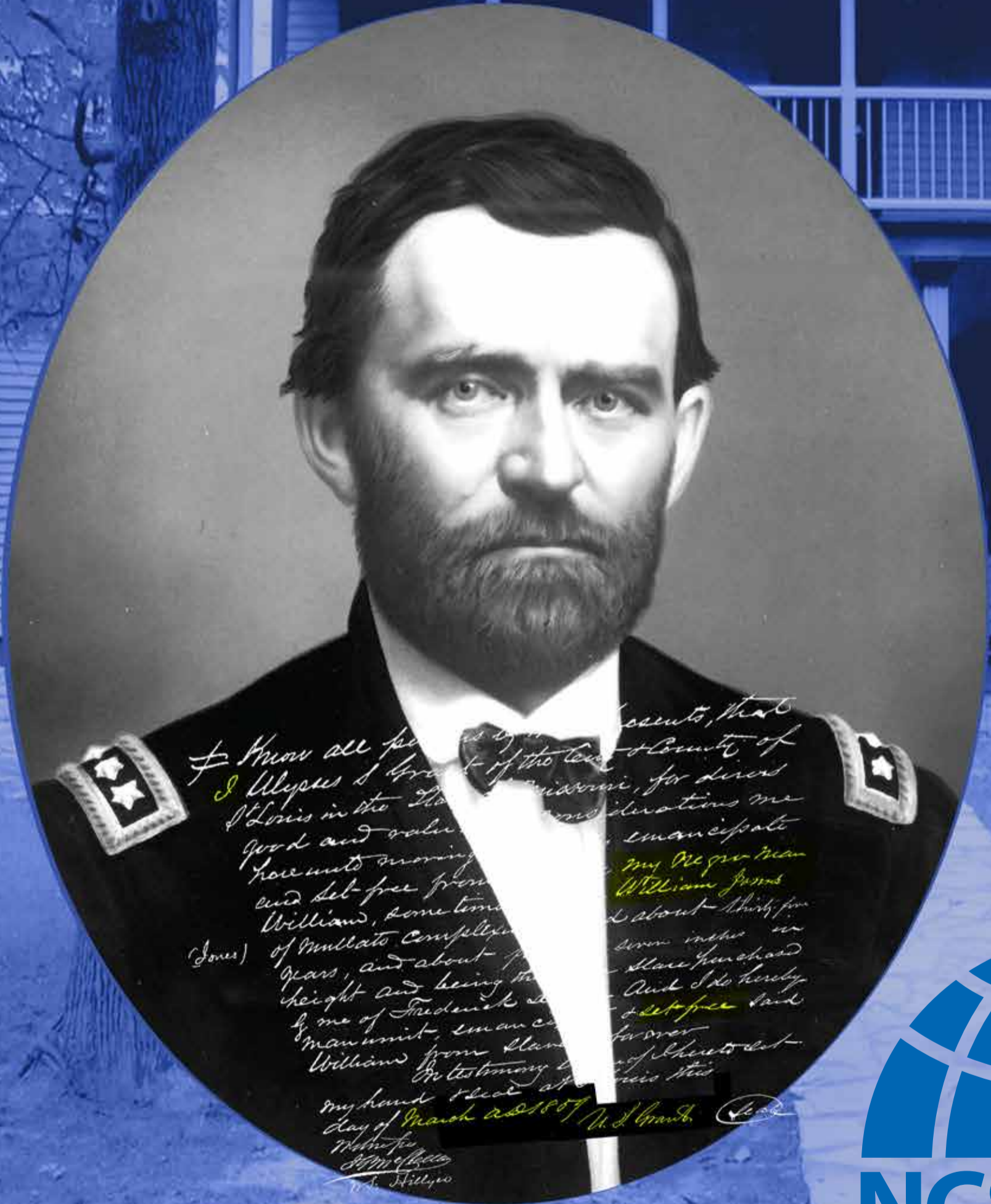


# MLL

middle level learning



An Emancipation  
Document by  
Ulysses S. Grant  
\* 1859 \*



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# Ulysses S. Grant Manumits William Jones: An Example of America's Entanglement with Slavery

Kenneth Anthony and Mary Katherine Morgan

As a military leader, Ulysses S. Grant is given much credit for winning the Civil War and restoring the Union. As a two-term president, he guided the nation through Reconstruction, with mixed results. School history texts convey these aspects of Grant's career; yet little is included about Grant's life prior to his Civil War experiences. For example, few people know that Grant owned an enslaved African American. An examination of primary sources provides students with a contradiction that, upon further study and discussion, can lead them to a more complex and nuanced understanding of this notable historical figure and of the institution of slavery in America.

## Growing Up in an Anti-Slavery Family

Grant came from a line of patriotic Americans. His grandfather, Noah Grant, was a soldier in the Continental Army and was present at the Battle of Bunker Hill. His father, Jesse Grant, "worked for, and lived in the family of a Mr. Brown, the father of John Brown," who would (decades later) lead the attack on Harper's Ferry.<sup>1</sup> Jesse Grant was a Whig Party supporter with abolitionist sentiments, so we can conclude that Ulysses S. Grant grew up in a household that was not supportive of the institution of slavery.<sup>2</sup>

As a boy, Grant disliked his family's tannery business in Georgetown, Ohio, but liked farming and was skilled with horses. Grant attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, having gained an "appointment," a scholarship awarded by his U.S. congressman. Grant did not enjoy military life, but at West Point he became friends with Frederick Dent, his roommate and future brother-in-law.

