

A Grub Hoe: **Enslaved Field Workers at Mount Vernon**

Students will learn...

- The roles of enslaved field workers at Mount Vernon- focusing on women
- To use primary sources as evidence in shaping their views of history
- Increase their media literacy

You will need...

- A picture of the grub hoe
- Infographic for the Enslaved Population at Mount Vernon worksheet
- [An Overseer Doing His Duty near Fredericksburg, Virginia](#) by B. H. Latrobe
- *Optional:* Abridged Farm Report
- *Optional:* [A Day in the Life of an Enslaved Field Person](#)

Sometimes that evidence enforces their ideas and sometimes it refutes them.

- In pairs or individually, give the students the Infographic of the enslaved population at Mount Vernon worksheet.

Note that most field workers were women, as men were more likely to be trained in a trade. Families lived on the farms they were assigned to and so families were often separated. Most children lived on the same farm as their mothers.

- Now give them the picture of *An Overseer Doing His Duty near Fredericksburg, Virginia*. Have them talk about this painting in groups- What do they notice? What is the hoe being used for? When was it painted? What does the title say about the artist's attitude towards this work?

Opener: Background Bias

- Ask your students what jobs they think the enslaved people at Mount Vernon did.
- Record their answers and then ask whom they think would be doing each task- man, woman, or child.
- Most likely, they will associate women's work with "housework" and men's work with physical labor in the fields.

Task: Using other historical documents

- Show them the picture of the grub hoe and ask them what they think it is, what it was used for and who would have used it.
- Tell your students that when archeologists find objects such as this, they use other primary sources to contextualize the object.

Closer: Correcting Assumptions

- Come back as a group to talk about it. Clarify that a grub hoe was used to remove trees, stumps, etc. from the land. It is very physically demanding labor. Plows, on the other hand, were mostly operated by men, although there are instances of women plowing.
- Go back to your initial list- how did the evidence they receive enforce or change their assumptions?
- Ask your students what other types of documents could help them understand the types of work enslaved people did at Mount Vernon.



Grub Hoe

Date: 18th century

Material: Wood, Iron

Geography: Unknown



Enslaved Population at Mount Vernon, 1799 Infographic

Instructions: Use the following infographic showing the demographics of the enslaved population at Mount Vernon in 1799 to answer the questions.



Source: Mount Vernon's Ladies Association, taken from George Washington's List of Enslaved People, 1799.

	Men	Women	Boys	Girls
Mansion House Farm	35	25	11	17
River Farm	15	23	11	8
Muddy Hole Farm	6	16	8	11
Dogue Run Farm	7	17	10	11
Union Farm	19	24	14	18
Gristmill and Distillery	11	0	0	0

1. Of the total adult population, what percentage are men and women for each of the five farms and the Gristmill and Distillery?

Mansion House Farm- Men _____% Women _____%

River Farm- Men _____% Women _____%

Muddy Hole Farm- Men _____% Women _____%

Dogue Run Farm- Men _____% Women _____%

Union Farm- Men _____% Women _____%

Gristmill and Distillery- Men _____% Women _____%

2. How many children were there on each of the farms?

Mansion House Farm- _____

River Farm- _____

Muddy Hole Farm- _____

Dogue Run Farm- _____

Union Farm- _____

Gristmill and Distillery- _____

3. Does this data support or disprove how you thought labor was divided at Mount Vernon? Why?

This _____ my thought that _____

because, _____

_____.

A Day in the Life of an Enslaved Field Worker

This timeline was put together by the historians at Mount Vernon's Ladies Association for the exhibition *Lives Bound Together*. It is based on 18th century documentation.



6:00 AM

Priscilla tells her middle children, Penny (age 11) and Israel (10), what chores need to be done that day, including fetching water and gathering firewood. They will also watch their younger brothers, Isrias (3) and Christopher (1).

6:30 AM

Robert Garrett, the hired overseer, checks that the 15 laborers are in their places and tells them their work assignments. Priscilla and her daughters begin hoeing in the corn field.

10:00 AM

Priscilla sees George Washington arrive at Dogue Run on his daily ride. He confers with the overseer and directs him to maintain the pace of work.



5:45AM

Priscilla, age 36, wakes up in the small cabin she shares with her 6 children at Dogue Run Farm.



6:15 AM

Priscilla walks to the fields with her two eldest children, Sophia (14) and Savary (13), who now work alongside her.

9:00 AM

Priscilla and the other field workers pause for 30 minutes to eat breakfast, perhaps a cornmeal pancake.

11:00 AM

Jack, a carter, hauls a load of corn in a small wagon from the farm to the nearby gristmill. He brings back heavy sacks containing 11 bushels of cornmeal, the weekly rations for those at Dogue Run.

2:00 PM

Field workers have a break for dinner, the largest meal of the day. Molly, the farm's enslaved cook, has prepared a stew.



3:30 PM

The overseer orders a small group of men and women to begin digging up trees, roots, and stumps in the adjacent swamp.

5:00 PM

Young women Linney and Sarah feed the Dogue Run livestock: 4 horses, 10 mules, 52 cattle, 5 calves, 65 sheep, and 8 lambs.



8:00 PM

At sunset, the fieldhands return to their quarters. Priscilla makes a small supper of cornmeal and fish for her children, then washes the mud from her skirt. She will have to wear it again tomorrow.

