INTRODUCTION

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” – Thomas Jefferson, 1776

The paradox of the American Revolution—the fight for liberty in an era of pervasive slavery—is one of the most troubling aspects of American history. Thomas Jefferson—drafter of the Declaration of Independence and third president of the United States—helped to create a new nation based on individual freedom and self-government. His words in the Declaration expressed the aspirations of the new nation. But “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” did not extend to African Americans, Native Americans, indentured servants, or women. 12 of the first 18 American presidents, including Jefferson, owned slaves.

This 3,500-square-foot exhibition uses Monticello, Thomas Jefferson’s plantation in central Virginia, and the lives of Monticello’s enslaved people, as a focal point for examining the dilemma of slavery in the United States.

Visitors begin their exhibition experience in an introductory alcove that features two projected images—on the right, Thomas Jefferson, with the words of the Declaration of Independence behind him, and on the left, Isaac Granger (Jefferson), a slave at Monticello who eventually lived out his days as a free man in Petersburg, Virginia. A list of the enslaved families at Monticello, in Jefferson’s hand, is behind him.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: LIBERTY & SLAVERY

Liberty

Slavery made the world Thomas Jefferson knew. The colonial society into which he was born—in 1743 at Shadwell plantation in what became Albemarle County, Virginia—would not have existed without it. Jefferson’s father, Peter Jefferson, was a planter, surveyor, county justice, member of the colonial Virginia legislature, and a loyal citizen of the British Empire. Jefferson’s mother, Jane Randolph Jefferson, belonged to one of the
ADD ONE/SLAVERY AT JEFFERSON'S MONTICELLO

colony’s most prominent families. Over 60 slaves lived and worked at Shadwell, tilling his father's tobacco fields, cooking and serving the family's meals, caring for Jefferson and his siblings, and eventually accompanying Jefferson to the College of William and Mary. The profits from slave-based agriculture made possible his parents' household and lifestyle, as well as his education and exposure to the colonial capital of Williamsburg. Though Jefferson came to abhor slavery, his livelihood depended on it.

The intellectual and material character of his parents' household at Shadwell shaped Jefferson in childhood and young adulthood. Peter and Jane Jefferson owned books, scientific and drafting instruments, and fashionable furniture and table wares.

A case in this section of Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello contains objects that were excavated from the family house at Shadwell. These items include: imported ceramic table wares, such as plate and wine glass stem fragments (the most expensive of the excavated items), buckles from men's knee breeches, shoes, buttons, and cufflinks.

At the College of William and Mary, the young Jefferson studied mathematics, natural philosophy (science), and political philosophy with Scottish scholar William Small. Through Small, Jefferson was exposed to the leading thinkers of the Enlightenment, who believed rational thought and useful knowledge guaranteed the progress of humanity. Later, as a law student under prominent jurist George Wythe, Jefferson absorbed the most important legal principles of the day.

A case of Jefferson's personal items, specific to Enlightenment philosophy, includes: Jefferson’s walnut revolving book stand; a 1767-68 copy of Shakespeare’s Works; an 1814 edition of Herodotus’s Histories; an 1821 edition of Livy’s History of Rome; a 1750 edition of Homer’s Iliad; a ceramic inkwell in the shape of Voltaire’s head; a silver and gold fountain pen; silver spectacles designed by Jefferson and made by John McAllister of Philadelphia; and a brass micrometer, a telescope for measuring the distances and sizes of objects, especially celestial bodies.

Having inherited land from his father, Jefferson began building Monticello when he was 26-years old. Three years later, he married Martha Wayles Skelton, with whom he lived happily for ten years until her death. Their marriage produced six children, but only two survived to adulthood. Jefferson, who never remarried, maintained Monticello as his home throughout his life, always expanding and changing the house.

