



George Washington poses as his manservant, William Lee, holds his owner's horse.

Within just 26 years, plantations in the Northern Neck produced something extraordinary: three future presidents—George Washington, James Madison, and James Monroe.

Although their lives followed different paths, they shared an ironic common thread. Each helped shape a new nation founded on ideals of independence and liberty while standing on a foundation of slavery.

From birth to death, slavery was woven into their lives, sustaining their households, plantations, wealth, and even their service in the White House.

These presidents are a reminder that, initially, the pursuit of freedom and liberty for the nation was not a pursuit of freedom and liberty for all. That struggle continued across many chapters of our history.

George Washington

Every place George Washington could call home relied on slave labor. In 1732, he was born at Pope's Creek, his father's plantation in Westmoreland. Around age 3, the family moved to the plantation now known as Mount Vernon and at age 6, relocated to yet another plantation—Ferry Farm in Stafford, where Washington spent most of his childhood.

Due to inheritance, Washington became a slave owner at age 11 and spent the years that followed helping his mother on the farm.

Washington took control of Mount Vernon in his 20s and fully stepped into the role of slave owner. He focused on productivity. Even while away, he closely scrutinized weekly reports

Northern Neck Presidents

Pursuing Liberty, Sustained by Slavery

from the plantation manager, notes Encyclopedia Virginia.

Washington bought, sold, and allowed physical punishment of slaves. He even raffled off another owner's slaves, including children, to satisfy a debt, Encyclopedia Virginia reveals.

According to Mount Vernon, Washington expanded the plantation and slave population, ultimately controlling over 500 slaves during his lifetime.

While president, he stripped slaves from their families and community to work in New York and Philadelphia.

Washington was so determined to have slave labor but retain ownership that when facing Pennsylvania's 1780 gradual abolition law—which freed enslaved people based on residency—Washington rotated slaves in and out of state to prevent them from qualifying, notes the White House Historical Association (WHHA).

Washington retired to Mount Vernon, where he died in 1799. Although he reportedly came to regret his hand in slavery and left a will freeing all his slaves, it only set one person free immediately. He stipulated the other 122 be freed only after his wife's death.

As the first president, Washington is remembered for setting enduring precedents, such as the two-term limit. But "the precedent of using enslaved labor to maintain the residence of the nation's highest office must also be recognized as part of Washington's presidential legacy," says the WHHA.

James Madison

James Madison, considered the architect of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, was born in 1751 on his maternal grandparents' plantation in King George, now known as Belle Grove. His mother was there visiting.

Madison grew up with his parents in Orange County. Initially, the family lived on a plantation at Mount Pleasant before moving to a larger plantation house built by slaves at Montpelier.

Although Madison spent several years at boarding school in King and Queen and at college in New Jersey, followed by periods in Philadelphia and Washington during his political career, Montpelier remained his lifelong home.

At 43, he married Dolley, a Quaker widow whose father had emancipated his slaves. Ironically, the couple lived at Montpelier—run on enslaved labor—for several years before Madison inherited the plantation along with over 100 slaves.

Madison went to Washington to serve as secretary of state before becoming the fourth president and relied on

slave labor during both roles. He brought some slaves from Montpelier, including a 10-year-old boy, and also leased slaves from other owners.

According to the WHHA, it's believed Madison relied on more slave labor in the White House than his predecessors.

Madison retired to Montpelier, where he died in 1836 without freeing a single slave. He left them to his wife.

James Monroe



A triplex slave dwelling at James Monroe's Highland

Considered the last Founding Father to serve as president, James Monroe was born into a slave-owning family in 1758 and spent most of his childhood on a plantation near present-day Colonial Beach.

Before he was 17, both of Monroe's parents died, and he inherited the plantation and its slaves.

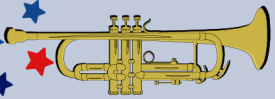
He later purchased Highland, a plantation adjacent to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, where he lived for about 24 years with a growing slave population. According to the WHHA, enslaved carpenters, blacksmiths, maids, cooks, and field workers sustained that plantation.

While Monroe was governor of Virginia, he was warned that Gabriel's Rebellion was brewing near Richmond. Within days, militiamen had terrorized hundreds of slaves, the WHHA notes. Ultimately, 72 were prosecuted, and 26 slaves were convicted and executed.

Monroe became the nation's fifth president and also brought slaves to Washington, where they labored at his temporary residence, the Caldwell House, and later at the White House.

Other slaves were rented from their owners to work on the White House grounds. In one instance, the government paid more to rent carts than they did for a person's physical labor, the WHHA notes.

Before his death in 1831, Monroe divided his estate between his two daughters and, according to the WHHA, is known to have freed only one person—his manservant.



250 Independence Day Festivities

July 2

4 pm: Kick off Independence Day weekend with a patriotic celebration and reading of the Declaration of Independence inside Historic Christ Church in Weems, hosted by the Cobbs Hall Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Richard Henry Lee Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

7 pm: Enjoy the "Music of the Nation" concert by Ampersand at the c. 1840 Lebanon Baptist Church. The program



features period music, including songs about the stirrings of revolution, experiences of colonists, songs from soldiers, a tune written by an enslaved person, and protest songs. Tickets are \$10.

July 3

12 pm: Swing by Westmoreland's 250th Anniversary Celebration at Montross Courthouse Square. Enjoy a free hot dog lunch, free American handheld flags, and free Westmoreland County flags. Event runs until 2 pm.

All Day: Celebrate America's 250 years in Colonial Beach with beach time, family fun, live entertainment, waterfront dining, and a spectacular fireworks display illuminating the Potomac River.

July 4

8:30 am: Join a 20th annual event beginning with a Salute at Burnt House Field where Richard Henry Lee is buried followed by a Service of Thanksgiving at Yeocomico Church.

8 pm: Bring a picnic dinner to Menokin. Colonial Williamsburg's Independence Day festivities and largest fireworks show will be streamed on the outdoor screen. Popcorn provided.



Fireworks over the Potomac