## Soldiering in an "Unjust War" Against Mexico

Although Ulysses S. Grant served in many major battles during the Mexican-American War (1846–48), he wrote, many years later in his *Memoirs*, that the war was "one of the most unjust

ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation."<sup>3</sup> We don't know if Grant held strong opinions about the war as a young officer, but he did write (again, in his *Memoirs*), "Experience proves that the man who obstructs a war in which his nation is engaged, no matter whether right or wrong, occupies no enviable place in life or history."<sup>4</sup> If Grant had refused to fight in 1846, he would not have become the general who led the Union to victory in 1865, ending the deadliest war in U.S. history. Grant saw his participation in both wars as his civic obligation.

Writing in his *Memoirs* near the end of his life, Grant opined that the conflict with Mexico turned many people in the North into abolitionists, which contributed to the social and political divisions that led to the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> Texas entered the Union as a slave state in 1845, and slavery grew rapidly there after the Mexican-American War.<sup>6</sup>

## Marrying into a Slave-Owning Family

As a young officer in 1848, Grant married Julia Dent, and after several years with the military and a two-year separation, he joined his wife and two children on her family's estate in St. Louis County, Missouri, where they lived for several years (roughly 1854–1859). Today, White Haven is preserved as the Ulysses S. Grant National Historical Site. The Dents lived with up to 18 enslaved African-Americans, mostly women and children with a few men who worked in the fields (**Sidebar A**).

How did Grant interact with these enslaved African Americans while he lived at the White Haven farm? Farmers in Missouri frequently worked alongside enslaved people.<sup>7</sup> Grant apparently followed this practice. In her book *When Grant Went A-Courtin'*,

**ON THE COVER:** Portrait of Ulysses S. Grant, ca. 1866; Emancipation Document of 1859; and a recent photo of the Main House at White Haven, Missouri. Images courtesy of Library of Congress, The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, and National Park Service, respectively.

Emily (Emma) Dent Casey (Julia's sister) describes Grant's own labors, then writes, "He had Dan to help him."<sup>8</sup> Dan was an enslaved African American. During the autumn harvest, the Grants also hired free blacks to help with the work. When his father-in-law (Frederick Dent senior) moved back to the city, Grant ran the farm, so he supervised both free and enslaved blacks at various times at White Haven.

In a letter that Grant wrote to his father in 1859, he used the euphemisms of a slave-owning culture, stating that his wife "might have some trouble" traveling in free states with her "servant."<sup>9</sup> Certainly, Grant and his wife were aware that Northerners who held antislavery attitudes might remark on the fact that Julia's "servant," who helped care for the children, was an enslaved African American. Julia could have been worried that this "servant" might try to escape, although that interpretation is not clearly supported by other evidence.

### Owning, and Manumitting, a Slave

Grant's wife and her family members were not the only ones, however, who held people in bondage. Grant himself owned a slave. According to the document "Manumission of Slave," Grant freed his slave, William Jones, on March 29, 1859.<sup>10</sup> To his credit, Grant freed Jones at a moment when it would have been beneficial financially to sell him. Grant does not mention this event in his *Memoirs*, and there are no further records from or about Jones, so there's much that is unknown about the situation surrounding the manumission.

Grant's manumission of William Jones occurred about two

years before the attack on Fort Sumter. When the South seceded from the Union, some Americans of Grant's age and station in society agonized over which side they would serve. Grant's loyalties were firm. He believed it was his duty to volunteer for the military, and we wanted to help prevent the dissolution of the United States and its popular (democratic) government. The nation was now in crisis and needed his professional skills as a soldier.

### Fighting the War that Ended Slavery

It should be noted that, while leading the Union forces to victory, General Grant "made sure that the enslaved men, women, and children who escaped to Union lines were protected and cared for" following Lincoln's enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>11</sup> In his *Memoirs*, Grant stated clearly his belief that slavery was wrong, and that slavery was the main cause of the American Civil War.<sup>12</sup> Grant also approved the deployment of black troops in combat. There were nearly 80 black commissioned officers by the end of the war.<sup>13</sup> (Sidebar B, page 4) Finally, while he was president, Grant signed into law the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protected the right of black men to vote.

### Reflecting on the Historical Record

Looking over his whole life, we can pose some interesting questions for discussion in a middle school classroom. Was Ulysses S. Grant a mean person for holding another human being in bondage? Or was he a thoughtful and progressive man

### Sidebar A: The Enslaved Population at White Haven, Missouri

Frederick Dent (Grant's father in law) used slave labor at his White Haven farm property, which is now the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site. For this area in Missouri, the enslaved population at White Haven would probably have been considered large, but not in comparison with the large work forces typically found on cotton and sugar plantations in the South.

Records from the U.S. Census are often a treasure trove for historians. The 1830 Census listed 18 enslaved men and women (8 male and 10 female slaves, to use the term in the Census), half of whom were under the age of 10 years old, living at Dent's White Haven farm property. In 1840, the Census lists 13 slaves. In 1850, Dent had listings for both the city property (13 slaves) and White Haven (17) for a total of 30 slaves. By 1860, Dent had 4 male and 3 female slaves.