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Jefferson's first design for Monticello was derived from his study of Andrea Palladio, a Renaissance architect. It was two stories high and had eight rooms. In 1796, inspired by neoclassical buildings he had seen while serving as American minister to France, Jefferson began transforming Monticello into a three-story, 21-room brick structure. Inside and out, Jefferson's free and enslaved workmen made his design a reality. Jefferson filled his house with furnishings and collections reflecting his education, broad interests, and status. He employed labor-saving technology for efficiency and maximized light and heat for optimal comfort.

Visitors can view a case with personal items from the Monticello main house. The items include French wares such as a silver tablespoon and fork (1784), porcelain sugar dish (1786), and a silver vegetable dish and cover (1786–87). Also featured in the case are a bronze medal, awarded to Jefferson in 1825 by the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society of Ghent, Belgium; an ivory chess set from France (ca. 1770–90), with red pieces representing Africans, and the white pieces representing Frenchmen; and Jefferson's whalebone walking stick (1809).

**Slavery**

Directly or indirectly, the economies of all 13 British colonies in North America depended on slavery. By 1700, there were 27,800 enslaved Africans in British North America. In 1740, there were 150,000. By 1770, the number of slaves had grown to 462,000, about one-fifth of the total colonial population.

The Monticello plantation comprised 5,000 acres divided into four farms: the Monticello home farm, Shadwell, Tufton, and Lego. At any one time, about 130 enslaved men, women, and children lived and worked at Monticello. Farm laborers lived near the fields where they worked. House servants and artisans lived in log dwellings on the mountaintop along Mulberry Row—a 1,300-foot-long section of the road encircling Monticello's main house—or in rooms under the south terrace of the main house.
ADD THREE/SLAVERY AT JEFFERSON’S MONTICELLO

Guests can view several fragmented items excavated from Shadwell’s slave quarters including: colonoware bowl fragments (utilitarian wares made by slaves from local clay, one fragment showing burn marks); a Delftware chamber pot; an English striped slipware bowl for food preparation; a hand-painted Delftware bowl; salt-glazed stoneware bowl; a Chinese export porcelain plate; parts of bone-handled eating utensils; a green glass bottle; a Westerwald jug; and imported clay pipes.

Mulberry Row was the hub of the plantation. Over time, it included more than 20 workshops, dwellings, and storage buildings where enslaved people, indentured servants, and free black and white workmen lived and worked as weavers, spinners, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, nail-makers, carpenters, sawyers, charcoal-burners, stablemen, joiners, or domestic servants. Mulberry Row changed over time—structures were built, removed, and re-purposed—to accommodate Jefferson’s changing plans for Monticello.

A display case dedicated to items excavated from slave dwellings on Mulberry Row includes: imported ceramics; pearlware items such as a painted mug, painted saucer, and diamond-shaped transfer-printed dish; transfer-printed plate fragments, large transfer-printed platter, and shell-edge plate fragments; a Chinese export porcelain pot and plates; fragments of tea bowl creamware; currency, including quarter-cut Spanish reales, Virginia half-pennies, and Liberty head pennies; padlocks and box locks; clothing buckles and metal buttons; and grooming article such as bone handle toothbrushes and a bone comb.

An additional case houses tableware from Mulberry Row including: a fragmentary lid for a black basalt teapot; a bone handle and fork fragment; a bone knife handle and knife blade; a pewter spoon bowl and handle fragments; glass stemware fragments; a green glass wine bottle; and a cast iron cooking pot and lid fragments.

Before leaving this section of the exhibition, visitors can view an enlarged, 3D tactile map depicting Jefferson’s land holdings at Monticello, gaining a better understanding of the scale of land that slaves worked. Guests also can elect to watch a 15-minute film, Thomas Jefferson’s World, about Jefferson and those who lived and worked at Monticello (both enslaved and free), the daily activities of the plantation, and more.

