



Solomon Gundy:

Fish from Mount Vernon to Jamaica

Students will learn...

- How Mount Vernon was a part of the global economy
- Extracting information from primary and secondary sources

You will need...

- Moxon's Solomon Gundy recipe
 - Stations Resources
 - From Mount Vernon to Jamaica worksheet
 - *Optional:* Ingredients and utensils to make Solomon Gundy
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Opener: Solomon Gundy

- Show your students Elizabeth Moxon's Solomon Gundy recipe.

Solomon Gundy is a traditional Jamaican dish. It is a pickled herring paste made with spicy peppers and seasoning and normally spread on crackers. It originated in Nova Scotia, Canada, where they likewise put pickled herring and onions on crackers.

- Tell them that Solomon Gundy comes from the time when enslaved Africans were on sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean. However, the herring they used was not from there. It was imported, in some cases from Mount Vernon itself.
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Task: From Mount Vernon to Jamaica

- Explain that they will be focusing on how the herring got from Mount Vernon to Jamaica.
- Divide your students into groups.

- In the room, set up four stations per group, each with one of the four source packet: Fisheries at Mount Vernon, Storage, Uses, and Jamaica.
 - *Optional:* You could have two groups using the one set of stations with one starting at the Fisheries and the other starting with Jamaica.
 - Each of the stations will have primary and secondary sources on them. The students need to look at the sources, discuss with the group, and take notes (about two main bullet points) from each station, which they can record on the worksheet provided.
 - *Optional:* If you do not have time for students to go to all four stations, make each group responsible for one station. They then have to present to the class what they learned.
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Closer: Solomon Gundy

- Coming back together, have each group come up with their answer to the following question: How did the exchange of goods influence both Jamaican and American culture?
- Share what they came up with but make sure to emphasize in the group discussion that it was not only on recipes and the economy that were affected but that the legacy of colonialism and America (and George Washington himself) as an active participator in the slave trade has shaped both of their cultures and histories.
- *Optional:* Make Solomon Gundy!

Solomon Gundy

Elizabeth Moxon is an English author from Leeds that wrote the popular cookbook, *English Housewifry. Exemplified in above four hundred recipes, never before printed...* First published in 1741, it underwent numerous editions and was even published in London. It's last and 18th edition was printed in 1808.

223. *To make SOLOMON GUNDY to eat in Lent*

Take five or six white herrings, lay them in water all night, boil them as soft as you would do for eating, and shift them in the boiling to take out the saltiness; when they are boiled take the fish from the bone, and mind you don't break the bone in pieces, leaving on the head and tail; take the white part of the herrings, a quarter of a pound of anchovies, a large apple, a little onion shred fine, or shalot, and a little lemon-peel, shred them all together, and lie them over the bones on both sides, in the shape of a herring; then take off the peel of a lemon very very thin, and cut it in long bits, just as it will reach over the herrings; you must lie this peel over every herring pretty thick. Garnish your dish with a few pickled oysters, capers, and mushrooms, if you have any; so serve them up.

cut into square pieces, dip them in egg and fry them to lay round your dish.

It is proper to lie about any other dish.

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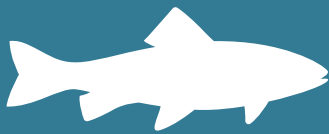
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224. *SOLOMON GUNDY another way.*

Fishing at Mount Vernon

“This River... is well supplied with various kinds of fish at all seasons of the year; and in the Spring with the greatest profusion of Shad, Herring, Bass, Carp, Perch, Sturgeon &ca. Several valuable fisheries appertain to the estate; the whole shore in short is one entire fishery.”

