Historical Segregation: Slavery at Public History Sites of the Revolutionary War Era

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract:

Slavery is quite possibly the most integral issue to understanding the history of the United States. The lingering effects of the inequitable institution of slavery can still be keenly experienced to this day. In the classroom, Americans learn about their country’s historic attachment to slavery typically when discussing the Civil War; however, slavery is often glossed over in favor of patriotic storytelling when learning about the Revolutionary War. This omission prevents clear understanding of the origins of the Civil War and modern day racial tensions; the history of African Americans in the United States cannot be fully understood without appreciating the sober reality of the freedom denied to them following the Revolutionary War. If the history of slavery during the Revolutionary Era is largely ignored in the classroom, how well have public history sites addressed the complex subject? Among the most popular sites of the Revolutionary Era are Colonial Williamsburg, the homes and the National Mall memorials of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and the iconic Liberty Bell. I analyze the histories of these nationally renowned sites to determine how openly they have addressed the paradoxical relationship between the American colonists’ fight for their own freedom while simultaneously holding slaves in chains.

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**Introduction: Historical Segregation**

The American Revolutionary War was a defining moment in world history. The rebellion of the thirteen British colonies marked the birth of democracy in the western hemisphere. These thirteen colonies, pitted against improbable odds, managed to defeat the superior British army and navy to win their independence from the “tyrannical” rule of the English crown. Inspired by the writings of Enlightenment thinkers, the intellectual leaders of the American Revolution reasoned that the British government was infringing upon the colonists’ “unalienable rights” for direct representation within Parliament. The Revolutionary War has been widely hailed as an inspirational triumph of liberty over tyranny, and has since inspired other laudable revolutions, most notably the 1789 French Revolution.

In the United States today, we continue to honor the sacrifices of American patriots with memorials, museums, and historical sites open to the public. For the Revolutionary Era, such popular historical sites include the homes and monuments of the Founding Fathers, Philadelphia’s Independence Hall, and the living history museum of Colonial Williamsburg. These sites are among the most iconic and most visited sites hailing from the Revolutionary Era; each site receives at least half a million visitors annually. However, how accurate are these public historical sites of the Revolutionary Era compared to the thoroughly researched history as determined by professional historians? Before considering how truthfully these sites portray the founding years of the United States, it may be prudent to first reflect upon why assuring the accuracy of historical sites is imperative.

So, why does portraying the historical truth of the Revolutionary Era matter? First and foremost: for the sake of truth itself. Although history is not an exact science, historians still rely
entirely upon evidence to arrive at their conclusions. Historians spend exhaustive hours conducting thorough research to discover the most reliable and verifiable conclusions to historical questions. Indeed, it would be a mistake and disrespectful to misrepresent the detailed research of historians. As a country, we certainly do not aspire to fabricate a delusional history for the public; our history helps to define our national identity and values. Moreover, studying history can elucidate the country’s past errors so that future generations may take heed and endeavor to avoid previous mistakes. Portraying history accurately to the public is also vital because citizens often make current decisions based upon their understanding of the past. If history is distorted, people may misuse the past to support their positions on current issues. For example, Dr. Jill Lepore of Harvard University charges that the ultraconservative political movement called the Tea Party misrepresents the ideals, facts, and political climate of America’s Revolutionary Era for its own political gain.¹

While American historians are obviously well versed in the founding of the nation, most citizens of the general public have not learned about America’s fight for independence since high school or early college. Apparently, Americans have a regrettable knack for forgetting their own history; a recent poll found that only 58 percent of Americans know that the original thirteen colonies declared their independence from Great Britain.² Likewise, only 7 percent of American citizens could name the first four Presidents of the United States.³ Fortunately, America has a vast number of public historical sites at which citizens can regain a meaningful connection to their past. Americans overwhelmingly trust historical museums over the lessons they have learned in the classroom; one study found that about one-third of Americans have confidence in

their high school teachers to deliver historical truth, whereas nearly 80 percent placed their trust in museums and other historical sites. Historical sites are the most visible reminders of our shared history and are the most effective means of communicating the themes of the Revolutionary War to the general public.

Certainly, the least discussed facet of the American Revolutionary War is the existence of slavery. Most Americans with a rudimentary understanding of their country’s history would be able to note that slavery existed in the United States during the Revolutionary War. Nevertheless, this facet of American history is largely glossed over in history classrooms. Many Americans would be surprised to learn that slaves accounted for nearly 18 percent (700,000) of the national population by George Washington’s first term as president. Most students of history are treated to a romanticized fight for independence while the African American population remains silently in a state of forced servitude.

Given its controversial and brutal nature, slavery has long been an uneasy topic to discuss. Textbooks in the first half of the twentieth century frequently painted a rosy picture of slave life on plantations while ignoring the harsh reality. One history textbook misleadingly described, “…the negro of plantation days was usually happy. He was fond of the company of others and liked to sing, dance, crack jokes, and laugh.” Even in the 1960s, textbooks still did not explicitly condemn the institution of slavery or even mention that the spread of slavery was the key cause of the Civil War. Before 1970, “…many textbooks held that almost anything but

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slavery – differences over tariffs and internal improvements, the conflict between agrarian South and industrial North, and especially ‘states rights’ – led to secession.\textsuperscript{6}

Only within the last thirty years have textbooks begun to depict a more complex analysis of slavery.\textsuperscript{7} Modern textbooks seek to emphasize the inhumane nature of the slave system. The high school history textbook, \textit{American History}, describes how “Slaves had absolutely no rights. It was not simply that they could not vote or own property. Their owners had complete control over their lives.” Following a similar theme, the textbook, \textit{American Adventures}, narrates, “Slavery led to despair, and despair sometimes led black people to take their own lives.”\textsuperscript{8} Even with a partially renewed emphasis on the arduous and unsympathetic nature of slavery, how many students explicitly learn that over half the signers of the Declaration of Independence owned slaves? Or, how many common citizens know that slavery legally existed in the northern states of New York and Pennsylvania until 1827?\textsuperscript{9} Textbooks still generally avoid confronting such difficult issues head on. American textbooks discuss Patrick Henry’s devotion to independence with his “Give me liberty, or give me death” speech; most are mute on his paradoxical ownership of slaves.\textsuperscript{10}

Middle school and high school teachers are widely silent on the existence of slavery and racism when teaching early American history. When polled about which historical theme was emphasized most prominently in their social studies classes, students’ top choices were “the Constitution or the U.S. system of government and how it works” and “great American heroes

\textsuperscript{8} Loewen, \textit{Lies My Teacher Told Me}, 138.
\textsuperscript{9} R. B. Berstein, \textit{The Founding Fathers Reconsidered}, (New York, 2009), 97-98.
\textsuperscript{10} Loewen, \textit{Lies My Teacher Told Me}, 147.
and the virtues of the American system of government.” Only 9 percent of students selected “racism and other forms of injustice in the American system.”\textsuperscript{11} When the Founding Fathers permitted slavery’s persistence into the nineteenth century they set the stage for the Civil War. Quite simply, the history of African Americans in the United States cannot be fully understood without appreciating the freedom denied to them following the Revolutionary War. Without a meaningful discussion of slavery in the Revolutionary Era, Americans are being presented with an incomplete version of the African American struggle for liberty.

It seems that when the Revolutionary War is taught in many history classrooms, the entire slave population of the colonies disappears altogether. In reality, the colonies were dominated by slaves – so much so that in 1737, a European traveler remarked that South Carolina appeared to be “…more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people.”\textsuperscript{12} The utter lack of slavery from Revolutionary War lessons is made all the more remarkable when one considers that “…20 percent of all those who fought on both sides of the Revolution were black.”\textsuperscript{13} Historians have long been fascinated by the ostensibly paradoxical rhetoric of the Revolution. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, there is a clear hypocrisy in the way in which the ideals of the Revolution were carried out. How can it be that the colonists fought for their own liberty from Britain while simultaneously fighting to keep an entire race in bondage?

Even during the fight for independence, many colonists and British observers recognized the inherent hypocrisy of the American drive for liberty. English essayist and literary critic, Samuel Johnson, shrewdly questioned, “How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty

\textsuperscript{13} James Oliver Horton & Lois E. Horton, \textit{Slavery and the Making of America}, (New York, 2005), 64.
among the drivers of Negroes?\textsuperscript{14} Likewise, a Massachusetts lawyer, named James Otis, also perceived the duplicity of the Revolution's rhetoric. He reasoned, "The colonists black and white, born here, are free born British subjects, and entitled to all the essential civil rights of such."\textsuperscript{15} So while historians are keenly aware of the rhetorical irony in the colonies' war for independence, the general public has been left largely ignorant of its existence due to an emphasis on a romantic picture of the Revolution.

This ignorance of slavery and its lasting legacy of racism may be in part propagated by inaccurate portrayals of the Revolutionary Era at public history sites. But of course, the sites from the Revolutionary Era are not the only locations of public history where slavery is glossed over. Numerous historical sites across the United States have been shy when approaching the controversial issue of slavery. Satirist Mark Twain's boyhood of Hannibal, Missouri makes no attempt to address its history as a slave market or even mention the famous runaway slave character, Jim, from Twain's own Huckleberry Finn. In a similar manner, the Virginian city of Richmond, once one of the nation's largest marketplaces for slaves, today lacks a single mention of its past connection to slavery. The historical marker for the infamous Civil War battle of Fort Pillow fails to directly explain the intentional slaughter of African American troops after their surrender (64 percent of black Union troops were killed compared to 33 percent of the white troops).\textsuperscript{16} Clearly, America's historical sites from all eras are uneasy when attempting to address their connection with slavery.

Slavery at public history sites from the Revolutionary Era may have the greater potential to be censured due to the paradoxical nature of the American struggle for liberty. Americans

\textsuperscript{15} Horton, \textit{Slavery and the Making of America}, 49.
have long viewed themselves as “...a freedom-loving people, but historical scholarship over the
last two generations has clearly shown that too often national actions did not reflect a
commitment to human liberty.”

Novelist and poet Barbara Chase-Riboud eloquently explains, “White patriots fought the Revolution to liberate themselves and retain the right to, among other things, preserve and propagate slavery... The inability to deal with historical contradictions explains why we don't want to talk about slavery; why we can't talk about slavery; why we can't even talk about not talking about slavery.”