9:30 PM

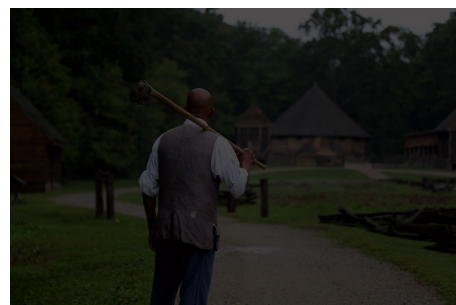
Priscilla's husband, Joe, arrives from Mansion House Farm. Work assignments force the family to live apart. Joe can visit on Sundays, but sometimes comes during the week, disobeying Washington's orders.

10:00 PM

The residents of Dogue Run Farm go to bed. Some sleep some on tattered pallets, others on dirt floors.

4:30 AM

Joe walks the 3 miles back to Mansion House Farm in time to begin the next day's work.



Abridged: Farm Reports, 26 Nov. 1785- 15 Apr. 1786

Here is an abridged version of George Washington's Farm Reports from 26 November 1785 until 15 April 1786. Every Saturday, Washington would record what tasks were assigned to his enslaved field workers on each plantation using reports from his overseers. He also documented the births and deaths of the livestock on his farms as well. This document lists more than thirty people by name, although a census in February 1786 records 86 enslaved field workers- 38 men (including overseers) and 48 women.

Instructions: Look at the jobs that the men and women are doing. Are they different or do both men and women do the same tasks? Specifically, pay attention to who is grubbing? Do we have any of the enslaved workers' actual names? If so, where do they appear?

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Dogue Run—24th Decr

Women all grubbing until Friday—3 of the Men at home House cutting wood for Christmas—the rest getting Posts for fencing except two who were plowing—Friday women raking up the old Dung of the last years Pens—Men still getting Posts. Saturday grubbing when not raining—Men cutting posts—Stock all well. One Lamb.

Muddy hole—24th Decr

4 days grubbing with all hands except the Carter who was Carting wood at the House, & Mink Will who was two days & half Plowing—Friday about the Wheat Field Fence—and getting in wood. Saturday threshing Wheat all day.

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River Plantn 31st Decr

Thursday getting Posts for fencing and other Timber for Rails—and cutting down Corn stalks with the Women. 4 Plows at work in the afternoon after the ground had thawed. Friday afternoon 4 Plows at Work. Men cutting & mauling Rails Posts, & Forks—and women threshing & putting up Farm pen. Saturday same.

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Muddy hole. 14th Jany

41 Old Sheep—16 Lambs—2 Men Cutting & Mauling (except one day Will was sick) women Grubbing all the week.

...

Ferry Plantation 4th Feby

Women Grubbing except Flora, who was sick—2 Men getting rails for the Plantation—2 Lambs and 1 Calf this Week—all the rest of the Stock as usual. Ferry men (when not in the Boat) cutting where the women are Grubbing.

Muddy hole Plantn 4th Feb.

41 Sheep—17 Lambs (one yeaned this Week) 32 Cattle—22 Horses—Women grubbing all the week with the overseer. little Will plowed half a day Monday, tuesday, Wednesday & thursday, & all friday. & part of this day after going from M. Vernon. Charles & Jupiter Mauling, Will cutting Rails &ca when not plowing—Cart drawing Rails round fence yesterday, & part of this day.

...

River Plantation 18th Mar.

Monday 2 plows laying off the [garden] for Corn &c., 7 plows crossing the ground for oats. Women filling gullies—2 Men grubbing —1 sick—on Tuesday the same except that one plow was added to the 7 abt the oat ground & taken from laying off. Wednesday 1 plow laying off, & 8 cross plowing oat ground half the day the other half the day men morticing posts & women threshing in the Barn. Friday 1 plow laying off, and 8 plows crossing Oat ground 2 Men removing stumps 1 sick—and women threshing. Saturday 6 plows crossing oat ground till twelve oclock—Then went to listing in timber landing field 2 others laying off—& 1 plowing in the first plow—3 Men removing stumps & women making fence anew round Wheat field—Waggon Carting rails thursday—One cart carrying stuff to fill up gullies two days—2 days and an half carting rails—the other half carting Provender & litter for the stock. 7 Lambs this Week & two Calves.

Muddy hole—18th Mar.

40 Sheep 22 Lambs 32 Cattle & 1 young Calf—the same as last week. 22 horses—Monday 3 plows crossing—2 Men Cutting Rails & Mauling—Women grubbing except Peg who was sick—Tuesday 3 plows crossing—2 Men cutting & Mauling—same women grubbing—Wednesday plows stopped by rain 3 Men Cutting & mauling—women all on the New ground—Thursday—the same as yesterday—Friday—2 plows laying off 2 Men Cutting & mauling—women all into the new [garden] Saturday—1 Man [cutting]—1 went to Alexandria in the Boat—1 Sick—Women all in the new [garden].

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Ferry Plantatn 25th [Mar.]

Monday—Cæsar cutting straw for horse feed—the rest grubbing & cutting, till it set into raining—after which London & Cupid went about Baskets, and the Women to shelling Corn. Tuesday, Wednesday, thursday, friday & Saturday Cæsar and two women plowing (except one day Cæsar was stopped by the breaking of his plow) Sam Kit cutting and Mauling all the Week. and London Cupid and the Women grubbing. The Cart employed all the Week in taking out dung—except when it went to Mill for Meal & Bran & carried home Oats—Increase one young colt—the rest of the stock as usual.