George Washington to Arthur Young, 12 December 1793

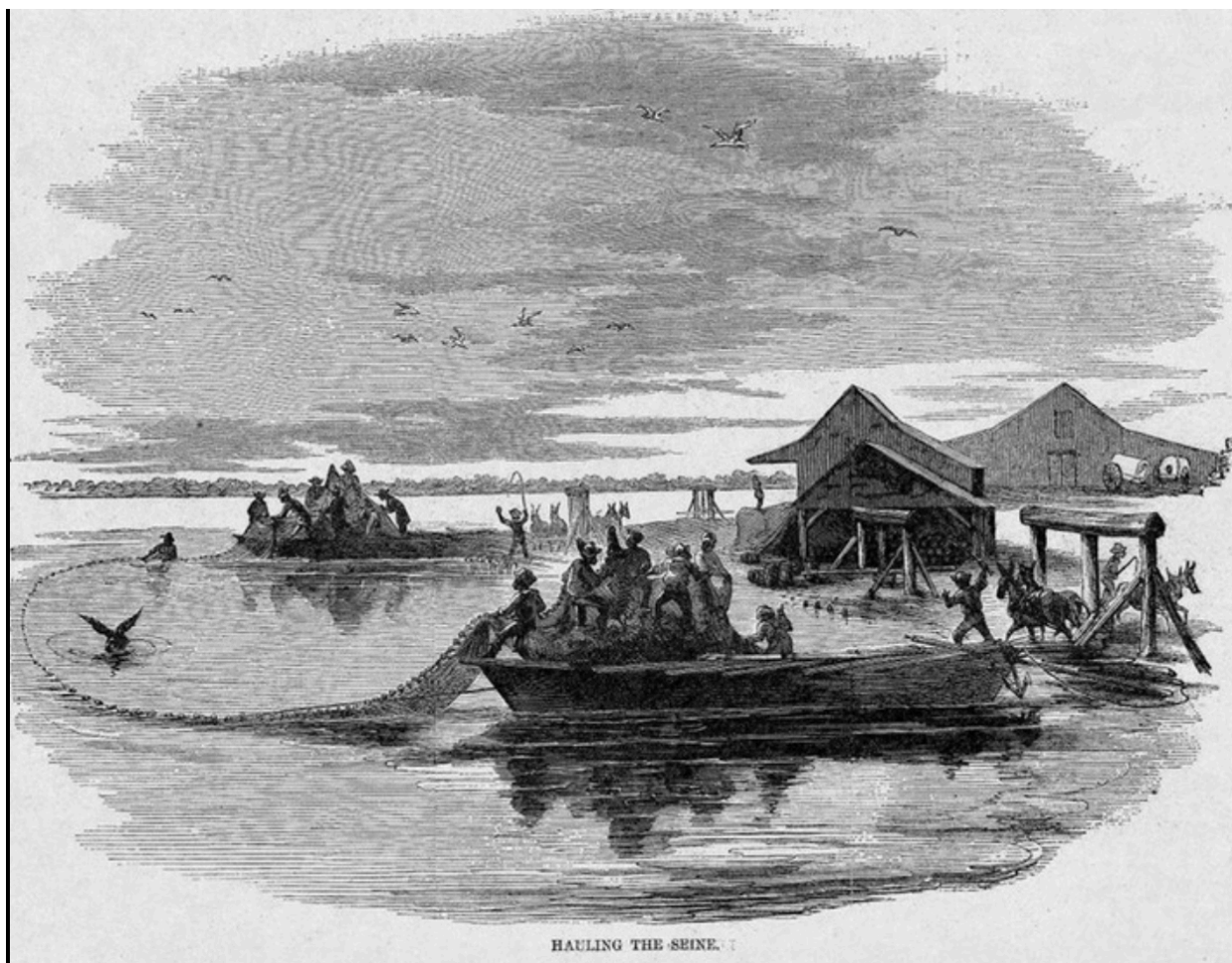


From April to May, shad and herring run along the river to spawn (reproduce). One could scarcely thrust a spear in the water, reported an observer, without harpooning a fish. According to another account, the constant thrashing of shad and herring made the entire surface of the water a gleaming white.



George Washington had 5 fisheries along the Potomac River.