Given American citizens' collective tendency to shun the uncomplimentary historical fact of slavery, how well do popular sites from the Revolutionary Era handle the “historical contradiction” of slavery?

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Before the accuracy of contemporary portrayals of slavery can be properly gauged, we must first come to know the general history of slavery leading up to and during the Revolution. Slavery existed in North America for 157 years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence; historical scholarship indicates that the first slaves brought to American soil arrived in Jamestown in 1619 aboard a Dutch ship.\(^{19}\) For the next century and a half, the colonists of North America received shipments of slaves from the western coast of Africa as well as from the Caribbean. Given the awful conditions afforded to the slaves on the trans-Atlantic vessels, it was miraculous how many slaves managed to survive the arduous voyage. The captured slaves were squeezed below the decks of ships for weeks at a time. Surrounded by foul air and the groans of the dying, the journey to America was described as a “horror almost inconceivable.”\(^{20}\) One doctor who inspected the slaves upon their arrival commented on the disgusting living conditions when he stated, “it is a wonder any escaped with life.” It is estimated that, on average, 12 to 15 percent of slaves died on trans-Atlantic vessels during the course of the eighteenth century.\(^{21}\)

Although the original English colonizers in 1607 did not explicitly envision a society predicated on slavery, the transformation of the colonial economy into one dependent on slavery may have been inevitable “...because the colonies were part of the growing Atlantic colonial economic system that produced staples for the European market and relied on whichever form of


labor best fit its needs.” It soon became evident that slave labor was the most reliable and cheapest means to mass-produce goods for Europe. For a century and a half leading up to the Revolutionary War, the colonies, primarily those in the southern region, profited greatly from slave plantation labor.

After defeating France in the French and Indian War (1754-1763), Britain determined that it needed to raise funds to pay off its war debt. Following the war, Britain increased its control over its American colonies after more than 150 years of salutary neglect. To pay for the war, Great Britain decided to tax the colonies it had just paid a substantial amount to defend. Responding to these increased taxes, many colonists were appalled by the utter lack of political representation they were afforded in the British Parliament. Influenced by the liberal writings of John Locke, the American colonists considered taxation without representation to be highly tyrannical. Even while millions of enslaved people toiled in the tobacco fields, the colonists still defiantly declared, “We will not be the slaves of England.” Meanwhile, the Founding Fathers drafted the Declaration of Independence, which explicitly stated “…that all men are created equal…” and possess “…certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Of course, these God given rights did not readily apply to the hundreds of thousands of American slaves.

It would be all too easy to excuse the hypocrisy of America’s fight for liberty as being a product of the moral and social zeitgeist. However, there were ordinary colonists who were able

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22 Wright, African Americans in the Colonial Era, 55-56.
23 Horton, Slavery and the Making of America, 48-49.
to recognize their own hypocrisy as slaveholders. A Connecticut soldier, who freed his slave before departing for war, wrote, “I will not fight for liberty and leave a slave at home.”

After the war broke out, the British hoped to use American slavery to their advantage by offering freedom to runaway slaves who decided to fight with the Loyalists. The royal governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, issued such a proclamation in November of 1775. Although the exact number is unknown, possibly as many as eight hundred slaves from Virginia sought their freedom by seeking shelter with the British. At least thirty of the eight hundred runaway slaves slipped away from Thomas Jefferson’s own home and plantation of Monticello. Only after General George Washington suffered several disastrous defeats did he, in 1777, permit free blacks to serve in his army; slaves were not initially permitted. The growing desertion of slaves to the British encampments eventually forced the northern states to allow slaves within their military ranks by 1779.

Ironically (and tragically), the enlightened ideals of the American Revolution exacerbated racism within the new nation. Given the preexisting prejudice against blacks, most colonists were unwilling to provide the same “unalienable rights” to their slaves. Clearly, the rhetoric of the revolution could not be applied to blacks. To rationalize the existence of slavery, Americans justified its existence by further placing blacks on “...a lower order of persons, short on morals, long on muscle, quick to pilfer, slow to move, and

25 Edward Countryman, Enjoy the Same Liberty: Black Americans and the Revolutionary Era, (Lanham, MD, 2012), 47.
26 Horton, Slavery and the Making of America, 58-61.
hard to work.” In short, the Revolution “…laid the foundation for a stronger and more pervasive racist ideology…”

In the end, the Continental Army of the United States managed to outlast the British, largely thanks to vital support from France. The newly formed states were loosely united under the Articles of Confederation for approximately eight years before the drafting of the more centrally powerful Constitution. While drafting the Constitution in 1787, the Founding Fathers solved countless political issues; however, one issue that they failed to properly address was that of slavery. Some of the Founding Fathers, such as Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton, opposed the institution of slavery. James Madison, “the Father of the Constitution” and a slave holder himself, wrote of slavery, “Great as the evil is, dismemberment of the union would be worse.” Although many of the men at the Constitutional Convention abhorred slavery, they still “…chose to tolerate slavery’s existence rather than risk the achievement of …framing and adopting the Constitution.”

The drafters of the Constitution carefully tiptoed around the increasingly divisive issue of slavery. In fact, the words “slave” or “slavery” are never once mentioned in the nation’s founding document. In doing so, “…the Constitution left to the individual states the authority to determine [slavery’s] fate…it strengthened the hold slaveholders had on their bondspeople and it made possible the steady extension of slavery across newly opened southern and western lands as the nineteenth century unfolded.” Given the Declaration of Independence and Constitution’s ambiguous positions on the issue of slavery, politicians in the first half of the nineteenth century

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27 Wright, African Americans in the Colonial Era, 160.
29 Berstein, The Founding Fathers Reconsidered, 98.
30 Wright, African Americans in the Colonial Era, 196.
were forced to debate the original intent of the founding documents as regards to slavery. As a result, a series of compromises were struck to assuage growing tensions. These compromises were unable to prevent the Civil War.

Quite simply, the history of America cannot be understood without the discussion of slavery. The Revolutionary Era of the United States laid the foundations for the Civil War, just as the Civil War and Reconstruction did the same for the Civil Rights Movement. Slavery is an integral part of America’s historical fabric, and it is for this reason that public history sites from the Revolutionary Era have a duty to include presentations and exhibits dedicated to telling slavery’s story to the American public.
Righting Past Wrongs: Colonial Williamsburg

Although American students and citizens often forget or ignore it, the simple fact remains that slavery pervaded the North American continent well before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Black slaves accounted for roughly half of the population when the city of Williamsburg, named in honor of Britain's King William III, became the capital of Virginia in 1699. Within a century Williamsburg would go on to play a crucial role in setting the stage for revolutionary America. Yet even before it attained its status as the capital of Virginia, Williamsburg had already begun to achieve distinction as the home of the continent's second
oldest university with the College of William & Mary, established in 1693. This historic university’s education had helped guide the quill of Thomas Jefferson as he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Williamsburg was the first city amongst the new British colonies to have a theater. As it assumed the status as the Virginian Capital, Williamsburg soon became a central hub for politics, economics, and culture. During its tenure as the state’s capital, Williamsburg saw many historic figures pass through its streets, including George Washington and Patrick Henry as members for the House of Burgesses.

Williamsburg’s glory was cut short unexpectedly when Thomas Jefferson, as the Governor of Virginia, decided in 1780 to move the Virginia capital to Richmond to prevent the capital from being taken by the British. Following this inauspicious decision, Williamsburg would live in relative obscurity for nearly 150 years.

The vision for recreating Williamsburg into a living history museum originated with Dr. William Archer Rutherfoord Goodwin, an Episcopal rector of the local Bruton Parish Church. By the time of Dr. Goodwin’s arrival in 1905, industrialization had begun to interfere with the city’s historic settings. Modern conveniences such as gas stations and telephone poles glaringly stood out from the humble colonial environment. Goodwin was disheartened to discover that “...modernity masked the town’s colonial character to such a degree that a passerby would not necessarily notice its rich heritage.” Dr. Goodwin personally undertook the effort to restore the run down church to its original eighteenth-century state. This two-year restoration project was completed in 1907. However, Goodwin had more ambitious plans than the restoration of a

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31 Harvard University had been established in 1636, fifty-seven years earlier than William & Mary.
single church: he wanted to restore the entire historic town to its original condition. Several of
the city’s original buildings, including the Public Magazine and the Courthouse, were still
miraculously standing, albeit in exceedingly poor condition. Other historic sites, like the famous
Raleigh Tavern and the Governor’s Palace, had been lost to time; however, their structural
foundations had remained.34

After failing to persuade Henry Ford to donate some of his millions to the ambitious
project, the son of American oil tycoon, John D. Rockefeller Jr., became inspired by Goodwin’s
dream in 1924. Rockefeller gradually and clandestinely bought much of the property of what
was to become Colonial Williamsburg. The grand plan for the historic property was not revealed
to the town until 1928. Rockefeller, ever a perfectionist, took great interest in the massive
project and visited the construction sites for two months out of each year – once in the Spring
and then again in the Fall.35 Thanks largely to the collective efforts of Dr. Goodwin and John D.
Rockefeller Jr., more than eighty buildings were preserved so that posterity may learn from the
past. Today, Colonial Williamsburg is home to eighty-eight restored, original buildings in
addition to “…hundreds of others that were reconstructed on brick foundations left over from the
colonial period.”36

When opened to the public in the 1930s, Colonial Williamsburg was not quick to provoke
an intellectual discussion about slave life. Since “slavery was virtually ignored” in Williamsburg
during the 1930s and 40s, visiting tourists would have had no inkling that half the city’s
population was originally held in slavery.37 The presence of African American citizens at

