

Washington History in the Classroom

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“Teachable Moment” essays start with a document, map, or image, that invites close analysis to understand its deeper lessons. The features are also windows into how their historian/authors analyze and interpret primary sources to discover layers of context and meaning.

“Washington History magazine is an essential teaching tool,” says Bill Stevens, a D.C. public charter school teacher. “In the 19 years I’ve been teaching D.C. history to high school students, my scholars have used *Washington History* to investigate their neighborhoods, compete in National History Day, and write plays based on historical characters. They’ve grappled with concepts such as compensated emancipation, the 1919 riots, school integration, and the evolution of the built environment of Washington, D.C. **I could not teach courses on Washington, D.C. history without *Washington History*.”**



Bill Stevens engages with his SEED Public Charter School students in the Historical Society’s Kiplinger Research Library, 2016.

Washington History is the only scholarly journal devoted exclusively to the history of our nation’s capital. It succeeds the *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, first published in 1897. *Washington History* is filled with scholarly articles, reviews, and a rich array of images and is written and edited by distinguished historians and journalists. **Washington History** authors explore D.C. from the earliest days of the city to 20 years ago, covering neighborhoods, heroes and she-roes, businesses, health, arts and culture, architecture, immigration, city planning, and compelling issues that unite us and divide us.

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Teachable Moment

Georgetown University and the Business of Slavery

BY ADAM ROTHMAN

On June 19, 1838, Reverend Thomas F. Mulledy S.J., the leader of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus and former president of Georgetown College, agreed to sell 272 enslaved people owned by the Jesuits to two Louisiana planters, Henry Johnson and Jesse Batey. The price, \$115,000, would be paid over a period of ten years at six percent interest per year. The terms of the agreement between Mulledy and the two Louisianans were spelled out in a seven-page, handwritten document now filed in a gray box that is part of the Maryland Province Archives, stored in the Booth Family Center for Special Collections at Georgetown University.¹ A close examination of the “Articles of Agreement,” interpreted in combination with related documents and in light of current historiography, can tell us much about the business of American slavery.

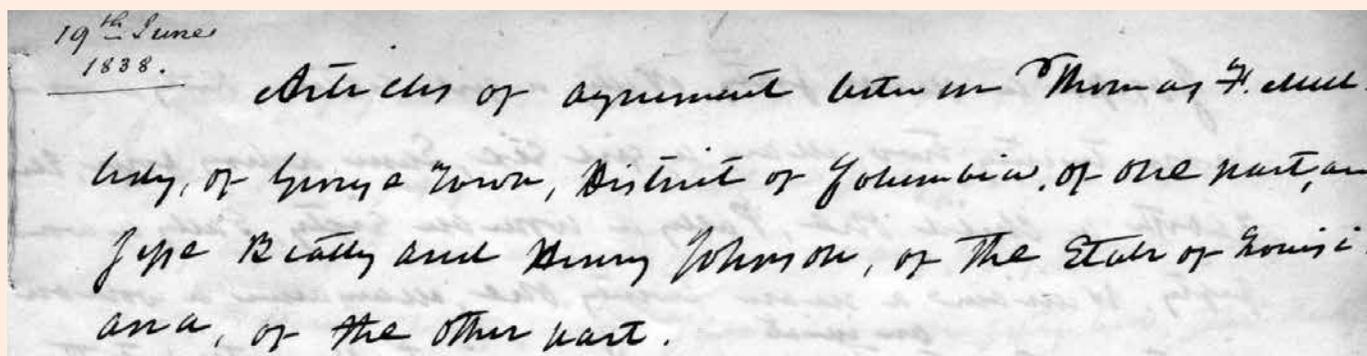
The Maryland Jesuits had amassed their human property for more than a century. They received people as gifts and also purchased them. If the women they owned bore children, those children became Jesuit property, too. By the 19th century, the Maryland Jesuits were among the biggest planters in Maryland, owning roughly 300 people scattered across several different farms and plantations, including Bohemia, White Marsh, St. Thomas Manor, Newtown, and St. Inigoes. The slaves’ family networks spanned generations. They grew tobacco, Maryland’s cash crop, and worked as carpenters, cooks, and artisans of all sorts. The profits from their labor subsidized the Jesuits’ religious and educational activities, including the Jesuits’ flagship school, Georgetown College.

