

Washington *Papers*

FALL 2017

Slavery in Barbados and Virginia *A Cross-Cultural Exchange*

Lynn Price, ASSISTANT EDITOR

George Washington became a slaveholder at age 11 when he inherited 10 slaves upon the death of his father, Augustine Washington, and he continued to own slaves throughout his life. However, his views regarding the peculiar institution evolved over time, and in his will, he promised to free his slaves upon Martha's death.

As a 19-year-old, George traveled to Barbados with his half brother Lawrence. Although his surviving diary of the experience does not explicitly discuss slavery on the island, his encounters with slavery there likely brought to view a higher level of brutality than he had witnessed in Virginia.

By the time of George Washington's birth, Virginia had been settled by Britain for 125 years. Soon after its colonization, Virginia began growing and exporting tobacco to England as part of a plantation-based economy. Barbados, meanwhile, had been colonized by Britain in 1625 and quickly became a vital trading partner of Virginia. While the island's tropical climate was favorable to the tobacco and cotton industries, the low market value of such exports led planters to switch to higher value sugar production in the 1640s. With the assistance of Dutch entrepreneurs, Barbados soon built a prosperous sugar industry.

With sugar as the predominant crop, land in Barbados became scarce for other endeavors. To fulfill additional needs, residents

relied on imports such as livestock, foodstuffs, and lumber, many of which were supplied by Virginia traders. In return, Virginians imported slaves from the island. The economic connection between the colonies later prompted thousands of Barbadians to migrate to Virginia, where land could be obtained more readily. The emigrants

comprised substantial numbers of slaveholders and slaves, who brought their ideas and customs with them.¹

The sugar revolution in Barbados demanded a steady workforce, leading the island to become the first English-American colony to replace indentured servants with African slaves. It gained a reputation as a harsh environment for the enslaved.² For plantation owners, on the other hand, Barbados became a highly profitable venture, earning the status of Britain's most valuable colony. Even as the much larger island of Jamaica surpassed Barbados in sugar

production in 1720, the industry continued to thrive, as did the institution of slavery.³ Virginia—with a climate that precluded sugar production—remained a tobacco colony and, like Barbados, transitioned from indentured servants to slaves.

Barbados influenced slavery in Virginia. In 1661, the island government passed an "Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes," making Barbados the first English colony to extensively

Continued on page 10.



Washington at Mount Vernon,
lithograph by Nathaniel Currier (1852).

Courtesy of Mount Vernon Ladies' Association.

Always Moving Forward



With the anticipated end dates for The Papers of George Washington, the Martha Washington Papers, and the Family Papers projects on the horizon, we are planning for the future. The Center for Digital Editing, led by senior editor Jennifer Stertz, continues to bring projects together, ensuring that the talent and expertise cultivated at The Washington Papers and beyond are not lost. Already, collaborations have been organized with more than 20 different organizations (see page 12).

Meanwhile, work on The Papers of George Washington carries on. Volume 25 of the *Revolutionary War Series* will be published in the fall. A single-volume edition of the diary Washington kept on his journey to Barbados, his only travel beyond the shores of the North American continent, is anticipated in the spring of 2018. Two other volumes are currently under editorial review: *Presidential Series* volume 20 (the penultimate volume in that series) and *Revolutionary War Series* volume 26. Work is under way on volumes 27 through 29 of the latter series.

The Martha Washington Papers project also is progressing steadily. The team, which is preparing as comprehensive a volume as possible, has found more than 80 letters to and from Martha that were missing from the only other documentary

edition of her papers. As of now, transcription is complete, and editors are deep into annotation.

We continue to engage with the public by sharing our historical insights. Some of these efforts have garnered widespread recognition. For example, a link from *The Oatmeal* website to a Washington Papers blog post resulted in more than 60,000 online hits for us in two days. And a blog post about the Hartford Conference—a November 1780 event overshadowed by Benedict Arnold’s treachery—received praise from National Archivist David Ferriero.

These efforts would not be possible without the generosity of our donors and funding institutions. We invite you to read the complete donors list on page 9. We are deeply grateful for the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the Packard Humanities Institute, the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, the Florence Gould Foundation, and the University of Virginia. Thank you!

