



James Armistead Lafayette

*A FIGHT FOR
FREEDOM & EQUALITY*



Justice in the Classroom

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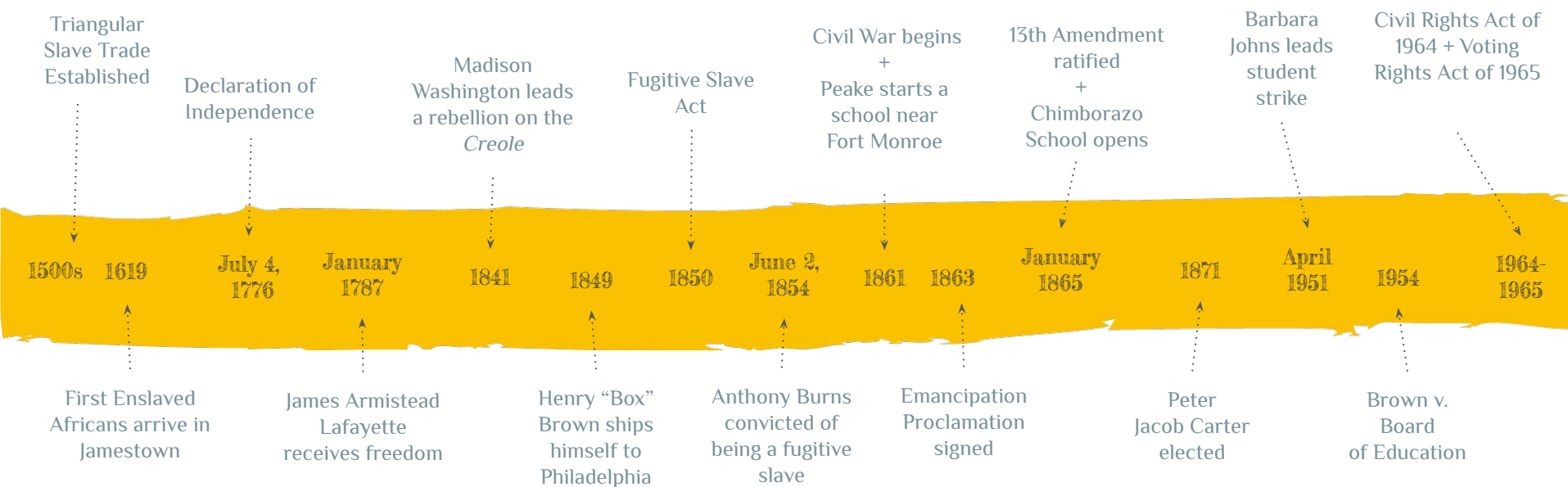
DETERMINED

THE 400-YEAR STRUGGLE FOR BLACK EQUALITY

In a partnership with VMHC, the John Marshall Center has created a set of lesson plans to complement the VMHC's exhibition,

Determined: the 400-year struggle for Black Equality

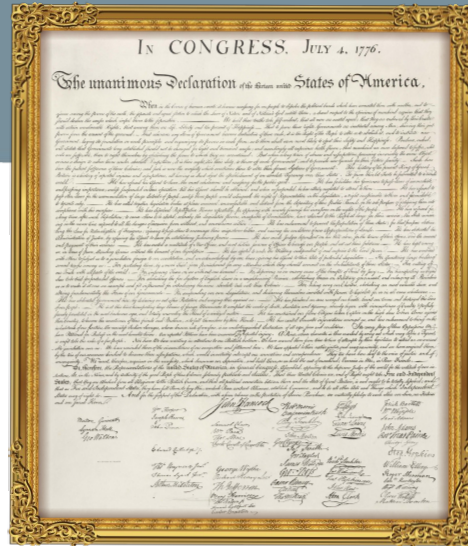
This is lesson 1: James Armistead Lafayette
A FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AND EQUALITY (MS)



Following the French and Indian War, tensions between the 13 colonies and Great Britain grew until a full scale war was waged for independence. The Declaration of Independence was a “break up” letter presented to King George that officially announced colonies’ separation from Great Britain. Many patriots across the 13 colonies fought for America’s freedom, including many in bondage who were also fighting for personal freedom and equality.

OBJECTIVE

Students will be able to explain why the involvement of African Americans in the Revolutionary War illustrates the contradiction of the words, “all men are created equal” contained in the Declaration of Independence.



