

# Lesson 1: Origins of American Slavery

**Estimated lesson time: 90 minutes**

**Guiding Question:** How did enslaved and free Blacks resist the injustice of slavery during the colonial era?

## Objectives:

- Students will define the principle of justice.
- Students will articulate how slavery was at odds with the principle of justice.
- Students will explain how enslaved men and women and free Blacks resisted the injustice of slavery.
- Students will summarize the main ideas of historic texts.
- Students will create arguments supported by evidence from primary sources.

## Facilitation Notes:

- Some components of this lesson contain terminology that is no longer used because the terms are recognized to be offensive or derogatory. These terms are retained in their original usage in order to present them accurately in their historical context for student learning, including understanding why these are not acceptable today.
- This activity focuses on slavery in colonial Virginia. The primary sources in this case study are meant to show students the complexity and nuance of these systems in the 17th and 18th centuries as they existed in Virginia. Slavery in other places in the British Empire would vary and may not represent slavery in those places.
- Glossary terms for this lesson are on a separate handout. The terms are also defined on each source prior to the historical context or introduction for each source.

## Student Resources:

- Background Essay
- Slide Deck - Background information
- Glossary
- Anticipate: Defining Justice handout
- Primary Sources
  - Required: Virginia Governor's Council reply to the petition of Matthew Ashby, November 27, 1769
    - Video think-aloud
    - Annotated document mock-up
  - Students choose two:
    - Runaway advertisement for Jude, October 28, 1768
    - Runaway advertisement for Frank, August 27, 1771
    - Runaway advertisement for Walton, 1774
- Graphic Organizer and Discussion Questions

## Teacher Resources:

- Answer Key

## Anticipate

- Optional: Have students read the background essay and answer the accompanying questions.
- Optional: Have students read through the background slide presentation. The background slides present the main ideas of the background essay in abbreviated form.

## Engage

- Have students respond to the prompts regarding the definition of the term "justice" on the Anticipate handout.
- Scaffolding Notes: If students struggle to create a definition, provide them with the Bill of Rights Institute's definition as a starting point.
  - Justice: Having a political order that protects the rights of all equally and treats everyone equally under the law.
  - You may also encourage student thinking by asking them to define or give examples of something that is unjust to help them brainstorm. Have students consider whether it is the responsibility of the government, its laws, and/or people to be just. Finally, encourage students to keep their definitions of justice in the back of their minds as they look at the primary sources regarding slavery in colonial Virginia.

## Explore

### Scaffolding Notes:

- The Matthew Ashby primary source includes a **video think-aloud** and **example annotations** to help students practice the skills needed for analyzing primary sources.
  - **Teachers in online classes may wish students to view the video asynchronously.**
  - **In-person classes may wish to go through the example slides together.**
- Glossary terms to the Matthew Ashby primary source include:
  - **Petition:** A formal written request, typically to a government or government official
  - **Indentured servants:** Men and women who signed a contract or indenture to work for a certain number of years in return for transportation to the American colonies and food, clothing, and shelter once they arrived. After completion of their contract, they were given their freedom.
  - **Codify:** To officially compile into written law and must be followed.
  - **Mulatto:** A person of mixed African and European descent.
  - **One hundred and fifty pounds:** The pound was a unit of British money. One pound equaled 20 shillings or 240 pence. £150 was a very large sum of money for 1769 and is roughly equivalent to \$36,000 in 2022.
  - **Manumit:** To release legally from slavery
- All students should read and answer the accompanying questions or the Matthew Ashby primary source.
- **Scaffolding Note:** Complete the accompanying questions for the Matthew Ashby source as a whole class, small groups, or individually. If done individually, have students share with a partner and then share aloud to the group to check for understanding.
- Transition: *Now you will look at two more primary sources related to slavery in colonial Virginia. You can choose which two you want to read. Answer the questions for the two sources you choose.*
- Have students choose two of the three remaining sources to analyze:
  - Runaway advertisement for Jude, October 28, 1768
  - Runaway advertisement for Frank, August 27, 1771
  - Runaway advertisement for Walton, 1774
- **Scaffolding note:** As with the Matthew Ashby primary source, each primary source includes defined glossary terms before the historical context.
- Transition: *Now that you looked at two additional sources beyond the Matthew Ashby petition, let's compare the main ideas from the sources.*
- Distribute the Graphic Organizer and Discussion Questions handout.
- In small groups or as a class, have students compare their “Shrink the text” statements for all of the sources and write a summary statement for each in their graphic organizer. By completing this step in groups or as a class, you should have

at least one person who read each of the three sources. Students should also brainstorm additional questions they have about each source using the question stems and examples provided.

- Lead a brief share-out/discussion on these statements.
- Transition: *Remember that we only looked at four sources on the topic of slavery in one place, Virginia. There are many other sources and accounts that give a more complete picture of this complex topic in the colonial period. Historians must always consider what the sources reveal, but also what its limitations are. That said, we can still use the primary sources we have to draw some conclusion.*

### Assess and Reflect

- Have students respond to the concluding questions under the graphic organizer:
  - Taken all together, what do these sources reveal about race and slavery in colonial Virginia?
  - What do these sources reveal about race and slavery in colonial Virginia?
  - Consider your definition of justice from the beginning of this lesson. Based on these sources, how did colonial slave codes violate the principle of justice? How did enslaved and free Blacks resist the injustice of slavery during the colonial era?
- Collect responses and/or lead a class discussion on student conclusions.

### Extend

1. Have students compare the system of slavery in colonial Virginia in the 18th century with the system of indentured servitude by analyzing the following primary sources:
  - Sale of Indentured Servants, May 1752
  - Runaway Indentured Servant, 1755
  - Sam Howel suing for freedom in court, May 2, 1766
2. Formal opponents to the system of slavery were uncommon in the colonial period, though some Quakers voiced their objections as early as 1688. Learn more here: <https://billofrights institute.org/activities/germantown-friends-protest-against-slavery-1688>