Middle school teachers and students can explore the online resources at the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site ([www.nps.gov/ulsg](http://www.nps.gov/ulsg)), the U.S. Census ([www.census.gov/history](http://www.census.gov/history)), and the National Archives ([www.archives.gov/education](http://www.archives.gov/education)).

#### Notes

Historic U.S. Census records from 1790 to 1940 are maintained by the National Archives and Records Administration. Thanks the staff at the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site for their assistance with this article.

for manumitting William Jones, his personal slave, before the laws of the land required him to do so? As a person grows and experiences more of the world, is it okay if his or her attitudes and opinions change? When should we hold on to a concept or a tradition, and when should we let it go?

Middle school students might wish to simplify history and think that all Southerners were slave owners and all Northerners were abolitionists, or that all slave owners were cruel people and all Abolitionists were kind and never harbored racist attitudes. Looking at primary source documents from U. S. Grant's life can dispel some of these notions. Grant's attitude about

slavery appears to have evolved from ambivalence to favoring abolition. (**Sidebar C**).

In many ways, Grant's experiences with slavery were typical. Just as the nation was split over slavery, Grant's personal history intersected with slaveholders and with abolitionists. After marrying into the Dent family, traditions and economic convenience resulted in him accommodating slavery into his daily life. Similarly, much of the economic and social life of Antebellum America, North and South, was intricately tied to the institution of slavery. For example, recall that in 1861, Mayor Fernando Wood proposed that New York City secede from

### Sidebar B: **Black Soldiers and Sailors in the Civil War**

By the end of the Civil War, roughly 179,000 black men (10 percent of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army and another 19,000 served in the Navy. Nearly 40,000 black soldiers died over the course of the war—30,000 of infection or disease. Black soldiers served in artillery and infantry and performed all noncombat support functions that sustain an army, as well. Black carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters also contributed to the war cause. There were nearly 80 black commissioned officers.

Black women, who could not formally join the Army, nonetheless served as nurses, spies, and scouts, the most famous being Harriet Tubman, who scouted for the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers.

**Source:** NARA, "Teaching with Documents: The Fight for Equal Rights and Black Soldiers in the Civil War," [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war). See also the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum, [www.afroamcivilwar.org](http://www.afroamcivilwar.org).

### Sidebar C : **Preserving Our Nation's History**

**Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site.** White Haven, the name Colonel Frederick Dent gave the main house and the 850-acre estate he purchased in 1820, was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1986. Ulysses S. Grant first met Julia Dent (the colonel's daughter and Grant's future wife) at White Haven. From 1854 to 1859 the Dents, Grants, and an enslaved African-American workforce lived on the property. Visit the park with your family, and learn about the people, places, stories, and collections at White Haven by visiting [www.nps.gov/ulsg](http://www.nps.gov/ulsg).

**Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library.** The Ulysses S. Grant Collection, housed at Mississippi State University Libraries, consists of some 15,000 linear feet of correspondence, research notes, artifacts, photographs, scrapbooks, and memorabilia and includes information on Grant from his birth in 1822, until his death in 1885. There are also 4,000 published monographs on various aspects of Grant's life and times.

From this collection, the series of volumes edited by John Y. Simon, titled *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, was published by the Southern Illinois University Press. Today, John F. Marszalek is executive director of the remaining publication projects: a supplementary volume and a scholarly edition of the Grant Memoirs. The Ulysses S. Grant Association, which owns the collection, has placed it in the Congressional and Political Research Center of the Mississippi State University Libraries. Many of these materials are online at [www.usgrantlibrary.org](http://www.usgrantlibrary.org).

the Union, declare itself the “Empire City of the South,” and continue its trade in cotton and other agricultural products with the Confederate states.<sup>14</sup>

The goal of examining these documents and discussing what they mean is not to make a villain out of Ulysses S. Grant, but to help students understand the ways that slavery was entrenched in American society. Grant’s life provides students with a chance to see these things on a very human scale. 🌍

### Notes

1. Ulysses S. Grant, *Memoirs and Selected Letters* (New York: The Library of America 1990), 18–19.
2. *Ibid.*, 9.
3. *Ibid.*, 41.
4. *Ibid.*, 50.
5. Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York: Penguin Group Inc., 1999), 112.
6. Texas State Historical Association, “Slavery,” [tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/yys01](http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/yys01).
7. Diane Mutti-Burke, *On Slavery’s Border: Missouri’s Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815–1865* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010); National Park Service, “Slavery at White Haven,” [www.nps.gov/ulsg/learn/historyculture/slaveryatwh.htm](http://www.nps.gov/ulsg/learn/historyculture/slaveryatwh.htm).
8. Emma Dent Casey, *When Grant Went A-Courtin’: The Personal Recollections of His Courtship and Life* (Circle Publishing Company, 1909), excerpt at [www.mhmvoices.org/2008SpringFeature3.php](http://www.mhmvoices.org/2008SpringFeature3.php).
9. Ulysses S. Grant, “To Jesse Root Grant,” March 12, 1859, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, vol. 1: 1837–1861*, ed. John Y. Simon (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University press, 1967), 346; [digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/USG\\_volume](http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/USG_volume).
10. Ulysses S. Grant, “Manumission of Slave,” March 29, 1859, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, vol. 1: 1837–1861*, 347.
11. National Park Service, “Ulysses S. Grant,” [www.nps.gov/ulsg](http://www.nps.gov/ulsg).
12. Ulysses S. Grant, *Memoirs and Selected Letters*, 26–27.
13. NARA, “Teaching with Documents: The Fight for Equal Rights and Black Soldiers in the Civil War,” [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war). See also the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum, [www.afroamcivilwar.org](http://www.afroamcivilwar.org).
14. “Timeline of New York History,” [www.pbs.org/wnet/newyork/series/resources/timeline.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/newyork/series/resources/timeline.html).