After viewing the film, visitors turn and take in a striking focal point of the exhibition—a life-size statue of Jefferson (created by StudioEIS in Brooklyn, NY). The statue stands in front of a wall of the names of each of Jefferson’s known slaves. In front of the statue, visitors can view a replica of Thomas Jefferson’s portable desk used to write the “rough draught” of the Declaration of Independence. The original version of this desk is in the collection of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.
ADD FOUR/SLAVERY AT JEFFERSON’S MONTICELLO

Along the wall of slave names, visitors can learn about Jefferson’s various proposals for a solution to slavery—from abolishing the slave trade entirely, to setting forth a gradual emancipation plan, to moving freed slaves outside of the U.S. in experimental colonization, to the “diffusion” of slaves in the west. These panels also explore Enlightenment philosophy’s strong influence on Jefferson, and Jefferson’s various publications espousing liberty as a natural human right.

THE ENSLAVED FAMILIES OF MONTICELLO

The Monticello plantation was a complex community dependent on the labor of many people—especially its enslaved field hands, artisans, and domestic workers. Enslaved people worked from sunrise to sunset six days a week, with only Sundays off. They observed Christmas, Easter, and Whitsun (seven weeks after Easter). Jefferson supplied slaves with clothing or cloth to make clothes twice a year and with blankets every three years. When couples married within the Monticello community, he gave them a cooking pot, a sifter, and a burlap sack to make a mattress. Slaves worked in their limited free time to earn money to acquire additional goods. Each enslaved adult was provided weekly rations of a peck (eight quarts) of cornmeal, a half-pound of pork or pickled beef, and four salted fish. To augment their rations, enslaved families grew their own vegetables, raised poultry, and hunted, fished, and trapped other animals for food.

Several extended families lived in slavery at Monticello for three or more generations. Among them were the families of Elizabeth Hemings and her children; Edward and Jane Gillette; George and Ursula Granger; David and Isabel Hern; and James and Philip Hubbard. Like others across the South, Monticello’s enslaved families resisted slavery’s dehumanizing effects by striving tirelessly to maintain family bonds, protect and nurture their children, and create rich social, cultural, and spiritual lives that flourished independently of Jefferson.

The Hemings Family
As many as 70 members of the Hemings family lived in slavery at Monticello over five generations. Elizabeth Hemings and her children (including Sally Hemings) arrived at Monticello around 1774 as part of Jefferson’s inheritance from his father-in-law, John Wayles, who was likely the father of six of Elizabeth’s Hemings’ children. Members of the family eventually occupied the most important positions in Monticello’s labor force. They helped build the Monticello house, ran the household, made furniture, cooked Jefferson’s meals, cared for his children and grandchildren, attended him in his final moments, and dug his grave. Most historians now believe that Jefferson, long after his wife’s death, was the father of Sally Hemings’ six children. The 10 people freed by Jefferson were all members of the Hemings family.

Guests can view the full Hemings family tree as well as items from Mulberry Row believed to belong to the Hemings. These artifacts include: ceramic pots used by Wormley Hughes (Elizabeth Hemings’ grandson) to blanch -MORE-
ADD FIVE/SLAVERY AT JEFFERSON’S MONTICELLO

sea kale for Jefferson; fragmentary gardening implements such as a garden gate weight, rake, hoe, and shovel; a tin-glazed earthenware jar for ointment; a brass spigot for pouring beer from a cask; and a walnut hanging cupboard made by John Hemmings. (Note: John Hemmings, who could read and write, often spelled his name with a double m, while other family members used a single m.)

An additional artifact case of personal possessions contains: thimbles of copper alloy and iron; copper alloy straight pins; a porcelain darning egg; bone buttons; a Chinese export porcelain plate rim fragment; green and blue shell-edge pearlware plate rim fragments; and an English wine bottle fragment.

Visitors also can view the headstone for Priscilla Hemings, carved by John Hemmings. Priscilla Hemings (ca. 1776–1830) was a nursemaid to Jefferson’s grandchildren and a favorite of the family. She and her husband John, lived several miles apart until 1809, when her owners, Jefferson’s daughter and son-in-law, moved to Monticello. This headstone was found on the Monticello grounds in the 1960s. The site of her grave, likely an undiscovered graveyard on the plantation, is unknown.