35 Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Jamestown, Williamsburg, Yorktown: The Official Guide to America's
Historic Triangle, (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2007), 131-134.
36 Monroe, Williamsburg, 17.
37 Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg, 7.
Williamsburg would have been particularly slight during the early years of the restoration; African Americans were not permitted to stay at the local Williamsburg Inn or the Williamsburg Lodge. Such discrimination forced the extremely limited African American visitors of Colonial Williamsburg to reside in the homes of local black residents. While the officials of Colonial Williamsburg “…did not necessarily believe in the separation of the races, they feared negative repercussions for the restoration should they back away from accepted state practices.” Colonial Williamsburg was therefore constrained by the unfair political and social climate of the 1940s and 50s. While certainly some heading Williamsburg disliked such racist policies, the historical site as a whole remained hesitant to defy the social mores.38 Instead of pushing the social fabric in a more progressive direction, Colonial Williamsburg “…waited until there was a greater acceptance of the role of blacks in American history before they presented a program that was consistent with the importance of African American history in Virginia.”39

Early twentieth century American historians certainly did not help alleviate Williamsburg’s uncomfortable position in regards to discussing slavery. During the early twentieth century many historians depicted slavery as a benevolent institution. Furthermore, erroneous prejudices concerning African Americans were explicitly affirmed in the now infamous 1915 film, Birth of a Nation. These prejudices were first directly challenged during the civil rights protests of the mid-1950s. Historian Kenneth Stampp also strove to reemphasize the hellish nature of slavery in his groundbreaking book, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South, in 1957. By the late 1960s, historians had begun to alter their view of slavery from a benevolent institution to a more complex and grueling experience.40

38 Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg, 75.
40 Horton, Slavery and the Making of America, 8-11.
As envisioned by its founders, Colonial Williamsburg was in part created to re-instill republican values into America’s morally wayward and increasingly materialistic population. While the hyper-patriotism preached by Williamsburg was effective during World War II and the 1950s, the act had already begun to wear thin by the beginning of the 1960s. However, “As early as 1954 many visitors sensed that Williamsburg was telling only part of the story.”41 A visitor to Williamsburg wrote in 1962, “[T]he only thing that…rubbed me the wrong way was a certain too strong Americanism or super patriotism.” Likewise, another visitor duly noted in 1969, “The contributions of the black population have been largely omitted...[A]ny questions asked about [the African] aspect of the life are met by the hostess by obvious discomfort and embarrassment.” Failure of Williamsburg to address slavery made it difficult for students to understand the roots of America’s racial tensions and the Civil Rights Movement.

Visitors through the 1960s and 70s had begun to question the more seamy aspects of life in eighteenth-century Williamsburg. One visitor lambasted Colonial Williamsburg stating, “At no time in no place by no person was the word or concept of slavery discussed, mentioned, or hinted at.” The New York Times commented, “Williamsburg does not have the flaw of vulgarity…it feels somewhat like a house in Greenwich [Connecticut], just a bit too neat and prim and tasteful to be altogether convincing.” As such, Williamsburg began to be perceived more akin to a historical Disneyland rather than a respectable historical living history museum.42

In response to the growing Civil Rights Movement, historians’ refocus on the cruel realities of slavery, as well as a litany of visitor complaints, Colonial Williamsburg began to quietly introduce more elements of slave life into its presentation of the past. Williamsburg’s

41 Wiencek, An Imperfect God, 177.
42 Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg, 138, 143, 146.
next attempt to bring a discussion of slave life into its presentation came in 1965 when a
prerecorded message in George Wythe’s house allowed visitors to push a button to hear about
how enslaved people washed the laundry. This addition proved to be short-lived when someone
deliberately damaged the device and inhibited future visitors from listening to the narrative.43
One of the first steps towards recognizing the lives of the city’s African American inhabitants
was in the Colonial Williamsburg guidebook from 1968; the mention of African Americans
appears in only a single paragraph out of the one hundred-page book. Even still, this small
inclusion was an improvement over nothing.44 These early inclusions of slave life were passive
additions to the city that could be easily avoided if a visitor so wished.

Given that half of Williamsburg’s original population was of African American descent,
Colonial Williamsburg’s complete dearth of black interpreters was a glaring omission for
visitors. It was not until 1979 that Williamsburg began a comprehensive study into its own
historical ties to slavery.45 It was also in 1979 that six African American interpreters were hired
to portray a wide range of characters including a scullery maid, a slave, and a free barber. These
early interpreters’ primary focus was portraying the humanity of individual slaves to clearly
illustrate that each slave had his or her own personality and familial connections. As with the
Wythe house recording and the guidebook, visitors to Williamsburg could easily avoid the
presentations conducted by the African American interpreters and thus Williamsburg continued
to strive “...not to offend those visitors who preferred to remain ignorant of certain aspects of the
town’s history.”46

43 Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg, 135.
45 Wiencek, An Imperfect God, 134.
46 Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg, 151.
As the latter half of the twentieth century progressed so did societal acceptance of African Americans. As it had done in the past, Colonial Williamsburg adapted to the social zeitgeist. In 1989, Colonial Williamsburg opened its reconstruction of a slave quarter to the public. While other historical sites in the United States had long showcased their slave quarters, Williamsburg became one of the first major sites to display eighteenth-century colonial slavery; most other sites exhibited nineteenth-century slave quarters. The public began to notice the marked change in Williamsburg's presentation of slave life. The *New York Times* observed that the guides of the city “...no longer speak of servants, but of slaves.” Instead of masking its unpleasant ties to slavery, Colonial Williamsburg began portraying a more realistic version of its history instead of a misleadingly glorified one.47

Perhaps Colonial Williamsburg's most impressive demonstration of its new commitment to engaging the public in a discussion of slavery was its decision to re-create a slave auction in October of 1994. The controversial decision was met by strong reactions from the public. The Virginia political action director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Jack Gravely, decried the plans for the proposed slave auction arguing, “You cannot portray our history in 21 minutes and make it some sideshow.”48 The primary protest of those who opposed the reenactment was the fear of visitors mistaking the auction as entertainment. Despite preliminary apprehensions, the presentation was mostly well received by its audience as well as academic historians. Jack Gravely, “...who had initially expressed

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opposition, [described] the reenactment [as] a transformative experience. ‘Pain had a face,’ he said, ‘indignity had a body, suffering had tears.’”

Humanizing the faceless and nameless enslaved people marked a revolutionary change in Colonial Williamsburg’s presentation. Today, Williamsburg offers several avenues for learning about and interacting with African American interpreters. A self-guided tour allows visitors to explore the religious history that the first Africans brought to the continent. The “Great Hopes Plantation” gives tourists an opportunity to hear the stories and music of enslaved people. Visitors can witness slave interpreters agonize over the prospect of being sold away from their families while their white interpreter overlords rancorously scold them for disobedience. These poignant performances accomplish what textbooks and written displays cannot: provide visceral emotion to the realities of slave life. The Williamsburg interpreters themselves also gain an intimate perspective of colonial slave life. One African American interpreter marveled, “Working for less than half an hour in the heat filled us with awe concerning our ancestors’ endurance. It drove home to us, like nothing else, how difficult and thankless slavery must have been.”

While often superbly educational, the intimate interpretations of slave life must be carefully monitored to ensure their appropriateness. There have been several documented incidences of realistic interpretations gone awry. In some cases, visitors have physically or verbally attacked Caucasian interpreters for their treatment towards the African American interpreters. Case in point, “One visitor even attempted to lead his own revolt against the slave

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handlers. ‘There are only three of them and a hundred of us!’ he yelled. The actors had to step out of character to restrain him.” 52 Other tourists can be brought to tears just at the sight of the slave quarters. Plainly, slavery continues to be a volatile issue for Americans when they visit Colonial Williamsburg.

Despite the mixed emotional reactions Colonial Williamsburg has received from guests, the historic city is to be commended for exploring the diverse possibilities for educating the public about Revolutionary Era slavery. To all intents and purposes, Colonial Williamsburg ignored slave life for the first half century of its existence; however, the city “…has come a great distance in its willingness and ability to deal with slavery. In the last decade it has become a model for other sites in the region.” 53

Belated Redemption: Mount Vernon and the Washington Monument

Of the many distinguished revolutionary men who travelled through Williamsburg, George Washington was certainly the most prominent. Today we continue to honor Washington’s memory for his heroic dedication to the Continental Army’s fight against the British, and for his service to the United States of America as the first president. Even in his own time, Washington was perceived as a legendary figure; he was already widely referred to as the “Father” of the nation during his tenure as president. Many believed the United States would have dissolved into individual states had Washington not been the first president. Indeed, “The widespread image of Washington as father offered a powerful means to assert common bonds of
nationality, and to unite Americans as one single family.”\textsuperscript{54} It was Washington, “the man who unites all hearts,” who made the initial preservation of America’s democratic experiment possible.\textsuperscript{55}

As many today are aware, George Washington was a lifelong slaveholder; much like fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson, George Washington was born into a society already heavily predicated upon slave labor. By 1750, the colony of Virginia was home to approximately 105,000 slaves. As all Americans know, Washington did not attain distinction as a simple plantation farmer. Washington had first achieved prominent recognition as a senior officer in the French and Indian War. After the war’s end, Washington was temporarily saved from debt when he married a young widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, in 1759. From her, Washington inherited a handsome £40,000, 18,000 acres of land, and the slaves owned by her previous husband.\textsuperscript{56}

Among the slaves George Washington inherited from marriage was his wife’s own half-sister. This half-sister, Ann Dandridge, was the daughter of Martha’s father and an unknown woman of mixed white, Native American, and African ancestry. Very little is known of Ann Dandridge’s life on Washington’s plantation. In all likelihood, Ann probably served as a house slave and performed sewing and other basic household chores. Nevertheless, Martha Washington’s willingness to hold her own half-sister in slavery appallingly illustrates the rigidity of the American slave system.\textsuperscript{57}

Washington lived and breathed efficiency, and he expected the same diligent work ethic from his slaves at his plantation and home, Mount Vernon. Almost humorously, Washington

\textsuperscript{54} Furstenberg, \textit{In the Name of the Father}, 75.
\textsuperscript{56} Wiencek, \textit{An Imperfect God}, 45, 67.
\textsuperscript{57} Wiencek, \textit{An Imperfect God}, 84-86.
chose to starkly title his diary “Where & How My Time is Spent.”58 Absent from virtually all
the pages of Washington’s journal are Washington’s personal thoughts and opinions; the diary
blandly reports the Founding Father’s daily routines and his observations for improving
production on the plantations. Although this journal may not reveal Washington’s deepest
secrets, it does expose how obsessed Washington was with ensuring efficiency and discipline on
his plantations.

