ladies-association/early-history/>.

Descendant Community

Much information regarding the Mount Vernon Descendant Community can be found on the Mount Vernon website. However, unlike Montpelier and Monticello, there is little representation regarding the descendant community present on property. While Washington had included a fair amount of information in his letters and documents about enslaved individuals that assist modern day historians and genealogists in tracking ancestry of descendants, the presence of these descendants are not seen while walking around Mount Vernon.²²¹ The reason why descendants do not currently have a space dedicated to them, like one may see in Montpelier's South Yard or Monticello's *Getting Word Project* exhibition, may be due to how "informally [Mount Vernon] has worked with descendants for some time – since the 80s or 90s. It wasn't until 5 to 7 years ago that [they] tried to formalize those relationships a little bit."²²²

Mount Vernon typically allows anyone one with a connection to an enslaved person at Mount Vernon to be considered a descendant, as well as those "who are interested in [Mount Vernon's] interpretation and identify with the history of slavery [at Mount Vernon]." ²²³ This same interviewee also stated that, "I would say those are stakeholders who are adjacent to the descendant community. They may not be literally in the descendant community, but we [at Mount Vernon] value and cultivate those relationships as well."²²⁴

²²¹ The information in these letters were not to the extent of Jefferson's Farm Book, but Washington's papers have survived unlike most of Madison's.

²²² Confidential interview, February 2022.

²²³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²²⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

One organization that fits this description is the non-profit organization Black Women United for Action (BWUFA). Beginning in 1985, BWUFA defines their mission to serve “communities, especially those considered ‘at-risk’ with low-income residents” and to “advocate for women and provide the building blocks for youth to achieve their potential.”²²⁵ BWUFA organizes the annual wreath laying ceremony at Mount Vernon’s slave cemetery, typically occurring in October. According to one interviewee “these women are not literal descendants but are committed to telling these stories...[and] supporting other projects related to African American history.”²²⁶

According to a descendant, “the process of joining [the] descendant community wasn't difficult in the least. Through open forums, as well as guided conversations, we discovered that we share, not only a common bond of blood and kinship, but also the need and desire to have our stories told.”²²⁷ Starting around 2014, there have been project-related relationships designed specifically to have descendant input as to how those projects were considered and would move forward. Mount Vernon has hired several descendants in the past as staff members, as one associate of Mount Vernon notes: “it was a descendant employed in the interpretation department that really created our first slave life tour. That was the 1970s or 1980s? [However] there was no institutional relationship. The institutional relationship in the past was with BWUFA.”²²⁸

²²⁵ “Mission & Vision,” BWUFA, accessed February 28, 2022, <http://www.blackwomenunitedforaction.org/mission--vision.html>.

²²⁶ Several members of BWUFA can trace their lineage to enslaved people, but that does not mean their ancestors we’re once enslaved at Mount Vernon; Confidential interview, February 2022.

²²⁷ Descendant Community online survey response, February 2022.

²²⁸ One staff member commented about Monticello’s and Montpelier’s concern over staff diversity that “I can agree that we face similar challenges that face the museum field as a whole in this arena.”; Confidential interview, February 2022.

2019 was the point that several interviewees felt that Mount Vernon began building more formal relationships with descendants: “It started with very light lifting, like we just made sure we could send them holiday cards...with this new thinking we were trying to figure out good ways in which we could understand build a longer relationship with members of the descendant community.”²²⁹ The relationship between the institution and descendants expanded in 2013 during the planning of the exhibit *Lives Bound Together*:

We wanted to reach out to the descendant community and make sure their voices were heard in the creation of that exhibit. We did a combination of one-on-one conversations, more formal focus groups to share exhibit scripts and get people’s reactions. We also did oral history interviews that are achieved in our library here and excerpts were shown in the exhibit itself. That kind of established a more formal role for the descendant community as a stakeholder group that Mount Vernon was interested in keeping ties to.²³⁰

However, like Montpelier’s Descendant Committee, Mount Vernon’s descendants quite recently began to be recognized as their own organized group. The closing of the exhibit was the catalyst because it caused them to ask what would happen next:

Around the time the exhibition [*Lives Bound Together*] closed in the summer of 2021, the descendants had been talking amongst themselves about the goal to establish more formally a group that could liaise with Mount Vernon to represent the descendant community instead of just individuals. Last July they formally announced that group which is called the League of Descendants of the Enslaved at Mount Vernon.²³¹

While the signage around the historic grounds of Mount Vernon have little to no reflection from the descendant community in permanent signage, there was signage in the *Lives Bound Together* exhibit, now closed, that discussed the relationship build during

²²⁹ Confidential interviews, February 2022.

²³⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²³¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

exhibition planning specifically with the Quander family, a family with direct ties to Mount Vernon's enslaved community.²³²

Mount Vernon staff have done much work with this documentation, archaeology, and descendants to interpret slavery at Mount Vernon. Most helpful is their "Slavery Database," started in 2014, in which users can search Washington's enslaved community by name, skill, date range, owner, gender, location, and keyword, which they list as "Event Type." Examples of event type include "advise," "punishment," "health," and "education." Over 900 individuals have been recorded.²³³ The website also contains video clips of oral histories provided by descendant community members. The oral history project began in 2015 to accompany the exhibit *Lives Bound Together*. Starting in 2021, Mount Vernon has released a podcast, *Intertwined: The Enslaved Community at George Washington's Mount Vernon*, which uses stories of known Mount Vernon enslaved individuals to discuss slavery at Mount Vernon.²³⁴

Programs

Descendants were working with staff when Mount Vernon began their teacher development plan involving slavery in George Washington's world. They invited an individual from the descendant community to talk with teachers so that teachers could have the perspective of descendants. This helped to ensure that teachers "leave with the

²³² Jessie MacLeod et al., "A Perspective on Mount Vernon Enslaved Ancestry," in *Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon* (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2016), p. 106.

²³³ "Database of Mount Vernon's Enslaved Community," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/slavery-database/>.

²³⁴ "Episodes," *Intertwined: The Enslaved Community at George Washington's Mount Vernon*, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://www.georgewashingtonpodcast.com/show/intertwined-the-enslaved-community-at-george-washingtons-mount-vernon-1/episodes/>.

understanding of the danger of monolithic approaches of interpreting slavery, and to understand strategies of elevating biographies of the people that were enslaved at Mount Vernon and connecting them to today through the connection to their descendants.”²³⁵ Similarly, one interviewee stated that as for them, their favorite aspect of collaborating with descendants is that “visitors can interact with those who were enslaved and the people who are alive today who have family connections with them” later noting that working with descendants does not necessarily change “the stories our staff is telling, but it changed the way in which people can receive those stories.”²³⁶

One associate revealed that it was not until 2021 that Mount Vernon received funding for programs that were inspired by descendant ideas. From this associate’s perspective, “it was really not necessarily programming for descendants, but inspired by descendants to view and understand this space. We hope it will open our site to a more inclusive experience for any visitor.”²³⁷ To one member of staff, “Engaging descendants is definitely a transformative experience for programming...on the flip side, it can be frustrating when descendants can see all the ways an institution can change, only looking at it from the perspective that they bring to the table,” then noting that a solution to one problem cannot be the solution to all problems.²³⁸

Like Montpelier and Monticello, Mount Vernon several staff noted the struggles of communication between the institution and descendants. One staff member simply stated that the “biggest challenge is knowing who to communicate with,” while another

²³⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²³⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²³⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²³⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

stated that Mount Vernon needs “to understand where [descendant] requests and expectations of an institution like [Mount Vernon’s] come from.”²³⁹ This interviewee further stated that they wish to work with descendants to “really get at the real challenge we want to resolve – it may not be the solution they’re offering – but together we can get at a main goal. That’s a long term relationship, and I don’t think we’re there yet.”²⁴⁰

Tours and Exhibition

*House Tour*²⁴¹

The style of tour at Mount Vernon is different from that of Montpelier and Monticello: the latter two have one tour guide to accompany the group for the entire tour while there are different modes of interpretation at Mount Vernon which are dependent on weather and crowd size. Visiting on a slower day will grant you a single tour guide for the whole mansion tour, similar to that of Monticello and Montpelier. “If we sell more than [2,000-2,500] tickets in a day, [Mount Vernon] shifts to ‘Highlights Mode,’ where people are stationed in each room highlighting the space and the ideas in that space as people move through.”²⁴²

There are no real drawbacks to this approach other than guests do not bond as much with their tour guide as they might should the guide remain with them for the duration of the full tour, and the overall feeling of being rushed from one room to the

²³⁹ Confidential interviews, February 2022.

²⁴⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁴¹ In full disclosure, the researcher visited Mount Vernon in November of 2021. The researcher would like to note that at this time, the home was emphasizing the Christmas season. This included the presence of Aladdin, the Christmas Camel that visits Mount Vernon, a holiday feast set on the dining table in the home, and interpreters playing historically accurate Christmas music on musical instruments of the time period while discussing what Christmas would have looked like.

²⁴² Confidential interview, February 2022.

next, resulting in how some of their questions may not be asked.²⁴³ One associate stated that they felt a drawback was that:

[B]ecause our docents are saying the same thing over and over due to the volume of visitors it is really difficult to keep their energy up and sometimes it can sound kind of brute. I have noticed that with the explanation of ‘slave’ vs ‘enslaved.’ Sometimes they aren’t fully engaged with what they are talking about.²⁴⁴

As this associate mentioned, a massively important thing that is mentioned during this tour is the more recent language shift from the term “slave” to “enslaved.”²⁴⁵ Of the three institutions, Mount Vernon is the only one to emphasize this language shift, which they do at the start of the house tour during a general discussion about the enslaved community at Mount Vernon.²⁴⁶ This shift is not as new to the public’s vocabulary, but by including this discussion on the tour, Mount Vernon assists visitors to learn and practice this change. Additionally, this same information is constantly mentioned on the institute’s social media.²⁴⁷ However, like the associate had mentioned above, the ways in which this information is received by visitors is very dependent on how this information is presented by the tour guide.

²⁴³ Visitors receive a nice view of the Potomac River from the home’s back porch roughly halfway through the house tour, and as there is less interpretation to be verbally conveyed to the guests, prompting the stationed tour guide to offer visitors the chance to answer questions that may have, or to offer trivia to the guests about Washington.

²⁴⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁴⁵ The term “slave” implies the idea that these people were objects while “enslaved person” incorporates humanity to the individual. The term “servant” should not be used when discussing enslaved people as servants were normally paid in some way while enslaved individuals were held against their will.

²⁴⁶ During this portion of the tour, guides also discuss the demographic breakdown of enslaved people at Mount Vernon. See Appendix Six for the diagram shown to guests.

²⁴⁷ See Appendix Seven.

The rest of the house tour does very little in discussing the enslaved community.

However, when they are referenced, they are reference by name:

The goal [for the house tour] is to mention the name of an enslaved person in every room of the house. That is a pretty radical shift from where we were 10-plus years ago. Having sometimes been in the mansion and hearing the tour, I don't know if that happens all the time [due to visitors' questions and time constraints].²⁴⁸

One interviewee feels that Mount Vernon has “hit that bar to make sure that enslavement isn't invisible at Mount Vernon's [mansion]. That was the first iteration of [house tour] revisions.”²⁴⁹ By naming individuals, this can remind visitors of the humanity of the enslaved population. “To humanize the experience of people enslaved at Mount Vernon” and to have visitors be “engaged in the humanity – the human experience of living in the 18 century” are the overall goals of Mount Vernon staff.²⁵⁰ Mount Vernon associated believes that the mansion tour,

[I]s an opportunity to bring the most effective intellectual interpretation forward. The goal is to ensure the mansion tour moves from a traditional material culture approach and more to a biographical and ideas approach...[we] reached out to [descendants] and shared with them we were going to be doing this. I think it's a great project to ensure we will be able to reflect descendant voices.²⁵¹

Property and Outbuildings

The main buildings that highlights the nature of slavery are all self-guided. One is a small family cabin and farm near the Dogue Run Farm, which served as one of

²⁴⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁴⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁵⁰ Confidential interviews, February 2022.