This section of the exhibition also features a glimpse into the Monticello woodworking and furniture-making shop, called the joinery, because the furniture made there was held together with wooden joints rather than nails. Jefferson established the joinery to produce the distinctive architectural woodwork for his house. Here joiners (highly skilled carpenters) made doors, windows, and decorative finish work, such as cornices, mantels, balustrades, and railings. Visitors are invited to try their hand at connecting pieces with mortise and tenon joints.

The Gillette Family

Though Jefferson referred to them simply as Ned and Jenny, their son Israel stated in 1873 that his parents’ names were Edward and Jane Gillette. Both farm laborers, they had 12 children and lived on the Monticello home farm. Jefferson said he had “most perfect confidence” in Edward.

The Gillette children learned a variety of valuable skills, including barrel-making, shoemaking, caring for horses, and cooking. The family used expertise and entrepreneurship to improve their situation, selling fish, chickens, eggs, garden produce, and wooden pails to the Jefferson family. Israel remembered Jefferson’s death as “an affair of great moment and uncertainty to us slaves.” In 1827, Edward, Jane, nine of their children, and 12 grandchildren were sold.

Barnaby Gillette, a cooper, made flour barrels that Jefferson sold to the tenants of his gristmill. In 1813, Jefferson offered Barnaby an incentive: the price of one barrel for every 31 he made. He could thus earn more money than most other Monticello slaves—up to $40 a year. His brothers Gill, Israel, and

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ADD SIX/SLAVERY AT JEFFERSON’S MONTICELLO

James worked in the stable and drove Jefferson’s carriage made by his enslaved tradesmen.

Guests can view the full Gillette family tree as well as items from Mulberry Row that they might have used. These artifacts include: a cradle scythe, used to cut wheat; children’s toys such as clay marbles, ceramic doll parts, dominoes, and dice; a brass jaw harp; horse stirrups, a spur, a stirrup bar from saddle tree; a draw-knife to shape wooden barrel staves; and barrel hoops made from sheet iron.

The Fossett Family
Joseph Fossett was a son of Mary Hemings Bell (daughter of Elizabeth Hemings). Bell lived in Charlottesville as a free person after Jefferson sold her to her white common-law husband, though he was unwilling to sell Joseph and his sister Betsy. Fossett’s efficiency as a nail-maker and house servant led to his training as a blacksmith at age 16.

During Jefferson’s presidency, Fossett’s wife, Edith Hern Fossett, lived in D.C. to learn the art of French cooking. Three of the Fossetts’ 10 children were born in the White House. In 1806, Jefferson reported that Joseph had run away from Monticello, failing to realize he was visiting his wife. When Jefferson retired, the Fossetts became head cook and blacksmith at Monticello. Jefferson freed Joseph in his will, but Edith and seven of their children were sold.

Guests can view the full Fossett family tree as well as items they might have made or used. These artifacts include: a slate tablet and pencil fragments; horseshoes, nails, and a crucible fragment; an iron hook, a loop hinge, punch, and skewer; a copper vegetable pot and sauté pan; and a wrought iron meat fork and ragout (stew) spoon.

The Hern Family
The story of David and Isabel Hern illustrates the strength of the African American family within an institution that constantly threatened family unity. Although slave marriage was illegal in Virginia, enduring unions were the norm at Monticello. The Herns, whose marriage lasted until Isabel’s death in 1819, had 12 children. Sons Moses and James married “abroad” (off the Monticello plantation) and persuaded Jefferson to buy their wives so they could live together.

David was a skilled woodworker and wheelwright. Jefferson considered him one of the “best hands” to blast rock with gunpowder. After Jefferson’s death, David and his 34 surviving children and grandchildren were sold.