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Above
Cameo portrait of Martha Washington,
created with ivory, gold, and mother-of-pearl (c. 1830-1870).
Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Woman in the Shadows

An Interview with a Martha Washington Interpreter

Katie Blizzard, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST
Katharine McEnergy Pittman, COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG INTERPRETER

Following the death of George Washington, Martha burned her correspondence with him, effectively casting herself into the shadow of her famous husband. Katharine McEnergy Pittman, a first-person historical interpreter of Martha Washington at Colonial Williamsburg, is helping to shed light once again on Martha. Communications specialist Katie Blizzard recently spoke with Pittman.

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Katie Blizzard: **What do you wish more people knew about Martha Washington?**
Katharine McEnergy Pittman: I wish people knew more about her involvement behind the scenes. She was so effective in her constant support and assistance to Washington: going to every single winter camp, going to the presidency, establishing what that role of the First Lady is. And yet, she was never asked if she wanted any of it. Many people talk about Washington’s duty to his country, but Martha’s duty to her country was just as fierce as his.

KB: **Are there any liberties you have to take in order to make Martha accessible today?**
KMP: I’ve noticed a lot of questions about slavery and Martha’s perspective on it, especially recently. One of the trickiest things for me is that Martha was a typical eighteenth-century woman. But to answer [in that way] would come off sounding harsh and racist.



Katharine McEnergy Pittman dressed as Martha Washington.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

You have to find a way to answer this in character but give all due respect to the person you’re talking about. It’s a very fine line.

KB: **Has Martha rubbed off on you?**
KMP: Definitely. When you interpret a character, you have to find some similarities with them in order to find their humanity. I’ve found that Martha is a fiercely loyal and protective person, at least in my interpretation of her. That’s something I am as well. Especially now having my son, I understand on a new level Martha’s motherly instincts.

KB: **Any final comments?**
KMP: I encourage people to come and talk to us [historical interpreters]. Oftentimes, especially when interpreting in first-person, I think people can’t quite wrap their heads around what we’re doing. But if people really would immerse themselves into what we’re saying, it can give such a different perspective on this time, that a history book could not even begin to scratch the surface on.



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THE WASHINGTON PAPERS IN THE NEWS

- Managing editor William M. Ferraro reviewed *Fatal Sunday: George Washington, the Monmouth Campaign, and the Politics of Battle*, by Mark Edward Lender and Gary Wheeler Stone, for *The Journal of American History*.
- *The Historian* will feature assistant editor Lynn Price’s book review of *The Washingtons* by Flora Fraser. *The Historian* is a quarterly historical journal published by Phi Alpha Theta.
- A May 2017 comic strip from website *The Oatmeal* cited research specialist Kathryn Gehred’s blog post “Did George Washington’s false teeth come from his slaves?” *The Oatmeal* used Gehred’s scholarship to help illustrate the psychological phenomenon known as the backfire effect, a reaction that occurs when core beliefs are challenged. In this instance, consideration of how George Washington’s dentures may have come to include teeth from his slaves challenges a core belief in his character.
- In a Feb. 22, 2017, article about George Washington’s medical history, *The Washington Post* extensively quoted from a report about the possible causes of George Washington’s death. The examination was a collaboration between University of Virginia physician White McKenzie Wallenborn and The Washington Papers.

An Introduction to Presidential Series

Volume 20, April–September 1796

Thomas E. Dulan, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

To many an individual who has toiled lifelong, the word “retirement” sounds very much like “Holy Grail.” It was no different for George Washington, whose unequaled service to his country had long since merited rest under his “vine and fig tree.”

Volume 20 of the *Presidential Series*, soon to be published, covers the period of April 1 to Sept. 21, 1796, during which Washington had entered the final year of his presidency and had begun to prepare for retirement. First and foremost, there was the matter of a farewell address—an issue that could not wait, lest efforts be undertaken to persuade him to forestall, yet again, his repose from public life. Four years earlier, he had enlisted James Madison’s assistance in composing a farewell address, which was rendered ineffectual when Washington was dissuaded from exiting the stage. Now, such was his determination to return to Mount Vernon that he appealed to Alexander Hamilton for help with an address nearly a year before his second term as president would close. This time, he would not be turned from his purpose.