²⁵¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Washington's farms known for having a 16-sided treading barn. At this cabin, which was opened in 2007, the family of Silla and "Slammin" Joe lived with their six children.

There are two areas of signage associated with this area: one is near the fence surrounding the cabin and the private garden the family would have operated, while the other briefly discusses Silla and Joe's family and work week. The larger sign outside the fence provides a brief summary of the enslaved field workers at Mount Vernon. This is the Pioneer Farm that one Monticello associate described as "tremendous" yet is often not seen by the public due to how out of the way some visitors may deem it to be.²⁵²



Image 22: Replica Slave Cabin at Mount Vernon. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

There is one small room on the other side of the property which summarizes much about enslaved life at Mount Vernon. Adjacent to the mansion, it discusses the living situation at Mount Vernon, stating that,

From the 1750s until 1792, the primary quarter was a two-story frame building known as the 'House for Families.' That structure was replaced by two one-story wings that were added to the existing brick greenhouse.

²⁵² Confidential interview, February 2022.

The four rooms in the new quarters were set up like barracks, with built-in bunks, the better to accommodate the adult men and women who stayed there. Several slave families also lived on the farm, and they occupied log cabins arranged in a line opposite the greenhouse.²⁵³

The room also discusses some of the roles enslaved people on the property may have been assigned and trained to do. Discussions on blacksmithing and cooking are primarily discussed as the cases in this room are filled with archaeological remains found on the property that were likely used by the enslaved population. While Monticello and Montpelier use the whole span of Mulberry Row and the South Yard to discuss this information, Mount Vernon has condensed it into the small room.

Near this room are the two separate bunk rooms. Both the male and female bunk rooms have signs explaining the use of space and the number of individuals who may have rested in the room each night, as well as specifically names some of these individuals. The men's bunk room's sign discusses the reasoning behind having barracks rather than cabins, while the women's sign acknowledges the presence of enslaved children. Each sign emphasizes the work done by each gender at Mount Vernon. However, a descendant stated that they felt "to date, [Mount Vernon] has not been willing to consider seriously the use of enslaved quarters as concession space."²⁵⁴

²⁵³ "The Greenhouse and Slave Quarters" signage at Mount Vernon. November 2021.

²⁵⁴ Descendant Community online survey, February 2022.



Image 23: Male slave bunker. The female bunker is quite similar in appearance. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

The bunks are in separate wings of a larger building that also included chimneys, a stove room, a shoemaker's room, and the greenhouse. This building was originally destroyed in the 1800s due to a fire, but was reconstructed in 1950. The life of the enslaved workers who cooked or made shoes are emphasized in the stove room and the shoemaker's room, which differs from other outbuildings on the property. The signage in the majority of outbuildings at Mount Vernon do not typically mention those who worked in these buildings, but rather primarily focus on Washington's influence over the work with Washington as the "primary actor" in the interpretation.²⁵⁵ For example, while the spinning house sign does mention enslaved workers, it subordinates them by saying, "while enslaved laborers and hired weavers produced basic textiles for plantation use, finer materials from England were imported for the Washingtons' household and clothing." This sentence follows text that explains how Washington selectively bred the sheep used to produce wool, as if he personally managed the flock. When talking about the signage in the historical area, one interviewee stated that,

²⁵⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

[It] has much improved compared to a decade or more ago. [Soon] we plan to re-vamp the interpretation in the outbuildings...right now they are fairly short. Some of them mention enslaved people...they could do a better job of creating a more vivid and engaging story. [Mount Vernon intends to] include more primary sources. Right now they are just green panels with white text, which was intentional to be unobtrusive in an area that [Mount Vernon] wants to maintain as historical.²⁵⁶

One may recall the mention of the signage design at Montpelier, which is Velcro, allowing for staff to continuously show their ongoing and immediate desire to update signage immediately. One interviewee mentioned that should a sign at Mount Vernon be damaged in some manner, they do see it as an opportunity to ponder any updates rather than reprint the old information.²⁵⁷ According to staff, the goal is that by the end of 2026, exterior signage will be brought into alignment with Mount Vernon's current interpretative stance.

*Lives Bound Together*²⁵⁸

We often got the question asking why *Lives Bound Together* wasn't a permanent exhibit. It was always intended to be temporary as part of our rotating series of exhibits on different topics. It was actually going to be much smaller: it was going to be in one gallery of the seven galleries it ended up being in. Part way into the process we realized we weren't going to be able to tell the story as well given the 1,200 foot gallery it was in. We made the decision to use the interior museum which is 4,400 square feet. The downside to doing this was we took off display objects that are iconic key objects of Mount Vernon.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁵⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁵⁸ In full disclosure, the researcher did not get to see this exhibition in person as the researcher visited in November of 2022 and the exhibition closed that summer. However, this exhibition has been digitized and is available on Mount Vernon's website, accompanied by a book published by the institution by the same name, and was the most talked about component in the interviews with descendants and staff at Mount Vernon.

²⁵⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Our intention was to never stop telling the story of slavery when that exhibition came down. We were really proud of it – we extended it twice as long as it was supposed to be up...it was supposed to be a small gallery temporary exhibition...and we basically tripled it in size and extended it.²⁶⁰

These interviewees described the amount of changes that went into the initial planning of *Lives Bound Together* and noted that the exhibition had to end due to several of the “key objects” that were displayed needing to return to their original sites. One descendant survey response expressed that the “products and content in the *Lives Bound Together* exhibit has yet to be repurposed for use on the grounds of MV [Mount Vernon].”²⁶¹ As of November 2021, there were several areas of permanent exhibition spaces that contained temporary plaques saying “This exhibit has been modified. The original objects have been placed in Lives Bound Together. Please visit the Visitor’s Center to see those original and unique items.”²⁶²

Included in Linnea Grim’s chapter in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historical Sites*, she includes a quote originally said by Mount Vernon’s assistant curator, Jessie MacLeod, in regard to the staff’s proposal to the board to create the exhibit *Lives Bound Together*. MacLeod stated as one of the reasons to do the exhibition,

‘Washington’s estate is no longer in a leadership position among its peer institutions on the topic of slavery and risks falling behind if it does not adopt strategies to interpret slavery and innovative ways, following the examples of Monticello, Montpelier, the Smithsonian, and other sites.’²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁶¹ Descendant Community online survey, February 2022.

²⁶² Researcher’s observation, November 2021.

²⁶³ Gallas and DeWolf Perry, eds., *Interpreting Slavery*, 34.

“*Lives Bound Together*” was the first major exhibit Mount Vernon has ever done. It was an award-winning exhibit.”²⁶⁴ Not only was it the project that really accelerated the relationship between Mount Vernon and its descendant community, many interviewees described the importance of this exhibition as what changed the narrative of Mount Vernon. For example, also offered at Mount Vernon is a tour of the outdoor area that discusses slavery at Mount Vernon. In conjunction with *Lives Bound Together*, Mount Vernon re-vamped the “Slavery at Mount Vernon Tour” and retitled it “The Enslaved People at Mount Vernon Tour”:

“That sounds like a small thing but the tour shifted from [focusing] on George Washington as a slave holder to the stories of specific people of the enslaved. That was really supported by the exhibit and the biographical information [gained from descendants]. *Lives Bound Together* was a catalyst to improve that aspect of the experience.”²⁶⁵

Associates at Mount Vernon stated that the general reaction to the exhibit, from visitors, descendants, and other stakeholders, was positive: “some people had an emotional reaction, especially those people who had ancestors depicted [through the silhouettes of enslaved people within the exhibition – 19 enslaved individuals were featured in *Lives Bound Together*].”²⁶⁶ Other associates mentioned their favorite aspects of the exhibition:

The entrance doors. They are glass doors with the names of enslaved people on them. You had to look through those names to look into the galleries. It was more of an aesthetic treatment than an interpretive tool, but seeing the sheer volume of names before you even confront or enter the space made for a very powerful experience. It was actually members of Black Women United for Action rather than descendants who saw [the doors] and immediately began crying. It was a very powerful moment to see that and realize that we had done something that did generate that level

²⁶⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁶⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁶⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

of emotion and was that meaningful to people...a lot of people would ask what those names were even if they didn't end up going in.²⁶⁷

At the very end of *Lives Bound Together* were videos of descendants talking about their ancestors, Mount Vernon, and their heritage. For that to exist at Mount Vernon – that was a very powerful thing to see.²⁶⁸

In regard to the exhibition and the entrance doors, one interviewee stated that while many people coming out of the historic area did not end up going into *Lives Bound Together*: “about 20% of our visitors ended up going in - so the minority really. But to know that that portion of the exhibit at least did make an impact on that many more people.”²⁶⁹ The oral history videos are now archived within Mount Vernon's library to serve for further exhibitions and scholars.²⁷⁰

However, one interviewee did not find there to be a slight disconnect between Mount Vernon and the descendants when *Lives Bound Together* was on display, stating:

There were a couple areas where I don't think we went far enough in the view of some descendants. That wasn't necessarily the choice of the curatorial staff but rather some institutional restraints in terms of talking about children that may have been fathered by people in the Custis or Washington Family – not George Washington, but other people. With one descendant in particular, our relationship was soured because we couldn't tell the story of her ancestor which did include being literally a descendant of George Washington Parke Custis, Martha's grandson. But in the years since that, we have started acknowledging that as an institution and we have started repairing that relationship with that particular person.²⁷¹

As stated in the introduction, this seems to be an ongoing problem at Mount Vernon, similar to the Sally Hemings controversy that once plagued Monticello.

²⁶⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁶⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁶⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁷⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁷¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

As *Lives Bound Together* has closed, the challenge now is to continue to keep the story of slavery as central to the interpretation at Mount Vernon. Staff has been continuously trying to find ways to keep the information from *Lives Bound Together* publicly accessible. As stated, the exhibition is now virtual on Mount Vernon's website. Additionally, information from the exhibition has been featured through Mount Vernon's podcast "*Intertwined*," which came about "to ensure the scholarship from that exhibition was publicly accessible in a public [and broader] way. More people will be able to listen to that podcast than ever be able to see that exhibition."²⁷² The next exhibit taking the place of *Lives Bound Together* is called *Mount Vernon: The Story of an American Icon*, due to open in March 2022. It discusses the history of Mount Vernon, including the landscape, the furnishings of the house, and the preservation of the estate. Slavery will be discussed in every section to be a "continuation of the spirit of *Lives Bound Together* in bringing forward the stories of enslaved people."²⁷³ The exhibit guide that accompanied the exhibit did well in explaining that slavery is what caused Mount Vernon not only to be a profitable plantation, but also become an American icon and museum.²⁷⁴

Lives Bound Together was located in a temporary exhibition space in the Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center. This space contains multiple galleries, theaters, and activities that focus on Washington. The website lists it as a place "to view the fascinating array of Mount Vernon artifacts and learn more about George

²⁷² Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁷³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁷⁴ Jessie MacLeod et al., "Slavery and Freedom at Nineteenth-Century Mount Vernon," in *Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon* (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2016), pp. 94-99.