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ADD SEVEN/SLAVERY AT JEFFERSON’S MONTICELLO

David Jr., a wagoner, made regular solo trips to transport goods between Monticello and Washington, D.C. during Jefferson’s presidency. He was able to visit his wife, Frances Gillette Hern, an apprentice cook in the White House kitchen. Other male slaves, including Elizabeth Hemings’ sons Robert and Martin, periodically traveled and worked away from Monticello. Even with this level of autonomy, family bonds led enslaved men to keep returning to Monticello.

Guests can view the full Hern family tree as well as items from Mulberry Row believed to belong to the Herns. These artifacts include: a tree felling ax; a single-tree, used to attach an ox or other draft animal to a wagon; an ox shoe; an iron axle hub, which connected a wooden carriage wheel to the axle; parts of a wheel jack, for raising a wagon for maintenance or replacing a wheel; and a fragment of a cog that moved the axle up and down. Using David Jr. as an example, visitors are asked to reflect on the question, “If you were enslaved at Monticello, would you try to run away?”

The Granger Family
Jefferson purchased George and Ursula Granger and their sons in 1773 because Ursula Granger was a “favorite housewoman” of his wife. Ursula supervised the kitchen, smokehouse, and washhouse from 1773 through the 1790s. George was the Monticello farm foreman and, later, overseer. The Grangers’ three sons were trusted and skilled artisans and laborers. George, Ursula, and their son George died within months of one another in 1799 and 1800. The youngest son, Isaac, later known by the surname Jefferson, survived into the 1840s as a free man in Petersburg, Virginia.

Guests can view the Granger family tree as well as items associated with the Grangers’ activities. These artifacts include: imported tobacco pipe fragments; a tobacco hoe and folding knife; horseshoes; tweezers; a chain and bridoon bit for horse; an axe head and scythe; wine bottles; an English stoneware jar for storing food; and Delftware apothecary and pharmaceutical jar fragments.

The Hubbard Brothers
Though their family lived at Jefferson’s Poplar Forest plantation, brothers James and -MORE-
ADD EIGHT/SLAVERY AT JEFFERSON’S MONTICELLO

Philip Hubbard were brought to Monticello in their early teens to work in the nailery. In later years, both were runaways, but for different reasons. In 1805, with money he had saved, James purchased forged “free papers.” He set out on foot for Washington, D.C. but was apprehended outside the city, when his papers were spotted as forgeries. He left Monticello again six years later, remaining at large for over a year. He was caught, sold by Jefferson, and later ran away for good. Philip also ran away: from Poplar Forest to Monticello to persuade Jefferson to intervene with an overseer so he and his wife, Hannah, could live together.

In the nailery, enslaved boys worked from sunup to sundown six days a week, swinging their hammers over a hot forge as many as 20,000 times a day. In 1806, an overseer reported that most nailers made between eight and 10 pounds of nails a day.

Debt and Dispersal
When Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, he left a debt of $107,000 (over a million dollars in today’s currency). Despite his efforts, the plantation was unprofitable, and his expenses were heavy. He died believing a public lottery would raise the money to keep his daughter, her family, and the enslaved workers at Monticello. Six months after his death, his executors were forced to sell the land, the house, and its contents, and 130 enslaved men, women, and children. Families who had served the Jeffersons for nearly 60 years stood on the auction block on a cold January day in 1827. Only seven people were spared: the five whom Jefferson freed in his will—Burwell Colbert, Joseph Fossett, John Hemmings, Madison Hemings, and Eston Hemings—and two whose informal emancipation he had recommended—Sally Hemings and Wormley Hughes.

AFTER MONTICELLO

Getting Word: An Oral History Project
In 1993, Monticello historians began an oral history project called Getting Word. By interviewing the descendants of Monticello’s enslaved families, they hoped to catch the words of ancestors—getting word back about who they were, where they lived, and what dreams they had for their children. Over 100 interviews later, some universal themes have emerged: the importance of education, the centrality of faith and the church, the formidable strength of family bonds, and the struggle for freedom and equality.