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There is no known image of William Jones, who was manumitted by U.S. Grant in 1859. For many formerly enslaved men, being a Union soldier was their first paying job. This drawing (1862–65) by Alfred R. Waud of an unnamed Union soldier is in the collection of the Library of Congress. Learn more about this image at [www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004660013](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004660013).

# Ulysses S. Grant Manumits William Jones: America's Entanglement with Slavery

## A Lesson for Grades 6–8

Mary Katherine Morgan and Kenneth Anthony

**Goal:** Students will have better knowledge of U. S. Grant's life and a deeper understanding of the complex institution of slavery that divided families and the nation in the years before 1861.

### Dimensions of the C3 Framework's Inquiry Arc

1. Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries
2. Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools
3. Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence
4. Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action.

NCSS, *Social Studies for the Next Generation: Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Bulletin 113, Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013), 5-68. A free PDF of the C3 Framework is at [www.socialstudies.org/c3](http://www.socialstudies.org/c3). Or buy the paperback book (with explanatory essays) at [www.socialstudies.org/store](http://www.socialstudies.org/store).

Learning Objectives	Common Core State Standards CCSS.ELA-Literacy	C3 Framework Inquiry Arc Social Studies
The students will develop inquiry questions to drive their research and further reading.	• WHST.6-8.7 and WHST.6-8.9	• Step 1 and 2
The students will make a claim about Grant and slavery.	• WHST.6-8.1a	• Step 1 and 2
The students will analyze primary and secondary historical sources.	• RH.6-8.1 and RH.6-8.2	• Step 2
The students will test their claim against historical evidence, alter their statement if warranted, and raise new questions about events and persons.	• WHST.6-8.1b	• Step 3
The students will share their research findings with the community in, and beyond, the school environment.	• SL.8.4 and SL.8.5	• Step 4

### Materials

Classroom textbook and handouts A-G, on pages 10–16.

### Lesson Engagement and Procedures

**Day 1:** Students read from their textbook about the life of Ulysses S. Grant. They engage in think-pair-share with a partner, discussing how this text extends their existing knowledge of Grant. The teacher then facilitates a classroom discussion of Grant, focusing on his role in the Civil War as a military leader, as well as his role as a two-term president during Reconstruction. The teacher will give students the “Manumission of Slave” document to read for homework (**Handout A**), and its transcript (**Handout B**), and goes over the glossary for those handouts.

*Glossary for Handout A (Manumission of a Slave)*

“manumission”—the act of freeing an enslaved person

“divers reasons”—diverse, many different reasons

“me hereunto moving”—that inspire me to take this action

### Concepts

- Ulysses S. Grant had close experience with the institution of slavery prior to the Civil War. In fact, he owned, and then manumitted, a slave.
- In the United States, the social, cultural, and economic entanglements with slavery were many and complex.
- By examining primary source documents, we can deepen our understanding of historical persons, events, and institutions.

### Length of Lesson

Three to four lessons of 50 minutes are needed to complete this lesson, which follows the Inquiry Arc of the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework*.

“Mulatto”—of mixed black and white ancestry, now considered an impolite term

“Frederick Dent”—Probably refers to Grant’s father-in-law (not brother-in-law of the same name)

**Day 2:** The teacher reviews the handouts and addresses questions about terms used or points of fact. Then the teacher facilitates a classroom discussion about the meaning of the document, asking, “How does the ‘Manumission of Slave’ document affect your view of Ulysses S. Grant?” The teacher should expect the students to experience some intellectual discomfort, since this document calls into question their prior knowledge of Grant’s opposition to slavery. In fact, he at one time owned a slave! What evidence is there about his opinions, self-image, and character as experienced by others?

The teacher challenges students to suggest four or five questions that they hope to answer with further research. Supporting questions that students might ask and then explore during the inquiry include:

- What was Grant’s experience with slavery before the Civil War?
- What were Grant’s views of slavery before, during, and after the Civil War?
- How did Grant end up with a slave that he later freed?

The goal of the discussion is to help students arrive at the idea that further research is needed into Grant’s life experiences and attitudes about slavery over time. The teacher guides the students through the process of developing inquiry questions to drive their research, modeling the process of curiosity, questioning, and then seeking knowledge from credible sources.

**Day 3:** The teacher facilitates a classroom discussion about how historians answer questions about the past, focusing on the difference between primary and secondary sources. The goal of the discussion is for the students to determine that in order to clearly understand Grant and his relationship to slavery, they must dig deeper and go beyond traditional textbook (secondary source) accounts of Grant’s life.

We are lucky that Grant wrote a best-selling autobiography, his *Memoirs*, and students are about to read some excerpts for themselves, with the attitude of a historian. Should we believe everything written in a memoir or autobiography? How might we verify what has been written? The teacher explains that, while this book is a valuable resource, authors often portray themselves in “a rosy light” when describing their own actions, motives, and careers. Thus, students now receive short excerpts from Grant’s personal letters (**Handouts C and D**), as well as excerpts from his *Memoirs* (**Handout E**), which he wrote near the end of his life. Students can begin to read these documents, pausing to ask questions that the teacher and students can discuss together.