Washington.”²⁷⁵ There is one permanent exhibition known as Discovering the Real George Washington, which contains a 4-D experience and a mini digital game for visitors. While the exhibit space is very impressive and features information regarding the modern-day equipment used to reconstruct a likeness of Washington’s face, the exhibit traces the entirety of Washington’s life, but currently contains merely one wall acknowledging his role as an enslaver. Several enslaved people are listed by name and a few have very brief blurbs discussing them further. As is the current trend of several areas of Mount Vernon, much of the space discusses Washington’s view on slavery rather than the enslaved population themselves. According to several interviewees, there are plans to create a new interpretation in this space to discuss the enslaved population in much further detail through a smaller version of *Lives Bound Together* within that space that will be permanent.²⁷⁶



Image 24, Left: Section of exhibit wall. Image 25, Right: Main portion of exhibit regarding slavery at Mount Vernon. Photos by Rachel Gregor.

²⁷⁵ “Donald W. Reynolds Museum & Education Center,” George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/location/donald-w-reynolds-museum-education-center/>.

²⁷⁶ Confidential interviews, February 2022.

Interpretation

Unique to Mount Vernon in comparison to Monticello and Montpelier is the use of historical costumed interpreters throughout the property on a daily basis.²⁷⁷ Mount Vernon brought the first African American historical interpreter, Gladys Quander Tancil, to the site in 1995.²⁷⁸ Both white and Black interpreters work at Mount Vernon and often speak with visitors regarding the general life at Mount Vernon.²⁷⁹ There are three forms of interpretation that Mount Vernon provides to ensure that information is provided to visitors who learn in different ways: those who give the mansion tour reach people “intellectually,” those who do a trade interpretation activate one’s “hands,” and characters “go and activate your heart. There is an emotional connection.”²⁸⁰ As previously stated, a goal at Mount Vernon is to have visitors be “engaged in the humanity – the human experience of living in the 18th century.”²⁸¹ As such, Mount Vernon hires individuals to portray free and enslaved Black people, Washington family members, hired and indentured servants, and friends of the Washington family.²⁸²

The space of the site and the number of visitors can impact the ability of providing costumed interpreters. Mount Vernon and sites like Colonial Williamsburg can provide this type of interpretation as these sites are larger and contain more buildings

²⁷⁷ Monticello does have a historical interpreter portray Thomas Jefferson Tuesdays through Saturdays, and Montpelier has a James Madison interpreter on Constitution Day, September 17th, and on Madison’s birthday.

²⁷⁸ “Timeline of Interpretation of Slavery at Mount Vernon,” George Washington’s Mount Vernon, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/timeline-of-interpretation-of-slavery-at-mount-vernon/#->; Gladys Quander Tancil was a relative of Nancy Quander, who has her own descendant community located out of Northern Virginia.

²⁷⁹ Researcher’s Observation, November 2021.

²⁸⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁸¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁸² Confidential interview, February 2022.

visitors can explore in comparison to Montpelier and Monticello. According to a Mount Vernon representative, “30-40% of our visitors are schoolchildren. We have a larger area to interpret and we have visitors waiting to get into the house [for tours]. Part of our goal is to provide educational and entertaining experiences while [visitors] are waiting.”²⁸³ In regard to being a costumed interpreter, descendants who participated in the Descendant Community Survey that was online and anonymous, most descendants stated that they would not be interested in being a costumed interpreter (Figure 3).

One interviewee recalled costumed interpreters at Mount Vernon feeling frightened due to visitors when in costume and “having to relive that traumatic history at all times.”²⁸⁴ However,

Encounters that visitors have with some of those interpreters are transformative. They’re informative and especially to children, it can be an eye-opening experience for them. No one should do something they are uncomfortable in doing, and institutions should provide mental health services for support, as well as provide flexibility to people doing those jobs. It feels denigrating to see people dressed up as slaves. It’s something we have to be very mindful of and listen to people whose opinions should matter the most because it is these people who are most impacted by this history and by these ways we are trying to [provide interpretation]. In general, there have been issues with retention due to the emotional labor required. It’s hard to balance these things that are really effective learning tools with the challenges on the individuals and the burdens placed on the individual.²⁸⁵

Similarly, another interviewee stated that Mount Vernon works to “understand the burden asked of African Americans to portray enslaved people, and we really work to create a healthy work environment to take on those roles.”²⁸⁶ According to an associate at Mount

²⁸³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁸⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁸⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁸⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Vernon, as the country has begun emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mount Vernon has “tried to restructure the program so no one is isolated and at risk of being treated unfairly of an ignorant guest...this happens to our African American interpreters but also our female interpreters.”²⁸⁷ This restructuring of interpreters was that:

Instead of just walking around in costume, which often led to people saying inappropriate things, [Mount Vernon interpreters] started doing more formal structured programs at a particular time in a particular place that people would have to opt-in to go to that place and engage with that topic. It made it more predictable and less prone to having negative experiences.²⁸⁸

Aside from the benefits listed above as to why this form of interpretation remains at Mount Vernon, one associate claims that another positive of doing costumed interpretation is due to this style of interpretation allows for staff to use the documentation about enslaved individuals left by Washington to allow for “real human beings emerge...our artists who portray them can bring them forward and connect people to them today.”²⁸⁹ However, one descendant stated:

For my race and for my ancestors...for someone to dress up and walk around the graves as a slave, is offensive. The reason being, if you look at Mount Vernon, you don't see many Black African Americans visiting plantations. It's something that rubs us the wrong way. We don't feel comfortable...for that person to walk up in fine clothes, supposed to be in the house situation, that's not true to fact. If you are going to interpret slavery, you need to show the good and bad of how those slaves were treated. if you are going to show a slave walking around, you need to show the ones who worked in the field. What did they look like? What were their clothes like? Did they have shoes. Look at the slave cabins – those slave cabins were not that pristine. They present nice little dormitory area that you believe the slaves actually lived in. That was not the case. It was

²⁸⁷Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁸⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁸⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

not as clean and pristine as they present. If you do interpretations, you need to make sure you interpret it fully or don't interpret it at all.²⁹⁰



Figure 3: Survey responses from the descendants of all three institutions. Question asked was "If given the opportunity by any historic institution, would you be interested in being a costumed interpreter at the institution to discuss the subject of slavery?"

Conclusion

Mount Vernon has the honor and burden of being home to the first United States president. As such, the institution has done much work to continue to celebrate Washington for his accomplishments, which often overshadows the fact that he owned people. As one descendant put it:

I am hopeful after all this time, they change a little bit and they try to adopt not this look, this look that George Washington can do no wrong...he was a man of his time. He held slaves, he whipped slaves, he sold slaves, and he slept with slaves. The more you try to sweep that under the rug, that doesn't fit with today's society...it doesn't take away all the great things he did for the country. But he does have one side that [Mount Vernon] needs to look at and engage in that narrative in a more broader sense.²⁹¹

Similar to Montpelier, the mansion tour rarely mentioned the presence of slavery in the United States. There was also little to no signage on property discussing the descendant community's effort at Mount Vernon, something that Montpelier and Monticello present

²⁹⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

²⁹¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

publicly. As *Lives Bound Together*, closed in the summer of 2021, visitors must now wait until smaller portions of the exhibition be included in future exhibitions and exhibition revamps, and wait for the artifacts removed to compose the exhibition return to their original cases around the property.

One thing that Mount Vernon provides that outshines that of Monticello and Montpelier is their online resources.²⁹² The Mount Vernon website contains a plethora of information regarding the lives of both Washington and the various enslaved individuals on property, all of which is presented in a very presentable way and is user friendly. However, the physical signage on property does not reflect this large amount of information that Mount Vernon has accumulated. Further, the narration regarding the enslaved community around property mostly focuses on the roles of the enslaved for Washington rather than them as individuals. On the random occasion there is verbal mentioning of enslaved individuals by a docent or tour guide, the enslaved individual is mentioned by name, which does offer a sense of humanity to that individual's memory. Yet that memory is tainted, as is most signage around the property, by the "happy and grateful slave narrative" presented throughout Mount Vernon.

Mount Vernon discusses that slavery at the site did not end after Washington's and Martha's deaths.²⁹³ While those enslaved on the property after 1802 were not owned by George or Martha Washington, these individuals still worked to preserve their legacy

²⁹² Note that both Monticello and Mount Vernon also have libraries dedicated to their history and study. However, at the time of research, both institutions had limited access to the libraries due to COVID-19. As such, the libraries were not discussed in the thesis.

²⁹³ Montpelier does continue to address that there are racial issues throughout the United States after the Civil War, such as through the *Mere Distinction of Colour* exhibition, the Gilmore Cabin, and the 1910 Train Depot.

as they tended to Mount Vernon, including those who remained on property to tend to Washington's Tomb and other areas of the property's landscape. One interviewee stated that what excited them about descendant community engagement is the opportunity to show that the descendants' relationship with Mount Vernon as a site is "a process and not a moment in time."²⁹⁴ Despite the interpretation about slavery post-1856, Mount Vernon does not connect slavery to modern-day racism as Montpelier does with *Mere Distinction* or Monticello attempts to with the *Getting Word Project*. While Mount Vernon as a public site is the oldest, it is the one that most recently began actively engaging with descendants. This relationship has brought about several changes to the Mount Vernon style of interpretation, and shows much potential for its descendants to aspire to one day potentially share stewardship with the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. As the League of Descendants of the Enslaved at Mount Vernon continues to become a stronger entity at Mount Vernon, staff intend to continue working with them to better collaborate in making interpretation.

²⁹⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Chapter Four: Slave Cemeteries

The practice of archaeology is not so much a question about whether it can create positive benefits for individuals and societies, but who benefits and at what price to themselves and others.²⁹⁵

[The cemeteries of all three sites] to some degree were neglected in comparison to the homes they are next to. Sometimes there were steps taken by these institutions to obscure the view of these places to pretend that they don't exist, sometimes they make attempts to celebrate them. It's all about the priorities of the institutions. A lot of times, that priority lies with the 'great white man' that the site is known for.²⁹⁶

Collaboration with descendant communities in providing interpretation can come with some challenges, but also provide much more positive outcomes in creating interpretation. Any information written by an enslaved person was more than likely internally censored to keep them safe from revealing the truth many refused to publicly acknowledge about slavery. The majority of records that attempt to recount slave burial practices would have been created by outside sources, such as white slave owners and overseers. These outside sources could have also been untruthful in their records of slave burial practices in order to further justify the institution of slavery. Slave burial sites were the one part of the plantation landscape that the enslaved population got to have to themselves, yet there is very little known about them. Lynn Rainville covers much of this in her book, *Hidden Histories*, specifically in chapter four, "Slave Cemeteries and Mortuary Rituals." She states that "it appears that in many plantations the enslaved community managed many if not all of their burial decisions," and also that while the white race forced enslaved Africans into Christianity, certain burial practices were about

²⁹⁵ Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendant Communities* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008): 5-6.