V O C A B U L A R Y

You Will Find The Following Terms Throughout Your Activity.
Understanding These Terms Will Be Important For Completing This Assignment

Indentured servants

People who signed a contract agreeing to work for typically 5-7 years in exchange for transportation to the 13 colonies.

Enslaved Africans

People who were forcibly brought to the 13 colonies from the Continent of Africa, treated as property and deprived of their human rights.

Declaration of Independence

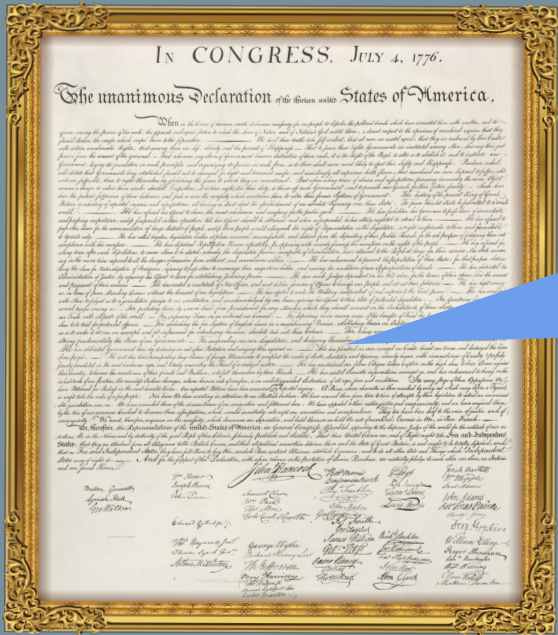
Document sent to the King of England formally explaining why the 13 colonies were fighting for freedom.

Emancipation

The act or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restriction.

Patriots

Colonists during the Revolutionary War who rejected British rule and fought for America's independence



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

- Declaration of Independence



Re-read the quote above and read the statements below. Move the hearts next to the statements you believe **SUPPORT** the quote above.

ALL WOMEN SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE

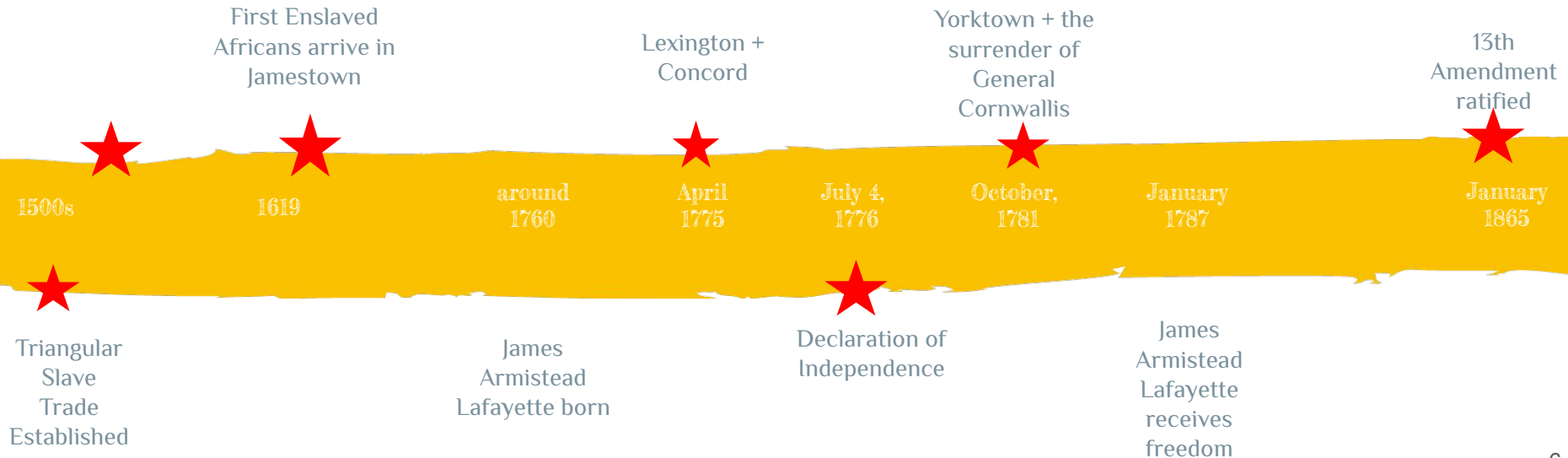
ALL HUMANS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