**Day 4 and 5:** Students continue reading, analyzing, and discussing the primary sources provided on Handouts C and D, using a three-step process:

1. Consider the *context*: When was it written? Why was it written? Who authored this document?
2. Consider the *content*: What was said? What arguments were made? What supporting points were made?
3. Consider the *connections*: How does this passage relate to the experiences, ideas, and values of people living in that era? What connections to other events and people in history can you make? What connections to your life can you make?

To anchor these discussions, students may benefit by creating, up on the board, a timeline of major events in Grant’s biography. At some point, they will want to know more about Grant’s personal behavior toward enslaved people and the specific social environment of those interactions. While slavery always meant bondage, the details about types of labor and quality of human interaction varied widely across the continent of North America. How slavery was experienced by owners, by the enslaved, and by observers, could be very different depending on the time and place. The teacher can provide to students a description of the conditions of enslavement at his wife’s family farm in White Haven, Missouri, which is now the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site (**Handouts F and G**).

As the students analyze these materials, they develop more questions to guide their inquiry. For example, ask students to consider what might have been the scenario for Grant freeing William Jones. Students might offer questions such as

- Did Grant own Jones for a long time, or for a short time?
- Did he pay full price, or was this a family transaction at a considerably lower price?
- Did he know Jones well, or not at all?
- Had Grant and Jones done manual farm work together?
- Was Grant's decision to manumit a slave influenced by the current events of the day, such as citizen resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act, or the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858?

All of these are valid questions, but there is little historical evidence to help us answer them precisely. We don't have a journal revealing Grant's thoughts and feelings at that time. We don't have a record of what William Jones experienced and felt. Inviting students to create and then ponder these questions emphasizes how much we don't know, and how historians must be careful not to "read too much" into documents.

As the students begin to formulate answers during their investigations, they support their answers with textual evidence from the documents. The teacher can invite students to take a look at a copy of Grant's *Memoirs* to see how it is organized, and to see what answers it might contain, and what interesting new questions it might raise.

### Assessment

Once the students complete their investigations, they communicate their findings to others, writing a short paper that details Grant's various experiences with slavery, expanding beyond what is typically covered in history textbooks. In their papers, they make a claim about Grant's relation with the practice of slavery, based upon findings from their research. Then, they support their claim with textual evidence from the documents on Handouts A-G. The goal is for students to develop a more sophisticated view of Grant's experience with slavery than

the one that they likely held initially. Additionally, students will see Grant's experience with slavery as an example of how entrenched slavery was in American society.

### Extension Ideas

Students could choose an additional venue and medium for sharing their findings with a larger audience beyond the classroom. How would they like to share their work, and with whom? Students could present their findings on posters displayed at a local historical society or public library, or provide a short presentation to younger students, or create a report on a school website using software like Prezi ([prezi.com/myqouhhikdzy/using-prezi-in-the-classroom](http://prezi.com/myqouhhikdzy/using-prezi-in-the-classroom)) or Glogster ([edu.glogster.com](http://edu.glogster.com)).

### Teaching the Lesson

We taught an abbreviated form of this lesson with students in a U.S. history class in a rural school in Mississippi. I (K.V.A.) regularly use primary sources with these students, all of whom are African-American. We focused on the first three learning objectives:

1. Analyzing primary and secondary sources,
2. Developing inquiry questions to drive their research, and
3. Making a claim about Grant and slavery.

The students read the account of Grant in their textbook and were able to provide a comprehensive list of Grant's well-known accomplishments.

As a class, we then read the "Manumission of Slave" document. Though it was necessary to define the word "manumission" the students readily understood that Grant was freeing a slave. This immediately led to a discussion about Grant's character. The students wanted to make initial evaluations based on the fact that he had owned a slave. Because the students were engaged and interested in this aspect, we decided to continue down that path. The students openly discussed and made claims about Grant and slavery. Some thought he was a good person because he freed William Jones, others thought he was against slavery because he freed Jones; one student was adamant that he was pro-slavery because he owned a slave and a few others generally agreed; and a few others said he "had a heart" because he freed the slave. Immediately the students began asking questions about the historical and personal context of the document. They understood that there must be a larger context, and that they needed more information to fully evaluate Grant and slavery. Finally, we asked the students what



they thought Grant's views on slavery were and collectively they proposed four theories:

1. He was for slavery
2. He was against it, but he put up with it out of necessity
3. He was for slavery, but changed his mind.
4. He was against slavery, but changed his mind and owned slaves.

The question they wanted to answer was, "How do we reconcile the stated beliefs of Grant on slavery, with the fact that he owned a slave?"

We read Grant's other letters, excerpts from his *Memoirs* about slavery, and the article "Ulysses S. Grant Talks War with Otto von Bismarck."<sup>1</sup> Upon completion of our readings, the students immediately began openly discussing how it appeared that Grant was against slavery (though not an abolitionist), but had somehow found himself in a place (through marriage) where he was working with slaves and owned one. This led them to develop some supporting questions about Grant's personal life in order to help them further understand how Grant found himself farming a plantation in St. Louis with slaves. Questions focused on Grant's family, where he was born and lived before the Civil War, how he ended up in St. Louis, his wife's family, the two families' past experiences with slaves, and their beliefs about slavery. Because time was limited, we read other accounts about Grant that helped students answer some of the questions, but in keeping with a spirit of inquiry, we left some questions open for further exploration.