²⁹⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

to have a sense of agency over their own heritage and culture in regard to funerary practices. This chapter by Rainville draws from a variety of sources to piece together a possible series of events from death to burial.²⁹⁷

Archaeology is the best way to gather information regarding enslaved burial practices. Montpelier, Monticello, and Mount Vernon continue to work with their descendant communities throughout many different projects and have various histories and levels of engagement with their descendants. The one space at each of these sites that is most heavily influenced by the descendant community is its slave cemetery. Current and future archaeological excavations regarding the cemeteries will continuously require descendant community input. As one Mount Vernon descendant reflected who had volunteered in the excavation of the Mount Vernon Enslaved burial site, “it is important to remember that the souls who were enslaved at Mount Vernon lived, toiled, raised children, and died on that land. As such, continuing to offer interpretations and displays alongside those of the Washington Family is imperative.”²⁹⁸

At each institution, there are past, present, and future plans of various forms of archaeological excavations that, hopefully, descendants will get an active role in all levels of planning and excavation. The history of the discovery, treatment, and excavation regarding these cemeteries have differed at each site, but currently, each of these sites work with descendants in planning future interpretation of the graveyards. The presentation of the enslaved graves vastly differs from that of the graves of Madison, Jefferson, and Washington. This chapter serves to briefly examine the presidential

²⁹⁷ Lynn Rainville, *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 62.

²⁹⁸ Descendant Community Survey, February 2022.

cemetery so that one may compare it to the site's slave cemetery, discuss the history of these cemeteries, and explore the outlook of descendant community engagement regarding permanent interpretation of the slave cemeteries at each institution.

Presidential Cemeteries

Archaeology is inseparably entwined with the past policies and programs of colonialism, the appropriation and exploitation of one people's resources to enrich another more powerful people. The colonial experience in the Americas and throughout the world was fundamentally about the exploitation of cultural objects.²⁹⁹

James Madison



*Image 26, Left: Front gate of Madison Cemetery with markers of James and Dolley being seen on the right.
Image 27, Right: Sign marker pointing to cemeteries. Photos by Rachel Gregor.*

The graves of James and Dolley Madison sit around many other white remains in a manicured graveyard with a short brick wall encompassing it.³⁰⁰ Bricks have been

²⁹⁹ Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice*. 3.

³⁰⁰ Dolley returned to Washington, D.C. following the death of James and after the home was sold. It was in D.C. where she later died and was buried, yet her body was later re-interred at Montpelier in 1858 to be next to Madison. Her gravestone was vandalized at one point but has been restored.

found near the Madison cemetery with numbers inscribed on them that archaeologists believe were used to count how many bricks were made by an individual in a day.³⁰¹

Madison, who died in 1836, was originally buried in an unmarked grave and a tombstone was not placed until 1857. Excavations took place at the Madison family cemetery from August 1999 until August 2000.

Archaeological excavations were required in areas around the monument [the gravestone of Madison] and along the collapsed section of the cemetery's north wall to explore and document any potential archaeological resources that would be affected by restoration work. The excavations also provided views of the monument's foundation for the restoration specialists to study.³⁰²

A trench excavation was completed to identify unmarked graves in order to avoid them when doing restoration; more than one half of the total burials in the cemetery were found to be unmarked. All graves that were discovered did not disturb human remains.

Thomas Jefferson



Image 28: Outside gate of Jefferson Family Cemetery. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

³⁰¹ There are no known numbers on bricks found near or used on the mansion. It is possibly that this was done but the numbers were placed facing the interior of the home and covered with plaster; information about brick numbers was gained through verbal discussion with archaeologists on site at Montpelier, November 16, 2021.

³⁰² Charles Thomas Chapman, "Who was Buried in James Madison's Grave: A Study in Contextual Analysis," (MA thesis, Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, 2005).

When Monticello was put up for sale in 1831, the family cemetery remained in Martha Randolph's ownership.³⁰³ Presently, the Jefferson family cemetery is owned by the Jefferson descendants of the Monticello Association where members are still being buried to this day - the latest burial in the cemetery was in 2021. Burial plots are limited to lineal descendants of Thomas Jefferson, through his two daughters with Martha Jefferson, Martha and Maria.

The Association's purposes are stated in Article II of its Constitution. Somewhat abbreviated, they are: A. (1) To preserve and care for the graves and grounds of the Monticello graveyard, (2) to protect and perpetuate the reputation and fame of Thomas Jefferson and, (3) to encourage association and friendship among Mr. Jefferson's descendants; B. To defend the property rights of the lineal descendants of Col. T.J. Randolph as owners of the original Monticello graveyard; and C. To affirm the right of the descendants of Thomas Jefferson to burial in the addition to the Monticello graveyard as provided in the covenant under which the property was deeded.³⁰⁴

At this point, no Hemmings descendants are buried in the Jefferson family cemetery. After the DNA study regarding the children of Sally Hemings, controversy erupted over if the descendants of Hemings should be allowed membership in the Association, which would grant them burial in the Jefferson family cemetery. According to a 2002 article, the Monticello Association voted against allowing Jefferson-Hemings descendants to be buried with Jefferson-Wayles descendants in the family graveyard. At the time of that article, "only two of the estimated 1,200 descendants of Hemings have

³⁰³ Martha was the only white child of Jefferson to survive past the age of 25. Close to her father, Martha often served as the informal First Lady due to her mother's death when Martha was only 10 years old. Martha would later marry her third cousin, Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., a lineal descendant of Pocahontas.

³⁰⁴ "About." The Monticello Association, 2016. <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/about.html>.

requested burial rights.”³⁰⁵ The cemetery is gated and is not open to the public. Visitors to Monticello are allowed to visit the cemetery from outside the gates. The shuttle stops at the Jefferson cemetery.

George Washington’s Tomb



Image 29: Washington Family new Tomb exterior. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

There is no Family Cemetery at Mount Vernon like there is at Montpelier or Monticello. Instead, Washington and his family are contained in a tomb.³⁰⁶ The first to be placed in the tomb was Washington’s niece, Jane Washington, in 1745; the last was Jane Charlotte Blackburn Washington, Washington’s grandniece-in-law in 1855. A guide remains outside of Washington’s tomb, but like that of Madison, there is no signage

³⁰⁵ Michael Kilian and Washington Bureau, “Jefferson’s Heirs Reject Hemings’ Kin,” Chicago Tribune, August 20, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2002-05-06-0205060232-story.html>.

³⁰⁶ After Washington’s death, Congress wanted to create a marble monument to Washington and place his body under it. Martha gave consent to this but the monument never was completed. After the new crypt was created, Martha and Washington were reentered within it. The centennial of Washington’s birth prompted the return of the idea of sending Washington’s remains to D.C., but at the Virginia legislature’s request and in considering Washington’s will, John Augustine Washington did not allow for Washington to be moved from Mount Vernon.

about the cemetery.³⁰⁷ The original vault, known as the Old Vault was “about two hundred and fifty yards sound of the mansion...in a very dilapidated condition.”³⁰⁸ Washington’s will discussed how the old family vault is “requiring repairs” and how he wanted a larger brick one to be constructed. He also stated how this new vault should contain “my remains, with those of my deceased relatives (now in the old Vault) and such others of my family.”³⁰⁹ Despite Washington himself recording these wishes, this did not immediately happen, happening instead around 1831 after the remains of an in-law of Bushrod Washington were stolen. The new vault is located about one hundred yards from the old vault and three hundred yards from the mansion.³¹⁰

George and Martha were placed in separate marble sarcophagi and their relations in the inner vault while Bushrod Washington and John Augustine Washington, two other owners of Mount Vernon after Washington’s death, are represented with marble shafts located in front of the vault. There lacks interpretation about the twelve previously enslaved individuals who came to Mount Vernon after being free to provide assistance when creating and caring for Washington’s tomb in 1835. Some of those who returned were those freed in Washington’s will, or were children of those once enslaved at Mount Vernon, but not all twelve. A local newspaper at the time stated “they had offered their services...as they only return in their power to make to the remains [of Washington]...I [the reporter] trust their names will not be forgotten.” The names of the individuals were

³⁰⁷ There is a sign from Monticello about the Jefferson’s family cemetery, despite Monticello not owning the cemetery.

³⁰⁸ James Albert Wineberger, *The Tomb of Washington at Mount Vernon*. Washington, D.C.: T. McGill, 1857. 39.

³⁰⁹ *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, vol. 4, 20 April 1799–13 December 1799, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999, pp. 479–511.

³¹⁰ Wineberger, *The Tomb of Washington*. 40.

also recorded in the newspaper: Sambo Anderson, William Anderson, Berkley Clark, William Hayes, Dick Jasper, Morris Jasper, George Lear, William Moss, Joe Richardson, Levi Richardson, Joseph Smith, and Nancy Quander.³¹¹ Nancy Quander was the only female to assist.³¹²

Slave Cemeteries

Montpelier

Six years after James Madison died, a visitor arrived at Montpelier...The visitor was shocked that the grave of the illustrious Madison was identified by nothing more than a 'white oak slate or the word of an octogenarian negro.' When Paul Jennings died in 1874, he was buried in Harmony Cemetery, an African American burial ground in northeast Washington. With the turn of the new century, a magazine article reported that while 'the former slave sleeps in a well marked spot in the capital of his country, Madison, the mighty man he served, lies neglected there at what was formerly the beautiful Montpelier.' Madison's grave was marked with a stone obelisk by this date, but the old family graveyard was dilapidated and overgrown with weeds. The contrast is now reversed.³¹³

It is believed that the original slave cemetery was located immediately south-west of the standing slave cemetery. Oral history from DuPont era workers claim that the current field there used to be plowed regularly and they recall discovering long bones in this field. It is also believed that around the same time that the brick wall was being

³¹¹ Alexandria Gazette, Nov. 16, 1835, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85025007/1835-11-16/ed-1/seq-3/>.

³¹² There is now an association recording the history and genealogy of the Quander family named the Quanders Unlimited that runs out of Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia.; Quanders United Inc., "Welcome to Quanders United Inc.," Quanders United Inc., accessed January 17, 2022, <https://quandersunited.org/our-story>.

³¹³ The remains of Jennings were misplaced when his remains were reinterred at the new National Harmony Memorial Park in Maryland; Taylor, *A Slave*, 224.

constructed around the Madison family cemetery, Madison also began farming in the same field where several of the enslaved workers had buried their immediate family and their friends.³¹⁴

The confirmed slave cemetery at Montpelier is marked with a weathered sign that discusses how the cemetery was discovered: depressions in the soil were created as the soil settled and the graves collapsed due to age.³¹⁵ Approximately 40 depressions were accounted for and cadaver dogs were used to identify the presence of human remains. Ground penetrating radar has been used on surrounding areas where oral history has led Montpelier staff members to find an earlier nearby cemetery.³¹⁶



*Image 30, Left: Slave cemetery sign, wreath, and slave cemetery in the background. Photo by Rachel Gregor.
Image 31, Right: Burial depressions of slave cemetery. Photo by Dr. Matt Reeves, Montpelier Archaeology.*

The descendant community has many comments about the current state of the slave cemetery. When asked their opinion about how they view the work done by

³¹⁴ *Archaeology Tour: "The Great Beyond" Cemetery Tour.* (YouTube, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDch0ZHdaYg>.

³¹⁵ There are two other human cemeteries on property: one is near the Gilmore Cabin, yet it is believed that the graves contain George Gilmore and his wife, Polly, as well as their immediate descendants. Therefore, those in this cemetery would be those who had been freed by the time of their death rather than enslaved. The other cemetery is known as Tag's Island cemetery, however it is not accessible to the public.

³¹⁶ *Archaeology Tour: "The Great Beyond" Cemetery Tour;* see Appendix Two and Three.