Image by: Mount Vernon Ladies Association



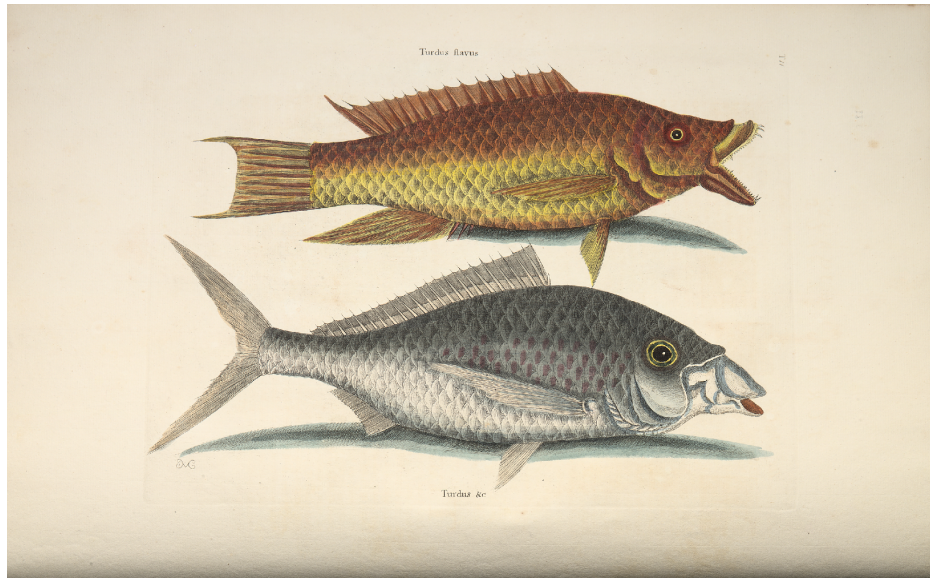
Washington used the Seine Fishing Method. This is when a boat with two men would drop a seine (big net) into the river. The boat, after putting out the net brought the other hauling line back to shore near the fishery and the people started hauling in on the lines to bring the seine to shore. The herring were removed from the net by hand into bushel baskets.

Image from Harper's Weekly (Sept. 28, 1861), p. 620.



For labor, Washington would stop the work on his outlying farms and have a majority of his enslaved workers at his fisheries catching and preparing the fish. He also hired more enslaved people from nearby plantation owners.

Image from Harper's New Monthly Magazine (March, 1857), p. 438.



George Washington wrote in 1793 that the Potomac was “well supplied with various kinds of fish at all Seasons of the year, and in the Spring with the greatest profusion of Shad, Herring, Bass, Carp, Perch, Sturgeon & ca.” Mostly, Washington sold Shad (above) and Herring (below).

Above Image: Illustration of shad from *The natural history of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands: containing the figures of birds, beasts, fishes, serpents, and plants. Volume II* (London: C Marsh, 1754)

Below Image: Blueback Herring illustration from Wikimedia



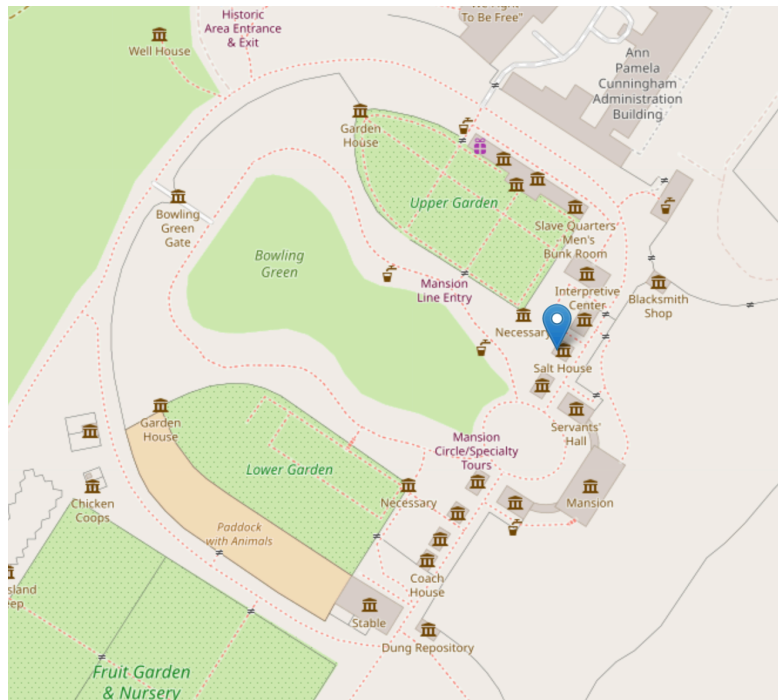
In 1772, Washington's enslaved workers caught around 1.3 million herring and 11,000 shad. This was not unusual as a typical annual herring catch often exceeded one million, and the shad numbered in the tens of thousands.

Storing Fish

Preparing the Fish

1. Remove the fish from the net and bring them to a table.
2. Remove the fish heads, cut the fish open, and remove the innards.
3. Rinse the fish in a brine solution (salt in water), because that will season the fish and make it more flavorful and it stops the flesh from drying out.
4. Pack the fish into barrels
5. Pack them tight and pour out any excess water on top.
6. Move the barrels into storage.





The fish barrels were moved into the Salt House close to the Mansion.