Some historians have promptly dismissed Washington’s inconvenient ties with slavery by
claiming he was a benevolent master. Several sources indicate that Washington disliked the use
of the whip and cautioned his overseers from using the punishment of the whip excessively.
While the Father of his Country may have not been an overtly cruel plantation master,
Washington, in order to establish obedience, did engage in the ubiquitous cruelties that
inevitably accompanied the colonial slave system. At least nine slaves were sold away from the
comfort of their families and friends in order to pay taxes. On another occasion, Washington had
a routinely disobedient slave shipped to work in the West Indies; the backbreaking labor coupled
with rampant disease was virtually a death sentence.59 Washington was the personification of
productivity and efficiency; as such, he expected the same work ethic from his slaves. He
frequently complained in his diary and correspondences about his slaves’ lack of industry. In
1795, Washington cuttingly commented about one of his house slaves, Betty Davis, that “…a
more lazy, deceitful and impudent huzzy…is not to be found in the United States…”60

Though most historians have made the argument that Washington was a more kindly
master compared to the more barbaric slaveholders, slavery at Mount Vernon was still largely a

58 Wiencek, An Imperfect God, 94.
59 Robert F. Dalzell, Jr. & Lee Baldwin Dalzell, George Washington’s Mount Vernon: At Home in Revolutionary
60 Fritz Hirschfeld, George Washington and Slavery, (University of Missouri, 1997), 34.
dismal existence. Washington expected his slaves to work from the time the sun rose until it set; this meant that slaves were awake before sunrise. To make certain that time was not wasted commuting from the slave quarters to the fields, Washington had slaves assigned to the quarters closest to the field in which they worked daily. This time saving practice inevitably broke families apart. Sadly, husbands and wives on the plantation were separated “...more often than not...[In] 1799 at Mount Vernon only eighteen women lived with their husbands.”  

Once awake, Washington’s slaves would then toil through fifteen to sixteen hour days, depending upon the time of year. When their day’s work came to a merciful end, Mount Vernon’s slaves, clothed in pathetic tattered rags, did not return to cozy, rustic cabins. When exiled Polish writer, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, paid a ten-day visit to Mount Vernon in 1798, he recorded the deplorable conditions of Washington’s slaves’ living quarters in his journal. The plantation slave houses, which could most accurately be labeled “huts,” were almost entirely made from wood and clay; Niemcewicz concluded these homes were “...more miserable than the poorest of the cottages of our peasants.” Unlike Thomas Jefferson, Washington never established a system of rewards for his slaves for performing outstanding work. For those disobedient slaves who failed to perform to his expectations, Washington, like virtually all slaveholders, considered physical punishment as a necessity.  

Although he only spent a grand total of ten days at his Mount Vernon home during the course of the Revolutionary War, General Washington maintained a continuous stream of correspondence with his plantation overseers dictating how the farms were to be best operated. When Washington was present at Mount Vernon he took great delight in routinely evaluating the

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61 Dalzell, George Washington’s Mount Vernon, 133.  
63 Wiencek, An Imperfect God, 120, 111.
status of his plantations. Washington loved the process of farming; he marveled, "The more I am acquainted with agricultural affairs the better I am pleased with them...I am led to reflect how...delightful to an undebauched mind is the task of making improvements to the earth.”

Frustratingly, for both George Washington and his slaves, the soil surrounding Mount Vernon had already been used for farming tobacco for the previous one hundred years. The land was well exhausted by the time Washington acquired it in the mid-eighteenth century. This fact reinforced Washington’s passion for efficiency and diligence regarding all of plantation life. In one infamous example, Washington timed his slaves as he looked on to calculate how many logs they could hew in one day. After observing his slaves directly, Washington discovered that each man was able to hew 125 feet compared to only 120 feet when all four carpenters were working without Washington breathing down their necks. From that day onward, Washington made 125 feet per day their individual benchmarks.64

Although Washington was an unreflective man by nature, historians today have been able to piece together Washington’s personal views on the institution of slavery. From his correspondences with French ally, Marquis de Lafayette, it becomes clear that Washington grew increasingly uncomfortable with his own and the states’ reliance upon slave labor. After the colonies’ victory over the British, Lafayette proposed a plan for the gradual emancipation of slaves, which Washington approved. Nevertheless, Washington never acted upon such an admirable plan during his life; “As much as he had come to dislike slavery, life at Mount Vernon as he knew it would have been unimaginable without slaves.”65 Following his death in December of 1799, Washington’s final will vehemently declared that his slaves were to be free upon his wife’s death. In this will, Washington stipulated that the slave children were to be

64 Wiencek, An Imperfect God, 104, 93-94.
65 Dalzell, George Washington’s Mount Vernon, 112.
educated so that they may support themselves in the free realm. Washington’s decision to free his slaves was entirely without precedence. In fact, none of the Founding Fathers save for George Washington chose to free their slaves. Unfortunately for future generations, it appears Washington’s postmortem compassion for his slaves had little, if any, effect on American slavery practices. At least one historian believes that, “Had [Washington] freed his slaves in 1794 or 1796, while in office, the effect might have been profound. He would have set the precedent that the chief executive cannot hold slaves.” Twelve of the first eighteen United States presidents would be slaveholders. Despite his earnest belated effort, Washington had permitted slavery to infect the young country.

The public today can acquire an intimate perspective into Washington’s life by visiting his Virginia home, Mount Vernon. The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association (MVLA) acquired Washington’s estate for future preservation in 1860. The necessary funds to purchase the estate were possible thanks to some savvy propaganda that sought to reinforce “…the tendency of Northerners to ignore the historical reality of slavery at Mount Vernon…[and] immunize [Washington’s home] from contemporary political debate.” Against the odds, the MVLA managed to retain an air of neutrality on the eve of the Civil War and succeeded in buying the prestigious estate for preservation. Although many citizens outside the MVLA advocated for the destruction of the buildings surrounding the main mansion on account of their off-putting connection to slavery, the MVLA blessedly opted to preserve these buildings. While these buildings apart from the mansion were saved from demolition, “The notion of presenting a historically accurate picture of plantation life could not have been further from the MVLA’s

66 Wiencek, *An Imperfect God*, 104, 4-5.
agenda." As a consequence of the MVLA's emphasis on promoting patriotic moral values, slave life at Mount Vernon was ignored by most visitors for the better part of a century.  

It was not until 1951, when a brick building that once served as slave quarters and a greenhouse was rebuilt upon its original foundations, that Mount Vernon began to seriously address the issue of slavery. The newly reconstructed slave quarters, which had originally caught fire in the 1835, were opened to the public in 1962. Lamentably, imprecise research on the renovated slave quarter gave the furnishings of the room a decidedly lavish quality, prompting many visitors to comment, "slavery wasn't so bad."

Influenced by the changing societal expectations wrought by the Civil Rights Movement, Mount Vernon gradually began integrating discussions of slave life into their presentations. A

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69 West, Domesticating History, 37.
70 While some of the bricks from the original slave quarters had remained intact, bricks from the original White House (dated from the same time period as Mount Vernon) were graciously donated by the Harry S. Truman administration as the deteriorating Presidential Mansion was being drastically renovated.
descendant of George Washington’s own slaves, Gladys Quander Tancil, “...advocated adding African American history to the tours [of Mount Vernon] in the 1970s.” Although this transition was regrettably belated, feedback from Mount Vernon’s visitors during the 1980s demonstrated that the public had a genuine interest in slave life. Mount Vernon’s informational signs that had previously read “Servants’ quarters” were replaced with the more accurate description, “slave quarters.” After further research into slave life at Mount Vernon, the furniture in the slave quarters was refurbished to better represent the squalor of slave living.

In 1983, a slave memorial was established on Mount Vernon to commemorate the slave burial ground. The now unmarked graves of Washington’s individual slaves are remembered with a plain stone monument designed by Howard University architecture students. Each September since the original dedication, hundreds have gathered for a wreath laying ceremony to honor the unnamed dead.

Throughout the 1990s, Mount Vernon made several commendable attempts to incorporate slavery into its presentation to visitors. The “African-American Community at Mount Vernon” tour was introduced in 1995. Additionally, in 1997, Mount Vernon opened the “George Washington Pioneer Farmer” site, which provides tourists with insight into Washington’s farming practices and the arduous duties of his toiling slaves. At the Pioneer Farmer site of Mount Vernon any visitor can step into the role of Washington’s slaves by performing the same work that was demanded of them. A Mount Vernon interpreter, Jinny Fox, explains that this hands on approach began “...because we wanted to produce a sense of what slavery really was...If you do the work you begin to grasp the labor...Only [the visitors] get to

74 Hirschfeld, George Washington and Slavery, 220.
quit. [They] can stop. But the slave is going to be there from five o’clock in the morning until the sun goes down.”76

While Mount Vernon’s interpretation of slavery has grown substantially since the 1980s, the site “…still tends to divide its presentation of black and white lives. Slaves have their own separate space in the education center. The slave life tour provides an optional way to see the grounds but does not remap the landscape for every visitor.” Although Mount Vernon provides several avenues to engross oneself in slave life, these options can be overlooked and avoided. For the most part, discussions concerning “…slavery…[stop] at the mansion house door.” Within the mansion (the historical site’s primary attraction), the tours are focused upon Washington’s life without explicit mention of his ownership of slaves. However, “On the second-floor landing, interpreters mention the enslaved women who catered to the Washingtons’ overnight guests.” Such a mention of Washington’s house slaves is a promising start: “Soon, one can hope, similar details will find their way from everyday domestic spaces into the spots where historic events occurred.”77

While the plans for the historic preservation of George Washington’s home had to wait until the mid-nineteenth century, memorializing the nation’s first president had been on the country’s agenda even prior to his death in late 1799. Ideas for a worthy monument varied widely; these proposals ranged from a majestic statue of Washington on horseback to an enormous one hundred and fifty foot tall Egyptian-style monument that interred Washington’s body. None of these plans ever came to fruition, and Washington’s final resting place remains at his beloved Mount Vernon. Washington was left without a public monument until the centennial

of his birth in 1832 finally inspired definitive action. Congress commissioned a statue of Washington to be placed in the rotunda of the Capitol Building; however, the statue, sculpted by Horatio Greenough, which portrayed a semi-nude George Washington in the likeness of a Greek god, was poorly received by the public and art critics alike. The Greenough statue, installed in the Capitol in 1841, was removed after only two years.78