Washington’s Farewell Address was no small undertaking—literally years in the making—and it produced enough drafts, revisions, and chronologically challenging contributions to be confounding. Former senior editor David R. Hoth, who himself retired from The Washington Papers in February 2017, proved up to the challenge, rearranging the pieces until a clear, coherent picture of the chronology of events emerged. After long weeks of sorting, assessing, and reassessing, Hoth lays out the complex history of Washington’s remarkable Farewell Address.

When a prominent public figure casts an eye on a restful return to private life, the other eye is firmly focused on preserving legacy. Again, it was no different for Washington, who understood that his legacy as president—to the extent that it would stand apart from those as Revolutionary War hero and Father of His Country—would rest primarily upon the preservation of democracy and the continued functionality of the uniquely American democratic system he had helped create. The Jay Treaty of 1794 with Great Britain tested those institutions. The treaty had been signed, consented to by the Senate, and ratified by the president, but there remained the matter of paying for its provisions. Debates over the treaty became debates over the separation of powers, as opponents in the House threatened to withhold funds—in effect, blunting treaty implementation. Washington was quick to condemn such measures and argued that funding should be automatic with ratification. Ultimately, the House approved funds.

The treaty improved relations with Britain, and, in turn, worsened relations with France. This and other thorny matters, both foreign and domestic, are also covered by Hoth in Presidential 20 as he, too, exits the stage in search of his own vine and fig tree.

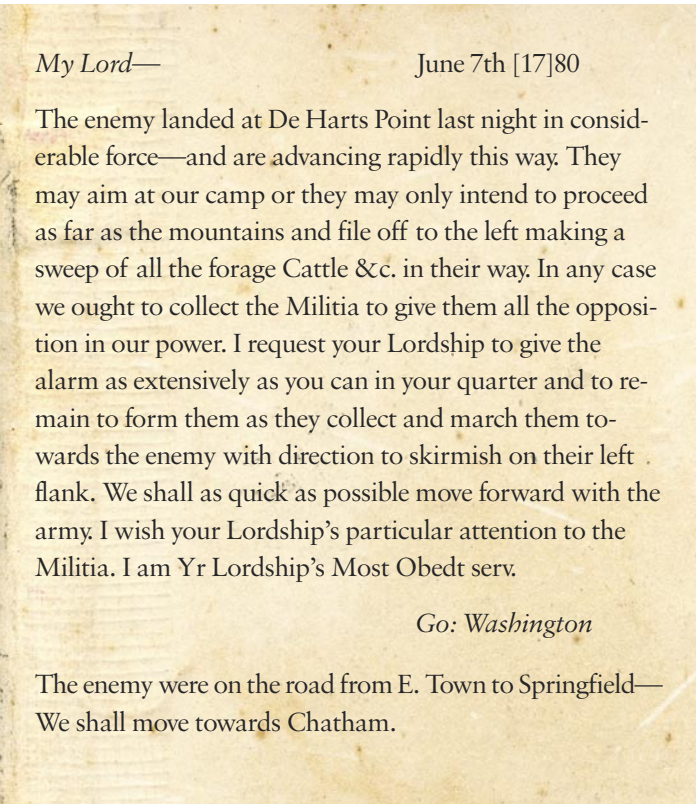


“Vine and Fig Tree,” cross-stitch linen exhibited by the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework (1908).

Courtesy of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Memorial Hall Museum, Deerfield, Massachusetts.

General Washington Calls on the Militia of New Jersey

Benjamin L. Huggins, ASSOCIATE EDITOR



In this brief letter, Gen. George Washington called on Major General Stirling (also known as William Alexander, Lord Stirling) to take charge of the New Jersey militia. By doing so, Stirling could oppose an invasion of that state by British forces and their German auxiliaries, both under the command of Lt. Gen. Wilhelm von Knyphausen. The incursion had begun at 11:00 PM the night before with the landing of four regiments at Elizabethtown Point and soon swelled to 6,000 men. Only the New Jersey Brigade, guarding nearby Elizabeth, N.J., was in position to oppose the landings, but it numbered a mere 870 men.