ALL HUMANS SHOULD BE BORN FREE

CREATE YOUR OWN STATEMENT BELOW THAT WOULD BE SUPPORTED BY THE QUOTE.:

USE THE FOLLOWING TIMELINE TO UNDERSTAND KEY EVENTS SURROUNDING THE LIFE OF JAMES ARMISTEAD LAFAYETTE + U.S. HISTORY

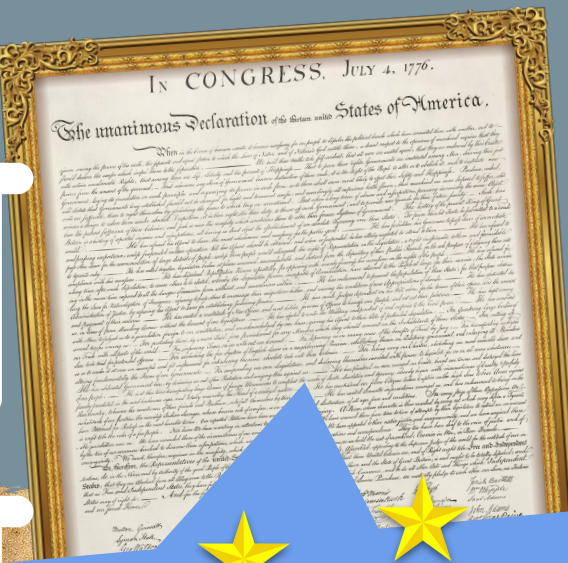
CLICK ON THE RED  TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH EVENT



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

was a “break up” letter to King George, the leader of Great Britain. This document provided a list of grievances which outlined the reasons why the colonies were separating and creating their own nation.

Read the following famous quote pulled from the Declaration of Independence. Move the three stars to the words or statements you think are most important and answer the following questions:



We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.
- Declaration of Independence

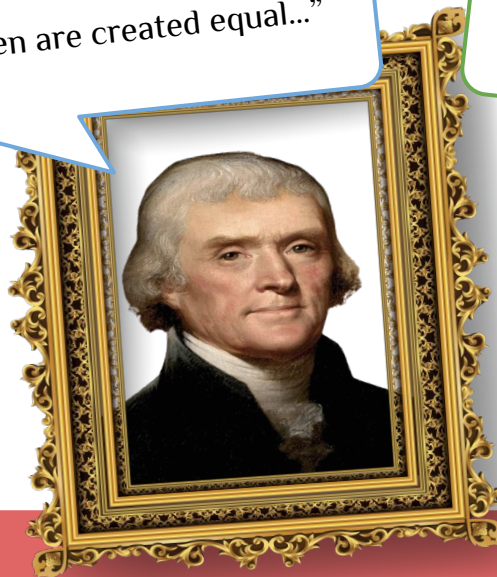
What does the phrase “All men are created equal” mean to you?

Based upon your knowledge of U.S. history, is there anything surprising about this quote? Why or why not?

Although the Declaration of Independence contains the words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." there was a contradiction to those words at the time they were first written. Slavery had existed in America for over a century and despite the principles presented in the Declaration of Independence, the Founding Fathers did not acknowledge it in this published document.

Many colonists across the 13 colonies made the decision to fight for independence against Great Britain. Those in bondage also made the decision to fight for freedom. Thousands of African Americans became involved in the war, refusing to be bystanders, fighting on both sides in the hopes of achieving emancipation.

"All men are created equal..."



Don't you mean all white men are created equal?



Why do you think it is important to learn about enslaved African Americans fought on both sides of the war?

How do you think this will impact the Revolutionary War?

READ AND HIGHLIGHT IN YELLOW THE ACTIONS
AFRICAN AMERICANS TOOK DURING
THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR
THEN ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

What is the most interesting part of this reading? Why?