Montpelier, one member stated simply, “One look at the ‘Slave Cemetery’ will give you the answer.”³¹⁷ Other statements about the cemetery include “the appearance of the Slave Cemetery is a disgrace” and that “the slave cemetery doesn't seem to be of importance to James Madison's Montpelier. My ancestors are buried in between the trees with no identifiable marks or memorial.”³¹⁸ Staff has similar responses - one staff member stated,

In appearance, there's a big brick wall that surrounds the Madison cemetery whereas the Slave cemetery has ropes. Only recently did we discover that the extent of the cemetery was much larger than what we believed. It went from 40 individuals to up to over 150. How are these places preserved and remembered? The Madison family was preserved in a great way when we didn't know about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the slave cemetery until recently. I'm interested to see what ideas the descendants bring to the table about the cemetery. To see how they want to see their family burial ground represented.³¹⁹

A descendant survey response adds to that by stating that Montpelier “received a \$1million grant from the state of Virginia to work on the cemetery. But that funding is just sitting there because of the impasse between the Montpelier Board and Descendants re: parity.”³²⁰ As of January 2022, there has been a delay as the Board debates the next steps in that process. More than one representative has confirmed this monetary amount and that there is an impasse between staff and descendants. Until there is a consensus between the stakeholders, any further landscaping and archaeology of this site has been halted.

³¹⁷ Descendant Community Survey, February 2022.

³¹⁸ Descendant Community Surveys, February 2022.

³¹⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³²⁰ Descendant Community Survey, February 2022.

Monticello

Monticello did most of their archaeological survey of their located slave cemetery between 2000 and 2002. This cemetery lies almost completely encircled by the visitor parking lot.³²¹ This location is known as “The Park.” 20 burials were identified during archaeological excavations; it is believed that over 40 graves are located within The Park, which was the cemetery used by when Jefferson owned Monticello (note that some graves could possibly hold more than one individual). No graves were excavated or disturbed during excavation. The cemetery is 75 feet by 65 feet, and according to the archaeological report, the site had been “completely preserved during the building of the parking lot.”³²² There is not a shuttle to the slave cemetery like there is to the Jefferson cemetery, yet due to its close proximity to the parking lot and the many walking paths to the cemetery, the cemetery should be visited by the public. However, like that of the Montpelier slave cemetery, it is not.³²³ Similarly, one associate stated that the cemetery “There was the perspective that visitors were going in for picnics and walking their dogs. We don’t know if that’s true, but we are doing everything we can to ensure that would never happen again.”³²⁴

³²¹ There is also at least one grave identified in the “Ancient Field,” a farming area located roughly 3,000 feet from the Park Cemetery, yet it is likely from the post-bellum nineteenth century. It is believed that this site is not from the Jefferson Era. The Ancient Field is not represented on the Monticello map for visitors.

³²² Sara Bon-Harper, Fraser Neiman, and Derek Wheeler, “Monticello's Park Cemetery” (Monticello, 2003).

³²³ The researcher visited Monticello’s cemetery twice in October 2021; the researcher was the only individual at the site. Similarly, the researcher visited Montpelier’s cemetery many times in 2019 and again in September of 2021; rarely were visitors at the slave cemetery.

³²⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Currently, Monticello is modifying the surrounding landscape, beginning pre-pandemic. The goal is to enhance the landscape around the cemetery; “the cemetery itself is not being touched – that was something the descendants felt strongly about.”³²⁵

Monticello is adding paths around the cemetery, noting this as a descendant request as well. This was inspired by the paths that were once around the Jefferson Family Cemetery which no longer are there due to an expansion of that cemetery. Most notably are the plans to include two seating areas:

One is for larger groups [that could] fit 60 people standing...with a big bench. There is also a much more private descendant seating area just for descendants. It will be gated [and private]. It’s just for descendants to come in and commune and contemplate their ancestors...there is no barrier to this smaller descendant seated area to the rest of the burial ground.³²⁶



Image 32: Slave cemetery at Monticello in October 2021. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

The staff at Monticello believe there to be more than one cemetery, which there more than likely is due to the number of enslaved at Monticello in comparison to the number of believed graves in the Park Cemetery, yet this is the only one currently

³²⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³²⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

discovered. According to one interviewee, this cemetery served as “the stand-in for the ancestors of the descendants.”³²⁷ Lynn Rainville includes a discussion on this cemetery in her book, *Hidden Histories: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia*. In it, she notes that after the Foundation erected the fence around the cemetery, they also sponsored a contest to design a memorial for the cemetery. While she does not say how many individuals entered the contest, she does indicate that submissions were received. However, there was no monument erected. Likewise, the multi-million-dollar visitor center opened in 2009 instead, only a “stone’s throw” away from one another.³²⁸ There are plans to include more dense plants around the cemetery due to the parking lot which surrounds the space:

[The parking lot] was not our decision – this was done in the 70s. We would not do that again. We really regret it’s there, but we are doing what we can. We will be removing parking spaces to deepen that buffer zone between the burial area and the parking ground. We still have work to do. It’s what we can do right now...a lot of people - a lot of visitors – [were] telling us they felt it looked disrespected, unmaintained. That was not the intention. We wanted to have as light a touch as possible to keep the landscape as preserved as possible. Like a wooden cemetery. But it did not come across that way. It looked more like an afterthought. We are trying to dress up what’s around it to show the importance to this modest historic resource.³²⁹

It is currently unclear what the next, if any, archaeological step will be to the Park Cemetery, or to discovering the other cemeteries that must have been at Monticello at some point.

³²⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³²⁸ Rainville, *Hidden History*.

³²⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

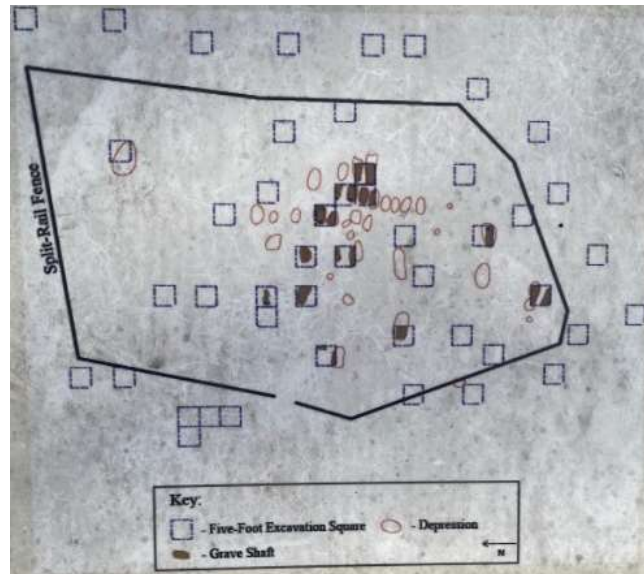


Image 33: Map of slave cemetery graves as presented on signage at the cemetery. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

The new signage around the cemetery will focus on the preservation of the landscape, the archaeology done at the site, and the cemetery's role in the larger plantation site. There will also be markers that discuss the meaning of the site and how it needs to be respected. Like at Montpelier, there is no docent nor staff stationed around the cemetery to answer questions. There are currently no plans about tours to the site but there may be in the future: "we tried to make every tour end there. Logistically it's a huge challenge."³³⁰ The events and ceremonies that have occurred at the site will hopefully resume more steadily when the pandemic continues to wane.

Mount Vernon

The close proximity to Washington's Tomb assists in drawing visitors to the slave cemetery, something that cannot be done at Monticello or Montpelier. The space is often much more crowded with visitors than the slave cemeteries of Jefferson and Madison.³³¹

³³⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³³¹ Researcher's observation, November 2021.

There is a wreath-laying ceremony at both the Washington Tomb and the slave cemetery every day. While the sad history of the slave cemetery at Mount Vernon should not be ignored, the attention to the cemetery in the modern day is one to be applauded.



Image 34: Archway to Slave cemetery. Note the outline of slave grave to the left. Photo by Rachel Gregor.

In 1929, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association funded a monument to mark the location of the slave cemetery on that plantation due to the possibility that the cemetery may begin to disappear due to natural causes. However, so little landscaping was done near the site that by the 1980s the marker was lost. It was rediscovered in 1983, followed by the placing of a new marker, designed by students of Howard University School of Architecture, and the completion of a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey in 1985. BWUFA organizes an annual wreath laying ceremony at Mount Vernon's slave cemetery and has such since 1990.³³² A Washington Post article from 1994 contains quotes from several members of the descendant community at the time, reflection on the annual wreath laying ceremony: "a drumbeat sounded as each of the names of the 317 slaves that

³³² The Clerk of the House of Delegates prepared a resolution, House Joint Resolution No. 235, offered on February 17, 2020, was offered to commend Black Women United for Action as they work to preserve the memory of Mount Vernon's enslaved community through the wreath laying ceremony.

Washington owned at the time of his death was read.”³³³ For every ceremony in October, staff outline the graves found archaeologically. According to one representative for Mount Vernon, “archaeologically, the best way we can give respect to the people who are there is to acknowledge and know and show people where they are [buried].”³³⁴



Image 35, left: 1929 cemetery marker. Image 36, right: 1983 marker. Photos by Rachel Gregor.

From May 2014 until the Fall of 2017, the archaeological staff at Mount Vernon completed a survey of the site, expanding on the 1985 GPR survey. In 2014, before a shovel even entered the ground, there was a ceremony, blessing the cemetery. According to one representative for Mount Vernon,

The descendant community has been at the forefront of our minds since the start of this project and we have always wanted to go about it in the most respectful way possible, both to the people who are buried in the hillside and to their living relatives...one of the positives of [engaging with the descendants] is remembering that this is not a thing of the past.

³³³ Eric Lipton, “Descendants of Mount Vernon Slaves Reflect on Pain and Progress,” *The Washington Post* (WP Company, September 18, 1994), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1994/09/18/descendants-of-mount-vernon-slaves-reflect-on-pain-and-progress/30e45c80-6442-42ce-9228-fed8affc14c5/>.

³³⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

The repercussions of slavery – we feel them very viscerally to this day.³³⁵

Since 2014 Mount Vernon archaeologists have “invited members of the surrounding community and any descendants to participate if they would like to, [as] several descendants can trace their lineage to some of the people who were most likely buried there.”³³⁶ The excavation did not include an excavation of the graves; they included the removal of the overlying soils so that only the top of the grave shaft is visible. Their goals are to know the boundaries of the cemetery, the number of graves, and how the graves are arranged in relation to one another and the natural elements. A document dated to 1855 shows 12 graves buried in the cemetery, yet other sources show that there were between 100 and 150 graves in that area in 1855. As of 2014, 70 graves had been identified.³³⁷ As visitors walk the path in the cemetery toward the two markers, they can see in the grass white string pegged in place with nails that outline each grave.³³⁸ The first of these outlines is seen near the archway one enters the path to venture deeper into the cemetery.

To a descendant who can identify their ancestor as one buried in the cemetery:

[The slave cemetery] is horrible. It has not changed one iota [in 25 years]. The only thing that is different is the little strings out there where they are stating where the slaves are buried – the bodies are – which is a somber feeling for someone that has relatives there. I think, as I told them, that they need to beautify it. It needs to be presented for the millions of visitors that come to that spot and sit and contemplate on those that are buried there. They don’t make it comfortable or enough for anyone to do that. It’s

³³⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³³⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³³⁷ “Why Is Archaeology at the Cemetery so Important?,” George Washington’s Mount Vernon, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/archaeology/slave-burial-ground-research/why-is-archaeology-at-the-cemetery-so-important/>.