Washington, though, soon put in motion the six brigades of his army at Morristown, 20 miles away. Knyphausen, seeking to capture Springfield, N.J., and penetrate Washington’s camp at Morristown, had expected little resistance, especially from the

militia. But his hopes were dashed as his troops pushed through Elizabeth and moved closer to Springfield. The tenacious resistance of the Jersey brigade and Washington’s decisive action in marching to defend Springfield blunted the German general’s offensive and forced him to retreat.

However, the greatest reason for Knyphausen’s withdrawal was the swift response and stiff opposition of the Jersey militiamen. They turned out in large numbers to harass the flanks of Knyphausen’s column, impede his march, and threaten his rear. Washington praised them in a letter to Samuel Huntington, president of Congress, on June 10: “The Militia have turned out with remarkable spirit and have hitherto done themselves great honor.”

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These letters will appear in the forthcoming *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, volume 26 (to be published in 2018), co-edited by Benjamin L. Huggins and assistant editor Adrina Garbooshian-Huggins.



Battle of Connecticut Farms, painted by Larry Felder (1989). On display at the Caldwell Parsonage in Union, New Jersey.

Courtesy of Union Township Historical Society.

Washington’s Leadership Through ‘steady perseverance’

Adrina Garbooshian-Huggins, ASSISTANT EDITOR

I trust...that a steady perseverance, and our spirited exertions, will put things right again.

— George Washington to Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., in a letter dated Aug. 4, 1777

One measure of leadership is the ability to inspire in the most difficult of times, and George Washington delivered this expression of resolve and optimism at just such a moment. Following the British capture of Ticonderoga, N.Y., in early July 1777, Connecticut governor Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., wrote Washington on July 28. Complaining that the “Militia are one half gone home,” he appealed for Continental reinforcements for the northern army to help counter an enemy advance. But a “deficiency” in the regiments had rendered Washington unable to grant the request. Washington and Trumbull feared that the evacuation of Ticonderoga and the subsequent retreat of Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair’s army would allow the British to penetrate into northern New York and western New England, thus cutting off communication between New England and the southern states. Washington’s frustration with “that languor which has but too generally prevailed throughout the States” to fill their quotas of the regiments suggests that the army lacked the troops required to hinder such a British advance. Yet, despite such difficulties, Washington relayed a message of perseverance and hope. It would be neither the first time nor the last time during the course of the war that Washington would articulate a message of perseverance.

The commander in chief again demonstrated such leadership in the spring of 1780, when starvation threatened the army at the Jockey Hollow winter encampment near Morristown, New Jersey. In a letter to his cousin Lund Washington on May 19, 1780 (which will appear in the forthcoming *Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series* volume 26, co-edited by myself and associate editor Benjamin L. Huggins), Washington wrote:

You ask how I am to be rewarded for all this? There is one reward that nothing can deprive me of, & that is, the consciousness of having done My duty with the strictest rectitude, and most scrupulous exactness—and the certain knowledge, that if we should—ultimately—fail in the



*George Washington after the Battle of Princeton, 1779–82, painted by Charles Willson Peale (1784).
Courtesy of the Princeton University Art Museum.*

present contest, it is not owing to the want of exertion in me, or the application of every means that Congress and the United States, or the States individually, have put into my hands.

Washington continued by invoking his faith in a “[Provi]dence” that “has always displayed its power & goodness, when clouds and thick darkness seemed ready to overwhelm us.” He penned this letter during a period in which the army was contending with severe provision shortages, a crisis that ultimately led to a mutiny in the Connecticut line in late May. Around the same time, Washington received reports of British incursions on the New York frontier and did not know the fate of the southern army in Charleston, S.C., which had in fact surrendered to the British on May 12. The difficulties facing the army prompted Washington to write to Lund about the increasing need for the “bounty” of Providence. In spite of his seeming desperation, Washington trusted in Providence and underscored his persistence to realize a successful conclusion to the war.