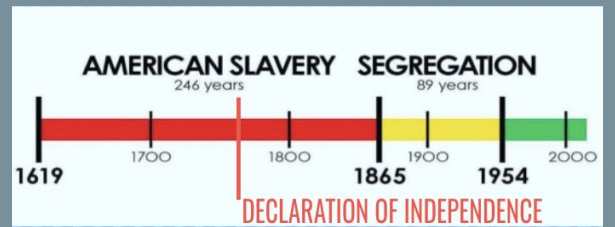
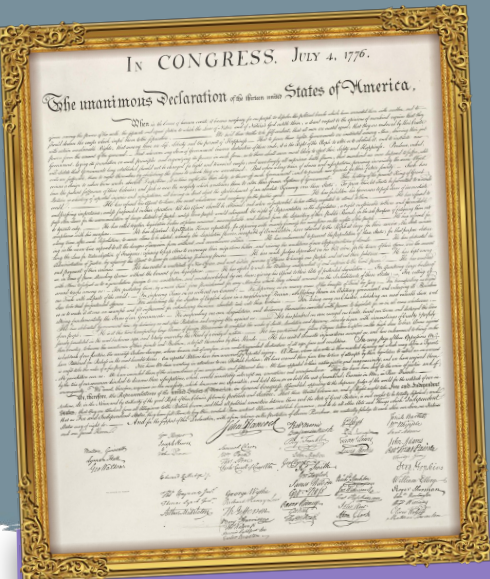
What questions do you have after completing this reading?

The Declaration of Independence and widespread talk of liberty provided thousands of Enslaved Africans high expectations, and many were ready to fight for a democratic revolution that might offer them freedom. African Americans refused to be mere bystanders and gave their loyalty to the side that seemed to offer the best prospect for freedom.

From the start African Americans made an impact on the war. At the first battles of Lexington and Concord at least 10 to 15 black soldiers, including some enslaved africans, fought against the British. Two of these men, Salem Poor and Peter Salem, earned special distinction for their bravery. Despite their bravy the Continental Congress adopted a policy of excluding black soldiers from the army.

In spite of these discouragements, many free and enslaved African Americans in New England colonies were still willing to take up arms against the British. In fact, as soon as the colonies found it difficult to fill their enlistment quotas, they began to turn to African Americans. Eventually every colony above Virginia recruited enslaved Africans for military service, usually in exchange for their freedom. Some voluntarily joined the war while others were forced to join by their enslavers taking their spot in the army. By the end of the war it is estimated 5,000 to 8,000 African Americans had served the American cause in some capacity. Many African Americans served by fighting in regiments. Several all-black units, commanded by white officers, also were formed and saw action against the British. While some served in support roles such as cooks, waiters, and artisans; Enslaved Africans were often trained and very talented in carpentry, masonry, as blacksmiths, shoemakers, seamstresses, bakers, and distillers. Their skills and talents were an important asset to the Americans in the Revolutionary War.

Black participation in the Revolution, however, was not limited to supporting the American cause. Thousands also fought for the British. Enslaved Africans made their own assessment of the conflict and supported the side that offered the best opportunity to escape bondage.



For some enslaved-turned-soldiers, the Revolution's promise of liberty became a reality. But despite the famous words from the Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal", free and enslaved African Americans did not experience widespread emancipation. Using the text you have just read, answer the questions below.

Using the middle image above, what do you notice about the Declaration of Independence and its relationship to slavery?

How does African American involvement in the Revolutionary War show the contradiction of the words, "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence?



CLICK ON THE IMAGES ABOVE TO READ ABOUT THE BLACK HEROES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

African Americans played an extensive role in the American Revolutionary War. They fought not only for our nation's independence but for their own personal freedom and equality. These heroes were a living contradiction to the words in the Declaration of Independence.

To explore this contradiction, we will look at the life of James Lafayette and the actions he took to bring our nation closer to realizing the ideals of freedom and equality enshrined in the Declaration.

To understand James's story we need to first learn about Dunmore's Proclamation:

In 1775 Lord Dunmore, the British Governor of Virginia, feared an attack on Williamsburg and fled to a British ship. Aboard that ship, he issued the following proclamation. Read an excerpt of the proclamation below and answer the following questions.

DUNMORE'S PROCLAMATION

"...And I hereby further declare all indentured servants, blacks, or others...free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining His Majesty's (King George's) Troops, as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing the Colony to a proper sense of their duty, to this Majesty's crown and dignity."

In exchange for freedom, what action(s) must these people take?

What is the purpose of this Proclamation?

How do you think this Proclamation will impact the war?

By His Excellency the Right Honorable JOHN Earl of DUNMORE, His MAJESTY'S Lieutenant and Governor General of the Colony and Dominion of VIRGINIA, and Vice Admiral of the same.

A P R O C L A M A T I O N .

