

Changes in Population

As tobacco fueled Virginia’s 18th century economy, it was also dominated by a handful of elite families (gentry), most of whom lived on isolated plantations but only made up a very small amount of the population. It is important for students to understand that many groups of people resided in colonial Virginia, but some continued to be denied basic rights and did not enjoy the privileges of the elite.

Have students look at the graph below, *Population of Virginia in 1790 as well as the data from George Washington’s Mount Vernon in 1799*. Invite them to consider this information through the thinking routine, [See-Think-Wonder](#) and share their thinking with partners, small groups, and/or whole group. Encourage deeper thinking through guiding questions as they **draw conclusions** and **make inferences** about the population of 18th century Virginia.

Guiding Questions to Encourage Deeper Thinking:

- What does this information tell us about changes in population in Virginia since the settlement of Jamestown in 1607?
- What conclusions can we draw from this information?

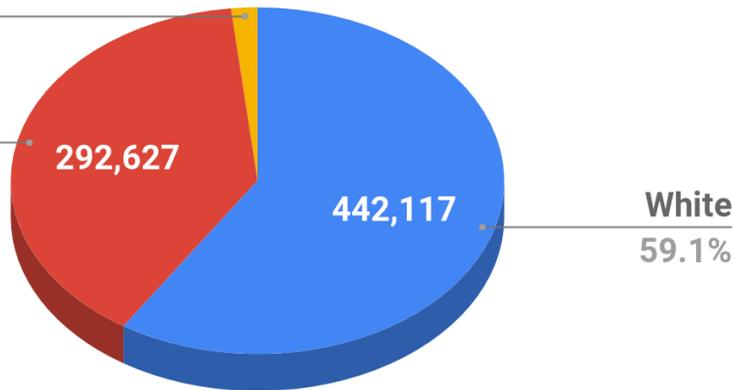
Population of Virginia 1790

Free Blacks

1.7%

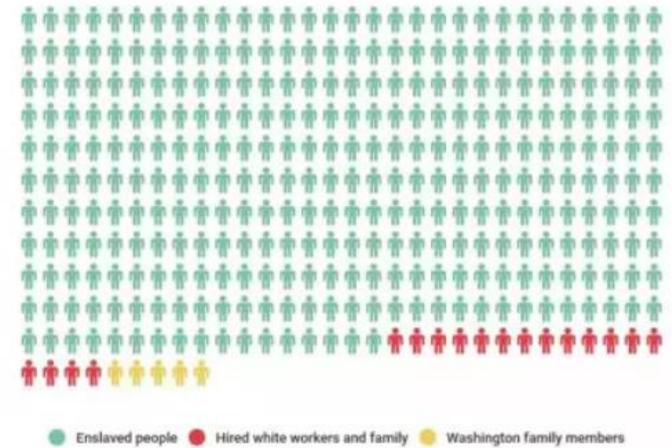
Enslaved

39.1%



Note: The Native Peoples of Virginia’s population changed over time. See next page for more information.

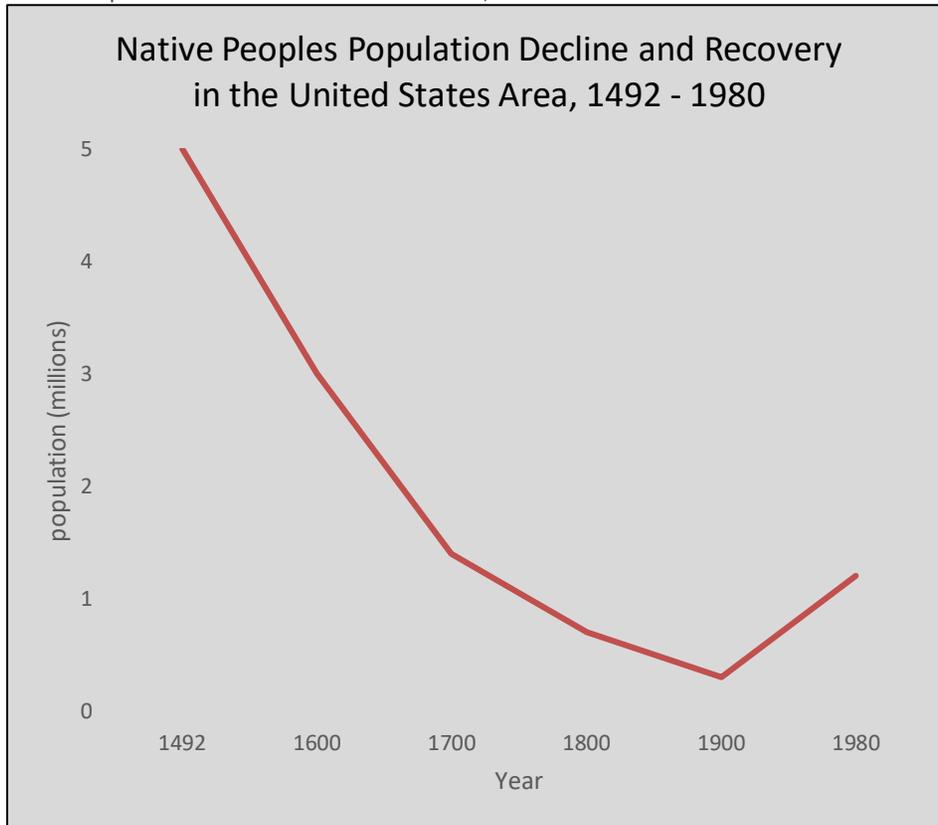
Mount Vernon in 1799



<u>Gentry</u> [4-7%]	<i>least</i>
<u>Middling Sort</u>	<i>many</i>
<u>Poor Farmers</u>	<i>most</i>