The enslaved people of Monticello and their descendants strove to make Jefferson’s
ideals a reality. They believed in the truth of the Declaration, cherished the hope that it would one day be more than an ideal, and joined with—and often led—countless other African Americans in the cause of liberty.

Here, visitors can watch a four-minute video highlighting the stories of descendants including Coralie Franklin Cook (1858–1941), a descendant of Elizabeth Hemings, who, born in slavery, became the first known descendant of Monticello slaves to graduate from college. She was a suffragist, friend of Susan B. Anthony, well-known speaker, professor of oratory at Howard University, and member of the Washington, D.C. board of education. In 1896, she co-founded the National Association of Colored Women, an organization of black women activists formed before the NAACP and still active today.

Peter Fossett (1815–1901), son of Joseph and Edith Fossett, became a caterer, community leader, and minister, active in the Underground Railroad after family members helped to purchase his freedom. He founded the First Baptist Church in Cumminsville, Ohio, in 1870. Ann-Elizabeth Fossett Isaacs (1812–1902), the Fossetts’ fourth child and Peter’s sister, became free in 1837 through her family’s efforts and moved permanently to southern Ohio in 1850. Her grandson: William Monroe Trotter (1872–1934), graduated from Harvard and became a dynamic crusader against racial injustice. In 1905, Trotter, along with W.E.B. Du Bois founded the Niagara Movement, forerunner of the NAACP, and together they drafted its Declaration of Principles, “We pray God that this nation ... will return to the faith of the fathers, that all men were created free and equal, with certain unalienable rights.” Trotter’s great-niece Peggy Dammond Preacely was active in the civil rights movement in the 1960s, joining sit-ins at lunch counters and spending many days in jail.

At least eight descendants of Elizabeth Hemings (and two men who married into the family) served in the Civil War. Four were in black regiments and four in white—all on the Union side. Frederick Madison Roberts (1879–1952), a Hemings descendant, became an educator, business leader, editor of the Los Angeles New Age, and the first black member of the California legislature.

**Monticello and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation**

Levy family ownership continued until 1923, when the newly formed Thomas Jefferson Foundation acquired Monticello. A non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Monticello (a -MORE-
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United Nations World Heritage site) and education about Jefferson, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation owns and operates Monticello today. Since the 1950s, staff archaeologists, historians, and curators have been engaged in research about the plantation and its communities.

Monticello slaves and their descendants were untiring in their efforts to make Jefferson’s ideals of liberty and equality a reality. Their life stories reveal the flourishing of the human spirit within a deeply unjust and dehumanizing institution. Presenting history from the perspective of enslaved individuals can help all Americans understand the struggle of African Americans to gain full citizenship in a country that continues to grapple with issues of race.

Jefferson Documents
The National Constitution Center will display several documents in connection with Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello—many written in Jefferson’s own hand. The documents will be available for view on the second floor of the museum inside the Constitution Center’s main exhibition, The Story of We the People, and include: a slave ship pardon from 1808 on loan from the National Archives and Record Administration; a list of slaves owned by Jefferson at his Tomahawk and Bear Creek plantations on loan from the Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia; and an 1821 anti-slavery letter written by Jefferson to Spencer Roane.

Visitors also will have an opportunity to view a rare printing of the Declaration of Independence while visiting the Constitution Center. The 1823 Stone Declaration is on loan from the collection of David M. Rubenstein, co-founder and co-chief executive officer of the private equity firm The Carlyle Group.

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Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello
At the National Constitution Center from April 9 through October 19, 2014
Presented by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello in partnership with the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello is included in the cost of general admission, which includes the museum’s main exhibition, The Story of We the People, the award-winning theatrical production Freedom Rising, and Signers’ Hall. General museum admission prices are $14.50 for adults, $13 for seniors ages 65 and over, and $8 for children ages 4-12. Active military personnel and children ages 3 and under are free. Group rates also are available. For ticket information, call 215.409.6700 or visit www.constitutioncenter.org.