Above Image: Map of Mount Vernon
 Below Image: Interior of the Salt House





The fish were packed tightly into wooden barrels, about 800 with alternating layers of fish and salt. The fish were packed head to tail, similar to what you see when you open a can of sardines, only with the backs down and the open stomachs up, rather than flat. This allowed the stomach cavity to be filled with salt. Excess water was then poured out as it collected on top.

Surprisingly, this method of preservation allowed the fish to remain edible (safe to eat) for incredibly long periods of time, much longer even than one year. An archaeological investigation in 1991 of the cargo of a sailing vessel that sank in 1830 revealed some herring packed in this method had remained in edible condition.



George Washington needed a lot of salt to preserve his fish. The best salt was in Lisbon, Portugal. Washington would trade super fine flour, which he made in his Gristmill at Mount Vernon with Lisbon salt. However, according to British law, the salt would at first need to be sent to England to clear customs and pay a tax on the salt before going back to the colonies.

Uses for the Fish

"Began to plant Corn in the common way at the Ferry on Monday last...A few fish heads, guts &ca. ordered to be put into some of the Corn hills, to try the effect of them as a manure."

George Washington's Diary, 22 September 1787

Washington needed £375 to break even on his fisheries. Normally, he not only broke even but made a profit. In 1797, Washington made £165 of profit. Not only that, but he also used his fish to trade for other goods, which he then used or sold to his neighbors at a higher price.

5th Ledger

1799 Fishery

1799 Contra

Herrings Sold Green

April 10th By William Violet for Herring 9000 at 12 18

William Cash Sent do 8000 do 16

Mr. Lunan Washington do 10000 do 20

Henry Peake do 5000 do 10

Mr. Eliza Peake for do 2000 do 4

Mr. Gray do 3000 do 6

Washington's Distillery and Fishery Ledger, 1797-1801 by Tobias Lear and James Anderson.

This ledger written by Washington's secretary, Tobias Lear, and the distillery manager, James Anderson record all the spending (left column) and profits (right column) involving the fishery and distillery.

1799

Contra

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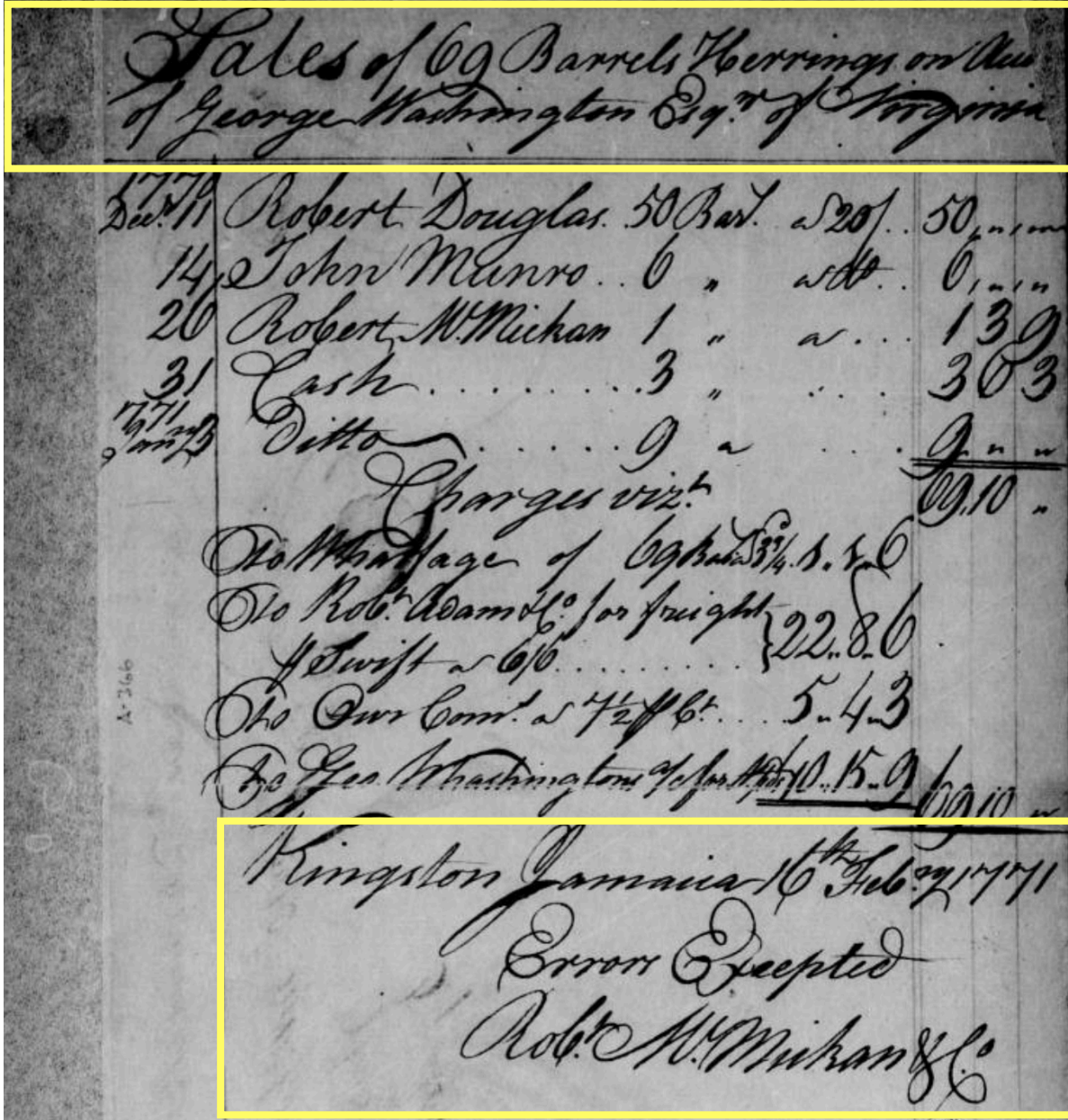
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“[The Washingtons] allot [his enslaved workers] each one [peck], one gallon of maize per week...and half as much for the children, with 20 herrings each per month.”

Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz's Diary 1798

Washington gave each of his enslaved workers 240 herring a year. Using his census, Washington had 317 enslaved workers in 1799 so he would need to provide 76,080 fish to a year. This is only around 5-8% of the amount of fish he gets in a year.



“Sales of 69 Barrels Herring on Acco [Account] of George Washington Esq.r [Esquire] of Virginia.”

....

“Kingston Jamaica 16th Feb.ry 1771

Errors Excepted

Rob.t McMickan & Co.”

Washington sold fish to nearby Alexandria, other New England ports, and as far away as Jamaica.

Jamaica

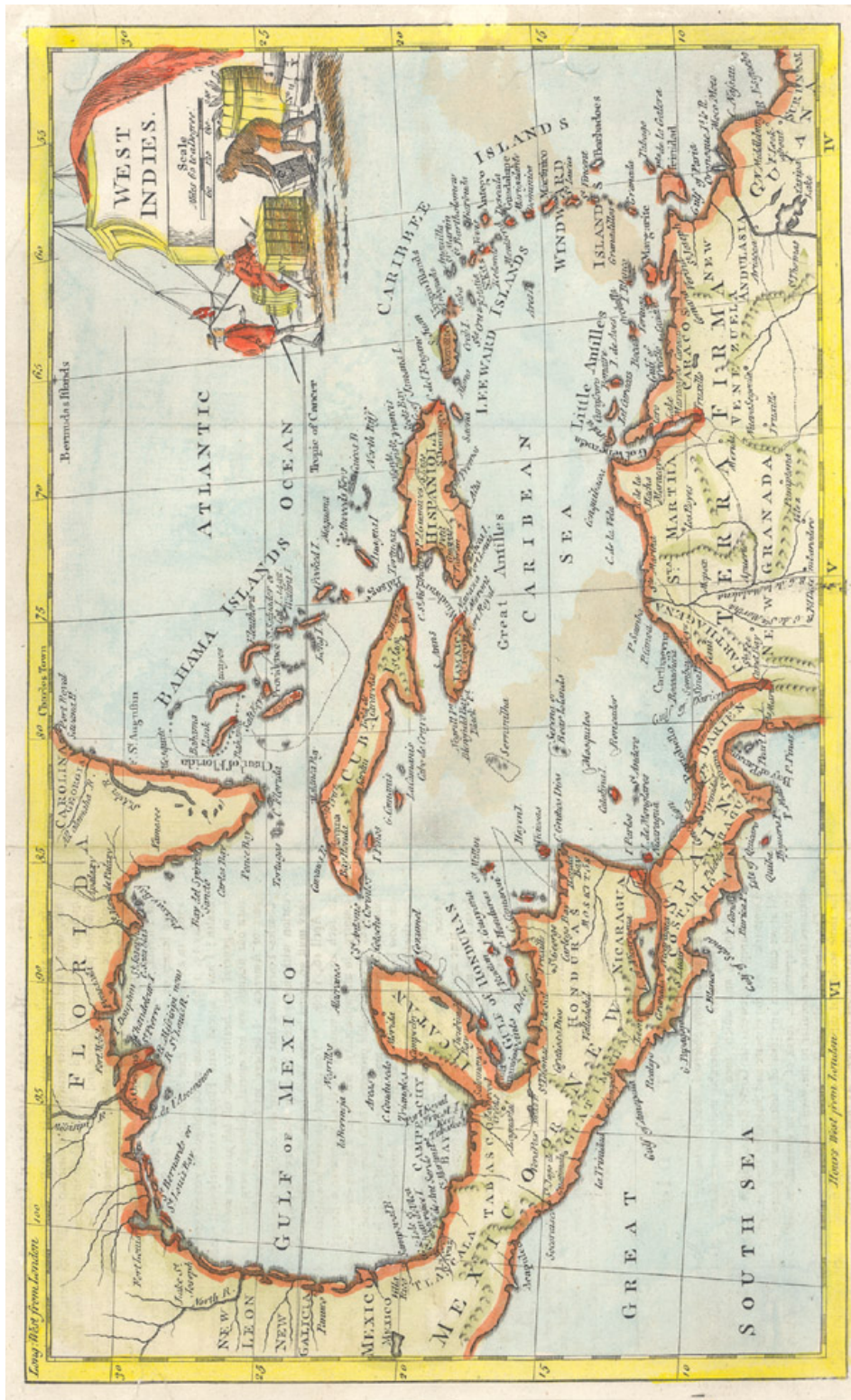


Image from Thomas Salmon's *A new geographical and historical grammar : wherein the geographical part is truly modern; and the present state of the several kingdoms of the world is so interspersed as to render the study of geography both entertaining and instructive* (1766).

Jamaica was a part of the British West Indies, a collection of islands in the Caribbean that were colonized by England.



The West Indies was an important aspect of the world's economy. Enslaved Africans were sent there to harvest sugar cane and turn it into sugar. Sugar was a big commodity, as it was used to sweeten tea and coffee and make rum and molasses. It was more profitable for slave owners to order fish from elsewhere and use the enslaved workers to make sugar than it was to allow them to fish to feed themselves. Washington was one of the suppliers of fish and flour to the West Indies.

Image by: William Clark (1823) *Cutting the Sugar Cane, Antigua*

“The Money arising from the Sales I would have laid out in Negroes, if choice ones can be had under Forty pounds [Sterling]...