Students responded positively to the opportunity to tangle with primary sources that expanded their understanding of what was taught in the textbooks. They appreciated that not everything in history is straightforward and that in order to understand history, students must be willing to go beyond one or two sources and be willing to ask questions. Finally, they all agreed that studying about Grant using primary sources gave them a more complete understanding of him and life in America as it related to slavery. Rather than seeing Grant as bad for owning a slave and working a plantation with his father-in-laws' slaves, they saw him as human and more inter-

esting because of the conflict between his stated beliefs and his actions. When going back to the question—"How do we reconcile the difference between Grant's stated beliefs and his actions?"—one student said, "He put up with it because that's how life was, but when he had a chance to help end it (slavery), he did." In Grant's life, that was true on both the personal and public level. On a personal level, he freed William Jones, and on a public level he prosecuted the war that led to the end of slavery in the United States.

The preceding statement highlights one other reason why using primary sources is a powerful tool. Too often in history, we attempt to judge the past. These students initially started down that path, but as they read more documents, they realized that it is easy to judge the past, but more productive and fulfilling to try to understand the past. That's what they strove to do as they explored Ulysses S. Grant's views about and experiences with slavery using primary sources. 🌐

#### Notes


1. Grant explained his view of slavery briefly during a meeting with Prince Otto von Bismarck in June of 1878. When asked if his participation in the war stemmed from a belief that he had to save the Union, Grant replied, "Not only save the Union...but destroy slavery." See the article by Peter Carlson, "Ulysses S. Grant Talks War With Otto von Bismarck," *American History* 7, no. 2 (June 2012): 27.

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# "Manumission of Slave," March 29, 1859

U.S. Grant used pen and ink to write an official document freeing his personal slave. Compare this page with Handout B, which is a transcript.

I know all persons by these presents, that  
I Ulysses S Grant of the City & County of  
St Louis in the State of Missouri, for divers  
good and valuable considerations me  
have unto moving, do hereby emancipate  
and set free from Slavery my Negro Man  
William, sometimes called William Jones  
(Jones) of Mulatto complexion, aged about thirty-five  
years, and about five feet seven inches in  
height and being the same slave purchased  
by me of Frederick Dent - And I do hereby  
manumit, emancipate & set free said  
William from Slavery forever  
In testimony Whereof I hereunto set  
my hand & seal at St Louis this  
day of March a.d. 1859  
Wm. Jones  
U. S. Grant.   
W.S. Hillyer

SOURCE: U.S. Grant, "Manumission of William Jones, March 1859" (Facsimile), St. Louis. Ulysses Simpson Grant Collection, Missouri History Museum.

## Transcript of “Manumission of Slave,” March 29, 1859

*Know all persons by these presents, that I Ulysses S Grant of the City & County of St Louis in the State of Missouri, for divers good and valuable considerations me hereunto moving, do hereby emancipate and set free from Slavery my Negro man William, sometimes called William Jones of Mullato complexion, aged about thirty-five years, and about five feet seven inches in height and being the same slave purchased by me of Frederick Dent—And I do hereby manumit, emancipate & set free said William from slavery forever*

*In testimony Whereof I hereto set my hand & seal at St Louis this [29th] day of March AD 1859.*

*U.S. Grant (Seal)*

*Witnesses*

*J G McClellan*

*W. S. Hillyer*

# Personal Letters by Ulysses S. Grant To Jesse Root Grant, March 12, 1859

In a letter to his father, Grant expresses his acceptance of slavery as normal and necessary in his family life and the difficulties traveling with an enslaved “servant” on a riverboat that would often land in free states.

*Julia and the children are well. They will not make a visit to Ky. Now. I was anxious to have them go before I rented but with four children she could not go without a servant and she was afraid that landing so often as she would have to do in free states she might have some trouble.*



Ulysses S. Grant, Lieutenant-General, ca. 1865



Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant (Julia Dent Grant), ca. 1865-85

**SOURCE:** The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, vo. 1, John Y. Simon ed. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University press, 1967), vol. 1, p. 346. Photos, Library of Congress.

# To Frederick Dent, April 19, 1861

In a letter to his father-in-law, Grant expresses views on slavery in relation to Civil War aims. Such views were common in the North as the war began. Here are excerpts from that letter. “Fred” Jr., mentioned at the end of the letter, is Grant’s brother-in-law.

April 19, 1861      To Frederick Dent

Dear Sir:

*I have but very little time to write but as in these exciting times we are very anxious to hear from you, and know of no other way but by writing first to you, I must make time.*

*We get but little news, by telegraph, from St. Louis but from most all other points of the Country we are hearing all the time. The times are indeed startling, but now is the time, particularly in the border Slave states, for men to prove their love of country. ...*

*In all these troubles the South have been the aggressors and the Administration has stood purely on the defensive, more on the defensive than she would dared to have done but for her consciousness of strength and the certainty of right prevailing in the end. The news today is that Virginia has gone out of the Union. But for the influence she will have on the other border slave states this is not much to be regretted. Her position, or rather that of Eastern Virginia, has been more reprehensible from the beginning than that of South Carolina. She should be made to bear a heavy portion of the burthen of the War for her guilt.*