Finally, on July 4th, 1848, mostly thanks to private initiatives and donations, the cornerstone of the Washington Monument obelisk was laid. During the construction of the monument, cities from around the world sent their own stones to be included in the obelisk. Greece donated a stone from the ruins of the Parthenon; other noteworthy stones hailed from Egypt, Switzerland, China, the remains of Carthage, and even Napoleon Bonaparte’s tomb.80

Ironically, Washington’s monument was being constructed as the nation slowly began to tear itself into a civil war over slavery. Many hoped that the giant obelisk could become a national symbol of unity; yet, the monument had not reached a third of its final height by the first shots of the Civil War. During America’s most bloody war, the “…unfinished stump stood out…as an emblem of a broken nation.”81

When the Washington Monument was finally finished in 1884, it stood a towering 555 feet and 5 1/8 inches. At its completion, the Monument was the tallest manmade structure in the world before the Eiffel Tower exceeded its height in 1889. Nonetheless, the Washington Monument remains truly unique within the landscape of the National Mall; its very presence commands immediate attention from nearly every vantage point. In addition to its impressive

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79 *Upon the Grecian stone was marked: “From the Mother of Liberty.”*
81 Savage, Monument Wars, 55-60.
size (the monument is still the world’s tallest stone obelisk), the monument is devoid of the ornate artistic sculptures and inscriptions that litter the Mall. Although the lack of ornamentation created frequent artistic opposition to the monument’s completion in the years following the Civil War, the plainness of the design insinuates “...republican simplicity and uncorrupted rational thinking.” Since the Washington Monument was not dedicated until after the Civil War, the monument became more of a symbol of national reunification than of the Revolutionary War’s general. Moreover, the completion of the monument and the ceremonies held in its honor masked the central government’s waning commitment to granting equal rights to freedmen.82

Since its completion, the Washington Monument has dominated the skyline of the United States’ capital. Save for the fifty flags surrounding the base, the monument remains unadorned. The plain nature of the monument continues to symbolize the nobility of Washington’s character. As expected, the monument’s foremost goal is honoring the memory of George Washington; educating the public on the less estimable aspects of his character comes a distant second – if at all. When touring the monument, visitors are treated to an idealized version of Washington. Inside the monument, in-depth displays of Washington’s life are lacking. Instead of thought provoking displays explaining Washington’s lifelong struggle with slavery, visitors are inundated with favorable quotes by Washington himself or his admirers. On one wall Thomas Jefferson’s words to George Washington boldly read, “There was nobody so well qualified as yourself to put our new machine into a regular course of action.”83 On another wall is inscribed

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82 Savage, *Monument Wars*, 118, 141.
Henry Lee’s famous eulogy for Washington: “...he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life; pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere...”\(^\text{84}\)

The closest the monument comes to addressing Washington’s ties to slavery is a single exhibit on the prolonged construction of the monument interrupted by the Civil War. Yet even here the focus remains solely on the monument itself and not Washington’s connection to slavery.\(^\text{85}\) It is worth mentioning that the space inside the Washington Monument is regrettably limited. Due to this shortage of display space, it can be reasoned that there simply is not adequate room to tell Washington’s entire life story. Nevertheless, it appears the Washington Monument is not a premier location for learning the historical details of George Washington’s relationship with slavery. Given its preponderance of patriotic memorials and monuments dedicated to American heroes, many would argue that the National Mall might not be the most appropriate place for a discussion of slavery; however the nation must not be too quick to forget that slavery legally existed in the District of Columbia until 1862.\(^\text{86}\) Indeed, the National Mall, including the White House and the Capitol Building, was built largely by unpaid slave labor.

Until the prestigious memorials of Washington, D.C. are renovated to better reflect the complexities of the Founding Fathers, the home of the nation’s first president provides far more opportunities to learn about the intricacies of his character. Washington’s Mount Vernon has listened to and acted upon the pleas of visitors who wished to learn more about slave life on the plantation. With new exhibits and presentations designed to enhance listeners’ understanding of the difficult subject, Mount Vernon today has made great strides towards humanizing the legendary figure of George Washington.


Enlightened Enigma: Monticello and the Jefferson Memorial

Whereas George Washington was a perennial man of action, his revolutionary counterpart, Thomas Jefferson, was ever a reflective philosopher. It was Jefferson’s pensive prose that penned the immortal words in the Declaration of Independence declaring “all men are created equal” and that they have “…certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” In his lifetime, Jefferson proved to be an unwavering proponent of the ideals encapsulated in the first Amendment of the Bill of Rights. Today, Jefferson is deified as an outstanding icon of liberty and equality. Despite his present day image
as a champion of democracy and equal rights, Jefferson's views on the very subjects for which he is today famous are less black and white as the public may perceive them to be.

Even while declaring the equality of all men in the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson owned hundreds of slaves on his plantation in Virginia. This historical fact makes Jefferson the most visible "...symbol of the Revolutionary paradox..."\(^87\) Jefferson's stirring words in the Declaration of Independence even misled George Washington's mentor, Landon Carter, into believing the document had freed the slaves.\(^88\) Intriguingly, in Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration, he accused King George III, of waging "...cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere..."\(^89\) This accusation was never ratified for the Declaration's final draft. Although this passage makes Jefferson seem like an abolitionist, Jefferson struggled with the increasingly controversial issue of slavery throughout his entire life. Prior to 1785, Jefferson was a frequent critic of the institution. In 1784, he sponsored a bill in the Congress of the Confederation that would have effectively outlawed slavery in any new state admitted. Perplexingly, in the years following 1785, Jefferson remained largely silent on the issue. However, in 1820, in the heat of the debate over whether Missouri ought to be admitted as a free or slave state, Jefferson decisively supported permitting slavery's expansion.\(^90\) Jefferson historians have busied themselves struggling to determine Jefferson's labyrinthine attitudes towards equality and slavery.

\(^{87}\) Wright, *African Americans in the Colonial Era*, 162.
\(^{88}\) Wiencek, *An Imperfect God*, 46.
Jefferson, like Washington, was born into a culture that was already dominated by the existence of slavery. In fact, it is said that his earliest memory was riding on horseback with a trusted slave.91 Throughout his entire adult life, Jefferson continued to hold slaves in bondage for work on his Virginian plantation; it is calculated that Jefferson owned over six hundred slaves during the course of his life.92 Many historians have attempted to justify Jefferson as a slaveholder by citing he was constrained by the times. This argument may convince some, yet, Jefferson, "...unlike hundreds of Virginia masters, ...did not enlist any of his own slaves in the Continental Army, and thus he denied them the opportunity to fight for their freedom as well as his."93 The popular public image of Jefferson as a proto-abolitionist is recurrently overstated.

Although "...the figure of Thomas Jefferson as slave owner has long been so conspicuous as to be known to the American public in general...his deeply rooted racial bias has been much less exposed..."94 Despite having a generally favorable opinion of Native Americans, it is indisputable that, by modern standards, Jefferson harbored shockingly racist sentiments for Africans. In his famous "Notes on the State of Virginia," Jefferson offers his observations of the African race:

"They are more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation...In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection...[In] reason [they are] much inferior [to whites]...[In] imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous."95

94 Halliday, Understanding Thomas Jefferson, 151.
To the modern reader, these words are more than distasteful – they are downright repugnant. These observations are made all the more shocking when considering the same man who declared equality for all wrote them. Despite his enlightened mind, Jefferson was quite intolerant of racial diversity and believed that the best means to deal with the slavery problem was by removing their presence from white society entirely. Although Jefferson, for the most part, strove to treat his slaves with a touch of humanity, he was not above using cruel punishment to force their cooperation. Jefferson coldly reasoned that the best means for punishing misbehaving slaves was to sell them away from their families. When he was in financial crisis (as he often was), Jefferson willingly sold slaves to pay his debts. After his return from France with eighty-six crates of luxury items, Jefferson sold eighty-five slaves to reconcile his purchases.\(^96\) After Jefferson died, slave parents were cruelly separated from their children when one hundred and thirty of Jefferson’s slaves were sold for $48,000 to pay for his tremendous debt.\(^97\)

Given Jefferson’s personal contempt for Africans, it is baffling to consider that he would choose to exploit them for sexual gain. The rumors that Jefferson was having a sexual relationship with one of his own slaves first surfaced in 1802. Journalist James Callender declared that, “[Jefferson,] whom it delighteth the people the people to honor, keeps, and for many years past has kept, as his concubine, one of his own slaves. Her name is Sally.”\(^98\) For nearly two centuries, historians have debated the validity of Callender’s seemingly libelous accusation against Jefferson. While Jefferson himself never openly denied or affirmed the

\(^{96}\) Lois E. Horton, “Avoiding History,” 145.
\(^{97}\) Jon Kukla, *Mr. Jefferson’s Women*, (New York, 2007), 141.