Andrew Jackson A Second Washington?

Thomas Coens, ASSOCIATE EDITOR, THE PAPERS OF
ANDREW JACKSON

During his lifetime, Andrew Jackson often was dubbed a “Second Washington,” and indeed, there is much to recommend the comparison. Both were generals-turned-presidents who had saved the country from the British on the battlefield. Other similarities, however, were not so flattering: both owned slaves, had little in the way of formal education, and were known for occasional fits of bad temper.

Throughout both the 1824 and 1828 campaigns as well as Jackson’s presidency, his supporters frequently juxtaposed the

Many people do not realize that Washington and Jackson’s political careers overlapped, and that Jackson once had rather mixed feelings about the “Father of His Country.”

two men for propaganda purposes. Friendly newspapers crowned Jackson “the second Washington and Saviour of his country,” and public events were staged capitalizing on the comparison. In 1824, for example, Jackson was gifted with a pair of Washington’s pistols, and in 1833 he spoke at a cornerstone-laying ceremony for a monument honoring Washington’s mother in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

In reality, Jackson’s attitude toward Washington was much more complicated than these appropriations suggest. Many people do not realize that Washington and Jackson’s political careers overlapped, and that Jackson, who was a freshman congressman during Washington’s final months as president, once had rather mixed feelings about the “Father of His Country.” Jackson was a Democratic-Republican who, during his tenure in Congress, sided quite consistently with the Jeffersonian opposition and against the supporters of presidents Washington and Adams.

On Dec. 15, 1796, Jackson was one of only 12 congressmen who voted against approving a speech thanking Washington for his Farewell Address.

The extent of Jackson’s disillusionment with Washington is revealed in a remarkable letter he wrote three days after that vote. Addressed to Daniel Smith, Jackson’s letter was until recently thought to be mostly lost to posterity. The manuscript, which is housed in the Library of Congress’s Jackson Papers collections, is so badly mutilated that only the opening few lines and several stray passages survive. The full text of the letter, fortunately, was recovered by The Papers of Andrew Jackson in 2008 when it was found printed in an 1879 issue of the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*.

In the letter, Jackson assails “the Administration of the American Government for these four years past,” and condemns Washington for unfairly favoring Britain at the expense of France, America’s Revolutionary ally. “I view the present as a solemn crisis in the American history,” Jackson lamented. “Nothing can ward off the horrid scene of war unless Jefferson should be elected President, of which I have but very little hope.” Jackson also explained his vote against thanking Washington for his Farewell Address: “View the [House’s] answer to the President’s speech [i.e., the “answer” Jackson refused to vote for]; you will see the majesty of the people prostrate at the feet of their servant, George Washington, anointing him with the most fulsome adulation for no other merit than performing the constitutional duties of his office. I never like to see the creator worshipping the created.”



The manuscript of Jackson’s letter in which he criticizes George Washington.
Courtesy of Library of Congress.

News and Announcements

Personnel

The Washington Papers Welcomes Two New Assistant Editors



Jeffrey Zvengrowski joined The Washington Papers in December as an assistant editor. A gift from the Florence Gould Foundation finances his position. He is working on

The Papers of George Washington Revolutionary War Series, volume 28, which will span September to November 1780 and will include Benedict Arnold’s treason and the Hartford Conference.

Canadian-born Zvengrowski moved from his hometown of Calgary, Alberta, to Charlottesville, Va., in 2008 to pursue a doctoral degree in American history at the University of Virginia. His dissertation focused on connections between the Democratic Party and French Bonapartists in the nineteenth century and served as the basis for *They Stood Like the Old Guard of Napoleon: Jefferson Davis and the Pro-Bonaparte Democrats, 1800–1870*, scheduled for publication in 2018 by the Louisiana State University Press. Zvengrowski looks forward to strengthening his knowledge of French-American relations through study of George Washington’s Revolutionary War documents. In addition to his expertise in French-American relations, Zvengrowski brings transcription experience to The Washington Papers, having worked for the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities’ Documents Compass project from 2013 to 2015.