After the War of 1812, however, it became apparent that the Maryland Jesuits were not profiting from slavery. The plantations were losing money, and some Jesuits thought that slavery was to blame. For 20 years the priests deliberated

over what to do with their human property. Should they hold onto their slaves, sell them, or free them? Finally in the mid-1830s, faced with mounting debts at Georgetown, the Jesuits of the Maryland Province, led by Thomas Mulledy, resolved to sell their slaves, harvest the windfall, and shift their farming operations to wage workers and tenant farmers. Like many other slaveowners in the Upper South in the 1830s, they took advantage of the labor-intensive cotton and sugar booms in the Deep South, where slaves were in demand, to cash out.

And yet the Jesuits were divided about the propriety of the sale. “Is it not cruel?” asked one.² Higher-ups in Rome approved the sale but attached conditions to make it palatable to Catholic principles. “Every care should be taken that they be sold in such a way that they have free exercise of the catholic religion,” went the instructions. Husbands and wives must not be separated, and the proceeds of the sale must not be used to pay off debts.³ These conditions tried to reconcile the religious obligations that the Jesuits felt toward the people they owned—obligations that led the priests to baptize, teach, marry, and bury their slaves according to Catholic ritual—with the soulless commercial logic of the slave market.

The Panic of 1837 and the search for acceptable buyers delayed the sale until 1838, when Mulledy found two planters willing to pay his asking price of roughly \$400 per person. Henry Johnson had been governor of Louisiana. His wife Elizabeth Rousby Key came from a prominent Catholic family in Maryland. (She was Francis Scott Key’s cousin.) Jesse Batey, the second Louisianan, owned a plantation in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, called West Oak. Both were looking to buy slaves cheaply in the Upper South and ship them to a new home more than a thousand miles away.



All illustrations, except as noted, appear courtesy, Georgetown University Slavery Archive.

The "Articles of Agreement" contract these men signed in June 1838 can be divided into four parts. The first part, the header to the document, identifies the parties to the sale: "Thomas F. Mulledy, of George Town, District of Columbia, of one part, and Jesse Beatty and Henry Johnson, of the State of Louisiana, of the other part."