*In all this I can but see the doom of Slavery. The North do not want, nor will they want, to interfere with the institution. But they will refuse for all time to give it protection unless the South shall return soon to their allegiance, and then too this disturbance will give such an impetus to the production of their staple, cotton, in other parts of the world that they can never recover the control of the market again for that commodity. This will reduce the value of Negroes so much that they will never be worth fighting over again.*

*I have just rec'd a letter from Fred. He breathes forth the most patriotic sentiments. He is for the old Flag as long as there is a Union of two states fighting under its banner and when they dissolve he will go it alone. This is not his language but it is the idea not so well expressed as he expresses it. Julia and the children are all well and join me in love to you all. I forgot to mention that Fred has another heir, with some novel name that I have forgotten.*

Yours Truly U. S. Grant

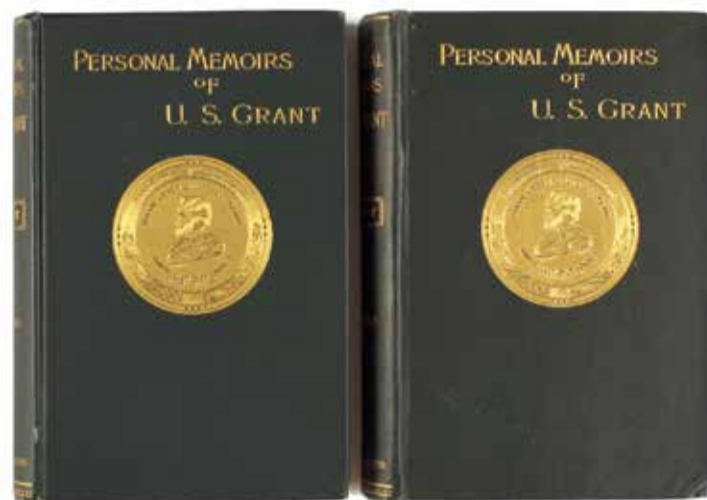
**SOURCE:** These passages are excerpted and spelling updated. See the whole letter online at [The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant](http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/USG_volume/id/15917), vol. 2, (April-September 1861), page 3, [http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/USG\\_volume/id/15917](http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/USG_volume/id/15917).

# From Grant's *Personal Memoirs*, 1885

In these passages from his autobiography, Grant states his view on slavery as an institution, and as a cause of the Civil War. As he was writing these words, he was 63 years old and dying of cancer.

*As time passes, people, even of the South, will begin to wonder how it was possible that their ancestors ever fought for or justified institutions which acknowledged the right of property in man. [p. 90]*

*The cause of the great War of the Rebellion against the United States will have to be attributed to slavery. For some years before the war began it was a trite saying among some politicians that "A state half slave and half free cannot exist."...I took no part myself in any such view of the case at the time, but since the war is over, reviewing the whole question, I have come to the conclusion that the saying is quite true. [p. 633]*



In these passages, Grant states his views of slavery as a principal motivation for the Mexican War (1846–1848) and a principal cause for the Civil War (1861–1865).

*The occupation, separation and annexation were, from the inception of the movement to its final consummation, a conspiracy to acquire territory out of which slave states might be formed for the American Union. [p. 26]*

*The Southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican war. Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. [p. 27]*

**SOURCE:** Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York: Penguin Group Inc., 1999)

From the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site

# Enslaved African Americans at White Haven, Missouri

## Growing Up as a Slave

In 1830, half of the Dent family's slaves were under the age of ten. Henrietta, Sue, Ann, and Jeff, among others, played with the Dent children. Julia Dent (who became Mrs. Grant) recalled that they all fished for minnows, climbed trees for bird nests, and gathered strawberries. However, the slave children also had chores such as feeding chickens and cows. They mastered their assigned tasks as the white children went off to school. Returning home from boarding school, Julia noted the transition from playmate to servant. She noted that the slave girls had "attained the dignity of white aprons." These aprons symbolized slave servitude, and showed that the days of childhood play were ended.

## Household Responsibilities

Adult slaves performed many household chores on the Dent plantation. Kitty and Rose served as nurses to Julia and her sister Emma, while Mary Robinson became the family cook. The wide variety of foods prepared in her kitchen were highly praised by Julia: "Such loaves of beautiful snowy cake, such plates full of delicious Maryland biscuit, such exquisite custards and puddings, such omelettes, gumbo soup, and fritters." A male slave named "Old Bob," who traveled with the Dents from Maryland in 1816, had the responsibility to keep the fires going in White Haven's seven fireplaces. Julia thought Bob was careless to allow the embers to die out, as this forced him "to walk a mile to some neighbors and bring home a brand of fire from their backlog." Such "carelessness" provided Bob and many other slaves an opportunity to escape their masters' eyes.

## Tending the Farm

Slave labor was used extensively in the farming and maintenance of the 850-acre plantation. Enslaved African Americans plowed, sowed and reaped the wheat, oats, Irish potatoes, and Indian corn grown on the estate. They used the "best improvements in farm machinery" owned by Colonel Dent. Slaves also cared for the orchards and gardens, harvesting the fruits and vegetables for consumption by all who lived on the property. During Ulysses S. Grant's management of the farm, he worked side-by-side with Dan, one of the slaves given to Julia at birth. Grant, along with Dan and other slaves, felled trees and took firewood by wagon to sell to acquaintances in St. Louis. More than 75 horses, cattle, and pigs required daily attention. Enslaved people with farming and carpentry skills also worked at maintaining the grounds and various remodeling projects on the main house and outbuildings.

