

Distance Learning for High School

Social Studies Day

Instructions: Read the following article underline words or phrases that describe the memorial (think *who, what, where, when, why*).

1 **The Slave Memorial at Mount Vernon**

2 From www.mountvernon.org

3 The Slave Memorial at Mount Vernon was designed by students attending the architectural school at Howard
4 University. It was dedicated and opened to the public on September 21, 1983.

5 A gray, truncated, granite column which represents “life unfinished” is the center of three concentric brick
6 circles. The three steps leading up to the column are inscribed, respectively, “Faith,” “Hope” and “Love” –
7 the virtues that sustained those living in bondage.

8 The memorial is located approximately 50 yards southwest of George and Martha Washington's tomb, on a
9 bluff above the Potomac River. This sacred ground was used as a cemetery for those enslaved and a few free
10 blacks who worked at Mount Vernon in the 18th and 19th centuries. Local folklore/tradition says that the
11 bodies were buried with their feet towards the east (the river), symbolizing their desire to return to Africa.

12 The graves were either unmarked or the markings did not survive, and the identities and numbers of those
13 buried remain largely unknown. Among those thought to be buried at the site are William Lee, George
14 Washington’s personal servant during the Revolutionary War, and West Ford, who worked as a manager for
15 the Washington families who lived at Mount Vernon after Martha Washington’s death in 1802. Both Lee and
16 Ford were “free blacks” at the time of their deaths.

17 The Slave Memorial stands adjacent to the Association’s 1929 marker noting the site of the 200-year old
18 slave burial ground, which reads, “In memory of the many faithful colored servants of the Washington
19 family buried at Mount Vernon from 1760 to 1860. Their unidentified graves surround this spot.” Despite the
20 importance of this official recognition, the area received little attention from the visiting public, as it was
21 located off the beaten path within the historic site. The burial ground lay unattended and forgotten in dense
22 underbrush for years thereafter.

23 In 1982, a small group searching for information regarding slave burial sites stumbled upon the grave
24 marker. Inspired by their discovery, Washington Post columnist Dorothy Gilliam wrote a column in 1983
25 calling for the slave burial ground to receive much more interpretation as a vital part of George
26 Washington’s estate. Soon a group of influential citizens began a concerted effort to honor the slaves of
27 Mount Vernon and other colonial plantations.

28 Simple and moving in its design, the Slave Memorial enhances Mount Vernon’s interpretation of slavery at
29 George Washington’s estate. When he was 11, Washington inherited 10 slaves from his father, and
30 eventually owned as many as 316 during Mount Vernon’s peak of activity. Over a period of several years,
31 Washington views began to change around slavery, declaring in 1786 that he hoped a plan would be adopted
32 by which “slavery in this country may be abolished by slow, sure and imperceptible degrees.” When
33 Washington died in 1799, his will stated that all slaves under his ownership were to be freed. Of the 123
34 slaves from Mount Vernon who were freed after his death, a number of them were provided for while staying
35 on the plantation.



Slave Memorial at Mount Vernon (from www.mountvernon.org)



Review the images of the memorial. List at least THREE questions that you have.

Is this what you imagined the memorial would look like? Why or why not?