Jefferson’s debt at his death was $107,000 – depending on how one converts this figure, his debt would be the equivalent of anywhere between one and two million dollars today.

allegation, recent DNA evidence heavily indicates that the third President of the United States did indeed father children with his slave Sarah (nicknamed "Sally") Hemings. Contemporary accounts from visitors to Jefferson’s plantation support the findings of modern scientists. Henry S. Randall, Jefferson’s eldest grandson, observed that Jefferson’s plantation harbored slave “...children which resembled Mr. Jefferson so closely that it was plain that they had his blood in their veins.” 99 Although historians continue to debate Jefferson’s relationship with Sally Hemings, historian Joseph J. Ellis reasons, “The burden of proof has dramatically shifted. If you want to argue Thomas Jefferson is not the father, you now have a tough case to make...You have to be on a crusade to rescue Thomas Jefferson to not believe it.” 100

Jefferson had inherited Sally Hemings when his wife’s father, John Wayles died in 1773. In one of history’s fascinating twists, Sally was the biological half sister of Jefferson’s own wife, Martha. John Wayles took Sally’s mother, Elizabeth (nicknamed “Betty”), as a mistress; they had six children together with Sally being the youngest, born the same year Wayles passed away. Sally was only around two years old when she moved onto Jefferson’s plantation in 1775. At the age of fourteen, Sally travelled to France with Jefferson’s daughter, Patsy, to serve as her nurse and to learn needlework and the care of clothing. It is speculated that it was during her time in France that her relationship with Jefferson first began. Since she had significantly lighter colored skin, Jefferson may not have viewed Sally as being black. Yet with such a lamentable dearth of evidence, it remains largely impossible to determine with any certainty the nature of Jefferson and Sally’s relationship. However, the word used to describe Sally’s status, both by James Callender and Sally’s own son, Madison Hemings, was “concubine.” The usage of this

99 Kukla, Mr. Jefferson’s Women, 119.
word “...implied not only low status but also a relationship based on the man’s sexual need and nothing more emotionally meaningful.”\textsuperscript{101} Jefferson had read the medical writings of Samuel Auguste David Tissot. As with many of his contemporaries, Tissot wrote that good health was achieved through a proper balance of bodily fluids. One bodily fluid that required regulation was semen. On the subject of semen, French philosopher Voltaire advised, “If one indiscreetly wastes it, it can kill you. If one retains it, it can still kill you.” With this erroneous medical principle in mind, some historians have asserted that Jefferson may have used Sally Hemings as part of his “...plan to fend off the effects of old age and regain control of his life through...regular sex.”\textsuperscript{102}

To convolute matters further, by Jefferson’s own reckoning, any children born between Sally and himself would have been considered biologically and legally white. Jefferson wrote to a scientist, Francis Calley Gray, in 1815 that he “...considers two crosses with [a] pure white parent, and a third with [a parent of] any degree of mixture, however small, as a clearing the issue of the negro blood.” Since Sally was only one-quarter black, any children she had with Jefferson were “white” according to Jefferson’s own formula. Nevertheless, Jefferson emphasized that, “...freedom...depends on the condition of the mother.”\textsuperscript{103} So, in Jefferson’s view, his own children with Sally could be considered white, yet still be legally held in slavery. Jefferson’s alleged children with Sally were eventually freed when they came of age; members of the Hemings family were the only slaves Jefferson ever freed. Jefferson never freed Sally.

It should be readily clear that Thomas Jefferson’s legacy of liberty and his actions in his private life in regards to slavery are quite contradictory. Simply put, “If the test of the greatness

\textsuperscript{101} Andrew Burstein, \textit{Jefferson’s Secrets: Death and Desire at Monticello}, (New York, 2005), 185.
\textsuperscript{102} Kukla, \textit{Mr. Jefferson’s Women}, 129-132.
for a politician is the willingness to lead a nation or state to what is right, even when it is unpopular, then Jefferson...fails the test on slavery.”\textsuperscript{104} For those wishing to acquire a more complete understanding of America’s most enigmatic Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia home and plantation are open to the public. Jefferson chose to build his home atop a mountain and fittingly chose to title his personal paradise “Monticello,” Italian for “little mountain.” Jefferson adored his mountaintop mansion and ardently wrote “…all my wishes end, where I hope my days will end, at Monticello.”\textsuperscript{105} Construction for Monticello first began in 1769 after the mountaintop was cleared and leveled the previous year. Given Monticello’s elevated location, it took slaves and hired workers forty-six days to dig through sixty-five feet of mountain rock before finally discovering water suitable for a well.\textsuperscript{106} Local white carpenters as well as Jefferson’s own slaves performed much of the carpentry for the house; the bricks and nails for the mansion were created on site. In 1796, the second floor of the home was demolished by Jefferson’s command to make way for his new vision. This architectural revision added the prominent dome to the second level of the mansion. Major alterations to the house were finished by the end of Jefferson’s second term as president in 1809; the house boasted forty-three rooms, four pavilions, and eight fireplaces.

Following Jefferson’s death on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1826, Monticello passed through the usage of several private owners and even the Confederacy during the Civil War. Finally, in 1923, the Thomas Jefferson Society purchased Monticello for future preservation.\textsuperscript{107} Today, Jefferson’s beloved home is open to the public to

\textsuperscript{104} Finkelman, “Thomas Jefferson and Antislavery,” 211.
tour and learn more about the American icon of independence. Yet, how well do the tours and exhibits at Monticello today reflect the perplexing and paradoxical nature of the man who once inhabited its rooms?

Visitors to Monticello are given the privilege to walk through the home that Jefferson held so very dear. For approximately thirty-five minutes, a tour guide leads visitors through the first floor of Monticello. The tour primarily emphasizes the furnishings and gadgets that highlight the brilliant mind of their original owner. Recently, visitors of the house tour were polled to determine how often Jefferson’s relationship with slavery was mentioned during the tour. Discouragingly, “When asked about the tour of Monticello generally, most visitors had a very conventional view, mentioning the architecture and Jefferson’s inventions and gadgets as having made the greatest impression on them.” Moreover, others responded that slavery was mentioned “very little.” Nevertheless, despite these unpromising responses, when questioned
further, "It [was] clear from the staff responses and from visitor responses that slaves are routinely mentioned on the house tour, though the coverage of slavery depends on the individual tour guide and on visitor interest." It is relieving to know that the tour guides of Monticello generally do not shy away from discussing slavery. Lamentably, discussing slavery in Jefferson’s home is a fairly recent phenomenon: "Up to the mid-1980’s guides only occasionally mentioned 'servants' in the tour of the mansion, as the story centered on Jefferson and his activities." The inclusion of slavery in the house tours has progressed substantially since the 1980s. Yet, there is certainly room for improvement in delivering its narrative since "There seems to be some disagreement over whether guides are responsible for telling the whole story of how the people lived at Monticello or whether they should be mainly entertainers who must be careful that visitors are told a story that will not upset them." 108 While the end goal of discussing slavery is most certainly not to upset individuals, the tour guides of Monticello must discover the proper balance between telling amusing anecdotes and revealing the sobering truth of slavery.

Simply touring Jefferson’s house will not supply a visitor with a fulfilling impression of life at Monticello. While in the home, much of Jefferson’s connections to slavery remain hidden because Jefferson masterfully hid the slave quarters (e.g. stables, laundries, kitchens, smokehouses, pantries, breweries) from clear view. To gain a clearer understanding of slave life at Monticello, tourists are invited to experience the “Slavery at Monticello” tour, which was formerly (and euphemistically) titled the “Plantation Community” tour.109 This tour was not available until 1993 and, due to the winter season, can only be offered from April through October. Although this tour currently provides the most detailed representation of slavery in

Jefferson’s life, guides estimate that fewer than ten percent of visitors choose to take this special tour. Most young students on school field trips to Monticello also miss this enlightening tour due to time constraints.\(^{110}\) Sadly, these visitors are unlikely to be exposed to the side of Jefferson that coldly calculated, “…a woman who brings a child every two years [is] more profitable than the best man of the farm.”\(^{111}\) Those that do opt to experience the Slavery at Monticello tour are given an in-depth look at the lifestyles of Mr. Jefferson’s slaves by touring Mulberry Row, the street upon which much of the plantation’s industry was performed. The Thomas Jefferson Society believes that a visit to Mulberry Row “…is a key part to any visit to Monticello.”\(^{112}\) Generally, visitor reactions to this tour have been “overwhelmingly positive.” Visitors came away appreciating their newfound understanding of Thomas Jefferson. Most visitors felt that “This more realistic sense of history…was better than having a ‘false sense of pride.””\(^{113}\)

Even though a disappointing number of visitors take the Slavery at Monticello tour, the Thomas Jefferson Society provides several other displays that call attention to Jefferson’s association to slavery. Recently, a new exhibit in the cellar level of Monticello, called “Crossroads Exhibition,” has opened to visitors. By displaying life-sized figures of Monticello’s slaves and members of the Jefferson family side by side, this new exhibition shines light upon the perpetual domestic duties that house slaves were called upon to perform.\(^{114}\) Additionally, for visitors who do not attend the official Slavery at Monticello tour, a new exhibition at Mulberry Row, titled “Landscape of Slavery: Mulberry Row at Monticello,” informs visitors of slave life.

The house and plantation tours, which both to varying degrees address Jefferson’s relation to

\(^{110}\) Lois E. Horton, “Avoiding History,” 138-140.
\(^{111}\) Wiencek, An Imperfect God, 46.
\(^{113}\) Lois E. Horton, “Avoiding History,” 138, 144.
slavery, are directly contrasted with his historical legacy. Of course, a visit to Monticello does not lack reference to Jefferson’s legacy for liberty; a technologically advanced display of flat screen televisions, titled “Thomas Jefferson and ‘the Boisterous Sea of Liberty,’” allows visitors to explore for themselves how Jefferson’s enlightened ideals diffused throughout the world.\footnote{Thomas Jefferson and ‘the Boisterous Sea of Liberty,’’ http://www.monticello.org/site/visit/thomas-jefferson-and-boisterous-sea-liberty (accessed May 29, 2012).}

For his contributions to the founding of the United States, Thomas Jefferson is prestigiously honored in the nation’s capital with his own impressive memorial. Completed in 1943, the Jefferson Memorial proudly houses a nineteen-foot tall, five-ton statue of Thomas Jefferson holding the Declaration of Independence. Surrounding this imposing sculpture are the words of Jefferson himself; of course, these quotations were “...cherry picked to put his thoughts and achievements in the most favorable light.”¹¹⁸ As a result, some of the quotations featured at the historical landmark are misleading and downright deceitful. For example, one Jefferson quote on the status of African Americans that the designers of the memorial chose to immortalize was, “Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people are to be free.” Despite the clear abolitionist implication of this statement, the designers cunningly chose to neglect the latter part of Jefferson’s quote, which explains, “…nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government.”¹¹⁹ Sadly, the Jefferson Memorial intentionally misrepresents and ignores Jefferson’s views on race, and instead “…makes him sound like an abolitionist...without any trace of irony.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Savage, Monument Wars, 244.
¹¹⁹ Halliday, Understanding Thomas Jefferson, 151.
¹²⁰ Savage, Monument Wars, 245.
While it is most unfortunate that the Jefferson Memorial shies away from depicting an accurate and complex interpretation of Jefferson, the memorial does an effective job of emphasizing Jefferson’s lasting positive influence. Nevertheless, for Americans citizens who wish to acquire a more complete and layered understanding of Thomas Jefferson’s character, the tours and exhibits of Monticello provide plentiful opportunity to learn about the most complicated Founding Father’s relationship to slavery.