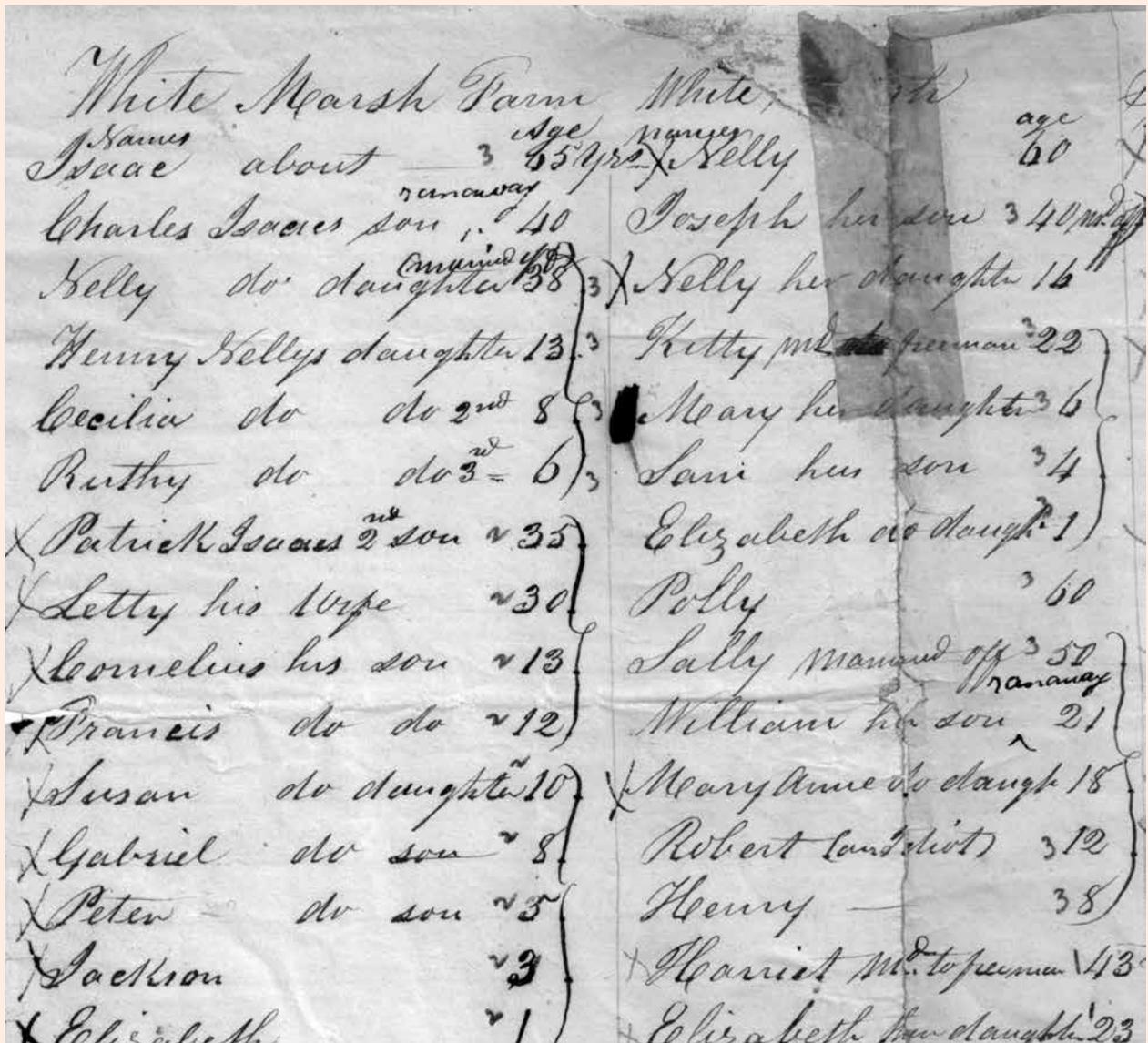
The second and longest part of the document lists all 272 men, women, and children to be sold, an extraordinary snapshot of the Maryland Jesuit slave community at the moment of the agreement. It begins with the following group:

Isaac, a man sixty five years of age, Charles, his eldest son, forty years of age, Nelly his daughter, thirty eight years of age, Henny, a girl thirteen years of age, Cecilia, a girl eight years of age, Ruthy, a girl six years of age, Patrick a man thirty five years of age, Letty, his wife, thirty years of age, Cornelius, thirteen years of age, Francis, a boy twelve years of age, Susan, a girl ten, Gabriel, a boy eight, Peter a boy five, Jackson a boy three, Elizabeth, a child one, James a man twenty eight, Delia a woman twenty two, Susan a girl three, George a boy one, Isaac a man twenty six, Kitty his wife, twenty eight, Austin a boy six, Isaac a boy four, Elias a boy about one and a half . . .

The agreement identifies slaves by name, sex, age, and—in many cases—family relationships. Charles and Nelly were Isaac's children (as were Patrick, James, and the second Isaac). Letty was Patrick's wife; Cornelius, Francis, Susan, Gabriel, Peter, Jackson, and Elizabeth were Patrick and Letty's children. Here were three generations of a family of enslaved people, ranging in age from 65 to one year old. The family relationships among them are sometimes explicitly acknowledged in the language of the agreement and in other cases implied by the order and pattern of the names and ages.

Two other documents clarify the relationships suggested by the Articles of Agreement.