If the Return's are in Slaves let there be two thirds of them Males, the other third Females—The former not exceeding (at any rate) 20 yrs of age—the latter 16—All of them to be [straight limbed], & in every respect strong & likely, with good Teeth & good Countenances—to be sufficiently provided with [clothes].

I have also to request the [favor] of you to bring me the following Articles.

A Cask of about 50 or 60 [gallons] of the best old Spirits especially from [Barbados]

A Barrel of best Oranges

1 Ditto of Lemon's or [limes]

1 [pot] of about 5 lb. best green Sweet Meats Mixed

1 Ditto of Ginger

10 lbs. of best Tamarinds—all of them [preserved] with White [Sugar]

A Pot of good [dried] Figs if to be had upon good terms

1 lb. of Kian Pepper

Some Pine apples & a [dozen] or two of Coco Nuts

Wishing you a pleasant and prosperous Voyage.”

George Washington to Daniel Jenifer Adams, 20 July 1771

George Washington chose to trade his fish and flour for goods rather than money because exotic goods such as oranges, limes, sugar, and rum were very valuable and were not available in America at the time. Washington used these products or sold them to his neighbors for a profit. Here, enslaved Africans are seen as ‘goods’ to be bought.

From Mount Vernon to Jamaica

Instructions- Use this sheet to take notes as you go through the four stations that link Mount Vernon's fish to Jamaica. Use the questions to guide your notes.

Fishing at Mount Vernon

What resources did Washington use to capture the most amount of fish?

- _____

- _____

Storing Fish

How did Washington store his fish to make sure they stayed fresh? Where and how did he get these supplies?

- _____

- _____

Uses of fish

What three things did Washington do with his fish?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Jamaica

Why did Jamaica import fish from Mount Vernon? Why did Washington sell his fish there, what could he get for them?

- _____

- _____