In July, The Washington Papers welcomed assistant editor **Dana Stefanelli**, who is based at Mount Vernon. Stefanelli said he brings to the project a “deep appreciation for the

life and legacy of George Washington.” He is editing *Revolutionary War Series*, volume 29,

which covers the winter months of 1780 and details the aftermath of Arnold’s treachery and the deepening of French military engagement in the war.

A native of Florida, Stefanelli earned his bachelor’s degree at Florida State University before pursuing his master’s and doctoral degrees at the University of Virginia. His dissertation explored the planning, construction, and settlement of early Washington, D.C., up to 1831.

Stefanelli has taught students about the periods surrounding the Revolutionary War, but has not concentrated on the military operations. He looks forward to gaining expertise on the war in his new post.

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Engagement

The Washington Papers Visits Capitol Hill

In March, Washington Papers senior editor **Jennifer Stertz**, research specialist **Kathryn Gehred**, and communications specialist **Katie Blizzard** attended the National Humanities Alliance’s annual Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C.

The two-day event began with lectures and panels on the role and current state of the humanities. The next day, Stertz, Gehred, and Blizzard visited the U.S. Capitol to meet with senators and representatives about the impact of the humanities on public education and scholarship. Sharing their experiences at The Washington Papers, the project members specifically advocated for sustained funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, two federal institutions that generously fund the Papers.

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Editors Study (and Teach) Abroad

In June, assistant editor **Adrina Garbooshian-Huggins** and copy editor **Jane Haxby** participated in classes at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI) in Victoria, Canada. Haxby attended a course on editing XML, a computer-coding language that helps make documentary editing materials accessible online. She hopes these new skills will allow her to contribute more to the production of digital materials. Garbooshian-Huggins attended a course on conceptualizing a digital edition, which will strengthen her understanding of The Washington Papers’ digital edition. **Jennifer Stertz**, a longtime instructor at DHSI, taught the course with assistance from colleague **Erica Cavanaugh**. In addition to assisting Stertz, Cavanaugh co-instructed a course about Drupal, the content-management system she and Stertz used to create the *George Washington Financial Papers*, a born-digital edition.

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Editors Engage with Peers at Conference

The Washington Papers were well-represented at June’s annual Association for Documentary Editing (ADE) conference in Buffalo, New York. **Katie Blizzard**, assistant editor **Lynn Price**, and **Jennifer Stertz**, who then served as ADE’s president, all shared what they have learned from their work at The Washington Papers.

Price discussed her scholarship on George Washington’s Barbados diary, asserting in one panel conversation that the diary would be virtually incomprehensible without extensive annotation. In another discussion, which assessed challenges faced by documentary editors, Price explained the methods she and co-editor Alicia K. Anderson used to contextualize diary material.

Blizzard and Stertz led discussions about the role of documentary editing projects outside the

academic world. Blizzard explored how projects can engage with the public, while Stertz discussed maximizing outreach through increased accessibility and fundraising. Prior to the conference, **Kathryn Gehred** and **Jane Haxby** attended the ADE’s Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents, also known as “Camp Edit.” Camp Edit is a highly regarded workshop on documentary editing for both new and experienced editors. Both Gehred and Haxby said the camp broadened their knowledge and understanding of the various roles and components of documentary editing. Stertz has taught for many years at Camp Edit, including this past year.

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Publications

Ferraro Writes Foreword to Monroe Autobiography

Managing editor **William M. Ferraro** contributed a scholarly foreword to a new edition of *The Autobiography of James Monroe* (first published in 1959). His foreword identifies the manuscript’s editors, examines their treatment of the text, and assesses the work’s research value. Ferraro concluded that despite some “flubs and infelicities,” this edited version of Monroe’s manuscript retains significance for students of early American history.

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Doing Digital Humanities Features Chapter by Stertz

In a volume about current work in the field of digital humanities, **Jennifer Stertz** described the ways in which digital tools are reshaping the field of documentary editing. Her summary article, “Foundations for Digital Editing,” outlined emerging questions and methodologies and encouraged editors to blend the practices and strengths of traditional documentary editing into the evolving environment.