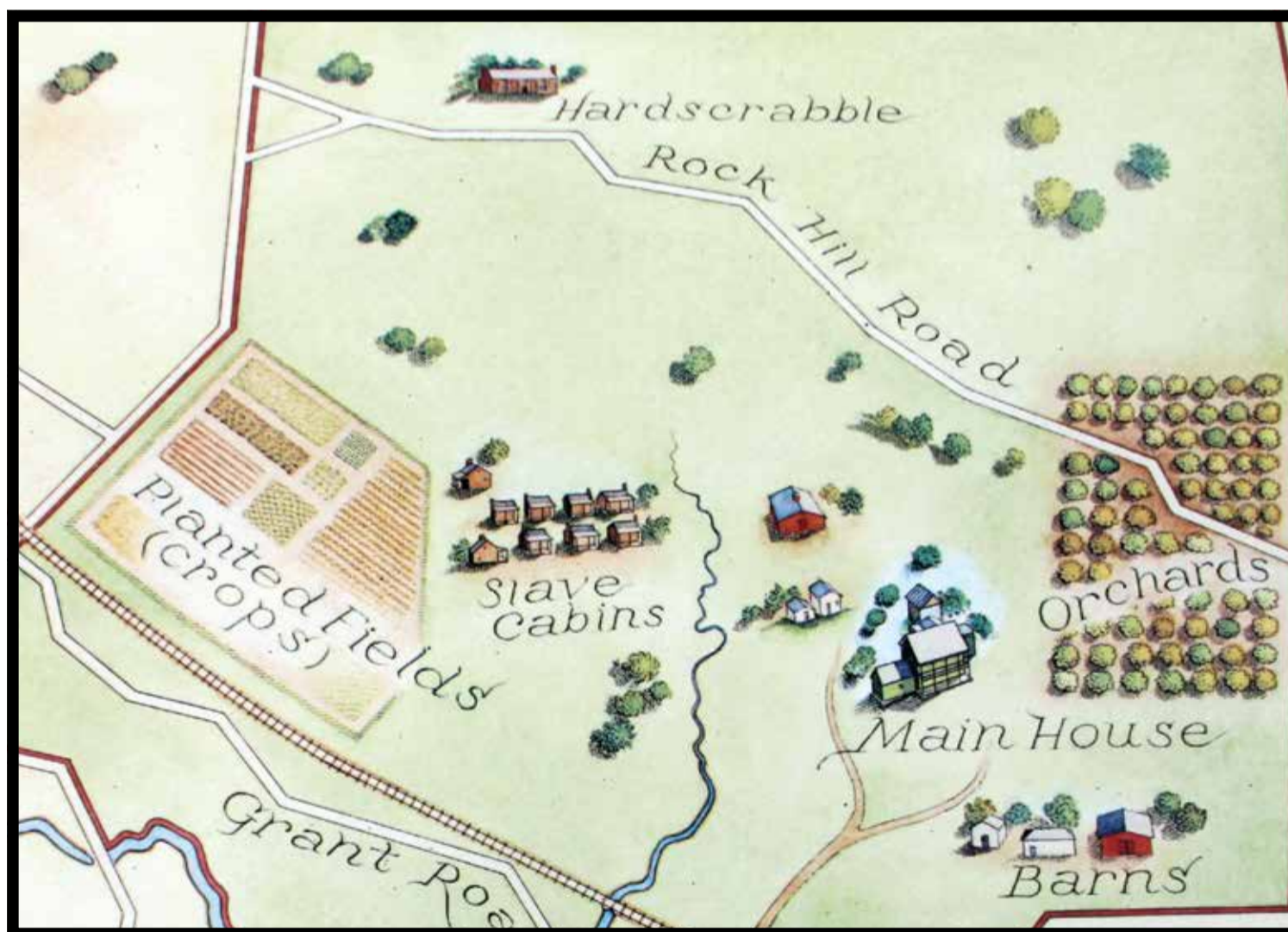
**SOURCE:** National Park Service, "Slavery at White Haven," [www.nps.gov/ulsg/learn/historyculture/slaveryatwh.htm](http://www.nps.gov/ulsg/learn/historyculture/slaveryatwh.htm).

# A Map of White Haven, Missouri, ca, 1855

White Haven farm is located near St. Louis, Missouri. In the early 19th century, it belonged to a slave owner named Frederick Dent. Dent's daughter, Julia, married a future U.S. president, Ulysses S. Grant. Ulysses and Julia lived at "Hardscrabble," a house on the property, in the 1850s.

## Questions:

1. What buildings do you see on the map? List them.
2. Who do you think lived in each of the houses or cabins at White Haven? Write down your guesses on the same list.
3. What kinds of work do you think the enslaved residents did outdoors? What evidence makes you think so?
4. What kinds of work might an enslaved person at White Haven done inside the main house?



**SOURCE:** From an online lesson plan by the National Park Service, "Ulysses S. Grant and Julia Dent Grant at White Haven Farm: The Missouri Compromise in American Life," [www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/154whitehaven/154whitehaven.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/154whitehaven/154whitehaven.htm).

Visit the website of the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, [www.nps.gov/ulsg](http://www.nps.gov/ulsg).

## Middle Level Learning

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