AS I have ever entertained Hopes, that an Accommodation might have taken Place between GREAT-BRITAIN and this Colony, without being compelled by my Duty to this most disagreeable but now absolutely necessary Step, rendered so by a Body of armed Men unlawfully assembled, firing on His MAJESTY'S Tenders, and the formation of an Army, and that Army now on their March to attack His MAJESTY'S Troops and destroy the well disposed Subjects of this Colony. To defeat such reasonable Purposes, and that all such Traitors, and their Abettors, may be brought to Justice, and that the Peace, and good Order of this Colony may be again restored, which the ordinary Course of the Civil Law is unable to effect; I have thought fit to issue this my Proclamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes can be obtained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to ME given, by His MAJESTY, determine to execute Martial Law, and cause the same to be executed throughout this Colony; and to the end that Peace and good Order may the sooner be restored, I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to resort to His MAJESTY'S STANDARD, or be looked upon as Traitors to His MAJESTY'S Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty the Law inflicts upon such Offences; such as forfeiture of Life, confiscation of Lands, &c. &c. And I do hereby further declare all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His MAJESTY'S Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty, to His MAJESTY'S Crown and Dignity. I do further order, and require, all His MAJESTY'S Leige Subjects, to retain their Quitrents, or any other Taxes due or that may become due, in their own Custody, till such Time as Peace may be again restored to this at present most unhappy Country, or demanded of them for their former salutary Purposes, by Officers properly authorized to receive the same.

GIVEN under my Hand on board the Ship WILLIAM, of NORFOLK, the 7th Day of NOVEMBER, in the SIXTEENTH Year of His MAJESTY'S Reign.

DUNMORE.

(GOD save the KING.)



James
Armistead
Lafayette

Born into enslavement around 1760, James Armistead lived much of his life on a plantation in New Kent, Virginia. During the American Revolution, James received permission from his enslaver, William Armistead, to enlist in the Marquis de Lafayette's French Allied unit of the Continental Army. Lafayette sent James to the British to work as a spy, posing as a household servant. Because of Dunmore's Proclamation and the promise of freedom it contained, the British received James Armistead and thousands of other enslaved Africans without suspicion. James Armistead worked to gain the confidence of the British, promising to share his knowledge of Virginia terrain and routes only a local Virginian would know, all the while still sending intelligence about British back to the Continental Army. Each day James worked behind enemy lines he risked being hanged for treason, but despite that threat he continued his work fighting for freedom and equality.

List some James's actions to serve the colonies during the Revolutionary War.

Why are James's actions significant?

What do you find surprising, interesting, or troubling about James' story so far?

The British assigned James to work for British General Benedict Arnold. At first James was completing menial tasks such as pouring cups of tea and taking care of uniforms.



Over time, by helping General Arnold maneuver his troops through Virginia, James gained significant insight into British movements. The British generals were so impressed with James they tasked him with spying on the Continental army.



James's work as a double agent allowed him to easily travel between camps. James gathered valuable information from British officers who spoke openly about their strategies in front of him.



Because he could read and write, James was able to scribble handwritten notes to be handed off to other spies and delivered to Lafayette. At the same time, he was giving the British false information.

How was James able to gain the confidence of the British during the war?

What risks do you think James was taking on when he chose to become a double agent and spy on the British?

What do James's actions show us about his dedication for fighting for the colonies and his own freedom?



One of James's most valuable pieces of intel came near the end of the summer in 1781. He sent a note to Lafayette, detailing Cornwallis's move from Portsmouth to Yorktown and giving word of the expected arrival of 10,000 British troops at the new location. In response, Lafayette informed General George Washington, and the pair made preparations to create a blockade around Yorktown by land and sea. Thanks to James's information, the blockade was a success and resulted in the final major victory for the colonists. Lord Cornwallis, head of the British Army, surrendered to the Americans on October 17, 1781. The victory at Yorktown ultimately led to the end of the Revolutionary War, and ensured the new nation's independence from Great Britain in 1783.

What is the significance of the victory at Yorktown?

What actions did James take to help the Americans win at Yorktown?

What is your reaction to learning about the role James played in defeating the British army?



John Trumbull's painting *The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis*, which hangs in the US Capitol Rotunda, depicts the forces of British General Charles Cornwallis surrendering to French and American forces Oct. 19, 1781, after the Siege of Yorktown.

Look closely at this painting. List at least 5 things you see.

The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis is a famous painting that focusing on White generals at Yorktown. This image does not show the important role African American soldiers played in this battle. Do you think this is a problem? Support your answer below.