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A topographicall [Description and] Admeasurment [of the yland of] Barbados in t[he West Indyaes], by Richard Ligon ([1657]).

Courtesy of John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Continued from page 1.

legislate slavery.⁴ Among other things, the act covered issues relating to punishment, fugitive slaves, and masters’ authority over slaves versus over servants. Jamaica copied the law in 1664, and South Carolina did the same in 1696.⁵ Although Virginia passed several laws regarding indentured servitude and slavery prior to 1705, that year saw passage of “An act concerning Servants and Slaves,” a compilation similar to the Barbados act.⁶

The more brutal form of slavery that George Washington would have encountered during his weeks on Barbados was described in horrifying terms by a visitor to the island in the 1760s. That

observer saw “the heads of slaves, fixed upon sharp pointed stakes, while their unburied carcases were exposed to be torn by dogs and vultures on the sandy beach.”⁷ After a 1756 visit to Barbados, sailor Edward Thompson declared, “The cruel tyranny exercised over slaves, is shocking to humanity.”⁸ We are left to ponder the reaction of a young George Washington, whose diary of his visit to Barbados remains silent on the issue.

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Alicia K. Anderson and Lynn Price edited the diary Washington kept on his journey to Barbados. The work is due for publication in spring 2018 and will be the most comprehensive treatment of that diary ever undertaken.

1 April L. Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2004), 86, 88.
2 Ibid., 140.
3 Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2012), 19–21.

4 Christopher Tomlins, *Transplants and Timing: Passages in the Creation of an Anglo-American Law of Slavery Histories of Legal Transplantations*, 10 *Theoretical Inq. L.* 389 (2009), 397.
5 Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 239.
6 Tomlins, *Transplants and Timing*, 409. For full text of the act, see *Encyclopedia Virginia*, accessed 7 July 2017, https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/_An_act_concerning_Servants_and_Slaves_1705.

Book Review

Never Caught

Kathryn Gehred, RESEARCH SPECIALIST

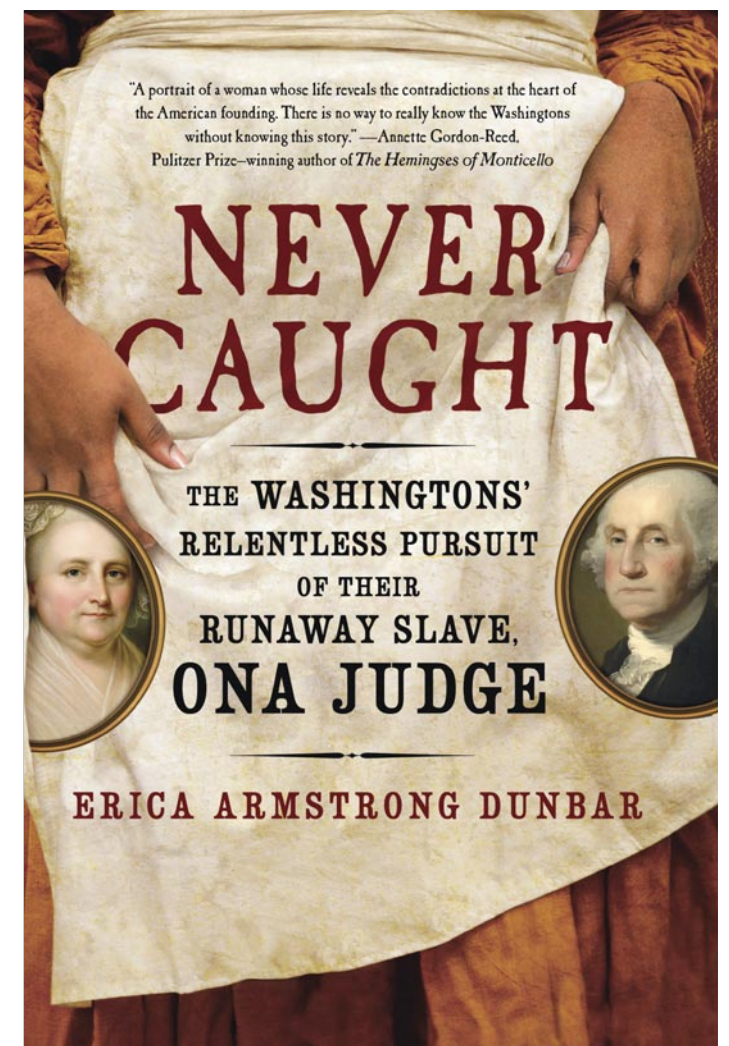
Erica Armstrong Dunbar’s new book, *Never Caught: The Washingtons’ Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*, adds some much-needed depth to the story of Ona Maria Judge Staines. At age 23, Staines escaped enslavement at Mount Vernon by slipping away during dinner and taking a ship to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. She eventually married and started a family, thwarted multiple recapture attempts, and lived as a free woman the rest of her life. Unfortunately, sources about Staines’s life beyond these details are scant. Denied an education and legally considered stolen property (she had stolen herself), Staines understandably left few documents behind.