³³⁸ It is uncertain how long the string outlines are in place, but they were when the researcher visited in November 2021, most likely still in place after the annual wreath laying ceremony. See Image 36.

sad.³³⁹



Image 37, left: Map of survey. Photo from Mount Vernon's website.

Image 38, right: 2014 Image of excavation. Photos from Mount Vernon's website.³⁴⁰

The archaeology staff at Mount Vernon wants to see every grave permanently marked: “[the archaeologists] are the ones down there - they experience when visitors see [the graves], even if it’s just a string outline, it’s impactful. But what does the great-great-great grandson or granddaughter want to see?”³⁴¹ To this staff, they remind themselves constantly that “it’s their cemetery [the descendant community’s] and we’re privileged to work in it.”³⁴² According to one interviewee, archaeologists at Mount Vernon are:

[S]till in the process of determining how and if [Mount Vernon] will mark the graves that archaeologists have surveyed. This is one area [Mount Vernon] really wanted to be in conversation with descendants about [discovering] the best way to mark the area. There is the consideration of the goal to create a historically accurate environment so [they] have to consider, say if [they] where to put headstones, that is not what was there in the 18th century, therefore not historically accurate. It would be giving visitors a misleading perspective of what that space looked like.³⁴³

³³⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁴⁰ “Season Four Summary,” George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/archaeology/slave-burial-ground-research/season-four-summary/>.

³⁴¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁴² Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁴³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Despite Mount Vernon providing those grave outlines, one interviewee wants more:

Beautify it, to put a plaque up...to see the list of the names, and then at the grave site, I don't know but maybe a stone monument to show that those are graves. I think what scares them is I don't think they want to see how many people are buried there. It's got to be over 150-300 people. When you walk on that pebbled road and walk into there, you're walking on graves.³⁴⁴

One interviewee brought up the consideration of staff maintenance to the site as well, perhaps hinting at the previous disregard Mount Vernon had to the slave cemetery in the past. There is constant foot traffic to the cemetery, most likely because it is located in a much more accessible area, near the center of the entire visitor's site at Mount Vernon, and also in close location to Washington's Tomb. This differs from Montpelier and Monticello who had member interviewees discuss how these features are not able to be adjusted to be in a more easily accessible area.

After every winter, Mount Vernon does a clean up of the slave cemetery. Starting in the spring of 2021, there was a program known as *Lives, Loves, and Loss*³⁴⁵:

We invited guests [who just happened to come that day] to create these painted stones that they could place in or around the graves and the memorials...they were never intended as permanent markers...It was specifically designed to open a space at Mount Vernon for remembering people for their full humanity. We wanted to engage this topic coming out of COVID since people had such a challenging time. We wanted a reflective space that allowed that grief. We focused on two stories or individuals who were enslaved, those whose lives were lost too early, and the families who lost those people. [It was also about] the profound love that is viewable through the limited documentations we have.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁴⁵ *Lives, Loves, Loss* was a special event organized by Brenda Parker. Parker was the African American Interpretation and Special Projects Coordinator who was at one point a character interpreter portraying enslaved housemaid, Caroline Branham. She was the first staff member whose job description included working with descendants; Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁴⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

The narrative focus was about two enslaved people, Boatswain and Alice, who died early. While a lot of markers created by the public include these two names, visitors could also include names of those whom they personally knew who may have passed away earlier than expected. “We invited the descendant community to every aspect of that event – they knew about it and they were aware of it. It was one of the programs that came out of those early conversations [with descendants about Mount Vernon interpretation.]”³⁴⁷ One concern with this project is that by installing these stones as permanent place markers, how can future visitors participate in a similar way? Organizers “talked about returning the stones to the river [to emphasize] the role water can play in rewashing. We are constantly exploring the symbolic aspects of the program.”³⁴⁸ There are plans to do this educational program again.

Conclusion

The future of all three slave cemeteries remains either uncertain to descendants, staff, and the public, or remains unknown to visitors. They descendants, who should have the right in determining the interpretation and potential level of disturbance of their ancestral remains, should be consulted by the institution before any plans are made or progress to each next step of excavation. Until a law similar to NAGPRA is created specifically for African American graves, institutions must ensure similar standards are fulfilled in their own institutions. Montpelier, Monticello, and Mount Vernon serve as case studies to this effort.

³⁴⁷ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁴⁸ Confidential interview, February 2022.

Conclusion:

Can you imagine dying and never leaving anything for your descendants? That your presence was never noted? That you were like a pet that was buried somewhere to be forgotten? The only time you know their names is when you see them on a slave report. You learn their names and how much they were worth. Is that all [these sites] want to understand? That's all [enslaved people] meant to them? They had being. A soul. A life.³⁴⁹

A common statement from almost every participant in this study was that visitors cannot understand Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and this country without understanding slavery, and that, similarly, visitors cannot understand Mount Vernon, Monticello, Montpelier, and America as a whole without understanding the lives of the enslaved that they were dependent on. While very little historical documentation regarding these enslaved individuals is left today, the oral history of their descendants can shine much light on the subject of slavery at these institutions. There are three things that affect the interpretation at historical sites regarding the subject of slavery: collaboration with descendants, visitation, and time.

Stakeholders are important. “No matter how hard you try to be a unified institution, individuals are the ones who carry out the work.”³⁵⁰ The relationships between these individuals - these stakeholders – are what create the whole-truth interpretation. To descendants, “they bring their story – they bring their oral history, which is sometimes their only history. They bring a level of dedication of work that I

³⁴⁹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁵⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

don't think can be matched. This is their family.”³⁵¹ There should be no debate that in terms of stakeholders, descendant community members are important, if not the most important, stakeholder. They are most affected as it is their family story, and it directly filters into their lives every day: “enslaved people are part of the story that continues on. Slavery – on paper – ends with the 13th Amendment. But that doesn't mean racist attitudes disappear. What does that transition mean for those people who were formerly enslaved? What is the continuing story after this era?”³⁵² There are ideas in place, like the Rubric, to hope for constant descendant community engagement, yet there needs to be a formal discussion as to how this reciprocity should work. An associated reflect that these institutions are “still benefiting and making money off of slave labor. While the enslaved population is now dead, people are coming to see the house and [these institutions are] still charging money for people to see the product of enslaved labor.”³⁵³ Another representative stated that sometimes “Descendants don't really benefit...The research should not be extractive. It should not be taking-from without giving-back-to. There needs to be some benefit to the person you are working with.”³⁵⁴

Visitors would not be coming to these sites unless they wanted to learn something. Some visitors may be coming to further instill in themselves the love for their country, or further implore upon their fascination with the white male Founding Fathers, but institutions have the ability to transform that narrative and provide a whole-truth discussion regarding the site. As previously stated, in the past the narrative at these sites

³⁵¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁵² Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁵³ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁵⁴ Confidential interview, February 2022.

have revolved around Madison, Jefferson, and Washington, yet now, because of this collaboration with descendants, more information regarding slavery can be dispersed.

There has been a history of sites not talking candidly about slavery or whitewashing the history...Through time and through transparency, and opening up those personal connection to get to know people, we were able to bring down those boundaries a little bit and get people to trust us a little more and prove we were trying to do the right thing.³⁵⁵

The lack of initial trust has been the common link between all three institutions when originally attempting to collaborate with descendants. The type and frequency of communication are what many interviewees – both staff and descendants – believe to be the most important way to establish trust in telling the whole-truth narrative.. One interviewee summarized the visitorship at their institution: “Our current audience is 50+, white, and in retirement age, which is telling. Why is this specific demographic coming to these places? A lot of it has to do with what story is being told. If your story isn’t being told at a place like this, why would you choose to visit it?”³⁵⁶

While Black Americans visit these institutions as well, whether as young students with a class field trip or an interested adult, they do not make up the majority of visitors to sites.³⁵⁷ However, “white Americans and African Americans may react to the story of slavery in different ways” in that “history can be painful to both.” Further,

What makes slavery so difficult for Americans, both Black and white, to come to terms with is that slavery encompasses two conflicting ideas – both with equal validity and with equal truth, but with radically different implications. One says that slavery is one of the great crimes in human history; the other says that men and women dealt with the crime and survived it and even grew strong because of it. One says that slavery is our

³⁵⁵ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁵⁶ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁵⁷ Researcher’s observation, November 2021.

great nightmare; the other says slavery left a valuable legacy. One says death, the other says life.³⁵⁸

Clint Smith asks, “What would motivate a black family to come spend a day at a plantation if they were concerned about how the story of that land would be told, what kind of people would be standing alongside them as it was told, and who was telling it?”³⁵⁹ By providing interpretation that discusses slavery – interpretation that was created out of collaboration with people of color who have a stake in said interpretation, may cause a shift in who visits museums. One interviewee made the following statement regarding Mount Vernon, but it could be said about any historical site discussing slavery: “If you make interpretation more interesting about slavery, you are going to get more tourism and people won’t dwell on slavery as much. If you tell the story a little bit, then they will understand that Washington was a man of his time.”³⁶⁰

Changes in museums can be realized within a moment but for visitors take time to occur. For sites that look at history, both the past, present, and future forever influence interpretation. Montpelier is the youngest of the three sites examined here and therefore has less of a past hanging over its head. As stated previously, Mount Vernon has always been owned by individuals or associations that once owned enslaved people. The challenges that they and Monticello have had to deal with early in their existence prepared Montpelier to avoid their mistakes. Similarly, Montpelier acts as a role model

³⁵⁸ James Oliver Horton, Lois E. Horton, and Ira Berlin, “Chapter 1: Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 7.

³⁵⁹ Smith, *How the Word is Passed*. 40.

³⁶⁰ Confidential interview, February 2022.

for other institutions as it leads the historical community with its pursuit of parity. An interviewee stated that while:

Montpelier is a young site, it came into existence at a very different time in the study of history. Sometimes people who are fighting to do good work are fighting against decades worth of institutional practices, policies, and interpretation. Think of the Whitney Plantation. That's a new institution and they interpret entirely from the enslaved experience. I doubt that would have happened in 1920s Louisiana.³⁶¹

Other sites, like the Whitney Plantation which opened in 2014, can look at the examples set by Montpelier, Monticello, and Mount Vernon as they begin to tell whole-truth history. The best way to do that? Collaborate with descendants. Descendants should strongly consider looking to the example set by the Montpelier Descendant Committee and the newly formed League of Descendants at Mount Vernon and establish their own organization to represent them. Using a document like the Rubric is how these sites can be held accountable to their decisions and their interpretation styles. As one representative stated, “what needs to change and what needs to be defined is how the evaluation takes place.”³⁶²

This needs to be the next step in descendant community engagement on a nationwide level. While Montpelier, Monticello, and Mount Vernon have assisted in taking these first steps, the process needs to continue through the creation of a formal review that allows for historical sites presenting slavery and collaborating with descendants to be held accountable. Further, these three sites need to continue to move forward with this collaborative process. All these sites can be observed as a separate case

³⁶¹ Confidential interview, February 2022.

³⁶² Confidential interview, February 2022.

study: Mount Vernon is determination to better represent their slave cemetery than they have in the past can show an attempt to repair wrongs; Monticello continues to enhance their tour scripts to better dispel whole-truth history instead of only embracing the story of a great white man; and Montpelier's rocky history negotiations with their established descendant community allows for other institutions to examine what they should and should not do in establishing a trusting relationship. All entities related to these institutions - boards, staff, descendants - should continue to look toward each other for guidance and support in a productive way to better present history in its entirety.

Among historical sites and public historians, there needs to be a discussion on creating an outside organization specifically committed to establishing partnerships between institutions and descendants. Not only would this agency act as mediators between descendants and historical sites, but also hold both entities accountable to promoting and providing whole-truth history. While Montpelier, Monticello, and Mount Vernon have all had various amounts of interaction, acknowledgement, and collaboration with descendants, and while each of these institutions have admitted to using the Rubric to different degrees, none of them have discussed how they keep themselves accountable for their actions regarding Black history interpretation. For example, some descendant interviewees at Mount Vernon and Monticello had never even heard of the Rubric, thus showing that while staff is aware of the Rubric and believe they use it in certain instances, they are not collaborating with descendants in using it. Should an agency be created - perhaps funded and ran by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund as they are who partnered in the creation of the Rubric with Montpelier - they would need to follow several steps in

creating conversation between institutions and descendants, assisting in establishing a descendant organization, and creating a site-specific rubric and a plan to achieving high marks on it, as well as continuously ensuring that both the institution and the descendants are collaborating to the fullest in interpretation whole-truth history.

The process in creating a healthy and prospering relationship between an institution and a descendant community involves time and communication, both of which contribute to the establishment of trust. This process does not occur overnight and will not provide a steady foundation without open and honest conversations at every level of the organization. As Dr. Michael Blakey stated in an interview with Renee Kemp-Rotan of American Roundtable,

Serious planning of any interpretive site/s of this magnitude will require at least two years of dedicated study, workshops, face-to-face rigor that asks and debates the hard questions about American slavery...from both sides of the coin. The viewpoints of both the descendants of former enslaved and the descendants of former slaveholders must be investigated. No one must be allowed to remain silent. Anything less is not multi-vocality.³⁶³

The first step in formally establishing this after initiating the desire to partner with one another would be for the descendant communities for each institution to form their own entity, like that of the Montpelier Descendant's Committee, allowing for descendants to speak as a unified front rather than a variety of opinions. Further, by being set as one group, it provides accountability to not only the descendants to work together

³⁶³ Renee Kemp-Rotan, "The Rubric: Engaging Descendants in the Interpretation of Africatown's Historic Sites," The Architectural League of New York, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://archleague.org/article/africatown-rubric/>.

with the institution, but also so that the institution does not single out one or two descendants in order to fulfill their own agenda.

After a descendant community organization has been created and initial trust has been established, this trust needs to expand. Step two would be to culminate a list of goals and desires for the institution and the descendants to achieve as partners, expanding the trust in an organized way. As explained in the Rubric and as seen as a pitfall in Montpelier's current strategy for collaborative effort, parity must be established at all levels of the institution. Therefore, members of all levels of the institution must be a part of the discussion with descendants when establishing a site-specific rubric, thus creating a "Rubric Committee" within their institution to ensure representations from all levels of partnership are involved. A proposed model can be seen in Figure 4. Based off Blakey's clientage model and the Rubric, this figure accounts for descendant parity in levels of staff and docents as well as at the board level. Recall that parity does not entail an equal ratio between descendant community members and non-descendant (for example) board members, but instead an equal ratio between descendant appointed board members and non-descendant appointed board members; a descendant-appointed board member does not require that person to be a descendant. Therefore, the overlap between the descendant community and, for example, the board, is not half of the entire representation of descendants or half of the entire representation of the board, allowing for this fluctuation. However, this model specifically calls for descendants - not descendant-appointed representatives - to be a part of the Rubric Committee.

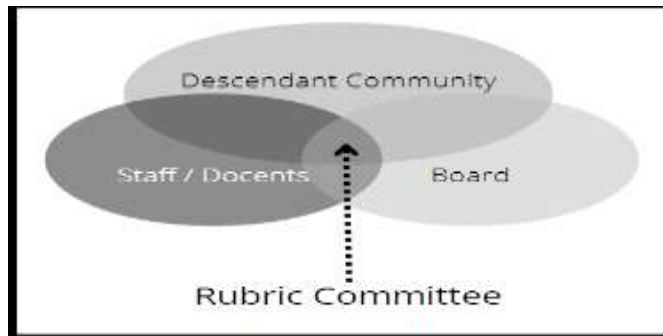


Figure 4: Proposed model for Rubric Committee Formation. Model by Rachel Gregor.

When creating a site-specific rubric, Montpelier's Rubric can stand as an example and direct portions of it can be used by other institutions, but aspects of each site's rubric must be reasonable, thus requiring the site's mission statement, stakeholders, finances, and other factors to be directly tied into their rubric. To further hold both the institution accountable, the information discussed at rubric committee meetings must be public, as should rubric scores following evaluations. While there is not yet an agency which would access a Rubric Committee for attempting or not succeeding in achieving high marks on their rubric, the committee itself must hold itself accountable.

There have been extremely positive and valuable lessons learned through doing descendant community engagement and collaboration as seen through Montpelier, Monticello, and Mount Vernon's examples. However, despite even their advantages in comparison to other historical sites, they too have had their challenges and shortcomings in many areas. Through an analysis of their previous work and the work yet to be done, other institutions can and should create their own methods and manner of descendant community collaboration to rightfully acknowledge and dispel whole-truth history to the masses.

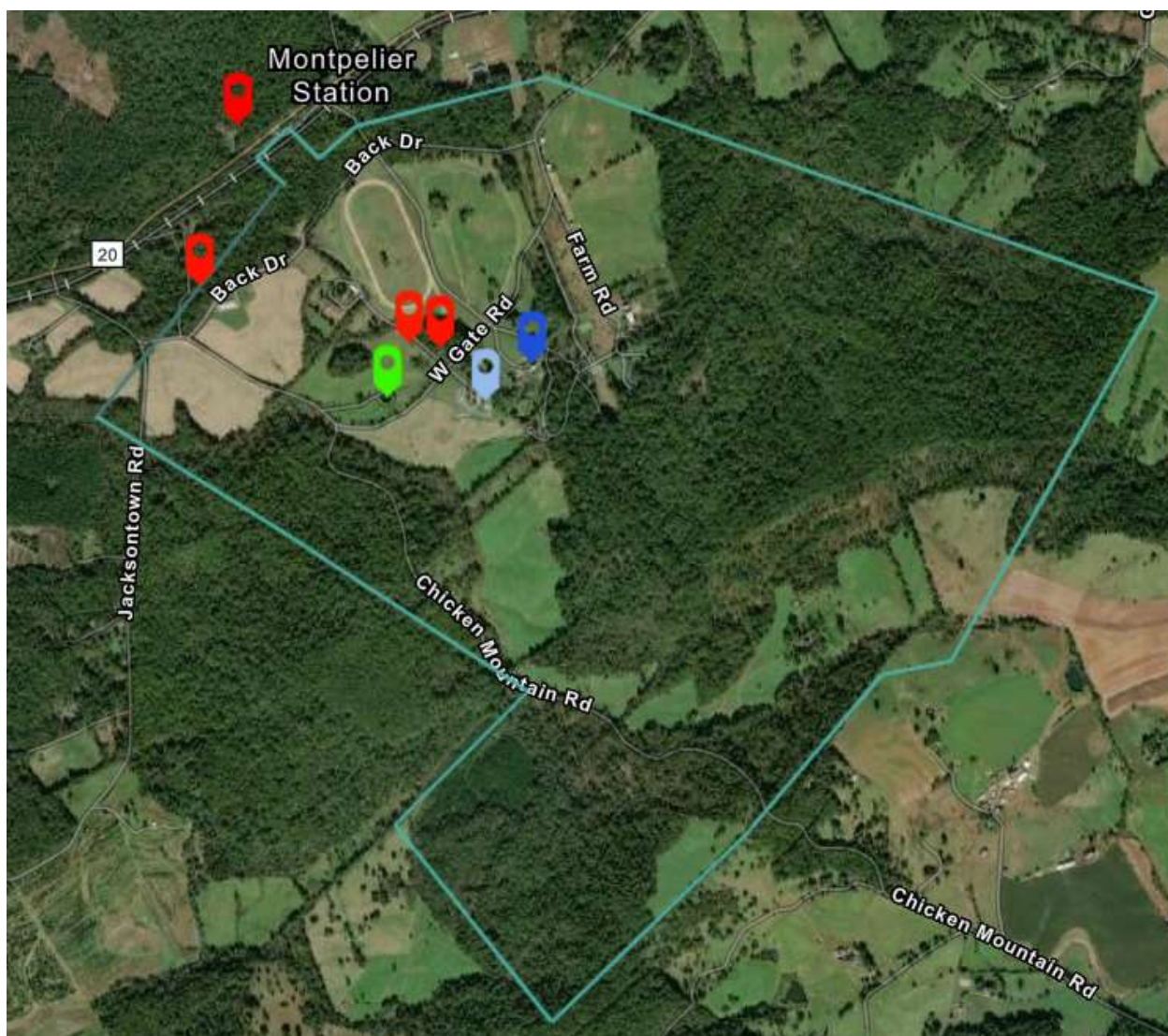
Appendix One - Map of Montpelier



Trail Map courtesy of James Madison's Montpelier.

Circles have been added by the researcher to show areas of discussion in the ADA section. The red circle the Slave cemetery open to the public; yellow circle is the Madison family cemetery; purple is the Visitor's Center; the blue circle is the House; the green circle is the Gilmore Cabin, and the orange circle is the 1910's Train Depot.

Appendix Two – Montpelier Cemetery Map



ArcGIS map created by the researcher. The boundary line represents the 1732 patent line. The darker blue point is the House; the light blue point is the Visitor's Center. The red points are locations of slave cemeteries. The green point is the Madison family cemetery.