A census taken shortly before the sale listed the members of the Maryland Jesuit slave community according to where they lived.⁴ Isaac, his children, and his grandchildren lived together at White Marsh in Prince George's County. Some were sold to Batey and shipped to West Oak, while others were sold to Johnson and shipped to his plantation in Ascension Parish. Isaac's clan was split across two plantations about 50 miles apart.



A manifest for the *Katherine Jackson*, the vessel that carried many of the Jesuit slaves to Louisiana, reveals yet another important detail. They had surnames. Patrick, Letty, and their children's last name was Hawkins.⁵ Family names including

Butler, West, Harris, Queen, and Dorsey testified to kinship networks that spanned generations and straddled the line between slavery and freedom.

Manifest of Negroes, Mulattoes, and Persons of Color, taken on board the *Katherine Jackson*
of *Georgetown* whereof *John G. Dorsey* is Master, burthen
Four hundred fifty five 185 Tons, to be transported from the Port of *Alexandria*
for the purpose of being sold or disposed of as Slaves, or to be held to service or labor.

Number of Entry.	NAMES.	SEX.	AGE.	HEIGHT.		Whether Negro, Mulatto, or Person of Color.	Owner's or Shipper's Names and Places of Residence.	Consignees names, and places of Residence.
				Feet	Inches.			
✓ 1	<i>Nans Butler</i>	Male	57	5	9	Black	}	}
✓ 2	<i>Bibby D.</i>	Female	14	5	3	Brown		
✓ 3	<i>Caroline D.</i>	"	17	5	7	"		

✓ 59	<i>Burnard Butler</i>	male	38	5	7 1/2	"	}	}
✓ 60	<i>Augustine West</i>	"	13	4	9 1/4	"		
✓ 61	<i>Adel West</i>	Female	9	4	2 1/2	"		
✓ 62	<i>George Harris</i>	male	15	5	6 1/2	"		
✓ 63	<i>Letty D.</i>	Female	50	5	0	"		
✓ 64	<i>Harris D.</i>	"	13	4	5 1/4	"		
✓ 65	<i>Sarah D.</i>	"	12	4	2 1/2	"		
✓ 66	<i>Oliver D.</i>	male	3	5	0 1/2	"		
✓ 67	<i>John Queen</i>	"	35	5	10	"		
✓ 68	<i>Haney D.</i>	Female	25	5	5 1/2	"		
✓ 69	<i>Patrick D.</i>	male	4	5	1 1/4	"		
✓ 70	<i>Dorsey Dorsey</i>	Female	30	5	2 3/4	Brown		
✓ 71	<i>Burnard D.</i>	male	15	5	2	"		
✓ 72	<i>Lucinda D.</i>	Female	13	4	10 1/4	"		
✓ 73	<i>Ann Jones</i>	"	26	5	3 1/2	"		
✓ 74	<i>Arnold D.</i>	male	9	4	4 1/2	"		
✓ 75	<i>Louisa D.</i>	Female	1	5	1 1/2	"		
✓ 76	<i>Emeline Brown</i>	"	13	4	9 1/2	"		

Alexandria

Windsor,

W. H. Thompson

The Deep South was no country for old men. According to the careful calculation of historian Sharon Leon, more than half of the 272 people listed in the agreement were under the age of 20, and 83 were under the age of 10.⁶ At least some of the older slaves may have been left behind in Maryland, and the Jesuits sold some of their people locally to prevent them from being separated from spouses who were free or not owned by the Jesuits. Reverend Mullydy seemed to have followed his superiors' instructions not to separate husbands and wives, though there is little question that the sale massively disrupted the Maryland Jesuit slave community. Those who were transplanted to Louisiana had to remake their lives and families in a strange land under the harsh conditions of cotton and sugar planting.⁷