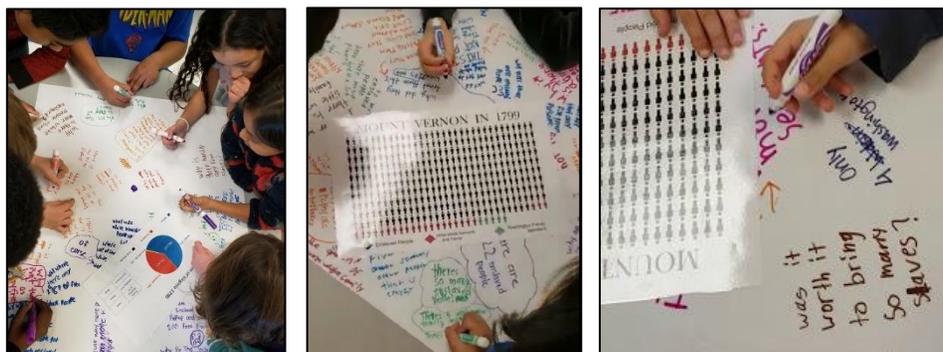
[Click here to learn more about slavery at Mount Vernon.](#)

Adapted from the *Nation to Nation Exhibit*, National Museum of the American Indian



<i>The African Population of Virginia</i>	
1625	23
1648	300
1671	2,000
1680	3,000
1700	16,390
1720	26,559
1730	30,000
1740	60,000
1775	210,000

Adapted from [Colonial Williamsburg](#)



According to 18th-century Virginia law, a child born in the colony inherited the free or enslaved status of his or her mother.

Source: [Colonial Williamsburg](#)

Students in Sherry Watkins 4th grade class at Bull Run ES engage in Chalk Talk to analyze population data from 18th century Virginia.

Suggested Time: 4 weeks

Portraits of Formerly Enslaved People

These two works of art portray two formerly enslaved people: **Yarrow Mamout**, who was a Fulani Muslim enslaved as a teenager and forcibly brought to Maryland in 1752, and **Emily Sims Motley**, born into slavery in Kentucky in 1842 and *manumitted* (formal emancipation from slavery) after the Civil War. More information about each of their lives is included at the links in the captions.

Use Information Sources

See-Think-Wonder

- What do you **see**?
- What does it make you **think** about?
- What do you **wonder**?



[Charles Wilson Peale, *Portrait of Yarrow Mamout* \(1819\)](#)



[Archibald Motley, *Mending Socks* \(1924\)](#)

Going Deeper:

After facilitating this thinking routine, provide students with some context about their portrait's subject, which can be found at the links in the captions.

To extend learning, students can find a partner who explored a different portrait and share what they uncovered.

Reflection Question:

What questions do you have that are still unanswered? How can you find out more?

Suggested Time: 4 weeks

Make Connections

Taking Action to Build a Better World

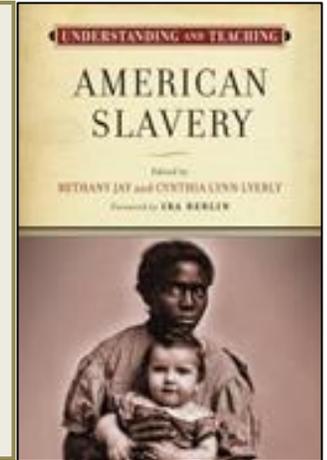
Teaching about an unjust and oppressive system like slavery can be an opportunity to empower students to contribute positively to their communities and world by noticing other unjust and oppressive systems and finding ways to take informed action.



This [Positivity Project PBL](#) focuses on the driving question: *How could you, as a social activist, create a plan to help people who need support in our community and convince others to take action?*

“We didn’t create these systems of oppression in which we find ourselves...” [but] “we all have a responsibility for considering how we might be part of upholding these systems, and we must commit ourselves to the work of undoing these systems.”

- Steven Thurston Oliver,
Understanding and Teaching American Slavery



Helping in the Community



Role-playing and Simulations in the Classroom

Learning experiences that allow students to assume the roles of other people or act out scenarios to gain a deeper understanding of certain historical events need to be considered very carefully before enacted in the classroom. Although not all topics are controversial, some simulations or role-playing can cause emotional responses and/or conflict for students, particularly if it relates to race, ethnicity, or equality. Additionally, if a classroom simulation is related to a tragic event in history or involves a marginalized or oppressed group of people, it is *not appropriate* for the classroom.

[Teaching Tolerance](#) suggests that classroom simulations around the institution of slavery in particular are “inappropriate for teaching about the deeply traumatic events surrounding enslavement.” Please use informed professional judgement when considering simulations or role-playing in the classroom. For further guidance, please see: [Some Dos and Don'ts of Teaching about Race, Culture, and Identity](#).