Dunbar, successfully drawing from her previous research into early Philadelphia’s free black communities, adds context and detail to the story. She further expands upon Staines’s life by focusing on developments significant to her subject rather than on the typical highlights of early U.S. history. Dunbar, for instance, essentially skips the Constitutional Convention, but examines in depth Pennsylvania’s 1780 legislation calling for the gradual emancipation of slaves. By focusing on Staines, and not just on what her actions imply about America’s First Family, Dunbar forces the reader to acknowledge how much of the story is lost when enslaved people are discussed only in reference to their owners.

The book is not without its flaws. Dunbar’s writing can veer toward the fanciful. A sentence like “Her resolve was as solid as the granite found throughout the earth in her new state” would appeal more to a casual reader than to a professional historian. In many cases, descriptions of what Staines must or could have felt underscore the lack of more substantive sources, and they can frustrate readers more interested in an unembellished presentation of facts.

Continued from page 10

7 Quoted in Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies* (New York, 2011), 267.
8 Edward Thompson, *Sailor’s Letters. Written to his Select Friends in England, during his Voyages and Travels in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. From the Year 1754 to 1759, Volume II* (Dublin, 1767), 112.



Never Caught tells a gripping story that should appeal to a wide audience. The bravery and resolve it took for Ona Maria Judge to flee from everything she knew in search of freedom is indisputable. Dunbar’s description of Ona’s siblings and other family members at Mount Vernon provides insight into the ties that made her decision to run so difficult. Staines’s own words resonate today. Asked whether, after living a hard life of poverty, she regretted leaving Mount Vernon, she responded, “No, I am free, and have, I trust been made a child of God by the means.” Dunbar’s book shares a truly American story and paves the way for future biographical work on enslaved people.

Washington *Papers*

The Washington Papers, a grant-funded project, was established in 1968 at the University of Virginia, under the joint auspices of the University and the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, to publish a comprehensive edition of the Washingtons' correspondence.

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Join our mailing and email lists by emailing kblizzard@virginia.edu.

Center for Digital Editing *Awarded Funding from Three Grants, Finalist for Another*

This summer, the Center for Digital Editing (CDE), led by Washington Papers senior editor Jennifer Stertzer, received \$60,714 in combined funding from grants sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Funding primarily supports editorial work and the creation of new digital editions for The John Dickinson Writings Project and The Papers of Martin Van Buren.

Additional funding from the NEH will bring together editors and technical experts for a two-day workshop to discuss, explore, and improve the usability and accessibility of tools that create digital documentary editions.

The CDE also secured a spot in the final round of consideration for a new, competitive grant sponsored by the Mellon Foundation and the NHPRC. The collaborative proposal intends to mobilize a team of leaders, spearheaded by the CDE, from the fields of digital humanities and documentary editing. In short, the Digital Edition Publishing Cooperative seeks to discuss and develop human and technical infrastructure to support the long-term preservation, discovery, and use of digital documentary editions. A decision about the award is anticipated later this year.

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To learn more about these grants, visit centerfordigitalediting.org.