Appendix Three – Montpelier Archaeology Map

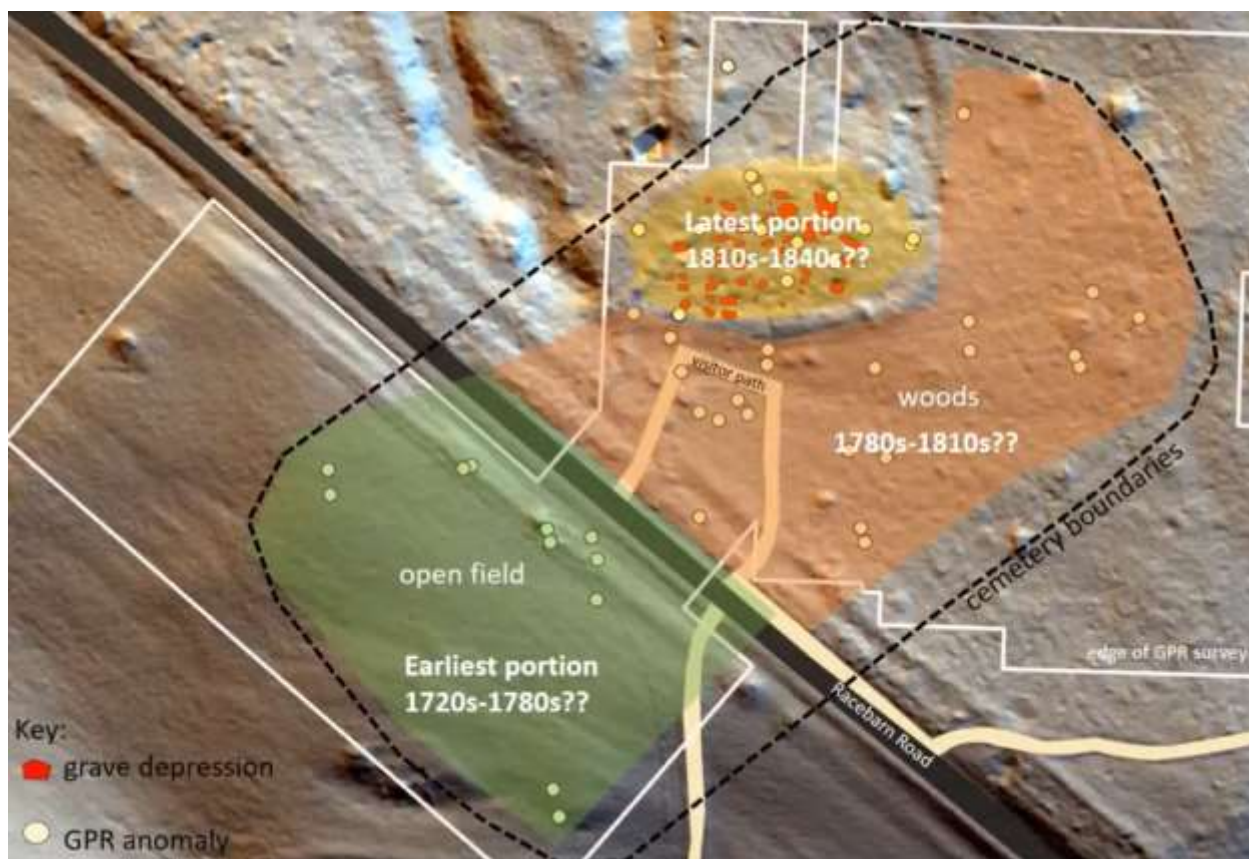


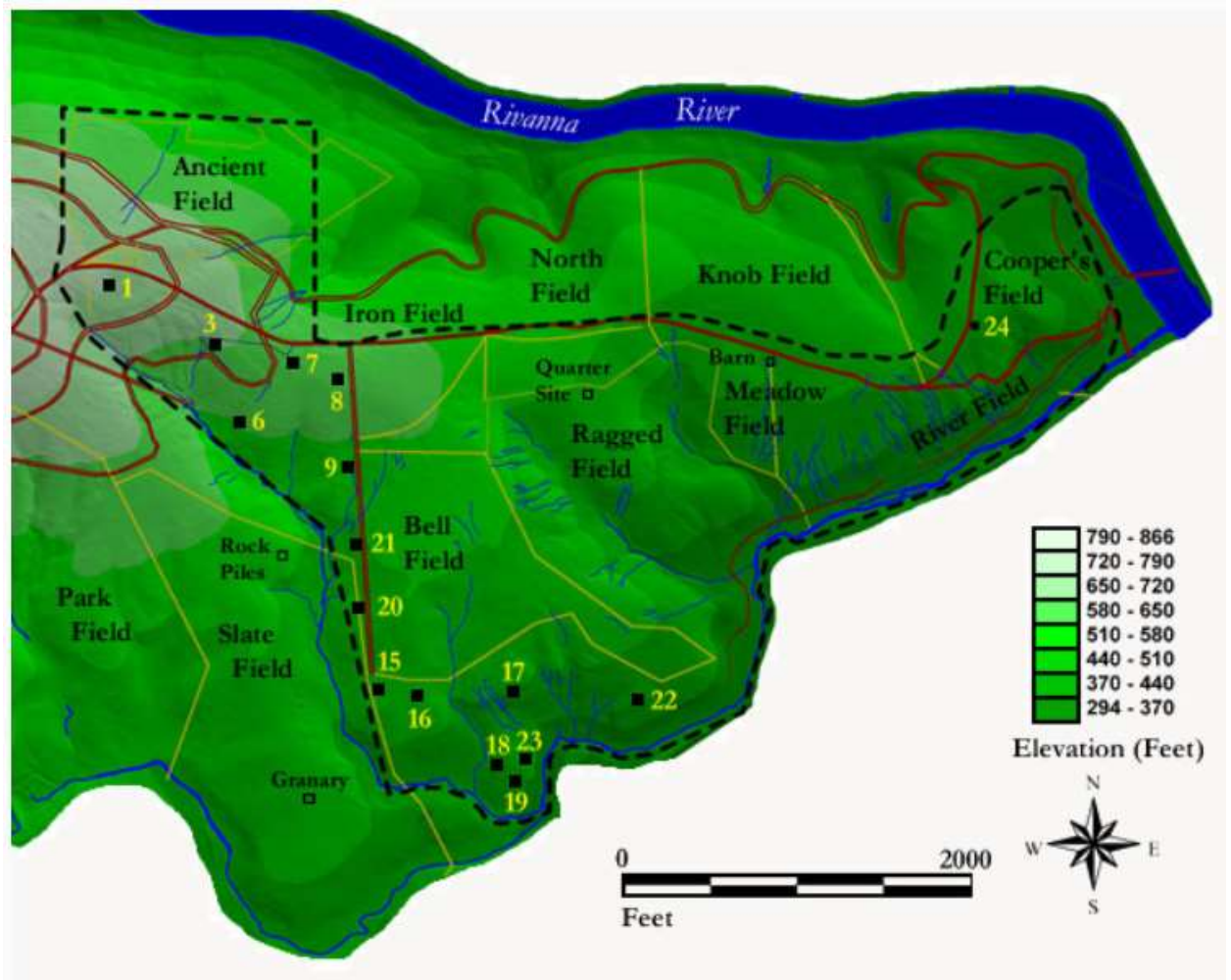
Photo from "The Great Beyond" Cemetery Tour video.

Appendix Four: Map of Monticello



Map of Monticello's estate. Yellow circle and red circle added by Researcher. Yellow circle indicates Jefferson Family Cemetery; red circle indicates slave cemetery.

Appendix Five: Plantation Survey Map, Monticello



Plantation Survey archaeological map at Monticello.

Appendix Six: Mount Vernon population in 1799

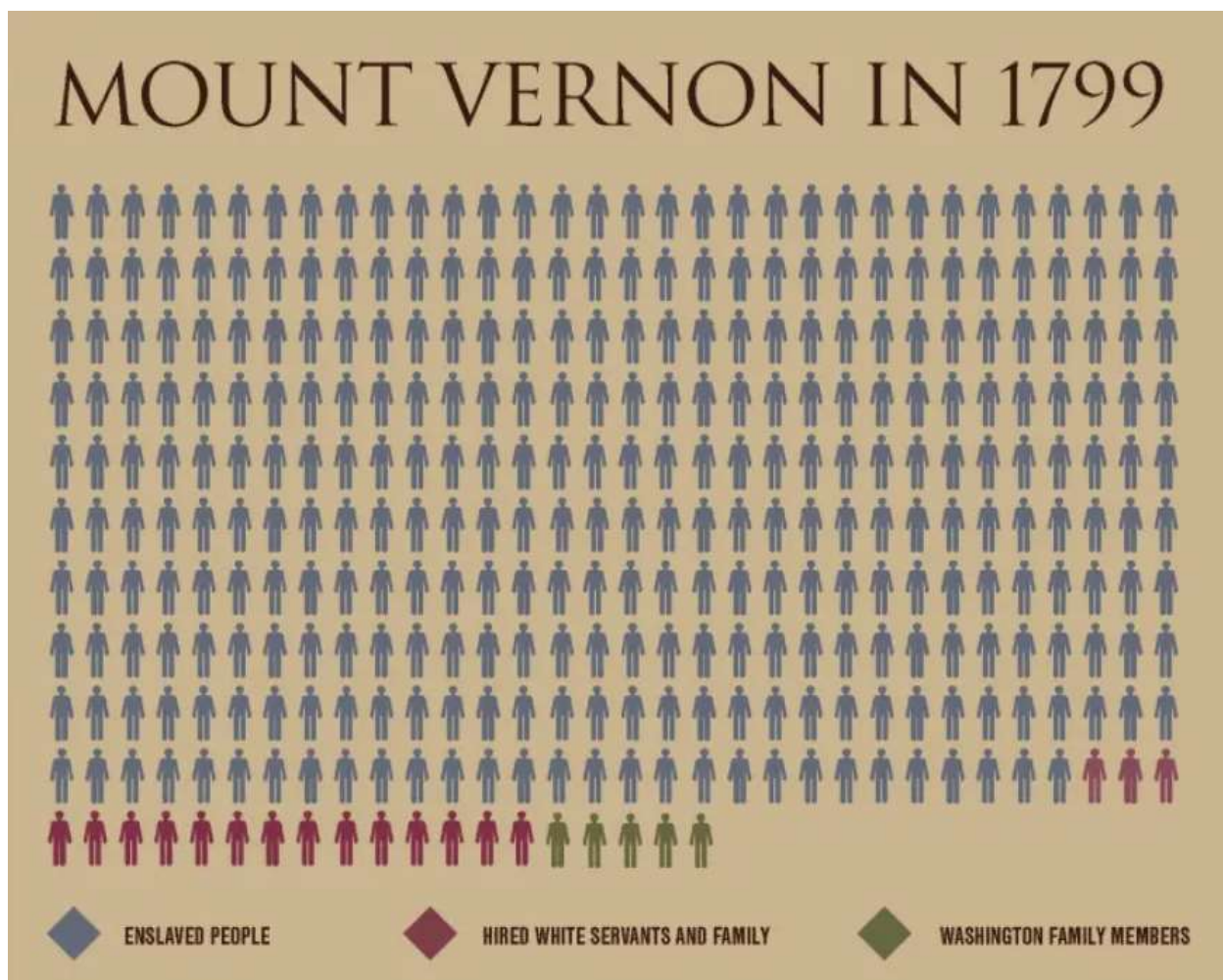


Diagram presented to guests at Mount Vernon. Digital copy found on Mount Vernon's website: <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/slavery-at-mount-vernon/>

Appendix Seven: Mount Vernon Social Media Post



Mount Vernon's social media post from February 24, 2022 describing the difference in the term "slave" and "enslaved."

Appendix Eight: Structure Map of Mount Vernon



Map of the structures of Mount Vernon's Estate. Yellow circle and red circle added by Researcher. Yellow circle indicates Washington's Tomb; red circle indicates slave cemetery and memorials.

Appendix Nine: IRB Approval Letter



**JAMES MADISON
UNIVERSITY.**

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: March 02, 2022
TO: Rachel Gregor, MA, History Department
 Gabrielle Lanier, History Department
FROM: Lindsey Harvell-Bowman, Associate Professor, IRB Panel
PROTOCOL TITLE: A Comparative Analysis of Montpelier's, Monticello's, and Mount Vernon's Collaborative Effort with Members of their Descendant Communities
FUNDING SOURCE: None
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 22-2808
 Approval Date: January 25, 2022 Expiration Date: December 31, 2999

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the amendment to protocol entitled: A Comparative Analysis of Montpelier's, Monticello's, and Mount Vernon's Collaborative Effort with Members of their Descendant Communities. The proposed modifications have been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the amendment request. This protocol must be reviewed for renewal on a yearly basis for as long as the research remains active. Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed. Although the IRB office sends reminders, it is ultimately your responsibility to submit the continuing review report in a timely fashion to ensure there is no lapse in IRB approval.

This approval is issued under 's Federal Wide Assurance 00007339 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the Committee's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to the IRB Chair:

Dr. Lindsey Harvell-Bowman
 harve2la@jmu.edu
 (540) 568-2611

Lindsey Harvell-Bowman

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

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