The agreement stipulated that 51 of the slaves, identified at the end of the Articles of Agreement in a fourth section, were to be sent to Alexandria "as soon as practicable," presumably to be shipped from there to Louisiana, while the rest were to be sent out in the fall. Three additional bills of sale drawn up in November 1838 parceled the remaining slaves out to Johnson and Batey—140 to Johnson and 64 to Batey—

many of whom were then shipped to Louisiana on board the *Katherine Jackson*, a voyage that took three weeks. This "Second Middle Passage," as the historian Ira Berlin describes it, "was the central event in the lives of African-American people between the American Revolution and slavery's final demise in December 1865."⁸

The third section of the agreement detailed the financial terms of the sale. It was not a simple transaction, yet it was a routine one for its era. Selling slaves was an everyday business in Jacksonian America, though it was not every day that a whole community of people was sold at once. That was unusual. The slaves would be purchased for a total of \$115,000—a lot of money. Taking inflation into account, that sum would be worth just over \$3 million today, or considerably more depending on how one compares value over time.⁹ The purchasers agreed to pay an initial \$25,000 upon the delivery of the first 51 slaves, and then would have ten years to pay off the remaining \$90,000 at six percent interest per year. The contract stipulated that the purchasers would have to start paying off the remainder at the end of five years.

It is distinctly understood, however, that the interest is to be paid from the time of the delivery of the slaves, as aforesaid, and that the first payment of interest will commence from the time of said delivery, and be calculated up to the period of

payment, and that the interest thereafter is to be annually paid to W. H. Mullydy, at Georgetown, District of Columbia.

Johnson and Batey bought the slaves on a long credit, and they secured their purchase by mortgaging the slaves, just as one would take out a mortgage on a car or a house today. Moreover, as was common in the 19th century, they signed “notes” (essentially, IOUs) for the purchase value of the slaves and were made responsible for each other’s notes. They also had to find a “responsible person” to back their notes. If either Johnson or Batey failed to pay, his co-signers could be held to account for the debt. In fact, Johnson couldn’t pay. He had to renegotiate the terms of the contract and sell off his property in the 1840s, and the slaves were not fully paid off until just before emancipation during the Civil War, by which time they had been sold again.¹⁰

Isaac Hawkins and the other members of the Maryland Jesuit slave community paid dearly for the Jesuits’ financial and moral calculations. Georgetown College was saved, but the slaves were sold down the river. Recently, Georgetown University and the Society of Jesus have begun to acknowledge their own debt to the slaves who were sold and shipped to Louisiana in 1838. A building on the Georgetown campus once named for Thomas Mulledy is now named for Isaac Hawkins, and Hawkins’ descendants have received a historic apology.¹¹ What more can and should be done to rectify this tragic history will be a subject of debate, negotiation, and work for years to come, but in the meantime, shining a light on the original documents that tell the story is a good place to start.



NOTES

1. Article of Agreement, June 19, 1838, Maryland Province Archives, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University. This and many other documents relating to the sale of the Maryland Jesuit slave community, are available online at the *Georgetown Slavery Archive*, slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/.
2. Dubuisson Memorandum, Dubuisson Memorandum (1836), Provincia Maryland 1005, II, 4, pp. 1–8, Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu.
3. Roothaan to McSherry, Dec. 27, 1836, Box 93, Folder 9, Maryland Province Archives, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University, slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/items/show/94.
4. Census (1838), Oversize Box 4 (WO 112), Maryland Province Archives, BFCS C, GU, online at slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/items/show/71.
5. *Katherine Jackson* manifest, Dec. 6, 1838, National Archives at Fort Worth, slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/items/show/2.
6. Sharon Leon, “Re-Presenting the Enslaved Community sold by the Maryland Province Jesuits in 1838,” Sept. 30, 2016, 6floors.org/bracket/#9.
7. Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. chap. 4.
8. Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 161.
9. For various calculations, see measuringworth.com/.
10. Joseph Zwinge, “The Jesuit Farms in Maryland,” *The Woodstock Letters* 41–3 (1912), 284–285.
11. Julie Zauzmer, “Grappling with its history of slavery, Georgetown gathers descendants for a day of repentance,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 18, 2017.