Describe an image that an artist could create that fully represents the events at Yorktown and the contribution of African Americans.



A Virginia law was passed in 1783 stating that enslaved men who “have faithfully served agreeable to the terms of their enlistment, and have thereby of course contributed towards the establishment of American liberty and independence, should enjoy the blessings of freedom as a reward for their toils and labours.”

What was the purpose of this law?

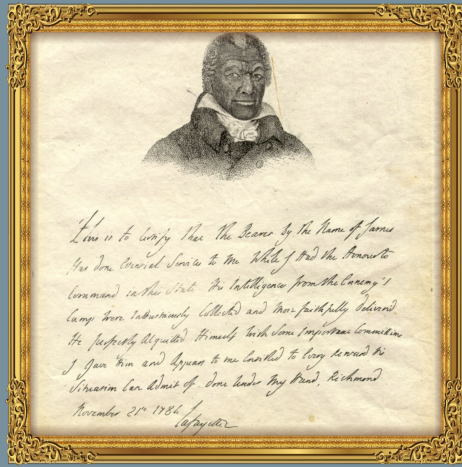
Do you think James Armistead Lafayette met the terms of this law and should have been given personal freedom? Support your answer below.



Although Americans celebrated freedom throughout the United States at the end of the war, James Armistead returned to a life of enslavement. Despite his heroic actions to help Continental Army win the Revolutionary War, he had to return to bondage. The Act of 1783 only emancipated enslaved *soldiers* who fought for the Americans, not spies like James. James repeatedly petitioned the Virginia legislature (lawmakers) for his freedom, but his requests were continuously ignored.

What is your reaction to reading the information above?

Why do you think James was unable to successfully petition for his own freedom?



In 1784 Marquis de Lafayette visited the General Assembly in Richmond. During that visit, the Marquis de Lafayette discovered that James, his former spy, was still enslaved. To help James achieve his freedom, the Marquis provided a testimonial letter, confirming James's instrumental work. In the note, Lafayette wrote:

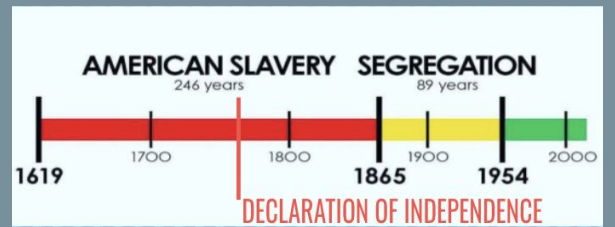
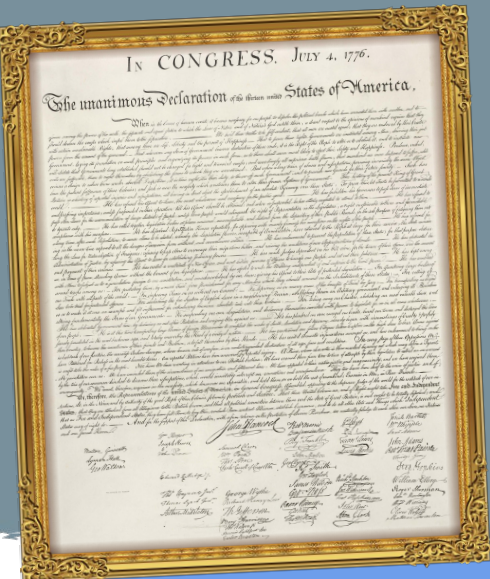
“This is to certify that James has done essential services to me while I had the honour to command in this State. His intelligence from the enemys camp were industriously collected and most faithfully delivered. He perfectly acquitted himself with some important commissions I gave him and appears to me entitled to every reward his situation can admit of.”

While they did nothing in 1784, the Virginia General Assembly finally emancipated James in 1787 after he had made multiple appeals.

What reason(s) does Marquis de Lafayette give for why James should have his freedom?

Who was Marquis de Lafayette writing to? Why is this important?

What was the outcome of the testimonial the Marquis de Lafayette wrote for James?



For some enslaved people who became soldiers, the Revolution's promise of liberty became a reality. But despite the famous words from the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal", American victory in the Revolutionary War did not result in widespread emancipation for enslaved African Americans.

After everything you have learned in this lesson, return to our original question. How does James Armistead Lafayette's story highlight the contradiction in the words, "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence?