

Sample True Grit Articles

**George Washington
Appomattox Court House**



[PEOPLE](#) [GROUPS](#) [DIARIES](#) [TAGS](#) [LABOR](#) [COMICS](#) [ELECTIONS](#) [ECON](#) [RADIO](#)

Search



Daily Kos Staff, Front Page [RSS](#)
Daily Kos editors
[Profile](#) [Diaries \(list\)](#)

[Subscribe](#) or [Donate](#) to support Daily Kos.

SUN FEB 09, 2014 AT 06:00 AM PST

George Washington is not my 'Great White Father'

[Denise Oliver Velez](#) [Daily Kos](#)

Share 908 Comments / 908 New

DIARY RECOMMENDED BY

RECOMMENDED BY DENISE OLIVER VELEZ

Black Kos, Tuesday's Chile
by [Black Kos](#) 650/650 New 155 Recs

ACTION: Join NAACP's America's Journey for Justice: Aug.1-Sept. 16
by [soaglow](#) 4/4 New 4 Recs

Ferguson: Press & Protestors Arrested; But Police Give Way As Oathkeeper Militia Turns Up With Guns
by [Chris Reeves](#) 144/144 New 218 Recs

Indians 101: Newfoundland Natives and Early European Invaders
by [Ojibwa](#) 16/16 New 26 Recs

Red Strings and Black Lives: reality confronts mythical 'heritage' in a Southern town
by [DocDawg](#) 42/42 New 85 Recs

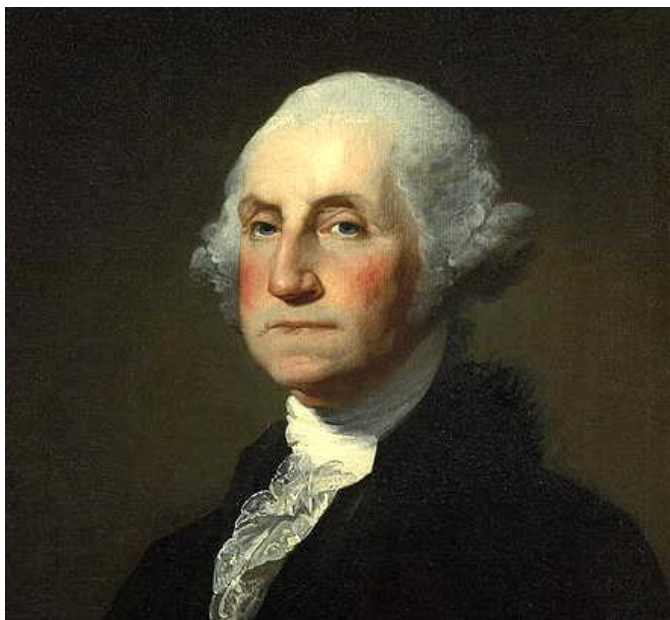
Excuse Me, Pardon, Sorry, Don't Mind Me, Sorry
by [LaFeminista](#) 69/69 New 132 Recs

TWiB Interview With Seattle Protestor Marissa Johnson
by [Chaddiwicker](#) 119/119 New 34 Recs

Study: 12.8% of non-voters in Texas district didn't vote in '14, assuming they had no proper ID
by [Meteor Blades](#) 38/38 New 88 Recs

Black Kos Presents: Book Group: Thomas Sugrue's Sweet Land of Liberty Chapter 10
by [Chitown Kev](#) 14/14 New 14 Recs

Top Comments - Dear Marco Republican
by [BeninSC](#) 27/27 New 32 Recs



Portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart (1846)

There is probably not a person over the age of six in the United States who doesn't recognize this face.

Rarely is his portrait placed side by side with this one.



*Thought to be a portrait of Hercules,
the enslaved chef of George Washington, who escaped (Gilbert Stuart)*

While paeans of praise are heaped upon George Washington, who is dubbed "The Father" of this nation, we are rarely reminded that Washington, like others of his ilk including **11 other presidents**, traded and benefited by owning human flesh, and built his wealth, power, fame and glory on the backs of human beings held in bondage for life.

If and when we are reminded, many historians, teachers and myth-makers make sure this "fact" is explained away, excused, reduced to being only that Washington "was a product of his times."

I don't and won't accept it, and **in honor of my ancestors held in vile bondage**—some even by one of those presidents on the list—I want to tell you how many of us feel about this man and any other owner of humans.

Black history is American history and the tale is often ugly.

Follow me below the fold for more.

Thanks to the work of archaeologists in Philadelphia and a very vocal group of scholars and community activists in the **Avenging The Ancestors Coalition** (ATAC) over the past 10 years, there have been more challenges to the prevailing discourse around Washington and those he enslaved.

Asked why they choose "avenging" in their organizational name they give this **response**:

The word "avenging" comes from the Latin word vindex ("defender, protector") (present active vindico, present infinitive vindicāre, perfect active vindicāvī, supine vindicātum). This passed through Old French to Middle English. As defined by leading etymological dictionaries, to avenge is to pursue "deserved or just punishment for wrongs or oppressions." It has little to do with "revenge," which implies the "infliction of punishment as an act of retaliation" and connotes personal malice and bitter resentment as the moving force. But that's not what ATAC does. That's not what ATAC seeks.

Instead, ATAC seeks deserved or just punishment — i.e., condemnation and correction — in regard to a wrong or oppression, e.g., President George Washington's enslavement of Black men, women, and children here in Philadelphia at America's first "White House." Apart from that, I must mention something that I often wonder about when well-intentioned people ask me why ATAC uses the word "avenge." I wonder why these people express their concern or alarm about "avenge" but never express their concern or alarm — or justifiable horror — about the outrageously brutal violence of slavery itself. Slavery wasn't just the one-time loss of freedom; it was the centuries-long loss of culture, family, land, language, name, religion/spiritual expression, human status, limb, and life. To me,

DENISE OLIVER VELEZ'S TAGS

- Addiction (1027)**
- Affirmative Action (480)**
- AIDS (1514)**
- Anti-choice (969)**
- Civil Rights (44810)**
- Cuban Five (20)**
- Dream Defenders (127)**
- environmental racism (84)**
- Harm Reduction (105)**
- HB-56 (2)**
- Hepatitis C (17)**
- HIV (1009)**
- Immigration (12407)**
- Indian Boarding Schools (18)**
- Loretta Lynch (264)**
- Moral Monday (305)**
- Moral Monday March (8)**
- Moral Monday March on Raleigh (2)**
- Moral Monday protests (9)**
- Moral Monday's (18)**

DENISE OLIVER VELEZ'S BLOGROLL

- Moral March on Raleigh - Feb. 2015**
- Solitary Watch**
- Motley Moose**
- Latino Decisions**
- SisterSong**
- Jay Smooth's ill doctrine**
- Color of Change**
- TransGriot**
- Horizons (Nancy LeTourneau)**
- Native American Netroots**
- The Root**
- Colorlines**
- End Rape on Campus**
- Partners in Health**
- Poz Magazine**

that hellish existence is much more of a concern than the use of the word "avenge."

Clearly, "avenging" is the perfect word.

In **The "Black" Eye on George Washington's "White" House** we get a chance to meet some of the faceless "well-treated" slaves owned by the president from the plantocracy. So well-treated that some of them took the opportunity to escape to freedom, though Washington tried to circumvent the fact that in Pennsylvania they were free.

We learn details about Christopher Sheels, whose escape plan was foiled. Hercules—Washington's renowned enslaved chef who escaped on the night of the president's 65th birthday celebration—did not escape from Philadelphia, as had often been reported.

A birthday shock from Washington's chef:

Contradictory to long-held beliefs, the chef did not flee from his vaunted position in Philadelphia at the end of Washington's second term. He had landed in distinctly less comfortable circumstances that miserable winter. Washington was on guard to prevent another escape during his final months in Philadelphia, where in the spring of 1796 Martha's maid, Oney Judge, had run away. So when he returned to the capitol that fall, Washington left Hercules in Virginia. Runaways from Washington's estate weren't uncommon, and though some managed to flee to the British during the Revolution, most failed, writes Wienczek. Four men escaped in 1761, only to be recaptured. A slave named Sam was caught several times trying to run away. One named Tom was caught and sent away in handcuffs to be sold in the West Indies. Hercules' literate contemporary Christopher was caught when a note to his wife detailing his escape plans was discovered.

Oney Judge proved Philadelphia was a risk. But back at Mount Vernon, surely, Hercules would be secure. The once-trusted chef, also noted for the fine silk clothes of his evening promenades in Philadelphia, suddenly found himself that November in the coarse linens and woolens of a field slave. Hercules was relegated to hard labor alongside others, digging clay for 100,000 bricks, spreading dung, grubbing bushes, and smashing stones into sand to coat the houses on the property, according to farm reports and a November memo from Washington to his farm manager. "That will Keep them," he wrote, "out of idleness and mischief."

When Hercules' son Richmond was then caught stealing money from an employee's saddlebags, Washington made his suspicions of a planned father-son escape clear in a letter: "This will make a watch, without its being suspected by, or intimated to them . . ." By February, after several days of working in the damp chill, Hercules had had enough. Before dawn on Feb. 22, 1797, he launched his quest for freedom.

Mentioned above as one of the reasons for Hercules having been sent back south, about whom we know the most, is **Oney Judge**.

Philadelphia newspapers told her story, like this piece in the *Inquirer*:

A slave's defiance: The story of rebellious Oney Judge is finally being told, along with those of other slaves who lived with George and Martha Washington in Philadelphia.

"I was struck by just the sheer improbability of what she did," said Cheryl J. LaRoche, a historical and archaeological consultant who worked on the excavation of the President's House, Washington's Philadelphia home, during the summer of 2007.

"Women, and black women in particular, were so deeply limited by the whole society, and black women, of course, by slavery. They were the last people, you would think, who would have the wherewithal to attempt to escape."

"Oney's sense of her self and of her self-worth," LaRoche said, led the young woman "to make a claim for herself and for her freedom."

For decades Judge's story went untold at Independence National Historical Park, site of the President's House, where the Washingtons lived with Judge, eight other slaves, and a group of servants. But controversy fueled in 2002 by the park's silence revived the unspoken story of Judge and many others, giving voice to their narratives.

More details can be found at **Enslaved Persons of African Descent in the President's**

Remembering Yuri Kochiyama

MOST SHARED

Retired generals and admirals voice support for Iran nuclear deal

by [Kerry Eleveld](#) 4031
84

Democrats target vulnerable GOP senators who voted to defund Planned Parenthood

by [Kerry Eleveld](#) 2687
120

Judge rules SWAT doesn't get immunity in raid of wrong 68-year-old woman's home with flash bangs

by [Walter Einkenkel](#) 3982
15

Judge rules to allow open carry in Michigan elementary schools

by [Walter Einkenkel](#) 6233
93

Republicans Who Cut and Tried To Defund EPA Now Attack It For Not Preventing Colorado Mine Spill

by [Dartagnan](#) 10687
64

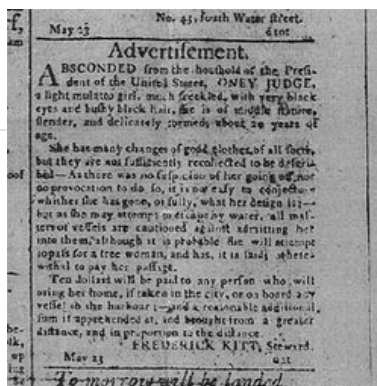
House.

Sadly we have no photos of Oney Judge, but there were several interviews with her in newspapers which were conducted in New Hampshire, where she lived, married, bore children and died—still a fugitive. We also know of Washington's attempts to have her kidnapped and returned to Mount Vernon, and other attempts at negotiation with her.

Oney (born c. 1773) was a dower slave, the daughter of Betty, a seamstress, and Andrew Judge, a white English tailor who was an indentured servant at Mount Vernon in the early 1770s. Austin, about fifteen years Oney's senior, would have been her half-brother. Washington does not seem to have recognized Oney as being Judge's child, which may indicate that Judge himself did not admit paternity.

attribution: he Pennsylvania Gazette

We do have a description of her at the time of her escape in Philadelphia from the advertisement Washington had his steward place to secure her capture and return:



ABSCONDED from the household [sic] of the President of the United States, ONEY JUDGE, a light mulatto girl, much freckled, with very black eyes and bushy black hair. She is of middle stature, slender, and delicately formed, about 20 years of age.

She has many changes of good clothes of all sorts, but they are not sufficiently recollected to be described—As there was no suspicion of her going off, nor no provocation to do so, it is not easy to conjecture whether she has gone, or fully, what her design is;—but as she may attempt to escape by water, all matters of vessels are cautioned against admitting her into them, although it is probable she will attempt to pass as a free woman, and has, it is said, wherewithal to pay her passage.

Ten dollars will be paid to any person who will bring her home, if taken in the city, or on board any vessel in the harbour;—and a reasonable additional sum if apprehended at, and brought from a greater distance, and in proportion to the distance.

FREDERICK KITT, Steward.

I almost laughed, though it is not funny, at the line "As there was no suspicion of her going off, nor no provocation to do so"—as if being a slave isn't provoking enough to want freedom. We do know that Oney thought she was going to be given to Martha Washington's granddaughter **after Martha's death**.

Judge fled when the Washingtons were planning to return to Virginia. She feared being given to the First Lady's granddaughter as a wedding present, and thought if she returned to Virginia, she would never be free. Judge said in an 1845 interview:

"Whilst they were packing up to go to Virginia, I was packing to go, I didn't know where; for I knew that if I went back to Virginia, I should never get my liberty. I had friends among the colored people of Philadelphia, had my things carried there beforehand, and left Washington's house while they were eating dinner."

The much bandied-about kudos to Washington for having "freed his slaves" in his will, is a pile of *merde*, to put it plainly. First—why praise anyone for gifting freedom after you die, and continuing to keep people in bondage while you are alive and benefiting from their enslavement? Second, his will stipulated that all his human property was to remain enslaved till after Martha died.

Have you ever given someone a wedding present?

I'm certain that on your wedding registry list you would never think of "gifting a Negro" to anyone. Have you written a will and left someone dear to you family items like quilts and candlesticks, and humans?

Having read through more than 5,000 summaries of wills from Virginia—including ones that named my own family—I cannot begin to describe to you the pain of **finding the name of a family member** passed on as chattel.

The Gettysburg Compiler

On the front lines of history

Pohanka Reflection: Jacob Ross on Appomattox Court House NHP

This post is part of a series on the experiences of our [Pohanka Interns](#) at various historic sites working on the front lines of history as interpreters and curators. Dr. Jill Titus explains the questions our students are engaging with [here](#).

by Jacob Ross, '15

We have all heard the stinging statement, “Americans do not know their basic history.” Although the blame for this atrocity is sometimes laid upon the shoulders of the United States’ educational systems, more often the judgment goes hand in hand with the stereotype that Americans are lazy. And perhaps we are. Like any American college student, my laundry will pile up until I run out of socks, and I would much rather watch a historically sketchy movie than dig through the research stacks at the library. But regardless of our love of television remotes and microwavable dinners, my summer as an intern at Appomattox Court House National Historic Park and the 1994 historical survey undertaken by David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig have shown me that Americans *are* taking an active effort to engage and connect with the past, albeit in a utilitarian way.



In their study, Thelen and Rosenzweig report that in a single year 91.1% of Americans engaged the past by looking at photographs with family or friends, and 81.3% of Americans watched movies or television programs about the past. Both of these methods of experiencing history are convenient and easy to access; social media and television have a direct feed into the homes of almost every American. Having a background in survey analysis, I am not completely convinced of the historical significance or accuracy of the photographs and television programs “about the past” that these Americans viewed. It seems likely that many respondents may have watched a film like “Gone with the Wind,” or a show like “Downton Abbey” and deemed them pictorial representations of historical reality. Although I am concerned about the quality and validity of the historical interpretations gleaned from this kind of easily accessible mass media, I do believe that Americans still have an active interest in their history outside of its entertainment value.

My time spent interning at Appomattox Court House NHP has put me in direct contact with members of the American public and the way they engage history. The Thelen-Rosenzweig study suggests that 57.2% of Americans travel in order to experience a historic place. So why would the majority of Americans expend the time, energy, and money to travel to a place like Appomattox Court House NHP? The study and my personal experiences both point to a motivating drive to explore connections to the past through family members. Many of our guests arrive at the park with the names of their ancestors and their respective units in hand, hoping to learn more about the experiences of their long-deceased relation. These visitors are most often interested in the places that their ancestors have tread.



When travelers come into the visitors' center knowing they had an ancestor who was surrendered with the Army of Northern Virginia, we are able to provide them with the answer to their question: "where was my great-grandfather?" Our visitors' center is equipped with regimental histories which we use to enlighten our guests on the travels and engagements of which their ancestor took part. But of course, the park itself is special to descendants because it was where their ancestors stood and participated in a vital event in American history. Knowing that a piece of themselves (albeit, a piece long gone) was involved in the shaping of the nation helps the visitors not only make sense of the United States, but also helps them describe themselves and their current station. Being able to stand in the same space, and see the same landscape as their ancestor is a powerful connection to that piece of themselves from a century and a half past.

Understanding the past is a major component in making sense of the present. Sometimes the answers can be as simple as a position on the battlefield with light fighting that meant a military ancestor returned home and was able to have a family after the war, leading to our visitor's existence. Or, the battlefield death of a great-grandfather led to the financial destitutions of a widow and her children, from which the family may have never recovered. However, there are also larger answers about the present that visitors seek to uncover. For example, the resolution of the Civil War meant emancipation for the millions of American slaves in 1865, but racial animosities were still present in the former Confederacy and parts of the North. The Civil Rights Movement of the 20th Century and persisting contemporary racial inequality are both results of the failure to adequately address the needs of freedmen in the wake of peace. African-American visitors are directly affected by those incomplete and faulty policies of 150 years ago.

The biggest question that a visitor can seek to resolve at our historical Civil War parks is what it means to be an American. Lieutenant Colonel Ely Parker was an Iroquois Chief on General Grant's staff at the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia; his ethnic status disqualified him from American citizenship. However, in the McLean Parlor surrender meeting General Lee remarked that Ely was the only real American in the room. Parker would reply by saying, "we are all Americans." He summed up the entirety of the war in those four complicated words. Even though we have different skin colors, cultural backgrounds, languages, state origins, and political beliefs, the Civil War proved that we are one indivisible people. We are an imperfect people, but we are a nation continuing to chaotically crash through barriers to develop the "more perfect

union” that our founders dreamed of over 200 years before. An ancestor’s piece in that complicated puzzle of national evolution helps a visitor make a personal connection to how far we have come, but also brings the enduring challenges of our nation to light.

As my experiences and the study suggest, Americans engage history when it is easily accessible to them in movies and television shows. But, an extra effort is required in order to make a personal connection to family history. As people seek to derive meaning from the Civil War, they often ask how the conflict defines the nation and themselves in the present day. Many visitors make this connection through the experience of place. Americans are a busy people, but perhaps not so lazy after all; through historical tourism they make time to engage history for the purpose of understanding themselves and the contemporary world.

This entry was posted on August 8, 2014 by [Civil War Institute](#).

<http://wp.me/p3dApw-p9>

[Previous post](#)

[Next post](#)

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#) [The Suburbia Theme.](#)