The goal of Monticello’s exhibits and tours is certainly not to condemn Jefferson’s honorable legacy; after all, “Jefferson’s attitude was, in fact, not far from that of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln did not wish to interfere with slavery where it already existed, though he wished that slavery would be ended as soon as possible. Lincoln, like Jefferson, did not propose radical action, nor did he envision blacks and whites as political equals.”

Jefferson’s words in the Declaration of Independence habitually served as the foundation for Lincoln’s own arguments against the existence of slavery. Lincoln, unlike Jefferson, willfully strove to apply the Declaration’s assertion that “all men are created equal” to black slaves. Although Jefferson had made no successful effort in his own life to slow the growth of slavery, his idealism expounded in the Declaration of Independence would inspire the subsequent generation to abolish it.

121 Burstein, Jefferson’s Secrets, 140.
The Liberty Bell, much like Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence, is one of the few remaining iconic and tangible objects that directly links the spirit of the American Revolution with the present. Unlike the national flag or national bird, the Liberty Bell is a distinctly American icon; no other nation in the world venerates a two hundred and sixty year old metal bell! The bell is one of America’s oldest relics. The bell existed since before “The Star Spangled Banner” was composed, the Pledge of Allegiance was written, and even before the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.
The Liberty Bell had a fascinating history before it became widely recognized as a uniquely American icon symbolizing the nation’s founding ideals. The bell was first conceived when Isaac Norris II, the speaker of the Pennsylvania legislative assembly, decided the growing city of Philadelphia required a larger and more respectable bell to summon the legislature and proclaim important announcements. Written on the bell, Norris instructed the London Whitechapel Foundry, was to be a Bible verse hailing from Leviticus, twenty-fifth chapter, tenth verse: “Proclaim Liberty thro’ all the Land to all Inhabitants Thereof.” Somewhat Ironically, Norris and many of his fellow legislators were slaveholders themselves; nevertheless, Isaac Norris II could have scarcely imagined how fateful his choice of inscription would become to a future nation’s history.123

Norris’ bell arrived in Philadelphia’s port in late August of 1752. When the bell was tested for the first time, the surrounding crowd was dismayed when a crack immediately formed; an attempt to mend the crack failed. The blame for the crack was disputed. The Whitechapel Foundry blamed an inexperienced bell ringer for the crack whereas many citizens of Philadelphia accused the Foundry of crafting a defective bell. When two amateur Philadelphians, John Pass and John Stow, melted down the bell they faulted a deficit of copper in the bell’s original metallic composition. Pass and Stow’s first attempt at recasting the bell was met with overwhelming discontent by the public at the sound of its ring. Pass and Stow quickly recast their initial failure and the twice recast bell was ready by June of 1753. Although many, including Isaac Norris, were still displeased with the quality of the bell’s ring, the 2,080-pound bell was deemed acceptable. The bell was hung at the top of the state house and rang at several key moments in the Revolutionary Era. The bell rang numerous times to summon the legislature

to debate the English tax abuses. Most notably, the bell pealed following the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. When Philadelphia was threatened by British occupation in the Fall of 1777, the bell was removed from the city in order to avoid being turned into ammunition for the British. Following the end of the war, the bell was fortuitously (and repeatedly) saved from attempts to be converted into scrap metal.

While there are several legends regarding how the Liberty Bell received its world-famous crack, the most reliable and likely explanation reveals the fracture occurred in 1846 while ringing in honor of George Washington’s birthday. The crack, however, did not prevent anti-slavery abolitionists from claiming the bell as a prominent symbol for their crusade. In fact, it was the New York Anti-Slavery Society’s Anti-Slavery Record that first dubbed Pass and Stow’s dissonant bell as “The Liberty Bell” in 1835. Abolitionists fervently believed in the command of the Leviticus passage emblazoned upon the bell and scornfully recognized that liberty did not yet exist for all the inhabitants of the land. Due largely in part to the bell’s inscription, abolitionists continued to utilize representations of the bell in their propaganda to further their noble cause and truly secure the United States as a home for universal liberty.

Yet even while abolitionists used the bell as a stirring symbol of liberty and freedom, the Liberty Bell continued being housed in the Pennsylvania statehouse throughout the 1850s while judges tried runaway slaves under the Fugitive Slave Act on the second floor. African Americans were by no means ignorant of this blatant hypocrisy. The National Era, an African American newspaper in Washington, D.C., called the sardonic location of Fugitive Slave hearings to its readers’ attentions. The newspaper decried that these slave trials were “...on the

124 Nash, The Liberty Bell, 6-15, 17.
125 Nash, The Liberty Bell, 35-36.
very same spot where the immortal words, fresh from the pen of Jefferson, that ‘all men are created free and equal; that they were endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’; were proclaimed to the world as the platform of universal man, and the basis of his eternal right to resist oppression.’

As the nineteenth century continued, the Liberty Bell became an increasingly recognizable national symbol throughout the country. Americans’ nearly universal reverence for the bell developed in reaction to a poignant, yet entirely fabricated, popular narrative of the bell’s triumphant pealing on July 4th, 1776 to publically announce American independence. In reality, the public was not informed of their delegates’ momentous decision until July 8th. This patriotic fiction was first propagated by a savvy journalist, George Lippard, in January of 1847. Lippard’s rousing tale of an elderly bell man and a young idealistic boy captured the public’s attention and was soon taught in school textbooks as historical fact.

While touring the nation in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Liberty Bell became a centerpiece of American civic religion. An Indianapolis newspaper stated that the bell “...represents a sentiment and an idea that Americans would die for.” Many Americans would indeed die to fulfill the promise of the bell’s inscription. For much of the bell’s history, its inscription went unfulfilled. With the increasing publicity of the bell’s connection to the American Revolution, women suffragettes, like abolitionists and African Americans, also identified with the bell’s command to proclaim liberty throughout the land. In the 1960s, the liberty espoused by the bell still proved illusive for African Americans. As such, the Liberty Bell became a particularly fitting site for numerous civil rights protests. The victory of the Civil

128 Mires, Independence Hall in American Memory, 156.
129 Nash, The Liberty Bell, 73.
Rights Movement ushered in a new era of extended liberty for the African American community. Although the Liberty Bell’s inscription instructs its readers to “Proclaim Liberty thro’ all the Land,” the fulfillment of Isaac Norris’ fateful Bible verse was over two centuries in the making. The Liberty Bell ought to serve as an iconic reminder of the past struggles of achieving genuine liberty as well as serve as an inspiration for future civil rights battles. Yet, how has the Liberty Bell been presented to the public to interpret? As mentioned earlier, the bell toured much of the country following the Civil War. Unlike the Union flag, the recently rejoined Southern states still cherished the Liberty Bell for its revolutionary origins. While travelling to large city expositions, the bell routinely made several stops in small towns to display the national icon to a wider audience. Audiences stood in awe of the Liberty Bell’s intimate connection to the Revolutionary War. Absent from these displays was any indication of a continuing struggle for liberty.

When the City of Philadelphia transferred control of Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell to the National Park Service in 1948, the federal dollars for restoration work failed to offer an enlightening perspective of the continuous struggle for liberty. The Park Service had the bell placed on display in a glass-walled pavilion, isolated from Independence Hall, in 1976. The bell resided in this pavilion for twenty-seven years. In the mid-1990s, the Park Service began its plans to relocate the bell once again. This time, the chosen location was only a block away from Independence Hall. The new site, much like the Liberty Bell, had its own fascinating connection with the struggle for human liberties. The site, Sixth and Market streets, was the exact location

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of the executive mansion George Washington and his slaves called home during the first president’s eight years in office.

When Washington travelled to the new national capital of Philadelphia to assume the presidency, he faced an awkward dilemma: Pennsylvania had recently passed a law that stipulated any slave brought into the state would receive their legal freedom after residing in the state for six months. Washington found the loophole in the law by having his slaves moved periodically into Virginia to prevent them from attaining a residency of six months. For the most part, Washington’s underhanded scheme was successful; however, his slaves were not fools and understood their master’s intent.132 At least two of Washington’s household slaves escaped to freedom during their years in the Philadelphia executive mansion. Martha Washington’s personal servant, Oney Judge, made her escape in 1796 while the Washingtons were out to dine. George Washington made several clandestine attempts to reclaim the young slave girl without success. In Judge’s own words, she would “...rather suffer death than return to slavery.” About a year after Oney Judge’s escape, Washington’s prized chef, known today only by his first name, Hercules, made his own successful dash to freedom. When his still-enslaved six-year-old daughter was asked if she was saddened by his permanent absence, she responded, “Oh sir! I am very glad because he is free now.”133

Despite the rich history of the now demolished executive mansion upon which the new Liberty Bell display center was to be built, the leaders of Independence National Historic Park (INHP) chose to largely neglect the site’s controversial past ties to slavery and the Father of his Country. The INHP’s interpretive plans for the new Liberty Bell Center lacked any discernible

132 Wiencek, An Imperfect God, 315-316.
emphasis on the inspirational nature of the bell’s message for African Americans, as well as women suffragettes. Moreover, the location of the new site as Washington’s executive mansion operated by slaves was to be glossed over. Instead, visitors would be treated to only the festive narrative of the bell. It was to be “...an exhibit to make people feel good but not to think.” The INHP feared that introducing the paradoxical nature of American liberty would create a “dissonance for visitors.” The INHP defended its current plans by asserting, “the Liberty Bell is its own story, and Washington’s slaves are a different one better told elsewhere.” INHP’s fears proved to be ill founded and the superfluously patriotic plans for the Liberty Bell Center began to receive much criticism in 2002. Historian Gary Nash lambasted the INHP on public radio for “downright [murdering]” history. After historians made the larger public aware of the simplistic plans for the bell’s new home, a media storm of coverage spurred a popular campaign to revise the INHP’s plans for the site. After urging from the National Park Service and negative press, the INHP rewrote its script for the planned displays to better emphasize the Liberty Bell as a “…symbol of an ongoing continuous struggle for liberty rather than liberty attained.”

A short example of the display’s alterations clearly captures the dramatic change in the tone and message of the Liberty Bell Center. The originally planned caption for a picture of a Native American next to the Liberty Bell at San Francisco’s 1915 Panama-Pacific Expo read simply: “Native American.” When the displays were overhauled, the new caption reads:

“As the Liberty Bell increased in popularity as a symbol of freedom and liberty for white Americans during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it reminded African

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135 Nash, “For Whom Will the Liberty Bell Toll?,” 82.
Americans, Native Americans, other ethnic groups, and women of unrealized ideals. While the bell travelled the nation as a symbol of liberty, intermittent race riots, lynchings, and Indian wars presented an alternative picture of freedom denied.\textsuperscript{137}

The difference between the two captions is striking. The original presents an exceedingly simplistic description of the photo while the revised text presents an extensive narration of historic inequalities.

As the public became more aware of the plans for the Liberty Bell Center, private citizens recognized the historic importance of the site at which the center was being constructed. Several hundred demonstrators banded together in early July of 2002 to demand attention be paid to the slaves held within Washington's executive mansion.\textsuperscript{138} Influenced by this mass demonstration, Pennsylvania Congressman Chaka Fattah proposed a bill to the Department of the Interior's budget that eventually led to the creation of the nation's first ever memorial dedicated solely to slaves.\textsuperscript{139} The new memorial, which prominently features the names of the nine slaves known to have inhabited George Washington's executive mansion, is located outside of the Liberty Bell Center to serve as a further reminder of the contributions of slaves and the continuous struggle for liberty. The "...contradiction in the founding of the country between freedom and slavery becomes palpable when one...crosses through [the] slave quarters site when entering a shrine to a major symbol of the abolition movement..."\textsuperscript{140}

Thanks to the efforts of passionate historians, private citizens, and the media, the new Liberty Bell Center, which was opened to the public in October of 2003, properly presents the

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\item[\textsuperscript{137}] Nash, "For Whom Will the Liberty Bell Toll?," 90.
\item[\textsuperscript{139}] Nash, The Liberty Bell, 210.
\item[\textsuperscript{140}] Nash, "For Whom Will the Liberty Bell Toll?," 86.
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distinctly American icon with multiple perspectives to over 1.5 million visitors per year. The Liberty Bell need not confine itself to being a symbol of American patriotism; instead the bell has a far richer history as a rallying point for America’s oppressed. The Independence National Historic Park had underestimated the public’s capacity to apprehend the historical hypocrisy of the Liberty Bell while still cherishing it as a national symbol of American ideals. Today, the Liberty Bell Center can proudly display the bell to the public with its controversial and often paradoxical existence intact. The Liberty Bell, for the first time in its history, now truly reveals itself as a preeminent symbol of the American struggle for liberty.
Conclusion: Historical Integration

America’s prestigious public history sites from the Revolutionary Era have progressed substantively in addressing the realities of African American life, especially following the Civil Rights Movement. Each of the four historical sites sampled (Colonial Williamsburg, Mount Vernon, Monticello, and the Liberty Bell) demonstrated a marked and reassuring improvement in its presentation of slavery. Thanks in part to a “…massive and widening liberalization of racial attitudes…over the last forty years,” many enlightening revisions at these historical sites have been made largely in response to increasingly vocal visitor demands for information on slave life.\textsuperscript{141} While middle school and high school classrooms may still gloss over slavery when learning about the Revolutionary War, public history sites today, instead of ignoring the contentious issue, appear more committed than ever before to educating the American public on the paradox of liberty.

Despite the recent positive additions and modifications to these historical sites, there still remains great potential for future improvement. The most troublesome trend is the predisposition to creating presentations relating to slavery as a separate entity from the primary attraction. This fault is found most visibly in the house museums sampled. The overriding tendency is to create separate tours and facilities to address slavery while the favorable stories of the early presidents are safely told in the confines of their mansions without referencing slavery. As evidenced from Monticello, many visitors choose to only experience the house tour; in doing so, they miss out on gaining a more complete picture of Thomas Jefferson’s life. Fortunately, this oversight can be easily amended by promoting the inclusion of stories involving slavery.

within the mansion tours. Another option would be to have the mansion tour immediately segue into the slavery tour, turning the mansion tour into an educational journey of the entire estate.

Colonial Williamsburg has a special opportunity to educate the public due to its reliance on human interpreters to deliver historical information and perspectives. While written historical markers and displays can inform tourists of the dates of famous occurrences and their significances, only visitor interaction with human interpreters can make history truly seem alive. However, for many citizens, seeing such a wretched aspect of American history resurrected can be an extremely emotional experience. While provoking an emotional reaction from the audience is unavoidable, and in most cases educational, historical sites must not lose sight of the tremendous emotional gravity that discussing slavery continues to carry to the present day. To counter the negative effects of potential emotional trauma, sites such as Colonial Williamsburg could include "warning signs" or instructional videos that serve to better prepare visitors for what they might experience. Above all, Colonial Williamsburg must be supremely cautious to not depict these emotional portrayals as trivial entertainment; interpretations of slavery are to be educational endeavors that force visitors to ponder the incongruence of America's historic legacy as a land of freedom.

Surely the history of American slavery is unpleasant; even so, historical sites must confront the reality of the past or else they are "...as guilty as a German reconstruction of the 1940s would be without mention[ing] the "final solution."" Trying to ignore slavery, one of the most influential factors in American history, while emphasizing the laudable legacy of the Revolutionary War presents a heavily skewed and inaccurate image of the early United States. Christy S. Coleman, the director of Colonial Williamsburg's African American interpretation department, defined the issue perfectly when she explained, "The legacy of slavery in this
country is racism...[and] until we begin to understand the horrors that took place...people will never come to understand what’s happening in our society today.”

Unfortunately, racism, unlike slavery, has not yet been eradicated from the American landscape.

Modern day racism and racial inequality stem directly from the failure to realign the incongruous ideals of the American Revolution. While it can be tempting to criticize Jefferson and Washington for permitting slavery to endure, one must not forget that the Founding Fathers “…freed the world from the domination of monarchy, struggled toward a notion of democracy which is still unfolding, [and] embraced principles of intellectual, political, and religious liberty...Measured against the magnitude of what they attempted, they succeeded greatly…”

Without question, the Founders are to be commended for their unprecedented accomplishments; that said, the continuation of slavery after the Revolutionary War had unimaginable historic consequences. Debate over slavery culminated in the Civil War, America’s most deadly war, which quite nearly succeeded in forever splitting the nation in two. The Civil War and Reconstruction did little to assuage or repair hostile race relations. This second failure to create an integrated society culminated in the heated Civil Rights Movement nearly a century later.

Today, much of the country is still markedly divided along racial lines. Chicago, the third largest city in the United States, is visibly segregated between its wealthier, white northern half and the poorer southern half dominated by African Americans. Seeing as the overwhelming majority of African Americans vote for members of the Democratic Party over the Republican Party, it remains clear that race continues to play an important role in democratic politics.

142 Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg, 143.
143 Alfred W. Blumrosen & Ruth G. Blumrosen, Slave Nation: How Slavery United the Colonies and Sparked the American Revolution, (Naperville, IL, 2005), 255.
unmistakable that race is one of the (if not the most) pervasive social forces of American history – and its origins lay in the Revolutionary Era.

While the past cannot be altered, learning about history and its consequences allows for citizens to glean its significant lessons while also gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the current political and social state of the nation. For too long, the general public as well as professional historians have ignored the contributions and suffering of the enslaved people during the Revolutionary Era. If the Jefferson Memorial and the Washington Monument are any indication, the National Mall lacks any conspicuous allusion to slavery of the Revolutionary Era. Washington, D.C. already honors those African Americans who fought for their own freedom in the Civil War with the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum. Many would argue that the Founding Fathers owed their own freedom to the free black and runaway slave soldiers who served in the Continental Army; national recognition for these black soldiers, who bravely fought and died in the Revolutionary War, is long overdue.

The founder of the National Mall Liberty Fund, Maurice Barboza, has been fighting to have a memorial dedicated to those forgotten heroes on the National Mall since 1984. Congress had set aside a plot of land on the National Mall and had given permission for the plans to honor the black patriots of the Revolutionary War; most unfortunately however, the funds to manage the plans for the memorial were egregiously mismanaged after Barboza was forced out of the original Black Patriots Foundation in the early 1990s. As a result, the deadline for building the memorial was missed and constructing new memorials on the Mall is now legally forbidden.
Despite Congress approving the plans for a Black Patriot memorial at the same as it endorsed the Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial, only the Dr. King memorial would ever see completion.¹⁴⁵

Maurice Barboza once envisioned that the Black Patriots Memorial, the Dr. King Memorial, and the Lincoln Memorial would form a stirring trifecta of memorials illustrating the progression of African American liberty. Now these hopes have been dashed. Although the newly completed Dr. King Memorial can serve as a reminder of the past tribulations and triumphs of African Americans, Barboza correctly explains, “The King memorial will tell only a small part of the long saga. Without showing Americans where the dreams originated [or how] ...the Revolutionary War generation came to form the backbone of the civil rights movement, we miss the so-much-larger and inspiring story.”¹⁴⁶ Without being presented information about the origins and the early preservation of slavery in United States, American citizens are robbed of the opportunity to appreciate the entire struggle for African American equality.

Slavery at public history sites is almost certainly the most difficult subject to address. This difficulty arises from several avenues. Slavery, by its very nature, is an inhumane system and this repulsion evokes potent emotions from those who confront its pitiful realities. Secondly, acknowledging America’s reliance upon slavery compels one to recognize the hypocrisy of our

national creeds and revolutionary heroes. Despite these challenges, the benefits of confronting America’s uncomfortable past are numerous. Those who learn the history of Revolutionary Era slavery will possess a fuller understanding of the plight of African Americans and thus acquire an improved understanding the current social climate. The effects of slavery have not altogether vanished from the land of the free.
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